



 CATALOGUE ENTRY

The Flight into Egypt

about 1635

Claude Lorrain

French, active in Rome, 1600 or 1604/5–1682

oil on canvas

28-1/2 × 39 in.

(72.5 × 99 cm)

The Clowes Collection

2003.171

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

Signed, bottom center, heavily abraded: CLAV[] I(N)V(ENIT)

Entry

1 Orphaned and only twelve years old, Claude Gellée left his home in Lorraine, France, and settled in Rome, where he became known as “Claude Lorrain.”¹ He first found employment as a servant in the household of Agostino Tassi (1578–1644), a prominent landscape painter who had studied with the Flemish artist Paul Bril (1554–1626). Then, beginning in 1620, Claude apprenticed for two years under a German landscape specialist, Goffredo Wals (1595–1638), before returning to Tassi as a studio assistant. By 1627, Claude was working as an independent artist. His fame spread rapidly, not only through the many diplomats and ecclesiastics who traveled to Rome and saw his works, but also through engravings Claude had made of his designs, which helped to spread knowledge of his artistic talent across the continent. By 1635, he was regarded as an unsurpassed master of landscapes and seascapes, gaining the patronage of popes, cardinals, princes, and ambassadors. Apparently, jealous rivals began to copy or even create forgeries of his works.² To safeguard his reputation against such imitations, Claude began keeping visual records of most of his paintings in an album of drawings he entitled *Liber Veritatis* (The Book of Truth).

2 In general terms, Claude successfully combined the classicizing Italian landscape model developed by the artists Annibale Carracci (1560–1609; fig. 1) and Domenichino (1581–1641) with the expressive qualities of the Northern European landscape tradition as practiced by Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610; fig. 2), Wals, and Bril. Claude’s skill in portraying atmospheric humidity and sunlight in all its permutations, and in combination with mist or dense masses of foliage, astounded his contemporaries. Among those who marveled at such technical virtuosity was the German artist and art biographer Joachim von Sandrart, who commented on Claude’s representation of a landscape “in which one can truly recognize how the sun, risen for some two hours above the horizon, dissipates the nebulous air and how the dew floating upon the waters really mingles astonishingly with [the air].”³ For all its verisimilitude, Claude’s depiction of nature is never merely a raw record of what he saw. Instead, it is refined, embellished, and exalted by means of compositional formulas and stock motifs drawn from pastoral poetry. The result is a blend of real and ideal that invests the ordinary rhythms of peasant life with elegiac poetry and that invests nature with classical grandeur. Rendering his work even more appealing to contemporaries, Claude infused it with recognizable local landscape features and characteristic local flora in a perfect synthesis of experience and imagination.



Figure 1: Annibale Carracci (Italian, 1560–1609), *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, about 1603, oil on canvas, 48 × 91 in. Galleria Palazzo Doria Pamphili, Rome, FC236.



Figure 2: Adam Elsheimer (German, 1578–1610), *The Flight into Egypt*, 1609, oil on copper, 12-3/16 × 16-1/8 in. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, From the collection of the Elector Johann Wilhelm of the Palatinate in Dusseldorf. Later in the Mannheim gallery, inv. no. 216.

3 All of these signature elements of Claude’s art can be found in the Clowes Collection’s *Flight into Egypt*. At one time, the Clowes painting had been considered a pendant to the artist’s *Coast Scene* (Los Angeles, private collection), which is included in the *Liber Veritatis* as no. 2.⁴ This theory of a relationship between the two paintings first arose after both paintings reached, by independent paths, the hands of the same French art dealer, Vincent Donjeux, in the late eighteenth century. Donjeux sold them as a pair in 1773. For the next 200 years, they were displayed together, and they were even temporarily renamed *Morning* and *Evening*, as if they had been intended by Claude as a contrasting pair.

4 Despite not having been recorded in the *Liber Veritatis*, Claude’s authorship of the Clowes *Flight into Egypt* has never been doubted. The canvas does, in fact, bear the artist’s signature, discreetly painted on a rock in the central foreground, but much abraded: CLAV[] IV. Presumably, this inscription would have originally matched the Latin inscription that has survived intact on the above-mentioned *Coast Scene* by Claude: CLAUDIO IV ROMA. In this formula, the letters “IV” stand for the Latin verb *invenit* (invented). Outside the realm of engraving, very few artists utilized the term *invenit* in their signatures. A painter would typically sign his or her name in the form of a Latin phrase stating that he or she had “fecit” (made) or “pinxit” (painted) the artwork. The choice of this less common term *invenit* may indicate Claude’s wish to give emphasis to the intellectual work of inventing or designing a painting’s composition, as opposed to the manual operation of applying colors. Otherwise, it may simply have indicated that Claude intended to produce an engraving after this work, which he did do in the case of the Los Angeles *Coast Scene* but not for this painting.

5 The Clowes Collection’s *Flight into Egypt* was designed to unfold slowly before the viewer’s eyes through curious, unhurried looking. In its most immediate aspects, the scene is of a forest bathed in midmorning light and populated by travelers and herdsmen. The two most prominent landscape features are a towering oak tree, bordering the forest to the left, and a long bridge, spanning a winding stream to the right. Throughout the scene, movement is implied. Highlighted by bright patches of colored clothing, a family and their donkey amble along a path in the central middle ground. Behind them in the distance, cows and goats, accompanied by herdsmen, file across the bridge and spill down along the banks in order to drink water from the rushing brook; above, the canopies of the trees seem to tremble in the morning breeze. The pleasant sounds of these moving elements—the churning of the waters, the tinkling of cowbells, and the rustling of the trees—can be imagined as well.⁵ After patient study, it eventually becomes possible to discern a few, small human figures emerging from the deep shade of the forest on the left. Engulfed by the towering trees around them, these minute figures suggest a shadowy, primeval existence in which man is part and parcel of a wild and untamed nature. In the clearing beside the brook, we see a different vein of coexistence with nature, in which humans are benevolent and peaceful domesticators who find contentment in simple pleasures. Rustic cowherds repose in the open pastures and on the sunlit riverbank, evoking the imaginary, lost arcadian age, in which shepherds were thought to have lived in serene harmony with nature and each other.

6 The peace that reigns over this pastoral society stands in stark contrast to the atrocious killing of children taking place in the city from which the traveling family has fled, for these middle-ground figures are Joseph and Mary carrying the baby Jesus out of harm's way while Herod effects his Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem (see Matt. 2:13–18). Although only an infant, the Christ child precociously holds the donkey's reins, a motif with precedents in the art of Wals and his workshop (fig. 3). This wondrous detail demonstrates the Christ child's divinity, while at the same time it alludes to the role of heavenly providence in guiding the family to safety. (In Claude's later versions of the subject, angels would often illustrate this latter principle.) Yet the Holy Family also appears to be protected by nature itself, here shown in its most gentle aspect by means of clear and abundant waters, the cool shade of the forest, the unobstructed and level paths, and the clement weather. Even the peasants who inhabit this arcadia are benevolent, as seen in the way the reclining shepherd helpfully points out to Joseph the correct path.



Figure 3: Circle of Goffredo Wals and workshop (German, about 1590/1595–1638/40), *The Flight into Egypt*, about 1620–1625, oil on oak panel, 10-1/8 × 12-1/4 in. Private collection. Sold at Christies, sale 11670, lot 94, London, 8 July 2015.

7 According to the Bible, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus found asylum in Egypt. For Claude's contemporaries, however, the countryside through which the Holy Family passed was in itself a safe haven. In particular, they considered the countryside surrounding Rome—especially near Frascati and the Castelli Romani—to be an ideal refuge, as this was where the wealthy cardinals and the Roman nobility retreated during the summer in the tradition of *villeggiatura*, a practice that was believed to improve one's health by means of restorative repose, fresh air, and exercise in nature.⁴ Claude's landscapes evoked this very topography, for the artist had carried out plein-air sketches in the Roman campagna to lend credibility and immediacy to his idealized views.² Owned by the baronial families and cardinals who formed Rome's ruling elite, the villas in this area were strategically situated and designed to provide sanitized, picturesque views of the rustic surroundings.⁵ To enhance the experience, the proprietors of these villas also indulged in pastoral poetry that verbally evoked the pleasant sights, sounds, and smells of the countryside.² Gazing outward at rural landscapes laden with poetical associations, these privileged inhabitants engaged in a kind of visual exercise that was considered to be salutary for the eyes and the spirits.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, looking at painted landscapes was believed to produce some of the same benefits as looking at real ones.¹¹ There is thus a distinct possibility that the first owners of the Clowes *Flight into Egypt* valued it as a means of soothing their fatigued eyes and their weary spirits; this is even more so considering the work's subject matter.

