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CLAUDE-MARIE DUBUFE AND STUDIO
(Paris 1790-1864 La Selle-Saint-Cloud)

*PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN,
BUST LENGTH, WEARING A TURBAN
(likely Hassan El Berberi,
keeper to Mehmet Ali Pasha's giraffe)*

oil on canvas, unlined
56 x 46 cm; 22 x 18 in.

Provenance

Private collection, France.

Literature

W. Elliott, "An Exotic Visitor to Paris: Context and Possible Identities for Claude-Marie Dubufe's Portrait". *Colnaghi Studies* 6 (2020): pp. 148-61 [reproduced p. 159].

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The sitter in this striking portrait has long been identified as Hassan El Berberi, a man of Bedouin origin and the chief keeper of the giraffe sent by Mehmet Ali, the Ottoman Pasha of Egypt, to King Charles X of France. El Berberi and three other keepers arrived in Marseille with the giraffe, a female from Nubia on 31 October 1826, after journeying by boat from Alexandria. As the animal was so tall, a hole had to be cut in the deck of the ship through which she could place her neck. Two attendants returned immediately to Egypt but El Berberi, with his Sudanese assistant Atir, continued north to Paris after resting in Marseille over the winter. Being the first giraffe ever seen in France, the party caused quite a stir over the course of their nine-hundred-kilometre trek to the capital, especially so since the animal had been fitted out with shoes and a two-part yellow coat by the naturalist Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hillaire. The animal was finally presented to Charles X on 8 July 1827 at the chateau of Saint-Cloud, before being settled at the Jardin des Plantes, which was at the time the site of the royal menagerie.

The giraffe's arrival in Paris caused a sensation, inspiring Honoré de Balzac to pen a story about her, and Nicholas Huet the Younger and Jacques Raymond Brascassat (fig. 1), amongst many others, to paint her. *La mode à la giraffe* gripped the French nation, with women arranging their hair in towering styles, and spotted fabrics becoming the fashion.

The present work is a high-quality copy of Claude-Marie Dubufe's original presumed portrait of Hasan, acquired by the Musée du Louvre in 2017 (fig. 2). Dubufe, a now little-known Parisian society portraitist of exceptional technical ability, studied under Jacques-Louis David and enjoyed great critical acclaim during his lifetime. After exhibiting a pair of allegories of emotions at the salon of 1827 (see figs 3-4), Dubufe's fame reached new heights, and the artist soon took up a large number of students, none of whom, however, enjoyed an illustrious career.

Dubufe's portrait elicited a surprisingly large number of generally good quality, contemporary copies, numbered at six in total. Of these, this portrait is the best in terms of quality. Due to the existence of several high-quality copies after the original, and the fact that Claude-Marie Dubufe ran a successful and widely respected art school, it has been suggested that the canvas now in the Louvre may have been used by Dubufe as a teaching instrument, and that these replicas were executed by his pupils.

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Fig. 1. Jacques Raymond Brascassat, *Giraffe Crossing*, 1827, Beaune, Musée de Beaux-Arts



Fig. 2. Claude-Marie Dubufe, *Portrait of a Gentleman, Bust Length, Wearing a Turban* (Likely Hassan El Berberi, Keeper to Mehmet Ali Pasha's Giraffe) Paris, Musée du Louvre

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Fig. 3. Claude-Marie Dubufe, *Regrets*, 1826-27, Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum.



Fig. 4. Claude-Marie Dubufe, *Rememberances*, 1826-27, Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum.