

MICHAEL WILLMANN'S WAY TO "THE HEIGHTS OF ART" AND HIS EARLY DRAWINGS

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In his letter to Heinrich Snopek, the abbot of Cistercian monastery in Sedlec, Michael Willmann recommended to the abbot his former pupil and stepson Johann Christoph Liska as a guarantor of a possible continuation of his work on the painting *The Martyrdom of the Cistercian and Carthusian Monks in Sedlec in 1421* in the following words: "...er schon in seinem besten Alter und in Italien mehreres gesehen oder begriffen alß ich in Hollandt thun kennen. Er ist auch in Inventirung der Hiftorien sehr geistrich in der Ordinanzien die Bilder voll in und durcheinander lebhaftt auch gluhenden Collieritten Summa waß einem rechten Kunstmahler nettig er in allem gutte wissenschaft (durch die gnad Gottes) begriffen hat."¹ Liska acquired the complete knowledge of these principles of art education, which are essential for the "right" painter - he could ingeniously "invent" a visual equivalent for a literary "story", moreover, he could wholly "arrange" both composition and colours of painting. The journey to Italy was crucial for obtaining these skills - the pupil could there "see or learn" more than his teacher could have done in Holland. Of course, we should read this opinion of stepfather about his stepson with an appropriate circumspection - its mercantile character is obvious - but we can agree with its general significance: the recommended competency of Liska was the result of such an art education, which Willmann could not have obtained. Indeed, in the biography of Willmann published in the Latin edition of Joachim von Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie...* - the biography most likely based on the information sent to Sandrart by Willmann himself - we can find a notion, that although Willmann came to Amsterdam "to gain more mastery of art", due to the shortage of money he not only could not afford lessons "at a very famous master", but also - forced "to earn living by his own work" - he was not able to leave for Italy. Therefore Willmann's way to the "heights of art" was by necessity different - the role of art teacher had to be fulfilled by art itself and "nothing but talent and nature given him by God" became the guarantors of the artist's success. Thus during his stay in Holland and later, while travelling in Germany and Poland, Willmann tried "to see all famous masterpieces" including renowned emperor's gallery in Prague where "he learned especially much". For the money he would have had to pay a teacher he bought in Amsterdam a collection of "prototypes", most likely copperplate engravings. The artist, "already excellently experienced in draw-

ing [...] having adopted the methods of Jacob Backer and also of Rembrandt and others", took up "very strict exercises" and carried them on diligently "days and nights".²

Unfortunately, among the extant drawings of Willmann, there are no works which can be unquestionably recognised as made in the period of learning and journeys of the artist.³ Thus we do not possess direct sources that will enable us to say something more about the self-teaching of Willmann. However, I believe that the set of twenty engravings by Josef Gregory after the drawings of "des berühmten Meister Willmann", made in 1794-95 and published in Prague in 1805, informs us in an indirect way about the character of the youthful exercises of the artist.⁴ So far only one work from the copied drawings of Willmann has been found - the scene *Unfaithful Thomas before Christ* [Fig. 1, 2].⁵ Comparing this drawing with the engraving made after it reveals extreme verity of the Gregory's work towards the prototype - the engraving accurately renders the strokes of the artist, differentiated in breadth and by technique of execution (pen, pencil). It allows us to validate our opinions about the lost drawings of Willmann formulated only on the ground of the set of Gregory's engravings.

The sketchy character of the drawings - their freshness which gives illusion that we deal with specimens of the immediate records of ideas born in the artist's mind - and the virtuosity of the artist's stroke made Willmann's researchers regard these works as the best drawings of the artist. Ernst Kloss emphasised the characteristic fury but also the unusual intuition of Willmann's strokes who had rendered "the plenitude of conceptions" (*die Fülle der Einfälle*) by drawing.⁶ The lack of connection with the paintings⁷ inclined to judge this set as a group of autonomous works of Willmann, the drawings, which were not preliminary studies but possessed - according to Jaromir Neumann's expression - "the importance of 'the drawn monologue'" [*povahu "kreslených monologů"*] of the artist.⁸ Such an independent character of the works but also their form built by vigorous strokes and sharp hachuring and narration of scenes full of "the psychological tension of action" [*psychologické napětí děje*] and "dramatic arrangements" [*dramatické střetnutí*] differentiated in the eyes of researchers this set from other drawings of Willmann.⁹ An explanation of this phenomenon was sought, in accordance with the conception of "influence", by indicating



Fig. 1a M. L. Willmann, *Unfaithful Thomas before Christ*. Prague, Graphic Art Collection, Strahov Monastery, Museum of Czech Literature. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

possible sources of the artist's inspiration. J. Neumann pointed out the influence of the work and attitude of Rembrandt – especially the drawings from 1640s – therefore he dated the Willmann's drawings at the early, "rembrandtesque" period of the artist's career.¹⁰ This supposition was questioned by Volker Manuth who emphasized cursorness of the Willmann's dependence on Rembrandt and doubted its exclusivity. The German researcher pointed out some analogies to the Amsterdam drawings of Juriaen Ovens and Govaert Flinck, he also noticed Flemish borrowings (e.g. a canon of human shape) in Willmann's drawings, which finally inclined him to state that Willmann merged in his works "influences of engravings of the circle of Rubens and the circle of Rembrandt".¹¹ Hardly explicable differences between works etched by Gregory and other drawings of Willmann gave rise to the more serious thought: if the works different from others by form and character, considered to be the best ones of the artist, are lost now, and we owe our knowledge about them to the accidental and, most likely, fragmentary records of Gregory, is it possible to judge the activity of Willmann as a draughtsman at all?¹²

All these misunderstandings, leading to such pessimistic statements, originated from the fact that different form of the works from Gregory's set resulted from other than it had been thought function of the drawings. These works are, as I want to argue, the records of individual exercises of Willmann, which – corresponding to teaching methods used in the Rembrandt's workshop – were based, however, on the artist's individual work with the collection of "prototypes" Willmann had bought in Amsterdam. In the case of thirteen drawings we can indicate definite graphic models Willmann took as a basis for his drawing exercises; the similar formal character of other works etched



Fig. 1b M. L. Willmann, *Unfaithful Thomas before Christ (verso)*. Prague, Graphic Art Collection, Strahov Monastery, Museum of Czech Literature. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

Fig. 2 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *Unfaithful Thomas before Christ*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



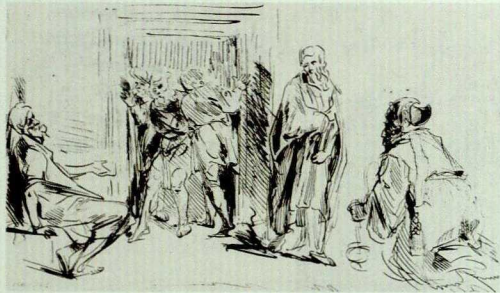


Fig. 3 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *Figural Studies with Melchisedech*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 4 Jan Saenredam after Karel van Mander, *St. Paul and St. Barnaba Refusing the Sacrifices Offered Them in the City of Lystra* (after *The Illustrated Bartsch...*).

