

Millet's Paolo – A Provenance



Paolo The Greek

Millet combined his graphic and writing abilities, together with his communication skills, to best effect as a war correspondent face to face with mortal danger in the thick of battle during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. His appointment as reporter-in-the-field for the New York Herald, where he was appointed by James Gordon-Bennett himself, The Daily News, Times of London, and as "special artist" to the London Graphic, was something of a catharsis for Millet following his earlier artistic self-doubt and personal conflicting emotional entanglements with Velma Morse in Massachusetts and, later, with Charles Warren Stoddard in Venice. At the end of it he would return reinvigorated and bearing many weaponry and costume souvenirs of the escapade but also including his Greek war-time orderly, Paolo, who was to be immortalised as the model in Millet's large painting: "*Bachi-Bouzouk et Bulgare: épisode de la guerre en Turquie*".

NEW-YORK HERALD

Bureau de Paris,
et Avenue de l'Opéra.

Paris le May 31^e 1877

To All whom it may concern:

This is to certify that Mr. Frank D. Millet is the authorized correspondent of the New-York Herald and I respectfully request that he may receive all the consideration and aid that can be afforded him in that capacity.

Gordon Bennett

Millet's own account of his involvement in the war published in, the British weekly illustrated newspaper *The Graphic*, in January 1878, detailed the part played by the soldiers of fortune known as Bashi-Bazouks:

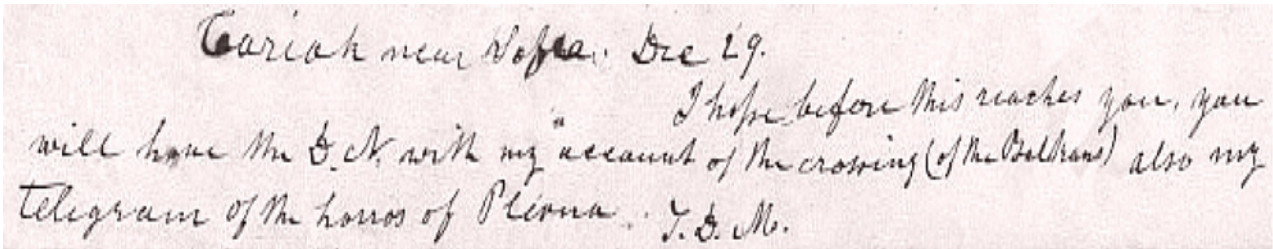
"We waited for the darkness to come on and then, with one impulse, the men ran forward and up the hill again. A perfect shower of bullets met them and they shortly came back, or part of them. Two or three times they repeated the rush with the courage of tigers. What they were trying to do was not to capture the work again but to get possession of the wounded, forty or fifty of whom lay on the slope within hearing. The night grew colder and the stillness was unbroken except for an occasional call or groan wafted down to us from the near hillside. Infrequent gleams of starlight alternated with drifting chill and withering cloud fog. A few men were stationed as pickets and the rest of us slept a feverish broken tired sleep in the woods across the plateau. At daybreak not a wounded man was alive on the snowy slopes above. In the fog and darkness a few Bashi Bazouks had crept down to them and cut off their heads. Their bodies could be seen for many days until a charitable fall of snow gave them a winding sheet. The doctor and I went to the rear in the early morning and found work enough in the valley to make us forget the night. But even now, on a blustering winter evening when the clouds scurry across the sky, that scene comes back to me with oppressive reality and I hear in the howling of the storm the faint cries of the doomed wounded and the responsive stifled groans of the friends who were powerless to help them. Turks rarely gave quarter. At the end of the campaign the Russians could exchange 1000 Turks for every Russian prisoner. It was just this little throat cutting trick of the Turks that made the campaign uncomfortable. Fortunately they were not a very active enemy. If they had been they would have had the heads of half the Russian army."

