

EDWIN LORD WEEKS CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ PROJECT

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Mr. Mark Lawson  
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FINAL RESEARCH REPORT ON..... "LAKE AT OODEYPORE, INDIA ".....Painted circa 1893-95

[Hard copy to follow by mail, with Letter of Authentication]

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Your painting is an authentic work by Edwin Lord Weeks. It is not Lot 168 in the artist's estate sale; Lot 168 was known as "Study of a Man in Armor" and was 19½ inches high.

The painting's original title is "Lake at Oodeypore, India" (Lot 258 in the 3-day estate sale of March 15, 16 & 17, 1905). Originally, its dimensions were 35½ by 61 inches, so you can see that with your consignors having cut it down to 30<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> by 49<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches, the painting has lost about 5 inches along the top and/or bottom edges and it has lost about 11 inches between the two sides (I believe most of this loss was on the right side where an unresolved area of paint and a missing element in the composition would have stood ). The painting was originally signed in the lower-left corner, exactly how we do not know, but probably simply as "E L Weeks" in his usual script.

It was purchased at the artist's estate sale for \$340.00, then a good price. Its first owner endowed the painting with great prestige: he was George A. Hearn, one of the greatest—if not the greatest—collectors of paintings in America and a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1903 until his death in 1913.

Hearn donated hundreds of paintings from his own collection to the Metropolitan Museum and purchased many more with his own funds for the museum. In 1905, in time for the Weeks sale, he was named a museum benefactor, a title acknowledging his generosity. He offered tremendous gifts of cash to the museum, but the vast majority of his gifts of paintings were works by living American artists. Hearn purchased two other paintings at the Weeks sale, both of them very distinguished, which we know for ourselves, as both have resurfaced on the international art auction market in recent years (I wrote the catalogue entries). They put "Lake at Oodeypore, India" in choice company, as did their initial selection by Hearn. One of the other Hearn paintings was "Horse Market, Persian Stables, Bombay" (55½ by 73 inches) selling to Hearn for \$530.00, and selling 17 June 1999 at Christie's London for \$387,165.00 total. The last of Hearn's purchases was the huge painting "An Open-Air Restaurant, Lahore" (65 by 98 inches), which sold to him for \$675.00, and appeared 17 June 2004 at Christie's London, selling for \$216,912.00 total.

"Lake at Oodeypore, India"

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1 OCTOBER 2007 / PAGE 1 OF 5

Efforts made to determine if Hearn had in 1905 immediately donated any of these three Weeks to the Metropolitan Museum, which would certainly have been in character, especially “Lake at Oodeypore, India”, unfortunately proved fruitless. When Hearn died in 1913 at the age of seventy-eight full-page obituaries appeared in all the city’s newspapers, as it was considered an enormous blow to the world of American art, not to say to the Metropolitan Museum. It was a great surprise to the museum that none of his private collection was dispersed to the museum when he died. Four years later his wife died, but the hundreds of paintings left in the estate by then (1917) were sold, again not donated to the Metropolitan Museum. If indeed Hearn retained the three Weeks paintings he purchased in 1905 in his private collection, a search for possible change in provenance after having remained in the Hearn collection until 1917 would have to begin with that year.

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Nothing further is known about provenance after George A. Hearn purchased “Lake at Oodeypore, India” until the descendants of the present estate in Schenectady, New York, which currently owns the painting having purchased it *circa* 1955-65, through Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, New York.

The earliest published description of “Lake at Oodeypore, India” is given by F.D. Millet, as author of the Weeks estate sale catalogue on behalf of American Art Galleries (bearing in mind Millet was looking at the complete painting, 35½ by 61 inches:

“Women are seen bathing and washing on steps at the left,” Millet wrote of No. 258, “In the centre of the lake is shown a beautiful white marble pavilion much resorted to for fetes on warm summer evenings, while over all towers the Maharaja’s palace, many-windowed and vast, the whole enveloped in an exquisite sunset haze of opalesque coloring that casts its glow over, and transforms into a bit of fairy-land, lake, pavilion and palace, as well as the houses of the town and shade trees that come in between.”

There is a strong possibility that in 1895 “Lake at Oodeypore, India” was exhibited at the *Empire of India Exhibition*; Earl’s Court, London, as No. 64. It is difficult to confirm this because Weeks tended not to use his established titles for many of the works he exhibited there; in addition there is a discrepancy in the short description Weeks wrote for this painting which appears to contradict the atmosphere of the painting as we see it now, and to make matters worse no dimensions are given for the large group of important paintings and small studies he shipped to London for this Exhibition, which ultimately won him a Medal of Honor. He describes the painting as:

“The Palace of the Maharana of Oodeypore, seen from across the lake in the early morning.” (sic: differs with afternoon light seen in painting, but Weeks argues in his book that the color of the light would appear the same, whether morning or afternoon, just on opposite sides of the building).

As poetic as Millet is in describing “Lake at Oodeypore, India” it is really Weeks himself who is our greatest aid as a writer in helping us to appreciate the visual drama and exquisite coloring of the painting by having published in 1895 his contemporaneous notes of his impressions of his

visit to the area during his journey through Oodeypore, one of his favorite cities in all of India. In a section of Weeks' book, *From the Black Sea through Persia and India* (1895), he attempts to convey his impressions in 1893 of one of the places in India he found perhaps the most enchanted, a major portion of which became the subject matter of the present painting. He wrote:

"It would be difficult to find any scene where art and nature are so happily blended together and produce so fairy-like an effect. ...[for example:]...

"[T]he dancing reflection of the sun in the water [known as "Pichola Lake"] is thrown up to long rippling waves of light into the shadow of the eaves. The view down the lake on the other side is unsurpassed in India. A long perspective of white palaces, with many domes and oriel windows, with solid masses of dark foliage rising from the water here and there, reaches to the great supporting walls of the Rana's castle, and at this point the lake opens out into greater width; its horizon of gardens and hills beyond is interrupted only by the fantastic silhouettes of the island palaces, which seem to float between water and sky. ...

"[W]e see other temples among dark trees, all in shadow, and there are also little garden pavilions, with steps descending to the water. ... [and] [T]he golden afternoon haze is beginning to soften the white of the walls . . ." (pp. 260; 270–271)

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With the ability to communicate with words such as are contained in the above passages, his visual sensations and receptions to his subjects as he travelled through exotic landscapes and witnessing first-hand the glorious colors and textures of the strange and beautiful costumes he saw on the native peoples throughout India, and with his great talent to communicate in sensitive detail and appreciation the odd new forms and styles of the magnificent architecture he found—throughout India—all of which he published compellingly at last in 1895, we more fully understand how his written thoughts prove to be keys to a better visual appreciation of his paintings. His paintings prove precisely how he carried out in oil on canvas what he was writing notes about, as he eventually gathered his material for publication. We see clearly the correlation between his words and his paint brush in "Lake at Oodeypore, India," for example. Although Oodeypore (now Udaipur) proved to be arguably the high-point of his lengthy travels throughout India, he did not see the city until the end of his third and last expedition to India, around January 1893.

Oodeypore was a highly exciting discovery for Weeks in his long campaign to permanently record the exotic peoples and multi-faceted architectural history of India. He first travelled on expedition to India in 1882-83, again in 1886-87, and finally for the last time in 1892-93, when he recorded the wonders, at last, of the fanciful semi-arid cities in northwest India, just above the tropics, known as Rajasthan—the seat of centers such as Jeypore (now Jaipur), Ajmere, Amber, Gwailor, Oodeypore (Udaipur) and especially Ahmedabad, further south, at the Tropic of Cancer, a glorious repository of Islamic architecture, particularly mosques and highly decorative urban domestic woodwork—a city that proved as exciting a center to paint for Weeks as did Oodeypore.

Simultaneous with the publication of Weeks important book in 1895, *From the Black Sea through Persia and India*, Weeks received a Medal of Honor for a highly important retrospective

exhibition of 78 paintings and studies of his Indian work at the Empire of India Exhibition, held at Earl's Court, London. As was noted earlier it is a distinct possibility that "Lake at Oodeypore, India" was among the works Weeks chose to exhibit in London. He received gold medals and an array of honors at other levels for works he had exhibited at the Paris *Salon* each spring and elsewhere in European exhibitions.

Even though he still actively retained his identity as an American artist, he spent the years from 1878 up to 1896 (and after) as an enthusiastic participant of the French academic artist's world. But because of the specifically "Oriental" nature of his subject matter, which began as soon as he started painting and never wavered, his reputation was always that of an Orientalist painter, and certainly by the mid-1890s he was known to museums across Europe and the east coast of the United States as the greatest American Orientalist artist alive.

It is fortunate for his reputation about 1895, achieved during four decades of non-stop painting prior to his unveiling of "Lake at Oodeypore, India" that this painting, and a few others of similar distinction he managed to accomplish contemporary with it (*circa* 1893-95) helped significantly to make Weeks known as America's most renowned Orientalist painter. In addition, considering his regular annual participation in the realm of "academic" art, which was centered in Paris, where Weeks lived and maintained his studio, he managed to have his best paintings exhibited at the Paris *Salon* virtually every year he chose to do so, from 1878 until his death in 1903.

His refined technique was greatly admired, and his exotic subject matter—stemming from his *in-situ* oil studies and photographs, all undertaken during his famous expeditions, at first to the Near East and Egypt, then through the most exotic and colorful realms of India, where he went on expeditions during the 1880s and early 1890s, and finally through the unprecedented paintings he exhibited of the harsh landscape but magnificent tiled Islamic architecture of Persia—all of these factors worked to garner for Weeks the entire array of honors and medals offered by the *Salon* system. By 1896 he received the rare, and highest distinction the *Salon* could offer an artist: induction into the Legion of Honor; a distinction doubly unusual because it was awarded almost invariably to French artists. Nevertheless, Weeks always exhibited as an "expatriate" American artist but his reputation in France, and in Europe generally, put him in the most prestigious artists' company. His work was purchased and managed by Durand-Ruel, one of the two leading commercial dealers in Paris. By the middle 1890s Durand-Ruel was also managing Weeks' sales for him in America.

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But most of all it was Weeks' Indian oeuvre, some studies of which he was still completing sporadically as late as a few years *after* the Empire of India Exhibition, that was responsible for establishing the heights of his artistic reputation, and for its renaissance and endurance today. At his initial *Salon* entries, Weeks' Moroccan paintings were responsible for his early recognition, but it was his Indian subjects that assured Weeks' position as a *Salon* medalist and artist of the highest caliber. Paintings by Edwin Lord Weeks were eagerly sought by institutions and collectors during his lifetime, but after his death his reputation languished during the middle decades of the twentieth century. From the 1940s through the 1960s a remarkable number of Weeks' most significant paintings were deaccessioned by important museums in America, many

of them initially gifts of wealthy donors who originally purchased these works from the Weeks estate sale in March 1905. One of these includes the gift to the Metropolitan Museum in New York by Weeks' widow herself, who organized the entire dispersal of 278 paintings and studies from all phases of her husband's career, her gift being Weeks' famed Indian painting, "The Last Voyage" of 1885. It was awarded great honors across Europe and America, and Weeks considered it a masterpiece from his Indian period. Nonetheless, the Metropolitan Museum de-accessioned it about 1950.

The renaissance that began in the re-assessment of Weeks' work, and in academic and Orientalist painting of the last quarter of the 19th Century generally, had its origins with the modest exhibition and publication of a black and white illustrated catalogue in 1976 at the University of New Hampshire Art Museum. It was a loan exhibition with a few high caliber works from the Portland (Maine) Art Museum, simply called *The Art of Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903)*, Durham, New Hampshire. By the early 1980s more paintings, mostly studies, became visible gradually at the two major auction houses in New York, and in the August 1985 issue of *The Magazine Antiques*, a very important ground-breaking cover article on the Indian paintings of Edwin Lord Weeks appeared, researched and written by D. Dodge Thompson. Filled with numerous color illustrations of newly located, forgotten but now identified, and unlocated important works by Weeks, Thompson also developed a chronology of Weeks' life, sequence of expeditions, and periods devoted to his paintings of Morocco and elsewhere.

The Thompson article brought forth an abundance of Weeks paintings on the auction market, with special attention to his Indian work, and a consequential rise in prominence. Collectors and museums have been drawn most strongly to his best examples of his Indian work, especially to the most exotic and romantic of these paintings—particularly paintings in which architecture is elaborate and realistic in rendering, native inhabitants or noble figures in colorful costumes with brilliant sunlit highlights, and bodies of water seen in bright sunlight where Weeks has perfected his skills with reflection.

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"Lake at Oodeypore, India," a luminous portrait of the enchanting architecture and its regal setting between the quiet Lake Pichola below it and the towering tropical mountain range circling it from above, displays every leading characteristic of a highly desirable and thoroughly charismatic major Weeks painting of India. The whole composition, set on the diagonal axis from lower-left towards middle-right—a result of the visual axis between the lowermost edge of the palatial complex as it meets the water and extends into the distance; the subtle play of light upon the vast marble surfaces; the stunning manner in which the calm, highly reflective waters of Lake Pichola are depicted with the most controlled and carefully blended brushwork possible, the naturalistic poses and faces of the collection of figures sitting and standing on the stone platforms built-up in the lower-left corner; and perhaps most of all in Weeks' uncanny ability to communicate different effects of atmospheric light—in this case, it is the magical afternoon light we see breaking upon the entire panorama. No one but Weeks could have executed this depiction of India.

Ellen K. Morris, PhD

"Lake at Oodeypore, India"

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1 OCTOBER 2007 / PAGE 5 OF 5