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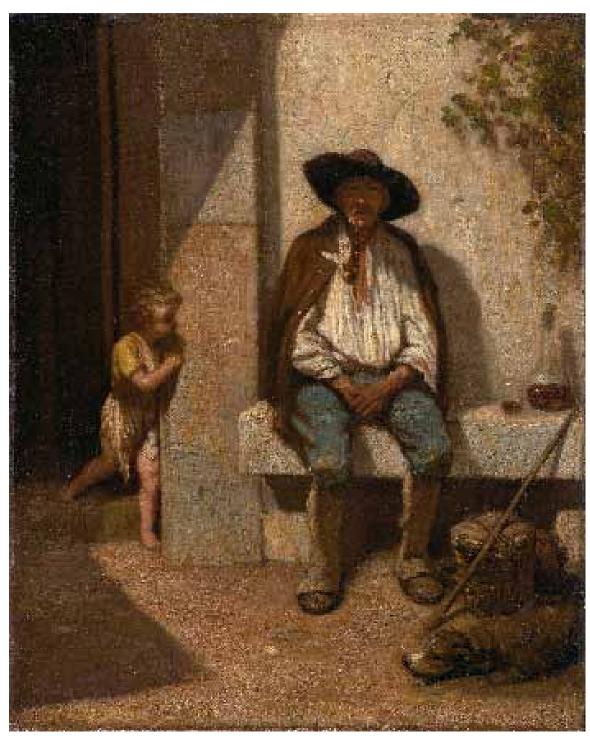
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Details:

(cat. 154)

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 PRECEDING PAGE 2: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Snake Charmer



106

106 | Italian Peasant 1842

Oil on canvas, 39.7 x 31.8 cm Lower left: DECAMPS 1842 1955.702

In November 1834, the journal *L'Artiste*, whose writers championed Decamps, announced the artist's impending departure to Italy: "Decamps, who, even today, after his triumphs at the last Salon, is as indif-

ferent to fame as at the time of his first debut, is going, for many years perhaps, to ask of Sicily a refuge against winters and against ministers who will again be tempted to pursue him with offers of the Legion of Honor." The artist got only as far as Rome, however; by April 1835, he had set up a studio and was fraternizing with Ingres's students—though not the master himself—at the French Academy. He returned to Paris by the following November, as noted by *L'Artiste*, which recalled the artist's "beautiful studies" from his earlier travels in Asia Minor, adding with regret, "We

would prefer that he had profited from his time in Italy by studying customs and faces there." ² Italy, unlike the Near East, "did not completely fulfill his aptitudes and tastes," as an early biographer later observed. ³ If his trip to Italy, the locus of classicism, was motivated by his desire to be a history painter—an aspiration that haunted him throughout his career—Decamps gravitated toward the picturesque and anecdotal in his Italian subjects.

Italian Peasant, painted some seven years after Decamps's return to France, is typical of his Italian genre scenes, many of which depict solitary figures drawn from a familiar repertoire of types—"his somnolent lazzaroni, his condottieri no less ferocious than Arnauts, his beggars in rags."4 These works recall the Italian genre scenes popularized in the Salons of the 1820s by the Swiss painter Louis-Léopold Robert (1794-1835).5 Decamps might well have been responding to the vogue for such subjects, which gained added currency following Robert's untimely death in 1835 and a retrospective that followed. To that point, it has been suggested that Decamps modeled the pose of the seated peasant after the central figure in Robert's Funeral of the Eldest Son of Roman Peasants, a work that was exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1831 (1831; Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Genoa).6 Such artistic borrowings were not unusual for Decamps throughout his career. His Italian subjects, though, lack the emphasis on such picturesque details as costume that characterizes Robert's works as well as the hard-edged precision of the Swiss artist's style.

