

# A visual Journey into the Bible

## **The Deuteronomy**

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## *Part I. The Book of Joshua*

### *Joshua's Conquest of the Promised Land*

The Deuteronomy is the Book of the Law of Israel. The Deuteronomic History is the history of Israel from the conquest of the Promised Land until the subjugation of Israel by the Babylonians and until the Babylonian Exile. The first book of the Deuteronomic History recounts the battles of the people of Israel in Palestine from the moment that Joshua crossed the Jordan. This happened just after Moses' death. Joshua, son of Nun, was Moses' adjutant and the new leader of the people.

Joshua first sent spies over the Jordan into Canaan to reconnoitre the defences of Jericho. His spies were found out but saved in Jericho by Rahab the prostitute. The spies told Joshua that the inhabitants of the first town over the Jordan were panic-stricken at the approach of the Israelites. The Canaanites had heard of the great deeds of the God of Israel, Yahweh, on the flight from Egypt. Joshua ordered one man of each of the twelve tribes to wear the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders and with the ark leading, Joshua's army crossed the Jordan. The sons of Reuben, the sons of gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed in battle formation at the head of the Israelites, some forty thousand warriors at arms. They stopped on the other side of the river, at Gilgal. Joshua ordered the whole nation to be circumcised then, for many had not been circumcised in the desert. The Israelites celebrated Passover and then started out to fight Jericho.

Yahweh told the Israelites to take seven priests carrying ram's horn trumpets in front of the ark and go on the seventh day seven times around the city. Then the priests had to blow their trumpets, the Israelites had to shout a terrible war cry and the city walls would collapse. Everything was done as Yahweh ordered. The walls collapsed and Joshua captured the city. The Israelites enforced the curse of destruction that Yahweh had thrown on the Canaanites and they slaughtered all the inhabitants of Jericho except Rahab and her family. The city was burned. The silver, gold, bronze and the iron things were put in the treasury of the Ark.

Joshua then sent three thousand men to attack Ai, but these men were ignominiously repulsed. That was because Israel had sinned against the curse of destruction on Jericho ordained by Yahweh. Achan, son of Camni (?) had kept something back. He had hidden in his baggage a fine robe, some silver and gold. Joshua took Achan and his family to the Vale of Achor. All of Israel stoned Achan's family, burned them and raised a great mound of stones over them. After that Joshua could march against Ai and capture that city too. Israel killed all the inhabitants of Ai, twelve thousand people in all.

Joshua built an altar to Yahweh on Mount Ebal and he wrote on the stones of Ebal a copy of the Law of Moses. Joshua loudly read the Law again to the people of Israel.

The next city on Joshua's road was Gibeon. The Gibeonites however feared Yahweh and used a ruse before Joshua attacked their city. They set out to meet the Israelites as if they came from a far land, had heard of the fame of Israel and asked for a treaty. Joshua struck indeed a treaty with them, guaranteeing their lives. When Joshua learned who the newcomers really were, the inhabitants of Gibeon, Chepirah, Beeroth and Kiriath-Jearim, he spared them since the leaders of these communities had sworn to the Israelites by Yahweh. The Israeli made woodcutters and water-bearers out of them.

Five Amorite kings then attacked Gibeon. These were the kings of Jerusalem, of Hebron, of Jarmuth and of Lachisch. Joshua caught their armies unaware and he defeated them completely. Yahweh hurled hailstones from heaven at them and more of them died from these hailstones than under the swords of Joshua. Joshua found the five kings that had fled from the battlefield in a cave. He told all the man of Israel to put their feet on the necks of the kings. Then he struck the kings, killed them and hanged them from five trees.

Consequently to these events Joshua captured the towns of Makkedah, Libnah and Lachisch. He also defeated Horam, king of Gezer. He took Eglon. He took Hebron and Debia. Then he captured all the towns and kings of the whole country, the Negeb, the highlands and the lowlands and the watered foothills.

Many kings of the North then gathered. They set out with all their troops and assembled at the Waters of Merom. These were the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites and the Jebusites, and the Hivites. Joshua caught these armies unawares with all his warriors. Yahweh put the opponents at Israel's mercy and Joshua defeated the northern kings. Then Joshua pursued them to the four directions. He only turned back at the borders of the country and took Hazor, putting its king to the sword. Hazor had been the ancient capital of all the northern kingdoms. Joshua continued his campaign and wiped out the Anakim of the highlands, of Hebron, of the highlands of Judah and of all the highlands of Israel.

Thus Joshua conquered the Promised Land and finally the country had rest from warfare. Joshua divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

When Joshua became old in years, he felt death approach. He gathered all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem. He told Israel to fear Yahweh and to serve their God truly and sincerely. But he prophesied that they would not be able to serve Yahweh since this was a holy and a jealous God who would not tolerate misdeeds or sins. The people however accepted once more Yahweh as their God. Joshua that day made a covenant with the people at Shechem. He wrote that down in the Book of the Law of Israel. Then he dismissed the people and died shortly after. He was buried at Timnath-Serah in the highlands of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

Joshua was a warrior-leader but in the Book of Joshua we learn little of his character. He appears as a man without a face, the instrument of Yahweh. He wins battles, but words that often return in the narrative of the Bible are, 'he caught them unawares'. The battles are won by Yahweh, inexorably won, and not by Joshua. In one instance Yahweh destroys more enemies by hailstones than Joshua by the sword. This one-sidedness of the narrative is remarkable in its implacable logic. Yahweh told to kill

and burn all the towns and Joshua does just that. When there is dissension in his own army, like when Achan keeps a few trinkets back from the destruction, the revenge is as implacable and Achan's whole family is burned in a holocaust. This horror is told in the Bible in an impersonalised, un-human way.

The Bible writers tell a few more human stories however. A prostitute at Jericho helps Joshua's spies and she is saved from the slaughter. The Gibeons enter the Israelite camp in disguise and win their lives as well as a place within the Israeli community by ruse. Yahweh does not object to this.

We only hear something of Joshua's character when he nears death. He then assembles all the tribes at Shechem and makes them vow to Yahweh. Here he appears as a man without illusions, who predicts that the people will not be able to face hardships before a jealous God. His last words are terrible with premonition, but they are the conclusion of hundreds of years of Israelite history as written down by learned and devote Jews. Joshua says, 'You have chosen Yahweh to serve him.' Saying that to people only too eager to serve nobody but themselves, is indeed a terrible message. And these words Joshua carved in stone.

Stone is the material we think off when we see the image of Joshua. He was a warrior, merely driven by a God who wants to destroy and to conquer. Whenever Joshua reached a major breakthrough, the Israelites took stones together, and piled them up to a mound in remembrance of the original conquest of Palestine. It happens from the beginning, when stones are taken from mid-Jordan and piled on the other shore of the river and it happens after the conquest when the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh build a huge altar of stone near the stone circle by the Jordan. These stone mounds will be the only but during witnesses that remain of Joshua's devastating passage. They are the signs of a rapid and devastating campaign of Yahweh to hand over the Promised Land to the Israelites. After that only came human fickleness, the eternal flux of arrogant refusal to serve a god and the humble obedience after the punishments.



## *Joshua's Battles*

### **Joshua's Battle**

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld (1609-1684). The Prague Castle Gallery – Prague

Schönfeld was a German, Swabian painter of the seventeenth century. He worked in southern Germany and in Switzerland, and he also stayed for long periods in Rome and Naples. From 1633 on he had been part of the painters that worked around the French Classicist painters Nicolas Poussin and Claude le Lorrain in Rome. From after 1635 and until 1649, he worked in Naples where he would have seen the pictures of the Neapolitan masters Micco Spadaro and Bernardo Cavallino (1616-1656).<sup>A9</sup> He was a Baroque painter, but one very much interested in classic landscapes. He expressed particular moods with a Romantic character in the depiction of ancient Roman ruins. Schönfeld also painted scenes of heroic, antique battles, such as 'Joshua's Battle'.

'Joshua's Battle' may represent the battle for the town of Gibeon. Gibeon was allied to Joshua but attacked by the Canaanites. Joshua caught the attacking armies unaware and unprepared. Yahweh hurled hailstorms unto the attackers, who were the Amorite Kings of Jerusalem, of Hebron, of Jarmuth and of Lachisch. Yahweh made the sun and moon stand still at Gibeon until Joshua had won the battle. The painting of Johann Heinrich Schönfeld therefore shows two scenes, one under the moon and one under the sun. The Amorites are driven away by the hailstorms and they fight in the dark of evening, at the right of the picture. On the left, Joshua attacks, supported by the light of the resplendent sun. The sun itself is not shown, but a very bright, diffuse light helps Joshua's armies to advance. Obviously this is the winning side. Joshua leads and points forward.

The composition of Schönfeld's picture is based on the horizontal part of the two armies. Out of this part rise the old Roman ruins that Schönfeld saw and copied in Rome. Thus he painted the three columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux, the remains of the Temple of Vesta and the Pyramid of Cestius. Between these high ruins advance the threatening war towers, loaded with warriors and drawn by elephants. Between the two armies the landscape opens wide, so that the composition is also a very long 'Open V'. 'Joshua's Battle' is indeed a huge picture. It is almost four metres long and a meter and a half high. Few scenes more heroic than these in their panoramic scope have ever been painted, so that in its two parts the picture has once been associated with the battles of Alexander the Great instead of with the battles of the leader of the small Jewish armies entering into Canaan. Schönfeld even added an oriental touch in many places, in the elephants, in the shields lying on the battlefield and in the dresses of the soldiers and their leaders. That oriental touch however reminds of Arabic hordes or of Indian armies.

More than a battle scene, we have the impression that Schönfeld tried to paint an Italian capriccio. The ancient ruins give that impression, but also the high-tone, light, hazy colours that the painter used. In that sense, Schönfeld's picture could resemble

Dutch or Italian pictures of the Baroque period. But the scene is not close to the viewer, since Schönfeld showed a very long battlefield and that feature marks the end of Baroque and the beginning of a more Classicist depiction of a new type. The light colours, some of the frozen attitudes of the soldiers, and the far distance from which the viewer looks at the scenes, are features we also find back for instance in Jacques-Louis David's pictures of classic themes. Classicist tendencies of course also run through the Baroque period, as for instance in the paintings of the Carracci family of Bologna. Schönfeld added a touch of German logic and distance to a Baroque depiction.

On the left of the painting, the warriors are mostly shown in yellowish-grey hues, in very light tones, as the light is strong there. The splendid, very bright light permeates the whole sky there and only few clouds are in the sky. On the far right, the soldiers are unrecognisable in the sombreness. We see dark mountains here and a menacing veil of black thunderclouds cover the attackers. The army of the Amorite kings is in disarray in the darkness as Joshua's men push forward with archers in the front. In both the battle scenes we perceive chaos of soldiers, horses, lances, and shields. We cannot but admire the skill with which Schönfeld presented all these details. In the apparent chaos Schönfeld introduced symmetries. Thus a horse and a shield lie on the ground to the left and to the right, two bluish-white flags are held high on both sides and also in the colours we find twice very striking patches of fierce red and blue hues combined in soldiers. One can perceive symmetries like this in various other details in the painting. So the painter drew the two battle scenes to one whole by these linking features of design.

Schönfeld knew very well the value of emotions evoked in the viewer and how to emphasise emotions by elements of design. Thus the victorious troops of Josiah are of course in the light side of the painting. The Roman ruins on this left side are painted higher up and also glimmer in the full brightness of the sun. The commanding figure of Joshua on horseback rises out of the crowd like a distant statue, out of a mass of figures painted in yellow and grey. In this way armies would have seen Joshua: only in the distance, a mythical figure showing where to advance only; in battle every one faces an enemy directly and sees the commanders only from the far. The weight of the scenes in the bright light pushes on the armies in dark of the right side by the weight of the bright colours and by the higher lines of the architectures. The soldiers of Joshua advance, whereas on the right the Amorite king of Jerusalem flees in full wealthy ornate, an arrow in his side, with his pink flowing cloak behind him. He flees in panic and in pain. Look how Schönfeld drew this figure to show to the viewer the emotions at the moment of the action of flight.

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld painted an impressive, panoramic view of a battle from the Bible, but the armies look like Roman and oriental armies clashing. Schönfeld's picture therefore also is an italianising one, in a trend we know from the Dutch painters working in Rome. Schönfeld added a heroic touch to a picture that would have been a landscape with ancient ruins. This kind of painting was much appreciated in the seventeenth century and would indeed have been a grand scene as the master picture of a large hall in a Roman or Neapolitan palace. Although his work is Classicist and although we almost see the picture of 'Joshua's Battle' as a capricious landscape, Schönfeld succeeded in showing under the landscape the chaos, thronging of a real battle.

Schönfeld's picture has nothing to do with any battle that would have happened in Biblical times in Canaan. Schönfeld would have had to show poorly clad peasant armies brandishing all kinds of weapons, some of which would have been merely tools used for tilling the land transformed into weapons. The armies would but have scant real armour, no elephants, and no imposing battle towers. These armies would have fiercely stricken at each other but there would be far less people involved than the grand masses Schönfeld tried to show. The battle would have taken place in rich green meadows and not in barren, desert hill country. The Romans would only arrive ten of centuries later. Schönfeld gave an imaginary interpretation of the bible theme, proving his belief that Joshua's battle was a symbol of the mind, more than an actual historic clash of bands of peasants around a Canaanite village, from which the elected leaders would be called kings.

### **Joshua orders the Sun to stand still**

Jacques Courtois called Il Borgognone (1621-1675). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

The scene of Joshua's battles by Jacques Courtois is from the same battle as the picture made by Johann Heinrich Schönfeld. Joshua had to fight a coalition of Amorite kings: Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem, Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhio king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. The kings attacked the town of Gibeon and the Gibeonites appealed to Joshua for help. Joshua marched his army from Gilgal and caught the Amorites unaware of his arrival. Yahweh threw the Amorites in disorder, the disorder that Jacques Courtois knew so well to paint. As the Amorites fled, Yahweh sent hailstorms on Joshua's enemies. Joshua wanted complete victory, so he said to the sun to stand still over Gibeon and also the moon to stand still over the Vale of Aialon. Sun and moon then indeed stood still until Israel had taken its vengeance over the Amorites. The sun stood still in the centre of the sky for almost a whole day. The Bible mentions that there never was a day like that before or after, when Yahweh obeyed to Joshua's voice, since Yahweh and Joshua together were fighting for Israel.

Jacques Courtois was born in 1621 in France, in Saint-Hippolyte of the Franche-Comté region but after having studied painting with his father Jean-Baptiste Courtois, he went to Italy, just fifteen years old. He travelled to Bologna, then Florence and Siena, to reach Rome at around 1640. The Italians called him by various names: Il Borgognone or the Burgundian, Giacomo Borgognone, or even Giacomo Cortese. He painted landscapes and religious pictures, but he also specialised on battle scenes. In 1657 his wife died and it was thought that Courtois might have murdered her. He then became a Jesuit. He died in Rome in 1675.

'Joshua orders the Sun to stand still' is a typical Borgognone picture. We see Joshua commanding his armies and of course also the sun, over a tumult of heavy battle.

Courtois gave this the first, immediate impression of the picture: there is chaos everywhere among friend and foe, men and horses; this is the heat of the battle at which point dramatic, drastic action needed to swing the balance of victory to the Jewish men. Jacques Courtois painted an extraordinary mêlée of fallen soldiers, slaughtered horses, risen swords, flowing flags, prancing cavaliers, dashing plumes on helmets, which are all intertwined in the fierce action. Courtois did not have to paint all the details here; he only had to convey to the viewer this impression of chaos to have the viewer grasp immediately the crux of the battle. Better to show a mix of vaguely indicated fighting, a hint of arms and swords all thrown together, than fine details of just a part of the army. In a real battle also, the impression one has of the whole remains vague and blurred in the action of clashing men amidst the dust and movements of the fight. We thus see only two rears of horses and the back of Joshua in some detail, the heads of two horses also, and this only because the light falls directly on them.

The sun stands in the middle of the sky, overpowering in brightness, like a sudden vision of Joshua, but low and ready to set. Joshua points his sword straight at it, commanding the sun to stand still so that the battle might linger on and so that the Jews would be able to kill all their opponents. Joshua commands like a god and Yahweh answers Joshua's order. Thus, Courtois painted one of the rare scenes of the Bible in which a man commands both the elements and God. And God complied.

Jacques Courtois emphasised of course the epic of the scene. So he painted the battle low in the frame, against a wide and low landscape as background (on the right) and with a wonderful sky and fully coloured clouds. The low scene well renders Courtois' message that despite a heroic battle, man remains small in nature and before the God of the skies. Only the finest soldier of Yahweh, Joshua, dominates the field.

Courtois used for the earth and for the battle mostly brown and deep orange hues. These ochre colours are warm and Courtois helped the warm mood by painting hues inclining further to red towards the left side of the scene: Joshua's cloak is red-brown and so is the large flag on the left. While Courtois brought in cooler hues also, below, a few blue patches and very white hues in the landscape on the very right, the predominant ochres must have been meant to form an overall hue that well suited walls of a main hall of a Roman palace, like the Palazzo Spada where the painting hangs now. Even Courtois' sky gives a warm, open impression since he tempered the blue sky not only with the radiant bright yellow sun, but also with brown hues in the clouds.

If the picture had to evoke a rapid impression of action and energy, Courtois also defined its structure to support this feeling. Slanting lines are always the lines of movement. So Courtois grew his scene from the lower right upwards. Very many lines of swords heaven, horses, and figures are slanting and also in various directions. Courtois' scene grows to the left, upwards, and Courtois did not even position Joshua in the middle, but skewed his figure to the left, so that symmetries around Joshua could not easily form. Such symmetries of shape, colours, balance of areas, would bring static and stability again in the picture, and fixed positions of figures. Courtois wanted to avoid that above all.

When we find for instance in Johann Heinrich Schönfeld's pictures of battles epic grandeur of mystery, we find in Borgognone's images the swirl of mighty action. We cannot recognise in Courtois' picture the enemy and Joshua's soldiers. It is impossible to tell who is who, so that only the impression of the battle itself was of value for this painter. He also had to show that the battle was fierce, rapid and vicious, so he painted fallen horses and fallen, dead soldiers.

Jacques Courtois yielded to a fashion of paintings of heroic battles, painted in fine colours and with the dash of rapid brushstrokes that appealed to the quick, flaring and sometimes dangerous tempers of the noblemen of Rome. He had a great sense of drama and epic, and together with his fine skills of a professional painter, he delivered scenes that are still agreeable to look at.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Allocation of the Promised Land**

Louis Licherie (1629-1687. Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**Joshua halting the Sun**

Nicolo Malinconico (1663-1721). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1692-1694.

## *Part II. The Book of Judges*

### *Introduction*

After the death of Joshua most of the Promised Land was conquered. The resistance by the original inhabitants was not wholly quenched however. The Israelites had to live together with many other peoples in Canaan.

Judah and Simeon, two brothers, fought the Canaanites and the Perizzites and defeated them at Bezek. The sons of Judah attacked Jerusalem and took the city, putting its people to the sword and setting fire to the town. Judah and Simeon captured Helcon, since then called Kiriath-Arba. They marched against the people of Debir, since then called Kiriath-Sepher. They captured Zephath, Ashkalon and Ekron. Some of the original people were spared, like the Jehusites of Jerusalem and some lived in peace with Israel. The sons of Hobab the Kenite, father-in-law of Moses in this way settled among the Israelites.

In the North, the Manasseh, Ephraim and Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali tribes did not destroy most of the people of the land as Yahweh had ordered, but lived together and among them. That was an error for Yahweh soon reproached them for having made a covenant with the Canaanites and therefore Yahweh threatened the Israelites and he predicted that these people would one day become the oppressors of the Israelites. The people began to wail when they heard Yahweh's angel proclaim this and they called the place Bochim. But the prophecy would become true.

### *The Judges Othiel, Ehud, Shamgar and Deborah*

For a few generations the Israelites remembered the deeds of Yahweh, exercised through Joshua. Then they blended with the people of the land, deserted Yahweh and started to serve the Baal Gods and Astartes. Then Yahweh's anger grew against the Israelites. He handed them over to pillagers and bandits and no expedition of the Israelites knew success.

Yahweh then appointed Judges to rescue the Israelites from the hands of their tormentors. As long as there was a Judge, the Israelites would more or less serve Yahweh. But when a Judge died, the Israelites would relapse into corruption. Yahweh allowed other nations to remain in Canaan and did not destroy these people as a punishment to the Israelites for their behaviour against the covenant.

The Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of Yahweh, so Yahweh gave them over to Cushan-Ristabathaim, king of Edom. The Israelites were captives for eight years.

They prayed to God then and Yahweh raised Othiel son of Kenaz. Othiel triumphed over the Edomites. There was peace for all the years that Othiel lived.

The Israelites did evil again, so Yahweh delivered them to Eglon, king of Moab. The people were enslaved for eighteen years. The Israelites then cried out for mercy to Yahweh. Yahweh raised a Judge called Ehud, son of Gera, a Benjaminite. Ehud stabbed Eglon in his own palace by using a ruse. Later, Eglon defeated the Moabites in battle and Israel knew peace again for eighty years. After him the Judge Shamgar defeated a tribe of Philistines.

### *Jael and Sisera*

#### **Jael and Sisera**

Carle Van Loo (1705-1765). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Nancy. 1732-1734.

After Ehud's death the Israelites sinned again. So Jabin, a king of Canaan who reigned over Hazor, threatened the Israelites. The army commander of the Canaanites was Sisera. The Judge of Israel at that time was a woman called Deborah. She sent for Barak, son of Abino from Kedesh in Pahtali. She told Barak to confront Jabin and Sisera. Barak agreed to that only if Deborah would join him. So Deborah stood up and went with Barak. They encamped on Mount Tabor. Barak charged down from that mountain with ten thousand men behind him and they won the battle against Sisera's army.

Sisera fled on foot towards the tent of Jael, the wife of Haber the Kenite. Haber had been with the tribe of Kain before and with the sons of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses. They had lived with the Israelite community. Jael prayed Sisera in, gave him milk to drink when he asked for water and she laid him to sleep, and even covered him with a rug. Jael, wife of Haber, then took a tent peg and a mallet. She crept softly onto the hidden Sisera. She drove the peg into Sisera's temple, right through into the ground, shattering his temple. Sisera crumpled between her feet. Sisera had been fast asleep, worn out from the battle. When Barak arrived in pursuit of Sisera, Jael came out of her tent to meet him and she showed the dead Sisera. Then the Judge Deborah sang a song of praise to Barak and Jael.

Carle Van Loo made a painting on the theme of 'Jael and Sisera'. The family of the Van Loo painters is remarkable. It covers five generations and two hundred years of art. The family members exercised their art from Amsterdam to Paris and from Nice, Turin, Rome, and Berlin to Madrid. The founder of the generations of artists, the first known painter of the family, was called Jacob Van Loo. He was born in 1614 in Sluis in Zeeland, a province of the Netherlands. He studied with Vermeer and Rembrandt but settled in Paris and became a member of the Royal Academy of Arts there in 1663. He died in 1670. His sons, Abraham and Jean were still born in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, but they also pursued a career in France like their father. Abraham settled first in Lyon. He converted from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism in Lyon in 1680 or 1681, and changed his first name from Abraham to Louis. From Lyon he

moved to further south, to Aix-en-Provence and Grasse, finally he lived in Nice on the Côte d'Azur. He died there in 1712. Jean van Loo also went south, to Toulon, the ancient war port of France and he became there a Royal marine painter.

Abraham-Louis had eight children among whom Jean-Baptiste (born in 1684 in Aix) and Carl Andrea, better known as Carle (born 1705 in Nice). Jean-Baptiste Van Loo took charge of his brothers at the death of his father. He travelled a lot and took his brother Carle with him. He visited Genoa, Turin, Rome, Monaco, London, and Paris. Jean-Baptiste became a member of the French Royal Academy of Arts in 1731 and he met many Italian and French painters, showing to his very talented brother all the styles of painting of his times and of previous centuries.

Carle Van Loo followed at first his brother and worked with him. He wanted to go to Rome, but his brother was ruined in the crash of the adventurer Law. Carle anyhow travelled to Rome in 1725, accompanied by his cousins Louis-Michel and François. Carle obtained the 'Prix de Rome' in 1725. He met in Rome François Boucher, the acclaimed painter of the French King, and he gained a first prize at Rome's Accademia di San Lucca. He left Rome for Turin, married there and returned to Paris to be accepted in his turn into the Royal Academy in 1735.

Jean-Baptiste Van Loo had six children. Among these, Louis-Michel (1707-1771), who went to Rome with Carle Van Loo, became a first painter of the King of Spain. Another son of Jean-Baptiste, Charles Amédée (1719-1795) was a painter at the service of Frederick I, King of Prussia. Thus in the eighteenth century, members of the Van Loo family served three European Kings. From Jacob Van Loo born in 1614 to Jules-César Van Loo, a son of Carle, who died in 1821, the Van Loo family covered two hundred years of painting.

Among the Van Loo family of painters, Carle Van Loo was the most famous. He was born in 1705 in Nice and died in 1765 in Paris. He was only seven years old when his father died but his brother Jean-Baptiste, then 28 years old, took care of the family. Together with his brother Carle was in Turin in 1713 and in Rome in 1716. In Rome he studied in the workshop of Benedetto Lutti. He returned to France in 1720, still with his brother. He must have been already a child prodigious in painting. He made major pictures in 1723 and 1724. He travelled on his own to Italy in 1727, arriving in Rome in 1728 and he had many successes there. He worked for the Cardinals of Rome and delivered paintings for churches. He returned to Turin in 1732 and married therein 1733 with Christine Somis, the daughter of a famous family of musicians. Carle worked in Turin for the King of Sardinia. He was thus in Italy from 1712 to 1720 and from 1727 to 1734, after all quite long periods during which he saw and could learn Italian art. Carle Van Loo came back to France to live in Paris in 1734. He painted portraits of Kings and courtiers and became a very well established painter in the capital of France.

Carle Van Loo's painting 'Jael and Sisera' dates from the undeniably happy years he spent in Turin around the date of his marriage. Van Loo painted religious and mythological scenes, with a preference for these last kinds of themes. 'Jael and Sisera' is a bible religious theme from the Old Testament, but the depiction of this theme has always been handled like an antique myth. Moreover it can be counted to the most tragic, violent themes of the art of painting, together with themes like 'Judith and



Holofernes' or 'David and Goliath' or 'The Sacrifice of Isaac'. The theme of Jael and Sisera was much less painted than these other themes however, so we remark the desire for originality in Van Loo. We see the pursuing commander Barak enter a tent, invited therein by Jael. Jael shows to Barak the Sisera he has been trying to capture; and Sisera lies gruesomely killed on a bed.

The picture looks like a study made in oil on canvas for an oval decoration for the ceiling or for a lunette of a palace wall. Carle Van Loo was working for a Royal palace in Turin. His painting may well have been a design for one of the decorations in that palace. Van Loo quite finished usually his paintings in all detail and with fine, calculated and delicate brushstrokes. 'Jael and Sisera' does not have this touch of finish, but is rougher in colouring. We experience immediately the Baroque fluidity of the curved lines and the vivacity of the scene. There are no strict vertical; horizontal or oblique lines here, and we see instead all curved lines of cloaks, curtains, arms and hands.

Barak enters the tent and his surprise is depicted in a very theatrical way. Jael's movements are more natural. Sisera lies killed, but also his state is more emphatically shown in the powerless arm that lies lifeless on the shield. Van Loo was a master in showing the emotions of his actors. Van Loo used subdued, almost pastel colours. We see a green-grey background and contrasting with this hue mainly the magnificent orange-red of the cloak of Barak. The only other non-green hue is the blue colour. Van Loo used it in the trousers of Barak, in the robe and in the cloak of Jael and in the shirt of the dead Sisera. The blue links the three personages of the tragedy. The blue colours are also subdued in saturation however; they are very light and not pure but blending harmoniously with the yellowish-green of the background.

Van Loo was a master in theatrical composition. In 'Jael and Sisera' also he definitely guides the view of the spectator. A viewer will be directly attracted by the only patch of a light, pure hue in the red cloak of Barak. The viewer's eyes will then follow the outstretched arm of Barak. This movement continues in the pointing hand of Jael. Jael points to Sisera, to the drama of the crime of the story. The viewer's eyes may then follow the bright area of Sisera's back and be further attracted to the eyes of Jael. And Jael's eyes look at Barak. Here the viewer will linger and admire the helmet of Barak, where Carle Van Loo painted a wonderful piece of gold and brilliant white. So Carle Van Loo directs the view of an onlooker all over the picture and its figures.

The figure of Barak is long and imposing. Jael bends her knees and her head comes thus quite lower than Barak's. Finally, Sisera's head is the top of a triangle, the base of which is the body of Barak, and in which we find the three protagonists of the scene. So in many aspects this is a strong, united composition of figures. But Van Loo brought also much relief in too strict a structure. He did that in the curved movements of the lines so that his picture remains very vivid. The rapid brushstrokes enhance a feeling of speed of execution, but also of powerful creation and expression of the idea of the painter. Carle Van Loo must have had the fever of sudden creation and in these rapid colours we feel most directly the happiness and eagerness of Van Loo's work.

We can compare Van Loo's picture in this way with the paintings of Tiepolo. But other pictures by Van Loo of this period are almost in the style of Watteau, whereas in other scenes he may remind us of Nicolas Poussin. Thus Carle Van Loo was an artist

of many facets although he was only around thirty years old when he made this 'Jael and Sisera'. He painted very theatrical attitudes for his figures in 'Jael and Sisera'. And yet his picture feels quite natural. Its meaning is conveyed efficiently. The theatricality disappears in the immediacy of the communication. There is a direct correspondence between the form used, the depicted attitudes of the figures, and the meaning. This is always a feature of great expression. Van Loo linked the three actors very strongly. He made meaning very obvious and it is almost impossible to see this scene otherwise. It would be impossible to omit eye-glances, gestures and poises and still come to such direct, easy impact on the viewer. All the elements of the scene are necessary for the communication of the simple message of the story.

Carle Van Loo was a painter caught between François Boucher and Jacques-Louis David, between Nicolas Poussin and Claude Le Lorrain, between Sébastien Bourdon and Watteau. He was very much still a Baroque painter, not entirely given in to the vagaries of Rococo or to the erotic art of Boucher, never forgetting classicist restraint but dedicated to theatrical scenes of luxurious decoration. His 'Jael and Sisera' is a good example of the many talents and styles that Carle Van Loo could play upon.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**Jael and Sisera.** Giuseppe Vermiglio (ca.1585-ca.1635). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**Jael and Sisera.** Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1620.

**Jael.** Johann Spilberg the Younger (1619-1690). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1644.

**Jael and Sisera.** Bartolomeo Guidobono (1654-1709). Collection Piero Pagano. Genoa. 1690-1693.

**Jael and Sisera.** Hans Speckaert (1530-1577). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Jael and Sisera.** Enrico Albricci (1714-1775). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

### *The Judge Gideon*

The Israelites soon did evil again, so Yahweh handed the over to the Midianites. The Israelites hid in caves and clefts but they had to come out of hiding to sow and harvest. Then the Midianites would come and destroy the Israelites. The people were in such distress because of these pillages that they cried out for help to Yahweh.

The angel of Yahweh then appeared to Gideon, son of Oprah. Gideon took his bull and destroyed the altar of Baal in the township, as Yahweh had asked him to do. That same day, Gideon received the name of Jerubbaal. He assembled an army of Israelites and marched against Midian and Amalek. But Yahweh did not want any victory yet for the Israelites as a whole. He did want a victory only for Jerubbaal-Gideon. So he told Gideon to bring his army to the waterside. Some of the warriors drank with their tongue, hands clapped to their mouths. Others knelt down and drank that way. Yahweh told Gideon only to keep the three hundred men who had drunk as dogs do and he promised Gideon to rescue him with these only.

Gideon attacked Amalek and Midian with his three hundred men only, organised in three groups. The enemy's camp was thrown in confusion and the Midianites fled away. The Israelites pursued them and killed many, among whom the Midianite chieftains Oreb and Zeeb. Then Gideon continued the pursuit of the Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna. He took also these two prisoners after having destroyed their army. Gideon also destroyed then the towns of Succoth and of Penuel because they had not wanted to provide him and his army with bread on the pursuit. Finally he killed the Midianite kings.

The Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them for generation after generation, which meant to rule as their king, but Gideon refused. He told that only Yahweh could rule over the Israelites. But he did ask one golden ring from everyone. He made an ephod, a cult object, out of these for Yahweh and set this in Oprah, his own town.

### *Gideon reviews his Army*

#### **Gideon reviews his Troops**

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld (1609-1683/1684). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1640/1645.

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld made with 'Gideon reviews his Troops' a painting that is very much in the same style as 'Joshua's Battle'. This painting is much smaller however, but the epic breadth and the dreamy atmosphere are the same.

Schönfeld situated the scene near a pond inside Roman ruins. Gideon's soldiers are assembled around the water. They seem exhausted and drink the water, but not eagerly. Many of the men are sitting down or even lying on the ground and Schönfeld made it clear that these are not really professional soldiers: few of the men wear armour, few have shields, and few wear boots. Many men only wear a loincloth or simple, short trousers, or an occasional feather in the hair instead of a helmet. Helmets have been thrown down, too heavy in the mountain and desert country. The men have gathered in a protected oasis and here they relax awaiting the battle with the Midianites.

Like Schönfeld did often, he painted the main figure of the theme in such a way that the viewer has to discover him. When the viewer reads the title of the painting, he or she will try to find Gideon and that takes some time. But when the viewer situated Gideon, the impression of epic grandeur increases and suddenly becomes more evident. Schönfeld rewards the viewer for finding the leader. In 'Gideon reviewing his Troops', the artist placed Gideon almost invisible in the haziness of the far end of the pond. There, in the middle, stands a man, seated on a horse, pointing with a commanding arm. The viewer understands that Gideon has arrived at the camp from out of the mist of the far and that he has been looking at his men to make his choice. Schönfeld painted the scene to represent the moment when Gideon, having too many men to lead, watches the men drinking and is choosing only those, like Yahweh told him, that drink the water by lapping with their tongue as dogs do. These were probably the fiercest and the poorest, the ones that could fight best. Gideon only chose three hundred men.

Schönfeld painted the scene situated in ancient ruins, as he had seen some in Rome. To the left are the ruins of the Forum and to the right is what could be a part of Rome's Coliseum. These two architectures form an 'Open V' structure of composition, in the middle of which Schönfeld painted Gideon and his staff of officers. They enter the oasis like a staff of ghostly heroes, arriving from out of the lore of time, sent by Yahweh like warrior angels to save Israel. Here also Schönfeld could open the landscape to far mountains, increasing the impression of grandeur and of epic for the viewer. To the right and left, in front of the imposing ruins, Schönfeld placed the groups of men. Schönfeld had a keen sense of Classicist balance and composition. To the left we see the very high ruins of a Roman temple but the soldiers are lower there. So Schönfeld painted the soldiers on the right standing taller and he even showed a soldier on horseback there, to balance the high structure on the left. He further introduced such symmetries also in the areas of colours. To the front left we see a man drinking, dressed in a blue robe of which Schönfeld shows but a few, delicate blue patches. There also we see a man holding a high lance, seated and turning his back to the viewer. The blue and the flesh colour are almost the only truly chromatic areas of the left scene. To the right we see some of that blue also in a man drinking and another man stands there also turning his bare, muscled back to the viewer; These two man are coloured in the same hues as on the left.

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld applied hues in his picture that are marvellously suited for a scene of epic heroes. He painted in delicate hazy, pastel, light colours of blue-grey and sparingly added touches of diluted but pure blue, orange and flesh-yellow hues. The whole scene is flooded in an eerie, bluish light. This use of colours evokes in the viewer an impression of a scene from an unreal world, from a world of dreams, a

world of epic deeds and great heroes sent from God, suddenly appearing from out of the mist of miracle. Schönfeld's painting is much more a mood than a scene of battle. He reached his aim marvellously by using the grey blue, delicate colours and by drawing only a few men in clear outlines and more striking colours.

Schönfeld was a master in creating such epic, romantic and melancholic mood of evoking scenes from old tales. That is probably the right way to remember Bible stories by, stories that were first told near campfires or in small houses of Canaanite villages by oral tradition before being written down by Israelite priests. These were the grand tales of epic deeds of the forefathers and they must have come to the minds of the listeners in the way Schönfeld showed them in his paintings.

*The Judges Abimelech, Tola, Jair and Jephtah*

After Gideon's death the Israelites again served the Baals, taking Baal-Berith as their God. Abimelech, one of the sons of Gideon-Jerubbaal, asked the elders of Shechem what they preferred, to be ruled by one man or by all the seventy sons of Jerubbaal. The leading men of Shechem swayed towards Abimelech. Abimelech put to death all his brothers then and the men of Shechem proclaimed Abimelech king.

Jerubbaal's youngest son, Jotham, had escaped from the massacre and from out of Mount Gerizim he addressed the leaders of Shechem. He said that of the men of Shechem had not acted in good faith then fire should come out of Abimelech and fire out of the leaders of Shechem to destroy each other. Then Jotham fled to Beer, to be out of Abimelech's reach.

Abimelech ruled as king of Shechem for three years. Then a group of men of Shechem rose against Abimelech. He attacked the town and killed all the inhabitants. He set fire to branches of wood piled up against a crypt in which the leaders of Shechem had fled. Abimelech then marched on Thebez. He besieged the town and he captured it. But all the leaders of Thebez had escaped into a tower in the middle of the town. Abimelech approached the door of the tower to set fire on it. At that precise moment a woman threw down a millstone on his head and cracked his skull. Abimelech died in this way and the prophecy and curse of Jotham had thus come true, both for Shechem and for Abimelech. This was the end of the first man who had been king in Israel for a short while.

After Abimelech was dead, Tola was a Judge of Israel for twenty-three years and after him ruled Jair of Gilead, who was a Judge for twenty-two years.

After these two judges the Israelites again began doing wrong and served many of the old gods of Canaan. They deserted Yahweh. Yahweh then let the Philistines and the Ammonites prevail over Israel. The Israelites were in distress. They prayed to Yahweh, gathered in Gilead and were looking for a volunteer to attack the Ammonites.

The elders of Gilead then fetched Jephtah, a valiant warrior. This was the son of a prostitute and his father's wife as well as his father had driven Jephtah out from their house when other, legitimate sons were born. Jephtah fled and settled in the territory of Tob, where he assembled a group of adventurers that raided with him.

*Jephtah's Daughter***The Sacrifice of Jephtah**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon.

The elders of Gilead and the other people asked Jephtah to command their army against the Ammonites. Jephtah defeated Sibon and his army and Israel could take possession of the Ammonite territory around Johaz. But the king of the Ammonites still stood up to Israel. A final great and terrifying battle was to come.

Jephtah moved with the army of the Israelites into Ammonite land. He first tried to dissuade the Ammonite king from attacking Israel but when the king took no notice of Jephtah's messages, he crossed further into Ammonite land. He asked Yahweh to deliver the Ammonites in his grasp. He made a vow to Yahweh. He told that if Yahweh delivered the Ammonites to him, he, Jephtah, when he returned from fighting the Ammonites victoriously, would sacrifice the first thing he saw coming out of the doors of his house to meet him. Jephtah indeed beat the Ammonites from Aroer to the borders of Minnith and to Abel-Keramim. He defeated the Ammonites severely.

When Jephtah returned to his house at Mizpah, his daughter came out to meet him, dancing at the sound of tambourines to welcome him. This was Jephtah's only child. Jephtah remembered his rash promise, tore his clothes then and told his daughter what he had promised to God. He exclaimed his misery, but Jephtah's daughter urged him to keep his promise to Yahweh. She asked her father for two months of respite and went with her companions to wander in the mountains and bewail her virginity.

When the two months were over, Jephtah did to his daughter what he had promised with his vow. He sacrificed his only daughter to Yahweh.

Since that time it is custom in Israel for the daughters to leave home every year and lament for four days over the daughter of Jephtah the Gileadite.

Later still, the men of Ephraim mobilised and stood up to Jephtah reproaching him of not having taken them to fight the Ammonites. Jephtah then had to make war to Ephraim and he defeated them. After these events, Jephtah still judged the Israelites for six years until he died.

Sébastien Bourdon was one of the artists that best represented the French Baroque period of the seventeenth century. He was born in 1616, in a Protestant family of Montpellier, but very soon he was sent to his uncle in Paris, as the French Royal and Catholic armies besieged Montpellier. In 1634, a few years before Louis XIV was born, he left for Rome and lived there for five years. Then he returned to Paris. His fame grew in the French capital, mainly in its Protestant circles. At times he returned briefly to Montpellier and he worked for two years in Stockholm for Queen Christina of Sweden. His fame as a Protestant painter may have helped him to be introduced to the Swedish Queen. Much later, in 1654, Christina would convert to Roman Catholicism, abdicate and go to live in Rome.

Bourdon remained however a Parisian painter, closely linked to the artistic sphere of Paris. In 1648 the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was founded. Bourdon was one of the twelve founding members, together with other famous French painters such as Charles Le Brun, Eustache Le Sueur, Laurent de La Hyre, Jacques Stella and Philippe de Champaigne. He even became the Rector of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1655. Louis XIV took over the reign of France from Cardinal Mazarin in 1661. Bourdon died in Paris in 1671. The 'Sacrifice of Jephthah' dates from around 1645, from right after his first major works that established Bourdon's fame in Paris. His first work in Paris to gain him renown was for the goldsmiths of Notre Dame in 1643. This commission showed some of the tendency to reconciliation of French society late in the reign of Louis XIII, as a Protestant painter could gain such acceptance from the Roman Catholic court of France, even though there were occasional remaining strifes between Protestant and Catholics. Cardinal Richelieu had won France for Catholicism, it was time to tolerate what remained of Protestantism. It proves also the great admiration and appreciation of his art by the Parisian nobility and its well-to do merchant families.

Sébastien Bourdon had married in 1642. He was famous, well settled. He painted many great paintings in this period. He was a Baroque painter, but he belonged to the French Classicist tradition of Simon Vouet (1590-1649) and Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Bourdon had met Poussin in Rome and seen his paintings. Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656), Jacques Stella (1596-1657), Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674) were all painters in the Classicist style of the Baroque period and their style perfectly matched the stern, exacting, precise spirits of the times of the Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, who governed France. The state needed to be put to order and the Cardinals wanted logic and rigour and this naturally showed in architecture and the arts. French academism brought the rigour also in the art of painting and although Sébastien Bourdon's 'Jephthah's Sacrifice' dates from a few years before the founding of the Academy of Paris, Bourdon's painting is an example – we would say a classic example – of French academicism. So when you start looking at a Bourdon picture, start looking at the composition first.

In the scene of 'Jephthah's Sacrifice' an old temple priest leads forward Jephthah's daughter to the altar where she will be offered to Yahweh. Sébastien Bourdon used the left diagonal to depict an ascending line of drama. Below left, a friend of Jephthah's daughter kneels before the offering and weeps. Jephthah's daughter looks at her from higher up and still further along the diagonal we find the priest. Bourdon also used the right diagonal of the frame. On the lower right we find another kneeling woman, a maidservant holding a silver platter with the water that cleans the offering. The direction of images grows then over the head of Jephthah's daughter to the upper left corner. The priest's head lies on the left diagonal; the head of Jephthah's daughter lies on the right diagonal. The two kneeling women, the priest and Jephthah's daughter form a very solid triangle or pyramid, the base of which is the entire lower border of the frame. This fundamental structure – the two diagonals and the triangle beneath them – is the very robust composition of the scene. If that structure had been the only construction however, the composition would have suffocated the artistic and visual value of the painting. It would have been too strong a view, too strict, too austere.



Sébastien Bourdon needed to break the strength of the composition that he started with. His problem was how to bring in variety without destroying his basic structure.

First, Bourdon broke the rigour of the left diagonal. He made it stop at the priest's head. Beyond the priest, Bourdon drew lines parallel to the other, right diagonal. Thus he drew the direction of the white smoke rising from the altar. Then he drew the direction of the Roman emblems of imperial power and the folded flag in the upper right part. The left diagonal was extremely strong because it held the main figures of the theme, the central view of the theme to which the viewers' attention would always be drawn. So Bourdon needed to break this diagonal to a certain extent and to emphasise the right diagonal again. He did that by drawing four lines or directions parallel to the right diagonal, but higher up so that his pyramid structure not be destroyed. Also lower down, he drew a direction parallel to the right diagonal. To find this direction, look at the other friends of Jephtah's daughter higher up, on the left. Take the line starting from the lowest Roman stone in the middle of the lowest border, and pass over the middle of the picture over the head of the knelt friend of Jephtah's daughter to the other girl friends of the daughter, and you have another line parallel to the right diagonal. These lines that recall the right diagonal, by their repetition, brought enough variety to be a counterweight to the strength of the left diagonal direction.

The result would still have been too rigorous. Bourdon now needed to look at his colours.

All the figures we have discovered so far are painted in the same hues, in shades of grey and yellow tints and flesh colours. Jephtah's daughter is in white, yellow-grey and she wears a cloak of light blue. The kneeling woman on the right was painted in shades of grey. All these hues and shades match harmoniously. The greys match the blue of Jephtah's daughter; the white and the light flesh colours agree well. The magnificent yellow-brown cloak of the daughter's friend matches the central blue cloak. These colours on their turn match the hues that are higher up: the grey tones of the smoke, the grey-yellow and light blue of the flag, and the greys of the Roman architecture in the upper background. Remark how these colours support the composition. Jephtah's daughter is painted in a central area of blue that forms a vertical support for the triangle or pyramid and this colour mass strengthens that structure. The lady on the lower right is in dark shades of grey, leading to the blue cloak of Jephtah's daughter, also strengthening by colour the right diagonal and finding itself a response in the grey cloak of the priest. The weeping women on the left are painted in shades of yellow and white and thus form a compact mass of almost similar colours, supporting a line parallel to the right diagonal, and this yellow goes to a yellow-golden vase down below in an uninterrupted line. We find moreover yellow-light hues in a left triangle, in the gathering weeping women, and darker grey to the lower right so that Sébastien Bourdon also brought effects of light into his scene. The light, although no dramatic effects of contrasts between light and dark are used, seems to fall on the left scene of women. The light seems to come from the upper left and does not reach the lower border. Bourdon enhanced this effect by painting the woman on the lower right in darker shades of grey.

So far we have seen the emphasis on the left diagonal, broken up halfway by several lines parallel to the right diagonal. We remarked the centre pyramid, which is

somewhat balanced by the triangle of the weeping women on the left. But since these forms were all painted in harmonious colours – blue and yellow are complementary hues and the hues are all in light tones – they formed still a homogeneous, strong mass of form and colour. How could Sébastien Bourdon break up still this strong structure? How could he bring still more variation in lines and colour? Well, there remained Jephtah, the great warrior himself. We have not yet looked at the second main actor of the theme, at the father of the offered girl. And we still have the right part of the picture, an unfilled right triangle formed by the space between the crossing two diagonals (right diagonal lower half and left diagonal upper half) and the right border of the frame. How to bring variation in oblique lines and in the harmony of grey-blue-yellow light hues?

Sébastien Bourdon again underscored the vertical direction and he brought in a colour that did not at all easily and harmoniously fitted with the light grey, yellow and blue hues used in the rest of the painting. Bourdon placed Jephtah in the right triangle, and he clad Jephtah in red. One vertical mass alone would not have been enough to break up lack of variety and would have really been too out-standing in the picture. Luckily the vertical red area of Jephtah answers the vertical blue cloak of Jephtah's daughter. Father and child are painted in the same vertical directions, whereas all other figures are painted in oblique poises; so father and daughter are obviously linked. Jephtah's red cloak is long and Jephtah is tall along the right border. Thus this supports the large right triangle made by the left diagonal and the right border. Bourdon now had two counterweights to the central pyramid. He had a left triangle of weeping women and a right triangle with Jephtah's imposing figure.

Sébastien Bourdon started his picture with a basic structure formed by the two diagonals and the pyramid under their crossing-point. He introduced variation and complexity to lessen the weight of this strong visual effect that was too simple, obvious, monopolising and heavy. He built up complexity logically, unwaveringly, intelligently and inexorably. Ultimately the viewer has to conclude that the complexity was naturally imposed and could not have been otherwise. That is the working of the mastery of a great genius.

We wrote about lines and colours in the composition of 'Jephtah's Sacrifice' by Sébastien Bourdon. We saw also how he brought in an effect of aerial perspective by concentrating the brighter colours to the left. We gave little attention however to the scene itself. Bourdon was a painter of the Baroque period. So we should expect theatrical show and ostentatious display of emotion in gestures and in expression of faces. Bourdon showed that indeed. Look at Jephtah on the right, look at the weeping women on the left. Emotions are on the extremes of the canvas. Calm determination, wisdom, resignation and acceptance of fate's vagaries are in the middle of the picture. Baroque display of feelings was relegated to the sides, whereas Classicist repose, order and tranquil state of mind are in the middle. But then, of course, if Jephtah's daughter remains calm and if she innocently looks at her crying friend, the priest – who is the executioner – lures very ready from behind the girl. He raises his long butchering knife all too eager to perform the crime. In this act, Jephtah's daughter seems to offer her breast to the thrust. Remark how in this small scene within the larger image, the priest and executioner is painted in dark grey shades, like a predator stands dark upon its prey. The man is also enveloped in the fumes from the altar and thus, like a dark ghost he encroaches on the innocence of the girl.

Many other details can be discovered in Sébastien Bourdon's painting.

Look at the altar. The stones are decorated with the heads of sacrificial lambs. The vertical lines of the square altar continue higher up in the vertical lines of a round tower or large column.

At the feet of Jephtah's daughter is a grey stone vase with the menacing head of a devil or satyr.

Jephtah's daughter is dressed in white and blue, which are the Virgin Mary's colours. Jephtah is dressed in flaming red, colours always used for Jesus. Did Yahweh not in some way honour Mary but also sacrifice her?

Jephtah was a fierce warrior; therefore look at the golden hint of his terrible sword. Bourdon painted Roman imperial emblems in similar golden colours above Jephtah's head, and these almost form a saintly halo above his head.

The figure of Jephtah's daughter is central and vertical. The stone very down in the middle of the lower border below points upward, towards Jephtah's daughter. So there is a rising force to support the verticals. Bourdon enhanced this rising impression by painting a pyramid grey roof just above the central figures. These features add to the impression of spirituality, of elevation of the spiritual act of an offer to Yahweh.

The picture uses a theme from the Bible. But the theme of a father who sacrifices his daughter is a very old theme of Greek tragedy. We think of course of Iphigeneia, offered by her father before his departure for Troy. The theme is as well a Classicist theme as a religious one from the Old Testament.

The figure of the priest is on the right of Jephtah's daughter and set obliquely to the girl, drawing the sub-scene into loss of balance, skewed to the right. So Bourdon situated a man half hidden on the left, behind Jephtah's daughter, also painted in dark colours. This dark mass balances the lighter form of the priest.

The four weeping women on the left, above the knelt girl, form yet another triangle in the picture.

Sébastien Bourdon created a very strong spatial perspective in the architecture of the antique building, the Roman or Greek columns in the upper right corner. Every part of the canvas was thus used to contain some element of design that added to the meaning or the visual enhancement of the picture.

He wanted to keep emphasis on the verticality of Jephtah's daughter, so he drew the horizontal lines of a Roman arch in the upper left corner. Here also we find a bit of blue sky.

Sébastien Bourdon painted in 'Jephtah's Sacrifice' a rare masterpiece that stands at the top level of academic design. It would be very difficult for a twentieth century or contemporary painter, who now would have full knowledge of all the elements of visual design, to better the composition of Bourdon in lines, shapes, composition and

balance and counterweight of colours. Bourdon's painting stood already at the top of the learning curve even though it is a seventeenth century picture. The marvel of such a complex, sophisticated, geometric and logical design is that in a viewer unaware of the design, the picture can inspire immediate emotion. Who would not be touched by compassion for the resigned and determined innocent young girl, for the tortured father who tears his clothes in oriental show of passionate misery? Who would not be touched by the outcry of the weeping women? But this was all for the greater glory of Yahweh and the pleas and the sadness rise with the smoke of the altar. The glory of victory at war symbolised by the ancient Roman emblems of its legions in the upper right, mean only torment and despair for the women on the left.

Sébastien Bourdon's work thus plays on the viewer's feelings and on his mind. Very, very few painters reached this mastery of their medium.

*Other Paintings:*

**Jephtah's Daughter.** Giuseppe Bazzani. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Before 1769.

**Jephtah's Daughter.** Peter Candid (Peter de Wittre) (ca. 1548-1628). Alte Pinakothek – Munich.

### *The Judges Ibzan, Elon, Abdon; Manoah, father of Samson*

After Jephtah, Ibzan of Bethlehem was Judge in Israel for seven years. Elon of Zebulun followed him for ten years. After him, Abdon son of Hillel of Pirathon was Judge of Israel. He was Judge for eight years. But again the Israelites began doing what was wrong in Yahweh's eyes. Yahweh delivered the Israelites into the power of the Philistines for forty years.

### *The Annunciation to Manoah's Wife*

#### **The Annunciation to Manoah's Wife**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection - Madrid. Ca. 1555-1558.

There was a man called Manoah of Zorah of the tribe of Dan, married to a wife who was barren. She had borne no children. The angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman, told her to drink no wine anymore or to eat anything unclean. He told her she would conceive and give birth to a son who would be God's nazirite from his mother's womb to his dying day and this son would rescue Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Jacopo Robusti's 'The Annunciation to Manoah's Wife' was made around 1555 to 1558, many years before the work on his most grand work, the decoration for the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice, which started in 1564. Jacopo Tintoretto was born in Venice in 1518. He lived all his life in Venice and died there in 1594. He lived in a period of glory for Venetian art; he was younger than its greatest artist, Titian. He shared Venice with Titian (who died in 1576), with Paolo Veronese (born in 1528 and died 1588) and Jacopo Bassano (died 1592) and so many other fine painters of the town. He was a Mannerist painter who had learned the unbridled imagination of Michelangelo's presentations but he had a particular style that was powerful and original also, as it reflected his own passionate and obstinate character. Tintoretto was not a painter of small works. He painted large and firm and he preferred epic dimensions. He forced his views upon his audience instead of trying to please them. That audience however, controlled large parts of the Mediterranean and knew what power was about. So Tintoretto pleased the Venetians. The clergy of the lagoon town and the venerable Guardians of the Scuoli, the large and rich charity institutions of Venice, honoured him with their money for paintings because he was a man so much like them: a strong man reaching out on his own for new expression and new perspectives. Tintoretto applied his colours ardently and ruthlessly and he painted his figures in grand scenes of passion.

When Jacopo Robusti painted the 'Annunciation to Manoah's Wife' he was about forty years old and he had not yet delivered his most formidable work. He was still looking to gain not so much the admiration of Venice as her astonishment. His picture is one of two paintings, painted both to Old Testament themes. The other picture is the 'Meeting of Tamar and Judith' and both pictures are now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Madrid. The pictures have a very similar composition.

In the 'Annunciation' we see Manoah's Wife on the left, the angel on the right. The composition is in a traditional 'Open V' and in the open space between the two figures we remark a beautiful landscape, a sea with a port town. Tintoretto painted the angel and Manoah's wife to the sides, even showing them only partly. He did that to be able to show more of the landscape. Few painters would have dared to cut off parts of their main figures of a theme, but we may assume that the pieces of Tintoretto were aimed primarily as decoration for a hall of a Venetian palace so that the decorative view received most attention. Tintoretto was already a renowned artist who could afford to use such a representation without being scolded at by his commissioners. He was also a painter who knew that his viewers would have no effort in imagining the whole figures. He knew that the power of imagination needed only to be stimulated a little by hints of figures.

The view of the landscape of Tintoretto is grand indeed. Tintoretto painted a dark green tree on the left and an ochre hillside on the right, still topped with a tree. The landscape view opens between these two. Jacopo Tintoretto was mostly concentrated on the expression of his figures, so this painting of a landscape is remarkable in that it proved Tintoretto also to be a great landscape painter – if he only thought landscape to be important. He obtained an astonishing, epic view by having the sun throw straight, silvery lines over lake and town. The view is imaginary, and does not have much to do with a Bible story, but it is particularly striking. Tintoretto applied several different hues of colour in the sky that lies heavily, laden with dark clouds over the view. The horizon is low and if the sky were not imposingly enough, Tintoretto added dark, massive hills – probably as he knew from the Venetian Alps – to the really flat and small town. We think of Naples, oppressed by its Vulcan, or of so many other small Italian towns in bays of the Adriatic of the Mediterranean/ Look at the marvellous play of light of the sunrays on the sea and on the clouds. The sea glows silvery and the sky is tainted yellow-orange with a richness of hues that reminds of Titian. The works of man, its architecture, is large and grand when compared to man himself, but here the Roman columns of ancient temples remain very small in the grandeur of nature.

Tintoretto borrowed elements from his illustrious competitors. He painted animals in his picture. We see cows, deer and birds. Jacopo Bassano was famous for his pictures of scenes with many animals. Bassano's paintings were much admired in Venice. Tintoretto seemed to have told with this painting of the 'Annunciation' that he was Jacopo Robusti, but that he could also paint animal scenes if he only put his mind and considerable professional skills to it. He could be equal to Jacopo Bassano when it came to painting animals in landscapes.

But of course, Tintoretto was Tintoretto. So he stayed committed to force of colour – with which he could equal Titian – and to bring the expression of emotions spectacularly close to the viewer. The angel in his painting looks at the viewer and Manoah's wife bows ostentatiously with grace.

Have a look at the angel. In the Bible story, Manoah's wife does not recognise the angel as an instrument or as a realisation of God when he tells her she will bear a child that will have to remain a nazirite. Even Manoah does not recognise the angel at first. Tintoretto however painted a real angel, at least as we are now used to: a fine youngster with wings. You could find no finer picture of an angel than here in Tintoretto's picture. The angel wears a golden robe, golden wings and a green cloak. Tintoretto painted the angel in nice detail and in glorious, harmonious colours. The angel stands out in brightness against the dark background, but his figure is all sweetness, happiness. He is shown with a touch of determination on his face and also of surprised curiosity at the viewer. The angel seems to be a little in anger at the intrusion of the viewer. Tintoretto thus involves the viewer in his painting. That was also the directness of Titian's portraits.

Manoah's wife bows to the angel, receiving the annunciation of her pregnancy with Venetian grace. She is of course a Venetian noble lady, beautifully clad and with the opulent forms of happy wealth and ease of living. She wears a brick red robe in which Tintoretto has deployed all his skills of chiaroscuro to show the luxurious play of folds. She wears a dark shirt and has a yellow-golden cloak over her shoulders. The pictorial mass of the chest of the lady is smaller than the colour mass of her robe, but Tintoretto used the contrast between darker colours and brighter colours in the upper half to bring balance in the two areas. The bodice of the lady is very dark grey-blue, so she would not be very distinguishable from the dark background, but Tintoretto let the golden cloak fall low around her shoulders and body to make her figure very apparent against the background. All the colours are brilliant and vibrating in the lady, heavy and strong, with marked contrasts. That is a feature of all the colours of the picture. And Tintoretto knew of course in a masterly way to create volume by showing chiaroscuro in the faces of the lady, on her breasts and bare shoulders.

Tintoretto showed a scene of a Venetian court, not a scene from a small Canaanite Jewish village, where Manoah and his wife were nothing more than poor peasants. In the Scuola di San Rocco he would paint Biblical scenes very realistically, as they might indeed have looked like. Here he showed the wealth of Venice like Paolo Veronese would have done. So Tintoretto proved that he also could bring images like the young rising star Veronese.

Jacopo Tintoretto's painting 'The Annunciation to Manoah's Wife' is practically a programmed picture. This master delivered a picture to be liked by commissioners as a synthesis of Venetian art, a combination of style elements of Veronese, Titian and Bassano in the Tintoretto style. It is certainly also a special painting in content, as Tintoretto painted an annunciation not of the archangel to the Virgin Mary but to Manoah's wife. So a host showing the picture to his visitors could show his erudition by remarking that this was not the annunciation to the Virgin, but to Manoah's wife in another story of the Bible. The painting is a curiosity since the theme of the annunciation to Manoah's wife is not a theme that was often painted.

## *The Sacrifice of Manoah*

### **Manoah offers a Sacrifice to God**

Carle Van Loo (1705-1765). Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts – Paris. 1721.

