

T O M A S S O



Luigi Valadier (1726-1785)

8. Paetus and Arria

Bronze

36 x 27 cm (14 ¹/₈ x 10 ⁵/₈ inches)

This arresting bronze represents Paetus and Arria, an ancient Roman marble now in the Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps, in Rome (inv. 8608). In the absence of documentation, it has been suggested that the marble group was probably discovered during the construction of the Villa Ludovisi on the grounds of the Sallustian Gardens, just prior to 1623, when it is first recorded in an inventory of the Ludovisi collection. Ten years later, it was displayed in the Palazzo Grande in the family estate on the Pincian Hill, where it remained until the early years of the nineteenth century, when it was moved to a casino on the Ludovisi property. Between 1885 and 1890 it was transferred to a new palace of the Ludovisi descendants in Via Veneto, and in 1901, together with most of the celebrated Ludovisi marbles, it was purchased by the Italian government and installed that same year in the Museo Nazionale.

The group depicts a nude male wearing a cape, plunging a sword into his neck with his right hand, whilst with his left he supports the collapsing figure of a woman who has fallen onto her knees, with her head to one side. The statue was described in the 1633 Ludovisi inventory as 'un certo mario ch'ammazza la figlia e se stesso' ('a certain Mario who is killing his daughter and himself'), referring to the story of the wealthy Roman patrician Sextus Marius who sought to

protect his daughter from the advances of Emperor Tiberius and was himself accused of incest with her. In 1638, the French painter François Perrier included the marble group in his anthology of the most admired statues in Rome (*Segmenta nobilium signorum et statuarum* [...]. Rome, pl. XXXII,). He captioned the illustration ‘*Vulgo Pyramus et Thisbe in Hortis Ludovisianis*’, believing the statue to represent the ill-fated lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, even though in Ovid’s story, Thisbe’s suicide followed that of Pyramus (who had killed himself because he thought his beloved Thisbe was dead), which is not the case in the Ludovisi marble. Other interpretations of the composition are Menophilus Killing Himself and his Charge, Macareus and Canace, Fulvius and his wife, however, since 1670, the group has more generally been referred to either as Paetus and Arria or Ludovisi Gaul. The story of Arria and Paetus is best known from an account given by Pliny the Younger in a letter to his friend Maecilius Nepos. Caecina Paetus was a Roman Senator embroiled in the plot of Camillus Scribonianus to overthrow Emperor Claudius in A.D. 42. Ordered to commit suicide for his role in the conspiracy, Paetus faltered, but his stoical wife Arria set an example by snatching the dagger from her reluctant husband, stabbing herself and handing the dagger back with the words ‘*Paete, non dolet*’ (‘Paetus, it doesn’t hurt’). The subject is now agreed to be a Gaul who stabs himself having already killed his wife to prevent her from falling captive, an identification that was first provided by the Italian art historian E. Q. Visconti, who connected it with the Dying Gaul in the Capitoline Museums and suggested that the statues once adorned a monument erected in Rome to commemorate defeat of the Gauls by Julius Caesar or of the Germans by Germanicus.

Paetus and Arria enjoyed enormous popularity amongst the wealthy and cultured travellers who sought mementos of their time abroad. A full-scale marble copy was made by the French sculptor François Lespingola for Louis XIV (now at Versailles, inv. MR 2035), whilst the plaster cast made for the French Academy in Rome appears to have served as the prototype for other replicas during the eighteenth century, when the Ludovisi descendants refused to allow new casts to be taken.

Artists working in Rome echoed the admiration that the marble group attracted and began making reductions in bronze, such as the present example. The high quality of the modelling, together with the fine workmanship of its surface, distinguish the present work and point to its production in an established Roman workshop. The characteristic dark patina and the excellence of the cast and chasing are further indicators that it comes from the Valadier workshop, located in Via del Babuino. Ran successfully by the pre-eminent Roman silversmith and bronze founder Luigi Valadier (1726–1785) until his death in 1785, the workshop continued to operate under the direction of his son Giuseppe Valadier (1762-1839). Renowned for the excellence of their casts, the Valadier workshop produced many bronze reductions of famous classical statues, on both a large and small scale, which closely compare to the present bronze. Its connection to the Valadier workshop is further confirmed by the Registro Generale of 1810, an inventory which documents the contents of the workshop when it belonged to Giuseppe, in which we find listed the model of the present bronze: ‘*Gruppo di Aria e Peto* (‘*Arria and Paetus group*’, in unspecified material) 3.50 scudi’ (González-Palacios 2018, pp. 479).

Literature:

F. Haskell and N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*, New Haven and London, 1981, pp. 282-284

A. González-Palacios, *Luigi Valadier: Splendor in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, exh. cat., The Frick Collection, New York, 2018

Fig. 1 ‘*Vulgo Pyramus et Thisbe in Hortis Ludovisianis*’, engraving from