Millet took a great interest in the Bashi-Bazouks, who were irregular mercenaries attached to the Turkish army but unpaid and reliant on plunder. They were undisciplined and totally ruthless. Millet painted two well-known works featuring Bashi-Bazouks. Both were painted in 1878, the one entitled: "*The Bashi Bazouk*" was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1879 and the National Academy in New York in 1880. It was purchased by John Jacob Astor, the American billionaire. The other entitled: "*Bachi-Bouzouk et Bulgare: épisode de la guerre en Turquie*" and, contemporarily, sometimes as "*Paolo his Man-servant*" or "*The Turkish*

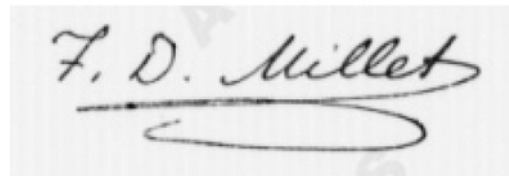
Guard is the lesser known but larger at 52" x 28" and more dramatic work showing Paolo as a Bashi-Bazouk about to decapitate a bound and crouching Bulgarian prisoner.

The Greek Paolo as Millet's orderly and man-servant accompanied him throughout the campaign and proved invaluable as the two men scoured the countryside on horseback; Paolo for provisions and Millet for newspaper copy. A typical Millet newspaper account of the deprivations they endured was penned by him shortly after the fall of Plevna which marked the cessation of hostilities:

"The Russians with characteristic want of forethought had not provided an extra supply of rations for the Turks and even their own men were half starved. Nothing could be done until supply trains came up and meanwhile thousands were being carted away to the ditch for the lack of a handful of bread apiece. And the inhuman Bulgarians who were set the task of burning the dead did not always wait until the poor wretches had ceased to live but many breathed their last, jolted and crushed in the ox carts under the weight of the corpses. It was a common sight to see men drop dead in the road as they struggled along hoping to get relief.....After a day of excitement and a night of writing I was awakened from a short sleep by my servant who said that two Turks were sitting on the step of the gate on the street and would die unless they were fed. We gave them all we had and I came back in to finish my dispatch. In a short hour I went back out again and the two men were dead where they sat, each with a crust of bread in his hand and the cigarettes which Paolo had given them half smoked on the ground beside them."



Carriah near Sofia. Dec 29.
I hope before this reaches you, you
will have Mr. G. N. with my account of the crossing (of the Balkans) also my
telegram of the horrors of Plevna. Y. G. M.



On the conclusion of the war, Paolo returned with Millet to the Merrill home in Rue de l'Orient, Monmartre where he was employed as a general servant and cook for an extended period. Paolo even spent the summer of 1878 with them in Vasouy, in Calvados, where Millet painted his soon-to-be wife Lily Merrill asleep in a hammock under a bower and entitled *Philosophy in Summer*, before Paolo eventually returned to Greece, ostensibly to open a shop. In his Paris studio, Millet entertained not only Mark Twain but numerous other illustrious visitors such as Louis Comfort Tiffany, as well as old artist friends from his Rome days such

as David Maitland Armstrong who described Millet's studio and the strange presence of Paolo:

"With Saint-Gaudens I used often to go to Frank Millet's place at Montmartre, where we were always sure of meeting Maynard or Bunce or some of the others in our little Paris circle. A queer and picturesque place it was and full of oddities, the accumulation of years of travel and adventure. There were innumerable divans and hanging lamps, while quantities of strange weapons and musical instruments cluttered the corners. Foremost I remember, and by no means indistinctly, the weird bashi-bazouk in gorgeous Oriental dress whom Mr. Millet stationed as a majordomo at his front door, thus succeeding in frightening nearly everyone who came to the house for the first time. He had picked him up somewhere during his travels in the East, and had brought him along with the rest of the collection when he returned to Paris"

This period is also well documented by the letters from Paris to a friend of Kathleen Merrill, Millet's future sister in law, who also resided with her mother and sister Lily in Montmartre. Kathleen was training to be a professional singer but died of tuberculosis in Paris on the 8th of May 1880 at age just twenty-two.

Montmartre March 11 1878

Dear Margherita

.....We expect "our hero" home very soon. He is now Chevalier having received a second decoration for his gallantry; the second higher than the first. "And now" says Frank "I shall expect to be treated with due respect, which I wish to remark I never have been". He has two servants, one Giorgio, tall straight and handsome as a statue, the other, Paolo, the one who he took out of prison and who is frightfully ugly, and looks like a Greek brigand, but who is the best servant he ever had. Giorgio is also very devoted and has often brought him something to eat under a heavy musketry fire. Paolo wants to come home with Frank very much and said with tears in his eyes "I will go with you anywhere, to Russia, England, Paris or America and serve you for nothing if you will only take me with you and I will serve you faithfully all my life". But Frank told the poor fellow that he could not take him but would set him up in a shop in Athens and if he ever needed him he would send for him. He says he wanted to bring him very much but refrained only out of consideration for us, for he was sure we would faint away at the very sight of him and as for having him open the gate he was sure some of our friends would dare to cross the threshold after encountering such a fierce looking creature at the door.....I cannot help sympathising with poor Paolo."

