

On Ribera's Philosophers: Rediscovering Aesopus

Roberta Lapucci



Fig. 1
Jusepe de Ribera, *The Philosopher* (Aesop), oil on canvas
(Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum, Mdina)

When viewing the portrait of *The Philosopher* at Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum in Mdina, (Fig. 1) one must distinguish this painting as belonging to a specific genre, that of the 'beggar philosophers.' Scholar Steven N. Orso describes the beggar philosophers as 'rough, plebian figures, dressed in tattered garments, pursuing their intellectual inquiries with neither benefit of, or concern for, material comforts of any sort'.¹ The genre, already flourishing at the beginning of the seventeenth century, had its main Italian centers of diffusion in Naples, Rome, Venice, and Genoa, and was particularly developed under the patronage of the renowned Marquis Vincenzo Giustiniani.² Foreign artists who worked in the Caravaggesque manner like the Spanish-born Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) and the Flemish Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) were documented as producing beggar philosopher portraits. However Ribera, and later the Italian Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), are the ones mostly known for succeeding in this genre.

Although the beggar philosopher genre would have been familiar to artists and patrons in the seventeenth century, an unidentified painting such as the portrait at the Palazzo poses two fundamental questions. The first concerns the exact identification of the portrayed personage: whether the portrait actually depicts a beggar philosopher, and if so, which one out of many possible choices he could be. Another possibility to contemplate is that the portrait could also be representing a contemporary personage who was seen, or wanted to be seen, as having the qualities of a certain ancient philosopher. This last possibility would lead to two further questions: whose portrait was it, and what historical figure could it be representing?

The next issue to contemplate would be the attribution: deciding which artist could have painted this portrait. It could have been created by the hand of a popular artist such as Ribera, by one of his contemporaries - made as a high-quality copy contemporaneously, or produced at a later date. In the past five years many scholars have approached these questions, primarily in Oreste Ferrari's essay '*L'iconografia dei filosofi antichi nella pittura del secolo XVII in Italia*',³ and more recently within studies by Francesco Lofano, Mario Epifani, Nicola Spinosa, Vincenzo Pacelli, and Steven N. Orso.⁴

Portraits of beggars are not always immediately identified with philosophers, and can be easily confused with depictions of the Apostles, allegories of the five senses, or simple character studies. Even if the portrait is attributed correctly to a beggar philosopher, the choice of which one remains. Two well-known beggar philosophers by Ribera are Democritus and Heraclitus. Democritus is called the laughing philosopher, as he reacted with mirth to the follies of mankind, whereas Heraclitus is the weeping philosopher, as the follies of mankind moved him to tears. Their portraits were often painted together as a pair, with their expressions being the indicator of who they were. Some portraits have more markers of identification, such as the presence of papers with geometrical drawings that could be Euclid's *Elements*, or indicating a mathematician philosopher such as Archimedes; others were characterized by references to music.

In the seventeenth century, philosopher portraits painted by Ribera and his contemporaries often conformed to the popular ideals of Neostoicism, which followed the teachings of Seneca. Seneca describes the previously



far left: Fig. 2
Ms. 1591, f.84v
(Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence)

left: Fig. 3
Illustration from *Aesopus Fabulae et vita latinae et germanice*, Ulm, Johannes Zainer (c.1476-1477), reproduced in C.L. Küster, *Illustrierte Aesop-Ausgaben des 15. Und 16. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1970), Taf. 1.1

opposite: Fig. 4
Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della Fisionomia dell'uomo* (1644), p. 133

mentioned Democritus and his development into a beggar philosopher, saying that 'Democritus, considering riches to be a burden to the virtuous mind, renounced them'.⁵ This follows the central theme of Stoicism, that the virtuous man lives in harmony with nature, achieving it by cultivating reason and developing the fortitude and self-control necessary to resist being distracted from virtue by destructive emotions. Things not essential to living in accordance with nature were considered 'indifferent', such as wealth or poverty, though Seneca quotes 'riches have shut off many a man from the attainment of wisdom; poverty is unburdened and free from care'.⁶ In poverty a beggar philosopher could exercise the logic and good judgment that would enable him to virtuously overcome the snares of passions, whatever caprice of Fortune might befall him.

