

JACQUES DUMONT called « **LE ROMAIN** »
(Paris 1701-1781)

Preparations for the fireworks display held in Piazza Navona in Rome on November 30, 1729, for the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV, after PANINI

1732-1735

Pen and black ink, red chalk, gray wash, and white gouache on oiled and waxed transparent paper, partially squared.

39 x 89 cm

Signed lower left: *Dumont le Rom.* and inscribed on the base *F Panini 1731*.

Provenance:

Poncelet Sale, (from Auxerre), Paris, Hôtel Drouot, March 25-26, 1873, n°178 (sold for « 450 »);
Mme de Polès, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, Me Lair-Dubreuil, Expert J. Feral, June 22-24, 1927, lot 8 (sold for « 30.000 fr. ») ;

Sale after death Mme de Polès, galerie Charpentier, Me Etienne Ader, November 17-18; 1936, lot 5 bis;

Sale Me. Fraysse, April 6, 2022, lot n°18; where acquired by the current owner;

Private collection, France.

Related works:

Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Preparations for the fireworks display held in Piazza Navona in Rome on November 30, 1729*, for the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV, oil on canvas, 1729, 107 x 248 cm, INV 415, Louvre Museum, Paris;

Replica, oil on canvas, 109 x 246 cm, signed and dated « *I.P. Panini 1731* », National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin;

Charles Nicolas Cochin II, *Preparations for the fireworks display held in Piazza Navona in Rome on November 30, 1729*, for the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV, engraving, 48.3 x 92.3 cm, dated 1735, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Vb5 (1737), (Rome, 6e quartier).

Bibliography:

Charles Antoine Jombert, *Catalogue de l'oeuvre de Ch. Nic. Cochin Fils*, Paris, Imprimerie de Prault, n° 24, pages 10 et 11.



Dumont le Romain had a long and successful career at the Académie (first entering as an academicien in 1728, becoming a professor in 1736, rector in 1752, honorary director in 1763 and chancellor in 1768) and enjoyed the patronage of King Louis XV.

Our drawing finds its source in Panini's painting, dated 1729, depicting this famous event, in the Louvre Museum, and more precisely in its replica dated 1731, at the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin; and its purpose in the desire for political promotion through its diffusion using the powerful medium of engraving in the 18th century. Our sheet is thus intimately linked to these two contemporaneous artists of Dumont, Panini and Cochin fils, but also to the ambitious personality of Melchior de Polignac, second of Viscount Louis-Armand XIX de Polignac, French prelate, diplomat, and Neo-Latin poet.

Upon the announcement of the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV and Marie Leczinska, on September 4, 1729, Cardinal de Polignac, ambassador of France to Rome, held a *Te Deum* at Saint-Louis des Français on November 20, followed by the Barberi race on the 26th, and a cantata by Léonard de Vinci. The celebrations culminated in a spectacular fireworks display in Piazza Navona, held on November 30, 1729¹. Panini's painting was commissioned by Cardinal de Polignac to be offered to Louis XV in 1731.



Musée du Louvre, Paris



National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

¹ F. ARISI, *Gian Paolo Panini e i fasti della Roma del'700*, Roma, 1986, ed. Ugo Bozzi, p.101 and cat.199-200 and 211

During his third stay in Rome, Cardinal Melchior de Polignac (Lavoûte-sur-Loire 1661 - 1741 Paris) served as the French chargé d'affaires to the Holy See until 1732. Aside from his diplomatic work, his embassy allowed him to indulge his passion for Roman antiquities. He conducted research in Rome, participated in the discovery of ancient sculptures, and thus built a collection that he later transported to Paris to install in his mansion on Rue de Varenne. As a patron of the French academy, the cardinal had amassed a significant collection of art objects, which Voltaire described as « *unique in Europe, for its beauty and rarity* ». An inventory of his collection was drawn up during his lifetime, in 1738, and another at his death in 1741.

He was also an ostentatious ambassador and invested himself in his role of representation by hosting grand festivities. The most famous were held for the wedding of Louis XV, and then in 1729, for the birth of the Dauphin.

The celebration was supposed to begin on November 20, 1729, and end the following night with a fireworks display, in memory of the celebration held on November 21, 1638, in Piazza Navona on the occasion of the birth of Louis XIV. However, heavy rains prevented this plan, and the celebration was postponed to November 30. Cardinal Melchior de Polignac's festivities were more lavish than those usually held in Rome on such occasions in the 18th century. The cardinal was the representative of a great power and had to fulfill the desire for *munificence* and *magnificence* of the French monarchy.

In 1729, Panini was probably confronted for the first time with the representation of Piazza Navona. The Roman artist favored length over depth. The painting shows the preparations made on November 30 with the help of three hundred workers, mingled with the population, driven by curiosity. Panini emphasizes the opportunity provided by the celebration to break down social barriers.

