

*Il Palladio conservato* [‘The Palladium Preserved’] Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Georg Reutter (1735, Vienna).

As Metastasio states in his *argomento*, the *Palladium* was a statue of Pallas that was carried from Troy to Rome, then the capital of the ancient region of Latium. It was believed that upon the preservation of the statue depended the destiny of both city and empire.

In a sacred forest that surrounds their dwelling place, Clelia, one of three Vestals, interrupts the conversation of her two close colleagues, Erennia and Albina. Although dawn has not yet broken, Clelia is anxious that the other Vestals be roused and that preparation for this special day begin. In response, Erennia and Albina make clear their awareness that this is indeed the day on which is celebrated the promised birth of a noble hero who will raise the Roman Empire to new heights. Clelia, however, claims that there will be more to this day than they could know and urges Erennia, whose turn it is to take care of preparations, to hasten to the temple. With Erennia departed, Clelia explains to Albina how, during the night, she was disturbed by sudden thunder and the descending of a cloud from which a flame lit the room. The cloud then opened to reveal Minerva (i.e. Pallas Athena) who commanded Clelia to rise and prepare for a marvellous event. Astonished, Albina reveals a mysterious vision of her own. A ferocious storm felled the sacred laurel tree near the temple. Then, from the North, Jupiter’s eagle appeared, and with its alighting on the fallen tree, the storm ceased and the unscathed tree stood again, protected by the heavens. As equally mystified as is Clelia, Albina starts off to find Erennia, but returns almost immediately, alarmed that the temple is on fire. Clelia’s immediate concern is for the Palladium, which Erennia, now returned, assures her is safe. Amid the commotion of the crowd, Metellus, the victorious general of the war in Numidia, rushed in and rescued the Palladium, leaving the crowd in tearful admiration of his bravery. With this news, Clelia, in a trance-like state begins to utter the assuring words of an inspiring divinity directed towards the hero whose birthday they celebrate. He should have no fear of raging storms or profane fire since the gods will always provide a Metellus. Furthermore, the anger of fate does not last forever, and evil is transformed by the virtue of an opponent. The three Vestals then conclude with an appeal to the gods for their hero’s long life.

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Two particular sources that appear to have provided Metastasio with the background for his *argomento* are the *Fasti* of Ovid (6.417-454), which he actually named, and the Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* (3.12.3). Here are outlined the events that lead to Athena’s carving of the wooden statue, its being cast down to earth by Zeus, and its preservation in Troy. From this point in the narrative, some accounts describe the theft of the statue by Diomedes and Odysseus and its removal to Athens while others outline the rendition that Metastasio clearly adopted which holds that the statue taken by the Greeks was an imitation and that the true Palladium was carried to Rome by Aeneas where it was preserved in the Temple of Vesta. Sources for this account, which also refer to Metellus and the fire, include the *Rhōmaïke archaiologia* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, (2.66.3-5), Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historiae* (7.45), the *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* of Valerius Maximus (1.4.5), and the *Periochae* of Titus Livius (19.241) which Metastasio named along with the Ovid *Fasti*.

*Il Palladio* was first performed on 1 October 1735 along with *Il sogno di Scipione* to honour the birthday of Charles VI, the former work being repeated for his name day on November 4. Archduchess Maria Theresa played the role of Clelia, her sister, Maria Anna, appeared as Erennia, and as Andrea Sommer-Mathis has recently suggested, the role of Albina was probably played by Camilla Fuchs, daughter of Countess Marie Karoline von Fuchs-Mollard, former governess of the archduchesses. This was the third and most serious work Metastasio wrote for these three performers, and he described it as an “*azione teatrale allusiva alle vicende di quel tempo*” (allusive to the events of that time), events that are clearly revealed in Michael Hochedlinger’s *Austria’s Wars of Emergence* (London: Longman, 2003, pp. 174-212). By the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714, the ascendancy of the Duc d’Anjou as King Philip V ended all claims of Charles VI to Spain and its colonies. Determined, thereafter, to keep Spain out of Italy, Charles, by 1720, had secured the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily and the duchies of Milan and Mantua. Through

Philip's consort, Elisabeth Farnese, however, their son, Don Carlos, became Duke of Parma-Piacenza when Antonio, the last Farnese duke died in 1731. One year later, Grand Duke Gian Gastone, the last of the Medici line, named him heir to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. For the Emperor, worse was to come. In the course of the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1738) Carlos, in 1734, conquered both Naples and Sicily, and was crowned king of both regions in July 1735. Such were the setbacks for which Metastasio attempted consolation while inspiring confidence, and against which he urged steadfast resolve in *Il Palladio* and *Il sogno di Scipione* on October 1. Two days later, a preliminary peace settlement, not officially ratified until the Treaty of Vienna of 1738, endorsed Don Carlos' position regarding Naples and Parma, but required his relinquishing of Parma-Piacenza and his rights to Tuscany to the Emperor. Perhaps, therefore, fate's hostility seemed less formidable by the time of *Il Palladio's* repeat performance on November 4.

Settings: Reutter (Vienna 1735); Santos (Queluz 1771)