

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Joseph Mallord William Turner
(London 1775 – 1851)

View of Jerusalem from the Latin Convent, 1832-1833

Watercolour
12.7 x 20.2 cm. (5 x 8 in.)

Provenance:
Collection of Lady Mayer;
By descent to previous owner;
Private collection.

Literature:
W. Armstrong, *Turner*, London 1902, vol. 2, p. 259.
A. Wilton, *The Life and work of J.M.W. Turner*, Fribourg and London, 1979, p. 450, no. 1261.



Observed from the elevated vantage point of the Latin Convent, this exquisitely drawn watercolour offers a panoramic sweep across Jerusalem's clustered domes and minarets, framed by the gentle rise of the Mount of Olives in the background. In the immediate foreground, a small group of figures, draped in robes, recline upon a rooftop terrace, their quiet assemblage and relaxed postures punctuating the otherwise vast urban vista with an intimate scene of daily life. At the heart of the city stands the Mosque of Omar, marking the historic site of Solomon's Temple, its prominent dome echoed by a constellation of smaller cupolas and towers that interweave the spiritual and civic fabrics of Jerusalem. To the right, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre - its dome visually resonant with that of the mosque - further affirms the layered religious significance of this sacred enclave. Subtle gradations of wash, ranging from the more intense detailing in the foreground to the paler, receding hills, impart a measured atmospheric depth, guiding the viewer's eye through the terraces, rooftops, and monuments that shape this storied cityscape.

Executed by J.M.W Turner circa 1832–1833, *View of Jerusalem from the Latin Convent* was engraved by Edward Finden in 1833 (see Fig. 1), for his *Landscape Illustrations of the Bible* (1836) - a series to which the artist contributed at least twenty-six topographical designs (Wilton, *op. cit.*, nos. 1236-61), joining efforts by artists such as Clarkson Stanfield, Augustus Wall Callcott, and James Duffield Harding, who frequently relied on the first-hand graphic material produced by Sir Charles Barry in the Holy Land, as in the present case.¹ Several of the original drawings by Barry are now at the Royal Institute of British Architects.

¹ L. Herrmann, *Turner Prints: The Engraved Works of J.M.W. Turner*, London, 1990, pp. 209–12.



Fig. 1. Edward Francis Finden (after J.M.W. Turner), *Jerusalem from the Latin Convent*, 1833, Etching and line engraving, 9.1 x 13.40 cm. Yale Center for British Art

From the outset, the publication clarifies its guiding purpose by noting that, "While other works of comparatively small value have employed the pencils of the finest artists, and have received every sort of embellishment, little, comparatively has been done towards illustrating the most important of all books - the Holy Scriptures. To supply this deficiency is the design of the present collection of Landscape Illustrations, in which are exhibited nearly one hundred of the most remarkable places mentioned in the Bible, as they actually exist, and very few of which have hitherto been delineated". The illustrations were accompanied by descriptive texts by the Reverend T.H. Horne of St. John's College, Cambridge.

Although our watercolour was never included in the published volume, the subject matter was intensively studied by Turner, with Armstrong (1902) listing seven of the Bible subjects under the title 'Jerusalem'.² To our knowledge, three of these are in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, one is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, while three more remain in private hands. See for example these remarkable *Valley of the Brook at Kidron, Jerusalem* and *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, conceived by Turner for the same series (Fig. 2 and 3). Notoriously, Turner never visited these sites in person, however, as John Ruskin commented, "of one thing I am certain, Turner never drew anything that could be seen, without having seen it. That is to say that though he would draw Jerusalem from someone's sketch, it would be, nevertheless, entirely his own experience of ruined walls".³

² See A. Wilton, *The Life and work of J.M.W. Turner*, Fribourg and London, 1979 p. 450.

³ J. Ruskin, in E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds.), *Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, London, 1903–12 pl. VIII



Fig. 2. J.M.W. Turner, *The Valley of the Brook at Kidron, Jerusalem (Absalom's Tomb)*, pencil and watercolour with scratching out, 14.5 x 20.6 cm. Christie's sale of 7th July 2015 (lot. 102)



Fig. 3. J.M.W. Turner, *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives*, watercolour on paper, 13.7 x 20.5 cm. Jerusalem, The Israel Museum.

Turner was born in Covent Garden in 1775 to William Turner, a barber and wigmaker, and Mary Marshall, and he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools at the age of fourteen, where his precocious aptitude for both oil painting and watercolour rapidly became evident. Throughout his career, he drew sustained inspiration from the Bible, beginning in 1800 with his grand oil painting *The Fifth Plague of Egypt*, which incorporated a quotation from the Book of Exodus. The following year saw the production of *The Army of the Medes Destroyed in the Desert by a Whirlwind*, referencing a passage from the Book of Jeremiah, followed in 1802 by *The Tenth Plague of Egypt*, again rooted in the Exodus narrative. In the 1830s, he returned to scriptural material with works such as *Pilate Washing his Hands* (1830), *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Burning Fiery Furnace* (1832), and *Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple*. His engagement with biblical themes continued well into the 1840s, exemplified by *Dawn of Christianity – Flight into Egypt* (1841) and *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846).

By the early 1830s, his practice had reached a period of particular refinement, characterised by a heightened concern with atmospheric drama and a nuanced approach to colour, often rendered through delicate washes. This phase coincided with his active participation in publishing ventures, as well as with continued travel on the Continent, where the study of French, Swiss, and Italian landscapes further shaped his visual vocabulary. At the time, Turner was applying his well-established command of watercolour to subjects carrying scriptural or poetic associations, a thematic strand that would remain a defining feature of his legacy until his death in 1851. *View of Jerusalem from the Latin Convent*, a watercolour of exquisite depth and quality, exemplifies this key strand of Turner's mature landscape production, encapsulating the balance he achieved between narrative content and observational acuity. Ruskin's assessment of Turner's watercolours for the series as "unrivalled examples of his richest executive power on a small scale" reflects the crisp execution, controlled washes, and skilful architectural detailing evident here, bestow a palpable energy on the drawing.⁴

⁴ J. Ruskin, in E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds.), *Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, London, 1903–12, p. 447.