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ROMULO CINCATATO

(Florence, c. 1540 – Madrid, c. 1597)

Christ washing the Disciples' Feet

c. 1587-1590

Pencil, pen, ink and grey-brown wash on paper

555 x 145 mm

INSCRIBED

“60 Rs”, lower left corner

PROVENANCE

Madrid, private collection

Philip II manifested a notable interest in both the construction and the pictorial decoration of El Escorial.

The building was not yet completed when the King began to have paintings sent to the monastery, the arrival of which are recorded in the *Libros de entregas* [delivery books].¹ He was also personally involved in seeking out and employing the artists who worked there on the creation of series of paintings or decorative fresco schemes. A key figure in this project was the Spanish ambassador to the Vatican, Luis de Requesens, who acted as royal agent in attracting artists, particularly fresco painters, into the King's service.² Through his mediation painters of the stature of Federico Zuccaro, Patricio Cajés and Romulo Cincinato arrived at El Escorial.

Cincinato was born in Florence at an unknown date around 1540. According to traditional sources he trained with Francisco

Salviati³ but in recent years it has been thought that he may have learned his profession in the studio of Taddeo Zuccaro due to the similarities evident between some of his works and models used by Zuccaro.⁴ Nonetheless, Cincinato's work reveals a rigidity, an obsession with form and a degree of academicism much greater than that of his master. This led him to be criticised by some of his contemporaries, who considered that he was “a man of little invention”.⁵

Following his arrival in Spain in 1567 he began to work for Philip II, first under the direction of Gaspar Becerra on the mural decorations for El Pardo and Valsaín then following Becerra's death in the Alcázar in Madrid under the direction of Giovanni Battista Castello, “il Bergamasco”. After Castello's death in 1569 Cincinato and Cajés were placed in charge of decorative schemes for royal palaces, leading Philip II to commission Cincinato with the

¹ The *Libros de Entregas* are housed in the Archivo General de Palacio, Patronato de San Lorenzo, Leg. 1995. The one relating to paintings was published by Zarco (1930) and has more recently been the subject of study. See Checa, Mancini and Vázquez (2013). On 16 June 1567 Felipe II wrote to Requesens asking him to seek out skilled painters in Rome: “Don Luis de Requesens com[en]dador m[ay]or por la memoria que os mando embiar con esta entendereis los pintores que de preste son menester para nras obras, encargos que conforme a lo que en ella se dize los hagais buscar y concertar que sean hombres de bien y bueos officiales y que vengan quanto antes...”. Archivo General de Simancas, CC, Libro 145, f. 55v, in Pérez de Tudela (2001), p. 471.

² Ceán Bermúdez (1800), vol. I, p. 332.

³ This idea was proposed by Ángel Rodríguez Rebollo in a lecture given at the Museo de Guadalajara in June 2014.

⁴ This criticism is recorded by both Father Sigüenza and by Palomino. See, respectively, Sigüenza (1881), p. 307 and Palomino (1715-1724/1947), p. 817.





Fig. 1 Romulo Cincinato, Triptych of *The legal Supper of the Lamb*, (open) c. 1587-1590. Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Patrimonio Nacional, inv. no. 10014871



Fig. 2 Romulo Cincinato, Triptych of *The legal Supper of the Lamb*, (closed) c. 1587-1590. Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Patrimonio Nacional, inv. no. 10014871

fresco paintings for one of the sacristies in El Escorial (1570-71). The success of these works brought the artist professional opportunities outside the court and he was invited to Cuenca to execute the paintings for the principal altarpiece of the Jesuit church, and to Guadalajara to execute fresco decorations in the palace of the Duke of El Infantado. In 1582 Philip II once again summoned Cincinato to work at El Escorial. First he commissioned him to paint a new version of *The Martyrdom of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion*, which the King had previously commissioned from El Greco with results that did not satisfy him. Philip subsequently commissioned

Cincinato to execute various decorative projects at the monastery of El Escorial, including paintings for two large reliquary altars in the Lower Cloister of the Evangelists.⁶ In 1773 Ponz described one of these paintings in volume II of his *Viaje de España*: “The paintings in the corners are in oil. Each depicts two subjects [...] The other two corners towards the South are: the first, by Peregrino Tibaldi, and the other, by Romulo Cincinato [...] Romulo Cincinato executed *The Transfiguration* and *The Last Supper* of the Lord. Both Suppers are present, in other words the legal or figurative and the sacramental, one on the interior and the other on the doors,

on the exterior, which have *The Washing of the Feet* and *The Entry into Jerusalem* on their reverse [...] These paintings in the corners, by which I mean those that are covered up, are not opened except when there are processions around the cloisters. They look today as if they had just been painted.”⁷

The present drawing is the final study for one of the doors of the reliquary altar described by Ponz. The triptych is dedicated to *The legal Supper of the Lamb* and remains today in its original location for which it was created (Patrimonio Nacional, inv. no. 10014871). With the doors closed it shows (*The Paschal Supper* fig. 2), which is the precise moment

when Christ, surrounded by the standing Apostles, blesses the food, as stipulated in the holy texts. The open triptych has a central scene of *The Institution of the Eucharist*, *Christ’s Entry into Jerusalem* on the left and *Christ washing the Disciples’ Feet* on the right (fig. 1). It is this episode, recounted in John 13:1-20, that Cincinato translated from paper to panel with only a few slight variations. The present sheet is a precise and highly finished final drawing that is squared up for use on the intended support of the finished work. It was initially executed in pencil then reworked by the artist in pen and grey-brown ink with delicate washes of the same tone through

⁶ Palomino (1715-1724/1947), pp. 817-818.

⁷ Ponz (1772-1794/1947), pp. 176-177.

which Cincinato creates the volumes and shadows. The grandeur of the fully classical architectural setting is perfectly conveyed and creates a greater sense of depth and perspective in the drawing. Cincinato was aware of his skills in this field and transformed the architecture and setting into one of the key elements in his composition in a way never previously seen in Spain.⁸ Located in the foreground is Peter, who with an expression of compunction seems to be addressing Christ and saying “Lord, dost thou wash my feet”, as in John’s account (13:6). Christ is depicted kneeling before Peter and supporting the calf of his lower leg, which the Apostle has just lifted out of a basin. Behind them are the other Apostles, who form an animated group in which the gazes and gestures direct the

viewer’s attention from one to another. There are almost no changes or significant variations between the figures in the drawing and those in the final panel although some beardless ones acquire beards. The most notable changes are to the setting: whereas the background of the drawing includes a flight of steps and some distant figures, this element is completely removed in the oil and replaced by a blind wall. In addition, the right side of the architectural setting in the drawing has an arched opening in the wall whereas in the final panel this becomes a low door with a relief above it. Overall however, the principal difference between the oil and this preparatory study is the loss of freshness and the rigidity of the final painting in comparison with the present drawing.



⁸ For the use and importance of the backgrounds in Cincinato’s work, there are interesting opinions in Ibáñez (1991), pp. 444-445.