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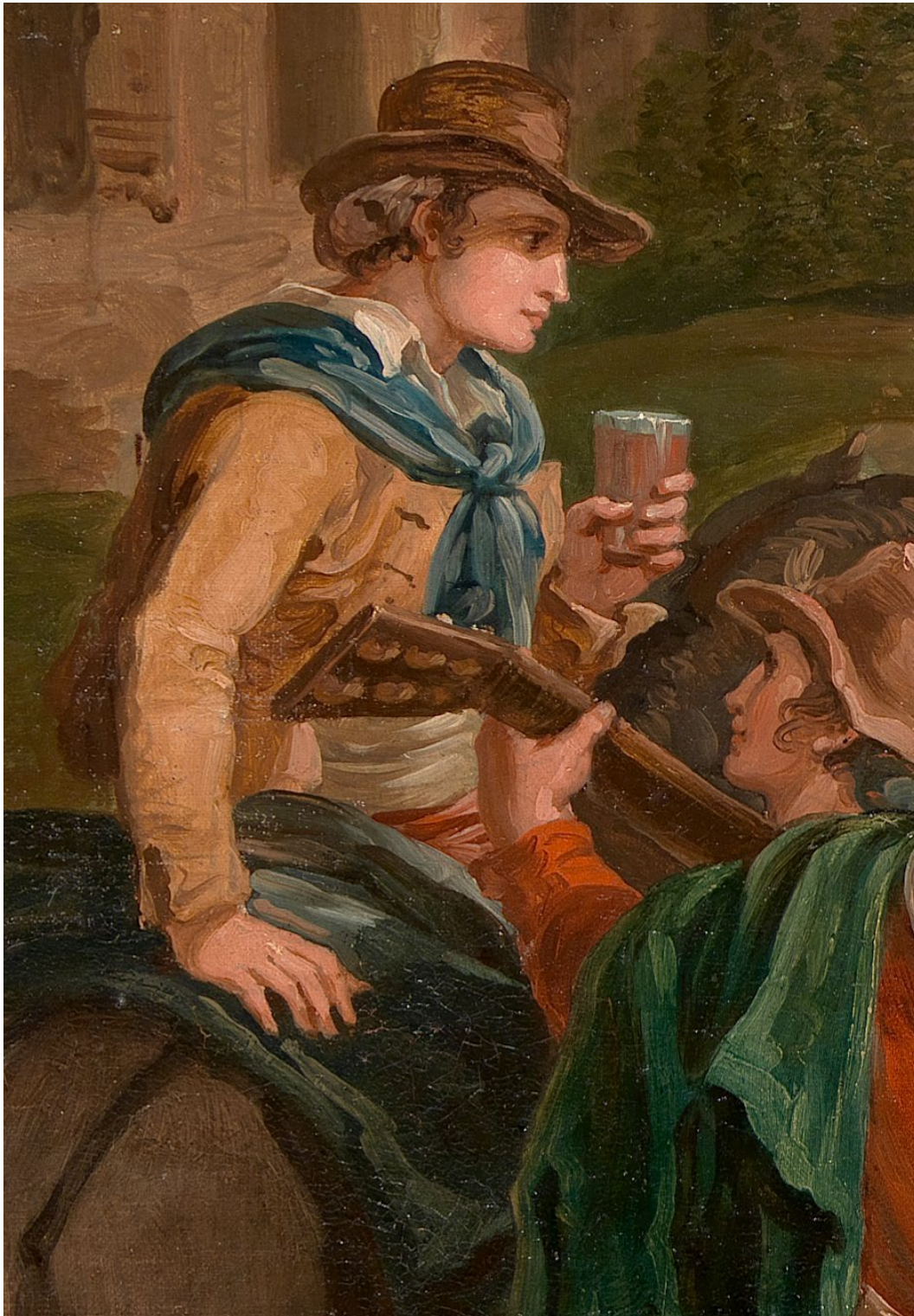
Bartolomeo Pinelli

**The Saltarello at Testaccio**

















**Bartolomeo Pinelli**  
(Rome, 20 November 1781  
– 1 April 1835)

## *The Saltarello at Testaccio*

Oil on canvas; 97 x 137 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, New York; Leo F. Corrigan Jr.,  
on display in the lobby of the Adolphus Hotel, Dallas, USA.