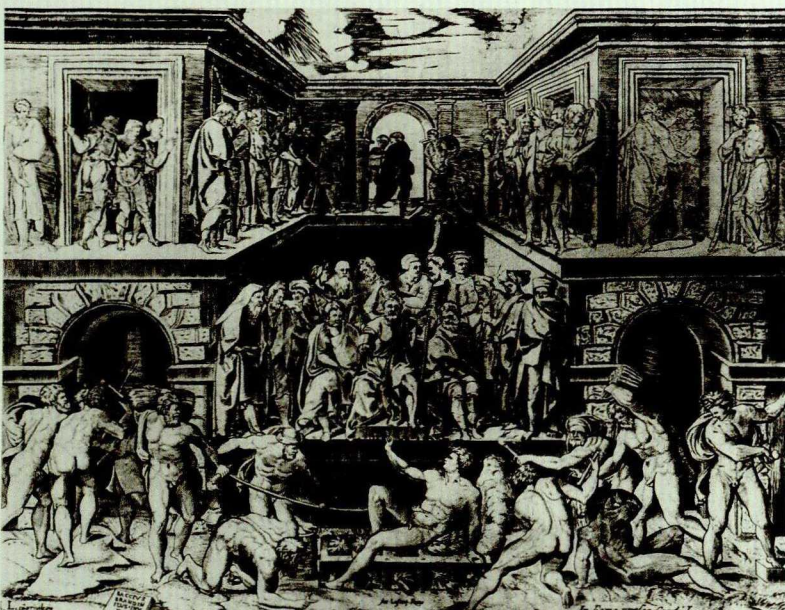


Fig. 5 Marcantonio Raimondi after Baccio Bandinelli, *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* (after *The Illustrated Bartsch...*). Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

by Gregory lets me believe, that their function was the same.

I would like to begin their survey with a presentation of those drawings, which are the records of the most elementary exercise - a study of an individual human figure and a group of few figures (titles of drawings after J. Neumann):

- *Figural Studies with Melchisedech* [*Figurální studie s postavou Melchisedecha*] [Fig. 3] - the figure of Melchisedech is based on the priest of Zeus temple adopted from the engraving *St. Paul and St. Barnaba Refusing the Sacrifices Offered Them in the City of Lystra* by Jan Saenredam after Karel van Mander [Fig. 4],¹³ the other four figures: the walking man and three men at the door opening, composed as one group, are copied from the work of Marcantonio Raimondi after Baccio Bandinelli *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* [Fig. 5];¹⁴

- *The Holy Family with young St. John the Baptist* [*Sv. Rodina s malým Janem Křtitelem*] [Fig. 6] - this scene was drawn after the central group of figures from the engraving *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* etched by Martino Rota after Titian [Fig. 7].¹⁵

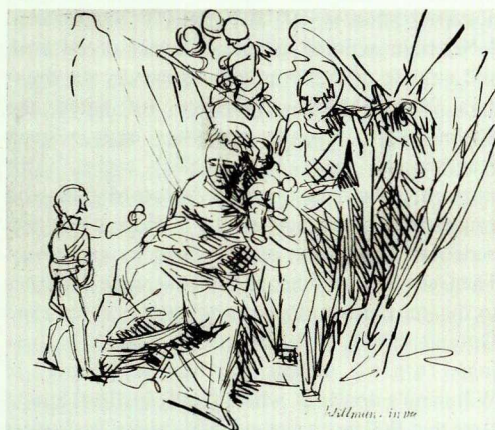


Fig. 6 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Holy Family with young St. John the Baptist*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

I suppose that the drawings: *The Lamentation of Christ* [Oplakávání Krista], *The Lamentation of Christ with a study of Virgin of Sorrow* [Oplakávání Krista se studií Bolestné Panny Marie vlevo] and *The Old Testament Scene (The Salomon's Verdict?)* [Starozákonní výjev (Soud Šalomonův?)] are also the copies of separate figures or groups of figures "cut out" from the graphic prototypes.

The redrawing of figures building up the whole scene or its most important - culminant - part was another type of Willmann's exercises. Unlike the previous study, now it was crucial to preserve the compositional character of the copied engraving as a complete scene:

- *The Bearing of the Cross - Christ and St. Veronica* [Nesení Kříže - Kristus a Sv. Veronika] [Fig. 8] - this work was drawn after the whole scene *The Bearing of the Cross* by Giovanni Battista Franco [Fig. 9];¹⁶

- *The Massacre of the Innocents on the Stairs in Front of the Palace* [Vražďení Nevinátek před palácem] [Fig. 10] - this scene is redrawn from the central part of the reversed copy of the engraving *The Massacre of the Innocents* etched by Marco

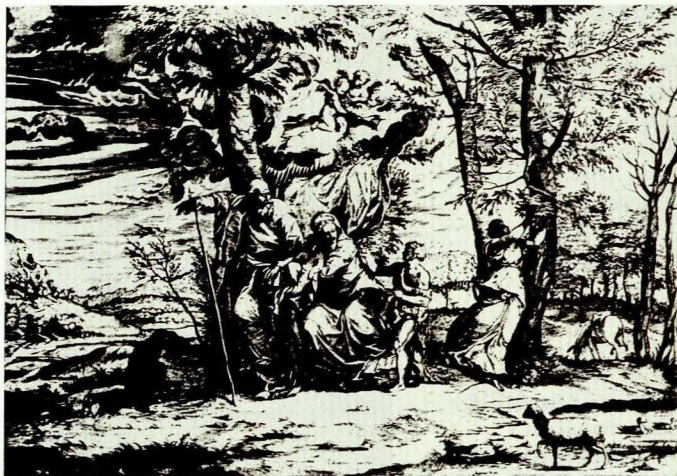


Fig. 7 Martino Rota after Titian, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (after *The Illustrated Bartsch...*).



Fig. 8 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Bearing of the Cross - Christ and St. Veronica*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 9 Giovanni Battista Franco, *The Bearing of the Cross* (after *The Illustrated Bartsch...*).

