Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Gustave Bauernfeind (Sulz am Neckar 1848 - Jerusalem 1904)

A Well in Jaffa

Watercolour.
Signed and inscribed G. Bauernfeind / Jaffa at the lower right.
Faintly inscribed and dated Brunnen in Jaffa Juni 18(8?)0 at the lower right.
Further inscribed Brunnen in Jaffa on the verso.
357 x 480 mm. (14 x 18 7/8 in.)

Gustave Bauernfeind visited Jaffa in 1880, during his first trip to Palestine. In a letter written from Beirut in January 1881, he noted that 'Two days before Christmas I took leave from Jerusalem and went to Jaffa, where I arrived in one piece by evening. After the stony wastes of Jerusalem, the luxuriant vegetation of Jaffa impressed me wonderfully, and you cannot conceive the magnificence of the orange gardens with their trees fairly bursting with hanging golden fruit. Although I had to wait for the steamer for several days (over Christmas) I could not get a stitch of work done, as I would be immediately waylaid by acquaintances.' Although this letter gives the impression that Bauernfeind's first trip to Jaffa was in December 1880, he must have visited the town somewhat earlier in the year, since it was the main port of entry for visitors to Jerusalem. An earlier stay in Jaffa is further suggested by the date faintly penciled on the present sheet, which seems to read as June 1880. Bauernfeind returned to Jaffa on his second trip to Palestine, between 1884 and 1887, and was there again briefly in 1889, during his third trip. When the artist settled in Palestine for good in 1896, he lived in the German colony in Jerusalem, although he also seems to have spent some time in Jaffa.

Bauernfeind produced a number of watercolour drawings of specific sites in Jaffa and Damascus; places where only a handful of Orientalist painters had worked. As one recent scholar has noted, 'these studies represent architectural documentation that was drawn up at the exact location of the subject and thus are highly interesting from the point of view of architectural history…Bauernfeind's chief concern all his life in his work was to produce topographically exact representations; he was not interested in merely producing a likeness of the view but rather worked with photographic precision.'

While Bauernfeind produced a number of paintings of scenes in Jaffa, the present sheet appears to be unrelated to any surviving painting by the artist. Stylistically comparable watercolours by the artist include several examples in the collection of the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich, including a Street in Damascus and a Fountain in Damascus, both dated 1899, as well as a Coffee House in Jerusalem, dated 1880, and an undated view of David Street in Jerusalem.

Provenance:

Private collection, New York.

Artist description:

Born in the province of Badem-Württemberg in southern Germany, Gustav Bauernfeind was initially trained as an architect and became a painter relatively late in life. Inspired by a trip to Italy in 1873-1874, he abandoned his architectural career in favour of working as a landscape painter, at first producing scenes of Swiss and Italian views and cities. Looking further afield, he decided to travel to the Near East in search of more exotic subjects, and began making plans to do so in 1879. Bauernfeind made three trips to the Near East - in 1880-1881, between 1884 and 1887 and finally in 1888-1889 - before returning to Munich in 1890. Six years later, however, he left Germany for good to settle in Palestine, where he lived for the eight years until his death. Although Bauernfeind is today regarded as undoubtedly one of the most significant and gifted Orientalist artists, he was singularly inept at self-promotion and struggled to make a living for much of his career.

Perhaps as a result of his training as an architect, Bauernfeind was particularly interested in the streets, buildings, temples and other urban architecture of the sites he visited in Cairo, Jerusalem, Jaffa and Damascus, and would often travel with a camera. Yet, as one modern scholar has noted, 'Bauernfeind had no intention of glamorizing reality, nor did he seek only elaborate or monumental structures. He concentrated on genuine paintings of every-day life, on forgotten and little-known corners, markets and narrow lanes – in other words, the scene as he witnessed it.' The artist would faithfully reproduce these views in watercolour before enlarging them in paintings peopled with exotic figures of Arabs, Jews and others.