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1 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *Saltarello romano*, etching from *Raccolta di cinquanta costumi pittoreschi*, 1809

*Up at Testaccio the soul of the people vibrates intensely because the capital's butchers congregate there and it is the dwelling place of many of the common people who are proud of their rebel spirit, impulsive in their acts, quick to take sides, violent in their actions, sentimental in love, fierce in their hatred, proud in their gestures, heedless of danger, as quick to befriend as to avenge, to shake a hand as to stick the knife in.*

Domenico Orano (1911)

The Roman people took the greatest delight in the "Ottobrata", when they would take advantage of the fine, festive days of October to leave the city and head, primarily, for the Testaccio where they would spend the day dancing, drinking and playing music. This painting depicts a dance known as the Saltarello at Testaccio. The scene unfolds around a young

couple performing the dance, while all around them people are standing around or seated on the ground or on horseback chatting or engaging in silent dialogue with their eyes, for example the group of three commoners in the right foreground. The crowd includes another couple dancing behind the two main figures, and two people playing the lute. In the background we see Monte Testaccio with its Classical ruins and the Pyramid of Caius Cestius, against the backdrop of a sky dappled with clouds. The artist has rendered the scene with rapid, dry, almost rough strokes of the brush, using so little paint that in places one can make out the pencil drawing beneath the painted surface. Pinelli's graphic output includes many more or less complex variations on the Roman Saltarello theme (fig. 1) but the composition of this painting is unique.



2 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *The Piper*, Private collection, formerly Walter Padovani

Bartolomeo Pinelli, who was born in Rome's Trastevere neighbourhood, began his training as a sculptor under the guiding hand of his father, a modest modeller of devotional statuettes in polychrome terracotta, the artist's production in this area resulted from the outset in the creation of numerous small-format sculptures (fig. 2), often signed and dated. Raggi reports that "in the last few days he made many small clay groups, which also represented modern costumes, and which he sold, as usual, at a very low price. [...] Which way of sculpting, held by him, pleases, because there is always that spirit, that fire and that candid touch, which you see in each of his works". Pinelli planned to model a thousand sculptures but, ac-

cording to the sources, he only executed 29 and in 1834 he also made a series of engravings (B. Pinelli, *Picturesque Groups...*). A substantial nucleus of his terracottas are now exhibited at Palazzo Venezia, in Rome (A. Santangelo, *Museo di Palazzo Venezia...*, p. 75). Pinelli also excelled in drawing, engraving and painting.

Moving to Bologna with the family in 1792, he attracted the sponsorship of Prince Lambertini, who apprenticed him to the painter Frulli. Pinelli returned to Rome in 1799 with a letter of recommendation from the prince to Abbot Levizzari and promptly enrolled at the Accademia di San Luca. He attended Jean Baptiste Wickar's classes in Palazzo Venezia and also found the time to take part in the encounters which Felice Giani held with artists under the intriguing title of Accademia dei Pensieri, the "Academy of Thought". These meetings were to have a huge impact both on his draughtsmanship and in fuelling his interest in the themes addressed by the Classical artists of the ancient world.

On returning to his native city at the turn of the century, he also began to work with Franz Kaisermann, painting the figures in the latter's watercolour views, but the two men's artistic partnership was to prove short-lived due to Pinelli's innate reluctance to take orders from others. He began to devote his energies to drawings on Classical themes, where his ironic touch and his marked predilection for the emotional and the expressive rather than for the purely heroic revealed Giani's deep influence on his art. He won a prize for his drawing of *Venus, Telemachus and Cupid* (now in the Art Institute of Chicago) at the Accademia di San Luca in 1807 (fig. 3). An enthusiastic admirer of Marcantonio Raimondi's engravings, however, he soon turned to etching and lithography, adapting his own drawings to these (for him) new techniques and achieving a considerable level of excellence.

