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JEAN LEMAIRE, called LE GROS LEMAIRE or LEMAIRE-POUSSIN

(Dammartin 1598 - Gaillon 1659)

A pupil of the painter Claude Vignon, Lemaire came under the patronage of the marquis de Chauvallon with whose support he went to Rome in 1613. He was to remain there for more than twenty years frequenting the circle of French artists. In 1624 he is recorded living with Simon Vouet and Nicolas Poussin and was still staying with the latter in 1630. He collaborated very closely with Poussin, who had a pronounced influence on his style and whose name he adopted. Lemaire is said to have painted some of the architectural backgrounds in Poussin's work, in particular, Mariette claims that he executed the architectural setting in the Theseus Discovering the Arms of his Father (two versions: Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly and Uffizi). Lemaire returned to France in the mid-1630s and was in Paris in 1639, when he was recorded as peintre du roi staying in the Tuileries. He executed a fresco for Cardinal Richelieu's residence in Rueil, of which only an engraving survives, and under the direction of Poussin took part in the decoration of the Grande Galerie at the Louvre 1641-2. According to Félibien, he went back to Rome with Poussin in 1642, but only stayed a short time. Following this final visit to Italy he retired to Gaillon, which was close to Poussin's native town of Les Andelys.

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt set in Landscape with Classical Ruins

Oil on canvas

100.5 x 133.5 cm.

Anthony Blunt, when publishing this painting ("Jean Lemaire: painter of architectural fantasies", Burlington Magazine, vol. LXXXIII, October 1943, pp. 241-6, pl. II.D) suggested that it should be dated between 1630-5. This dating was based upon its close affinity with Poussin's work of that period. Blunt noted that Lemaire "advanced with Poussin, from a type of painting with ruined buildings and Venetian colouring, towards a more severe style in which the buildings are usually shown as complete and the colouring tends towards greater coldness". He further remarked that the present painting is similar to Lemaire's composition of The Childhood of Bacchus (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) in the treatment of the architecture which has an identical creamy whiteness and was formerly attributed to Poussin. It is interesting in this connection that in 1857 Waagen enthusiastically described the present painting

as if it were also by Poussin.

There is a second smaller version (82 x 113 cm.) of this painting in a private collection in Rome, which shows several variations, above all in the chillier rendering of the landscape. This version was published by Estella Brunetti in 1958 ("Some unpublished Works by Codazzi, Salucci, Lemaire and Patel", Burlington Magazine, vol. C, September 1958, pp. 315 & fig. 27) and dated to the 1640s. Andrea Busiri Vici also inclined towards a slightly later dating for this version of the composition ("Opere Inedite Romane di Jean Lemaire", Palatino, 1965, IX, p. 167 & fig. 13). The very close similarity between the two versions has led to understandable confusions and prompted Luigi Salerno ("Landscape Painters of the Seventeenth Century in Rome", Rome, 1977, vol. II, pp. 488-93, fig. 80.3), when publishing the version in Rome to add a corrective footnote (n.21) which wrongly identified the painting published by Blunt (pl. II.D), (the present one) and that published by Busiri Vici (fig. 13) and himself (fig. 80.3) (private collection, Rome); as one and the same work.

Hist.: The Earls of Caledon, 5, Carlton House Terrace, London (by 1857).  
Sale, Christie's, London, 9th June 1939, lot 61.

Bibl.: G. Waagen, Galleries & Cabinets of Art in Great Britain, London, 1857, p. 151.

A. Blunt, "Jean Lemaire: painter of architectural fantasies", Burlington Magazine, vol. LXXXIII, October 1943, pp. 241-6, pl. II.D).

Estella Brunetti, "Some Unpublished Works by Codazzi, Salucci, Lemaire and Patel", Burlington Magazine, vol. C, September 1958, p. 315, n. 29.

A. Busiri Vici, "Opere Inedite Romane di Jean Lemaire", Palatino, 1965, IX, p. 168, n. 23.

L. Salerno, Landscape Painters of the Seventeenth Century in Rome, Rome, 1977, vol. II, pp. 488 and 491 and vol. III, p. 1048, notes 18 & 21).