Amalia Lindegren, *Study of a Man in Turkish Dress*

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In the mid-19th century, history painting was regarded as the finest genre of visual art. Besides representations of historic scenes it also comprised biblical, mythological and literary subjects. Paris was not the only city that attracted artists with this orientation – Munich was just as interesting. The Königliche Akademie der Bildende Künste had been founded in 1808, and the royal court was passionate about art. Among the Bavarian kings, Ludwig I was an especially avid collector and patron. The Academy was a seat of learning and also a stimulating hotbed for artists. Leading history painters such as Wilhelm von Kaulbach and Carl Theodor von Piloty drew students and other interested artists to Munich, which also had a vibrant museum sector, with considerable collections that were useful for studies and inspiration. In 1836, the Alte Pinakothek was inaugurated, with its collections of works by old masters such as Raphael, Dürer and Rubens, followed in 1853 by the opening of Neue Pinakothek. This new museum, one of the first in Europe to focus exclusively on contemporary art, acquired works directly from the most prominent artists of the time.

Among the Swedish artists who went to Munich in the mid-19th century were the history painters Johan Fredrik Höckert and Johan Christoffer Boklund, and also Amalia Lindegren (1814–1891). At the age of 20, Höckert began studying at the Academy in Munich in 1846, an option that was not

Fig. 1 Amalia Lindegren (1814–1891), Study of a Man in Turkish Dress, 1854. Oil on canvas, 75 x 58.5 cm. Purchase: Hedda and N. D. Qvist Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7301.
open to women. Opportunities were equally male-centric in Stockholm. But things looked up the following year, when Amalia Lindegren and two other women were allowed to participate in basic training and draw after the collection of plaster casts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. This exception from the rule came about thanks to their private drawing master, the sculptor Carl Gustaf Qvarnström, who was a professor at the Academy. Not until 1864, however, were women admitted as regular students.¹

Not only was Amalia Lindegren in the first year of women students at the Academy; in 1850 she was also the first woman artist in Europe to be awarded a government grant for a study journey abroad. Her first destination was Paris, where she studied in Léon Coignet’s studio for ladies and under Ange Tissier.⁵ Judging by the preserved works from this period, she appears to have focused on genre scenes in the French salon style. In autumn 1853, Lindegren travelled eastwards. She stayed for a while in Düsseldorf, a stronghold of genre painting that attracted many Nordic artists. From there, her study tour went to Munich, where she stayed for some four months in early 1854.⁶

Although Munich was best known for history painting in the mid-19th century, there were, of course, artists who painted genre scenes too. From the sparse information on Amalia Lindegren’s sojourn in Munich we can deduce that she painted from a model.⁷ If Lindegren visited the art museums, for instance Neue Pinakothek, which had opened the year before, she may have studied the collections of grandiose history painters such as von Kaulbach and von Piloty, and Italian genre scenes by the likes of August Riedel and Theodor Leopold Weller. Italy, incidentally, was the next stop on Lindegren’s study tour.⁸

Like all grant recipients, Lindegren was obliged to report to the Royal Academy in Stockholm on the progress of her studies and work. In order to get her government grant extended, she also needed to present concrete results in the form of works of art. In a letter to the praeses Michael Gustaf Anckarsvärd dated 4 May 1854, she writes that she has made two paintings in Munich, which would be sent home to Sweden. She was still working on “The Evangelist Matthew (half-length)” and had already completed “A Man in Turkish Dress (bust)”.⁹ The Evangelist Matthew was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1856,¹⁰ but his subsequent fate is unknown. The second painting was included as a prize in the Swedish Association for Art’s (Konstföreningen) lottery the same year it was despatched to Sweden, or, more precisely, on 22 December 1854, under the title of “Turkish Head”.¹¹ The Association had very close ties to the Academy. Anckarsvärd was one of its founders,¹² and the Association availed itself of the Academy’s premises at that time.¹³ The lottery winner was the industrialist Fredrik Bergwall from Norrköping, and the painting remained in his family until it was acquired by the Nationalmuseum in 2015 (Fig. 1).⁸

Study of a Man in Turkish Dress is signed “Am. Lindegren. München 1854”. It shows a man with a large, grey beard. He is wearing a white turban and a green caftan with gold-patterned edges. The background is neutral, with no indication of the setting. Bowing slightly, the man has an introverted gaze. Stylistically, he resembles Lindegren’s works from Paris. His melancholy expression and inclined head could, for instance, be compared to the ageing grandfather in her genre painting The Orphans, painted the previous year in Paris (Fig. 2).¹⁴

It is not known whether the man in the turban was intended as a mere exercise or as part of a larger composition. Both the style and composition give the impression of a finished piece rather than a sketch or study. The man could very well be a Bavarian artist model who posed for the artist in “Turkish costume”. The subject matter is not entirely unrelated to Lindegren’s other painting from Munich, The Evangelist Matthew. The man in a turban and caftan would also be useful in a Biblical narrative. Paintings with themes from both the Old and New Testament often featured characters in costumes associated with the Middle East – the land of the patriarchs and Jesus. The model could have represented a pre-Christian prophet, or a priest from the Temple in Jerusalem in a scene from the passion of Christ. It is not inconceivable that Lindegren during her time in Munich, the city of history painting, was inspired to work on a Biblical theme.

Another alternative is that Lindegren was intending to paint a genre scene set in the Middle East or North Africa. During her study tour in the 1850s, Lindegren was open to impressions from the art she encountered on her route, and she did try painting various subject categories. Her genre scenes from this period do not have any direct links to Sweden – the Paris paintings are in line with the Salon ideals, and her motifs from Italy are not radically different from Italian vernacular scenes by other contemporary artists. Despite their immense popularity on the Continent, “Oriental” genre paintings never attained the same standing among Nordic 19th-century artists. Two of the few exceptions were Lindegren’s contemporary, the Danish artist Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann, who had travelled in the Middle East, and a younger Swedish painter, Frans Wilhelm Odelmark. Whether Lindegren, when painting this study of a man in a turban, was planning a Biblical or “Oriental” motif is something we will never know. Regardless of which, it is a unique work in her oeuvre.

After concluding her study tour, Amalia Lindegren returned to Sweden, where she became an established and highly successful genre and portrait artist. Her output focused increasingly on Swedish scenes, and her motifs from the province Dalarna became especially popular. She lived in an era of rapidly improving printing techniques, and her works thus became available to a broad public by being reproduced on porcelain, in magazines, and as art prints and suchlike. Lindegren has been represented
in the Nationalmuseum for more than 160 years now. *Her Girl with an Orange* was one of four works purchased in 1856, when the government for the first time earmarked funds for the acquisition of new art for the Nationalmuseum. *Study of a Man in Turkish Dress* is the seventh work by Amalia Lindegren to be added to the Museum’s collection of paintings.

**Notes:**
8. Ibid.
9. Letter from Amalia Lindegren to Michael Gustaf Anckarsvärd, Munich, 4 May 1854. Allmänna brevsamlingen, Arkivet, Kungliga Akademien för de fria konsterna. I wish to thank Fig. 2 Amalia Lindegren (1814–1891), *The Orphans*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 125.5 x 103 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, NG.M. 00202.
Eva-Lena Bengtsson, PhD, curator at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, for alerting me to this letter and for the excerpt.

11. Förteckning öfver de konstarbeten, som bortlottades i Konstföreningen den 22 december 1854, Stockholm 1854, no. 10.
14. Also known under the title of Farfars undervisning (Grandfather Teaching). The painting belongs to Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, Oslo, inv. no. NG.M.00202.
15. Nationalmuseum, inv. no. NM 991.