

19th Century FRENCH SCHOOL

Study of a Soldier in Albanian or Greek Costume

Pencil and watercolour.

244 x 121 mm. (9 5/8 x 4 3/4 in.)

The present sheet depicts an Greek or Albanian soldier, perhaps an Arnavut (or Arnaut), a warlike mountain people from the region of Epirus, in the northwestern part of the Ottoman Empire. As described by a 19th century visitor to Cairo, 'Their costume is artistically disheveled, their costly weapons as glittering as they are inoffensive, their proud and disdainful poses, their slightest gestures, everything about them seems to have been studied in its effect.'

Albanian soldiers were to be found throughout the Near East and were particularly noted for their elaborate dress. The poet Lord Byron, who employed a number of Arnavuts as his personal guards,

praised their costume as ‘the most magnificent in the world, consisting of long, white kilt, gold-worked cloak, crimson velvet gold laced jacket and waistcoat, silver mounted pistols and daggers’. A contemporary of Byron’s further remarked that ‘The Albanians or Arnauts...are extremely fond of gold and silver ornaments in their dress...The wealthier Arnauts have the outer vest of velvet and gold, richly interwoven with elegant ornaments...The breeches which are white are tied below the knees with a coloured garter...’