

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM  
FINE ARTS

**JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME**

Vesoul 1824 - Paris 1904

French School

**BUFFALO IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLES AT PAESTUM**

Oil on canvas

H. 0,65 m; W. 0,81 m

Signed and dated lower left: *JL. GEROME. / 1851*

DATE: 1851

PROVENANCE:

Étienne Moreau-Nélaton (1859-1927) Collection

Moreau-Nélaton sale, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, from 11 to 15 May 1900, no. 42, "Troupeau de buffles paissant dans la campagne de Paestum" (ill.)

France, private collection

EXHIBITIONS:

Paris, 1852 Salon, no. 535.

Paris, Cercle de l'Union Artistique, 1866.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Fanny Field Hering, *Gérôme, his Life and Works*, New York, 1892, p. 60.

Gilles Cugnier, *Jean-Léon Gérôme 1824-1904. Peintre, sculpteur et graveur. Ses œuvres conservées dans les collections françaises publiques et privées*, Vesoul, 1981, p. 18 and p. 21 (ill.).

Gerald M. Ackerman, *La vie et l'œuvre de Jean-Léon Gérôme*, Paris, 1986, p. 192, no. 40 (ill.).

Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme. Monographie révisée. Catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, p. 220-221, no. 40 (ill.)

RELATED WORKS:

A large charcoal drawing squared for transfer, H. 465 mm; W. 600 mm, directly related to our painting was, according to Ackerman 2000, on the Paris art market in 1977.

A study for our painting: *View of Paestum*, oil on canvas, H. 0,59 m; W. 0,78 m, La Roche-sur-Yon, Musée Municipal de La Roche-sur-Yon (inv. 2020.7.1)

Wood engraving (published according to Ackerman 2000 in *Le Magasin pittoresque*, 1862)

*View of Paestum*, about 1847, sketch, oil on canvas, H. 0,19 m; W. 0,27 m, showing the same temple from a different angle (south east), without the temple of Hera on the left, formerly with David & Constance Yates, New York, 1995; private collection; the cartoon squared for transfer of this composition was sold by Sotheby's, New York, on 16 November 1991; Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme. Monographie révisée. Catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, p. 220-221, no. 40.2 (ill.);

Another version: *View of Paestum*, Ackerman, no. 25, exhibited at the 1849 Salon "ex catalogue", according to Ackerman without a herd of buffalo, location unknown.

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**Jean-Léon Gérôme, who represents a form of academic realism, is known above all for his Orientalist paintings. This early work, predating his travels to the Middle-East, is inspired by drawings he brought back from Italy. Impressed by the architectural grandeur of this perfectly conserved Doric sanctuary, he shows here his profound love for Antiquity as much as his skill in painting animals.**

At the age of 16, Gérôme entered the studio of the history painter Paul Delaroche (1797-1856) at the peak of his fame at the time and his principles would leave a lasting mark on his young pupil's work. Gérôme accompanied his master to Italy in 1843, visiting Rome, Florence, and Naples where he made many studies of architecture, landscapes, figures and animals. He was especially interested in buffalo which were used to transport rocks.<sup>1</sup> It was during this voyage that he discovered the famous temples of Paestum. He brought several albums of drawings back to Paris, most of which have disappeared, that he would use for paintings, such as our one.<sup>2</sup> Typhoid fever forced him to return to Paris the following year, where he attended classes held by the Swiss painter, Charles Gleyre (1806-1874), a prominent *pompier* painter, after which Gérôme worked as an assistant of Delaroche for a year.

He continued to sketch animals in the company of the animal sculptors Emmanuel Frémiet (1824-1910) and Alfred Jacquemart (1824-1896), drawing from life.<sup>3</sup> It is probably at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris that the artist studied a herd of buffalo in detail, to prepare our painting.

### **Leader of the hyperrealistic movement**

Gérôme was highly successful at the 1847 Salon with his neo-Greek painting, *Young Greeks Attending a Cock Fight* or *A Cock Fight*,<sup>4</sup> which earned him a third-class medal, the first of many awards he would receive during his entire career. Jean-Léon Gérôme was in effect one of the most famous French painters of his time.