The angel appeared a second time and also Manoah spoke to it this time. Manoah took a kid and offered a burnt offering to God. The angel of Yahweh ascended in the flames before the eyes of Manoah and his wife and they fell with their face to the ground.

The woman gave birth to a son and called him Samson. The boy grew up to a handsome and strong youth.

This was the story that Carle Van Loo painted in 'Manoah's Sacrifice'. Carlo Andrea Van Loo was born in 1705 in a family of painters, of which he represented the third generation and that would span five. His father was a famous painter as well but he died in 172, when Carle was only seven years old. Carle's brother Jean-Baptiste, then twenty-eight and already a known painter, took care of him and that meant recognising Carle's great and precocious talent and training the boy into becoming a great artist. Of all the Van Loo painters, who covered two hundred years, Carle Van Loo was the most gifted.

Carle Van Loo made the painting 'Manoah offers a Sacrifice to God' in 1721. He was only sixteen then and with this piece he tried for a first prize at the Parisian Academy of painting and Sculpture. The painting is still in the 'Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts' today and an oil picture on canvas from the same year 1721, most probably a study for his final work is in the Museum of the town of Tours in France. The painting we have chosen is probably the first finished and conserved major painting of Van Loo. It is marvellous what a child of sixteen could prodigiously present.

The subject of Manoah's sacrifice is not common in painting. It is also not a story that is well known from the bible, Manoah being only the father of Samson. How a sixteen-year old boy could come up with such a theme, whether he read the Bible so attentively as to be struck particularly by it, whether his brother advised him or maybe a priest, remains a mystery. Carle Van Loo came from a Dutch Protestant family but his father had left the Netherlands and had converted to Roman Catholicism in Lyon. Bible reading may have remained a custom in the Van Loo family so that Carle knew the smaller stories and themes of the Old Testament.

Manoah sacrifices an offering to Yahweh. An angel of God had visited himself and his wife before, but neither Manoah nor his wife had recognised an angel in the visitor. Now, in the smoke of the burnt offering to Yahweh, the angel of God shows and Manoah recognises the messenger as an emanation of god. Van Loo painted Manoah in front of the altar. The angel appears in the smoke.

Carle Van Loo's painting is eminently Baroque, even though that period was coming to an end. Carle showed Manoah with a theatrical gesture of surprise and that feeling



is shared by the friends and by the servants of Manoah's household. Van Loo used a composition along the two diagonals. Manoah, a knelt servant and the angle indicate the left diagonal. Van Loo stretched Manoah along that line. The right diagonal starts from the lower right at the women holding a baby, goes over Manoah's hands to the staff of the shepherds and to a tree in the upper left corner. At sixteen this boy had learnt about composition in paintings and used the lines of the frame to a design.

Carle Van Loo used mainly brown, yellow and ochre colours. A boy his age would have preferred more contrasting hues but Carle must already have had an acute sense of harmony in colours and known that blue had to be used sparingly. He did use blue, and the blue colour stands out in this picture, especially in the cloak of the mother on the right. This blue is too harsh. The other blues are more delicate however and better chosen, and Van Loo did enhance the right diagonal by applying some blue colour along this line: in the mother, in the maidservant beneath Manoah and in the sky in the upper left. The blue in the mother is too strong for the picture, but Carle Van Loo probably wanted a dark blue there to use deeper contrasts on the mother, more pronounced chiaroscuro in this part of the picture. He certainly brought light on this scene of the mother with child and also on the maidservant that is knelt in front of the altar, holding an incense burner, honoured with a patch of white. The baby of the mother is only clumsily drawn. Van Loo needed to learn still in anatomy of all ages. But he knew already how to paint in more intricate detail the parts of a picture that were closer to the viewer and to paint in more hazy lines and less pronounced hues the background scenes, like the shepherds in this picture.

There are nice touches in the painting. Manoah was Samson's father. Van Loo painted a mother with an infant baby in the right, referring to Samson and we cannot but reflect also on Jesus' birth with that scene and an announcement to Mary and Joseph.

'Manoah's Sacrifice' is not an ambitious painting, but the first work of a very young painter. It seems that the great painters were accomplished artists very soon and we see that also in many other painters. Genius and talent are in-born gifts that have to be present from the beginning, God-given, and that can only be perfected with time in the details. Carle Van Loo had that talent and genius, even if he is not enough appreciated today.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The Sacrifice of Manoah.** Solomon Koninck (1609-1656). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. c. 1650.

**The Sacrifice of Manoah.** Carle Van Loo (1705-1765). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Tours. 1721.

**Brazilian Landscape with Manoah's Sacrifice.** Frans Post (ca. 1612-1680). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

## *Samson*

Samson grew up with his father Manoah and his mother.

One day Samson went down to Timnah and saw a Philistine girl there. He wanted to marry the girl, but all the time also he sought a quarrel with the Philistines. Samson went down the vineyards at Timnah and as he came there a young lion advanced on him. The spirit of Yahweh was in Samson. Samson tore the lion to pieces with his bare hands. Samson then continued on to Timnah to look at the girl and he became fond of her. Somewhat later he went back to her. He found the carcass of the lion on his way and there was a swarm of bees in the lion's body, and honey. He gave some of the honey to his father and mother.

His father then went down to ask the girl to marry his son and Samson organised a feast, as is the custom for young men. The Philistines chose thirty companions to stay with him. Samson then gave a riddle to the Philistines and made a bet for thirty pieces of fine linen and thirty festal robes. The Philistines took up the bet. Samson said that the riddle was, 'Out of the eater came what is eaten, and out of the strong came what is sweet'. After three days the Philistines appealed to Samson's wife for the answer of the riddle. So Samson's wife wept on his neck for the seven days of the feasting and she was so persistent that Samson told her the answer. He finally inclined and gave her the story of the lion and the bees. The woman hurried to tell her countrymen. So the Philistines could give Samson the answer of the lion. Samson then retorted, 'If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would never have solved my riddle'. But Samson had lost the bet.

Samson went then to Ashkalon, killed thirty men there, took their robes and gave thirty festal robes to the Philistines who had answered the riddle. He returned to his father's house and he repudiated his Philistine wife. Her father gave her to the best man who had witnessed the marriage.

Not long after that Samson wanted to visit his wife again. But her father had given her away and Samson refused her younger sister. He was really mad at the Philistines then. He went off and caught three hundred foxes, took torches, bound the foxes tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. He lit the torches and let the foxes run free in the cornfields of the Philistines. The corn, vines and olive trees of the Philistines burned down. As revenge the Philistines burned down the house of Samson's former wife and of her father. This enraged Samson all the more so he continued to wreak havoc among the Philistines until he grew tired and went to live in a cave in the Rock of Etham.

The Philistines came to the tribe of Judah and threatened to destroy it. The men of Judah went to Samson. They did not kill him as the Philistines had asked, but bound his hands behind his back and brought him thus as a captive to the Philistines. When the Philistines came up running to Samson, Yahweh's spirit descended on him. Samson's rope broke suddenly? He took a jawbone and killed alone a thousand Philistines. Samson then threw the jawbone away, asked for a drink to Yahweh and Yahweh opened a hole in the ground from which gushed water. This is still today the spring of En-Ra-Kore at Lehi.

Samson was Judge of Israel for twenty years.

*Paintings:*

**Samson Victorious.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

## *Samson and Delilah*

### **Samson and Delilah**

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1589-1641). The Trustees of Dulwich Gallery – London. 1618-1620.

When Samson had been a Judge of Israel for twenty years, he fell in love with a woman of the Vale of Sorek called Delilah.

The Philistines came to see her. They asked her to find out where Samson's strength came from. In return for telling them they promised to pay her eleven hundred silver shekels. Delilah pestered on Samson day after day and kept nagging at him. Samson at first made a fool of her and always gave her another untrue story on his strength, which Delilah then tested out. But in the end he gave up and told Delilah that if his hair were shorn, he would lose his strength. He told her he was a nazirite and that a nazirite should not be shorn. Delilah knew that this was the true reason for Samson's strength then. She went to the Philistines and asked for the money. She lulled Samson to sleep, called a man and had him cut off Samson's seven locks of hair. Thus she broke the strength of Samson. The Philistines could now seize him, put out his eyes and take him to Gaza where they fettered him with a double chain of bronze.

Many paintings were made of this tragedy that spoke to the imagination of many bible readers and the theme was particularly popular in the baroque seventeenth century.

In Sir Anthony van Dyck's 'Samson and Delilah', we see Samson sleeping in Delilah's lap. A Philistine barber shears off Samson's nazirite hair. Delilah offers her lover's neck to the barber but she urges the man to be deft and silent. Delilah holds her left arm up in fright and caution, and raises of finger to silence the barber. On the left, Philistine soldiers hide behind a column, still afraid of Samson's strength, but soon preparing to bind him and take him away as their prisoner. On the right side of the canvas, two women – one elder, a procuress, and one younger – watch over Delilah's shoulder. The younger one is in awe and surprise. She is all nervous tension. The older woman however is mainly curious, but determined. She eagerly watches every slight movement of the barber, as if guiding his hand. This is the old schemer that may have convinced Delilah to take the money. Now she makes sure the work is well done. Van Dyck situated the scene in an open loggia, so a patch of the blue sky appears in the upper part of the picture. Delilah lies on a couch and we see a heavy, rich brocaded gold and black bedspread down beneath.

Sir Anthony van Dyck used an example of Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), namely a 'Samson and Delilah' painted by his master around 1609. Van Dyck would often, also in his later periods, use examples of other great painters such as Rubens or titian, as compositions for his pictures. Many times then he would invert the scene. In Ruben's picture Delilah lies on the left; van Dyck situated her to the right. Rubens also let Samson sleep in Delilah's lap. We can excuse van Dyck having used Rubens'

illustrious example, as the artist was only nineteen to twenty years old when he made this painting. At that time also he was still an assistant to Rubens.

Anthony van Dyck was born in 1599, more than four hundred years ago and about three thousand years after Samson's being a Judge. Van Dyck's father was a cloth and silk merchant of Antwerp but his paternal grandfather had been an artist and in his mother's family also there had been artists. The boy had talents as a painter, so he was given in apprenticeship to Hendrik Van Balen, a quite successful artist of Antwerp. Anthony entered Van Balen's workshop at ten years old, in 1609. Antwerp was still a rich town then, although it had run into economic difficulties. In 1609 a truce was settled between the Netherlands and Spain after forty years of war. The Netherlands had become a Protestant republic and the Southern Netherlands, and the province of Brabant with Antwerp remained under Spanish governance and was thus Roman Catholic even though Protestantism had thrived also there. The Dutch closed the River Schelde on which Antwerp laid so that the city's trade declined, as heavy custom duties were levied by the Dutch, whereas Amsterdam, to which most of Antwerp's Protestants had fled, thrived. The daughter of the Spanish King Philip II, called Isabella, and her husband Albert of Austria, ruled Flanders and Brabant.

Albert and Isabella ruled wisely and compassionately over a truce that really only lasted twelve years, but these were crucial years for Anthony van Dyck. Many of the decorations of Antwerp's churches had been destroyed during a Protestant iconoclasm, so there was much work for painters in the town. In 1608 the prince among the Flemish painters, Pieter Paul Rubens, had returned to Antwerp from a prolonged travel in Italy and Rubens' paintings were well known to Anthony van Dyck, as around 1618-1620 he was working in Rubens' workshop as an assistant to the great master.

Van Dyck had already started working on his own around 1615 or 1616 and had set up a workshop of his own with his friend Jan Breughel the Younger. In 1618 Van Dyck joined the Antwerp Guild of Painters as an independent master. In 1620-1621 he would travel to London and work for King James there. Apparently his fame had by then grown enough. Van Dyck soon returned from London however, but stayed there only for another eight months before leaving for Italy where he remained six years. Between 1627 and 1632 he was in Antwerp again. Then he left definitely for England and worked there. He was knighted at the court of London and was now called Sir. He died in London in 1640.

In 'Samson and Delilah' van Dyck used dark colours on the left side. Here the soldiers stand in black armour behind a dark grey column. The barber also is a dark grey to black mass that menaces Samson like a horrible ghost. Samson is half naked, only covered by a dark brown animal's skin. From there on however, the tone of the colours change. Some light falls on Samson's powerful back, but his skin – though of a somewhat lighter brown – is still dark. His head is crowned by his heavy black hair, whereas his beard is long, heavy and black also. All the light is concentrated on Delilah, to enhance her sensual fairness and nudity. She wears a marvellous long, silvery robe. This light grey-blue colour is only half a hue; there is no warmth of orange or red colours on Delilah and silver is the colour of the inconstant moon. On the robe van Dyck could demonstrate his professional talent. The play of light on the folds in chiaroscuro is magnificently rendered. Our eyes wander from Samson over

the silver robe to the naked breasts of Delilah. Here lies a woman with full, voluptuous and alluring forms. Delilah seems not to care for her nudity, even in the presence of the barber and the soldiers. In Delilah is all the interest for such a scene to Baroque painters.

‘Samson and Delilah’ is a scene of violence and of erotic sensuality. Samson was one of the strongest men of the bible and a stern Judge of Israel, a man dedicated to God the sign of which was that he never shaved. Delilah is the most typical object of lust. The combination of these two in one scene amounted to a theme of tension between the masculine power of Samson and the feminine power of luxury and the senses impersonified in Delilah. Thus the story was a very moral one and at the same time the painters could delight in a depiction of power and of female attraction. The painting of van Dyck was eminently Baroque.

The Baroque style is in the very expressive faces of Delilah and of the women behind her. Van Dyck succeeded in showing the dark determination of the barber and the fear and tension in the prudent soldiers that have felt Samson’s power before. As most in Baroque, all the lines of the picture are curved and flowing, even in the main figures. Van Dyck eased some of the tension also by painting the scene in an open loggia instead of in a closed space where the apprehension would be too strong and it is difficult to see the alluring Delilah as a scrupulous schemer. Here she is just a lover; the schemer is the old woman behind her and in her gesture of silence we feel some regret. Van Dyck represented Delilah as he had seen Rubens do so. She is a wealthy Antwerp courtesan, wealthy in forms as in dress. She is an opulent blonde, going on weight, as Rubens liked to paint his women and she wears her blond hair like a golden crown. On her head is a jewel of pearls, always a symbol of seduction. Van Dyck would later paint much more sophisticated ladies of high standing.

There is something naïve and inexperienced in the way van Dyck depicted Delilah. ‘Samson and Delilah’ was an early work of Anthony van Dyck. That shows in the figure of Delilah. Some comparison can be made between the early work ‘Jephtah’s Sacrifice’ by the young Carle Van Loo and ‘Samson and Delilah’ of van Dyck. Both painters favoured an oblique composition following the left diagonal, going from the lower left to the upper right. This is a more natural movement for the hand, which comes easier to younger painters. Both painters showed emotions in a rather theatrical way. Van Loo could not paint baby children well so that the anatomy of the baby in the right part of the painting looks clumsy. Van Dyck painted a Delilah that is a delicious blonde from the country, but he missed some of the power of cunning in Delilah. The two painters showed however a complete mastery of drawing and of painting at a very young age.

The story of ‘Samson and Delilah’ had a very moral meaning in it, sine it showed a hero trapped by lust. So above Samson’s head, contrasting against the blue sky that brought some innocence and freedom in the scene, stands a golden vase with on its handle the figure of an aroused satyr.

*Other Paintings:*

**Samson and Delilah.** Andreas Cornelis Lens (1739-1822). The Museum of Ancient Art – Brussels.

**Samson and Delilah.** Jan Steen (1625/1626-1679). Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln. Around 1665-1670.

**Samson and Delilah.** Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna. 1630.

**Samson and Delilah.** Pieter Paul Rubens. The National Gallery – London. 1609.

**Samson and Delilah.** Sir Anthony van Dyck (1589-1641). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1628-1630.

**Samson and Delilah.** Giuseppe Nuvolone (1619-1703). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen.

**Samson and Delilah.** Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. Ca. 1700.

**Samson and Delilah.** Michele Rocca (1670/1675-after 1751). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.

**Samson and Delilah.** Matthias Stom (ca. 1600-after 1650). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome.

**Samson betrayed by Delilah.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz – Berlin. Ca. 1630.

**Samson and Delilah.** Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1655-1657. 1639.

**Samson and Delilah.** Jan Lievens (1607-1674). Rijksmuseum. Amsterdam. Ca. 1628-1629.

**Samson in Prison.** Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. 1590-1595.

**Samson and Delilah.** Domenico Fiasella (1589-1669). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1622.

**Samson and Delilah.** Bartolomeo Guidobono (1654-1709). Collezioni Zerbone. Genoa. Ca. 1690.

## *The Blinding of Samson*

### **The Blinding of Samson**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1668). Städelsches Kunstinstitut – Frankfurt am Main. 1636.

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn painted the 'Blinding of Samson' in 1636. That was the year of happiness for the artist as he would rarely see later. A year and a half earlier, in 1634, he had married. True, his first son had died a few months after birth, but there was hope for other children. Rembrandt had started to deal in art, he had no money problems, and he had begun to gather a collection of all kinds of exotic objects. He had moved to another house in Amsterdam in 1635, he adored his wife and life seemed bright. Much of that joy can be seen in his painting of Samson, even though the scene is horrible and gruesome of course. For one thing, it is one of the extremely few pictures in which Rembrandt used green and blue colours, and his yellow-golden hue on Samson is simply marvellous. It is also one of the paintings that is most Caravaggist. The painting is powerful, and Rembrandt who was thirty years old then, was in full confidence of his skills which were already fully acknowledged in Amsterdam.

We see Samson lying down on the floor of a room but we only see a kind of cavern lighted from the outside. Samson lies in the bright light. He wears a yellow robe and that robe glows golden in the incoming sun. He struggles, throws his feet in the air, but a man lies under him and pins him down, while heavily armoured Philistines enchain his arms. A soldier horribly pushes his dagger into his eye and so blinds him, while another stands near and points his oriental spear to his hearth. Blood rushes out of Samson's eyes and we can hear the screaming of the tortured and contorted judge of Israel. Samson has no power anymore and Rembrandt also showed why, because on the right side of the cave Delilah flees to the light, trusting Samson's hair before her and still holding the shears with which she cut off his nazirite power.

Rembrandt painted the most dramatic, tragic moment of the bible story and he did that with an unequalled power. Few artists could have imagined Samson on the ground, with his head to the viewer. Rembrandt showed the act of torture very close to the viewer and this moment could not be painted in a more pointed, direct and ghastly manner. Rembrandt had read the Bible story and retained the horror of the pains of Samson and he had wanted to paint exactly that. He succeeded in creating one of the most immediate, powerful scenes of religious painting.

The structure of the painting is in the way of a V. Look at the white glimmering of the light on the right armoured soldiers. The white shining forms the right side of the V. To the left stands an oriental soldier with a lance and the outline of this figure is the left side of the V. Inside the V is full bright light from the entering strong sunlight of Palestine. We may even see here the blue water of a lake and here also Delilah flees,



dressed in a splendid green robe. The 'Open V' structure is a very traditional compositional structure for pictures, and Rembrandt also found it efficient for his scene since he could concentrate the light here on Samson. We could also distinguish a direction following the right diagonal, from the soldier that is blinding Samson to Delilah. Thus the two main actors of the crime are strongly linked in the picture.

Most remarkable and so wonderful in 'The Blinding of Samson' is Rembrandt's use of colours. In almost no other painting did he use such wonderfully different and pure hues. Samson is in bright golden colours. The soldier on the left is painted in red hues. Delilah wears a bright, white short and a green robe. And on the ground under the soldier with the lance lies a blue cloth, whereas also some blue can be seen in the full light of the entrance. Rembrandt then also showed his wonderful skills in contrasts of light and dark in the left triangle of his composition, where we discover the armoured soldiers. The play of the light on their armour is brilliantly rendered. Rembrandt really sought colour in this painting, because he did not dress the soldier on the left in armour but instead showed him dressed like an oriental, Arab man, with a curved sword and dressed in wide red trousers. Rembrandt thus could paint his marvellous red here, as he would almost never again do. Look also at Delilah's flimsy, transparent cloak that lies golden over her shoulders. Look at her golden thin hair string and at her face that Rembrandt painted in exquisite chiaroscuro. Delilah flees, but she has a satisfied and mean expression on her face.

'The blinding of Samson' is a truly wonderful picture of Rembrandt. It has strong structure, magnificent colours that surprise us for that artist, and it shows strong depiction of the very heat of the action, however horrendous. Pictures like this are rare. They are among the very best, the very greatest art of the seventeenth century. The picture has no direct reminiscence to Rembrandt's own life. It dates from a period in which the painter certainly could still keep a distance between his own feelings and his art. So it may lack some of the personal tragic of the man that made it. But it remains a superb display of professional skills by a painter that entirely mastered the subject.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The Blinding of Samson.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. 1609/1610.

**The Blinded Samson.** Lovis Corinth (1858-1925). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1912.

## *The Revenge of Samson*

### **The Revenge of Samson**

Johann Georg Platzer (1704-1761). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. Ca. 1740.

Samson had to turn the mill in the prison. But slowly his hair began to grow again.

The Philistines assembled for a great sacrifice to Dagon their God and for a feast on their victory over Samson. They even summoned Samson out of prison to perform feats for them at the celebration. During the feast Samson came to stand between the pillars supporting the building. The building was crowded with Philistines. Samson called out to Yahweh. He took hold one the two central pillars, braced himself with one arm around the right pillar, and with the other arm around the left pillar. He then heaved with all his might, shouting he wanted to die with the Philistines. The pillars moved and the whole building collapsed on the Philistine chieftains and on the three thousand men and women who had participated at the feast. All were killed.

Johann Georg Platzer took up the theme of Samson's revenge in the eighteenth century. He was born in the Southern Tyrol region and he learned to paint with his stepfather Joseph Anton Kessler at Innsbruck, then with his uncle Christoph Platzer at Passau. He came to Vienna, the capital of Austria, around 1721 and he painted pictures there for the rich middle class families of the town. He met the Austrian painter Franz Christoph Janneck there and became friends with him. The work of both these painters has similarities, but Platzer was more flamboyant even in his Baroque representations of scenes with very many figures than Janneck. Platzer's fame for gallant mythological, historical and genre pieces grew so much that he delivered from out of Vienna works for the rich and noble from London to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In a later age, after a stroke, Platzer retired to his home village again, to Sankt Michael im Eppan, where he changed his style to rougher brushstrokes.

Platzer's 'Samson's Revenge' is a spectacular picture for which the artist worked in oil on a copper plate. His painting is one of the largest coppers ever made; its dimensions are 76 by 95 cm. Copper is a superb medium for paint. It allows splendid detail and brilliant colours. German copper painters, starting with Adam Elsheimer, offered a wealth of very small details and of very many figures, and Platzer's picture is no exception to the tradition.

We see an incredible chaos of figures and objects in Johann Georg Platzer's painting. The falling balcony that seems to hang, suspended in the air, grips the viewer's attention immediately. Various figures also fall in all directions. Under the balcony we discover a bald Samson, embracing two columns more than tearing at them. The columns come away and all lines around Samson thus are oblique, everything is falling around him. The columns do not seem heavy and strong. Samson pushes them out and they give in easily so that they look like carton replicas in a cheap movie. The lines of the columns are in all directions as they come apart at Samson's hands. Platzer used skilfully a design of lines in all directions; all lines being skewed. The

world is being destroyed and in all places the architecture breaks down, drawing people in the destruction. At the top of the painting people are screaming out, throwing their hands in the air in signs of panic, disarray and fear. But the powerful balcony descends. Here Delilah falls, naked under a bright blue gown and surrounded by powerful Philistine soldiers. The figures seem to hang in the air, as if movement was frozen by surprise at the first moments of the drama. The figures fly in the air like angels or putti in Rococo pictures. But we know they are real people of a Bible tragedy, falling to their deaths. The exaggeration, also in the chaos of people and objects beneath, is much a terrible scene. And yet, we see this picture also as decoration, the decorative aspects were its intention.

Notwithstanding the apparent chaos, Platzer used a strong composition in this painting, though one we are not so accustomed to. He placed dark scenes along the sides and his setting is as if in a theatre, so that the scene opens in the middle like an 'open V' structure. The real composition however, the real V structure is in the falling balcony. This scene is also in the form of a triangle, of an 'open V', but the V does here not open to a wide landscape, but it contains the very crux of the drama. The V is filled with the balcony and the falling people. This kind of composition, which looks also like the traditional pyramid inverted, is quite unusual. The balcony and falling people form a heavy triangle shape of intertwined forms and lines. These enhance the effect of weight that comes down on Samson, top down. A pyramid on its top is always an image of a very unstable construction since such a shape cannot stand – it will always fall. Platzer used this very cleverly to increase in the viewer the impression of the falling. The structure was ideal for such a scene.

Pictures like 'Samson's Revenge' are a delight as curiosi images. They are scenes with spectacular dramatic views that can impress any viewer immediately. They contain so many details that viewers can stand a long time before them, to discover all the elements. And it takes some time to discover Delilah falling, to see another Delilah down on the right, to discover the strong muscled Philistines, to admire all the golden vases lying on the ground. Johann Georg Platzer made pictures like these for sheer delight and the medium of copper allowed him to work with very fine colour touches. Platzer's imagination was totally unbridled in 'Samson's Revenge' and he knew perfectly how to catch a world of figures in different, spectacular action and passion. Platzer's painting is the circus of Baroque leaning to the decorative outbursts of Rococo style. The artist used dramatic action almost as a gentle genre scene with people falling to their death painted as if they were flying in the air. A viewer will find in the picture half naked men and women, soldiers, grotesque architecture, golden vases and brocaded cloths. Platzer made of 'Samson's Revenge' a spectacular capriccio for the eyes.

Samson's brothers and his father's family came down and carried his body away. They buried him in the tomb of Manoah, his father. Samson had been a Judge of Israel for twenty years.

*Other Paintings:*

**The Story of Samson**

Jörg Breu der Ältere (ca. 1480-1537. Kunstmuseum. Basel.

### *The Virgins of Shiloh*

The Book of Judges terminates with several short stories. A crime was committed in Gibeah, a Benjaminite town. A man there had to offer his concubine to a group of bandits who raped the woman. He then cut his concubine in twelve pieces and sent the pieces throughout the territory of Israel. The tribes of Israel wanted to punish this crime, but the tribe of Benjamin did not agree. So a breach started to grow among the tribes of Israel. There was a great battle between the Israelites and the Benjaminites before Gibeah and with Yahweh's help the Benjaminites were defeated. The town of Gibeah was burned down. The men of Israel swore an oath then never to give any daughter of theirs to marriage to a Benjaminite. The people built an altar at Mizpah and swore a new oath that anyone who did not come to Yahweh and to the assembly of the tribes to offer would certainly die.

After a while the Israelites felt sorry for their deed to banish the tribe of Benjamin. Israel was thus amputated of a tribe. So the Israelites thought of how to give wives again to the tribe of Benjamin. But they had sworn not to give them any daughters of their own. It was discovered however that no one from the tribe of Jabesh in Gilead had come to the assembly of the great offering to Yahweh at Mizpah. The Israelites attacked Jabesh, took the virgins and brought them to their camp to Shiloh in Canaan. These were given to the Benjaminites.

In another version of this story however, also told in the Book of Judges, slightly different events happened to the virgins of Shiloh. In this version the Israelites were indeed sorry for the Benjaminites. So they brought the men of Benjamin to Shiloh, where there was a feast to Yahweh every year. They told the Benjaminites to hide in ambush in the vineyards and to fall upon the girls of Shiloh who came out to dance. Each of the Benjaminites thus seized a wife from the girls of Shiloh. The Benjaminites caught as many wives as there were men, set off to their heritage and rebuilt their towns.

The last lines of the Book of Judges are sad. They say that, 'In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did as he saw fit'. The Israelites longed for a king and the next books of the Bible tell how indeed kings came to be chosen for Israel.

### *Part III. The Book of Ruth*

A man from Bethlehem called Elimelech took his wife Naomi and his two sons to live in the plains of Moab because there was a famine in the country of Israel. The family lived there for ten years and Elimelech's sons married to Moabite women, one of whom was called Ruth. Elimelech and his sons died but Naomi decided to return when the famine was over. Ruth though a Moabitess did not want to leave Naomi so the two women arrived in Bethlehem.

Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side that was very well off. His name was Boaz. Ruth asked to Naomi to be allowed to glean in the fields of Boaz. Boaz saw her in the field but he was nice to her. He ordered his workmen to leave her alone. He gave her bread and told his men even to pull a few ears corn and to drop them for Ruth to glean. So Ruth could stay among Boaz' working women and she gleaned for Naomi and herself.

Naomi remarked Boaz' kindness. She told Ruth to wash and to perfume herself, to put on her cloak and to go to the threshing floor. She told Ruth not to let Boaz recognise her but to find out where he laid himself to sleep, then to go and turn back. Naomi told Ruth to take the covering away from Boaz' feet and to lie down there herself too. Ruth did that. Boaz woke up in the middle of the night and he remarked Ruth at his feet. She told Boaz he had a right of redemption over her and could spread the skirt of his cloak over her. But Boaz let her sleep then and in the morning gave her six measures of barley. With these Ruth returned to Naomi and waited to see what Boaz would do next.

Boaz had not really a right of redemption over Ruth. Naomi had a closer kinsman than Boaz. Boaz went to speak to this man and told him of his right of redemption since Naomi wanted to sell Elimelech's land. If the man redeemed his right, the man would be able to acquire the field from Naomi but then he also had to acquire Ruth. On that the man answered he did not want Ruth because he did not want to jeopardise his own inheritance. Therefore the man gave the right of redemption to Boaz. As a sign the man took off his sandal and gave that to Boaz, as was the custom on such transactions.

In that way Boaz inherited everything that used to belong to Elimelech. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. They came together and thus Ruth conceived of a son. That son was called Obed and he was the father of Jesse, the father of David who would be the greatest king of Israel.

*Boaz, Ruth and Naomi***Boaz, Ruth and Naomi**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca.1641/1642.

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) was a contemporary painter to Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Rubens and van Dyck died shortly the one after the other so that Antwerp came to Jordaens only. Of course, van Dyck had been in England, away from Antwerp since 1632 and had worked in London. Jordaens was quite the equal artist to Rubens and van Dyck, but he did not paint to the refinement in content and in representation that characterised Rubens and even more so van Dyck. If Rubens and van Dyck were princes, Jordaens was the jester. That does not mean that he was less intelligent however, and certainly also not that he lacked the professional skills of the two former great masters.

Jordaens' pictures were coarser. They depicted scenes of a wilder, uninhibited, unruly imagination. Jordaens' scenes are sometimes vulgar and they were often genre scenes like his colleagues of the Northern Netherlands preferred, but presented in all the boisterous show of Brabant love for life as it is. Dutch painters might have sophisticated a pub scene so that the message was barely perceivable; with Jordaens it was all too apparent what happened in the painting. Thus, Jordaens blended the impetuous Baroque representation of Rubens with the realistic, genre spirit of Holland; he showed Dutch scenes in the style of Antwerp. Jordaens was not as refined as Rubens or van Dyck, but he was a formidable painter and if he wanted he could be as sophisticated as these two. His scope of subjects and of representation was wider and his skill not less. He was a very professional artist who delivered pictures that were to the tastes of the Antwerp richer merchants.

Antwerp was then still one of the major ports of Western Europe, even if the Ditch had closed the River Schelde and levied taxes on all ships that came over the river from the sea to the port. Amsterdam was newly flourishing, but Antwerp still possessed the combination of merchant skill, of knowledge, and old money that was needed to make trade a success. The port lay more south than Amsterdam and somewhat closer to France and Germany. Jacob Jordaens painted for Antwerp's merchants and for the country nobles of the Brabant hinterland, as well as for the other Brabant cities, among them Brussels.

The two pictures 'Boaz' and 'Ruth and Naomi' were probably designed to decorate Jordaens' house in Antwerp.<sup>S1</sup> The two paintings are short in horizontal dimension but long vertically so that they could have been designed to be hung between two high windows. Jordaens made them when he was about fifty years old, when he was at the height of his art and when he might have felt old age encroaching upon him. Some identification with the older Boaz, or a kind of curiosity for old age, and a desire to believe that old men could still charm young women might have made the subject quite agreeable to Jordaens. We sense admiration in Jordaens for Boaz, curiosity for a

man that attracted the young Ruth and a touch of admiration and of longing for the example of Boaz.

The figure of Boaz is magnificent. We see an old man, still powerful. The viewer's attention is drawn to the face of Boaz, to the piercing and vivid eyes that scrutinise and command, set in an otherwise impassive and cool face. The folds of old age surround the eyes and the brows are held in concern, work and reflection of years. This man is a thinker. The face shows no feelings. Boaz has stayed up late for many years to think of all things that had to be done and that were needed to make a household not only survive but also thrive. But he confided in nobody. This is a man that has grown his house to become an estate. That man commands many servants but his people are taken care of. Therefore the face of Boaz contains the folds of worries, of years of fighting against fate. The face does not show the victories or the defeats. Boaz' beard is long; his lips are sunk beneath his hair face and hides his sensuality. Boaz has a face of dignity and of robustness. His long beard is the sign of respect for Yahweh, as the zealous of Israel did not shave. Moreover, the man stands like a rock. He is tall and straight. He wears a gown of an undistinguishable reddish colour that blends well with his environment in the sun of Bethlehem. But Boaz also wears a golden brocaded cloak over his robe, long brown trousers and a yellow-golden turban crowns his head so that he seems even more imposing. The golden cloak marks his wealth and force. It hangs nonchalantly but in such a way that no one can make a mistake: Boaz is a man of substance. The golden cloak also says that though a man that looks closely at his money, he may be a sensual man who likes beauty.

Boaz shows a shoe and holds that high. This is a sign of his property. Boaz bought the land of Naomi's husband from her next-of-kin. With the land came Naomi and of course Ruth. The sandal is the sign of Boaz's right of redemption over Ruth. The old Boaz has just acquired more than property. Boaz is a hard man but also not an unkind man. He has bought Ruth because he desires her, but she offered herself to him first. Boaz' portrait is a full scene, static and strict. But Boaz shows the sandal and by that element the portrait becomes a story that opens the imagination of the viewer to the whole scene. Here is action. Jordaens could not refrain from telling a story. He liked that. Ruth also shows to Naomi the barley that Boaz has given her after she had slept at his feet. So both portraits are also small, delicately told stories.

Besides Boaz we see his real weakness, Ruth. Ruth is the voluptuous but virtuous Moabite, a girl more desirable than beautiful, a virtuous girl but one who will not refuse desire and sex. She wears a thick robe of a silvery white and a blue cloak. The silver is the colour of inconstancy, and Ruth is still young enough and feminine enough to be as inconstant as the moon. Anthony van Dyck used such a colour on his 'Delilah'. The blue is the colour of innocence and virtue, usually the colour of the Virgin Mary. There is some link to the story of Joseph and Mary, as Mary also married a man much older than she. Ruth shows most of her bare breasts, but just prudently enough so that her nipples do not show. She is full-formed, hospitable, open-breasted, but her eyes and face are not alluring and she looks downwards in shyness and humility.

However hard and law-abiding Boaz might be, however old, however a provider of protection for his household, however responsible, he will desire Ruth and that will be



allowed. Boaz needed urging to bring him to Ruth, and the right circumstances for him to believe in it being still appropriate for him to take a beautiful, young bride.

Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, provided the appropriateness. Naomi will drive Ruth to Boaz. Her face is as hard, old, wrinkled, showing the results of days of despair and deprivation. Naomi's face is also the face of someone who provides for her kin, but she might use any ruse and means of an old schemer. She is poor, so she has it harder than Boaz to reach her aims and so she will have less scruples and no law will stop her ambition, which here was a matter of life or death.

The two paintings of Jacob Jordaens are marvels of observation, though the artist created figures from memory. The faces of Boaz, Ruth and Naomi express exactly what the Bible personages were. They are marvellous in depiction and in understanding if the characters of the Bible. This was one of Jacob Jordaens' great strengths in painting. Contrary to many of his other pictures, Jordaens showed very little decoration behind his figures. The representation of the figures is simple and direct but therefore monumental and gripping, masterpieces of efficiency with frugal means. These portraits are wonders of communication and painterly expression. But remark the fine chiaroscuro in Boaz' golden cloak: Jordaens could do much more besides his skills as a portrait painter.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**Landscape with Ruth and Boaz.** Marco Ricci (1676-1730). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. c.1715.

**The Story of Ruth.** Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842-1942). The Tate Gallery – London. 1876/1877.

**The Summer; or Ruth and Boaz.** Nicolas Poussin. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1660-1664.

**Ruth and Boaz.** Nicolas Moeyaert (1591-1655). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1625-1630.

**Ruth and Naomi.** Emile Lévy (1826-1890). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen.

**Ruth.** Francesco Hayez (1791-1882). Collezioni Comunale d'Arte. Bologna.

## *Part IV. The Book of Samuel*

### *The first Book of Samuel*

Elkenah, or Eli, an Ephraimite, had two wives of which one was called Hannah. Hannah was barren. She prayed in despair to Yahweh and, should she conceive of a boy, offered to give her boy to Yahweh for the whole of his life and never to let a razor touch his head. Eli lay with his wife Hannah the next day. She conceived and in due course gave birth to a son, whom she called Samuel. Samuel was thus a nazirite, for Hannah kept her promise to Yahweh. When she had weaned the boy, she took a three-year-old bull, a measure of flour and a skin of wine and offered these to Yahweh in the temple at Shiloh. She thus handed Samuel over to Yahweh and both Hannah and Eli worshipped Yahweh there.

These were rough times for the Israelites. It was rare for Yahweh to speak and visions were uncommon. Eli's sons were scoundrels and mocked Yahweh. All, except Samuel did this.

One night Yahweh called out three times for Samuel. Samuel did not yet understand, young as he was, who called him. But Eli did and Yahweh spoke. He said that Eli's family had been cursing God so now he would condemn the family and do something that would make the ears of all that could hear ring.

Samuel grew up and though he never spoke of his vision, all of Israel knew he was a prophet of Yahweh.

There was a battle against the Philistines near Ebenezer and Israel was once more defeated. The elders of Israel then sent for the Ark and the two sons of Eli, Hophiri and Phinehas arrived with it in the camp. The Philistines were afraid then of the Ark, but all the same defeated the Israelites. They killed Eli's sons and captured the Ark. Messengers came to tell this to Eli. At that terrible news he fell backwards off his seat, broke his neck and died. Thus the prophecy of Yahweh came true. Eli had been Judge of Israel for forty years.

The Ark of Yahweh was in Philistine hands for seven months. It wreaked such havoc in the Philistine temples and towns where it was kept successively, that in the end the Philistines returned the Ark. The Philistines put the Ark on a cart and led the cart to wander on its own. The bulls led the cart to Beth-Shemesh. Later from there, the men of Kiriath-Jearim took the Ark to them.

After these events a long time passed and the Israelites again longed for Yahweh. Now, Samuel stood up and spoke to the whole house of Israel. The Israelites mustered at Mizpah and when the Philistines heard of this, they gathered an army and marched against Mizpah. But during the ensuing battle, while Samuel presented burnt offerings to Yahweh, Yahweh thundered over the Philistines and they were defeated. The Philistines were humbled then and one town after the other returned to Israel.

When Samuel was old, he appointed his sons Joel and Abiah as Judges. His sons did not follow Samuel's example. They took bribes and gave biased verdicts. The elders of Israel assembled and went back to Samuel at Ramah. They told Samuel they wanted him to give them a king to judge, as all the other nations had. Samuel consulted Yahweh and Yahweh agreed to the voice of the people. He told Samuel however to give to Israel a solemn warning to do as the king ordered. Samuel pleaded with the people and he told them all the disadvantages of kingdom, all the bad things a despot could do to them. But the people would not listen. So Yahweh again told Samuel, 'Do as they ask and give them a king'.

**The Plague of Ashdod**

Nicolas Poussin (1594 -1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1630.

Eli was Judge and High Priest of Israel while Samuel grew up. Eli's sons were wicked and did not respect God. So God condemned Eli's family. In that time, the Philistines mustered to make war on Israel. The Philistines fought fiercely and they defeated Israel. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinelas, died. Also, the Ark of Israel's God was captured. The Philistines took the Ark from Ebenezer to Ashdod. They put the Ark in the temple of their own god, Dagon.

Each morning the statue of Dagon lay face down on the ground before Yahweh's Ark until even Dagon's head and hands were severed. Yahweh brought ravage to Ashdod and he afflicted its people with tumours. When the people were thus oppressed, they went to speak to the Philistine generals and demanded that the Ark be taken away to Gath. But the same afflictions happened at Gath, so the Ark was taken to Ekron. The Ekronites were afraid of the power of Yahweh's Ark. In Ekron too, the people died or were afflicted with tumours. The Ark of Yahweh stayed with the Philistines for seven months. Then the Philistines could hold on no longer. They took two milk cows and harnessed them to a cart on which they placed the Ark. They made golden replica of their tumours and of the rats that had ravaged their country and placed them in a box, as a gift to Yahweh. Of the golden tumours there was one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, for Ashkelon, for Gath and one for Ekron. The cows went to Beth-Shemesh, to the field of Joshua. The Levites then gave burnt offerings to Yahweh. The men of Beth-Shemesh took the Ark to Kiriath-Jearim, where the Jews consecrated Eleazar to guard the Ark. Twenty years later only, Samuel started to speak out and he banished all the foreign gods, the Baals and Astartes. The Israelites mustered, fought the Philistines and defeated them at Mizpah.

Nicolas Poussin made a painting of the plague of Ashdod. Poussin was born in 1594, in a small village of the Seine River in Normandy. Around 1612 he left his village, deciding to learn to paint. He studied with minor painters in Rouen and Paris. He learned to admire Raphael's pictures and yearned to go to Rome. With the help of Giambattista Marino, an Italian poet at the court of Queen Maria de Medici, he succeeded in going there. He became gradually known in Rome, having maecenasses like Cassiano del Pozzo, the secretary to Cardinal Barberini. He took on themes of classic mythology, but painted these still in the exuberant Baroque style that was so prized in Rome. He admired the darker tones and full colours of the Venetian painters, and especially the way Titian painted. In the mid 1630's his style changed to more serene, solemn, clear, Classicist depictions. Since Poussin gained fame in Rome, Cardinal Richelieu tried to bring Poussin back to the court of the King of France. In 1640 Poussin did return to France, but he could not thrive in the intrigues of the Parisian court and he could not repeat the successes he had obtained easily in Rome. So after a year and a half he left Paris again for Rome. Poussin continued to work in Rome and he died there in 1665.

The 'Plague of Ashdod' is still one of the very baroque pictures of Poussin, in which many figures are engaged in feverish activity around the Ark. Very many figures were

drawn in all attitudes and gestures, showing the horrors of a city afflicted by the plague.

The mood of the picture is Venetian. Poussin painted in colours that have the same tone and intensity, though they show different hues. The brown, orange, and broken white colours dominate, not unlike in some paintings of Tintoretto and Titian. The only outstanding colour is the blue of the sky but here also many hues support the general shades. Overall, the impression is as if the sun has dimmed its light and the gloom of oppression colours the city brown-red. The haze of the plague is also in the air and in the light. The mood is thus dirty, dark, filled with the sand of the desert.

We see a splendid and rich city, with large and huge, colonnaded buildings and temples. Dagon's temple stands to the left, but on the right also stairs lead to a temple. The Philistines placed the Ark of Yahweh's Covenant in Dagon's temple, in the open space between two columns so that all the time would be the result of the victory of the Philistine warriors. Dagon's statue has fallen down, like is said in Samuel's Book face down. Its marble head and hands lie severed on the floor of the temple. A lower frieze of the building depicts the battle between the Philistines and the Jews. A man in white, a priest of Dagon, shows the destroyed statues of Dagon to people huddled in cloaks, to the generals of the Philistines. He points, and obviously complains on what the Ark has done to the Philistine god. The generals discuss around the priest and we see their gestures of the arguing and their disputes. They have won the Ark in battle; the Ark in Ashdod is the symbol by excellence of their might and domination over the Jews. They have offered the god's ark to Dagon. How can they possibly return the symbol of their victory? They would lose all that was won. Nicolas Poussin gave an oriental note to the bystanders since some of them wear white turbans. The scene around the priest is one of a meeting, of the Philistines arguing over the fate of the Ark. The scene can be considered separately from the rest of the painting. The view and organisation of Poussin's painting becomes more evident after discerning this central scene around the Ark. Here is an assembly of Philistine chiefs discussing what to do with the Ark and wondering about its powers. In front of this scene, towards the viewer, and unfolding over the entire lower border of the painting, Nicolas Poussin showed the horrors of the plague.

The plague of Ashdod is a long horizontal band that occupies the lower part of the frame. Poussin placed a dead or dying woman on the ground, in the middle of the lower border, and he painted this figure in the broken white colours of death to draw the first attention of the viewer to this scene. The woman lies down and all the other figures in that scene hence look at her. The contours of the heads of this crowd form an open V structure, the lowest point of which is on the woman. This then opens up a view for the other scenes behind. The people in the front might be just one family, the mother of which is dying. The 'Plague of Ashdod' is still a painting of the early period of Poussin, so he showed the grief of the personages very dramatically, without restraint. On the right the people bow their heads, hide their faces in their hands, kneel or cry out their fears and beat a fallen column in revolt yet in weakness. The husband of the dying woman bows over his wife. He tries to touch her in a last farewell, but this touching could be dangerous so he has to hold his hand away. He seems to bless one of his baby children, who will now surely die also since it still seeks its mother's breast. Another child lies already dead next to the mother.

Poussin drew standing figures on the right, so to construct the V composition he had also to draw a standing personage on the left. He painted this man with a wide cloak so that he well balances the two figures of the right. Poussin painted that man with a blue cloak, which contrasts with the orange tunic on the right, but also here we find a little blue in the robe of a woman behind the front figure, whereas the orange tunic of the man on the left answers the orange of the right part... So Poussin used the same hues on left and right, merely permuting a little their areas.

The man standing on the extreme left also looks to the left side. He looks more or less downward, to another man that fell down, but in doing that he draws attention to the left side. Also the people on the right side look in that direction, and it is of course on this left side that stands the Ark. Poussin guides the viewer's eyes from the dying woman in this way, in a growing movement to the figures on the right, then to the men on the left in the striking blue colours, upwards towards the Corinthian columns, between which stands the Ark, the true main subject of the picture and the cause of the plague.

Remark the gesture of the man on the left: Poussin showed his surprise, his turning away from the central horror scene, the fear and the act of abandoning.

In this central scene of the plague, a very baroque Poussin was at work, showing in the most direct way of poises of the figures the strong emotions of the people. Such is not really a Classicist stance. Poussin would learn with age to depict emotions in a less overt way, more subtly. He showed emotions also on the Ark itself, since we see that the golden statues on the Ark are sculptures of mourning figures.

The scene before the Ark, with the assembly of the council of the Philistines and the priest of Dagon, is a closed group of figures. These people are wealthy. They are the notables of the town and the generals of the army and while they speak and argue, they seem to remain oblivious of the tragedy around them. To the right of the frame, opposite the council, dead people are being brought up the stairs of a temple and on the monumental stairs another figure has fallen down to die. Remember how in the front scene, on the left side, a man with a blue cloak seemed to pass cautiously between the dying. A man in blue also runs up the stairs of the temple on the right, to seek refuge from the plague. Here we have cowardice, people trying to save their lives and abandoning Ashdod to its fate. Thus Poussin also brought symmetry in his themes.

Nicolas Poussin's front theme of the horrors of the plague opens with its V structure to the council of Ashdod. Behind the council, and using the Roman architectures on both sides, Poussin painted one of the most powerful views of perspective of his entire oeuvre. All the lines of the buildings of the lane flow towards a low point on the ground of the far square, to a point situated a little to the left of the base of an obelisk. This point is skewed to the left of the painting and it is almost, but not exactly, on of the Golden Mean points of the frame. That allowed Poussin to draw a few more details on the right scene of the temple stairs. Here he showed a scene of less confusion, with fewer figures, with a few trees and with maybe the king of the Philistines contemplating from the loggia of his palace the disasters that happen to his city. Poussin rarely painted such elaborated backgrounds and we remember large streets of Rome with high building, which resemble much this view. Poussin may

have had such views in his mind, felt them very strongly and used them as an occasional background for his pictures.

Nicolas Poussin's 'Plague of Ashdod' is a painting of the artist's early period. It is a picture that is Baroque in expression and that brings the emotions fully over to the viewer in a very ostentatious way, a way that the contemporary Romans of Poussin's days may have appreciated much. Poussin showed the violent emotions in the most blatant way in this picture. What could be more appealing than a dying mother with a dead child next to her, a crying baby seeking out her breast, her helpless husband stricken with grief and touching her gently in a last goodbye? Yet, beneath this show of emotions a string intellect was at work and that intellect ordered, organised, and composed the structure of the picture in its various parts. Poussin used a composition that is not so easily read, on which his narrative is not so powerfully founded as he could realise later in his career, but which keeps the interest of the viewer on the picture. Poussin drew an impressive perspective of a lane he might have seen in Rome and then filled with ancient architectures in his imagination. It is always surprising to find in Baroque paintings strong structure, and that is certainly the case – though still in a minor way – with Poussin's 'Plague of Ashdod'. Nicolas Poussin's evolution towards order, clarity of depiction, could not but grow with age, as he learned by himself and experimented in views. No picture of Poussin leaves an interested viewer without admiration.

## *Saul*

Among the tribe of Benjamin was a man called Kish. He had a son called Saul.

One day, Kish's donkeys strayed off so he sent his son and a servant to look for them. The donkeys went so far that Saul and the servant could not catch up with them. They could not see the donkeys anymore. Saul one moment wanted to return, but his servant pointed out to him that in a near town there lived a holy man who was a seer. The servant had a quarter of a silver shekel on him and proposed to go and give that to the man of God from him to tell them which way to go to find the donkeys. Saul acquiesced and they went to the town. As they were stepping through the gate Samuel came out to meet them. Samuel had had a revelation from Yahweh the day before. Yahweh had revealed to Samuel that he would the next day send a man from the Benjaminites to Samuel to save Israel from the Philistines. Saul was a Benjaminite. Samuel recognised Saul as the one sent by Yahweh. He told Saul not to worry anymore over the donkeys because they had been found. Samuel gave the men to eat and told Saul already that the whole wealth of Israel was destined for him. The next morning Samuel told Saul to go to Gilgal. He prophesied various events would happen to Saul on his way and when all these happened as Samuel had predicted, Saul knew that Samuel was indeed a great prophet of Yahweh.

Samuel summoned the people of Israel to draw lots for a king. First the tribe of Benjamin was chosen among all the tribes of Israel. Then the clan of Matri was chosen among the Benjaminite clans. And from the clan of Matri the lots fell on Saul. Samuel explained a last time the king's constitutional function to the Israelites and inscribed this in a book, which he placed before the Ark of God. Saul returned to Gibeah accompanied by only a few strong men who acknowledged him as king. But there were still many scoundrels in Israel who would not recognise Saul as king.

About a month later, Nahash the Ammonite marched with his army against Israel and laid siege to Jabesh in Gilead. The elders of Jabesh sent for Saul. Saul became very angry then for the fact that all the Israelites would not follow him in such dire situation. He cut a yoke of oxen to pieces and sent the pieces all over the country with the message that he would do the same to all who would not come with him to fight the enemies of Israel. The people flew into a panic then; they all marched out and assembled at Bezek where Saul could inspect them.

The next day Saul burst into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them. Saul then was officially proclaimed King of Israel at Gilgal. Samuel now made the Israelites remember all the great deeds of Yahweh and commanded them to obey Saul. Yahweh sent thunder and rain that same day and all held Yahweh and Samuel in great awe.

Saul did great deeds in Yahweh's name. He killed the Philistine governor at Gibeah. The Philistines then threatened with three thousand chariots and six thousand horses and with this force they set up camp at Michmash. The Israelites were very frightened then. They started to desert Saul and dispersed in the land. Saul did not know what to do. He doubted. Did he have to attack the Philistines or leave them? Saul had been waiting for Samuel but as the prophet did not come soon enough to his taste, he made



a burnt offering to Yahweh himself and pleaded for help. Samuel arrived at Gilgal at that very moment. He asked what Saul was doing and when he heard Saul's doubts, he said that Saul had acted as a fool. Saul had not obeyed the order of Yahweh. Yet Yahweh's order of destruction had been clear. Saul had doubted Yahweh and a punishment would come. Samuel told that this was so, otherwise Yahweh would have confirmed Saul's sovereignty over Israel forever. But now, Saul's sovereignty would not last, for Yahweh had discovered a man after his own hearth and would designate this man as the leader of the people. This was the first time that Samuel told to Saul that he, Saul, would not found a dynasty. Samuel then got up and left Gilgal.

Saul and his son Jonathan confronted the Philistines. The Philistines had forbidden the Israelites to have blacksmiths, so the Israelite army had no spears or swords. Only Saul and Jonathan had such weapons. One day, Jonathan and his arm-bearer saw an outpost of the Philistines. They attacked the outpost and killed all the men. There was a panic then in the camp of the Philistines. When Saul saw the panic he now also attacked the Philistines and that day Yahweh gave a victory to the Israelites. Saul fought on and pronounced a curse on anyone who would eat food before evening, before he had taken full revenge on the Philistines. Jonathan had not heard his father however and when he saw a delicious honeycomb he put a stick into the honey and the stick in his mouth to eat. Only then did the Israelites around Jonathan tell him of the curse of his father. In the evening Saul consulted Yahweh to know whether he should stop or continue to pursue the Philistines. But Yahweh would not speak. Saul summoned all his army then and asked Yahweh to indicate who had sinned. The lots fell on Jonathan and Jonathan confessed having eaten. Jonathan should be killed now, but the people rallied around him and would not let Saul kill Jonathan for they knew that the victory of that day belonged to Jonathan. The people ransomed Jonathan and he was not put to death. Saul also did not pursue the Philistines then. Thus it was that a curse was laid on Jonathan and that Saul for a second time had not obeyed the order of destruction of Yahweh.

Throughout Saul's life, there was fierce warfare with the Philistines. Saul fought the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites and the king of Zobah. One day Samuel came back to Saul and told him that Yahweh had ordered Saul to destroy the Amalekites. Saul indeed fought and defeated the Amalekites but he kept their king Agag alive and spared him with the best of the sheep and cattle, the fatlings and lambs and all that was good of Amalek. Samuel heard of this and he was appalled. Saul had once more broken his allegiance to Yahweh by sparing Agag and the booty. Samuel went to Saul and reproached the king for not having obeyed the curse of destruction ordained by Yahweh. Saul answered that he knew he had sinned and asked for pardon. But Samuel would not hear of any pardon and also refused to go back with Saul. As Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed him at the hem of his cloak and tore the cloak. Samuel then said that today Yahweh had torn the kingdom of Israel from Saul and given it to a neighbour of Saul's who was a better man than Saul was. Saul repented that he realised he had sinned and begged Samuel to show him respect in front of his people and to come back with him. Samuel followed Saul then, and went back with him. Saul worshipped God then and killed Agag as Yahweh had ordered. But this was the second time Saul had disobeyed Yahweh.

After these events Yahweh spoke to Samuel and told him to go to Bethlehem, to a man called Jesse for Yahweh had found a king among Jesse's sons. Samuel departed

for Bethlehem, not without a ruse, so that Saul would let him go. Samuel arrived in Bethlehem and went to see Jesse. He purified Jesse and his sons and invited them to a sacrifice for Yahweh. When the sons of Jesse came, Samuel looked successively at Eliab, Abanadab and Shamash and Jesse presented all his seven sons. But each time Yahweh told that he had rejected these. Finally, Jesse told Samuel that he had only one son left and that this one, called David, was the youngest one. David was looking after the sheep. Jesse sent for David too and Yahweh told Samuel that this was the chosen one. David had ruddy cheeks, fine eyes and an attractive appearance. Samuel took his horn of oil and anointed David. Then Samuel set off and went to Ramah. From that day on Yahweh was on David.

An evil spirit of Yahweh afflicted Saul. The king's servants said that only a skilled harpist could ease Saul's afflictions. Harp music would do well to Saul and the servants knew a skilled harpist in the young David, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem. Saul sent for David and so David entered King Saul's service. Saul grew very fond of him and David became the king's armour-bearer.

## *The Young David*

### **David**

Domenico Fetti (1588/1589-1623). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. 1617-1619.

The figure of the young David was treated by history as a very romantic image. David has been seen as a delicate young man, playing the lyre or accompanying Saul's armies. He was the young squire to King Saul. Thus also Domenico Fetti depicted David. Fetti was an Italian painter of the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century.

Domenico Fetti was born in Rome around 1589, and learned to know the great masters there. Later on he worked at the court of the Dukes of Mantua. He further saw many early Baroque paintings at that court, paintings from Flemish masters like Rubens, but also of Venetian masters.<sup>G3</sup> He painted many religious scenes, among which the stories from the parables of the New Testament retained most his attention. He worked already in Mantua for Venetian patrons, for the Contarini family, and therefore might have been invited to Venice, where he arrived in 1621. The 'David' was painted between 1617 and 1619 for a Venetian patron of Fetti, but the work was done before the artist arrived in Venice. He could not work for long in the lagoon city however, for he died at the early age of thirty-three or thirty-four years. Domenico Fetti painted fanciful pictures in a very soft, gentle way. Most of the paintings we have of his hand were made when he was only in his twenties and he might have made more powerful pictures had he only lived longer. He absorbed many influences and could try out styles that resembled as well Caravaggio as Tintoretto.

Fetti's David is close to a depiction by Caravaggio, but without the latter's ferocity and power. Yet the picture is striking. We see a very young courtier, a flamboyant youth of dazzling beauty and with a touch of arrogant defiance on his face. The young man seems kind, but ready at a sudden impulsive burst of action that would be more filled with enthusiasm and carelessness than with power. David is a boy gifted with an immediate and hot temper. Fetti painted the typical Italian courtier.

The young David indolently holds an arm to his side in a gesture of firmness and with the other hand he holds a magnificently decorated but very heavy sword, which he might sway a few times but certainly not much more as it is too long and too heavy for his age. This sword evokes in the viewer the impression that the boy might have a great calling. David would indeed become the great warrior and king, the founder of the royal glory of Israel. Domenico Fetti painted David as if the youth were aware of that and telling to the viewer, 'I am young and boisterous, but I will do great deeds. Beware of me.' David was the armour bearer of Saul, so the long sword may just be the king's main weapon. David brings them and guards them, but they are for Saul to brandish.

Fetti painted a portrait. But for a dashing figure like the young David, he had to use a presentation that was also daring, a new image as indolent as his personage. So Fetti used a new poise in portraiture and painted David sideways and half in the dark. He could concentrate the light and thus the attention of the viewer almost solely on the face of the boy. The picture is very much painted in Caravaggio's shrill contrasts between light and dark, so much so that we only see a small curved band in bright colours, whereas all the rest of the picture is hulled in darkness. Such views always give the impression as if the hero appears from out of the centuries. Fetti also painted to great realism, probably using a young sitter as a model, like Caravaggio.

Domenico Fetti painted the dash of the young man in details of his dress. David wears a hat with marvellously coloured plumes and the plumes are set high on his head. They show the daring of the young man. David wears a white collar like a garland of delicate flowers around his neck. His sleeves are fanciful and so are the breeches around his knees. David is depicted as a valiant knight. He is very much armed and besides the heavy sword a long, silver-decorated dagger hangs on his hips. David's looks are somewhat effeminate, full and sensual, but David sends an affirming and strong, unwavering glance in the direction of the viewer. That glance changes the impression the viewer has from considering the David as only a young insolent boy to a soldier knight that can be vicious, with sudden reactions of cunning violence. Fetti's David needs only an occasion to show his great deed and come forward from the mass of the many courtiers to the foreground, to recognition as one of the best and a future challenger of the king himself.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**Scenes of the story of David.** Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1534.

**The Young David.** Andrea del Castagno (c.1421-1457). National Gallery of Art – Washington. Ca. 1450-1457.

**David.** Giovanni Francesco Romanelli (1610-1662). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. Ca. 1640.

## *Saul and David*

The Philistines prepared for a major war with the Israelites. They assembled at Socoh in Judah. Saul and the Israelites also assembled and pitched camp in the valley of the Terebinth. The Philistines occupied the high ground on one side and the Israelites stood on the high ground on the other side, in opposing battle lines.

A champion stepped out from among the Philistines. His name was Goliath, from Gath. He was a giant of a man, six cubits and a span tall. He wore a heavy breastplate of scale-armour made of bronze and he had bronze greaves on his legs. A heavy scimitar was slung over his shoulders. He wore a spear as thick as a weaver's beam and the head of the spear was of solid iron. A shield-bearer walked in from of him. Goliath challenged the Israelites to choose a man and fight it out with him. The stake of the duel would be high, no less than one people becoming the servants to the other. Saul and the Israelites were dismayed and terrified at the words of Goliath.

David just then arrived on the battlefield. His father Jesse had sent him to ask for news of his brothers who had joined Saul in the campaign. When David heard of Goliath's challenge he spoke out. He asked who that uncircumcised brute was to challenge the armies of the Israelites and what the reward would be for killing him. These words were reported to Saul so Saul sent for David. Saul saw that David was still only a young boy and no warrior. But David retorted that he looked after his father's sheep and that whenever a lion or a bear came and took sheep from the flock he would follow the animal to snatch the sheep out of its jaws. David said he would seize lion or bear by the beard and batter it to death. He told that Yahweh would also deliver him from the clutches of the Philistine. Saul then accepted David as his champion. He dressed him in his own armour with a breastplate and a bronze helmet. Saul buckled his own sword to David. David tried to walk in these, but he could not. He said he was not used to armour, so he took them off again and confronted Goliath without protection.

David took his stick in one hand. He selected five smooth stones from the riverbed and put them in his shepherd's bag. Then with his sling in hand, he approached the Philistine. Goliath and David insulted each other, as was the custom before a duel. The Philistine cursed David by his gods. David said he had come in the name of Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Israel that the Philistine had challenged. He told Goliath he would kill him, cut off his head, and give his corpse as well as the corpses of the Philistines to the birds in the skies and to the wild beasts, for Yahweh's glory. Then David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone penetrated Goliath's head and the giant fell heavily on the ground. David ran to Goliath, stood over him, seized the Philistine's sword, pulled it out of its scabbard, killed Goliath with it and cut off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead they all fled in disarray. The Israelites pursued them and killed them on their flight so that the Philistine dead lay all along the road from Shaaraim to Gath and Ekron. The Israelites plundered the Philistine camp. David took the Philistine Goliath's head to Jerusalem. He took the giant's weapons in his own tent however.

After the battle, David was presented to Saul again. Jonathan, Saul's son, then felt an instant affection for David. He loved David like his very self. He gave David his cloak, his armour, even his bow and sword. Saul and Jonathan kept David with them.

## *David and Goliath*

**David slaying off the Head of Goliath.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Private Collection Dr. Gustav Rau – Germany. 1606/1607.

Guido Reni was a painter of Bologna. His father was a musician. He began to paint around the age of ten and first learned his art at the school of Denys Calvaert, a Flemish painter that worked in Bologna. He joined the Academy of Bologna when he was twenty. This was the Academy founded by the Carracci family of painters and the teachings of that academy would form his style. One of his co-students at the Academy was Domenichino. Guido Reni stayed faithful to the classical academicism of the Carracci academy. He continued to live in Bologna but he was also frequently in Rome and worked for the Popes, in particular for Pope Paul V Borghese. Annibale Carracci died in 1609, Ludovico Carracci in 1619, so Guido Reni remained as the main painter of Bologna then and he was a worthy successor to the great family of the Carraccis. He had learned from Denys Calvaert, from Ludovico Carracci, and also from Caravaggio, whose works he knew from 1602 on when he often worked and lived in Rome. He had been invited to Rome by Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrato. Guido Reni died of a bad fever in 1642, leaving a large workshop but also many debts, although he was very famous and charged high prices for his paintings, because he was a passionate gambler.

David threw a stone on Goliath's front with the might and accuracy of his sling. Goliath now lies down and David heaves over his body, ready to slay off Goliath's head. In this composition, Guido Reni used strong vertical and horizontal lines, as Goliath lies on the ground and David towers above him. The giant in the picture is not Goliath but David. David holds the Philistine sword with both hands so high that Reni only painted it somewhat further than the hilt. The painting is partly in the style of Caravaggio. It is still an academic painting of classical art from Bologna in the style of the Carraccis also, for Reni showed only the two characters in the scene. Bolognese painters of the Baroque painted usually just a few figures in their pictures so that the scene would be limpid and could easily be recognised. But Reni also applied Caravaggist contrasts of light and dark, as can be seen on the harness of Goliath. He also painted a dark background but differently from Caravaggio Reni showed a wide, low landscape and an imposing sky behind David. The sky is heavy, laden with dark, ominous, stormy clouds. One may sense the presence of God in these clouds, or of fate, as often God darkens the sky and lets winds blow when he is at work. The horizon is low so that David can tower over the earth and in front of the divine elements of nature. We see a wide plain with a few hills on right and left and between these the Israelian and Philistine armies confront each other.

Goliath fell on his face according to the scriptures. Reni shows the man still grasping at the wound in the front above his eye. Goliath's helmet has been torn away and a light that seems to come from above, from David, shows his glimmering, polished armour. There is no steel around his neck however, and here David will strike. Guido Reni painted masterly the shadows and light patches of that armour. By this prowess we know that Reni had extraordinary talent. The artist then contrasted the dark, brutal

menace of the Philistine warrior with the red colours of cunning. David is only clad in a red tunic, hanging carelessly around him and held only by a knot at this hip. David's sling still hangs in this tunic. Reni showed David holding Goliath down with one leg, but David had probably that knee on the Philistine only to better reach the man's neck. Reni marvellously painted the red tunic above the steel-grey of Goliath. The chiaroscuro in the folds of David's tunic is fine and exact. Reni used here many shades, tones and intensities of the blood red that will later mark the scene. So many painters showed the red blood of Goliath everywhere; Guido Reni hinted only at it in the tunic of David. This is an element typical of the control over emotions that the Bolognese painters had learned from the Carraccis.

David is the young man of the Bible. Guido Reni painted him like an Apollo. David has a fine, slim body on which the heavy muscles have not yet been so trained as to stand out imposingly. The body is hairless and well –proportioned. David has boyish, short hair on his head but Reni makes him look down at his victim so that the viewer cannot make well out David's traits.

Guido Reni made one of the most classical and now traditional pictures of the scene of David and Goliath. He chose a moment before David slew off Goliath's head and in that was his originality, for most other pictures show David carrying off Goliath's severed head. He made a very Baroque picture, dedicated to the spur and rapidity of the moment. And he made a very Bolognese painting in that he represented just the two figures toweringly close to the viewer. He used light, contrasting colours and showed the movement of the slaying of Goliath better than most other painters of his generation. The scene evokes in the viewer swift movement and that vision remains impregnated in the viewer.

We may have grown used too much to such pictures to still be impressed by 'David and Goliath' of Guido Reni. When we pass by such a painting in a museum we are impressed by David's overpowering image, which is only diminished by his youth. But then we recognise easily the means that Reni used to evoke surprise and we respect that. We know now how such effects can be obtained by placing low horizons and by placing the figures high in the frame and not in their entirety so that the viewer feels close and small. Still, in the times of Guido Reni such effects were not common in paintings and it was a main feature of Baroque to seek such impressions in viewers. Guido Reni's 'David slaying off Goliath's Head' is a fine example of the techniques and style elements discovered by painters and now lavishly used to surprise viewers. It is a fine painting in composition, assemblage of colours and presentation of the content of the theme.



**David and Goliath**

Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (ca. 1570/1571-1610). Museo Galleria Borghese – Rome. Around 1605-1610.

Caravaggio's 'David and Goliath' is a very peculiar painting. It is dark, sad, horrible, magnificent and gripping at the guts of any viewer. Out of a very sombre, black night, into a scarce light – maybe of a campfire of the Israelite army – steps the young David holding Goliath's head to show it once more to the amazed soldiers of the Jews. In the strange orange light only the essentials are seen: a hairless puberty body, a young face expressing aversion and determination and another tortured, black-bearded, ugly, fiercely decapitated head. And yes, there is the blade of the sword that did the job, shown in a lower corner.

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio painted a picture of essentials only. There is no background but a uniform black. A feeble light comes from the lower left, just enough to show us the mastery of anatomy of the artist. David's body is of a young Apollo, perfect, pure, unblemished, strong but without the muscles of a warrior. It is simply healthy and new. The boy steps forward and brings the head of Goliath towards the viewer, thrusting the horribly gasping face out of the canvas and to the viewer. The head still gasps at being slaughtered. This is the gasp of sudden death, but life only stands still; death is not a state; it is just the sudden stopping of breathing and thinking and feeling and laughing. Laughter there was, laughter from the black-haired brute at the youth that dared to challenge a giant warrior like Goliath. That youth now holds far from him the long black hair of the brute, unwilling to otherwise touch a sordid object. The face of the boy shows the loathing for the object, not for the man; it shows the abhorrence for the lifeless dirty face. Therefore the head is kept far with outstretched arm so that it does not touch the flawless body of the Apollo and so that the blood that is still oozing out of the head not dirties the boy.

The face of the youth also expresses respect and sadness. The boy seems to regret having killed. The killing was maybe not necessary and the killer always – more than all spectators – feels linked to the dead. This the boy's kill; the boy has taken the life. The boy understands that now, better than anyone else, and with the comprehension comes the regrets. But it is too late? The past events of life cannot be undone – and should not, for Goliath was a Jew killer of a Philistine. But Goliath still was a human being. Goliath would not have repented nor regretted killing David; but David is sensible and intelligent and he regrets. The life of Goliath is gone and it was David who took it. So youth always kills age. And of course, age kills youth for once, with time passing, David will have a face like Goliath's.

The date of Caravaggio's painting is uncertain. The work may date from somewhere between 1605 and 1610. Dates most offered are between 1606 and 1607. If that dating were exact, the painting would have been made on the Island of Malta. Michelangelo Merisi called the Caravaggio had fled there from Rome over Naples. He entered the service of the Hospitaller knights of Saint John the Baptist in their stronghold port of La Valetta of Malta. But the painting may also have been made after Caravaggio's return from Malta, which happened in 1608, when he fled from the same knights that had made them one of theirs and for whom he had made powerful portraits of their

Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt. The 'David and Goliath' we discover may have been painted in Sicily or in Naples, from where he tried to reach a ship that might bring him back to Rome. Then this picture may have been one of the very last Caravaggio made.

We have several other pictures of the theme of 'David and Goliath' by Caravaggio. One is in the Prado of Madrid, another in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna. These works do not have the poignancy and immediacy of the picture in the Galleria Borghese. The other pictures seem softer, more decorative – if that word could be used for Caravaggio -, painted with more distance to the theme, with a colder contemplation of the subject. In the 'David and Goliath' of the Galleria Borghese we feel us to be really inside the scene, not just spectators. We feel the intimate connection of the artist with the drama and his expression of the theme of death. Caravaggio had witnessed decapitations in Rome.

One of the executions he might have seen was of a noblewoman, Beatrice Cenci (1577-1599). Beatrice Cenci was the daughter of a rich and powerful man, Francesco Cenci. He was a violent man and imprisoned Beatrice and her stepmother in the Castle of Petrella Salto, near Rieti. He continuously abused his family. With the consent of her stepmother and of her two brothers, Beatrice Cenci murdered her father in 1598. She was taken a prisoner after that at the order of Pope Clement VIII. Beatrice was decapitated in Castel Sant'Angelo in September 1599, before a large crowd of people among whom might have been Caravaggio. The painter could have learned there how a head was cut off and all the gruesome anatomical details of such an act. We know how Beatrice Cenci looked like, for Guido Reni (1575-1642) made a portrait of her that is now in the Palazzo Barberini of Rome.<sup>129</sup>

Death accompanied Caravaggio often on his travels and in his works. He travelled only to escape prison. He painted Christ's sufferings, torture and death. He painted the death of Jesus' mother, the martyrdom of Saint Catherine and Saint Matthew, the sacrifice of Isaac, the torments of Saint Jerome. He showed men in an inn looking at a barber extracting a tooth from the rotten mouth of one of them. He showed Judith cutting through the throat of Holofernes. He painted Salome wearing the head of John the Baptist on a platter. He painted the crucifixion of Saint Andrew, the crucifixion of Saint Peter, the entombment of Saint Lucia and the entombment of Jesus. So many horrible scenes of violence, torture, self-torture, and savagery accompanied Caravaggio always and especially once he had to leave Rome.

Michelangelo Merisi was born in 1571, probably in Milan. His parents had fled the town of a plague epidemic so early after his birth and settled in a small village near Milan called Caravaggio, that he was known his life long for that village. The family returned soon to Milan, to flee it again from the plague in 1576. Caravaggio's father may have died from the plague in 1577, when Michelangelo was six years old. He stayed with his mother in Milan and in Caravaggio. He became an apprentice to the painter Simone Peterzano in Milan. His mother died in 1590 and the twenty-year old Caravaggio voyaged to Rome. He worked for various commissioners there, made paintings for churches and palaces. Times were light and happy then and Caravaggio made also nicer, mythological scenes. But he had a bad temper and fate pursued him. He was arrested a first time for a short while only in 1603 for having written defamatory poems. He was arrested in 1605 for illegally wearing arms and in 1606 he

may have killed a man – alone or with a friend – at a dispute over a ball game. He had to run from the Papal soldiers then, away from Rome. He travelled to Naples. In 1607 already he arrived on the Island of Malta. There he worked for the Grand Master of the Maltese Order, was even made a Knight of Malta, but excluded from the Order again in 1608. He fled from Malta to Sicily and then back to Naples. He was wounded in the face in Naples in 1609. In the year after, in 1610, he was looking for a ship near Naples, in Porto Ercole, to take him back to Rome. But he died on the beaches of Porto Ercole, either of a sickness or killed by hirelings or bandits. Little is known of Caravaggio's death, but he was merely forty years old.

The 'David and Goliath' of the Galleria Borghese may be a double auto-portrait. The traits of Goliath certainly resemble Caravaggio's own. And the artist also painted a few times young men to his resemblance. We have pictures of faces that are presumably portraits of him. These also resemble the face of David. So we see in 'David and Goliath' of the Galleria Borghese a tortured head, from which the blood is all dripping away. The head cries out at the sad, horrible events of a savage life of violence and at the ineffectiveness of it all. The boy looks with melancholy and pity at what has become of the mature man, unable to change anything and of course also unwilling to halt fate. The act needed to be done. Caravaggio was much in travel during the time he made this picture of 'David and Goliath'. He always used sitters to model for him. He may not have had any other model during his travels but himself. Therefore David and Goliath may well have been Caravaggio at different ages. Some have called this picture Caravaggio's testament. David is Caravaggio and Goliath is Caravaggio. The viewer may not like Goliath, but that is what Caravaggio, the man, had become in his own eyes.

The painter Caravaggio used parsimonious but very effective means of painterly design for his picture. He only used black colour, yellow-flesh and silvery white. The background is completely black. Caravaggio needed no background, no decoration and certainly not a silly superfluous landscape. Such details would not have added anything to the power of expression and could only have distracted the viewer. David and Goliath are of course painted in the colours of their flesh, with just a little, almost unperceivable orange hue here and there. Goliath's head is also mainly black, covered with long black hair, with a black mouth and heavy black beard. Like Rembrandt later, Caravaggio surprises with marvellous lead-white in David's shirt. With little means, Caravaggio shows the long black and grey lines that hang down with the shirt and that make the shirt a silvery, noble gown that glimmers in the light.

Caravaggio used a traditional pyramid composition like in so many portraits. The blade of the sword, even only shown in a small piece, balances in this composition Goliath's head. The pyramid does not go all way to the top of the frame. Some space had to be left at the top to bring more weight onto Goliath's head, to push the composition down and thus to enhance the effect of gloom and sadness. So, although a very expressive picture, Caravaggio naturally, intuitively probably, came to a very classic representation of portraits.

The 'David and Goliath' of Michelangelo Merisi called the Caravaggio is a very remarkable picture. Caravaggio applied the contrasts between dark and light to unusual expressiveness and we are always in awe at the skills of realistic detail and of depicting force by this painter. 'David and Goliath' was a theme that the artist knew

well, and that in the end may for him have represented his very life of a man torn between normality, happiness and youth on the one side and dark despair on the other.

*Other Paintings:*

**David holding the Head of Goliath.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1601/1605.

**David wearing the Head of Goliath.** Jacob van Oost the Elder (1601-1671). The State Hermitage – Saint Petersburg. 1643.

**David with the Head of Goliath and two Soldiers.** Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection -Madrid. Ca. 1620.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. Ca.1610.

**David triumphant.** Bartolomeo Manfredi (1582-1622). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1615.

**David victorious.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

**David and Goliath.** Caravaggio. – Museo Nacional del Prado. – Madrid. Ca. 1609.

**David and Goliath.** Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (ca.1570/1571-1610). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. Ca.1599-1600.

**David victorious.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. Ca. 1630.

**David having decapitated Goliath.** Claude Vignon (1593-1670). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen.

**David returning with the Head of Goliath.** Bernhard Strigel (ca. 1465/1470-1528). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**David and Goliath.** Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. Ca. 1610.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Domenico Fetti (1588/1589-1623). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. 1617-1619.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1571-1610). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1606-1607.

**David victorious over Goliath.** Meltand (middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Hendrick Van Somer. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice – Nice.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Battistello (Giovanni Battista) Caracciolo (1570-1637). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. Ca. 1612.

**David with Goliath's Head.** Follower of Dosso Dossi. Galleria Borghese. Rome. First Half 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

**David and Goliath.** Guillaume Courtois (1628-1679). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. Ca. 1660.

**David and Goliath.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. Ca. 1620.

**David and Goliath.** Nicolas Régnier (1591-1667). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. Ca. 1626-1630.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1630-1635.

**David with Goliath's Head.** Gian Domenico Cerrini (1601-1683). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. 1653.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. Ca. 1610.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1621.

**David with the Head of Goliath.** Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**David with the head of Goliath.** Antonio Balestra (1666-1740). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Triumph of David*

### **The Triumph of David**

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Dulwich Picture Gallery – Dulwich (London). 1631-1633.

Nicolas Poussin was a French painter of the beginning of the seventeenth century. He was born in France but he went to Rome in 1624 when he was around thirty years old and he never really returned to France. His work was quite appreciated by the French Royal court but Poussin could very well paint in Rome, where apparently he felt artistically more stimulated, and ship his paintings to France. Poussin was a Baroque painter but he treated mostly examples from classical antiquity and he was a very French, rational painter who applied the techniques of his art in a very self-conscious way so that he has often received the label of being very academic. Poussin made a picture of the 'Triumph of David' in 1631 to 1633 while he was in Rome. We see David advancing in a procession, led by two heralds that proclaim his glory blowing trumpets. David wears Goliath's head on a spike and people look in awe but also happily and curiously at the spectacle.

Nicolas Poussin lived in Rome. The Roman emperors and generals held triumphs in that city after they had won important battles or conquered new foreign land. Poussin may have had the idea of a picture of such a triumph from that association between Roman triumphal procession and a mention in the Bible that David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem. Poussin situated the scene in Rome. Public triumphs were not usual in Jerusalem, even though heroes like David were probably also publicly acclaimed when they entered towns. David will not have worn Goliath's head beyond the battlefield but Roman generals carried with them in their triumphal procession the enslaved princes they had conquered and imprisoned. Poussin elaborated on this idea.

The picture is drawn with unusual skill and painted in the soft, pastel hues that we are accustomed to find in other pictures of Nicolas Poussin. Poussin liked soft orange and yellow hues and we see those amply in 'David's Triumph' too. Poussin used a few blue areas, balanced and placed symmetrically on the canvas. There is blue in the woman on the left, in the figure of the man with a beard on the right and also on the seated woman of the middle. We will later explain that these figures have particular meaning in the painting and Poussin made them more visible for spectators by contrasting the blue of their tunics with the background of orange-yellowish colours. Poussin used a very theatrical setting for David's triumph. David passes before a temple and we find mostly strong vertical and horizontal directions in this architecture. That feature supports the idea of a long procession that will pass before an audience. Poussin also made the group of women in the lower middle sit down, to show better the advancing heralds and the figure of David.

The various groups of people in the scene are Romans, clad in Roman tunics and the view is before a temple with Greek or Roman columns. They represent the different feelings that spectators may have felt at a procession of David and Goliath.

On the extreme right a soldier on horseback shows the advancing procession. Here is the soldier that urges to advance to advance to victory. On the top right, a man in red tunic similarly has a movement to advance in his arm. This group of people urges to attack, and justifies David's killing of Goliath. The feelings shown are of vengeance, of conquest and of warriors' impetuosity.

The group on the lower right expresses surprise. The bearded man dressed in a blue tunic holds his hands in wonder. The woman dressed in green points to the scene of David, drawing the attention of her baby at the extraordinary scene of David passing by, holding high the head and curbing his back under the weight. While the woman points she also leads the viewer's eyes back to the gruesome, ugly and monstrous head that is the bewilderment of the audience.

The women in the lower middle express happiness. The danger of the Philistines, of the barbarians that threatened Jerusalem, has been averted. Rome had been thus relieved many times when the consuls defeated the German hordes. A woman in blue dress salutes David with uplifted hand and thus honours him.

The group on the lower left seems to express indifference. Here are the sceptics. Some of the people here turn their backs to the approaching David and they ignore the advancing trumpets. A woman in blue points to the skies, not to David at all. She may attract the attention of her group to something else but David, and she may imply that David merely realised God's design. When we follow her finger, we come to the façade of the temple and just above the lower left group we see a woman fleeing behind a column. She may go to another scene in the upper part, but the artist who made the picture may also have indicated her disinterest as she disappears behind a column.

In the top part of the painting are two groups of people. The left group stands with presents and fruit and documents to recognise David's deed, ready to enter him for eternity in the history of Israel. We would have expected King Saul in this group. These people officially honour David and they seem to wait stoically David's arrival. This group is static, solemn, waiting in dignity as if they were members of the Roman senate.

To the right we see awe, fear and outright disturbance. Everybody is gesticulating with movements of arms and bodies. The lines suggested by arms and bodies go in all directions. There are exclamations of fear, of lauding the Gods and of immediate emotions.

Nicolas Poussin thus made a painting in which he painted David advancing amidst a whole spectrum of human emotions. It is a picture of these emotions and Poussin imagined a circle of the scale of feelings that could have been evoked in the minds of the spectators at David's feat. Poussin of course also painted a scene of the multitude of feelings that readers of the Bible and of the feelings that the spectators of pictures of David's slaying of Goliath might experience. The viewers of pictures thus may recognise themselves inside the picture.

David walks in the middle. He seems to be unperturbed by what goes around him. He is oblivious of the people. He strides forward simply and directly. He does not look around. He is not really in symbiosis with the people of Jerusalem. Not one of the six groups of people seems to be linked to another and also not with David. No individual points to another group. No person looks at another group. That is the tension in the picture, which makes of this painting a strange depiction that evokes a peculiar feeling of unease in any viewer. Something is wrong with this picture. There is no unity of emotion, no unity of people, no symbiosis, no common understanding, and no social warmth. Eyes and gestures are sometimes directed at David but David ignores these. He too remains isolated. This tension throws a very cold atmosphere over Poussin's painting and lowers the viewer's attraction to the scene.

The isolation of the groups and lack of unity may have been an error of the artist. It is hard to believe however that a painter with the skills and intelligence of a Nicolas Poussin would have made such an error. Poussin knew extremely well how to create unity of action and of form in a painting. He would have linked the figures in one way or other and would have ensured that David did not remain isolated in his triumph. The painting may not have been painted by Nicolas Poussin however, and some doubts indeed have been cast on its origins as it is not mentioned in early records of Poussin's works.<sup>U14.</sup>

Another interpretation might be that Nicolas Poussin has deliberately shunted unity of depiction from this work. Then he may have wanted to represent the theatre of human emotions around the bible story in a detached way. He may have wanted to show ironically how over the centuries David's act of killing Goliath has given rise to hollow, now very conventional, demonstrations of feelings. Other elements of the canvas support this interpretation. Poussin placed the scene before a temple with Roman columns, as we might expect from the background of a Greek tragedy. In such plays also appear choirs that exclaim and explain the feelings of the audience, or of society, at the main act of the play. The various groups of the people in the painting seem to represent the expression of such feelings, in the same way of the choirs of Greek tragedies. Choirs always sound somewhat artificial, detached. Choirs are spectators that merely regard the tragedy uninvolved as from a mirror, separated from the action and contemplating it to draw conclusions.

Poussin painted a tragedy as he might have it imagined staged in a Roman theatre. And indeed, there is something very theatrical in the way David walks stiffly over the stage. It is as if he were afraid of dropping the head and thus spoil his entrance on the theatre scene. David advances in the midst of the emotions, unperturbed and oblivious of the world around him, driven not by his own feelings or interpretations, but driven like an automaton by the Gods. An un-committing smile only is on his lips but it is a private smile and almost a quirk of his face.

Nicolas Poussin then even indicated specifically that six feelings are represented. In the lower left corner Poussin painted a small block of stone with six rectangular stone stubs, one stub for each emotion represented. Did Poussin reflect on which emotions could be aroused by David's act, and did he imagine that mainly these six existed?

Nicolas Poussin made a painting that evokes many feelings in the viewer. The colours are warm and balanced. The outline forms of the groups are symmetrically positioned



so that the viewer is made at ease and pleased by the apparent orderliness of the scene. The viewer is reminded of the logic of a Greek play. The viewer is invited to go over the splendid and harmonious variety of hues and over the wealth of chiaroscuro in the folds of the tunics of the Roman citizens. Poussin painted every figure differently, in poise, and with another face. The viewer may be affected by the many different emotions depicted and find interest in discovering the emotions. Nicolas Poussin thus made a picture that is nice to look at, and nice to discover in its many details. He introduced a tension however that brings the viewer quite at unease after some time and that tension leads to more intellectual reflection. The viewer senses that the painter tried to express a weird situation. That piques the interest of the viewer and leads him or her to a more profound reflection not only on the painting and to what the art of painting should do to viewers, but also on the Bible story of David and Goliath. Such evoking of all the senses of the spectator is the mark of a great artist, whether it was Nicolas Poussin or not.

*Other Paintings:*

**David before King Saul presenting the Head of Goliath**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1627.

**David victorious.** Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1431-1498). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1472.

### *Saul's attempt on David's Life*

Saul put David in command of fighting men and David was successful in his missions so that Saul's staff and the people respected him. After a while however, the people sang songs on David. The songs went, 'Saul has killed thousands and David has killed tens of thousands'. Saul grew jealous then. Saul removed David from his presence and appointed him commander of a thousand men, to lead the people on campaigns. Saul feared David for Yahweh was with David whereas Yahweh had abandoned Saul. War broke out again and David sallied out with the Israelites to fight the Philistines once more. David defeated the Philistines.

Saul wanted David to perish now. For that, David had to fight the Philistines. Saul tempted David into marrying his daughter Merab. In reward for Merab he told David to serve him and to fight Yahweh's wars. But David found his lineage was too low so Merab was given to Adriel of Meholah instead.

Somewhat later, Michal, another daughter of Saul's fell in love with David and this pleased Saul because he could thus repeat his ploy. He asked of David to bring him one hundred foreskins of Philistines and that would be the only bride price Saul demanded of David for Michal. David thought it would be a fine thing to be the king's son-in-law so he killed two hundred Philistines and brought the foreskins to Saul. David then married Michal

.

### **Saul attacking David**

Giovan Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini – Rome. 1646.

It is told in the Book of Samuel that David fought the Philistines and defeated them for King Saul. But one day, when David was playing the harp in Saul's palace, an evil spirit came over Saul. Saul sat near David with his spear in his hand. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David avoided the thrust and the lance stuck in the wall. David thus avoided Saul's spear twice. David fled then and went to his own home.

Guercino painted this scene when he was about fifty-five years old, in his later period, when he liked more the restrained, Classicist style of the Baroque period than his earlier style of rich, passionate colouring and overt show of emotions.

In 'Saul attacking David', Guercino stressed the monumentality of his personages of the Bible, to better express the epic of the old Bible stories. Like in many Classicist paintings we see just a few personages, here only Saul and David, and a very frugal background. Guercino painted a few columns behind his figures and only the sky with clouds. But he had a fine eye for using the background. David is young and frail, a

poet and a music player; he looks not at all like a warrior. Guercino set one column behind David, and he placed the column even only in half against the border of the frame. He placed the column to the right of David, not right behind him, and in the direction of David's movement of escape so that this column, though a very vertical and static element, adds subtly to the impression of rightward movement of David. Behind Saul however, Guercino placed two massive, dark columns shown in their full width. These are right behind Saul and so emphasise the power of the king but also his still position. Saul thrusts his spear with all his body and strength, but he does not move.

Behind the columns the viewer discovers a blue sky and clouds, but a sky almost without effects of aerial perspective. So the scene remains very theatrical, as if it were a rehearsed act of a theatre play. The scene remains flat; space is only in the scene of the figures, in the seemingly narrow palace room. Guercino also fixed his personages in action, as if they were statues or actors that wanted in slow motion to offer the viewer more time to watch the scene. The personages seem to be fixed in time. Yet, Guercino also used the slanting lines of movement in his pictures. David is drawn in such an oblique direction and Saul even more so. Their main body lines go to the right, as David flees to that side and Saul seems to lean with his body in that direction also, to near David. Saul holds his spear downward, also in a slanting direction, but aimed straight at David. The viewer's eyes go from this spear always to David.

Although we remark in this picture flowing cloaks, such as in David's blue cloak or Saul's orange-red one, and very ostentatious show of rapid gestures, the clear lines and cool colours give an impression of distance to the viewer. Saul is in the very act of thrusting his spear and David's arm tries to avert the danger. These gestures should have evoked feelings of motion in the viewer, but the well-delineated colour areas and the non-committing hues fix the figures in space and time. There are as well elements in this picture that would attract a viewer, as there are elements that would restrain the spectator from becoming emotionally involved in the scene. This contradiction or conflict in evoked impressions is rather disconcerting for a viewer. It is however a concept of style that is very Classicist and that was employed, developed, nurtured by the Bolognese school of Classicism. The effect seems to capture the attention of the viewer for a while, while the viewer looks and tries to find a solution for the conflict. But there is no solution, so the viewer remains interested for quite some time before the painting, which is always an effect arduously desired by painters. But it also leaves the viewer at the end perplexed and unsatisfied.

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, nicknamed Guercino which meant 'the squinter', was born in Cento, a small village between Bologna and Ferrara. He taught himself to paint, but he knew the style of the school of Bologna well and its Classicist views of the Carraccis. In his youth he was a more overtly Baroque painter than the Carraccis so that his pictures show more the warmth, exuberance of Baroque. In later years he returned to the colder and classicist style of Bologna. In 1621 Pope Gregory XV asked him to come to Rome but at the Pope's death in 1623 already he came back to Cento. When Guido Reni died in 1642 in Bologna, he moved to that town to become the leading painter there. He died in Bologna in 1666. Guercino painted the picture we discuss together with another one, 'Samson and Delilah', in 1646 for Cardinal Falconieri, who was at that time the Papal Legate to Bologna.<sup>129</sup> The picture was made a few years after Guercino had definitely returned to settle in Bologna.

Guercino had the marvellous skills of a master painter, and he had a mind of his own, his proper views on art, as can be seen in 'Saul attacking David'. Guercino also worked much on copper from about 1615 to 1625 and although 'Saul attacking David' is a painting in oil on canvas, Guercino brought some of the feeling for the smooth fluidity of paint in fine copper in this canvas: all colour areas are well covered and uniform in hue, perfectly filled-in and juxtaposed, and all details of zones well cared for in delicate chiaroscuro. Guercino painted fine details, in clearly separated colour areas. His figures are finely shown. The way he painted the smallest details of Saul's cuirass, in steel-grey hues and in which chiaroscuro is both elegantly and elaborately displayed, is just wonderful. Guercino used overall the grey and blue colours to support a cool mood, and that mood of course contrasts entirely with the hot, impulsive act of Saul. Guercino applied the grey also for the flesh of Saul's arms, face, spear and tunic. Yet, Saul should have been red-blooded by sudden anger. Also David's face is almost grey. The columns and clouds are grey. But then Guercino also used wonderful blue areas in David's cloak and in Saul's lower armour plates, harmonising the orange-red-brown in David's robe and Saul's cloak. Guercino had to use somewhat more orange and more yellow hues in David's robe to match David's blue cloak (a little yellow contrasts better blue since it is its complementary hue). In Saul's figure however, where he used mainly steel-grey, Guercino could force more pronounced red in Saul's cloak, so that Saul balances better David in hues. And he dared to use a little green lower down on Saul, but then also a green with yellow strokes to contrast well Saul's blue lower armour. Lighter shades of this yellow-green colour are on David's trousers. So Guercino used a refined set of matching and nicely contrasting colours, but few of them – except the blue, which expresses the coldness of the scene - are straightforward and familiar hues.

Guercino showed Saul as the elder, powerful, bearded king and David as a very young boy, girlishly playing the harp. David's face is surrounded by luxurious, girlish curls. It would be hard to believe that David was then already a fierce warrior, who had not only slain the giant Goliath but who had also defeated repeatedly the Philistine armies. David had led Saul's troops to victory and he had fought with the men. He should have been a powerful youth by now, well muscled and manly in demeanour. But Guercino did not paint David as any viewer would have expected him. This however might have been the contrast that irritated Saul. Saul himself we expect as a bulky, hairy devil of a man, a sleek schemer and vicious person. But Guercino shows him as a more refined king. These conflicts and contradictions in representation are very much the main interest of the picture and certainly no error of judgement of Guercino. We have seldom been brought before a painting that evokes such mixed feelings, evoked expressly by a painter that played thus with the viewer's reactions in novel modes.

*Jonathan pleads for David*

That same night after Saul's attempt to kill David, Saul sent agents to David's house to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him and told him to flee. Michal let David down through a window and David escaped from the grip of Saul. Michal took an image of David, put a tress of goat's hair at the head and placed the image in bed, covering it up. When Saul's agents came in the house, Michal told them that David was ill and in bed. The agents went back to Saul, but Saul ordered them to bring David – ill or not – to him. The agents found the image now and Saul scorned Michal for having deceived him and let his enemy, David, flee.

David in the meantime went to Samuel at Ramah.

When Saul learned how Michal had helped David to escape, he bitterly reproached his daughter for having saved David. Saul then gave Michal to Palti, son of Laish, from Gahim, as wife.

Samuel and David lived for a while in the huts of Ramah. The agents sent by Saul to Ramah all fell into frenzy and could not harm Samuel or David. Even Saul, who went there to take revenge on David himself, went into frenzy. He stripped off his clothes and fell naked on the ground in front of Samuel and David. David fled from Ramah.

**David and Jonathan**

Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano (1459/1460 – 1517/1518). The National Gallery – London.

David confronted Jonathan over these events. Jonathan still thought his father would not kill David. He said he would hear his father out and in the meantime David could stay in the country. Jonathan swore to David to tell him the truth and he asked David to swear also that if he, Jonathan, died, not to let his name be exterminated with Saul's family. The youth loved each other dearly. Jonathan did try out his father but Saul flew into a rage when Jonathan defended David. Saul said that as long as David lived neither Jonathan nor his royal rights would be secure. Saul was determined that David should die and even in his anger threatened Jonathan with his spear. Jonathan returned to David as promised and he told David the truth. Jonathan then wanted David to stay and hide in the country. The two youths embraced and wept copiously before they departed. But Jonathan kept his oath to David.

The Italian painter Gianbattista Cima da Conegliano tried to express the friendship between the two youths David and Jonathan.

Cima was a painter of the Veneto born around 1460 in the village of Conegliano, hence his name. He remained there until around 1484, and then worked in Vicenza. In 1492 he moved to Venice. He painted many pictures in bright colours and he had a good sense of harmonious and balanced compositions. He had a keen idea of landscapes. In 1516 Cima returned to Conegliano, where he died around 1517 or 1518. He may have been formed in Vicenza in the workshop of Bartolomeo Montagna and influences ascribed to him may have been by the main Venetian masters like Alvise Vivarini, Antonella da Messina, Giovanni Bellini, Giorgio da Castelfranco called Giorgione and Vittore Carpaccio – in other terms, all painters from which he had seen pictures. Cima painted in an effortless way, absorbing images and styles of the others without imprinting his own force of style on the period. He was a good professional and delivered simple paintings with the charm and delicacy that Venice appreciated. His pictures were clear, luminous, in nice, harmonious and rather pure hues, uncomplicated in composition and could be understood rapidly. What Cima lacked in power, he added in picturesque. Cima was very likable and quite esteemed in Venice. His ‘David and Jonathan’ is such a picture.

Cima’s ‘David and Jonathan’ is a graceful, poetic picture of two young boys walking leisurely and calmly in the Veneto countryside. Cima painted the boy on the left the smaller, stockier, more robust and broader in the shoulders. This boy is dressed like a shepherd. We know that he is David because he holds the head of Goliath, his trophy, casually in his right hand. The head of Goliath seems still to live and to look menacingly with open eyes at the viewer. But David does not give the head a particular look. He carries a large curved sword over his shoulder. The boy has golden locks, a full face and he looks intently but innocently before him. He wears a sling at his belt. That was the weapon that killed the giant Goliath, not the sword. Cima painted David as if he were a young martyr. It was the habit from medieval times to depict Saints with their instruments of passion and in that same practice, Cima showed David with the attributes that he is well known for in the Bible: with Goliath, the sling and the sword. David was the armour bearer of King Saul. There can be no doubt to any viewer that this is David, identification is easy and immediate.

Next to David walks a young soldier, dressed in green leather armour. He wears a red cloak over his shoulders and in the folds of this cloak we can see that Cima knew how to paint chiaroscuro and give an impression of volumes as well as any other master Venetian painter. The boy is taller than David, thinner and with finer looks. He wears a long lance that is in fact a very long, thin arrow. It is not specified in the Book of Samuel how the Philistines at the battle of Mount Gilboa killed Jonathan and his brothers Abinadab and Malchishua, but the Bible does tell that the Philistine archers came upon their father, King Saul, and severely wounded him. So Cima presumed probably that the Philistine archers also had killed Jonathan and he painted him with a long arrow. Jonathan looks affectionately at David. Cima shows plainly that Jonathan admires David and loves David, whereas David is oblivious of that affection and pursues his way, his road to ambition. He who is loved is the master, not he who loves, so David continues to walk on, whereas Jonathan has to look at the road and at David. The relations of the more powerful to the follower are thus clear to viewers.

The ‘David and Jonathan’ is an unpretentious scene without intricate composition. Cima did add picturesque elements to make the picture more interesting, but the attention of the viewers remain concentrated on the two boys. In the picture the two

youths walk nonchalantly through a nice landscape. Cima painted an imaginary landscape. We see to the left an Italian castle on a high promontory and on the right high mountains and a fortified town in the plains. Between these two is a river, leading into a sea. The landscape forms a low 'open V' structure, but the composition remains inconspicuous as Cima simply added some view on the left and right of the boys, where he had some space to fill. He did not detail the terrain the boys are walking in, so that it is as if the boys wander in a part of desert sand and desert is somewhat like we know Palestine to be today.

Gianbattista Cima did know how to paint however: remark the details of the turrets of the castle, of the mountains, of the Medusa-like head of Goliath and the gentle aerial perspective with which he treats near and far colours. Cima used colours also remarkably well in the two boys. David is dressed in yellow and blue, which are complementary colours that contrast well together. Moreover the hues are deep and warm; the yellow is not shrill. Jonathan is dressed in green and red, equally complementary colours and equally colours of hues that contrast well. David wears red boots, in the colour of Jonathan's cloak; Jonathan wears long, leather shoes of blue like the colour of David's collar piece. Such details of sweet harmony, easy to discover, these little delicate touches of refinement made Cima popular.

Cima da Conegliano's 'David and Jonathan' does not look really like a Venetian painting. It looks more like a Florentine limpid, clearly lined Florentine drawing that was filled in with colours after the drawing. It is only in the soft balancing of the darker tones of colour used on David and especially on Jonathan that we perceive something of Venetian colour and soft charm. Furthermore, the picture tells a story of two boys walking with their trophies and telling stories was also eminently Venetian.

The friendship of Jonathan for David was a very romantic theme after all and the figure of Jonathan in his integer love for David is very pure and touching since Jonathan confronted his father in this relation to David. Therefore it was a nice picture subject for Cima.

*David hiding from Saul*

David went on a journey, hiding from Saul. He went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. This priest gave him the sword of Goliath for David had no arms. Goliath's scimitar had been kept in Nob, wrapped in a piece of cloth, hidden behind the ephod. David fled to Achish, king of Gath of the Philistines. David was welcomed at first, but the Philistines remembered him so he had to feint lunacy, to feint being a madman so that the Philistines would spare him. David then took refuge as an outlaw in the Cave of Adullam. David's family joined him there. David brought his family to Mizpah however, to the king of Moab. The prophet Gad warned David not to remain in the stronghold of Moab because he was in danger there, so David fled on. Saul was still pursuing him. Saul heard that the priest Ahimelech of Nob had given Goliath's sword to David, so Saul ordered Ahimelech to die and Doeg the Edomite, Saul's servant, slew all the priests of Nob. One son of Ahimelech alone escaped. His name was Abiathar. He joined David and told him the terrible news.

David had heard in the meantime that the Philistines were besieging Keilah. David consulted Yahweh, attacked the Philistines and won a great victory. But Saul then knew where David was, called his men to arms and went on his way to besiege David. David consulted Yahweh because he was aware that Saul was plotting against him. Yahweh warned David that Saul was coming and that the people of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. David escaped from Keilah then and fled into the desert. He stayed in the mountain strongholds of the desert. Jonathan came to David again and made a pact with him before Yahweh. Jonathan told that Saul would not reach David. He said David was to reign over Israel and Jonathan could be his second. David remained in the stronghold of Horesh in the desert of Ziph, on the hill of Hachilah. Later, David installed himself in the stronghold of En-Gedi.

Saul pursued David but messengers came to Saul to notify him that the Philistines had invaded the country. Saul then broke off his pursuit and turned to confront the Philistines. When Saul had fought the Philistines and heard that David was at En-Gedi, he took three thousand men of Israel and moved back in pursuit of David. On that way Saul went one day into a cave to cover his feet. David and his men were sitting in the recesses of that very cave. David cut off a border of Saul's cloak but immediately repented for Saul was still the anointed of Yahweh. When Saul left the cave, David also came out after him in the open. He addressed Saul saying that he wanted no harm to Saul, even though he could easily have killed him in the cave. Saul began to weep aloud, answering that David was upright and he was not. He said he knew he had behaved badly to David. He said he really knew that David one day would reign over Israel but he made David swear not to suppress Saul's descendants or blot Saul's name out of his family. This David swore to Saul and Saul went home.



## *Abigail*

### **Abigail before David**

Moritz von Schwind (1804-1871). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1830.

Samuel died. All Israel assembled to mourn him. He was buried in his home in Ramah. David was at the funeral, and then descended the road to the desert of Maon. David protected the people of Maon.

There was a man of Maon called Nabal, married to a woman called Abigail. When David heard that Nabal was at his sheepshearing he sent some of his men to Nabal to ask for whatever Nabal's hand could give them. Nabal flared up and refused to give anything to David's servants, not even some bread. David was angry when his men came back and four hundred of his warriors buckled their swords to punish Nabal.

But Abigail, Nabal's wife, had heard how rudely her husband had answered David's polite quest. She took roasted grain, bunches of raisin, cakes of figs, loaves of bread, skins of wine and several sheep and brought these to David's camp. She fell before David and told her husband was only a brute and that not her husband but she herself was to blame. She pleaded with David to forgive Nabal.

David was pleased with what Abigail had brought, accepted it and told her that had she not come he surely would have killed her maniac husband. Now David pardoned Nabal. Abigail returned home to Nabal who was feasting. The next morning she told her husband how she had been to see David. Nabal's heart died within him at the news and he became like stone. He died shortly after. David then sent Abigail, now widow of Nabal, an offer of marriage and Abigail accepted David as husband.

David married Abigail. He had two wives since he had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. Michal was still with Palti, son of Laish.

The painter Austrian-German Moritz von Schwind took up the theme of Abigail for one of his first pictures.

Moritz von Schwind was a painter of the late Romantic period. He was born in 1804 in Austria's capital Vienna, in Napoleonic times. He was the son of a high-placed civil servant of the court of Vienna and studied philosophy until 1821. Then he learned how to paint and came under the influence of artists of the German Nazarene circle, painters that had worked for longer periods in Rome in a community there. The Nazarenes were so called by the Romans because they wore their hair long and had headbands like the followers of Jesus in Nazareth. The Nazarenes painted religious themes and worked in a clear, Florentine Renaissance type of style of realistic

depiction with emphasis on line and drawing, in soft colours. They also reverted to fresco painting in Rome. Von Schwind thus met Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who was his teacher at the academy, Ferdinand Olivier and especially Peter von Cornelius who was his teacher in Munich. He moved much in the circles of the musician Franz Schubert and met his friends, musicians, painters, and writers. Von Schwind had learned to know and appreciate von Cornelius, who had been in Rome from 1811 to 1819 when he had been called to Munich by Prince Ludwig. Von Cornelius' work was however not very to the taste of the King, but von Cornelius had become the Director of the Munich Academy. Von Schwind left Vienna for this town to be near to von Cornelius, to study with him at the academy of Munich. Von Schwind moved definitely to Munich in 1828. He learned the art of fresco painting and quickly became socially very acceptable in the circles of the German richer middle-class. He painted for the palaces of King Ludwig I and Crown-Prince Maximilian, even for Ludwig II of Bavaria – even though the latter did not appreciate von Schwind much<sup>D8</sup> - and he was called in to paint frescoes in town halls of Karlsruhe and Frankfurt. From 1847 on he was a professor at the Munich academy but he also remained connected to Vienna, where he painted frescoes in the Opera House from 1863 to 1867.

Von Schwind was a poetic, late Romantic painter. Since he was much in fashion with the well-to-do middle class and nobility of the major towns and courts of Germany and Austria, he has been classified as an eminent 'Biedermeier artist'. Biedermeier art was very bourgeois art, sentimental, poetic, genre-oriented and refusing academic historical painting, but remaining very academic in execution. Biedermeier art was deliberately simple and unpretentious, somewhat moralising but that then very gently. It delivered nice landscapes, intimate genre scenes, a few mythological themes and religious romantic pictures. Von Schwind for instance decorated on themes from fables like Cinderella or Snow White and his landscapes were filled with beautiful, elegant elves.

The name 'Biedermeier' came from a character called Gottfried Biedermeier, invented by the writer Adolf Kussmaul in 1853. Kussmaul and Ludwig Eichrodt wrote poems, 'The Biedermeier Poems', between 1855 and 1857 that were published regularly in a Munich satirical magazine 'Münchner Fliegende Blätter' (Munich Loose Pages). The Biedermeier period dated mainly from between 1815 to around 1850, the first half of the nineteenth century in Austria and Germany.

Von Schwind's 'Abigail before David' was painted in the middle of the Biedermeier period, in 1830, when the artist lived in Munich and was only just trying to learn painting and make a name for himself. We see Abigail knelt in front of David, pleading for leniency and bringing with her servants food to David's men. David is shown as a king, dressed in full armour, as he might well have been at the times of the Bible story, and accompanied by his soldiers. Moritz von Schwind was still young when he made this picture, since he came only to painting from 1821 on. He had made sketches for the scene from 1823 to 1824, and wanted since long to make a real painting of the theme. He stood fully in the influence of Peter von Cornelius. The 'Abigail before David' was one of his very first large oil paintings. So he made a picture that is very Romantic in its aspirations of a young, beautiful, pure young woman coming to present herself humbly to a chivalrous knight. The woman Abigail is fine and noble, gracious and dressed in the fine, elegant clothes of a country lady. She has come to recognise the prevalence and power of David, which was a theme

certainly of actuality in 1830 since Western Europe was racked then by growing unrest and challenges to the established nobility. Von Schwind already showed himself to be an artist that was very respectful of traditions and of the men that were in power. Von Schwind painted David in an equally elegant though somewhat mannered poise, known of ancient Roman statues. The whole scene is idealistic, poetic and composed with dignity.

Moritz von Schwind showed a scene of refinement. He used an easy composition, placing the women to the left and the men to the right. In the background he depicted an open landscape to bring more space in the picture and used for that the well-known 'open V' structure, placing high dark trees on left and right. He strengthened the 'open V' by the directions of the top enveloping lines of the figures, as Abigail kneels before David thus allowing a view on the wide landscape. Remark in this picture the clearly delineated colour areas, which were easy for a young painter and one of the design elements characteristic for Nazarene painting, and of Peter von Cornelius. The forms are very apparent, easy to discern for a viewer. Von Schwind also applied soft hues, almost pastel colours and we discover symmetries in his filling in of areas with colours. The hues on the right answer the hues of the left symmetrically. Von Schwind painted a vivid scene with all figures in different poises and he proved already to be able to master scenes with many figures and liking to depict many figures in scenes.

We have first paintings or first major paintings from many painters of course. Moritz von Schwind showed with 'Abigail and David' his skills and rapid learning. He proved himself a painter eager to please the circles in which he was raised with sweet Romantic themes. He knew he had to surprise to please, so he made a picture of a theme that has rarely been painted before him, of the story of David and Abigail.

#### *Other Paintings:*

#### **The Meeting of David and Abigail in a Landscape with the Settizonio of Septimus Severus**

Flemish Painter of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Galleria Colonna. Rome.

#### **The Meeting of David and Abigail**

Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691). Kunstmuseum. Basel.

### *Saul in David's Hands*

Saul came after David in the desert. In the dark, David and Abishai, son of Zeruiah, made their way to the camp of Saul and found him sleeping inside the camp. Abishai then said to David that God had put Saul in David's hands. But David merely took Saul's spear and the pitcher of water from beside Saul's head. He did not want Abishai to strike at Saul for Saul was still the anointed of Yahweh. David went away and from the far called to Saul and to Abner, Saul's army commander. Saul recognised that God had brought him into David's hands when he saw the spear and the pitcher. He told he had profoundly done wrong. Saul blessed David for having spared him and wished David success in his undertakings. Saul returned home. David thus twice avoided a battle between the Israelites and twice spared Saul's life.

David still feared Saul's anger. He went to the Philistine territory, to live in the lands of Achish son of Maoch in Gath and settled there with his family and his two wives. When news reached Saul that David was hiding in Gath, in Philistine territory, he stopped searching for David. Achish gave the village of Ziklag to David and from there David raided against other enemies, against the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. Achish trusted David and when the Philistines mustered for war on Israel, Achish even asked David to go into battle with him as vassal of the Philistines. David answered he would come, so Achish appointed David as his permanent bodyguard.

### *Saul and the Witch of En-Dor*

#### **Saul and the Witch of En-Dor**

Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen (ca. 1470-1533). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1526.

The Philistines assembled for war and Saul was afraid when he saw their camp. Samuel was dead; all Israel had mourned him and he was buried at Ramah. So Saul could not ask for advice to Samuel anymore. The Philistines pitched camp at Shunem. Saul was afraid of the Philistine strength.

Saul called for a necromancer to consult him and since he was encamped at Gilboa, his servants found a witch close by at En-Dor. Saul disguised himself by changing his clothes and went to the witch accompanied by two men. He asked the witch to conjure someone up for him. The witch however answered that Saul had proscribed conjuring. Saul had to promise that nobody would harm her, and then asked to call up the ghost of Samuel. The witch conjured up Samuel for Saul. When she saw Samuel she recognised Saul also and was afraid, but Saul eased her.

Saul asked Samuel what he should do since God had abandoned him. Samuel told Saul what he already knew. Yahweh had abandoned Saul and given his favour to Saul's neighbour, David, because Saul did not execute Yahweh's will in front of the Amalekites. Yahweh would deliver Israel and Saul into the hands of the Philistines.

Samuel predicted that after the battle of the next day Saul and his sons would be with him, Samuel. Saul fell full length on the ground then and he was terrified.

The witch owned a fattened calf, which she slaughtered. She took flour, kneaded it and baked with it unleavened cakes. She gave this to eat to Saul, and then the King left En-Dor the same night.

Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen made a picture of the witch of En-Dor. Van Oostsanen was a painter of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. He was born in Amsterdam and lived there his whole life, but he must have known the way of painting of some of his contemporaries and he was much influenced by these. He also worked for a time as an engraver in Antwerp, from 1507 to 1517.

Van Oostsanen was an artist of transition between the medieval, Gothic tradition of Flemish painting and Italian elements of the Renaissance. His paintings lean towards the works of three of his contemporaries: Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533), Jan van Scorel (1495-1562) and Jan Gossaert called Mabuse (1478/1488-1532). A few elements of his painting 'Saul and the Witch of En-Dor' also remind of Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) whose dark and mystical visions of witches and devils are somewhat mirrored in this work of van Oostsanen. Van Oostsanen must have thought that Renaissance style of painting was mainly a new way of representing old themes. He painted usually very many figures in his scenes, which was the continuance of a Dutch tradition to be found in Bosch pictures, and added many ornamental elements like Roman columns, flying angels and ample volutes in decoration. He painted 'Saul and the Witch of En-Dor' entirely in this style. He made the picture in the prolongation of Bosch's obsession with satanic representations and we cannot but wonder what undercurrents to religion and ancient pagan habits drove artists like Bosch and van Oostsanen to show such pictures. The Christian religion though already old and implanted in society since long, must have lived in the country side by side with ancient folk lore of witches and powers of witchcraft. Bosch showed these and van Oostsanen continued with this picture the series, as if mesmerised and attracted to the darker powers of the mind.

Van Oostsanen represented various scenes on the canvas, as was the habit in much earlier medieval paintings.

In the middle foreground we see the witch of En-Dor hold her court. She is seated on an animal resembling a dog, the symbol of loyalty. This may indicate that the witch can exert power over other creatures that serve her loyally. She is of course old and ugly and van Oostsanen takes pleasure in showing her sagging breasts and her grey hair even if the witch hides this under a red cap. Objects of witchcraft are around the witch. We see an owl, the typical night bird for which men always were somewhat in awe as the bird only flew at night. A satyr holds open the book by which the sorceress will conjure up Samuel. To her side sits a man or a woman, pinching the leaves of the satyr's hair. This may be Saul, but he has then already been transformed from a warrior into an instrument of the witch. The witch of En-Dor holds one metal baton high and fumes rise from this staff. She holds another such staff in a furnace to heat it until it is incandescent red. Power comes from fire; fire is a symbol of hell. The

furnace seems to be fuelled by the heat from sunrays. We see another satanic creature coming from a nightmare of Bosch holding a mirror to the fire. With the two staffs the witch conjures and can bring temporarily to life the dead. She does that not by appealing to the powers of Yahweh, but through the powers of evil and hell, impersonified in the satyrs, the owl, the goats and the fiery angels that come hurling from the skies at her calling. The witch of En-Dor is in full action and van Oostanen painted her blue-red silk gown flowing around her, showing an evil wind enveloping her. But for this gown, the witch seems to be naked.

On the left middle is another scene in which Saul presents himself at a gate of the witch's dwelling. He asks to be received by the witch. Saul is dressed in armour and above him we see another small scene of the Israelite camp of soldiers, preparing for battle.

On the right is a scene of women witches that accompany the witch of En-Dor. The women are eating from a furnace and the symbol of wickedness, a goat with several horns is in their midst. Goats are indeed a theme and emblem of witchcraft here, representing the evil forces; a witch, dressed in yellow and drinking from a beaker that may hold the gift of eternal life is seated on yet another goat. Above the women Satanic angels fly through the air on strange animals that might have been inspired by images of Hieronymus Bosch. These angels bring food to the witches. On the farthest right is a satyr, playing music on a mechanical, country instrument that wandering singers used in the Middle Ages. The women are drinking and eating and drinking so much, enticed by evil angels, was considered a sin. So these women are engaged in sin at the command of the witch.

Behind the witch of En-Dor are the ruins of an ancient palace and of course, the witch could not live in a well-built house. She can only live among the ruins of old buildings. The ruins have still Roman arches intact and through the largest, central arch we see Samuel rising from his tomb. Further in the distance, Samuel talks to Saul and tells him of the impending defeat of the Jews. In the far we see the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines.

The painting 'Saul and the Witch of En-Dor' is a complex picture of many scenes and even more figures, animals, angels and objects. Nevertheless, van Oostanen organised his scenes in a logical composition of the 'open V'. Here the witch and the movement of her staff high above her on the left, form the left angle of the V. Whereas on the right we see a woman holding high her beaker and a fiery angel coming down with a platter from the skies, followed by a streak of fire, form the right angle of the V. The V is indeed open so that a central arch is in the middle and through the arch the viewer sees in the far three further scenes of the story of the witch of En-Dor. The viewer's gaze furthermore goes to a piece of landscape and a blue sky with a sunrise so that van Oostanen brought a natural perspective and thus far space into his picture. Van Oostanen of course gradually diminished the dimensions of his figures in this landscape, adding to the sense of perspective and thus of distance in the viewer. Remark also the nice colour hues in the picture and how van Oostanen brought balance in the colour masses. The witch of En-Dor wears a gown of blue and red, colours indeed that are apparent in silk. And on the right we find a woman in blue and one in red.

Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen made many very religious paintings so that the 'Saul and the Witch of En-Dor' was a rare subject even for him. But it gave him the occasion to depict the evil powers that held the Christian powers in check. Therefore, although a scene from the bible, the story and images tell much more than the mere story of Saul's encounter with a witch. Van Oostsanen seems to say that appealing to the darker forces only brings defeat, so that his picture is a very moralising one. But for that he needed to show ugliness and since he must have known Hieronymus Bosch's pictures, he groped back to Bosch's visions to represent witchcraft. And yet, he could not entirely follow Bosch but had to depict scenes that were more in line with the newer, Renaissance representations. Most of his figures in the painting are still human, and he painted the witch and her companion in Renaissance nude. In this aspect, his picture is quite interesting and rare.

*Other Paintings:*

**Saul and Endor the Magus**

Johann Heinrich Schönfeld (1609-1683). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome.

## *Samuel's Ghost and Saul*

### **The Apparition of the Ghost of Samuel to Saul**

Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1668.

Like Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen in 'Saul and the Witch of En-Dor', the Italian master Salvator Rosa equally showed the witch in a scene painted hundred and fifty years later. Rosa also shows the witch while she is conjuring up the Prophet Samuel, but Rosa presented the witch even wilder, with even worse nightmare horrors around her. Now hell is more perceptible, close and full of immediate almost palpable danger. Rosa placed the witch on the left of the painting. She is, like in van Oostsanen's picture, half naked, with an old wrinkled body and sagging breasts. Just like van Oostsanen saw her, Rosa depicted the witch using fire for her exorcism. A fire stand is near and she holds a pot out of which come fumes. She holds a twig high and over the pot, to set fire on the wood and thus bring light to the scene, or using the added powers of the fire to keep Samuel with her. She conjures up the powers of evil and Salvator Rosa showed a skeleton jumping from out of the darkness of hell towards the scene. The skeleton is hardly human and long, amphibian bones protrude into the picture middle. Rosa furthermore painted a horse's head, a large heavy bird of the night, a skull of a predator bird and higher up another bird that could be an owl. All the lines here are fusing and Rosa used very deep tones of dark brown and grey colours to indicate hell and its devilish creatures of the night. The witch of En-Dor has grey hair that rises to the horrors above her, where all the beasts of hell seem to come at her appeal or at her command to recall and retain Samuel. Does she command these animals or do the animals try to take command of her and does she need all her force to hold them back and not take in all the figures of the scene? The witch screams out at that effort. This whole image is nightmarish indeed and a remarkable picture of the century, sprouted out of a wild mind of a strange artist.

Salvator Rosa was a painter of the seventeenth century. He was born in Naples in 1615 and received his training as a painter in Naples, which was then under Spanish dominance. His uncle Domenico Antonio Greco taught him first, then his brother-in-law Francesco Fracanzano. Later still he painted in the workshops of Jusepe de Ribera and Aniello Falcone until 1635. In 1637 he left Naples and went to Rome. Except from stays in Florence from 1641 to 1649 he spent the rest of his life in Rome and died there in 1673.

Salvator Rosa had a very strange, passionate personality. He was not only a painter but also a poet and a musician. He wrote satirical plays for a group of actors that he had assembled and with which he performed in Rome. In doing that he did not spare some of his fellow-artists and in so doing he attracted their enmity. Salvator Rosa painted battle scenes and landscapes, in which his wild, Romantic imagination prevailed. He also occasionally made religious pictures and more rarely still-lives. Later still he turned to engraving, hoping to become more known through this medium. Rosa painted in strong contrasts of light and dark, which was a tradition build in Rome after Caravaggio and his pictures are often very dark, which may be a



way of depiction he saw from the Spanish Tenebrist styles learnt from Jusepe de Ribera.

In Salvator Rosa's painting 'The Apparition of the Ghost of Samuel to Saul' the Prophet Samuel stands imperturbably before the witch of En-Dor. He still seems to sleep and the witch will need more effort to bring him entirely awake to Saul. To confront the devilish creatures, Samuel is dressed entirely in the white long cloth that may be the white linen in which he was laid in his coffin. By this white the viewer understands that this is Samuel's ghost appearing to Saul. The Prophet Samuel is a dignified old man, but the only detail by which Rosa indicated this is the old face and the grey-white beard. Otherwise, Samuel is wholly covered by the white linen and he protectively holds his arms crossed, as he might have had in his coffin. It seems that he has only just been reluctantly recalled from his rest and from the solace of heaven to this cold, dark terrestrial night. Samuel is an imposing figure of wisdom and stands like a rock of purity before the forces of hell.

Before the Prophet kneels King Saul. From him also we see only part of a head. The king is frightened, kneels very deep with his head almost to the ground and he barely dares to look at Samuel. He seems oblivious of the witch, so in awe is he of the ghost of the Prophet. His soldiers also, behind Samuel, have fallen to the ground and look in surprise and fear. The witch of En-Dor, the Prophet Samuel and King Saul thus form the three figures of the scene and they are brought closely together in a scene of horror mixed with spiritual purity and earthly power.

Salvator Rosa used a composition based on the diagonals of the frame. From the back of Saul over Samuel's head goes the left diagonal and from the fallen soldiers on the lower right over the line of the witch's twig to the outlines of the satanic animals goes the right diagonal. But this is a scene of horror and chaos, so Salvator Rosa did not much emphasise these lines, even though they are present as directions. He almost deliberately avoided the lines in places and broke their direction. The picture is in dark tones as this is a night scene, but a diluted light come from the lower left, accentuates the left diagonal and lightens a few details of the picture. The light falls magnificently on the yellow-golden cloak of King Saul, on the naked back of the witch and on the white linen of Samuel. Here we see the remarkable skills of Rosa in painting chiaroscuro on the cloaks and in giving the right impression of volume in the bodies of Saul and Samuel. Salvator Rosa played marvellously with light and dark in this picture, in the best style of Roman contrasts and Spanish Tenebrism.

The pictures of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen and of Salvator Rosa lay separated by hundred fifty years. One picture was made by a North European painter of the Netherlands, the other by an Italian of Naples in Italy. Yet the image Western Europeans had of hell, of devilish creatures and of witches were remarkably the same. A visual consensus over how witchcraft might be demonic seems to have been universal and to have been a consistent, continued image.

*Other Paintings:*

**Anne and her Husband present their son Samuel to High Priest Elias to consecrate him to God.** Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout (1626 – 1674). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1665.

### *Saul's Death*

In the meantime, the Philistines lost confidence in David. Achish, king of the Philistines, told David he trusted him but that he was not acceptable to the chieftains. So Achish sent David home. Then the Philistines marched on Jezreel without David. David arrived in Ziklag again, only to hear that the Amalekites had raided the town and taken his two wives captive. David went in pursuit of the Amalekites. Soon they found a young Egyptian who had been a slave to the Amalekites and this boy indicated to them where the Amalekites had gone. David found his enemy's camp as the Amalekites were still celebrating and feasting on their booty. David attacked them by surprise, slaughtered them all and returned with his family to Ziklag.

At the same time, while David fought the Amalekite bandits, the Philistines gave battle to Saul. The Israelites were defeated and slaughtered at Mount Gilboa as Yahweh had predicted. Jonathan was killed there, as well as Abinadah and Malchishua, two other of Saul's sons.

The fighting concentrated on Saul and he was severely wounded by the archers. Saul then said to his armour-bearer to take his sword and run it through him. But the man was very much afraid. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. The armour-bearer seeing that Saul was dead, fell on his sword too and died with Saul.

The Israelites had lost the battle and they saw that Saul was dead. They abandoned their towns and fled. The Philistines occupied the towns. They found Saul and his sons. They cut off Saul's head. They showed Saul's armour throughout the Philistine territory to proclaim their victory. They gave the armour to their temple of Astarte. They bound Saul's body to the walls of Beth-Shean. The Israelite warriors of Jabesh however set out and took the bodies of Saul and his sons off the walls of Beth-Shean. They buried their bones under the tamarisk of Jabesh in Gilead.

## *The Suicide of Saul*

### **The Suicide of Saul**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna.

In Pieter Bruegel's painting 'The Suicide of Saul' we have a typical example of his mastery of landscape. Mountain views, forests, open plains and a river are shown in one picture, painted according to scenes of nature as Bruegel had absorbed them in his mind from his travels and combined as the setting for a Bible tragedy. Like in many of Pieter Bruegel's paintings the landscape is the most important element. Bruegel constantly showed his viewers how majestic and grand, how overpowering nature can be. Nature was imperturbable for this artist and eternal, and people just moved in it, strange aliens that adapted parts of the nature for their meagre needs, but these changes in the environment always seemed small and un-disturbing. Nature was overwhelming and silent. It was the patient universe in which people like small ants only passed but were no masters off. They formed part of the nature ultimately, as long as they remained small. And so Bruegel painted people. Thus, the tragedy of King Saul's death was but a detail in the grandeur of the world's nature and a slain king was nothing more but a triviality.

Pieter Bruegel showed Saul's army and the also the Philistine army as they are engaged in battle. The clash of the battle is hardly shown. The viewer will remark the forest of lances and flags rising out from the marching mass of soldiers, but few individual soldiers can actually be discerned. Behind the army lie the dead, assembled in the heaps where the fighting among the groups were the hardest. Here the slain fell by numbers.

In the mountain rocks, on a boulder that dominates the battle scene, we see the small figures of Saul and his armour-bearer. Saul lies on the rock, with the sword to his neck. His armour-bearer is still seen fallen on his own sword. Bruegel painted how the armour-bearer pushed the sword to his throat and then leaned on the sword to his death. A few Philistine soldiers climb the mountains, where they believe Saul had fled and one of them finds indeed the king and beckons the other to hurry.

In Pieter Bruegel's paintings like 'The Suicide of Saul', man is small and nature is great. Saul's death does not impact nature and the act disappears in the everlasting nature. Bruegel had a very great sense of eternity and of the smallness of human deeds. He was the artist who relativised as no other the Renaissance call to greatness of man.

Pieter Bruegel must have been born around 1525 to 1530. He died already in 1569 in Brussels, so he was not much older than forty years. He seems to have been a student of Pieter Coecke van Aalst; at least he married a girl called Mayken Coecke in 1563. So wrote Karel van Mander in the middle of the seventeenth century. Van Mander was a Flemish painter and chronicler of Flemish and Dutch painters' lives but exact information on that has not been found in the registers of the time. Bruegel appeared

in the town of Antwerp in 1551 and his name was then entered in the lists of the guilds of painters. He may have studied elsewhere however. Bruegel became an independent master in Antwerp in 1551 and in 1553 he was in Italy. He crossed the Alps and travelled to Rome, but very little is known of this trip except his later engravings of spectacular mountain views. The first dated painting we have of Pieter Bruegel is from 1558 so that the whole known work of this master covers merely ten to eleven years. Fifteen, about half of his paintings are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, Austria and so is the 'Suicide of Saul'.

Bruegel painted thousands of figures in his thirty-five or so oil paintings. In his early pictures and in rarer later paintings he painted people close to the viewer and then considered background and landscape subsidiary. With growing age, though he died young, landscape became more important for the artist, and he then placed his figures smaller in the landscape and rather distributed them over the canvas, often lost in the wide nature. Landscape was preponderant for him and the subjects from the Bible that he used were merely occasions for landscape pictures and for the message that all what happened to mankind and to individual people was trifling compared to the grandeur of nature. Bruegel preferred to show very far, deep, global views and he situated his figures in the vastness, in the enormously broad valleys and against the high mountains.

Bruegel usually applied a composition in his landscape views that was oblique. He positioned the main theme –always a human story – to the left in a triangle and opened the view on the right to the far. He was a master who looked at nature in an epic way and he placed epic Bible or mythological scenes in epic nature. In such views however, nature dominated and had the right to occupy the largest part of the canvas and the part of honour: the right side.

King Saul's drama disappears in the chaos of the rocks of the mountains; the wide landscape of the picture remains in the impression of the viewer. Is it not also thus with the stories from the bible? We read and learn about individual Bible tales, but story after story adds only each one grain to the epic breadth of the Deuteronomic History and the grand design of the God of the Israelites, Yahweh.

### *The second Book of Samuel*

David heard the news of the death of Saul and he tore his clothes in mourning. He consulted Yahweh and listened to his advice to go to Hebron. The men of Judah came there and they anointed David as king of the House of Judah.

In the meantime however, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's armies, had made Saul's son Ishbaal king of Gilead, of the Asherites, of Ephraim, of Benjamin and indeed of all Israel. Only Judah supported David.

Ishbaal's retainers led by Abner and David's retainers led by Joab, son of Zeruiah, had a fierce battle at Gibeon. Abner had to flee but while doing that he killed Asahel, brother of Joab, in a duel fight. Many men were killed on either side. Abner could escape without suffering Joab's revenge. The war thus dragged on among the Israelites.

Abner took complete control over the House of Saul. He took as wife a concubine of Saul's called Rizpah, daughter of Aiah. Ishbaal reproached this to Abner, but Abner flared into anger and cursed Ishbaal so that Ishbaal was afraid of Abner now.

Abner sent messengers to David to propose him his support. David agreed to take in Abner. But he demanded of Abner to give back his former wife Michal. So Ishbaal sent for her to be taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish and Michal came back to David. Abner then arrived in David's camp. David held a feast for Abner and Abner promised David to rally Israel behind him. But Joab just then returned from the raids against the Philistines. Joab was angry with David for having let Abner go for Asahel's death, the death of Joab's brother, had remained un-revenged. Joab, unknown to David, sent messengers to bring back Abner to Hebron. When Abner reached Hebron, Joab struck him a mortal blow in his belly and thus took revenge for the blood of his brother Asahel. David was appalled when he heard of the murder. He said to Joab and to his company to tear their clothes, put on sackcloth and to mourn with him behind the bier of Abner. Thus the king lamented over Abner, Saul's army commander, and called him a great prince.

Only Ishbaal was left then to confront David. Two freebooting chieftains of Ishbaal, called Baanah and Rechab, sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, and Benjaminites, now attacked Ishbaal's house. Ishbaal was lying in his bedroom. Rechab and Baanah killed Ishbaal, struck off his head and brought that to David at Hebron. But David was not pleased with what the bandits had done for Ishbaal had been an upright man. So David had the two men killed, cut off their hands and feet and hung them beside the pool of Hebron. David took Ishbaal's head and buried it in Abner's grave at Hebron.

## *The Anointment of David*

### **The Anointment of David**

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1555.

Paolo Veronese was a contemporary of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569). His name was in fact Paolo Caliari and he was the son of a stonemason. He was born in 1528 in Verona, hence his added name. He studied painting with Giovanni Badile in Verona and also with Giovanni Caroto. From 1553 on he was in Venice and his growing fame there allowed him to work for palaces and churches, among which even the Doge's Palace. He dominated Venetian painting with Titian and Jacopo Tintoretto. Paolo Veronese treated his religious scenes often in a very secular representation. That led him into difficulties with the clergy, however tolerant Venice's church hierarchy was. In 1573 he was obliged to appear before the Inquisition because he had treated the 'Supper at the House of Levi' too profanely. Paolo Veronese died in Venice in 1588. He was one of the very great masters of art of Venice and brought Venetian brilliance and feeling for splendid harmonious colours to its zenith. If Titian was the emperor of the Venetian painters of the sixteenth century, and Tintoretto its passion, then Paolo Veronese impersonified Venetian elegance and colour.

There could be no greater contrast between Pieter Bruegel's grand landscape settings for Bible stories and Paolo Veronese's handling of such themes.

Veronese's 'Anointment of David' is a joyous, luxurious scene of a painter that was still young, thirty years old. The painting is in very gentle, warm reddish, orange, yellow, brown and broken white colours with only touches of a diluted grey-blue in the sky. Veronese isolated the blue colour as it did not match well harmoniously with all the other hues. We see a horizontal band of figures, shown almost like classic sculptures. There is a wealth here of folds of robes and cloaks, sculpted on the people. This proves Veronese's extraordinary gift at painting chiaroscuro with delicate touches, and his using that to indicate the body volumes.

Veronese painted the 'Anointment of David' like a Classicist scene and he added several details to give the viewer the impression of a scene from ancient Roman or Greek antiquity. We discover a bull with long horns as if this was a rapt of Europe, a wonderful tall lady dressed in a white robe and orange cloak on the right that could be Ceres, the goddess of harvests. This lady wears a child that could be a love, a Cupid or a putto playing music on a thin and long satyr's horn. There is a satyr's goat on the lower left, together with the bull ancient offering animals but also animals often depicted in Roman iconography. Samuel's altar is decorated also with goats' heads in stone, which are typical pageant symbols. Further on the left of the altar stands an alabaster vase, likewise decorated with ancient, maybe Medusa, motifs. The altar of the anointment looks like a Roman offering altar, a secular altar in a Bible scene, even though of course the Jews offered regularly to their god. Such profane presentation of a Bible scene brought trouble to Veronese. His love for classic representation light

have been tolerated in scenes of the Old Testament, but could be considered heresy if shown in New Testament paintings.

On the far left of the canvas we see ruins of old Roman buildings. They may represent the old worlds that were before David, when Israel was in ruins. On the far right are scenes of resplendent architecture, which remind of Venice as the New Jerusalem of the future King David.

Veronese placed his personages before a dark wall so that he had a dark background against which his figures in brighter colours would be more visible still. The viewers thus could better discern the figures. In the middle stands the grey bearded Prophet Samuel. He holds a glass and a young lady pours water or oil in Samuel's glass so that the Prophet can anoint David. The viewer has to look for David. David can be found depicted as a humble shepherd boy, to the left of the altar, kneeling deeply for the anointment by Samuel. David has denuded his upper body and he seems to be the only figure to have done so in the picture. David will be anointed and cleansed, purified by the water.

Around Samuel stand various other figures. Veronese applied symmetry of colours and balance of colour areas in these. So there is a tall lady in a broken white robe and orange cloak on the right and a man painted in similar colours and equally tall on the left side. There is a man with a beard on both sides of Samuel, as well as an equal number of people (of faces) to the left and to the right of the Prophet. The complete shape of the crowd of people around Samuel is a trapezium with its longest side on the top. Veronese painted to the right and to the left of the crowd a man who is inclined. He cleverly made the leftmost man look upwards, so that the viewer would discover by following his gaze a figure on the dark balcony. The rightmost man looks down, so that the viewer would follow also this look and find a small Venetian scene on the lower right. These two figures are the oblique side lines of the trapezium structure within which the people around Samuel and David are confined.

The composition of the painting is, like was often the case with Paolo Veronese, one of horizontal bands. Here, in the 'Anointment of David', there is one such band only in the group of figures. Such a composition could easily have become very rigid and dry for an elegant picture. So Paolo Veronese gave oblique poises to many of the figures so that the vertical directions be eased and the rigidity of the structure broken by a variety of directions of lines. The result is a vivid scene that is warm, tender, loving, elegant in its multitude and of great ancient Venetian dignity.

Paolo Veronese gave all importance in this picture to the actors of the Bible story. He painted landscape views, but we all sense that this was only to make the picture somewhat longer at the sides, and the landscapes have a function as symbols of David's renewal of Israel. These landscapes were not painted for their own right. Veronese was not a landscape painter. He could paint magnificent landscapes, but he was not interested in landscapes. He had not the contemplative character and the gift of admiration of nature of Pieter Bruegel. Veronese was an urban painter and in a town, one is interested first and foremost with the people themselves. It would last till the next century before other great Venetian painters like Canaletto and Guardi would discover their city as a landscape.

## *King David*

All the tribes of Israel gathered at Hebron. David made a pact with their elders. David was thirty years old when he was anointed sole King of all Israel. David reigned over Judah for seven years and six months. Then he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites. He took the citadel of Zion and built a wall around it. He went to live in the citadel and called it the City of David. Hiram, king of Tyre, sent cedar wood and carpenters and stonecutters to David. With these David built a palace. Many sons and daughters were born to him there in Jerusalem. He defeated the Philistines twice in the Valley of the Rephaim.

David went then with his people to Baalah of Judah where the Ark was and wanted to bring it into his city. This was not a small task and David had difficulties on the road. Finally, David danced a whirling round before the Ark, wearing only a linen loincloth and brought the Ark thus inside. Michal was filled with contempt when she saw that. When David came home to bless his household she remarked to the king that he had made quite an exhibition of himself dancing like a buffoon before the servants and maids of the palace. But David answered that he had danced for Yahweh and would lower himself even further. He might be base in Michal's eyes but the maids would hold him in honour. Michal left. From that moment on, Michal daughter of Saul had no children.

David exclaimed to how beautiful a cedar palace he had for God. Nathan the prophet had a vision of Yahweh then. First Yahweh said to Nathan that he did not need a temple for he would always be with Israel in whatever house and would not let the people of Israel be oppressed anymore as they had been before. Yahweh told he would not withdraw his favour from David. David would have a dynasty and his son would reign after him. This son would build a temple to Yahweh's name and Yahweh would be a father to him. David prayed then and praised Yahweh. Yahweh furthermore told that he would make David's fame as great as any on the earth. David indeed became famous for his victories against the Philistines, the Moabites, the King of Zobah, the Aramaeans of Damascus, the Amalekites and the Edomites.

Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son of five years old. When the news arrived of Saul's and Jonathan's death, his nurse had picked him up and fled. As she hurried she fell. Jonathan's son fell also and was lamed. Jonathan's son was since then crippled at both feet. His name was Meribbaal. David remembered Jonathan. He found Jonathan's crippled son in Lo-Debar. David restored Saul's estates to him and he was very kind to him. Meribbaal ate at the king's table like all David's sons. He lived in Jerusalem with David.

*Paintings:*

### **King David**

Bartolomeo Passerotti (1528-1593). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. Ca. 1570.



### *David's Sin*

David sent ambassadors to the new king of the Ammonites, Hanun. Hanun's father had died. But Hanun and his princes did not treat David's ambassadors well. Fearing David's reaction they hired an army of Aramaeans. Joab, the commander of the Israelite army, defeated the army of Hanun. The King of the Aramaeans then, Hadadezer, saw this as a threat and sent an even greater army against David. But David defeated them and killed Shabach the commander of the Aramaean army. David then marched against the Ammonites again and sent Joab to siege Rabbah in Ammonite territory. David remained in Jerusalem meanwhile.

One evening when David was strolling on the palace roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. David asked who she was and was told, 'That was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite'. David then sent messengers to fetch the woman. She came and he lay with her. She returned home. Soon after, the woman conceived and she sent word to David that she was pregnant.

David now sent a letter to Joab ordering him to send Uriah to him. Joab sent Uriah back to Jerusalem. David asked Uriah how Joab was, and then sent him home. Uriah left the palace but did not go to his house and slept at the palace gate. This was reported to David. David asked Uriah the next day why he had not gone home. Uriah answered that the Ark, Israel and Judah were lodged in huts and the warriors camping in the open. Uriah said that in those circumstances he could not go comfortably to his house and eat and drink and sleep with his wife. The following day David invited Uriah in and made him drunk. But again, Uriah slept with the bodyguard and did not go to his house.

David then wrote a letter to Joab and had this letter be brought by Uriah. The letter said, 'Put Uriah out in front where the battle is the fiercest and then draw back so that he is killed.' Joab did this and Uriah the Hittite was killed.

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned. When her period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her into his house. She became his wife and gave birth to a son.

What David had done displeased Yahweh.

Yahweh sent Nathan with a message to David, with a story. The story was about a poor man who had nothing but a ewe lamb and about a rich man who had many. When a traveller came to stay, the rich man did not take anything from his own flock or herd to provide for the wayfarer. Instead he stole the lamb of the poor man and prepared that for his guest. David flew into a great rage. 'This man should die', he cried, 'Who is this rich man?' Nathan then said to David, 'You are the man!' And Nathan told how displeased Yahweh had been with David causing the death of Uriah and taking Uriah's wife to become David's wife. Nathan prophesied that Yahweh would raise misfortune for David out of his own house. Before David's eyes he would take his wives and give them to his neighbour, who would lie with David's wives in broad daylight. David then wept to Nathan, and said, 'I have sinned.' Nathan answered, 'Yahweh forgives your sin. You are not to die. But since you have outraged

Yahweh, the child born to you will die.' And the child of David and Bathsheba fell ill and died on the seventh day. David then prostrated himself in Yahweh's sanctuary. He consoled his wife Bathsheba. He slept with her. She conceived and gave birth to a son whom she called Solomon. Yahweh loved Solomon and made this known to Nathan, who named him Jedidah as Yahweh had instructed.

*Bathsheba in her Bath***Bathsheba in her Bath**

Harmensz Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) The Louvre – Paris. Around 1654.

The story of Bathsheba was one of the most popular for paintings of female nudes of the seventeenth century, especially for Protestant artists. Painters used Bathsheba to show a magnificent nude and still have the excuse to represent a Bible scene. The image of Bathsheba in her bath was a replacement for lascivious pictures of Venus or of Diana. It would be impossible to write on this scene without mentioning Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, who made the most impressive and special 'Bathsheba in her Bath'.

Rembrandt did not have an easy life. He was happy at first and then intensely sad. He was born in 1606 in the town of Leyden in the Netherlands. He started to study philosophy at Leyden University, but abandoned these courses for the art of painting around 1622 already. He studied painting with various masters: Jacob Isaacz van Swanenburgh and Jan Lievens in Leyden and for a short while also with Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam. In 1631 Rembrandt travelled once more to Amsterdam, already a well known painter, and he would live there for the rest of his life. In 1634 he married Saskia van Uylenburgh, the niece of the arts dealer in whose house he lived then. These years were happy for Rembrandt and he adored his young bride. He had many successes in painting. Then, the same year in which he made the now world famous 'Night Watch', in 1642, his wife died. To keep his household and raise his children, a first servant and then a second, Hendrickje Stoffels, entered his house. Rembrandt lost money, could not pay anymore his expenses with his painting alone. He contracted loans and made debts. Hendrickje Stoffels became his mistress. In 1656 Rembrandt was declared bankrupt. His paintings and his house were publicly sold but the resulting amount of that sale was even not enough to pay off all his debts. Rembrandt and his family moved to another house in Amsterdam. From then on he worked not for his own account, but for Hendrickje Stoffels and for his son Titus, who had become an arts dealer. These two managed his production. In 1663 Hendrickje Stoffels died, in 1665 his son Titus. Rembrandt was practically alone then and he lived with his daughter-in-law until his death in 1669.

Rembrandt made his painting 'Bathsheba in her Bath' in 1654. He was about forty-eight years old then, and he lived with Hendrickje Stoffels as husband and wife without being legally married. That same year Hendrickje was called before the Council of the Protestant Church of Amsterdam and blamed for living unmarried, in shame with Rembrandt. That fact had become visible because Hendrickje was pregnant and in 1654 also a daughter was born to Rembrandt called Cornelia. Rembrandt had had two other daughters by that name before, from his first wife Saskia, but these two babies had died in infancy, very early after birth. In 1654 also he made a portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels bathing in a river, holding her long white shirt

above her knees. This picture is now in the National Gallery of London. Bathsheba might very well be Hendrickje Stoffels.

The painter made a very special picture of Bathsheba. He painted in brown and white hues, with few touches of red-orange in deep tones. All the colours of this painting are very harmonious and gradually shift into warm, similar hues and tones. Rembrandt used no blue or green, which might have contrasted and broken some of the warm mood of the picture. He let a diffused light come from the lower left and in this light David could admire the golden body of the woman. The lady servant that wipes Bathsheba's feet dry is heavily dressed, but Bathsheba is entirely nude. She holds in her hand the letter that David sent her. So 'Bathsheba in her Bath' suggests two events of the bible story. In one event, Bathsheba is the nude that could have been admired by David, in the other, later event, Bathsheba receives the letter of the king. In several other pictures of the seventeenth century it was the habit of showing Bathsheba with David's letter in her hand. The letter could be considered to be a symbol of marriage and of David's love. The letter suggests to the viewer all the rest of the story of David and Bathsheba, their marriage, David's sin and the firstborn dead child but also the glory of Solomon. These elements of course can also refer to Rembrandt's own life and the painter cannot but have reflected on the parallels between his own life and the Bible story.

Bathsheba is beautiful of face. She has nice features in her face, long but thin eyebrows, a straight nose, full lips, and her face is neither thin nor too full. It is the face of a generous, nice lady. She wears her hair pulled back, not alluringly hiding some of her features and her face is fully freed and open. She looks down, interested, but also melancholic, dreamily lost in thought and smiling just a little. She looks down at the servant, but also at the letter that she has just read. She really is a beautiful woman. She could be a striking figure when dressed in a wonderful, multi-coloured, heavy robe as Amsterdam ladies wore at the times. She wears a few jewels: a double dark brown string in her hair, a pearl at her ear, a white stone at a black necklace around her slender, long, neck and an armband of gold and pearls again on her left arm. These jewels are small, delicate and not the heavy jewels of seduction that by their ornament attract men.

Bathsheba has the body of a real woman, not the body of an idealised Venus or Diana. Bathsheba has small straight breasts, a belly that is already heavy for a woman so young and very strong muscled legs. This is not the body of a courtesan or of an aristocratic lady that has never worked in her life. Rembrandt showed the body of a woman still young, with an intelligent, delicate face but with the body of a mature working woman. It could be a body that Rembrandt had seen and knew very well, the body of Hendrickje Stoffels. That body however is presented simply and directly, not in a seductive poise. Bathsheba is a virtuous woman so Rembrandt could not and wanted not to present her with her arms high above her head or lying down sensually, as would be the case in so many pictures of Venus. In the contrast between body and face Rembrandt expressed some melancholy on the fine beauty that such a woman could have been, but whose body has grown strong through a very active working life. Still, the nude is magnificent and noble and Rembrandt enhanced this feeling in the viewer by showing a golden brocaded blanket next to Bathsheba. This element places Bathsheba in a rich environment and the viewer suddenly knows that the nude woman lives in a palace and is indeed the future Queen of Israel.

The skills of Rembrandt are of course fully displayed in this painting. The viewer has to look at the wonderful chiaroscuro on the body of Bathsheba, by which the painter shaped the volume of the nudity. Her left leg is in the shadow, so Rembrandt had really to know how the shadow of one leg could fall on the other and form a complex shadow area there. The white linen next to Bathsheba is a masterpiece of the art of painting. Rembrandt there used his famous lead whites and the viewer could of course almost touch the linen, so strong is the texture of the brushstrokes in the lead white colour, and so perfect the illusion of the folds. The brocaded blanket also is marvellous, as well as the headdress of the servant, and just look at the delicacy with which Rembrandt painted the hair of Bathsheba.

The composition of the painting is simple. Bathsheba sits right near the bed. She holds her head slightly inclined however, so that the vertical line of her straight back is broken. By her look Rembrandt directs the viewer downwards, over the letter to the servant. This line lies on the left diagonal of the picture. The head of the servant balances in the lower left the face of Bathsheba higher up. And halfway between the two heads is the letter, which in some way binds the two figures since the servant probably brought the letter and knows its content. Most of the scene, Bathsheba's body and the white linen, lies in the right triangle under the left diagonal. This mass needed balance so Rembrandt painted a golden brocaded, heavy blanket there – upwards from the left diagonal. That way he brought perfect balance of masses of colour in the picture.

Perfectly fine pictures such as 'Bathseba in her Bath' by Rembrandt can only be made with very much love and obsession. Rembrandt must have loved Hendrickje Stoffels, have gladly and eagerly taken in her delicate traits in his mind so that he could paint them by heart. And he loved painting. Painting came intuitively, but Rembrandt also knew how to deal intelligently with composition and colours. The result of that love was all warm mood in a gentle, magnificent picture.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**Bathsheba in Bath.** Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1725.

**Bathsheba in Bath.** Jacob van Loo (1614-1670). Musée du Louvre. Paris.

**Bathsheba in her Bath.** Paolo Caliari called Veronese (1528-1588). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.

**Bathsheba in Bath.** Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. Ca. 1720.

**Bathsheba in Bath.** Paris Bordone (1500-1570). Wallraf-Richartz Museum. Köln. 1545.

**Bathsheba's Appeal.** Govert Flinck (1615-1660). National Gallery of Ireland. Dublin. 1651.

**The Toilet of Bathsheba.** Mirco Spadano called Domenico Gargiulo (ca.1612-ca.1679). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Sarasota.

**The Toilet of Bathsheba.** Jacopo Zucchi (1541-ca. 1589). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1570-1575.

**Bathsheba in her Bath.** Carle Van Loo (1705-1765). Musée Bossuet. Meaux. Ca. 1723.

**Bathsheba in her Bath.** Friedrich Heinrich Füger (1751-1818). Szépművészeti Múzeum. Budapest. 1783-1786.

**Bathsheba receives the letter from David.** Willem Drost. Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1654.

**Bathsheba in her Bath.** Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1562-1638). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1617.

**Bathsheba in her Bath.** Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1725.

**Bathseba in her Bath receives David's Message.** Jacopo Amigoni (1682-1752). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1475.

*David giving the Letter to Uriah***David giving the letter to Uriah**

Pieter Lastman (1583-1633). The Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1619.

Pieter Lastman was a painter born in Amsterdam of the Netherlands in 1583. He studied painting with Gerrit Pietersz Sweelinck, and he stayed several years in Italy, from around 1603 to 1607. He was well positioned therefore to lead Dutch painting into the seventeenth century and into full Baroque, transforming a Mannerist style that had also been taken up in the Netherlands. He must have seen Caravaggio paintings in Rome; he travelled to Venice, and absorbed those influences of the Italian images to incorporate them in his own pictures. Lastman painted mythological and biblical scenes in which usually many figures appeared in theatrical attitudes, indicating vivid action. He had a great imagination and liked to decorate his paintings with abundance of decorative elements. Pieter Lastman was a teacher of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn and he thus had a certain influence on the early works of this great master, even though Rembrandt may only have studied with Lastman for six months or so. Lastman spent his whole career in Amsterdam. He was quite esteemed in his town and died in 1633.

In Lastman's 'David giving the Letter to Uriah', the painter presented David as a mature King. David is seated on a throne and dressed in the full ornate of the supreme leader of a country, holding the sceptre that is the symbol of his supremacy. Uriah, the Hittite, in full armour, kneels beside the King and David hands him the letter that will send Uriah into the heat of the battle and unto his death. The theme is simple enough, but Lastman added many elements that bring the picture not in the Bible sphere but in the mythological domain.

David sits on a throne on a dais before the Roman columns of what could be a church, and he sits in the open. On the left of the picture we see Lastman's idea of Saint Peter's of Rome, though the cathedral cupola is exaggerated compared to its front. Other roman columns are on the extreme left of the canvas. The setting is thus one of Roman antiquity and also Uriah could be dressed like a Roman centurion. But David and his squire or scribe are dressed as potentates contemporary to Lastman's times, David in a heavy cloak lined with furs and the scribe in the austere black courtier's suit of the Dutch seventeenth century. Heavy curtains hang on the right and also a brocaded tablecloth decorated this part of the painting. David hands the letter, but he more holds the letter still in his hand than giving it over to Uriah. Pieter Lastman did not really paint the act of the handing over of the fatal letter and he did not show much the difference between a conscience-torn king and the loyal soldier. Therefore, Lastman has missed most of the tension of the story. He shows the scene of the story, but David looks too much the wise, already older man. David looks too innocently so that much of the psychology and of the real tragedy is not presented. Rembrandt would have shown exactly this: the desire, lust and growing remorse in the king, compared to the innocent loyalty of the soldier. Lastman preferred to paint other elements of the story but the psychology of the characters at the moment.

Pieter Lastman used various colours in his picture. David wears a red cloak; his scribe is in black; the tablecloth is painted in dark orange; the tapestry behind David is a yellow-brown. More importantly though, Lastman also painted in the colour green, and the curtains on the right as well as Saint Peter's are painted in this colour. Lastman also used blue on Uriah, and a little violet in the sky. He used another hue of violet on David's robe. Rembrandt would in his later painting altogether avoid green and blue hues, but his teacher must have shown him these colours and learned to use them. Rembrandt could learn enough from Lastman the technique of chiaroscuro. The folds in David's robe, in the cloth beneath his feet and in the green curtains are painted very luxuriously and absolutely emphasised in contrasts of light shades. Lastman showed here his painterly skills and the delight he took in such details. Lastman must have found real pleasure in creating volume so clearly by this technique, so that the exact shape of David's legs for instance is seen in the play of the folds. In this, Lastman was a master, but it also distracts the viewer's attention from the crux of the scene.

Pieter Lastman used a composition that we find back in some of Rembrandt's pictures. David's figure and his cloak form a pyramid structure. Lastman even painted a dog on the left of David and he let the pattern of the table cloth on the right follow the descending line of the pyramid or triangle shape. This enhanced the impression of solidity of the king that the viewer has of David. Lastman positioned David somewhat to the right however; David is not in the exact geometric middle of the picture. Lastman had then some place for the Roman landscape and of course for the figure of Uriah. Lastman then balanced Uriah on the right side with the table and the scribe, but the colour balance is not so well chosen since the orange tablecloth is a more striking area of colour than the various darker hues that Lastman used for Uriah. Lastman balanced well the green area of Saint Peter's and the view in green hues of Rome with the green colour used in the curtains on the right. Pieter Lastman's colours however remain difficult. David wears a blue violet robe but an orange-red cloak and these two do not match well. Overall the colours do not match very well, seem too heavy and contrasting, and the contrasting is not ideal. A painter that would be extremely sensitive to harmony of colours, like Rembrandt, might well have been afraid to use such a diverse palette of strong colours this way.

Pieter Lastman liked to bring picturesque details in his pictures, by which we recognise both the Baroque painter's love of ornament and the preference of Ditch painters for genre elements. There is the dog, a symbol of loyalty, positioned between the king and Uriah. Look at Uriah's helmet on the ground, studded with feathers. Look at several small figures of Roman people and of soldiers on the left. These lay at leisure or have come to admire the spectacle of the king in full royal dress. Such small details announce further genre handling in Dutch pictures.

Pieter Lastman mixed so many objects, decoration of curtains and tapestries, and strong colours, that the painting seems to a viewer more a capriccio, an elegant piece of imagination than a stern Bible story. Lastman transformed David in an oriental tyrant, glorifying in his power and wealth. Lastman was in this picture an Italianising Classicist, but a little too decorative for Classicist purism. His presentation lacks the power of the psychology of the tragedy. He influenced the young Rembrandt, but Rembrandt was too powerful a character to remain permanently interested in the



picturesque of the Dutch Italianisers and he must have found the colour breadth of his teacher Pieter Lastman too wide and too harshly contrasting for his taste. Lastman however had considerable skills at drawing and painting and he knew well the design of composition. From these the young Rembrandt could profit.

*David and Bathsheba***David and Bathsheba**

Jan Massys (1509-1575). The Louvre – Paris. 1562.

Jan Massys was a Mannerist painter of Brabant in Belgium, born before 1509 in Antwerp, and mainly living and working there until his death in 1575. He was the son of Quentin Metsys (1465-1530), also a painter of Brabant, born in the university town of Leuven some fifty kilometres south of Antwerp, but who came to Antwerp around 1490. Quentin Metsys or Massys was one of the first Renaissance painters of Brabant, but still much linked to the Gothic traditions of the Flemish Primitive painters. His sons Cornelis and Jan were also painters and Jan one of the first Mannerists of the Southern Netherlands. Jan Massys was a painter of Brabant and of Antwerp, and there he was a contemporary of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569), but he painted in a very different style than Bruegel. The history of the Metsys family, like the history of the family of Pieter Bruegel, is closely connected to the history of Antwerp.

Antwerp was a Roman Catholic town in the beginning of the sixteenth century but Protestantism appealed. Jan Massys became a Protestant and he may because of that have had to leave the town around 1544, only to return to Antwerp around 1558 when Protestantism was better tolerated. During his absence from Antwerp he stayed probably in Italy and France, so that his Mannerist ways of painting may have been the result of influences of Florentine Mannerism and also from the Italian painters and their French assistants working on the decoration of the Castle of Fontainebleau in France.

Antwerp was the most important metropolis, port and merchant town of Western Europe in the sixteenth century. Around 1570 the town could count about 90.000 inhabitants within its fortified walls. Calvinism attracted many followers in Antwerp and the Calvinists were out to impose their views on the town and its government. In 1566 a few tens of Calvinists became so aggressive that for a while they could enter Catholic churches and destroy their sculptures and paintings in a wave of iconoclasm. The uprising was quickly stopped however and from 1567 to 1578 Roman Catholicism was the only officially religion in Antwerp again. Protestant influence rose during that period and in 1578 a religious peace treaty was concluded by which Protestant and Catholic faiths were professed together. In the meantime, the Spanish King revived the war with the Netherlands. He sent the Duke of Alva to the Southern Netherlands, to Flanders and Brabant, to conquer the Northern Netherlands and stamp out Protestantism. The war did not proceed well for Alva; the Northern water rebels could not be tamed. Moreover, money became scarce for Spain. In 1571 Alva levied heavy taxes on Antwerp, with which he hoped to pay his mercenary army. In 1572 the Dutch rebels blocked the River Schelde on which lay Antwerp, so that more taxes were levied on the ships that fared on the river to Antwerp. Sympathy with the Protestant North grew in Antwerp and the Calvinists became more and more influential. Jan Massys had worked throughout this period in Antwerp; he died in 1575. In 1576 Alva's troops had not been paid anymore since many months. They entered Antwerp and looted the town in a frenzy of plundering, rape and murder

known since in Antwerp by the name of the 'Spanish Fury'. This did not enhance sympathy for Catholic Spain in the town. At the end of the 1570s, Protestant notables governed Antwerp. The mayor was a Calvinist and even though over sixty percent of the population was still Catholic, the Roman Catholic cult was only allowed in a few churches.

Spain was devotedly Roman Catholic faith and could not tolerate Protestantism in its territories. The Spanish King sent a new general to Flanders and Brabant. This was an Italian nobleman, Alexander Farnese. Farnese looked to Antwerp and he wanted to halt the Protestant progression in the Southern Netherlands. In 1579 Farnese allowed his army to plunder the country villas of the wealthy Protestant merchants around Antwerp and in 1585 he set siege to the town. Antwerp surrendered soon. Farnese was quite tolerant to the Protestant, but all Protestant preachers were banned from the town. The social decline of Antwerp that had set in slowly in 1572 now grew rapidly as the Protestant families left the town and moved to Amsterdam. After a few years the town would fall to half the population it had in 1570. Jan Massys did not see Protestantism flourish, grow to power and then be banned altogether from Antwerp.

In the painting 'David and Bathsheba' of Jan Massys we see immediately a central image that Massys used repeatedly in many of his pictures. He painted a magnificent nude in a certain poise and he repeated practically the same image in pictures like 'Susannah and the Elders', now in the Musée d'Art Ancien in Brussels and in a 'Flora with View of Antwerp', now in the Kunsthalle of the German town of Hamburg.

Jan Massys was a Protestant painter, but he made a picture that does not seem to have been devised in protestant piety and austerity. Massys was too much a man of Brabant and of Antwerp, a man who liked outward display of wealth, like most of the Brabanders of his time. He used a bible theme to paint a very elegant nude. Bathsheba sits on the terrace of an Italian palace and she listens lovingly to a story that Uriah tells her. She may just have come out of bath and she now lingers in the warm sun. Two young lady servants accompany her. Bathsheba is really a splendid nude. She is slender and tall. She has a long bust and longer, well-formed legs. She wears a few jewels: two armbands of gold, two necklaces with a single pearl on each, and a modest head band of red cloth. Bathsheba has withdrawn her hair so that we see a gentle, aristocratic face of a real beauty. Jan Massys must have found a svelte Antwerp beauty with a fine nose, slim but inviting lips, very thin plucked eyebrows and her face and neck have no trace of puffiness. He then used this model, or the image of ideal female prettiness he had in his mind, in several pictures over and over again.

Bathsheba holds a wonderful cloak around her waist and Jan Massys could in a very masterly way paint all the folds of this flimsy cloth without disturbing with too much chiaroscuro the general mood of the canvas. This cloth forms with Bathsheba a pyramid structure so that Jan Massys intelligently applied a structure that was now well known to artists. He really drew all attention to this central triangle, in which is the splendid figure of the biblical Venus Bathsheba. The other figures only fill in the rest of the picture, as Bathsheba steals all attention.

Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, is a cunning, tall, soldierly youth. He is dressed splendidly. Jan Massys used on Uriah darker colours so that the paleness of

Bathsheba's body is enhanced. Uriah holds one arm to his hearth and with his other arm holds two fingers high, swearing fidelity to Bathsheba. Massys painted a hunting dog next to Uriah, always a symbol of loyalty, whereas a much smaller, playful animal accompanies Bathsheba. This dog already aggressively barks at Uriah's dog, but the dog seems to ignore with calm the attacks of the small thing that is Bathsheba's dog. David talks. Is Uriah looking at Bathsheba? If you follow his gaze, downward, you will arrive at a flirting servant. This is the girl of the extreme right, who is washing Bathsheba's feet. While she washes, she smilingly and mockingly eyes Uriah. She may be mocking Uriah's oath of fidelity and flirting at the same time, alluring the Hittite into a new adventure. The second girl servant, holding a vase of water, seems to understand what is happening and she looks scornfully, though still innocently, with slight surprise also, at the washing girl and the viewer. Thereby she represents the viewer. The two girls are also marvellously dressed. Remark the details of jewels, of lace and of the magnificent red robes that Jan Massys added in the picture.

Where is King David? Jan Massys used also the right diagonal in his composition. The outline of the figures could start at the two young girls in the right lower corner and pass over Bathsheba's head to the left top corner. There is a terrace of the royal palace and there, painted as a very small figure, stands King David watching the scene of the nude Bathsheba. The king leans out of the window to see better, in obvious interest, and we recognise him here because he wears the royal crown. So the positioning of the figures in the scene seems natural, but is in fact quite sophisticated. A girl servant kneels down to wash the feet of her mistress, but she looks at the eyes of Uriah and thus enhances the direction of the right diagonal. Massys painted another girl somewhat higher, so that the outlines of these two combined with the outline of Bathsheba would again direct the view to the right diagonal. To the right of that diagonal Jan Massys then had a free space that he could fill in with a landscape of the town of Jerusalem. But Massys' Jerusalem is also an imaginary town, in which he mixed architectures from Antwerp, from Rome and from Florence. Overall the town looks like a town from Tuscany, but we discover at least two Greek temples, built in the Roman way, as Massys may have seen in Rome. The slender, high towers he may have seen in Florence and the robust tower on the left feels like a bell tower of a Flemish city. But the town should be in the orient, so Massys added a few palm trees and a fine garden with fountains to indicate a life of leisure and pleasure at David's court. Here, life was easy, quiet and elegant. So a peacock walks on the balustrade between the girls and Bathsheba, a symbol of flirtatious coquetry.

The picture of Jan Massys contains many details in its wealth of visual elements and stunning sophistication. Moreover, Massys really was a painter of great talent and skills. Can we love and admire a painting that looks so flamboyant and showy? Well, we have to admit that Massys presented not a gaudy scene. The figures are too sweet and too nice for that. Maybe this presentation is not anymore to our tastes, but one has to be somewhat of a curmudgeon not to smile and be happy and not to admire such beauty as of Bathsheba. Brabanders of Antwerp, Protestant or catholic, could not but appreciate such good-natured display of niceties and wealth. Antwerp Brabanders always were a little swanky and showy. Jan Massys found in Mannerism just what they liked. And, oh yes, this was a Bible scene after all.

*Other Paintings:*

**David and Bathsheba.** Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1526.

**David and Bathsheba.** Gustav Adolf Mossa. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice – Nice. 1906.

**Bathsheba goes to King David.** Francesco Salviati (1510-1567). Fresco, Palazzo Sacchetti – Rome. 1552-1554.

**The Penitent David.** Paolo Farinati (1524-1606). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

*Amnon, Tamar and Absalom*

David had a beautiful daughter whose name was Tamar. David's son Amnon fell in love with her. He was so obsessed with her that he fell ill. She was a virgin and Amnon thought it was impossible to do anything to her.

Amnon had a friend called Jonadab. This friend was a son of Shimeah, King David's brother. Jonadab was very shrewd so he remarked Amnon's distress. Amnon told him he was in love with Tamar but did not know how to come near her. Then Jonadab proposed Amnon to pretend to be ill and when his father would visit him, to ask for his sister to bring him something to eat and prepare that before him. Amnon pretended to be ill and his father visited him. David indeed sent word to Tamar to prepare food for Amnon. Tamar took dough, kneaded it and made and cooked cakes while Amnon watched. She took the pan and offered it to eat to Amnon, but Amnon refused to eat; He ordered everyone to leave his room and bid Tamar to bring the cakes to his inner room. As she showed Amnon the cakes there, he caught hold of her and wanted to go to bed with her. Tamar refused but Amnon overpowered her and raped her.

Amnon then suddenly hated Tamar. Tamar begged not to be sent away, which would be another wrong done to her after the bad thing that was already done to her. But Amnon would not listen. He called his servants and had Tamar thrown out of his rooms.

David heard what had happened and was very angry. But Amnon was David's first born and he loved him very much so he did him no harm. But Tamar's brother Absalom also heard of the rape of his sister since she came to his house inconsolable. He told Tamar that Amnon was his brother and that she should not take the matter too much to heart. But Absalom hated Amnon now for having dishonoured his sister and he did not want to speak to Amnon anymore.

Two years later, Absalom prepared a royal banquet and invited David's sons. During the feast Absalom ordered Amnon to be slain. Absalom's servants killed Amnon in the middle of the feasting. David's sons leapt to their feet, mounted their mules and fled. Absalom feared the wrath of his father so he fled too and went to Talmai, son of Ammihud, king of Gehur. He stayed there for three years.

After three years Joab, King David's army commander and friend, observed that David's resolution against his son Absalom had softened so he hired a shrewd woman who could speak well to address David. With a story she eased David into accepting the young man Absalom's return to Jerusalem. Joab brought Absalom back himself. David did not want to see his son, so Absalom retired in his own house.

After two years David finally admitted Absalom to him. Absalom fell with his face to the ground before King David and David blessed his son again. Four years went by.

*Amnon and Tamar***Amnon and Tamar**

Lucio Massari (1569-1633). The Prague Castle Gallery – Prague.

Lucio Massari showed Tamar at the moment that she brings a dish of food to the supposedly sick Amnon, her brother. Amnon already opened Tamar's shirt so that her full breasts are bare and he draws her nearer to him. Amnon looks with imploring eyes of love and desire at Tamar, but she refuses him and with her free arm tries to fend off the entreaties of her brother. On the right side of the canvas, Jonadab keeps away the courtiers that would like to visit King David's preferred son.

Massari painted a nice girl, Tamar, with roman features. She is tall and she has very long legs, which are not covered by her red robe. The robe alluringly opens to allow her legs to be bare and their nudity adds to the nudity of Tamar's breast so that she is all too seductive in her innocence, not to entice Amnon. Tamar looks like a virtuous girl, but one that is unaware of her attraction on males and Massari has well captured this chaste aspect of the girl.

Lucio Massari depicted the scene of the rape of Tamar by Amnon quite austere; even the figure of Tamar is impressive in her blameless and spotless beauty. Massari painted a scene that is easily grasped by viewers. The two figures are rather statically presented and few added elements distract the viewer from the main figures of the theme. That is entirely in the Classicist Baroque style, as Massari had learned from the Carracci painters in Bologna. The lines of the composition therefore remain strict, axed on the verticals of Tamar, of Amnon, of Amnon's friend and even of the bed. The only detail of decoration that Massari added is the winged female, sphinx-like figure that in bronze, golden colours supports the bed. That sculpture is more a symbol of female sensuality and attraction than a real ornament.

Lucio Massari was a well-skilled professional. So he used bright, pure colours in the two principal figures: red and a little blue on Tamar, brown-yellow on Amnon. All the rest of the painting is in quite dark tones, simplifying the view for the spectator and centring the attention on Amnon and Tamar. Viewers indeed are first attracted by bright, pure hues. So Massari used these exclusively on his two figures whereas the other elements of the picture are painted in dark brown and grey colours. To brighten up the background however, he painted marvellous blue curtains over the bed and this contrasts well with the white linen on the bed. This combination of colours, separated by very dark blue or black is quite happy.

The story of 'Amnon and Tamar' is a story of incest. Yet the story was written down in a rather detached, calm and objective way, without much emphasis on the sin of incest. A man subjugates a young girl, but it seemed not so horrible, when this Bible part was written, that the man was the brother of the girl. Amnon's brother, Absalom, was very angry at the rape and he killed Amnon for it. But the deed is only told as the revenge of a brother on the rape of his sister. The very reasons of Absalom's anger are not really declared in the Bible and Absalom could as well be angry because his sister was raped, as because he loved the girl himself or, more probably, because Amnon

was the preferred son of his father. Jealousy and not revenge over an incestuous deed may have been Absalom's main motive for the murder of Amnon. Incest between brother and sister may have been more tolerated in biblical times than now. But also, the writers of the texts of the Old Testament may have preferred here to tell the story without moral evaluation because it was linked to their most splendid hero, King David and his family.

*Other Paintings:*

**Tamar.** Alexandre Cabanel. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice – Nice. 1875.



### *Absalom's Rebellion*

Absalom was very much praised for his beauty. He had marvellous thick hair. The people liked Absalom. Absalom fomented rebellion. He travelled to Hebron. From there he sent couriers throughout Israel to say that when they heard the trumpet sound they were to say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron.' Soon the conspiracy grew in strength. Messengers told David that the men of Israel had shifted their allegiance to Absalom. David fled from Jerusalem. But the king ordered Zadok the priest to take the Ark back into the city. David said that if he had Yahweh's favour then God would bring him back to the Ark. David's confidence in Yahweh had not wavered. David sent his friend Hushai back to Jerusalem too, to stay in the palace and in the vicinity of Absalom, to hear everything and report it to the priests Zadok and Abiathar so that David would hear what happened there.

Absalom reached Jerusalem and settled in the palace. While David went over the Mount of Olives he met Ziba the retainer of Meribbaal. She told him that Meribbaal had stayed in Jerusalem because he said that the House of Israel would give him back today his father's kingdom. That was another blow to David, who had been kind to Meribbaal.

Absalom arrived in Jerusalem and asked Ahithopel the Gibonite, David's former counsellor who had gone over to Absalom, what he should do next. Ahithopel advised Absalom to go to his father's concubines. Ahithopel said that this should be arranged for all Israel to see how Absalom antagonised his father. David had left his concubines to look after Jerusalem for him; the women were still in Jerusalem. So a tent was pitched for Absalom and Absalom went to his father's concubines so that Yahweh's prediction became true.

Hushai, David's spy in the palace, thwarted some of Ahithopel's plans to fall on David and kill him while he was tired and dispirited. David received word from Hushai and fled across the Jordan. When Ahithopel saw that his advice to Absalom had not been taken, he went home and hanged himself.

Absalom marched on King David. David then split his army in three groups, which he put under the command of Joab, of Abishai and of Ittai the Gittite. These able commanders engaged Absalom's troops. David's retainers defeated the army of Israel. The battle was a great victory for David.

Absalom fled away. He ran into some of David's guards so he had to run fast. Absalom rode his mule and the mule passed under the thick branches of a great oak. Absalom's head got caught in the oak and he was left hanging in the tree while his mule went on. Someone saw this and reported it to Joab. Joab went to the oak and to Absalom. He took three darts and planted these in Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive, hanging in the oak tree. Then Joab's armour-bearer arrived, struck Absalom and killed him. They took Absalom, flung his corpse in a deep pit in the forest and raised a huge cairn over it.

Two messengers brought David the tidings that a victory had been won and that Absalom was killed. David wept for his son and victory was turned into mourning. David covered his face and cried out, 'My son Absalom, Absalom my son, my son.' David then returned home to Jerusalem. He was greeted by Meribbaal who pleaded again allegiance to David and who told that Ziba had not told all the truth.

With the death of Absalom did not return and end to the internal upheavals in Israel however. Soon a man called Sheba, son of Bickri, from the highlands of Ephraim, revolted against Israel. David's army commanders pursued Sheba. They besieged Abel Beth-Maacab. The townsmen, wanting to save their lives, cut off Sheba's head and threw it to Joab. Joab left the siege and returned to Jerusalem with the army.

David rules as King of Israel. He made a census in Israel. Israel had eight hundred thousand fighting men and Judah five hundred thousand. More than Israel, Judah supported David.

## *Part V. The Book of Kings*

### *The Death of King David*

King David was now a very old man. He was always cold. So his servants found a beautiful young girl to look after him. She was called Abishag of Shunem.

In those times Adonijah, son of Haggith and one of David's sons, was growing pretentious and spread the news that he would soon be king after David. He was very handsome and his mother had given birth to him after Absalom. Neither Nathan the prophet or Abiathar, David's priest, or Joab liked Adonijah. Nathan and Bathsheba then schemed and spoke to David in favour of Bathsheba's son Solomon. David summoned his champions and priests. He told them to take Solomon to Gihon. Zadok the priest and the prophet Nathan were to anoint Solomon King of Israel there. They did so, sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, 'Long live King Solomon!' Adonijah was in terror of Solomon then and all the conspirators fled in all directions. Adonijah fled in such a hurry that he ran off to cling to the horns of the altar.

During that time David's life drew to an end. He blessed his son and successor Solomon a last time and gave him good advice to rule over Israel. Then King David died. He was buried in the City of David. He was King of Israel for forty years. He had ruled in Hebron for seven years and in Jerusalem for thirty-three years.

### *King David*

#### **King David**

Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961.

Moshe Segall, called Marc Chagall, was born a Jew in 1887 in Lyozno in the suburbs of the Russian town of Vitebsk, where a thriving Jewish community lived before the Second World War. Chagall left Vitebsk for St Petersburg in 1907 and from there travel to Paris, where he mixed with a group of artists and emigrated Russians, some of which were preparing for the revolution in Russia. He would return to Vitebsk over Germany, where his works were exhibited in Gerhardt Walden's gallery of contemporary art 'Der Sturm'. When the First World War broke out, Chagall was trapped in Vitebsk. He married and went to Moscow only in 1920. In Vitebsk he could found an academy of painting with the help of his Bolshevik friends of Paris, but he had to leave that school when abstract avant-garde art overtook his own ideas

of the art of painting. He left Russia in 1924 for Paris and would not return anymore to his home country. During the Second World War he was invited to the United States but lost his very beloved wife Bella there and he came back to France after the war. In France he had changed his name from Moshe Segall to Marc Chagall.

Several painters made important series on the themes and spirit of the Old and the New Testament. Georges Rouault dedicated almost his whole production to religious themes, among which the large series 'Miserere'. Barnett Newman painted fourteen panels on the theme of the 'Stations of the Cross' in 1956 and Marc Rothko decorated the chapel of the Catholic University St Thomas of Houston in 1960. Around that same time Chagall started seventeen large canvases on the themes of the first books of the bible. In 1966 he offered these to the French State and France's government decided to build a museum around the pictures in the town of Nice on the Côte d'Azur, now called the 'Musée National Message Biblique Marc Chagall', the 'National museum of the Biblical Message'.

In his series Marc Chagall painted the creation of man, Adam and Eve in Paradise, Noah and the Flood, stories from the lives of Abraham and Jacob and several scenes from Exodus and Moses. Finally, Chagall painted five pictures of the 'Song of Songs', in which he also evoked David and Bathsheba. To these works were added in the museum the triptych 'Resistance, Resurrection and liberation', started around 1937 but on which Chagall continued to work until 1953, a few more works on scenes from Exodus and Moses, a painting of the Prophet Jeremiah, and 'Descent of the Cross' of Jesus Christ, and a painting on the theme of King David. 'King David' was made in 1951. Chagall then had lost his first and so beloved Russian wife Bella. He had met however in France another Russian woman, Valentina Brodsky, and married her in 1952. In 1951 he must have known Valentina already and he was reconciled with life. Moreover, Chagall decorated several Catholic churches in France and the figure of Jesus Christ, represented as a Jew, was a recurrent theme in his paintings. Chagall died in France in 1985.

'King David' is very typical for Chagall's work. He painted images that came to his mind around a theme and situated these over the canvas without any logical order, wherever he found a place, guided only by intuition of balance of forms and colour. Chagall was all dedicated to colour in the first place? He never really could or would draw well. His images are all emotion and colour expressed best his lyrical emotions. Chagall's pictures are the expression of his tenderness, the result of the need of a very sensitive spirit to be alone and dedicate that time to make visible his thoughts of sweetness, sadness, joy, elation and love.

In Chagall's painting we see King David, crowned, playing the lyre. The lyre was the symbol associated with the young David, not with David the warrior, but with David the romantic poet that had apparently written or assembled the love poems and the 'Song of Song', the long song of love that is part of the Bible and of Jewish tradition. For Chagall, David was foremost the musician and poet. David was also oriental, so Chagall painted a striking red robe on David and we see moon-shapes slightly represented on that robe. Maybe the moon patterns remind of the Muslim world that Palestine had become. Chagall mixed Jewish with Christian motives also. David wears a yellow crown, a green beard and he does not really hold the yellow lyre: it floats to his hands; the fingers only play on the strings. This artist saw in colours, but

his colours did not necessarily have to concord with reality. His colours were his emotions and when he needed a striking contrast or vividness, he could very well paint a red robe and a green beard. Chagall painted David entirely on the left side; other symbols and scenes are on the right. No special meaning should be given to the assembly of these scenes; they were simply ideas, images that came to the artist's mind while he worked.

Opposite David we see a long, elongated figure of a white bride. This figure is shown like a white comet appearing in the sky and passing. This would be Bathsheba, the innocent and pure bride of Uriah the Hittite, the woman that David coveted and married after having ordered Uriah to be sent in the heat of battle so that he would be killed. But we know that David represents Marc Chagall here, so that the white bride would be his first wife Bella. Out of the white ghost, out of the passing comet, grows another woman, maybe Valentina or Vava, as she was called, presenting a candelabra of glory and of peace.

Above her we see images remembered from the Jewish shtetl, the Jewish village where Chagall lived near Vitebsk: a horse in a stable, a cock calling the morning and situated against the full moon of night, a fiddler playing the violin of the villagers and also a painter who holds a palette with one hand and a frame with the other. Another woman flies there in the air and brings like an angel a bouquet of bright yellow flowers that match the yellow light of the candelabra. Is that Bella again, agreeing with the peace brought by Vava? These are all peaceful, joyous scenes, referring to the happiness of David's years.

In the lower part of the picture Marc Chagall represented sad scenes. Happiness and sadness are always together in a life. We see a red sun fiercely red like a ball of fire that consumes a town and drives people out. Chagall may have referred here to a fire that destroyed parts of Vitebsk when he was a very young child. Or he may have referred to the wars of David. Chagall of course also saw these miseries in the two world wars and during the Russian revolution in his lifetime. Here, in the incandescence of the fire, we see a mother fleeing with her child at her breast, a woman almost painted like a Christian Madonna. For David, the destruction of the town and the fleeing people may have come as a nightmare or as a precognition of the future of Jerusalem. David and his son Solomon built a wonderful Jerusalem, but Jeremiah had a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem and lamented over its fate. So Chagall painted a mourning Jeremiah seated in the right corner, painted in dark green colours. We know that the town is Jerusalem, but the realistic rendering its main architectures is not necessary for the viewer to recognise the town. Chagall drew a high tower, the Tower of David, and that symbol suffices for a viewer.

Chagall did not use a deliberately, logically designed composition in his paintings. He did not need intricate, complex, refined design. He painted purely from intuition. He would of course make essays in gouache for a major oil painting, to find the right feeling of colour areas and forms, but he was far from an academic painter. Chagall applied thus also for 'King David' pure and bright colours, which were painterly the 'right' ones for Chagall but not necessarily realistic ones. He liked colours that would appeal strongly to the viewers. He used deep red, very pure white, very bright yellow and very strong green. These colours contrast much, cry out against each other, and increase the emotions of attraction, of happiness or of reflection in the viewer.

Chagall's art is all emotion, marvel and lyrical waves of feelings are evoked in the viewer. It would be impossible not to like the gentle, naïve representations of a person that always looked at life and at the Bible with the eyes of a child, unaware of laws or rules. But are all men not like this somewhere in a part of their personality, a part that is all too often repressed or forcibly denied? Chagall feared not showing this part, relished in expressing it to give back to the viewer what that viewer knows very well to exist but is often ashamed of and hides. Yet, the bible is full of those feelings. Chagall was the ultimate poet in the art of painting. He also grasped well the dual nature of David. David was represented in bible stories as the Romantic young shepherd that played the lyre, who was fair and looked innocently at life. But David grew up and Saul held him at court, in the intrigues of the hierarchy of Jerusalem. David married and desired different women. He lusted for Bathsheba and got her, but had to cheat and do wrong for it. He waged many wars, destroyed much, defended Israel and founded a lasting dynasty of kings for the Jews. But we know that the fate of that new and glorious Jerusalem would be destruction of its buildings and deportation of its inhabitants. An old man weeps over such tragic events, and Jeremiah therefore could equally well be the old David, or of course Marc Chagall, because the duality of David is the duality that is in every man.

The images that Marc Chagall presents to the viewer are of course very different from all other views that Bible painters of mainly the seventeenth century showed. Astonishingly however, Chagall's images were as different from anything else made in his own times. Chagall's early contemporaries were the dark Expressionist or the avant-garde Abstract artists. Their images had been born in the horror of the twentieth-century world wars and revolutions. Among these painters, Chagall was almost the only one to show images of love and hope, which are always the messages of the New Testament.

## *David and Solomon*

### **David's dying Charge to Solomon**

Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1643.

Ferdinand Bol was a Dutch painter, born in 1616 in Dordrecht. He went to Amsterdam around 1635 and for a few years continued to study with Rembrandt and working as Rembrandt's assistant. From the beginning of the 1640s he worked on his own, so that 'David's dying Charge to Solomon' must have been one of the first pictures made in his own workshop. He made many portraits and we see also in 'David's dying Charge to Solomon' Ferdinand Bol's predilection for portraiture, which he did in the beginning in Rembrandt's style but where later he brought less emphasis on style elements and more on elegance and realistic, neutral, immediately clear, well-delineated depiction.

Ferdinand Bol's painting is much in line with Rembrandt's style, even if the picture was made in 1643. Rembrandt was only thirty-seven years old by then, but Ferdinand Bol was ten years younger. We see a picture in mostly brown colours, sharp contrast of light and representing a rather static scene of figures. The people in the circle of Rembrandt took over the master's vision, but also added elements of design of their own conception and thus modulated Rembrandt's style. Bol gave more attention to the background and we remark just a slight touch of blue, a colour Rembrandt generally avoided.

Ferdinand Bol showed a very old, dying man lying buried under the linen and the blankets of a huge bed. Bol concentrated the light of the picture on the dying man. The man still holds a sceptre, a crown lies on the bed and thereby the viewer recognises in the bed an old king for otherwise this could have been any old man, dressed in a white sleeping-shirt and wearing a white cap in his head to protect him from the cold. Few viewers would have situated the scene in generally warm Israel. Bol showed immediately how the King has lost all power, practically disappears inside the bed and indeed needs to hand over power to his successor.

Ferdinand Bol showed a dignified Solomon standing sadly on the other side of the bed, holding his arm to his hearth. He is dressed in splendid courtly clothes. Here is some blue on gold, but in pure Rembrandt style Bol had to position Solomon in the darkness and only a little light falls on Solomon's solemn face.

The third figure is Bathsheba. She too has grown old and like the old David she is enveloped in heavy cloth. She wears large robes and a veil, so that we only see of her face and a hand. Her hand too hangs rather sadly and powerless.

The figures are all static in this picture. They express their feelings in only a subtle way, but the psychology of the figures is shown. Thus, David has only a little strength left to move his right hand – not his full arm – in blessing. He cannot hold up his sceptre nor does he wear his crown. Bathsheba also sits slumped and without force; her hand hangs without energy. And Solomon stands aside, not too close, reverent,

sad, but also somewhat haughty and since he is not very close to his father, we feel here already the arrogance of a new King. Solomon has the power of rule already; it does not really need to be given. Ferdinand Bol positioned the three faces of Solomon, David and Bathsheba on one line of sight, linking the three figures firmly together and making sure that from David to Bathsheba the viewer will always look at Solomon too. That is also really the only element of composition in a picture that emphasises the verticals and horizontals to give an impression of stately dignity.

Contrary to what Rembrandt would have done, and although light is only on David, Bol could add details of the background. He painted splendid hues, evolution of brown and golden colours in the curtains on the left, on a golden stand, on Bathsheba's robes, and on the curtains above and on the right side. The dark colours suggest that the scene as shown by Bol happens in the evening or at night. In this way, Bol could naturally harden the contrasts between light and dark. Bol of course imagined the scene as if it were a scene of a Dutch King dying, even though he depicted Bathsheba truly as an elderly oriental woman. An advantage of painting night scenes was that the painter could let the light come from a side and a height he wanted. Light did not have to come from above. Light from above, from the sun, might only highlight the upper parts of furniture and figures. In the evening, light could be come from a candle or an oil lamp and that source could be situated anywhere, throwing light from any direction desired by the painter.

The interest of paintings like 'David's dying Charge to Solomon' lies in their historical value. Pictures like these indicate how strong Rembrandt's influence had been on many painters of his period. But artists like Ferdinand Bol, Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout, and Govert Flinck also knew how to modify Rembrandt's particular use of the elements of design in painting such as composition and colour. Ferdinand Bol was maybe one of the painters who stayed the closest to Rembrandt's vision of the art. But Bol was also a very good artist and Rembrandt's style was well suited, added to Bol's considerable painterly skills, to bring a fine work of art.



## *King Solomon*

Solomon now sat on the throne of David.

Adoniah came to Bathsheba and asked for Abishag of Shunem in marriage. Bathsheba asked her son but Solomon would not yield on this. He wanted Adoniah to pay for these words because Adoniah was an elder brother and demanding marriage to Abishag amounted to ask for the kingdom. King Solomon commanded Benaiah son of Jehoiada to strike Adoniah down, and that was how Adoniah died. Abiathar the priest and Joab the army commander also had supported Adoniah. Solomon deprived Abiathar of the priesthood, thus fulfilling the prophecy that Yahweh had uttered against the House of Eli at Shiloh. And Benaiah struck down Joab for Solomon. Solomon decided to that because Joab had killed two good men without David's knowledge. These were Abner son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel under Saul, and Amasa son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. Joab was buried at his home in the desert. In the place of Joab Solomon appointed Benaiah son of Jehoiada and in the place of Abiathar he appointed Zadok the priest.

Solomon was a great king. He became the son-in-law of Pharaoh, king of Egypt and he brought Pharaoh's daughter to Jerusalem. Solomon loved Yahweh and he followed the precepts of his father David. He sacrificed at Gibeon, the principal high place and he sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings on the altar.

## *King Solomon*

### **King Solomon**

Alessandro Bonvicino called Moretto (ca.1490-1554). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. 1545-1546.

Alessandro Bonvicino was a painter of the larger Veneto region. He worked in Brescia. He must have lived from around 1490 to 1554 but very little is known of his life. His portrait 'King Solomon' was part of a set of pictures of which four remain: a 'St John the Evangelist', the 'Samian Sibyl' and 'King Solomon' now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan, as well as a 'Magdalene' in the Art Institute of Chicago.

Moretto painted Solomon as an oriental king. David wears a crimson cloak lined with ermine however, the traditional dress of the Venetian Doges. Senators of the government of Venice wore crimson velvet cloaks, but only the Doge also could wear the ermine shoulder cap that we see on Solomon in Moretto's picture. The only detail that distinguishes David from a Doge is that he does not wear the Doge's cap, but the turban. In the sixteenth century Palestine was in the hands of Muslims, who generally wore turbans. Moretto added to the turban the symbols of a crown, the red spikes, to represent Solomon as the idea of a European king. Various inscriptions also refer to Solomon as King and to David's charge to Solomon as his successor. Moretto may

have painted Solomon wearing a Doge's clothing simply so that a viewer of the Veneto would easily understand that the figure of Solomon was an important one, the highest function in the country. Or he might have emphasised the justification for the Doge as the continuation of the power invested in David and Solomon. Moreover, the Venetian Serenissima was supposed to be a council or parliament of the wisest men of Venice. Solomon not only holds his 'Book of Wisdom' in his hand under his cloak, but he also points with his other, gloved hand, at the book. This marks the painting clearly for Venice or for use in a palace or a church of a region controlled by Venice. Solomon is indeed a judge more than a monarch, a wise, old, integer, and honest but also hard man. He has a square face that shows determination, vivid eyes and a full white beard that always indicates wisdom. This also Moretto emphasises the Doge more as a wise notable or judge than as a despotic king. That view was the most accepted one in Venice, which was a republic.

Moretto filled in the painting by adding background elements: remains of architecture in a stone slab, so old that a tree or bush has grown into it. Thereby the painter added to the impression of age of the image. Moretto's painting is interesting in that a viewer sees how the image of the wise Solomon could be used for means that carry a political reference.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The History of Solomon.** Master of the Solomon Triptych (active ca. 1520). The Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis – The Hague. ca. 1521/1525.

### *Solomon's wisdom*

Solomon saw Yahweh in a dream. God said, 'Ask what you would like me to give you.' Solomon answered he was still very young and unskilled in leadership. He asked for knowledge to govern his people, and for how to discern between good and evil. God was very pleased that Solomon had asked wisdom instead of a long life for himself or a life in richness. Therefore Yahweh gave Solomon a wise and shrewd heart. But he promised for Solomon the riches he had not asked, the glory too and a long life. Solomon woke up, returned to Jerusalem and stood a long time before the Ark of the Covenant. He gave more burnt offerings to God.

Solomon judged. Once, two prostitutes came to see Solomon. One had given birth to a child and three days later the second woman also gave birth in the same house. Then while the women were alone in the house, the child of the second woman died. In the middle of the night she got up and took the son of the other in her arms while she put her own dead son to those of the first woman. The first woman presented this case to Solomon but of course the second woman protested and there was quite a dispute before Solomon. Finally, Solomon said, 'Bring me a sword, and cut the child in two. Give half to one, half to the other woman.' At these words the mother of the living child spoke to the king, begging him not to kill the child and give it to the other woman. Whereas the other woman said indeed to cut the child in half, since he should not belong to either of them. Then Solomon gave his decision of judgement. He said, 'Do not kill the child. She who wants to save him is the mother.'

All Israel recognised in awe the divine wisdom for dispensing justice of King Solomon. The wisdom of Solomon surpassed the wisdom of all the kings of the East and of Egypt. He composed three thousands proverbs and over a thousand songs. He could discourse on plants, on animals and birds, reptiles and fish. He received gifts from all the kings in the world who had heard of his wisdom. The Bible said that 'God gave Solomon immense wisdom and understanding, and a heart as vast as the sand of the sea-shore.'

### *Solomon's Judgement*

#### **The Judgement of Solomon**

Valentin de Boulogne (1535-1632). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1625.

Valentin de Boulogne was one of the great French masters that pursued a career in Rome. The other painters were Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Gellée called le Lorrain (1600-1682). They died all three in Rome but Valentin de Boulogne died the youngest, at about thirty-eight years old. His picture 'The Judgement of Solomon' was made in his later years, around 1625, and it was in the collection of the French King Louis XIV. The court of the Sun King seems to have appreciated work of its

French painters in Rome and acquired many. Claude Gellée is best known for his imaginary landscapes, some of which were painted in a mythological context. Nicolas Poussin was the most Classicist and academic painter of the three. And Valentin de Boulogne was probably the most baroque painter, inclined to very Roman style and Caravaggist pictures. But these three painters represent French academism, French rigorous composition at its best. When you look at a Valentin, a Poussin or a Claude you look for composition first.

The basis of Valentin's composition is a large triangle or pyramid structure, positioned centrally in the picture. The top of the pyramid is the crown of Solomon. The base is the lowest border of the frame, between the two women. The sides of the triangle are formed by the outlines of the three main figures, Solomon and the two women. In a second scene, a scene with the main theme, Valentin de Boulogne painted other oblique directions by which other triangles of composition can be perceived.

There is a line made by the left mother, going from her head over the child and upwards over the lance of a soldier, to the upper border of the frame. In the space to the left of this line we find another triangle, comprising the woman and the soldier that grasps the child. Perpendicular to this left oblique line we discover the line of Solomon's outstretched arm.

To the right of the picture however, there is more calm and calm is indicated in paintings by vertical and horizontal lines, not by oblique lines. So the woman holds herself upright even though she kneels, and two old, wise counsellors stand to this side, to emphasise the vertical directions. These lines are all of course chosen by purpose instead of by pure intuition. The difference between the directions of the lines to the left and to the right support the emotions expressed in the painting.

The strong emotions of the painting are mostly situated on the left. Solomon judges in a quick, terribly tragic command to kill a child. A soldier, represented as an executioner or as a butcher, seizes the child and the woman bows in the effort of retaining the baby child. Here is a clash of emotions; here is the conflict, the tension, and the swift decision of tragedy. So Valentin de Boulogne used here intersecting, crossing and unsupported oblique lines that are not parallel to the main directions of the picture. Oblique lines indicate always action, movement, energy in a painting. Valentin de Boulogne's picture is a spectacular example of the Baroque design of using such oblique lines to support expression of emotions. On the other side of the picture, on the right side, Valentin showed a serene and loving woman, holding her hands to her breast in a gesture of resignation. This woman abandons her child to save it. On this side is not action, energy, and speed of decision making. So Valentin positioned the mother in a position where she kneels in humility as well as two old men that seems still to be engaged in thinking while the executioner already grasps the child. Even Solomon's left arm and his sceptre are vertical lines here and so are the curtains whose vertical folds are the most visible in this part of the picture.

Valentin de Boulogne enforced the pyramid structure of Solomon's throne even more. He painted the body of a dead boy child at Solomon's feet. The body is longer than the base line feet cushion, so forming or adding to the base line of the central pyramid. This boy could be either an earlier victim, or, more probably, the vision of

the real mother of the child, the woman of the right, the precognition of her own child killed.

Valentin de Boulogne used strong structure and strong colours in his painting. In the patterns of colours also we can discern symmetries and structure. The woman of the left has her back half bare and Valentin let light come from the lower left so that this nudity offers a bright area of colour in the painting. To the right, the mother has a very low neckline in her dress and she wears a white apron. These two areas, equally bright, nicely balance the same colours. They also settle the central pyramid firmly as the left and right flesh colours are linked by the equal flesh colour of the child at Solomon's feet. So it was also by colour that Valentin de Boulogne linked the two women, over the image of the dead child.

There is a sub-scene on the left of the frame. Here also, Valentin brought balance in the masses of colour. The bright colour of the woman's back is balanced here by the darker area of the bare chest and arm of the executioner. Remark also how skilfully and intelligently Valentin balanced the oblique poise of the woman by a counter-movement of the executioner. Although the woman leans over much, it is as if the executioner holds her in equilibrium. That impression however is only achieved by the composition of lines, of directions of the bodies.

Valentin de Boulogne had learned from Caravaggio in Rome. His own contrasts between light and dark are spectacular, but less pronounced than in Caravaggio's scenes. Valentin used more figures generally in his pictures than the great Roman master, and that fact tends to decrease somewhat the striking tension in a picture. But it suffices to look at the woman with the child and at the executioner, to discover the vigour with which Valentin de Boulogne developed sense of volume using only chiaroscuro, colour shading, and contrasts between lighter zones and darker ones. Like seen in most Caravaggio's paintings, Valentin painted the background of 'Solomon's Judgement' very dark and that feature of course supports the dramatic tension of the representation of the figures, and draws the attention of the viewer to the figures.

Valentin de Boulogne painted a picture that needs to be seen in a rapid movement of the eyes. Then the viewer will perceive immediate action, the decisive command of Solomon and the executioner's swift response. Valentin expressed action by the crossing of oblique lines in his composition and by the attitudes of the figures. We know that an outstretched arm, a grasping of a child, as depicted, are brusque movements. Valentin showed just these and therefore the picture has a striking immediacy in the display of emotions. But a painting is also a static picture. When movement is too much emphasised and does not have at least some static quality, then the viewer will soon sense that something is missing or wrong in the picture. Movement is direct and very visible Valentin's 'Solomon's Judgement'. But the viewer knows that such a movement cannot be sustained. When he or she continues anyhow to look at the painting, the sense of movement becomes so strong that after a while it will be perceived as being unnatural. Only very great painters know how to present movement in their pictures and still give that representation a static character that makes the painting acceptable, realistic, balanced also in motion, even when the viewer looks at it for longer periods. Valentin's Solomon is a little too much in

immediate action. Valentin de Boulogne certainly knew this aspect, but he may have been experimenting or still learning.

Valentin de Boulogne painted a strong scene of powerful emotions. He was a very Baroque painter in expression. He used warm colours, not much blue but for a diluted grey-blue hue. The colours lock into each other harmoniously. He was dedicated to chiaroscuro and to more forceful contrasts between light and dark than Nicolas Poussin or Claude Gellée would ever admit to. He showed in a more gripping way emotions than these more academic Baroque Classicists who presented more austere views. In that, Valentin de Boulogne was closer to the Flemish painter Rubens, to a great feeling for composition but to greater intuition and freedom of expression of emotions than Poussin or Claude.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Giorgione (c.1480-1510). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Jean-François de Troy (1679-1752). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. 1742.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Martin Johann Schmidt called Kremsserschmidt (1718-1801). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1781.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Jean Tassel (c.1608-1667). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. ca. 1650s.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1666). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1649.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Pier Francesco Foschi (1502-1567). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Master of the Judgement of Solomon (active 1620-1630). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1620-1625.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1620.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Lucas Cranach the Elder's workshop (1472-1553). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1537.

**The Judgement of Solomon.** Giovan Francesco Caroto (ca. 1480-1555). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo. 1535.

## *The Temple of Jerusalem*

Solomon then started to build a Temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem. Like his father he wrote to Hiram, king of Tyre for help. He needed cedar wood and juniper. Hiram also provided Solomon with wheat and oil. Solomon raised a levy throughout Israel for forced labour and he put Adoram in charge of the workers. Hiram sent workmen too and the huge stones for the foundation were laid immediately. Then, in the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt and in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the Temple of Yahweh was built. The building of the Temple was done with quarry-dressed stone. No sound of hammer or pick was to be heard in the Temple while it was being built. It was roofed with a coffered ceiling of cedar wood. Annexes were built too. The inside of the Temple walls was lined with cedar-wood and the floor was covered with juniper planks. The length of the Holy of Holies, the Debir room, was twenty cubits. The Temple measured forty cubits in front of the Debir. The inside cedar wood was ornamentally carved with gourds and rosettes and no stone showed. The Debir was not only twenty cubits long but also twenty cubits wide and twenty cubits high. The inside of the Debir was overlaid with pure gold. The altar was of cedar wood and likewise overlaid with gold. Solomon had two winged creatures made of wild olive wood and had these covered with gold. The statues were placed in the Debir with open wings. In the eleventh year of Solomon's reign the Temple was completed after seven years of work.

Solomon spent thirteen years building a palace. This also was a magnificent building, with a huge Hall of the Throne and a Hall of Justice.

Solomon now summoned the elders of Israel to Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh from the City of David, that is Zion, into the new Temple. In the Ark were the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb. Then a cloud filled the Temple of Yahweh and the glory of God filled it. Then Solomon prayed to Israel and to Yahweh. The King and all Israel now offered sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem.

The splendour of Solomon's reign grew. Solomon traded over the seas. He equipped a fleet at Ezion-Beber near Eliath. Hiram of Tyre sent experienced sailors to serve with Solomon's men. Solomon sent out his own and Hiram's fleet and these would return every three years laden with gold, ivory, and silver. Solomon became a wealthy trader. Pharaoh's soldiers captured Gezer and Pharaoh gave the town to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Solomon re-built Gezer. Solomon was very wealthy. He possessed great amounts of gold. He made a great ivory throne for himself, overlaid with refined gold. All Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold and so were the plates in his house of the Forest of Lebanon. Solomon had over three thousand three hundred chariots with horses, stationed in Jerusalem and in special chariot towns.

## *The Dream of Solomon*

### **The Dream of Solomon**

Luca Giordano (1632-1705). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca. 1693.

Luca Giordano was born in Naples in 1634. First his father, Antonio Giordano, taught him to paint and then he worked for a time with Jusepe de Ribera, the Spanish painter that had been called to the Naples by the Spanish ruler of Naples. In 1650 Luca Giordano painted together with Pietro da Cortona in Rome. He travelled also to other cities of Northern Italy, among which Venice. From 1665 on he painted mainly in Naples, but he also worked at times in Florence. His output grew prodigiously and he must have had a large workshop with many assistants. In 1692 he accepted an invitation from the king of Spain, Charles II, to become a court painter in Madrid. In 1702 he returned to Naples and he died there in 1705. Luca Giordano left a very extensive oeuvre that can only be compared to the production of the workshop of Pieter Paul Rubens of Antwerp. There is hardly a museum in Europe that does not pride in a picture by Rubens and by Giordano. He worked so fast that he earned the name 'fa presto'. But working fast meant also often lack of originality, repetition of themes and copying of earlier views.

Giordano's 'Solomon's Dream' is one of his paintings in which we discern originality and fresh inspiration. As always with Giordano, the scene he shows is sumptuous. Solomon sleeps and Yahweh appears in his dream, surrounded by angels. Yahweh shines his light of wisdom into Solomon and he gives the king of Israel a vision of the Temple of Jerusalem. Behind Solomon we see the imposing walls of the enormous temple that Solomon would later build for Yahweh. Above the sleeping young Solomon sits the goddess Minerva, who was the ancient goddess of wisdom. Both will inspire Solomon in his judgements.

Luca Giordano used for structure the right diagonal but he opened an oblique band of light just above that diagonal. This structure is simple and could have been easily and rapidly conceived, then explained in elementary terms to assistants. The rays that shine out of Yahweh, parallel to the right diagonal, build that band and the rays are projected onto Solomon's face. Around the rays there is light and towards the upper board of the frame more light is coming from the halo around Yahweh's head. In this band of light, Giordano painted much darker tones that deepen more towards the corners of the frame. Luca Giordano used mostly yellow colours for the light, slightly going to orange in places. In the side scenes, which are triangles, he used green and blue shades that are very close and that are progressing to darker and to more grey hues. These colours form a quite harmonious view, even though the colour combination is a little strained. Still, the picture represents a dream and thus can be a little skewed in choice of complementary colours to evoke also a strange impression in the viewer of an un-natural, exceptional and uncommon atmosphere.

The painting 'Solomon's Dream' of Luca Giordano is quite interesting in its decorative qualities, a feature that announces Rococo abundance and emphasis of



decorative elements. We see it here in the angels painted by Giordano around Yahweh as well as in the many curved forms, the many folds in Yahweh's robe and in the blankets on Solomon. Luca Giordano painted a nice, original view, in a very decorative picture. This was a painting to be seen rather rapidly and that could be understood rapidly by viewers. It would have been admired for its straightforward skill of efficiency in depiction. It was a painting that viewers could look often to. It was also however a piece of art made with love and dedication by a painter who was definitely out to please his audience and knew very well what to give. The picture has everything to please: a nice dreamy mood, sweet colours, a mythological content (Minerva) combined with a religious one (Yahweh) and a royal figure (Solomon), a beautiful nude of a young men resembling Apollo (Solomon) but kept decently covered enough for any church, and of course the sumptuous representation of the glory of the heavens. Commissioners would have been more than pleased with such a picture, so Luca Giordano received orders from all over Europe. His Neapolitan workshop was famous for its production all over Italy and well into the Southern Netherlands, where one can find such pictures still in small village churches.

### *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wisdom. She came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with difficult questions. She came with camels loaded with gold and spices and precious stones. The Queen of Sheba and Solomon conversed and Solomon answered to all the challenges of the Queen. The Queen was breathless at the buildings of Solomon, at his retinue, his organisation of Israel and at his wisdom. She said the reports she had received of Solomon's wisdom were all true. She concluded that Solomon surpassed in prosperity and wisdom all she had heard. She found Israel fortunate to be ruled by such a king and blessed was Yahweh to have set Solomon on the throne of Israel. The Queen of Sheba presented to the king the gold and spices and stones and no such wealth was again brought to the court after her. Then Solomon traded with the Queen and Solomon's fleet brought back great cargoes of timber and precious stones from the land of the Queen of Sheba. Solomon used the wood for his buildings but also for the music instruments of the royal palace, for the harps and lyres. These were also of timber as no one had seen before. King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba everything she wished. Then she left and went home to her own country.

### *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon*

#### **The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon**

Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. Ca. 1600.

We can only exceptionally present an important painting of a religious subject based on a Bible scene from a female painter. Lady painters made pictures that were as fine in quality as most male painters, but we try to present pictures that are very special and if possible made by a great master that had an enduring influence on his or her epoch. Lady painters were very much at a large disadvantage because in the earlier centuries of religious representation, most of them were simply not allowed by their family to paint. Several lady painters that were indeed great masters stopped to paint when they got married. They might have become anonymous assistants to their father or husband.

Among the female painters that persevered in their art, many painted portraits, still lives or genre scenes. These pictures could be made entirely in-doors and without human models. A very few lady painters made landscapes, a few mythological scenes. Very few were inclined to paint religious scenes, as the Christian clergy preferred for churches and monasteries to commission to male painters. Thus, even when female painters were allowed to exercise their art by their closest family, they might have been ostracised by society. A few exceptions of female painters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that are also quite well known and were recognised for their religious scenes in their life-times were Ser Pulisena Nelli, who was a nun, Lavinia

Fontana, Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani. Among these, Fontana and Sirani worked in Bologna.

There was a tradition in Bologna of well-educated female artists. The University of Bologna was not only the first one of its kind founded in Europe, it was also open to women. Bologna had its woman saint, Saint Catherine of Bologna, who had lived in the fifteenth century and who had painted. The presence of a religious cult for a woman saint who painted may have helped in creating more tolerance to women artists in Bologna.<sup>G34</sup>

Lavinia Fontana was born in Bologna in 1552 and among all the cities of Western Europe, Bologna remained the most sympathetic and tolerant to lady painters. The first teacher of Lavinia was her father, Prospero Fontana, who was a well appreciated and established artist in Bologna. Prospero Fontana had many students, among whom also Ludovico Carracci, who would later found with other painters of his own family the Classicist tendency in Italian Baroque art. Lavinia Fontana's fame was well established in the late 1570's but for instance she would not have been allowed in the Academy of the Carracci painters of Bologna because that academy emphasised painting from the nude. Lavinia's first known work dates from 1576 and it was already a religious painting, a Christ with angels.<sup>G103</sup> In 1577 she married another Bolognese painter whose name was Gian Paolo Zappi and who had also been a student in her father's workshop. Zappi remained almost anonymous in art history. At best he might have worked as an assistant in his wife's workshop. But Lavinia Fontana seems to have birthed eleven children. Around 1592 she was so famous that the King of Spain asked her to paint a picture for his Escorial palace in Madrid. That was a fine proof of her social tenure at the times. She worked for churches in various Italian cities. In 1603 Pope Clemens VIII invited her to Rome. She painted many religious pictures there. She worked in the Palace of the Cardinal d'Este and she worked for the basilica of San Paolo Fuori le Mura on a painting that was however destroyed in a fire in the nineteenth century. She became a member of Rome's San Lucca Academy, one of the best recognitions of her status and fame as an artist. She stayed in Rome until her death in 1614. The most famous Bolognese woman artist after her was Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665), who died quite young.

Lavinia Fontana's 'The visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon' was made during her last years in Bologna, around 1600. She was already around fifty years old then, but like male painters of her age she had not lost her inspiration or her skills in the art. The picture is probably also portraiture. Solomon might be the Duke of Mantua, Vincent I Gonzaga, and the Queen of Sheba the Duke's wife Leonora de Medici. In 1600 the Duke and Duchess attended to the marriage of Maria de Medici in Florence. They may have travelled over Bologna and commissioned the work. The influence of Leonora de Medici on her husband may have helped in convincing her husband to have a picture painted by Lavinia Fontana, though Lavinia's eminence was established enough. The Duke of Mantua was a ruling aristocrat and that he had ordered a work to a woman painter tells much about Lavinia's fame.

Lavinia Fontana painted a scene at the court of an Italian city-state like Mantua in the late sixteenth century. An Italian noblewoman is received by an Italian Prince. The picture could as well have been the portrait of Duke of Mantua welcoming the return of his wife Leonora de Medici after a long voyage.

Solomon wears the usual symbols of his kingdom: the sceptre and the crown. His armour-bearer is near, holding his imposing sword. All the honour goes however to the lady that has come to his court, the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba wears a sumptuous robe lined with expensive lace. And she is followed by a rich court of other noble women, her ladies-in waiting. The Queen brought a jester with her and Lavinia Fontana painted a hunting dog to add a touch of genre intimacy, whereas a negro servant brings golden and silver presents to Solomon. Fontana painted in the background a nice landscape, either in a window or as a painting of such a landscape that hangs in the ceremonial hall.

The most striking effect of this painting on the viewer is one of refined court manners, of reverence for ladies, as indeed would have been the case in the courts of the late Renaissance Italian cities. The following of the Queen of Sheba is represented as the normal court of a visiting monarch, but it consists entirely of women. Lavinia Fontana painted with delicate skill the lace collars and lace sleeve linings of the ladies and with time these white lines stood out much against the other colours of the painting. She cared for her work, detailed much all the figures of the picture and even the background to an elegant whole. The main impression of the viewer is one of elegant courting, relations of respect between noble women and men. This is a theme that a woman would be sensitive to, would represent, and that would probably less come to the mind of male painters.

The composition is simple, and based on a division of three to five in length, which is the golden proportion. One scene is Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the longer scene is the Queen's following. Portraiture was the main aim of the picture, so Lavinia used a simple horizontal representation of the figures. The picture has all the characteristics of a solemn Renaissance picture, even though Baroque and powerful realism had started in Rome with Caravaggio.

Fontana painted a magnificent scene however. The colours and details are splendid and shown in all detail. Fontana used her fine skills in the way she painted the robe of the Queen of Sheba and the dresses of the other ladies. Every face of the ladies-in-waiting is different, every poise is different, but all express the solemn dignity of the arrival at court. The group of ladies isolates itself from Solomon and the Queen. Every lady looks away from the two main figures. They ladies look either at the viewer, either at the incoming presents. They follow with their eyes the gesture of the dwarf. Thus isolated, the encounter of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba become more intimate, and Lavinia Fontana obtained the nice effect as if the ladies diverted their looks from the couple to give it a few moments of intimacy in which the tender feelings are exchanged that the court does not need to witness. Lavinia Fontana brought another such delicate touch in her representation in the fact that Solomon wears crown and sceptre, but the Queen of Sheba wears no crown. The lady just behind the Queen brings her crown. This is probably a delicate recognition of the supremacy of Solomon, and of the supremacy in the marriage of the Duke of Mantua over the Duchess, or can be so interpreted.

Lavinia Fontana leads the viewer over the picture. The viewer will normally start at the figure of the story, King Solomon. Solomon leans towards the Queen of Sheba and his arms open to her. When the viewer looks at the Queen, the Queen's arms

direct the eyes to the lower right side, where the dwarf with the red shirt is situated. The dwarf points to the negro servant entering with a plate full of golden and silver presents. And then the viewer's gaze is led back over the various faces of the ladies-in-waiting, back to the left scene and to the Queen. The Queen of Sheba here is with her wealthy, brocaded robe the true main figure of the scene.

The 'Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon' is a large canvas and one of the most ambitious scenes of Lavinia Fontana. With such paintings she proved not to be the lesser artist of her male counterparts. Her composition, clarity of depiction and of message marks her still as a painter of the Renaissance, but with the sumptuous presentation of the court figures she introduces the more decorative period of Baroque.

*Other Paintings:*

**Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.** Claude Vignon (1593-1670). The Louvre – Paris. 1624.

**Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba.** Claude Gellée le Lorrain (1600-1682). ). The National Gallery – London.

**The Queen of Sheba before Solomon.** Konrad Witz (ca.1400-ca.1446). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie - Berlin 1435-1437.

**The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon.** Leandro Bassano (1557-1622). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin.

**Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1545.

### *Solomon adores foreign Gods*

Solomon loved many foreign women. He had Egyptian, Moabite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite wives. Yahweh had said to the Israelites not to go among foreign women for they would distract Israel's love from Yahweh. But Solomon was much attached to his foreign women. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. When Solomon was old these charmed his heart towards other gods so that his heart was not with Yahweh anymore. Solomon became a follower of Astarte. This was the goddess of the Sidonians and also of Milcom, an Ammonite abomination. Solomon built a temple for Chemosh, the god of Moab and also to the mentioned Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, on a mountain near Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives so that they could sacrifice to their own gods.

Yahweh was angry then. God said that since Solomon had sinned in this way he would tear the kingdom away from Solomon and give it to his servants. For the sake of Solomon's father, David, however, Yahweh would not do this in Solomon's lifetime but in the lifetime of his son. And for the sake of David and of Jerusalem Yahweh would leave whole one tribe of Solomon's dynasty.

Hadad the Edomite rose now against Solomon. God raised a second enemy against Israel, Rezon son of Ehaida. Rezon captured Damascus and from that town he was hostile to Solomon. God also sent a revolt headed by Jeroboam, son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zeredah.

Jeroboam met Ahijah the prophet on the road. Ahijah had a new cloak and he tore this in twelve strips. Ahijah gave ten strips to Jeroboam saying that he would tear the kingdom from Solomon's hands and give thus ten tribes of Israel to Jeroboam. Ahijah gave ten strips of his cloak to Jeroboam. Ahijah then told two strips were still for Solomon, one for David and one for Jerusalem. But Ahijah predicted Yahweh would only take the land from Solomon's son. Solomon tried to capture and kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt and bided his time.

Solomon fell asleep with his ancestors after forty years of reign. He was buried in the City of David. His son Rehoboam succeeded him.

### *Solomon sacrificing to Idols*

#### **Solomon sacrificing to Idols**

Jacques Stella (1596-1657). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. Ca. 1650.

Jacques Stella was a French painter of the seventeenth century. Born in Lyon in 1596 from a family of Flemish origins, he entered the service of Cosimo II de Medici in Florence. He stayed a long time in Italy, like many other French painters of that

period, from 1616 to 1635, in Florence, but also in Rome. He made major paintings in Florence but returned to Paris and was appointed painter of the French King in 1634. He was the official painter of the Cardinal Richelieu. He died in Paris in 1657. Stella was a Baroque artist, but of the Classicist trend in Baroque art. This trend might have been created by the Carracci family of Bologna in a reaction to Roman and Venetian extravagant depiction of scenes that were represented in all dramatic pathos and exuberance. One may reflect that there is a logic in that the Classicist, more austere form of Baroque was created in a city like Bologna, which was the first university town of Europe and where one would expect more thoughtful, sceptical and restrained handling of painterly themes. It should also not come as a surprise then that the Classicist trend was the main – but not the only – expression of France's centralising, mathematical and philosophical, hierarchically structured logical spirit. France's main painters of the early Baroque period like Simon Vouet and then Nicolas Poussin, Claude Gellée le Lorrain and Valentin de Boulogne, as well as Philippe de Champaigne adhered to the Classicist, academic view of the art of painting. Classicist Baroque and truly, resplendent Baroque elements could however interplay, be used simultaneously or intermittently by painters of this period, according to their inclination of the moment.

'Solomon sacrificing to Idols' is a picture made around 1650 when Jacques Stella was quite over fifty years old. He had a bad health then, he was frequently sick and the self-portrait he made, which can be found in the same Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon, shows a pessimistic man dressed entirely in black, with flat but long flowing hair, with a large moustache on a long, emaciated but forceful face with sunken cheeks and characterised by a high and broad forehead of the intellectual, a broad nose, sensual lips and piercing eyes.

Jacques Stella painted also a 'Solomon receiving the Queen of Sheba', so he was familiar with the subject and he may have known the picture 'Solomon's Judgement' of his friend, Nicolas Poussin. Stella let aside for his 'Solomon sacrificing to Idols', for the sake of the theme, his more austere views that he had developed in his many pictures of scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary about ten years earlier. He engaged in a complex scene with many figures and ample architecture in the background. But Stella often presented his scenes against extraordinary Roman architecture. He thus situated the theme inside an arched temple, showing partly the altar of the deities on the right side, and a pagan Greek-Roman structure on the left. Stella situated the adoration of the pagan gods in the large hall of the palace, enlightened by high burners that throw an eerie, scary, wild light on the scene. The viewer sees a frenetic scene of dancing women and youth, all jumping and humping around. In the middle of the frantic crowd kneels King Solomon. Women are behind him, entreating Solomon to worship idols, pointing forward to the idols and telling him to enter their own wild beliefs. Solomon complies. He trusts his hands forward over a sacrificial fire, towards the heathen priest, imploring eternal life and continued peace, youth and force. He worships golden vases, silver shields, busts of foreign abominations, all gathered together and exposed in a large niche of the hall. The scene happens at night of course, at the hour of witchcraft and dark orgies. Solomon will soon be in the same trance as all the women around him and give himself over to desperate pageantry.

Jacques Stella used the left diagonal as composition in his painting. He painted two oil burners high on the right side and a descending outlines goes over two other burners,

situated more to the right and lower, over a dancing woman in blue cloak, to a knelt child and from there to the lower left corner. The dancing crowd is also a band of figures, whirling around in wild saccadic movements that contrast very much with the austere vertical directions of the background architecture and of the fire burners. Once a logical, solemn and dignified spirit reigned in the palace so that such a palace was built to honour a Yahweh of force and dignity; now in this temple takes place the frenzy of a nightly orgy.

Jacques Stella much broke symmetries in his picture to enhance the impression of the chaos of the people, but we do remark an area of red colour in the clothes of the dancing woman on the left and on the astonished courtier on the right.

Stella treated the subject of 'Solomon sacrificing to idols' as a horrifying picture of a disgraceful bacchant of an old man and he presented Solomon as a King that has all but lost all hope in Yahweh. Solomon has lost his wits and he abandons himself to the orgies of the night. That is a very pessimistic view indeed, and Jacques Stella also abandoned his usual strict, calm depiction for a scene of very many figures and for an ostentatious display of emotions in wild dancing. He therefore left his Classicist views somewhat for the exuberance of Baroque, but the Roman architecture remained very present. Stella clearly showed his contempt for what Solomon had become in his old age and the picture might be seen as an expression of fear or a fascination with the atavistic feelings that might have come to the mind of the aging Stella. The composition of the picture is fine, and all details marvellous. The frenetic movement is shown in a credible way. Stella's message is clear, the content of horror clearly presented. Jacques Stella was a great painter, who understood the Bible story of Solomon worshipping idols well and who seemed to have been captivated by the subject.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The Idolatry of King Solomon.** Sebastiano Conca (1680-1764). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca. 1735.

**Solomon sacrificing to Idols.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée du Louvre – Paris.



*Rehoboam, Jeroboam and the subsequent Kings of Israel and Judah*

Under Rehoboam, all the people of Israel assembled at Shechem and asked the new king to lighten their yoke. But Rehoboam spoke harshly to the people. Revolt fomented then in Israel.

Jeroboam came back from Egypt and he fortified Shechem and Penuel and settled there. But Jeroboam built altars for other gods in Israel. So Israel was not only divided politically, but also religiously. Jeroboam consecrated priests as he wished and he chose priests from among the common people instead of from the Levites. Such conduct proved for Yahweh that the house of Jeroboam was a sinful house. This would cause the ruin of the House of Israel, Jeroboam's dynasty. Jeroboam reigned from 931 to 910 BC. Yahweh promised disaster to the house of Jeroboam.

At that time Jeroboam's son fell sick. Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and go to Shiloh to see the prophet Ahijah there, the prophet who had said that Jeroboam would be king of ten tribes of Israel. So Jeroboam's wife went to Shiloh and arrived at the house of Ahijah who was so old that he could not see anymore. His eyes were fixed with age. But Ahijah anyhow received the woman and told her he had bad news for her and for her husband. He told her that Jeroboam had not been like David. David had kept Yahweh's commandments. Ahijah further said that Yahweh knew that Jeroboam had done much evil, since the king had cast idols of metal that had angered Yahweh. Yahweh had confided to Ahijah that for this he would bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, wipe out every maniac of the family and sweep away the house of Jeroboam as a man sweeps away dung till none was left. Ahijah continued the sad foreboding. He told the woman to return home. The moment she would enter the town her child would die. Ahijah promised also that Yahweh would abandon Israel for all the sin that Jeroboam had committed. When Jeroboam's wife arrived back in Tirzah, her child died as Ahijah had prophesied.

Israel was split in two kingdoms now, a kingdom of the North called Israel and a kingdom of the South called of Judah.

Rehoboam reigned only over Judah and from 931 to 913 BC. During Rehoboam's reign Shishak, king of Egypt, advanced on Jerusalem. Shishak took away the treasures and the Temple of Yahweh and of the royal palace. Warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued.

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Asa who reigned in Judah from 913 to 911 BC. Asa reigned from 911 to 870 BC.

His son Nadab succeeded Jeroboam, King of Israel. Nadab reigned from 910 to 909 BC. Then Nadab was succeeded by his own son Baasha, who reigned from 909 to 886 BC. Baasha's son Eliah reigned after him from 886 to 885 BC. Eliah was slain by one of his officers called Zimri while he was drinking himself senseless. Zimri was king for a few days but the people of Israel proclaimed the army commander Omri to king. Omri ruled from 885 to 874 BC. Then Ahab, son of Omri became king of Israel and reigned from 874 to 853 BC. All these kings of Israel did what displeased Yahweh.

They erected altars to foreign gods such as to Baal and Yahweh promised revenge on the kings of Israel.

*The Wife of Jeroboam***The Wife of Jeroboam and the Prophet Ahiah**

Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635-1681). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lille. 1671.

Frans van Mieris was a Dutch genre painter. He was born in Leiden in 1635, the son of a goldsmith, and he worked his whole life in this port town of the Northern Netherlands which had become independent from Spain and the German Empire, and a Protestant powerhouse of trade. Van Mieris painted early and was a student of another Leiden painter, Gerard Dou. Dou was also a master of genre painting, which represented simple scenes of everyday Dutch life. Van Mieris was already a master of the guild of St Luke in Leiden in 1658. He painted portraits, many genre scenes, and in-door scenes of Dutch bourgeois people. His pictures had a strong moralising character hidden beneath an otherwise innocent, nice depiction. They also had a frivolous undertone, for which the viewer might expect that van Mieris condemned the intentions. But van Mieris painted the scenes with such skill that he became one of the most successful artists of Leiden. He founded a generation of painter artists, because also his son Jan and his grandson Frans van Mieris the Younger were renowned painters in their own times. Frans the Elder died in Leiden in 1681.

Frans van Mieris the Elder was also a painter of very small formats, even of miniatures. His picture of 'The Wife of Jeroboam and the Prophet Ahiah' is also very small: it is barely 24 by 20 centimetres. The painting is exquisite in its small dimensions. Van Mieris used only one main colour: a shade of brown-red and he only applied together with that hue a broken white or lighter version of this hue. The viewer sees in this equal mood a monk with a pilgrim's staff seated next to a table. A lady in wealthy robe stands close to the monk. The only other element of interest in this painting seems to be a small dog situated between the feet of the monk and the woman. So at first sight, the picture represents nothing more but the visit of a rich lady to an elder monk and she seems to bring charity to the old man.

The monk is however the Prophet Ahiah, says the title. The Prophet is a wise old man with a white beard, as he should be. The Bible story says the man was blind and Ahiah looks before him without really seeing the woman. He holds a hand to the table, apparently grasping for a hold, but in fact he seems to push away, to hide the objects that are on the table. The man tugs away something that is folded in a cloth and that strangely looks like a pig's head. He may also push away the money that lies on the table, surprised as he has been by the sudden arrival of the woman. He may have a reputation of being a poor, moneyless Prophet, but he lacks nothing and indeed, he looks imploringly with a bent head, but he has no emaciated face. The prophet is well fed and he sits in a wooden chair that is ample like a throne. His brown Franciscan monk clothes hide a well-filled body. Ahiah has put his foot on a thick book. He may once have been reading the book – maybe an old Bible – but now it serves only to rest his foot. If he was a Franciscan, Catholic monk, he showed disdain for the Bible that was so revered by the seventeenth century Dutch Protestants. Next to the feet of the Prophet is the dog, a plaything of wealth, a symbol of luxury. Van Mieris with such images, hidden away in small details of his picture, shows the past vanity of the monk. Above Ahiah van Mieris painted a gourd and that may have

contained water, but more probably ale or wine. If Ahiihah is represented as a Franciscan monk, van Mieris indicated the open distrust of the Protestant Dutch for the – in their view - hypocrite Catholic Orders.

The wife of King Jeroboam has come disguised. She is barefoot, wears no jewels and she has a dark cap on her head, a cap that is not so very different from the Prophet's cap. But the cap of the woman is black and much longer, as she had to hide her long, well-cared-for hair. She was not able to, nor did she want entirely to abandon the signs of her true status. So she wears a marvellous silk robe in the purple hue of emperors. Frans van Mieris used all his skills in showing in minute detail the play of light on the folds of the robe and on the velvet cloak she wears over her shoulders. And the velvet opens above her breast in a coquettish way. Van Mieris showed here what a fine painter he was and these details alone would have pleased any commissioner. 'Ahiihah and the Wife of Jeroboam' was made in 1671. Van Mieris was a fully accomplished painter by then. Van Mieris could choose his subjects and show them as he liked.

Frans van Mieris showed behind the woman a window and through the window the viewer may discern the hazy figure of a man wearing a luxurious head cap. This may be just a courtier hiding outside, but van Mieris might also have suggested with this shadow the King Jeroboam himself. So behind the woman stands the ghost of the King, eagerly watching the scene and awaiting the verdict. The whole picture therefore, with all its figures, is a disguise.

The woman brings her hand humbly to her hearth to greet and to talk to the Prophet, and then she pleads. But she also holds a simple earthen pot behind her back, hidden from the eyes of the Prophet. The Prophet Ahiihah was blind when Jeroboam's wife went to visit him, but Prophets can see without eyes, so the attempt of the woman to hide the pot seems futile. Still, her intuitive gesture was to hide the pot on her side. Does she really believe the man is blind? Maybe she knows the monk is not really blind at all, maybe she fears the powers of the blind seer. What does the pot contain? Water, oil, food or coins? Jeroboam's wife may have brought with her a considerable amount of money. The dog is also at her feet, a sign of wealth since such a pet dog has no other use but being a companion of abundance.

The woman and the prophet have things to hide. The Prophet hides his gluttony of old, lonely age. He still shows his past glory and power but no viewer will be fooled. The woman hides her intentions but her nice clothes and her dog prove who she really is. King Jeroboam is even worse since he hides altogether, his whole presence. The woman has come with coins hidden in a pot but she will only use that if necessary. Frans van Mieris the Elder's picture is a picture of hide and seek with the viewer. Here is a world of appearances and like the Prophet Ahiihah who was blind, the painter seems to convey the message that we too are blind for the real state of affairs of the bourgeois world we live in. Dutch genre painting emphasised this aspect of the vanity of people and the underlying sins or weaknesses of mankind and of society.

The true character of the scene is now clear. The monk is poor, but he hides all the food, a big pig's head he has received. A pot of ale hangs above his head. He is an old wise man, but he secretly loves the nice things of life and these amply. He lives in the sin of daintiness. The woman has come in disguise, but the viewer recognises her as a

wealthy woman in her magnificent robe and in her plaything of a dog. She secretly thinks that Ahiihah can still see; she believes he is not blind. She has come to consult the Prophet, but she knows that her pleas will be all the more effective if she brings money or presents. She has come to bring charity, but she knows that charity is not necessary here. Yet, she keeps up appearances, the appearances that the Protestant Churches denounced so much. Neither the monk nor the woman have illusions left about the other or about the situation. Appearances are recognised and treated with hypocrisy; but man and woman need each other. Van Mieris of course painted a Catholic monk and a rich, bourgeois Dutch lady. In this way, a story from the bible was diverted into a genre scene with an underlying very apparent moral tone. In fact, the title referring to the Bible story is but an element needed for the understanding of the moral message of the viewer. Without that title the viewer may have wondered at the real meaning of the scene; the title allows to solve the rebus of symbols.

Suppose you were a rich merchant of the sea town of Leiden. You have no television, no photographs in journals, and no images in publicity folders. You have eyes of course and your eyes are avid for some beauty in your house. You would be avid for pictures, for paintings to hang on your walls because that would be the only decoration you would be able to acquire. But your preachers and religious teachers would bang at you incessantly about the vanity of the world and the dire state of society, a society of richness as the Dutch had never seen before in their history. Then a small picture such as Frans van Mieris' 'The Prophet Ahiihah and the Wife of Jeroboam' would be a sheer delight. Your preacher would see no issue with the picture since it represented a Bible theme. It would be a delight of decoration because it is marvellously painted in a wonderful wealth of varying shades of colour. It would be only a small painting, so only a small surrender to pleasure. It would hang in a corner, to be discovered only in the passing. It would show a pretty lady in the middle. And each time you would pass by you would smile at the details that the painter had explained to you or that you had by now discovered. You might not have brought the people around you into the secret, but otherwise you might have shared a laugh. You would have been delighted with the picture, knowing it was a scene from the venerable Bible but with a very moral tone. The picture would remind you of the vanity and hypocrisy of the world outside, and of the protection of your home. You would be satisfied. And that made the success and fame of Frans van Mieris the Elder. The Dutch merchants just flocked to his workshop to buy his pictures.

### *The Prophet Elijah*

Under the reign of Ahab, King of Israel, the prophet Elijah the Tishbite of Gilead said to the king that by Yahweh there would be neither dew nor rain unless he, the prophet, gave the word. That meant famine in Israel. Elijah was instructed by Yahweh to go east and hide in the ravine of the torrent Cherith, east of the Jordan. Elijah would drink from the water there and the ravens brought him bread in the morning and meat in the evening as ordained by Yahweh.

But the stream dried up like all the water in Israel. Yahweh ordered Elijah to go to Zarephath in Sidonia. Yahweh ordered a widow there to give food to Elijah. She said she only had a very little bread and oil for herself and her son. But Elijah told her not to be afraid. The woman went and did as Elijah had said. They ate the food and drank. The jar of meal was not spent nor the jug of oil emptied. This was as Yahweh had foretold to Elijah.

Sometimes later the son of the house of the woman of Zarephath fell sick and he died. Elijah prayed to God. He took the son from the widow and carried him to the upper room where he lived and laid him on the bed. Elijah then cried out to Yahweh. He stretched himself three times on the child, begging life into him again. Yahweh sent the child's soul back into the body so that Elijah could give the son back to the widow.

After these events Yahweh told Elijah to return to Ahab, King of Israel, and bring rain back to the country.

On his way Elijah met Obadiah, the master of the palace. Obadiah had been sent out by Ahab to meet Elijah, but Obadiah did not want to return to the king as messenger of Elijah. Elijah persuaded Obadiah to go back to the king and Obadiah thus preceded Elijah. In each other's presence, Ahab called Elijah the scourge of Israel. But Elijah explained that the famine had come over Israel because of the king, Ahab, who had deserted Yahweh. Elijah demanded of Ahab to gather around him on Mount Carmel all Israel and also the four hundred prophets of Baal who were with Jezebel, Ahab's wife. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians and she had lured Ahab into serving Baal. Jezebel butchered the prophets of Israel.

When all were gathered on Mount Carmel, Elijah took two bulls. He gave one to the priests of Baal and kept one for himself. He proposed a challenge to Israel. The priests of Baal could dismember the bull and call on the fire of Baal to consume the bull. Elijah would do the same with his second bull. The hundreds of prophets of Baal performed their rites and called on their god all day, but no fire came to consume their offer. Then Elijah dismembered his bull and put the meat on wood. He had three times four jars of water poured over the wood. When Elijah prayed to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, God sent his fire to consume the burnt offering and the flames licked up all the water. Then all Israel cried, 'Yahweh is God!' Elijah had the prophets of Baal captured, took them down the Kishon and he slaughtered them all.

Elijah then climbed on top of Mount Carmel and began to pray. He sent a servant to look at the sea. Seven times Elijah told him to go back. The seventh time the servant saw a small cloud rise from the sea. Then the sky grew black and rain fell in torrents.

Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah for having slaughtered her priests of Baal. Elijah fled from her wrath. He journeyed to Horeb and an angel of God touched him in his desperation and gave him to eat scones and water to drink. Elijah journeyed thus for forty days sustained by the angel. Then he arrived in a cave on Horeb and spent the night there.

Yahweh one day told Elijah to go to the top of the mountain and stand there before Yahweh. Yahweh sent a hurricane and earthquakes and a fire to the mountain. But God was not in the hurricane nor in the earthquake nor in the fire. Then came a light murmur. Elijah covered his face and Yahweh spoke. He asked what Elijah was doing on Horeb. Elijah answered he had come because Israel had abandoned the covenant. Then Yahweh told Elijah to go back and to traverse the desert again. He told Elijah to anoint Hazael as King of Aram and to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel. Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-Mehordah needed to be anointed prophet to succeed on Elijah. Then God pursued by saying that anyone of Israel who would escape the sword of Hazael would be put to death by Jehu and Elisha would kill anyone who fled from Jehu. But Yahweh would spare seven thousand of Israel, all the knees that had not bent before Baal. Elijah came down mount Horeb and he found Elisha who was ploughing behind twelve yoke of oxen. Elisha followed Elijah and became his servant.

### *Elijah and the Angel*

#### **Elijah fed by the Angel**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

Jacopo Robusti was a Venetian, born in 1519. He lived a life of an artist all the time in Venice and died there in 1594. He was called Tintoretto after his father's profession. His father was a dyer of silk materials. He was a painter early, his talents recognised early, and he was already an independent master at twenty. He married when he was around thirty years old, in 1550, to a daughter of a Guardian of one of the Venetian Scuole and he had several children who worked with him. Besides two sons, Domenico (born in 1560) and Marco (born 1566) he had a girl, Marietta (born in 1554) who was the most gifted female painter of her time and who worked as his assistant but who remained almost anonymous. When she married, Tintoretto demanded in the marriage certificate that Marietta would continue to work for him. Tintoretto might have wanted to protect his daughter so that she could continue an activity she liked very much, or we can see in this the absolute egotism of an artist wanting to keep one of his most gifted assistants in his workshop.

In 1564 he began to work in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco of Venice, a relatively new Scuola, founded only in 1478. This Scuola was a fund of mutual social support for Venetians. The Scuola di San Rocco aimed at relieving the sick that fell victim to epidemics. Many wealthy Venetians offered money to Saint Roch, to its miraculous relics and thus to the Scuola. The Guardians of the Scuole had decided in Tintoretto's life times to build a new chapter house. The social support funds of Venice were rich, very rich, so the new building that was begun in 1517 by the well-known architect Bartolomeo Bon was sumptuous. The work on the building was only finished in 1549, but the Scuola worked for eternity and not for speed. Last touches were made as late as 1560. It had been decided already in 1546 to decorate the walls of the Sala dell'Albergo but it was only in 1564 that the decision was put to realisation. The thirty-six councillors would support the expense of the central canvas on the ceiling of the first hall. To that aim, a competition was opened. Jacopo Robusti surprised everybody by not bringing a cartoon or sketch but the work itself, a 'Glorification of St Roch'. Tintoretto donated the painting for free, maybe because he saw that the councillors were not very pleased by him having twisted their intentions. He even proposed to decorate without payment the rest of the ceiling. But afterwards, Tintoretto would receive commissions for other paintings in the Scuola, which he made in oil on canvas. He worked on paintings for the Scuola in this way from 1564 until 1588. He delivered sixty paintings in all, which have been preserved, so that now the whole makes not only of the Scuola di San Rocco one of the main attractions of Venice and one of the most imposing monuments of the lagoon city, but it is also the lifetime monumental work of the painter Tintoretto, to be compared only with the absolutely very greatest works of the genius artists of Italy. The Tintoretto cycle in San Rocco can only be rivalled in power of expression by the Vatican ceiling and altar wall of Michelangelo in the Vatican.

The picture 'Elijah fed by the Angel' was made in 1577 to 1578. It is an oval oil painting in the ceiling of the Upper Hall. The pictures of this ceiling were all made between 1575 and 1581, in total thirty-four paintings, all made by Tintoretto and these are a very impressive unity of realisation. Tintoretto proposed scenes from the life of Moses, from other Old Testament themes such as Genesis, Isaac and Jacob, the Prophets Jonah, Ezekiel, Elijah and Elisha, and various themes from the life of Jesus Christ.

The oval 'Elijah fed by the Angel' is a very fine and very powerful theme presented by Jacopo Robusti. He showed the Prophet sleeping and he painted him lying on the ground in an open space in the wood, with his legs towards the viewer. The Prophet sleeps and rests on the road to Horeb. In a dramatic depiction, an angel literally falls out of the sky and focuses on Elijah. The angel had food, bread and water, in its hands. Elijah sleeps under a furze bush, as the Bible story tells, and soon the angel will touch Elijah. The angel will tell to Elijah, 'Arise and eat'.

The angel brings bread and water and on this side of the Upper Hall of the Scuola, near the altar, are other paintings related to the Eucharist, the Mass ritual of the holy Host and the wine that Jesus offered to his disciples at Last Supper. Other scenes are 'Elisha multiplying the Loaves', two 'Last Supper' pictures, and the 'Miracle of the Loaves and Fish' from the life of Christ.



The colours on Elijah are marvellous. Tintoretto painted a yellow-golden robe on the Prophet, and a red cloak. But Tintoretto used very many other hues, brown, grey, and even green, to show in the chiaroscuro shading of light the forms of Elijah's body under the cloth. One might think that the painter would have been frugal in his use of so many hues for a painting that would be hung so high, but Tintoretto painted in his studio and then presented every picture to the Scuola councillors from close by, so that every painting had to be a masterpiece in its own right before it was hung high.

Wonderful colours also, shades of white and of yellow and brown are on the angel. Tintoretto painted the angel's wings in broad brushstrokes and that gives an effect of a tactile experience, of three-dimensionality as one feather seems to cover another also physically on the canvas. Also the golden brown hair of the angel's head is rendered in full detail and Tintoretto showed in a splendid way the play of the light of dawn on the angel's robe and on its hair. The angel falls down more than it flies in the sky and Tintoretto showed the angel in one of the most immediate positions one could depict of that action. The angel drops head first so that Tintoretto drew it in dramatic foreshortening. A viewer, looking from below, also thus sees the angel as if it really came down through an opening in the ceiling of the Upper Hall.

Tintoretto painted the body of Elijah in one oblique direction and the angel in another slanting line, almost perpendicular to the first. Caravaggio could not have shown two figures more efficiently in the heath of action and Tintoretto was certainly one of the very first painters of Mannerism, or already of Baroque, to use slanting lines in this spectacular way to give the viewer a strong impression of movement and of course illusion of action. For Tintoretto only the action counted and no rules of academicism would retain him from giving a powerful impression to viewers.

Tintoretto also painted a landscape in the oval. He painted the juniper tree and a bush on either side, so that he obtained a basic open space in the middle, not unlike an 'Open V' structure of composition. In the middle then he painted the rising light of dawn, very bright, as if the divine light suddenly was on Elijah and on the angel. Tintoretto also painted the plants and their overlapping leaves in a wonderful, realistic way, in which he used his technique of seemingly rapid but unwavering brushstrokes.

Jacopo Tintoretto knew perfectly what a powerful visual representation was to be. He had a global idea of the view he would represent and only the essence of that really counted. He then used elements of design of the art of painting completely freely, as necessary for his vision, and he let no rules or conventions hamper him. Painting was only a tool totally subservient to his expressive powers. The expression was all-important for Tintoretto. He had a vision of a scene like this and then everything he had at his disposal in the art of painting, all elements of design, could be used to express his view. Thus the suddenness of the appearance of the angel is the main idea in 'Elijah fed by the Angel'.

Once the main idea shown to the viewer, the viewer could add details by his or her own imagination. Thus, Tintoretto did not paint Elijah and the angel in full. The viewer looks through a window of vision at the scene, through an oval opening in the ceiling, and in the rapidity of the action the feet of Elijah, part of a leg of the angel and part of the angel's wings are outside the frame. No matter, the viewer has caught the action and 'sees' the rest even though it is not all in the picture. The viewer sees

the head and the tin cup of water, he or she sees the angel falling and the sleeping Elijah, and the two heads together in the intimate embrace of the miracle. That is the idea of the picture and the rest is after all not that important. But Tintoretto does not neglect the rest; he handled enough details to prove that he wanted to show the act of the falling angel this way deliberately.

Jacopo Tintoretto dominated fully his art with a great feeling for the necessities of the position of a canvas in a whole, like in the setting of a large hall such as the Upper Hall of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. He was an exceptional painter, who like Caravaggio, who was fifty years younger, inexorably brought Italian painting to a style we now call Baroque. But the tensions of the action in Tintoretto's pictures make the painter still an artist of Mannerism. 'Elijah fed by the Angel' is an excellent example of such pictures.

### *Elijah in the Desert*

#### **Elijah in the Desert**

Ferdinand Olivier (1785-1841). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1830-1831.

Ferdinand Olivier was born in 1785 in Dessau, an industrial town of Germany not so far from Berlin. He learned to paint quite early, first in Dessau and then in Berlin where he arrived in 1802. In 1804 he went with his brother Heinrich to Dresden, studied painting there also and learned to know Germany's Romantic painters working around Caspar David Friedrich. Together with his brother he was in Paris from 1807 to 1810 and later travelled to Vienna. Ferdinand Olivier knew many of Austria's and of Germany's great Romantic painters: Joseph Anton Koch, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Philipp Veit and others. Although he was a Protestant he had close friendships with the Catholic painters of the circle of the Nazarenes in Vienna and he became even a member of their 'Lukasbund' in 1816. But he stayed in Vienna and returned even to Germany, to Munich, where he became a professor of the history of art. Ferdinand Olivier painted at first religious scenes, as he was closer to the religious revival in the arts of the Nazarenes. His brother Friedrich was completely caught in the Nazarene movement and even lived a time with the Nazarene community in Rome. The great German landscape painters influenced Ferdinand Olivier in the later period of his work, from 1830 on. Olivier belonged to a family of painters. His brother two brothers, Heinrich and Friedrich painted and knew the Nazarene movement. German and Austrian painters had founded in Rome in 1810 a community in a former convent, the convent of Sant'Isidro. The painters wore their hair long and hence the Romans somewhat mockingly called them 'Nazarenes' after Jesus of Nazareth.

With 'Elijah in the Desert' Ferdinand Olivier went back to a religious Bible theme from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gillis van Valckenborgh (1570-1622) painted for instance a picture of the theme with much skill at landscape painting that is now in the Musée d' Art Ancien of Brussels, and Ferdinand Olivier must have seen that painting or engravings or copies of this picture, because he used the same poise in his Elijah.

The Prophet Elijah sits in what is not yet a desert, but will soon be one. Elijah prophesied a long draught ordered by Yahweh to punish King Ahab. Yahweh told Elijah to go to the brook of Cherith. Yahweh sent his raven to feed Elijah there. So Olivier showed Elijah sitting near the small river that will soon dry up. The water is very low already, and disappearing. A raven flies through the air with a loaf of bread in its beak. Elijah sits and with one hand he points to the raven sent by Yahweh; with the other he points to a fig tree. The fig tree was the symbol for the coming kingdom of the Messiah. Elijah stretches his arms in a sign that reminds of Jesus' Crucifixion. Like in Van Valckenborgh's picture, the main objective of Ferdinand Olivier's picture was the landscape.

Olivier painted a nice landscape. He made preparatory sketches of it, which are also conserved in the Neue Pinakothek of Munich, proving the seriousness with which he undertook this painting of Elijah in the desert. Yet, the composition of the painting is very conventional. Olivier used of course the 'Open V' structure. He painted a few trees on the left, a rock and high trees on the right, and he placed the lightest colours in the middle. But there are enough variations in the structure to make a viewer see only the variety of the plants and of the landscape and not a strict structure of lines. Olivier painted the trees in nice detail and the way he painted the different zones of illumination on them is brilliant. So is the way he let the sun of dawn glow the sand of the starting desert, to a very bright hue. Olivier here indicated what the story of the bible told. The sun rises from the right side of the frame and Olivier showed such a strong light here that it completely makes the shades of the far mountains disappear in the blinding light. That light of course will scourge the earth and bring desert to the few bushes among which sits Elijah.

Ferdinand Olivier made a picture full of Romantic nostalgia and admiration for a landscape of trees and desert. In that he combined the main theme of the German Romantic painters of Dresden, who centred on landscape painting, with the religious themes of the Nazarenes. But his picture reminds of the style of the seventeenth century Baroque artists in its use of dark shadowing and less of the more Classicist Nazarenes who painted their scenes in the traditional all-pervasive light or early Renaissance pictures. 'Elijah in the Desert' is a nice picture however, that shows again with much skill a very old theme in the art of religious painting. The themes of the seventeenth century also were thus revived by the Nazarenes.

*Other paintings:*

**Landscape with the disobedient prophet.** Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675). Musée Malraux – Le Havre.

**Elijah nourished by a Raven.** Gillis van Valckenborgh (1570-1622). Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels.

**Elijah fed by the Raven.** Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo (ca. 1480-1548). National Gallery of Art. Washington DC.

**The Angel awakens Elijah in the Desert**

Antonio Escalante (1673-1670). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

*Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath***The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath**

Bernardo Strozzi called IL Cappuccino (1581-1644). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1640.

Bernardo Strozzi lived a very unusual career. He was born in 1581 in Genoa. At the age of seventeen he entered the Capuchin Order and from 1610 on he was a priest. Hence he was later called 'Il Cappuccino'. He had learned to paint, but from 1614 to 1621 he was an engineer of the harbour of Genoa. He left his religious order and went to Venice around 1631. He painted during this time, before he came to Venice, taking inspiration from the styles of Simon Vouet and Orazio Gentileschi, Pieter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck and the Bassano painters of Venice. The great Brabant painter Rubens was in Italy from 1600 to 1601. And besides Rome and Venice, he had also stayed in Genoa. Likewise, van Dyck was in Italy from 1620 to 1627, staying mainly in Venice, Rome and the port of Genoa. Strozzi was a Baroque artist whose depiction became gradually more individual. He died in Venice in 1644.

Bernardo Strozzi's 'The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath' is a truly splendid though apparently humble picture. It is a painting of portraiture, but it shows three figures in an act of interrogation. The composition is very strong for Strozzi formed a pyramid with outlines of the Prophet and the woman, a structure well known by portraitists. A find of depiction is the figure of the widow's son that comes like an intrusion between the woman and the man and separates them in an innocent way, but maybe laden with psychological significance.

We see the Prophet still wearing his cane, so he just entered the house. The prophet is an old but still a very strong man. Strozzi shows a muscled, powerful arm and a firm grip around the cane. He also opened the shirt of the Prophet to show strong shoulders and chest. Elijah holds an imploring hand forward, but the hand is also held in a gesture of explanation, as it is open, asking instead of ordering. So with a very simple means Bernardo Strozzi proved the act of the Prophet. He also drew the head of the Prophet inclined in an attitude of plea and appeal. Strozzi painted really marvellous but deep colours on the prophet: grey-brown in the over-shirt, grey-blue in the cloak and Strozzi contrasted these with a pure white of the man's shirt. The way Strozzi painted the old head with the grey beard and grey hair of Elijah is simply impressive in art. Strozzi brought Caravaggio's realism to Venice, but he did not apply the dramatic contrasts between light and dark of this master and seemed to love Venice's sense and beauty of colours. Strozzi had enormous talents but he very intelligently had the Prophet look at the widow, away from the viewer, so that he did not boast with his skills and entirely subdued them to the force and necessity of the depiction of the theme.

The widow of Zarephath is ready to hear what the Prophet has to say. Elijah may have only whispered, while asking for food. So she inclines her head too, bringing it close towards the Prophet's head. Her face is young, plain and open but handsome and she

is very willing to hear out the Prophet. She comes near with her head to the old man, which allowed Strozzi not only to form the pyramid structure in his painting, but also in a very fine way, very subtly but very efficiently for the viewer, to show the psychology of the woman in the conversation. The woman listens and she good-heartedly would give what the prophet asks, but a part of her instinctively also holds back; so she keeps her hands on the oil and on the barrel of flour that are on the table. The woman is poor but she has full features and she has an intelligent face. Bernardo Strozzi shows the rosy of her cheeks, a full bosom that she tends to the Prophet, a white short of innocence and a black robe. Strozzi used the black robe to make the fine colours of the widow stand out better and probably also to paint at least somewhat in the now desired style of the Roman Caravaggists. The 'Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath' is a late work of Strozzi, when he had learned to moderate the exuberance of Baroque.

The widow's son intrudes between the widow and Elijah. The boy is the most rapid to naively offer water to the Prophet, most spontaneously and openly to react to Elijah's plea. He looks at the old man with expectation, equally with appeal to the Prophet, maybe hoping for support in return for his gift. He appeals to the prophet like to a father. But at the same time he positions himself also between the prophet and his mother. That is a gesture of protection and also of intuitive defiance. The Prophet is still a strong man, the boy's mother a beautiful woman that has an opened bust and more than a passing hospitality might grow between the man and the woman. Boy and mother love each other. They resemble each other in facial traits. Elijah might come between the now exclusive love of the boy for the mother, so the boy pushes himself forward in a, intuitively possessive act. The boy also wants to be noticed. His position says, 'Here is water, but this is my mother, and she is mine.' Bernardo Strozzi used strong colours on the widow and on Elijah. He used softer tones, cream-flesh colours on the shirt and dress of the boy, indicating less strength in the youth compared to Elijah and the mother.

Bernardo Strozzi painted no objects in the background that could divert the viewer's attention from his theme, from the psychology of the figures. Strozzi showed two slightly different scenes from the bible story at the same time. The widow's son gives water to the Prophet and Elijah seems at that instance to assert, to promise that the family would never be lacking anymore in flour and oil, although that happens somewhat later.

Strozzi's 'The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath' is a marvellous picture for connoisseurs. It shows Strozzi's considerable talent at fine painting without being showy. Strozzi used a very strong composition but he depicted the scene so lively that the composition is practically invisible and does not strike the viewer at first glance. It is unobtrusive, as it should be. The psychology of the characters within the Bible stories is efficiently drawn, but shown in natural gestures that are not theatrical, ostentatious or so tragic as in so very many Baroque paintings. We feel something of the old breath of Giovanni Bellini in this portraiture. Strozzi could have used very contrasting effects of light and shadow and thus brought overwhelming visual power, as Rembrandt or Caravaggio might have done in their best pictures. But Strozzi painted instead carefully in splendid colours, fine detail and he did not overpower the viewer with such special visual effects. This is painting at its very best, in a humble but very sophisticated way.

Bernardo Strozzi is quite less well known than Rembrandt or Caravaggio, but in less passion he was more refined. He was a formidable artist in his own right with this picture of 'Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath'.

*Other Paintings:*

**Elijah and the Widows' Son.** Ford Madox Brown. The Birmingham City Museum – Birmingham. 1864.

**The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath.** Two Paintings. Pier Francesco Mola (1612-1666). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca. 1650.

**Landscape with Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath.** Jacob Jacobsz van Geel (1584/1585 - after 1638). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

**Storm, Elijah and the Angel.** Gaspard Dughet (1613-1675). National Gallery. London. Ca. 1655-1660.

## *Ahab*

Ben-Hadad, King of Aram, mustered his army and drew against Samaria. He demanded silver and gold from Ahab but the King of Israel refused to give it to him. A prophet of Israel came forward and told Ahab to attack the Aramaeans. The Israelites defeated their enemies before Samaria. Then Ben-Hadad marched on Apheb to fight Israel from that place. For seven days the two armies were encamped on opposite sides. A prophet once more foretold a victory for the Israelites and when the battle took place the Israelites slaughtered the Aramaeans. Part of the enemy army fled to Apheb and into the citadel but the city walls collapsed on the survivors of the battle. Ahab captured Ben-Hadad. He let the King of Aram go free, for granting a treaty. Elijah however condemned Ahab for not having killed Ben-Hadad.

Ahab coveted a vineyard close to his palace, a vineyard that did not belong to him. It belonged to a man called Nabaoth. Ahab's wife Jezebel sent a letter in Ahab's name to the elders and notables of the city where Nabaoth lived. The letter ordered the elders to stone Nabaoth to death. Nabaoth was an upright man however, so a ruse had to be found to accuse Nabaoth of a crime. Two scoundrels of the city came forward and accused Nabaoth of having cursed God. Nabaoth was stoned to death for that offence. Ahab then could take possession of the vineyard. Yahweh sent Elijah to accuse Ahab of murder. Elijah told that disaster would come upon his house. He said the dogs would eat Jezebel in the Fields of Jezreel. Ahab repented at Elijah's scorn, tore his clothes and humbled himself. Yahweh saw this and promised not to bring disaster on Ahab's House in the king's own days but in those of his son.

After three years of peace with Aram, Ahab King of Israel and Jehoshapat King of Judah decided together to attack Aram. They consulted all the prophets of Israel and all except one predicted a victory for the Israelites. Micaiah son of Imbab told Yahweh had deceived the other prophets because God wanted disaster on Ahab. Ahab threw Micaiah in prison for these words. The two kings of Israel attacked the Aramaeans at the city of Ramoth in Gilead. In the heat of the battle, Ahab was shot by an arrow between the joints of his armour. The fight grew fiercer and the blood gushed from the king's wounds. In the evening he died.

Ahab was succeeded by Ahaziah who reigned from 853 to 852. Ahaziah revered Baal and this provoked the anger of Yahweh. In Judah however reigned Jehoshaphat from 870 to 848 and he was an upright man. He waged war on Judah's enemies. His son Jehoram succeeded on him.



## *Part VI. The Second Book of Kings*

Ahaziah had fallen from the balcony of his upper room in Samaria and he lay ill in bed when the Moabites rebelled against Israel. The king sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, god of Ekron and ask him for recovery from his illness. An angel of God warned Elijah the Prophet and Elijah, wearing nothing but a hair cloak and a leather loincloth, was furious. He intercepted the messengers saying that Yahweh had commanded that Azaiah would never leave his bed and would certainly die. Azaiah sent soldiers out to capture Elijah. Elijah sat on the top of a hill and fire from heaven fell and destroyed the soldiers who came up to grab him. This happened two times. The third time the captain of the guards begged Elijah to spare his men, to come down with him and give his divine message to Azaiah. Elijah went with the captain. Azaiah died shortly after, exactly as Elijah had prophesied.

Azaiah had no son so his brother Jehoram succeeded him.

Elijah was a very powerful prophet. He was one of the few who like Moses would converse with God and to whom Yahweh showed his power over the elements. Therefore Elijah was often represented in paintings together with Moses. In the Transfiguration story of the New Testament for instance, Moses and Elijah appear to Jesus, and stand around Jesus as the glory of God is shown to the apostles that were closest to Christ.

Elijah now knew he was close to death.

Elijah and Elisha set out for Gilgal. Elijah told that he only was sent by God to Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan but Elisha insisted many times to accompany him until Elijah conceded. Elijah crossed the Jordan by separating the waves. The two prophets then stood near the Jordan and Elijah asked Elisha what he wished. Elisha asked Yahweh to inherit a double share of Elijah's spirit and Elijah told him that this wish would be granted if Elisha could see Elijah's departure to the heavens. Elisha saw indeed Elijah go up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha took Elijah's cloak, which had fallen and went back to the Jordan and the other prophets in Jericho.

## *Elisha*

Elisha was indeed a powerful prophet too who performed many miracles. For instance, he made foul water become wholesome and he conjured bears to devour young boys who had scolded at him. Elisha was already old and bald then, when he took up the inheritance of Elijah.

While Elisha was a prophet Jehoram was King of Israel (from 852 to 841) and he did like his father Ahab had one. He did what was displeasing to Yahweh. Elisha brought water back during a drought while the Israelites attacked the rebellious Moabites. The armies stood in front of each other in a valley and the water in the valley looked like blood to the Moabites as the sun shone on it. The Moabites were defeated.

Elisha performed many other miracles. Once he brought many jars of oil to a poor woman that was pursued by creditors. He told the woman to bring as many empty jars as she could get and from one jar she had still full with oil, she filled all the other jars. He changed bad, poisoned soup by putting some mead in the pot. Men lost an axe in a river and Elisha could point to where the axe was lost in the river. Two miracles of Elisha are told in long in the Book of Kings: the story of the woman of Shunem and the story of the healing of Naaman.

One day Elisha was on his way to Shunem. He was invited to stay and eat with a woman of rank who lived in Shunem. After that, when he passed that house he repeatedly stayed there, as he was always welcome. The woman even proposed to her husband to build a room for the holy man so that he could rest in a bed there. Elisha thought about what he could do to help the woman in return. Elisha's servant, Gehazi, had heard that the woman had no son and that her husband was old. So Elisha told the woman of Shunem that she would conceive and hold a son in her arms this time next year. The woman could not believe him, but she did conceive and gave birth to a son.

The son of the woman of Shunem grew up and one day he exclaimed suddenly he had a pain in the head. The boy died by midday. The mother went to Mount Carmel and called upon Elisha. Elisha sent his servant Gehazi with his staff and told Gehazi to stretch the staff on the child. Gehazi sped to the house in Shunem, laid the staff on the child, but nothing happened. When Elisha arrived somewhat later, he stretched himself on top of the child and lowered himself seven times onto the boy. Then the child sneezed and opened his eyes. Elisha called in the Shunamite woman to take her son.

Elisha later said to the woman of Shunem to move away with her family and to go to live in a foreign country for Yahweh would send a famine over Israel, which would last seven years. The woman hurried to follow Elisha's advice and she went to live in Philistine territory. After the seven years she came back and lodged her claim for her house and land to the King. The King was just asking Gehazi, Elisha's servant, about Elisha's deeds and Gehazi explained the miracle that the prophet had exercised on the woman's son. The King then restored all the property to the woman of Shunem.

Elisha cured Naaman, the army commander of the Aramaeans from a virulent skin disease. For his flesh to become clean again, Naaman had to bathe seven times in the Jordan. Elisha did not accept any money from Naaman but Elisha's servant ran after

Naaman and asked for silver and festal robes. When Gehazi returned, Elisha knew already what had happened. He told Gehazi to keep the money but Naaman's skin disease would now cling to Gehazi and his descendants forever. From that moment Gehazi became white as now from skin disease.

The Aramaeans waged war on Israel but Elisha could know the plans of the King of Aram. A small Aramaean force came to besiege the town of Dotham to capture the prophet. Elisha prayed to Yahweh and the Aramaeans were struck sunblind. Elisha whispered to the men of Aram that they were on the wrong road and he took them inside Samaria. He opened their eyes inside Samaria. The King of Israel proposed to have the men killed but Elisha only wanted them to be fed and sent off again. No Aramaean raiding parties then invaded Israel again.

Elisha travelled to Damascus. King Ben-Hadad of Aram was ill. He sent Hazael to Elisha to ask him to consult Yahweh and find out whether he would recover from his illness. Elisha answered to Hazael that Ben-Hadad might recover, but he also told that he would surely die. Then Elisha wept and he said to Hazael that he had seen Hazael as King of Aram, killing the Israelites and burn down their houses, and bringing horrors of suffering over Israel. Hazael went back to his master. He told him he might recover. The next day Ben-Hadad took a blanket, soaked it in water, and spread it over his face. Ben-Hadad thus died. Hazael succeeded on him to the throne of Aram.

In Judah reigned Jehoram (848-841 BC) and then Azaiah, son of Jehoram (841).

In those times Elisha sent one of his disciples to anoint as King of Israel Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Elisha now gave a message to Jehu to avenge the blood of the prophets on Jezebel and on the whole family of Ahab. Jezebel would be given to be eaten by dogs in the Field of Jezreel. Jehoram was still King of Israel then so Jehu plotted against the king. Jehu and the non-suspecting Jehoram met in a field near Ramoth, which the king was holding against Hazael, King of Aram. Jehu struck down Jehoram and sent an arrow in his hearth. Thus Jehu realised the sentence of Yahweh against Ahab's family. Jehu also went in pursuit of Ahaziah the King of Judah and killed him in Megiddo. Then Jehu went back to Jezreel where he knew he would find Jezebel. Jezebel made her eyes up with mascara and appeared at a window. She spoke out to Jehu but he ordered her officials to throw her down the window. Jehu then went inside the building and ate and drank. Then he ordered Jezebel buried because after all she was a king's daughter. But when the servants looked for her body, they only found her skull, feet and hands. Dogs had eaten her flesh as Elisha had prophesied. Jehu killed every member of the House of Ahab surviving in Jezreel. He also slaughtered the brothers of Azaiah. He destroyed Baal's temple, destroyed Baal's image and all the adherents of the foreign gods. Jehu thus rid Israel of Baal. He reigned as king from 841 to 814 BC. At the end of his reign Yahweh began to whittle Israel down and Hazael defeated the Israelites throughout many territories.

When Athaliah, mother of Azaiah heard that her son was killed, she murdered all the rest of the royal family around her. But Azaiah's sister could rescue Jehoash, Azaiah's son. She hid him from Athaliah. Athaliah governed the country now. Jehoash stayed hidden in the Temple for six years. The Jehoiada, the Temple priest, sent for the regimental commanders and showed them the righteous King of Judah. They crowned Jehoash to King of Judah. They anointed him as king, clapped their hands and

shouted, 'Long live the King'. Athaliah heard this. She came by. When she saw Jehoash she tore her clothes and shouted for treason. They commanders of the guard her and killed her outside the Temple.

Jehoash ruled in Judah from 835 to 796. In the end Jehoash's own retainers rebelled and murdered him. His son Anaziah succeeded him.

Jehu of Israel was succeeded by Jehoahaz, his son (814-798 BC). His son Jehoash or Joash then reigned after him (798-783 BC).

In Joash's reign Elisha fell ill. The King came out to see him and shed tears. Elisha told the King to open the window, to take a bow and arrow. While Joash tended the bow, Elisha laid his hand on the king's hand until the king drew the arrow. The arrow was sent to the east. Elisha said, 'shoot' and the King shot again. Elisha said this was the arrow of victory over Aram. The King would defeat the Aramaeans at Aphek. Then Elisha ordered the king to shoot into the ground and the king's arrows struck the ground three times. Elisha was not satisfied with that. 'You will only defeat Aram three time', he said, 'You should have struck the ground at least a dozen times'. Then Elisha died. Even after his burial his tom performed miracles.

## *Elisha and the Multiplication of the Bread*

### **Elisha multiplies the Bread**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

Elisha was a very powerful Prophet who performed many miracles, some of which remind of the life of Jesus. Many stories from Elisha's life also remind of his master, Elijah, so that the two Prophets may have been but one and the same person, or for whom Elijah's stories were repeated in stories of his successor.

Once, a man came from Baal-Shahishah, bringing bread from the first fruits, twenty barley loaves and also he brought fresh grain that was still in the husk. Elisha told the man to give it to eat to the company. But the servant was surprised at that command, because there were a hundred men. He wondered how a few loaves could serve for so many. But Elisha insisted. Elisha told that Yahweh had said, 'Eat and there will be left over.' The servant complied. All the men ate from the loaves and even some was indeed left over, as Yahweh had predicted.

Jacopo Tintoretto painted several pictures in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice around the theme of the Eucharist. Jesus used bread and wine and asked his disciples to eat the bread and to drink the wine in remembrance of him. The ritual of the Last Supper became the main moment of the Catholic ritual of Mass. Tintoretto painted scenes of miracles involving bread, scenes of Prophets and of Jesus near the altar of the Upper Hall of the Scuola. One of these pictures is the oval oil picture in the ceiling of the hall, 'Elisha multiplies the Bread', painted around 1577- 1578.

The painting shows Elisha handing out the bread. Tintoretto painted the prophet as a young man. He had read the Bible well. The miracle of the multiplication of loaves is told in the Bible in the Elisha cycle soon after Elijah's death. Elijah died and had transferred his functions to Elisha, so Tintoretto considered Elisha still to be a young man.

Tintoretto had an oval form to bring his scene, always a difficult shape for a picture. He had a brilliant idea. He painted Elisha as a long, towering figure of power and authority, distributing the bread and slightly curved in the act, so that he could position the Prophet all along one side of the oval. In this way the figure of Elisha fits perfectly the shape of the frame. Since Tintoretto positioned Elisha along a side, he had ample space to show a few Jewish women and the bread. Tintoretto painted them like humble and almost like beggar women, very much lower in the picture than Elisha. This imaging of Elisha is very much a Mannerist means, full of tension and that tension is not relieved as in Baroque art.

Other figures of Jews are in the background and a blue sky fills the scene, but much of that might be restoration work done by Giuseppe Angeli around 1777 – 1778. The

Guardians of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco always, over the centuries, saw to it that the decorations of the Scuola remained in good order. During one of these restorations done by Giuseppe Angeli from 1770 on, this painter worked for many years on Tintoretto's pictures and other paintings in the Scuola.

Tintoretto painted a marvellous Elisha. He painted not in pure colours, even though it is difficult to know sometimes what colours he really used, because Tintoretto's hues have become altered with time. Today we see dark yellow and orange shades, which go well together. Tintoretto applied strong chiaroscuro shading on the mantle of the Prophet and the volume of that mantle makes of Elisha the imposing figure that impresses also the viewer that looks up to the high oval. It is as if Elisha looks down, an effect that Tintoretto must have sought out deliberately, as if a heavenly figure looked down from the sky, through openings in the ceiling of the upper Hall. Tintoretto also painted a marvellous basket in which Elisha holds the bread. He showed splendidly how the light brightens the threads of the reed. Such beautiful and many shades are also on the Jewish women. Tintoretto painted in visible brushstrokes that remained independent each, and that were unwaveringly correct. This was a powerful new way of painting, not a fine detailed filling in of well-delineated areas, not fine transitions, but in the lines of paint made by a brush that sculpted as much as it painted and that proves immediately that the picture is a painting and not reality itself – of course. There is indeed a tactile quality in this way of laying paint that is remarkable and entirely Tintoretto's own style. Jacopo Robusti was a very self-assured artist, and in 1577-1578 fully in possession and confidence of his skills.

## *Elisha and the Children of Bethel*

### **The Death of the Children of Bethel**

Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Arras. 1653.

The Prophet Elisha was in Jericho and he travelled to Bethel. While he was on the road, some small boys came out of the town and jeered at him. 'Hurry up, baldy!' they shouted. 'Come on up, baldy!' Elisha turned round and looked at them; and he cursed them in the name of Yahweh. And two bears came out of the forest and savaged forty-two of the boys. From there Elisha went to Mount Carmel and then returned to Samaria <sup>G38</sup>.

Laurent de La Hyre painted the slain children of the town of Bethel. De La Hyre was born in Paris in 1606. He was destined to become a painter. His father, Etienne de La Hyre (ca. 1583-1643) was a painter also, and taught Laurent while he was still very young. Laurent de La Hyre may have studied a while also with Jean-Baptiste Lallemand. Although he never travelled to Italy, he went often to the castle of Fontainebleau near Paris, to look at the pictures made by the Italian masters there, such as of Rosso Fiorentino, Primaticcio, Nicolo dell'Abate, and others. He was very quickly known among the better painters of the capital of France and he received many commissions from the court of the King, from the notables that ruled France. When he was thirty-three he married the daughter of one of the guards of Louis XIII. A little later, in 1643, when his father died, he inherited quite some money and left Paris for the countryside. He kept painting portraits, religious scenes and landscapes for the Parisian court however. The Guild of Goldsmiths twice called upon him to make pictures for the nave of Notre Dame Cathedral, a commission for a large painting they gave each year in the month of May. Laurent de La Hyre was also one of the twelve artists to help found the French Academy. He worked for Cardinal Richelieu, for the Chancellor Séguier and for many other courtiers, who entrusted him with decorations of their palaces and chapels. With Jacques Stella, Eustache Le Sueur and of course Simon Vouet, de La Hyre was one of the few artists that epitomised French Classicism of the seventeenth century. He was one of its most brilliant representatives.

'The Death of the Children of Bethel' is a theme from the Old Testament, but the painting could as well represent the killed children of Niobe, a mythological theme of antiquity that was often painted also. Laurent de La Hyre painted the scene indeed rather as a mythological theme, more than as a religious and devotional picture. As a subject from the Bible it was however more acceptable in the wider circles of the court. De La Hyre may have made the work for Claude Hélot, a painter and collector, a man very much in favour of Italian art, and who may have decided on the subject for de La Hyre. Pictures like this one, in which Greek temples in ruins are represented, are also called for French Atticism. De La Hyre's painting is in the best French Classicist style, showing elements of Baroque art. It avoids the rigidity that make of some of the French paintings of that period hard and stiff images.

When we look at the painting, we are caught by the movements of the figures in the scene. Yet, de La Hyre did not use the main diagonals of the frame, as in almost all Baroque paintings. He applied dominantly horizontal and vertical lines in his structure, and added fine, pure colours.

It was hard not to use diagonals in the Baroque era, so Laurent de La Hyre did use diagonals anyway, but not the prominent ones of the entire frame. It is as if he divided his frame horizontally in two, and then used the diagonals of the lowest part to position his figures in. We can see the diagonals in the lines of the low hill that goes from lower left to right, and also in the direction of the small river that starts from the right lower corner. The children of Bethel lie in this lower part of the picture, and also the parents that pick up the bodies are placed here.

In the upper part, de La Hyre painted impressive Greek ruins, and a landscape with luxurious trees. The very vertical lines of the columns of the temple and the top horizontal lines of the building dominate the painting and create the impression of austerity and solemn calm. There is no movement in this part of the painting, and since this temple is the single largest, coherent element in the painting, the image of this temple imposes its main impression of silence, abandonment and rest on the viewer. Thus, there are calm and austere lines in the upper, left part of the painting. The Greek antique temple with its strong vertical and horizontal lines, the horizontals rigidly parallel to the low and upper borders of the painting, keep the view strict and static.

De La Hyre then drew movement in the lower part. Yet, we see no chaos here. There are no lines going in all directions at the same time, no intertwined bodies, no out-screaming of horror and no blatant emotions of terrible tragedy. If one looks closely, one has to remark that the bodies of the children of Bethel all lie in the same direction of the two lower diagonals, the diagonals we noted before. Only the vertical lines, the lines of the figures standing, break or add to these directions of the diagonals. There is even a mourning woman in orange gowns to the right, behind which de La Hyre placed a broken, ancient column, to enhance the effect of the vertical lines there. De La Hyre used the diagonals of Baroque, but by placing them so low and by then favouring the verticals, he gave preference to his Classicist conceptions. His figures do not form a crowd. We see figures lying separately on the ground, hardly ever touching, and also the mourning parents are shown individually, mourning separately.

Notwithstanding the strong, stiff structure, the picture presents a mild and even intimate character. This effect, de La Hyre obtained by how he handled his figures. Look at the classic play of folds in the robes and clothes of the dead, at the natural but curved poises of the bodies, at the gestures of the parents and even at the slight hint at motion given in the centre scene of a man who transports the corpses on a horse. The lines of this horse are parallel to the viewer, and they are also very horizontal. The children of Bethel seem to be sleeping. Their bodies are not contorted in pain, not bleeding. The bodies are unblemished, as if rather a divine wrath slew the children in the nick of a moment, not a fierce bear that would have torn the boys apart. The poise of the dead figure in the centre, clad in a rose cloak is serene and fine, and so is the poise of the dead youth in the left corner. Not one poise is the same and de La Hyre also does not shied away from applying difficult perspective in the bodies, with



dramatic foreshortening, such as in the body near the river, but all dead figures are handled with deep respect, even tenderness.

Laurent de La Hyre had an extraordinary sense for colour. His painting is mainly in soft brown and orange shades. These provide a soft, warm, compassionate hue to the entire scene. But the painting would have been dull without some pure, striking, bright hues. So, de La Hyre placed small areas of wonderfully bright and pure hues here and there, very discreetly painted. He brought a little blue on the cloak of a dead boy in the lower left, some less conspicuous rose and less bright orange in the centre on the group of the dead body, and some lighter and purer shades again in the lower right. That is all. These marvellous hues, diligently applied, break the even tones of the painting just enough and make us admire the skills of the painter in the chiaroscuro he uses on the robes and cloaks of the figures. Finally, de La Hyre also varied the warm tones of the picture with the green foliage of the trees in the upper centre and right, but remark how here also the front tree has all leaves in brown and red colours, the colours of autumn of course, but also the colours that fit well with the overall mood of the painting. Nature starts to die in autumn, and the ancient ruins of the temple represent dead times too, so many elements of the painting remind of the dead Children.

De la Hyre was also a fine landscape painter. He drew the bushes, the trees and the temple in a very fine, perfectly detailed way, in a way in which nature blends nicely with the ruins of the temple. Remark the fine shades of blue in the sky and the white clouds that are delicately placed at the end of the scene.

Laurent de La Hyre made a great painting with the 'Children of bethel'. He transformed what could have been a very violent scene of the Old Testament in a delicate painting of respectful, silent mourning. This was a scene that could have been painted in a most Baroque way of intertwined body lines and with overt show of tragic emotion. De La Hyre presented the scene with the restraint of what is the very best one could hope for in French Classicism. With such mastery, it is no wonder that he was one of the most respected painters of the reign of King Louis XIV.

Other Paintings:

**Elisha damns the Children that mock him.** Willem Willemsz van den Bundel (1577-1655). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

### *The Kings of Israel and Judah after the times of the Prophets Elijah and Elisha*

Jehoash son of Jehoahaz recaptured some of the towns from Hazael and from Hazael's son Ben-Hadad, successive kings of the Aramaeans.

His son Jeroboam followed Jehoash as king.

In Judah, Amaziah became king and reigned from 796 to 781 BC, during the reign of Jehoahaz king of Israel. His son Uzziah, who was barely sixteen years old when he was crowned, succeeded him. Uzziah was struck with a violent skin-disease so that he was confined to his rooms. Jotham his son governed the country in his name until he himself became king.

In Israel, Jeroboam II son of Joash was King from 783 to 743 BC. He recovered much territory from Aram. Jeroboam of Israel was succeeded in his turn by his son Zechariah (743 BC). Shallum, son of Jabesh, plotted against him and murdered him at Ibleam. Shallum then usurped the throne of Israel in 743 BC. But Menahem, son of Gadi, entered Samaria and murdered Shallum. Menahem then reigned from 743 to 738 BC. In his times Pal, in fact Tigliat-Pileser III King of Assyria invaded Israel and Menahem had to pay off the King of Assyria to remain on the throne. When Menahem died his son Pekaiiah reigned in Israel (738-737 BC). Pekah, son of Remaliah, his equerry, plotted against the King and assassinated him. He became the new king of Israel. He reigned for twenty years and lost much land to the Assyrians. Hoshea son of Elah plotted against him, murdered him and became king in his turn.

Meanwhile in Judah, Jotham son of Uzziah became King of Judah and reigned from 740 to 736 BC. Then his son Ahaz succeeded him from 736 to 718 BC. The Kings of Israel and of Aram made war on Judah. Ahaz sent messengers to Tigliat-Pileser, king of the Assyrians, for help. Ahaz paid the Assyrians and even went to Damascus to plead his cause. His son Hezekiah succeeded him.

*The Assyrian Invasion of Israel and the Assyrian Exile*

Hoshea reigned for nine years in Israel, from 732 to 724 BC. Shalmaneser, king of Syria, waged war on Hoshea and the King of Israel had to pay a tribute to the Assyrians. Hoshea played a double game with Sais, King of Egypt, against the Assyrians. So the King of Assyria imprisoned Hoshea in chains. Assyria invaded Israel and sacked the country for three years. Samaria was captured and the Israelites were deported to Assyria. Shalmaneser settled the Israelites in Hadah on the Habor, a river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had thus fallen and the Israelites were sent in Assyrian banishment.

The King of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthath, Avra, Hamath and Sepharnaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. These people came with their own gods, Succoth-Benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Niblaz, Tartak, and Adrammelech, but they worshipped Yahweh as well at the same time as the local god.

### *The Kings of Judah until the Babylonian Exile*

In Judah, the Southern Kingdom, Hezekiah had become king and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem (716-687 BC). He put his trust in Yahweh and was successful in his wars against the Assyrians. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen and its capital Samaria taken, Sennacherib King of the Assyrians marched also against the fortified towns of Judah. But Sennacherib withdrew from Judah for much gold and silver.

Later the King of Assyria sent his cupbearer with a large force to Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Hezekiah's ambassadors came to see the cupbearer but the cupbearer shouted to the people saying that the King of Judah should not elude them. He cried that the appeal to Yahweh would not work this time. The ambassadors returned then to Hezekiah to report. Hezekiah sent Eliakim, the master of the palace and Shebirah the secretary as well as the elders of the priests to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah spoke with Yahweh. Yahweh said not to be afraid of the words and blasphemies uttered by the King of Assyria's minions. Isaiah assured that Yahweh would send the King of Assyria back into his own country. And indeed, the cupbearer returned to Lachish but then continued to Libnah for Tirhalsah the king of Cush was on his way to attack Assyria. Sennacherib later again sent messengers to Hezekiah but Isaiah prayed to Yahweh and prophesied that Judah would not be harmed. That same night an angel of God struck down many men, almost two hundred thousand, in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib returned to stay in Nineveh. One day his sons Addramelech and Sharepar murdered him with a sword and escaped into the territory of Ararat. Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon became King of Assyria.

Hezekiah fell ill and at first Isaiah prophesied to him that he would die. But Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh. Isaiah then received a message from Yahweh informing him that since Hezekiah had shown faith in God he would be saved. In three days' time Hezekiah was cured.

It was at that time that the King of Babylon, Herodach-Baladon sent letters to Hezekiah and a gift because he had heard of the king's illness. Hezekiah was much pleased with this and he showed all the riches of Jerusalem to the Babylonian ambassadors. Isaiah warned that one day the Babylonians would return and carry off all the wealth that Hezekiah's ancestors had amassed. But Hezekiah was too flattered by the Babylonian honours to take heed at Isaiah's words.

When Hezekiah died his son Manasseh succeeded him and reigned from 687 to 642 BC. Manasseh was twelve years old when he came to the throne of Judah and he reigned for fifty-five years. He worshipped many other gods but Yahweh. Yahweh then promised that he would bring great disasters over Judah and Jerusalem. He promised to Jerusalem the same treatment as to Samaria. Manasseh took no heed of the warning and shed much innocent blood as a tyrant.

When Manasseh died his son Amon succeeded him (642-640 BC). Amon's retinue plotted against him and killed him in his own palace. The people of the country however proclaimed his son Josiah as his successor. Josiah was eight years old when he came to the throne. He reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years (640 – 609 BC).

During his reign the prophet Hilkiah re-discovered the Book of the Law in the Temple. The King asked Hilkiah to consult Yahweh. Hilkiah and other priests went to the prophetess Huldah. This prophetess predicted that a great disaster would fall on Judah but not in the lifetime of Josiah. Josiah had humbled himself before Yahweh, so Yahweh would let die Josiah in peace. Josiah then assembled all the people and renewed the allegiance to Yahweh in a new Covenant. The King then ordered a religious reform in Judah, fully dedicated to Yahweh. Notwithstanding all the good and pious orders that Josiah gave to re-install the true religion of Yahweh, Yahweh did not lessen the great anger that had been aroused in him against Judah.

In Josiah's times, Pharaoh Necho advanced to meet the King of Assyria at the River Euphrates and Josiah went to intercept him. But Necho killed Josiah at the battle of Megiddo. Archers shot Josiah. The people of Judah chose his son Jehoabaz to succeed him.

Jehoabaz reigned only for three months. Pharaoh enchained him and put another son of Josiah, called Eliakim, on the throne of Judah. This King changed his name to Jehoiakim. Necho took Jehoabaz with him to Egypt, where he died.

Jehoiakim reigned for six years from 609 to 598 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah in his lifetime and Jehoiakim became a vassal of Babylon for three years until he rebelled against Babylon. When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin succeeded on him (598-597 BC). He reigned only for three months, for Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem again and the city was besieged. Jerusalem surrendered and Jehoiachin was taken a prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar plundered the Temple of Jerusalem. The Babylonians then deported Jehoiachin into exile in Babylon.

Jehoiachin was only eighteen years then. Nebuchadnezzar deposed him in favour of his paternal uncle Mattoniah, whose name he changed to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was twenty-one when he became King and he stayed for eleven years on the throne (598-587 BC). Nebuchadnezzar again advanced on Jerusalem, besieged it and captured it. Zedekiah escaped but Chaldaean troops caught up with him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar. The Assyrian king slaughtered all Zedekiah's sons before him, put out his eyes, chained him and carried him off to Babylon.

The Chaldeans now sacked Jerusalem. They took prisoner all the men of distinction, including the head priest Seraiah and deported all of them to Babylon. A man called Gedaliah was appointed governor of Judah. But the Judaeans soon killed this governor and Ishmael, who was of royal decent, and who had killed the governor fled to Egypt. In Babylon, the Babylonian King Evil-Merodach pardoned Jehoiachin after a while. He treated him with kindness but kept him and his people in Babylon.

## *Isaiah*

### **The Prophet Isaiah**

Master of the Annunciation of Aix (active around 1445, Barthélémy d'Eyck).  
Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam.

The Master of the Annunciation of Aix was one of those artists of the Gothic Medieval period whose proper names have been forgotten, if they were ever known. He worked in the Provence region of France in times when this country was very independent still from the centralising power of the French Kings and when a soft culture of fine arts, of poetry, paintings and music could develop in a part of the land that was rich and prosperous. The Master of Aix lived around the middle of the fifteenth century. He was called after almost only one sole great painting, a triptych of which the central panel was an 'Annunciation to the Virgin', now in a church of Saint Mary Magdalene of Aix-en-Provence in the south of France. Originally the panels were in the church Saint Sauveur of Aix. They were ordered by the cloth merchant Pierre Corpici of Aix, who was a draper of the King. The other panels of the altarpiece are dispersed over many museums.

It is now believed that the master of Aix who did not sign the triptych was in fact Barthélémy d'Eyck, a painter who must have come from the Netherlands and who may have been connected to the Eyck family, the family of the very well known painters Jan and Hubert van Eyck who worked in the town of Gent of Flanders and who were court painters for the Dukes of Burgundy. King René d'Anjou of the Provence appealed to painters from the Netherlands and Flanders and invited them to his court of Aix. Barthélémy d'Eyck may have been one of those painters that were attracted to the Mediterranean and to the good character of René d'Anjou, who was called 'Le bon Roi René', the 'Good King René'. Other great masters worked at that court, among whom Enguerrand Carton and - after Barthélémy death – another Flemish painter, Nicolas Froment. Barthélémy d'Eyck was not only a painter of large panels. He was also a miniaturist. He may have studied with Jan van Eyck for this art and he decorated books of prayers for King René. His father-in-law was Pierre du Billant, also a Flemish painter, whose original name was Pieter van Bijlandt and this Pierre may have gotten Barthélémy to Aix. Pierre du Billant was also a court painter of the Provence and du Billant's presence in Naples is acknowledged, as he accompanied René d'Anjou to the South Italian court, so there may have been ties between the North (Flanders), the Provence region with Barthélémy and Naples.<sup>B23</sup> Barthélémy d'Eyck was a very fine Gothic painter and a keen portraitist. His 'The Prophet Isaiah' is in the Boymans-Van Beuningen museum of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The Master of Aix painted a portrait in long of a medieval noble man and presented the man as the Prophet Isaiah. We see a dignified man in long robes coloured in green, with a red head dress. The robe definitely is very similar to dresses we saw in other pictures of the period, mainly made for the Dukes of Burgundy. Medieval dress was alike in the Provence region that lay just south of Burgundy in contemporary

France. Isaiah holds his hand in a blessing and he was turned towards the rest of the panels of the altarpiece. The Master of Aix painted the Prophet as if he was a sculpture, and that was a habit in the Middle Ages on polyptychs that served as altarpieces. Commissioners, mostly the clergy of churches, preferred sculptures for their altarpieces but the pieces needed to be protected so they ordered panels that would close on the boxes in which the sculptures stood. The panels then had to be painted, but on the outside the painters imitated the sculptures that were inside. Often pictures on the outside were painted in grisaille, so the images of prophets on the polyptych of Aix are not typical. If the altarpiece dated from around 1450 however, painting had evolved and tastes also so that colours could be used. In the Isaiah we see that the Master of Aix knew very well how to use chiaroscuro and this master did not use black or grey to indicate the shadows, but deeper shades of green. That was quite an evolution, for painters had come to recognise that also shades had colour and not just absence of colour. This fact showed a keen observation of nature, of things as they were, instead of objects imagined. The observation of nature had also grown from previous periods and the Master of Aix was one of those painters that had learned.

Barthélémy d'Eyck showed a learned man in the Prophet Isaiah, with a stern, thoughtful face, a guardian of the church. The Prophet stands in full against a background of brown and green hues and his figure throws a dark shadow on the wall. This shadow is not painted in the complementary colour of green, but still in black or dark grey. We would have to wait much longer still for painters to fully understand that also in the shadow thrown, colour was seen.

#### *Other Paintings:*

**The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.** Barthélémy d'Eyck (Master of the Annunciation of Aix-en-Provence, active around 1445). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen. Rotterdam..

## *Part VII. The Books of Ezra and of Nehemiah*

In 539 BC King Cyrus of Babylon allowed the Judaeans to return to Jerusalem. He returned to them the objects taken from the Temple of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and ordered them to be restored to the Temple. Forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty people returned from the exile in Babylon. The temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt (520-515 BC). The heads of the Israelian families were Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Their prophets were Zechariah and Haggai. The Jews rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel on its old site. They rebuilt the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem and the sacrificial liturgy was re-instated. During the reign of Artaxerces the work on the Temple ceased and was discontinued until Darius became King of Persia. Darius honoured the word of Cyrus and he protected the Jews from their neighbours. The governors of the Transeuphrates region followed Darius' orders so that under the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah the work in the Temple resumed. Passover was feasted in 515 BC.

During these times, Ezra son of Shaiah, a scribe that knew Moses' law, came back from Babylon. Ezra knew the Law and he was a priest. He was allowed to come back by Artaxerces, so several waves of Israelites returned to Jerusalem. Ezra dissolved marriage with foreigners. The Israelites sent away all the foreign wives and children, in obedience to the law of God. Ezra thus became responsible for the religious reform after the return from Babylon.

Nehemiah presided over the people from 445 BC to 433 BC. Nehemiah son of Hacaliah was the cupbearer of King Artaxerces. The king allowed him also to return to Jerusalem and Nehemiah asked for the king's permission to supply the Israelites with timber from the king's forest for the beams of the gates of the citadel of the Temple and for the city walls. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, with the help of Eliashib the high priest. The Jews worked with a sword at their side because their enemies did not dare to attack. Nehemiah was the governor for the King of Persia in Judah. The Jews grunted over so much work but the walls were finished and not a single gap was left.

Many other exiles then returned from Babylon and Jerusalem was re-populated. The scribe Ezra read the Book of the Law of Moses in full view of the people, and Judaism was restored. Ezra blessed Yahweh. The people then held a ceremony of expiation and they confessed their sins and worshipped Yahweh. All the people, with Nehemiah and Ezra, promised again to adhere to the Law and to observe and practice the commandments of Yahweh.



## *Part VIII. The Book Tobit*

### *Tobit*

The book Tobit tells of Tobit son of Tobiah, who lived in Nineveh in Assyria during the Assyrian exile of the Jews. Tobit was born in the land of Israel however. He married in Israel to a woman called Anna and he had a son from her, called Tobias. Then came the banishment to Assyria and Tobit was taken away to Nineveh. Tobit kept to the laws of Moses however.

Tobit came into the favour of King Shalmaneser and was the king's purveyor. When Shalmaneser died, his son Sennacherib succeeded him. Sennacherib killed many Jews in his rage. Tobit stole their bodies and buried them. A Ninevite told the king what Tobit had done, so Tobit was afraid and fled. All his possessions were confiscated. Sennacherib was killed by his two sons who fled to the mountains and Esarhaddon succeeded as king. The son of Tobit's brother Anael, a man called Ahikar was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer for the kingdom. Ahikar interceded for Tobit so that he could return to Nineveh. Tobit returned with his wife Ann and his son Tobias.

One day, Tobias found the body of a Jew that had been strangled and the thrown down in the marketplace. Tobit went to fetch the man and buried him during the night. Afterwards, he took a bath and laid down by the wall of the courtyard. He left his face uncovered and sparrows on the wall let hot droppings fall into Tobit's eyes. This caused white spots to form and after a while Tobit became completely blind.

Sarah was the daughter of Raquel. She lived in Ecbatana of Media and she had married seven times but Asmodeus, the worst of the demons, had killed her husbands. Then she prayed to the God of Israel and the angel Raphael came. Raphael devised a complex scheme to take away the white spots and Tobit's eyes so that he might see again but Tobit should give Sarah as a bride to Tobias to rid her thereby of Asmodeus. The Book of Tobit relates how Raphael realised this difficult task.

### **Tobit burying the Dead**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Valence. Ca. 1635-1640.

Sébastien Bourdon was born in Montpellier in France in 1616. Montpellier was a Protestant town then and in 1622, after disorders directed against the Catholic churches had broken out in the town, King Louis XIII sent his army to bring the town to other feelings. The Bourdon parents sent their son Sébastien to safer places, to

Paris, to his uncle. He started to learn to draw in Paris but around 1630 he went to Bordeaux. He engaged in the army, but an officer soon sent him away, urging him to paint instead of giving him over to soldiering. Sébastien bourdon stayed in Paris for a while, and then in 1636 he arrived in Rome. He was a very young man without money and he could only earn himself a living by making the scenes the Romans wanted at that time. He painted mythological scenes, genre scenes, landscapes, and mostly Bamboccio pictures. These themes of the Italian countryside with brigands and country people had been made popular in Rome by the Dutch painter Pieter van Laer. In 1637 already, Bourdon returned to Paris. He was introduced in the wealthy Protestant circles of the town and became well-known. From then on his career developed. Bourdon became one of France's most famous Baroque painters. In 1648 Sébastien Bourdon became one of the twelve founders of the French Academy in Paris. Other founding members were such eminent painters as Charles Le Brun, Laurent de la Hyre, and Eustache le Sueur. He taught at the French Academy, and gave lectures on the art of painting. In 1652 he went to Stockholm to become a court painter to Queen Christina of Sweden, but in 1654 already he returned to Paris. In 1655 he was appointed the head of the French Academy. With age, his skills of composition became more pronounced, so that his pictures from 1640 on are examples also of academic rigour. Sébastien bourdon may have met Nicolas Poussin in Rome and he certainly studied Poussin's pictures in the late 1640's. But he had developed by then also his own style. He died in Paris in 1671.

'Tobit burying the Dead' may have been a painting made right after Bourdon's return to France, dating from between 1637 to the early 1640's. It still has style elements of the way bourdon painted in Rome and it reminds strongly of his Bamboccio period. Bourdon deliberately applied some structure already, but hesitatingly and not with the discipline he would do so later.

We see a white corpse being buried in a tomb by servants of Tobit. Tobit stands to the left, controlling the scene and the youth standing next to him may be his son Tobias. The corpse that is being lowered to the earth is very white and bourdon used the very white colours to denote his primary scene. The wife of the buried Jew stands also close to the corpse. She is dressed in a long white cloak and she seems in that white-grey, harshly coloured dress almost a marble statue of desperate grief, struck with sudden sadness. Somewhat below we find another patch of white colour on the naked body of another woman, maybe a servant, holding the body of what could be a child. Such is the scene of the burying, the scene of death. Death for Bourdon was implacable, hard, cold, and of the very striking white colour.

Around this central theme, several people move. They work at the burial, as Tobit has told them to come in the night. Sébastien bourdon painted them all in different positions, all active, all looking in various directions, looking at each other, looking at the burial, and aside to Tobit. They hurry and are fearful of what happen if they were found out. But Tobit controls and stands firm, a powerful and commanding man. Bourdon showed in this second scene his skills in depicting action: all figures are inclined, so Bourdon used amply the slanting directions on his figures to indicate movement and the slanting lines intertwine in a chaos of directions, which always represents energy in a picture. The light that falls on the burial scene comes from the upper left, from the direction onto which Tobias looks. Here we may suspect the light of Yahweh, helping Tobit and his servants.

The two scenes together form a horizontal, low band of figures in the frame. Bourdon used here the three fundamental colours of painters: blue, yellow and red, but in broken hues, like he did in his Roman period. Later he would use brighter hues. These are the brighter colours of the picture however, because Bourdon painted above the band of figures a large darker part of a Roman or Greek architecture and a dark sky. Tobit buried Sennacherib's victims, his kinsmen, at night. So Bourdon painted a night scene. To the right of the frame, Bourdon placed a vase and behind the vase an Egyptian obelisk or pyramid, as well as two curved structures which are tree-trunks. One tree-trunk is broken, and these trunks as well as the cracks in the temple structure may indicate the decaying of Tobit's town Nineveh, wracked by internecine battles. The tree trunks on the right and the pyramid must balance the temple structure of the left part.

Sébastien Bourdon used a few elements of structured composition in his painting, but by far not as much as in his later periods. The white areas in the picture for instance form a weak triangle that goes from the lower left to the upper right, to the woman in mourning on the right. Bourdon also brought a pyramidal structure in the picture: look at the antique statues in the upper middle. It must represent the god of Nineveh, of the town in which Tobit lived in banishment. From the top of that statue two lines can be considered going down on the left and the right, to form a triangle within which is the burial scene, all the persons engaged immediately in the burial. Bourdon even drew a woman holding a child on her shoulders to continue the line of the statue and to make the connection with the broader area of the bent people lower down. Then to the left of that triangle, Bourdon painted Tobit and Tobias, three people in all. To the right he placed the mourning woman and three other figures. Bourdon had structure in his mind, but he had not yet reached the sophistication of his art in which he could emphasise structure over all other visual elements such as colour, lines and design of the content as well as the background to blend into one coherent visual whole. We regret in this picture the contrast between figures and background, the heaviness in view of that dark background, the strange artifice of the tree-trunks necessary to bring symmetry and the rather weak support of structure in the scene of the figures.

The painting 'Tobit burying the Dead' is not one of Sébastien Bourdon's best pictures. Still, we see an accomplished artist at work. Bourdon painted a scene of people burying a corpse at night, an ominous and terrible sight and he showed especially Tobit's determination. He stayed true to the Bible scene. He had to draw a night scene and often also Bamboccio scenes are at night or evening, when the thieves come out and when danger lurks, so Bourdon evolved slowly from his early Bamboccio themes to Bible and mythological scenes. We feel that Bourdon was discovering the power of structure, but yet not daring to make structure the force that linked his entire picture into one coherent view. He was looking to enhance his picture by reflection the colour areas and the lines in his picture, but he was still young and he needed to work fast.

With this burying theme of Tobit Bourdon may have been making a reference to the entombment of Christ. The corpse that is put into the grave may represent Jesus. The mourning woman in blue and white could be his mother, the Virgin Mary, dressed in pure white. A rich man helped in the burial of Jesus and proposed his own tomb, so that man might be represented by Tobit. Jesus came to abolish the old order so that in

the renaissance pictures we often see images of cracked ancient temples appear in the background, like in this picture of Sébastien Bourdon. In early medieval themes appear often two tree trunks: a broken one, representing the old world, and a living tree which is here with Bourdon an organically curved one, representing life in Jesus. Often such scenes of Christ are composed in a setting of Roman temples, and a Roman environment, symbolised by the Roman pyramid of Sextus, like Bourdon drew on the right. When Jesus died the sky darkened suddenly, and Bourdon also painted dark clouds overshadowing the sun, coming from the upper left. So there might indeed be more to discover in Sébastien Bourdon's painting. Visually however, it is a weaker picture than many of his later works. The 'Tobit burying the Dead' remains however a painting that is always interesting to look at, if only to discover the way Bourdon drew the various figures in fine colours and chiaroscuro. This painter had great talent; his genius shows better in other paintings. We should not forget that if this picture indeed dates from 1635 to 1640, Bourdon was still in his twenties and learning by himself the elements of design. He would discover them all however, and he would later teach them at the French Academy of Paris. Bourdon was one of the founding fathers of French Academicist painting.

### **Tobit and Anna with the Goat**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1626.

The subject of Rembrandt's painting is a short, painful story from the time when Tobit was blind. His wife Anna worked then. She spun wool, wove cloth and sold her work. Her customers paid her and also once gave her a kid for a meal. Tobit heard the animal bleat. He grudged to his wife and reproached her, for the animal might be stolen. He urged her to give it back to its owners. His wife refused however. She told Tobit that it was a rightful present. Tobit did not believe her; he felt ashamed for her and he insisted to give back the kid. But Anne then replied by asking about Tobit's own alms, his own good works. She asked what he had received in return. Since that was the blindness that afflicted him, Tobit sighed and wept. He was sad and said his lamentations. He regretted all the wrong things Israel had done and asked God to do with him as God wanted. He even begged for death. Then he prayed to be relieved of his blindness.

Rembrandt's 'Tobit and Anna with the Kid' dates from 1626, when the painter was about twenty years old. So the picture must have been one of Rembrandt's earliest paintings. We recognise an astonishingly accomplished artist in the young painter.

Tobit and Anna are sitting in a Dutch seventeenth century house. The light comes to the scene from a window on the left side of the room. The interiors of Dutch rooms with its not so tall windows were often dark inside, so Rembrandt could already paint his picture in strong contrasts of light and dark, as he would particularly emphasise in his later work. But he showed in 'Tobit and Anna' wonderfully bright colours. When

he was young Rembrandt made many pictures with a far richer palette of vivid hues, in which he would even apply some blue and green, than in his later work. Thus the orange colours of Tobit's robe and also part of Anna's robe are marvellous. It is a rich, splendid, and warm hue and it steels the view very obviously. Rembrandt showed rich diversity of other light colours in other parts of Tobit's robe, in Anna's headdress and on her shawl, on the kid, on Tobit's walking stick that lies on the ground, and also on the faces of the two elder people. We cannot but be amazed at how accomplished such a young painter was in painting these splendid, harmonious and wonderfully sympathetic hues. Rembrandt showed the brighter colours set against the dark interior of the room but even there a basket, a spinning wheel, glass bottles are wonderfully detailed in fine brushstrokes. One might easily do away with the magnificent hues as being picturesque instead of powerfully accentuating the essence of the scene and of the medium that is the frame, but the effect on viewers is strong pleasing and in our opinion not at all a sign of weakness. The young Rembrandt used vivid hues because he was young and had still the enthusiasm of brightness and of newly discovered hues. But he would not develop into a painter concerned with the power of strong, bright colours as primary element of his art. He would be a painter of expression. He would remain a master of colour, but colour he would never again show and use for its own sake.

Rembrandt used light and its absence well already in this painting. He brought the light splendidly on Tobit, thereby emphasising the hues on the prophet as well as on Anna's head. He painted the kid very finely and like a real master gave to his view almost a tactile experience to the long, soft hair of the kid. He placed however the dog under Tobit in the shadows, showing that he could as well paint figures and animals in the light as in the dark. Rembrandt showed a corner of a small kitchen. The perspective of the ceiling indicates a small part of the room, a corner into which a cupboard and kitchen utensils were placed. Tobit and Anna are in a corner of the room, which quite corresponds to the mental state both Tobit and Anna are in.

The faces of Tobit and Anna are much wrinkled and Rembrandt detailed their traits with ultimate care. Every wrinkle in the face of Anna is painted with complete and exact realism. This is really how a worried, working, old woman, strong and determinate against hardships looked like. Tobit likewise is an old man. Rembrandt shows his helplessness in his face. It is less sunburnt because Tobit was confined to the interior. His face also is wrinkled of the worries of banishment. Rembrandt drew Tobit's unkempt hair, his balding head, his long white beard and his very old hands. Anna's hands are as deeply carved as Tobit's praying hands. But the hands are lively, respectful and as much the true subject of the painting as Tobit and Anna's faces.

