



Girolamo Sellari, known as Girolamo da Carpi

(Ferrara 1501 - 1556)

The Dacian Prisoners

(Study after Polidoro da Caravaggio ca. 1550)

Pen and ink on laid paper

7 7/8" x 6 7/8" (20 x 17.5 cm) - Framed 11 1/2" x 9 5/8" (29.2 x 24.4 cm)

Price on request

French frame in Saint Lucy wood, Louis XIV period, decorated with foliate scrolls and floral motifs

We would like to thank Dr. Gudrun Dauner for confirming, after a direct examination of the drawing on June 23, 2025, that it was a drawing by Girolamo da Carpi, probably inspired by a fresco by Polidoro da Caravaggio for the façade of a palace in Rome's piazza dei Capretarri.

This vigorous drawing, executed in pen and ink and perfectly preserved, is typical of the technique used by Girolamo de Carpi during his stay in Rome, around 1550. For this drawing, Girolamo da Carpi was probably inspired by a fresco by Polidoro da Caravaggio for a palace facade, now lost, but known from a preparatory drawing kept in Turin's Royal Library.

Our drawing, in turn, served as a source of inspiration for Girolamo da Carpi's pupils, as attested by a drawing in the British Museum; as such, it is a perfect example of the dissemination of the models created by Polidoro da Caravaggio by the Renaissance artists during their stay in Rome.

1. Girolamo da Carpi, a life between Ferrara and Rome in the service of the d'Este family

Our knowledge of Girolamo da Carpi's life is largely based upon the second edition of the *Lives of the Artists* published in 1568 by Giorgio Vasari (1511 - 1574), who became a close friend of his around 1550.

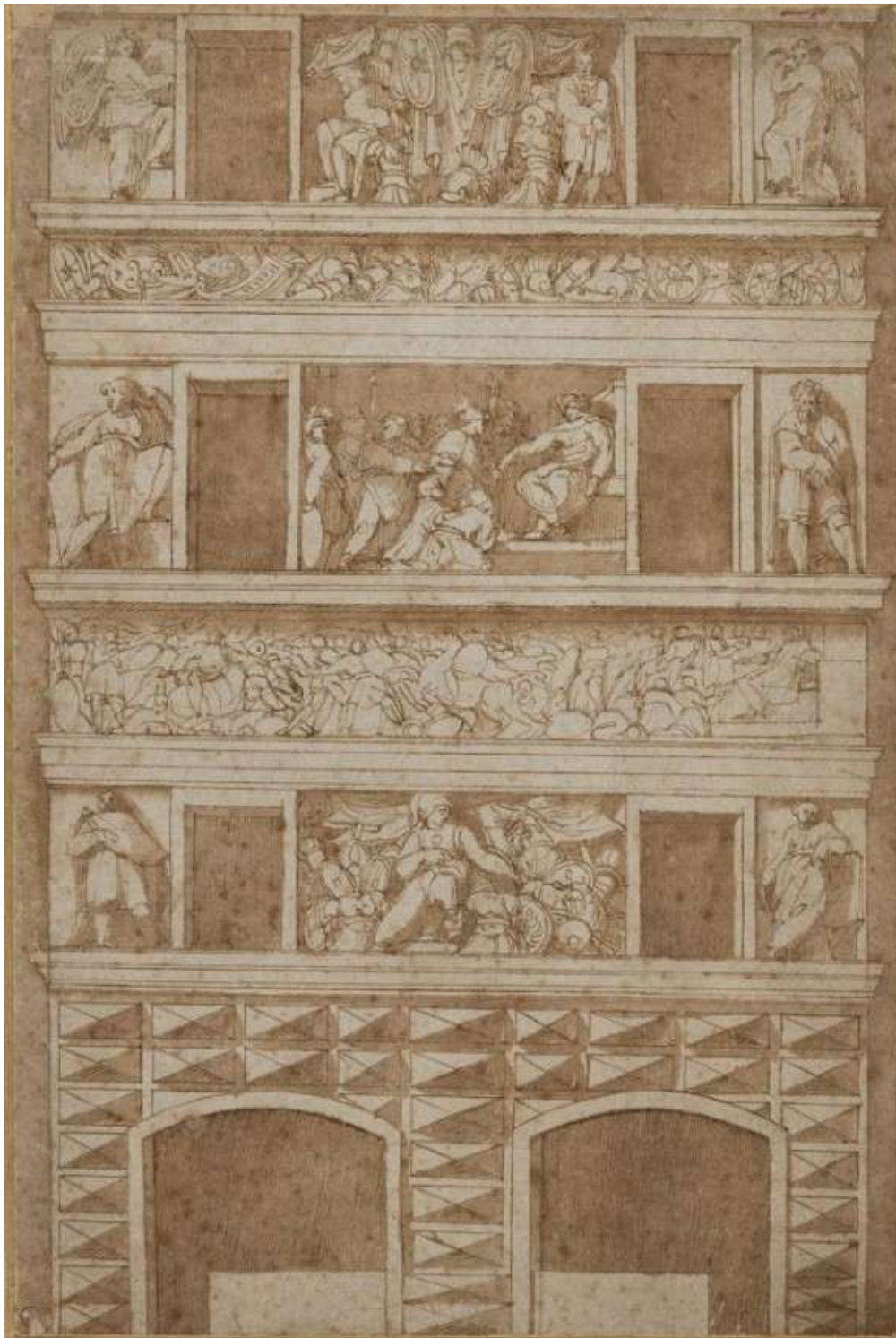
Girolamo da Carpi was born in 1501 in Ferrara where his father was also a painter. After an apprenticeship shared between his father's workshop and that of Garofalo, Girolamo began his career in Bologna, where he settled in 1525, working on the frescoes in the sacristy of San Michele in Bosco alongside Biagio Pupini. He was then influenced by Parmigianino, whom he had met in Bologna or during a brief stay in Rome before moving to Bologna.

