

COLNAGHI

This is a detail from the painting 'The Flagellation of Christ' by Luca Cambiaso. The central figure is the torso of Christ, depicted with a pale, muscular physique. He has long, wavy brown hair and a beard. His right arm is raised, and a thick, braided rope is visible around his right wrist. He is wearing a white loincloth. To the left, the back and shoulder of another figure are visible, wearing a yellow garment. The background is dark and indistinct, with a vertical architectural element visible behind Christ.

Luca Cambiaso
The Flagellation of Christ, c. 1570-1575

COLNAGHI

LUCA CAMBIASO

Moneglia (Genoa) 1527 – 1585 El Escorial

THE FLAGELLATION OF CHRIST, c. 1570-1575

Oil on canvas

162 x 134 cm; 63 3/4 x 52 3/4 in.

Inscribed on the reverse: S. (or I?) + P.

Provenance

Massimiliano Spinola (1780 – 1857), by 1847, initially at his palace in Genoa;

Transferred to Castello Tassarolo;

Thence by descent to Paolo Spinola (1929 – 2005);

Acquired by the present owner in the late 1990s.

Literature

F. Alizeri, *Guida Artistica per la Città di Genova*, 2 vols, Genoa, [1846–47] 1847, II/1, p. 777.

A.-A. Lavice, *Revue des Musées d'Italie. Catalogue raisonné des peintures et sculptures exposées dans les galeries publiques et dans les églises...*, Paris, 1862, p. 118.

C. Blanc, *Histoire des peintres de toutes les Écoles*, Paris, 1883, vol. 14, p. 8.

M. Labò, *Mostra centenaria di Luca Cambiaso*, exh. cat., Genoa, December 1927, p. 21.

B. Suida Manning, W. Suida, *Luca Cambiaso, la vita e le opere*, Milan, 1958, p. 117.

L. Magnani, "Dopo la mostra di Milano", in *Napoli, Genova, Milano. Scambi artistici e culturali tra città legate alla Spagna (1610–1640)*, proceedings of the conference Turin-Genoa, 13–15 September 2018, ed. L. Magnani, A.

Morandotti, D. Sanguineti, G. Spione, L. Stagno, Milan, 2020, pp. 220–221, 227, fig. 12.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI

This *Flagellation of Christ* joins a group of late and powerfully expressive naturalistic works by Luca Cambiaso, painted during his mature period in Genoa before his departure for the Escorial in 1583. Born the son of the minor local painter Giovanni Cambiaso (1495 – 1579), Luca Cambiaso from an early age assimilated multiple sources of inspiration: the grand monumentality of Michelangelo, the luminist innovations of Correggio and Parmigianino, and the achievements of Giulio Romano, Perino del Vaga, Beccafumi, and Pordenone - artists whose works he could study from Genoese commissions or during his probable stay in Rome (c. 1547 – 50). By the 1560s, Cambiaso was firmly established as the leading painter in Genoa, receiving altar and fresco commissions from the city's most illustrious patrician families. From around the 1570s, a distinct naturalistic and dramatic idiom began to emerge in his *œuvre*. As Bertina Suida Manning observed, Cambiaso's late phase was marked by "an increasing contemplative serenity and monumental simplicity", qualities that resonate powerfully in this *Flagellation of Christ*.¹ Fluent as a draughtsman, Cambiaso refined a highly personal artistic language that would determine the course of painting in Genoa until the following century. The Maritime Republic was a notable beneficiary of the financial problems of the Spanish empire, and it was therefore not surprising that in 1583 Cambiaso was summoned by King Philip II to paint for his court.

In the present painting, a softly diffused light highlights the pallor of Christ's exposed torso. Bound to the column in the centre, He appears with a profound calm and resignation, a stark counterpoint to the straining physiques and animated gestures of the four tormentors who throng around Him. The subtle glow unifies the composition, leaving the background in shadow and drawing attention to Christ's spiritually charged countenance. By contrast, the executioners' exaggerated faces, twisted in grimaces, embody the cruelty of evil, recalling the graphic, almost caricatural types seen in Cambiaso's *Christ before Caiaphas* (Genoa, Museum of Ligustica Accademy of Fine Arts, Fig. 1). Their theatrical poses underscore the intense physicality of the moment, while the subdued palette and controlled highlights - distinctive of Cambiaso's late painting - amplify the emotional resonance. Noteworthy, too, is the

¹ B. Suida Manning, "The nocturnes of Luca Cambiaso", in *The Art Quarterly*, vol. XV, no. 3, 1952, p. 199.

