

FOLLOWER OF JACQUES CALLOT

(Nancy 1592 - Nancy 1635)

A Sultan Riding a Camel Led by a Driver, Accompanied by a Dignitary

oil on panel
36 x 46 cm (14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in)

Provenance: Viennese private collection.

A *SULTAN RIDING A CAMEL LED BY A DRIVER, ACCOMPANIED BY A DIGNITARY* is a whimsically delightful composition by a follower of Jacques Callot. Callot, best known for his etchings chronicling the lives of soldiers, clowns, gypsies, beggars and aristocrats whom he encountered in the streets or at court, also depicted figures in eastern dress, which reflected the European taste for Orientalism. His compositions often included elements of the exotic, such as the camels in *An Army Leaving a Castle*, which give the work an undoubtedly foreign feel (fig. 1).

The present painting may be influenced by Callot's illustrations for *Il Solimano*, a play centring on the intrigues of the Ottoman court of Suleiman I the Magnificent, which was published in 1620 as a tribute to Grand Duke Cosimo II. *Il Solimano* prefigured the works of Jean Baptiste Vanmour (1671-1737), a French-Flemish painter who devoted his career to depicting life in the Ottoman Empire during the Tulip period. A series of engravings made after Vanmour's paintings were published in 1708 under the title *Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant*, and had enormous influence in Western Europe. Vanmour's portrayal of oriental dress, although less flamboyant, is clearly related to Callot's style of illustration, and the present work.

In *A Sultan Riding a Camel Led by a Driver, Accompanied by a Dignitary*, the sultan is depicted in the centre of the scene, exotically caricatured in a red sleeved tunic, gold boots with turned up toes and a white turban with a feather. He rides a stately camel, whose head is decorated with a spray of feathers, and



Jacques Callot, detail of *An Army Leaving a Castle*, c.1632, J. Paul Getty Museum (Figure 1)



Jacques Callot, *Franca Trippa and Fritellino in Balli di Sfessania*, 1621, Private Collection (Figure 2)

shelters under a red and black fringed canopy adorned by a crescent moon. The sultan's dramatic appearance is heightened by the long blue cloak with a scalloped edge that hangs behind him, held up by a dignitary. The dignitary is richly clad in a full-length red vest and matching turban. Leading the procession is the camel driver, whose unusual headdress has two protuberant horns and a large upright feather. The ground where each figure treads is spot lit while the rest of the composition fades into darkness, emphasising its theatricality. Birds, with colourful plumage and stylised wings and tails and the occasional cloud stand out against a mysterious black background.

The men's beards in *A Sultan Riding a Camel Led by a Driver, Accompanied by a Dignitary* are exaggeratedly pointed in a fashion reminiscent of those belonging to Pantalone and other male characters in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. The Italian comedy fascinated Callot, and one of his most notable series of engravings, called the *Balli di Sfessania*, depicts its most popular entertainers. These highly caricatured and grotesque figures bear a resemblance to the sultan and his entourage, particularly the camel driver with his pointed headdress (fig. 2). The present work combines something of the comical absurdity of Callot's depictions of *Commedia dell'Arte* characters, with the fanciful magnificence and exoticism of his figures from the Ottoman court.

