Minna Heimbürger

MATERIALI

Salvator Rosa author of *The Dead Soldier* in The National Gallery of London?

Who has once in the undergrounds of The National Gallery of London seen *The Dead Soldier* (fig. 1, tav. VIII)[1], difficultly forgets the painting again, and as art historian you get frustrated at every return to the museum because its author still remains anonymous. This fact is not because there is a lack of proposals, on the contrary, as will be seen below.

First of all we can establish that everybody considers the work to have been executed in the XVIIth century, and that it is a masterpiece which only a great master could have painted. But here unanimity seems to end. When it in l865 was acquired by the Gallery, it was ascribed to Velázquez, an attribution which was later overruled by various, more or less likely, and never accepted hypotheses, such as for instance the Spanish painter José Antolinez or the Neapolitan Bernardo Cavallino. In fact, it was still suspected to be of Spanish origin, which also appears from the museum's catalogue of 1971 even if it here was mentioned under 'Italian(?) School, XVIIth(?) Century', and commented in this way:

> If the picture is Italian, it might well be Neapolitan work [...]. In fact, the handling does not seem analogous to that of any known Neapolitan painter, and in some ways the almost unfinished appearance of the sky and background is untypical of most seventeenth century Italian work – as is both the concept and execution of the bare branch of tree[2].

Nevertheless the entry contained a rather important observation: «The subject is perhaps intended to be a 'Vanitas'». This possibility as well as the suspect of a Neapolitan master were taken up and accepted in 1982 by Clovis Whitfield, who added that the work was executed in the 1630ties[3]. He even put forward as a cautious suggestion that it possibly could be a work by Salvator Rosa, and suggested that Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* had been the model for the composition.

New silence enveloped again the dead soldier in mist. The Museum's files[4] lastly have accepted an attribution to Italian school and give the information that the canvas in 2002 was cleaned and technically examined. In this occasion it had been revealed that the inscription of an A on the right side of the composition was not authentic but added in a later time. It seems strange then that Nicola Spinosa in spite of this information enters the discussion in 2008 with an attribution to Aniello Falcone based, among other arguments, on this A, claiming that it was the beginning of the signature not more legible of this painter[5]. Hereafter no new proposals seem to have been advanced, and so we are back again in the time after the repudiation of Velázquez when the whole attribution problem started. No wonder that Marjorie Wieseman ended her going through the bibliography with the despairing exclamation

1. Salvator Rosa (here attributed to), *The Dead Soldier*, canvas, cm 150 x 167, London, The National Gallery.

that the dead soldier «may carry the secret of its creation to the grave»[6].

Nevertheless: never give up! This cry of distress finally has animated me to take up the whole question once more and examine the painting from all possible aspects, applying the principle of exclusion, which means consider the various characteristics of the painting and then exclude all the painters who do not comply these requirements.

The deliberately conceived composition painted on a great canvas is rigidly concentrated around the beautiful youth lying face upward on the ground in the centre, and shown in natural size in an oblique linear perspective. Several still-life elements are added which help the observer to concretize the subject matter and the milieu in which the unusual scene is thought to take place. The composition is closed to the right by a high, vertical rock side from where a completely leafless, ramified branch stretches out over the soldier repeating the same horizontal position as his body. In the foreground is vaguely hinted at a puddle on which some airy bubbles are rocking. At the top of the scenery – and occupying more than a third of the whole canvas – hovers an enormous, dark, ominous cloud cover; beneath it, and in the low, far away horizon, it is possible just to make out the sea with a shore behind. Geographically we are in a rocky cave situated somewhere between sea and land exactly as they are found along the Neapolitan coasts. The gloomy atmosphere of the whole spectacle is accentuated thanks to a certain number of 'inanimate objects' such as a brilliant lamp hung up in the branch from where the fluttering smoke of a dying flame wriggles into the air, or two skulls and two bones thrown on the ground around the man who is dressed in cuirass and have beside him a sword.

The painter's whole description gives the impression that we are on a small, outlying burial place, and not on a battlefield as perhaps might have been suspected of a fallen, armed man. In fact, if the rock is well observed, we notice that a big plate of stone in the same colour is leaning against it, which must indicate that behind it is found an opening, or more precisely a grotto, probably the soldier's final resting place.