In 1809 he published a *Raccolta di cinquanta costumi pittoreschi incisi all'acqua forte* depicting various customs of Rome and Latium, as we can see from the









3 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *Venus, Telemachus and Cupid*, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago

titles of the prints: the *grape harvest*, the *saltarello*, the *game of bowls*, the *game of mora*, *men of Trastevere quarrelling*, *women bickering* and the *pipers*. He put together further albums of engravings with genre scenes in 1810 and in 1819, but he also became involved in illustrating the *Aeneid* in 1811, various episodes from Greek history in 1812 and episodes from Roman history in 1816. 1822 saw the publication of *Costumi diversi inventati e incisi da Bartolomeo Pinelli* in 25 plates depicting various Roman festivities, the most fashionable games played in the papal capital and scenes of peasant life. He was to publish further collections in 1823 and in 1831. In 1823 he published *Il Meo Patacca o vero Roma in feste nei trionfi di Vienna. Poema giocoso nel linguaggio Romanesco di Giuseppe Berneri. Romano Accademico Infecondo. Edizione seconda, arricchita di num. 52 tavole inventate ed incise da Bartolomeo Pinelli romano in Roma, presso L. Fabri in Via Capo le Case*

n° 3, telling the story of a mercenary, a commoner skilled in weaponry, who, on hearing that an Ottoman army led by Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha had laid siege to Vienna in 1683, decided to organise an expedition to relieve the city. Pinelli also illustrated such great works of literature as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

In his drawings, the Classical ruins of imperial Rome serve very much as a backdrop for his own fellow Romans. The epic mood and the sense of heroism which pervades his working-class heroes, so conscious and so proud of their Roman birth, shine through in every one of his pictures. He is in fact the illustrator and the poet of this unquenchable *Romanitas* and he was nicknamed *Er Pittore de Trastevere*, the painter of Trastevere, the most authentically "Roman" of old Rome's four-



teen neighbourhoods. The inhabitants of Trastevere were uniquely self-righteous, arrogant, bold, proud and bellicose. In fact, during the Sack of Rome in 1527 they opposed the hordes of Charles V's Landsknechter with indomitable courage and pride. Pinelli's art reflects both an interest in the past, a nostalgia for the grandeur of ancient Rome, and a fascination with the present and with observation of daily life. This eccentric painter was fond of wandering the streets and alleys of Rome alone, armed only with a drawing pad and pencil to sketch the things that caught his eye or those that he found most intriguing. He sported a "huge hazelnut top hat, a full overcoat opening into broad folds to form a collar shrouded in a long cravatte, light-coloured trousers floating around his ankles, and with his hair hanging in long plaits around his face, just as Belli describes him:

4 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *Self-portrait*, etching by Moretti

5 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *The Lopper's Nocturnal Saltarello in Piazza Barberini*, Rome, Museo di Trastevere