Seneca's ideals were very well known among literary men all over Europe because of the emergence of Neostoicism, a philosophic current that sought to fuse the teachings of ancient Stoicism, writings by Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, with the doctrines of seventeenth-century Modern Christianity. The most renowned scholar who propagated these ideas was Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) who published a critical edition of Seneca's works in 1605.⁷ Lipsius affirmed the Spanish birth, in Córdoba, of Seneca, which led to Neostoicism being particularly appreciated in that country. Artists such as Ribera, called '*lo Spagnoletto*' or 'little Spaniard' in reference to his origins, surely felt regional pride when affiliated with the great philosopher.

There are records of two series of Philosophers executed by Ribera for two different patrons; one for the Prince of Liechtenstein in 1636, and an earlier one in the late 1620s for a patron, Don Fernando Enriques Afán de Ribera, 3rd Duke of Alcalá de Los Gazules (1583-1637), who was also Spanish-born. The Duke was in Naples as Vice Regent from 1629-31, and during that time commissioned from Ribera a series of twelve philosopher portraits. Series such as these were common in Rome and Naples as decorations for the Libraries

of noble patrons in the Neostoic entourage. During the Counter Reformation these portraits of philosophers were considered most effective when painted '*in verosimile*', which means as close as possible to the physical likeness described by ancient literary sources, such as Diogenes Laertius. The realistic nature of the portraits was praised by the Duke, who also had within his collection representations of dwarfs and deformed beings. It was for him that Ribera painted the famous full body portrait of *The Bearded Woman*, and inscribed upon it '*Josephus de Ribera hispanus Christi Cruce Insignitus sui temporis alter Apelles*',⁸ meaning that he considered himself similar to Apelles, who was renowned for the mimetic qualities of his art. At this time, the limits within art between the natural, the scientific, and marvellous wonders (*mirabilia*) were very fluid.

In 1637, an inventory of the Alcalá estate mentions '*Dos Philosophos de mano de Josephe de Ribera que el uno tiene avierto un libro y el otro tiene dos libros cerrados torcidos los ojos*' ('Two philosophers by the hand of Jusepe de Ribera, one holds an open book and the other holds two closed books [and has] crooked eyes').⁹ Some scholars have identified the portrait of the philosopher with the open book as that present at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles titled *Euclid*. The description of the second philosopher could refer to the Mdina portrait, though Spinosa¹⁰ found that these two did not match in size and shape, as a portrait pair should. The Mdina portrait could therefore perhaps be linked to the Balbi collection inventory in Genoa; two references are of interest in the Balbi family 1740 inventory, that of a '*Ritratto di vecchio con bastone di Spagnoletto*', and '*Uomo con un libro vecchio del Spagnoletto*' (Portrait of an old man with a cane by Spagnoletto; Man with an old book by Spagnoletto).¹¹ The Balbis were a Genoese noble family, already patrons of Ribera's father-in-law Bernardo Azzolino.¹²

Adding further mystery to the Mdina portrait's origin is the presence of many similar genre paintings by Ribera's contemporaries, mainly Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin,

and Domenico Fetti.¹³ In the *Stati delle anime* of 1615 and 1616 '[...] Giuseppe Riviera Valentiano Pittore/ Giovanni suo fratello/ Giovanni Coraldo di Saragozza/ Giovanni Calvo di Saragozza/ Pietro Maria da Valeriano Italiano, are all mentioned as members of Ribera's workshop, and could all easily have made copies of Ribera's works.¹⁴ Bernardo De Dominici, author of the *Vite dei Pittori, Scultori, ed Architetti Napolitani*, published in 1742, writes that Juan Do, Bartolomeo Bassante, Cesare Fracanzano, as well as Salvator Rosa's brother-in-law Francesco Fracanzano, were all painting 'mezze figure di filosofi' (half figures of philosophers), following the example of the Master [Ribera].¹⁵ The Mdina portrait, here considered to be a depiction of Aesopus, has in the past also been identified as Archimedes. An Aesopus attribution is, however, more fitting in this context; there exist other versions of the Mdina portrait, some of which have 'Hissopo' or 'issopo' painted on the spine of the closed book featured in the painting.¹⁶ The Mdina portrait lacks this detail, although the physical attributes of the figure fit a historical description of Aesopus (c.620-560 BC), the ancient Greek fable writer who is hypothesized to have lived in the age of Croesus and Pisistratus. Aesopus's life was divulged through the writings of Massimo Planude, a Byzantine monk, who described him as an extremely ugly man, transferred from Frigia to Greece as a slave and then brought to the Island of Samo by the rich philosopher Xanthus. While serving his Master, he demonstrated his intelligence by narrating a series of witty episodes that taught important moral principles. Aesopus was not properly considered a philosopher, but a sarcastic counterpart to moral hypocrisy; his writings have had great success in western culture.¹⁷ There are several Latin editions of his text; Aviano (fourth century), Romulus (Carolingian age), Ademaro di Chabannes, and Walter of England (twelfth century). A famous Italian translation (Venice, 1550) by Giulio Landi, the Count of Piacenza, preserved Aesopus's fame in Italy; the book was so popular that new editions hands, which lack

