

· AGNEWS ·

EST. 1817

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Cornelis van Poelenburgh (Utrecht 1594/5 – 1667)

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Signed with initials: 'CP'

Oil on panel

12 ¼ x 16 ¼ in. (31 x 41.1 cm.)

Datable to the late 1630s



Provenance:

Sodani, Milan;

Acquired from the above by James Irvine on behalf of Sir William Forbes, 7th Bt. of Pitsligo (1773–1828), 8 November 1827, in Milan, for 70 Louis ('Riposo Polemberg'); and by descent at Fettercain House, Kincardineshire, Scotland until 2017.

Cornelis van Poelenburgh began his career as a pupil of Abraham Bloemaert, and he is generally acknowledged as one of the most important first-generation Dutch Italianate (or “schildersbent”) painters. He was in Italy from 1617 to 1625, where he almost certainly worked for Cosimo II de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He also spent time in Rome, where he was exposed to the work of Adam Elsheimer, whose small luminous paintings on copper were a strong influence on him, as was the work of his countryman Bartolomeus Breenbergh with whom he worked closely. In 1638 Poelenburgh travelled to London at the behest of King Charles I, during which time he enjoyed considerable aristocratic patronage, and as a result of which many of his paintings are in British stately homes. Indeed, the present beautifully preserved panel was acquired in 1827 by Sir William Forbes, 7th Bt. of Pitsligo (1773 – 1828) and hung at Fettercain House, Kincardineshire, Scotland until 2017.

In 1638 he travelled to London at the behest of Charles I and was supported by the sovereign during his stay. He enjoyed considerable aristocratic patronage for his small classical landscapes, usually on copper, although records show that only five of his paintings ever entered the royal collection. Poelenburgh returned to Utrecht in 1641. He is also known to have added the staffage to paintings executed by other painters, including Jan Both, Willem de Heusch, Herman Saftleven and especially Hendrick van Steenwyck.

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Poelenburgh was first elected to the Utrecht Guild in 1646. He is generally acknowledged as one of the most important first-generation Dutch Italianate (or 'schildersbent') painters. His early works show the influence of Bartolomeus Breenbergh as they worked closely together in Rome, and this is often the cause of confusion over their attribution. Poelenburgh, however, seemed more adept at the depiction of Italian light. Such was his following that he was patronised by some of the most important figures of the time. As well as the Grand Duke he painted pictures for Prince Frederick Henry of Orange Nassau, Charles I, the Baron von Wyttenhorst and the King of Bohemia. His enamel smooth landscapes generated a large following and he continued to influence painters long into the 18th Century.

The present picture can be dated to the late 1630s, the same date as *The rest on the flight into Egypt* at the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, (fig. 1) which is very similar in its composition – particularly in the execution of the ruins – and which displays an ‘alternation between sharp and blurred contours and areas that are uniformly lit with passages of shifting light, all rendered in bright colours and great detail. Indeed, this is one of the most successful paintings of this subject that Poelenburgh ever produced’ (Nicolette Sluijter-Seijffert, *Cornelis van Poelenburgh 1594/5-1667*, Amsterdam 2016, pp.115 and 116, fig.113).



Fig. 1: Cornelis van Poelenburgh, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, late 1630s., oil on copper, 34 x 44 cm, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge.