



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

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

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Jean-Léon Gérôme

French, 1824–1904

152 | **Slave Market** 1866

Oil on canvas, 84.6 x 63.3 cm

Lower right: J. L. GEROME

1955.53

Gérôme's *Slave Market*, much like his *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154), has become one of the iconic images of Orientalism, particularly since the publication of Edward Said's defining 1978 book of the same name and Linda Nochlin's discussion of the *Slave Market* in her equally influential article, "The Imaginary Orient," in 1983. Certainly, the sexual and racial dynamics that the painting depicts are provocative, prompting diverse, and at times strongly polarized, interpretations.¹ Although Gérôme's travels in the Near East, his use of his own extensive sketches as well as photographs by others documenting the region, and his highly skilled, impersonal painting style, were intended to secure a factual neutrality for his paintings, the implications and the sheer visual power of the scene depicted in *Slave Market* are anything but neutral.

The scene centers on a nude woman surrounded by a group of men; the seller, at the right, presents her to a prospective purchaser, who probes her teeth with his finger. The dehumanizing nature of this gesture is self-evident; further, as Colette Beaudan has noted, the buyer is the only figure in the scene who, like the viewer of the painting, can see the woman fully, and he is covered head to toe with only his eyes visible, effectively embodying the viewer's position, and suggesting a degree of voyeuristic complicity.² The setting evokes the Near East, as indicated by the architecture and the clothing and skin color of the figures, but it is not a specific, identifiable location. Nonetheless, the site is clearly non-European, allowing the observer to censure the practice of slave trading as foreign and barbaric while still enjoying the idea of complete access to the female body, physical as well as visual, that it affords. As Nochlin memorably wrote, imagining Gérôme's voice, "Don't think that I or any other right-thinking Frenchman would ever be involved in this sort of thing. I am merely taking careful note of the fact that less enlightened races indulge in the trade in naked women—but isn't it arousing!"³ A rarely noted detail appears to the right of the central scene, where

a nude black male, his back to the viewer, is similarly being examined. This vignette might be intended to counterbalance some of the sexual overtones of the foreground scene, but it also hints at the slave trade's wider scope, suggesting that any inhabitant of the African continent, male or female, of any skin tone, is equally subject to European domination.

Gérôme probably painted *Slave Market* in 1866, selling it to the dealer Goupil in August of that year; it appeared at the Salon the following year. As he did with most of his paintings, he seems to have drawn from various sources to compose the image. He made two trips, in 1856 and 1862, to Egypt and nearby countries, spending several months observing and sketching the landscape, monuments, and people of the region. The pointed arches of the background building in *Slave Market* may have been based on architecture that Gérôme observed during his travels, and he peopled the scene with figures wearing the same types of North African costumes that appear in many of his other paintings. It is unlikely, however, that the artist actually observed a scene like this, as there is little, if any, reliable documentation of such slave markets. Indeed, Gérôme may have drawn inspiration in part from Gérard de Nerval's 1851 account of a similar incident in his partially fictional *Voyage en Orient*: "The sellers [of slaves] offered to have them undressed, they opened their mouths so that one could see their teeth, they made them walk and highlighted especially the elasticity of their chests."⁴ The naturalism of the scene is thus open to question on a number of levels, since Gérôme probably combined narrative sources, sketches made during his travels, and studio models, as he so often did. As early as 1881, Edward Strahan suggested that the model for the central figure may have been the same woman who appears in *Cleopatra and Caesar* (1866; private collection),⁵ providing a certain irony for the informed viewer in seeing the same figure as both queen and slave.⁶

The purported verisimilitude of *Slave Market* may be further undercut by another version of this composition, in which the figures are dressed in classical togas and stand in a much simpler setting, but the painting's uncertain status raises a number of questions.⁷ That work appears to be dated 1857, which would suggest that Gérôme developed the content and composition for the scene several years earlier and reused it, modifying the setting and adding greater detail, in 1866. This sequence would further support the idea that the final painting derived from

the artist's imagination, rather than from an incident he observed. In his revised catalogue raisonné, however, Ackerman lists the earlier *Slave Market* as a studio work,⁸ and indeed its relatively rough facture and simplified forms seem uncharacteristic of Gérôme. In this case, a date before 1866 seems problematic, despite the date on the canvas, and the classical scene might conceivably be a modified version after the finished work, rather than a prefiguration of it.

