SPHINX FINE ART



Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (Venice 1675 - Venice 1741)

Young Hannibal Swears Enmity to Rome

oil on canvas
71 x 94 cm (27⅞ x 37 in)

'When I come to age, I shall pursue the Romans with fire and sword and enact again the doom of Troy. The gods shall not stop my career, nor the treaty that bars the sword, neither the lofty Alps nor the Tarpeian rock. I swear to this purpose by the divinity of our native god of war, and by the shade of Elissa.'

- Silius Italicus, *Punica,* Book I, 114-119

In this powerful work, Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini depicts one of the formative episodes in the life of Hannibal (147-183/182 BC), the famed Carthaginian general who is considered one of the great military leaders of antiquity. Hannibal's father was Hamilcar Barca (c. 275-228 BC), commander of Carthage during their defeat to Rome in the First Punic War (264-241 BC). In the wake of this defeat, Hamilcar aimed to subjugate the tribes of the Iberian Peninsula. As Livy relates 'Hannibal, then about nine years old, begged, with all the childish arts he could muster, to be allowed to accompany him; whereupon Hamilcar, who was preparing to offer sacrifice for a successful outcome, led the boy to the altar and made him solemnly swear, with his hand upon the sacred victim, that as soon as he was old enough he would be the enemy of the Roman people'.[1]

This is the scene which Pellegrini has depicted, and he has opted to almost fill the composition with his figures, which focuses attention to the emotional relationship between father and son. Hannibal is depicted deliberately youthful and innocent, his face upturned to his father with an expression of naivety and awe. There is no hint of the great warrior that he will become. Hamilcar towers above his son, and looks down at him with a fierce expression, as if to try and convey to him the importance of the oath.

Although his son is only a child, Hamilcar has a strong grip on his arm, and this rough treatment suggests that if Hannibal is ready to take this oath, then he is ready to be treated as an adult. Indeed this moment can be seen as the start of Hannibal's journey from a child to the great general who surpassed the achievements of the powerful warrior depicted here.

There is another version of the present work hanging over the doors in the former Antechamber if the Residenz at Würzburg. This version, along with its pendant *Polyxena Led to Sacrifice,*[2] is larger, but otherwise is almost identical with the exception of absence of the third halberdier at the extreme right-hand side of the composition. However, the Würzburg version is coarser in its handling, and less finely detailed, as would be expected from a work designed to be hung high up. The Würzburg picture probably dates to 1737, and the present version is commonly thought by scholars to predate this, although the date of execution is disputed. Rodolfo Pallucchini believes Pellegrini painted the present work c. 1731,[3] although Bernard Aikema and Professor Alessandro Bettagno believe this date should be slightly later, c. 1737.[4]

The emotional intensity of *Young Hannibal Swears Enmity to Rome* is heightened by Pellegrini's theatrical composition. Emotions and gestures are expressed dramatically, which gives the work clarity of narrative. Similar techniques are in evidence in *Achilles Discovered with the Daughters of Lycomedes.* In that work the composition has been arranged so that the viewer's gaze is immediately drawn and held by the figure of Achilles, holding a sword and disguised as a young woman. The realisation and shock on Achilles' face, as he realises that he has been tricked into revealing his identity is the central aspect of the work. As with *Young Hannibal Swears Enmity to Rome,* it is the emotional responses of the protagonists that seems to chiefly concern Pellegrini, and in order to focus attention upon this he ensures that his figures dominate the canvas, and discards superfluous details and background which could distract the viewer.

Hannibal's upturned profile in the present work is a common motif in Pellegrini's work. It reoccurs in many of his paintings, for example in the figure of the fiancé in *The Continence of Scipio.* In fact this figure, with his long hair and youthful appearance, seems to derive from the same model as the young Hannibal. By using the technique of an upturned face, Pellegrini effectively conveys one figure's subservience to the other. It also serves to underline the figure's gaze and the pyramidal composition, and so places emphasis on the central figure in the narrative. Pellegrini's ability to arrange a composition full of clarity is one of the outstanding features of his art.

