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INSPIRATION – SELECTION – FUNCTION. AN ANCIENT OBJECT IN HENRYK SIEMIRADZKI'S PAINTINGS

An ancient artefact can play various functions in a work of art. If the theme of the work is embedded in ancient times, the object obviously builds the theme and sometimes it becomes the main motif of the work, or a background for history, myth or genre.¹ However, not always an ancient theme of work forces an artist to place an ancient object in a painting. The artist can focus on people and events, for instance myth, avoiding the artefact and thus reducing the ancient background understood as a set of objects in which the recipient of the work recognizes the ancient time and place.

This issue is a broad, separate research topic, but to visualize the role of an ancient monument in Henryk Siemiradzki's works, we can

1] Katarzyna NOWAKOWSKA-SITO, *Od czasów Winckelmanna do sczyłku XIX wieku – przemiany postrzegania antycznego mitu (From times of Winckelmann to the end of the 19th century – changes in ancient myth Deception)*, in: *Ars Mitologica. Wokół zagadnień recepcji mitów greckich. Ceramika i rzeźba starożytna. Grafika europejska oraz Sztuka zdobnicza XVI – XIX wieku*, ed. Joanna A. TOMICKA, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warszawa 1999, pp. 42-51. The research on the role of ancient iconography in post-ancient art are still in progress – cf. latest (May 2019) Thirteenth International Conference of Iconographic Studies in Rijeka *Afterlife of Antiquity. Case studies and New Perspectives in Iconology*.

even compare the convergent works of the inspirer of the classical trend in the French Baroque painter Nicolas Poussin, who lived in Rome.² His works like *Death of Germanicus* (1627-1628), *Apollo and Daphne* (1664) or *Bacchanal* (1624-1625) are dominated by human emotions and landscapes. Architecture or other artefacts are only shown if they seem to be necessary. We can see a similar relationship in the paintings of neoclassical painter – Jacques-Louis David (*The Death of Socrates*, 1787; *The Loves of Paris and Helen*, 1788), or the classicist pupil of David – Antoni Brodowski (*Saul's Anger at David*, 1812-1819; *Oedipus and Antigone*, 1828). It should be noted however, that the role of the ancient detailed artefact is already increased by Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres (*The Illness of Antiochus*, 1840; *Apotheosis of Homer*, 1827).³

Of course, it is quite simple and even trivial to define the reasons for the gradual change in the role of the detailed shown ancient object in the picture. Undoubtedly, the development of archaeological research from the mid-18th century, discovering the civilization of Greece, Rome with symbolic excavations in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Olympia, penetrations of Hellenistic Anatolia or Ancient Near East, gave impetus and inspiration for artists to refine the ancient theme and to incorporate architectural elements and other objects to the works of art. Additionally, a pioneering vision of ancient times as the epoch of the perfect and original beauty of Johann Joachim Winckelmann with his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* gave another impetus to the embellishing of the work by including objects of Greek or Roman art (though as we know Winckelmann had the opportunity to study only Roman copies of Greek works).⁴

The focus on the ancient detail is one of the distinguishing features of academic art, although the role of the ancient artefact depends on the artist, time or school.⁵ The accents can be put here differently. For

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- 2] Otto GRAUTOFF, *Nicolas Poussin*, Parkstone Press International, New York 2015, pp. 39-71.
- 3] Interesting, broader context of ancient myth in modern art on the example of myth of Oedipus and the sphinx is present in: Rosanna LAURIOLA, *Revivals of an Ancient Myth in Modern Art: Oedipus and the Episode of the Sphinx. From Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres to Michael Merck*, in: "Trends in Classics", 2011, vol. 3, pp. 154-194.
- 4] Johann J. WINCKELMANN, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, vol. 1, Walther, Dresden 1764, p. 167. Accessible online: http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/winckelmann_kunstgeschichte01_1764; Ranuccio BIANCHI BANDINELLI, *Introduzione all'archeologia classica come storia dell'arte antica*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2005.
- 5] Maria POPRZEĆKA, *Akademizm*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1989, pp. 146-183.

example, *Oedipus in Thebes* (1843) by Eugène Ernest Hillemacher is a picture in which the ancient background – the temple, the silhouette of the city, the altar, the statue are silent participants in the action plan. As we can see, it is obvious that in the case of Siemiradzki we deal with a completely different approach, although of course not isolated in the European painting. Remembering *Bacchanal* by Nicolas Poussin and keeping in mind Siemiradzki's works, we can pay attention to *Bacchanal*, the Croatian academician, pupil of Academy in Munich – Mato Celestin Medović from 1893 (fig. 36).⁶ In the area of ancient artefacts, we can see here many similarities with Siemiradzki's paintings.