No wonder that some scholars have proposed that the scene in fact was thought to be a *Vanitas* composition. I agree, but instead of *Vanitas* I should only prefer the appellation *Memento Mori*, an admonition of the circumstance that lifelessness, death, destruction and annihilation are the destination of all beings – even of young persons – and of all plants, too.

2. Salvator Rosa, *Landscape with Five Figures and a Dying Tree*, canvas, cm 122 x 195,5, Prato, Casa d'aste Farsettiarte, 26-10-2018, lot 470.

However, the unusual composition presents other important phenomena which may contribute to disclose the identity of its author. First of all the individual texture effects of its components: the soldier's pale face marked by Death, his abnormally long and stiff fingers, his polished, black shoes with the silk shoelaces tied in a bow, his soft wool dress beneath the bronze-and-iron cuirass, the copper lamp, the realistically executed skull and bones in the lower left corner, the humid ground, the transparent water bubbles or the wooden material of the bare branch. This is naturalism with *tactile values* in the best style. The painter has obtained these tactile qualities thanks to the colours. This important factor has also helped him in other senses. Certainly, based on a scale of brown and ochre, this colouring is perfectly harmonized with the sombre theme of the picture. Moreover it served him in order to create volume of the elements of the composition, or better to impart the third dimension to them.

This kind of combination of a richly faceted scale of brown and ochre tones conducts us to the famous 'tenebrous' artists who practiced a monochrome painting style that mirrors the Dutch current – called *toonschilderij* (tone painting) or *duisternisschilderij* (darkness painting) – which was in vogue in the thirties and fourties in the Northern provinces of the Netherlands.

No doubt that *The Dead Soldier* belongs to the Riberian version of the 'tenebrous' painting manner. In fact, this consideration was also one of the arguments for classing the work as belonging to the Neapolitan school. Also the rigorous naturalism of the picture counts for this hypothesis. Until around 1630 Jusepe Ribera (1591-1652) practiced the 'tenebrous style' in his agressive, realistic compositions, and surely they have been the direct source of inspiration when our anonymous artist conceived the London image.

It should now be time to give a summary of the above noted observations of the characteristics of our painting, and to carry out our exclusions of artists unworthy of being accepted as its possible author.

1. The quality of the painting speaks in favour of a great master.
2. The considerable size of the canvas advertises that he excelled at large scale paintings.
3. The militarist topic might suggest that he is to be found among the battle scene painters but not necessarily.
4. The subject indicates that he was a figure painter.
5. Some details suggest that he probably also painted landscapes.
6. A real and a metaphorical interpretation make it clear that he was accustomed to use *double entendre*.
7. The colouring unveils the author as a 'tenebrist'.

These seven characteristics are evidently the requirements which must be fulfilled by the author whom we are searching for. Our method of exclusion permits us, after the respective deliberations, to exclude all XVIIth century painters with the exception of two personalities of whom certainly Jusepe Ribera, the creator of the famous Neapolitan painting school. But only to be refused again because, more than anything else, the description of the scene – in despite of the sombre and dreary contents – is wrapped in a wistful, romantic atmosphere which comes

into conflict with the Spanish painter's brutal, aggressive, hyper realistic mode of expression. Even the soldier himself represents an idealized beauty which is a type of human beings unknown in the Riberian repertoire of figures.

The only remaining candidate now is in my opinion Salvator Rosa, the multitalented, original and extravagant artist to whom all our claims can be applied. I don't think it necessary to spend many words in order to affirm the general view that Salvator Rosa belongs to the most important painters in European art. Certainly he was not a pioneer such as for instance Caravaggio or Ribera, but he created at least masterpieces of an artistic quality that is not inferior to theirs. Just like other great painters who executed sublime works only following the established painting principles of their time.

The Dead Soldier measures 150 x 167 cm. Our question is now: did Salvator Rosa paint compositions on large scale canvases like this one? The answer is shortly yes he did. Into the bargain very often. And not only landscapes, but certainly also figures.

