

RÖBBIG · MÜNCHEN

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A SET OF FOUR PAINTINGS "VIEW ON THE GULF OF POZZUOLI", "VIEW ON SESSA AURUNCA", "THE CHURCH OF S. MARIA DELLE VERGINI IN SCAFATI NEAR NOCERA INFERIORE" AND "VIEW ON VALLOMBROSA ABBEY"

JACOB PHILIPP HACKERT (PRENZLAU 1737 - FLORENZ 1807)

Circa: 1806

View over the Bay of Pozzuoli

Oil on canvas, lined

64.5 x 96.5 cm (25³/₈ x 38 in.)

Signed bottom middle: "Philipp Hackert / 1805"

On the back of the stretcher at the top is a label with an inscription in another hand: "No (.) / Veduta di Pouzzolo, Baja Capo Misono, / Procida, Ischia, presa ai. P: P: Capucini / a Pouzzolo. 1805. Filippo Hackert"

View of Sessa Aurunca

Oil on canvas, lined

64 x 94.5 cm (25¹/₄ x 37¹/₄ in.)

Signed bottom left: "Phi Hackert / 1806"

On the back of the stretcher at the top is a label with an inscription in another hand: "No (2) / Sessa pres de St. Agata sur la Route de Rome / à Naples. Phi: Hackert f: 1806."

View of the Church of S. Maria dei Miracoli in Scafati near Nocera Inferiore

Oil on canvas, lined

64 x 87 cm (25¼ x 34¼ in.)

Signed bottom middle: "Philipp Hackert 1806"

On the back of the stretcher at the top is a label with an inscription in another hand: "No (.) / Scaffata di Nocera da Pregano, Regno / di Napoli. Filippo Hackert. dipinse 1806."

View of the Abbey of Vallombrosa

Oil on canvas, lined

64.5 x 88.5 cm (25⅜ x 34⅞ in.)

Signed bottom left: "Vallombrosa / Filippo Hackert / 1806"

Published:

The painting View of the Abbey of Vallombrosa was published in: Kroenig 1984, fig. 3; Salerno 1991, no. 94; Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 339.

In 1786, after a period of eighteen years as a freelance artist in Rome, the landscape painter Jakob Philipp Hackert was appointed as First Court Painter to the Bourbon king Ferdinand IV of Naples (Naples 1751–1825 Naples). Although Hackert had fully expected to live out his days as the occupant of this highly lucrative and prestigious office, he was compelled to flee the kingdom, leaving behind almost all his possessions in Naples because of the French occupation of 1799. In the face of this, the king had retreated to Sicily. After having spent an initial year in Pisa, Hackert settled in Florence, where he applied himself with characteristic discipline and single-mindedness to building his life anew, going on walking tours that took him deep into the forests of Tuscany and painting landscapes both of his new homeland and of the kingdom of Naples. As a result, he quickly found new customers for his work. Although he had at first hoped to return south once the political situation had calmed down, he gave up this intention in 1804 and purchased a country house and small estate near Florence at Careggi, where he devoted himself to both painting and agriculture.

Of critical importance to Hackert as an artist were his drawings, which he had taken with him from Naples to serve as a kind of pictorial data bank. On May 10, 1803, in a letter to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Frankfurt am Main 1749–1832 Weimar), he wrote with distinct satisfaction and relief: "I have no lack of material, because I possess thousands of drawings made accurately from nature. I can honestly say that my portfolios contain almost the whole of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily."ⁱ

We may assume that when he was visited by travellers on the Grand Tour in his atelier in Florence, the procedure will have been for him to show them drawings and then to take orders for paintings, which he would then realise from the drawings. This was probably what happened in the case of the present four paintings, of which the first, dated 1805, shows a view of the Bay of Pozzuoli, which is separated from the Bay of Naples by the promontory of Posillipo. On account of its scenic beauty, it was one of the best-known areas in all Italy. Hackert visited the bay for the first time as early as 1770, making numerous drawings; in later years he returned regularly, making it the subject of a number of different paintings, one of which was purchased by Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich (St Petersburg 1754–1801 St Petersburg, from 1796 Tsar Paul I).

The picture shows the bay from a viewpoint east of Pozzuoli, near the Capuchin church of San Gennaro, about 120 metres above sea level. The little town is seen standing upon a small headland of tuffaceous rock with the cupolas of the cathedral and the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie rising above the rooftops. To the left, on a small rocky spit, is the Ospizio dei Cappuccini, which was used as a restaurant after 1970, but has now been abandoned. An undated drawing made from a closer viewpoint, possibly as early as the seventeen-seventies (fig. 1), gives a more detailed impression of the town, with the conventual building and the road leading to the town

gate being clearly visible.ⁱⁱ On the far shore of the bay in the present painting one can see the fifteenth-century Castello Aragonese of Baia with the low-lying island of Procida behind it and Monte Epomeo rising cone-shaped on the island of Ischia in the distance. The promontory to the left of the castle terminates with the Capo Miseno and with a small highland bearing the same name. In the foreground of the veduta, cows and goats are grazing while a shepherd passes the time of day in the company of a peasant woman and her daughter.

In 1793, Hackert had painted the town and bay from a somewhat more distant standpoint in a work (fig. 2) showing on the left the Capuchin friary close to which was the viewpoint of the present veduta.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1798, the artist made a further variant (fig. 3)^{iv} before going on to realise the pictorial motif again in 1799 and 1802.^v In all these pictures the view of the bay is framed by meticulously executed trees that are different in each case and remind us of the reputation Hackert enjoyed for his depictions of trees. Even during his first years in Rome he had specialised in making single, clearly identifiable trees the subject of his large-scale bistre drawings; similarly, his paintings regularly feature highly detailed single trees that Hackert intended his viewers to be able to identify without any doubt, as he himself expounded upon in his little treatise on landscape painting.^{vi}

The second of the present paintings also shows an area in the kingdom of Naples, though one considerably less well-known than the bay of Pozzuoli and well off the customary tourist routes. In it we see the small town of Sessa Aurunca, located to the north of Naples and on the foothills of Monte S. Croce near the extinct volcano and town of Roccamonfina. Running through the locality is the ancient Via Appia, which Hackert had trodden on during walking tours from Rome towards Naples. After having first explored the area in 1792, Hackert returned to it in 1794 in the retinue of his patron Ferdinand IV, who was holding a large military review of which Hackert made a pictorial record. In the same year, he made a drawing (fig. 4)^{vii} with a tree-lined road—in the foreground—presumably the Via Appia, and in the middle distance, delicately depicted the ruin of the castle of Sessa on a hill with its high, angular tower. Stretching down to the left are the town's roofs interrupted by the majolica-tiled cupola and the twin bell-towers of the Baroque church of Santa Maria dell'Annunziata; rising in the distance are the delicate outlines of the Monti Aurunci.

For the present painting Hackert used the rear portion of the drawing with the town of Sessa Aurunca, the buildings of which can be clearly recognised. In front of the town, the Via Appia follows a curving path that, in the drawing, leads into the foreground. For the painting, however, Hackert changed the composition by inserting a river leading to a waterfall lined with bushes and poplars. We may presume that the cellar hewn out of rock, with two men and a woman sitting on a bench in the drawing, was a real feature and that Hackert changed the foreground for compositional reasons. Nevertheless, the waterfall seen in the painting did in fact exist, being located not far from Sessa Aurunca, as is shown by another drawing likewise dated 1794 (fig. 5).^{viii} For the present painting, Hackert evidently saw fit to combine two different vedute that conveyed the character of the district of Sessa Aurunca particularly well.

The third painting is also devoted to a locality in the kingdom of Naples: the small town of Scafati, which lies on the river Sarno near Nocera Inferiore between Naples and Salerno. From the early seventeen-seventies onwards, Hackert explored this area repeatedly; one excursion of 1782, for example, is documented through two drawings made in the vicinity of Nocera.^{ix} The centre of the present painting is occupied by the river Sarno spanned by a bridge, and immediately behind this is the fifteenth-century church of Santa Maria delle Vergini. Only built in the eighteenth century, the bridge had led to a reduction in the use of ferry boats or "scafe" after which the town had been named. At the right-hand edge of the painting stands a derelict tower probably dating from medieval times, when it will have formed part of Scafati's fortifications. On the left-hand side, the view is framed by a gnarled oak. Neither the bridge nor the tower are in existence today. An old photograph shows that even at the time it was taken, the town had already undergone major changes since Hackert's day (fig. 6).

Hackert was not the only artist to be attracted to the motif of the waterside church and the bridge over the river Sarno: they are also to be found in a painting by Raffaele Carelli (Martina Franca 1795–1864 Naples) known today only through a coloured lithograph (fig. 7).^x Although Carelli followed Hackert in depicting travellers on the bridge, he did not include the tower. Another difference is that Hackert's painting features certain details betraying his interest in the life and work of the local people living in the localities he painted. On the river bank a family and a traveller are standing by a press, most likely used for extracting oil from olives; to the right are a number of barrels probably containing the pressed oil, their covers weighed down with stones. This concern to document the activities of the rural population is characteristic of Hackert, who was indeed frequently commissioned by Ferdinand IV to do pictures of peasants at their labours.^{xi} The present painting is thus not just a landscape, but also a pictorial document providing information on the condition and economic character of a certain geographical area at a certain point in time.

Finally, the fourth of the present paintings presents a pictorial motif from Hackert's new homeland, Tuscany, which he had begun to explore immediately after moving to Florence in 1800. On May 10, 1803, particularly impressed by the dense forests of fir in the regions of Casentino and Pratomagno with their abbeys of Camaldoli, La Verna, and Vallombrosa, he wrote enthusiastically to Goethe: "Vallombrosa, Camaldoli, La Verna all offer a great deal of material in the form of various kinds of beauty and unspoilt nature. These monks have a fine understanding of how to cultivate trees. Here the natural world is not mutilated but rather, it is allowed to develop freely so that one sees it in its perfection: rocky outcrops, trees of various kinds, plants of exceptional beauty, in short, every kind of material for the most beautiful and best foregrounds, both in form and in colour, so that when I paint them I am rejuvenated by the pleasure I feel in my heart."^{xii}

Situated at 968 metres above sea level on Monte Secchieta in the Pratomagno region in the midst of a 447-hectare forest principally made up of fir trees, the abbey of Vallombrosa had already been painted once by Hackert in 1802 (fig. 8).^{xiii} A large-format drawing executed on an excursion in 1800 shows a view of the dense forest and two pilgrims saying their prayers before a cross (fig. 9).^{xiv} Finally, in 1804, Hackert's very last walking tour took him to the forest of Vallombrosa and bore fruit in a drawing showing a wayfarer resting in front of tree-covered rocks (fig. 10).^{xv}

The present painting shows a view with the abbey of Vallombrosa in the distance much as it is still preserved today, that is to say, in its fifteenth-century form. Rising high over the monastery buildings is a twelfth-century campanile, and at the right-hand end, a squat fifteenth-century tower. A little way up the slope behind is the hermitage of Il Paradisino, which was founded in the ninth century and expanded in the thirteenth as a place to which the monks would retreat for penitential exercises. In the foreground, a wayfarer with pack-mule and dog is seen in front of magnificent fir trees lining the road, which frame the view on the right-hand side.