Slave Market was exhibited in the Salon of 1867, but because the Exposition Universelle of that year took place at virtually the same time, few critics reviewed the Salon and few people visited. Of the reviews that mention this work, two viewpoints are almost directly opposed, demonstrating from the outset the range of possible reactions to its imagery. In the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Paul Mantz wrote, "If the buyer decides [to purchase the slave], what could he do with a woman made of ivory? . . . The preciousness of execution accords rather well with a certain vapidity of thought and a poor and mannered line."⁹ By criticizing Gérôme's skill at painting, Mantz addressed only the work's material nature, essentially denying the realism of the depiction while avoiding any deeper discussion of the content of the image.

Maxime du Camp, who had himself traveled extensively in the Near East and taken photographs, saw the painting very differently, explicitly spelling out the characters' natures and reading into the image even greater precision than Gérôme himself supplied. According to Du Camp:

The Slave Market is a scene done on the spot. The djellabs [presumably meaning slave traders], once they have returned from their long and difficult journeys on the Upper Nile, install their human merchandise in the large okels that spread out in Cairo alongside the ruins of the mosque of Caliph Hakem; one goes there to buy a slave as one goes to the market here to buy a turbot. . . . It is one of these [more expensive] women, an Abyssinian, that M. Gérôme has taken as the principal figure of his composition. She is nude and being displayed by the djellab, who has the fine head of a brigand accustomed to every sort of abduction and violence; the idea of the eternal soul must not very often have tormented such a bandit. The poor girl is standing, submissive, humble, resigned, with a fatalistic passivity that the painter has

