On 14 June 1607 Caravaggio left Naples where he had been living since early October 1606, having fled Rome after killing Ranuccio Tomassoni in a brawl over a gambling debt in May of the same year. From Rome he went on to Zagarola, Palestrina and Paliano, fiefdoms of the Colonna where he spends some time before settling in Naples then in Malta (there is mention of his being there from 22 July) where he entered into the service of the Knights of the Order of Saint John. During his first Neapolitan stay – he later returns to the city between 1609 and 1610 having fled Malta and stopping first in Messina and Syracuse – Caravaggio painted, among other works, the *Seven Acts of Mercy* for the church of Pio Monte della Misericordia, the *Flagellation* for the de Franchis chapel in the basilica of San Domenico Maggiore (now exhibited at the Museo di Capodimonte) and the *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* (Cleveland Museum of Art) for the viceroy of Naples (1603–1610) Don Juan Alfonso Pimentel Enriquez, Count of Benavente, the *Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

However, prior to his departure for Malta, Caravaggio left two paintings – the *Madonna of the Rosary* and Judith and Holofernes – (possibly for sale) in the Naples studio belonging to Louis Finson, a painter from Bruges who is recorded in Naples between 1604 and 1605, and his partner Abraham Vinck, born in Antwerp and present in the Southern capital between 1598 and 1599. The latter is described by certain sources as already being in Rome and as a close friend of Caravaggio. In fact, both paintings are mentioned for the first time as works of the Lombard painter in a letter dated 15 September 1607 sent to Vincent I, Duke of Mantua by Ottavio Gentile, his agent in Naples. In that letter, both paintings – without specifying the subjects – are listed as being in the possession of a
Flemish painter (without specifying the name) and estimated at 300 and 400 ducats respectively. A few days later, on 27 September, the Flemish painter Frans Pourbus, in Naples to authenticate paintings belonging to the Prince of Conca sent a letter to the Duke of Mantua where he advised him to buy the paintings seen in the studio of Finson and Vinck: “I have seen here two paintings by Michelangelo de Caravaggio: the first, that represents a rosary, is designed for an altarpiece; it measures 18 hands across and they will not take less than 400 ducats; for the other, a painting of average size designed for an interior and representing Judith and Holofernes; they will not sell it to you for less than 300 ducats.”.

Both paintings are mentioned again, this time listed in the last will and testament dated 19 September 1617 drawn up by Finson in Amsterdam – where he had moved after having spent time in Provence – and where he joined his friend and partner Abraham Vinck, who had already been there for some years.

In his will, the Franco-Flemish painter bequeathed all of his belongings to Vinck, including two paintings that they had jointly owned for some time: the *Madonna of the Rosary*, which Finson himself had copied, a canvas sold in 1631 by the dealer Charles de Koninck, and the Judith. Finson’s death was soon followed by Vinck’s and *The Madonna of the Rosary* was put up for sale after 1619 by his heirs and bought for 1800 florins by a committee of Flemish painters and “amateurs” – of which Peter Paul Rubens was a member – for the church of the Dominicans in Antwerp. It is there in 1781 that the Emperor of Austria Joseph II of Habsburg, on a visit to the city, admired it. In 1786, the painting is either given or sold to him placing it first in the imperial collections before joining that of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

Recently dated as belonging to Caravaggio’s first Neapolitan stay on stylistic grounds as well as by the possible identification of the person kneeling to the left as being the Viceroy Count of Benavente (Denunzio 2009, pp.175–194), the monumental painting of the *Madonna of the Rosary* is more likely to be situated – as suggested Prohaska - (Prohaska–Swoboda 2010, pp.71–84) - alongside other paintings done by Caravaggio shortly before he fled Rome (for archival documentation on both canvases left in Naples by Caravaggio, cf., Bodart 1970 pp.10–16, 50–56 and Macioce 2010, pp. 236 and 279). It is likely that the painting was then taken to Naples by Caravaggio and left in Finson and Vinck’s studio – just like the Judith that was painted in situ and at the same time as the Crucifixion of Saint
Andrew (now in Cleveland Museum of Art) for the Count of Benavente – before the artist’s departure for Malta.

Unfortunately, even though the presence of The Madonna of the Rosary is known successively in Naples in 1607, Amsterdam in 1617, Antwerp after 1619 and Vienna as of 1786, there is no trace of the Judith subsequent to the death of Finson and Vinck. However, in recent years, it was suggested that the painting from a private collection in Naples, known since the mid 20th century that had entered the collection of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank, should be identified as its copy¹.