The present work is a variant of an earlier composition by Decamps, A Beggar Counting his Money (1833; Musée du Louvre, Paris), which similarly focuses on a lone figure seated against a white wall. Such walls, whose surfaces Decamps exploits for the play of light and shadow, recur in his imagery, from the Italian village evoked here to the ancient streets of Smyrna that serve as a backdrop for his Orientalist subjects. In Italian Peasant, the wall, rendered with layers of thick, opaque paint, acquires an almost physical presence, recalling a nineteenth-century description of the "solidity of tone" characteristic of his works.7 In 1846, the critic Théophile Thoré questioned Decamps's predilection for such heavily layered surfaces in his review of Decamps's Salon submissions: "One can build a house like this, even in a painting; but how can one apply this process to the air and the water?"8 Yet, Decamps's technique inspired an evocative passage written by the Goncourt brothers on the occasion of the artist's 1855 retrospective, in which the present work was included: "This wall, whitewashed and re-whitewashed with quick lime... Decamps's brushes trowel it, they build it, they render it... and suddenly, the wall, the whole of the wall itself, is on the canvas."9

Citing Decamps' Italian imagery in 1861, Marius Chaumelin recalled this work as "a *Peasant*, sitting on a bench and smoking his pipe with the placidity of an Italian beggar." ¹⁰ By the time that Sterling Clark acquired this work in 1944, it had lost its association with Decamps's Italian genre subjects and was titled simply *The Traveller*. Clark, who owned four paintings by Decamps, once declared that he would prefer a "fine Decamps" over a work by Delacroix. ¹¹ KCG

PROVENANCE Émile Gaillard (by 1855–1904, his sale, Georges Petit, Paris, 7 June 1904, no. 10, ill., as *Paysan italien*, sold to Arnold and Tripp); [Arnold and Tripp, Paris, from 1904]; [Wildenstein, New York, sold to Clark, 1 Nov. 1944, as *Le Voyageur*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1944–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1855, p. 295, no. 2879, as *Paysan italien*, lent by Gaillard fils; Williamstown 1956a, pl. S-17, as *The Pedlar*; Williamstown 1984a, pp. 40–41, no. 10, ill., as *The Wayfarer*.

REFERENCES Moreau 1869, p. 165, as *Paysan Italien*; Clément 1886, p. 83; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 33, ill., as *The Traveler*; Mosby 1977, vol. 1, pp. 174–75, vol. 2, pp. 617–18, no. 469, pl. 59A, as *Italian Peasant*.

TECHNICAL REPORT The weave of the support linen is visibly distorted out-of-square in the upper half of the image. This may indicate that the artist stretched the canvas. Prominent irregular threads can be seen in the surface texture, possibly enhanced by the glue lining, especially as the secondary canvas has the same weave (19 threads/cm) as the original. The painting is presently expanded 0.5 cm on all four sides; this was probably done to fit the replaced mortise-and-tenon stretcher, or to allow full image visibility when framed. Linen strips now protect the brittle fabric of the tacking edges from fraying further. The lining dates prior to 1944, as the 1945 treatment by De Wild involved only cleaning. Some traction cracks appear to be filled, and small deposits of hazy over-fill can be seen near some locations. The painting was partially cleaned in 1983, when earlier abrasion was noted in several locations, as well as inpainting on three edges. Scattered remains of original dark glazes, seen under magnification as deposits in the paint interstices, punctuate the weave impression. In ultraviolet light, a faint residue of natural resin coating is still detectable, along with the 1983 retouchings, in the thin dark outlines of costumes and the left shadow area.

The ground layer is an off-white color, seen beneath the many scattered paint-layer traction cracks. Several small changes in the paint film are recorded with infrared reflectography, such as the outline of the proper left shoulder of the main figure. Old tack holes can be seen along the left edge, confirming the inclusion of the tacking edges in the present image dimension. The presence of an underdrawing is assumed due to scattered deposits of charcoal in the paint, although lines were not detected in infrared reflectography. The image is created in a peculiarly layered structure. which in reflected or specular light produces uneven raised areas in the light-colored, thicker brushwork. The lowest layer appears to be a glaze of warm brown underpaint. Thick opaque colors were then laid on locally for the light passages, leaving the lower layer visible to represent the shadows and folds. The thicker, light-colored applications were then covered with toned glazes to enhance the colors. The background was finished around the figure, although some details, such as the now abraded pipe, were clearly added over completed passages.

