



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME ONE**

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With an essay by Richard Rand  
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Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,  
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: John Constable, *Yarmouth Jetty* (cat. 73)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Bathers of the Borromean Isles* (cat. 89)

PAGE VIII: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Woman Crocheting* (cat. 267)

PAGE X: Claude Monet, *Seascape, Storm* (cat. 222)

PAGE XII: Jacques-Louis David, *Comte Henri-Amédée-Mercure de Turenne-d'Aynac* (cat. 103)

PAGE XVI: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr* (cat. 33)

PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154)

scène prise sur le fait. Les djellabs, lorsqu'ils reviennent de leurs longs et pénibles voyages sur le Haut Nil, installent leur marchandise humaine dans ces grands okels qui s'étendent au Caire du côté de la mosquée ruinée de kalife Hâkem; c'est là qu'on va pour acheter un esclave, comme ici on va à la halle pour acheter un turbot. . . . C'est une de ces femmes, une Abyssinienne, que M. Gérôme a pris comme personnage principal de sa composition. Elle est nue et montrée par le djellab, qui a une bonne tête de brigand habitué à tous les raptés et à toutes les violences; l'idée de l'âme éternelle n'a pas dû souvent tourmenter un pareil bandit. La pauvre fille est debout, soumise, humble, résignée avec une passivité fataliste que le peintre a très habilement rendue. Un homme l'examine, regarde ses dents comme on regarde celles d'un cheval, et apprécie la marchandise avec cet oeil défiant qui est particulier aux Arabes."

11. Note that the second painting Gérôme exhibited in this Salon was titled *Clothes Seller in Cairo* (A 181), but that no such location is specified for *The Slave Market*.
12. RSC Diary, 27 Jan. 1928.
13. RSC Diary, 23 Jan. 1942.
14. Goupil Stock Books, book 3, p. 94, no. 2355.
15. *Ibid.*, book 3, p. 119, no. 2598. The buyer is recorded only as "M. Mayer, de Dresde." Gambart had returned *The Slave Market* to Goupil in exchange for a second version of Gérôme's *Louis XIV and Molière* (A 139; Goupil Stock Books, book 3, p. 119, no. 2597). See also Bordeaux–New York–Pittsburgh 2000–2001, p. 132, under no. 91.
16. Mayer purchased the painting in Jan. 1867, but since it was shown in the Paris Salon, which opened on 15 April, he may not have taken possession of the work until after its exhibition. This painting has also, erroneously, been catalogued as belonging to the August Belmont collection, but this confuses it with a painting often similarly titled *The Slave Market* now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (A 217).
17. Listed in Ackerman 1986a, p. 218 (rev. French ed., p. 260), although the source of this information is unknown.

### 153 | Fellah Women Drawing Water c. 1873–75

Oil on canvas, 67.3 x 100.2 cm

Center right: J. L. GEROME.

1955-52

In 1868, Gérôme made one of the longest of his many trips to the Near East, leading an expedition of artists, photographers, and writers on a five-month journey through Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. They arrived in Cairo in early January and spent about a month in and around the city. Among the company were the writer Paul Lenoir, the artist Léon Bonnat, and Gérôme's brother-in-law, Albert Goupil, who served as a photographer. After spending some time in Cairo, they set off in a caravan of donkeys and camels, arriving in the region of El Faiyûm, roughly 115 km south of the city. They set up camp outside the town of Sinuris and there, as Lenoir described in his account of the trip, they observed groups of fellah, or peasant, women walking from the town to draw water from a particular spot in the river.<sup>1</sup> This is just the scene Gérôme depicted: in the distance is a village and at the right the minaret of a mosque rises above a fortified structure, while several groups of women carry or fill large jugs of water or rest with them in the shade, and two others wash laundry. That this scene does not simply document an event witnessed by the travelers becomes clear when it is compared not only to Lenoir's narrative, but also to two other images. Gérôme painted another version of the scene that is very close to this work in broad outline, but differs in many details (fig. 153.1),<sup>2</sup> and this version in turn, is closely related to a photograph taken by Albert Goupil, dated 1868 and titled *Medinet-el-Fayoum* (fig. 153.2), the name of the neighboring town.

Particularly since the difficulties of desert travel prevented Gérôme from making full-scale paintings during his trip, he must have composed his works from various sources once he returned to his studio. In this instance, he clearly based the Najd version quite closely on Goupil's photograph, which is empty of figures but shows the same shoreline, the same slightly twisted, leafy trees, and the same tent-like form or pile of sticks in the middle distance that Gérôme reproduced in his canvas. He then added the figures of women drawing water, perhaps based on his own sketches from the trip, for, as Lenoir noted, "we were just able, in rapid sketches, to note some



153

of their most frequent attitudes.”<sup>3</sup> Because it shows greater variation from the photograph, the Clark’s *Fellah Women* may well have been the second version, a possibility supported by the presence of grid lines and strong outlines beneath the paint surface that suggest that parts of the image were transferred from another source (see Technical Report). In the Clark version, the artist placed two washerwomen in the left foreground and moved the women drawing water to the opposite bank, and he replaced the leafy trees with more exotic-looking palm trees, among many other changes. The washerwomen may have been inspired by Lenoir’s narrative (published in 1872), for just following the passage on water carriers, he describes his own attempt to sketch three women who were washing their own clothes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while Gérôme probably observed something similar to the scene he depicted, he most likely drew on Lenoir’s and Goupil’s written and visual sources several years later in order to create the Clark painting.

*Fellah Women Drawing Water* is slightly uncharacteristic of Gérôme’s work in this period, for it focuses as much attention on the landscape as on the figures,<sup>5</sup> and suggests little of the exoticism that marks, for example, the other two paintings by the artist in the Clark (see cats. 152 and 154). Aside from their cloth-

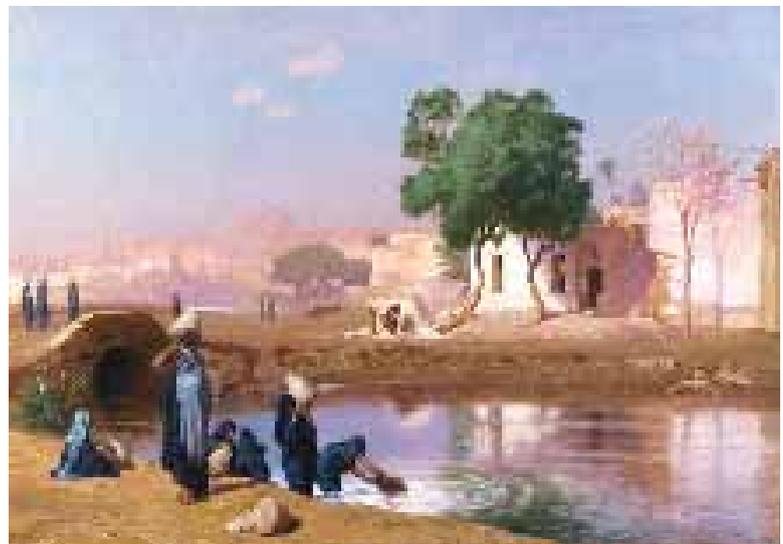


Fig. 153.1 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Fellaheen Drawing Water*, c. 1870–75. Oil on canvas, 44 x 62 cm. Najd Collection

ing and surroundings, these Egyptian peasant women seem not to differ significantly from the French peasants depicted by artists such as Jules Breton (1827–1906), who similarly showed rural laborers, often exclusively women, going about their daily tasks as their ancestors had done for centuries. In fact, Lenoir,