Rembrandt's picture is just an interior scene. But the young painter knew people already as if he were sixty years old. He painted Anna with an expression of mixed feelings. She seems surprised by Tobit's reaction to refuse the kid. She is wary, old and tired, exhausted. She has come home panting from holding the kid, at first happy and proud and then disillusioned by Tobit's reaction. So Rembrandt painted her with an open mouth of surprise, the large eyes of reproach, the bent head and bent shoulders of pleading. She holds the kid, proudly and protecting, as if it were innocence itself. She keeps on to the kid however, telling Tobit over and over again that the kid was not a stolen animal. She knows how much the need the kid, now that Tobit is blind and some extra meat would be so welcome.

Tobit sits in a chair. He wears wonderful, rich, warm clothes, the remnants of better times that are now torn at the arms. It is cold outside. Tobit and Anna wear heavy clothing and Tobit has been warming himself at a small fire in the room. Tobit prays to God, refusing the least sin such as the theft of a kid, even though the household is in want of money. He holds his closed and dead eyes to the heavens, in a way that indicates pleading to God and reproach for Anna. How can his wife bring in a stolen kid? Why has God thrown him in blindness and poverty, what sins did he commit so that he would be now confined to a chair and so that his wife had to accept a stolen kid to survive? How can he refuse the kid to Anna when she stops all arguments by referring to his own alms, and by referring to his helplessness? He can only lament to the skies and only the lamentations can bring him solace.

Rembrandt knew Dutch genre scenes well and he painted such a scene too. We see all the utensils of a kitchen in the background: garlic, a bird cage, a basket, cupboards, large bottles, and a spinning wheel. A loyal dog stayed with Tobit at the fire. Tobit wears simple leather shoes, old and torn, at his feet. Tobit's wealthy-looking clothes of golden colours are torn. It is the scene of Dutch poverty. But Rembrandt ennobled the scene by referring to a Bible theme and by showing powerfully the psychology of his personages. Anna looks at Tobit and the action at the moment of pleading and pitying is so strong that it links the two figures very strongly. How could a young man of twenty already make such pictures that show so directly emotions of old people and the feelings of the soul, and show Tobit's and Anna's psychology so immediately and poignantly? A very intelligent and mature, very sensitive artist was at work on 'Tobit and Anna'. The genius of Rembrandt, his talent for capturing the essence of human emotions in a scene started with pictures like this.

We are used with Rembrandt to see, perceive visually only, the emotions in his pictures, our attention being unencumbered with other details or even by splendours of colour – even though as we saw in this picture Rembrandt mastered harmony of vivid colours also. With age, Rembrandt seemed to concentrate on the emotions of his personages and to hide in darkness all other details, considered superfluous. Hence his pictures in which just a few features of his figures come out of the dark backgrounds. When one looks at Rembrandt's early paintings, like the 'Tobit and Anna', one must admire the wonderful hues of Rembrandt's youth. He had all the abilities to become a great colourist and he remained much of that in later periods, but we never saw the wealth of contrasting, bright hues of his young age again. Yet, also in pictures of bright hues one can express feelings subtly and forcefully and that is proved also by 'Tobit and Anna'. In later paintings, Rembrandt would obsessively go for the essentials of human feelings. The surrounding details were then unnecessary and for Rembrandt in all probability more an impediment to his expression. It is by knowing the young Rembrandt that we appreciate the mature painter.

Rembrandt was still in Leiden when he painted 'Tobit and Anna' and he attended in 1620 the faculty of Philosophy of Leiden University. He had gone to the Latin School in his hometown first and he was the eight son of the van Rijn family. It was only in 1622 that he would abandon his studies in Leiden and enter the workshop of Jacob Isaacs Van Swanenburgh. He stayed with this painter for two years, and then in 1625 for about six months he worked with Pieter Lastman. 'Tobit and Anna' was thus

probably made while Rembrandt still studied at Leiden University. He was still much an autodidact then in painting, but did he have to learn much in art?

### *The young Tobias*

Tobit remembered that he had left money, silver, with Gabael at Rhages in Media. He told his son Tobias to follow always the Law of Israel in case he, Tobit, would die and he told his son also of the ten talents of silver left with Gabael son of Gabirias. Tobit told Tobias that he and Gabael had signed a note with their signatures and then cut the note in two. Tobit took one piece and he had laid the other with the silver. Thus, Gabael would recognise the owner.

Tobias then went out to look for a man who would accompany him to Media, for he did not know the road. Tobias found the angel Raphael waiting outside for him, though he did not know that this was an angel. Tobias spoke to him, asked him whether he knew the road to Media and the angel told Tobias he had often been there. Tobias presented the angel to Tobit. The angel said he was called Azarias son of Ananias, one of Tobit's kinsmen. Tobit knew Ananias well, so he welcomed the angel. Tobit promised Azarias a drachme a day and the same expenses as his son. Soon Tobias kissed his father and mother and together with the angel he set on his way to Media, the dog following behind.

### **Tobias saying Good-bye to his Father**

Adolphe-William Bouguereau (1825 -1905). The State Hermitage Museum. Saint Petersburg. 1860.

Adolphe-William Bouguereau made a Neo-Classicist painting of 'Tobias saying Good-bye to his Father'. The picture is not on a mythological theme; its figures are not the powerful nude Greek or Roman heroes for which we know this painter best, but the picture has all the features of the grand Neo-Classicist French academic style of the middle of the nineteenth century.

Bouguereau made the painting in 1860, a few years after his stay at the Villa Medici in Rome. He now worked again in France. And he wanted to make a grand painting. How could he impress viewers with towering figures on just a flat frame? He could do exactly what the words describe. He could make the figures towering and monumental to the viewer. He could position the point of view of the spectator low in the frame, so have a low horizon line in his picture or even none at all visible. He could show his figures in dignified poises, have them seem very worthy of respect. He should draw his personages at rest, not in movement, and if he had anyhow to show a scene of action, the movement should be caught in a still moment of equilibrium, in a moment of stasis somewhere in the midst of the action. The personages should be large, fill the frame. They should be imposing and not too close to the viewer either. He should build a rigid structure in his composition, and preferably support his design on vertical lines, which always gives an impression of static and of determination in viewers. He should use clear, cool, even a little hard colours and certainly not too warm hues. Warm hues would evoke a mood of empathy in the viewer and Bouguereau had to



avoid that, he would have to keep a distance between his scene and the viewer. So his blue hues should be full, bright blue, his yellow should be definite yellow and the other colours should stay bright, as bright as possible without losing harmony overall. So, Adolphe-William Bouguereau built his scenario and painted just like that.

The spectator's eyes seem always to be low in Bouguereau's paintings, in a mole's view. Tobias' father is a towering figure of a strong man with the beard and toga of a wise Greek philosopher. He is blind, so he looks up, to the heaven, and that effect forms the spirituality of the painting, the abandonment of the anxious father to God's providence. Tobit is a truly epic and imposing figure. The viewer personifies him or herself with the hero of the picture, which is Tobias. But Tobias bows his head in humility and Bouguereau painted him quite smaller than his father. So the viewer is humbled also. Epic is enhanced in Greek dramas. Greek dramas have a choir that exclaims the feelings. Bouguereau painted thus Tobias' mother on the right, weeping and hiding her face in her hands. To balance the area of Tobias' mother, Bouguereau had to paint another figure to the left and luckily the Book of Tobit talks of the Archangel Raphael. Bouguereau then painted the angel on the left and he continued the tradition of showing an archangel neither as a male nor really as a female figure. He added a sympathetic touch: the angel holds the boy's hand, somewhat hidden, behind Tobias' back. The Archangel Raphael is taller than the mother of Tobias and she bends her head, so balance was broken. Bouguereau solved the issue by drawing the side of Tobit's house behind and over the woman and by painting this part lighter – he used a blend of broken white, yellow and blue hues. But then balance was broken again, the right side being too high. So to bring symmetry again, Bouguereau painted a tree on the extreme left, above Raphael. That allowed just enough open space in the upper middle, to show a patch of blue sky into which he could place Tobit's head, with a look of the mind into the far.

Much perspective in epic pictures, landscapes in the background, are not really necessary in Neo-Classicist pictures because they divert attention away from the powerful central scene, but Bouguereau did give a small indication of it, just enough to suggest deeper space, in the lines of the door of the house for instance. Bouguereau applied a very rigid structure of vertical lines in his personages, only a little modulated by a bending tree, a bent head. In this austere structure only Tobias brings relief, which draws the attention of the viewer to the boy. Bouguereau also painted Tobias in more striking orange colours, whereas the elder Tobit is dressed in tunic and cloak of darker tones. Thus Bouguereau indicated youth and old age. To the sides, both the angel and Tobias' mother are symmetrically painted in broken white hues. Bouguereau did even introduce after all also a pyramid structure in his picture, the structure by excellence of portraiture and of academicism: the staffs of Raphael and of Tobias form a triangle that is solidly planted with its base to the ground and within this triangle we find the angel and Tobias, the future travellers. With this triangle design, as well as with similarities in colours and the fact that the angel and Tobias hold hands, Bouguereau created a visual intimacy as well as a physical one, between Tobias and Raphael.

Adolphe-William Bouguereau was born in 1825 in the old, charming, once very Protestant, and very active French port town of La Rochelle. He learned first to paint in Bordeaux, then in Paris. From 1848 on La Rochelle subsidised his studies at the Parisian Academy. In 1850 he won a Prix de Rome and could hence stay for three years at the French Academy in Rome, in the villa Medici. Bouguereau was

confronted in Rome with classical art and this combined with the Neo-Classicist style of the French Academy would stay with him his entire life. He painted landscapes and genre scenes for a living, but his major works were on mythological themes in which his Neo-Classicist views of heroic grandeur could be shown at their best.

William Bouguereau was one of the painters of the French Classicist School of the nineteenth century that is not forgotten, but very thoroughly eclipsed anyway by the French modernist movements of that century, notably Impressionism and Symbolism. This school nevertheless counted many marvellous painters of great talent: Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Paul Baudry, Léon Bénouville, Victor Biennoury, Joseph-Paul Blanc, Alexandre Cabanel, Hippolyte Flandrin, Anne-Louis Girodet, Henri Lehmann, Jules Lenepveu, Jean-Victor Schnetz, Luc-Olivier Merson, and Emile Lévy are but a few names of a longer list. These artists painted mythological scenes or scenes of antiquity and of the Bible, showing a few figures in heroic scenes. Most of them passed a few years in the Villa Medici; some of them were directors of the French Academy in Rome. They painted in cool, often harshly contrasting hues that however globally remained very harmonious and nice to look at. Their colour surfaces were distinct and easy to discern. The artists had great talent and could depict with intricate detail in clear lines, with great feeling for design and composition of scenes.

If these artists seem to have fallen in disgrace nowadays, it might be because they emphasised the intellect and emotional discipline in their art, as taught in their academies, which gradually grew out of fashion and out of liking from the middle of their century to our days. Also for us, the monumentality and epic appeal of their grand scenes call powerfully to our mind the images of the Fascist and Communist dictatorial regimes. These regimes appealed to grand visions of societies otherwise in want of bare necessities, to heroic dreams of an ideal and splendid future of a nature-dominating humanity for which many sacrifices had to be made gladly. The people of these dictatorial regimes seemed to be longing, or were directed to long, for societies of order, security, and purity. The projects, goals of the Fascist and Communist doctrines had in view an ideal world that was altogether clean, managed, epic and that proved utter faith in the concerted, heroic acts of the individual within a perfectly organised and led society. The French Neo-Classicists did not have such visions of their society, but the grandeur of their images and their style, by which they obtained their grand images, did prove their longing for the epic and it is hence difficult for us to disassociate their picture from what happened a hundred years later than their art. Nevertheless, their art should be otherwise considered and can then be savoured because these painters showed some of the finest scenes of the art of painting. Adolphe-William Bouguereau was one of the truest and most faithful painters of this style.

Adolphe-William Bouguereau painted thus with 'Tobias saying Good-bye to his Father' a very Neo-Classicist, French academicist, logical, rational picture. He did as expected by his style and the placement of the figures in the composition, the colours and other features of his picture can be almost mathematically predicted. Still, the painting does not fail to exert its visual powers. Any viewer is normally impressed by the theme, grieved by the poor mother of Tobias, charmed by the young people holding hands, driven to respect and awe by the wise old Tobit and every viewer feels sympathy for the gentle son that is sent on a perilous travel by a desperate father. The

picture is eminently efficient and otherwise finely painted in lines and colours. Adolphe-William Bouguereau remained truly dedicated to such views, although he had the talent and the intellect to vary, his entire life.

### **Tobias and the Archangel Raphael**

Tiziano Vecellio called Titian (ca. 1485-1576). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. Ca. 1520-1530.

Titian was born in Pieve di Cadore, in the Friuli region of Italy, not far from the Austrian border. His parents were modest people. They were Gregorio and Lucia di Conte dei Vecelli. Around 1498, at about the age of ten, Titian and his elder brother Francesco were sent to Venice to learn painting in the workshop of Sebastiano Zuccato. After a few years, Titian could enter the workshop of Giovanni Bellini. In 1507 he changed workshops to become the assistant of Giorgio da Castelfranco, called Giorgione. Giorgione and Titian painted together; they worked for instance both on exterior frescoes for the Fondacco dei Tedeschi, the German exchange of Venice. When Giorgione died around 1510, Titian received commissions for himself in Padua and from then on he worked as an independent master. In 1513 he had his own workshop and worked with assistants. He was now the most celebrated artist of Venice. His wife died in 1530 and that changed his art some. Titian became more silent and meditative. He painted large canvases for churches of Venice and also for Federico II Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. Through this Duke Titian was introduced at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor of Germany, Charles V. Titian was appointed court painter to Charles V in 1533 and even knighted by the emperor. He also painted for Pope Paul III Farnese and was much praised as Europe's best portrait painter. Titian worked for princes, kings and emperor, for the Dukes of Mantua, Ferrara and Urbino, for the kings Francis I of France and Philip II of Spain, and for Emperor Charles V. Nevertheless, he rarely left Venice. Other artists came to see him: Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Dürer, Fra Bartolommeo and even Michelangelo. He visited Rome briefly in 1545 and he made also a few visits between 1548 and 1551 to Augsburg, where Charles V held his court. During his last years, from 1555 on, he made his most marvellous and powerful paintings, on which he worked for long times, sometimes leaving the pictures untouched for months and even years, taking them up again by chance for small additions, so that it is not certain of those works whether they were finished or not in the state they remained in. Titian died in 1576, over ninety years old, in his house in Venice. He was buried in the church of Santa Maria Glorioso dei Frari.

It is not certain whether Titian really made the 'Archangel Raphael and Tobias', but due to the high quality of the painting it is nevertheless ascribed to him.<sup>121</sup> Nothing is known about the origin of the picture. We see a very young boy being led by an angel. The boy carries a fish and the angel points the way. The Bible story also mentions a dog and Titian painted a dog in the picture too. So the theme is rather obviously a reference to Tobias and Raphael, but the boy is far too young to be the Tobias from

the bible and Titian knew too well his Bible stories and he was far too intelligent a painter to have neglected checking on the story. Tobias should be a youth of marrying age. Titian painted Tobias as a boy of less than ten years old. So we can venture into assumptions.

Titian may have made the picture as the portrait of a boy of a member of the Bembo family, whose coat of arms is visible just below the scene. The subject of the picture then could have been a commission from loving parents for a portrait of their first born led by his guardian angel. The first name of the child may well have been Raphael, so that Titian might have depicted the boy with his patron angel. The angel in the picture could be a portrait of another son of the family, or even of a daughter. If the picture is a portrait, and we may safely assume at least that, then it might also have been a picture of a deceased child of the family. A parent might have sought solace in a picture in which an angel guides the boy to heaven. We might imagine a loving father seeing his wife in distress and mourning after the loss of her beloved son, offering her such a fine picture to comfort her, expressing his belief that the boy was brought to heaven and dwelled in the company of angels.

Seen in this perspective, the picture is charming and tender. Titian painted it lovingly. The colours are warm, ochre browns with red and yellow shades, and broken white. Titian worked out marvellous details of chiaroscuro in the tunic and robes of Tobias and the angel and we can remark that the master-painter added more fine folds than he really needed to, in a kind of honouring for the family and commissioner. The two figures wear the same dress, showing the empathy between the two personages. Also the expressions on the faces of Tobias and of the angel are nice. Tobias looks with confidence to the angel, like to a parent who has only done nice things to him so far. Raphael keeps Tobias protectively by the hand, and he looks tenderly at the boy, with sincere interest and care, and he seems to explain where they are going to, instead of just leading the boy without a word. The angel guides, but not in an authoritative way. Titian added a dog as a fine, intimate symbol of loyalty and trust. Finally, the painter showed a delicate landscape in the background, painted in the same hues as those that build the overall mood of the painting. The landscape seems only to have been brought on in a sketchy way, but the landscape should not retain our attention, just the figures. The trees for instance are however finely detailed. Titian apparently worked with assiduity, intently on the painting and that may be not just because it was a commission for a great and noble family of Italy but because he might have been touched by the subject, maybe by the parents' grief. If the assumptions we made are true, the fine quality of Titian's work also shows something of his character. He was moved by the subject and definitely brought some comfort also to the family by the zeal and dedication with which he honoured the child in his picture.

### **Tobias and the Angel**

Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo (ca. 1480-after 1548). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1540.

Girolamo Savoldo also made a painting of the theme of Tobias and the angel. He was born in Brescia, and hence also called Girolamo da Brescia. He seems to have first worked in Parma and Florence. Later, by 1520, he was in Venice and lived there until

his death. Little is known of him, and he made but few pictures. He painted portraits and religious themes. Savoldo's 'Tobias and the Angel' was originally thought to have been painted by Titian, probably because it was of such good quality. Savoldo may have seen Titian's painting of the same subject and have been inspired by it. If the date of Savoldo's picture is around 1540<sup>140</sup>, then Titian's picture must date from before that period. Savoldo looked well at Titian's work and improved on it in certain aspects. When Titian's painting is an expression of Titian's empathy for his figures, Savoldo made a very professional, sophisticated picture of his 'Tobias and the Angel'.

The two paintings, from Titian and from Savoldo, are very similar and also very different. They express the same mood, use the same soft colours, are of course both splendid but intimate, and differ mainly in composition. Savoldo's picture has stronger structure. Savoldo used the left diagonal. He made Tobias kneel to be lower than the angel and he created thus a feeling of exaltation of the mind since the viewer's eyes and attention will rise from Tobias upwards to the angel. Even if the viewer starts first at the angel, the viewer will come back from Tobias to the angel and Raphael stands higher up.

The quality of Savoldo's depiction of the dress of Tobias and of the angel is practically as good as in Titian's painting. Savoldo also had a wide palette of hues and he varied the hues in tone and intensity. His chiaroscuro is as detailed as Titian's. Savoldo showed a landscape that is finer and even better situated in the composition than in Titian's work. Thus, Savoldo opened up a panorama above Tobias, which could be a nice reference to the far journey made by the two travellers. The light from the open landscape on the left falls pleasingly on the two figures, but Savoldo could have exploited effects of light and shadow a little more, as he did in other paintings.

Like Titian, Savoldo let his angel point. Savoldo made the angel point at Tobias however, so that the figures are more closely linked to each other in the scene and that adds to the strength of the depiction. Savoldo painted Tobias really as a youth, not as a very young boy, old enough to go on a dangerous journey alone and in that aspect Savoldo stayed closer to the Bible story. Like Titian, he drew a dog but Savoldo's dog is on the other side and all curled up and asleep. Remark also how Savoldo painted the dress of Raphael and of Tobias similarly to Titian's picture. But whereas Titian used the same sequence of colours on his figures, Savoldo inverted them to bring more variation. Titian's Tobias holds a fish like a small boy would hold a toy for a journey; Savoldo's fish is still in the water but ready to be scooped up, which brings an element of dynamic in the picture. Savoldo, like Titian, painted the angel of rather undetermined sex. This was habit in the Late Middle Ages and in the Renaissance period. We may almost surely assume that Savoldo saw Titian's work and inspired by it, improved on its composition, delicacy of the landscape, and he stayed true to the Bible story. But Savoldo's painting does not equal Titian's in its empathic warmth, compassion and appeal to the feelings of the viewer. Any viewer will be moved by the gentle sensibility of Titian's image, whereas Savoldo made a picture of a scene from the Bible expertly but without being involved in emotions. Savoldo used lighter hues therefore, and more intense hues, which contrast more and are a little less warm than in Titian's painting. This adds to making of Savoldo's picture a cooler painting.

Girolamo Savoldo's painting is of high quality and was certainly worthy of the Borghese gallery, Rome's jewel by excellence of ancient art. In that palace sweet

feelings, as Titian expressed, were more out of place and Savoldo's professionalism just sophisticated enough and cool enough.

### *The Journey of Tobias and the Angel*

On the road to Media Tobias and the angel camped by the River Tigris. Tobias went to wash his feet, when a great fish leapt out of the water and tried to swallow his foot. The angel said to catch the fish. The boy mastered the fish and pulled it onto the bank. The angel then told to cut the fish open and take out the gall, heart and liver for these had curative properties. He said that when the fish's heart and liver were burnt, their smoke could be used on a man or woman plagued by an evil spirit. Such a demon would leave for good. The gall could be used as an ointment for anyone with white spots on his eyes. After using it one only had to blow on the spots to cure them.

When they entered Media, the angel Raphael spoke to Tobias. The angel said that in Media lived a man called Raquel, who was a kinsman of Tobit. The angel said that Raquel had a daughter called Sarah who belonged to Tobias before anyone else and that Tobias could claim her father's inheritance. The angel told that Sarah was thoughtful, courageous and very lovely and that her father loved her dearly. The angel proposed Tobias to marry her. She could not be betrothed to anyone else; that would be asking for death, as prescribed in the Book of Moses. Tobias had heard about the seven previous husbands and about the demon but the angel told him not to worry about that. Tobias could burn the heart and liver of the fish, burn it in the burning incense. The reek would rise and the demon would flee. The angel continued so much to praise Sarah, that Tobias fell in love with her and he understood that Sarah was his sister, a kinswoman of his father's family.

Tobias and the man called Azarias arrived at Ecbatana and went to the house of Raquel, who was married to Edna. Tobias explained that he was Tobit's son and since Raquel knew Tobit, Raquel killed a ram from the flock and gave a warm welcome to Tobias and Azarias. They washed, bathed and when they sat down, Tobias asked for the hand of Sarah. Raquel told that he could not refuse since she was given to Tobias by the prescription of the Book of Moses since Tobias was her next of kin. He therefore entrusted his daughter to Tobias. He drew up the marriage contract and gave his daughter as bride to Tobias. Then they began to eat and when that was finished, it seemed time to go to bed. Tobias was taken to the bedroom. He put some of the fish's heart and liver on the burning incense and the reek of the fish distressed the demon; who fled through the air to Egypt. Raphael pursued him there and strangled him.

Raquel had already prepared a grave for Tobias but in the morning he was astonished to see Tobias still alive and asleep next to Sarah. He then gave to Tobias half of everything he had, gave his daughter to Tobias to take her with him and promised the other half of his possessions to Tobias after his death.

Then Tobias turned to Azarias and asked him to go to Gabael in Rhages with four servants and two camels to get the silver left by his father. He told Raphael to invite Gabael to the wedding feast at Ecbatana. Raphael went to Gabael and Gabael gave all the sacks of silver to Raphael with the seals intact. Gabael came to the wedding feast and he blessed Tobias.

The feasting lasted fourteen days. Tobit and his wife Anna were very worried over Tobias since they saw him not return. They even thought that Tobias might be dead. Tobias suspected the worry of his parents. So after the feast, Tobias bade his leave of Raquel, took Sarah, and left to return to his father.

### **Landscape with the young Tobias**

Jan Brueghel I (1568-1625). Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein. Vaduz. 1598.

Jan Brueghel's 'Landscape with the young Tobias' could not be missed in a series of paintings on the Book of Tobit because it is such an extraordinary painting of very special, fine qualities. It is only a small painting, of merely 26.5 by 35 centimetres but it contains unbelievable detail. Such a painting could only be made on copper. Copper is a fine medium for pictures of great detail. Painting on copper started well into the middle of the sixteenth century in Italy. Sebastiano del Piombo, Giorgio Vasari, Agnolo Bronzino and Alessandro Allori all worked on copper plates. The art was well in use at the court of the German Emperor Rudolph II in Prague, where painters such as Hans von Aachen, Bartholomeus Spranger and Joseph Heinz I painted towards the end of the century on this medium. Somewhat later, Joachim Wtewael of Utrecht painted mythological and erotic scenes on copper in Holland. The Flemish painter Paul Bril and the German Hans Rottenhammer worked often together on copper plates, even when the first was in Rome and the second in Venice. Another German, Adam Elsheimer also painted religious scenes among which his 'Stoning of Saint Stephen' is probably the best known. Jan Brueghel I of course worked much on copper and he was in Rome from 1592 to 1594, where he worked together with Paul Bril. Copper was also much appreciated for still-lives of flowers. Roelandt Savery worked thus in Prague and Ambrosius Bosschaert I in Middelburg of Holland, all around the turn of the sixteenth century. Many other painters of the early seventeenth century in Flanders and Holland used the medium, among whom even for one panel the great Rembrandt van Rijn. In this century then also Carlo Saraceni and Guercino worked on copper in Rome and also even Domenichino. But at the end of the seventeenth century the use of this wonderful medium declined rapidly, probably because larger canvases were preferred then by commissioners, whereas it was difficult to obtain large copper plates.

A copper plate is very even and although painter brought an intermediary layer of paint and oil on the metal, often using lead whites, the layers could be very thin so that the paint of the final picture could also be brought in thin layers and in a very fluid manner. The optic properties of the copper then did the rest, making pictures resplendent in colours and brightness. Even the tiniest brushstrokes stuck well and immediately, and the paint remained very bright and visible in each hair-thin stroke. Thus Jan Brueghel could reach such fine detail with few and small brushstrokes. He painted in the 'Landscape with the young Tobias' many figures on just a few millimetres of the copper plate. His landscape is one of the finest pictures made on this medium.



Jan Brueghel's aim was twofold. He painted not only a wonderful landscape but also a procession of people gathering near a river. The two scenes are on either side of the right diagonal of the plate.

In the landscape scene Brueghel painted a river. We see on the right bank a wood, but also an opening in the wood and a few people walking in the grass. Boats bring people from one side of the river to the other. Swans and ducks are in the water there, painted microscopically small. The river disappears in the far, behind a Flemish high house. There the mountains begin to grow. Brueghel painted this part in a bright light. The light falls on the trees and the painter indicated this nicely by colouring the first leaves with yellowish colours among the overall green. The light also plays wonderfully on the water and Brueghel there used all shades of blue to white hues to show the glimmer of the sun on the river. The mountain landscape is imaginary. There are no mountains in Flanders. Brueghel applied also effects of light in the blue mountains, including white impressions of snow. He thereby followed a general feeling that mountains in the distance looked blue; but Brueghel painted them in very light hues, hues that contrast harmoniously with the yellow shimmers of the sun on the trees. The tone of the colours in this part of the picture is bright, soft and cool, to indicate the distance from the main scene, which Brueghel placed on the left side of the frame. His panoramic view is wide and deep. He drew the trees so that they become smaller towards the centre of the frame, towards the point where the river vanishes; the river banks also converge to this point. He thus created a strong sense of perspective and he gave the viewer a feeling of very deep space. Brueghel situated the vanishing point at about the Golden Mean to the right of the length and down the height of the painting, so that the vanishing point is one of the Golden Points of the frame. Brueghel knew all about how to create powerful impressions of space in a viewer through the medium of painting.

The sun stands high in the sky and it is so bright that Brueghel only painted its dazzling white light that gloriously brightens and enlivens the right part of the picture. We remark here also the brilliant palette in colours and colour transitions of the sun, the sky and the clouds. Brueghel again here emphasised the vastness of space by picturing a few birds, in such different positions of flight, that the impression of movement we have of these small animals so high in the sky is just marvellous. The birds also evoke in the spectator further feelings of the vastness of the cosmos higher up, like the river and the trees evoke the depth of the landscape. We are quite used now to such views, and we know quite well the illusions that paintings can give of space, but such wideness in pictures had not yet been conquered in Italy in the beginning of the seventeenth century so that Brueghel's intimate pictures of landscapes – as Paul Bril's – must have been much admired and seen as wonders and novelties.

To the left is an extraordinary scene of people beside the river. Brueghel painted this scene under the right diagonal. He particularly stressed this diagonal for the trees from an outline, until they reach the top left corner of the frame. In this scene, which should lie in the shadows of the high trees, Brueghel used darker tones and colours of higher intensity than in the right part. His trees are of a more pronounced green here. But Brueghel also let the light play in yellow strokes on the myriad of leaves. The shades of green and yellow colour he used are extraordinary in variation and in brilliance of hues. Even here, amidst the trees, he showed a very bright opening in the forest, and in the light of the sun fowl and animals run peacefully in the warmth.

Colours are darker under the trees and on the extreme left side. A crowd has gathered there. This might be a market place because we see a flock of pigs to the left, guarded by a farmer and his dogs. But they are more surprised by the sudden crowd than having come to this place, so Brueghel showed them disappearing towards the left side of the frame. A great variety of people and also animals, dogs and horses, walk about. All people are caught in lively movement. They chat, show each other things of nature, point to the landscape features, greet each other, and walk up to the river. There are men, women and children dressed like farmers, like city dwellers, but most like noblemen.

In the front lower middle for instance, we see a noble woman of a court dressed in a splendid golden robe. She may be accompanied by her sisters, maidservants and her mother. A man behind her points to a small scene to the right side of the picture. And there we see the young Tobias catching a fish in the water with his bare hands. Here also stands, very tiny, the archangel Raphael. In the story of Tobias the archangel has not the appearance of an angel but Jan Brueghel showed him anyhow so in the imaginary scene. We have here not a natural scene but an image of the old, magical Bible story. Brueghel positioned the golden, though small area of the woman in a very conspicuous place of the picture. The golden-yellow dress is also the most striking colour of the picture so that the spectator's gaze is rapidly drawn to this place. And then of course, the eyes of the viewer follow the pointing arm of the lady's suitor, to the scene of the fishing Tobias. Brueghel thus also had learnt how to lead the view of spectators where he wanted them to look.

With the group of people on the left bank of the river, Brueghel painted a scene that follows the right diagonal. He painted tens of people, in a lively crowd. The people have come to the river to cross it. The people are elegantly dressed, having come seemingly for no other reason but to be together, to look at nature on a fine, sunny day and to make a boat trip to the other side of the river. The boats are filled with people and on the right bank we see other people, cheerfully welcoming the boats. If the left part of the painting represents the departing from earthly life, the crowd may have gathered on the left to travel the river of life from out of the shadows into the ethereal light of spiritual life on the right part. The river then becomes a phase to pass, like the souls have to pass rivers of Hades in ancient mythology to find peace and light. A dead tree trunk in the lower middle of the picture also indicates this idea. The trunk stands in the left part of the picture, dead and abandoned, with the people, very angular and very strangely protruding in the landscape. The trunk may represent dead life on that side of the river. Brueghel painted ironically a bird – a scavenger? – on top of the trunk, a bad omen.

What then has the scene still to do with Tobias? Tobias and the archangel Raphael fish at the beginning of the complete left part of the picture. The left part starts with Tobias and the angel; they are painted at the right lower corner. They may be the beginning of the whole movement of people, or souls, moving from terrestrial life in the shadows to the spiritual life in God in the lighter right side, like the bible is the beginning of religion and thus of Yahweh and Jesus leading believers to eternal life. This life is peaceful and bucolic, in perfect harmony with a bright nature.

For Brueghel of course, the theme of Tobias was just an occasion to paint a wonderful picture of a panoramic landscape and of a crowd of elegant people, in which he could show his painterly skills to impressive splendour. But the Flemish and Dutch painters of the beginning of the seventeenth century should not be taken too lightly. They painted for an erudite public of wealthy, educated men, for cardinals and noblemen, and often for men that possessed these three qualities at the same time. Such men demanded, and admired only, paintings that had more substance than being merely nice pictures. Painters like Jan Brueghel could only well succeed in this already truly international market is they showed their own intellect, profound knowledge of the Bible and its meanings, and packed a novel and surprising view subtly in wonderful colours, composition and wealth of fine detail. Jan Brueghel was one of the greatest masters of Antwerp in this, and so recognised from Brabant and Flanders to Italy.

### **Tobias fishing**

Gianantonio Guardi (1698-1760) and Francesco Guardi (1712-1793). Church of the Angel Raphael – Venice. Ca. 1750.

In the Chiesa dell' Angelo Raffaello, the church of the angel Raphael in Venice, is an eighteenth century Baroque organ that has its parapet decorated with seven painted panels with scenes from the Book of Tobit. The pictures were painted by two brothers. The master that received the commission was Gianantonio Guardi and his younger brother Francesco Guardi worked with him. The church dedicated to the angel Raphael is very old, perhaps dating from the seventh or eighth century but its present form dates from the seventeenth. It was fitting that in its interior were pictures from the stories of the Book of Tobit since the Archangel Raphael appears much as the hero of this narrative.

Gianantonio Guardi was born not in Venice but in Vienna, the capital of Austria. His father, Domenico Guardi (1678-1716) probably originated from the Veneto region, but he had moved to Vienna. He married there and returned to Venice around 1700. Although Giovanni Antonio was thus born in Vienna, Francesco was baptised in Venice. Just after Domenico's return to Venice also a daughter was born and christened Cecilia. She later married Giambattista Tiepolo and with that painter the Guardi's were among the main masters of Venice's eighteenth century art of painting. When Francesco died in 1793, his son Giacomo Guardi (1764-1835) inherited the Guardi workshop in Venice and he continued to honour the name of Guardi in Venetian painting.

Little is known of Gianantonio's life even though he has left over a hundred paintings. He was probably the student of his father. He painted for count Johann Matthias von der Schulenburg from 1730 to 1746 and he was also a well known portrait painter in Venice.

Francesco Guardi studied with his brother. His early work happened in the studio of his brother and he only became really known from the 1760's on, with his views of Venice, his particular veduti. He became one of the most celebrated artists and painters of Venetian views of the eighteenth century. Francesco married a female painter in 1757, Maria Mathea Pagani (1726-1769) but he never had the success that Canaletto (1697-1768), the other prolific painter of Venetian landscapes, had before

him. After his father's death, Gianantonio may have worked for a while with another famous Venetian painter, Giambattista Pittoni (1687-1767). Another great Venetian veduti painter was Bernardo Belotto (1720-1780). Francesco Guardi was the last of the great Venetian veduti painters. Four years after Francesco Guardi's death, Napoleon Buonaparte took Venice by arms and ended its republic.

The scenes from the Book of Tobit in the church of the Angelo Raffaele are remarkable because they are so different from other styles of painting. We cannot however speak of a revolution in the art occasioned by the Guardi brothers, because the brothers were not followed in their way of painting. Gianantonio probably invented the new style and Francesco continued it, but then only in a softened and less radical way. Still, the reason why Francesco had relatively little success with his views during his lifetime may be due to his particular and so innovative way of painting, to his particular style.

One of the finest panels of the organ is 'Tobias Fishing'. In this scene, Tobias sits on the bank of a small river. He is accompanied by the dog that came with him on his journey. The Archangel Raphael stands behind him and points at the fish that will have miraculous powers since with it Tobias would be able to drive away a demon from his future wife Sarah and to cure his blind father. To the left, in a smaller and subsidiary scene, Tobias and Raphael take out parts of the fish. The scenes are simple, nice and common. The interest of the painting is in its new technique of colouring, used for all the panels of the organ.

Gianantonio and Francesco Guardi used spiky brushstrokes, brushstrokes that placed needles of colour and short rays of coloured, sparkling light on the canvas. These give only an impression of the landscape, of the bushes, the tree trunks, the plants, rocks and building. We cannot see any detail of the faces of Tobias and Raphael, but in the scarce delicate areas of colours the viewer recognises intuitively, much more than by analysis, a face. The same technique was applied to the clothes of the two figures. The result is a stunning burst of colours.

The technique of the Guardi's on the organ of the Chiesa dell' Angelo Raffaello is not unlike the technique employed much, much later, in the beginning of the twentieth century, when two Russian painters, Natalia Gontcharova and Mikhail Larionov argued that since light is sent in rays, painter could depict these rays in thin shafts of colours. Their technique, called Rayonism, was visually far from what the Guardi's delivered but some of the same thoughts must lie at the basis of the style of 'Tobias Fishing'. Francesco Guardi did not continue to paint this way, so credit for the discovery and vision may well have to be given to the enigmatic Gianantonio, who is much less known now than his brother Francesco.

Gianantonio Guardi innovated in the handling of colours and in the technique of how it was brought down on the canvas, but he remained otherwise quite traditional and academic in depiction. That can be recognised in his composition and in the ways he built space in his scene. He painted a series of swamp bushes on the extreme right and indicated with darker colours as well as in size that these are closest to the viewer. He placed the scene of Raphael and Tobias neatly in the centre, but painted the two figures smaller and in brighter hues than the plants of the right. Then, to the left, he showed another scene of the two personages and the dog, smaller still and brighter

still, in which shapes are even more difficult to perceive. So the Guardi's devised three main spatial planes. In the composition, the left scene balances the darker plants of the right. And balance is also honoured in heights because from the left to the right Gianantonio painted a high tree trunk and the extravagant flow of Raphael's white wing, followed by a high light-green bush and then again the darker plants of the extreme right. Finally, the painters also showed clear but not overly strong aerial perspective in the river and more so in the sky. So, although there are no fleeing hard lines of perspective of architecture or roads, the Guardi's evoked in the views by means we might call purely organic, strong and deep sense of space in the spectator. The darker colours of the right moreover had to find some balance also on the left, so we see the darker ochre hues and dark greens also on the lower left. Since here the dark tones are lower in the frame, a hint of diagonal movement of view is created from this lower left corner over Tobias to the upper right.

'Tobias Fishing' is a sparkling painting and so are the other panels of the life of Tobit and Tobias on the organ of the Angelo Raffaele church in Venice. The new visual expression suited well the new concepts of decoration of the early eighteenth century, the Rococo style. In Rococo, decoration had to be brilliant, bright, light, delightful, inspiring and elevating in vision, very striking in contrasting hues, extravagant in scenes and in added profusion of smaller decorative elements. Gianantonio's style epitomises Rococo even though his scenes are more intimate than grand.

One must reflect on what might have happened if painters had really taken on fully Gianantonio's style, taken the new technique serious and developed the style, using it as a point of departure for further experimentation. Then one might have had a much earlier emphasis on the impression of a scene than on its details of narrative, much earlier emphasis on the expressive qualities of colour and new insights into how colour could be used on its own to denote emotions, without the confinement of the line. As it happened, Gianantonio became not famous enough to impose his style; it came too soon. Francesco diluted the representation that was probably discovered by his brother, introducing closer detail and abandoning the sparkling rays. The great brother-in-law of the Guardi's, Giambattista Tiepolo, occasionally also could use Gianantonio's style, but he chose to paint still in his own way, which offered a blend of detailed decoration in places and more purely vision, colour –oriented areas in other places. Gianantonio's style thus did not become a revolutionary innovation. Picturesque detail was asked by the society of Venice and its wealthy commissioners, not the light-bursts of Gianantonio. His style was an innovation, but it built on the ways some painters of Venice had used before him, such as Johann Liss (1595-1630) and Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734) and even Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (1675-1741). We also sense some of the style in the pictures – the capriccio's - of a painter that was Gianantonio's contemporary, Marco Ricci (1676-1730). Marco Ricci also was inspired by the story of Tobias and made paintings on the subject. Gianantonio Guardi really innovated the art of painting to a new extreme but his magnificent style remained personal. It sparkled briefly but disappeared as rapidly as it had come. The cycle of Tobias remained an isolated phenomenon of ideas on painting that would have to mature a hundred years more.

### **The Bridal Room of Tobias and Sarah**

Jan Havickszoon Steen (1625/1626 – 1679). Centraal Museum. Utrecht. Ca. 1661-1662.

### **The Archangel Raphael enchains the bad Spirit Asmodeus**

Jan Havickszoon Steen (1625/1626-1679). Museum Bredius. The Hague. Ca. 1661-1662.

Jan Steen was born in the Dutch town of Leiden. He was the son of a brewer, Havick Steen, and very soon he learned to paint with various masters: with Nicolaus Knüpfer in Utrecht, Adriaen van Ostade in Haarlem, finally with Jan van Goyen in The Hague. He became a member of the Guild of Painters of Leiden in 1648. In 1649 he married van Goyen's daughter. He had seven or eight children with Jan van Goyen's daughter. He moved to Delft in 1654, took over a brewery but failed in that business and returned to Leiden in 1656. From 1661 until 1670 he stayed in Haarlem, and then moved to Leiden again where he also sought a license to run a tavern in 1672. His first wife died in 1669, but Jan Steen re-married with a woman called Maria van Egmont and he had two more children. Steen painted then and before to pay the debts of his tavern. He died in his home town of Leiden in 1679, in heavy debt.

Jan Steen epitomises the painting of Dutch genre scenes. He knew breweries and taverns very well, loved their open, generous, cantankerous and humorous atmospheres and he brought these over in many of his pictures. But Steen also had a good talent for finer painting and he is known for excellent portraits, mythological scenes and he painted also on religious themes. He was a master story-teller in pictures, pointing out weak but gentle and humorous sides of Dutch society. Jan Steen was born a Catholic and stayed Catholic in a society dominated by Protestantism.

The two panels we present, one from the Bredius Museum of The Hague and one that is now in Utrecht, were once parts of one and the same painting. The original picture was cut or sawed in two and the right part with the angel Raphael was further cut down in its height. The total scene well documented a theme from the Book of Tobit. In the left part, Tobias and Sarah kneel in prayer before the bed of their bridal chamber, while in the right panel the archangel Raphael burns heart and liver of the fish that Tobias caught to drive out the bad spirit Asmodeus. Asmodeus has become visible already in the form of a small but hideous dragon, and Raphael binds the bad spirit in chains. Soon Raphael will drive the beast away to Egypt.

Jan Steen added a few details. He showed flowers strewn over the nuptial bed, naked putti flying and playing. The dog that accompanied Tobias and Raphael sleeps curled up before the bed. Raphael has set aside his traveller's cane and his broad pilgrim's hat, and he is armed since we see a sword hanging at his side. All this is nicely painted, with well-formed figures and smooth colouring. The painter worked with harmonious colours and he gave much attention to the expression of the faces of the figures. Sarah opens her arms in ecstasy. She seems to look at the vision of angels above her bed, which must have been quite another view than with her previous husbands in a room possessed by the devil. Tobias is the fine young man with an earnest and somewhat naïve look. Raphael then is determined and hard at work, intently to enchain the dragon in a corner of the room. We do not have to look for

much refinement in composition in this work. Jan Steen simply painted the scenes next to each other.

The painting is a good and typical example of a scene from the Bible used by a Dutch genre painter to tell a story that has erotic undertones and that contains at the same time a moral lesson for its viewers. The scene is a bed scene. Soon the girl and the young man will go to bed. They pray, but Sarah is already in the ecstasy of her night. She looks at the marvels of putti above the bed. They are the symbols of the joy and happiness she expects of marriage. Of course, the young man has no such idealistic visions. He prays because Sarah has ordered him to do so, but since he is a sweet travelling boy he has acquiesced easily and hence kneels next to his future wife. The ecstasy of Sarah is not really his. Raphael enchains the dragon, and Jan Steen symbolises with the beast the danger of Sarah's and Tobias' passion, which will be unbridled soon. Thus marriage may bring elation and happiness, or indulgence in sex and heated passion. It is not for nothing that Steen showed the fire under the bad spirit and he shows Raphael enchaining the dragon, as he would urge bride and groom to enchain their passions. Jan Steen knew the passion of the nuptial bed all too well, since he had at least ten children. So the story of Tobias and Raquel was used and diverted by Jan Steen to once more one of his moralising genre scenes. Such bed themes were as popular in the Netherlands as tavern or brothel scenes and for the severe Dutch Protestants the picture had all the more dangerous but certain appeal since it was made by a dissolute Catholic who also exploited a tavern and who was known for painting pictures of dubious content. But Jan Steen must have amused himself a lot with such pictures, and he was a fine painter who could make these panels rapidly.

*Tobit healed*

When Tobias and Raphael were near Kaserin, opposite Nineveh, Raphael proposed for him and Tobias to go ahead of Sarah. Raphael warned Tobias to take the gall of the fish and the dog followed them. Tobias met his mother and father. He applied the fish's gall on the eyes of his father, and blew into his eyes. He applied the medicine, pulled away a thin skin from the corners of his father's eyes with both hands and Tobit was blind no more. All prayed then to the glory of God.

Tobias now told his father everything that had happened on his way to Media and also of his wedding to Sarah. Then Tobit set off to the gates of Nineveh to meet his daughter-in-law and all the people of Nineveh who saw him walking so briskly were astonished. That day there was a great joy in Nineveh and Tobit ordered another wedding feast.

When the wedding feast was over, Tobit told Tobias to pay his companion. But Tobias wondered how he would ever be able to pay back to Azarias all the good his companion had given him. Azarias had brought Tobias back safe, cured his wife, brought the money back, and also cured his father. So Tobias told Azarias to take half of all he had brought back in payment.

Then Azarias revealed himself and told all the good that Tobit had done, like burying the murdered men, and that this had been tests of God. He said he was Raphael, one of the seven angels that stood ever ready to enter the presence of the glory of God. Tobit and Tobias were overwhelmed with awe and they fell on their faces in terror. But the angel told them to not be afraid and to bless God with him. Then all praised God with hymns and thanked him for the wonders he had performed through his angel.

**The young Tobias gives back Sight to his Father**

Jan Sanders van Hemessen (1500-1567). Musée du Louvre – Paris.

Jan Sanders van Hemessen was born near Antwerp in Brabant, in a village now called Hemiksem – hence his name. Very little is known of his early life, but he was made a master painter by the Antwerp Saint Lukas Guild in 1524. Around 1550 he moved from Brabant to Holland in the Netherlands, to the town of Haarlem. He painted mainly scenes from the Bible, religious scenes, but also genre scenes of proverbs and Dutch intimate life. He had a good sense of humour and his paintings are among the first true genre pictures for which Dutch painting became so famous. Jan Sanders had a talented daughter, Catharina von Hemessen, born in Antwerp, and one of the early and best known female painters of Brabant. He taught her in his workshop and she



may have become even more famous than her father. She married a musician, Chrétien de Morien and they were both even invited by the Governess of the Netherlands to work at the court of Madrid.

In 'Tobias gives back Sight to his Father', Jan van Hemessen depicts the moment at which the young Tobias and his companion, the Archangel Raphael, return from their journey to Media. Tobias brings the gall of the fish that can cure blindness. The angel pointed out the fish to Tobias, and the boy caught it on his journey. Tobias put the gall on a plate and applies some of it the eyes of his father.

Tobias' mother and his future wife, Sarah, are looking at what happens. It is in this last scene that we recognise the touché of Dutch genre painting in Hemessen's presentation. Tobias' mother is a very old woman with a white cap on her head, and Sarah a nice country girl with rather plain features. They look intently, with much curiosity at what happens to Tobit, in expectancy of a miracle. This kind of curiosity, so obvious in the faces of the females, and the direct implication of the bystanders is a recurring image of Dutch genre scenes.

Jan Sanders van Hemessen showed the psychologies of the figures in the scene. We see the poor Tobit, helpless, dressed in long robes, crossing his arms in protection and in devote believing. His wife has to keep his head inclined for Tobias to well be able to bring his fingers and the gall to Tobit. Also Sarah seems to hold and support her future father-in-law. Tobias is not anymore the young, inexperienced youth that started naively, unaware of dangers on the long journey. Tobias has become a hardened lad, adult now. Van Hemessen painted him with strong legs and sinewy muscles gained on the road. Tobias has a sun-burnt face that is not weak but resolute now, with fine and somewhat angular features. At the beginning of the journey Tobias might have been a young boy with round, full features. The boy has toughened into a fine young man and it is with a determined poise, confident in the powers of the fish, that he stands before his father.

Van Hemessen painted the Archangel in a strange way. Raphael accompanied Tobias, but during the journey he was the leader, the more mature companion that advised Tobias all along and on all he had to do: catch a fish that would cure his father, drive out a demon, find a beautiful girl to marry, regain his father's money. We would have expected to see a mature man, to see Azarias. Van Hemessen painted Raphael however like a boy or even a girl, younger than Tobias. Of course, Raphael is an angel and angels had to be depicted like ordinary people expected angels to look like in van Hemessen's times, so Raphael is a youth. Raphael has the arms of a man, but the finely-shaped legs of a woman and a face that could be either male or female. On the road, Azarias was a man, but the angel of the Bible story could be interpreted as being an asexual angel, only appearing like a man to Tobias. There is thus some irony in the way van Hemessen depicted the angel.

The angel, young as he or she is, pushes Tobias forward. Tobias might still have had doubts about the curing powers of the gall. Raphael holds his walking staff right behind Tobias and seems to use it as a lever to push Tobias forward. Van Hemessen thus points out that although Tobias is an adult young man, he still remained much the naïve young boy that indeed needed to be driven forward and led by the angel. This kind of narrative and showing of the weaknesses of the characters of the figures in a

humorous way, which makes viewers slightly smile before the picture, was very much the mark of Dutch genre painters. Although van Hemessen brought some irony in the right hand scene and some humorous curiosity on the left, these feelings remain subtly represented in the depiction of an otherwise solemn moment. Tobias cures his father and performs a miracle that will change in the happy sense again the life of the family.

Despite the irony and the humour, van Hemessen also showed the earnestness of the Bible story. He introduced an element of monumentality in his picture. Van Hemessen painted Tobias, the angel and also to a lesser extent the other figures in a grand way. Tobias is so tall that he has to bend his head not to touch the upper border of the frame. The angel has to recline his back and lower his/her head to not do the same. Sarah is shown so high in the picture, that she also just touches the upper border. The figures are tall and fill the frame. The story of Tobias and Tobit is one of the most intimate, nice, smooth stories of the bible, intimate, filled with sensibility, consisting of gentle small events that happen to individuals. There is no epic breath in the story of Tobit and Tobias. It is just a nice narrative of incredible but small events in the lives of a few personages that are neither kings nor priests of Israel. Tobias and Tobit are ordinary Jews, strangers in a foreign land but living there happily and well. The story has no effect on the lives of the Jews overall. It is not a story that changes the course of history. Its religious content and its religious messages are scant. It is almost a story to be told at the bedside of children to make them have nice dreams and fall asleep with a happy face. Van Hemessen knew this of course. The Book of Tobit is the most truly genre text of the bible; so it was ideal for a genre painting. Yet, instead of emphasising the genre, intimate aspect or even simply showing the humility of the figures, van Hemessen depicted Tobias and also Tobit as if they were important heroes of the Bible. Tobit and Tobias were no epic heroes. They were only simple, common people, to which a few strange and happy circumstances off ate happened, even if occasioned by an angel. Van Hemessen however seems to state that the small things of life, the small events, the small happiness, the little nice things that happen to common people are heroic, and very worth of painterly interest. That was also the whole program of the Dutch genre painters. In this message lies the essence and justification of Dutch genre painting, which is now considered the hallmark of a large part of Dutch seventeenth century painting. Van Hemessen expresses in his picture the feeling that the simple life is heroic and worth of honour and interest, even in a humble manner.

Van Hemessen painted his scene in rather harsh colours, in which furious red and deep blue dominate. He painted the skies without effects of aerial perspective. He placed Tobias and the angel before a blue and green far landscape, but the figures are so tall that the viewer receives no real feeling of deep space. All the attention of the viewer remains on the scene of Tobias and the angel. In his composition Van Hemessen did use the two diagonals. Under the right diagonal we find Tobit and the two women, whereas down below the legs of Tobias and of Raphael also follow the direction of the right diagonal. The left diagonal is somewhat indicated by the movement, backwards, of Raphael and his wings. The striking direction is however the vertical position of Tobias, so that the viewer looks first at this static visual area and on Tobias' noble face. The painting is quite dark, seen as if in a storm, but light falls nicely and almost full horizontally from the right side – in a quite unusual view – on Tobias' face and legs and on the angel's arm and face too. It lights up dramatically the old mother's cap. It would be a long time still for the Baroque period to discover

the power of light and dark contrasts, but this painter, Jan Sanders van Hemessen, painting around the middle of the sixteenth century, had discovered quite much already of this style.

### **The Archangel Raphael refuses the Gifts of Tobias**

Giovanni Bilivert (1576-1644). Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina – Florence. 1612.

Giovanni Bilivert made a picture of the moment at which Tobias thanks Azarias-Raphael for having helped him – led him – on his travel to Medina. The angel has protected Tobias, gained him a wife, allowed him to bring his father's fortune safely back home and found the way to cure his father. The angel helped Tobias to drive out a demon from Sarah's house and Raphael guided Tobias on his journey with such good advice that Tobias has grown up from a young boy to a man, ready to support his father in his old age. The travel was the journey to manhood and Tobias returned to his father's home capable to live his own life.

Little is known of Giovanni Bilivert or Biliverti, beyond that he worked in Florence for the Medici family of rulers. He was probably of Dutch origins, of the Bijlivert family of the town of Maastricht on the Meuse River. Other artists of that name came to Florence, among them a goldsmith who worked for the Medici and who is well known. Few paintings of Giovanni Bilivert still exist. He may have been a student of Ludovico Cardi called Cigoli (1559-1613). Bilivert worked for the Medici and several of his paintings remained in the Pitti palace of Florence, the later palace of the Medici.

Bilivert produced a painting for the court of the rulers of Florence. His figures are dressed in rich gowns and they have courteous gestures. Tobias kneels before the angel and also Tobit obviously speaks in polite and entreating words. Tobias even grasps the angel's cloak and he and his father beg in profusion their benevolent saviour to accept a part of the treasure that Tobias could bring back home from Medina. Tobias and Tobit plead, urge in the smoothest and most eloquent phrases, as their body language indicates.

Bilivert painted Tobit in nice blue colours, but of a warm hue. Tobias wears a wealthy robe, a yellow-orange courtly robe, and an ermine collar reserved to princes. Raphael is clad like a Roman soldier, in the traditional way of God's warrior angels, and not like the traveller Azarias. So Bilivert also showed Azarias in the shape of an angel, and in fact all paintings from the Book of Tobit depict thus Azarias. Yet, Tobias only saw the traveller Azarias until he begged his companion to accept the gifts. Raphael wears a white tunic, a pink robe, a purple cloak. In the background we see Anna and Sarah. Anna's head is covered, also as is usual in pictures of the story of Tobias. But Sarah is the noble and rich lady of Florence, with elaborate headdress and fine clothes of the latest fashion.

Tobit is not the wise but helpless man like other painters showed him. There could be no images of poor men at the court of the Medici. In Bilivert's picture Tobit is a

powerful mature man with thick black hair and thick black beard. Bilivert's Tobit has a heavy purse of money in his hand and he is not at all the frail lamenting Jew of Rembrandt but the string master of the palace. His son is a nice youth, dressed with a leather belt and ermine knots at his waist. Images like this were well suited for an old and well established court, which was now certainly more superficial than ever.

Giovanni Bilivert used a simple pyramidal structure for his painting. His image was close to portraiture and the pyramid structure was often used for this kind of pictures. The pyramid is in Raphael and Tobit and to broaden the base Bilivert made Tobit recline towards the angel and he made Tobias kneel somewhat to the side.

Tobit and Tobias were no people that lived at a court. They were Jews banished from their homeland and deported to a city of their enemies and masters. They must have had a hard life in a foreign country. Giovanni Bilivert merely made a nice, professional picture as many common painters could have made for a court and rich commissioner. He did not look beyond the surface of the visual depiction to the feelings of the real people as poignantly narrated and described in the Book of Tobit. The Medici appreciated still great talent; they recognised talent and rewarded it actively. But they were also now in need of many respectable pictures which were in the line of tradition, which conserved the courtly view and which they could use as decoration of their many halls without concern. Bilivert delivered to the Medici rulers a painting of a Bible story without particular message, simply a Bible scene always very acceptable on the wall of a reception room. The commissioners might have heard of the bible story and Bilivert certainly read the text, but the painter showed a scene of wealthy people so that the courtiers could recognise themselves in the picture without afterthought. Tobias hence displays many luxurious jewels, a long chain of pearls, and Tobit is ready to hand over a thick bag of money, of course from behind his back, uncertain, and maybe secretly hoping that the handing over of the money need not happen. A picture like Bilivert's 'Raphael refusing Tobias' gifts' was also a delicate hint that gifts could be made to the Medici duke for honours and help provided but that the Duke also knew what magnanimity meant.

The painting of Giovanni Bilivert must have pleased the court of Florence. It was a nice, smooth, polite, non-obtrusive picture with a small message, showing only innocent feelings and of course it was a scene of wealthy people that lived in splendour and profusion. Pictures like this could be produced rapidly and easily. Of course, the narrative in pictures like this, professionally nice as they were, did not go deep.

### **The Archangel Raphael leaves the Family of Tobias**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1637.

Rembrandt made the 'Archangel Raphael leaves the Family of Tobias' in 1637. He was then thirty-one years old, and established since a few years in Amsterdam – since 1631. He had happily married in 1634 Saskia van Uylenburgh, the daughter of a well-to-do arts dealer. He had started a business as an art-dealer himself in 1636 and he had

assembled all kinds of exotic rarities, a collection of the most diverse objects. The only sad event that happened to him was the death at the end of 1635 of his first son Rumbertus, who died a few months after his birth. Rembrandt was already a very accomplished and even admired painter; he had a workshop and students. His wife had money of her own and a bright future could be expected. Rembrandt's picture of Tobias and the Archangel prophesied more tragic occurrences of the painter's life. The angel would leave Rembrandt's family. Rembrandt's wife would die young. He would go bankrupt and even declared unfit to manage any business of his own. The only constant was his art and that stayed with him until his death. By then he was a broken man.

We see in 'The Archangel leaves Tobias' Family' a double scene. The viewer perceives first the angel because Rembrandt painted him in full light. The angel glows with light and as he breaks the clouds, the sun or a heavenly light falls on the angel. Rembrandt applied a double light. The angel breaks through the heavy clouds towards the light, but light also falls from the upper left on the angel. Raphael flies with spread wings, but he has already departed and we see only his back. Rembrandt did not paint the departing itself, but the moment at which sadness sets in, just after the leaving.

Beneath the angel is Tobias' family. Tobit has been cured of his blindness so that he bows and kneels deep in gratitude. He prays and holds his folded hands to the earth. No man has ever been shown in such a humble attitude and Rembrandt made this a very emotional scene for the old man. Tobit is a beaten old man. He has a long neck and face, a long beard and in the way he holds his head, in acceptance of fate, we see a person destroyed by that fate. Yet, this is for Tobit also a happy moment because his son has returned safe and well, with all his money, and with a beautiful and rich wife of his own kin. What more could he wish. Still, sometimes after the worries and the fear of bad things that can happen, after the sad events of one's life, the catharsis of the end of bad times really break a man into tears, when courage is not necessary anymore. The shock of sudden happiness then weighs heavily on a man, as once they would on Rembrandt when he could find peace after many troubles and when he was cared for by his mistress and his son. The scene also shows how well Rembrandt read the Bible, since the story tells that Tobit and Tobias were overwhelmed with awe when the angel revealed himself, so that they fell on their faces in terror

Tobias also holds his hands in prayer. But he is young and naïve, open to the life of prosperity and happiness that opens for him. He dares to look upwards, to the miracle of his companion turned into a mighty angel of God and it seems he still has not yet well understood what has happened to him. Will he now be a grown-up man and not anymore the young boy that his father sent out?

Behind Tobias and Tobit stand the two women of the family, Tobias' mother and his future wife Sarah. The women stand behind the men, since the Bible is a man's epic. The main stories of the Bible, with the exception of very few, are events that happened to men. Men are the primary heroes in the Bible, or the ones on whom fate decides. Women are mostly spectators. So here also they have second role. Yet, when the men are in ecstatic emotion, the women are stronger, and so is especially Tobias' mother. Some of the strongest characters of the Bible are characters of women. Tobias' mother towers over her husband and son. She is the real anchor of the picture. It is to her that the departing angel sends his last look. The angel knows what women

endure when their husbands go blind and their inexperienced sons are sent on a long, dangerous journey. The angel has come to help Tobit, but more so Tobias' mother.

