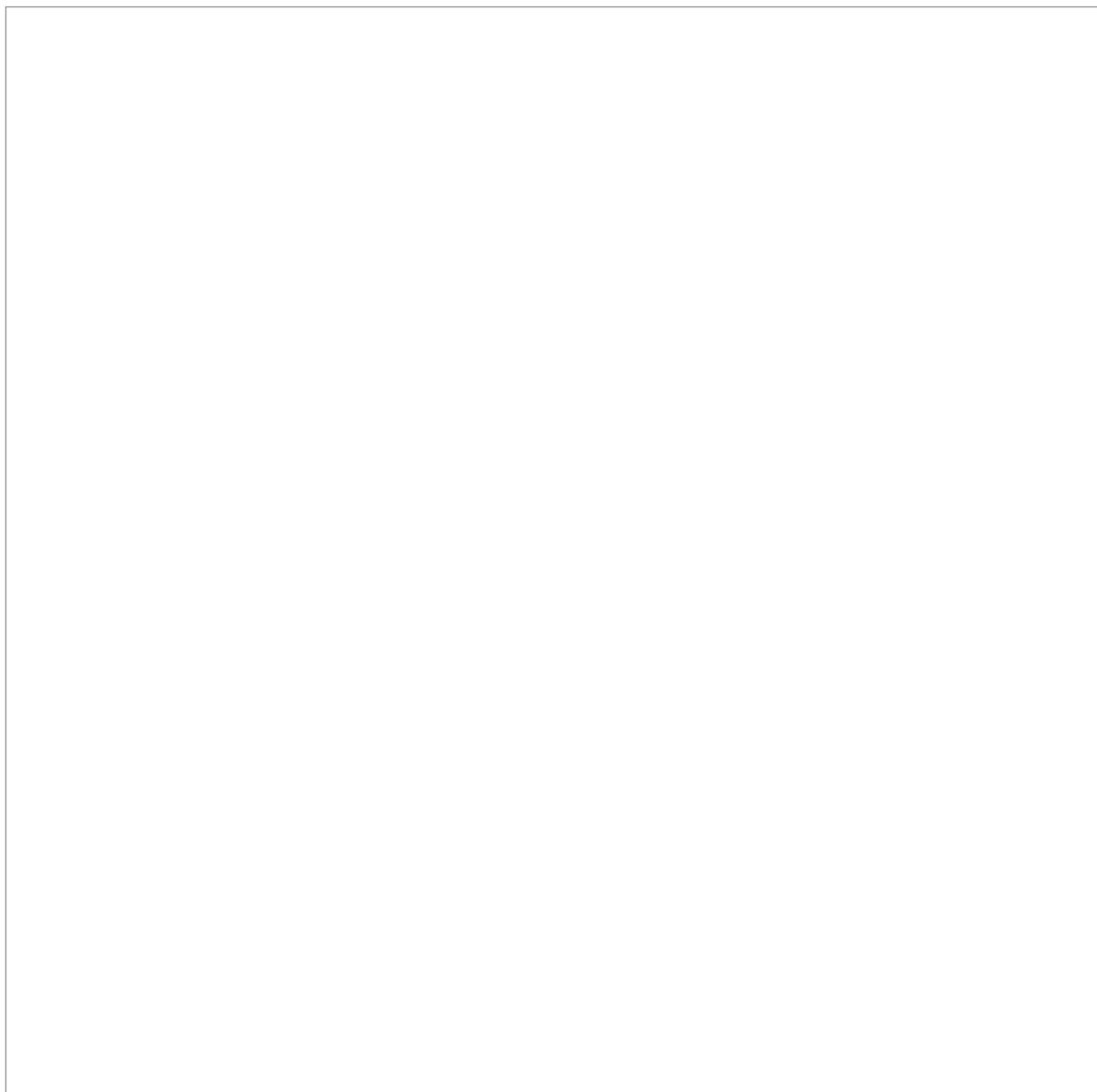


Painting “Nero’s Torches” by Henryk Siemiradzki



- Author Henryk Siemiradzki
- Date of production 1876
- Dimensions height: 385 cm, width: 704 cm
- Author's designation H. Siemiradzki Roma 1876
- ID no. MNK-II-a-1
- Museum [The National Museum in Kraków](#)
- Oddział The Sukiennice
- Availability The Siemiradzki Room
- Subjects [city](#), [religion](#), [painted](#), [famous people](#)
- Technique [oil painting](#)
- Material [canvas](#), [oil paint](#)
- Acquired date donated by the author in 1879
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- Digitalisation NMK, iMNK project
- Tags [chrześcijaństwo](#), [Rzym](#), [malarstwo](#), [2D](#), [audiodeskrypcja](#), [domena publiczna](#)

Nero's Torches by Henryk Siemiradzki, also called *Candlesticks of Christianity*, initiated the collection of the National Museum in Kraków. On the painting, the artist immortalised one of the most tragic moments in the history of Christianity, which was the burning of alleged perpetrators of the fire which broke out in Rome during the reign of Nero in 64 AD, described by Suetonius and Tacitus.

The painting is divided into two opposing parts of composition. On the right, martyrs — women and men — tied and attached to poles are being portrayed. Below, there are plaques with a Latin inscription informing us that they are Christians who put fire to the city. Men starting fire bustle around close to these “living torches.” The second part of the work, which occupies nearly the whole space of the canvas, portrays the splendour of “Nero’s Golden House” and he himself is carried down from the stairs on a sedan chair by black people dressed in yellow clothes. In front of the palace, there is a group of senators, philosophers, patricians, clerks, gladiators, slaves, dancers, and strumpets crowding with curiosity and waiting for the sign to begin the execution — a red scarf, given by the Caesar’s apparitor, who is standing in the distance. And there are also ones who are standing alone, looking at the hideous scene with fright. Promiscuity or apathetic curiosity is definitely more visible in this painting than merciful compassion. Siemiradzki saturated the painting with colour, a multitude of details, paying his artistic attention to rendering a historical moment from Rome in the past in a way which is full of beauty, charm, and undisguised delight, despite the unquestionable tragedy occurring in its most essential fragment but pushed to the margin. One can observe that the artist avoided showing, as the title suggests, the martyrdom of the first Christians in a nearly literal way by pushing it to the margin of the composition and focusing on illustrating the beauty and splendour of Ancient Rome. In 1876, the finished painting was exhibited at the Roman Accademia di San Luca [Academy of Saint Luke], and then the painting started its triumphant tour of Europe. It was exhibited in Munich, Vienna, Berlin, Saint Petersburg, Lviv, Poznań, London and Prague.

During the solemn celebrations of the golden jubilee of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski’s artistic work, which took place in October of 1879 in Sukiennice [Cloth Hall] in Kraków, Siemiradzki gave *Nero’s Torches* to the nation as a piece of work that was supposed to initiate the collections of the future National Museum in Krakow.

Inscription on the frame: ET LUX IN TENEBRIS LUCEBAT ET TENEBRAE EAM NON COMPREHENDERUNT ("the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it", John 1: 5).

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