Therefore, in the case of academic painting and the works of Henryk Siemiradzki, we deal with an ancient object, which is undoubtedly an important, sometimes leading component of the theme, though not its title motif. However, this relationship cannot be treated as a permanent relation and ahistorically. It seems that Henryk Siemiradzki in his school-works had to pay attention not only to the figure or landscape, but also to architecture. At the end of his artistic path, in the opinion, for instance of Tatiana Karpova, he adapted the Impressionist achievements in the picture *The Riddle* (1896).⁷ In this work there is basically the only ancient quote – a vessel – oinochoe held by a pair of shepherds. The house buildings visible in the background and the architecture of the fountain itself can come from the contemporary for the artist time.

Looking through Siemiradzki's works contextually embedded in antiquity, we can notice a varied intensity of the number and range of ancient artefacts used, taking into account, of course, the subject of the work or the time of its creation. Thus, it is possible to distinguish four thematic bunches in which the presence of ancient artefacts takes on various intensities.

In the first group of paintings related to Christ and geographically with Palestine under the Romans, the presence of monuments and meticulously shown details are extremely reduced (*Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*, *Christ Blessing the Children*). Attention is focused on the person of Christ, his interlocutors and on the landscape. It seems that the author did not see the need to compact the image with unnecessary details, directing attention to

6] Slavko Batušić, *Medović P. Celestin (Mate)*, in: *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, Band 6, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1975, p. 188.

7] Татьяна КАРПОВА, *Вдохновение Рима: жанр Бантичных идиллий в творчестве Генриха Ипполитовича Семирадского* (Tatiana L. KARPOVA, *Inspiration of Rome: genre of "antique idylls" in Henryk Siemiradzki's work*), "Sztuka Europy Wschodniej", 2015, vol. III, p. 25.

the person of Christ. Sometimes the scene is accompanied by an ancient vessel, jewellery, architectural detail, but without a specific, readable reference to the time. Thus, the scenes with Christ seem to be timeless, and the ancient object could disturb this transmission in its timelessness.

The second group is genre scenes, idylls usually settled in Greece or assuming after some archaeological suggestions in pre-Roman Italy, where precisely placed ancient artefacts appear as a quote, supplement, citation (*For Water, By the Spring, The Painter of vases*). They are mainly vessels – various types of Greek or Etruscan vases, as well as architectural details and for example fountains.

The third group is a mythological illustration, where a greater number of ancient objects interact with deities and heroes creating an intense action. These are details of robes, jewellery, superb fragments of architecture (*The Judgement of Paris, Phryne at the Festival of Poseidon in Eleusis*).

However, a real conglomerate of monuments, sometimes even visually dominant in the painting, appear in works of the fourth group, thematically and chronologically settled in Roman times (*Nero's Torches, Christian Dirce*). Apart from well-known works from the history of Christians' persecutions, also other Roman works abound in numerous artefacts and their compilations, both of Greek, Roman and sometimes oriental provenance and origin. The architecture and elements of everyday life and the equipment of the Romans of that time are expanded.

Of course, this relations result from the subject of the work, as well as the availability of sources – let us not forget that Siemiradzki lived and created in Rome and he knew many objects from autopsy.

But what determines the choice of Siemiradzki's ancient attributes? It seems that the image of antiquity defined by Winckelmann, confirmed by the reception of classical works and contemporary writers, including Ernest Renan, was very important. Greek times – classical style in Winckelmann's approach (5th – 4th century BC) and beautiful style (4th century BC – 1st century BC) is a time of perfect beauty of man-oriented art – which is reflected even in the scenes of an idyllic style, where ancient monuments do not dominate and do not disturb the beauty of the classical style. This style of Siemiradzki is built mainly by a human and a beautiful sunny landscape.⁸ Also, the figure of Christ

8] Witold DOBROWOLSKI, *Wazy greckie w twórczości Siemiradzkiego*, "Sztuka Europy Wschodniej", 2017, vol. V, pp. 28, 38.

requires the reduction of the ancient subject, the most important is the ethical and Christian message. A completely different picture is drawn by Siemiradzki in the case of works set in Roman times, where, as mentioned, ancient artefacts sometimes create real conglomerates of monuments. For Winckelmann, in accordance with his parabolic model of the development of ancient art, the Roman period is a decadent period, for Renan the times of Roman cruelty, for Siemiradzki a period of contempt, wealth and emotions that contradict Winckelmann's idea of Beauty as restraint and simplicity not falling into pathos.⁹ The selection of numerous and culturally diverse objects, including oriental ones, is a picture of the Empire – a conqueror in which ancient art is only a background for numerous tragedies of human fate.