A notable feature of *Young Hannibal Swears Enmity to Rome* is the rich and vivid colouring used by Pellegrini. The palette is dominated by shades of yellow and gold, as the picture is flooded in warm light, which is enlivened with the large areas of deep red and blue that make up Hannibal and Hamilcars' cloaks. This dynamic use of colour is often seen in Pellegrini's work, another example being *The Clemency of Alexander before the Family of Darius.* The red, yellow and blue of the central figures' costume immediately draws the viewer's attention and helps them emerge from the muted background. The theatricality of this colouring is bought to prominence even further by Pellegrini's effective use of chiaroscuro. This skilful modelling of light is a feature in the present work but is even more in evidence in a painting such as *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna* (Museo del Settecento Veneziano, Venice.)

Pellegrini, together with Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734) and Jacopo Amigoni (c. 1685-1752), was one of the finest Venetian history painters of his day. Credited with seamlessly melding the Renaissance

style promoted by Paulo Veronese (1528-1588) with the Baroque of Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669(and Luca Giordano (1634-1705), Pellegrini enjoyed great popularity amongst the European aristocracy. He travelled widely around Europe executing elegant commissions to decorate the palatial residences of the wealthy upper classes.

Having trained under P. Pagani (1661-1716) in Venice, Pellegrini was invited to England in 1708 by the British ambassador to Venice, Charles Montagu. Whilst there he decorated the stairwell of Montagu's London home in Arlington Street, which has since been destroyed. The following year, Pellegrini, along with Marco Ricci (1676-1730) who had also been invited over to England by the ambassador, painted the set designs for Alessandro Scarlatti's opera, *Pirro e Demetrio* and for Giovanni Bononcini's *Camilla.* That same year he received a commission from Charles, the 3rd Earl of Carlisle to paint the cupola, staircases and entrance hall of Vanburgh's magnificent Castle Howard in North Yorkshire which was largely destroyed by fire in 1941. Employing the fashionable genre of mythological and allegorical paintings, Pellegrini created a dramatic version of the Fall of Phaethon for the cupola and used the walls for allegorical settings. Following this success at Castle Howard, Pellegrini was also called upon to decorate another of Charles Montagu's residences, Kimbolton Castle. He adorned the walls with *The Triumph of a Roman Emperor* and a rendition of *Minerva* on the ceiling. *Minerva* includes a portrait of the patron upheld by putti. Again, the light and radiant colours are indebted to Veronese; the scene of musicians playing a fanfare, painted in a triangular area, is brilliantly accomplished, both as an independent work and as part of the whole. Both of these frescoes represent the most important surviving British achievement with a spaciousness of design and a radiance of colour that anticipates Giambattista Tiepolo (1695-1770).

Other large-scale projects undertaken whilst in England include a series of mythological canvases originally intended for Burlington House, London which hang now in Narford Hall, Norfolk. Pellegrini worked with Sebastiano Ricci on this commission and together they produced Diana and her Nymphs Bathing.

Pellegrini was particularly successful in England and through his acquaintance with Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723) he assisted in the foundation of Kneller's Academy in London in 1711 and also became a director. Pellegrini even submitted designs for the dome of the new St. Paul's Cathedral and his design is said to have been Sir Christopher Wren's (1632-1723) preferred choice. In the end Pellegrini was pipped to the post by the English painter Sir John Thornhill (1675-1724) who received the commission instead. This anecdote in itself goes some way to demonstrate the great esteem in which Pellegrini was held. His rivals for the St. Paul's commission included some of the greatest European artists of the day: Juan-Baptiste Catenaro, Pierre Berchet and Louis Laguerre (1663-1721) were among his competitors. According to the writer and antiquarian George Vertue, Sebastiano Ricci on finding out that the commission had been awarded to Thornhill, 'left England once and for all when he found it was resolved that Mr. Thornhill shou'd paint the Cupolo of St. Paul's'.

Pellegrini left England in 1713. Subsequently he was employed by Johann Wilhelm, Elector of the Palatinate in Düsseldorf for whom he painted *The Fall of the Giants* and *The Fall of Phaethon* to adorn the stairwell of the Elector's Schloss Bensberg. He also completed a series of allegorical canvases to celebrate the Elector's rule. These are commonly regarded as the apex of his achievement as a history painter. Pellegrini worked all over Europe, in Antwerp, The Hague, Würzburg, Dresden, Mannheim and Vienna. Following this extensive travelling, Pellegrini finally settled in Venice for the remaining years of his life.

In 1735 he was paid for the delivery of an altarpiece, *St. Catherine*, for the Santo in Padua, which is now in the library of the Santo. Pellegrini had an important collection of Dutch art, which, after his death, was acquired by the English consul Vivian Smith. His work was widely influential and played an important role in the formative years of Tiepolo and Giovanni Antonio Guardi (1699-1760).

[1] Livy, *The War with Hannibal: The History of Rome from its Foundations,* Book XXI, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt.

[2] Knox, G., *Antonio Pellegrini* (Oxford, 1995), p. 265, cat. no. P.509, illustrated plate 145.

[3] Pallucchini, R., 'Novita 'ed appunti per Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini' in *Pantheon,* vol. XVIII, 1960, pp.247-248.

[4] The Matthiesen Gallery, The Settecento 1700-1800, 1987, no. 10.

Provenance:

Ruggero Sonino, Venice;
Anonymous sale, London, Christie's April 24th, 1981, lot 98;
The Matthiesen Gallery, London.

Exhibitions

London, The Matthiesen Gallery, *The Settecento 1700-1800,* 1987, no. 10, pl. 5.

Literature:

Rodolfo Pallucchini, 'Novita 'ed appunti per Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini' in *Pantheon,* vol. XVIII, 1960, pp.247-248, reproduced;

George Knox, *Antonio Pellegrini* (Oxford, 1995), p. 239, cat. no. P.169.

Artist description:

Along with Sebastiano Ricci and Jacopo Amigoni, Pellegrini was the most important Venetian history painter of the early 18th century. By uniting the High Renaissance style of Paolo Veronese with the Baroque of Pietro da Cortona and Luca Giordano, he created graceful decorations that were particularly successful with the aristocracy of central and northern Europe. He travelled widely, working in Austria, England, the Netherlands, Germany and France.

His father, a glover, came from Padua. At an early age Pellegrini was apprenticed to the Milanese Paolo Pagani (1661–1716), with whom he travelled to Moravia and Vienna in 1690. In 1696 Pellegrini was back in Venice, where he painted his first surviving work, a fresco cycle in the Palazzetto Corner on Murano, with scenes from the life of Alexander the Great and allegorical themes on the ceiling. Here his figure style is clearly derived from Pagani, but the effects of light and the free handling suggest the art of Giordano or even Cortona, whose work Pellegrini could not then have known. He was in Rome from 1699 to 1701, before returning to Venice for two decorative projects, both on allegorical themes: one for the Scuola del Cristo and the other for the Palazzo Albrizzi. These works are deeply influenced by the art of Giordano and the late works of Giovanni Battista Gaulli, which he had seen in Rome. In 1704 Pellegrini married Angela, a sister of the pastellist Rosalba Carriera. He remained in close contact with his sister-in-law for the rest of his life.

In 1708, Charles Montagu (later 1st Duke of Manchester), the British ambassador extraordinary at Venice, invited Pellegrini and Marco Ricci to England. Pellegrini stayed until 1713. The visit was of decisive importance for him because he established himself as one of the most sought-after decorative painters in Europe during these years. His first work in England was probably the decoration (destr.) of

the stair-well in the Duke of Manchester's house in Arlington Street, London. In 1709, with Ricci, Pellegrini designed sets for Alessandro Scarlatti's opera Pirro e Demetrio and for Giovanni Bononcini's Camilla. His most important large-scale decoration was the cycle in Castle Howard, N. Yorkshire, which was largely destroyed by fire in 1941. The cupola of the hall was filled by a dramatic painting of the Fall of Phaeton, and the walls were decorated with mythological and allegorical scenes. By now the influence of Giordano and Gaulli had weakened and his style, with clear, light tones, was an entirely individual interpretation of the art of Paolo Veronese. In 1713 he finished the decoration of the chapel and the stair-well of the Duke of Manchester's country house, Kimbolton Castle, for which he provided the Triumph of a Roman Emperor on the walls and Minerva, which includes a portrait of the patron upheld by putti on the ceiling (both in situ). Again, the light and radiant colours are indebted to Veronese; the scene of musicians playing a fanfare, painted in a triangular area, is brilliantly accomplished, both as an independent work and as part of the whole. Pellegrini's third large-scale cycle from this period, probably done c. 1709–10, consists of a series of mythological canvases originally intended for Burlington House, London, and now in Narford Hall, Norfolk. Pellegrini enjoyed considerable success in England. He was popular with the aristocracy and was appointed one of the directors of Kneller's Academy in 1711.

