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“DO WE NEED A RUSSIAN ACADEMY IN ROME?” HENRYK SIEMIRADZKI AND ART EDUCATION

The first scholars of the Imperial Academy of Arts appeared in Rome at the time of Peter the Great. Initially, the graduates of the Academy were sent only to Rome, the center of classical art, but the Charter of the Academy of 1859 made staying in Rome – the Eternal City – optional. This decision lasted until 1886, until it was decided that Paris, Dusseldorf, Munich and other world art centers had a negative influence on the morality of young artists. Rome, of course, unlike Paris of that time, could not be called the center of art education and exhibition activities. However, the city of martyrs, which played a special role in the history of Christianity and became the second Holy City, had always attracted people of arts from all over the world. In Rome, everything was for the needs of artists “in abundance and for a pittance. The living was cheap; the wine was excellent, the artists felt at home there.”¹ It would seem they came there only for a while, but it turned out that many would prefer to stay there forever. Some, like Spanish artist José Villegas Cordero (1844-1921), having achieved fame, would build their villas with beautiful, elegantly finished workshops. His house was considered one of the sights of the

1] Antoni MADEYSKI, *Artyści polscy w Rzymie (Garść wspomnień)*, “Sztuki Piękne”, 1930 (Year 6), no. 1, p. 2.

new Rome. Among the frequented ones was Henryk Siemiradzki's Villa, which was also an attraction for both, the Italians and the multilingual *cosmopolis*.

The Academy's scholars could stay abroad for six years. But when they came to Rome, they would not find there what they had dreamed about in St. Petersburg. Having breathed in the stupefying air of freedom, they wouldn't be able to bring themselves to work. Therefore, the issue of establishing an Academy for Russian scholars in Rome, modeled on Académie de France, in the Villa Medici, was on the agenda.

In 1872, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich (1847-1909 son of the Tsar of Russia Alexander II) entrusted Aleksei Bogoliubov (1824-1896) with the supervision of young artists. But after the World's Fair in Vienna in 1873, when the latter left for Paris, the supervision of scholars in Rome was taken over by Piotr F. Iseyev², the Conference Secretary of the Academy.

Iseyev wrote a letter to Siemiradzki – in Rome at the time – whom he would favor as an outstanding student. In the letter, there were two issues that he touched upon – how to monitor and educate scholars, the latter being a particular priority for the Academy. Realizing that Iseyev wanted to entrust him with the supervision over the young artists, Siemiradzki avoided discussing the first issue. He only noticed that “as was always the case, those who were put in charge, would happen to be **the people** who could not boast of having the breadth of vision and, as a result, would display lack of tolerance.”³ In these words, there was an echo of recent groundless speculations that in Rome Siemiradzki kept aside from everyone and “the reason for this is his fanatical hatred of everything Russian.”⁴ Bogoliubov who was looking after the scholars then “hinted to the slanderer about his readiness to bring this to the attention of His Highness.”⁵ And he did so, eventually, judging by the reprimand received by the scholar soon.

2] Piotr F. Iseyev (1831-?) – the Conference Secretary of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg (1866-1889).

3] Russian State Historical Archive (=RGIA). Российский государственный исторический архив, Санкт-Петербург, ф. 789, Академия художеств, оп. 4, д. 121, Личное дело Семирадского Генриха Ипполитовича, 13 октября 1864 – 9 октября 1902, лл. 40, 154 об., 155, 156, 342, 343 (St. Petersburg, Fond 789, Academy of Arts, ser. 4, rec. 121, Personal file of Semiradzki Genrikh Ippolitovich, 13 October 1864 – 9 October 1902, ll. f. 40, 154 recto, 155, 156, 342, 343).

4] RGIA. Fond 789, f. 113.

5] RGIA. Fond 789, f. 114.

The second issue – the scholars' education – was more focused on. In Siemiradzki's opinion, the main mistake of all European academies was that "none of them could see where to limit control, neither one was able to expand the notion of seriousness (of education) in accordance with the public opinion and artists' views."⁶ The subsequent reforms at the Academy of Arts showed how far-sighted he was: "Find a measure that would be timely to put a restriction on the tyranny of teachers. This is the task that should be set, together with the establishment of academies. This one alone would stop in the future the feuds between the Academy and the majority of artists, a sad phenomenon that has led to the loss of authority by many European academies of the Arts, loss of trust in them by young beginner-artists; to generating self-taught artists without elementary knowledge."⁷

Iseyev's desire to send graduates of the Academy to Rome did not find support either among the members of the Association of Traveling Art Exhibitions (the Wanderers), or with Vladimir Stasov: „it would be time to stop sending abroad at public cost, as has always been done, the best young artists that graduated from the Academy because, so far, nothing but harm ever came from it [...] Why should they live for 6 years in Rome or anywhere else in Italy, i.e. in places where there are just the works of ancient art. [...] We don't need cadavers, no matter how beautiful they are! But I'll say even more: why would they linger for 6 years not only in Italy, but also in Paris, Munich, Düsseldorf or any other centre of the modern advancing and developing art. Why spend the best, the strongest, most energetic and fiery years of one's life away from your genuine fatherland [...]. What's the point in living all these years and to look at the foreign nature, foreign monuments of art, foreign characters, types and scenes of life; **why use these years to copy some outdated, at least so-called, – Classical creations of ancient art**".⁸ Many efforts were made on their part to prevent success of

6] RGIA. Fond 789, f. 153. Письмо Г.И. Семирадского П.Ф. Исееву от 17 июня 1874 года (H[enryk]. I. Siemiradzki's letter to P[iotr]. F. Iseyev, 17 June 1874, f. 153).

7] RGIA. Fond 789, f.153.

8] Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) wrote „пора бы прекратить посылку на казенный счет за границу, как это всегда делалось, лучших молодых художников, кончивших курс в Академии, потому что до сих пор ничего, кроме вреда, их этого не выходило [...]. Зачем им жить целых 6 лет в Риме, или где бы то ни было в Италии, т.е. в тех местах, где есть только одни произведения старинного искусства. [...] Что нам в кадаврах, как бы они красивы не были! Но я скажу еще более: зачем им прозябать 6 лет не только в Италии, но и в Париже, Мюнхене, Дюссельдорфе, или каком угодно центре современно движущегося вперед и развивающегося искусства. Зачем проводить лучшие, самые сильные, энер-

his undertaking: and although the idea of establishing the Academy's subsidiary in Rome had been in discussed, the project was eventually rejected. Bogoliubov defiantly refused the post of director of the Academy of Arts in Rome, and Stasov struck a final blow, reminding everyone of Major General Ludwig Karl von Kiel (1793-1851), who made Aleksandr Ivanov (1806-1858) "suffer a lot", and summarizing that "all this (the project) is a gross mistake, a wasted and falsely directed efforts; and the people's money, composed of labour pennies, obtained through sweat and tears, should not be spend on inflicting damage to the best graduates' abilities."⁹

Siemiradzki's term as a scholar was drawing to a close. He was finishing work on *Nero's Torches* which he had started in 1874. Although incomplete, the picture drew almost the entire art world of Rome to Siemiradzki's studio. Within a short time, it was visited by Domenico Morelli (1823-1901), Ernest Hébert (1817-1908), Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) – all of them spoke about the picture with admiration.

In 1876, together with Scipione Vannutelli (1831-1894), Achille Verunni (1826-1897) and Alma-Tadema, Siemiradzki was elected to the Jury Board to award prizes for the best works of the annual exhibition in Rome. A year later he became a member of the Academy of Saint Luke in Rome.

Siemiradzki, now a European celebrity, was about to be back in St. Petersburg. His possible return made Stasov and the Wanderers concerned. It was not by chance that, shortly before the organization of the Association of Travelling Art Exhibitions, Ivan Kramskoi (1837-1887) (one of the member) had warned of new forces, having Siemiradzki in mind: "We are in for a fight! Take it or leave it. That's for certain!"¹⁰ Assessing the situation in the Art, Stasov shared his opinion with Vasily Vereshchagin:¹¹ "As to the art world, everything is going

гические и огненные годы своей жизни вдали от настоящей своей родины [...]. Зачем проживать эти годы в виде чужой природы, чужих памятников искусства, чужих характеров, типов и сцен жизни, зачем употреблять эти годы на копирование каких-то отживших, хотя бы и так называемых, – классических созданий старинного искусства". Transl. Agnieszka Pospiszil). *Собрание сочинений В.В. Стасова. 1847-1887 г. Художественные статьи* (Collection of V. V. Stasov's writings. 1847-1887. Articles on art), т. I, Типография М. М. Стасюлевича, Санкт-Петербург 1894, p. 125.

