

**Rudolf Swoboda, *At the Well***

oil on panel  
11 ¾ by 7 ½ inches (29.5 by 19 cm.)  
signed and dated lower right: '*Rudolf Swoboda 1886*'

provenance: Private collection, Europe

note: Rudolf Swoboda was born in Vienna in 1859. The artist's taste for Orientalist art derived from his uncle, the painter Carl Leopold Müller, with whom he studied from 1878 to 1884, and whom he visited in Egypt in 1879. This marked the first of six visits made by the artist to Egypt between 1880 and 1891. In addition, as a court painter to Queen Victoria for whom he worked from 1885 to 1892, Swoboda travelled in 1886 to India, passing through Afghanistan and Kashmir on his way. The Queen commissioned him to paint a series of portraits of Indian people and other British colonial subjects for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886. He later travelled to the Indian sub-continent at Queen Victoria's request to produce images of the local population. Among his subjects were Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus with occupations ranging from military officers to snake charmers and jugglers. Swoboda's portraits describe the diversity of Indian society in finely observed detail. Swoboda died in 1914.

Unlike Gérôme, who painted the Orient as much to indulge the imagination of a Western audience as to reflect a social reality, Swoboda's paintings are grounded much more in the day-to-day existence of the people he observed on his travels.

The present work depicts an Indian man drawing water for an irrigation system. It is an excellent example of Swoboda's work as it takes in a wealth of detail that is both precisely rendered, but painterly enough to convey a strong sense of plasticity and texture.