Akribisch und kritisch zugleich: Der Elsheimer-Zeichnungskatalog

Joachim Jacoby
Die Zeichnungen von Adam Elsheimer: Kritischer Katalog.
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At first sight, Joachim Jacoby's monumental *corpus* of Adam Elsheimer's drawings might seem almost too big a tome for its subject: After all, the artist is credited with no more than 27 autograph sheets – and the book counts no less than 419 pages. But each one of these sheets presents a series of particular problems. Therefore there are various issues to deal with and much material that needs to be sorted out, elaborated and analyzed. In fact, Jacoby's volume is not the first attempt to define the artist's graphic production, but it may remain the standard work on the subject for many years to come, not only for its seemingly exhaustive presentation of facts and data but also for its high standards of critical evaluation.

In his introductory chapter, Jacoby reviews the work of Elsheimer's predecessors, beginning with Wilhelm Bode's pioneer essay from 1880, in which the artist was credited with no less than 300 drawings. Almost one hundred years later, Keith Andrews, Elsheimer's most recent and authoritative biographer and cataloguer, accepted only approximately two dozen sheets as autograph works (see *Adam Elsheimer. Paintings, drawings, prints*, Oxford 1977; enlarged German edition: Munich 1985). Jacoby scores 27, accepting Andrews's core group with a few exceptions, and including some drawings that have been convincingly added to Elsheimer's *œuvre* during the last fifteen years or so.

The drastical reduction in numbers is the result of a paradigmatic change in research methods and critical judgement which is due to a series of factors. Above all, there is the question of the so called "Frankfurter Klebeband", a volume of drawings which since 1868 is part of the collection of the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. Almost all were originally attributed to Elsheimer, but the Klebeband's drawings eventually turned out to be by Hendrick Goudt, Elsheimer's Netherlandish "shadow" and propagator of his art, whose role as such is further considered in Jacoby's book. After the various studies of Heinrich Weizsäcker and Hans Möhle, it was Jan van Gelder and Ingrid Jost who, in a seminal article from 1967, established once and for all the fundamental artistic unity of the Frankfurt group, clearing the way for a new approach to Elsheimer as a draughtsman. Contrary to the traditional view of Elsheimer as an "incomparabile paesista" (Padre Resta, 1704), the artist now took the stage as a *figurista*.

VENETIAN RAPPORTS

This new vision was further developed by Andrews and confirmed by Jacoby in the present volume. In their view, Elsheimer is in the first place the author of a limited group of small-scale figure drawings of various types and subjects done in pen and (brown) ink – for the most part without a preliminary sketch in red or black chalk. Drawings done with probing, rather short and scratchy outlines of various density which in themselves convey a suggestion of

spatiality; indeed the artist hardly ever employed any of the usual, "picturesque" hatching or washing techniques common to other draughtsmen of the period. Elsheimer's charged pen strokes give his drawings an intense, expressive quality that set them apart from those of the artists of his immediate *ambiente*. Among the latter, Augsburg born Hans Rottenhammer is of particular interest for it is in his Venetian *atelier* that the young painter from Frankfurt received his first, decisive impressions of Veneto painting and draughtsmanship. Nevertheless, Jacoby plays down the elder draughtsman's impact on the younger man (30), and concludes (Kat. 6; 124-126) that Elsheimer learned little else from Rottenhammer than the use of a free wash technique.

This seems a bit reductive, as the use of "prodding" contour lines is obvious in Rottenhammer's early *Hades and Persephone with a music-making Muse* (private collection), illustrated by Jacoby himself on p. 124, Abb. 78: A drawing like this one would have presented a perfectly stimulating example for Elsheimer. Scratchy outlines, at times applied with a variability in intensity of the brush, can be found regularly in Venetian late-Cinquecento drawings, such as those by Jacopo Palma il Giovane and other artists working around 1600 in the Veneto area. It would stand to reason that the young artist from Frankfurt felt stimulated by such works. After all, Elsheimer's knowledge of Venetian and Veneto art (Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto, and most specifically, the Bassano family, see below) is sufficiently known, and might be further illustrated by the motif of the bearded man sitting behind a table as represented in a drawing in Berlin (Kat. 11), which, besides Caravaggesque reminiscences, seems to rather reflect knowledge of Giovan Gerolamo Savoldo's painting showing the *Calling of St. Matthew* now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Be it as it may, Jacoby is certainly right in suggesting that Elsheimer's manner of creating volumes by the use of the "loaded" pen is alien to the rather more "picturesque" techniques of the Venetians, whose outlines contain rather than create space and volume.

