

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Théodore VALERIO (Herserange 1819 - Vichy 1879)

A Bashi-Bazouk from Upper Egypt

Watercolour, pen and brown ink and brown wash, over traces of a pencil underdrawing, on light brown paper.

Signed and dated VALERIO 1854 SILISTRIA at the lower right.

Stamped with the Valerio vente stamp (Lugt 2476) at the lower left.

Inscribed and numbered Le negre [?] / 02886500 on a label pasted onto the old backing board.

453 x 277 mm. (17 7/8 x 10 7/8 in.) [sheet]

This drawing of a bashi-bazouk was drawn in 1854 at an Ottoman military camp in Silistria, a town on the banks of the Danube in what is today northeastern Bulgaria. A bashi-bazouk was an irregular soldier of the Ottoman army. Although usually of Albanian, Kurdish or Circassian origins, they could be of any ethnicity. During the early 1850s Théodore Valério was engaged on a series of studies of the various peoples of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. In 1854, the date of the present sheet, Silistria found itself on the front lines during the Crimean War; indeed, the Ottoman-ruled town was besieged by Russian forces between April and June of that year.

This watercolour is closely related to, and may be a study for, an etching and drypoint, of somewhat smaller dimensions, entitled *Bachi-Bozoucq de la haute Egypte (camp de Silistrie)*. The print was reproduced as Plate 2 in Valério's album *Les Populations des provinces danubiennes en 1854*, published in Paris around 1855.

Artist description:

Of Italian origins, Théodore Valério was born in the Moselle region of France and entered the studio of Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet in Paris in 1834. The two artists soon became friends, and in 1836 travelled together on a sketching tour of Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Valério made his Salon debut in 1838, at the age of nineteen. Active as a painter, engraver and draughtsman, he produced landscapes, genre scenes and military subjects. Although he lived in Paris, he was an inveterate traveller, and in the 1840s and 1850s made extensive tours of Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Romania, as well as the Balkans and Turkey. He made numerous studies of the exotic costumes of the people he saw on his travels, as well as genre scenes, and many of these were published in the form of albums of lithographs or etchings. During the Crimean War Valério was attached to the Ottoman army of Omar Pasha, and produced numerous drawings and watercolours of the conflict, notably the siege of Sebastopol. Valério exhibited at the Paris Salons between 1838 and 1879, and also showed a large group of watercolours at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855, to considerable acclaim. The artist spent much of his later years in Brittany, which he had first visited in 1843, and also spent some time in England before his death in 1879. The following year, a sale of some of the contents of his studio, including sixty paintings and numerous drawings, was held in Paris.

As one modern scholar has written of Valério's drawings, 'En même temps qu'un type, chacun de ses personnages est un portrait. La main est légère, les formes harmonieuses, la ligne pure autant que la touche franche et spirituelle. C'est une riche moisson pour la grâce comme pour l'étrangeté, avec la saveur piquante de l'inconnu.' An important group of drawings by Valério - numbering around one hundred pencil drawings and eighty watercolours, executed between 1851 and 1854 in Eastern Europe - was purchased by the State at the Exposition Universelle of 1855 and is today in the collection of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.