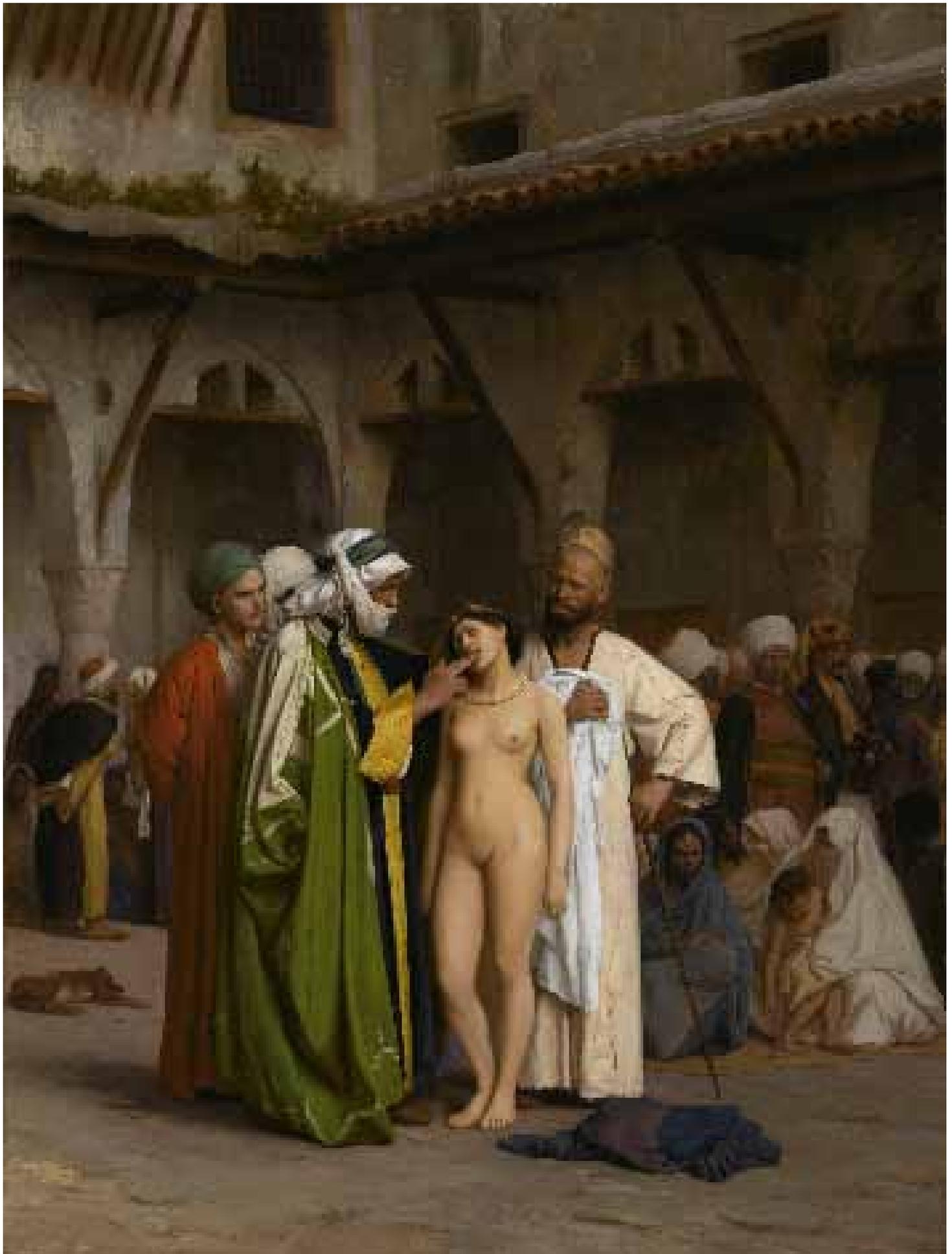
*very skillfully rendered. A man examines her, looking at her teeth as one looks at those of a horse, and appreciates the merchandise with that defiant eye that is particular to Arabs.*¹⁰

Du Camp approached the artist's near-photographic image much like a neutral document to be interpreted, presumably as Gérôme had intended, and his Orientalist reading is unequivocal—thus for Du Camp the slave trader is a violent, non-Christian bandit, the woman submissive, and the buyer characteristically Arabic in his defiant gaze. In addition, without any specific indications from the artist, the site becomes the slave market in Cairo and the woman an Abyssinian, details that Du Camp presumably added based on his own experience.¹¹

Sterling Clark, for his part, generally commented only on Gérôme's skill as an artist, rather than on the content of his work. Clark seems to have first seen the alternate version of this composition at the Knoedler Gallery in New York in January 1928, when he noted in his diary: "Saw Gérôme. Roman buyer examining teeth of nude slave before purchase. Early work. Beautifully drawn," an assessment that clearly avoids any acknowledgement of the provocative nature of the subject matter.¹² His offer to the owner of that painting was rejected, however, and it was not until May 1930 that Clark purchased the present work. A number of years later Clark summed up *Snake Charmer* (cat. 154) in the same manner in his diaries, calling it "academic, yes, tight, yes, but what drawing and mastery of the art."¹³ He never seems to have remarked, at least on paper, that he owned two major works by Gérôme that presented highly racially and sexually charged scenes. SL

PROVENANCE The artist, sold to Goupil, 23 Aug. 1866, as *Un marché d'esclaves*; [Goupil, Paris, sold to Gambart, 22 Sept. 1866];¹⁴ [Ernest Gambart, London, 1866, returned to Goupil, Nov. 1866]; [Goupil, Paris, Nov. 1866, sold to Mayer, 27 Jan. 1867, as *Marchand d'esclaves*];¹⁵ [Mayer, Dresden, from 1867];¹⁶ [Knoedler, Paris, sold to Clark, 1 May 1930, as *Marché d'Esclaves*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1930–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1867c, p. 87, no. 642, as *Marché d'esclaves*; possibly Berlin 1868;¹⁷ Williamstown 1955, no. 53, pl. 38; Williamstown 1958b, pl. 24; Williamstown–Baltimore–Charlotte 2000–2001, p. 129, no. 4, ill.; Williamstown 2006, no cat.; Los Angeles–Paris–Madrid 2010–11, pp. 97, 272–73, no. 156, ill. (exhibited in Los Angeles and Paris only).