Giulio Landi, the Count of Piacenza, preserved Aesopus's fame in Italy; the book was so popular that new editions were frequently printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸

Although his stories may have remained consistent, descriptions of Aesopus's physical appearance have evolved. Though Massimo Planude described him as an extremely ugly man, in medieval times he lost his ugly aspect and was portrayed as an elegant and literate writer wearing a red mantle, sitting on a rich throne (Fig. 2). However, as seen in later engravings, tradition refers to him as a hunchbacked and deformed man (Fig. 3). But literary sources did not always agree on this; Plutarch used several critical statements when describing the meeting of Aesopus with the Seven Sages, but he never mentioned that he was ugly. The myth of Aesopus's ugliness however, caused the attribution of a grotesque marble sculpture currently preserved at the Museum of Villa Albani in Rome, as being a *Portrait of Aesopus*. The *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* by Giovan Paolo Lomazzo, printed in 1584, listed the representations of philosophers and provided their physiognomies. Aesopus is described, following Massimo Planude's text, as 'deforme e sparuto... il naso largo e schiacciato, il collo corto e torto, le labbra grosse... fu di colore negro' (deformed and small... a large flattened nose, short twisted neck, big lips... of a black colour).¹⁹ This description, along with the reference to some Sub-Saharan animals in his fables, leads to a hypothesis that he was of Ethiopian origin. In the seventeenth century, Giovan Battista della Porta²⁰ associated physiognomical typologies of diverse human beings to animals, likening Aesopus's appearance to that of a pig (Fig. 4), although the contrast between the ugliness of his physical aspect and the perfection of the spirit was considered a topos applied since ancient times as a synonym of anticonformism.

Restoration

The Restoration of the Mdina Aesopus started with a complete diagnostic operation executed by the Art-Test company, which consisted of X-rays, IR reflectography with a CCD scanner, UV fluorescence, Multispectral and Multilayer imaging, XRF (X-ray fluorescence), and digital Microscope acquisitions.²¹ The X-ray images (Fig. 8 & 9) were particularly interesting as they showed a change in the posture of the figure; an under layer shows him simply holding a cane with his hands positioned in opposite directions, both vertically set on the wooden stick. The final version however has the cane at an angle, as though the figure is putting his weight with his left hand onto the stick, showing him as really crippled or hunchbacked. His face and

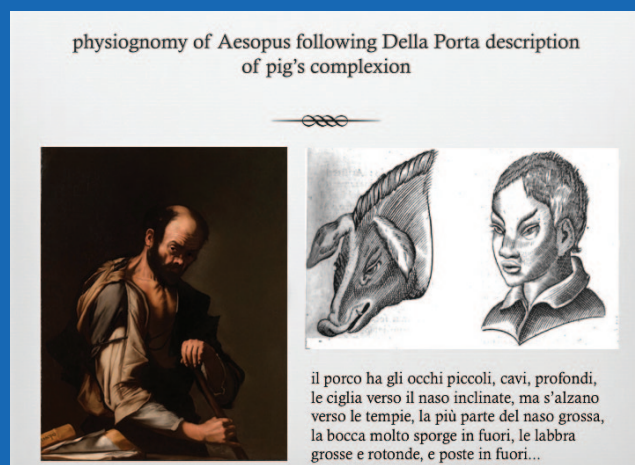




Fig. 5
X-ray fluorescence being executed by Art-Test

shoulders were also slightly repositioned, and the head of a pig seems to be noticeable in a first version over Aesopus's forehead. Ultraviolet fluorescence showed the presence of two layers of protective varnish; an old one (emitting a green fluorescence) and a more modern synthetic one (violet fluorescence) (Fig. 10).