9] Ibid., p. 126.

10] *Переписка И.Н. Крамского. Переписка с художниками*, т. II, (*Correspondence of I. N. Kramskoy. Correspondence with artists*, vol. II.), Государственное издательство «Искусство», Москва 1954, p. 284.

11] Vasily Vereshchagin (1842-1904) was one of the most famous Russian war artists, his mother had Tatar origins.

from bad to worse! Iseyev and the like (professorial dinosaurs, old fo-geys) have united around themselves a whole bunch of wise guys with no talent at all, such as Valery Jacobi (1834-1902), in the first place, and Siemiradzki, to boot."¹²

However, Henryk Siemiradzki decided to stay in Rome. Iseyev went on with his efforts to establish a subsidiary of the Academy of Arts in Rome. In 1886, when the Academy of Arts once again opted for Rome as the place for scholars to be sent to, he designed a "Note on the establishing a house for the scholars of the Academy in Rome" (1887).¹³

After Vice-President, Major General Grigory Gagarin (1810-1893) left his post, Iseyev became an omnipotent figure in the Academy which gave him the opportunity to openly express his opinion about the situation in the Russian art: "School, as an institution, has always been conservative, and, therefore, based on traditions. But suddenly, with a fresh wind new trends have emerged, the pseudo-liberal ideas of the 50s preaching global liberation, resolutely, from everything – from school, from authorities, from wonderful traditions."¹⁴ Regarding who will head the Roman subsidiary, he said that among all the 41 painters and 7 sculptors sent abroad in 28 years, only Siemiradzki and Fyodor Bronnikov (1827-1902) are the best to take the post.

The search for a suitable building for this purpose began. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered the Academy of Arts a house on Via dei Polacchi, where the embassy staff lived, but it turned out to be unsuitable for accommodation.¹⁵ So, they decided to sell it. Even a buyer,

12] *Переписка В.В. Верещагина и В.В. Стасова. 1874-1878*, т. I, Письма подготовлены к печати и примечания к ним составлены А.К. Лебедевым и Г.К. Буровой под редакцией А.К. Лебедева (*Correspondence of V. V. Vereshchagin and V. V. Stasov, 1874-1878*, vol. I, Letters prepared to publication and notes on them compiled by A. K. Lebedyev and G. K. Burova, ed. A. K. Lebedyev), Государственное издательство «Искусство», Москва 1950, p. 59.

13] RGIA. Fond 796, f. 451.

14] Department of Manuscripts of the National Library of Russia (= OR RNB). Отдел рукописей Российской Национальной библиотеки (ОР РНБ), Санкт-Петербург, ф. 796, Тюменев И [лья] Ф[едорович], оп. 1, ед. хр. 451, апрель 1888 г. (St. Petersburg, fond 796, Tyumenev I [lya] F[edorovich], ser. 1, ed. khr. 451, April 1888). OR RNB. Санкт-Петербург, ф. 796, Тюменев И[лья] Ф[едорович], оп. 2, ед. хр. 451, Исеєв П.Ф. «Записка по вопросу об устройстве в Риме дома для пенсионеров Академии», апрель 1887 г. (St. Petersburg, fond 796, Tyumenev I [lya] F[edorovich], ser. 2, ed. khr. 451, Iseyev P. F. "Note on the issue of establishing a house for Academy pensioners in Rome", April 1887).

15] OR RNB. Санкт-Петербург, ф. 708, ед. хр. 736. Выставки (газетные вырезки) 1886, 1887 г., л. 150. Художественные новости, т. IV, 14-15 июля 1886 г. Внутренние известия. (St. Petersburg, fond. 708, ed. khr. 736. Exhibitions (paper clips) 1886, 1887, l. 150. Art News, vol. IV, 14-15 July 1886. Domestic news).

who offered 500,000 francs, was found. As was supposed, with this money, they could build a new house. Initially, there was an idea to build a house for the Academy's subsidiary next to Porta del Popolo, but then they opted for the site beyond Porto Pia away from the Tiber flooding.

In *The Art News*, published by the Academy of Arts, it was reported: "The Academy of Arts have been long cherishing the idea of establishing its own subsidiary in Rome for its scholars there. Lack of means has prevented its realization so far. This spring we have had a chance, a combination of circumstances *The New Time* is writing about. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet expressed its official consent to give the selected house in Rome to the Academy."¹⁶

The correspondence between Siemiradzki and Iseyev began. The artist gladly offered his help in settling this issue: "The warm and respectful attitude of the Court that I have enjoyed, the knowledge of the local life and my connections in the high society – all this could be more than once useful to scholars."¹⁷ Siemiradzki explained his reluctance to return to the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg to the conference-secretary: "Because of the genre of painting that I have chosen, living in Rome is a necessity, an artistic vocation for me."¹⁸ The eternal city became an everlasting source of inspiration for him. As to St. Petersburg, he did not like it (that was not his world). He thought it was a welcome place for anyone, but an artist.¹⁹

In August 1887, while in Minsk, he wrote to Iseyev: "Why haven't you got around to visiting Rome? You should have, indeed. Especially now that the Academy has sent all its scholars there. You really should have dropped by to see the Eternal City. You ought to come and stay at my place – it would be a great pleasure for me. I would be your *cicerone* [guide] and interpreter. I will always remember how kind you were to me when I was a student of the Academy. It would be an honour to oblige you."²⁰ Iseyev promised: "When the question of the

16] *Собрание сочинений В.В. Стасова...* (Collection of V. V. Stasov's writings...), p. 86.

17] RGIA. Fond 789.

18] Ibid.

19] Ibid.

20] RGIA. Fond 789. Академия художеств, оп. 4, д. 121, Личное дело Семирадского Генриха Ипполитовича, 13 октября 1864 – 9 октября 1902, Письмо Г.И. Семирадского П.Ф. Исеёву. Минск, 9 августа 1887 г., л. 245 (Academy of Arts, ser. 4, rec 121, Personal file of Semiradzki Genrikh Ippolitovich, 13 October 1864 – 9 October 1902, H[enryk]. I. Siemiradzki's letter to P[iotr]. F. Iseyev, Minsk, 9 August 1887, f. 245).

house in Rome is finally resolved, I will be there to settle household matters."²¹

Shortly after Iseyev had nominated Bronnikov and Siemiradzki as candidates for the post of the Academy's Roman subsidiary, *The Art News* of August 15 published Bogoliubov's refutation where he denied the fact that he had been seen as the one to supervise the subsidiary of the Academy of Arts in Rome. That rumor was allegedly launched by the Paris newspaper *Le Temps* and reprinted by many foreign and Russian newspapers. The loss of interest in his personality hurt Bogoliubov a lot. He wrote that he had never had pretensions to the post and "could not have had it because he considered the establishment of the Russian Academy in Rome as serving no purpose and useless for our art as well as artists."²² He was echoed by the venerable critic in the article "Is the Russian Academy in Rome necessary?"²³, in which the latter explained to readers why he was an ardent opponent of the Roman Academy. The critic was convinced that talented artists needed to travel, but "it is harmful to go abroad when you are staunchly devoted only to a few representatives of the old school and concepts; it is harmful to turn a blind eye to modernity and live only by traditions."²⁴ "The Russian Academy of Arts in Rome can not be useful either to our artists or our art – that's what I have believed for a long time, too. I will say more than that. In my opinion, it will not only be useless, but, also, just harmful. I am very glad that, on this matter, I see eye to eye with one of the most remarkable of our artists (Bogoliubov), [...], who, having lived abroad for many years [...], has had a chance, not only in theory but in practice, to see the fruits of such "roman academies" and weigh up all the pros and cons of the issue."²⁵ As a result, soon after these publications in the press, *The Art News* informed their readers

21] RGIA. Fond 789. Академия художеств, оп. 4, д. 121, Личное дело Семирадского Генриха Ипполитовича, 13 октября 1864 – 9 октября 1902, Письмо П.Ф. Исеева Г.И. Семирадскому. Август 1887 г. Письмо адресовано в Варшаву на адрес М.И. Семирадского, л. 247 (Academy of Arts, ser. 4, drec. 121, Personal file of Semiradzki Genrikh Ippolitovich, 13 October 1864 – 9 October 1902, P[iotr]. F. Iseyev's letter to H[enryk]. I. Siemiradzki. August 1887. Letter addressed to M[ichał]. I. Siemiradzki in Warsaw, f. 247).