From 1530 onwards, Girolamo da Carpi settled in Ferrara, probably making a further stay in Rome in 1531. He also began to work for the d'Este family, first in Belriguardo, where he took part in the decoration of the *Sala della Vigna*, then in the *Palazetto della Montagna di San Giorgio* (of which he may have been the architect), which he also decorated with frescoes, and finally in Copparo. A true Renaissance court artist, Girolamo also executed easel paintings, ephemeral decorations and tapestry cartoons for his clients.

Cardinal Hippolyte d'Este, who, since the early 1540s, had been one of his main clients within this powerful family, called him to Rome to design the layout of his Quirinal garden. Girolamo remained in Rome for four years, also working as an architect at the Belvedere for Pope Julius III, before returning to Ferrara in 1553. His last work as an architect was the reconstruction of the ducal palace in Ferrara, which had been partly destroyed by fire in 1554.

2. Description of the drawing and related artworks

The inspiration for the scene depicted in our drawing was identified by Gudrun Dauner after a project for a Roman palace façade attributed to Maturino da Firenze, Polidoro da Caravaggio's associate at the time of the decoration of those Roman palaces, which is preserved in the collections of the Royal Library of Turin. The scene that inspired our drawing was located in the center of the façade of this palace on Piazza dei Capretarri in Rome (in the Piazza Navona district, opposite the Basilica of St. Eustatius), between the two windows on the second floor.



Attributed to Maturino da Firenze - *Facade project* - Biblioteca Reale di Torino (Inv. 17253)

This fresco, now completely lost, depicted two Dacian prisoners being presented to a military commander (an emperor or a general) seated on a platform, the outline of which can be seen at the bottom right of our drawing.



Attributed to Maturino da Firenze - *Facade project* (detail) - Biblioteca Reale di Torino (Inv. 17253)

The group appears less crowded than the one depicted in this drawing¹, which suggests that the final fresco was less compact in composition than the one depicted in this project, or that Girolamo sought to synthesize a few figures from a more complex composition. The two prisoners have their hands tied behind their backs, one by a chain and the other by a rope, both held by two young soldiers. They are characterized by their full beards and Phrygian caps. The toga pulled up over the shoulder of the man facing us reveals the muscularity of his arm. This taste for anatomical precision is echoed in the drawing of the legs of the three main protagonists, whose muscular contours are evident beneath their clothes.



Girolamo Sellari, known as Girolamo da Carpi - *The Dacian Prisoners* (detail)

¹ Of particular note is the absence of the two kneeling figures in the foreground.

The lines drawn below the group of figure-frames evoke the frieze that separated the second and third floors, suggesting that Girolamo had assembled several drawings on a single sheet, which would later have been reduced to its present dimensions.

Our drawing was executed entirely in pen, with a very steady hand, leaving no trace of a preliminary sketch. Its incisive and precise style can be compared to that of the drawings of the *Taccuino romano*, a sketchbook created mainly by Girolamo da Carpi during his stay in Rome (1549-1553) and which is now shared between the Rosenback Museum & Library in Philadelphia and the Royal Library in Turin.

Below are details of two of its pages: a *Dioscure* whose powerful musculature is evoked by a few pen strokes and the *Presentation of Two Barbarians*, a scene inspired by a bas-relief on the Arch of Constantine, whose composition is like that of our drawing.



Girolamo da Carpi - Two details from the Taccuino romano drawings - Torino, Biblioteca Reale

On the left *Dioscure* (Folio 3C recto), on the right the *Presentation of two Barbarians* (Folio 7 C recto)

Several drawings in this sketchbook are inspired by other facades painted by Polidoro da Caravaggio². These facades, almost all of which have now disappeared, were one of the main attractions of Renaissance Rome due to their number, diversity, and decorative scale.

² This sketchbook has been the subject of a detailed study by Gudrun Dauner: *Drawn Together - Two Albums of Renaissance Drawings by GIROLAMO DA CARPI* - Rosenback Museum & Library - Philadelphia 2005. See in particular numbers 35 recto, 36 recto, 37 recto, and 38 recto (pages 98 to 105).

Finally, it is interesting to note that our drawing was probably in turn the source of inspiration for a drawing preserved in the British Museum (inventory number 1956,0216.3 verso³). This drawing was part of a notebook made by Girolamo da Carpi's pupils from drawings by the master, of which 7 other sheets remain in the British Museum and 4 in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum.

3. Framing

Our drawing is presented in a Louis XIV period frame in Saint Lucy wood. It is adorned with foliage scrolls and floral motifs whose fine carving brings out the delicacy of our drawing's pen-and-ink work.



Girolamo Sellari, known as Girolamo da Carpi - *The Dacian Prisoners*

Main bibliographical references:

Alessandra Patanaro - *Girolamo da Carpi* - Officina Libraria - Roma 2021

Gudrun Dauner - *Drawn Together - Two Albums of Renaissance Drawings by GIROLAMO DA CARPI* - Rosenback Museum & Library - Philadelphia 2005

³ Unfortunately, this verso, of which Dr. Dauner gave us a poor-quality reproduction, does not appear on the British Museum's online site.

