

CARAVAGGIO

Judith and Holofernes

By Jean-Pierre CUZIN, ex chief curator of painting department, Musée du Louvre

Translated from the original French text, which is to be considered the legal version.

The rediscovery of Judith and Holofernes, a long-lost masterpiece by Caravaggio (1571-1610) is a major event. It brings with it an important addition to the reconstruction and understanding of the oeuvre of one of the greatest painters in art history. Caravaggio is today an almost mythological figure whose revolutionary vision makes him one of the geniuses of pictorial representation. In addition to his artistic genius, his adventure-filled life with all of its violent chapters has turned Caravaggio into a true romantic hero.

The subject of the painting, Judith and Holofernes, is taken from the Book of Judith in the Old Testament and can be found as early as the High Middle Ages. The painting discovered in Toulouse is of horizontal format and shows Judith, the widow from Bethulia, cutting off the head of the General Holofernes who has taken siege of the city and whom she has managed to seduce. The scene takes place in Holofernes' tent. Unlike the biblical text, which describes Judith's servant Abra as waiting outside, here she is a central figure holding the sack that will carry the head of Holofernes. As for Judith, she wears the black dress and veil of a widow whereas in the Bible she is said to have worn her most beautiful robes in order to seduce the general.

The early history of the present painting can be retraced with near certainty thanks to several documents. On 25 September 1607, the Flemish painter Frans Pourbus (1569-1622), writing from Naples to his patron, Vincenzo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua states that he has seen two paintings by Caravaggio for sale in the city. He qualifies them as "bellissimi". There is il Rosario, which is none other than the Virgin of the Rosary, now in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna as well as « un quadro mezzano da camera di

mezze figure et è un Oliferno con Giudita¹», which we can translate as: "a medium sized picture painted for an interior showing half-length figures who represent a Holofernes with Judith". The prices that were being asked were enormous. The Virgin of the Rosary was priced at 400 ducats, Judith and Holofernes for only slightly less at 300 ducats. One should remember that in April of the same year, the Duke of Mantua had paid 280 ducats for the famous "Death of the Virgin" altarpiece, which today hangs in the Louvre Museum. Different documents lead us to the conclusion that the two works were up for sale at the atelier of two painters who were also art dealers and associates in Naples at the time; Louis Finson, often known as Ludovicus Finsonius (1580-1617) from Bruges and Abraham Vinck (1575-1619) from Antwerp. One can imagine, without certainty, that it might have been Caravaggio himself who consigned the paintings. As early as 15 September 1607 a letter sent from Naples to the Duke of Mantua, by one of his agents Ottavio Gentili, had alluded to the two paintings with less precision than Pourbus: « qualche cosa di buono di Michelangelo Caravaggio che a fatto qui che si venderanno», but is clear in saying that both had been painted in Naples.

The deal is not concluded since the two paintings appear ten years later in the will and testament of Finson upon his death in Amsterdam in September 1617. He leaves them to Vinck, already half-owner of the work. The Virgin of the Rosary would first be sold to a group of artists led by Rubens to be donated to the Dominicans of Antwerp² before finding its way at the end of the 18th century into the collection of the Emperor Joseph II; it has remained in Vienna ever since. The fate of Judith and Holofernes at that moment is unknown. It could be the painting found in Antwerp in 1678 and then in 1689, which would mean that it did not leave the Low Countries until the end of the 17th century. After that, it is material evidence, the lining of the canvas and its stretcher, which attests to the fact that the painting was in France at the end of the 18th century or at the start of the next one.

Is it possible that Judith and Holofernes might have come through Toulouse, perhaps with other paintings by Caravaggio when Finson was staying in the city in 1614? The fascinating personality that is Louis Finson, painter and art dealer who played an essential role in spreading throughout Europe the style of Caravaggio and Caravaggism in particular, is to

¹Stefania Macioce, *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio: fonti e documenti 1532-1724*, Rome, U. Bozzi ed., 2003, pp. 230-231.

³ Sebastian Schütze, *Caravage : l'œuvre complet*, Köln, Taschen, 2009, p. 269.

be found as much in the canvases by Merisi that he carried with him as by his own paintings, often copies of works by the master³.

