

Edward Lear



Pentedatilo, Calabria

Reference: 11057

Dimensions:

Height: 11.40 cm / 4½ in
Width: 20.90 cm / 8¼ in

Signed with monogram l.r., inscribed l.l.: Pentedatilo, watercolour and bodycolour on laid paper

11.4 x 20.9 cm; 4½ x 8¼ inches

Provenance: Private collection, UK, until 2018.

Literature: Jasmine Jagger, 'Moving Lines', Apollo, December 2018, pp. 87-91, ill. p. 91.

One seem'd all dark and red – a tract of sand,
And someone pacing there along,
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
Lit with a low large moon.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'The Palace of Art'

Lear's close friendship of thirty-seven years with Tennyson inspired his 'Painting=Sympathisations', a proposed project of three hundred memories tied to three hundred poems, reflections of the relationship between painted word landscapes

KAREN TAYLOR

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and written word paintings, described by Jasmine Jagger as open to a kind of synaesthesia. In her opinion, the finest examples of Lear's poetrypainting can be found in the works he made of Pentedattilo. 1 Lear worked on the project on and off for thirty years, his drawings going through what he described as their egg, chrysalis and caterpillar stages. The final oil, or 'butterfly', of the painting of Pentedattilo was given by Lear to Tennyson's oldest son Hallam and his bride Audrey as a wedding present, and was loved by the poet. Jagger suggests the present watercolour is the closest surviving version of this 'butterfly', with a distant speck of a hunched-over heron and its shadow replacing the figure seen in the multiple sketches of the subject. The lightly portrayed moon suggests the passage of time, and the dark lines over the sky have just faded. 2 The artist's plan to illustrate Tennyson's poems began to take shape in the summer of 1852, a couple of years after they met. Although their friendship had ups and downs, Lear's affection for the poet's wife, Emily, remained constant. Lear enjoyed selecting the lines of Tennyson's poems on which to base his 'Poetical Topographical' project, and he began work on the scheme several times. In 1878 he finally got down to work in earnest, although the project was never completed, and Lear died with unfinished Tennyson canvases in his studio. Pentedattilo is an abandoned town in Calabria on Monte Calvario, a mountain whose shape once resembled that of five fingers: hence the name, from the Greek penta and daktylos (for five and fingers). It was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1783. Lear made a trip through southern Italy in 1847; his diary records his arrival on 30 July, at an elevated plateau whence the whole 'Toe of Italy' is finely discernible, a sea of undulating lines of varied forms down to the Mediterranean; a few towns glittered here and there, and towering over the southern extremity of land, a high cluster of rocks, the wild crags of Pentedátilo, particularly arrested our attention . 3

1. Jasmine Jagger, 'Moving Lines', Apollo, December 2018, pp. 87-91, ill. p. 91.

2. Ibid.

3. Edward Lear in Southern Italy: Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria and the Kingdom of Naples, introduction by Peter Quennell, 1964, p. 41.