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# A drawing attributed to Adam Elsheimer in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid

A pen-and-ink and chalk drawing depicting Tobias and the angel is clearly related to Adam Elsheimer's so-called 'Small Tobias', one of three paintings of the subject he is known to have made when in Rome in 1600–10. It is here proposed that the drawing is a preparatory sketch by Elsheimer for a lost fourth treatment of the story, recorded in a mezzotint made in London c.1685.

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**A** HITHERTO ANONYMOUS DRAWING (Fig.2) in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (hereafter BNE), is catalogued as a copy – with some small differences – of one of the depictions of Tobias and the angel painted by Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610).<sup>1</sup> Elsheimer's treatments of this subject, painted between 1605 and 1610, were influential as a result of being circulated widely across Europe in prints published by the Dutch engraver Hendrik Goudt (1583–1648) in 1608 and 1613.<sup>2</sup>

Elsheimer's earliest version of the subject is thought to be a painting on copper that formed part of a series depicting Old and New Testament scenes that probably decorated the front of a piece of furniture (Fig.1). The series is believed to have consisted originally of ten panels but only nine are known today, of which eight are at Petworth House, West Sussex.<sup>3</sup> The panels were probably painted in 1605 after Elsheimer had settled in Rome in 1600.<sup>4</sup> They almost certainly remained in Rome until 1635, when they were recorded in the collection of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, from whose collection they were acquired by Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland (1602–68), owner of Petworth. The two figures on the panel move across the picture plane from left to right, occupying nearly all the available space. Tobias, who is depicted as a child in profile, drags alongside him a large fish, while his guardian angel, who is twice his size, turns to face the viewer, holding a traveller's staff. The treatment of the landscape anticipates its role in Elsheimer's later depictions of the story, and even at this small scale the composition includes anecdotal details, such as a man

1. *Tobias and the angel*, by Adam Elsheimer. 1605. Oil on silvered copper, 9 by 7 cm. (Petworth House, West Sussex; photograph © National Trust Images/Derrick E. Witty).



This article is part of a four-year academic partnership between the Fundación Universitaria Española and the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (hereafter BNE) from 2018 to 2021 to identify, study and carry out technical analysis on drawings of the Madrid school of the second half of the seventeenth century in the collection of the Fine Arts and Maps Department of the BNE.

<sup>1</sup> BNE, Dib/18/1/1275. Acquired in 1867, the drawing was previously in

the collection of Valentín Cardenera (1796–1880). Cardenera's stamp (L. 432) appears in the upper right corner of the drawing and the library stamp for the Fine Arts department of the BNE (L. 4109) is in the upper left corner. For Cardenera as a collector, see J.M. Lanzarote Guiral: *Valentín Cardenera (1796–1880): Dibujante, coleccionista y viajero romántico*, Madrid 2019, pp.249–81.

<sup>2</sup> On Elsheimer's treatment of the



on horseback alongside another man walking by the river, that reappear in a more developed form in his small painting on copper known as the *Small Tobias*, which has been dated to 1607–08 (Fig.3). This painting, in which Elsheimer develops the iconography of the scene and treatment of the landscape, would become well known in Roman circles and later across the whole of Europe.

In the *Small Tobias*, as in Elsheimer's source, the apocryphal Old Testament Book of Tobit (Chapter Six), Tobias crosses the river, walking on stepping stones, accompanied by the angel, who holds him

**2. *Tobias and the angel*, here attributed to Adam Elsheimer and dated c.1605–10. Pen, ink and wash with red chalk on paper, 15.2 by 19 cm. (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid).**

by the arm, while Tobias's dog follows behind. Although Elsheimer has changed the orientation of the two figures, who now travel from right to left through the wooded landscape, he reuses the figure of the child from his earlier panel, changing the position of the fish, which is now under Tobias's arm. Both figures are shown in profile. The role of the landscape has become more prominent, and a new softer depiction of

Tobias story, see J.V. Sandrart: *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild-, und Mahlerey Künste*, Nuremberg [1675], ed. A.R. Peltzer, Munich 1925, pp.53–56; W. von Bode: *Adam Elsheimer: Der Römische Maler deutscher Nation*, Munich 1920, pp.47–49; F.W.H. Hollstein: *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca.1450–1700*, Amsterdam 1951, VI, pp.151–52; K. Andrews: *Adam Elsheimer: Paintings, Drawings, Prints*, Oxford 1977, pp.150–51, no.20;

p.154, no.25; p.162, no.47; and p.164, no.58; J. Jacoby: *Die Zeichnungen von Adam Elsheimer. Kritischer Katalog*, Frankfurt 2008, pp.245–58, no.A3. On Goudt, see H.S. Reitlinger: 'Hendrik, Count Goudt', *The Print-Collector's Quarterly* 8 (1921), pp.230–45; F.W.H. Hollstein: *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca.1450–1700*, Amsterdam 1953, VIII, pp.151–57; F. Stampfle: Goudt's drawings of Tobias and the angel', in A.M. Logan, ed.:

