



Laurens Jules

1825-1901

Caravanserai in Tabriz

Watercolor on paper

Dimensions : 29,5 x 44 cm

Dimensions : 11.42 x 17.32 inch



Dimensions with frame : 45 x 60 cm
Dimensions with frame : 17.72 x 23.62 inch

In this view, a courtyard-like caravanserai welcomes travelers and merchants, some of whom are wearing late Qajar period clothing. The name of the fourth righteous imam, Ya Ali, is visible in one of the niches in the background, next to the year of completion of the building: 1104 AH (1692 A.C.E.). Built as inns or staging posts for merchants traveling through the region to procure supplies, rest, water and feed their horses, caravanserais were architectural structures common throughout Asia Minor.

Typically square in shape, they included stables and accommodation for travelers. An open courtyard, usually with a communal fountain for religious and secular purposes, provided a place to trade, socialize and exchange information.

Biography

Born into a modest family of five children, Jules Laurens was born in Carpentras in the Vaucluse. He grew up in an artistic atmosphere: his brother, 25 years older, was a well-known painter and talented musician, and his father was passionate about music. It was therefore quite natural that the young Jules learnt his first artistic skills from Bonaventure, his elder brother. He then attended the Beaux-Arts in Montpellier before moving to Paris at the age of 16 to join the studio of Eugène Isabey and Paul Delaroche.

He was admitted to the Salon in 1845 where he received his first favorable reviews. He was then noticed and asked to participate in a mission to the Orient and Persia for the Ministry of Public Instruction, led by the explorer, engineer and geographer Xavier Hommaire de Hell.

This real journey of more than three years will be decisive in the career of the painter.

The journey began in July 1846 with a stay of several months in Constantinople. The young 21-year-old painter led a social but serious artistic life there, which was enriched by excursions to Pera or Therapia. In August 1847, Hommaire de Hell and Laurens entered Trebizond after a journey along the shores of the Black Sea. The expedition must join Teheran by the road of Erzeroum, Vann and Tabriz. Spending nearly fourteen hours a day in the saddle, camping uncomfortably in tents and caravanserais, battling cholera, fever, freezing temperatures and snowstorms, Laurens nonetheless conscientiously recorded his impressions in his sketchbooks during each stage. The painter preferred to use paper that was already colored yellow, blue or pink. This background gave warmth to the tone of the work, which is enhanced by a few strokes of white pencil to brighten the light.

Arriving in Tabriz (the ancient Tauris) on November 9, 1847, the travelers were welcomed in the luxurious residence of a family of bankers, the Railly. The artist fully tasted the riches of Persia, the Arab architecture remaining the main source of his motives which he considered as a flowering, a product of the very ground which carries it. Discovering his sketchbooks, local dignitaries such as Prince Malek-Hassen-Mirza, uncle of the Shah, or the Bishop of Tabriz commissioned their portraits from him. The two men set off again for Tehran, which they reached in February 1848. They resided there for three months with the Count of Sartiges, Minister of France to the Shah. The expedition then continued towards the Caspian Sea, then on foot towards Hispahan further south before ending by crossing Egypt, Palestine and Syria.

Exhausted by the disease and the fever which did not leave him any more, Hommaire de Hell died in Djoufa at the end of summer 1848. The death of the expedition's leader marked the end of the adventure for Laurens whose mission from then on was to bring back to France, in addition to his numerous sketches, the material and the precious notes of the deceased geographer.

The return of Jules Laurens made a strong impression in Paris. The one who was thought to be buried next to his unfortunate companion Xavier Hommaire de Hell in the cemetery of Jufa, arrived rich with memories, more than a thousand drawings in black pencil or graphite and a few watercolors. Many of his drawings will be published as lithographs in magazines or popular publications. They will also be used to illustrate "Voyage en Turquie et en Perse exécuté par ordre du gouvernement français pendant les années 1846, 1847 et 1848", a work based on the diary of Hommaire de Hell and published by his widow. Some of his engravings were also used as artistic support in the Illustration for articles on the subject in 1853, 1860, 1864 where his painting Tehran, general view taken on the road to Casbinn (Persia) appears.

A recognized artist, Laurens exhibited regularly at the Salons as soon as he returned in 1850. He was made a knight of the Legion of Honor in 1868 and spent his life between his native town of Carpentras and stays in London, Rome and Paris. In 1892, Laurens donated a large number of drawings made during his mission in Persia to the National Library of Fine Arts. The artistic production of Jules Laurens is not limited to the Oriental lands,

but it is to them that he owes his fame.

And to pay homage to this land, which he would never wanted to see again, Laurens wrote in his notebook upon his departure from Tehran "This is the most beautiful panorama in the world; whoever loves the great scenes of nature and the great memories of history should not die without having seen it".

Museums

Carpentras, Musée Comtadin-Duplessis

Paris, Orsay Museum

Montpellier, Musée Fabre

Marseille, Museum of Fine Arts

Londres, Victoria and Albert Museum

Bibliography

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Lynne Thornton "Les orientalistes, peintres voyageurs" Editions ACR

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