Supplementary research for the diagnostic interpretation of this painting was centered on comparisons with published technical sources on Ribera's paintings.²²

A technical study found the painting to be executed on a single piece of canvas of a regularly woven linen fabric,²³ of a density of 7x7 threads per square cm, with no joining lines. The auxiliary stretcher is old and wooden, though not original. The reddish and thin primer had been unevenly applied with a very large spatula, which resulted in curving waves visible in the X-ray plates. Infrared reflectography revealed that the paint layers had been applied quite thinly yet the highlights and lighter areas have denser strokes, and charcoal traces are found in the face, the left eye, the base of the nose, and in the beard. The *en reserve*²⁴ technique had been abundantly used, with the red primer employed as a half tone. Unfinished areas were detected, especially in the hands, which lack detail. There is also a soft halo around the

face, as though the figure has been moved slightly to the left. *Pentimenti*²⁵ in the hands, and the disposition of the facial elements and of the shoulders support this hypothesis. Fine highlights are found on the ear, the forehead, around the eyes and on the knuckles.

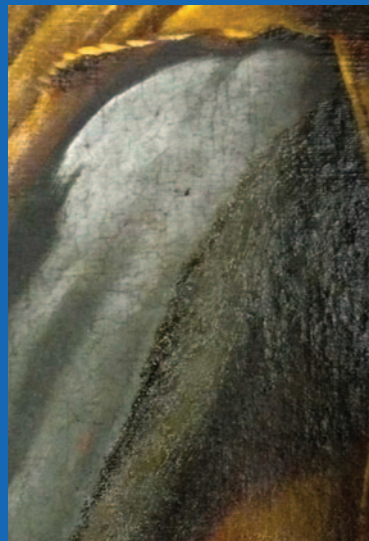
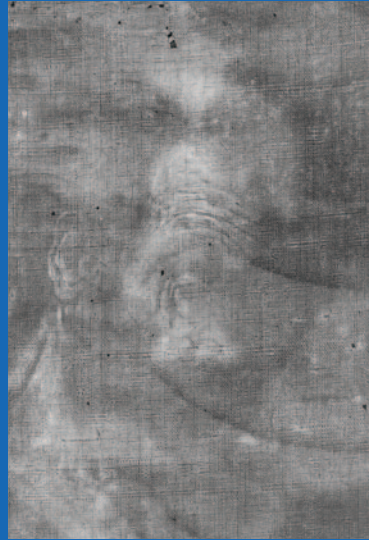
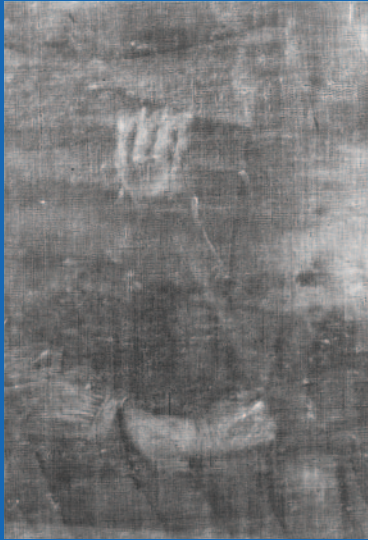
The conservation intervention began with Feller Tests,²⁶ aimed at determining the minimum polarity needed to dissolve the varnish layer. Test no. 8 was satisfactory, with an Fd level of 68. Therefore the cleaning solvent chosen was a mixture of 20% DMSO (dimethyl-sulfoxide), 30% Ethanol and 50% Ligroin, addensed in a stearic emulsion, which was then neutralized by Ligroin and Lavender Essence. Prior to cleaning, a glue consolidation and a plastering of several small flaking portions on the upper side of the painting was necessary. During the varnish removal, the cleaning level was always controlled by observation under UV light with a binocular microscope. Patches were removed from the back and the canvas tears were repaired with polyamide suturation. The subsequent intervention consisted of a *pasta fiorentina*²⁷ lining procedure, and later mounting back to the painting's original and restored auxiliary support; this latter



top: Fig. 6
Detail of cleaning under binocular microscope observation



bottom: Fig. 7
Lining intervention



top left: Fig. 8
X-ray detail showing a pentimento in the positioning of the hands

top right: Fig. 9
X-ray detail showing the wave-like application of the priming and the presence of the head of the pig over the forehead of Aesop in an underlying version

bottom left: Fig. 10
UV fluorescence showing two layers of varnishes (a blue/violet fluorescent one and a greenish/yellow one)

bottom right: Fig. 11
Detail of the blue in the sleeve during cleaning process

needed to be reinforced with tensioning systems. Losses were plastered, surface texturing of the plaster surface was executed and a first undertone gouache colour layer was in-painted. A first protective layer of Talens retouching varnish was applied by brush, then by varnish color glazes. After the retouching was completed, a final Ketone varnish was sprayed with a compressor.