It is obvious to distinguish three basic phases in the process of placing an ancient object in the work. However, Siemiradzki's inspiration, choice and significance have a special dimension due to the well-known, even archaeological precision in the handing over of ancient monuments, but also an unconventional approach to their creation in works, not only limited to their simple copying.

The phase of inspiration or defining sources, whether textual or visual – archaeological for ancient art in Siemiradzki's paintings, is the subject of in-depth research undertaken mainly by archaeologists.¹⁰ There is, of course, no place to indicate all, or even the main sources, but we should mention a thorough reading of archaeological sources, as evidenced by the artist's library in Rome, museum and travel inspirations (Pompeii) and observations *in situ* in Rome. Also important are studies on objects including original, such as, for example, the ancient vases possessed by the artist, mainly Etruscan ones. What really distinguishes Siemiradzki here, besides faithfully shown objects and sculptures and “crossing” certain elements in various works (such as rhytons, also as fountains, Egyptian harps), is the fact of combining and compiling elements for example of architecture – a kind of intelligent game consisting in creating a new object of art. It is well known that in the field of ancient Roman architecture, Siemiradzki based himself, inter alia, on Luigi Canina's *Indicazione topografica di Roma Antica* and Johannes Overbeck's works on

9] J. J. WINCKELMANN, op. cit., p. 145.

10] Cf. latest: W. DOBROWOLSKI, op. cit., pp. 11–44; Jerzy MIZIOLEK, *Dirke chrześcijańska i inne tematy all'antica w twórczości Henryka Siemiradzkiego. Uwagi i rozważania*, “Sztuka Europy Wschodniej”, 2016, vol. IV, pp. 21–54.

Pompeii.¹¹ Research also indicates that in the field of the ancient Near East, he drew on the work of the father of the Assyriology of Austen Henry Layard, but more on his numerous translations.¹² In the end, Egyptian details were transposed, among others, from the work of the German Egyptologist Georg Ebers.¹³

The most important, however, is the intelligent interweaving of inspiration and the creation of eclectic compositions. We can indicate the example of the painting of *The Judgement of Paris*, where, next to ancient works, we also see medieval and later quotes.¹⁴ A compilation with a smaller amplitude of time can also be found in the painting *The Vase or the Woman?*, where the tapestry in the background contains compilations from various scenes from the Assyrian temple reliefs. In this tapestry Siemiradzki compiled and connected a few scenes, creating a new one, with logical consequences and archaeological precise. Thus, in the upper strip we can see a scene of taking fortress or town by using siege machine, warriors on chariots and in battle formation. In the bottom strip we can see a typical scene of combat between a winged daemon and a lion and a scene of feast at a table. At the top, there is a typical and characteristic for religious scenes symbol of Ahuramazda. This composition as a whole makes sense, but it is built from single episodes, and transferred from stone wall to the tapestry, what was original artist's idea. Moreover, Siemiradzki added correct elements of bordure – in the shape of rosettes and a winged bull. Therefore, Siemiradzki created a new, very logical work of Assyrian art in typical lane composition with upper war register and bottom register with a religious message, like ancient artist in a workshop in Niniveh or Nimrud almost three thousand years ago.¹⁵

The artist also skilfully enlarged some objects, such as rhytons, creating architectural elements from them, or sphinx sculptures.¹⁶ It also seems that Siemiradzki had favourite ancient objects like the aforementioned rhyton, Egyptian harp, or the statue of Victoria, painted on different paintings.

11] Dorota GORZELANY, *Zabytki rzymskie źródłem inspiracji malarzkiej w Pochodniach Neron Henryka Siemiradzkiego*, "Rozprawy Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie", 2013, pp. 165-180.

12] Grzegorz FIRST, *Res Orientalis: Works of art from the ancient Near East and Henryk Siemiradzki's "archaeological workshop"*, "World Art Studies", 2018, vol. 18, pp. 55-61.