8 Although most of Claude's artworks have secular themes, among those that were religious, the Flight into Egypt was by far his most popular: he made ten versions of the story and another ten representing the closely related theme of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt. The subject emerged for the first time in Claude's oeuvre in 1631, when he painted the *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* on copper that is now in the Belvoir Castle Collection of the Duke of Rutland, as well as the similarly dated *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, also on copper, now in the Collection of the Duke of Westminster. In that very year, nearly all of northern and central Italy was in the grip of a catastrophic outbreak of bubonic plague, which had begun the previous year and would rage on until 1634. Romans were terrified.¹² Since ancient times, Italian physicians typically counseled people to avoid the highly contagious disease by leaving the congested cities and finding refuge in a distant, safe place. This advice was summed up in the maxim *cito longe tarde*, meaning, "flee far and fast, and tarry in your return."¹³ In the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313–1375) *Decameron*, set during the plague of 1348–1349, wealthy Italians flee the cities for their countryside villas, where they focus on staying healthy and cheerful, remaining there for the duration of the outbreak.¹⁴ Thus, during the very time that Claude first experimented with the subject of the Flight into Egypt, showing the Holy Family traveling in the countryside to escape the peril in the city of Bethlehem, his patrons were themselves seeking refuge in the countryside to avoid the danger of contagion in the crowded cities. Claude's 1631 paintings of this subject may have been intended to be carried away by those very individuals who were lucky enough to be able to flee to a second home, as the small size and copper support of these two paintings made them easy and safe to transport.

9 Seventeenth-century Roman viewers surely would have found parallels between their own tribulations as dwellers in a plague-prone metropolis and the fearful decision of Joseph and Mary to abandon the city of Bethlehem. Such commonalities no doubt contributed to the prominence of the Flight into Egypt in Claude's repertoire, where the Roman campagna is repeatedly idealized and presented as a cure for the problems of ancient and modern cities alike. In the Clowes Collection's *Flight into Egypt*, Claude has depicted the Holy Family hurrying through this arcadian setting as they urgently make their escape to Egypt; only there, according to the biblical account, will they feel safe from persecution. Luckily for historical audiences, and even for audiences today, there is no need to rush away from this pleasant, imagined place in order to find solace. Meditation upon the peaceful beauty of this perfectly composed earthly paradise offers immediate respite from everyday worries in the form of comforting associations and visual contentment. Claude's art was a balm for the weary, anxiety-ridden souls of the early modern world.

Author

[Sheila Barker](#)

Provenance

Vincent Donjeux (died 1793), Paris, by 1773;¹⁵

Henry John Temple, 2nd Viscount Palmerston (1739–1802), Broadlands, Hampshire, England, in 1773;¹⁶

By descent within his family to Evelyn Ashley (1836–1907) until 1889;

(Thomas Agnew and Sons, London);

Sir Edward Cecil Guinness (1847–1927), later Earl of Iveagh, Dublin and London, in 1889;¹⁷

By descent within the family to executors of the estate of Arthur Ernest Guinness (1876–1949), Holmbury House, Surrey, until 1953;

Intended sale at (Christie's, London), in 1953, but sold prior to auction;¹⁸

(Knoedler Galleries, New York, with Thos. Agnew & Sons, London, and Pinakos Inc., New York), in 1953;¹⁹

(Thos. Agnew & Sons, London);

Mrs. G.H.A. (Edith Whitehill) Clowes, Indianapolis, in 1959;

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1959–2003, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (C10052);

Given to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2003.

Exhibitions

British Institution for Promoting the Fine Arts in the United Kingdom, London, 1828, *Pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and Dutch Masters*, no. 32, as *Morning*;

Royal Academy, London, 1884, *Exhibition of Works by The Old Masters*, no. 162;

Thos. Agnew and Sons, London, 1957, *Recently Acquired Pictures by Old Masters*, no. 11;

John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, 1960, *Indiana Collects*, no. 36 (reproduced);

Wildenstein, New York, 1978, *Romance and Reality: Aspects of Landscape Painting*, no. 14 (reproduced);

Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou; Hunan Museum, Changsha; Chengdu Museum; 2020, *Rembrandt to Monet: 500 Years of European Painting*.