Fig. 10 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents on the Stairs in Front of the Palace*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

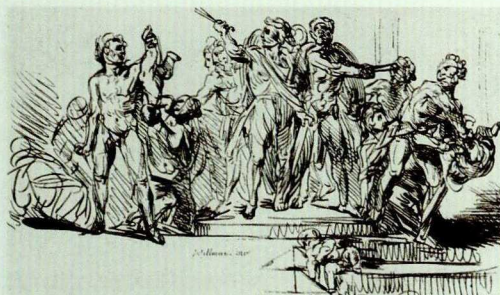


Fig. 11 Marco Denta (Marco da Ravenna) after Baccio Bandinelli, *The Massacre of the Innocents (after The Illustrated Bartsch...)*. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

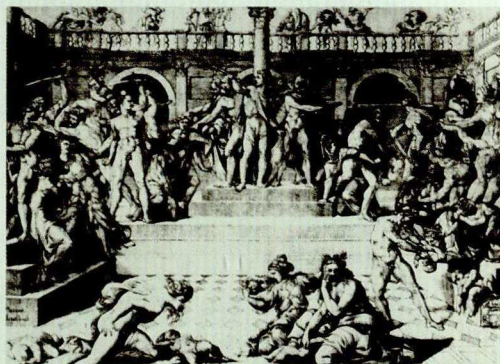


Fig. 12 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Birth of the Virgin*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 13 Master G. R. after Gulio Romano, *The Birth of the Virgin (after The Illustrated Bartsch...)*.

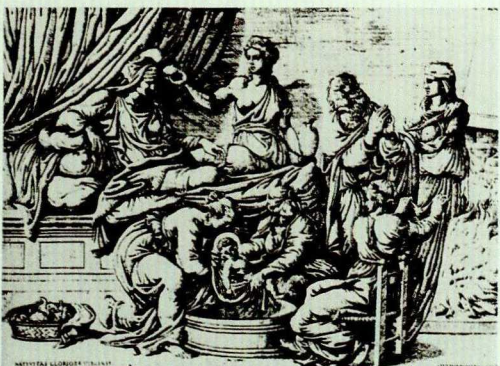


Fig. 14 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *Christ Healing the Sick*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Denta (Marco da Ravenna) after Baccio Bandinelli [Fig. 11];¹⁷ trying to make the scene more complete, Willmann added to the copied group the figure of a dead child, “cut out” from another part of the same prototype.

The drawing *Unfaithful Thomas Before Christ* could also be seen as an attempt to render the integrity of the set of figures from the “prototype”.

The next drawing exercise of Willmann consisted in improving the copied figural scene – the main part of the composition – by adding new figures adopted from the same work or other prototypes, or also, what is not unlikely, invented by the artist himself:

- *The Birth of the Virgin* [Narození Panny Marie] [Fig. 12] – redrawing the whole scene from the work *The Birth of the Virgin*, etched by Master G. R. after Gulio Romano [Fig. 13],¹⁸ was the starting-point for Willmann – he developed this arrangement by adding a group of three persons discussing aside;

- *Christ Healing the Sick* [Kristus uzdravuje nemocné?] [Fig. 14] – the foreground group of figures from the engraving *The Visitation* by Giorgio Ghisi after Francesco Salviati [Fig. 15]¹⁹ constituted the basis for further work for Willmann, who brought redrawn figures closer together around the center and added two new figures at both sides of the scene, changing thus completely the original meaning of the composition;

- *The Adulteress and Christ* [Cizoložnice před Kristem] [Fig. 16] – the composition of this drawing resulted from the “overlapping” of the title scene, most likely redrawn from an unknown “prototype”, with the figures “cut out” from the engraving *The Raising of Lazarus* by Hans Collaert after Lambert Lombard [Fig. 17];²⁰ the old man leaning on a stump (with silhouettes of two persons stand-

Fig. 15 Giorgio Ghisi after Francesco Salviati, *The Visitation (after The Illustrated Bartsch...)*.



ing behind him) and the averted digger; adding these new figures to the scene distinctly rhythimized and completed the original composition;

- *Twelve Years Old Jesus in the Temple* [Dvanáctiletý Ježíš v chrámě] [Fig. 18] – this scene was made by the rearranging of the composition of the engraving *Jesus in the Temple* by Cornelis Cort after Michel Coxie [Fig. 19];²¹ Willmann replaced the key figure of teaching Jesus, situated at the back of the “prototypical” scene, by the sketched silhouette of a sitting male figure at the foreground of the scene.

I assume that also the “rich” scenes: *The Adoration of the Shepherds* [Klanění pastýřů], *A Saint Converting and Baptizing Pagans* [Světce obrací a křtí pohany] and *The Lamentation of Christ with On-lookers* [Oplakávání Krista s přihlížejícími] were drawn in accordance with this principle.

Undoubtedly the most creative exercises in Willmann’s work with the graphic “prototypes” were the attempts to construct an entirely new composition by an appropriate arrangement of separate fragments of one or two engravings:

- *Studies of Biblical Figures* [Studie biblických postav] [Fig. 20] – this scene, with no specified meaning, is composed of the figures “cut out” from the engraving *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Marcantonio Raimondi after Baccio Bandinelli [Fig. 5] – Willmann arranged them in the balanced disposition with accents on the center and on two centripetally turned figures at both sides of the scene;

- *The Figural Scene with Male Nudes - Lighting the Fire* [Figurální výjev s nahými mužskými postavami - rozdělávání ohně] [Fig. 21] – is formed by two “condensed” groups of figures, redrawn from the same engraving as the previous work – the reclining figure of St. Lawrence, binding these groups in the



Fig. 17 Hans Collaert after Lambert Lombard, *The Raising of Lazarus* (after *Bilder nach Bildern...*).

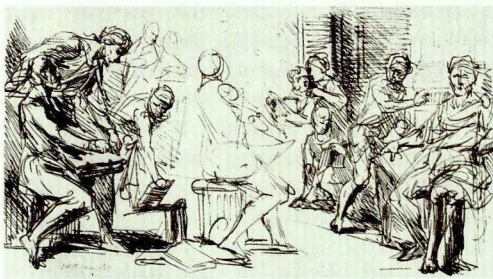


Fig. 18 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *Twelve Years Old Jesus in the Temple*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 19 Cornelis Cort after Michel Coxie, *Jesus in the Temple* (after J. C. J. Bierens de Haan).



Fig. 20 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *Studies of Biblical Figures*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 21 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Figural Scene with Male Nudes - Lighting the Fire*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

Fig. 16 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Adulteress and Christ*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 22 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents with the Mother Holding the Head of Her Child*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



Fig. 23 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents (with two men on horseback)*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.