The next characteristic – even not obligatory, but anyway a kind of support for an attribution: was he a battle scenes painter? Again we can answer with yes. This genre was even his first speciality, chosen in his youth before leaving Naples, and developed under the guidance of his master Aniello Falcone, famous painter of battle scenes. In fact this activity brought about his reputation as *Salvator delle battaglie*. This genre generated in him a great interest in the soldier and in his brutal destiny, and he used him as model for innumerable representations. No doubt that he was his favorite character, and he presented him not only as a dead, dying, wounded or fighting warrior in compact compositions during a battle, but also in private, during his solitary transfers from one battle field to another in enormous compositions of savage, rugged landscapes, or during a halt in conversation with some local peasants (fig. 2, tav. IX)[7]. In these cases he served Rosa as minor elements in the main subject. But he also used him for his own sake in compositions exclusively dedicated to him (fig. 3)[8].

So no wonder that he for his historic, mythological and biblical scenes several times has chosen military personalities – Goliath[9], Catilina, Aeneas, Cadmus ecc. – and shown them dressed in cuirasses. He has even executed the portrait of a soldier (*Portrait of a Warrior* in Palazzo Chigi-Saracini, Siena), and as the culmination of this obsession he has painted himself in a half-length portrait as a warrior with a resolute hold on the hilt of a sword (*Self-Portrait as a soldier*, Collezione Chigi-Saracini, Palazzo del Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Siena).

Instinctively we may ask, why this lifelong fascination? There can be various explications, but the dominating factor was no doubt that he – perhaps already from the beginning of his activity as a painter – was emotionally engaged in the hard fate of warriors, and embraced them with comprehension, ache, tenderness and pity, emotions that all together not could not result in an oppressive pessimism. At a certain moment these eternal meditations seem to have inflicted on his mind to such an extent that he compared his own life and profession with the destiny of a soldier.

Many of Rosa's paintings can at least be interpreted in that way. Furthermore, this view finds confirmation in his literary works[10].

If we now return to our masterpiece in London and try to analyze the composition bearing in mind these observations, it seems to be in perfect keeping with them. Conceptually it stands alone

3. Salvator Rosa, *Sitting Soldier Holding a Long Cane* etching, mm 145 x 95.

in the art of this period, but regarded in view of Rosa's many representations of soldiers in various situations, it finds in this atmosphere its natural *raison d'être*.Perhaps we have here the most weighting argument for ascribing to Salvator Rosa this moving monument in memory of 'The Unknown Warrior' – perhaps the most beautiful ever erected.

Anxious to take up again the list of characteristics, we must now ask if Salvator Rosa was a figure painter. I think that nobody acquainted with his work can refuse that he mastered – in paintings as well as in drawings – the execution of human beings in all situations, as portraits and as allegoric figures, in natural size and in small scales, placed in the foregrounds, in the middle grounds or in the backgrounds, shown as entire figures or only in half-length. So our answer can only be yes, certainly he was a figure painter.

Was he also a landscape painter? The answer is the same: nobody acquainted with his *oeuvre* can deny it. It was perhaps even his main genre, treated in the beginning for enjoyment, later for proceeds. Nearly all the compositions show magnificent prospects from the neighbourhood of his native town – even many years after his depart – praising this breathtaking territory situated between the sea and the rocky shores. Sometimes they were pure landscape views, other times they were animated with one or several figures. In the last cases the subjects could be taken from historical, mythological, biblical or religious accounts as for instance in the landscape picture in Detroit showing the narrative of the *Finding of Mosé* (fig. 4, tav. X)[11]. In this painting we recognize the composition from *The Dead Soldier* with an open area in the foreground, a high rock to the right, and in the background a view to a faraway coast and the sea. Both scenes take place in a cave landscape; in the Detroit version we look at the cave from outside, whereas in the London composition we are inside it. The lonely, bare, bifurcated branch jutting out from the side of the rock in the composition with the soldier is clearly added as a support for the lamp. Less clear is its hidden meaning: a symbol of death. Seen from the view of posterity it keeps even a third dimension: its special form and realistic rendering helps us to disclose the identity of its creator. Who has thrown more than a short glance at Rosa's trees in his many landscape paintings will recognize this branch (figg. 2, 4, tavv. IX, X), because he had developed a rather special, very characteristic and easily recognizable manner of painting trees: nearest the trunk the branches are leafless, after which they split into two smaller branches, and only here the foliation starts. Just as he also was fond of representing branches when they are no longer in leaf. So I think that this dead branch must have been painted by him.