Monmartre April 21 1878

Dear Margherita

.....To begin with, Frank has arrived home. He came a week ago Thursday at midnight, accompanied by his faithful servant Paolo, the ugly man.....I wish you could see the things he has brought homea Bulgarian man and woman's costume, a handsome Turkish man's dress....and knives and yatagans with jewelled hilts, a complete Bashi-Bazouk dress, very ragged and dirty with a belt full of long savage knives, one of these a yatagan with blood and hair on it captured from an old Bashi-Bazouk who boasted to have killed with it two hundred non-combatants.....Now I must tell you about Paolo; he is a very fierce looking, ugly man with the softest most musical voice imaginable, his care for Frank is womanish and he has a romantic affection for him. While he was in the Orient with him he always slept extended across the door as it was dangerous there, and no one could enter without stepping over him. I believe I told you he had a handsome servant Giorgio who he intended bringing with him, notwithstanding the pleadings of Paolo, and when Paolo found out that that Giorgio was going with Frank he hated him. He had hated Giorgio before, because they had had a political discussion and Giorgio had spoken slightly of the Greeks (Paolo's nation) and Paolo is intensely patriotic; and when he learned that Giorgio was going with Frank, jealousy was added to

his hatred, and Paolo, in his sweet voice, told Frank that one night he was going to cut Giorgio up in twenty pieces after first shooting him. "How will you cut him up Paolo" said Frank and Paolo explained in detail exactly how he would cut him up and Frank said it made his blood run cold. When they reached Adrianople Frank sent Paolo off somewhere with a dispatch and Frank gave Giorgio considerable money and sent him off on an errand on horseback.....It was nearly night and Giorgio had not returned when one of the officers came in and said "Your servant is having a nice time, I encountered him at the outpost very drunk and driving your horse like mad".....He charged him bluntly with it and Giorgio said he had met an old friend who he had not seen for years and he had only drunk a very little.....Frank said that made no difference he could not go with him for he had broken his word....Giorgio again promised never to drink another drop, went down on his knees, kissed Frank's hand, kissed his boots, cried and begged but Frank was inexorable, and when Paolo returned from his long two hundred mile horseback ride Frank told him he might go with him, and his delight equalled Giorgio's sorrow. He has taken forcible possession of the house, will not let any of us do a particle of work, works in the garden, waits on the table with great dexterity, makes Turkish coffee, mounts guard over the silver and makes our little femme de ménage, Adele, walk very straight. He gets up at unheard hours in the morning, goes softly up into Frank's room and lays his clothes out, then glides downstairs and softly closes my door which is open into the passage, for a current of air so we shall not be waked by any noise downstairs; He speaks Greek, Turkish, Roumanian, Seclavic, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish and a very little French which Adele is rapidly teaching him. In short he is a wonder, and when Frank first got him one of the officers said, facetiously referring to his fierce countenance, "You will have to get another servant to protect you from this one." But before the end of the campaign they all wanted borrow him of Frank to send on difficult errands of trust".

The picture of Paolo in the guise of a Bashi-Bazouk having been exhibited in the 1878 Exposition Général des Beaux-Arts in Brussels was eventually taken back to Millet's new studio in Bridgewater, Massachusetts where it remained for the duration. Within the report of an extensive studio visit and interview for George Parsons Lathrop in the Boston Herald in 1880, Millet commented on Paolo and the painting thus:

"He was devoted to me. He always slept at night lying across the entrance to my quarters, wherever we were, so no-one could get in without encountering him; and when I got back to Paris he insisted on carrying out the same plan, sleeping at the threshold of the lower door of the house to protect me against possible murderers."

Paolo was painted at his own particular request as in the act of a Bulgarian prisoner, who is bound and seated at his feet, The Albanian is attired in a rich costume of dark blue knee-breeches with yellow sash, crimson fez, and jacket adorned with gold. He carries a small armoury of pistols and sabres thrust through the waist sash and is holding the drawn sabre through his teeth:

"There is a nice point of etiquette by the way", Mr. Millet explained, "about the manner of wearing that sabre in the belt. When the thin edge of the scabbard, corresponding with the sharp edge of the blade, is turned outward it means hostility. When it is turned inward, toward the wearer, his intentions are peaceful. Some of the painters of eastern subjects don't seem to understand that. I took Paolo to see some pictures of Gerome's and among them was one with several Turks drinking coffee and smoking together amicably; but they had the sharp edge of the scabbard turned out. Paolo spat on the floor in great disgust and said "Bah! that man don't know how to paint"

When asked by Lathrop how he, Millet, transported all his Eastern paraphernalia from Turkey to Paris, Millet explained the efforts he had to make to do so:

"It was a difficult matter" admitted the artist, and ex-correspondent "especially as when we got to Adrianople, the Turks made a strict proviso that everyone going down to Constantinople should carry nothing but a handbag full of these things, and I must get them through then if at all. So, I got

my servants together, big Paolo and little Paolo and the rest; five men in all - and ordered them to take the boxes down to the train, which was to start the next morning. There I found a flat car on which were some carriages belonging to the Grand Duke. I told the men to put the boxes under these carriages and then to lie down and sleep on the car all night. There were enough of them to resist any attempt to take the boxes away. They stayed there, and so things went along in the morning without question."

FRANK D. MILLET.

New England Artist in His
Rural Studio.

His Career as a Journalist
and Painter.

His Accomplishments and
Surroundings.

Perhaps there is not another instance in the annals of art where, as in the case of Mr. F. D. Millet, an artist who has achieved distinction by his early prowess in painting, has also won an enviable reputation as a journalist. Mr. Millet has almost as much talent in literature and for press correspondence as in picturing with pencil and colors. In the late Russo-Turkish war he distinguished himself as correspondent for the London Daily News and the New York Herald, ranking with Archibald Forbes and McManis, and taking the former's place when Forbes was obliged to go back to England, sick with fever. Some of the best descriptions of scenes in that war, in the volume afterward issued by the Daily News, are from his pen, and he has also done much other journalistic work. But as a man can hardly follow two careers so widely diverse, Mr. Millet has returned to this country to devote himself to the first object of his life, viz.: art. A glance at his career, and at the unique surroundings in which he intends to pursue his profession, will interest the public. In the studio at

A small building near the studio, which is a coiling provides pieces of a coat into a small sleeping chamber above, dedicated to one of the owner's artist friends, and inscribed with his initials, though the "dedicatee" has never yet slept in it, being absent in England. Here may be seen at present a life study of Mr. Millet's devoted servant Paolo, an Albanian, who accompanied him through most of the Turkish campaign, and afterward attended him in Paris. "He was devoted to me," says the artist. "He always slept at night lying across the entrance to my quarters, wherever we were, so that no one could get in without encountering him; and when I got back to Paris he insisted on carrying out the same plan, sleeping at the threshold of the lower door of the house, to protect me against possible murderers." This man was also an admirable cook, spending hours over the composition of *recherché* soups, but satisfied himself on salt pork and bread. He afterward returned to his native country. That he was a semi-savage is plain enough from the expression of his face in the picture, and also from the fact that he was painted at his particular request as in the act of

PREPARING TO MURDER

a Bulgarian prisoner, who is bound and seated at his feet. The Albanian is attired in a rich costume of dark blue knee-breeches with yellow waist, crimson fez and jacket adorned with gold. He carries a small armory of pistols and sabres thrust through the waist sash in front, and is holding the drawn sabre between his teeth. "There is a nice point of etiquette, by the way," Mr. Millet explained, "about the manner of wearing that sabre in the belt. When the thin edge of the scabbard, corresponding with the sharp edge of the blade, is turned outward, it means hostility. When it is turned inward toward the wearer, his intentions are peaceful. Some of the painters of eastern subjects don't seem to understand

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From this upper room a door opens on to a narrow gallery looking out into the long room mentioned above, which is the studio proper, provided with easels for models to pose on, easels, a spinning or primitive piano, old chairs, a superb brass-handled desk, etc. The walls are hung with pictures, tapestries, rugs and sumptuous Eastern costumes, a further supply of the latter being stored in a big green Bulgarian chest of odd appearance. The most noticeable thing in the studio, perhaps,