References

John Preston Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819), 2:59, as "a landscape, with figures of the Holy Family";

Important Pictures by Old Masters and Pictures and Drawings, sale cat., Christie's, London, 10 July 1953, no. 57;

Recently Acquired Pictures by Old Masters, exh. cat. (London: Thos. Agnew and Sons, 1957), no. 11;

Art News (Summer 1957): 65;

Illustrated London News (14 December 1957): 36 (reproduced);

Marcel R thlisberger, "Les fresques de Claude Lorrain," *Paragone* (January 1959): 48, 50n26;

Marcel R thlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:466; 2:fig. 35 (reproduced);

Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968);

Marcel R thlisberger and Doretta Cecchi, *L'opera completa di Claude Lorrain* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1975), 91 (reproduced);

Denys Sutton, *Romance and Reality: Aspects of Landscape Painting*, exh. cat. (New York: Wildenstein, 1978), no. 14, fig. 13;

Ellen Wardwell Lee, ed., *Indianapolis Museum of Art Highlights of the Collection* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2005), 106 (reproduced);

Kjell M. Wangenstein et al., *Floating Lights and Shadows: 500 Years of European Painting* (Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing: Nanjing, 2020), 156–159 (reproduced).

Technical Notes and Condition

The painting has been relined in the twentieth century and retouched. The stretcher is in stable condition, and the few areas of visible original canvas are also in good condition; visible cupping along all four edges proves that the work is still roughly its original size. Slight degradation of the image has occurred over the centuries. There has been some abrasion to the upper paint layers and glazing due to restoration campaigns before the twentieth century, while the relining of the canvas resulted in the flattening of any areas of impasto. Some blanching (or obstructing opacity) of the surface layer of the painting may also have occurred, due to improper removal of varnish with solvents during previous restorations. It was treated most recently in 1978–1983 to remove yellowed varnish and replace old overpaint with retouching in AYAB and dry pigments.

The ground, formed by a chalky, off-white layer of medium thickness, exhibits moderate, typical cracking, but it is intact. Some underpainting in a black carbon-based pigment was carried out in the initial phase, to which a lead white primer was applied. Much of the blue color in the sky area was painted with ultramarine blue, and the evidence of the use of other blue pigments probably can be attributed to restorers' inpainting interventions in modern times. The paint, likely mixed with linseed oil, was applied with both wet-in-wet and wet-over-dry techniques, to achieve diverse illusionistic effects.

Although there are remaining signs of woodworms in the modern reproduction frame, there is no current infestation and the frame is structurally sound.

