

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Pier Francesco Mola  
(Coldrerio 1612 – 1666 Rome)

*Profile of a man wearing  
a turban*

oil on canvas

70 x 56.5 cm.;

27 1/2 x 22 1/4 in.

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This bust-length portrait, seen in profile and turned to the left, of a young oriental man wearing a turban was painted by Pier Francesco Mola. The sitter wears a pearl earring and on top of the turban we see a gold brooch with a feather (a *pennacchino*). He wears a dark fur dress, and over it golden olive-brown drapery. The face is set against a dark-bluish background. The face and the golden coat are lit from the left. The picture appears to have been executed c. 1650-55, when Mola was influenced by the art of Salvator Rosa.<sup>1</sup> However, since quite differing dates have been proposed for various comparable pictures, it might be safer to give a wider date range of c. 1650-60. The streamlined, slender and elegant features of the face, and the fluency with which the folds of the turban and the golden brown coat are rendered, suggest, in my opinion, a dating in the first half of the fifties as opposed to a later dating in the early sixties.

We find young men wearing turbans as secondary figures in paintings depicting the *Preaching of Saint John* and the *Preaching of Saint Barnabas*, but also in 'quadri da stanza' depicting scenes from Tasso (see, for example, fig. 1). There are likewise portrait or genre studies of men of different ages, wearing a turban, as single figures, mostly bust length or half length.<sup>2</sup> Most of these figures are dated by Francesco Petrucci in his 2012 catalogue raisonné to c. 1650-55 or 1650-60. A figure with similar traits to the present sitter, although bearded and not shown in profile, is the young man of roughly the same age with a turban who appears in the background of the *Preaching of Saint John* in the Gallerie Nazionali d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome, formerly (from 1919-2009) on loan to the Italian Embassy in Madrid. The picture was correctly recognised as by Mola by Francesco Petrucci in 2004.<sup>3</sup> Petrucci (2012) dates the picture c. 1660-62, a date which I find too late.<sup>4</sup>

The picture is quite close in spirit to the three lunette frescoes in the Chiostro Grande in S. Maria della Quercia near Viterbo, documented and paid for, from September 1650 to January 1651,<sup>5</sup> and I find it also close to the aforementioned *Oriental Warrior* in the Louvre, dated 1650. One might even think of the altarpiece in the Costaguti chapel in SS. Domenico e Sisto in Rome, the *Vision of San Domenico in Soriano* of 1648 or the figures in the *Preaching of Saint John the Baptist* in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (fig. 2).<sup>6</sup>

Adapted from a text by Professor Erich Schleier.

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Born in Coldrerio, near Lugano, Mola moved to Rome with his family at a young age. Aside from two extended periods from 1633-40 and 1641-47, which he spent traveling in northern Italy, including extended sojourns in Venice and Bologna, he remained in Rome for the rest of his life. Employed by wealthy patrons in Rome, including Pope Alexander VII and the Colonna family, and in 1662 he was appointed prince of the Accademia di San Luca, a position from which he resigned in 1663 on account of ill health. Mola combined his mature style with sophisticated elements of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Roman *gran maniera*, the beautiful *colore* of Venetian art, and the attentive draftsmanship of the Bolognese masters, especially Guercino. One of his most famous works the splendid and exceptionally powerful portrait of a *Barbary Pirate* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, fig. 3), signed and dated 1650 and featuring another turbaned subject.

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**Figure 1.** Pier Francesco Mola, *Erminia and Vafrino cure Tancredi*, 1650s.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris

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**Figure 2.** Pier Francesco Mola, *Saint John the Baptist Preaching in the Desert*, c. 1650-55.  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

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**Figure 3.** Pier Francesco Mola, *Barbary Pirate (also known as Oriental Warrior)*, 1650.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> E. Schleier, *Caravaggism and the Baroque in Europe*, Robilant and Voena, Turin 2007, pp. 44–47; E. Schleier, *Pier Francesco Mola*, Robilant and Voena, London 2008, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Portrait of a Beduine*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; see F. Petrucci, *Pier Francesco Mola*, Rome 2012, p. 244, no. A4, reproduced in colour p. 159, fig. 108 (1650–55); *Portrait of an Arab intellectual*, formerly [?] Koelliker collection, Milan; Petrucci 2012, p. 245, no. A15, reproduced in colour p. 160, fig. 109 (1650–55); *Portrait of an Ottoman Prince* (Oriental warrior), Louvre, Paris, dated 1650; Petrucci 2012, pp. 241–42, no. A12, reproduced in colour p. 154, fig. 103; *Portrait of an old levantine man*, Petrucci 2012, p. 243, no. A13 (1650–55); *Portrait of a boy with a 'berretto alla polacca'*, Shanks Collection, Andalusia, PA; Petrucci, 2012, p. 246, no. A16 (c. 1650–60).

<sup>3</sup> F. Petrucci, 'Contributi al Mola pittore di figura', in *Studi sul Barocco romano, Scritti in onore di Maurizio Fagiolo dell' Arco*, Milan 2004, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> Petrucci 2012, p. 363, no. B94, reproduced in colour p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> Petrucci 2012, pp. 430–34, no. D7–9.

<sup>6</sup> Petrucci 2012, pp. 606–07, no. C1, reproduced in colour p. 93.