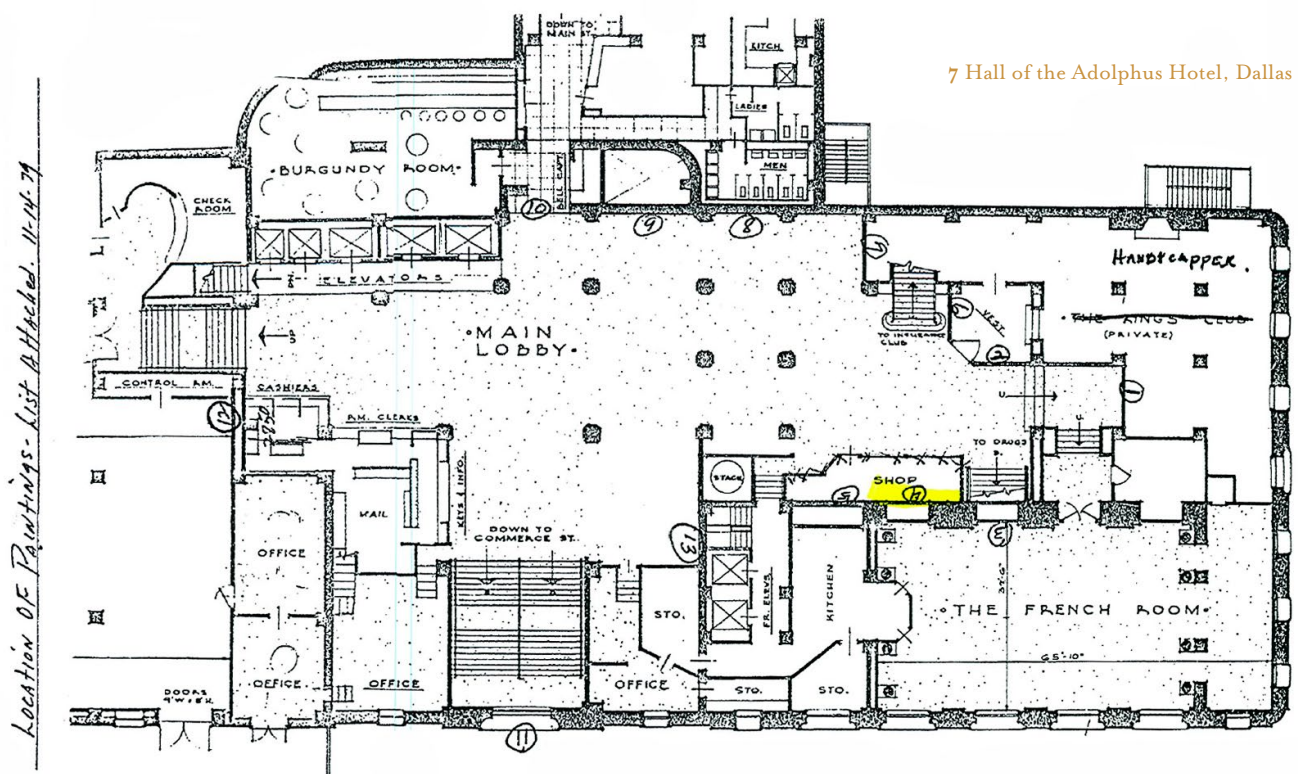
6 Bartolomeo Pinelli, *The Race of the Barberi Horses in Piazza del Popolo*, Rome, Museo di Roma

... The man who wore his hair about his snout and a goatee on his long chin....

... His attire was completed by a huge walking stick, the pommel of which was carved in the shape of a hippogrif, for which he was regularly upbraided by the police, and two inseparable mastiffs trailed along behind him wherever he

went" (Ceccarius, *Bartolomeo Pinelli...*, p. 160; fig. 4). Beloved by Romans of all classes, Pinelli's local popularity never waned; in fact a monographic exhibition devoted to his work was held in Palazzo Braschi shortly after the first centenary of his death and was presented by Carlo D'Aloisio da Vasto in an extremely affectionate article published in "Capitolium" (C. D'Aloisio da Vasto, *La mostra...*).

Pinelli was a prolific artist, producing not only a very large number of drawings, etchings and engraving but also frescoes, for instance the figures of *St. Francesca Romana* and *St. Gregory* in Santa Maria in Cappella, a room in the Académie de France à Rome and a room on the first floor of Villa Villoresi in Sesto Fiorentino. Oil paintings on canvas, however, are something of a rarity in Pinelli's artistic output. Two paintings identical in size to the picture under discussion here depicting *The Lopper's Nocturnal Saltarello in Piazza Barberini* (now in the Museo di Trastevere; fig. 5) and *The Race of the Barberi Horses in Piazza del Popolo*, the latter signed and dated 1821 (now in the Museo di Roma in Palazzo Braschi; fig. 6), were



7 Hall of the Adolphus Hotel, Dallas



purchased by the Municipality of Rome in 1958, both of them from a private collection in New York which had four oil paintings by Pinelli.