Provenance

Reference to the recent provenance of the Mdina painting can be found in Box 35 of the OFG Archives at Palazzo Falson.²⁸ An extant document shows that on the 24th October 1859, Judge Giacomo Bruno acquired in Malta a number of antique paintings, including an '*Archimede mezza figura al vero stile di Michelangelo da Caravaggio* [per] lire L[ir]e [sterline] 20', from the artist Giovanni Gallucci.²⁹ Judge Bruno was the great grandfather of Olof Gollcher, so

it is likely that this painting came into the latter's possession through inheritance, although this hypothesis is not certain.

Attribution

The figure's position is similar to the St Jerome by Caravaggio at the Co-Cathedral of St John in Valletta, but could also refer to many other deformed St Jeromes, some of which are attributed to Ribera.

As previously mentioned, there are other Aesopus's portrait replicas bearing striking similarities to the Mdina painting.³⁰ Four paintings come from: the Bruxelles Demarbaix Collection (134x98cm); a Brescia Private Collection (194.5x74.5cm); Barcelona, Joan Maoraman (125x95cm); and Fiorenzuola d'Adda, Villa Cipelli (125x95cm). In 1995, Christie's London included in one of its catalogues a painting with a possible signature and date of 1614 (119.2x79.8). Other paintings, seen in Fig. 12, include the following:

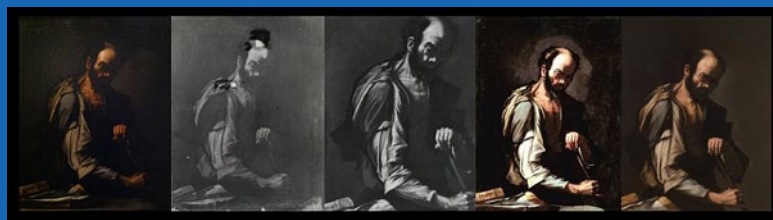


Fig. 12

Five versions of *The Philosopher*, from left to right respectively: Monasterio de San Lorenzo, El Escorial; National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin; Unknown location; Private Collection, New York; Whitfield Collection, London

Ribera's workshop, El Escorial, Monasterio de San Lorenzo (123x97cm); Dublin, The National Gallery of Ireland, attributed to Luca Giordano (122x96cm); attributed to Luca Giordano, unknown location (97x74cm); Ribera, New York Private Collection, presented in a Spanish Exhibition in 2005 (125x92cm); and attributed to Ribera, London, Whitfield Collection (120x94cm).

The presence of so many ancient and same-age replicas painted by the Master Ribera or by his workshop assistants, has created problems of attribution for art historians. It is one of those cases in which the technical research can provide the maximum help with their decisions. However, the two highest quality versions remain the Mdina painting and the New York version, even if the technical differences between them are very evident. The unfinished composition, the use of repentances, the soft gentle halo, and the more balanced-less contrasted use of light of the Mdina painting reveal the characteristics typical of artworks executed by the young Ribera before 1620. On the contrary, the *tenebra*-corroding light and the sharp character of the second New York version, bring it close to his full 1630s production.

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students of the Late Spring-Summer and Fall 2011 classes for the help provided in the restoration work.

Roberta Lapucci obtained a PhD in Art History from the University of Florence, Rome and Parma with a thesis on the technique of Caravaggio. She has practiced as a professional restorer recognized by the Italian State Superintendence since 1981, and also runs a private restoration studio where her main activity concerns mainly seventeenth-century canvas paintings of the caravaggesque school. Lapucci also teaches Artistic Diagnostics in the Department of Organic Chemistry at the University of Florence.

