

COLNAGHI



Alberto Pasini,
*Passage d'une caravane à travers les défilés qui
séparent la Perse des grandes steppes du Khorassan*

COLNAGHI

ALBERTO PASINI

(1826 Busseto, Parma – Cavoretto, Torino 1899)

PASSAGE D'UNE CARAVANE À TRAVERS LE DÉLFIÉS QUI SÉPARENT LA PERSE DES GRANDES STEPPES DU KHORASSAN, 1859

Signed and dated lower left: "A. Pasini 1859".

Oil on canvas

118.5 x 198 cm; 46 5/8 x 78 in.

Provenance

Monsieur Delon, Paris, 1859;
Wilhelm I, King of Wurttemberg, 1859;
Private Collection.

Literature

A. Houssaye, Salon de 1859, in 'Le Monde illustré', n.285, Paris 1859;
J. Claretie, in 'L'Indépendance', n. 170, Paris, 19 June 1878;
Burraschino, *Arte e Artisti. Alberto Pasini*, in 'Fanfulla', n.275, p.3, Rome, 9 October 1878;
E. Seletti, *La città di Busseto*, p. 293, Milano 1883;
A. Ferrero, *Alberto Pasini, l'uomo e l'artista*, in 'La vita italiana', p.30, Torino 1894-1895;
L. Arienti, *Alberto Pasini*, in 'La Gazzetta di Parma', n.352, p.1, 20 december 1899;
G. Carotti, *Artisti contemporanei. Alberto Pasini, in memoriam*, in 'Emporium', vol. X, n.59, p. 499, Bergamo, December 1899;
A. Belforti, *Alberto Pasini*, in 'L'Oriofiamma', p.25, Chieti 1900;
O. Roux, *Illustri Italiani contemporanei. Memorie giovanili autobiografiche*, p. 169, Firenze 1909-1910;
M. Calderini, *Alberto Pasini pittore*, p.27, Torino 1916;
D. Soresina, *Enciclopedia diocesana fidentina. I personaggi*, p.340, Fidenza 1961;
V. Botteri Cardoso, *Pasini*, p.251, plate 173.1, Genova 1991;
M.A. Fusco, *Orientalismo e richiami esotici*, in 'Pittori e Pittura dell'Ottocento Italiano', vol. V, pp. 98-99, Novara 1997-1999;
P. Serafini 2018, *La carriera artistica di Alberto Pasini*, in 'Pasini e l'Oriente', exh. cat., Silvana editoriale, pp. 27, colour plate pp.106-107, p. 176, Parma 2018.

Exhibited

Paris, Salon 1859, n. 2320, cat. p. 287;
Pasini e l'Oriente (Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Parma, 17 March - 1 July 2018), exh. cat. ed. by Paolo Serafini and Stefano Roffi (Silvana editoriale, 2018), cat. n.72, pp. 27, 106-107, 176.

COLNAGHI



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI

This extraordinary landscape painting by Italian Orientalist painter Alberto Pasini (Busseto, 1826 - Cavoretto, 1899) depicts an important episode in the Crimean War (1853-1856): the moment a French delegation journeyed into Persia to secure support for the allied forces. The episode dates to 1855. The previous year, France and England had joined the Ottoman Empire in its war against Russia, dispatching their navies to the Crimean Peninsula and laying siege to Sevastopol. To shore up support in the region, Russian delegates offered to return Afghan territories to Persia, in exchange for the country's neutrality. Fearing Russian influence on Shah Nasir al-Din, in July 1854 Napoleon III ordered the establishment of a permanent legation in Tehran and dispatched a French mission to Persia.

This French diplomatic mission would prove historic. Due to the Russian naval blockade in the Black Sea, the traditional route to Persia through Trebizond was rendered inaccessible. Thus, the delegation was compelled to approach Persia from the south, circumnavigating the Arabian Peninsula. This route posed great logistical challenges, however, by crossing hitherto little-known territories the delegation gained precious insights into the history, geography, and political situation of the region.

The French mission was led by Nicolas Prosper Bourée (1811-1886), French Minister plenipotentiary to Persia. It included anthropologist and novelist Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), a first secretary, two assistants, an attaché, two interpreters (*dragomans*), as well as many aides and drivers.

Alberto Pasini joined the mission as its documentary illustrator, following a recommendation from his friend, Théodore Chasseriau (1819-1856), who was originally ear-marked for the role but was forced to decline the invitation due to ill health. In his stead, Chasseriau recommended Pasini, a promising Italian artist with whom he shared a studio, and whose talent for landscape and Orientalist scenes he was quick to recognise.

