

46

**Jack Butler Yeats RHA (1871-1957)**

THE SACK OF BALTIMORE [WEST CORK], c.1890-91

pen and ink

with inscribed Dawson Gallery label on reverse detailing title; also with a photocopy of the artist's inscription on reverse of illustration, showing title and signature  
9 by 12.50in. (22.86 by 31.75cm)

*Provenance:*

Dawson Gallery, Dublin;

Private collection

This previously uncatalogued Indian ink drawing is an early work by Jack B. Yeats. An illustration to Thomas Davis's 1844 poem, *The Sack of Baltimore* the exact details of its commissioning have not been recorded. It was made at the beginning of his career when he was anxious to establish his reputation as an illustrator. It illustrates the final stanza of Davis's poem when the locals of West Cork exact their revenge on the man who led the Barbary pirates into Baltimore on 20 June 1631.

'T is two long years since sunk the town beneath that bloody band,  
And all around its trampled hearths a larger concourse stand,  
Where high upon a gallows-tree a yelling wretch is seen:  
'T is Hackett of Dungarvan—he who steer'd the Algerine!  
He fell amid a sullen shout with scarce a passing prayer,  
For he had slain the kith and kin of many a hundred there.  
Some mutter'd of MacMurchadh, who brought the Norman o'er;  
Some curs'd him with Iscariot, that day in Baltimore.'

Thomas Davis, *The Sack of Baltimore*, 1844

The events of 1631 have been more recently outlined in Des Ekin's *The Stolen Village: Baltimore and the Barbary Pirates*. (O'Brien Press, 2008). In 1631 two galleys from Algiers, under the protection of the Ottoman Empire, came to the West Cork coast. Their sailors sacked the village of Baltimore and abducted many of its inhabitants, the majority women and children. These were sold into slavery in North Africa. Davis's poem concludes with the hanging of John Hackett, a Dungarvan fisherman who had guided the pirates into the village. He was convicted and executed for his involvement in the raid.

Yeats' illustration is comparable to the style and approach found in his first published illustrations to Ernst Rhys's *The Great Cockney Tragedy*, published by Fisher Unwin in 1891. Both these and *The Sack of Baltimore* refer to a tragic subject and make use of a stark contrast of light and dark to heighten this mood. The surface of this drawing is built up through cross-hatchings which create a detailed texture, a technique that Yeats used widely in his early drawings. The composition is framed by the derelict houses of the village on the left and the stark form of the crudely made gallows on the right, from which dangles the terrified figure of Hackett. Inspired at one level by Yeats' familiarity with excited crowds at political rallies and sporting events, a terrifying air of vengeance permeates this drawing. Its rawness and despair is unlike the optimism of Yeats' subsequent illustrative work. It captures the spirit of Davis's poem and its attention to detail of expression and character is unmistakably Yeats'.

Dr. Roísín Kennedy

April, 2013

€6,000-€8,000 (£5,040-£6,720 approx.)