13] Georg EBERS, *Ägypten in Bild und Wort: dargestellt von unseren ersten Künstlern*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, Leipzig 1880.

14] J. MIZIOŁEK, op. cit., p. 44.

15] G. FIRST, op. cit., p. 56.

16] J. MIZIOŁEK, op. cit., p. 37.

It should be emphasised, however, that the artist himself admitted that in the process of inspiration he did not have a definite or definitive character of the picture. In a letter to his parents from December 1873, reporting on the work on the painting, he writes: “[I have] a head with a future image that it is difficult for me to turn my thoughts to something else. Despite the fact that I am still working, my Nero (or rather the Christians under the rule of Nero have not yet begun.) I am still working on sketches of him and I am reading a lot of material, I am thinking and I’m dreaming about work – what will happen?”¹⁷

How, then, did the process of selection of attributes take place and what criteria did the artist follow here? This is probably the most difficult question and the answer to it is not unambiguous, especially in the case of works with a large number of ancient artefacts, that is, those settled in Roman times. Undoubtedly, the academic workshop forced him to aestheticism of the work and selection of elements to create a perfect whole. The artist took care of the continuity and stability of some elements of the ancient world, as can be demonstrated by the same type of balustrade in Roman buildings and stages in various paintings.¹⁸ Sometimes decorative values decided about the choice of elements, although the effect does not always seem to be expected. In the image *The Martyrdom of St. Timothy and St. Maura, his Wife* (1885, National Museum, Warsaw), a conglomerate of numerous Roman and Egyptian attributes even blows. The overloading with details and objects gives a picture of paganism but distracts too much attention, which should be focused on the drama of the pair of heroes and their oppressors.¹⁹ Undoubtedly the following factor is the erudition of the artist, his reading of the ancient authors and the knowledge of the antiquity that he had to use.²⁰ The indicated criteria seem to be obvious, but can we be tempted to define some others, among which we can see the unobvious motivations of the artist?

For example, let us draw our attention to the thematically coherent image of Christ and women – the Samaritan woman and Mary and

17] Archivio di Pontificio Istituto di Studi Ecclesiastici, Roma (PISE), 22 – Siemiradzki Legacy, file 1, Henryk Siemiradzki, letter to parents, Roma, [December] 1873, f. 398-399v.

18] Cf. balustrades on Siemiradzki's and mentioned Medović's paintings.

19] Grzegorz FIRST, *Egipt Siemiradzkiego. Scena męczeństwa pierwszych chrześcijan (Męczeństwo św. Tymoteusza i Maury jego małżonki)*, “Sztuka Europy Wschodniej”, 2017, vol. 5, pp. 105-114.

20] We can mention here such inspiring for artist ancient authors as Herodotus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Plutarch, Diodorus of Sicily, Apuleius, Ammianus Marcellinus.

Martha (fig. 37 a-c). The first image *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (fig. V) refers to the Biblical scene from John's Gospel 4, 1-42 in which Jesus meets a woman from Samaria, who gives him water from a well in a jug. Apart from the image of a talk between Jesus and a woman, located in a sunny, green and peaceful background, we have only two ancient artefacts: the jug and the woman's clothes with jewellery. As the action unfolds in Samaria, Siemiradzki takes as an inspiration from Palestinian pottery and copied with precise typical decoration of this jug, stressing that the meeting is taking place in Orient. As has been pointed out, the inspiration for Siemiradzki could be an original jug or its depiction dated for Late Bronze Age I (1550-1400 BC) and belonging to the group of so-called bichrome ware, produced in Canaan and according to latest research also in Cyprus. It differs from Greek or Roman pottery, often visible in Siemiradzki's paintings, so the author chose correctly an artefact from the East to show with archaeological precision the reality of Samaria. Of course, this jug due to its date could not be used in times of Christ, as well, its shape and clay material did not allow it to be used as a scoop. Similar, as it was pointed out the woman's clothes were inspired by 19th century female dress from Rafidiye near Nablus in Palestine.²¹ As an "archaeologist" Siemiradzki decided to paint this Biblical episode with the reality of times and the Palestinian dress and the decorated jug were for him a good opportunity to show advanced workshop based on archaeological and ethnographical data. However, if we compare this scene to the selection of artefacts in the second painting – *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, first of all we will see a similar reduction of artefacts characteristic of Siemiradzki's "Christs" works, which however were here a bit "ragged" from the antiquity. A modest vessel in the foreground, a carpet with a geometric pattern, a modest musical instrument, or house buildings can be read here in a contemporary origin and context. Interestingly, however, it is Mary's dress, which is fundamentally different from what we see in the Samaritan woman. Mary from Bethany probably came from Judea, but undoubtedly her outfit has the association not of Near Eastern origin, but more Slavic even Ukrainian. The red colour, the flower motif and the pattern on the blouse may indicate