Pasini had arrived in Paris in 1851 from Parma, where he had studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti and specialised in landscape painting. Following the first war of Italian Independence (in which he took part as a volunteer fighting for Modena), he sought refuge in Geneva and, subsequently, Paris. There, he was introduced to Eugène Cicéri (1813- 1890), a noted engraver, who hired him as a lithographer and in whose country house he became acquainted with the painters of the École de Fontainebleau (1852-53). Following this important encounter, Pasini began to practice *en plein air* painting and to study the fleeting effects of light and shadow on nature. Indeed, his skill in capturing light would become a trademark of Pasini's art, distinguishing him as one of the most accomplished among 19th century Orientalist painters.

When Pasini was offered the chance to accompany the French delegation to Persia, he immediately understood the significance of the occasion and seized the opportunity to enrich his formation and advance his career. The delegation embarked

COLNAGHI

on 10 March 1855 from Alexandria in Egypt, passed through Cairo, and descended to Suez aboard the *Victoria*, a British vessel belonging to the East India Company. From Suez, it paused at Jeddah and continued its journey around the Arabian Peninsula, crossing the Bab el Mandeb Strait. After pausing in Aden, Yemen and Muscat, Oman, the delegation began its ascent into the Gulf, crossing into modern-day Dubai, Qatar and Bahrain before entering Persia at Bouchir. From there, it travelled across the rugged and impassable Zagros mountains and reached Shiraz and Isfahan. After traversing the Dasht-e Kavir desert, the delegation finally entered Tehran on 2 July 1855.

Details of this historic mission are known thanks to Gobineau's memoirs *Trois ans en Asie (de 1855-1858)*, published in Paris in 1859. Equally enlightening are the works of Pasini, who meticulously documented the journey through personal notes, drawings and oil sketches realised on route and later published in two volumes under the title *Croquis d'Orient*. The journey made a profound impression on Pasini and marked a turning point in his art. The unique insights gained thanks to his travels allowed him to become a sensitive and perceptive interpreter of the colours and atmospheres of the Middle East, and one of the few Orientalist artist of his day to offer a truly original perspective, both in terms of composition and subject matter.

Following the conclusion of the Crimean war in March 1856, Pasini returned to Paris and immediately set to work converting his drawings and studies into large scale paintings and lithographs intended for the Salon. At the Salon of 1857, he showcased three Orientalist oil paintings and drawings; and, in 1859, he published twelve engravings based on his travels with Parisian publisher Joseph Lemercier. However, his great public breakthrough came with the exhibition of the present painting, *Passage d'une caravane à travers les défilés qui séparent la Perse des grandes steppes du Khorassan*, at the Salon of 1859.

This ambitious and innovative painting depicts a caravan crossing the rugged, inhospitable mountainous terrain that separates Persia from the vast steppes of Khorasan. The subject is inspired by a drawing sketched shortly after Pasini's arrival in Persia (pencil on paper, 16 x 22 cm, private collection) (Fig. 1). The composition could not be more striking, with its alternation of close ups and panoramic views punctuated by towering precipices, ravines, and verdant plains. At the summit of the pass, the viewer is presented with an expansive vista, stretching endlessly into a horizon marked by billowing clouds of dust and the interplay of light and shadow cast by dramatic cloud formations.

The depiction of the caravan is both artistically masterful and historically significant, mirroring Gobineau's description of the splendid and culturally diverse entourage that accompanied the French delegation. Pasini depicts a caravan composed of two guides leading the way, a "cavaz" sporting the characteristic red "tarbush", followed by a soldier armed with a spear and wearing a black headdress. He shows parade horses adorned with gold and silk trappings, preceding members of the delegation, who travel in comfortable red and blue tents. Further back are French and Persian servants, men leading spare horses, and a contingent of armed cavalymen under the command of the Shah's appointee (the "mahmandar").

COLNAGHI

What marks this painting's utter originality is Pasini's unparalleled skill in rendering space through composition and color, coupled with his artistic ingenuity in selecting viewpoints, and his ability to capture the transparency of air and the atmospheric nuances of distant lands. The innovative composition, which allocates significant space to the horizon, the kaleidoscopic caravan ascending the rugged terrain, and the ethereal atmosphere, simultaneously dynamic and suspended, with the swiftly moving clouds casting intricate patterns of light and shadow, mesmerised Salon attendees.

The painting garnered great public admiration and was reproduced in "Le Monde illustré" in an engraving by Charles Maurand. Almost overnight, Pasini was propelled into the ranks of the foremost Orientalist painters of his day, and his painting was acquired by William I, King of Württemberg, for the considerable sum of 2500 francs.

Although this success was followed by many others, clearly *Passage d'une caravane à travers les défilés qui séparent la Perse des grandes steppes du Khorassan* remained one of the artist's favourite works if, towards the end of his career, he made a smaller replica as a personal memento (Fig. 2). This painting contains, in essence, the same freshness, luminosity, and suspended atmosphere found in the earlier larger version. By then, these elements had become defining features of Pasini's art and sources of inspiration for many 19th century Orientalist painters.

