LOT 47
GIOVANNI ANTONIO GALLI, CALLED LO SPADARINO
ROME 1585 - AFTER 1651
PTOLEMY II DISCUSSING THE TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH THE HEBREW SCHOLARS
oil on canvas, unlined
45 2/3 by 63 1/3 in.; 116.5 by 161.5 cm.

ESTIMATE 250,000-350,000 USD
Lot Sold: 509,000 USD

CATALOGUE NOTE
Born in Rome, Giovanni Antonio Galli was the son of a swordsmith or frabbricante di spade, earning him the moniker, “Spadarino”, or roughly “Little Sword”.¹ Though previously mistaken for his brother, an engraver and gilder who went by the same name, Spadarino was in fact a painter at the forefront of the Caravagesque movement and, alongside Carlo Saraceni, Bartolomeo Manfredi, Juisepe de Ribera and Cecco del Caravaggio, is considered to be among Caravaggio’s closest followers.² Combining dramatic chiaroscuro with a muted color palette, this painting is executed with the intense realism that characterized the anti-classical movement in Rome in the 1620s. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285 - 247 B.C.) was the second ruler of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Alexandria. An enlightened ruler, he demanded a translation of the first five books of the Old Testament, or Septuagint, for the Alexandrian Jews who more commonly spoke Koine Greek than Hebrew. From the Latin septuaginta meaning seventy, the Septuagint is named after the 70 (or possibly 72) Hebrew scholars who were brought from Jerusalem by Ptolemy, and tasked
with translating the scripture for the Great Library of Alexandria.
Dressed in a leather cuirass, and red cloak, emphasizing his Greek origin, Ptolemy II here holds back the pages of a book, held out to him by the scholar at left, and considers the text. The solemn and concentrated expressions of the surrounding figures, clutching books, and the heavy tomes placed in the foreground, lend the composition a sense of gravity, worthy of this particularly rare subject.

We are grateful to Giuseppe Porzio for suggesting an attribution of this lot to Giovanni Antonio Galli, called Spadarino, on the basis of photographs, and for suggesting the subject to be Ptolemy II discussing the translation of the Old Testament with the Hebrew scholars.