On his way to Paris Pellegrini stopped in Düsseldorf, where he was introduced to John William, Elector of the Palatinate. The ambitious and luxury-loving Elector liked Pellegrini's work and persuaded him to stay for three years by commissioning decorations for the Wittelsbach country seat, Schloss Bensberg. In the autumn of 1713 he completed two ceiling paintings for the stair-wells, representing the Fall of Phaeton and the Fall of the Giants (both in situ). In the following year he started a series of large allegorical canvases celebrating the Elector's rule and intended for one of the rooms of Schloss Bensberg . This series, now in Schloss Schleissheim, near Munich, is generally considered Pellegrini's most important work. The large historical allegories show a clear relationship with the Medici cycles by Rubens (1622–5; Paris, Louvre) and Cortona (Florence, Pitti). The similarity with the latter is unsurprising in view of Johann Wilhelm's marriage to a Medici princess, Anna Maria Luisa, and the consequent contact between the courts of Florence and Düsseldorf. Pellegrini would have become acquainted with Rubens's work in England and again in the Elector's collection at Düsseldorf. It is clear from the brilliantly coloured, festive paintings for the Schloss Bensberg, with their suggestion of grand opera, that he had been impressed by that master's style.

Having moved to the north Netherlands in 1717, he fulfilled at least one important commission in Amsterdam, for a ceiling in a house at the Herengracht (in situ; Aikema and Mijnlieff), and, in 1718, worked in The Hague on the decoration of the lower hall of the Mauritshuis (in situ). While in Holland, Pellegrini met William Cadogan, 1st Earl Cadogan (1675–1726), who invited him to decorate his country house (destr.) at Oakley, Bucks, in 1719; he returned to Venice in the winter of that year and on his way through Paris won the commission to decorate the ceiling of the Mississippi Gallery in the Banque Royale. To fulfil this commission he returned to Paris between April 1720 and March 1721, accompanied by his wife, sister-in-law (who described the visit in her diary; see Sani) and Anton Maria Zanetti the elder. In this project he created an elaborate allegory celebrating the success of the bank and the glory of the King. The bank failed shortly thereafter and the painting (untraced) was removed.

In the early months of 1722 Pellegrini executed some of his most successful works, among them two altarpieces, St Ulric Healing a Sick Man and the Virgin of the Rosary (both in situ) for the Benedictine monastery of St Mang at Füssen, and in Venice the Martyrdom of St Andrew (Venice, S Stae); all of these are distinguished by brilliant colours and dissolving light. He was back in Paris in the summer and autumn of 1722, thereafter once more in Venice and in Würzburg in 1724. In 1725 he worked in Dresden, where the lavish patronage of Augustus II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, was becoming renowned. His frescoes for Ubigau castle and the Zwinger pavilion are destroyed, but there are two surviving altarpieces, one of the Trinity (in situ) for the Catholic court chapel at Dresden and the other depicting Christ Handing the Keys to St Peter (Bautzen, Stadtmus.).

In the autumn and winter of 1725 Pellegrini stayed in Vienna, where he made important contacts and to which he returned in 1727 after a short trip to Italy in 1726.

Pellegrini was now 55 years old and had travelled almost continuously for more than 20 years. He settled for his remaining years in Venice, where he executed commissions in and around the city. In

1735 he was paid for the delivery of an altarpiece, St Catherine, for the Santo in Padua (now in the library of the Santo). He undertook one more trip abroad in 1736–7 to work for the Elector Charles Philip (reg 1716–1742), who was related to Elector John William, on a series of four ceiling pieces in his Residenz in Mannheim. Like so much of Pellegrini's work, these ceilings were destroyed by bombardment in World War II. Pellegrini had an important collection of Dutch art, which, after his death, was acquired by the English consul Vivian Smith. His work was widely influential and played an important role in the formative years of Giambattista Tiepolo and Giovanni Antonio Guardi.

COLLECTIONS

Pellegrini is represented in the following collections: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery, London; Louvre, Paris; Kunsthistorisches, Vienna; Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Museo Correr, Venice; Museu de Arte de Sao Paolo, Brazil; Les Musee Ingres, Montauban amongst others.