ELSHEIMER'S FOLLOWERS

Equally convincing is Jacoby's analysis of the fundamental differences between Elsheimer's concept of drawing and that of his "alter ego", Hendrick Goudt, whose many drawings *à la manière de* Elsheimer show a great technical versatility, but lack the tense, expressive qualities characteristic of the Frankfurt artist's sheets. Among various other artists from Elsheimer's circle, David Teniers the Elder appears to obtain similar graphic effects – but it should be said that his drawn *œuvre* is not sufficiently known to allow for firm conclusions. All things considered, it seems that Elsheimer's style of pen drawing did not have a great impact on the many artists who got fascinated by his painting manner and subjects, such as the Italians Carlo Saraceni and Agostino Tassi (although the pen and wash drawing from the Alfred Moir collection, Santa Barbara, illustrated on p. 23, Abb. 7, is, in my opinion, not by Saraceni but by Marcantonio Bassetti – notwithstanding the connection with Saraceni's painted *Daedalus and Icarus*, p. 33, Abb. 8).

A chapter *a parte* is constituted by the *gouaches* which have been associated with Elsheimer. This issue goes back to the 18th century – *pace* van Gelder and Jost –, from which time on brush drawings attributed to Elsheimer began to appear at auctions. As a result, Hans Möhle (*Die Zeichnungen Adam Elsheimers: Das Werk des Meisters und der Problemkreis Elsheimer-Goudt*, Berlin 1966) proposed no less than 35 "picturesque" landscape *gouaches* as works of the Frankfurt master, but van Gelder and Jost (again) could prove that a number of these drawings were done by the Dutch mid-17th-century draughtsmen Pieter de With and Gerrit Battem, whereas others are clearly the work of Hendrick Goudt. Elaborating on the latter point, Jacoby reconsiders Keith Andrews's thesis, according to which Goudt would have mediated Elsheimer's landscape conception to Northern Europe. He tends to lend credit to this idea, although it remains a fact that as of yet no landscape *gouaches* have been identified with certainty as by Elsheimer.

A separate nucleus is that of the figure drawings done in brush technique. Although none of these drawings can be associated unequivocally to any of

Elsheimer's painted works, some of them reveal such high quality and technical virtuosity that their attribution to the Frankfurt master is a strong case. Some of these drawings have been copied or re-elaborated in *gouaches* by – again – Goudt, or other Netherlandish draughtsmen, operating later in the 17th century (e.g. Elsheimer's *Bathseba* from the Albertina, Kat. 27, which has been repeated in a different setting in a sheet in Berlin, possibly by Goudt, or even by Gerrit Battem, Kat. A1). From here stems the tentative conclusion that Elsheimer may have played a major role in the genesis of the *gouache* as a graphic *genre* in (Northern) European art.

PREDECESSORS

In any case, Elsheimer's spectacular *chiaroscuro* brush drawings did not originate without predecessors. Pointing at a variety of washed pen drawings in later 16th century art, many of them heightened with white, Jacoby then advances the interesting suggestion that Elsheimer may have been particularly inspired by Venetian draughtsmen, such as the Tintoretto (above all Domenico), whose oil-sketches capture values of light and dark in a spectacular way, or the Bassano. Francesco Bassano's *Vision of Joachim* (?) at Winsor Castle offers a fascinating example of a night scene, rendered with a blue brush against which the accents of light are elaborated in a strongly contrasting manner (77, Abb. 59). Such a sheet may well have been a source of inspiration for Elsheimer, all the more so as Bassano's small-scale, somewhat stocky figures show affinity with those of the German artist. Following this train of thought, I was struck by the similarities between Elsheimer's dramatic *notturne*, such as *Salome Receives the Head of St. John the Baptist* in the Devonshire collection, and certain *gouache* drawings from Verona, executed during this period, such as a sheet at the Louvre, Paris, showing *The Flagellation*, which carries an attribution to Felice Brusasorci (1539/40-1604; cat. exhib. *Le dessin à Vérone aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. Dominique Cordellier/Hélène Sueur, Paris 1993, 143-144, cat. 65, and p. 40, colour ill.).

It may be worthwhile to look further into this matter, all the more so since small scale night scenes, both in drawing and in painting, were an early specialty of the Bassano workshop and of the school of Verona. But oil sketches from other Italian regions may have been inspiring as well, such as Giorgio Vasari's *Studio of the Painter* in the Uffizi (Linda Freeman Bauer, "Some Early Views and Uses of the Oil Sketch", in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ölskizze*, Braunschweig 1984, 15, fig. 1), or even works in this technique by the Netherlandish artist Dirck Barendsz, who spent some time in Venice in Titian's workshop. In any case, the sources for Elsheimer's *notturne* are to be looked for in this category of works, and not in Caravaggesque painting, as has often been assumed (but see Jacoby's thoughtful comment on p. 211, under Kat. 23).

Without entering into details, it should be said that the *catalogue raisonné* is a true model of *acribia* and sound critical judgement. Jacoby's carefully worded evaluations invariably carry conviction, also – and especially – when it concerns "border case" sheets such as the *gouaches* showing *Bathseba* (Kat. A1), *Tobias and the Angel* (Kat. A3), both in Berlin, or the *Young Woman Seated* (Kat. A6), in New York, all three excluded on good grounds from Elsheimers' autograph *corpus*. A precious, fully illustrated catalogue of drawn copies after Elsheimer adds to the value of this exemplary volume. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the whole project was researched and prepared in the astonishingly short time span of just two years. *Chapeau!*

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