TONELLI, Sig.ra Luigi, née Anna Nistri
Florence c.1763–22.VII.1846
Portraiture in miniature and pastel, and watercolourist. At some stage before 1785 she married the virtuoso Luigi Tonelli (a noted violinist, he published a Metodo completo pel violino in Milan c.1800). She seems to have received her early training in Florence, possibly from Giuseppe Piattoli (q.v.): a conversation piece of the family of Granducato Pietro Leopoldo, executed in collaboration with Piattoli and Giuseppe Falsini, is known from an engraving (where her name is recorded as “Torelli”), perhaps a confusion with Sigra Torelli, née Lucia Casalini, painter and mother of the artist Stefano Torelli, dated 1785, by Giovanni Battista Cieschi and Benedetto Eredi.

Works such as the portrait of the collector Henry Blandell, who was in Rome in 1790 collecting marbles, are evidently closely connected with Hamilton, as is the portrait of Jane Ormsby. Tonelli came to the attention of Hamilton, as is the portrait of the artist Stefano Torelli, dated 1785, by Giovanni Battista Cecchi and Benedetto Eredi.

In 1794 she taught drawing to his pupil in the notice that appeared in the Morning Chronicle, 20.VII.1794. From 1794 she taught drawing to his children, living in London, where she exhibited (from 97 Norton Street) at the Royal Academy in 1794 and 1797. (Evidently she also came into contact with the Bidulph/Myddeleton family of Chirk Castle, not far from Lord Clive’s Powis Castle.) She then accompanied the family to India between 1798 and 1801, embarking on a journey of more than 1000 miles around southern India with Lady Clive and her daughters. Her employer called her “a treasure in every way”, even if her accommodation requirements were much more difficult to satisfy than expected. Several watercolour portraits of the Rajah of Tanjore, from life, were made on this trip; she sent one to Lord Clive, apologising that “the work is very bad but I hope your Lordship will excuse it on account of the Likeness.” An elaborate watercolour of Tipu Sultan enthroned, executed in 1798, also required an apology as she “had no good place to paint in” and that it was “the first thing of the sort she ever did”.

It seems that all the portraits or landscapes she made on this trip were in watercolour or miniature rather than pastel. She is mentioned in three letters written in Madras in .II.1799 by the wife of General Harris, née Anne Carteret Dickson, to her husband: in this she explains that Tonelli had taken Grant Richardson’s bungalow to paint in, and charged “twelve guineas for likeness in the manner of Lady Clive’s and thirty guineas the miniatures”. She herself was to commision one of the 12 gns (the medium is unclear, perhaps watercolour), while her daughter Anne, Mrs Lushington, sat for a miniature.

Soon after reaching London in XI.1801, Tonelli returned to her own family in Florence. In 1806 the American agent in Paris, Filippo Mazzei, engaged her to bring up his daughter Elisabetta. He provided a description of the family to Thomas Jefferson (letter, 20.VII.1806) with a view to their emigrating to the USA, praising the father, a virtuoso “the peer of any other”, the two children (born c.1789–90), and the mother who “sings and plays the piano like an expert; knows very well her own language, French, and English; draws and paints with excellent taste; is accomplished in embroidery and all needlework; and knows geography quite well.” Jefferson’s response highlighted the expense of living in a major city, which may have deterred the family; by 2.XI.1807 they were in Pisa with Mazzei, while in 1809 they seem to have settled in Florence. Mario Praz saw a pastel by Anna, dated 1812, in Florence. It is unclear if she was the Signora Tonelli to whom Shelley tried to repay a debt in Florence in 1819, only to be told by a servant that the family had gone to England.

Bibliography

Salon critiques
Annan, 1794, no. 348. Arischi. Signor Anna TUNELLI. This is the portrait of the Duchess of Caserta, an Italian lady of high rank, who being said to resemble this bust, assumed the character at a masquerade in Italy. The head-dress is eminently graceful; but, though coloured, it retains something of the marble.

Anon., World 28.III.1794. Signorina Anna Tonelli, the Florentine, and Pupil to the Crayon Hamilton of Rome, as many of our Readers may remember, has four Crayons in the Anti-Chamber, which, for an Impression, promise much.

