

Marco Simone Bolzoni

Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino

maestro del disegno

Long neglected by scholarship, Giuseppe Cesari (1568-1640), better known as the Cavalier d'Arpino, was during his lifetime one of the most important artists of papal Rome. While a young adolescent at work on the Vatican projects of Gregory XIII his talent was recognised and his subsequent career was a succession of successes: Giuseppe Cesari was favoured by the Aldobrandini family as well as becoming first painter to the Pope and his cardinal nephew, Pietro. He became the protagonist of artistic events in the capital and the animator of Rome's cultural circles; his fame extended well beyond the walls of the papal city to reach as far as France. In 1629 he was called to Paris to decorate the sumptuous gallery of the Palais du Luxemburg that was later executed by Peter Paul Rubens. In 1600 he was honoured by the Pope who created him Cavaliere di Cristo and thirty years later the French political authorities ennobled him with the titles of the Cross and of Saint Michael. After almost sixty years of uninterrupted activity Giuseppe Cesari died at Rome to the resounding sound of praise from art experts, collectors and academics: first among them all was Giovanni Baglione, his friend and biographer, who was to remember the painter in his *Vite* with an history full of admiration and rich in curious details about the artist's life. From an early age Giuseppe Cesari was a point of reference for many artists: he was the director of an imposing and highly productive studio and his activity played a leading role during a period spanning two centuries. He was the heir of the Renaissance tradition, and a spectator, and to some degree a precursor to a newly emerging age of art. In fact several of the leading masters of the seventeenth century were formed in his studio, among them we might recall among others, Caravaggio, Andrea Sacchi and Pierfrancesco Mola. The paintings of Giuseppe Cesari were praised by his contemporaries as much, if not more than those of Annibale Caracci and Caravaggio. The importance of his oeuvre in the history of art has been re-established thanks to the many studies of Hewart Röttgen, the curator of the first and most recent exhibition dedicated to the artist (held at the Palazzo Venezia, Rome, 1973); in 2002 thanks to his collaboration with Ugo Bozzi Editore, Röttgen brought to press his important monographic study of the artist's paintings: *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino. Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna*. The idea for the present volume, which is entirely concerned with Cesari's work as a draughtsman, was born of the 2002 publication. While the events of the painter's life are by now well known to scholars, the identity of his achievement as a graphic artist remains little explored. During the centuries in which the idea of Drawing triumphed as the 'Father of the Arts' the Cavalier d'Arpino generated works on paper of unexpected beauty and great quality revealing the brilliance of his art, his refinement of style and the exuberance of his invention. Many of the drawings presented in this book are here published for the first time, some alongside unpublished paintings. Through the over three hundred beautiful drawings born of the Cavalier d'Arpino's mind and capable hand, the artist's creative progress will be unravelled, from the first idea (*prima idea*) to the finished project, thereby revealing all the steps leading to his finished paintings, already brilliantly discussed by Hewart Röttgen. The drawings of the Cavalier d'Arpino encapsulate the totality of the Roman tradition of the sixteenth century, from Raphael to Polidoro and from Perin del Vaga to Taddeo Zuccari – but they also alert us to the "fresh air" of the seventeenth century to come.