Notes

- 1 Steven N. Orso, 'On Ribera and the "Beggar Philosophers"', in Sarah Schroth (ed.), *Art in Spain and the Hispanic World*, (London, 2010), 87-105, 87.
- 2 Francesco Lofano, 'I Filosofi Giustiniani. La nascita di un genere' (to be published, October/November, 2012); Patrizia Cavazzini, 'La diffusione della pittura nella Roma di primo Seicento: collezionisti ordinari e mercanti 1610-1640', in *Quaderni storici*, 116 (2004), 353-374; Silvia Danesi Squarzina (a cura di), *La Collezione Giustiniani: Inventari I Inventari II-Documenti* (Turin, 2003); Irene Baldriga, 'La personalità di Vincenzo Giustiniani nello specchio della sua biblioteca', in *Caravaggio e i Giustiniani, Toccar con mano una collezione del Seicento* (Exhibition Catalogue: Palazzo Giustiniani, Rome, 26 January-15 May 2001), (a cura di Silvia Danesi Squarzina), 73-80; Vincenzo Giustiniani, *Discorsi sulle arti: Architettura, pittura, scultura* (Introduction by L. Magnani), (Novi Ligure, 2006), 48; Silvia Danesi Squarzina, 'New Documents on Ribera "pictor in urbe", 1612-16', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 1237 (2006), 244-251.
- 3 Oreste Ferrari, 'L'iconografia dei filosofi antichi nella pittura del secolo XVII in Italia', in *Storia dell'Arte*, 57 (1986), 103-182.
- 4 F. Lofano quoted; M. Epifani, 'I ritratti di filosofi antichi: nuove considerazioni intorno a Salvator Rosa e il soggetto ritrovato di un dipinto di Domenico Fetti', and also Francesco Lofano, 'e Democrito caccia di Parnaso i poeti che sian savi'. Salvator Rosa e il tema del *Democritus cogitans* tra Tasso e Accetto', in *Salvator Rosa e il suo tempo*, Acts of the Symposium, Roma, Hertziana Library (2009); Nicola Spinosa, *I Profeti di Ribera a San Martino* (Naples, 1992); Steven N. Orso, op. cit. 87-105.
- 5 Seneca, *De Providentia*, VI, 2, as quoted in Steven N. Orso, op. cit., 103, and note 6.
- 6 Seneca, *Epistulae*, LXXXII, 10-2 as quoted in Steven N. Orso, op. cit., 93,

and note 13.

- 7 For the edition of Justus Lipsius, see Steven N. Orso, op. cit., 91-92.
- 8 For the Duke of Alcalá, see: J. González Moreno, *Don Fernando Enriquez de Ribera, tercer duque de Alcalá de los Gazules (1583-1637): Estudio biográfico* (Seville, 1969); Jonathan Brown, Richard L. Kagan, 'The Duke of Alcalá: his Collection and its Evolution', in *The Art Bulletin*, LXIX, (1987), 232-236; Vicente Lleó Cañal, *La Casa de Pilatos* (Madrid, 1998), 59-77; Michael Scholz-Hänsel, *Josepe de Ribera 1591-1652* (Cologne, 2000), 58-65 (Chapter: Works for the Duke of Alcalá - Art Theory and Beggar Philosopher).
- 9 Brown and Kagan, op. cit., 231-255.
- 10 Nicola Spinosa, Ribera, (Napoli, 2006), card A82, 293.
- 11 Ratti (1780), 86, n. 200: as quoted by Spinosa, op. cit. (2006), 293, card A82.
- 12 Delphine Fitz Darby, 'Ribera and the Wise Men' in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec. 1962), 279-307.
- 13 Ferrari, op. cit., 103-182.
- 14 The *Stati delle anime*, citing the cooperators of Ribera's workshop are quoted in Craig Felton and William B. Jordan, *Josepe de Ribera: Lo Spagnoletto*, 1591-1652 (Kimbell Art Museum, 1982), 46; they were mentioned previously by Chenault (1969) and Bousquet (1980).
- 15 Bernardo De Dominici, *Vite de' Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti Napolitani*, III (Napoli, 1742), 1-24.
- 16 Alfonso Emilio Pérez Sánchez, Nicola Spinosa, 'L'opera completa del Ribera', in *Classici dell'arte*, (Milano, 1978), 138 (El Escorial and New York versions with the inscription Hyssopo).
- 17 On Aesop iconography see: Anthony F. Blunt, 'Poussin and Aesop', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXIX (1966), 436-437; Nicholas Tromans, 'The iconography of Velázquez's Aesop', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LIX, (1996), 332-337.
- 18 On latin and Medieval translations of his writings see F. Bertini, 'Favolisti latini', in *Dizionario degli scrittori greci e latini*, diretto da F. Della Corte, II (Milano, 1987), 981-991; Kenneth McKenzie, 'An Italian Fable its sources and its history', in *Modern Philology*, I (1904), 497-524.
- 19 On Massimo Planude, see Charles Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (1867), Vol. 3, 384-390.
- 20 Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Della Fisionomia dell'uomo*, libri sei, chapter 'che dinotino brutti di faccia e di corpo', VI, (1644), 133.
- 21 For any technical information on the parameters and instrumentation used for the diagnostic examination, please refer to www.art-test.com.
- 22 On Ribera's technique see: Z. Veliz, *Artist's Techniques in Golden Age Spain: Six Treatises in translation* (Cambridge UK, New York NY, Melbourne Australia, Cambridge University Press, 1986); particularly related to Ribera are the sub-chapters of this book: A. Palomino y Velasco (1715-24), in *The importance of preparation layers for painting. Why many excellent pictures flake. The safest method to prepare canvases*, 152-153 (discussing the *cernada* priming); A. Palomino y Velasco (1715-24), in *The preparation of gacha*, 49; F. Nunes (1615), *The Art of Painting*, 3 (priming with pumice stone); F. Pacheco (1649), *The Art of painting: preparation of canvases*, 68 (gacha); other books: E. du Gué Trapier, *Ribera* (New York, Hispanic Society of America, 1952), (she