The drawings of Giovanni Paolo Panini mentioned in several documents have now disappeared. Only his oil sketch at the Art Institute of Chicago and a study preserved at the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin remain from his hand.

Cardinal de Polignac attended the event at the Ottoboni Palace, which had been adorned for the occasion with a platform adorned with sumptuous coats of arms. This platform appears in the painting. On the column, a statue of the Sun King was placed, not of the reigning monarch, Louis XV. On each side of Bernini's fountain stand Corinthian temples adorned with intertwined figures: on the left, Justice (*Justitia*) and Peace (*Pax*); on the right, Faith (*Fides*) and Strength (*Fortitudo*), which will be the maxims of the Dauphin. Next come two fantastic monuments, erected on either side of the Fountain of the Four Rivers. Each of these monuments, whose existence would be ephemeral, has four volutes. On each of the volutes, a Fame seated on a dolphin blows into a trumpet. The dolphins evoke the expression used to designate the heir to the throne (Delfina) and Apollo. To this are added the Trajan's Column, measuring 40 meters high erected in 113, as well as the column of Marcus Aurelius, with a height of 42 meters. These are copies executed with great freedom placed on pedestals and equipped with commemorative plaques.

In the foreground of the canvas, almost in the center, prominently in a group of people, stands a man dressed in black and wearing a black tricorne hat. He clearly wears the French Order of the Holy Spirit. This man is the French ambassador, the patron of the painting. Other personalities may be identified, notably, on the left, the exiled Stuarts (Charles Edward, Henry, and their father James III), a pair of figures likely representing Panini himself and most likely Ghezzi.



Panini elevated the subject of festival painting to the level of a painting immortalizing a specific event; he created his own genre.

In addition to the painting intended for the king Louis XV, Cardinal de Polignac commissioned a nearly identical replica in dimensions, format, and composition from Panini to provide a visual record of this high point of his career as an ambassador in his own residence, which he kept until his death. It is the replica that features a greater number of figures. Of even greater importance for the further dissemination of the image and thus of the cardinal's merits was the medium of engraving then became necessary. Its inscription also underscores the cardinal's role as the driving force behind the event: « *Preparations for the grand fireworks display that S.E.M. Cardinal de Polignac ordered to be set off in Rome's Piazza Navona on November 30, 1729, for the Birth of Monseigneur the Dauphin.* » Charles Antoine Jombert in his Catalogue of the works of Ch. Nic. Cochin Fils mentions that the print was « *etched by Cochin II in 1735, and completed with the burin by his mother, in 1736.* » (pages 10-11, N°24). According to the author, this print was only announced in the *Mercure de France* in October 1737: « *Nous avons à annoncer une très grande planche en largeur, d'une composition riche, judicieuse et abondante, y ayant près de 900 figures, et d'une exécution admirable pour la gravure, qui est de M. C. N. Cochin le Fils, jeune homme d'une très grande espérance... Cette estampe se débite avec beaucoup de succès, rue Saint Jacques, chés Cochin, Graveur du Roi.* »



It is therefore neither accidental nor insignificant that the engraving of the painting, executed in 1735 by Charles Nicolas Cochin II after a drawing by Jacques Dumont, reproduces not the first version for Louis XV but the second one for de Polignac. Back in Paris in 1732, the cardinal is the commissioner of the engraving, as evidenced by the Union Contract of the creditors of the succession of Cardinal de Polignac²: Charles-Nicolas Cochin, engraver to the king, of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, residing on rue Saint-Jacques, is a creditor for 1,000 livres, the price of the drawing of the feast given by the cardinal in Piazza Navona, in Rome, on the occasion of the birth of the dauphin. At the death of the cardinal in 1741, the engraver had still not been paid. Consequently, the cardinal is the commissioner of the preparatory drawing for the engraving executed by Dumont le Romain. This contract would suggest that it was Cochin II, a creditor of the cardinal in his succession, who chose Dumont to execute it. Furthermore, does this allow us to infer that Dumont's drawing was not delivered to the cardinal but retained by Cochin; it does not appear in the inventory after the death of Melchior de Polignac drawn up on December

² MC/ET/XCII/514 - Archives Nationales - 2 Décembre 1741 - Me Roger.

4, 1741, at his Hôtel particulier on rue de Varenne, at the request of his heirs, the vicomte, the knight, and the abbot of Polignac, his nephews³.

Panni's painting is mentioned in article 66 of the inventory, but there is no trace of our drawing. Was it still in Cochin's studio at his death in 1790? In the notice of the *différens objets de curiosité de feu M. Cochin, écuyer, chevalier de l'ordre du Roi, graveur et dessinateur de S. M. en son Académie de peinture et sculpture, dont il était le secrétaire, garde des dessins du cabinet du Roi aux galeries du Louvre*⁴, Dumont's drawing does not appear explicitly. Lot 17, page 8, mentions a portfolio « containing various academies and studies made by different Artists, which will be divided ». However, it is hardly imaginable that our drawing, given its dimensions, could have been added to this portfolio. It was likely the object of a gift due to its format and the importance of the subject represented. Its survival is miraculous, the oiled paper and its dimensions significantly increasing its fragility.

