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Jean-Baptiste Hilaire

An Ottoman Encampment at the Ruins of the Temple of Euromus

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JEAN-BAPTISTE HILAIRE
(Audun-le-Tiche 1751 – 1828 Paris)

AN OTTOMAN ENCAMPMENT AT THE RUINS OF THE TEMPLE OF EUROMUS

Watercolour, gouache, pen, and black ink on paper, laid down on panel
59.5 x 91.5 cm (23 3/8 x 36 in.)

Provenance

Hubert Guerrand-Hermès, Paris, until 2023;
Private Collection, NYC.

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This impressive large-scale watercolour by Jean-Baptiste Hilaire (1751-1828) depicts the ruins of the Temple of Zeus at Euromus, an ancient city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Hilaire produced the work during his travels with Marie-Gabriel-Florent-Auguste, Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier (1752-1817), whom he accompanied on his celebrated 1776 expedition to Greece and Asia Minor. The composition would later serve as the basis for an engraving (Fig. 1) in Choiseul-Gouffier's monumental *Voyage pittoresque de la Grèce* (1782-1822), a richly illustrated travel account that became one of the most influential publications of its kind in Europe.

The Temple of Zeus at Euromus, begun under Emperor Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), was among the best-preserved Corinthian temples in Asia Minor. Originally encircled by a colonnade of eleven columns on the long sides and six on the short, sixteen columns still stand today, just as Hilaire depicted them in the late eighteenth century. His composition vividly juxtaposes the grandeur of antiquity with scenes of Ottoman and Bedouin life: a caravan of camels and horses winds past the ruins; groups of figures converse, rest, or play games beneath the shadow of fallen capitals; tents rise between the ancient shafts, suggesting the site's incorporation into the rhythms of everyday life.

Hilaire trained at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris under Charles-Louis Clérisseau, one of the leading architectural draughtsmen and antiquaries of his day, whose influence is evident in Hilaire's treatment of classical ruins. His association with Choiseul-Gouffier gave him the opportunity to document ancient monuments and Ottoman customs alike, producing over one hundred drawings and watercolours that were later translated into engravings for the *Voyage pittoresque*.

Choiseul-Gouffier's *Voyage*, published in three volumes between 1782 and 1822, was a landmark in both travel literature and antiquarian scholarship. It introduced European readers to the landscapes, monuments, and people of Greece and the Ottoman Empire through 311 copperplate engravings. Hilaire's contributions, including the present composition, were central to the project's success and deeply influential in shaping European perceptions of the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the Enlightenment.

This watercolour not only captures one of antiquity's most evocative sites but also embodies the 18th-century fascination with travel, archaeology, and the picturesque encounter between East and West.

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Fig. 1 Jean-Baptiste Hilaire, *Ruines d'un temple à Euromus*, engraving. Hambis Printmaking Museum, Nicosia.

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