REFERENCES Du Camp 1867, pp. 283–85; Mantz 1867, p. 531; Strahan 1881, pt. 6, ill. (print after the painting); Champlin and Perkins 1885, vol. 2, p. 129; Stranahan 1888, pp. 311–12, 318; Hering 1892, pp. 117, 133, 233, ill., as *For Sale*; *Arts Magazine* 1955, p. 15; Frankfurter 1955, p. 29–30, ill.; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 66, ill.; Hamilton 1970, pp. 82–83, fig. 69; Dayton–Minneapolis–Baltimore 1972–73, pp. 21–22, fig. 11; Lucie-Smith 1972, pp. 126–27, fig. 133 (rev. ed., pp. 126–27, fig. 133); Norman 1977, p. 95, ill.; Harding 1979, p. 83, ill.; Verrier 1979, no. 27, ill.; Cornell 1983, pp. 365–66, fig. 453; Nochlin 1983, pp. 118, 125, ill. (repr. in Stuttgart 1987, p. 176, fig. 3; Nochlin 1989, pp. 44–46, fig. 5); Roskill and Carrier 1983, pp. 31–32, 37, fig. 9; Garb 1984, pp. 350–51, fig. 2; Nicolaus 1984, p. 47, ill.; Weinberg 1984, pp. 14–15, 17, fig. 11; Wernick 1984, p. 130; Pelfrey and Pelfrey 1985, pp. 158, 308, fig. 6.18 (rev. ed., pp. 157, 307, fig. 6.13); Ackerman 1986a, pp. 62, 117, 218–19, no. 162, ill. (rev. French ed., pp. 60, 260–61, no. 162, ill.); Ackerman 1986b, p. 83; Ackerman 1986c, pp. 79–80, fig. 19; Le Pichon 1986a, p. 115, ill.; Ariès and Duby 1987–91, vol. 5, p. 274, ill.; Edwards 1987, p. 31, fig. 28; Munsterberg 1988, p. 41, fig. 2; Nochlin 1988, pp. 11–14, fig. 6 (repr. in Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1991, pp. 21–25, pl. 6); Berlin 1989, p. 363, fig. 434; Brooks 1989, pp. 74, 77, fig. 10 (English ed., p. 16, fig. 11); Bugner 1976–89, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 163–64, fig. 118; Croutier 1989, p. 16, ill.; Gill 1989, pp. 297–98, 301, fig. 204; Sauer 1990, pp. 44, 47, fig. 18; Bersson 1991, pp. 376–77, fig. 9.30; Locke 1991, pp. 271, 273, fig. 3 (repr. in Dellamora and Fischlin 1997, pp. 167–68, fig. 7.1); Weinberg 1991, pp. 87, 146, pls. 85, 90; Brentjes 1992, pp. 12–13, fig. 3; Koch-Hillebrecht 1992, p. 58, ill.; Luderin 1992, p. 144; Roach 1992, p. 179, fig. R7 (repr. in Pollock 1998, pp. 61–63, fig. 7); Gost 1993, p. 38, ill.; Beaudan 1994, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 2–4; McLerran 1994, pp. 11–13, fig. 3; Toorawa 1994, pp. 20–25; Mackenzie 1995, p. 46; Deaville 1996, pp. 168, 185, fig. 3; Leppert 1996, pp. 236–40, fig. 9.7, pl. 17; Lewis 1996, pp. 113–15, pl. 11; Stockholm 1996, p. 25, ill.; Williamstown 1996–97, p. 65; Salzburg 1997, p. 82, fig. 8; Scherer 1998, pp. 18–20; Bordeaux–New York–Pittsburgh 2000–2001, pp. 23, 132, 140, 155; Lemaire 2000, p. 242; Yeazell 2000, pp. 63, 114, fig. 21; Leppert 2001, pp. 268–70, ill.; DelPlato 2002, p. 81, fig. 3.12; Mileaf 2002, pp. 48–49, fig. 18; Assante 2003, p. 19, fig. 5; Bohrer 2003, pp. 46–48, fig. 3; Vienna 2003–4, p. 86, fig. 8; Bersson 2004, p. 507, fig. 16.36; Hurd 2004, pp. 68–69, ill.; Leppert 2007, pp. 113–22, ill; Tromsø 2007, p. 28, fig. 7; Werbel 2007, p. 21, fig. 13; Gedo 2010, pp. 56–57, fig. 3.2; Painter 2010, pp. 54–55, fig. 4.8; Groningen 2010–11, pp. 89–90, fig. 3.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a moderate-weave linen (22 threads/cm), glue- or paste-lined to a bleached double warp and weft fabric (13 doubled threads/cm). The six-member, mortise-and-tenon stretcher has been replaced and stained to make it look older. The lining, which is structurally stable, was probably done by Beers Brothers in 1942. There is a small tear in the right background, and another repair is

