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PAUL FLANDRIN

1811 Lyon - Paris 1902

A Meadow in the Bugey

Oil on paper mounted on cardboard

Signed in the lower left: *Paul Flandrin*

22 by 18.5 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France

Bugey is a region in the Southeast of France, between Lyon and Geneva. It belongs to the Department of Ain. Its geographic boundaries are marked off in the South by the bend of the Rhône and in the West by the river Ain. In the North runs the southern prolongation of the Jura, the mountain massif that extends itself beyond the Rhône, into Savoy. Bugey is called “miniature Italy” because it is made of alternating heights and valleys, between architectonic limestone blocks and enclosed valleys, such as the one depicted in the painting.

When Lyon became an industrialized city in the eighteenth century, an entire legion of landscape painters moved to the countryside close to Lyon. Philippe Burty states that the landscape painters “have only to fasten up their knapsacks, to unhook the parasol from the walls of the studio, to fold it and take the travel box, and, in three steps they are right in the middle of the forest, in the heart of the mountains” (Élisabeth Hardouin-Fugier and Étienne Grafe, *La peinture lyonnaise au XIX^{ème} siècle*, Paris: Les éditions de l'Amateur, 1995, p. 188). Among others, Antoine Duclaux, the future teacher of the Flandrin brothers, went to live there. Balthazar Augustin Hubert de Saint-Didier (1779-1863) composed an album of lithographs, the *Album du Bugey pittoresque*; some painters, for example Augustine Alexandre Thierrat (1789-1870), Laurent Hippolyte Leymarie (1809-1844), Horace Fonville (1832-1914), and the archeologist Moyria-Mailla moved there; Jacques Vingtrinier (1820-1887, a student of Auguste and then of Hippolyte Flandrin) emphasized its folk customs. The Lyonnaise landscape painters, who were above all attracted by the luminosity of the region, “think they have found Italy in its sunny sites” (*op. cit.*, p. 209). The one who made the region known beyond the Lyon metropolitan area was Adolphe Appian (1818-1898), who, having abandoned the drawing of *fabriques* in favor of the *plein air*, moved to the Bugey region and stayed there continuously for years until shortly before his death, representing it in many drawings and oils, repeating at times the same subject.

The mountains of Bugey were known for the healthy air, and it was customary to wet-nurse the newborn of Lyon in that region. This was so also for the Flandrin brothers. Hippolyte stayed there until 1815, Paul until 1818. In the first seven years of his life, Paul “lead the most rural life, running barefoot across the fields” (Felix Thiollier, *Paul Flandrin peintre*, Saint-Étienne, Impr. Théolier, 1896,

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p.10) and having as his companions the shepherds and flocks. Years later, when he writes to his mother from Crémieu, he will recall that he was himself a shepherd: “It is nice to hear the songs of the shepherds coming back in the evening with their flocks; this brings me back to my youth, when I used to be a shepherd too” (*Paul Flandrin à sa mère*, Crémieu, lundi 13 septembre 1847). This first close contact with nature marked him profoundly. We can trace to these years the ingenuous and idyllic love for nature that we read in his landscapes, which are for the most part melancholy and Virgilian thanks to a sentiment of nature learned from his childhood, and which is not to be confused with a mannerist attitude or a mere choice of style.

Paul will always remain attached to the iconographic motive of flocks and of the pasture, which are depicted in numerous paintings both from the earlier, Roman period and from later periods, such as the present work. In fact, in Rome his first painting was *Herd of oxens in the Roman countryside* (1835, private collection).

In the course of his career, Flandrin situated several works in the Bugey, six of which were presented at the Salon, and he returned to the region several times from 1840 onward, as a guest of his painter-friend Florentin Servan in Lacoux or in company of other colleagues, on the occasion of the regular visits to his mother in Lyon. Among those that are documented in the notebooks and in the notes taken by his son Louis Flandrin can be counted for example the sojourns of 1840, 1841, 1849, 1850 and 1851, during which the present oil on paper may have been produced. In fact, it presents the stylistic characteristics of the 1840s, in the profound shadows and in the harmony of a binary choice of colors. The trees that are illuminated from behind throw long shadows on the meadow and the blond and warm light of a late summer evening engulfs with calm the serene view of a sunset in the country-side.

In the critique of the Salon of 1879, where Flandrin presented a *Vue du Bugey* (location unknown), Charles Clément commented on the work with words that would fit well also the present painting: “These are well-constructed grounds that rise up the slope in tiers until the horizon, which is placed very high. Some elegantly and distinctly shaped trees are firmly rooted on the slopes and on the plateau, of which the summit draws its silhouette against a blue sky blurred by some white clouds” (Ch. Clément, Exposition de 1879, *Le Journal des débats*, jeudi 19 juin 1879).

The painting will be added to the *catalogue raisonné* of Paul Flandrin, which is currently in preparation.

Dr. Elena Marchetti
Catalogue raisonné of the work of Paul Flandrin