Today, Pasini's works are housed in prestigious museums and private collections worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore; the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; the Musée d'Orsay, Paris; the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence and the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Palazzo Pitti, Florence; the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan and the Museo di Scienza e Tecnologia, Milan; the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Turin; and the Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza.

All of Pasini's larger canvases are now held in prominent museums and collections: "The Caravan of the Persian Shah" (Marzotto Collection, Rome) (Fig. 3), "A Caravan preparing to leave Shiraz for Isfahan" (Parma, Galleria Nazionale) (Fig. 4), "A Caravan Resting" (Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna) (Fig. 5), "Pasture on the route from Teheran to Tabriz" (Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts) (Fig. 6), and "The Door of the Mosque of Yni Djami in Istanbul" (Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts) (Fig. 7). The present painting is the only one of Pasini's large canvases to be still in a private collection and currently for sale.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 1 Alberto Pasini, *Passage d'une caravane à travers les défilés qui séparent la Perse des grandes steppes du Khorassan*, 1855. Pencil on paper, 16 x 22 cm, private collection.



Fig. 2 Alberto Pasini, *Passage d'une caravane à travers les défilés qui séparent la Perse des grandes steppes du Khorassan*. Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 73 cm, private collection.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 3 Alberto Pasini, *The Caravan of the Persian Shah*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 130 x 228 cm, Marzotto Collection, Rome.



Fig. 4 Alberto Pasini, *A Caravan preparing to leave Shiraz for Isfahan*, 1864 Oil on canvas, 119 x 203 cm. Galleria Nazionale, Parma.

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

BRUSSELS

COLNAGHI



Fig. 5 Alberto Pasini, *A Caravan Resting*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 119 x 203 cm. Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan.

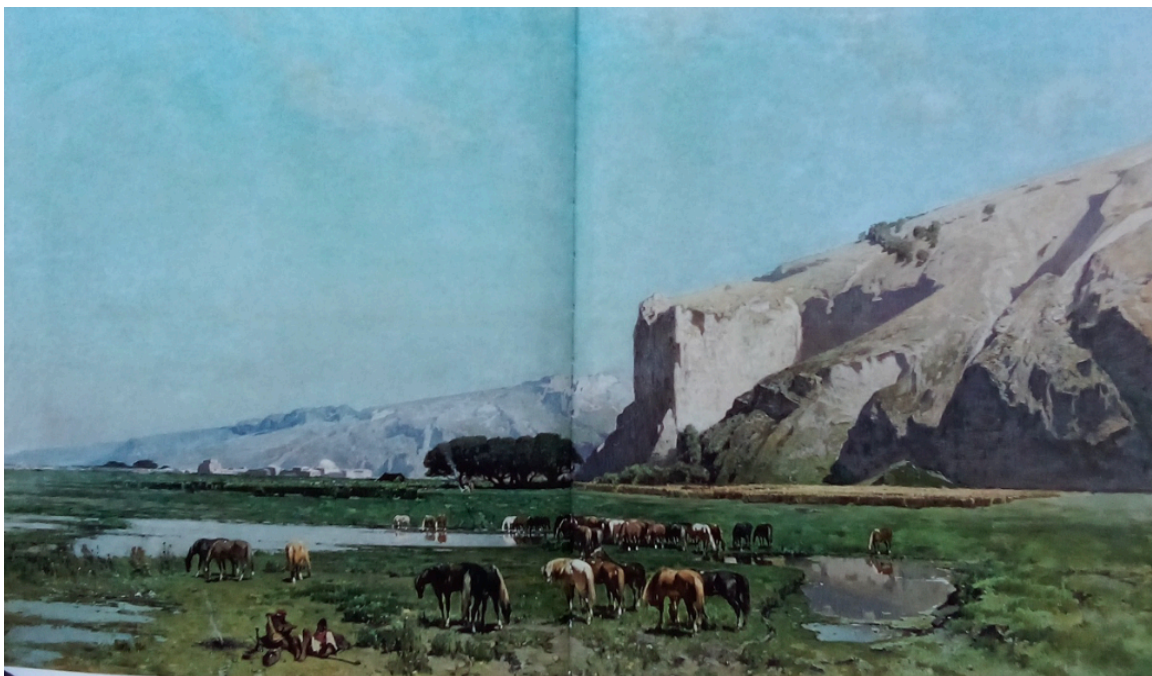


Fig. 6 Alberto Pasini, *Pasture on the route from Tehran to Tabriz*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 120 x 205 cm., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.

COLNAGHI



Fig. 7 Alberto Pasini, *The Door of the Mosque of Yni Diami in Istanbul*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 163 x 116 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com