- 1. L'Artiste 1834, p. 208: "Decamps, qui, toujours aussi insouciant de la renommée aujourd'hui même, après ses triomphes du Salon dernier, que lors de ses premiers débuts, s'en va, pour plusieurs années peut-être, demander à la Sicile un refuge contre les hivers et contre les ministres qui seraient encore tentés de le poursuivre de leurs propositions de croix d'honneur."
- 2. L'Artiste 1835, p. 208: "belles études"; "Nous aimons mieux qu'il ait profité de son séjour en Italie pour en étudier les moeurs et la physionomie." For details of his travels in Italy, see Mosby 1977, vol. 2, pp. 229–30n13.
- Clément 1886, p. 20: "ne répondit pas non plus d'une manière complète à ses aptitudes et à ses goûts."
- 4. Chaumelin 1861, p. 33: "ses lazzaroni somnolents, ses condottieri non moins farouches que des Arnautes, ses mendiants déguenillés." The Arnauts were inhabitants of Albania, specifically those who served as soldiers in the Turkish army during the Ottoman Empire.
- 5. On the influence of Robert in Decamps's work, see Mosby 1977, vol. 1, pp. 139-41, 174, 182.
- 6. Mosby 1977, vol. 1, p. 174.
- 7. Moreau 1869, p. xiv: "solidité de ton."
- 8. Thoré 1846, p. 98: "On peut bâtir ainsi une maison, même en peinture; mais comment appliquer ce procédé à l'air et à l'eau?"
- 9. Goncourt and Goncourt 1893: "ce mur blanchi et reblanchi à la chaux vive . . . les pinceaux de Decamps le truellent; ils le maçonnent, ils le crépissent. . . . Et soudain, le mur, le mur lui-même, est tout entier sur la toile."
- 10. Chaumelin 1861, p. 33: "un Paysan, assis sur un banc et fumant sa pipe avec la placidité d'un lazzarone."
- 11. RSC Diary, 9 Nov. 1940.

107 | The Poacher c. 1847

Oil on canvas, 24.1 x 18.6 cm Lower left: DECAMPS 1955.700

Scenes of the hunt recur in Decamps's imagery, from his earliest works, which recall his "rustic apprenticeship," as he described his youth in Picardy, to those produced at the end of his career, probably inspired by his hunting expeditions in the forest of Fontainebleau.1 His contemporaries recognized that his paintings reflected his dedication to the sport: "Decamps was himself a Nimrod too passionate and too assiduous not to understand, through his experience, the smallest details of modern hunting. It's based on his personal memories that he has presented hunters, dogs, and game."2 The figure of the poacher appears in his earliest hunting scenes, described by a nineteenth-century source as "familiar landscapes animated by the figures of woodcutters, poachers, or gamekeepers." The Clark picture, though, belongs among Decamps's mature works, executed during his stay in the village of Chailly-en-Brière in Fontainebleau in 1846-47.

During this period, Decamps deliberately removed himself from the art scene in Paris, an expression of his disaffection with the hierarchy of the Academy, following his rejection by the jury for the Salon of 1846. Mosby describes the artist's Fontainebleau sojourn as a time of "isolation and frustration" and suggests that Decamps's preference for single-figure compositions, such as The Poacher, as well as another contemporaneous hunting piece, Lying in Wait (L'Affût) (1847; Musée du Louvre, Paris), reflects his own feeling of remoteness.4 This autobiographical reading, however, fails to consider the single-figure compositions that Decamps produced both before and after his self-imposed exile from Paris. The hunter in The Poacher first appeared silhouetted in the foreground of a lithograph from 1829, Return from the Hunt (fig. 107.1), whose composition Decamps repeated in a painting of the following year, The Gamekeeper (Musée du Périgord, Périgueux). In The Poacher, painted more than a decade later, Decamps narrows his focus, notably eliminating the other two hunters in the background. Decamps's images of lone hunters, as well as other solitary figures, which date from after 1844, reflect his increasing preference for simplified figural