describes three stylistic periods: 1. 1620-35, dramatic chiaroscuro, dry and tight technique with the major influence by Caravaggio; 2. 1635-39, soft luminous, sensitive light, and heavy impasto, influences from Carracci, Guercino, Reni, Correggio; 3. 1640-52, looser brushstroke, less detail with a return to a caravaggesque manner); C. Felton, 'Ribera's Philosophers for the Prince of Liechtenstein', in *The Burlington Magazine*, 128, no. 1004 (November, 1986), 785-789 ('over the dark ground with which he generally primed his canvases, Ribera first structured each head with a rich brown under-paint. Lighter, flesh tinted pigments were then employed to model the substance of the forms. Working rapidly on a wet on wet technique, Ribera used coarsely bristled brushes which gouged through the various layers of flesh tones, thereby revealing the successively darker and subtle colors which approximate the natural appearance of furrowed brows, lined faces, deeply textured hair and beards, and gnarled worn hands. The process gives a sculptural plasticity to the structures producing a three-dimensional surface that allows the natural, external light to play across the passages, setting up patterns of light and shadow which reinforce those created by the artist with the heavy impasto of the paint itself').

- 23 Canvas analysis report by Mirella Baldan, R&C Laboratory, Altavilla Vicentina, 31/08/2011, n. 3430/1
- 24 *En reserve* technique: it is a way of leaving free, saved from the reddish/brown priming color, a line between two paint layers, which acts as a contour edge, see Roberta Lapucci, 'La tecnica del Caravaggio: materiali e metodi', in *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, come nascono i capolavori*, Exhibition Catalogue (Milano, 1991), 31-51, 33.
- 25 *Pentimenti*, or repentances, were light external contour edge modifications, intentionally done by the artist in order to correct a shape
- 26 Cleaning tests aimed at determining the polarity of the deposited dirt and choose the appropriate solvent, see R. Feller, *On picture varnishes and their solvents* (1959, reprinted in 1971, 1985); other series of cleaning tests have been developed by Masschlein Kleiner, Taco (mainly used by the Central Institute for Restoration in Rome), R. Wolbers and P. Cremonesi (mainly used by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence).
- 27 *Pasta fiorentina* is a traditional adhesive used for centuries. It is very reversible, and requires that the painting be kept in a controlled microclimate in the future; due to the Maltese island humid and warm temperature, the Italian recipe has been slightly modified with the addition of a biocide, anti-fermentative product (Rock alum) and of a stabilizer (Plexisol); the final ingredients were therefore: 125 gr. Rabbit skin glue, 125 gr. Ox Bone glue, 375 gr. Wheat flour, 125 gr. Linseed flour, 375 gr. Rye flour, ½ coffee spoon Molasses, ½ coffee spoon Venetian Turpentine, 5 gr. Rock alum, ½ coffee spoon Plexisol.
- 28 Thanks to Francesca Balzan who provided the restorers with historical background information and precious support.
- 29 'Archimedes, half figure from natural life in the style of Michelangelo da Caravaggio, for 20 sterlins.'
- 30 A recent monograph by Nicola Spinosa, *Ribera, La obra completa* (Madrid, 2009), at the cards A141, 382-383 and A102-115, 364-373, analyzes all the versions of this painting.