With this discussion we have already opened the next item in our checking list which deals with the use of ambiguous interpretations of a work of art, the so-called *double entendre*. Indeed, the bare branch can be interpretated in two different ways, a realistic and a symbolic one, just as the other 'lifeless objects' in the painting. The greater part of the XVIIth century painters was familiar with the use of *double entendre*, and Salvator Rosa was no exception. He was even one of the most fanatic adherents in Italy of this intellectually marked expression manner. His intellectual and philosophic reflections, manifested in allegories and personifications of various virtues, were impossible to express in visual art without *double entendre* or/and without resorting to symbols. In fact, *double entendre* and symbols were closely associated factors in the artist's communications with the observers of his works. Usually symbols were borrowed from the world of inanimated objects, that is to say still-life elements. So symbols and still-life are also closely associated with each other. Consequently there is a strength connection between these three artistic aids.

Rosa knew very well how to navigate across the ocean of symbols and still-life objects, but paradoxically he was not a still-life painter in the proper sense of the term, because in his whole life he executed only a few pure still-life paintings, preferring to use this genre in his figure compositions as symbols that clarify the 'hidden' identity of the represented allegoric persons. His favourite symbol was surely the skull, and he used it in its established qualities as a symbol of death, vanity and *memento mori*. But the most interesting in this discussion is that if he did not find in the usual repertoire of symbols an object that served him in a certain occasion, he did not shrink from inventing a new one assigning to it his personal conception. In the language of *double entendre* of this erudite, ingenious Neapolitan artist, *The Dead Soldier* can perfectly well be inserted.

Certainly, Neapolitan he was, and not only of birth but, more important, also of training as a painter. The years of apprenticeship in the workshops of Aniello Falcone and José Ribera have marked him for the rest of his life and stamped his future paintings. In order to estimate if they fulfill our last characteristic of the picture of the soldier in London, that is to say the claim of an execution in the 'tenebrous' style, once more we can answer with a confirmation. In fact, scholars have already described Rosa as a 'tenebrist' painter, and it seems

4. Salvator Rosa, *The Finding of Moses*, ca.1660-1665, canvas, cm 123 x 202,5, Detroit, Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase with fonds from Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb.

quite certain that he was made acquainted with this style in Ribera's studio, even if this head of the Neapolitan school in the 1630ties had started replacing his dark palette with a brighter one. In Rome the young Salvator came in contact with the Dutch *bamboccianti* who were 'tenebrous' masters practicing this style in its genuine, Northeuropean form. Perhaps this was his real reason – and not their popular themes – for frequenting their circle in the beginning of his Roman stay. But in the long run it was the Spanish-Neapolitan painter, one of the 'tenebrous' pioneers in Italy, who inspired him. Not only in regard to the painting style and colour choices, but also iconographically.

It has been proposed that Caravaggio's *Death of theVirgin* should have inspired the anonymous author of *The Dead Soldier* to conceive this painting[12], but if the author really is Salvator Rosa, he certainly did not need to go to Caravaggio for inspiration having executed in the foregrounds of his scenes from the battle fields so many whole and half bodies of fallen soldiers slantwise foreshortened, and even in an identical position as for istance in the enormous battle scene in Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

If we absolutely want to see a model for our enigmatic composition, I think that a couple of Ribera's pictures might be proposed. The young Salvator's removals between Naples, Rome, Viterbo, Firenze and his visits to Naples have not yet been completely cleared up, but they are known in broad outline, and from this it appears that at the end of the 1630ties he was present and even active in his native town[13]. In this period his former master had in execution two important paintings, *Jacob's Dream*, signed in 1639 and *St. Paul the Hermit*, signed in 1640 (fig. 5, tav. XII)[14], both in Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. They are interesting from various viewpoints as for instance that the painter here uses different kinds of the linear perspective in the execution of the figures. In the 1639 composition the sleeping Jacob lies with the hips bent in a right angle, the legs bent too, and the feet placed in different positions. It is a well known pose for a sleeping person, but rather intricate to show correctly for a painter who needs to resort to the use of difficult oblique parallel projections. In the painting from the following year, the Saint is shown in quite another pose, but the problem of the foreshortening is the same.