The present four paintings date from the last two years of Hackert's life when in spite of his advanced age he rose to the peak of his artistic powers. As he reported in a letter of 1894 to the painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (Haina 1751–1829 Eutin), his capacity for work was undiminished: "My health is good, God be praised. In winter I suffer from the cold but the hotter it gets the healthier I am. My eyes have not yet deteriorated and my hand is as firm and steady as it was in my youth. As long as I can paint, I am happy."^{xvi} Even two years later, on March 29, 1806, the artist wrote as follows to a friend of his younger days, Eleonora Schwarz (c. 1750 – after 1806), following the death of her younger brother Georg (1755–1805): "[I] have to draw my strength from within and live out the days that Providence has granted me in good spirits. Although I find that my physical powers are declining, my mind is still clear and I am fortunate to have reached the age I have; this being the case, I strive to forget everything that is bad, in which endeavour I am helped in no mean measure by my art, as I work with no less zeal, industry, and studiousness than I did when I was thirty years of age. My eyes are good, my hand is

steady and does not tremble in the least, so that I study daily and bring forth special works that are a cause of admiration to many; perhaps I am an exception, as while artists commonly decline in their old age, in my case it is said that I improve by the day. Well, at least I do my best to preserve my good reputation.”xvii

The winter of 1804/05 had not been an easy one for Hackert. As we know from a letter of March 5, 1805, his health had suffered greatly on account of the cold, and an epidemic of yellow fever had claimed lives in great numbers in and around Livorno (then Legorno or Leghorn). It may be assumed that out of fear of infection the painter kept social intercourse to a minimum, though, of course, he could not have avoided coming into contact with travellers who were potential purchasers of his paintings. Furthermore, not only had tourism of the Grand Tour suffered greatly under the impact of the Napoleonic wars in the first years of the nineteenth century, but the epidemic of yellow fever had led to a quarantine which even in March 1805 was still preventing foreigners from getting to Florence.xviii

This being the case, we may assume Hackert to have been mightily pleased by the commission for the present four paintings, which will have been issued to him in the second half of 1805, when Florence had once again become accessible to tourists. The unknown patron probably chose the pictorial motifs from drawings at Hackert's atelier. When doing so, he very likely asked the artist for information about the places depicted and made a note of the names of the locations and districts. This is strongly suggested by the labels on the reverse of three of the pictures, which, in my opinion, were affixed to the paintings by Hackert's client himself after receipt, as is also suggested by the fact that the first three pictures are simply signed and dated by Hackert, with only the view of Vallombrosa bearing an indication of the location in Hackert's hand. It will thus have been the purchaser who affixed the labels with the place-names to the backs of the other three pictures, possibly repeating inscriptions on drawings seen at the artist's atelier. The fact that Hackert sometimes signed his drawings in French and sometimes in Italian may explain why the inscriptions on the reverse of the paintings are partly in one language and partly in the other. In the case of the view of Sessa Aurunca, the label additionally states that the painting shows the view from the quarter of Sant' Agata; as this information does not appear on the drawing preserved in Berlin, it was presumably communicated directly to the writer by Hackert. In the case of the third painting, it appears that its new owner did not remember the place-name correctly, as Scafati is written wrongly as “Scaffata,” which made it considerably more difficult to identify the location. As it has not been possible to find a town or village called “Pregano,” it is probable that this name too was wrongly remembered.

On the labels of the first and third pictures, the place-names are followed by Hackert's name in the Italian form “Filippo Hackert,” while in the case of the second picture the signature from the canvas “Phi: Hackert” is repeated; in addition, the labels bear a year, 1805 or 1806. As these inscriptions are, without doubt, not in Hackert's hand, it may be surmised that the patron transcribed the signatures from the respective drawings and combined them with the year in which the painting was executed.

