

Andrea Gastaldi
Turin, 1826 - 1889

Study for *The Siege of Tortona* or *The Thirst of the people of Tortona*
Circa 1866 - 1867

Charcoal, with white highlights, on light brown paper
140 x 126 cm.

Provenance:

The artist's studio upon his death in 1889;
and by descent until acquired by the father of the previous owner in the 1970s

Comparative literature:

M. Ranzi, *Les Beaux-arts italiens à l'exposition universelle de Paris*, Paris, 1867
L. Rocca, *Costanza dei Tortonesi. Gran quadro a olio del cavaliere Professore Andrea Gastaldi di Torino. Album della Società Promotrice delle Belle Arti*, Torino, 1868
F. Dall'Ongaro, *L'arte italiana a Parigi. La pittura (1867) in Scritti d'arte*, Milano, 1873
A. M. Brizio, in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XVI, Roma, 1932
R. Maggio Serra, *Andrea Gastaldi (1826/1889). Un pittore a Torino tra romanticismo e realismo*, Torino, 1988
E. Dellapiana, *Gli Accademici dell'Albertina (Torino 1823-1884)*, Torino, 2002

The present drawing is a spectacular example of Andrea Gastaldi's exquisite and masterful skills as a draughtsman and demonstrates his rare talent for working on a massive scale. Gastaldi was a leading proponent of historical romanticism, making work which mirrored the contemporary struggles of the Italian Unification movement.

In the present example, the artist has rapidly sketched life-size figures in charcoal, adding white accents to highlight the volumes. This sensuous study from life probably took place in the artist's studio, as was typical of academic practice in the 19th century. The composition exhibits a number of similarities with important masterpieces that Gastaldi must have seen while studying in Paris before 1858. The most striking comparison, given the pyramidal composition of the group and the dramatic tension of the screaming soldier - whose face is half-hidden behind his arm - is perhaps one of the most iconic paintings of the 19th century: Théodore Géricault's *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (*The Raft of the Medusa*), painted in 1818-19 and now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Fig. 1).

The present drawing represents a study for a detail of *The Siege of Tortona* or *The Thirst of the people of Tortona*, a massive canvas commissioned by the newly-established Italian government and presented at the 1867 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris (Figs. 2-3). Another preparatory drawing for a different section of this painting was discovered by Lullo · Pampoulides in the same collection as the present work and has since been acquired by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The recent emergence of Andrea Gastaldi's series of masterful, large-scale *Cartone*, allows us to re-evaluate an artist who, as professor at the Accademia Albertina in Turin for 30 years, was much celebrated during his lifetime, but who is comparatively unknown today. However, he is finally being appreciated by international museums and private collectors as one of the most original and talented artists of his generation.

LULLO · PAMPOULIDES

The historical and romanticised battle scenes Gastaldi depicted in works such as: *Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa escaping from the battlefield in Legnano* (1858) and *The Siege of Tortona* (1867), were undoubtedly intended as a metaphor for the contemporary struggles of the Italian Unification movement, against what was considered the foreign invader. For when Gastaldi executed these works, the nation of Italy (which was only unified under King Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy in 1861) was engaged in the Second and Third Wars of Independence. It is worth noting that Rome was only taken in 1870, with the final defeat of the Papal States and was still fighting for the annexation of Austrian-controlled Veneto in 1866.

ANDREA GASTALDI (1826-1889)

The artist came from a wealthy Turinese family; his father, a lawyer, was at first opposed to his son's artistic inclinations, while his mother's brother, Giovanni Volpato – a resident at the Accademia Albertina, restorer and Inspector of the King's private collection - had a great impact on the young man's ambitions.

Gastaldi studied in Turin, Florence, Rome and Paris. During the formative years he spent in the *Ville Lumière*, he was influenced by the work of artists such as Thomas Couture, Horace Vernet and Paul Delaroche, partly acquiring the international style that allowed him to establish himself as one of the most appreciated and successful academicians in Italy. While in Paris, he met his future wife, Léonie Lescuyer, who was also a painter.

He soon received important public commissions and exhibited works at the *Promotrice delle belle Arti*, Turin and *Expositions Universelle*, in Paris. In the 1855 Parisian show he obtained an honourable mention for *The Dream of Parisina* and *The Prisoner of Chillon* (Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo). In 1858 he was appointed Professor of painting at the Accademia Albertina, Turin, a position he held for the following thirty years.

In full accord with the mid-19th century trend towards historical romanticism (of which Gastaldi was one of the foremost interpreters in Italy) the artist repeatedly depicted historical and heroic subjects, revelling in the didacticism which advocates of academic painting believed was a central function for art: to educate.

