

PAOLO ANTONACCI

ROMA



IPPOLITO CAFFI (1809–66)

The so-called 'Temple of Vesta' in Rome

Sepia watercolour on paper, 230 x 315 mm.

Signed 'Caffi' and inscribed bottom right: 'Tempio di Vesta a Roma'.

On the back: 'Study of perspective with letters'

The watercolour depicts the famous Temple of Hercules the Victor, known for many years as the 'Temple of Vesta', with Carlo Francesco Bizzaccheri's (1656 – 1721) *Fountain of the Tritons* in the Piazza della Bocca della Verità on the left.

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Ippolito CAFFI

Belluno, 1809 – Battle of Lissa, 1866

Discovering a talent for drawing at a very early age, Ippolito Caffi began studying art in his native city of Belluno, later moving to Padua to pursue his studies in the field of painting. He completed his artistic training at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice between 1827 and 1832, studying perspective under Tranquillo Orsi (1771–1844) and figure drawing under Teodoro Matteini (1754–1831). During his time in Venice he fell under the spell of the 18th century *vedutisti* in general and of Canaletto in particular.

Caffi moved to Rome in 1832, joining the workshop of his cousin, the "historical" painter Pietro Paoletti (1801–47), and publishing the first edition of his *Lezioni di prospettiva pratica* in 1835. In 1837 he painted *Carnival in Rome: The Feast of the Little Candles* which was to become his best-known painting and was revisited on fully forty-two occasions. After travelling to Trieste, Venice and Padua, where he painted four pictures for the Caffè Pedrocchi, Caffi was back in Rome by 1843.

His travels in the Middle East were to have a major impact on his art: driven by a desire not only to see new places but also to discover little-known peoples and cultures considered different from those in Europe, Caffi sailed from the port of Naples on 5 September 1843 on a journey which was to coincide with the most fertile and promising period in his entire career.

The clear, bright light and perfect geometry in his views of Athens gives way to more liquid images shrouded in a golden atmosphere, such as those that he painted in Constantinople – for example his splendid *View of the Sweet Waters of Europe* (1843) –, and to the burning light and lyricism of the pictures that he was to paint in Egypt, including *The Simoon Wind in the Desert* and the *Isthmus of Suez* (1844). Caffi went on to visit Jerusalem (*A View of the Mount of Olives*), Ephesus, Laodicea and Hierapolis, which he captured in a masterpiece swathed in a softly magical and dreamlike light.

He painted in Rome from 1844 to 1848, also showing his work at the Mostra dei Cultori e Amatori di Belle Arti. He remained in Venice in 1848 and '49 to fight against Austria until the city capitulated. Outlawed, he fled to Genoa, only returning to Rome in 1855 and residing there until 1858. He was in Venice from 1858 to 1860, remaining in the city with only a few short breaks until the fateful year of 1866, when he decided to embark as an interpreter on the flagship *Re d'Italia* and took part in the Battle of Lissa. His plan was to record the bloody naval battle from close quarters, but tragically he lost his life when the flagship was sunk.¹

¹ The following works are still of vital importance for a study of the painter's life and art: *Vedute Romane di Ippolito Caffi*, Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, June – July 1959, Rome 1959; G. AVON CAFFI, *Ippolito Caffi 1809 - 1866*, Venice 1967; M. PITTALUGA, *Il pittore Ippolito Caffi*, Vicenza 1971; G. PEROCCO, *Ippolito Caffi 1809 - 1866. Raccolta di 154 dipinti di proprietà del Museo d'arte moderna Cà Pesaro - Venezia*, Venice 1979; *Ippolito Caffi. Luci del Mediterraneo*, Belluno, Palazzo Crepadona, 1 October 2005 – 22 January 2006, Rome, Palazzo Braschi, 15 February – 2 May 2006, exhibition catalogue edited by A. SCARPA, Milan, 2005. For Caffi the orientalist see *Ippolito Caffi - Viaggio in Oriente - 1843/1844*, Mestre Istituto di Cultura "S. Maria delle Grazie", 3 July – 15 September 1988, catalogue of the exhibition curated by F. SCOTTON, Venice 1988 and *Ippolito Caffi: dipinti di*

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His work may be admired today in the Museo di Belluno; at the Museo dell'Arsenale, Ca' Pesaro, the Museo Correr and the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Venice; at the Pinacoteca di Treviso; at the Gallerie d'Arte Moderna in Turin and in Rome; at the Museo Rivoltella in Trieste; and at the Palazzo Reale in Naples.

viaggio tra Italia e Oriente, Trieste, Museo Storico del Castello di Miramare, 8 July – 8 December 2015, exhibition catalogue edited by A. SCARPA, Marsilio, 2015.