

GIOVANNI GUERRA

1544, Modena – 1618, Rome

*Mucius Scaevola's Trial by Fire*

Pen and light brown ink and wash on tan paper.

222 x 156 mm

Inscriptions and marks: "B 174" in red chalk and "Zuccari (Federico)" on the reverse.

Provenance: Giuseppe Vallardi's collection (Lugt 1223), seal on the lower left part.



Giovanni Guerra was an Italian painter and draughtsman of the late Mannerism period. Born in Modena, he soon moved to Rome, where he developed his whole career. After studying in the Accademia di San Luca, he started to realise decorative cycles, such as the one he executed in the Palacio Cenci for a modest commission. From 1586, he received more prestigious commissions, under the patronage of Pope Sixtus V: he completed the al fresco decoration of the stair that unites the Sistine Chapel with the Basilica of Saint Peter of the Vatican. To carry out these ambitious works, he founded a workshop together with Cesar Nebbia: both of them prepared the designs for the decorative projects, which were then executed by a group of assistants. Thanks to these works, he acquired great fame as a draughtsman. He also showed his mastership through other commissions such as the illustrations for the book of emblems *Iconography (Iconologia)*, by Cesare Ripa (1593), reference work for various generations of artists.



Fig. 1. Giovanni Guerra, *St. Jerome*. Pencil and brown-grey ink, wash. Private collection.

This drawing carries on its verso a black chalk drapery study and multiple inscriptions including the number "B 174" in red chalk and a light inscription in black chalk that seems to read "Zuccari (Federico)". There is the collector's mark of the nineteenth-century Milanese collector Giuseppe Vallardi (Lugt 1223) on the recto. Despite this inscription, it is certainly not the work of either of the Zuccari, but from the hand of Giovanni Guerra, an artist who was a contemporary of Federico Zuccaro and worked in Rome at the same time. Its comparison with a drawing of St. Jerome by the same artist (Fig. 1) permits to recognize Guerra's manner.

While our drawing does not use the more usual brown-gray wash of most of Guerra's drawings, the manner of the application of the washes and, more specifically, the technique of drawing feet and the curious manner of suggesting the abdomen and navel are quite consistent.

The stylistic similarities should be considered together with Guerra's fondness for portraying scenes from Roman history. The Louvre owns a large number of small drawings of this kind, all seemingly from the same portfolio or sketchbook. In fact, most of what is known about Guerra's drawings come from similar large bodies of small works, most notable the three volumes

illustrating the life of Alessandro Farnese that are divided between the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid and the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. These small studies, though, do not give an accurate sense of his approach to larger compositions. One fairly relevant sheet to this drawing is the one of *Nebuchadnezzar Arising to See the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace* (Fig. 2)

where we see the same approach to shading with wash and the staccato dotting of facial features and indentations of musculature. Note that this drawing is inscribed "F. Zucaro" which is an understandable coincidence with our sheet.



Fig. 2. Giovanni Guerra, *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Saved from the Fiery Furnace*. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, over traces of black chalk, 197 x 222 mm. New York, The Morgan Library.