

ATTRIBUTED TO
ANTONIO TEMPESTA

(Florence 1555 - Rome 1630)

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

oil on marble
37.4 x 53 cm (14¾ x 20⅞ in)

Provenance: Galerie Reynald Liron-Péan, Deauville.

THE SUMPTUOUS GOLDEN, JEWEL-LIKE COLOUR scheme of *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* is superbly complemented by the marble upon which it is painted. The natural colour variations, patterns and veins found in the marble are picked out in the walls of the architecture, craggy landscape and heavenly sky, providing a unique ocular experience for the viewer.

The present work, attributed to Antonio Tempesta, shows the stoning, or martyrdom, of Saint Stephen. The Acts of the Apostles (6:1-8:2) tells how Stephen was tried for blasphemy for spreading the word of Jesus and was stoned to death in c.34/35 AD by an enraged mob whose actions were encouraged by Saul of Tarsus (later to become St. Paul). In the centre of the composition, the kneeling figure of St. Stephen can be seen; his palms facing upward in serene protestation.¹ Surrounding him are three male figures in the process of hurling stones, while other figures nearby casually watch the activity unfold. In the sky above, the resplendent figure of Christ wears a billowing red cloak and clutches a crucifix, while to his right the delicately sketched figure of God holding a large orb is visible.



Antonio Tempesta, *The Death of Adonis*, c.1593, oil on stone, Galleria Sabauda, Turin (Figure 1)

The technique of painting on stone was fashionable in Italy from the early sixteenth century until the middle of the seventeenth century. The prevalence of quarried marble on the Italian coast made it a readily available, though unusual, surface for paint. By the 1590s paintings on copper, stone, lapis lazuli and alabaster amongst other materials had gained prominent positions in Italian collections as they displayed refinement, delicacy and an exceptional artistic skill. Tempesta was one of the artists at the forefront of this varied media experimentation and his works were distributed amongst connoisseurs in Rome, often encased in elaborate enamel frames. Another example of Tempesta's delicate works on stone is now held in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin (fig. 1).

Tempesta was an Italian painter and engraver whose *oeuvre* fused the styles of Baroque Rome and the artistic culture of Antwerp.² He enrolled in the Accademia del Disegno in Florence on 8 December 1576 where he was a pupil of Santi di Tito (1536-1602) and Joannes Stradanus (1523-1605). It was with Stradanus that Tempesta worked under Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) on the interior decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. He later relocated to Rome where, alongside Matthijs Bril (1550-1583), he was commissioned by Pope Gregory XIII to produce the *Transfer of the Relics of St Gregory of Nazianzus* (1572) and other religious scenes in the loggias on the third floor of the Vatican Palace. He received other papal fresco commissions, notably for the interior of the chapel at S.S. Primus Felicianus in Rome. He also produced over one thousand engraved prints and book illustrations which were widely circulated during his lifetime and which were used as models by other artists.³ Tempesta became a member of the Accademia dei Virtuosi al Pantheon in Rome in 1611 and of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome by 1623.

¹ St. Stephen was the first deacon and the first martyr and, as in the present work, is usually depicted wearing a dalmatic (a wide sleeved tunic) - a recognisable attribute of his office.

² Silvia Danesi Squarzina, "The Collections of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani. Part II" *The Burlington Magazine* 140 (February 1998: 102-118) particularly p. 110, note 43.

³ Tempesta's engraving of the French King Henry IV on horseback (1593) served as a model for portraits of Henry by numerous artists, including Jacques Callot (1592-1635), Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Diego Velázquez (1599-1660).

