

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Charles-Théodore Frère
(Paris 1814 – 1888)

Sunset on the Nile

Signed lower right: *TH. FRÈRE*

Inscribed on the old mount: *Souvenir du 12 Juillet / 1886. / J. Bouland à sa chère / Elève et amie J.L.*

Watercolour on paper

14 x 23 cm.

Provenance:

Madame J. Bouland, by 1886;

Gifted to J.L on 12th July 1886.



Dazzling Nile sunsets were a subject of predilection for Charles-Théodore Frère, the most talented of the French Orientalist landscapists. This small watercolour is a particularly beautiful example. Backlit by an orange sky, a small group of buffalo wade down to the water's edge, with a flock of birds wheeling overhead. Palm trees, dhows and low buildings on the far bank provide a backdrop. Despite all being rendered in silhouette, the composition has a definite feeling of depth and recession.

The watercolour can be linked to Frère's unusually large-scaled *Sunset on the Nile* shown at the Salon of 1877, though if anything it is even more intense, with the orange hues of the spectacular sunset taking up the entirety of the composition. Although the canvas depicts watercarriers and camels, rather than buffalo, the section of the Nile is almost the same. A third related composition was recently on the art market.¹



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

Frère first became fascinated by the 'Orient' during a lengthy stay in Algeria from 1836 to 1839. On his return to Paris he exhibited two views of Algiers at the Salon. From 1851 to 1854 Frère travelled through Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Syria and Palestine. Of all these regions, it was Egypt which spoke to the artist above all, so much so that in 1853 Frère established a studio in Cairo. Favoured by members of the Egyptian government, Frère was awarded the honorific title of 'bey'. After multiple journeys, Frère visited Egypt for the final time in 1869 to witness the opening of the Suez Canal.

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

¹ Sotheby's London, 25th April 2023, lot 72.

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.

The old mount, which came with the drawing, carries an inscription from 'J. Bouland', gifting the drawing in 1886 to her 'friend and pupil J.D.'. Though we do not know the identity of Bouland, she seems to have been a close friend of the artist, as other works by Frère carry dedications to a 'Madame J. Bouland'.²

² For example, 'Sunset at Siout, Upper Egypt', a small oil on panel sold by Christie's Paris, 9 November 2010, lot 1, which carries the dedication '*offert à Madame Bouland le 4 9 1881*'.