*Essays in Northern European Art, presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann on his Sixtieth Birthday*, Doornspijk 1983, pp.257–63; and Andrews, *op. cit.* (this note), pp.38–40; and *idem*: 'Hendrik Goudt', in J. Turner, ed.: *The Dictionary of Art*, New York 1996, XIII, pp.222–23. **3** A panel depicting St Lawrence is in the Musée Fabre, Montpellier, inv. no.825.157. See R. Klessmann, ed.: exh. cat. *Adam Elsheimer 1578–1610*, Edinburgh (National Gallery of Scotland)

2006, pp.116–25, nos.21–22. For a complete pre-2006 bibliography, see <http://www.nationaltrustimages.org.uk/image/27390>, accessed 17th May 2021. There is a copy of Elsheimer's painting of Tobias on a copper panel by Cornelis van Poelenburgh (1594–1667) in the collection of Palazzo Pitti, Florence, inv. no.8262. **4** On Elsheimer in Rome, see A. Thielemann and S. Gronert, eds: *Adam Elsheimer in Rom: Werk, Kontext*, Munich 2008.

**'Tobias and the angel' by Adam Elsheimer**



3. *The small Tobias*, by Adam Elsheimer. 1607–08. Oil on copper, 12.1 by 19 cm. (Historisches Museum, Frankfurt).

4. *The small Tobias*, by Adam Elsheimer. 1607–08. Etching, 9 by 14 cm. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

5. *The small Tobias*, by Hendrik Goudt after Adam Elsheimer. 1608. Engraving, 11.3 by 18 cm. (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid).

6. *The large Tobias*, by Hendrik Goudt after Adam Elsheimer. 1613. Engraving, 25.9 by 25.2 cm. (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid).

light produces a visual effect that successfully unifies all the elements of the composition. Elsheimer expands the scene with additional details, for example, placing frogs – creatures that symbolise uncleanliness and evil – on the river bank. Closely related to this painting, and to the creative process underlying its composition, are an etching (Fig.4) and a gouache in the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, in which the arrangement of the main figures is the same.<sup>5</sup> In both, Elsheimer focuses on the way the figures are embedded in the landscape, and in particular the effects of light and shade, but omits the minor details in the painting.

At the same time, in 1608, Goudt produced a faithful – although reversed – copy of the *Small Tobias* as an engraved and etched print, illustrated here in its second state after the addition of the inscription 'ELSHEIMER / PINXIT' in the lower left corner, and 'H GOUDT SCULP'



/ ROMA 1608' in the lower right (Fig.5).<sup>6</sup> The print measures 11.3 by 18 centimetres, the same dimensions as a preparatory drawing made for it by Goudt in brown ink on parchment (Musée du Petit Palais, Paris), which shows the figures facing in the same direction as in Elsheimer's painting.<sup>7</sup> A great many copies were made of the print in which the composition of the figures was no longer reversed but reflected the original arrangement in Elsheimer's painting, gouache and etching. Among them is a print dated after 1608 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) that alone adds the words 'AELSHEIMER PINXIT' beneath the moralising lines that accompany the image.<sup>8</sup>

Goudt had arrived in Rome in 1604 and remained there until Elsheimer's death in 1610. He then returned to the Low Countries with Elsheimer's engraving plates and an unknown number of his paintings and it was there that between 1612 and 1613 he published new prints based on works made by Elsheimer in Rome.<sup>9</sup> These included a new etched and engraved print of Tobias and the angel, known as the *Large Tobias*, dated 1613 and signed with Goudt's name alone (Fig.6). A preparatory drawing for this print, also by Goudt, is in the Morgan Library and Museum, New York (Fig.7).<sup>10</sup> Elsheimer's painting, which appears to have been in Goudt's possession from 1611 onwards,<sup>11</sup> has been lost but two copies are known (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, and the National Gallery, London).<sup>12</sup> As in the Petworth House painting, Tobias is shown





7. *The large Tobias*, by Hendrik Goudt after Adam Elsheimer. 1613. Pen and brown ink on parchment, 19.2 by 25 cm. (Morgan Library and Museum, New York).

dragging the fish alongside him, but he is now depicted as a youth, not a boy, and he looks back at the angel.

