

**RCEWA Case 12 (2014-15): Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain, *A Mediterranean port at sunrise with the Embarkation of Saint Paula for Jerusalem***

**Expert adviser's statement**

**Reviewing Committee Secretary's note: Please note that any illustrations referred to have not been reproduced on the Arts Council England website**

**Claude Gellée, called Claude Lorrain (1604/5?-1682)**

***A Mediterranean port at sunrise with the Embarkation of Saint Paula for Jerusalem***

**1650 (?)**

**Oil on canvas, 39.75 x 53.25 in. (100.9 x 135.2 cm.)**

**Inscribed lower centre: NOBMA. ROMANA ST PAVOLA IM- BARCHI PER  
GIERVSALEMME**

**Condition**

The relined picture is structurally sound and seems to be in relatively good condition, albeit much retouched. There are at least two distinct campaigns of retouching visible under UV examination, though little of the restoration seems to be concerned with the repair of large damages. The cumulative effect of the numerous finely applied retouchings may suggest a more general pattern of wearing or abrasion, or it may result, in part, from a wish to impart a particularly high level of finish on the work. Some of the more extensive passages of retouching occur in the contours and darker tones of the foreground figures (especially within the seated group at the left), the rigging and sails of the boat in the middle distance at the right, cracks present in much of the middle distance ocean and buildings, as well as more clearly visible abrasion to the right of the left-hand ship and the cliffs to the right the distant, central building.

**Provenance**

Probably commissioned by Cardinal Domenico Cecchini (1589-1656), Campo Marzio, Montecitorio, Rome; with Louis-François de Bourbon, prince de Conti (1716-1776), presumably after 1757, Palais du Temple, Paris; his anonymous sale, Paris 15 March 1779,

lot 53 (920 livres); (presumably) either with John Dawson (1744-1798) (created Viscount Carlow, 1779, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Portarlington, 1785), Emo Park, County Leix, or Joseph Damer (d. 1798), 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Dorchester, Milton Abbey; by inheritance to Henry John Reuben Dawson-Damer (1822-1889), 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Portarlington, Emo Park, County Leix; William Henry Smith, M.P. (1825-1891), or his son, William Frederick Danvers (1868-1928), 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Hambleden, and by descent to the present owner.

### **Exhibited**

London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School*, Winter Exhibition, 1882, p. 32, no. 149 (listed as by Claude, from the Earl of Portarlington's collection).

### **Select Bibliography**

Mme. Mark Pattison, *Claude Lorrain. Sa Vie et ses oeuvres d'après des documents inédits*, Paris, 1884, p. 233 (unnumbered) (listed as being in the Prado, Madrid, exhibited at RA 1882, no. 149 as part of the Earl of Portarlington's collection, and with same dimensions as the Hambleden picture);

Émile Dacier, *Catalogues de Ventes et Livrets de Salons illustrés par Gabriel de Saint-Aubin*, vol. 10, *Catalogue de la 2e Vente du Prince de Conti (1779)*, Paris, 1919, unpaginated;

Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain. The Paintings*, London 1961, vol. I, pp. 297-9, no. LV120 (the version in the Musée des Vosges, Épinal);

Marcel Röthlisberger and Doretta Cecchi, *L'opera completa di Claude Lorrain*, Milan, 1975, pp. 110-111, no. 188 (the version in the Musée des Vosges, Épinal);

Michael Kitson, *Claude Lorrain: Liber Veritas*, London, 1978, pp. 128, no. 120.

### **Other versions**

*Coast Scene with the Embarkation of Saint Paula*, oil on canvas, 105 x 150 cm, Musée des Vosges, Épinal (LV120) (there attributed as autograph)

*The Embarkation of Saint Paula at Ostia*, oil on canvas, 110 x 136 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. no. B 518 (there attributed as “Attributed to Claude Gelée)

### **Paintings related by subject-matter**

Claude Gelée, called Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with the Embarkation of Saint Paula Romana at Ostia*, 1639-40, oil on canvas, 211 x 145 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no. P2254 (LV49)

Claude Gelée, called Claude Lorrain, *Seaport with the landing of a Lady*, 1642, oil on canvas, 49 x 37.5 cm, Wellington Collection, Stratfield Saye (LV61)

Copy: After Claude Lorrain, *Embarkation of Saint Paula*, after 1642, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 39 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery

### **Related Drawing**

Claude Gelée, called Claude Lorrain, *Coast scene with the Embarkation of Saint Paula*, from the *Liber Veritatis*, 1650, pen and brown ink with brown wash on blue paper, 19.7 x 25.7 cm, British Museum, London, inv. no. 1957, 1214.126 (LV120).

### **Engraved**

Richard Earlom after Claude Gelée, *Coast scene with the Embarkation of Saint Paula*, etching and mezzotint, in *Liber Veritatis; or a Collection of Prints after the Original Designs of Claude Le Lorrain; in the Collection of His Grace the Duke of Devonshire...2 vols.*, London, 1777, no. 120; reprinted in Rome, 1815.

### **Waverley Two – the painting is of outstanding aesthetic importance**

Claude recorded the composition of the present picture in his *Liber Veritas* (LV120) (British Museum, inv. no. 1957, 1214.126), the verso of which he inscribed ‘Claude inv. f. / cardinale / csequin’. Claude’s drawing was engraved by Richard Earlom in 1777, and the painting was exhibited in London in 1882 but was then lost sight of in the art historical literature. Marcel Röthlisberger, in his catalogue raisonnée on the artist, considered the Épinal version to be the primary work. The Hambleden painting is listed as a subsequent version separate from another copy that was part of the Earl of Portarlington collection. Recently discovered, this painting has however emerged as among the finest examples of

Claude Lorrain's seaport and harbour scenes, a subgenre that comprises more than a quarter of the artist's output for which he was especially admired. It represents a rarely depicted subject during the seventeenth century, the story of Saint Paula, told by Saint Jerome in his letters (CVIII), and partially cited in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, a collection of hagiographies that would have been readily available to Claude. After the death of her husband, Toxocius, and that of her eldest daughter, Blaesilla, Paula, a Roman matron of noble birth, underwent a powerful spiritual conversion. She renounced all worldly possessions and bodily pleasures for a life of poverty, charity and perpetual prayer, thus becoming a model for Christian widows. She left Rome for the Holy Land in 385 where she felt she could better serve God, setting up several monasteries there.

Claude chose to represent the sensitive moment just before Paula's seaborne departure from the Port of Ostia, adhering relatively closely to Jerome's text: "She went down to the port, and her brother and close relatives and friends, and, more important than these, her children, followed her and tried to dissuade their most loving mother [from leaving]" (Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*). Paula is shown in the centre foreground on the quayside in simple dress holding a rosary, testaments to her modesty and piety. Close by her side is her daughter Eustochium, her only companion on the journey. Just behind them are three figures, one of which is a man with his hands raised, perhaps the brother of Paula mentioned by Jerome. A lavishly dressed woman with her back turned has her arm raised as if to support her face. Perhaps she is Rufina, Paula's fourth daughter, "who was about to be married, [and] held back her tears and begged her mother to wait for her wedding" (Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*). This key figure is positioned in the very centre of the foreground, looking out toward the distant horizon, which is beautifully lit by the glowing early morning sun. She thus signals the viewer to emulate her gesture and peruse the vast view before them. To her left, also in ornate dress, is perhaps Paula's other daughter, Paulina, who inherited her mother's property. The seated figural group at lower left includes a man with his hand under his chin looking outward and contemplating the view, much like Rufina, another model for the viewer. Paula's only son, Toxocius, is nearby "...on the shore with outstretched, pleading hands" (Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*). The young Toxocius's gesture is mimicked by a slightly older boy to his left who has one arm outstretched to receive alms from a woman. Although not part of Jerome's text per se, Claude cleverly included this anecdote of almsgiving as a way to foreshadow Paula's activities in the Holy Land where she looked after the poor, as is told later in her *Life*, as cited from Jerome in the *Golden Legend*.

Despite the fact that he was representing an expansive seaport view, Claude took great care in painting individual details within this work. For example, in the lower left foreground he included ruins and rocks interspersed with vegetation and shells that he modelled beautifully with the shining sunlight. At the top of the ruined column, Claude included a small figure, looking downward and observing the scene. This eyewitness might be difficult to spot at first sight, and only becomes apparent after prolonged looking, which Claude thus encouraged. The rigging of the ships is meticulously rendered and the hustle and bustle of marine life is effectively suggested by the numerous figures shown busy at work. The sterns of the large ships are elaborately decorated with gilding, as ships from Claude's own time would have been, and with figures and animals painted *en grisaille*. The beautiful rippling effects of the moving water are especially convincing.

In addition, the balanced and successful organization of the picture reveals how carefully Claude considered Saint Paula's story and how to best relate it visually. The composition is framed by architecture and landscape on the left and right, respectively, a device that Claude employed in other seaport scenes (for example *Seaport with the Embarkation of Saint Ursula*, 1641, London, National Gallery). The fluted Corinthian column and engaged pilaster at left (which closely resemble those in Claude's *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*, 1648, London, National Gallery) allude to an ancient pagan temple that Paula has turned her back upon and will leave behind. The hard stone marble contrasts with the softer trees and the rippling effects of the water, thus exhibiting Claude's virtuosic ability to paint a variety of surface textures, both man-made and natural. The large ship at left, only partially visible behind the columns, frames the composition further with its mast pointing right and upward in the direction of the sun. It is balanced at right by the smaller vessel with half opened sails, whose mast is pointing left and upward, also toward the sun.

The viewer is thus encouraged visually to direct his or her attention to the other main protagonist of this picture aside from Saint Paula, the light, which emanates from the rising sun positioned slightly above the horizon. Although difficult to tell, Claude likely painted a sunrise, suitable for an embarkation; the metaphor of a new day was also appropriate to suggest the new chapter that is about to begin in Saint Paula's life. Infrared reflectography suggests that Claude may have initially conceived the position of the sun slightly higher and to the left, and thus smaller; this detail would be interesting to compare against an x-ray of

the painting. Claude also originally conceived the rounded tower nearby significantly larger overall, which would have diminished and obscured the impact of the sun. By enlarging and placing the sun more centrally, and reducing in size nearby elements such as the tower, Claude ensured that the sunlight occupied a prominent position in the picture. The light, with its symbolic associations with divinity, reinforces Paula's conversion and extreme piety. Claude's convincing ability to subtly suggest the reflection of light on all surfaces within the painting imbues this work with an extraordinary poetic beauty.

Although many of Claude's seaport scenes were paired, often with a pastoral landscape, this work lacks a pendant. Claude represented the subject in a vertical format in an earlier picture currently at the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, where the figures are shown in reverse of the current painting; he then produced a simplified variant of the Prado picture, today in the Duke of Wellington Collection (see Related Paintings above). The horizontal format of the Hambleton painting allows more prominence to the horizon and to the warm morning glow, making it more conducive to suggesting the powerful effects of light than in the vertical versions. The moving impact of the sunlight in the current picture is unique to Claude's representations of Saint Paula, and stands among only a handful of seaport scenes with similarly effective light effects.

Material and technical examination combined with the overall high quality of the painting confirm that this is the primary version after which the painting in Épinal was based. The herring-bone weave canvas is characteristic of Claude. The presence of alterations visible in the infrared such as the shift in the position of the sun, the lowering of the entablature and the diminished size of the rounded tower, suggest that Claude was still working out details of the composition in this painting rather than emulating a finished work. This is supported by the overall high quality of the painting, with its subtle effects of light, carefully balanced composition and extreme attention to detail, which result in a highly moving and pleasing painting.