

JEAN-ANTIONE JULIEN, CALLED JULIEN DE PARME

(Cavigliano 1736 - Paris 1799)

The Marriage of Alexander to Roxana

signed and dated 'julien I [Invenit]. 1768, à Rome' (lower right)
black chalk, pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash, heightened with white
on lightly washed paper, watermark encircled fleur-de-lys
33.2 x 45.9 cm (13¼ x 18⅞ in)

Provenance: An unidentified collector's mark PBR (*verso*).

ROXANA WAS THE FIRST OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S wives. Daughter of Oxyartes, a baron from Bactria, a region which now encompasses Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, she was betrothed to Alexander on the capture of Sogdiana. Robin Lane Fox writes on Alexander's nuptials, 'Roxana was said by contemporaries to be the most beautiful lady in all Asia. She deserved her Iranian name of Roshanak, meaning "little star". Marriage to a local noble's family made sound political sense. But contemporaries implied that Alexander, aged twenty-eight, also lost his heart. A wedding feast for the two of them was arranged high on one of the Sogdian rocks. Alexander and his bride shared a loaf of bread, a custom still observed in Turkestan. Characteristically, Alexander sliced it with his sword.'¹ Alexander fell passionately in love with Roxana, and was determined to raise her to the rank of his consort. She accompanied Alexander all the way to India, and bore him a child, Alexander IV, six months after Alexander the Great's death.

Jean-Antoine Julien, known as Julien de Parme, is now recognised as one of the precursors of neo-Classical painting. Born in Switzerland, he settled in Rome in 1760, after a short sojourn in Paris. In Italy his main patron was Guillaume-Léon du Tillot, Marquese of Felino (1711-1774), Prime Minister of the Duchy of Parma. Each year, du Tillot would commission a large historical picture from the artist, who, as a sign of his gratitude to the court of Parma, decided to adopt the name Julien de Parme. When du Tillot fell from power in 1772, de Parme followed him into exile in Paris. Whilst there, his works did not meet with the success he was expecting, and his career ended in obscurity and poverty. His *Journal* as well as his published correspondence with the Belgian painter André-Corneille Lens (1739-1822) serve as invaluable documents of artistic life in Rome and Paris at the end of the eighteenth century.

This drawing is a study for *The Marriage of Alexander to Roxana* painted in 1768 for the court of Parma, now in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence.² The present work was followed by another developed composition, closer to a work now in a French private collection,³ which demonstrated de Parme's equal interest in both antiquity and in the great masters of the Renaissance, as is typical of de Parme's work. It has often been noted that the initial source of inspiration for de

Parme's composition was a fresco of the same subject, executed in 1512 by the Italian Mannerist painter il Sodoma (1477-?1549) at the Villa Farnesina. The influence of Sodoma's fresco is evident in de Parme's *The Marriage of Alexander to Roxana*, where the placing and the postures of the main protagonists of the scene are directly borrowed from il Sodoma's composition. The version in the Pitti is closer to the now lost composition by Raphael (1483-1520) on which Sodoma based his fresco, and which de Parme would have known through an engraving by G.J. Caraglio (c.1500/05-1665).

Interestingly, de Parme acquired a drawing at the sale of the famous collection of Pierre-Jean Mariette, then considered to be Raphael's study for his *Marriage of Alexander to Roxana*. Long regarded as having been executed by one of the members of his studio, it has recently been reattributed to the master himself.⁴

The son of a stone-mason, de Parme received his initial training in Cravégia under a local artist, Giuseppe Borgnis, with whom he spent two years. By 1760 he was in Rome, where he threw himself into the study of the antique. He quickly proclaimed his scorn for such contemporaries or immediate predecessors as Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) and Carlo Maratti (1625-1713) in Italy, and François Lemoyne (1688-1737) in France, though he was full of praise for Raphael, Polidoro da Caravaggio, Carracci and Domenichino (1581-1641). Indeed, Domenichino's work was to exert a very strong influence on him. De Parme's earliest known extant picture is a life size painting of *Cupid* (1762), currently in the Barbieri private collection in Parma, which exemplifies the main features of his style. It is inspired by classical sculpture, and the effect of the careful composition is heightened by the subordination of colour to line.

De Parme travelled to Venice in 1771 but was unimpressed by what he saw there, preferring instead the work of Giulio Romano (c.1499-1546) at the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, through which he passed on his return to Rome. In May 1773 he left Italy for Paris. He did not enter the Académie Royale but enjoyed the patronage of du Tillot. After du Tillot's death in 1775 de Parme found another patron, Louis-Jules-Barbon Mancini-Mazarini, Duc de Nivernais (1716-1798), for whom he was to work for the next twenty years.

¹ Robin Lane Fox, *The Search for Alexander*, 1980, p.298.

² P. Rosenberg, in *Julien de Parme 1736-1799*, exhibition catalogue, Rancate, Pinacoteca Cantonale and Parma, Fondazione Magnani-Rocca, 1999-2000, no. 20.

³ P. Rosenberg, *ibid.*, no. 21.

⁴ *Roma e lo Stile Classico di Raffaello*, exhibition catalogue, Mantua and Vienna, 1999, no. 81.