Finally, the patron can be assumed to have been a Frenchman, as on March 4, 1806, writing to Goethe from Florence, Hackert reported on his economic situation as follows: “Because only a small number of foreigners are travelling in Italy at the moment, I have had few orders. Nevertheless, I regularly do little bits of business: a week ago, for example, I sent 4 landscapes to France at 60 zecchini each.”xix

As we know from an account by Wilhelm Titel (Boltenhagen 1784–1862 Greifswald), who lived with Hackert in the last year of his life, Hackert worked “as a rule only 14 or 15 days for a picture about 2 foot wide (his usual format, from which he only rarely departed in his last period), for which he charged at least 60 ducats.”xx As the eighteenth-century European foot was around 30 centimetres, the information “2 foot wide” corresponds roughly to the width of the present pictures. As for the gold zecchino (or “sequin”) that was standard currency in Italy at

that time, it had roughly the same value as the Austrian ducat, so that the price quoted to Goethe of 60 zecchini per painting also matches Titel's account. In the view of the present author, the current paintings are certainly the ones mentioned in the letter to Goethe: Hackert will have executed the view of the Bay of Pozzuoli in the autumn of 1805 and the other three pictures in the first two months of 1806, before despatching them to France at the end of February.

As has been shown, the present paintings are exact and faithful landscape portraits: the beholder receives detailed information about the locations depicted, their situation (and in the case of the view of Scafati, also its olive oil production), and finally about the local vegetation, which is represented in masterly fashion in all four pictures. It is indeed precisely Hackert's skill in the depiction of plants and trees that gives the paintings an artistic status far above that of mere vedute and justifies the view of Hackert as Europe's first landscape painter. All the trees depicted can be identified with certainty; in addition, they are all appropriate to the respective landscapes, which owe to their trees—poplars, which thrive in wet ground, on the banks of the waterfall at Sessa Aurunca, for example, or the stone pines overlooking the bay of Pozzuoli—no small part of their intrinsic character.

Nevertheless, the manner in which the trees are presented gives them a value that makes them more than just component parts of the landscape. What the painter was concerned to do was to reveal their individual beauty, which is enhanced when they are contrasted with one another—a procedure that is perhaps most conspicuous in the Pozzuoli view with its juxtaposition of pines, cypresses, and chestnuts, but can also be noted in the views of Scafati and Sessa Aurunca. Only in the view of Vallombrosa was Hackert compelled by the force of circumstance to restrict himself to firs—and even in this case he succeeded in giving the densely growing conifers a touch of the sublime by contrasting them with the small figure of the wayfarer.

The four pictures can thus be counted amongst Hackert's masterpieces. They certainly confirm the painter's own opinion that even in his old age he was still growing in his stature as an artist. They are also of great interest on account of their provenance, which as sources show can be traced right back to the artist himself. As a group of works that was planned in this form by the artist or, rather, by his unknown patron, the paintings occupy a highly important place in Hackert's late oeuvre.

1. Letter preserved at the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv in Weimar, quoted in Nordhoff 2012, p. 194.

2. Jakob Philipp Hackert, Blick auf den Golf von Pozzuoli, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, pen and sepia ink and pencil, 61.7 x 86.1 cm; on this drawing see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 1076. At that point I assumed that the drawing had been made in the late seventeen-nineties, but it probably dates from an earlier decade.

3. Jakob Philipp Hackert, Blick auf den Golf von Pozzuoli, privately owned, canvas, 65 x 97 cm, marked: "peinte par Philipp Hackert 1793 Vue d'Ischia, Procida, Baia d'Pozzuole prise au-dessus de la Solfatara," see exh. cat. Weimar/Hamburg 2008, cat. no. 73.

4. Jakob Philipp Hackert, View of the Bay of Pozzuoli, privately owned, canvas, 65 x 98 cm, marked: "Filippo Hackert dipinse 1798," see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 275. The painting was sold at Bonham's London, July 6, 2011, lot no. 121.

5. The paintings are preserved at the National Trust property of Attingham Park, Shropshire, and in private possession, see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. nos. 284 and 308.