The drawing in the BNE is in a fragile state of conservation. The edges have been trimmed, the original backing has been lost on the right-hand side and there is pronounced staining that has diluted the ink. The entire sheet has been pasted onto a secondary backing, which can be seen clearly in the lower right corner, where only the head of the dog is still visible. The drawing is in pen using brown ink, with brown washes and numerous traces of red chalk. The two figures stand out from the

sketchily rendered landscape, thanks to a thick line that outlines most of their shapes. The cross hatching on their garments is slightly stiff. The depiction of their facial features is reduced to the bare minimum and the balance of light and shadow between the figures is achieved only by the contrasting treatment of their hair. The red chalk helps to model and highlight the figures, while at the same time lending warmth and a progressive sense of depth to the composition. There are some errors – Tobias's right leg seems not to have been drawn and the draughtsman does not appear to have found an entirely satisfactory solution for the shape of the fish. The outlines of the figures have been retraced with a stylus to the extent that in some areas the point has pierced the paper. This is evident on the outline of Tobias and on his face, as well as on the

5 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no.KdZ8498 (7 by 9 cm.). Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.162, no.47 (gouache) and p.164, no.58 (etching), links these works with one another and with the painting. Klessmann, *op. cit.* (note 3); and Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.245–48, no.A3, corroborate his view. According to Klessmann *op. cit.* (note 3), p.183, no.45, pp.152–54, this etching and the

gouache in Berlin the must predate the painting, while sharing the right-to-left movement of the figures. Both were most likely preparatory works. 6 A version of the first state, before lettering, is in the British Museum, London, see [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=1440791&partId=1&searchText=elsheimer&images=true&page=1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1440791&partId=1&searchText=elsheimer&images=true&page=1),

accessed 17th May 2021. 7 Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, inv. no.D. DUT 1116 (11.3 by 18 cm.), see Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.282, no.GK 6d, available at [https://www.photo.rmn.fr/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult\\_VPage&STID=2C6NU0714Q8B](https://www.photo.rmn.fr/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&STID=2C6NU0714Q8B), accessed 17th May 2021. 8 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no.RP-P-1887-A-12008, engraving, 14.1 by 18.8 cm.

9 For the painting, see Klessmann, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.219. 10 Morgan Library and Museum, New York, inv. no.1,146a (19.2 by 25 cm.), see Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.294–95, no.GK8c. 11 Klessmann, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.166, no.34. 12 Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. no.KMSSp745; and National Gallery, London, inv. no.NG1424.

## 'Tobias and the angel' by Adam Elsheimer

wings of the archangel, both around their edges and along the layers of feathers. The banks of the river have also been retraced.

The most noticeable feature of the drawing is its sketchy, pictorial character. In this summary yet convincing presentation of an idea, the landscape is resolved as a wooded scene, revealing a spontaneity of execution lacking in Goudt's preparatory drawings for the engravings, where greater detail imposes greater technical and compositional constraints. Elsheimer was particularly fond of chiaroscuro effects, yet the drawing lacks the pronounced areas of light and shade, made with wash or hatching, that would have guided the next step in the process of engraving the image on the printing plate.

On the basis of these features it is proposed that the BNE drawing is by Elsheimer. It cannot be attributed to any of the artists who worked closely with him in Rome.<sup>13</sup> Although it displays features common to works by Goudt, such as the wide ink borders evident in the heads of Tobias and the angel, which have often led Elsheimer's drawings to be attributed to Goudt and vice versa, the treatment of drapery is more fluid than the stiff, detailed rendition typical of Goudt's work, which also displays a more old-fashioned use of hatching to create shadows.<sup>14</sup> Drawings from Elsheimer's Roman period differ from one another in style and technique. Nevertheless, they present similarities with the BNE drawing. The treatment of the landscape, for example, recalls that in Elsheimer's 'Study for Dawn' (c.1606; Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).<sup>15</sup> The way the outlines of the figures, particularly the faces, are represented using a shorthand of thick lines can be seen also in his drawing for *The denial of St Peter* (Fig.8)<sup>16</sup> and in a sheet of figure studies in the Kupferstichkabinett.<sup>17</sup> The treatment of the drapery folds in the BNE drawing is echoed closely in other drawings and gouaches by Elsheimer as well as in his paintings. Eloquent examples are the gouache *Ceres changes Stellio into a lizard* (Fig.9),<sup>18</sup> in which the figures are modelled in a very similar way to those in the BNE drawing, as well as the three preparatory drawings for *Il Contento* (in particular the single figure on the left of one of the drawings kept in the Musée du Louvre, Paris), in addition to the painting itself (c.1607; Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh).<sup>19</sup> On all three drawings the outlines have been partially retraced with a stylus.<sup>20</sup> This technique, which allowed Elsheimer to

transfer key elements of the composition to other sheets of paper and develop the final version without having to redraw the entire scene, provides another link with the BNE drawing.<sup>21</sup> The care evident in the treatment of the figures and draperies, in contrast to the sketchy treatment of the landscape, supports the argument that the composition as a whole was an idea to be loosely followed, whereas the two main figures were to be reproduced faithfully.

The drawing appears to represent a moment of creative reflection that brings together a number of different compositional elements in the sequence of the Tobias paintings. In the drawing, Tobias does not carry the fish under his arm, as in both the *Small Tobias* and the *Large Tobias*, but instead drags it along with his left hand. As in the *Small Tobias*, he is depicted as a child rather than as a youth. Both these elements look back to the 1605 Petworth painting but in its overall composition and the atmospheric presentation of the figures in the landscape the BNE drawing is indebted to the *Small Tobias*.

It is possible, therefore, that the drawing represents another version by Elsheimer of the Tobias and the angel story that incorporates elements of both the Petworth painting and the *Small Tobias*. Evidence for the existence of such a version is a mezzotint dated c.1685 by the English engraver John Smith (1652–1743), which reproduces, down to the smallest

8. *The denial of St Peter*, by Adam Elsheimer. c.1600–05. Pen and brown ink on paper, 12.4 by 16.7 cm. (Städel Museum, Frankfurt).

9. *Ceres changes Stellio into a lizard*, by Adam Elsheimer. 1605–08. Gouache and pen and brown ink on paper, 11.6 by 6.8 cm. (National Gallery of Art, Washington).





detail, the composition of the BNE drawing, although in reverse (Fig.10). Inscribed 'ÆLLSHEIMER PINX.', it is one of seven prints made by Smith for publication by Alexander Browne in the 1670s and early 1680s, of which three were based on old-master paintings by Titian, Parmigianino and Elsheimer respectively.<sup>22</sup> The Elsheimer print (12.1 by 16 centimetres) is smaller than the BNE drawing (15.2 by 19 centimetres), which bears no stylistic resemblance to drawings known to be by Smith that make ample use of red chalk and in any case are mostly linked to portraits that he subsequently reproduced as mezzotints.<sup>23</sup>

If the reference to Elsheimer in the inscription is accepted as genuine, it seems that Smith reproduced a now lost painting for which the BNE drawing would have been a preparatory sketch. It is possible that this painting can be identified with one described as 'Un Tobia in tela

10. *Tobias and the angel*, by John Smith after Adam Elsheimer. c.1685. Mezzotint, 12.1 by 16 cm. (British Museum, London).

*abbozzato*' [A Tobias sketched on canvas] listed in Elsheimer's posthumous inventory.<sup>24</sup> His meticulous technique and the length of time he spent working on his pictures meant that at times works were left unfinished. In any case, the BNE drawing clearly shares an underlying artistic vision with Elsheimer's work as a whole. The gestures, movement and poses of the figures, the relationships between them and the use of the setting to evoke mood reflect a set of features that recur consistently throughout his oeuvre. All these factors lead us to attribute the drawing in the BNE to Adam Elsheimer and to date it to between 1605, the date of the Petworth painting, and 1610, when he died.

13 On Elsheimer's artistic associates in Rome, see Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.38–40; and C.T. Siefert: 'Adam Elsheimer's artistic circle in Rome', in Klessmann, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp.209–23.

14 See Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.39.

15 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no.KdZ 2237; see Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), no.16, pp.172–77.

16 Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 8), no.18, pp.184–87.

17 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no.KdZ 4636; see Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), no.9, pp.137–42.

18 National Gallery of Art, Washington, inv. no.2007.111.9; see Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 2), no.24, pp.212–15.

19 For the painting, see Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, inv. no.NG 2312; and Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.39.

20 Jacoby, *op. cit.* (note 8), nos.20–22, pp.192–206. For the preparatory

drawings for *Il Contento*, see Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. nos.18657r and 33953r and Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, inv. no.RSA 298.

21 On the preparatory drawings for *Il Contento*, see Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp.161–62, nos.43–45.

22 A. Griffiths: 'Early mezzotint publishing in England – I John Smith, 1652–1743', *Print Quarterly* 6 (1989), pp.243–57, at p.251.

23 See, for example, John Smith's

preliminary study after Herman Verelst for the mezzotint *Hon. Constantia Hare* (c.1694; British Museum, inv. no.2015,7083.3). See also the many drawings in his hand now in the Tate Collection and in the New York Public Library.

24 See K. Andrews: 'The Elsheimer inventory and other documents', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 114 (1972), p.600; and Andrews, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.49, document 12.