“prototype”, was omitted by Willmann in the drawing which gave the scene an entirely different meaning and more coherent composition;

- *The Massacre of the Innocents with the Mother Holding the Head of Her Child* [Vražďení Neviňátek s matkou držící hlavu svého děčka] [Fig. 22] – this scene, a rough compositional sketch, is arranged by the contrasting juxtaposition of two groups of figures, which were redrawn from two different parts of the reversed copy of the engraving *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Marco Denta after Baccio Bandinelli [Fig. 11] – the disposition with the dramatic microtheme in the empty center is one of the best Willmann’s compositional ideas;

- *The Massacre of the Innocents (with two men on horseback)* [Vražďení Neviňátek] [Fig. 23] – the main part of this compositional sketch is formed by the group of figures adopted from the engraving *The Massacre of the Innocents* etched by Philips Galle after Frans Floris [Fig. 24];²² Willmann enriched this simple scheme by adding the figure of kneeling man and the group of two men on horseback – as a whole, the composition seems to be an unsuccessful one, and as if abandoned by the artist;

- *The Massacre of the Innocents* [Vražďení Neviňátek] [Fig. 25] – a compositionally complete scene, created by the arrangement of separate figures and groups of figures redrawn from two engravings with the scene *The Massacre of the Innocents* by Marco Denta after Baccio Bandinelli [Fig. 11] and by Philips Galle after Frans Floris [Fig. 24]; despite the dynamics resulting from the subject the scene obtained the balanced and rhythmical disposition with distinct foreground accents at the center and both margins of the action.

All kinds of Willmann’s work with the graphic “prototypes” reveal the artist’s basic intention: what attracted his interest were human figures and those relations between them, which led to the formation of the scene (*istoria*) as a significant arrangement of a form balanced around the center. An individu-



Fig. 24 Philips Galle after Frans Floris, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (after *The Illustrated Bartsch...*).



Fig. 25 J. Gregory after M. L. Willmann, *The Massacre of the Innocents*. National Gallery in Prague. Photo: National Gallery in Prague.

al human figure is for the artist in the first place an element of composition, a form of specified spatial shape and meaning, expressed by posture, gesture and facial expression. By redrawing it from a "prototype" Willmann interpreted specifically the visual form of a model – the most important for him became the contour, the linear border of an individual form, and those lines, which marked out the essential anatomical partition of human body or folds of garment, and also – if they were significant – the gesture of hands and facial expression, whereas anatomical details and the details of attire were omitted. This network of lines was covered then with hachuring, sharp drawn by strokes of differentiated breadth, giving figures plasticity and uniting them with the whole composition as well. While line was the dominant element of constructing individual figures, the hachuring provided a spatial organisation of a scene and integrated separate elements of composition into one entirety – a shallow light-and-shade "relief". A group of figures taken from a "prototype" was reduced in a drawing to two perspective settings: a foreground domain of action constituted by figures of expressive gesture and face, and a background, where a human figure was often marked out only by schematic outline. Redrawing a scene from a "prototype" was therefore an attempt of compositional interpretation of a model, an attempt at rendering these elements and relations of it, which consisted – let me use the term used by Willmann himself – the *Ordinanz* of a visual representation. The exercises based on improving a redrawn scene by adding new figures can be considered as attempts to develop a composition of a scene on the basis of existing, adopted together with redrawn figures, "organisation" of a picture. Willmann's practices eventually resulted in acquiring the skill of arranging a new scene by "assembling" groups and individual figures "cut out" from "prototypes" according to his own, new *Ordinanz* of visual schema – the idea of contrasting arrangement of the composition with the dramatic microtheme in the empty center (*The Massacre of the Innocents with the Mother Holding the Head of Her Child*) or, used by Willmann most often, "tritych schema" with accented figures in the center and both margins of the foreground (*The Massacre of the Innocents, Studies of Biblical Figures*). In those cases a graphic model was used not as a source of disposition, but was exploited as a collection of attractive postures and gestures of human figures. This rule is reflected by the character of the "prototypes" chosen by Willmann for studies – apart from the few-figure scenes with coherent composition and uniform subject redrawn by the artist as a whole (*Rest on the Flight into Egypt* by Martino Rota or *The Birth of the Virgin* after Gulio Romano), the main part of the collection were the developed, consisting of more than ten figures, "digressive" images (*The Massacre of the Innocent* by Marco Denta or *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Marcantonio Raimondi). The former engravings, where an action was often replaced by a presentation of individual nudes, were used by Willmann most often – never as a whole composi-

tion, but above all as a source of figures individualized by pose and gesture. The majority of the collection of graphic "prototypes" used by the artist were Italian sixteenth-century engravings. These works might have constituted for Willmann, forced to base his further education exclusively on art, a classical ideal of nude and composition – a poor substitute of a not realized journey to Italy.

Taking up – by necessity – individual drawing exercises based on the collection of engravings Willmann adopted, as Joachim von Sandrart wrote, "*the methods of Jacob Backer and also of Rembrandt*". These words, the matter in interpretative disputes of the Willmann's researches, should be understood, in my opinion, in the most literal way.²³ Willmann, who could not afford lessons "*at a very famous master*", imitated in his individual exercises with the set of "prototypes" the methods of teaching of composition used at that time by the artists from the Rembrandt's circle.²⁴ We are informed about these practices by the pupil of Rembrandt, Samuel van Hoogstraeten, in his *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkunst*: "*The way to become certain and assured in composition is that one should become accustomed to making many sketches, and drawing many histories on paper... It will be most advantageous to the student, when he is weary of the brush, to occupy himself in the evenings with drawing many histories from the imagination, in which he sometimes makes use of that which he has studied from life. But I advise him that what he has designed in the evening, he should look over the next morning... Sketch and sketch again, and play out the history, first in your thoughts; ...and don't give up until you have invented a pleasing composition.*"²⁵ Several hundreds of independent, not connected with paintings, drawing sketches of historical subjects made by Rembrandt, his pupils and followers have been preserved to our times, the amount confirming the opinion that they were really produced days and nights. These sketches constitute the largest single category of extant drawings both by Rembrandt and the artists of his circle, including those, who specialised in other kinds of painting than historical pictures. William Robinson pointed out the artistic outputs of two Rembrandt's pupils: Philips Koninck, the excellent master of the panoramic landscape painting, the artist, who rarely painted the historical subjects, but often made sketches of historical themes, which form the main part of his drawing output, and Nicolaes Maes, the specialist of domestic genre painting and elegant portraits, the author of only five known pictures on Biblical subjects and more than one hundred independent sketches of Biblical themes among about two hundreds survived drawings by him.²⁶ Both Koninck and Maes cultivated the habit of the evening drawing long after they had left Rembrandt's workshop. These sketches of historical subjects, made in such a great number by the master and his pupils, were compositional studies of scenes considered to be as well a disposition of masses as a certain emotional construction, built by gestures and facial expression of shown figures. It was Rembrandt's ability to grasp the external man-