That is what was known up until 2014, year of the appearance at the offices of Cabinet Turquin in Paris of a painting, a Judith and Holofernes – coming from an attic in an old house in Toulouse – in every respect identical to the copy of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank. The painting differs only slightly in its dimensions (144 x 173.5 cm as opposed to the 140 x 180 cm of the Naples painting) and presents the same iconographic solutions and even the same composition, as well as an identical assembly of twill canvas of Neapolitan manufacture. The two paintings are each made up of two lengths of canvas that have been sewn together with a seam that runs horizontally from Holofernes’ left hand to the right of Judith’s. At the time of its discovery, the picture was in decent condition but very dirty with some minimal losses to the original paint surface and covered with several

¹ Long considered as being the work of an anonymous caravaggesque painter, the Judith of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank has since been attributed either to Finson between 1607 and 1613 (his years in Provence), or to the so-called Master Emmaus of Pau (a painting of this subject belongs to the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Pau (see Navarro, Naples (1991–1992), pp. 261–262: 2004, Bologna, Naples 2004, pp. 166–167)). Subsequently, Giuseppe Porzio suggested a rather controversial attribution to the Neapolitan painter Filippo Vitale, painted during his naturalistic period when he came into contact with Caravaggio (Porzio in Paris 2012, pp. 14–23). The attribution to Finson of the Intesa Sanpaolo bank Judith was confirmed by Gianni Papi and Maria Cristina Terzaghi. However, it is necessary to consider the obvious differences in the pictorial representation that became apparent once the Intesa Sanpaolo Judith was placed in comparison to other works by Finson, for example the 1611 painting of the Allegory of the Four Elements (Quattro Elementi) today in the Blaffer Foundation in Houston, but also with known copies – some signed and dated – of certain originals by Caravaggio (such as copies of The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew that can be seen at the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Dijon – attributed also to Vinck – and in the Back-Vega collection in Vienna, then considered, with little credibility, as being a replica done by Caravaggio himself). Just like the Ecstasy of Mary Magdalen painted by Caravaggio at the time of his second Neapolitan stay and intended as a gift, at the same time as two Saint John’s, for cardinal Scipion Borghese for which we know of one signed copy at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille and another signed and dated 1613 in a private collection in Saint Rémy-de-Provence or even the Resurrection of Christ in the Fenaroli Chapel at Sant’Anna dei Lombardi which can be considered a copy, probably with variations, of a painting by the Bruges painter (Aix-en-Provence, Eglise Saint-Jean de Malte).
layers of abundantly oxidized varnish, notably on the right-hand side due to superficial traces likely caused by rainwater and humidity.

After a first lightening of the varnish, the picture was displayed in 2016 at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan for a comparative study with the museum’s The Supper at Emmaus – painted by Caravaggio in Paliano after his flight from Rome – with the Intesa Sanpaolo Judith and with two of the innumerable copies known (the one signed by Finson from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseille and another one from a private collection) of the lost Ecstasy of Mary Magdalen, painted, as defended by Gianni Papi, during Caravaggio’s second Neapolitan stay.

When I saw the painting again during the comparative study at the Pinacoteca di Brera it seemed obvious to me, just as it had the first time that I saw it at the Cabinet Turquin in Paris, that the Judith from Toulouse, for pictorial reasons, was of a superior quality in comparison to the Intesa Sanpaolo version - that was attributed with little certitude to Finson – but that it differed in every aspect from Finson’s other known compositions.

This allows for the confirmation, as long as one is ready to lay aside prejudice, of the previous hypothesis that identified the Toulouse Judith as the original painting left by Caravaggio in 1607 at Finson and Vinck’s Neapolitan workshop at the same time as The Madonna of the Rosary. This hypothesis had already been put forth by certain scholars when the picture was seen for the first time at the Cabinet Turquin. Today, it is all the more substantiated by the light cleaning that was done to the varnish which highlighted the clearly original qualities of the painting confirming the very elaborate stylistic elements that concur with certain works executed by Caravaggio at the end of his Roman stay (in particular The Death of the Virgin today in the Louvre, and The Madonna of the Rosary in Vienna), in Paliano when he was under the protection of the Colonna (The Supper at Emmaus at the Pinacoteca di Brera) and in Naples between 1606 and 1607 (notably The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew; now in Cleveland).

These are the qualities that we find today in the Judith from Toulouse with its intense stylistic pictorial representation: as clearly visible in the depiction of the tragic event as in the treatment of various details.

For example, there is the rendering of the sumptuous red drapery of Holofernes’ tent that recalls a theatre backdrop (just like the one in The Death of the Virgin and The Madonna
of the Rosary) and which amplifies the appearance and the realism of the painting. The skillful treatment of Judith’s rich black velvet garment is another example. The use of color in the rendering of Abra’s humble garment and the cloth she wears on her shoulders echo the previously mentioned paintings from the Pinacoteca di Brera and the Cleveland Museum of Art. The recent cleaning enhances the finely decorated golden hilt of the sword with which Judith finally cuts the head off Holofernes as well as the clever entanglement and almost inextricable crossing of Abra’s left hand with that of Judith’s as she grasps Holofernes’ hair.