The Southwestern region of France also played an important part in the dissemination of this new style of painting. A letter from Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc of Aix en Provence dated 12 September 1614 to Merri de Vic makes mention of Finson's voyage from Provence to Paris and his passing through Montpellier, Toulouse and Bordeaux. His visit to Toulouse in the autumn of 1614 seems to have lasted quite a long time, "some business" as he called it, an illness that obliged him to lengthen his stay. It is suggested by Bodart that while there he is likely to have painted an Annunciation Scene.⁴

A document discovered by the art historian Mickael Szanto in the municipal archives in Toulouse, dated from March 1615, makes mention of a grouped lot of one hundred and sixty paintings in an itinerant lottery organized by both Finson and Peter de Bruyn of Brussels. Among the paintings comprising the lot was Caravaggio's David and Goliath (N° 126, estimate 300 sols).⁵ These itinerant lotteries were commonly known as blanques.

At the start of the 17th century Toulouse was an important catholic stronghold in a region where the wars of religion had led to destruction and where Protestantism had conquered more than one city. As early as 1590, the Catholic Reformation, under the impulsion of Cardinal de Joyeuse, made the diocese of Toulouse a highly structured center of Catholic revival. It would have appeared to be the appropriate place to sell paintings of religious subjects.

³ See the letter from Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc to Merri de Vic dated du 25 May 1613 and quoted by Didier Bodart, *Louis Finson*, Bruxelles, Palais des Académies, 1970, p. 55.

⁴ Voir la lettre de Peiresc à Merri de Vic datée du 12 septembre 1614. Citée par Didier Bodart, *op.cit.*, note 1 p. 27.

⁶ Mickaël Szanto, « Les "merveilles" d'Anvers au royaume de France ou les loteries de tableaux de Pierre de Brun », in *Du baroque au classicis : Rubens, Poussin et les peintres du XVII^e siècle*, Musée Jacquemart-André, 24 September 2010-24 January 2011, Brussels, Paris, Fonds Mercator, Culturespaces, 2010, p. 54.

There are two paintings of Judith and Holofernes that resemble each other very closely: the present one and the one belonging to the Intesa Sanpaolo bank in Naples (oil on canvas, 140 x 160 cm). That painting, before the reappearance of the Toulouse picture, was the subject of an excellent and very complete text published in 2013 by Giovanna Capitello, Antonio Ernesto Denunzio, Giuseppe Porzio and Maria Cristina Terzaghi titled *Giuditta decapita Oloferne. Louis Finson interprete di Caravaggio, Judith decapitating Holofernes, Louis Finson interpreter of Caravaggio* which clearly takes a stand in seeing the picture as a copy of the painting by Caravaggio, a copy done by Finson in Naples when the painting was in his possession. A comparison of the two paintings that took place in Milan at the Pinacoteca di Brera in 2016-2017, clearly demonstrates that the work from the Intesa Sanpaolo collection is a very faithful but dry and careful copy of the one from Toulouse. Of rigorously similar dimensions, it is executed as the original on two lengths of canvas of the same weave stitched together at the same place along a horizontal line, as if to imitate the original even down to its exact structure. This copy appears to have been made immediately after the original painting, perhaps at the same moment, in the same atelier.

It is almost certain that this copy was painted by Finson, even if there is no document to attest to it. Not even the accuracy, down to the demarcation of the canvases, can prevent one from recognizing the very particular style, with its use of harsher volumes and their slight sheen, of the painter from Bruges. The attribution of the work to Finson is, however, rejected by Nicola Spinosa as well as by Ferdinando Bologna (2004).

Finson, who was a great admirer of Caravaggio, is a diligent copyist of his paintings: he is known to have made at least two signed versions of Mary Magdalen⁶ - one of the painter's lost works - and one of the Crucifixion of Saint Andrew (in Cleveland) and he uses the upper portion of the *The Seven works of Mercy* from the church of Pio Monte della Misericordia in several of his Annunciation scenes. It is logical that he would have made a copy of the *Judith and Holofernes* - a painting that he owned.

