

**Cremonese School, circa 1570**

PORTRAIT OF A BOY WITH A TENNIS RACKET AND BALL, WEARING A PINK SLASHED DOUBLET AND HOSE

Oil on canvas

170.5 by 65 cm.; 42¼ by 25½ in.

The present work would appear to be among the earliest known representations of a tennis player, and dates from a time when Real or Royal tennis was at the zenith of its popularity. It was played throughout Europe, principally by Kings and their courtiers. In England, Kings Henry VII and Henry VIII were enthusiasts, and in France, where the Papal Legate in 1598 recorded over 250 courts, the Kings François I, Henri II, Charles IX and Henri IV were all keen players. In Italy, where the Locko Park portrait was painted, the game was equally popular. It was at the University of Parma that in 1555, Antonio Scaino de Salo published his seminal book, *Trattato del Giuoco della Palla*, dedicated to his patron Duke Alfonso II, Prince of Ferrara. His lengthy analysis of 'il giuoco della corda' ('the game of the net') describes various styles and methods of play, including the use of rackets (as opposed to hands) for the larger courts. The wide, almost triangular head of the racket in this painting, together with its straight as opposed to angled face, would also appear to be accurately depicted, and amongst the earliest types in use. It may be dated to circa 1555 (see G. Clerici, *Tennis*, 1976, pp. 30-31, figs. 9 & 10).

The suggestion that the painting may be from Cremona is due to the late Philip Pouncey, who suggested (private communication) that the painter may have been associated with the following of Bernardino Campi. The portrait has also more recently been compared to the work of Sofonisba Anguissola.

*Exhibited:*

Leeds, *Exhibition of Works of Art*, 1868, no. 311, as by Moroni;

Derby, 1870, no. 244, as by Moroni;

Nottingham, 1982, no. 19, plate I, as circle of Bernardino Campi.

*Literature:*

Richter, 1901, no. 129, as by a 16th Century Florentine artist.

£50,000-70,000