22] *Собрание сочинений В.В. Стасова...* (Collection of V. V. Stasov's writings...), p. 866.

23] „прелестна Италия, чудесна для художника жизнь среди красот ее природы и музеев, но это не резон, чтобы ему там обезличиваться и терять свою физиономию и национальность в диком монастыре”. (“adorable Italy, a wonderful life for an artist among the beauty of its nature and museums, but it is not a reason for him to depersonalise and lose his physiognomy and nationality in a wild monastery”. Transl. Agnieszka Pospiszil). Ibid, pp. 873-874.

24] Ibid, p. 866.

25] Ibid, p. 866.

that the issue of the Academy's subsidiary in Rome is "purely hypothetical. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not yet expressed its consent to the cession of its house in Rome to the Academy and, actually, nothing has been positively resolved on the issue, and, therefore, all the assumptions about this matter are premature."²⁶

At the annual exhibition at the Academy of Arts, from January 23 – February 26, 1889, Siemiradzki presented his works he had created over the previous two years: *Phryne at the Festival of Poseidon in Eleusis*, the second version of *After the Example of the Gods, Before a Bath, At the Fountain* and *The Temptation of St. Jerome*. *Phryne* and *After the Example of the Gods* were purchased from the exhibition by Tsar Alexander III at a price of 40,000 roubles. The artist was nominated an "extraordinary member" of the Council of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts. Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, the President of the Academy of Arts who had visited the exhibition on the eve of the opening ceremony, then personally commissioned the artist to find a suitable house in Rome for the Academy.

Siemiradzki returned to Rome on 12th April and proceeded at once with the most thorough search for a suitable building. In this, he was assisted by architect Francesco Azzurri (1831-1901). Two months later, the information they had collected was sent to Iseyev: there was not a single house that would fully meet the goal in view. Everywhere, significant restructuring was needed, besides, the main problem was that they needed to choose a building with the presence of natural light and the absence of reflexes. The most suitable villa was located just behind Porta del Popolo, next to Villa Borghese. There was a garden and a beautiful view of Rome, and the house itself was meant for studios – there were eight to four on each floor with tiny storage rooms not suitable for habitation. However, due to the lack of a basement, the ground floor was very damp, so it might be quite good for artists to work there but unhealthy to live in: "the whole neighborhood around Villa Borghese was infamous for poor sanitary conditions."²⁷ In fact, Siemiradzki suggested some other options: Villino Ruffo; sculptor William Wetmore Story's house at Via San Martino and a house at 123, Via Sistina. He asked the Academy to send an architect who would know Rome well. He was worried that "for all the thoroughness of the search, something could have escaped my attention. In any case, it

26] Ibid, p. 865.

27] RGIA. Fond 789.

would be desirable to resolve this issue as quickly as possible. The inevitable building of the house will also require a lot of time. If the inspection of the premises confirmed what I have said above, and the shortcomings of those listed by me and of the ones to be found were a serious obstacle to the realization of His Highness's desire, then I would offer the Academy to use my own house on the most advantageous conditions."²⁸

When building his house, the artist tried to provide for everything that would be necessary for work. In front of the house there were cavalry barracks and parade-ground of the Military Department, so there were no problems with light. The studio itself was so spacious "that no canvasses piling on will block it."²⁹ Moreover, there was another one – exactly the same – on the floor above. There was, also, a beautiful garden there, and from the terrace there was a beautiful view of the Sabatini Mountains and Tivoli Gardens; on the left one could see a beautiful silhouette of the Alban Hills and the desert-like Roman Campagna. Siemiradzki offered his house for the money that he had once invested in it himself, "without losing the interest"³⁰ and pledging to submit to the Academy all available construction bills. Making the offer to sell the house, he was not going to even consider that huge difference "in the price of the land between the time when I bought it in a completely out-of-the-way area and the present when it turned into a fashionable and beautiful part of the city."³¹