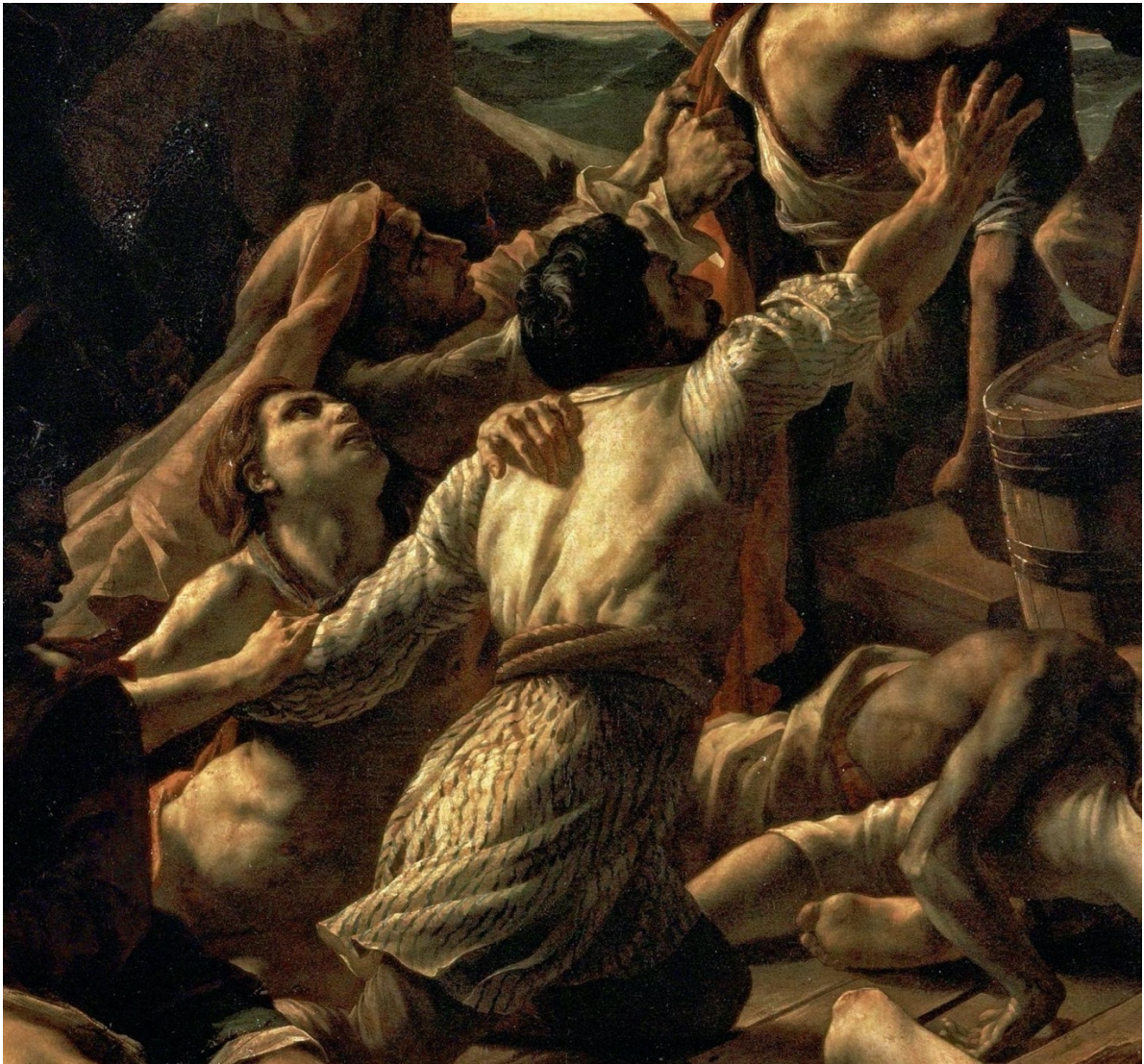


Fig. 1, Théodore Géricault, *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (*The Raft of the Medusa*), 1818-19 (detail)
Oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris



Fig. 2 Andrea Gastaldi, *The Siege of Tortona*, 1867 (detail)

Oil on canvas, Tortona, Palazzo Guidobono, on long-term loan from the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome



Fig. 3 Andrea Gastaldi, *The Siege of Tortona*, 1867 (detail)

Oil on canvas, Tortona, Palazzo Guidobono, on long-term loan from the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome