

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Woman in Greek Dress

After Georges de La Chappelle

Possibly France or Turkey, late 17th – early 18th century

Oil on copper

20.5cm high, 15.2cm wide

Provenance: Private European Collection

Stock no.: A4990

This painting depicts a woman standing in front of a splendid green curtain, edged with gold brocade and drawn to one side to reveal the cityscape of Istanbul in the distance. The artist has employed a vibrant palette of red, purple and bluish-white for the woman's clothing, set against the brilliant green curtain, blue waters and sky. The woman's gaze is directed towards the viewer as she stands elegantly dressed, holding a tulip in one hand.

This painting was rendered after an illustration in a book entitled *Recueil de divers portraits des principales dames de la Porte du grand Turc, tirée au naturel sur les lieux, et dédiée à Madame la comtesse de Fiesque*, by French artist Georges de la Chappelle. The book includes twelve engravings depicting women dressed in costumes associated with different nations and cultures related to the Ottoman Empire, often with views of Istanbul and the Bosphorus in the background. Chappelle travelled with the French ambassador Monsieur de la Haye to Istanbul in 1643 where he lived for several years, and sketched local women with whom he met through the embassy. He paid close attention to detail when portraying the various Ottoman Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Persian and Tartar costumes of the time, verifying their accuracy with the ambassador. Chappelle's book was published in Paris in 1648, and the original copy was held in the collection of Philippe of France, Duke of Orléans (1640-1701), younger son of Louis XIII.[1]

This painting follows closely, though not identically, Chappelle's ninth illustration entitled '*Afendias*

Athenia yapar, 'Souveraine d'Athenes'. In this illustration, a woman is portrayed wearing a traditional Greek costume that would have been worn for events such as assemblies, baptisms and marriages in the 17th century when Chappelle was in Istanbul.[2] In keeping with this illustration, our painting portrays the woman standing on hammam platform shoes (*nalins*), wearing a tunic held by a bejewelled belt, and an outer fur-lined cloak. Minor differences can be noted in the patterns and folds of the garments, the position of the woman's left hand, and the addition of a tulip held in her right.

It is in the treatment of the woman's facial features, headdress and the background of the painting, however, where the painter has borrowed and combined elements from another of Chappelle's illustrations, the second one entitled '*Quarassa Romeca*', '*Dame Grecque*'. Here, the woman's smaller eyes, rounder cheeks and leftward-pointing gaze have been included in our painting. Furthermore, her large cap with hanging pearls and stones has been combined with that from the illustration of '*Souveraine d'Athenes*'. Additionally, in our painting, the background of Istanbul and the Bosphorus from the '*Dame Grecque*' has been combined with the grand curtain from the '*Souveraine d'Athenes*'.

Costume albums in addition to topographical drawings and portraits of the 'other' became increasingly popular in Europe during the 17th century, as diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire evolved. As such, publications like Chappelle's were often commissioned and reproduced. The Ptuj Regional Museum, Slovenia, for example, holds a collection of oil paintings dated to circa 1682 that follow very closely the illustrations of *Recueil de divers portraits des principales dames de la Porte du grand Turc*. [3] Further examples from a private collection, dated to circa 1660, and painted on copper like our painting, are illustrated in Boghossian, pp.74-75.

Literature:

Boghossian, J., Ed. *Couleurs d'Orient: Arts et arts de vivre dans l'Empire ottoman*, Villa Empain, Fondation Boghossian, Brussels, 2010.

La Chappelle, G. *Recueil de divers portraits des principales dames de la Porte du grand Turc, tirée au naturel sur les lieux, et dédiée à Madame la comtesse de Fiesque*, Antoine Estiene, Paris, 1648, accessed online via Digital Libraries, Gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Clair, A. *The Image of the Turk in Europe*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1973.

Image of the Turks in the 17th century Europe, Sabancı University, Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul, 2005. Pages 228-29.

[1] Image of the Turks, p. 210.

[2] Chappelle, view 50/85.

[3] Image of the Turks, esp. p.228 for 'Soueraine d'Athenes', and p. 218 for 'Dame Greque'.