Fig. 153.2 Albert Goupil (French 1840–1884), *Medinet-el-Fayoum*, 1868. Photograph. Plate 16 from *Voyage en Égypte, au Sinaï, en Jordanie et en Palestine* (Paris, 1868)

in his narrative, explicitly described the fellah women as having “the majesty of vestal virgins going to the sacrifice,” a comment that both suggests the unbroken tradition of their practice, and implicitly links them to the same Greco-Roman heritage often ascribed in idealized accounts to their French counterparts.<sup>6</sup> In both Breton’s and Gérôme’s work, however, the artists’ romanticized view of the timeless quality of such scenes obscures the less picturesque reality of contemporary life. In addition, while there may have been little evidence of modernization in a rural region like El Faiyûm, Gérôme has also omitted virtually all traces of his own or his companions’ presence as European tourists. Only the placement of the artist’s signature, located illusionistically on the far bank of the river, might serve as an emblem of his complex situation. This placement seems simultaneously to present the scene as “real” and unmediated by avoiding the framing viewpoint and authority implied by a more traditional signature, and to insist on Gérôme’s presence, his literal intrusion, on the actual ground of Egypt.<sup>7</sup>

There is some uncertainty about the dating and early history of this work. Gerald Ackerman noted that a manuscript catalogue at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France of works by Gérôme lists a painting with the title *Fellah Women Drawing Water* that is dated “c. 1870” and further notated as having a second version and being photo-engraved by Goupil.<sup>8</sup> The

description probably matches the Najd version of this image, since there is a photogravure of that work published by Goupil; the Clark painting would then be the second version mentioned.<sup>9</sup> Since Goupil probably bought only one of the two versions, it seems most likely that the dealer bought the Najd painting, rather than the Clark one, a fact that leaves the date of the present work open to question, although both versions were probably made in approximately the same period. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the Goupil records, where just one work presumably of this subject is listed, its title, *Oriental Women Drawing Water*, most likely referring to the foreground figures in the Najd, not the Clark, painting.<sup>10</sup> Further, a small plaque placed on the reverse of this work sometime before its purchase by Sterling Clark notes that it was exhibited in the Salon of 1903. Ackerman states, however, that the Clark painting was confused with a third painting, *View of Medinet el Fayoum, Fellah Women Bathing*, which he dates to 1893.<sup>11</sup>

*Fellah Women Drawing Water* is the final work by Gérôme that Sterling Clark purchased, but he bought it just one week after acquiring *Snake Charmer*, paying, as for that work, only \$500 for it. Though he made no comment in his diary about obtaining two works by the artist virtually simultaneously, he did note that he told the dealer, John Levy, that he would take the Gérôme despite another dealer wanting to sell him a work by Alfred Sisley, a comment that once again reveals Clark’s view that collecting two such different artists was not mutually exclusive.<sup>12</sup> SL

**PROVENANCE** The artist, possibly sold to Goupil; [Goupil, Paris]; [John Levy Galleries, New York, sold to Clark, 29 Jan. 1942, as *View of Medinet el Fayoum, Upper Egypt*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1942–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1955, no. 52, pl. 37, as *Medinet-El-Fayoum*; Williamstown 1958b, pl. 23, as *Medinet-El-Fayoum*.

**REFERENCES** Possibly Stranahan 1888, p. 318; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 65, ill., as *Medinet-el-Fayoum*; Dayton–Minneapolis–Baltimore 1972–73, p. 18; Vesoul 1981, p. 28, ill., as *Vue de Médinet-el-Fayoum*; Gerdtz 1984, p. 25, fig. 14; Ackerman 1986a, pp. 88, 228–29, no. 206, ill. (rev. French ed., pp. 276–77, no. 206, ill.); Madison–Dallas–Durham 1987–88, pp. 14–15, fig. 22; Juler 1991, p. 134; Kolars 1992, p. 22, ill.; Tel Aviv–Bayonne–Paris 1993, p. 32, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, p. 65; Lafont-Couturier 1998, pp. 27, 68, ill.; Aubenas and Lacarrière 1999, pp. 35–36.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The original support is linen of moderate weight (22 threads/cm), with an aqueous-adhesive lining onto a bleached, double weave fabric. The five-member stretcher is probably replaced. There are stress and mechanical cracks in the sky, and traction cracks are visible in most dark colors. In 1977, the painting was lightly cleaned to remove surface grime and additional varnish was spray applied. Repainting and inpainting can be seen in most dark shades of the women's costumes, the reflection below that of the dog, and the center palm tree trunks. The basket in the lower left corner is entirely overpainted, and retouching in the upper left corner of the sky is somewhat discolored. A lower depth of retouching is faintly detectable in ultraviolet light, indicating that there may be further solvent abrasion. In reflected light, the vertical threads of the original fabric support can be seen, as well as the more broadly applied brushstrokes of the sky and water areas. There is a disturbed matte area in the underside of the bridge at the far left.