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1.72.115 John BIDDULPH, in blue coat, pstl, 24x20
(Biddulph; London, Sotheby’s, 9.XII.1931, Lot 57; Box)


Clive, v.q. Northumberland; Williams Wynn

1.72.137 Countess COWPER, née Hannah Anne Gore (1758–1826), and her sister, Emily Gore (1755–1832), pstl, a/r “Monsieur Amilton” [Hamilton] (George, 3rd Earl Cowper, inv. p.m. for export license from Florence to England, 9.III.1790, no. 53; Countess Cowper; her sister, Emily Gore; shipped to England, 9.III.1827). Lit.: letter, Rev. Thomas Brand to Earl of Ailesbury, 8.VI.1793, “[Lady Cowper] has just sent for the copy Anna Tonelli made of her beautiful picture by Hamilton. I carry it this morning to the Quercia to show Lady Bruce, who has some curiosity to see her”; Ingamells 1997, p. 411; Ellis 2005, pp. 49, 61 n.59, 70f.

1.72.1373 The children of the Hon. Penn Asheton CURZON (1757–1797) and Baroness Howe (1762–1835), George Augustus William (1778–1820) and his sister, Marionne (1790–1820), 24x30 ov., sd 1794 (desc.: Edward Curzon, 6th Earl Howe of Gopsall Park and Penn House; Colchester, Reeman Dansie, 27–28.VI.2023, Lot 1184 repr., est. £1500–2500)

1.72.1375 Lady HARRIS, née Anne Carteret Dickson (1759–1833), m/u (mentioned in a letter to her husband of 12.II.1799, 12 gns)

1.72.1377 Lady HARRIS, née Anne Carteret Dickson (1759–1833), m/u (mentioned in a letter to her husband of 12.II.1799, 12 gns)

1.72.138 John David LA TOUCHE (1772–1838), collector, before the amphitheatre at Taormina, with Mount Etna in the background, pstl, 96.5x68.5, a/r Hamilton, s “ANNA NISTRI TONELLI COPIO” (David La Touche of Marley; desc. his granddaughter Elizabeth Frances Hatton; London, Bonhams Knightsbridge, 28.III.1990, Lot 45, £3800;


1722.142 Miss Rebecca Probert (1763–1827), dau. of John Probert, in white muslin dress, powdered hair, psl., a/r Hugh Douglas Hamilton pnt. (Powis Estate, dep.: Powis Castle). Lit.: Peter Moore, Guide to the pictures at Powis Castle, 2016, p. 31 n.r.


1722.144 Mr Palmer, m/u, Royal Academy 1795, no. 481


1722.157 Mr R. WESTMORELAND, m/u, Royal Academy 1795, no. 495, as a young gentleman


1722.16 Gentleman, m/u, Royal Academy 1794, no. 347

1722.161 Gentleman, m/u, Royal Academy 1794, no. 398

1722.162 Young lady, m/u, Royal Academy 1795, no. 472

1722.163 Young man, pstl, 23x19.2 ov., inscr. verso “Anna Tonelli fecit in Londra 1795” (Felbrigg Hall, National Trust). Lit.: Maddison 1995, p. 42 n.r.

1722.165 Young girl in a white dress with a white bonnet tied with a blue ribbon, pstl, 25x19 ov., 1784 (London, Christie’s, 10.vii.1990, Lot 89 repr., est. £400–600, £650 [=£715]. Newbury, Donnington Priory, Drewett Neate, 27.ix.2006, Lot 44 repr., est. £300–500, £350) φ

1722.166 Young girl in a white dress with a white headdress, pstl, 24x20.5 ov., inscr. verso “Anna Tonelli fecit in Londra/1796” (Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 3–4.III.2011, Lot 621 repr., as unknown sitter by Tonelli, est. £200–300, w/d; Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 9–10.vi.2011, Lot 713 repr., as of Tonelli by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, est. £1000–2000, £1200) φ

1722.167 Lady in white dress with white headdress, pstl, 24x20.5 ov., inscr. verso “Anna Tonelli fecit in Londra/1796” (Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 3–4.III.2011, Lot 621 repr., as unknown sitter by Tonelli, est. £200–300, w/d; Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 9–10.vi.2011, Lot 713 repr., as of Tonelli by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, est. £1000–2000, £1200) φ


1722.169 Two young ladies, m/u (Horace Walpole; desc.: Earl Waldgrave; Strawberry Hill, George Robins, 25.iv.1842 & seq., p. 118, no. 69 n.r.)