

# ABBOTT and HOLDER Ltd

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## Carlo Labruzzi (1748-1817)

'Ponte antico fuori di Molo (sic. Mola di Gaeta) dove passa la Via Appia / Gaeta nella distanza 16'; ('Ancient bridge outside Molo (sic) where the Via Appia passes, Gaeta in the distance').

Pencil, pen, ink and watercolour. c.1789-1793. Inscribed and numbered '196'.

Watermark: Beehive within a shield. Possibly by J. Honig and Zoonen. See Heawood Nos.54-57.

Provenance: Commissioned by Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838) in 1789; with Messrs. Palmer (Print Sellers at 163 Strand London) by February 1794; whereabouts unknown until rediscovered in London during WWII bound into one of four albums of Labruzzi's Appian Way watercolours; John Manning (Bond Street), 1960; Karl & Faber Auctioneers, May 1977, Lot 680.

Exhibited: John Manning, *Carlo Labruzzi (1748-1817) An Exhibition of Fine Watercolour Drawings of The Appian Way*, 9<sup>th</sup> June – 16<sup>th</sup> July 1960, Cat. No.89.

41.5x55cms. Framed: 59x74.5cms.

On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1789 Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838) set off to travel the entire length of the Appian Way, from Rome to Brindisi. His motivation was in part to follow in the footsteps of Horace (who made the journey in 38BC), but this was primarily an archaeological expedition; to record the ancient monuments that lined the Way. He took Carlo Labruzzi (1748-1817) as both ‘companion and artist’, and while Hoare made detailed notes of classical inscriptions, Labruzzi painted views. The fresh and spontaneous watercolours that he made - and of which this is one - are widely accepted to have been painted *en-plein-air* and demonstrate why he was considered by Grand Tourists alongside Hackert, Ducros and Lusieri as one of the finest landscape draughtsmen working in Italy before the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. His lightness of touch and interest in conveying a sense of place – Italian light and air as much as topography and archaeology – places him at that critical juncture between the topographers of the eighteenth century and the Romantic painters that would return to Italy from 1815.

This watercolour was made where the Appian Way meets the Lazio coast halfway between Rome and Naples at the town now called Formia; the villages of Castellone and Mola di Gaeta were united in 1863. To the right is the Torre di Mola and Gaeta can be seen in the distance. The ancient bridge, presumably lost in the heavy bombardments the area endured during WWII, must be crossing the Rio Acquatraversa. The larger river Gargliano, the natural boundary of Lazio and Campania, meets the sea a few miles south from here, just beyond the town of Minturno. It was crossing the Gargliano that Autumn rains and flooding forced Hoare and Labruzzi to leave the Appian Way. They took the carriage road as far as Capua and re-joined the ancient road, but by the time they reached Benevento the weather had got so bad, and Labruzzi had fallen so ill, that they had to abandon their project entirely and retire to Naples.

If their attempt to complete the whole Appian Way had been a failure, Hoare’s copious notes and Labruzzi’s drawings were valuable, and unique, raw material. A period of great production ensued. Labruzzi continued to visit sites along the Appian Way and make watercolours, mostly in the vicinity of Rome, as new sites and monuments were discovered. He then made 226 polished sepia drawings – ideal for translating into print – incorporating Hoare’s transcriptions of epigraphs and introducing staffage and foreground incident typical of eighteenth-century *veduti*. It appears Hoare intended to use the ‘finished’ sepia works to illustrate an account of their journey. However, ultimately only 24 of Labruzzi’s views were published, at Hoare’s expense, being issued in two sets of 12 prints as *Via Appia illustrata, ab urbe Roma ad Capuam*, the first set appearing in 1794.

Hoare kept all 226 of Labruzzi’s ‘finished’ sepia views in five albums. These were sold at Sotheby’s Stourhead Library Sale, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1883 (Lot 1170) and are now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. A further group of 188 sepia versions, possibly preliminary to those retained by Hoare, are in the Biblioteca Romana Sarti at the Accademia di S. Luca, Rome. It seems that Labruzzi retained his ‘original’ *en-plein-air* watercolours until 1794 when the print seller J Palmer (of 163 Strand, London) who was to market and sell *Via Appia Illustrata*, advertised that he had the drawings on view. Where the watercolours went then is unknown, but they were eventually rediscovered in a bombed house in London during WWII, bound into four albums. One of the albums, containing views made on the first five miles of the Appian Way out of Rome, was sold to the British Museum in 1955 (BM 1955,1219.10.1-64) (dismantled for conservation in 1973). The watercolours from the other three albums, including this sheet, were exhibited by John Manning in 1960.

## British Museum Watercolours and Vatican Sepia Drawings

The album of watercolours acquired by the British Museum in 1955 can be viewed here - <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=1955,1210.10.1>

The sepia drawings Labruzzi made for prints, and retained by Hoare, can be viewed here - [https://www.vaticanlibrary.va/home.php?pag=in\\_evidenza\\_art\\_ODR13](https://www.vaticanlibrary.va/home.php?pag=in_evidenza_art_ODR13)

### Further Reading:

Francis Watson, 'Carlo Labruzzi (1748-1817)' in *Carlo Labruzzi (1748-1817) An Exhibition of Fine Watercolour Drawings of the Appian Way*, Exh. Cat. John Manning, London, 9<sup>th</sup> June – 16<sup>th</sup> July 1960.

Sir Timothy Clifford, *Carlo Labruzzi, The Grand Tour*, Exh. Cat. Simon Dickinson Ltd in association with Bill Thompson, Albany Gallery, London, 12<sup>th</sup> June 13<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

Barabara Jatta and Pier Andrea De Rosa, *La via Appia nei disegni di Carlo Labruzzi alla Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vatican Museums, Publ. 2013.