



## 8 Jan Harmensz. Muller (Amsterdam 1571 – 1628)

### *Hercules with Nessus and Deianeira*

numbered “12/9” and “91. =Paoli =due= Goldzio-“ on the backing  
pen and brown ink, pinl-brown wash  
125 x 147 mm.

#### Provenance:

Seymour (1920-2014) and Zoya (1924-2021) Slive, Cambridge, USA.

#### Bibliography:

W.W. Robinson, “A Drawing by Jan Muller in a Modest Collection”, in *Shop Talk: Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*, Cambridge, MA, 1995, pp. 209-210, p. 389, fig. 1.

According to William Robinson, the present sheet is an early work by the artist that can be dated to *circa* 1590 by comparison with two similarly exploratory sketches at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Brussels<sup>1</sup> and the Musée du Louvre in Paris<sup>2</sup>. It was probably drawn under the influence of Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617), just before the latter departed for Italy in the autumn of 1590 and or after his return barely more than a year later. In favour of a dating of the present sheet to the mid 1590s, after Goltzius return from Italy, are the drawings of the *Hercules Farnese seen from behind* drawn by Goltzius in Rome in 1591 and brought back by him to the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>. Goltzius’s *Hercules* finds a distinct echo in the present Hercules, although Muller transposed the contrapposto of the figure, who is now leaning to the right rather than to the left and who uses the club as a cane rather than and as a crutch.

The handling of the pen, with more or less pressure for the thickness of the lines, as well as the angularity of these lines are characteristic of Muller’s technique, as in the drawing of *Elijah fed by the Ravens* bought by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2003<sup>4</sup>. Also idiosyncratic of Muller are the smallish features not quite covering the full faces of the figures.

In the foreground, the drawing represents the triumphant Hercules seen from behind, leaning on his club and wearing his lion’s skin. At his feet are a quiver and a bow that he just used to kill Nessus, lying dead on the left. The killing of Nessus is the small scene visible in the right background. Hercules, who had just eloped with Deianeira, came upon a large river to be crossed. The centaur Nessus was the ferryman and after he carried the beautiful Deianeira to the other shore, he tried to abduct her. Hercules then drew an arrow and killed Nessus.

On the backing of the drawing is an inscription tracing the drawing to an anonymous 18<sup>th</sup> Century Italian collection where it was inventoried as Goltzius and valued at two *paoli*. The *paolo* was a coin created by Pope Paul and that weighted 3,85 grammes. It was used all over the papal states. In Milan, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it was worth about 14 soldi and in Rome, a bit later, the equivalent of 10 *baiocchi*.

<sup>1</sup> In the De Grez collection, inv. 40060.

<sup>2</sup> Inv. 19286. Also compare the landscape to the *Flight into Egypt* dated 1591 in the Pushkin Museum (photograph at the RKD).

<sup>3</sup> Both in the Teylers Museum, Haarlem (inv. no. K III 30 and inv. no. N19; H Leeftand and G. Luijten, *Hendrick Goltzius*, exhib. cat., Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam and elsewhere, 2003-2004, nos. 42.1 and 42.2) Goltzius himself reused the figure as Mars in the 1596 composition of *Mars and his Children*, washed almost in the same colour as the present sheet, engraved by Saenredam.

<sup>4</sup> Inv. 2003.516.

*Dessins anciens  
et du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*