21] Joachim ŚLIWA, *Henryka Siemiradzkiego Chrystus u studni rozmawiający z Samarytanką (1890). Komentarz archeologiczny (Christ talking to Samaritan woman by Henryk Siemiradzki. Archaeological comment)*, "Scripta Biblica et Orientalia", 2015-2016, vol. 7-8, pp. 47-56.

that in this case the artist made a different selection, and perhaps turned his attention to the homeland, thus encrypting the ethnic message hidden in the person of a woman who, as we know from the Gospel of Luke 10.41 “has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”.

It is obvious that Siemiradzki did not create his paintings in the artistic vacuum. His contacts with other painters and artists are even certified in the letters. In one of them he reports on the meeting with Lawrence Alma-Tadema: “Here is the famous Dutch painter Alma-Tadema, known for his generic images from the lives of Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. He was with me and then there was a bigger rapprochement between us, it’s a pity he is leaving these days because he is a very decent person.”²² Undoubtedly, Siemiradzki knew the works of other academicians and orientalists, and probably some of his paintings can also be interpreted as the artist’s dialogue with other perspectives of the theme, including the selection of ancient artefacts. The question arises how much the artist took care of the coherence of the vision of antiquity, including the oriental one, and how he inspired himself, and how he cared to create his own vision by choosing ancient details.

The aforementioned painting *The Vase or the Woman?*, which is an excellent source for multiple searches in the field of invention of Siemiradzki, contains as we mentioned a wonderful tapestry on the wall in an antique shop. This shop is the background and a place of the difficult choice of the Roman patrician who must choose between a beautiful vase (interestingly not Greek), and a beautiful woman. A similar, though somewhat different, dilemma have the rich Babylonian men who choose a wife from women gathered in the Babylonian market of wives in the picture of Edwin Long *The Babylonian Marriage Market* from 1875. This scene inspired by the passage of Herodotus takes place in the background of the Assyrian tapestries and reliefs, slightly different in detail from the one shown in Siemiradzki’s painting.²³

The same British academician and orientalist Edwin Long painted in 1883 the picture *Anno Domini*, in which he combined the simple and seemingly modest world of emerging Christianity in the form of

22] Henryk Siemiradzki, letter to parents, Roma, [first quarter 1876], PIŚE, 22, file 1, f. 436 v.

23] HERODOTUS *The Histories with an English translation by A. D. Godley*, Cambridge Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1920, Book I Chapter, p. 196.

a Holy Family escaping from Egypt with the pulsating pagan religious life of Egypt. We see here against the background of a vast temple and looming pyramids, a procession with a statue of Isis and a dark-skinned pedlar of amulets standing out from the crowd. Two years later, Siemiradzki presented his vision of Egypt as a land where the drama of a young Christian couple takes place under Roman rule. In the mentioned *Martyrdom of St. Timothy and St. Maura*, we notice a different emotional charge, although it is necessary to pay attention to the convergence of some details with the statue of Isis, for which the inspiration was the statue from the Louvre drawn in the book of Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez *Histoire de l'art dans l'Antiquité, Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie mineure, Grèce, Etrurie, Rome* from 1882 (fig. 38).²⁴

However, the figure of an amulet pedlar appears in Siemiradzki's works at least twice in the picture *Sale of Amulets*, and *A Wandering Priest of Isis*. In the Egyptian context, it is also worth to indicate an ambitious but eventually overloaded selection of artefacts in the mentioned *The Martyrdom of St. Timothy and St. Maura*, where the artist, next to the looming temple and a sphinx statue probably inspired by the St. Petersburg sphinxes from the Neva seafront before entering his Alma Mater, did not present the Egyptian symbol in the form of a pyramid or an extensive panoramas of a cruel house of captivity, as we can see even in the monumental painting of Edward Poynter from 1867 *Israel in Egypt*.²⁵