To see in the painting from Toulouse an original work by Finson seems impossible, as demonstrated by its confrontation in Milan, in 2016-2017, with several other paintings by the Bruges painter such as the *Samson and Delilah* from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille. Finson, a fine painter but a repetitive one, was very impressed by Caravaggio

⁶ One is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille, the other in a private collection.

who he copies, as previously mentioned, on many occasions but his powerful volumes never quite conceal a certain stiffness and their systematic metallic shapes. He is incapable of any inventive originality, of dramatic intensity and virtuosity of execution, so varied from one element to another that one finds in the Judith rediscovered in Toulouse.

Everything attests to this being the painting owned by Finson and Vinck, everything attests to its being the original work by Caravaggio painted by the artist when he came through Naples between September 1606 and June 1607. The painting's dramatic strength, the violence and the tension in the faces, combined with the beauty of its execution that is at once bold, simple and varied, the strong but subtle use of color, with the reds of the drapery, the yellow ochers, the opposing of black and white are all that of Caravaggio. The energetic handling of the paint, the very long uninterrupted brushstrokes, the way that the ground is used to construct shadows, are all specific to his technique. The sumptuous quality of each element taken one by one, so particular to the artist, is easy to see given the remarkable condition of this painting, a rarity in the known canvases of Caravaggio. One is able to appreciate in all its sincerity the paint surface, which has minimal wear. There are numerous pentimenti, that is to say evidence of changes made by the artist to outlines or details done during its execution. These are visible in the X-Radiographs and in some places are visible to the naked eye – all elements that show we are indeed dealing with an original work. We can take as an example the pentimenti found in the hands of Holofernes, in Judith's veil and décolleté, in the hands and clothes of Abra the servant, in the fingers of Holofernes' raised hand and in the numerous contours that have been reworked or modified.

A very thorough diagnostic analysis of the painting done on 15 March 2017 led by Claudio Falcucci, the person responsible for the scientific studies done on canvases by Caravaggio that were presented at the exhibition in Milan, *Dentro Caravaggio*, in 2016-2017,⁷ corresponds perfectly to other works by the artist (preparation of the canvas, stages of execution) during his first Neapolitan period (1606-1607). The abundance of pentimenti clearly demonstrates that this is clearly an original work. The radiographic images show that initially Judith was looking at Holofernes and not towards the viewer, a fact confirmed by recent surface cleaning (see the report by Laurence Baron Callegari). It tells us that the face of Abra was reworked and that her wrinkles were strengthened. It shows that a newer

⁷ Twenty paintings by Caravaggio were exhibited.

Claudio Falcucci, *"Come dipingeva il Caravaggio"? Forse così Dentro Caravaggio*, Milan, Palazzo reale, 29 September 2017- 28 January 2018, Milan, Skira, 2017, pp. 305-326.

light-colored ground was placed before these changes were done but without an indication of the lapse of time between the original intention and the modification. An argument could be made for this intervention being done either by Caravaggio or immediately by another artist.

These documents also show that initially the eyes of Abra were larger, almost bulging, and that they were consequently changed, bringing them to their current expression. In the version belonging to the Intesa Sanpaolo bank the eyes of Abra are close to those of the first idea of the Toulouse picture, which supports the theory of the two paintings having been executed at the same moment and in the same atelier, or the changes made to the original painting having been realized just after the copy was completed. It is impossible to ignore the material characteristics that are shared by both paintings; they are the same size and are both executed on two lengths of canvas sewn together along the same horizontal line.

Abra's face, with its wrinkles lined up with insistence and which had appeared harsh and mechanical before light cleaning, to such a degree as to lead one to suspect their having been painted by another hand, has now regained its fullness with volumes that are well constructed in the light without any discontinuity in relationship to the rest of the figure. This light cleaning has clearly revealed the continuity of historical craquelure that crosses the wrinkles. In relief, these wrinkles were particularly clogged with old varnish and dirt, which had reinforced their heaviness.

The vain hypothesis of a reworking of these elements by another painter, perhaps Finson, the artist most likely (although not unanimously agreed upon) to have painted the copy of the work that stands in Naples today that was postulated by Rossella Vodret and accepted with caution by Keith Christiansen in Milan, does not seem tenable since neither the scientific analysis, no more than the sympathetic reduction of the varnish, were able to clearly demonstrate a painting executed in two stages.

