

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Charles-Théodore Frère
(Paris 1814 – 1888)

The watering hole at sunset

Signed lower left: *TH. FRÈRE. BEY*

Watercolour on paper

28.6 x 46.7 cm. (11 ¼ x 18 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Andrew Cunningham Ware (1945-2025);

By whom posthumously sold, Freemans, Philadelphia, 4 November 2025, lot 73.



Dazzling Nile sunsets were a subject of predilection for Charles-Théodore Frère (fig. 1), the most talented of the French Orientalist landscapists. This watercolour is a particularly beautiful example. Remarkable for both its impressive scale and exceptional state of preservation, the work displays Frère's characteristic mastery of luminous atmosphere.

Backlit by a hazy dusk sky of yellow and orange hues, a train of camels and buffalo descend to the pool's edge, guided by their drovers. They approach a group of women filling jars at the water, creating a gentle narrative of daily Egyptian life. Acacias line the far bank and frame the composition, while the faint silhouette of palm trees and a distant minaret anchor the scene on the horizon. Overhead, a flock of birds wheels in the fading light. Though the figures and vegetation are rendered largely in outline, the work conveys a striking sense of depth and spatial recession, capturing the quiet poetry of the Nile at the end of the day.



Fig. 1, Charles-Théodore Frère, *Sunset on the Nile*, oil on canvas, 113 x 183 cm, Private Collection

Frère's fascination with the 'Orient' began during a prolonged stay in Algeria between 1836 and 1839. Upon returning to Paris, he exhibited two views of Algiers at the Salon. From 1851 to 1854 he travelled extensively through Egypt, Greece, Turkey and the broader Near East. Of these regions, Egypt resonated with him most deeply. In 1853 he established a studio in Cairo, where he quickly gained the favour of the Pasha's court and was granted the honorific title of *bey*, a distinction that appears alongside his signature in the present work. This suggests that the watercolour was created during his Cairo period in the 1850s, and may well have been intended for a patron within the Ottoman elite.

From 1839 to 1887 Frère exhibited over one hundred and twenty North African, Egyptian and Near Eastern landscapes, becoming one of the most prolific and influential of the Orientalist painters of his day. Notable for their vivid and luminous palette, Frère's works

were immensely popular with European collectors of the 19th century. He was lauded by artists and critics too, praised by Claude Monet and Théophile Gautier alike.