

Cape Lefkada or Sappho's Leap, Greece

Edward Lear



Description

Edward Lear (1812-1888)
Cape Lefkada or Sappho's Leap, Greece

Signed with monogram lower left
Watercolour heightened with white
16.5 by 26cm., 6 ½ by 10 ¼ in.

Provenance:
Charles Church (1823-1915);
Bequeathed to his grandson, Humphrey Paget;
By descent until sold at Christie's, 11th July 1989, lot 180;
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, 4th July 2002, lot 227

Lear lived in Corfu during the winter months in the late 1850s and early 1860s but left for good when the island was handed back to the Greeks in 1864. He visited Lefkada on his tour of the other Ionian Islands between March and June 1863. Cape Lefkada is located at the southern tip of the island is famous for its dramatic white cliffs which are almost two hundred feet high. It is also known as Sappho's Leap as according to legend the ancient poet Sappho threw herself into the sea from the cliff after being spurned by the beautiful sea god Phaon.

Lear visited the cliffs on 21st April 1863 and records in his diary: 'Rose at 5. Coffee 5.30. A horrid night, but somehow I do not get worse, & we are ready to start at 5.30. Rocky hill sides, & paths winding among the usual Cistus.... are the order of the day. Ups & downs - & about 7 we near the great rocks of the narrowing... promontory. Lower down, we come to gaps, whence, looking over, the cliffs are vastly fine, - dark gray, & perpendicular from the dark water, edged with foam, tho' the sea is calm. 5 ordinary vultures sate on a ridge of the highest edge. By 7.30, I was at the top of the highest cliffs, where there are remains of a temple - to the east, the cliff covered with wild cedar.'

An on-the-spot sketch drawn at 7.30 am of this view is in the Gennadius Library, Athens and is the basis for the present studio work (see Edward Lear & the Ionian Islands, exhibition catalogue, 2012, p.16, illustrated full page). It was also the basis for a lithograph, no. 11 in Lear's Views in the Seven Ionian Islands published in 1863 (op. cit., p.100, ill.).