The idea of a "bottega aperta" or an "open atelier" in Naples that Caravaggio would have occupied and where he might have worked with foreign painters, not just Finson and Abraham Vinck, has been suggested by Nicola Spinosa, who from the very start has been a firm believer of an attribution of Caravaggio to the Judith. This would be one way to explain certain variations, done during their execution, between the original and the copy. But this is so contrary to the deeply ingrained image of the solitary Caravaggio, hostile to

any form of collaboration, that it is difficult to imagine him accepting any intervention from anyone and should be considered only with a great deal of reservation. It is important to remember the very large price being asked for the painting in 1607, 300 ducats, a price that would have only been possible for an original work executed by, and only by, Caravaggio himself!

What place does the painting hold in Caravaggio's oeuvre? It is almost certain that it was painted in 1606 or 1607 in Naples. The letter written by Ottavio Gentili to the Duke of Mantua leads one to believe that like the *Virgin of the Rosary*, *Judith and Holofernes* was painted in Naples. The almost sculptural strength of the volumes, the way the figures protrude from the dark background, the boldness of its execution, the large brushstrokes, are also to be found in the great *Flagellation* in the church of San Domenico Maggiore, today on view in the Museo di Capodimonte, in the *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* in the Cleveland museum and in the *Christ at the Column* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen. The way the different fabrics are translated here, notably that of the white cloth, is surprisingly close to that of the sheet on Holofernes' bed.

The painting appears as an echo to the famous *Judith* (possibly 1597) identified by the restorer Pico Cellini as a Caravaggio and published as one by Roberto Longhi in 1951. That painting, which came from the collection of Vincenzo Coppi and is now in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica at the Barberini Palace was painted in Rome for Ottavio Costa. The structure of the composition is very similar, with the two women placed to the right of the bed, the servant seen in profile to the far right now standing in the center of the composition. The position of Holofernes is very close, with his body arching backwards, arms and right hand on the bed, directly comparable. All this makes a good argument for the *Judith from Toulouse* being a Caravaggio: we know that the painting from the Costa collection was in Rome, inaccessible, and could not have immediately served as an inspiration for any "follower". Only Caravaggio could outperform Caravaggio! In this same way the restless red drapery, the one from the general's tent, work in harmony with the movement of the figures in both canvases, a beautiful concept that is superbly developed in the second painting.

But a comparison of these two paintings allows one above all to accentuate their complete opposition. On the one hand, in the Roman painting, there is breadth and breathing space. *Judith* is imposing and seductive in her fine white chemise, which reveals her physical beauty, an inspiration taken from antique statues - notably the *Laocoön* from

the Vatican and those of the great Florentine and Roman Renaissance. On the other hand, the later painting is all about tension, contraction and worry, darkness and cruelty. That which the Roman picture holds in terms of taught elegance, its insistence on curvilinear rhythms, makes way for a more intense, less diluted composition resulting in a painting that is darker, more naturalistic, more acerbic, marking a more advanced stage in the painter's art. The dark dress and veil of the heroine which seem to emerge from the picture, the terrible look of determination in her eyes, and at the same time looking away – but the scientific report by Claudio Falcucci shows us that originally, she was looking at Holofernes! – all completely different from what is being shown in the Roman canvas. Here Judith appears to be being encouraged by the servant to commit this act: the silent dialogue between the two women standing so close together constitutes the central drama of the painting. Judith's heroism, which in this moment saves her own people, takes on an even greater dimension. Holofernes is represented as a hateful figure, ruthless, the invader, with black fingernails and hands weathered by the sun and the white body of a general. His face is twisted in pain and his eyes have already rolled back. This naturalism and this insistence on the power of the sword mark the evolution of the painter towards a concern with dramatic tension that reaches an almost unbearable height. The formal tension of these figures who are grouped together in the center of the canvas with the union of their tightly contracted hands around the severed head, find their counterpoint in the draperies, amongst the most beautiful ever painted by Caravaggio, which, as they amplify, serve to elaborate the larger rhythms of the composition. The folds of the white sheet are treated with broad brushstrokes and the subtle mixing of colder and warmer shades, the heavy folds of the red drapery of Holofernes' tent, with its large knot in the center of the canvas, work as an echo to the knotted hands in their murderous gesture. It is impossible not to evoke the striking drapery that hangs down in the upper portion of the Louvre Museum's *The Death of the Virgin*, whose ample rhythms harmonize with the ensemble of the composition.

