



GIOVANNI MARIA BUTTERI

(1540 Florence 1606)

Allegory of Patience.

Oil on panel.

145.3 x 71 cm.

Provenance: - Possibly collection of Francesco I. de Medici (1541–1587), Florence. - Possibly collection of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga (1690–1756), Rome. - Collection of Dr Armando Buresti, Florence (label verso). - With Matthiesen Fine Art Ltd., London, 1980. - European private collection. The nearly life-size figure depicts a young woman with bare breasts, her body visible through a muslin veil. Her hair is held in place by ribbons, black pearl threads and a sort of tiara, vaguely reminiscent of an ancient headdress. The same antique taste characterises

the jewellery that frames her shoulders, compresses her breasts and surrounds a medallion in which a figure (Diana?) armed with a bow appears on a black background. The young woman, captured in an elegantly curved pose (inspired by Giambologna's (1529–1608) *Grotticella-Venus*), fixes her gaze on a shoot sprouting from the withered trunk of an olive tree, which she lightly touches with one hand. It is one of the symbols of the Medici family, which confirms the Florentine origin of the painting. With her other hand, she holds a star-shaped disc with the mythical figure of Ouroboros, the serpent biting its tail, framing the god of time, Chronos, who is devouring one of his children. The cyclical nature of time is recalled by the sun, which appears in the background on the right in a cloudy sky crossed by Apollo in his chariot. The woman's left foot is attached by a chain to a rock over which a fine stream of water drips. This collection of symbols, whose literary sources are classical, corresponds for the most part to those that Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) recommended to his friend Bernadetto Minerbetti (1507–1574), Bishop of Arezzo, who wanted him to paint a picture depicting the allegory of patience. In a letter dated 14 November 1551, Vasari explained that it should be a depiction of a woman neither fully clothed nor fully naked ('né tutta vestita né tutta spogliata, acciò tenga fra la Ricchezza e la Povertà il mezzo'), patiently and with her left foot chained ('incatenata per il piè manco per offender meno la parte più nobile'), while a jet of water fails to erode the rock to which the chain is attached ('fiché el tempo non consuma con le goccioline dell'acqua la pietra, dove ella è incatenata', see K. Frey: *Il carteggio di Giorgio Vasari / The Literary Estate of Giorgio Vasari*, Munich 1923–1930, vol. I, 1923, pp. 312–314). The painting made by Vasari, recently identified by Carlo Falciani (*Vasari, Michelangelo e l' 'Allegoria della Pazienza'*, in: *Paragone*, LXX, 2019, 148/827, pp. 3–35), only partially corresponds to this iconographic project, which nevertheless had considerable success (*Giorgio Vasari e l'Allegoria della Pazienza*, Ausst.-Kat. A. Bisceglia (ed.), Livorno 2013), especially in Tuscany and Ferrara. This version, unpublished until today, is an important addition to the research on this subject. As Mina Gregori was the first to recognise (expert opinion of 19 March 1980, copy available), it

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was painted by Giovanni Maria Butteri, a pupil of Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) and collaborator of Alessandro Allori (1535–1607), who was involved in the decoration of the Studiolo of Francesco I de Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence between 1570 and 1571. The reference to the Medici family makes it likely that our painting was designed for one of the rooms in the private apartments of the Florentine ruler. The richness of the symbols used, the impeccable technical execution and the dramatic interpretation of the landscape bathed in an almost nocturnal light make it clear that the work must have been created shortly after the Florentine Studiolo was decorated in the 1570s. Our thanks to Prof. Mauro Natale for his expert assistance in cataloguing this painting.

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