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Hermann D.S. Corrodi
Sunset on The Nile, c. 1890

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HERMANN D.S. CORRODI
(Frascati 1844 – 1905 Rome)

SUNSET ON THE NILE, C. 1890

Signed lower left: 'H. Corrodi Roma'

Oil on canvas
98 x 115 cm; 45 1/4 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, London.

Publications

The Orientalists: Western artists in Arabia, the Sahara, Persia & India by Kristian Davies, New York: Laynfaroh, 2005.

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This luminous Orientalist oil painting depicts a view of the Nile at sunset, balancing the natural expanse of river and sky against the human world of the right bank. In the foreground several figures are seated in conversation, while others crouch at the water's edge, collecting water. Also, along the bank, additional figures and animals, possibly camels, horses and donkeys, are visible. In the middle distance to the right, the Great Pyramids of Giza can be seen. The river itself mirrors the last light of the sun - to the left, palm trees line the far bank, dissolving softly into the horizon.

The composition is characteristic of Corrodi's mature Orientalist landscape style: romanticised yet meticulously observed, generous in its detail and deeply attuned to atmosphere. Strong horizontals, formed by the river and its banks, provide structural calm, while the vertical accents of the palm trees and the white mausoleum introduce a counterbalancing rhythm. The figures in the foreground anchor the scene in human scale without competing with the grandeur of the setting. Throughout, the handling is academic and precise, whether in the rendering of natural light on water, the texture of stonework or the fall of fabric on the figures. The result is a scene that feels both specific and timeless, suffused with the particular stillness of a North African dusk.

By the time Corrodi made his first journey to Egypt in the winter of 1876-77, the Nile had already become one of the defining subjects of European Orientalist painting. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had accelerated both tourism and artistic interest in Egypt, and the river at sunset, with its feluccas, palm-lined banks and distant minarets, had become an almost emblematic image within the genre, painted by David Roberts, Frederick Arthur Bridgman and many others before him. Corrodi was therefore working within a well-established pictorial tradition. What distinguishes his contribution is the particular quality of restraint he brings to it. Where many Orientalist painters were drawn to the dramatic, the exotic or the overtly picturesque, Corrodi favoured a quieter, more contemplative register. His figures inhabit their landscape naturally, engaged in the ordinary rhythms of daily life rather than performing their otherness for a European gaze.

Hermann David Salomon Corrodi was born in Frascati in 1844 into a distinguished artistic family. His father, Salomon Corrodi (1810-1892), was a respected watercolourist, and his brother Arnold also pursued a career as a painter, making the arts something close to a family vocation. Hermann's own formation was rigorous and wide-ranging. From 1860 he studied in Geneva in the studio of Alexandre Calame (1810-1864), the celebrated Swiss landscape painter whose dramatic Alpine compositions instilled in him a lasting sensitivity to atmosphere and natural light. He continued his training at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome from 1866, studying under his father, before travelling to Paris, where he encountered two of the most influential painters of the age, Ernest Meissonier and Jean-Léon Gérôme, both of whom deepened his understanding of academic technique and of the possibilities of Orientalist subject matter.

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By the early 1870s, Corrodi's reputation had grown considerably. In 1872, he exhibited at the Munich International Exhibition, and in 1873, he was awarded a Gold Medal at the Universal Exhibition in Vienna for his painting *Pine Forest*, a remarkable distinction that confirmed his standing within the European academic tradition.¹ It was also in 1872 that he formed a close friendship with Lawrence Alma-Tadema, one of the most celebrated painters of the Victorian age, at whose invitation he travelled to London and was introduced to the British Royal Family.² The connection deepened further in the summer of 1884, when Corrodi met Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck, at the Hotel Sonnenberg on Lake Lucerne, who discovered that he had previously given painting lessons to Princess Alexandra. Royal commissions followed, and works by Corrodi entered the Royal Collection, among them *Queen Victoria on the Terrace of Villa Palmieri* and *A Rocky Coastline*, both of which remain there to this day.³ His appeal to royal and aristocratic patrons extended beyond Britain: from 1876, he adopted a seasonal rhythm, spending winters in Rome and summers in Baden-Baden, where he received numerous commissions from the German nobility, including Kaiser Wilhelm II, who acquired his celebrated *Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem*.

In 1876, Corrodi made his first journey to Egypt, a visit that would prove the defining experience of his artistic life. Travelling through the Nile Valley during the winter of 1876-77, he accumulated the sketches, studies and artefacts that would sustain his studio practice for years to come. Further journeys followed throughout the 1880s, taking him to Syria, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus and Constantinople, each adding new material to his visual repertoire. Back in his studio in Rome, surrounded by the objects and textiles he had brought home, he transformed these accumulated observations into finished compositions: desert landscapes, scenes of the Nile, Arab figures, Egyptian temples. His work was consistently well received by British audiences, and *Storm in the Desert, Egypt*, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1881.⁴ In recognition of his achievements, Corrodi was appointed Accademico di Merito by the Accademia di San Luca in 1893, an institution at which he had long served as a professor. He remained in Rome until his death in 1905.

Corrodi stands as one of the most accomplished Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century, an artist whose extensive travels through Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Turkey and beyond provided the raw material for a body of work that answered, with consummate skill, the European appetite for the landscapes and peoples of the Near

¹ The Vienna Universal Exhibition of 1873 was one of the most prestigious international showcases of the period; Corrodi's Gold Medal placed him in distinguished company among European academic painters.

² British Museum, *Hermann Corrodi (Biographical details)*, British Museum Collection Online: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG245782>.

³ Royal Collection Trust: *Queen Victoria (1819-1901) on the Terrace of Villa Palmieri*, RCIN 404839; *A Rocky Coastline*, RCIN 404626. <https://www.rct.uk>.

⁴ Royal Academy of Arts exhibition records, 1881.

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East. His paintings offered audiences not merely the exotic and the unfamiliar, but something rarer: a sense of genuine encounter, grounded in direct observation and brought to life through exceptional command of light and atmosphere.

His early formation as a landscape painter, shaped by the rigorous academic tradition of Geneva and Rome, gave his Orientalist work a naturalistic authority that set it apart from more theatrical treatments of the same subjects. His luminous handling of light, whether on the still surface of the Nile at dusk or across the vast expanse of the desert, placed him among the most sensitive colourists of his generation and anticipates the broader European turn towards atmosphere and natural observation that would define the later decades of the century.

The reach of his reputation confirmed as much. From the Royal Collection to the courts of the German aristocracy, his work was sought by the most discerning collectors in Europe, a testament to a painter who brought both intellectual seriousness and rare visual poetry to one of the great subjects of his age.

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