We do not know who commissioned Judith. The *Madonna of the Rosary* that was up for sale at the same time, might have been brought from Rome by Caravaggio: one is struck by the difference in brushstroke from one painting to the other, and by the greater calm in the painting that today hangs in Vienna. It is almost certain, for the stylistic reasons previously stated, that Judith was painted in Naples. And the rendering of the hilt of the sword is striking in its particularity. It is so finely done, so refined, with the unusual use of gilt, that one wonders if it might belong to the person who commissioned the painting,

that he would have wished to see his sword represented by the artist, and given the subject of the painting, imbued with a special significance.

The attribution to Caravaggio of our Judith and Holofernes was defended early on by Nicola Spinosa (2016-2017, p. 21- 45). It was also defended by Keith Christiansen who viewed the painting a short time after and who organized the colloquium held at the Museo di Brera in Milan on 6 February 2017 bringing together numerous experts on Caravaggio (see his report "Study day at Brera" and his interview in the La Gazette de l'Hôtel Drouot Friday 18 January 2019). The attribution is notably defended by: Sergio Benedetti, now deceased who agreed to the attribution on the basis of a photograph and by David M. Stone, Catherine Puglisi, Wolfgang Prohaska (former director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna), Rossella Vodret and Claudio Falcucci (who organized the exhibition Dentro Caravaggio at the Palazzo Reale in Milan), Guillaume Kientz (curator of European Paintings at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth) as well as John Gash (Senior Lecturer and Head of the Art History Department at the University of Aberdeen). As John Gash himself writes: « There is every reason to believe that, stylistically and technically, the Toulouse Judith and Holofernes emanated from Caravaggio's mind and brush, and is the original painting recorded as being for sale in Naples in September 1607, and previously known only through the copy in the Banca Intesa di Sanpaolo. It is an imaginative reworking of Caravaggio's earlier rendering of the story in Palazzo Barberini, adding new layers of psychological insight, spatial complexity, and expressive lighting in a hyper-realistic idiom, which verges on the grotesque. This latter raises the outside possibility of some limited studio collaboration or completion but, on balance, I consider such hypotheses unnecessary and unlikely. » (27 January 2019)

The moment that the painting reappeared, divergent voices were raised, notably that of Mina Gregori - the renowned Caravaggio specialist responsible for numerous high-profile discoveries regarding the artist - who did not recognize it as being by his hand. And yet, in her own monograph of Caravaggio published in 1995, she described the painting with the Intesa Sanpaolo bank as being a copy of the lost Caravaggio (p. 152, fig. 61). As of today, while recognizing that the present painting is a work of the very highest quality, (see the article by Eric Biétry-Rivierre, « Le mystère du "vrai faux" Caravage », Le Figaro, 10 January 2019) she wonders if it might not be the work of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652) but comparisons with works by this artist, whose subjects are often cruel, is unconvincing.

Similarly, Gianni Papi, whose work on the subject of Caravaggism over the past twenty years has contributed so much, refuses the attribution to Caravaggio. He sees the painting

as the work of Finson copying the lost original in direct contact with Caravaggio; as for the version in the collection of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank, he sees it as a second copy also done by Finson at a later date and not as close to Caravaggio in spirit and technique. We can only point out that the numerous pentimenti and the exceptional energy of execution found in the canvas from Toulouse do not plead in favor of its being a copy. Additionally, other specialists such as Francesca Cappelletti and Maria Cristina Terzaghi also refused the attribution of Caravaggio to the Toulouse painting.

It must be said that every new discovery of a work by Caravaggio has provoked debate, often with very fierce opposition, before the attribution is ultimately accepted by a majority or unanimously. In the following pages are the most notable examples of paintings that were once strongly contested and that today are all considered as being original works by Caravaggio.

Caravaggio, or not Caravaggio? A few cases:

Without claiming to rewrite or add to the admirable book by André Berne Joffroy, *Le dossier Caravage* (1959⁸), it is important to remember to what degree the reconstruction of the oeuvre of Caravaggio, considered today as one of the greatest painters in history, has been arduous, difficult and fueled by controversy, enthusiasm and disappointments. We will list a few examples, without making mention of the "rediscoveries" not recognized by the majority of art historians and the art market.

The Flagellation of Christ acquired in 1955 by the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen, as a work by Mattia Preti (1613-1699), was only confirmed as being by Caravaggio in 1960 by Roberto Longhi although he had previously considered another painting from a private collection in Lucques to be the original work. Denis Mahon, on the other hand, until his death in 2011, continued to maintain that the original was in a private Swiss collection. Today it is unanimously considered to be a masterpiece by Caravaggio.

Salome receives the head of John the Baptist in the National Gallery of London, coming from France and identified by Longhi, was brought to the attention of the National Gallery in 1970 by Mahon, purchased by the museum in spite of the reticence of some of the directors – including the director Michael Levey – who would leave it for many years in the reserves; today unanimously accepted as right.

The Knight of Malta from the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, determined to be by Caravaggio by Mina Gregori in 1970 while the painting was confined to the museum's reserves, an attribution long debated that today is widely accepted.

Saint Francis in Meditation from the Pinacoteca Civica in Cremona, long considered a copy by Longhi, today regarded as a masterpiece after having been rehabilitated by Mahon and Longhi himself, followed by Mina Gregori and Keith Christiansen.

⁸ André Berne-Joffroy, *Le dossier Caravage: psychologie des attributions et psychologie de l'art* (deuxième édition), Paris, Flammarion, collection « Champs arts », 2010, forward by Yves Bonnefoy. Preface and notes by Arnauld Bréjon de Lavergnée.

The painting of *Martha and Mary Magdalene* in the Detroit Institute of Arts was acquired by the museum at the initiative of Fred Cummings in 1973 following its having been unsuccessfully offered at auction in 1971 – a failure due in part to opposition voiced by Michael Levey at the time. Its attribution to Caravaggio, supported by Mahon and Maurizio Marini, was controversial. In spite of a few remaining divergent opinions, the attribution to the master is now widely accepted.

The Denial of Saint Peter in the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired in 1997, coming from a Swiss collection and attributed to Caravaggio by Longhi and published by Maurizio Marini in 1973. Today it is considered by all to be an admirable original late work by the artist.

The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew, acquired in 1976 by the Cleveland Museum of Art, whose attribution to Caravaggio had been rejected by Alfonso Perez Sanchez⁹, but following the work by Ann Tzeuschler Lurie and Denis Mahon published in 1977 is considered to be the original of the painting commissioned by the Count of Benavente. This attribution is unanimously accepted today.

The Taking of Christ, belonging to a religious community and deposited at the National Gallery Dublin, a fine discovery by Sergio Benedetti in 1993, which dethroned another version in Odessa, decidedly a copy. The Dublin painting is unanimously accepted today.

The Cardsharps from the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, long considered lost, purchased with the initiative of Ted Pillsbury, the subject of much disbelief in regards to the attribution until the discovery of the seal of Del Monte on the verso of the original canvas is an essential work by the artist.

The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula from the collection of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank in Naples, acquired in 1973 as a work by Mattia Preti, long debated, brilliantly defended by Mina Gregori and today admired, in spite of its state of conservation, as one of Caravaggio's great late works.

⁹ Ann Tzeuschler Lurie & Denis Mahon, « Caravaggio's Crucifixion of Saint Andrew from Valladolid », *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, vol. 64, n°1, 1977, pp. 2–24.

Timeline of a rediscovery:

-23 April 2014: recovered in the attic of a house in Toulouse by Marc Labarbe, auctioneer in Toulouse

- 29 April 2014 sent to Cabinet Turquin in Paris.

-30 April 2014: first identified by Julie Ducher and Stéphane Pinta, then by Eric Turquin, soon joined by Jean-Pierre Cuzin, as being the original work by Caravaggio, the copy of which is in the Intesa Sanpaolo bank in Naples as published by Giovanna Capitelli, Antonio Ernesto Denunzio, Giuseppe Porzio et Maria Cristina Terzaghi (2013) and by Mina Gregori in her monograph of Caravaggio published in 1994.

-8 July 2014: Mina Gregori is shown the painting; does not believe that it is by Caravaggio; suggests that research should focus on Finson.

-17 December 2014: Nicola Spinosa is the first to defend the attribution to Caravaggio.