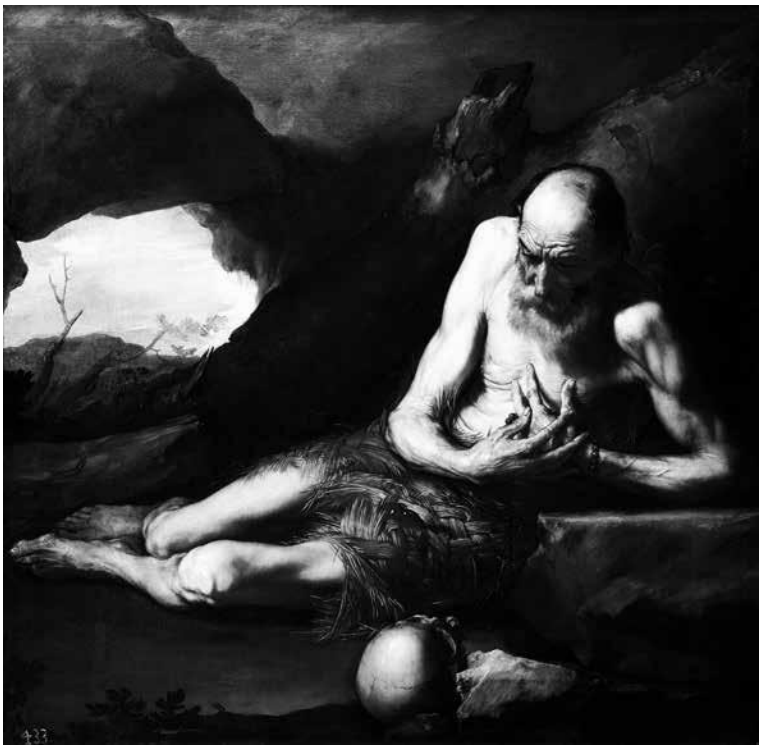
During Salvator Rosa's presence in Naples at the end of the 1630ties we understand that the Spaniard was occupied with the question how to solve foreshortening of figures situated in diagonal contrapositions. Most probably the young visitor in the master's studio has even seen the two here recorded works in progress, and a debate can have taken place about how to create a perfect illusion of the third dimension of a lying human body seen in prospective and with bent legs. Anyway, I think that the author of *The Dead Soldier* very well can have been inspired by Ribera's here mentioned works when he conceived the great composition with the fallen soldier. In favour of this view is also the fact that Rosa has placed his figure in landscape settings very similar to those of Ribera.

With these observations we are approaching another question: if Salvator Rosa painted *The Dead Soldier*, when did he do it? The brushwork tells nothing, because his dated works difficultly lead us to establish stylistic changes in the various periods. As leitmotiv we have almost only our statement of a Riberian influence. That is to say that we have a *terminus post quem* in 1640. Of a certain

help might also be the well known information that around 1650 Rosa returned to Ribera for inspiration[15]. Instinctively I should prefer to date the picture to l640-1642. This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that in 1639 Ribera signed another painting, *An Executioner with St. John the Baptist's Head* (sold by Christie's, New York, 1st May 2019, lot n. 19), a half-figure composition which was the prototype for Rosa's painting with the same subject executed shortly after (now in a private collection). The distinct affinity of the painting with works by Ribera appears also from the monochrome colouring held on a scale of brown tones in the typical 'tenebrous' manner as well as the distribution of light, two characteristics that Rosa repeats for instance in the already mentioned *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* in Monte dei Paschi, Siena, which is believed to date from his Florentine period.

Still another observation could also back up the theory of an early date. In 1971 Michael Levey asserted in the above quoted catalogue entry[16] that the concept and execution of the bare branch of tree in the composition of *The Dead Soldier* as well as the appearance of the sky are untypical of most seventeenth century Italian work. This is a rash assertion, and not a plausible argument for denying an attribution to an Italian master. Salvator Rosa is not at any rate a good exemple of this claim, rather the contrary. The bare branch has already been discussed here, and as to the sky in the London picture, we find an identical handling in well known paintings by this artist. When he painted a sky as background in a composition, usually he showed it with clouds whose forms and colouring harmonized with the atmosphere that the subject emanated (dramatic, idyllic, with «orrida bellezza», terminology employed by Rosa himself[17], ecc.). Sometimes, instead of clouds he painted a dark layer of clouds which covered almost entirely the blue sky. The very first examples seem to date from the beginning of the 1640ties, whereas he later varies the cloud cover or he combines it with real clouds.