ifestations of human feelings by only few strokes of the pen that was admired by descendants most of all: "Connoisseurs are acquainted with hundreds of his pen sketches wherein the passions of the soul in all kinds of situations are so explicitly and artfully shown in the faces that is admirable. Anger, hatred, sorrow, joy, and so on, everything represented so naturally that one can read the meaning from the very pen-strokes themselves." – wrote in his book Arnold Houbraken.²⁷ Rembrandt gained this admired skill, as it is commonly considered, mostly by the direct studies from life. Collective sessions of drawing after a model and after "scenes" of historical subjects arranged by pupils and visitors were often carried out in Rembrandt's studio. This quasi-theatrical technique, advised also by Samuel van Hoogstraeten as the source of required poses, gestures and relations between individual figures, enabled Rembrandt and then his pupils to gain independence from the conventional language of poses and gestures evidenced in the art of predecessors.²⁸ There are many studies of the composition of the same theme among the extant sketches of Rembrandt and his school: the sketches differentiated by the arrangement of figures and the expressional character, often made in quick succession, as if day after day, but sometimes also after a many-year-period. Many drawings of the same historical subject often make separate series usually including one work made by Rembrandt and several contemporary drawings by his pupils. This didactic practice of the master must have been recorded by Samuel van Hoogstraeten when he wrote in his treatise: "I advise masters, when they look over the drawings of their pupils, that they improve them by making sketches of the same subject."²⁹ Sketches made by the master not only showed the pupils how to represent a certain theme, but also challenged them to modify and even to improve the composition of the teacher. Rembrandt used to prepare the drawing models for pupils also on the level of rendering an individual human figure – many of his drawings and etchings with compositionally unrelated human figures, busts and heads on one sheet served this didactic purpose.³⁰ According to the intention of Rembrandt, who placed in the background of the etching *Two Male Nudes* a scene of a child being taught to walk – an emblematic image of education – these models should give young students of drawing the necessary basis, which would enable them to undertake the subsequent lessons of composition of many-figure scenes of historical subjects.³¹

The course of teaching pupils how to invent a proper composition of a scene of historical theme, based both on the drawing or graphic models provided by the master and on making drawings *naer het leven* after a model or arranged "historical scenes" by pupils themselves under the supervision of the teacher, carried out in Rembrandt's workshop, was imitated by Willmann by using exclusively the graphic "prototypes". Thus a study of a living model was substituted by the redrawing of required figures from graphic models, while the composing of the whole scene resembled the making of a collage with the individual figures and

parts of scenes "cut out" from the engravings. Willmann's collection of "prototypes" consisted mainly of sixteenth-century Italian engravings, which provided to the artist the "classical" (that is – timeless) norm of correct composition and nude. The choice of such "prototypes" allowed indigent Willmann to compensate to the certain extent the lack of lessons "at a famous master" – if he could not afford a good teacher he at least had to base his own autodidactic work on the "prototypical" art as the Renaissance Italian painting was considered at that time in Holland.³² Thus the art of predecessors constituted in many cases virtually the construction basis for Willmann's own art.

Such a method of learning composition of pictures corresponded to the practice called in Netherlands *rapen*, the method, which was not evaluated as the best, but was commonly accepted.³³ According to the rhetorical triad: *imitatio, translatio, aemulatio* a budding artist, already experienced in making copies after the great masters, was encouraged to "borrow" from the existing resources of art also at the further stage of education. He had to practice that, though, prudently and, above all, skillfully. "...o Jünglinge, betretet rasch den Weg der Arbeit, denn das Ende ist süß. Malt, zeichnet, kritzelt, beschmutzt frisch einen Teil Papier, wovon ihr gewöhnlich viel habt. Stehlt Arme, Beine, Hände, Füße, es ist nicht verboten; die, die wollen, müssen den Rapiamus gut spielen. Gut gekochte Rüben geben eine gute Suppe"³⁴ – Karel van Mander advised young painters in 1603 quoting in the last sentence the well-known Dutch proverb expression (*Goed gekookte rapen is goede soep*), the sense of which resulted from the double meaning of the word *rapen* (this word means in Dutch both "scraping together" and "turnips").³⁵ In the evaluation of what an artist can and what cannot "borrow" from the predecessors' works the sole criterion should be "*recht oordeel*", that is a proper judgement, called by Philips Angel the most important skill of an artist. It was the "*ghesont verstant*" (the sound judgement) of a painter that does not let this "*eerdievery*" (thievery) injure the art of painting but often enables "*onvolmaecktheyt tot een meerder volmaecktheyt te brengen*" (imperfection to generate more perfection). Angel yet warned the painters by quoting the words of a proverb: "*De Rapen sijn wel goede kost, wanneerse wel ghestoof sijn*" (The turnips are cooked well when the odds and ends are well worked over); the copied fragments of other works ought to be smoothly merged together in a new painting. A spectator, even having recognised in the young artist's painting the quotations from other works, ought to be delighted by the look at how the conscious and skillfull use of the fragments of existing works in the new picture also opened the new possibilities of their interpretation, how the known jewel was brightened up by the new setting. In case of too strong dependence on the works of others and too recognizable borrowings the artist would be ashamed of this trick.³⁶ This proverb with warning was illustrated by Gerrit Dou: in the painting, formerly exhibited in Schlesisches Museum der bildenden Künste in Breslau (Wrocław), beside

a woman, peeling the turnips for a soup, there was a young painter's apprentice holding up a mousetrap with a mouse in it. Catching an artist practising *rapen* held him up to a ridicule.³⁷ While using this method of "borrowing" from the work of others acquired in the Netherlands around 1650 the quality of a subtle game between the artist and the perceptive public, at the same time in Germany the practical advantages of constructing pictures in this way were priced above all. This can be concluded after reading the short theoretical work by an unknown author entitled *Kunstverständiger Discours von der edlen Mahlerey*, the text added by the translator – Georg Andreas Böckler – to the German version of the Abraham Bosse's *Der Radier- und Etzkunst...*³⁸ The author of the "discourse" reflecting, I daresay, the condition of the whole theory of painting in Germany before the issue of Joachim von Sandrart's treatise, in the fourth part of his work named *Von der Mahlerey Unterschied* distinguished three kinds of artists: these, who are "good" in inventing new forms, these, who are "good" in imitating and these, who use the work of others "wie die Schneider die aus einem Mantel ein Kleid machen". This classification corresponds to the three kinds of "die Mahlerischen Erfindungen" specified by the author: "I. Wann Mann eines andern Erfindung nachahmet und eben dasselbe jedoch mit ander Stellung aufreiset oder mahlet..." with the example: "Ich sehe das Bild der Gerechtigkeit kunstartig gestalten. Ich mache daraus ein Friedensbild, behalte die Stellung gebe ihm aber in die rechte Hand eine Taube mit dem Oelblat an statt der Waages und einen Olivienzweig an statt des Schwertes.", "II. Wann ich dergleichen Erfindung als ich bey andern gesehen aussinne..." with the example: "Es hat einer die vier Jahres zeiten mit einschichtigen Bildern unter der Gestalt deß Morgens, Mittages, Abends und des Mitternacht gemachet [...] ich mache vier andre Bilder in Französischer Tracht veränderte Lanschaft und behalte doch den Morgen, Mittag, Abend und Mitternacht als den Tag deß gantzen Jahres oder deß vollendeten Sonnen Lauffs." and "III. Wann ich aus ganz eigener Erfindung ohne Beyhülff anderer Meisterproben oder Kunststücke mahle was mienes Wissens kein andrer gemachet...". Just as painters are esteemed for their different predispositions also all three types of "inventing" gained the full approval of the author of "the discourse about noble painting".

Documented by Gregory's set, Willmann's self-teaching of the art of composition after the graphic "prototypes" he had bought in Amsterdam determined the methods of composing used throughout his later practice as a painter. The choice of such a way to "the heights of art" is in my opinion the reason of such a customary use of graphic models by Willmann, the practise ascertained already by E. Kloss, and confirmed by the recent studies prepared for the catalogue of the latest exhibition of Willmann's work.³⁹ Among his numerous paintings we can easily find such compositional schemes, which can be recognized as results of the youthful exercises: from adopting the whole model (e. g. the painting *The Martyrdom of St. Stephan*, based

on the whole on the engraving on the same subject by Cherubino Alberti after Rosso),⁴⁰ through improving the "prototype" by changing or developing it (e. g. *The Martyrdom of St. Andrew*, based on the engraving on the same subject etched by Alexander Voet II after Rubens, enriched by adding among other things the squatting figure of a man "cut out" from the work *The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* by Lucas Vostermann after Rubens),⁴¹ to arranging a new picture from fragments of graphic "prototypes" (the most spectacular example surely is the ceiling of the great refectory in the abbot palace at Lubiąż with the scene *Triumph of the Hero of Virtues*, 1692–93, the compilation of the engravings after Ribera, Carracci, Van Dyck, Rubens and Le Brun). It was a reliable method of constructing the composition of a picture, a way of fast work of the artist inundated by numerous orders, used by Willmann throughout his career. The Willmann's attachment to graphic "prototypes" is clearly exemplified by one of the paintings – *The Martyrdom of St. Thomas*, which used to belong to Lubiąż set of *Martyrdoms*.⁴³ Despite the opinion of some researchers⁴⁴ the composition of this picture was not based on the painting of Rubens on the same subject, since 1639 in the collection Augustinian monastery in Prague, the picture Willmann surely must have seen several times during his sojourns in Prague, but it was based on the graphic "prototype" made after this picture (reversing the composition of the model) – the engraving by Jacob (Jacques) Neefs.⁴⁵

To understand young Willmann's decision to choose such a way of education and – as a consequence – the method of his later work we ought to try to reconstruct Willmann's attitude to the art of the past. In this instance we are dealing with such a model of the painter's education which, situated beyond institution of teaching art – "academy", which at that time meant a workshop of a recognized master – distressingly resemble by its results the effect of a compulsory journey of a young craftsman's apprentice who coming back from his trip was enriched not by rules of "true art" – *ars* – but only by a sketch-book full of models redrawn from the works of art that he had seen and which were to be reused in his own work. Indeed, based on the "all famous masterpieces" and the bought collection of "prototypes", Willmann's education can be considered in great part a result of following in the footsteps of an old trade tradition. However, I believe, there is a difference between a Late Gothic craftsman's apprentice and Willmann in the conscious use of the existing resources of art. It is significant that Sandrart, an exponent of a classical trend in the seventeenth-century art theory rebuking in his book Rembrandt for his rejection of rules of art and exclusive reliance on nature, presented the artistic biography of Willmann in a particularly affirmative way. Willmann's declared choice of the way to art through art, in practice realized by the purchase of a set of engravings, paradoxically corresponded with the specific formula of eclecticism promoted by Sandrart not only in his theoretical works but also

in his own painting – the formula, which allowed to achieve “*the heights of art*” also through solely copying masterpieces.⁴⁶ The Willmann’s conviction that *good art = prototypes + talent* can be regarded not only as an effect of the role that model played in the trade’s tradition but also as the result of at that time common awareness both of great value of contemporary art and of its pluralistic normative character, which was often manifested by the certitude that every great artist has a speciality he stands out in. Samuel van Hoogstraeten, pointing out the example of “*the Germanic artists*”, wrote then in his treatise that: “*Dürer was usually sensitive to the similarity of fabric in the garments, Lucas van Leyden preferred modesty, Rubens rich arrangements, Antony van Dijk charm, Rembrandt favoured spiritual sufferings and Goltzius the proper rendering of some great masters’ hands*”.⁴⁷ This conviction of the existence of many artistic epitomes was summarised by the discussed unknown author of “*the discourse about noble painting*” in the very short and pointed way: “*Alles kann ein jeder nicht.*” Then he specified “*Der Durchschnitt Michael Angeli, die Coulorit Raphaels, die Erfindung Parmesans, Bassans Nächte und Dürers Bilder*” as these achievements of the contemporary painting, which “*...sollen den Alten Meistern gleichen und sie in vielen übertreffen*”.⁴⁸ Thus the art of the past was for Willmann, the artist from provincial Königsberg, neither an object of emulation nor a source of “influences” he passively absorbed. Willmann exploited the existing works of art as a collection of prototypical realizations produced by the generations of artists from the early sixteenth century to the times contemporary to the painter, a source which was easily accessible for him by the medium of graphic. He valued the art of the past not in respects of style or territorial attachment but from the point of view of conformity and completeness of prototypical solutions this collection offered him. His attitude was an active one – armed with the ability of proper judgement developed by visiting galleries with “*all famous masterpieces*”, the said “*recht oordeel*” put by Angel on the first place among the attributes of a good artist, Willmann was making the choice of the most proper “prototype” for an artistic enterprise he planned to undertake, intending by doing this to bring his art the quality of perfection.