COLNAGHI

measured monumentality of this composition. Although the figures occupy most of the foreground, the cylindrical column against which Christ stands is depicted with pronounced simplicity, offering a sense of architectural solidity reminiscent of Cambiaso's earlier work in Genoese *palazzi*. The stark vertical axis of the column forms a powerful pivot between the luminous figure of Christ and the swirling violence of the soldiers, a compositional device that reinforces the painting's thematic focus: the humbly majestic serenity of the Saviour versus the convulsive brutality of His tormentors. In this wholly unadorned setting, the sense of depth is conveyed by the forward tilt of Christ's torso and right knee, achieving compositional balance through a skilful modulation of *chiaroscuro*, while His persecutors are arranged along parallel planes behind and in front of the central column.

The subject of the *Flagellation of Christ* features prominently among Cambiaso's larger-scale religious nocturnes, which typically depict episodes from the Passion - from the already mentioned *Christ before Caiaphas*, in Genoa, to the *Christ Disrobed by his Tormentors*, formerly with Canesso gallery (Fig. 2), and the Blanton Museum's *Ecce Homo* (Fig. 3), or other scenes of the New Testament. A similar simplified version of the Colnaghi painting is the *Christ at the Column*, now at Palazzo Bianco in Genoa, formerly in the collection of Maquis Ambrogio Doria (Fig. 4). Scholars have linked the development of this naturalistic and dramatic manner to contemporary aesthetic ideals of the Counter-Reformation, which promoted directness of emotional appeal and clarity of theological message. A date of around 1570 has been proposed for our version, coinciding with the period in which Cambiaso heightened his interest in dramatic *chiaroscuro*. Testifying to the success and consequent diffusion of the present composition, a related woodcut of this work - though lacking the leftmost figure in the background and adding rays of light around Christ's head - is recorded in several impressions, including an example at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, inv. no. M.88.91.212, Fig. 5). A preparatory drawing for the print can be found in the Albertina collection: with the great compositional synthesis typical of Cambiaso's graphic idiom, fast, broken, darting lines carve out the figures' volumes, while parallel pen strokes, reinforced by a brown wash, define their shading (Fig. 6). As in the painting, the light source comes from the right.

COLNAGHI

Documentary evidence indicates that the painting was in the possession of the distinguished Genoese entomologist Massimiliano Spinola by at least 1847, when the art historian Federico Alizeri noted a *Cristo alla colonna del Cambiaso* in Spinola's palace in Genoa.² Subsequent private family archives (c. 1850) mention a "*Flagellazione di Nostro Signore – del Cambiaso*," locating it definitively at Castello Tassarolo after the 1847 sale of the Palazzo Doria-Spinola.³ By the mid-twentieth century, the painting was again cited in private family documents concerning inheritances within the Spinola line, before eventually leaving the castle in the late 1990s to enter its present ownership. The inscription on the reverse, "S. (or I?) + P.," has not been conclusively deciphered, and any direct connection to the Spinola lineage remains speculative.

² F. Alizeri, *Guida Artistica per la Città di Genova*, Genoa, [1846–47] 1847, II/1, p. 777. See also M.L. Repetto, *Gli Spinola conti di Tassarolo: committenza e collezionismo tra XVI e XIX secolo*, 2021 (Università degli Studi di Genova). In the private archives of the Spinola family of Tassarolo (APSTas), which Repetto consulted, she found in a "Nota dei dipinti di Massimiliano IV Spinola" (dating to around 1850, according to her) a reference to a "*Flagellazione di Nostro Signore – del Cambiaso*." Then, around the mid-twentieth century, the painting is still cited as being in the castle in a private document pertaining to the inheritance divisions of living family members.

³ See *Palazzo Doria Spinola. Architettura e arredi di una dimora aristocratica genovese da un inventario del 1727*, ed. R. Santamaria, Provincia di Genova, 2011, p. 69.



Fig. 1. Luca Cambiaso, *Christ before Caiaphas*, c. 1575.
Oil on canvas, 188 x 138 cm.
Genoa, Museum of Ligustica Accademy of Fine Arts.



Fig. 2. Luca Cambiaso, *Christ before Caiaphas*, late 1570s.
Oil on canvas, 184 x 133 cm.
Formerly with Galerie Canesso, Paris.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 3. Luca Cambiaso, *Ecce Homo*, 1570s.
Oil on canvas, 108 x 98 cm.
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 4. Luca Cambiaso, *Christ at the Column*, c. 1570-1575.
Oil on canvas, 171 x 130 cm.
Genoa, Musei di Strada Nuova - Palazzo Bianco.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 5. Luca Cambiaso, *The Flagellation of Christ*, c.1570-1580.
Woodcut. Sheet: 33.66 × 25.08 cm, image: 33.34 × 24.77 cm.
LACMA | Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 6. Luca Cambiaso, *The Flagellation of Christ*.
Pen and ink with wash on paper, 32,4 x 24,2 cm.
Vienna, Albertina.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com