evident near the window in the upper left, which explains the presence of the lining. Scattered fine drying traction crackle appears in the gray areas of the building and floor. Cracks in the upper right seem to be from a blow, and there is a fill in the upper left corner. Solvent abrasion is visible along the tops of prominent threads and in thin, wrinkled, dark passages of the small figural group at the left edge, and to a lesser extent in the seated group at the right. The wrinkled paint may be related to water reaction of the original canvas during the earlier glue lining. In 2010, the painting was cleaned to remove two layers of varnish: an upper synthetic resin layer applied in 1977 and a very discolored yellow natural resin layer, probably dating to near the time of the lining. There were no residues of original varnish. The painting was then varnished with a synthetic resin, and in painting was done in the old damages and abrasions.

The ground layers are off-white and presumably commercially applied. Underdrawing lines are visible in the thin flesh areas of the mother and child at the right, and appear to be executed in blue ink. Visible under low magnification but not with infrared reflectography, these lines seem to define only the hands and faces. The turban on the standing bearded figure at the left edge was originally painted dark gray, which is detectable due to abrasion of the upper white paint. The paint layer is thin and vehicular in consistency.

1. Nochlin 1983 first articulated the view that *Slave Market* presents an Orientalist view of masculine, European superiority and power, while in response, Ackerman contended that it can be read as an “abolitionist picture.” See Ackerman 1986c, p. 79; and Ackerman 1986a (rev. French ed., p. 260). Most later discussions similarly tend either to adopt or to oppose the Orientalist reading.
2. Beaudan 1994, p. 2.
3. Nochlin 1983, p. 125.
4. Nerval 1851; reprinted in Guillaume and Pichois 1984, vol. 1, p. 324: “Les marchands offraient de les faire déshabiller, ils leur ouvraient les lèvres pour que l’on vît les dents, ils les faisaient marcher, et faisaient valoir surtout l’élasticité de leur poitrine.”
5. A 159.
6. Strahan 1881, n.p. Despite the difference in their social status, however, their sexual status is nearly equivalent, as the figure in *Cleopatra and Caesar* is only marginally more clothed.
7. A 79.
8. Ackerman 1986a (rev. French ed., p. 234, no. 79). In his text, however, he seems to discuss it, confusingly, as an autograph work.
9. Mantz 1867, p. 531: “Si l’acheteur se décide, que pourra-t-il faire d’une femme en ivoire? . . . Cette préciosité de l’exécution s’accommode assez bien d’une certaine mièvrerie dans la pensée et d’un dessin pauvre et maniéré.”
10. Du Camp 1867, p. 284: “*Le Marché d’esclaves* est une

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.¹ 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),² 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