Furthermore, thanks to this recent light cleaning, other elements have reappeared that enable us to definitively consider the Judith from Toulouse as the painting left by Caravaggio – as he is about to leave for Malta – in Naples with Finson and Vink alongside The Madonna of the Rosary. Of particular importance is the discovery of pentimenti that were previously invisible: these pentimenti are found in the shortening of the fingers on the left hand of Holofernes, Judith and the servant; as well as in the treatment of the edge of the chemise that covers the heroine’s breast. Conversely, in regards to the chromatic treatment of the white sheet, upon which lies a howling Holofernes, one might have initially thought before the sympathetic reduction of the varnish that its appearance was caused by an earlier cleaning of the original paint surface when in fact it is quite the opposite. It now seems that it was the result of a specific method used by Caravaggio that can be found in other paintings done after his flight from Rome: The Crowning with Thorns at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Saint Jerome in Meditation at the Montserrat Museum, the Saint John the Baptist at the Nelson – Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, The Madonna of the Pilgrims in the church of Sant’Agostino, The Supper at Emmaus at the Pinacoteca di Brera, Salome with the head of Saint John the Baptist at the Palacio Real in Madrid as well as the Crucifixion of Saint Andrew at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

It is known that in 1602, Caravaggio had already painted a Judith beheading Holofernes in Rome for the Genovese banker Ottavio Costa - for whom he painted shortly thereafter a Saint John the Baptist – today in Kansas City. The subject of Judith beheading Holofernes (an episode from the Old Testament’s Book of Judith 13, 1-10) is a subject that can be found in paintings and sculptures since the beginning of the Quattrocento. Judith, a young and beautiful woman from Bethulia, recently widowed, thought up a plan to kill Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army who had taken siege of the city of Bethulia in Judea. Having approached and seduced the general during a feast held for her inside his
tent, and with the help of her maid Abra, Judith, as Holofernes was lying drunk on the bed, cuts off his head, which is then put in a sack and taken to be brandished triumphantly before the Bethulians. The Costa Judith, passed down to the collection of Vincenzo Coppi’s ancestors in the mid 16th century and acquired by in 1971 by the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini is noticeably different as much by its iconographic choices as in its pictorial representation to that of the painting rediscovered in Toulouse. In the version from the Palazzo Barberini, Caravaggio underscores the beauty of the biblical heroine in dressing her in an ample white shirt that clings to her breast while exalting it, as well as by highlighting her triumphant and disdainful attitude that contrasts with a howling Holofernes in the final moments of his life. In this way, the painter accentuates the contrast with the old servant, who stands to the side (according to the biblical text Abra had, in fact, remained outside Holofernes’ tent) and is viewed in profile with her prominent nose and throat and a deeply wrinkled face. On the other hand, in the Toulouse painting – in opposition to the Barberini version – the depiction of Holofernes’ violent death is immersed in an atmosphere of dark and austere tones, as found in Shakespearean tragedies: the painting is set in a moment of maximum physical and emotional tension for the three protagonists. Abra suffers from a goiter just like the old woman who appears on the lower left of the Crucifixion of Saint Andrew in the Cleveland Museum of Art. Surprised and frightened, she now turns to a proud Judith who has accomplished her violent act with determination. Judith wears a black dress, sign of her widowhood. Although still beautiful, here she is not as young as the Barberini Judith. Now she turns her gaze towards us instead of towards Holofernes, as if to make us accomplices to her dreadful gesture and witnesses of her heroic deed. In any event, the whole scene differs from that of the Palazzo Barberini version; not only by the iconographic choices and the pictorial solutions but also in the expression of the human condition, of being and existence. These are elements that the Caravaggio distilled in other compositions in particular in Malta, in Messina, in Syracuse and during his brief second Neapolitan stay. He had gradually matured since the realization in Rome of The Death of the Virgin and The Supper at Emmaus in Paliano, and which he pushes to an extreme first in Naples; in particular with the Flagellation (today at Capodimonte), the Crucifixion of Saint Andrew for Benavente and then with the “rediscovered” Judith from Toulouse.

In light of the stylistic elements exposed here, it is clear that the Judith from Toulouse can be placed chronologically between the earlier Supper at Emmaus at Brera and the later The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew of Cleveland, executed before the painter’s departure for Malta. When he embarked on one of Fabrizio Colonna’s ships headed to Valletta,
Caravaggio was compelled to leave both the *Madonna of the Rosary* and the *Judith in good hands* in the studio of his friends, Louis Finson and Abraham Vinck.

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