

LORENZO BARTOLINI
(Vernio 1777-Florence 1850)

Son of a poor blacksmith, Bartolini first worked as an ornamental sculptor and alabaster carver in Tuscany, before going to Paris in 1797 where he studied in the studios of David and Lemot. After being brought to the attention of Vivant Denon, he received several official commissions, including that for a colossal bronze bust of Napoleon for the pavillon Sully of the Louvre (1805), and in 1808 he was invited by Napoleon's sister Elisa Baciocchi to Carrara, to revitalise the school for sculptors at the Academy founded there in 1769. He stayed in Carrara until the fall of the Empire, and then moved to Florence, where he met with considerable hostility for his political associations and his aesthetic views; he first found favour with foreign visitors, above all the English. But in time Bartolini rightly came to be considered the most famous Italian sculptor of the generation after Canova. In his teaching, as in his own highly popular output, which is best exemplified by the Fiducia in Dio (1835, Milan, Musco Poldi-Pezzoli), he sought to infuse naturalism into forms taken from the Antique, in contrast to the doctrinaire Neo-Classicists. His art was of major importance for the future evolution of Italian sculpture: among his pupils were Dupré and Fedi.

Relief of the Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael

Plaster

73 x 105.5 cm.

Although no relief of this subject is recorded in any of the rather summary inventories of Bartolini's oeuvre drawn up by the sculptor himself or by the head of his studio, Eliso Schianta (cf. Mario Tinti, Lorenzo Bartolini, Rome, 1936, vol. II, pp. 11-24), its style and its firm provenance from his studio clearly denote it as his.

Reliefs were actually infrequent in Bartolini's output, as were orthodox biblical scenes (as opposed to works of religious sentiment, such as the Fiducia in Dio), but Bartolini's approach to relief sculpture, as exemplified in the allegorical plaster relief in the Galleria Communale in Prato (Tinti, op. cit. vol. II, pl. XXXV) and in the drawing for another allegorical relief of The healing effects of the spa

at Porretta (ibid. vol. I, fig. 32; exh. cat. Lorenzo Bartolini, Prato, Palazzo Pretorio, 1978, cat. no. 81), is perfectly reconcilable with the style of the present relief. Bartolini's reliefs are, interestingly, much more classical in approach than his free-standing sculpture; the figures are detached from one another and are seen in simple poses, mostly en face or in profile, and they form a frieze in the front plane of the relief, with minimal indications of a setting.

It need occasion no surprise that the present relief is not apparent in any of Bartolini's lists, since it may never have been translated into a more permanent medium; many of the plasters in the Gipsoteca Bartoliniana go similarly unmentioned. The Gipsoteca Bartoliniana was formed in 1883, when the sculptor's heirs made a long-term loan to the Gallerie di Firenze of all the original plasters that had remained in his studio in Borgo San Frediano, on condition that they were appropriately exhibited. Up until the disastrous floods of 1966 they were shown in the suppressed monastery of San Salvi on the outskirts of Florence; their eventual destination is still undecided. The studio in the Borgo San Frediano was, however, but one of several used by the sculptor, and there are a number of works in Bartolini's lists and Tinti's catalogue of which plasters never came to the Gipsoteca. Many of them appear to have remained with the descendants of Bartolini's pupil Pasquale Romanelli, who took over his studio in the Borgo San Frediano, amongst them our relief.

Exh: Heim Gallery, Summer Exhibition, 1982, no. 43.