So, what was the significance of the ancient objects for Siemiradzki and what function did they fulfil in his paintings? Undoubtedly, they created the atmosphere of the times, in some cases decorated and embellished the picture. But Siemiradzki was undoubtedly an ambitious artist, and in details, making choices of particular ancient objects, he probably tried to provide more information than just the theme of the work itself. Some researchers suggest here the artist's reference to the home country – native landscapes, which may be indicated by Mary's costume not from Bethany.²⁶ An important factor may also be Siemiradzki's interest in occultism; the artist's participation in spiritual séances is confirmed, and his contacts with, for example, Julian

24] Georges PERROT, Charles CHIPIEZ, *Histoire de l'art dans l'Antiquité, Égypte, Assyrie, Perse, Asie mineure, Grèce, Etrurie, Rome*, vol. 1, Hachette, Paris 1882, p. 87, pl. 55.

25] G. FIRST, *Egipt Siemiradzkiego...*, pp. 105-114.

26] In case of other paintings this idea is expressed by W. DOBROWOLSKI, op. cit., pp. 11-44.

Ochorowicz indicate the proximity of this subject.²⁷ In some of his paintings, amulets, talismans, as well as the person of the diviner, create not only genre scenes, but also talk about people's faith in the world and supernatural activities. Too little is also said about Siemiradzki as an orientalist, but his Orient is not the Orient of events or people but just of objects.²⁸ Besides, the not preserved early works suggest that the artist had to have inspiration in eastern monuments, even though the Biblical subject matter.

To analyse the meaning and context of ancient objects selected by Siemiradzki, as already mentioned, the paintings whose theme was embedded in the times of the Roman Empire are especially important. Particularly, however, two pieces of art work have an important meaning for the analysis of the function of the ancient objects in Siemiradzki's paintings – the already mentioned *The Vase or the Woman?* and in the *Isaurian Pirates Selling their Booty (A Pirates' Cave)*. Both depict scenes from the times of the Roman reign – the first picture is a genre scene, the second refers to the history of the land of Isauria in Asia Minor, where in the times of the Empire, as reported by Ammianus Marcellinus, pirates threatened Roman peace in this part of the Empire.²⁹ Both paintings contain conglomerates of ancient artefacts collected accidentally in confined spaces – an antique shop and a pirate cave. As it was mentioned, this conglomerate of artefacts among which we can see, apart from Greek and Roman things, also Egyptian, Assyrian and Anatolian symbolize probably Roman or simply human power built on power over other nations and cultures. This image differs from images depicting beautiful nature of full sun and greenery, Christ or Greek and Italic idylls. The selection of ancient objects helped the artist to obtain this juxtaposition of worlds, while monuments in Roman times do not lose their beauty, they still have an anthropocentric character, however, they show a man and serve him.

Undoubtedly, in the selection of objects, Siemiradzki resorted to Winckelmann's idea of unchanging Greek Beauty. He appealed to the classical world as an ideal time not only because of the theme or personalities, in which he also copied the poses of ancient sculptures, but also through ancient objects. Objects cannot show passions and

27] Kamilla TWARDOWSKA, *Henryk Siemiradzki and his interest in the paranormal phenomena*, in: *The Henryk Siemiradzki that we do not know*, "World Art Studies", 2018, vol. 18, pp. 103-107.

28] G. FIRST, *Res Orientalis: Works...*, pp. 55-61.

29] AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, *Roman History*, London-Bohn 1862, chapter 14.2.2.

pathos and are immutable, and these are the features of Beauty in art. At the same time, however, the artist used these objects also to show his sensitivity, his painting traditions, and his technique.