6. As the treatise categorically demands: “I wish every botanist to immediately recognise the tree in the foreground, and also plants and other leaves [ich wil daß ein jeder Botanicus den Baum so gleich kennet, Pflanzen und Andre Blätter in Vorgrund],” quoted in Miller/Nordhoff 1997, p. 113.
7. Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Blick auf Sessa Aurunca*, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, pen and brush in sepia, 52.4 x 74.1 cm, marked: “a Sessa 1794. Filippo Hackert. dl.,” see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 875.
8. Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Near Sessa Aurunca*, privately owned, pen and sepia ink and pencil, 56.5 x 69 cm, marked: “a Sessa 1794. Filippo Hackert. del.” In 2012, the drawing, which was originally in Hackert’s estate, was held by the Galerie Bernheimer, Munich. A further drawing, of which no photograph is known, probably shows the same motif (Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Near Sessa Aurunca*, privately owned, pen and brush in sepia, 56.3 x 69 cm, marked: “A Sessa 1794. Filippo Hackert del.,” sold at Gutekunst & Klipstein, Bern, June 21–22, 1949, no. 615; according to the catalogue it shows a *Cascade et Fontaine*, see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 876).
9. The two drawings are held by the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. nos. 812 and 813.
10. Raffaele Carelli, *View of Santa Maria delle Vergini in Scafati*, privately owned, Naples, watercoloured lithograph by Fr. Wenzel, 21.2 x 29.3 cm, marked: “F. Wenzel dis / R. Carelli dip / Lit.o Cuciniello Bianchi / Ponte di Scafati—Pont de Scafati,” see Fino 1995, colour ill. no. 3. Wenzel’s lithograph appeared in the volume *Viaggio Pittorico nel Regno delle due Sicilie*, which was brought out in Naples between 1829 and 1834 by the publishers Cuciniello and Bianchi (see Fino 1995, p. 41).
11. Perhaps the most interesting example is a painting dated 1787 with a view of the hemp harvest at Caivano in a marshy area between Naples and Caserta, in which the individual harvesting and further procedures are depicted in detail (in 2005 the picture was held by the Galerie Sanct Lucas in Vienna; see Nordhoff 2012, colour ill. no. 20).
12. Letter preserved at the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Weimar, quoted in Nordhoff 2012, p. 193.
13. Jakob Philipp Hackert, *View of the Abbey of Vallombrosa*, privately owned, oil on canvas, 65 x 86 cm, signed: “Valle Ombrosa Filippo Hackert depinse 1802,” see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 310.
14. Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Bei Vallombrosa*, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, pen and sepia ink over pencil, 65.5 x 86.1 cm, signed: “Filippo Hackert 1800 Ingresso à Vallombrosa,” see Nordhoff/Reimer 1994, vol. 2, cat. no. 932.
15. Jakob Philipp Hackert, *Wayfarer at Vallombrosa*, privately owned, pen and sepia ink over pencil, 76.3 x 54.1 cm, signed: “à Vallombrosa 1804 Filippo Hackert,” see Nordhoff 2012, p. 637.
16. Letter preserved at the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Leipzig, quoted in Nordhoff 2012, p. 211.
17. Letter written at an unknown location, quoted in Nordhoff 2012, pp. 219–220.
18. As we know from a letter written by Hackert to Johann Ludwig von Negelein preserved at the Goethe-Museum, Düsseldorf and quoted in Nordhoff 2012, pp. 214–15.

19. Letter held at the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Weimar, quoted in Nordhoff 2012, pp. 216–17.

20. Quoted in Meinhold 1838, p. 122. On Titel and his not unproblematic relations with Hackert (who initially took him in hospitably in March 1806 but ordered him to leave his house shortly before his death) see Nordhoff 2012, p. 650.

Provenance:

The paintings come from a South German private collection, which has been their home since the middle of the twentieth century. For the previous provenance, see below.

Literature:

Nordhoff/Reimer 1994; Weidner 1998; Seta/Nordhoff 2005; exh. cat. Caserta 2007; exh. cat. Weimar/Hamburg 2008; Nordhoff 2012