Between 1853 and 1875, he went on several voyages to the Middle East and his numerous Orientalist paintings reveal his fascination for Arab culture. The realist effect rendered by his precise touch marks authentically the general fascination for the Orient at that time, where sensuality and violence were combined.

As Professeur at the École des Beaux-Arts, he was fiercely opposed to the Impressionists and became a symbol of Academism. Considered a reactionary for a long time, his reputation was rehabilitated by the pioneering research of Gilles Cugnier and Gerald Ackerman during the 1970s and 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> "Nous faisons des études et beaucoup de croquis (...). Dans les rues, il y avait du linge aux fenêtres, des costumes, des vaches, des buffles, beaucoup de buffles, qui servaient au transport des pierres. [We made studies and a lot of sketches (...) in the streets there was laundry at the windows, costumes, cows, buffalo, lots of buffalo, which were used to transport rocks]" cited by Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Gérôme, peintre et sculpteur*, Paris, 1906, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Cugnier, "Notice biographique", *Jean-Léon Gérôme 1824-1904. Peintre, sculpteur et graveur. Ses œuvres conservées dans les collections françaises publiques et privées*, Vesoul, 1981, p. 17 "De ce voyage datent (...) plusieurs albums de dessins qui serviront de modèles pour certains de ses tableaux : *Paestum*, (...) [Several albums (...) of drawings date to this period and would serve as models for some of his paintings]"; see also p. 18 « En 1851, il exposa une vue de *Paestum*, réalisée d'après des dessins faits sur place (...). [In 1851, he exhibited a view of *Paestum*, created from drawings made in situ (...)] »

<sup>3</sup> Elmar Stolpe, "Gérôme, Jean-Léon", *Saur. Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon. Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, vol. 52, Munich and Leipzig, 2006, p. 229.

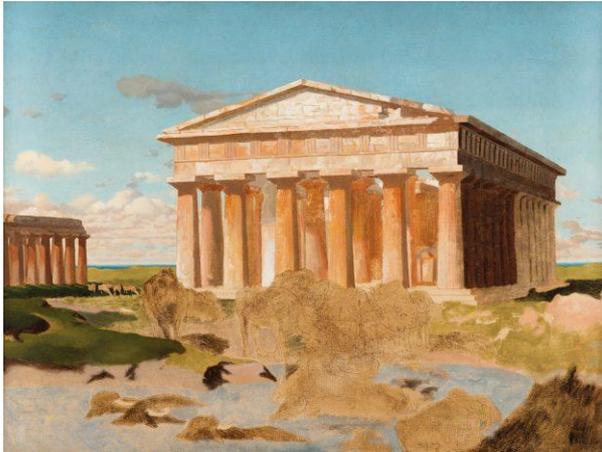
<sup>4</sup> *Young Greeks at a Cock Fight* or *A Cock Fight*, 1846, oil on canvas, H. 1,43 m; W. 2,04 m, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, inv. RF 88.

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Jean-Léon Gérôme, *View of Paestum*, c. 1848-1852, oil on canvas, H. 0,59 m; W. 0,78 m, La Roche-sur-Yon, Musée Municipal de La Roche-sur-Yon

## **Paestum and the so-called Temple of Poseidon**

Located about a hundred kilometres south-east of Naples, Paestum was a port city founded about 600 B.C. by Greek colonisers who called it *Poseidonia* and placed it under the protection of the goddess Hera. A Roman colony, called *Paestum*, was founded there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

