

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM
FINE ARTS

PIERRE PATEL THE ELDER

Chauny 1605 - Paris 1676
French School

LANDSCAPE WITH ANCIENT RUINS AND SHEPHERDS

Oil on canvas
H. 0,61 m; W. 0,81 m

DATE: c. 1650

PROVENANCE:

Anonymous sale ('The Property of a Gentleman'), London, Christie's, 23 April 1887, no. 101.
Acquired at this sale by an English collector, thence by descent until the Sotheby's sale,
London, 10 July 2003, no. 53.
Private collection

LITERATURE:

Natalie Coural, "Ruines antiques et lumière d'Ile-de-France. Quelques nouveaux Patel",
Mythes et réalités du XVI^e siècle. Foi, idées, images, Alessandria, 2008, p. 208-209, p. 213-
214, p. 227 fig. 3.

RELATED WORKS:

A copy of our painting, "Landscape with classical ruins and shepherds", was cited by Natalie Coural, *Les Patel. Pierre Patel (1605-1676) et ses fils. Le paysage de ruines à Paris au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 2001, p. 199, CP5. This copy appeared again at a sale in Versailles, Chevaux Légers, 22 July 2007, "Paysage avec des ruines classiques et des bergers gardant un troupeau", see Coural 2008 p. 214-215.

The poetry of his ruins in flooded fields, dotted with reeds and slender trees, is luminous and fresh. With his imaginary landscapes, Patel creates havens of peace that are made particularly endearing thanks to his great sensitivity to atmosphere. A friend and associate of Simon Vouet and afterwards of Eustache Le Sueur, he worked on some of the most prestigious decors of his time, such as the Hôtel Lambert. He developed a style that fits perfectly with what is called Parisian Atticism.

Youth under Northern Influence

The son of a mason, Pierre Patel the Elder (1605-1676) was born in Picardy, in Chauny, a town around ten kilometres from the magnificent Château de Blérancourt, which no longer exists. Built by Salomon de Brosse, this château was a major artistic project between 1612 and 1620, and it is quite possible that the young Patel visited this site where the painter Martin Fréminet (1567-1619) was among those working. Nothing is known about Pierre Patel's formation. He was described as a painter when he married in Paris in 1632. Like many provincial and foreign artists, Patel settled near the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, an area not governed by the rather restrictive Parisian guild. In 1619, in response to the influx of foreign painters, the guild had made it longer and more expensive to become a master painter, and in the first half of the 17th century, the district became the stronghold of Dutch and Flemish artists in Paris.

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Patel was admitted as a master painter to the Saint-Germain-des-Prés Corporation in 1634 at the latest.¹ The following year, he became a member of the Paris guild of painting and sculpture, the future Académie de Saint-Luc, to which he remained loyal. He was never a member of the Royal Academy, which was less open to landscape painting at the time.

In Simon Vouet's Workshop

The following years appear to have been marked by Patel's professional and social development. He became a collaborator of Simon Vouet (1590-1649), the most fashionable painter of the second quarter of the 17th century, who revived painting in Paris. After spending fifteen years in Rome, where he had enjoyed a brilliant career, Vouet was called back to Paris by Louis XIII in 1627. The precise date of Patel's arrival in his workshop between 1635 and 1639 remains uncertain. In 1641, Simon Vouet was made godfather to Patel's son Simon, while Marie Grégoire, wife of the sculptor Jacques Sarazin, was his godmother. Patel then became familiar with Vouet's brilliant style, and seems to have specialised in landscapes in the master's studio. He created tapestry cartoons, learned to work as part of a team, and made some decisive encounters. The artist became friends with Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655), who he asked to be godfather to his daughter Elisabeth in 1644.

Prestigious Commissions

Patel's career was marked by major commissions. In 1645-1646, he worked on the decoration of the *Cabinet of Love* in Nicolas Lambert's mansion. This project brought together leading painters: Eustache Le Sueur, Jan Asselijn, Berthollet Flémalle, Henri Mauperché, François Perrier, Giovanni Francesco Romanelli and Herman van Swanevelt. By this time, Patel had achieved complete mastery of his style. In his three landscapes,² his use of a rather cold palette with a predominance of blues and sonorous, lilting tones, and his depiction of ancient ruins are remarkable.

