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Ponte Vecchio, Florence

Antonio Canale (Il Canaletto), 1697-1768

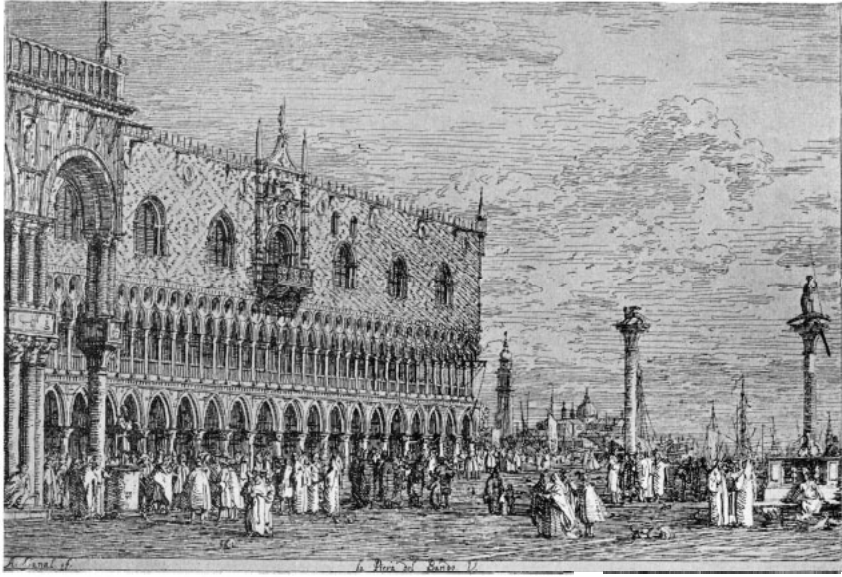
The Ponte Vecchio by Canaletto

THE Museum has just acquired an unusual painting by Antonio Canale (Il Canaletto), purchased from the Maria Antoinette Evans Fund. Named by his English admirers Canaletto, because of his numerous paintings of the canals of Venice, it is a matter of surprise to find an important work of his of the Ponte Vecchio, Florence.

Born in 1697, son of a theatrical scene-painter of Venice, he learned his craft in his father's studio. At the age of twenty-two, "solemnly excommunicating the theatre," as he says, he left home for Rome, where he, like Piranesi, was attracted by its picturesque ruins. There he studied to great purpose and produced oil paintings and charming drawings in pen, pencil and sepia, which reveal a remarkable knowledge not only of perspective, but of light and shade. On his return home his work attracted the attention of an English merchant,

Joseph Smith, who became later British Consul to the Republic. This connection between him and his patron led Canaletto to go to London, where he spent two years (1746-48), painting many pictures for the Windsor Collection and numerous others which have found their way into the Wallace Collection. It is generally believed that his work in London had a direct influence in the awakening of the English school of landscape painters — Gainsborough, Turner, Cox, Cotman, etc.

The artist afterwards executed a number of etchings, thirty-one of which were published and dedicated to his patron. The Museum is the fortunate possessor of Mr. Joseph Smith's own set of these. In these silvertone prints Canaletto enjoyed depicting quiet country scenes on the outskirts of Venice, and in them he revealed the same



La Pira del Bando, Venice

Canaletto

faultless perspective and knowledge of light and atmosphere as in his paintings.

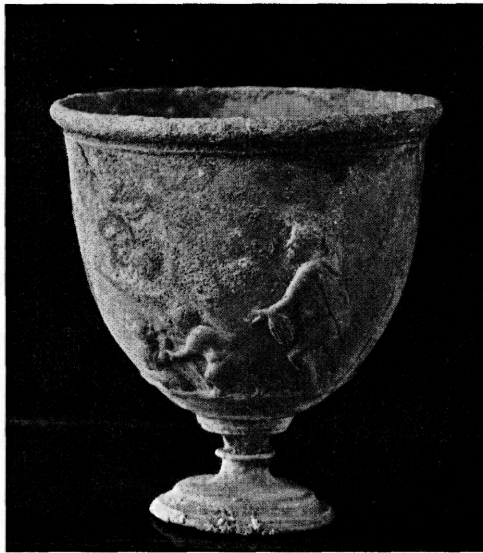
Many of the artist's pictures supplied the demand for souvenirs; in fact, there is a deceptive photographic appearance about his paintings, including this one of the Ponte Vecchio, although it is impossible that he could have seen this view entire save from an aeroplane. Rather it is a revelation of his knowledge of perspective and his feats of draftsmanship. The composition must have been worked out mathematically, and yet there is no hint of his being tied and bound by any literalness; nor does he resort to illusions, dear to the heart of modern painters and regarded as necessary by them. Again, to the science of perspective and the practice of draftsmanship he unites a strong feeling for decoration. In this particular composition he combines picturesque but solid structural forms with a balance of color, which almost unexpectedly produces a feeling of harmonious decoration. Perhaps this is part of his inheritance from Carpaccio.

The colors he uses are burnt ochres, giving soft orange-browns which are foiled by mellow blues; and his technique in painting the water distinguishes him sharply from his nephew Bellotto (Il Canaletto).

On this canvas he has caught for us a vanished past, and, picturing the old buildings along the **Lungarno Acciajuoli and opposite, has preserved for us a bit of eighteenth-century Florence.** C.H.H.

Silver Goblet from Meroë

A SILVER goblet with the patina intact as found bears a judgment scene in relief, of which the part in the illustration shows the condemned man(?) with his two children clinging to him and on the right the executioner. Beyond the part shown is a lictor facing the man, and beyond the lictor the king or judge seated on a throne. To the right of the executioner the block and axe are represented. The general resemblance to the Boscoreale silver goblets is perceptible, but the style of decoration is distinctly different. This cup was found at Meroë in the debris of the pyramid of Amen-



tabale, who is estimated to have been king of Meroë about 45-25 B. C. If, as M. Villefosse believes, the Boscoreale cups were made in Alexandria in the first century A. D., our cup might well have come from the earlier craftsmen of the same workshop.

G. A. R.