Italian Studies from the 1820s by Théodore Caruelle d’Aligny

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Following studies under Jean-Baptiste Regnault and Louis-Étienne Watelet, the young landscape painter Théodore Caruelle d’Aligny went to Italy in 1822, staying there until 1827. He mainly resided in Rome, but also travelled to Umbria, Sicily, the Bay of Naples and other parts of the country. He was to return to Italy a few years later, in 1834–35. For a long time, Caruelle d’Aligny’s first visit to Italy was less well known than his second, but when the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes acquired 17 drawings of Italian architectural and landscape subjects in 1983 and 1984, most of them dated and signed, a clearer picture emerged of the artist’s stay in the country from 1822 to 1827.1 The Rennes drawings showed many parallels with 15 works in the Museo di Roma (formerly the Gabinetto Communale delle Stampe), they too consisting of confidently executed graphite sketches of Roman motifs and landscape views from central Italy. With the Nationalmuseum’s

Fig. 1 Théodore Caruelle d’Aligny (1798–1871), The Capitol in Rome Seen from the South, 1823. Graphite on paper, 200 x 383 mm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 32/2017.
Caruelle d’Aligny also drew the architecture of antiquity; several studies show the substructures of the Palatine Hill and the half-collapsed walls of the Baths of Diocletian (Fig. 2). In some cases, the ancient monuments are still distance and with a focus on the overall topography, rather than on details of the architecture and the ancient monuments. Two of them are dated 1823, one a view of the Lateran from the north-east, with gardens in the foreground, the other showing the Capitoline, viewed from the Palatine Hill (Fig. 1). An undated view of the Franciscan monastery of San Bonaventura on the Palatine in Rome shows the monastery from the south, with its gardens and a number of buildings that are now demolished. In other studies, the artist comes closer to his motif, but still with an interest in perspective and the spatial relationships of the different buildings. One sheet shows the Piazza di San Giovanni in Laterano, seen from the Via Merulana. Walls separate gardens and vineyards from the street, which opens onto the square, with the Lateran Palace to the left and, in the background, the papal benediction loggia that terminates the north transept of the Lateran Basilica (Fig. 3). Caruelle d’Aligny has used very thin strokes of graphite to render the architecture of the loggia, which appears to be veiled in a light haze beyond the vertical of the imposing obelisk, while the walls and the paving of the street in the foreground are drawn with greater pressure and broader strokes.

The Roman motifs include a number of panorama-like views drawn at some acquisition of drawings by Caruelle d’Aligny in 2017, a further 20 sheets can be added to the group from the artist’s first stay in Rome. Like the earlier-known studies, the majority are signed with a monogram, dated and provided with a brief inscription identifying the subject. The signatures consist of a number of variants of the initials “TCA” that appear to have been used in parallel. The drawings are done in graphite, sometimes with more vigorous strokes and shading, sometimes with extremely thin lines. Some of them are on thin, transparent tracing paper. Several have a pinkish-red wash: pigment from red chalk mixed with water and applied with a brush (lavis de sanguine).

The Roman motifs include a number of panorama-like views drawn at some
surrounded by later buildings that were removed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The ancient Porta Maggiore in eastern Rome is shown from inside the city, partly obscured by custom houses that have now been demolished (Fig. 4). Most of the drawings are unpopulated, but in an image of the Roman Forum, two figures are seen leaning over a wall, viewing the lower parts of the Arch of Septimius Severus, which were uncovered during excavations of the Forum in the Napoleonic era, initiated by the French occupiers (Fig. 5). To the left, are the three Corinthian columns of the Temple of Vespasian, with the basement of the Senators’ Palace – the ancient Tabularium – as a backdrop. Two studies of streets in Pompeii were also among the drawings acquired.

Motifs from beyond Rome include, in addition, a sketchy study of the port of Gaeta, a drawing of buildings on the shore of the Bay of Naples, and a precisely executed view of the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, seen from the arcaded forecourt of the double church (Fig. 6). The last of these is dated 1826, when Caruelle d’Aligny clearly made a journey to the north through the Italian peninsula, which may also be documented in an undated drawing of Dante’s tomb in Ravenna, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes. A view of a large, unidentified Romanesque church, dated 1827, may be assumed to have been drawn in northern Italy or southern France, on the artist’s return journey to France.

Only one of the sheets acquired is a pure landscape study, a drawing of rock
formation at Ariccia. Given that Caruelle d'Aligny is primarily known as a landscape painter, the preponderance of architectural subjects is perhaps surprising. However, it fits in with the earlier-known material in Rennes and Rome. In comparison with his later visit to Rome, from which the Louvre has a great many dramatic landscapes drawn in Subiaco and the Alban Hills, but few architectural studies, during his 1822–27 stay the artist also seems to have been very interested in recording the built environment, both individual monuments and the topography of the city. That that interest extends to Gothic architecture as well, as in his study of the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, is typical of his generation. Among French artists and writers of the Romantic avant-garde, especially, there was a fascination with medieval monuments that was probably still unusual in an Italian context. During his time in Rome in the 1820s, Théodore Caruelle d'Aligny was something of a central figure among the French landscape painters in the city. His name tends to be mentioned, in particular, in connection with a shy and uncertain artist who joined the group in 1825, and who was given support and encouragement by Caruelle d'Aligny: Camille Corot. “Corot will be a master to us all” (“il sera notre maître à tous”) are the prophetic words Caruelle d'Aligny is said to have voiced after seeing his friend working on a painting of the Colosseum. The two artists’ friendship and work together during their years in Rome laid a solid foundation for their future careers as landscape painters. The Nationalmuseum’s acquisition of 20 drawings from Caruelle d'Aligny’s years in Italy gives us an insight into how his view of landscape was shaped. Buildings, whether well-known ancient monuments or anonymous farms in the hills around Rome, are firmly anchored in the terrain and given a precisely defined extent in his image of the landscape; their shapes and surface structures are recorded with the same concentration as those of rock masses and vegetation.
ACQUISITIONS/ITALIAN STUDIES FROM THE 1820S BY THÉODORE CARUELLE D’ALIGNY

Fig. 5 Théodore Caruelle d’Aligny (1798–1871), *The Forum Romanum, Rome, with the Triumphal Arch of Septimius Severus, View towards the Capitol*, c. 1825. Graphite and red chalk on thin paper, 235 x 262 mm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 31/2017.
ACQUISITIONS/ITALIAN STUDIES FROM THE 1820S BY THÉODORE CARUELLE D’ALIGNY

Notes:


3. Ramade 1986, pp. 128–129, n. 9, notes six variants of the monogram, which the artist used, abandoned and returned to over the course of his career. The hypothesis that they can be used for dating cannot be verified. Caruelle was the name of the artist’s father, Aligny that of his stepfather. Not until around 1859 did he write his name with the prefix, “d’Aligny”; see Aubrun 1988, p. 19.


5. Ramade 1986, p. 122 (fig. 3).

6. Aubrun 1988, pp. 19, 35–36. According to Aubrun, the circle around Caruelle d’Aligny and Corot, most of whom were associated with the French Academy in Rome at the Villa Medici, consisted of Léopold Robert, Guillaume Bodinier, Louis-Auguste Lapito, Charles Delaberge, Jean-Victor Schnetz and Édouard Bertin.

Fig. 6 Théodore Caruelle d’Aligny (1798–1871), The Basilica di San Francesco at Assisi, 1826. Graphite on paper, 150 x 210 mm. Purchase: the Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMH 24/2017.