NOTES

- 1 The letter is dated 22nd of May 1702 – Státní oblastní archiv, Treboň, sign. XLVII/4. For more information about Willmann’s work for Sedlec monastery see especially: J. Neumann, “*Expresivní tendence v české barokní malbě. 2*” [The Expressive Trends in the Bohemian Baroque Painting. 2], *Galéria*, VIII, 1984, 175–195.
- 2 J. de Sandrart, *Academia nobilissimae Artis Pictoriae* [...], Noribergae 1683, part II, book III, 393ff.
- 3 V. Manuth, *O sztuce rysunku Michaela Willmanna* [About Michael Willmann’s Art of Drawing], [in:] *Michael Willmann (1630–1706)*. exh. cat. Residenzgalerie Salzburg (15 June – 25 September 1994) and Muzeum Narodowe in

Wrocław (22 October – 11 December 1994), Salzburg 1994, 145.

4 *Historische Darstellungen in 10 Blättern nach dem berühmten Meister Willmann*. In Kupfer gebracht und herausgegeben von Josef Gregory. Kupferstecher und Zeichnungslehrer in Prag. I. Heft, 1805 (10 engravings), II. Heft, 1805 (10 engravings) – Grafická sbírka Národní galerie, Prague – Inv. No. R 55001-55020.

5 Prague, The Graphic Art Collection, Strahov Monastery, Museum of Czech Literature, pen and brush in grey and black ink on grey paper, 165 x 259 mm. Acquired from the Karásek collection. See: *Obrazárna v Čechách 1796 – 1918. Katalog výstavy uspořádané Ng. v P. u příležitosti dvoustého výročí založení Obrazárny Společnosti vlasteneckých přátel umění v Čechách*. exh. cat., Národní galerie, Prague, ed. V. Vlnas, Praha 1996, No 1.1.1.28 (P. Preiss) and A. Kozieł, *Rysunki Michaela Willmanna (1630–1706)* [The Drawings of Michael Willmann], Ph. D. dissertation, vol. 1–2, Wrocław 1998, No. II. 39. The second drawing from the works copied by Gregory – *The Lamentation of Christ with a study of the Virgin of Sorrow* – has appeared on auction No. 50 on 28th of November 1966 in Horst A. Rittershofer’s auction house in Berlin (No. 358). Its present owner is unknown.

6 E. Kloss, *Michael Willmann. Leben und Werke eines deutschen Barockmalers*, Breslau [1934], 142.

7 We can indicate only two fragmentary analogies: the group of Christ and Veronica from the painting *The Way to Golgotha* (Muzeum Narodowe, Wrocław) resembles the same group from the drawing *The Bearing of the Cross – Michael Willmann (1630–1706)*. exh. cat...., 122, No. 22; the reclining figure of sick young man from the painting *The Recovery of the Holy Cross* (St. Francis, Prague) is identical with the figure shown on the drawing entitled by J. Neumann as *Christ Healing the Sick*.

8 Neumann 1983 (as in n. 1), 207.

9 Kloss 1934 (as in n. 6), 142; Neumann 1983 (as in n. 1), 207; Manuth 1994 (as in n. 3), 148.

10 Ibidem.

11 Manuth 1994 (as in n. 3), 146–148.

12 See: Kloss 1934 (as in n. 6), 142; Manuth 1994 (as in n. 3), 143.

13 *The Illustrated Bartsch*, ed. W. L. Strauss, vol. 4: *Netherlandish Artists. Mathem, Saenredam, Muller*, ed. W. L. Strauss, New York 1980, No. 113.

14 *The Illustrated Bartsch*..., vol. 26: *The Works of Marcantonio Raimondi and his School*, ed. K. Oberhuber, New York 1978, No. 104-I.

15 *The Illustrated Bartsch*..., vol. 33: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century School of Fontainebleau*, ed. H. Zerner, New York 1979, No. 2.

16 *The Illustrated Bartsch*..., vol. 32: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century School of Fontainebleau*, ed. H. Zerner, New York 1979, No. 11-I.

17 *The Illustrated Bartsch*..., vol. 26..., No. 21.

18 *The Illustrated Bartsch*..., vol. 33..., No. 6 as an unknown engraver after Giulio Romano. Stefania Massari attributed the engraving to Master G. R. from Verona – S. Massari, *Giulio Romano pinxit et delineavit. Opere grafiche, autografe di collaborazione e bottega*, Roma 1993, No. 97.

