

## Sarah's Grand Tour

Following her father's death, Sarah was an independent young woman of considerable means, rather than a daughter on an allowance. She was free to travel and, like so many others of the educated classes, she headed to Europe on a 'Grand Tour' to further her education by visiting works of art and architecture. The unrest on the continent had restricted travelling, but after the Treaty of Paris and Napoleon's departure to Elba, Sarah took her opportunity. In August 1814, along with her sister, Katharine, and aunt, Margaret, she set sail from Newcastle to Holland. For the next two months they toured the Low Countries and France, returning in early October full of praise for the Dutch and disdain for the French.

In the year after Waterloo, Sarah, Katharine and their Uncle William set off to France, Switzerland and Italy. Sarah made copious notes on places, buildings and customs. Her biographer, Henry Lonsdale, felt that, 'In every page of her seven manuscript copy-books there is to be found readable and interesting matter, descriptive scenes, architectural notices; and observations on man and manners: and all so full of freshness and point.' These journals have disappeared, but Henry Lonsdale quoted from them in his publication, *The Worthies of Cumberland*.

In the Haute Savoie they visited the picturesque town of Pont l'Echelle on the eve of Rogation Sunday. Sarah recalls being woken by the sound of psalms from an approaching procession:

'The mists still rested on the hills, and the dew spread its pearly fretwork on the valley; all was still and solemn, not a breeze disturbed the blossoms, nor was a human creature to be seen stirring, except where, turning the point of a jutting crag, a long line of villagers, clothed simply in white, moved slowly forward. . . . Though the primary object of these ceremonies is to obtain the fructification of the earth, yet those who partake in them become also linked in a sort of association to one another, and contract or cement the obligation to reciprocal offices of kindness and charity.'

At Terracino, on the Gulf of Gaeta, Sarah wrote:

'We were attended both by dogs and cats during supper, which consisted of rice swimming in water, peas swimming in oil, and fish swimming in goat's milk, with cheese, apples, and fennel-root, to be washed down with wine literally impregnated with flies, as the bottles are seldom corked.'

After seeing the ruins of the vast temples at Paestum, she wrote:

'Of a scene more calculated than Paestum to inspire melancholy it is impossible to form an idea. At Pompeii we had seen the dwellings of ordinary mortals, as destroyed yet preserved, by a preternatural calamity; at Paestum, whence all meaner relics have disappeared, we seemed to tread the footsteps of superior beings, whose temples still remain to attest their pre-eminence; yet of this people, so elegant and so enlightened, no other trace is in existence. By a long succession of the most common casualties they have vanished from the earth, and their place knoweth them no more. Of their history every record has perished. It seems as if Fate but spared a casual trophy of human art and of human glory to remind succeeding ages that the feebler works they produce will still more entirely and more speedily decay.'

After her visit to the Sistine Chapel, Sarah recorded her own very definite, if controversial, views:

'It is a spacious and gloomy hall, one end of which is entirely covered with the famous fresco of the 'Last Judgment', considered the grandest and most terrific composition of the pencil, but the awful catastrophe it images seems little to weigh on the minds of the cardinals when assembled here to elect a pope. It is, after all, but painting, and the more wonderful it is, the more it convinces one that the utmost faculties of man are inadequate to portray or even conceive the things of a future existence. In this picture all is gloomy and horrible. . . . Michelangelo has evoked fiends and conjured hell to appal mankind to aspire after heaven.'

James Losh considered Sarah's journal to be 'one of the most amusing and instructive works on Italy of recent years'. They are the notes of an antiquarian but also of the Romantic. The experience would live with her and be an inspiration and resource for the rest of her life.