Working for a second time at the Hôtel Lambert between 1651 and 1655, Patel painted the landscapes of five large canvases for the *Cabinet of the Muses*, in which the Muses were painted by Eustache Le Sueur (Paris, Musée du Louvre).³

His first royal commission came in 1660: two landscapes to decorate Anne of Austria's cabinet overlooking the river in the Louvre Palace (Paris, Musée du Louvre). Between 1668 and his death eight years later, he painted a series of views of royal residences, including a *View of Versailles*, 1668 (Château de Versailles). He ended his career as "Ordinary Painter to the King for the Royal Households".

His son Pierre-Antoine Patel the younger (1648-1707), who was his pupil, continued in the same style but did not achieve the same level of fame.

The Work and Stylistic Development

In her 2001 catalogue raisonné of the artist, Natalie Coural attributes around fifty paintings to Pierre Patel, some of which are signed and dated, as well as around twenty drawings. Natalie Coural believes that he worked slowly, carefully grinding pigments and especially paying

¹ Natalie Coural, *Les Patel. Pierre Patel (1605-1676) et ses fils. Le paysage de ruines à Paris au XVII^e siècle*, Arthéna, Paris, 2001, p. 17

² Natalie Coural, 2001, PP 13-15.

³ Natalie Coural, 2001, PP 23-27.

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particular attention to the time needed for drying,⁴ which is why most of his paintings are remarkably well preserved.

His earliest works date to the 1630s and are greatly influenced by Flemish artists, in particular Jacques Fouquières (1580/90-1659). Patel's early compositions had a shifting, unstable quality that would later disappear. His figures are stocky, sometimes arched, similar to those of Paul Bril (1554-1626), and the contrasts of light and shadow are reminiscent of the paintings of Cornelis van Poelenburgh (1594-1667). Around 1640-1645, Claude Lorrain's (1600-1682) influence can be seen in the balance of architecture and vegetation and the general harmony, as well as in the main lines of his compositions, in which there are more realistic elements.

Parisian Atticism

Unlike the landscapes painted in Rome by contemporaries Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Claude Lorrain, and Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675), Patel's were all painted in Paris. In fact, Patel seems never to have travelled to Italy.⁵ It was in the French capital that, alongside Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656), Henri Mauperché (1602-1686), and Gabriel Pérelle (1602-1677), Patel developed a model of landscape using luminous colours which blend nature rigorously and elegantly with ancient elements in clear, transparent light. The subtle harmony between vegetation and ruins, with skilful effects of atmospheric perspective, is among the most original features of these Parisian landscape painters. Patel occupies a special place in a new style of painting that flourished under Mazarin's prime ministership. Called Parisian Atticism by Jacques Thuillier,⁶ it is characterised by a return to the ancient world and a quest for balance and clarity.⁷

A Passion for Ruins

In the middle of the 17th century, France, and Paris in particular, saw the emergence of a genre of painting that reflected a 'poetic of ruins'⁸ that was perfectly in tune with the growing interest in perspective and the sophisticated taste for ancient buildings and country life that was evident in novels with pastoral themes. This is an Arcadia transposed to the Île-de-France.

To create his antique reconstructions, Patel undoubtedly built up a repertoire of forms. They were more widely distributed thanks to numerous albums of prints illustrating ancient Roman monuments, published from the 16th century onwards, including the one published in Paris in 1585 by Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, which was very popular in the 17th century.⁹

⁴ Natalie Coural, « Ruines antiques et lumière d'Ile-de-France. Quelques nouveaux Patel », *Mythes et réalités du XVI^e siècle. Foi, idées, images*, Alessandria, 2008, p. 207.

⁵ The fact that certain artists, including Michel Corneille the Elder, (c. 1601-1664), Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674), Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656), Charles Poerson (1609-1667) and Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655), did not feel a need to travel to Italy was seen by their contemporaries as a sign of the maturity of the French school of painting. Sylvain Laveissière, exh. cat. *Le Classicisme Français. Masterpieces of Seventeenth Century Painting*, The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1985, p. XXXVIII.

⁶ Jacques Thuillier, "Au temps de Mazarin. L'atticisme' parisien", *La Peinture française. De Le Nain à Fragonard*, Geneva, 1964, p. 65-69; the expression "atticism" comes from Bernard Dorival, *La Peinture française*, Paris, 1942, t. I, p. 6.

⁷ Alain Mérot, *Éloge de la clarté. Un courant artistique au temps de Mazarin, 1640-1660*, exh. cat. Dijon, musée Magnin, Le Mans, musée de Tessé, 1998.