Perhaps we have the first pure example in his self-portrait from around 1642 in the National Gallery of London called *Philosophy* or *Self-Portrait as Philosopher of Silence* after its Latin inscription translated as «Keep silent, unless your speech is better than silence». The same type of sky appears in another painting executed a few years later (ca. 1646) and belonging to the same museum,



5. José Ribera, *St. Paul the Hermit*, 1640, canvas, cm 143 x 143, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

6. Salvator Rosa, *Witches at their Incantations*, ca. 1645, canvas, cm 72 x 132, London, The National Gallery.

Witches at their Incantations (fig. 6, tav. XI)[18]. The cloud cover is in this case almost identical with the sky in the composition of our dead soldier. Even a detail as the small opening of the cover at the left border of the canvas, allowing a sun-lit strip of the sky to appear on the horizon just over a bit of the blue sea (of the blue sky in the witchcraft scene), is exactly the same in both paintings. However, if we will consider the possibility of a dating to the middle of the 1640ties, it does not seem much likely, because at that time the artist focused his personal and artistic activities on the camps of philosophical meditations and unrestrained sorcery hallucinations which are not in tune of the vanity reflections that have brought out the outstanding masterpiece in London.

If we in turn consider the situation a few years later, the situation has changed for our brilliant master from South Italy. Fed up with the Medici Court circles he had decided to leave Florence and to settle in the city of Rome whose cultural and artistic milieu soon gave him new inspiration. As already noticed, it was also the period in which he returned to be stimulated by the works of his former Spanish master who was still alive in Naples (Ribera dies in 1652); and, much important in our case, the moment when he began to conceive paintings with large figures placed in the very first plane of the canvas and filling up sometimes even the greater part of the space of a composition.

The inflammatory force of philosophy, which had seized him during his stay in Tuscany, relaxed its hold in his first Roman years giving place to more melancholic and dejected thoughts resulting in works, the contents of which often were disguised allusions to vanity and *memento mori*. The desolate and depressing atmosphere of *The Dead Soldier* as well as its subject matter fit in perfectly well with several figure paintings from these years, so perhaps the first half of the 1650ties could be proposed for its execution.

Here in Rome – apart from remarkable figure compositions – Rosa took up again landscape painting, partly because of the massive demand from his Roman admirers. A typical example is *The Finding of Moses* from the first half of the 1660ties (fig. 4) which, as already stated, shows a landscape setting not unlike the environment in which the dead soldier is lying. In fact, this might be another circumstantial evidence in favour of an attribution to the 1650ties. It cannot be excluded that the picture is the prelude to Rosa's painful time of disillusions, melancholy and depression which saw the birth of sorrowful images, of which *Humana Fragilitas* in Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, is perhaps the most impressing manifestation.

On the other hand, a more advanced period may even be considered (around 1663). Rosa's poetical interpretation of his hero in the painting in London corresponds to other representations of heroes incorporated into similar romantic surroundings as seen for instance in *The Dream of Aeneas* from ca. 1663-1665 in Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. There can be drawn parallels between these two works executed in honour of armed men, but it is a question, if this fact is enough to affirm a common date of origin[19].

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NOTES

1. *The Dead Soldier*, inv. n. NG741, cm 150 x 167 cm. When the painting turned up in Paris at the beginning of the XIXth century, it was attributed to Velázquez, and it was still believed to be by him when the National Gallery bought it in 1865. However, this purchase was the signal for the start of a polemic about its authorship which has never born fruit. A painted A at the right-hand edge has been believed to be part of a signature until 2002, when a technical examination proved that it was an addition made in later times.

2. M. Levey, *The Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Century Italian Schools*, National Gallery Catalogue, London, 1971, n. 741, pp. 148-149.

3. C. Whitfield in *Paintings in Naples 1606-1705 from Caravaggio to Giordano*, London, 1982, exh. cat. n. 88.

4. The files concerning *The Dead Soldier*, which have served as basis for the here presented biographies, were published by M.E. Wieseman, *A Dead Soldier/Close Examination*, research-paper, The National Gallery, London, 10-6-2010.

5. N. Spinosa in *Salvator Rosa tra mito e magia*, Naples, 2008, exh. cat. n. 88. The author asserts incorrectly that the monogram is composed of an A and an F, whereas the truth is – according to the examinations made during the cleaning of the painting in 2002 – that only the first letter exists. Indeed, the proposal has not been accepted, furthermore also because this battle scene painter executed no figures on such a grand scale.