- 19 *The Illustrated Bartsch...*, vol. 31: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. S. Boorsch, J. Spike, New York 1986, No. 1-I.
- 20 F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1400-1700*, vol. 4, No. 27.
- 21 J. C. J. Bierens de Haan, *L'Oeuvre gravé de Cornelis Cort, Graveur Hollandais 1533-1578*, Le Haye 1948, No. 53.
- 22 *The Illustrated Bartsch...*, vol. 56: *Netherlandish Artists. Philips Galle*, ed. A. Dolders, New York 1987, No. 29.
- 23 All artist's monographers considered this statement to be the proof of close relations (at least "master-pupil" relation) between Rembrandt and Willmann. Recently Rüdiger Klessmann interpreted Sandrart's words on the basis of arguments of Rembrandt and Lievens against a journey to Italy (recorded by Constantijn Huygens) as Willmann's appeal to the encouraging example of Rembrandt and Backer, the artists who were not in Italy, for an excuse of not undertaking a journey to the South - see R. Klessmann, *Willmann i Niderlandy* [Willmann and Netherlands], [in:] *Michael Willmann (1630-1706)*. exh. cat., 55-56.
- 24 The description of Rembrandt's method of learning and teaching of composition by making drawings of historical subjects after: W. W. Robinson, *Rembrandt's Sketches of Historical Subjects*, [in:] *Drawing defined*, preface and commentary by K. Oberhuber, ed. W. Strauss, T. Felker, New York 1987, 241-256. On the subject of Rembrandt as teacher see also: E. Haverkamp-Begemann, *Rembrandt as Teacher*, [in:] *Rembrandt After Three Hundred Years*. exh. cat., Chicago 1969, 21-30; *Bij Rembrandt in de Leer / Rembrandt as Teacher*. exh. cat., Museum het Rembrandthuis Amsterdam, ed. P. Schatborn, Amsterdam 1984, passim; S. Alpers, *Rembrandt als Unternehmer. Sein Atelier und der Markt*, trans. H. U. Davitt, Köln 1989, 80-197; J. Bruyn, *Rembrandts Werkstatt: Organisation & Produktion*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt: Gemälde*. exh. cat., Berlin 1991, 68-89; P. Schatborn, *Aspekte der Zeichenkunst Rembrandts*, [in:] *Rembrandt. Der Meister und seine Werkstatt. Zeichnungen und Radierungen*. exh. cat., ed. H. Bevers, P. Schatborn, B. Welzel, München-Paris-London 1991, 10-21.
- 25 S. van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkunst: Anders de Zichtbare Werelt*, Rotterdam 1678, 191-192; quotation and translation after: Robinson 1987 (as in n. 24), 241. On Hoogstraeten's schooling in Rembrandt's workshop see: C. Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion. The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten*, Chicago-London 1995, 24-45.
- 26 Robinson 1987 (as in n. 24), 254. See: W. Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt's School*, vol. 6, No. 1317-1527XX and vol. 8, No. 1758 and following.
- 27 A. Houbraken, *De Groote Schouburg der Nederlantsche Konstchilders en Schilderessen*, vol. 1, Amsterdam 1718, 270; quotation and translation after: Robinson 1987 (as in n. 24), 244.
- 28 Alpers 1989 (as in n. 24), 80-197.
- 29 S. van Hoogstraeten 1678 (as in n. 25), 192; quotation and translation after: Robinson 1987 (as in n. 24), 249.
- 30 J. A. Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, Utrecht 1968, 154-159; J. Bruyn, *On Rembrandt's Use of Studio-Props and Model Drawings During the 1630s*, [in:] *Essays in Nothern European Art presented to Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann on his sixtieth birthday*, Doornspijk 1983, 57.
- 31 *Two Male Nudes*, etching (B. 194). The explanation for the occurrence of a child being taught to walk in the background of this etching was given by Jan Emmens, who also pointed to the words of d'Argenville in his *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* of 1745 (now impossible to verify), that Rembrandt's "*livre a dessiner est de dix a douze feuilles*" - Emmens 1968 (as in n. 30), 157.
- 32 For example see: K. Clark, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, London 1966.
- 33 On the subject of *rapen* see: Emmens 1968 (as in n. 30), 111-115; *Bilder nach Bildern, Druckgraphik und die Vermittlung von der Kunst*. exh. cat., 21 March - 2 May 1976, ed. G. Langemayer, R. Schleier, Münster 1976, esp. 125-168 and B. P. J. Broos, *Rembrandt en zijn Voorbeelden / Rembrandt and His Sources*. exh. cat., (2 November 1985 - 5 January 1986) Rembrandthuis Amsterdam, Amsterdam 1985, 11-15.
- 34 *Quellenstudien zur Holländischen Kunstgeschichte*, ed. C. Hofstede de Groot, vol. VIII: *Das Leergedicht des Karel van Mander*, ed. and trans. R. Hoecker, Haag 1916, 36-37. See the commentary in: K. van Mander, *Den grondt der edel vry schilderconst*, ed. and comm. by H. Miedema, Utrecht 1973, part 2, 388-389 and H. Miedema, *Kunst, Kunstenaar en Kunstwerk bij Karel van Mander, Een Analyse van zijn Levensbeschrijvingen*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1981, 132-138.
- 35 Emmens 1968 (as in n. 30), 196.
- 36 Ph. Angel, *Lof der Schilder-Konst*, Leiden 1642, 35-37; my quotations are after: Emmens 1968 (as in n. 30), 111-112.
- 37 *Katalog der Gemälde u. Skulpturen*, VI. Auflage, Schlesischen Museum der bildenden Künste, Breslau 1926, 26. There is also the author's replica of this painting in Musée Fabre in Montpellier - W. Martin, *Gerard Dou. Des Meister Gemälde*, Stuttgart - Berlin 1913, No. 124. The explanation of the meaning of the picture after: Emmens 1968 (as in n. 30), 112.
- 38 *Kunstverständiger Discours von der edlen Mahlerey*, [in:] A. Bosse, *Der Radier- und Itzkunst...*, Nürnberg 1652. This text undoubtedly had not been written by Carlo Dolce as E. Berger supposed (*Quellen für Maltechnik während der Renaissance und deren Folgezeit*, ed. E. Berger, München 1901, 442). Judging by the examples referred to in the text its author belonged to the Nurnberg circle in the first half of the seventeenth century. Willmann certainly knew this discourse about painting because at least two prescriptions for preparing etching from so called artist's notes (Strahov Library, Prague) are cribbed from the

- German translation of Abraham Bosse's treatise.
- 39** On the problem of the use of graphic models by Willmann see: B. Steinborn, *O życiu i twórczości Michaela Willmanna* [About Michael Willmann's Life and Work], [in:] *Michael Willmann (1630-1706)*. exh. cat..., 18ff; Klessmann 1994 (as in n. 23), 56ff and Koziel 1998 (as in n. 5), vol. 1, 94ff.
- 40** Warsaw, All Saints', oil on canvas, 360 x 280 cm, around 1682; on the engraving see: *The Illustrated Bartsch...*, vol. 34: *Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. S. Butta, New York 1982, No. 51-II.
- 41** Warsaw, the Cathedral Record Office, oil on canvas, 395 x 287 cm, 1662; on the engravings see: *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450-1700*, vol. 42, comp. Ch. Schuckman, ed. D. de Hoop Scheffer, Roosendaal 1993, No. 6 and vol. 43, comp. Ch. Schuckman, ed. D. de Hoop Scheffer, Roosendaal 1993, No. 88.
- 42** R. Nowak, "Zapomniane malowidła freskowe Michała Willmanna w pałacu opackim w Lubiążu" [The Forgotten Fresco Paintings by Michael Willmann in the Abbot Palace at Lubiąż], *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej*, XIV, 1986, 97-116; Item, "Die Willmann-Fresken im Abtspalast von Kloster Leubus in Schlesien", *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung*, XXXVI, 1987, 75-94.
- 43** Warsaw, All Saints', oil on canvas, 395 x 311 cm, 1662.
- 44** Klessmann 1994 (as in n. 23), 66.
- 45** Hollstein (as in n. 20), vol. 14, No. 20.
- 46** On the eclectic character of Joachim von Sandrart's art see: Ch. Klemm, *Joachim von Sandrart. Kunst, Werke und Lebenslauf*, Berlin 1986, 50-51. It is worth pointing out that Sandrart possessed "books" with drawing copies of various engravings he had made in the early years as "Lerntechnik" - at least two of them were later used by the artist as compositional models for paintings - Klemm 1986, 15.
- 47** S. van Hoogstraeten 1678 (as in n. 25), 75.
- 48** *Kunstverständiger Discours...*, 139.