-22 December 2014: X-Radiographs are taken of the painting at the veterinary school at Maisons-Alfort.

- 9 January 2015: Gianni Papi views the painting and considers it to be a fine copy by Finson of the lost Caravaggio

- 27 January 2015: Keith Christiansen is shown photographic documentation of the painting by Eric Turquin in New York City.

- 4 May 2015: Keith Christiansen is shown the painting alongside Nicola Spinosa and recognizes it as the lost original.

-Late June 2015: The painting is shown to curators and directors from the Louvre Museum: Stéphane Loire, followed by Sébastien Allard, followed by Jean-Luc Martinez.

-29 September 2015 - 21 October 2015: the painting is examined at the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF) (French Museums Center

for Research and Restoration) at the request of the Paintings Department of the Louvre Museum.

-25 March 2016: The export license is refused by decree from the French Minister of Culture (Ministre de la Culture et de La Communication), Audrey Azoulay, « for a painting possibly attributed to Michelangelo Merisi, dit Caravaggio, Judith and Holofernes, oil on canvas 1600-1610, a recently discovered painting, of great artistic value, which could be identified as a lost composition by Caravaggio, known to us until now by indirect references, deserves to be kept in the country as a landmark of "Carravagisme", whose history and attribution remain to be examined."

-12 April 2016: presentation of the painting to the press at Cabinet Turquin, Paris.

-19 May 2016: David M. Stone and Sybille Ebert-Schifferer view the painting. The former gives a positive opinion on the attribution to Caravaggio, the latter disagrees.

-9 June 2016: Rossella Vodret and Claudio Falcucci view the painting and support the attribution to Caravaggio.

-23 June 2016: Catherine Puglisi views the painting and supports the attribution to Caravaggio.

- 10 November 2016 - 5 February 2017, exhibition Terzo Dialogo. Attorno a Caravaggio. Una questione di attribuzione: thanks to James M. Bradburne, director of the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, the Toulouse painting is included in the exhibition where it is hung next to the version belonging to the Intesa Sanpaolo bank and where it can also be compared to the Supper at Emmaus in the Brera's own collection. The painting is also confronted with works known to be by Finson, his copy of Caravaggio's Mary Magdalen in Ecstasy and his Samson and Delilah, two paintings from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille, as well as another copy of Mary Magdalen from a private collection.

-6 February 2017: article by Keith Christiansen, (Study day at Brera, online at: <https://pinacotecabrera.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Study-Day-at-Brera-Keith-Christiansen-1.pdf>)

-15 mars 2017: Technical report by Claudio Falcucci.

13 June 2017: A study day in the Grande Galerie in the Louvre: a meeting of the specialists regarding the Judith and Holofernes from Toulouse was held in front of the three paintings by Caravaggio from the Louvre as well as the Flagellation of Christ brought from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rouen (a meeting reported by Didier Rykner in an online article dated 13 June 2017 at latribunedelart.com).

Caravaggio
Judith and Holofernes
Oil on canvas
144 x 173.5 cm

The painting is executed on two lengths of canvas sewn together along a horizontal seam at the level of Holofernes' raised hand; relined in France between 1790 and 1820, a time frame that can be confirmed by the painting's pine wood key stretcher that is certainly French.

Provenance:

Naples September 1607: With Louis Finson and Abraham Vinck in 1607: contemporary documentation indicates that the artists had the painting in their possession for sale for the price of 300 ducats.

Amsterdam 1617: By descent to Vinck in 1617: Finson dies in Amsterdam on 19 September 1617 and according to his last will and testament, the painting is left to Abraham Vinck.

The painting is not listed in the inventory done after the death of Vinck in 1619 in Antwerp.

Antwerp 1678? Presumed to be in Antwerp in the collection of the engraver Alexander Voet as early as 15 October 1678, mentioned in the estate inventory done after Voet's death in 1689¹⁰.

Toulouse: Private Collection. According to family tradition the painting has been with them since 1871, date of the purchase of the house where the painting was found.

¹⁰ Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse Kunstinventarissen uit de Zeventiende Eeuw*, Bruxelles, Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 2001, vol. 11, p. 531, p. 569. « A *Judith* by Michiel Angelo da Caravasio » (sic).

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