AN ITALIAN LETTER FROM INGRES

By MICHEL N. BENISOVICH

Mr. Benisovich is well known for his research in records and documents of the history of art, particularly European painting of the eighteenth century. He has published other letters in the Museum’s collection in the Art Bulletin, the Gazette des Beaux-Arts, and the Bulletin des Amis de Courbet in Paris.

In the Museum Library there is an album of letters from painters, mostly of the nineteenth century, put together and given to the Museum by the New York picture dealer Samuel P. Avery a number of years ago. Some are letters to Mr. Avery; others were evidently acquired in Paris. Among these last is one written, in Italian, by Ingres, who was at the time, 1838, Director of the French Academy in Rome:

Sua Emm. a Sua Rev. Emminenza Reverendissima
il sottoscritto Direttore della Reale academia di Francia bramando di potere misurare e formare, o sia stampare qualche dettagli dei tempi nella citta di Cori, a l’onore di pregare Sua Emm. Sua Rev. di volergli concederne la necessaria Licenza.
Sperando che tale domanda verra favorvolamente accolta della Sua benevolenza.

Mi dichiaro con sensi di sommo Rispetto, di Sua Emminenza Reverendissima
umilissimo ed ubbidientissimo servitore

J. Ingres
Roma 14 di agosto 1838

231
It is addressed to the Camerlengo, or Chamberlain, of the College of Cardinals and reads:

Most Reverend Eminence
The undersigned Director of the Royal Academy of France, wishing to be allowed to measure and make plans of, perhaps to publish, several details of temples in the town of Cora [Cori], has the honor to beg

Your Most Reverend Eminence to grant the necessary permit.

Hoping that such a request will be favorably entertained

I declare myself, with sentiments of the highest respect, Your Most Reverend Eminence's most humble and most obedient servant

J. Ingres
Rome August 14, 1838.

At the time of his second directorship in Rome, from 1835 until 1849, Ingres established a course in archaeology at the Academy given by A. Nibby, author of Analisi ... de' dintorni di Roma, including the ruins in the town of Cori, and it is possible that the letter was written at Nibby's suggestion. Interest in the monuments of Cori, a very ancient city of Latium, in the territory conquered by the Volscians, had been stimulated by the publication of Piranesi's Antichita di Cora (1764) and other books dealing with Roman remains there: Antolini, L'Ordine Dorico; ossia, il Tempio d'Ercole nella città di Cori (1785); Viola, Memorie dell' antichissima città di Cori nei Volsci (1825); and Angelini and Fea, Monumenti più insigni del Lazio (1828).

There is not to our knowledge any evidence that Ingres's plan of publishing the ruins of Cori had any result. More recently plans for restoring the so-called temple of Hercules made by V. Blavette when he was a member of the French Academy in Rome were included in a work which was brought out in the year 1905 under the direction of H. d'Espouy: Fragments d'architecture antique, d’après les relevés et restaurations des anciens pensionnaires de l'Academie de France à Rome.

It is entirely probable that the Director's request was not well received at the Vatican. The French Academy and the French Embassy in Rome had very real difficulties with the papal administration, and the work of students reconstructing the plan of Trajan's Forum or making copies in the Sistine Chapel was not looked upon with favor. But in the end Ingres's tenacity usually won out.