Notes

1. The scholarship on the artist's contested birth date is summarized in Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:4; Röthlisberger found the arguments for the 1600 birthdate to be definitive.
2. This claim of forgers counterfeiting Claude's works was recorded in the seventeenth-century biography of the artists written by Filippo Baldinucci (1624–1696). This entire biography by Baldinucci is published in English translation in Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:53–62; the relevant passage is at 1:59.
3. Cited in Richard Rand, *Claude Lorrain: The Painter as Draftsman; Drawings from the British Museum* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 25.
4. This theory is explained and rejected in Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:99, 466. The Los Angeles *Marine Scene*, measuring 72.5 × 96.5 cm and recorded as *Liber Veritatis* 2, has the words "per Parigi" (meaning "to be sent to Paris") written on the back, and dates from about 1630–1635. On the Los Angeles *Marine Scene*, see Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:98–99; 2: fig. 28.
5. On the elements of movement and sound in the imaginary pastoral landscapes of seventeenth-century French literature, see Michel Conan, "Friendship and Imagination in French Baroque Gardens," in *Baroque Garden Cultures: Emulation, Sublimation, Subversion*, ed. Michel Conan, *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture* 25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 323–383, especially 345–346, 349–350.
6. On Roman *villeggiatura* in general, see David R. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Claire Pace, "Free from Business and Debate: City and Country in Responses to Landscape in 17th-Century Italy and France," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 73, no.3 (2004): 158–178. In subtle contrast to the previous two studies, it is suggested in Tracy L. Ehrlich, *Landscape and Identity in Early Modern Rome: Villa Culture at Frascati in the Borghese Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), that rather than leaving all business behind, the Roman elites began using villas to serve their pressing political objectives and strategies of social one-upmanship in their competition for power and prestige. For the health benefits of villa life, see Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199–208.
7. For Claude's plein-air sketching, see Richard Rand, *Claude Lorrain: The Painter as Draftsman; Drawings from the British Museum* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 58–86. For the connections between the sites represented in Claude's paintings and the actual settings of the villas of Roman elites, see Mirka Beneš, "Pastoralism in the Roman Baroque Villa and in Claude Lorrain: Myths and Realities of the Roman Campagna," in *Villas and Gardens in Early Modern Italy and France*, ed. Mirka Beneš and Dianne Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 88–113; and Lisa Beaven, "Claude Lorrain and La Crescenza: The Tiber Valley in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Site of Rome: Studies in the Art and Topography of Rome, 1400–1750*, ed. David Marshall (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2014), 109–139.
8. According to Tracy Ehrlich, "Pastoral Landscape and Social Politics in Baroque Rome," in *Baroque Garden Cultures: Emulation, Sublimation, Subversion*, ed. Michel Conan, *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture* 25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 131–181, especially 157, villas such as Mondragone, built by Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577–1633), were designed to spare their inhabitants the troublesome sight of the bleak poverty of rural peasants.
9. Cardinal Scipione Borghese, for instance, had the papal court poet Lelio Guidiccioni (1570–before 1644) recite pastoral poems during the banquet dinners at the villa. These poems described the romanticized lives of ancient shepherds, the flocks of sheep and goats, cattle herds, wooded groves, open pastures, and babbling brooks. See Tracy Ehrlich, "Pastoral Landscape and Social Politics in Baroque Rome," in *Baroque Garden Cultures: Emulation, Sublimation, Subversion*, ed. Michel Conan, *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture* 25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 131–181, especially 158–160.
10. The green colors of the plants were considered to be therapeutic for the eye, as that hue was as a balanced medium between the extremes of black and white. Additionally, the gentle movement of the eye as it studies the view was considered a means of relaxing the eye as well as the mind. Furthermore, many of the things seen in the countryside, such as pastures, brooks, and sheep, were recognized as bringing cheer to one's soul. Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 175, 196–197, 200–205; also, Frances Gage, *Painting as Medicine in Early Modern Rome: Giulio Mancini and the Efficacy of Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 57–62.
11. On the use of painted landscapes in seventeenth-century Rome to stimulate some of the same beneficial physiological effects gained by looking at real ones, see Arnold A. Witte, *The Artful Hermitage: The Palazzetto Farnese as a Counter-Reformation "Diaeta"* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2008); Frances Gage, "Exercise for the Mind and Body: Giulio Mancini, Collecting, and the Beholding of Landscape in the Seventeenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61, no.4 (winter 2008): 1167–1207; and Frances Gage, *Painting as Medicine in Early Modern Rome. Giulio Mancini and the Efficacy of Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 66–82.
12. Sheila Barker, "Art in a Time of Danger: Urban VIII's Rome and the Plague of 1629–1634," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002.
13. Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (London: Routledge, 2016; first published by Ashgate: London, 2012), 151.
14. See Sheila Barker, "Poussin, Plague, and Early Modern Medicine," *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 4 (2004): 655–689.
15. For information on the eighteenth-century artist-turned-dealer Donjeux, see the preface of Lebrun et Paillet, Paris, sale cat., *Catalogue des Objets Précieux trouvés après le décès du Citoyen Vincent Donjeux, ancien négociant de Tableaux et curiosités*, 29 April 1793, and Charlotte Guichard, "Small Worlds: The Auction Economy in the Late Eighteenth-Century Paris Art Market," in Neil de Marchi and Sophie Raux, eds., *Moving Pictures: Intra-European Trade in Images, 16th–18th Centuries*, *Studies in European Urban History* (1100–1800) 34 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 244, 246.
16. Donjeux sold this painting (and LV2, *Coast Scene*) to Henry Temple, 2nd Viscount Palmerston, as recorded in the viscount's "Book of Purchase"; see Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:99, 466.
17. Marcel Röthlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: The Paintings*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 1:99.
18. Christie's, London, sale cat., *Pictures by Old Masters, Ancient and Modern Pictures and Drawings*, 10 July 1953, no. 57. However, this painting apparently sold before the auction to Knoedler, Agnew and Pinakos; see Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, M. Knoedler & Co. Records (Knoedler digital archive), Painting Stockbook 10, page III, no. 5435.
19. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, M. Knoedler & Co. Records (Knoedler digital archive), Painting Stockbook 10, page III, no. 5435. Knoedler digital archive. The stock number "A5435" is written in crayon on the back of the frame; see [Technical Examination Report](#).