Siemiradzki really wanted to work with talented young artists, be head of the Academy's Roman subsidiary. He wrote openly to Iseyev that offering his house, "I was hoping to work later for the benefit of the new institution, and the burning desire to implement the idea in the soonest possible time prompted the above plan that combined in

28] RGIA. Fond 789. Академия художеств, оп. 4, д. 121, Личное дело Семирадского Генриха Ипполитовича, 13 октября 1864 – 9 октября 1902, Письмо Г. И. Семирадского П. Ф. Исееву. Рим, 1/13 июня 1889 г., л. 342 (Academy of Arts, ser. 4, rec. 121, Personal file of Semiradzki Genrikh Ippolitovich, 13 October 1864 – 9 October 1902, H[enryk]. I. Siemiradzki's letter to P. F. Iseyev. Rome, 1/13 June 1889, l. 342).

29] А. М. Матушинский. *Русские художники в Риме. Статья вторая*. Художественные новости, т. II, 12-15 июня 1884 г., с. 304-305 (A[ppollon]. M. Matushinsky, Russian artists in Rome. Second article, "Art News", vol. II, 12-15 June 1884).

30] RGIA. Fond 789. Академия художеств, оп. 4, д. 121, Личное дело Семирадского Генриха Ипполитовича, 13 октября 1864 – 9 октября 1902, Письмо Г. И. Семирадского П. Ф. Исееву. Рим, 1/13 июня 1889 г., л. 342 (Academy of Arts, ser. 4, rec. 121, Personal file of Semiradzki Genrikh Ippolitovich, 13 October 1864 – 9 October 1902, H[enryk]. I. Siemiradzki's letter to P. F. Iseyev. Rome, 1/13 June 1889, l. 342).

31] Ibid.

itself an equal benefit for the Academy and myself – all this being somewhat an ambitious desire to justify the trust of the Grand Duke as soon as possible. Presenting to you all that has been said, I am asking you, dear Piotr Fyodorovich, to convey the contents of my letter to His Highness.”³²

The artists, on their part, did not forgive the conference secretary, the “rude despot and impudent fellow”³³ for taking independent decisions, especially, the one to invite Siemiradzki to work at the Academy. “The rumor has it,” wrote Pavel Cherkasov (1834-1900) to Vereshchagin, “that Iseyev is in for some trouble, that a large party headed by Bogoliubov – who is very influential and close to the imperial Court – is in opposition to him.”³⁴ Eventually, on December 19, 1888, by the Highest Decree of the Ministry of the Imperial Court, Iseyev was made to resign. Soon he was accused of embezzling large sums of state money, brought to trial and exiled to Viatka. In fact, the President of the Academy Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, whom Bogoliubov, once taught to draw, was involved in money fraud himself, and who, after all that happened, even never remembered about the Roman academy for Russian talented artists.

In 1893, Pavel Chistiakov (1832-1919) wrote to Pavel Tretyakov (1832-1898): “Iseyev has been convicted. I was among the witnesses there. The Secretary of State Nikolai Petrov (1838-1913) fell ill, and his treasurer died, and all this happened when the court hearings of Iseyev’s case were over.”³⁵

32] Ibid.

33] Department of Manuscripts of the State Tretyakov Gallery (= OR GTG). Отдел рукописей Государственной Третьяковской галереи (ОР ГТГ), Москва, 17/1159, Письмо Черкасова П. А. к Верещагину В. В. 11/23/XI 1892 г., л. 2. (Moscow, 17/1159, Letter of Cherkasov P[avel]. A. to Vereshchagin V[asily]. V. 11 /XI 1892, f. 2).

34] OR GTG. Москва, 17/1159, Письмо Черкасова П.А. к Верещагину В.В. 11/23/XI 1892 г., л. 2. (See footnote 49).

35] OR GTG. Москва, ф. 1, П.М. Третьяков, е/х 4164. Письмо Чистякова П.П. к П.М. Третьяков. 2 января 1893 г., л. 1. (Fond 1 (P. M. Tretyakov), ed. khf. 4164. P[avel]. P. Chistyakov’s letter to P[avel]. M. Tretyakov. 2 January 1893, f. 1).