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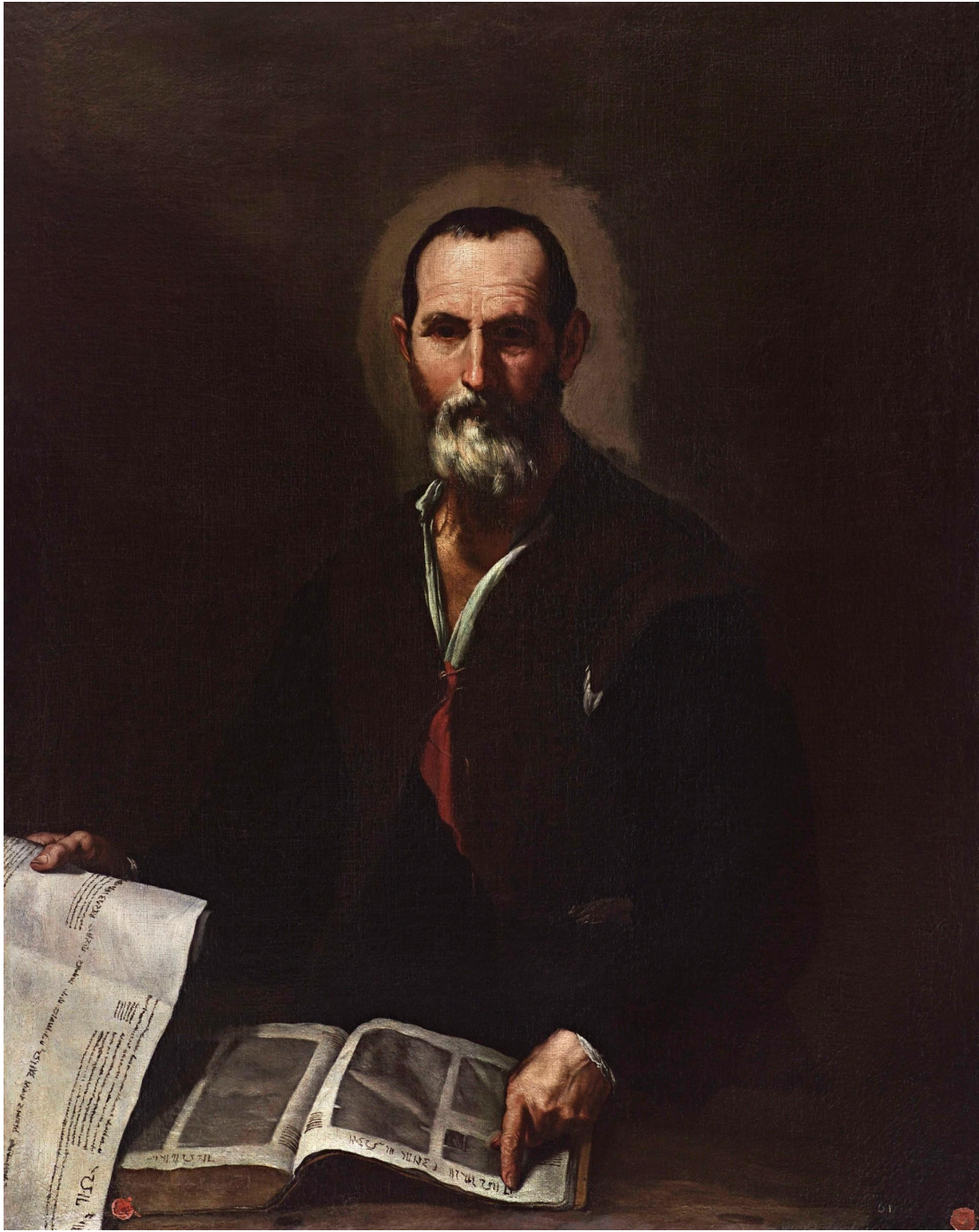
José de Ribera

1591-1652

PHILOSOPHER

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Philosopher

Oil on canvas, 124 x 98.5 cm

Provenance: Private collection. Madrid, Spain.

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The painting by my inspection, which represents the philosopher Crates, is an autographed work by José de Ribera carried out between 1636 and 1637 by its tight stylistic affinities, by the cutting of light and shadow, producing anatomical, somatic and expressive details, such as the treatment of clothes and books in the foreground, together with the series of philosophers of Antiquity by the painter, commissioned by prince Carlo Eusebius of Liechtenstein, by imitation of the series of philosophers painted by Ribera between 1629 and 1631 for the Duke of Alcalá, Vice King of Naples.

The series of Liechtenstein was comprised of only six images of philosophers and, as with the series of Alcalá, has been scattered for some time amongst various museums and private collections. But like the series of Liechtenstein, of which this Crates was originally part, and as with the series of Alcalá, many reproductions signed by Ribera are known by the success this series had achieved upon completion. A success also documented by the presence of numerous copies painted by contributors to Ribera's studio.

The painting in question, of which other work is known (124 x 98.5 cm), signed and dated 1636, in the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, presents the terms "Spagnoletto" and "Alessandria" on the back, clearly relating to the city of the represented philosopher, and the number 9 relating to the inventory of the source collection.

This collection was to be completed at least by the beginning of 1800, from the moment in which, on the front part, bottom right, the number of the previous collection (61) appeared, and to the left the wax seals from the time of Ferdinand of Bourbon - 1st King of the Two Sicilies - were applied, certifying permission of free movement of the painting in accordance with protection laws in force at the time in the Kingdoms of Naples and the Two Sicilies.

In any way, the previous placement of the painting in question was carried out in, at the end of 1800 and early 1900, the famous collection of Horacio Echevarrieta (Bilbao 1870 - Burceña 1963), a notable figure in political and economic life of last-century Spain, as well as a great merchant and man of business and culture.

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The painting, through confirmation of its "Riberezca" authorship, presents some pentimenti (alterations) in the arrangement of the left side of the head and back, passing through the neck of the represented philosopher. While, however, the part showing - below - the left hand with the forefinger pointing to the open book (a remarkable piece of "still life" which, as with the scroll held in the right hand, is a common trend also found in other paintings by Ribera) shows no pentimenti.

The modality in the brushwork, using dense color which defines the somatic features of the represented character (taken from reality with a model that is also represented in other Ribera's paintings of the same period) is very high, documenting this phase of the painter's activity which, since the mid-1630s, gives impetus to reconcile the legacy of last season - still with vigorous solutions of a naturalistic footprint - with recent inclinations towards a more chromatically rich phase, immediate and cordial from the expressive point of view.

The very clear halo against the background around the head of the character represented can be explained, as in other paintings of philosophers of the same time, with a different preparation used on the fabric where the face was painted compared to the remaining area: a different preparation that, even if it could make the "portrait" of the represented philosopher more evident and relevant, with the passing of time has suffered, obviously, different reactions compared to the surrounding painted surface.

It is noted that a copy of the painting in question appeared in a sale at Christie's in 2003, measuring 124x97, probably from the hand of the painter Luca Giordano.

Nicola Spinosa

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