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Tomás Moragas
Rest of a Moorish Caravan

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TOMÁS MORAGAS

Girona 1837–1906 Barcelona

REST OF A MOORISH CARAVAN

Signed lower left: "Tomás Moragas"

Oil on linen

72 × 144 cm (28 1/3 × 56 1/2 in.)

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The Catalan painter Tomás Moragas (1837–1906) was among the leading Spanish Orientalists of the 19th century, renowned for his genre scenes and evocative landscapes. Though born in Girona, Moragas relocated with his family to Barcelona at an early age, where he enrolled at the Escuela de la Lonja, the city's academy of fine arts. It was here that he met Marià Fortuny, with whom he built a life-long friendship that would profoundly shape his artistic trajectory and aesthetic. In 1858, in the company of Fortuny, Moragas arrived in Rome, a city he would return to many times over the course of his career. While in the Eternal City, the Catalan artist was immersed in a vibrant community of painters interested in depicting the Orient, even though few had personally travelled to North Africa or the Middle East. Drawing from a shared artistic milieu, as well as the study of works by Fortuny and other artist-travellers, the exchange of travel narratives, and an acute sensitivity to the stylistic trends of the time, Moragas and his contemporaries created compositions of such realism and atmospheric poignancy that their Orientalist scenes often appear drawn from firsthand observation.

Rest of a Moorish Caravan depicts a group of Oriental figures resting with camels and horses before a mosque in a verdant rural landscape. In the distance, mountains and a stretch of coastline extend across the horizon. The composition carefully balances the figural richness of the foreground with the breadth of a panoramic view, combining topographical suggestion with the formal clarity of academic realism. The pervasive and even light allows for a detailed rendering of the scene, while the presence of the pearlescent mosque situates the composition within the broader Orientalist fascination with Islamic architecture. More specifically, the square-shaft minaret, typical of the Maghrebi region, along with the lush coastline, suggests a Moroccan rural setting. Clothing, animals, and architectural motifs are carefully delineated, reflecting Moragas's training in both figure and landscape painting. The Moors, draped in long tunics and turbans, relax and engage in quiet conversation. Meanwhile, the horses, with their sleek coats, and the Arabian camels, saddled and heavily laden, are depicted in a moment of rest.

Camels not only play an important role in the narrative of the scene but also offer a compelling pretext for the artist to showcase his skill in the depiction of animals. Repeated in multiple poses and viewed from varying angles, the camel becomes an occasion of painterly virtuosity to which Moragas freely devotes himself. Thanks to a related work by the same artists depicting camels in diverse stances against an undefined, greenish backdrop, we know of the artist's sustained interest in the animal's anatomy.

The exotic overtones that permeate Moragas' oeuvre, combined with his mastery of academic realism, were key to his broad commercial appeal. He was part of a wider circle of Spanish and Italian painters, among them Antonio Fabrès, whose work was deeply shaped by the influential legacy of Fortuny. Starting from the end of the 18th century and throughout the entire 19th century, the imperial ventures of Britain and France played a central role in rendering the Near East increasingly visible and accessible to Western audiences. This was achieved through a variety of channels, including Great Exhibitions, photography, ethnographic studies, travel literature, and popular translation of literary works such as *The Arabian Nights*. These developments

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collectively shaped the West's understanding of, and appetite for, the exotic—an appetite that Moragas' paintings, with their depictions of distant yet legible "other" worlds, directly addressed. Within this cultural context, his works found a natural place in the homes of Western collectors.

One of Moragas's greatest accomplishments is to be found in his ability to seamlessly integrate carefully studied Orientalist motifs within the framework of academic realism. His paintings are marked by a harmonious balance between exotic subject matter and a disciplined compositional structure, resulting in works of enduring elegance. A quiet embodiment of these qualities, the present work attests to Moragas' commitment to realism, even when depicting imagined or idealised scenes. The earthy path, extending from the foreground into the depth of the landscape, invites the viewer to follow its course with the eyes and to embark on an imaginary journey that culminates in the tranquil, blue expanse of the distant gulf.

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