To create this drawing based on Panini's painting, the artist could only have had direct access to the painted work. He faithfully reproduces the composition of the painting, the arrangement of the decorations, the angle of view, and the characters animating the scene. The Parisian artist, however, remains faithful not to the first version that was then exhibited at Versailles (now at the Louvre) but to the replica commissioned by Cardinal de Polignac, for himself (now in Dublin). The Parisian artist probably went to the prelate's mansion to draw the picture so that Cochin could proceed with his engraving. The dimensions of the painting and the owner's attachment to this *ricordo* may suggest that Dumont traveled. Small details from the Dublin painting that differ from the version intended for the King are all found in our drawing: especially in the characters in the second or third plane, such as the figure chasing a dog being replaced by another character.



Dumont's style, in contact with the work of the Italian Baroque artist, is infused with vivacity and fantasy. The lively characters move on the canvas with Panini's brush as they dance on the paper with the pen of Dumont le Romain.

The moment of preparation offers the artist the opportunity to introduce numerous and delightful details: workers busy with the final installations of decorations and lights, the crowd of elegant ladies and curious onlookers...

³ MC/ET/XCII/514 - Archives Nationales - 4 Décembre 1741 - Me Roger

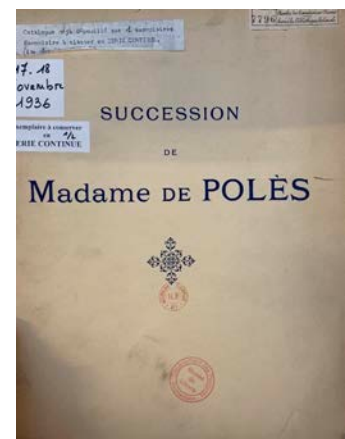
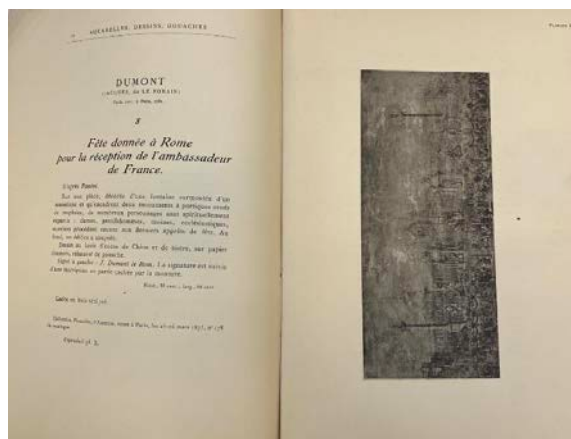
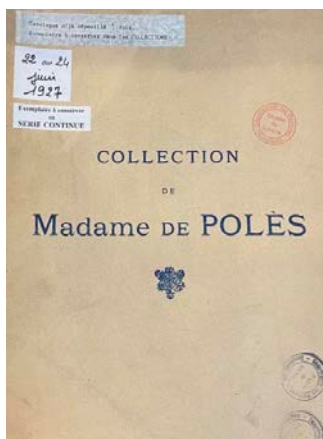
⁴ Basan, Pierre-François (1723-1797) . Expert; Regnault-Delalande, François-Léandre (1762-1824) . Expert; Prault, Louis-François (1734-1806), Notice des différens objets de curiosité de feu M. Cochin, écuyer, chevalier de l'ordre du Roi, graveur et dessinateur de S. M. en son académie de peinture et de sculpture, dont il étoit le secrétaire, garde des dessins du cabinet du Roi aux galeries du Louvre, censeur royal pour la partie des arts, et membre de plusieurs académies. Dont la vente en sera faite le lundi 21 juin, et jours suivans, de relevée, dans son logement aux galeries du Louvre, 1790.



The fact that the memory fades as soon as the event is over and the temporary setting dismantled is due to the very nature of the celebration. However, in the 18th century, festivities had an extremely important political function, as they were charged with showcasing the magnificence of heads of state. Long before Panini, festivities already served to leave a favorable image of the sponsor to posterity. As a knowledgeable patron, Melchior de Polignac ensures that the memory of this celebration does not fade too quickly. No other era than that of Roman and French Baroque has left so many important documents concerning festivities. Cochin Fils' engraving is the epitome of this documentation. In the 18th century, publications related to festivities were costly and ambitious in terms of artistry. Dumont le Romain's drawing confirms this.

The lasting success of Polignac's strategy to use Panini's canvas and its engraved reproductions to solidify his role as *impresario* of the spectacular 1729 celebration among the French public is evident in an Italian travel journal published by Parisian astronomer Joseph-Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande in 1769. In his description of Piazza Navona, he reminds his readers of the « *famous festival* » that took place forty years earlier; he mentions Polignac by name and refers to Panini's painting, obviously expecting many of them to be familiar with it through the engraving.

It is difficult for us to trace the provenance of our sheet between its commission around 1732-1735 and the Poncelet sale in 1873 (lot 178). It then appears in the prestigious collection of Madame Christiane de Polès as it is listed in the sale at the Georges Petit gallery in 1927 (lot 8), and it seems to have been repurchased by Madame de Polès as it reappears in the sale of her estate in 1936 at the Galerie Charpentier (lot 5 bis). Since that sale, the drawing had disappeared until it recently reappeared. We are particularly pleased to present it to you.



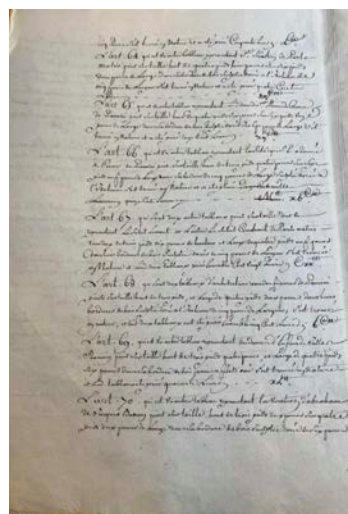
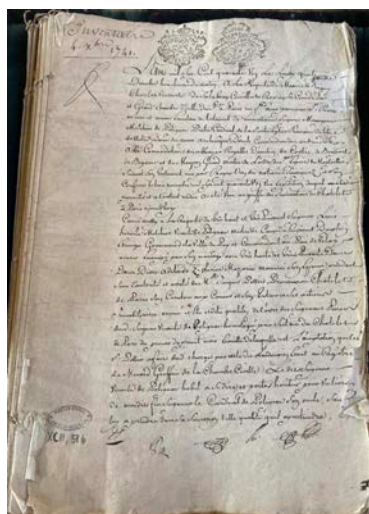
Jacques Dumont is the son of sculptor Pierre Dumont (1660-1737) and Madame Mercier, relative of Madame Marie Madeleine Mercier, the wet nurse of the future King Louis XV, who enjoyed a privileged status close to the Dauphin and then the King throughout her life. She was able to have a society portrait executed ("*Marie Madeleine Mercier, wet nurse of Louis XV, and her family*" now preserved at the Louvre) by her relative, Jacques Dumont, and was ennobled. It is highly likely that through the intermediary of Madame Marie Madeleine Mercier he was introduced to the King, working within the sphere of the royal family in the 1730s/35s. It is worth noting that he is the author of the engraving of the View of the fireworks display held in Paris at the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV (January 21, 1730), 196 x 291 cm.

A painter of history and mythological scenes, as well as popular subjects and portraits, he was also a teacher, cartoonist, academician, rector in 1752, and then chancellor in 1768 of the Academy. He entered the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the workshop of Antoine Le Bel (1705-1793); then completed his artistic training in Rome between 1720-21 and 1725, hence the nickname "le Romain" that he gave himself to distinguish himself from another painter of the same name. In Rome he studied not only antiquity and the Renaissance, but also the work of contemporary artists such as Benedetto Luti (1666-1724). He returned to France in 1725. Despite his low production, Jacques Dumont made a great reputation for himself as a painter. Admitted to the Academy in 1728, with a painting depicting *Hercules and Omphale* (now at the Musée de Tours), he climbed all the ranks of the hierarchy, from the rank of professor in 1736, to that of chancellor in 1768.

In 1747, Charles François Paul Le Normant de Tournehem, director of the King's Buildings, organized a painting competition whose works were exhibited in the gallery of Apollo at the Louvre Palace; Jacques Dumont participated with his *Mucius Scaevola before Porsenna*, alongside ten other painters, including Charles Antoine Coypel and Collin de Vermont. In 1749, this same director commissioned him two paintings, *Generosity and Peace*, to adorn the salon of the château de la Muette in Paris (now preserved at the Louvre Museum). From 1727 to 1761, he exhibited at the Salon. From 1731 to 1755, he was appointed tapestry painter at the Aubusson Manufacture. From January to April 1749, he was director of the Royal School of protected students.

We are grateful to Mrs. Chantal Mauduit who confirmed the authenticity of the work after examination.

An essential link in Cardinal de Polignac's powerful promotion program, our drawing embodies the quintessence of 18th-century art under the reign of Louis XV—its international character, its political purpose, and its artistic creativity.



Inventory of Cardinal Melchior de Polignac drawn up on December 4, 1741, by Me Roger - Article 66 mentioning the painting by Panini.