Siemiradzki's intelligent approach to the seemingly insignificant elements of the picture filling the background of the work can be confirmed by the choice of the tapestry's theme that hangs in the background of the unfinished painting *Feast of Dionysius I – the Tyrant of Syracuse*. According to the record of Diodorus of Sicily, a tyrant who had literary and artistic ambitions decided to take part in literary competitions organized as part of a feast called the Lenaia that took place in Athens.³⁰ The drama *The Ransom of Hector*, based on a story recorded by Homer in the Iliad, was won there. When the chorister who took part in the Feast in Athens came to Syracuse at the court of Dionysius with joyful news, the tyrant ordered to make a great and delicious feast during which thanking the gods for victory, participants drunk, eaten and entertained without restraint. During this time, the tyrant overdosed alcohol and died. Siemiradzki in his painting presented the moment of tyrant's feasting surrounded by his court, dancers and musicians. However, the seemingly insignificant tapestry that hangs in the background in the central part of the painting may be the key to reading it (fig. 39). Siemiradzki has intelligently encrypted here the drama, thanks to which Dionysius won Lenaia. The theme of the tragedy – an episode from the Trojan War – the ransom by the king of Troy Priam of the body of his son Hector, killed by Achilles in revenge for the death of his friend Patroclus, was probably transferred to the tapestry that we see in the background. He used here perhaps inspiration from vase painting, as evidenced by the schematic way of showing the heroes. So, we see a group of persons probably with Hector's parents: Priam and Hecube, on the right side perhaps the hero's body, on the left a chariot, to which Achilles attached Hector's body. The scene is topped with a shield representing a snake. The theme of ransom of Hector's body has been very popular in vase painting since the Archaic period. It is worth mentioning the hydria with the scene Hector's body being dragged by the Achilles chariot surrounded by other participants of the drama (fig. 40). On this hydria, in the lower right

30] DIODORUS OF SICILY, *Diodorus Siculus. Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes with an English Translation by C. H. Oldfather*, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1989, Book 14, 74. Lenaia – wine festival held annually in January and February, during which comedies and tragedies were staged.

corner, perhaps in the symbolic grave of Patroclus, we can see the serpent, just like on the shield on Siemiradzki's tapestry. The intelligent play testifies here that inspiration, choice and function in Siemiradzki's workshop was not unintended. Even seemingly decorative archaeological detail can have a deep meaning, based on deliberate choice and accurate inspiration.

Concluding we can mention that an interesting picture of his archaeological but also classical personality visible in the works and ancient objects was captured by the critic of *Political, social and literary review* Jan Gnatowski. In 1894 he wrote: "I really do not know whether, apart from Alma-Tadema, anyone of the painters so sensed in an ancient world, so absorbed his creations with his charm, carnal and sensual, but strangely powerful. So many artists recreate it, and thanks to the development of archaeological research and history of ancient culture, every fibula and every pattern of chlamida is most accurately copied from authentic patterns; but to understand the whole external figure of this world, recreate it in its sunny glow, and at the same time tune it to our aesthetic tastes and concepts, not capturing or adding anything, but with a greater dose of poetry and beauty [...] this is what Siemiradzki can do. It is the poetry of the body and the beauty of the senses – probably, other poetry and other beauty this world did not know".³¹ It seems that the opinion from before more than a century is still valid.

31] Jan GNATOWSKI, *Z wystawy dzieł sztuki (III)*, "Przegląd polityczny, społeczny i literacki" (Lwów), 1894, no. 173 (31. VII), p. 1.

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36. Mato Celestin Medović, *Bacchanal*, 1893, oil on canvas, 200 × 350 cm, Modern Gallery, Zagreb. Photo in public domain.



37 a. Henryk Siemiradzki, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1886, oil on canvas, 191 × 302.5 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Photo Museum.



37 b. Henryk Siemiradzki, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* – detail [fig. 37 a].

37 c. Henryk Siemiradzki, *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* – detail [fig. V].

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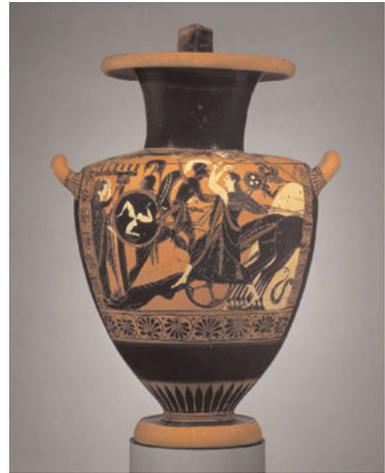


38. Edwin Long, *Anno Domini* – detail, 1883, oil on canvas, 241.5 × 488 cm, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth. Photo public domain.

Henryk Siemiardzki, *The Martyrdom of St. Timothy and St. Maura, his Wife* – detail, 1885, oil on canvas, 125 × 200 cm, National Museum, Warsaw. Photo Museum.



39. Henryk Siemiradzki, *A Feast of Dionysius I, Tyrant of Syracuse* – detail 1882-1886, oil on canvas, 100 × 180 cm, private collection, Rom. Photo PISnSŚ.



40. Hydria, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (63.473), Athens 520-510 B.C., (CVA /Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum/ Boston 2, pl. 082). Photo Museum.