6. Wieseman, *A Dead Soldier...*, cit.

7. *Landscape with Five Figures and a Dying Tree*, canvas, cm 122 x 195,5, Prato, Casa d'aste Farsettiarte, 26-10-2018, lot 470.

8. *Sitting Soldier Holding a Long Cane*, etching from the series "Diverse figure".

9. In Rosa's *David and Goliath* (private collection, Rome), Goliath is shown with the same type of curled locks of hair as the dead soldier.

10. The harsh critiques which Rosa voices in his *Satire* – published posthumously in 1695 – reflect not only his dissatisfaction with his contemporaries, but also his own fits of depressions. *La guerra* contains the often quoted lines: «E pur noto è a ogn'uno sin dalle fasce, che pochi ne [from the war] ritornano al paese, che alla guerra si muore e non si nasce». His depressive mood finds still more expression in *Tirreno*, written shortly before his death, in which he complains about his own useless life and works.

11. *The Finding of Mosé*, ca. 1660-1665, oil on canvas, cm 123 x 202,6, Detroit, The Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb, inv. nr. 47.92.

12. See note 3. If Salvator Rosa executed this painting, it seems rather impossible that he should have seen this work by Caravaggio. XVIIth century copies of it are unknown, and it had left Rome even before Rosa was born. It was painted for the Roman church Santa Maria della Scala, but refused, sold and sent to Mantova in 1607. In 1627-1628 it was sold again, now to Charles I, but only to be sold once more in 1649 after the execution of this king. Even the new owner sold it, namely in 1671 to Louis XIV at Versailles, and from there it found its final place in the museum of Louvre, Paris.

13. W. Prohaska, *Salvator Rosa profilo biografico*, in *Salvator Rosa tra mito e magia*, cit., p. 292: «Durante i suoi sessant'anni circa di vita, Rosa compì numerosi spostamenti tra Napoli, Roma, Firenze». More detailed are the informations given in A. Spinosa, *Salvator Rosa a Napoli*, ibid., pp. 15-21, and in C. Volpi, *Filosofo nel dipingere: Salvator Rosa tra Roma e Firenze (1639-1659)*, ibid., pp. 29, 42, n. 3. From them we learn that in 1635 the painter decides to settle in Rom; but in 1637 and 1638 he is documented in Naples. From here he visits Rome many times – or from Rome he visits Naples many times. During the carnival 1639 he is present in Rome, but already in March he is again in his native town. At the end of the year 1640 he moves to Florence and remains here and in environs until February 1649.

14. *St. Paul the Hermit*, 1640, canvas, cm 143 x 143, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

15. Posterity usually speaks of two periods in which influences from Ribera are evident in Rosa's works: in the 1630ties and again around 1650.

16. See note 2.

17. About Rosa'a landscapes and the notion of *orrida bellezza* see S. Ebert-Schifferer, *Il teatro filosofico della vanità, le iconografie di Salvator Rosa*, in *Salvator Rosa tra mito e magia*, cit., p. 69.

18. *Witches at their Incantations*, oil on canvas, cm 72 x 132, London, The National Gallery, inv. n. NG6491.

19. If the here proposed attribution to Salvator Rosa of *The Dead Soldier*, which shows a remarkable maturity, can be accepted, its dating surely has to be gone more thoroughly into question in the future; and the painting itself has to be analysed in connection with documented compositions by him as, for instance, his *Prometheus* in Galleria Nazionale di Arte Antica, Palazzo Corsini, Rome, which is still subject of discussions with regard to the year of its creation (earlier it was believed to be from 1639, but recently it has been estimated to date from around 1650; see C. Volpi, in *Salvator Rosa...*, cit., pp. 29-30, 35). Certainly both of them are mature and outstanding masterpieces, and have in common certain compositional characteristics, but stylistically – and particularly in the handling of the chiaroscuro effects – they present considerable differences.

Salvator Rosa author of The Dead Soldier *in The National Gallery of London?*

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The Dead Soldier, originally attributed to Velázquez, has for more than a century been subject of numerous attempts in order to unveil the anonymous artist's identity, but unsuccessfully. This paper argues that Salvator Rosa, multitalented, original and extravagant artist, might be the responsible painter.