The pink ground layer, which may have been applied by the artist, contributes its color to many areas of the image. Pinholes at the edges may suggest that the picture was executed flat against a board, and later stretched. The underdrawing appears to be executed in black ink applied with a nibbed pen, as the lines are double tracked. Lines also grid the surface every 10 to 11 cm in both directions, some seen in infrared light, others partially detectable in normal light. Strong outlines can be seen with the unaided eye in all the details reflected in the water. These cursory outlines may have been used to transfer the image onto this surface from another source. Some lines also seem to lie on top of the final paint. There is a thin brown paint sketch below the final paint layers. The paint handling is relatively varied and sketchy. A palette knife was used either to apply or to adjust the white paint of the building's reflection. The palm trees are painted in and around the sky brushwork, while the trees at the far right are painted on top of the sky color. The larger tree trunks have underdrawing lines and reserves left for them in the paint. The signature is dual-toned in blue and green paint.

very likely derives from Lenoir's text rather than from Gérôme's own experience.

5. Théophile Gautier noted this distinction, and commented on the artist's more usual focus, in an article published just after Gérôme's first trip to Egypt; "his powerful studies as a history painter, his talent as a draftsman, fine, elegant, and exact . . . made him more suited than anyone else to render that simple detail that modern explorers of the Orient have neglected until now in favor of landscapes, monuments, and color—humans!" ("ses fortes études de peintre d'histoire, son talent de dessinateur, fin, élégant, exact . . . le rendaient propre plus que tout autre à rendre ce simple détail qu'ont négligé jusqu'ici, pour le paysage, le monument et la couleur, les explorateurs modernes de l'Orient—l'homme!"). Gautier 1856, p. 34.
6. Lenoir 1872, p. 111: "la majesté de vestales qui vont au sacrifice."
7. Gérôme favored this type of unusual, almost illusionistic signature in many of his other paintings, including the other two at the Clark.
8. Gerald Ackerman letter to the Clark, 27 Nov. 1984.
9. The photogravure appears in Strahan 1881, pt. 7 and is also included in the list of works reproduced by Goupil in Bordeaux–New York–Pittsburgh 2000–2001, p. 161.
10. In the Goupil Stock Books, inventory no. 10112 appears in two entries, once as "Femme d'orient puisant de l'eau" in an incomplete entry in book 8, p. 83, with an acquisition date given as April 1875, and again as "Femmes d'Orient puisant de l'eau," in book 9, p. 43, listing the work as bought by Goupil on 27 April 1873 and sold to the dealer Adolf Kohn, New York, in August 1879. While it is therefore unclear whether the subject of this image is one or several figures, and similarly unclear when Goupil acquired the work, it is likely that the painting in question is the work in the Najd Collection (fig. 153.1), based on the title as well as on the lack of evidence linking this stock number or provenance to the Clark painting. See Goupil Stock Books.
11. Ackerman 1986a, p. 228 (rev. French ed., p. 276). For more on this work, see note 4.
12. RSC Diary, 29 Jan. 1942.

1. Lenoir 1872, pp. 110–12. Gérôme's own diary entries are much shorter and far less descriptive than Lenoir's, and the portion published in Moreau-Vauthier 1906, pp. 223–53, begins on 20 Feb., presumably after their stay in El Faiyûm.

2. A 207.

3. Lenoir 1872, p. 113: "Aussi pouvions-nous à peine, par de rapides croquis, noter quelques-unes de leurs attitudes les plus fréquentes."

4. Ibid. A third painting (Najd Collection; A 478) is much later, dated 1893, and only slightly formally related though it has a similar title, *View of Medinet el Fayoum, Fellah Women Bathing*. It shows women both bathing in the nude and drawing water, and because Lenoir described spying on the bathers by himself, as well as because the painting was executed many years later, it