



**PIERO BONACCORSI CALLED PERINO DEL VAGA**

(Florence, 1501 - Rome, 1547)

*The death of Cleopatra (recto); Three prophets (verso)*

numbered upper right recto: 30; numbered middle right verso: 65, possibly collectors mark, L.5247

pen and brown ink with brown wash

140 x 190 mm

**Provenance:**

Private collection, Sweden

This previously unknown drawing by Perino del Vaga takes up the enduringly popular theme of Cleopatra's suicide. The rediscovery of a Roman marble, initially identified as Cleopatra, and its subsequent purchase by Pope Julius II and installation in the Cortile Belvedere in 1512, helped to both popularise and standardise representations of Cleopatra's death. The identification of the statue as Cleopatra, predicated on a misinterpretation of the snake bracelet, prevailed until the late 18th century when the theory was invalidated. The figure has since been known as the Sleeping Ariadne.

The verso depicts three draped prophets holding books who can possibly be associated with the saints James Major, Joseph, and Roch in Perino's Nativity at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Although the books would have no place in a traditional nativity, the painting can more accurately be described as a mystical adoration of saints, rendering their inclusion plausible within the context of the artist's *primi pensieri* (first thoughts). The poses, arrangement and features are all highly comparable and a red chalk study for the painting in the Albertina, Vienna, demonstrates that Perino revised the design considerably over time.

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