This site is known above all for its three large Greek Doric temples, “rediscovered” in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Two temples date to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the third, formerly thought to be dedicated to Poseidon, the one Gérôme shows here, was built in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Although the town was called *Poseidonia* when it was built, it is likely that the temple was dedicated to another god, Zeus or Apollo, or perhaps Hera, like the temple visible on the left of our painting. This construction, dating to the same period as the Parthenon of Athens and perfectly conserved, is one of the most famous examples of Greek Doric architecture. It is surrounded by thirty-six impressive columns with a diameter of 2 metres at their base and supporting a smooth architrave and a frieze on which metopes, whose painted decoration has disappeared, alternate with triglyphs. The pediment sits on a prominent cornice. Gérôme describes this gigantic sanctuary with great precision, from a point of view that does not reinforce its monumentality. With no sentimentalism, the artist has reinstated the sunlight coming through the ruined roof. Buffalo are moving in a dense herd on ground with scorched grass and in the foreground sink into a pond on the surface of which reeds and water lilies are growing.

## **Paestum viewed by Gérôme**

Three compositions by Gérôme of Paestum’s temples are known. Our painting is directly related to a sketch painted on canvas of almost identical dimensions, now at the Musée Municipal de La Roche-sur-Yon<sup>5</sup>. Gerald M. Ackerman refers in addition to a charcoal drawing squared for transfer and a wood engraving that was published in 1862.<sup>6</sup> Showing the same

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Léon Gérôme, *View of Paestum*, about 1848-1852, oil on canvas, H. 0,59 m; W. 0,78 m, La Roche-sur-Yon, Musée Municipal de La Roche-sur-Yon.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme. Monographie révisée. Catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, no. 40.

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temple from a different point of view, without the temple of Hera on the left, a small *View of Paestum*, dated 1849 was published by Ackerman that relates to a squared study for this composition.<sup>7</sup> Lastly according to Ackerman, Gérôme exhibited a third composition at the 1849 Salon, titled *View of Paestum*, without the herd of buffalo.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Buffalo in front of the Temple**

The herd of black buffalo and the pond have belonged to the iconography of the temples of Paestum since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, a red chalk drawing by Hubert Robert shows the same view with buffalo and shepherds in front of the famous temple.<sup>9</sup> In 1826, Anton Sminck van Pitloo<sup>10</sup> described these temples in the manner of an archaeologist and also shows a pond, shepherds and the same black buffalo.

However, Gérôme's animals are depicted in an entirely different way to these other two examples. First, they are much larger and cover almost half the canvas, thus lessening the temples' monumentality. In Pitloo's views, the buffalo contribute to the picturesque atmosphere of his painting, unlike Gérôme who describes these animals with great realism, reflecting the massiveness of their bodies and their movements, even the details of the hair on their rumps. The buffalo surprise the viewer in this way simply by their presence. These elements make this powerful painting a very modern work. Around 1840-1850, the young Gérôme was ahead of his time. The picture, which was exhibited at the 1852 Salon, received praise from the Goncourt brothers: "The entire scene breathes a delicious freshness."<sup>11</sup>

### **Provenance from the Étienne Moreau-Nélaton Collection**

Our painting was in the collection of Étienne Moreau-Nélaton (1859-1927) until 1900. He was a painter and ceramicist whose erudition and work as an art historian were exceptional. His two major donations of works of art (in 1906 and 1919) as well as the bequest of the rest of his collections and his library in 1927, make him one of the most important donors to the French State.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald M. Ackerman, 2000, p. 220-221, no. 40.2 (ill.). Sold by Sotheby's, New York, 16 November 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald M. Ackerman, 2000, no. 25. This *View of Paestum* has not been located to date.

<sup>9</sup> Hubert Robert, *View of the Temple of Neptune, with the Basilica in the Background*, about 1760, red calk on paper, H. 339 mm; W. 457 mm, Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts (AG.1964.4.10).

<sup>10</sup> Anton Sminck van Pitloo, *View of the Three Temples at Paestum*, 1826, oil on canvas, H. 0,60 m; W. 0,86 m, Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Fanny Field Hering, *Gérôme, his Life and Works*, New York, 1892, p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> *De Corot aux Impressionnistes. Donations Moreau-Nélaton*, exh. cat. Grand Palais, Paris, 30 April-22 July 1991, Paris, 1991.