

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jean-Léon Gérôme
(Vesoul 1824 – 1904 Paris)

A seated man in prayer

Pencil on paper
25.4 x 19.1 cm (10 x 7 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Suzanne and Aimé Morot, the daughter and son-in-law of the artist;

By descent to their son, Aimé-Léon Morot;

By whom sold, Sotheby's, Paris, 27 June 2002, lot 187;

From where acquired by the present owner.



This finely worked study shows a bearded man seated cross-legged, head bowed, hands resting on his knees, absorbed in prayer. The folds of his robe are carefully described in delicate hatching and the slight tilt of the head beneath the turban conveys a quiet, meditative dignity.

The drawing cannot yet be connected with certainty to a single painting but Gérôme employed such figures in several compositions exploring themes of Islamic devotion and architectural grandeur. These include *Evening Prayer, Cairo* (fig. 1) and *Prayers in the Mosque* (fig. 2), both of which depict groups of worshippers absorbed in ritual before either monumental interiors or spectacular backdrops. The present sheet is characteristic of the preparatory work underlying these canvases, where Gérôme studied individual poses in isolation before combining them into complex ensembles.



Fig. 1, Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Evening Prayer, Cairo*, 1865, oil on panel, 50 x 81 cm, Private Collection

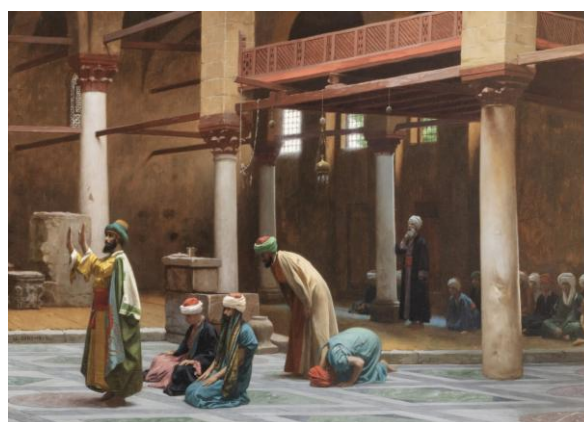


Fig. 2, Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Prayers in the Mosque*, oil on canvas, 66 x 93 cm, Private Collection

Such drawings reveal Gérôme's method: rather than improvising from imagination, he built his compositions from a repertoire of precisely observed figure studies. Here the subtle variations of line weight used to suggest the folds of cloth and the downward focus of the sitter are evidence of his academic training, tempered by a sensitivity to stillness and inner absorption.

Whether or not it relates directly to *Evening Prayer*, *Prayers in the Mosque* or another composition, the sheet exemplifies Gérôme's enduring fascination with Islamic worship as a subject: moments of silence and humility rendered with the same exacting care he devoted to architectural detail and costume.