⁸ Roland Mortier, *La poétique des ruines en France. Ses origines, ses variations de la Renaissance à Victor Hugo*, Geneva, Droz, 1974.

⁹ Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau, *Livre des édifices antiques romains, contenant les ordonnances et desseings des plus signalez et principaux bastiments qui se trouvaient à Rome du temps qu'elle estoit en sa plus grande fleur... par Jaques Androuet Du Cerceau*, [Paris : [Denis Duval], 1584.

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Patel's taste for weathered stone embedded with vegetation can be seen in our painting. The ruin, inseparable from nature, is covered with shrubs and climbing plants. It sits in a crystalline light, its geometric rigour is counterbalanced by a keen eye for atmosphere. The artist makes us feel the air surrounding the forms.

A Fan of Far-Flung Places

Our landscape is a perfectly balanced composition, with the ruin of an ancient Roman inspired temple on the right and, on the left, a tree with a slim trunk whose foliage is placed against the light like lace against the blue and orange sky. The succession of planes is clearly marked. Darker areas alternate with lighter ones. The rather strong contrasts in the foreground fade in the distance. This escape into bluish horizons is an idea dear to Patel.

In Love with Reflections on Water

A river slides in from the right, between the foreground and the ruins, forming a small waterfall. It flows diagonally through the composition, leading the viewer's gaze into the distance. Patel's interest in flooded landscapes may have come from the marshes of Picardy, which he had probably contemplated in his youth. Water, with its mysterious shadows and blue and white reflections, crumbling stones covered in moss and blades of grass, are a constant in the artist's work. The flat stones at the water's edge, covered with moss, or with sharp corners, are typical of Patel, as are the sharp reeds in the foreground.

Typical Patel

The painting has cold, precise light characteristic of Patel's art. The overall colour range is cool, with very luminous blues that expand as they recede and multiple shades of green. The groups of animals and figures wearing modern costumes enliven the composition with bright colours. In the background, other tiny, elongated silhouettes stand out against a dark background. This is another of Patel's characteristics. A number of rustic buildings are placed in the background. The coexistence of ancient architecture and familiar or contemporary elements is also quite typical of Patel's manner, as is the way in which he depicts trunks covered with light vegetation, his treatment of foliage, contrasting dark cuttings and thinner branches with characteristic pointed leaves, and the drawing of the foliage and rushes in the foreground.

Our Painting in Patel's Oeuvre

Some of the motifs in our painting can be found in other paintings by Patel. For example, the tree in the left foreground and the goat in the centre appear in a work dated around 1640.¹⁰ Patel seems to have used the same drawing for several painted compositions, proving that he reused motifs several years apart.

Natalie Coural also compares our painting to a landscape in the Kunstmuseum Basel, signed and dated 1650,¹¹ in which the space is similarly organised, the trees are distributed in the same way, and the same washerwoman is carrying a basket of washing on her head.

Characteristic of a clear and refined classicism, our painting illustrates perfectly the artist's mature period in its confident compositional arrangement, the attention paid to the finest nuances of atmosphere, its rendering of reflections on the water and its skill in portraying small

¹⁰ *Landscape with Ruins and a Shepherd*, c. 1640, oil on canvas, H. 0,78 m; W. 0,97 m, Paris, Banque Paribas. Natalie Coural, *Les Patel. Pierre Patel (1605-1676) et ses fils. Le paysage de ruines à Paris au XVII^e siècle*, Arthéna, Paris, 2001, PP 10.

¹¹ *Landscape with Figures and a Ruin on the Left*, oil on copper, H. 0,31 m; W. 0,45 m, signed and dated lower centre: "P. PATEL 1650.", Basel, Kunstmuseum, inv. 1181. Natalie Coural, *Les Patel. Pierre Patel (1605-1676) et ses fils. Le paysage de ruines à Paris au XVII^e siècle*, Arthéna, Paris, 2001, PP 17.

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figures. According to Natalie Coural, our painting was probably not part of a décor and was intended for an amateur. She dates it to around 1650.¹²



Landscape with Ruins and a Shepherd, c. 1640, oil on canvas, H. 0,78 m; W. 0,97 m, Paris, Banque Paribas.



Landscape with Figures and a Ruin on the Left, oil on copper, H. 0,31 m; W. 0,45 m, signed and dated lower centre: "P. PATEL 1650.", Basel, Kunstmuseum, inv. 1181.

¹² Natalie Coural, 2008, p. 208.