The *Saltarello at Testaccio* also comes from the United States, having once formed part of the decor of the Hotel Adolphus in Dallas, along with another of Pinelli's paintings entitled *The Popular Improviser in the Campo Vaccino*. A plan of the hotel dating back to 1979 shows both paintings hanging in the boutique in the lobby on the ground floor of the hotel (fig. 7).

The pair of paintings formerly in the Adolphus Hotel come, like the two paintings now in Rome, from the above-mentioned collection in New York (G. Incisa della Rocchetta, *Due dipinti...*). They are likely to have been part of a group of five oil paintings commissioned from Pinelli by "Count Gourieffe", to which Raggi refers in his biography of Pinelli penned in 1835 (O. Raggi, *Cenni...*, p. 26). Falconieri, who was a personal



8 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Portrait of Count Nicolay Guryev*, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum



9 Wilhelm Marstrand, *Festive Enjoyment Before the Walls of Rome on an October Evening*, Copenhagen, Thorvaldsen's Museum



acquaintance of Pinelli, also discusses certain oil paintings by him in his biography of the artist: “I shall now turn to a few surviving paintings of his. Two oil paintings, fairly large and depicting Roman customs, made for the Duke of Devonshire, and five others made for the Count Gourieffe, have much expression and vibrancy in them” (C. Falconieri, *Memoria...*, p. 10). If the descriptions provided are anything to judge by, the *Saltarello* seems more likely to have been one of the group of pictures painted for the Russian aristocrat Count Nikolay Guryev (fig. 8).

Bartolomeo Pinelli elevated the theme of the *Saltarello* dance, codified by poets writing in Roman dialect in the late 18th century, to the level of an icon. He focused in particular on two ritual moments in the dance: one version, more widespread until the 1820s, depicts the saltarello at Testaccio during the *Ottobrata* festivities, reminiscent of 18th century Arcadian celebrations with relatively static groups of figures and landscaped backdrops; while from circa 1818, depictions of the crowds at performances of the saltarello begin to acquire a more Romantic quality, a change which was to have a huge impact on the colony of foreign artists then resident in Rome. Writing in 1821, the German sculptor Hermann Ernst Freund (1786 – 1840) informs us that: “Here in Rome all is calm and peaceful, save for the brigands who are now so bold that one can no longer feel safe outside the

city gates” (H. P. Olsen, *Roma com’era...*, p. 96) yet for all this, jaunts outside the city gates were part and parcel of these artists’ daily lives. While Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783 – 1853), the city’s leading Danish painter, was interested in the architectural features and landscape of the city and its surrounding countryside, steering well clear of colourful folk scenes, not so his disciples and followers, who showed immense enthusiasm for the scenes of daily life being played out in the countryside and in the inns and hostelries. This kind of painting became particularly fashionable in the 1820s. Many of the subjects frequently addressed by Pinelli became popular with this circle of artists, especially with Wilhelm Marstrand (1810 – 1873) who copied his prints on numerous occasions and whose output includes many drawings, sketches and pictures showing Roman commoners enjoying themselves dancing the saltarello, and occasionally even featuring Danish travellers as onlookers watching the performance. A clear source of inspiration for Pinelli, and in particular for his print depicting *The Lopper Returning from the Grape Harvest*, may be found in a painting of *Festive Enjoyment Before the Walls of Rome on an October Evening* (1839; fig. 9), showing a parade with torch-bearers, musicians, men and women dancing the saltarello. This extremely successful painting was eventually purchased by the celebrated Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen.





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