Rembrandt often used only very few colours and he liked the brown ochres modulated with magnificent lead-whites. The 'Archangel Raphael leaves Tobias' Family' is also such a typical Rembrandt picture. We see only the ochre colours finely tuned to the varying shades of light in the picture. The Italian way of depicting strong contrasts of light and dark had found its way north to Amsterdam, and no Dutch or Flemish painter but Rembrandt had found the style so appropriate to his own character and vision of expression. Rembrandt's pictures often look like sudden views, come at night to a devote believer in the mystic images of the Bible scenes. Rembrandt even painted a dark, undecorated background behind Tobias' family so that he needed only to use a few lighter tones of brown to show the personages. The light effects of the white robe of the departing angel are marvellous. Rembrandt used the two diagonals in his composition. The lighter areas of the face of Tobit, Tobias and of the angel are along the left diagonal. Under the right diagonal is the entire scene of Tobias' family. Rembrandt balanced efficiently the darker zone of the left, of Tobias' family, a larger zone, with the smaller but brighter zone in the upper right, the departing angel Raphael.

Rembrandt's scenes are often static, but the word 'static' is not good enough to characterise his scenes by. We had better speak of 'stasis', his scenes fixing personages in the spur of the moment but in such a way that the timeliness of the scene is the general impression evoked inconspicuously in viewers. Rembrandt often presents his figures in movement, but as no other painter he could make the viewer forget the movement of the figures and show a picture that is remarkably at rest. His pictures express the immobility of the idea itself that lies at the basis of a scene. Rembrandt's picture of the Archangel Raphael and Tobias' family is not typical in this respect. The flying angel brings an element of dynamic in the picture, such as Rembrandt rarely used. We may call this element typically Baroque and Rembrandt may have experimented a little with movement – to later discard the style element. The lower part of the painting is static however and Rembrandt contrasted this quietness with the energy of the angel flying into the clouds.

The viewer remains at a distance of Rembrandt's painting. Rembrandt showed the figures in full, so that the viewer can contemplate the whole scene as if he or she were reading the story from the Bible. Rembrandt painted many scenes from the bible and some of them are among his greatest works. The 'Archangel Raphael leaves Tobias' Family' is also such a work of great qualities in composition, treatment of colour and depiction of the action.

*Tobit's Death*

Tobit died when he was a hundred and twelve years old. He was buried in Nineveh. Before he died he urged his son to go to Media with all his family and possessions because he believed Nineveh and Nahum of Assyria and Babylon would be destroyed. A census would be taken of the Jews living in Israel and the Jews would be exiled. Israel, Samaria and Jerusalem would become a desert. The Temple would be laid waste and burnt. Afterwards the people would come back and rebuild the Temple, but that was long off. When his mother died, Tobias buried her next to his father. Then he left for Media with his wife and children to live in Ecbatana with Raquel, his father-in-law. He inherited from Raquel when his father-in-law died.

Tobias saw the ruin of Nineveh. The town was destroyed and its people deported by Cyaxares, king of Media, as Tobit had predicted.

*Other paintings:*

**Tobias and the Angel.** Andrea del Verrochio (1435-1488). ). The National Gallery – London.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Karel Dujardin (1622-1678). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Pieter Pietersz Lastman (1583-1633). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.

**Landscape with Tobias and the Angel.** Paul Bril (1554-1626). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Matthias Stom (c.1600-c.1650). Museum Bredius – The Hague.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Sir Peter Francis Bourgeois (1756-1811). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**Landscape with Tobias and the Angel.** Marco Ricci (1676-1730). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca. 1715.

**Landscape with Tobias and the Angel.** Salvator Rosa (1615-1676). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1670.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Francesco Maffei (1600-1638). Church of SS. Apostoli – Venice.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Giuseppe Zais (1709-1781). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Pier Francesco Foschi (1502-1567). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1545.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Raffaellino Motta called Raffaellino da Reggio (1550-1578). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1570s.

**Tobias and the Angel.** Lorenzo de Ferrari (1680-1744). Palazzo Bianco. Genua. Ca. 1715.

**Landscape with Tobias and the Angel.** Eglon Hendrik van der Neer (1634-1703). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**Tobias and the Archangel Raphael.** Antonio Pollaiuolo (1431-1498) and Piero Pollaiuolo (1441-1496). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1470.

**Tobias with the three Archangels (Michael, Raphael, Gabriel).** Filippino Lippi (1457-1504). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

**Tobit's Wife and the Kid.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1645.

**The Marriage of Tobias and Sarah.** Nicolas Knüpfer (1603-1655). Centraal museum. Utrecht. 1654.

**Tobias and Sarah.** Pieter Lastman (1583-1633). Museum of Fine Arts. Boston.

**The Marriage of Tobias and Sarah.** Jan Steen (1626-1676). Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Gemäldegalerie. Braunschweig.

**The Healing of Tobias.** Follower of Caravaggio. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1615-1620.

**The Return of the young Tobias.** Etienne Lavallée-Poussin (1733-1795). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen. Rouen.

**The Angel departing from Tobias and his Family.** Jan Victors (ca. 1620-after 1670). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1651.

**Holy Family with Saint John, Tobias and the Archangel Raphael.** Bonifacio Veronese (Bonifacio de Pitati) (c.1487-1559). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. 1520s.

**Tobias and the Archangel Raphael**

Francesco Botticini (1446-1497). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.



## *Part IX. The Book Judith*

In Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the Assyrians and Nineveh, Arphaxad reigned over the Medes in Ecbatana. Nebuchadnezzar gave battle to Arphaxad in the plains of Ragae. Although abandoned by his allies, Nebuchadnezzar routed Arphaxad's army. He occupied towns and advanced on Ecbatana. He captured Arphaxad in the mountains of Ragae and killed him with his spears. His war with the Medes finished, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to take revenge on the allies that had not supported him. He sent for Holofernes, general-in-chief of his armies and told him to take over hundred thousand soldiers to advance against all the western lands that had disregarded his call. Holofernes advanced along the Euphrates, crossed Mesopotamia and he butchered the people of Cilicia who offered him resistance. He plundered the Midianites, set fire to the fields of Damascus, demolished the shrines and sacred trees of Sidon, Tyre, Sur, Ocina and Jamnia, Azotos and Ascalon – the coastal peoples. Then Holofernes reached the edge of Esdraelon in the neighbourhood of Dothan, a village that faces the ridge of Judaea.

When the Israelites that lived in Judaea heard of what Holofernes had done to the other nations, they trembled for their own fate. They had only just returned from captivity when this new scorn arrived. They alerted the people of Samaria, Kona, Beth-Horon, Belmain, Jericho, Choba, Aesora and of the Salem valley. They prepared for the war. Joakim the high priest of Jerusalem was in command. He ordered the people of Bethulia and of Betomesthaim to occupy the mountain passes that were the only access into Judaea through the great ridge of Judaea. Then all Israel prayed.

When Holofernes heard that the Israelites had prepared for war, closed the mountain passes, fortified the peaks and other high places in the plains, he was furious. Holofernes called all the other Canaanites and asked for their advice. All spoke out in Holofernes' council. The Moabites and Ammonites told Holofernes that as long as the Israelites did not sin against their God they were an invincible people. But Holofernes would not listen to such talk. He said the Israelites were weak and powerless to resist to an attack of his armies. So he ordered his army to advance.

Achior, leader of the Ammonites had spoken for the Israelites so Holofernes reproached him for this, took him prisoner and brought him into the hill-country to leave him near one of the towns in the region, in the hands of the Israelites. Holofernes' soldiers left Achior bound in front of Bethulia. Uzziah son of Micah, Chabris son of Gothoniel and Charmis son of Melchiel, the chiefs of Bethulia took Achior in. Uzziah questioned Achior and Achior told what had happened at Holofernes' council and told all the people how Holofernes had ordered to advance into Judaea.

A few days later, Holofernes marched on Bethulia and he set siege to the town. A troop of Moabites and Assyrians penetrated the valley and occupied the water-points of the Israelites and their springs. The inhabitants of Bethulia soon had no water-jars filled anymore; their wells dried up and water was severely rationed. The Israelites of Bethulia then became desperate and wanted as much to abandon themselves to

Holofernes than to die within the wakes of their city. But Uzziah asked them to hold out five days more.

Judith daughter of Mesari, whose husband Manasseh had died a few years earlier, heard of Uzziah's plan. She immediately sent her serving women, who ran her household, to summon two elders of the town, Chabris and Charmis. She said that the elders should not have bound themselves by oath to surrender to their enemies and not to put God to the test, to demand guarantees from God. She urged them to plead for help from God. She reminded the elders that she intended to do something that would be handed down in the memory of Israel. She predicted that the Lord would make use of her to save Bethulia before the hour of surrender had come. Upon these words the elders left. And Judith prayed and called on the God of Israel.

Judith washed herself, dressed her hair, wrapped a turban around her hair, anointed, put on her best robe, sandals on her feet, necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings, all jewellery she had and made herself so beautiful that the eye of any man would beguile her. She handed over to her maid wine and oil, various kinds of cakes, and loaves. Judith took all that and asked for the gates of the town to be opened.

Outside the gates, she was intercepted by Assyrians who stared in astonishment at such a beautiful woman. She told the soldiers she was on her way to Holofernes to give him trustworthy information. The Assyrians took her to Holofernes' camp. There, she fell on her face and did homage to the general. She told Holofernes that the city of Bethulia was doomed because the Israelites had sinned, and would soon fall. Judith told that the elders had sent men to Jerusalem to ask for permission to surrender Bethulia. When Judith had heard that news, she had fled the town. She expected Holofernes to soon take Bethulia and she proposed then to be his guide right across Judaea until he reached Jerusalem, to enthrone Holofernes in the middle of the city.

Holofernes was pleased at these words. He brought Judith in his tent where his silver dinner service was laid out and he gave Judith of his food and wine. After that, Holofernes gave her a tent of her own where she stayed for three days. Holofernes ordered his guards not to prevent her.

On the fourth day, Holofernes gave a banquet for his staff and he also ordered his officer in charge of his personal affairs, Bagoas, to persuade the Hebrew woman to eat and drink in their company. Holofernes said the Assyrians would be disgraced to let a woman like Judith go without seducing her. Judith acquiesced to Bagoas' invitation. When she entered Holofernes' tent, his heart was ravished at the sight and his soul was stirred. Holofernes was so enchanted by Judith that he drank far more wine than he had ever done before.

After the banquet, Holofernes' staff hurried away. Bagoas closed the tent from the outside. Judith was left alone with Holofernes who had collapsed wine-sodden on his bed. Standing beside the bed, Judith prayed to God. Then she went up to the bedpost at Holofernes' head, took his scimitar, caught Holofernes by the hair and murmured, 'Make me strong today, Lord God of Israel'. She struck two times with the scimitar at Holofernes' neck with all her might and cut off his head. Then she rolled the body off the bed, pulled down the canopy from the bedposts and gave the head to her maid who put it in her food bag. Then the two left the Assyrian camp as they had done each

morning to go to prayers. Once they were out of the camp, they climbed the slopes to Bethulia and towards the gates of the city.

The Bethulians opened the gates and welcomed the women. Judith then showed the head of Holofernes and said, 'This is the head of Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian army. God has struck him down by the hand of a woman!' Uzziah praised Judith and all the people prostrated themselves and worshipped God. Judith told everything she had done the previous days. Achior testified that the head was indeed of Holofernes, so that at daybreak the Bethulians hung the head of Holofernes on the ramparts. Then every man of Bethulia took arms and attacked the Assyrian camp.

Every leader of the Assyrian army sought his leader. Bagoas found Holofernes' body without his head and he also found that Judith was gone. He shouted to the leaders that a simple Hebrew woman had brought shame on the house of Nebuchadnezzar. Then all the camp was panic-stricken. The Assyrians could not keep together and the Bethulians routed them. Uzziah sent word to Betomesthaim, Bebai, Choba, Kola and all the territories of Israel to urge them to throw themselves on the enemy. All Israel and Jerusalem fell on the Assyrians now. The men of Gilead and Galilee attacked them on the flank and pursued the Assyrians until they came close to the territory of Damascus. For three months, the people of Israel rejoiced with their high priest Joakim in front of the Temple of Jerusalem, and Judith stayed with them.

The people of Bethulia looted the camp of the Assyrians. Judith received Holofernes' tent, all his silver and furniture. Then Judith took her place at the head of a procession of women who accompanied her, taking wands of vine-leaves in her hand and putting on with her companions wreaths of olive. Then Judith sang a song of thanksgiving to God. Never again were the Israelites troubled during Judith's lifetime and even for a long time after her death.

### **Judith and Holofernes**

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1620-1621.

Artemisia Gentileschi was a woman painter. She was born in 1593 in Rome, where her father worked. Her father was Orazio Gentileschi, a well-known painter. He taught his daughter to draw and at a young age already she worked with him. When her father partnered with another painter, Agostino Tassi, she also learned from the latter. But in 1612, Orazio Gentileschi accused Agostino Tassi for having seduced and raped his daughter. Artemisia was still only a girl of eighteen years then and Tassi was called before the judges. It was unclear who seduced who, and Artemisia had stayed a time with Tassi on promise of marriage. Tassi had already been convicted for

having raped his sister-in-law incestuously, and had allegedly conspired to have his wife murdered. The trial lasted for seven months. The judges threatened Artemisia, even tortured her with thumbscrews and Artemisia had to allow herself to be examined by midwives, so she was publicly humiliated. Finally, Tassi confessed. But Artemisia also did not come out of the affair unscathed, her reputation suffered. Tassi had accused her of course of promiscuity. Agostino Tassi was thrown into prison. He never painted again. Although Tassi left prison rapidly, within the year, his career was now definitely broken and ended there. We do not know what happened further to Tassi. Around the end of the trial Artemisia married a Florentine painter called Pietro Antonio Stiattesi and she settled with her husband in Florence. She had a daughter, Palmira in 1618, and left her husband shortly after. She travelled much then, living of her art. She travelled probably to Genoa first and may have met Anthony Van Dyck there. She went to Venice. She was in Rome in 1624, and accompanied her father to Venice in 1627. In 1630 she was in Naples. She accompanied her father to England, to help her father who had been appointed painter at the court of King Charles I. Around 1641, when civil war broke out in England, she returned to Naples and died there in 1653.

Artemisia Gentileschi painted pictures of powerful, passionate women. She liked to paint scenes in which women played important roles, such as scenes from the life of Cleopatra, Lucrezia, Minerva, Mary Magdalene, Jael and Sisera, Susannah and the Elders, or Judith. There are two marvellous paintings in Florence on the theme of Judith in Florence; one is in the Uffizi and the other in the Pitti Palace. Another version that resembles much the Uffizi picture, but dates from about 1611 to 1612, is in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte of Naples.

Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi knew the paintings of Caravaggio in Rome. Caravaggio had truly transformed the art of roman painting with very realistic, obdurate images and sharp contrasts between light and dark in scenes that concentrated on the personages of drama and that hardly contained any background. Orazio Gentileschi also started to work this way, but his daughter surpassed him in power of representation. Her 'Judith and Holofernes' is a horrifying picture. We see two women, Judith and her servant, holding down with all their might the general Holofernes on his bed, while Judith cuts Holofernes' throat. The act could not be represented more realistically and more gruesomely. Blood spreads on the white sheets of the bed and spurts from the man's neck while Judith draws her sword slowly through the flesh. Judith tears at Holofernes' hair and the servant has both her hands on his chest, pushing the man down with all her weight. In a last gasp, Holofernes draws at the head-cloth of the girl and tries to push her away, but it is too late.

Artemisia Gentileschi showed a fine lady in Judith clad in rich golden-coloured and heavy, courtly gowns, with her shoulders alluringly nude, dressed like she was at the feast held in her honour with all the officers of Holofernes. She strains her forehead, her face is in the stress of the horror of the murder but she does not waver. She stays as far from Holofernes as her arms permit, but she decidedly draws the long sword over Holofernes' neck.

The light of the scene comes from the lower left. It seems to be rather a point source of light, maybe from the torches in the dark of the tent. Artemisia placed the three figures against a black background and all her attention was concentrated on the

figures. The three heads of the personages form a triangle in between which is a tangle of nude arms so that the three figures are linked in oblique lines. Holofernes heaves one leg up in a last spasm, so that his body is parallel to the right diagonal of the frame. The servant and Holofernes' head are along the middle vertical and Judith is along another oblique line. Artemisia Gentileschi used the oblique lines in her painting to give a strong impression of immediate, violent movement and she succeeded totally in that illusion of the act. We must admire the skill of this woman painter in the many details which are painted formidably. The folds of the red and white bed linen over Holofernes for instance are wonderfully drawn and coloured, and so is Judith's rich robe. Artemisia rendered masterly the shadows thrown by the light on the arms and bodies of the figures. She used warm colours overall, red and golden and brown hues, which she worked upon in marvellous and exact chiaroscuro. Like in a true Baroque painting, she placed her figures in half-body so that they are closer to the viewer. The viewer is closer to the scene, hence more involved in the horror of the violence. Yet, Artemisia showed enough of the feelings of Judith on her face, the disgust and consciousness of the cruelty, maybe some feeling also of apology and regret, so that she can remain sympathetic to the viewer. She worked evenly on all details and displayed her considerable painterly talent. For instance, the white broken hues of the bed linen under Holofernes are marvellously rendered in all its tones.

There are hardly any faults of style in this picture, which is one of the strongest images of the art of painting. Caravaggio did not better on this scene in his own picture of the slaying of Holofernes that dates from 1598-1599. Artemisia may have borrowed some elements from Caravaggio's painting, such as the attitude of outstretched arms in horror of Judith, but overall Caravaggio's painting is less powerful, right and stylistically sophisticated than Artemisia's. Artemisia was still in her twenties when she made this picture. Yet, her painting is a very strong expression for a woman so young and it is perfect in composition, colours, lines and depiction of emotions.

### **Judith**

Artemisia Gentileschi (1597-1652). Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina – Florence.  
Ca.1614-1620.

The painting of 'Judith and Holofernes' by Artemisia Gentileschi that is in the Pitti Palace of Florence, depicts the scene of Judith and her maidservant after the killing of Holofernes. Judith has kept the sword with which she had decapitated Holofernes and her maidservant now holds a basket in which we see the severed head. Again, Artemisia Gentileschi painted a surprising picture. She did not show Judith in a simple poise. Judith's figure is inclined from the lower left to the upper right, so that Gentileschi applied the oblique lines that always give a strong feeling of movement in a picture. The viewer believes instantly that Judith has been disturbed by a noise, maybe the finding of the corpse of Holofernes, and she anxiously looks over her shoulder to the right. Still, by that movement Artemisia could show Judith's face in

profile and show her string but fine traits. The maidservant is placed in front of Judith; she turns her head too in a direction parallel to Judith. This forms a kind of mirror-image of Judith in the servant.

This painting of Judith is a calmer version of course than the painting of the very slaughter of the general, but the poses of the personages are very original and a powerful representation. Again, Artemisia Gentileschi demonstrated her awesome gifts as a painter. Like Caravaggio she had no attention at all for the background, which remained in the picture entirely black. She painted also the personages in not complete bodies so that the viewer believes that he or she is very close to the scene. Artemisia Gentileschi painted in a masterly way the light falling from the middle left on the face of Judith and on the arms and robe of the maidservant. The chiaroscuro on the golden-coloured robe of the servant is simply perfect and worked out in patient detail. Gentileschi gave the servant a white headdress, like in the painting of the Uffizi and the way she painted the folds of the headdress in the play of light is just wonderful and right. Other details, such as the pommel of Judith's sword and her dark, heavily brocaded dress with the white lace lining is masterly rendered. We are used to the original compositions and poses of Caravaggio's figures, but Artemisia's scenes are equally powerful in depiction, original, and a mark of a painterly genius as great as Caravaggio's. Realism was complete in Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings and like Caravaggio she was first interested in the emotions of her personages, of the women Judith and the servant.

### **The Return of Judith from the Enemy Camp. The Discovery of Holofernes' Corpse.**

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

Sandro Botticelli, probably the greatest master among the Florentine painters of the fifteenth century, also painted two smaller panels on the theme of Judith and Holofernes. Like Artemisia Gentileschi, he made these pictures when he was still young. The differences between Botticelli's pictures and Artemisia's are enormous however, and they allow us to wonder what had happened in views of the world and of the art of painting by artists between the late fifteenth and the early seventeenth century, for almost a hundred and fifty years separate the two pictures.

Botticelli's paintings are of course grace and elegance first. For Botticelli, it did not matter much who Judith really was. Botticelli knew the story from the Bible, but his view of the tale was one of sophistication in pictorial representation of the characters without emotional participation in the scenes. In the first panel we see Judith returning from the enemy camp with her maidservant, who nonchalantly holds a basket on her head with the head of Holofernes. Judith and her maid are dressed in robes with light, flimsy cloaks. Judith wears a blue robe, her maid one in orange-golden colours so that we recognise already in this scene of the young Botticelli his sure sense of complementary hues. Judith and her maid walk without anxiety, relaxed, elegantly and dignified. They will not run, even if danger threatens behind them. If the servant seems a bit more anxious, since Botticelli drew her as if she were running a little and entreating her mistress to hurry, Judith remains the fine, sweet young woman that

walks and handles events at leisure. She still bears her curved sword, but also the twig and leaf of peace and victory. Everything in the two girls is elegance. Their shirts and robes flow around them. The wind plays in the shawl in which the servant hides Holofernes' head, in the curls of Judith's light-coloured hair. The girls are drawn somewhat curved also, not rigid, in gracious attitudes. The servant holds her robe with one hand, like a courtier or an aristocratic lady of Florence hurrying through the streets of the wealthy Italian town. Judith still wears her jewels and a band around her slim waist emphasises her femininity. Botticelli moreover also treated these panels with care and showed a fine landscape with the enemy camp and the city walls of Bethulia behind Judith. Botticelli painted Judith as the Muse of victory, like the symbol or allegory of a Republican hero that fights against tyranny. His vision was one of ideals, whatever the real scene of Judith's violence.

In the second scene, Holofernes' officers find the headless corpse of their general. Holofernes' body lies on the bed and we see the severed neck, the blood on the bed and the red bed linen, but Holofernes' body seems fine and relaxed, more the body of a young Apollo than of a middle-aged fierce general and leader of savage troops. Botticelli knew the scene took place in the Orient, so he painted his figures in this scene with oriental head-dresses, with Persian curls in their beards and long hair and dressed them in long, heavy robes and cloaks. Here also the various figures remain elegant, courtly aristocrats and they seem not to be the fierce warriors that have come to invade and devastate the country of Bethulia. Botticelli painted even a horse-rider at the entrance of the tent. The cavalier is elegant and both horse and rider incline their heads in mourning for the dead leader. This panel of the 'Discovery of Holofernes' also is painted in utmost detail and Botticelli showed his skills in drawing, his care for strong and bright hues, and his talent for cramming many figures with ease in on picture to a natural scene that does not lose attention for the main subject. He showed especially bright red and blue hues, and contrasted these with the golden hues of Holofernes' body. The corpse should be white-blue to grey now, but realism was not Botticelli's aim. He brought elegance and fineness of depiction. He showed the concept, the surface of the Bible story alone. He lived in a world in which apparently courtly manners in speech and depiction mattered more than the emotions of the personages, than the feelings of the viewers and the gruesomeness of the tragedy. Botticelli had to show a fine picture, considerable skills dedicated to grace and politeness, restraint and dignity. Such was the art of Florence's fifteenth century, and art that sought gracious beauty, was looking to present ideal figures inspired by divine spirituality, was trying to prove that humans were indeed made to the image of God. That art could not reflect reality. The society of these artists was directed towards ideals and views that did not include the depiction of misery and violence in the arts.

Misery was in the streets, but was no part of the courts of the great families that had been rich since ever and had grown richer recently by trade and industry. These people wanted a new society of dignity, courteous behaviour towards ladies, republican government in which each could have its say or governance with a benign leader sometimes chosen by themselves for a period of times of war, and that in fact perpetuated the old Roman civic views. They were future-oriented, forward-looking, working at the next world always. Hence the images of Botticelli, for Botticelli worked for these men.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries much had happened to the views of the Renaissance. Wealth had come and gone and people had realised that working at the future did not secure that future at all. One was still, like in the ages before the Renaissance, prone to natural and economic disasters, to sudden and harsh dictatorship, to wars and devastation. The misery in the streets had not disappeared but with the growing population it had grown too, and become more visible still. The foundations of faith and the authority of the Popes had been shaken. The heavens had not split open and punished the Protestant schism. The Protestant nations were on the winning and prosperous side now. People began to doubt that they could explain what happened in the world by religious reasons alone. The all-pervasive bright light of the Renaissance, its hopes and solaces had broken down in tension. It was time to look at the stark reality and to start new investigation from that reality to search for other answers. The bright light of ideals was quenched and artists like Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi and Rembrandt van Rijn painted in black now. They painted scenes in scarce light. It was only the background that was black however; the figures still sought the divine light, but the divine light was reduced to the light of a torch or of a candle. If one could less interrogate the heavens, less concentrate one's hopes on the Gods, one might as well scrutinise the tangible living.

It is typical how in the early Renaissance figures were mostly painted in full, like Botticelli painted Judith in the pictures we look at, and how in the seventeenth century Baroque period figures were drawn closer towards the viewer and painted only in half-body to encourage that illusion. The art and views of Botticelli had evolved into the views of Artemisia Gentileschi. Which was the better art? Both Botticelli and Artemisia were great geniuses of the art of painting. When one passes before a painting by Botticelli, the feelings evoked in the viewer are still the feelings of the Renaissance. They are the feelings of the illusion of an ideal, spiritual society that the Renaissance sought. We feel the longing for grace and elegance and admire the sophisticated, easy harmony of Botticelli's work. But when we look at Artemisia's paintings we see humanity, even fighting humanity, when Judith walks with her sword nonchalantly over her shoulders. We feel the hatred for tyranny and the violence that was part of the society but now as seen for what it really was. Ideals had made way for coping with the issues of the day.

### **Judith with the Head of Holofernes**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1530.

Lucas Cranach the Elder, a painter that worked in the early sixteenth century in Saxony of Germany, made several paintings on the subject of Judith and Holofernes. In the painting of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, he showed a fine Judith in portrait mode, so in half-body alone, holding Holofernes' head. Judith is a fine lady of a German court and Cranach presented her dressed up with a wealthy brocaded robe and wearing an elegant, red felt hat with the dash of feathers of an adventurer. The hat brings to the girl an air of daring, of defiance also and a touch of affirmation of her individuality and freedom. This lady has a will of her own and will defend her independence. Her affirming stance is emphasised by the long, straight sword, which very obviously declares her determination. Her thin mouth shows tenacity and



resolution. Judith looks dreamingly in the far, but she thinned her lips in an otherwise determined line. She has not the sensual, swollen lips and small mouth of a courtesan. Still, her profuse hair flows on all sides of her shoulders, enhancing her femininity and she did not hide her shoulders in heavy shawls but displays her seduction. Yet, here also, we see the feminine jewels that diminish elegantly the length of her neck and also the heavy chains that evoke bondage, which evoke the harness of war and which add a rough, warlike element in her adornment. Judith wears many rings around her fingers and holds the sword with one hand while with the other she seems not so much to hold as to caress Holofernes' head. But for this object in the picture, we might have found an elegant portrait in Lucas Cranach the Elder's painting. Lucas Cranach the Elder lived in Germany and that country was a little rougher, a little less sophisticated, a little less devoted to idealised fineness than Italy. So Cranach placed Holofernes' head in the picture, but he showed a terrifying head. Holofernes is dead all right, so his face is ashen-grey. He still keeps on his dead face the expression of surprise, of excruciating pain from the moment his throat was cut and his eyes still look upwards, towards Judith. The contrast between the elegant, fine, rosy-cheeked, young, seductive lady and the horror of Holofernes' face could not be greater. Moreover, Cranach took well care to show the severed arteries of Holofernes' neck, a gruesome detail in the picture, and which should also be considered in comparison with Judith's own nice, bejewelled, delicate and charming neck and bust.

Lucas Cranach painted the Judith in the surest, most true way that a reader of the Bible story might understand her: the free, undertaking, self-determined, intelligent, independent and good-looking woman that was better than all the men of Bethulia in decisiveness, gifted with an unwavering will to cut the chains that adorn her seductive neck.

Lucas Cranach's painting dates from half a century after Botticelli's work. Cranach painted an entirely black background, like also Artemisia Gentileschi used, but like in renaissance pictures we see hardly any effect of light and shadows on Cranach's figure. Cranach hardly applied chiaroscuro on the face and body of Judith so that the viewer has to rely on the round lines of Judith's bodice and arms alone to get an illusion of the volume of Judith's body. Cranach often painted in such flat compositions of colour but he always diligently used other means of creating volume and space. In his composition of Judith's portrait he showed the straight vertical lines of the sword and the straight horizontal line of the table, which add to the sense of determination of the personage.

Lucas Cranach the Elder made a picture that can be situated in style between Botticelli's and Gentileschi's Judith. Botticelli painted an elegant young lady and so did Cranach. But Cranach's strong lady with the dishful hat resembles the natural elegance of the young woman that fights for her independence as painted by Artemisia. Botticelli painted a fine landscape behind his Judith; Cranach did not and neither did Artemisia. Cranach's painting is pictorially between Botticelli's immaculate charm and Artemisia's powerful lady. Whereas Botticelli originated from the austere Tuscany, from Florence, Cranach was a German and Artemisia a Roman. Sensitivities, characters and cultural backgrounds of the painters differed as much as the times in which the paintings were made.

Lucas Cranach the Elder was born in Kronach. He received his first lessons in drawing from his father and from 1500 to 1505 he was active in Vienna, in Austria. After that period, he became the court painter of the Elector of Saxony and he had a workshop in Wittenberg. In Wittenberg also lived and wrote Martin Luther. Lucas Cranach knew Luther and became his supporter. In the period between 1519 and 1545 Cranach was a Councillor of the town of Wittenberg and also at times its Mayor. For Luther, such a man worthy of respect was important to have on his side. Cranach worked both for the Electors of Saxony, who were sympathetic to Luther, and for the very Catholic Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg. This Cardinal was the main Catholic Cardinal of Germany, at first not deaf for some of the reforms that Luther proposed, and not inclined to let Luther preach outside Catholicism. The schism between Lutherans and the Catholic Church took many years to be consumed. In 1547 Cranach lost his appointment as court painter but when the Elector Johann Friedrich of Saxony had to go to prison from 1550 to 1552, Cranach went with him and followed the Elector also to Weimar, where he died in 1553.

**Judith and Holofernes**

Gustav Klimt (1862-1918). Österreichische Galerie Belvedere. Vienna 1901.

About three hundred years after Artemisia Gentileschi's painting of the theme of 'Judith and Holofernes', Gustav Klimt equally took up the subject. Klimt was born in Vienna in 1862 and he made 'Judith I' when he was thirty-eight years old, in 1901. He had been an early revolutionary of Austrian art. He had studied art in Vienna at the School of Arts and Crafts there, but worked already from around 1880 together with his brother Ernst – who died young in 1892 – and Hans Makart and another friend on decorations of palaces and public buildings of Vienna. Klimt was at first a member of the 'Genossenschaft bildender Künstler Wiens', the Society of Artists of Vienna, also called the 'Künstlerhaus'. In 1897 a group of forty painters, led by Klimt, left this association to found the Vienna Secession. Klimt became the appointed president of the Secession and organised with his friends the exhibitions of the group until 1905. From 1900 on Klimt was a renowned painter of Vienna, painting many portraits from the more open-minded Viennese aristocracy and wealthy jet-set. The establishment around the Austrian Emperor rejected him however several times when he appealed for a professorship at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts. Until he died in Vienna in 1918, together with the imperial regime, Klimt participated in many exhibitions and was one of Vienna's most famous artists of the Symbolist movement, the Jugendstil.

Gustav Klimt's Judith is of course very different from Cranach's, Botticelli's and Artemisia's Judith. We see how the woman also holds the severed head of Holofernes, but the style of the painting is totally dissimilar.

Gustav Klimt's Judith is naked and gold motives surround her. She wears a bunch of golden victory trophies, the palm leaves of victory and Klimt also painted behind her a hint of a landscape in the trees, which all bear fruit. Klimt's Judith is in the trance of victory, which is almost an orgasm for her. Judith has her eyes closed, her face directed upwards in ecstasy, swollen lips in an open mouth as she seems to cry out gently and privately. She is still naked, as if she has just stepped back from the bed in which she has slept with Holofernes, but Klimt leaves doubt as to whether Judith is in ecstasy of that moment or of the gold of Holofernes' treasures that now encircle her. Holofernes is slain. Judith holds his head, but there may be doubt in the viewer whether the general's head is yet severed. Judith wears heavy, protective golden jewels around her neck and her head is crowned with thick, dark hair. She has not the hanging, flowing hair of Cranach but the profuse, hard hair made up in voluptuousness to support and surround her face.

The difference with the images of Botticelli, Cranach the Elder and Artemisia Gentileschi are still more striking. Society evolved. Wealth augmented still over the centuries, industry and the sciences delivered their first spectacular economic results so that a part of society had amassed such richness that its children could call themselves the elite and live without working, without even having to speculate further about finance and about tomorrow. This was a part of the society of Imperial Austria and especially of its capital Vienna. Gustav Klimt painted for this society and to express the glitter and leisure of wealth, he had the idea to use in his paintings the

very symbol of this wealth: gold. The gold colour contributes greatly to the mood of the picture.

Klimt seems to tell in his Judith foremost however about the power of femininity, of the dangers that are in a woman that can play with men, about the seductiveness and the independence from men, now gained entirely. Despite a relaxed Judith, who is not present for the viewer but lost in ecstatic dreams, the viewer is practically a voyeur of intimate poises and thoughts. There is a mood of menace in the picture. The feelings expressed are of heavy eroticism, of gloom and lack of caring for any value, of preference for the defiance of gratuitously malign acts. Judith can play with men like a cat with a bird and she can take pleasure from the game that she dominates. No wonder another part of the Viennese public, the conservative government officials found Klimt's views decadent. They also were very frightened that Gustav Klimt would spread a fashion of life that had remained hitherto confined to a smaller circle of the bourgeoisie of Vienna.

For Gustav Klimt, Judith represented the symbol of a society. Hence he underscored that concept and had to abandon the simple realism of Artemisia Gentileschi and of Lucas Cranach, and even more so the idealism of Botticelli. Judith was only the symbol, but another symbol. In the style of painting also, the means of depiction had become entirely free. Abstraction was not yet discovered, but one could bring golden patterns in an otherwise figurative painting. One could also emphasise the painting with a gold frame. The frame of Klimt's Judith was made by his younger brother, the goldsmith Georg Klimt (1867-1931), but after Gustav Klimt's own design.

Artemisia Gentileschi's work was rich in the representation of emotions. So was Klimt's work. It was also highly individualistic, and very expressive. Klimt expressed his own feelings and impressions of certain women of Vienna's high society. So, that society may have shaped Klimt's images and he might have merely been showing in an original, special way the sentiments evoked in him by that society. But Klimt's might also have shown his particular views of women, independent of any society. Then he might indeed have been shaping his society, like the Imperial Court of Vienna feared. Was Gustav Klimt out at making an original painting with extravagant and extremely striking elements of style, such as all the artists of the previous centuries had not been able or had not dared to discover? Did Klimt merely arrogantly, dandy-like wanted to impress his viewers with daring originality and innovation in depiction? Had he been calculating how best to shock, surprise his audience and thus delivering this striking image? Probably all of these feelings and calculations came realised to a certain degree in Klimt's enigmatic painting. It is certain however that of all existing Judith pictures the one from Gustav Klimt is the strangest and the one viewers forget the least. Gustav Klimt turned Judith into an ornament, into an element of decoration, like Vienna had become outward show and an ending society of gold.

Sandro Botticelli, Cranach the Elder and Artemisia Gentileschi presented Judith as the courageous woman that certainly up to a point shamed the men of Bethulia. After all, she defeated the enemy army on her own. But she was still the symbol of liberation only, and the image of a woman that saved her town from odious tyranny. She was the decisive mother of the nation, who leisurely returned to her own people with the sword over her shoulders. Gustav Klimt presented an altogether quite different view

of Judith. For Klimt she was the archetype symbol of the dangerous female, of the vamp, of the man-eater and man-slaughterness. With the centuries, such a view of women could develop and was brought open in art, especially in the Jugendstil of the end of the nineteenth century. The Jugendstil or Art Nouveau trend in Symbolism was obsessed with the concept of woman and no one better than Gustav Klimt showed this image in bright gold. Woman was not only now the strong independent creature but the creature that could be an adversary, an enemy to man, a creature that existed to consume man. This fascination with the aspect of the battle of the sexes was typical for the Jugendstil, which often showed the enigmatic, mysterious and perverse attraction of men to the superiority in character of women.

In the Bible are many strong characters of women and in that the Bible stories are also remarkable when compared to the books of other religions. The Koran for instance largely suppressed these images of strong women. European Christianity also suppressed the concept of strong-willed females to a degree, because the images of women saints and of the Madonna are pictures of either tortured and martyred or of suffering women. The Virgin Mary is most often presented as the sweet, gentle, caring mother and the unrelenting intercessor with God. The painters have shown the stronger features of Judith and of other women of the Bible such as Sisera. So the Bible stories, however ancient, remain a prime source for the depiction of types of characters that are universal, non-temporal and that could be interpreted differently in each century. Botticelli, Cranach, Artemisia and Gustav Klimt showed each different aspects of the one type that was Judith.

#### *Other paintings:*

**Judith.** Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Private Collection Rau – Germany. 1525.

**Judith.** August Riedel (1798-1823). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1840.

**Judith.** After Cristofano Allori (1577-1621). Dulwich Picture Gallery – Dulwich (London).

**Judith.** Gian Battista Piazzetta (1683-1754). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Jan Massys (1509-575). The Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Ambrosius Benson and workshop (active 1518-1550). The Museum of Grenoble. 1530-1535.

**Judith.** Gérard de Lairese (1640-1711). The Museum of Walloon Art, Liège.

**Judith in Prayer.** Jacques Stella (1596-1657). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1571-1610). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini – Rome. Ca. 1597-1599.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. Ca. 1581.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Francesco Furini (1603-1646). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1636.

**Judith and Holofernes.** Henri Regnault (1843-1871). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Marseille. 1869.

- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Cristofano Allori. Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina – Florence. Ca.1620.
- Judith displaying the Head of Holofernes to the People.** Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1553.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1583-1585.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Fede Galizia (1578-ca. 1630). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1596.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Tiziano Vecellio called Titian (ca. 1490-1576). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. Ca. 1515.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Horace Vernet (1789-1863). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Pau.
- Judith.** Palma Il Vecchio (c.1480-1528). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.
- Judith.** Joachim Anthonisz Wtewael (ca. 1566-1638). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.
- Judith slaying Holofernes.** Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Johann Liss (1590-1629). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Giovanni Baglione (1573-1644). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1608.
- Judith and Holofernes.** Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1533). Suermondt-Ludwig Museum – Aachen. 1571.
- Judith.** Giorgione (1477-1510). The Ermitage – St Petersburg. Ca. 1504.
- Judith and Holofernes.** Giuseppe Vermiglio (c.1585-c.1635). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. Mid 1620s.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Painter of Reggio Emilia (Fede Galizia or Fabrizi di Parma?) (Last quarter 16<sup>th</sup> century). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.
- Judith and Holofernes.** Giulia Lama (1681-1747). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1730-1740.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Francisco del Cairo (1607-1664). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca.1635.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Fede Galizia (1578-1630). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. 1596.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Jan Massys. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1543.
- Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Gherard Seghers (1591-1651). Galleria Corsini. Rome.
- Judith and Holofernes.** Venetian, last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, attributed to Andrea Vicentino. Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours.
- Judith and Holofernes.** Emile-Jean-Horace Vernet (1789-1863). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Pau. 1829-1830.
- The Meeting of Tamar and Judith.** Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection -Madrid. Ca. 1555-1558.
- Judith at the Gates of Bethulia.** Jules Ziéglér (1804-1856). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. 1847.
- Judith and her Maid.** Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1489.
- Judith and her Maid.** Antonio Allegri called Correggio (ca. 1489-1534). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1510-1514.

**Judith with the Head of Holofernes.** Gerrit Pietersz. Sweelinck (1586-1608).

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Stories of Judith and Holofernes.** Andrea Meldolla called Lo Schiavone (ca. 1522-1563). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

## *Part X. The Book Esther*

Mordecai son of Jair lived in Susa during the reign of King Ahasuerus, a king we now call Xerxes. Ahasuerus reigned over an empire that stretched from India to Ethiopia from out of his capital Susa. Mordecai had a dream and saw in a great turmoil of earthquakes two great dragons come forward. At the sound of their throat every nation prepared for war and a great darkness came on the earth. But then the righteous cried out to God and a great river flowed from the cries. The sun rose and light came. The humble were raised up and they devoured the powerful. Mordecai awakened from the dream and wondered what it meant.

Mordecai lived at Ahasuerus' court with two of the king's eunuchs called Bigthan and Teresh. He got to know of their designs to assassinate King Ahasuerus and he warned the king. The two officers were tortured and confessed. The king then appointed Mordecai to an office at his court and loaded him with presents. But Hannan son of Hammedatha the Agatite, who was in high favour with the king, was determined to do injury to Mordecai in revenge of the king's two officers.

In those days Ahasuerus organised a banquet for all of his officers, commanders and ministers to show his splendour. Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the king's palace too. The feasting lasted seven days and on the seventh day Ahasuerus ordered the queen crowned with the royal diadem to come to the banquet. But Queen Vashti refused to come. The king then asked to his officers-of-state what had to be done. They called in expert lawyers and jurists. One of them called Memucan replied that not only the king but also all of the officers had been wronged. So an edict should be issued to the effect that Vashti was never to appear again before King Ahasuerus and that the king would confer her royal dignity to a woman of more worth. The king did as Memucan advised and repudiated Vashti. He sent letters to all his nations, ensuring that every husband should be master in his own house.

The king's gentlemen-in-waiting searched on the king's behalf for beautiful young virgins and commissioners were sent out to bring all these to the citadel of Susa under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch. In the citadel of Susa Mordecai had brought up a girl called Hadassah, otherwise called Esther, his uncle's daughter, who had lost her father and mother. Mordecai had adopted her and the girl had a very beautiful face and a nice figure. Esther too was taken to the palace. The girl pleased Hegai and won his favour. Esther had not told she was a Hebrew, since Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Each girl had to appear before the king. Each girl could take with her whatever she wished from the royal palace. The next day she would be entrusted to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's officer and custodian of the concubines in another harem but unless the king was particularly pleased with her she did not go to the king anymore.

When Esther was brought to Ahasuerus in the tenth month, called Tebeth, of the seventh year of Ahasuerus' reign, the king liked Esther better than any of the other women. He set the royal diadem on her head and proclaimed her queen instead of Vashti. The king then gave a great banquet for Esther.



Shortly afterwards the king promoted Hannan son of Hammedatha, so that Hannan received precedence over all other officers of the state. Everybody used to bow low when Hannan appeared, as such was the king's command. But Mordecai refused to bow or to prostrate himself. Hannan became very furious at this and when he heard what race Mordecai belonged to, he made up his mind to wipe out all the Jews. Hannan told the king that the Jews were still an unassimilated nation in his empire. He asked the king to sign the destruction of Israel. He told Ahasuerus he was ready to pay ten thousand talents of silver to the royal treasury to please the king. Ahasuerus took his signet ring and gave it to Hannan, telling the officer to keep the money and do whatever he liked to the people. Hannan used Ahasuerus' signet ring to sign letters sent to all nations to order the annihilation of all the Jews in the kingdom. Consternation reigned then in the city of Susa. Mordecai tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes.

Mordecai then went to the chancellery but was not allowed to enter. Mordecai wailed and mourned. Esther was him from her window and she sent Hathach, an officer whom the king had appointed to wait on her, to hear what had happened and what caused Mordecai's distress. Hathach spoke to Mordecai and then told Esther. Mordecai asked Esther to plead for the Jews to the king. But Esther said that anyone who approached the king unsummoned would die, and the king had not summoned her for the last thirty days. But Mordecai answered via Hathach that she should not suppose that she would be the only Jew to escape. She should not persist to remain silent at such a time. Her family would surely perish and maybe she had come to the throne for just an event such as this. Esther then told Mordecai to assemble all the Jews of Susa for her, to pray and to fast for three days. She would do the same and then got to the king in spite of the law. Mordecai did so, and all the Hebrews prayed to their God.

After three days Esther put on her best dress and showed joy and love on her face. She passed door after door of the palace and found herself finally in the presence of the king. He was sitting on his royal throne, dressed in all his robes of state that glittered with gold and jewels. He looked full of anger and saw Esther. Esther fainted and sank to the floor. Ahasuerus sprang from his throne, took her in his arms and soothed her when she recovered. He put his golden sceptre on her neck and told her to speak out. She lauded the king then, but fainted again. The king was really alarmed then and asked her what mattered. Ahasuerus said to Esther that she would be granted what she wanted, even if it were half his kingdom. Esther merely asked to invite Hannan and her to the banquet she had prepared. So the king and Hannan came to the banquet that Esther had prepared and during the feast the king repeated his promise. But Esther merely asked again for the king and Hannan to come to a banquet the next day. Hannan was still angered at the sight of Mordecai. The wife of Hannan, Zeresh, and all his friends told him to ask the king to have Mordecai hung on a gallows in the morning. Hannan erected such a huge gallows in front of his house.

Hannan went to see the king. Ahasuerus had just read in his books how Mordecai had saved him from the plot to assassinate him and he had found out that Mordecai had received almost nothing for this. So he asked Hannan what the right way was to treat a man that the king wished to honour. Hannan thought the king wanted to honour him, Hannan, so he said that such a man deserved royal robes, and a horse from the king's stables. Then the man should be arrayed and led on horseback through the city

market, with the noblest of the king's officers proclaiming, 'This is the way a man is treated that the king wishes to honour.' Ahasuerus ordered Hannan to do so for Mordecai. So Hannan had to array Mordecai and lead him through the city square. After that, Hannan was in discomfiture and Zeresh told him that he was beginning to fall and Mordecai to rise.

Hannan went to the second banquet of Ahasuerus and Esther. Now Esther spoke out. She asked the king to grant her her life, and the lives of her people. She said she had been handed over to annihilation with her people. Ahasuerus then asked who was the man that had thought of doing such a thing. Esther told it was Hannan. The king stood up in a rage and ran into the palace garden, whereas Hannan stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. When the king returned he found Hannan sprawled across the coach where Esther was reclining, so he thought Hannan was going to rape the queen in his own palace. One of the officers said there was a gallows at the house of Hannan, prepared for Mordecai. 'Hang Hannan on it', said the king and so was done. Then the king's anger subsided.

That same day the king gave Esther Hannan's house. The king gave his signet ring, taken from Hannan, to Mordecai and Esther gave Mordecai the charge of Hannan's house. The king allowed Queen Esther and Mordecai to write letters to all his nations stating that the Jews had the right to assemble in self-defence and to annihilate any armed force that might attack them. This way the Jews could strike down their enemies. The Jews slaughtered thousands of men. The days of the rehabilitation were proclaimed as days of festivity, the days of Purim. Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, wrote a second letter to observe these days of Purim. Mordecai became next in rank to Ahasuerus. He was a man held in high respect. He cared for the welfare of his race.

### **Esther and Mordecai**

Aert De Gelder (1645-1727). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1685.

Aert De Gelder was a Dutch painter from the city of Dordrecht, born at the end of 1645. He first studied with Samuel van Hoogstraten but then also became, from 1661 to 1667, one of the last pupils of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn in Amsterdam. He was very much influenced by Rembrandt's style and like his master he took much to scenes from the Old Testament. He was however a lighter-charactered man. He also applied a lighter palette than Rembrandt overall. Aert De Gelder painted with his brush, with the hard other end of brushes, with palette knives, and even with his thumbs and fingers. He thus showed more texture still than Rembrandt. De Gelder did not have to live by his art and worked much for his own pleasure. He painted into the eighteenth century, introducing a few new mannerist elements, which brought him to the Rococo era, but he never forgot the pictures of Rembrandt. De Gelder died in 1727 in Dordrecht. He painted an 'Esther and Mordecai', which is now in the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest, Hungary.

De Gelder shows in his picture of Esther how Mordecai pleads with Esther to go to king Ahasuerus to ask him to withdraw the edict of Hannan. In the Bible story Mordecai never sees the Queen in person; he speaks to her only through the intercessor Hathach. The essential element of the story is however the pleading of Mordecai and de Gelder painted that theme.

Esther was Queen of Susa. She is wonderfully dressed. De Gelder gave her the very heavy several robes of a Dutch lady and he painted a veil over her head. She wears pearls around her neck and pearl earrings at her ears. She sits in a huge armchair and was reading from a book when Mordecai entered. Mordecai is dressed in black, so that he almost blends with the background. Mordecai is bent with age and with the reverence he now owes to the Queen. He has an intelligent face, a long face with a long beard; but he is not very old. He also wears a black hat. Of Mordecai the viewer only sees his face and hands. Mordecai's lips do not move but his hands tell the story. He opens his arms and the fingers of his right hand in a gesture of respect but he makes clear his intentions with the pointing and moving fingers of his left hand. He looks at Esther but does not really dares to look in her eyes. Esther looks in astonishment at Mordecai but she has to grasp with her left hand the chair in which she sits, and seems to go to her heart with her right hand in sudden fright. This hand asks whether it is really her that Mordecai implores to peak for the Jews to the king. Aert De Gelder painted Esther like the Bible described her when she went to Ahasuerus, 'Rosy with the full flush of her beauty, her face radiated joy and love; but her heart shrank with fear.'<sup>G38</sup> Such is Esther in De Gelder's painting. He painted her as a fine Dutch girl, well in the flesh and satisfied, but who suddenly receives a message of tragedy. She could be a tradeswoman of Dordrecht hearing of a disaster that has happened to one of her merchant ships. De Gelder used the hands of his personages to tell in a vivid way the whole scene of the pleading to Esther.

De Gelder painted 'Esther and Mordecai' entirely in the style of Rembrandt. There is no background but merely the black or darkest brown of a room behind the figures. De Gelder used only ochre, yellow, brown and dark grey colours; he used no blue, no

green. The faces of the two figures stand out against this darkness and so does the fine dress of Esther. De Gelder apparently had all his joy in painting the heavy, rich robes of Esther. He enlivened the scene further, more than Rembrandt would have done in his later years, by showing a red carpet on the table and the open book contrasts well in its brighter hues against this red area. The yellow, red and brown hues on Esther, placed against the dark background, look even brighter than the golden hues and among this gold Esther's soft face with its gentle round features and soft cheeks, is the more prominent in the light. Aert De Gelder played of course fully on the contrasts between light and dark, which is particularly fine in these golden hues, as he had seen from Rembrandt. From Rembrandt also De Gelder had learnt to show the instant in gestures and looks. These express the narrative in the content and the moment. De Gelder was indeed one of Rembrandt's most faithful followers and admirers.

### **Esther before going to Ahasuerus**

Aert de Gelder (1645-1727). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1684.

Aert De Gelder painted another picture of Esther. 'Esther preparing to meet Ahasuerus' dates from somewhat before the picture of 'Esther and Mordecai'. This scene is rather unusual, though other painters have painted on this particular scene also. Esther prepares for her special, un-called for meeting with the King of Susa. She is dressed up in the fashion prevalent in the seventeenth century in Holland and not as an oriental Queen. Her servants bring the last touch to her long veil. The episode of this preparation is but told in a few short words in the Bible. Yet the scene is one of expectancy and of tension for Esther does not know how Ahasuerus will receive her. Esther may still seduce the King by her beauty and impress him by her wonderful clothes but she may also lose by impertinence, be rebuked by the King for having come unsummoned, fall in disgrace or even be executed.

De Gelder did not paint Esther as a fine, slim, elegant young woman. Like in other paintings of his, she looks rather like a plump, well-filled, short and squat Dutch merchant's daughter or merchant's wife. She should be well into her thirties or forties. We can also not say that her waiting women or servants are fine, nice young women. They are richly dressed in heavy robes also but their faces are not gracious. De Gelder imagined the women of the town of Dordrecht in the position of Esther. De Gelder painted for himself and lived much as a recluse when it came to painting. He was apparently more satisfied with the life and people he knew around him than with imaginary beauty. This preference for reality was a recurrent feature in Dutch art of the century.

De Gelder however was a fine painter. He painted Esther and especially her dress in marvellous detail. He used a pyramid composition on Esther. She is flanked by two servants, which form the wider base of the pyramid. Her hair and elaborate, veiled headdress are made up so high that they form the upper point of the triangle and from

there descend the lines of the veil into the traditional structure also. The transparent veil over Esther catches the eye of the viewer but also the heavy brocades on Esther's dress are well rendered. De Gelder's greatest talent was however in how well he showed the tissues in this painting. The viewer has really an immediate physical impression of the heavy cloth, as if one could truly feel the materiality of the textures at one's fingers.

De Gelder continued to paint in Rembrandt's hues in this picture of Esther. He used orange, brown, yellow and grey hues in a varied palette in tone and intensity. He brought brightness in Esther's face and surrounded her by the lead-white for which also Rembrandt had been so famous. The fine, transparent, white veil is a flimsy protection for Esther and yet it confines her world and isolates her from the people around her. In his composition De Gelder positioned Esther and her maids-in-waiting to the left side of the frame instead of in the middle, also a somewhat unusual, asymmetric structure. But then he could show other servants around a basin of water from which Esther has washed. The water is a symbol of purity. Esther was compared in old times with the Virgin Mary and in ancient paintings of the Madonna and Child one also finds references to purity through symbols like the pail of water. De Gelder re-discovered the symbol. He painted this scene however in the background, in sombre tones, to the right of the picture, as if to indicate that these were but old symbols and now past. Esther's purity and innocence also will be lost as she goes to the King.

**Esther before her Meeting with Ahasuerus**

Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn (1606-1669). National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa. Ca. 1633.

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn also painted the scene of Esther preparing to go to Ahasuerus, like Aert De Gelder. Rembrandt's picture is however of fifty years earlier than the one of De Gelder. Yet, the painting of Rembrandt seems the one that is the most innovative. In comparing two paintings like these one can distinguish the true genius from the great painter.

Rembrandt showed his Esther seated and being prepared by an elder servant. He used a simple pyramid structure of light for his portrait, but did not need a long white veil to strongly support and make very obvious that structure like in the painting of De Gelder. His pyramid is a triangle of light in his picture and we see the portrait of Esther in the triangle of bright light in the centre of the painting. Esther's face sparkles with light and Rembrandt brought these flashes of light in fine lines of white colours also on the sleeves of her shirt. Esther's white short comes through her red robe at the arms and here Rembrandt brought almost Impressionist brushstrokes of white. Rembrandt's genius was often in his use of utter bright light lead white on dark backgrounds and here also he worked this white judiciously in certain places of his picture. In fact, he supported his major triangle of Esther also with these white areas for we have at the top of the pyramid the face of Esther and lower down her two white arms, then lower still the bright patches on her knees. These areas also follow the lines of the pyramid.

Aert De Gelder painted the robes of Esther in all detail and he placed Esther parallel to the viewer, facing the viewer. He also applied a triangle structure. But compared to Rembrandt's picture we miss in De Gelder's painting the slight variation of forms, the modulation and softening of the strong structure that shows the difference between a great and an inspired picture. Rembrandt's Esther sits with her body not parallel to the viewer but facing the right. She turns her face to look at the viewer, thus looks more natural and less static. De Gelder's Esther does not look at the viewer but she looks sideways, avoiding the viewer and remaining distant and inside her own life. Rembrandt's Esther is more open and expectant, also more coquettish. Esther also does not look straight onto the viewer in Rembrandt's picture; it is as if she has been surprised by somebody or something in the direction of the viewer, but then something just next to him or her, or behind. Still, as she looks in the direction of the viewer, the viewer has an impression of a closer Esther. As in so many of his paintings, Rembrandt has made a portrait which is always a quite static scene of little movement in gestures of the figures but he nevertheless created a fine grasp of an instant of time, and a fragment of action. Rembrandt's genius lies thus in his representation of the moment, perpetuated in a timeless picture. Here, Rembrandt reaches this effect with the position of only Esther's face, which shows very efficiently a sudden glance and thus the moment. Aert De Gelder has just not been able to show the same opposition of moment and perpetuity even though he certainly tried. He succeeded closely enough in some of his pictures but his 'Esther preparing to go to Ahasuerus' retains the static monumentality that stays its weakness. Rembrandt remained in this aspect the unsurpassed master.

Rembrandt's brushstrokes of colour seem much freer, wilder even, more enthusiastic and younger, fresher than De Gelder's. Rembrandt used on Esther's shirt and robe a combination of impetuosity of colouring and of detailed drawing. He contrasted the fine, white strokes on Esther's right arm and on her knees with delicate, detailed drawing of the knot on her body and on the jewel-like borders of her dress around her neck. At Esther's neck Rembrandt detailed in several colours the borders of her robe, whereas lower down, where the viewer will scrutinise less, he only hinted at the intricate patterns of the lining with a few sudden brushstrokes. Rembrandt showed the play of light on the face and knees of Esther quite more dramatically also than De Gelder, showing his power of depiction more so than in the picture of his pupil. Yet, Rembrandt made his own Esther when he was still young, about twenty-seven years old, whereas De Gelder painted his Esther at the age of around forty. The man of twenty-seven had more force and intuition of depiction than the man of forty. Rembrandt was at ease in his genius and could almost unknowingly create compositions that retained the impression of natural, while De Gelder had to strain himself and lacked the natural tranquillity while not entirely able to indicate the tensions of the theme.

Rembrandt placed Esther against a dark background. Yet, when he was young he used a brighter palette than in his mature years and we sense in his Esther the transition from his period of contrasting and varied hues to a more limited palette of hues. Like Aert de Gelder, Rembrandt used mainly red and brown colours, which, by the effect of light, glow into golden and yellow to his sparkling white. The background also remained brown and grey, but Rembrandt nevertheless showed more variation here than in his later years.

Like Aert De Gelder, Rembrandt painted a rich Dutch merchant's daughter. Esther is well in the flesh, rather plump like some men prefer portly ladies. Esther may be pregnant however. We may suspect that from the way Rembrandt opened her upper robe over her under-robe. He shows her with her legs somewhat opened like pregnant women sit sometimes to ease their body around a baby. Esther holds her right hand just above the knot that hangs on her belly and that might be the symbol of her pregnancy. Her face radiates brightness in a soft, satisfied happiness and she has a look of inner victory, of private secrets of knowing. She has an inner pleasure on her face. The coquettish look she throws in the direction of the viewer is one of relaxed pride. Such radiation of subtle emotions would also have been too much for Aert De Gelder.

### **The Toilet of Esther**

Théodore Chassériau (1819-1856). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1841.

Théodore Chassériau was a child prodigy in painting. At the age of eleven he entered the workshop of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, one of if not the most famous French painter of Neo-Classicism and of academicism in France. Ingres looked at Chassériau for a long time as his most gifted pupil. In 1840 Chassériau joined Ingres in Rome, where Ingres was now Director of the Medici Villa, the seat of the French Academy in Rome. When Chassériau learnt to know the pictures of Eugène Delacroix and Delacroix' conception of freer compositions and of using wild, heavy colour combinations, he perceived that this style suited more his own Romantic aspirations. Chassériau broke with Ingres and once back in Paris he worked much on decorations for churches and governmental public buildings. Many of those frescoes have however been destroyed. In 1846 Chassériau travelled to Algeria and like other French painters before him, drew many portraits and scenes there, like Delacroix, in a fashion now called Orientalism. Chassériau was a painter of Romanticism, but of the late French such period. French painting would take other directions soon. Chassériau remained very much influenced by Ingres' Classicism and he blended to a degree Ingres' austerity of depiction with Delacroix' freer style and ideas of colour. Chassériau was one of the last painters of a French generation before Realism and Impressionism really won the times and he announced the Symbolism of Gustave Moreau. He died young, at thirty-seven years.

Chassériau's 'Toilet of Esther' shows references to several traditions. Chassériau painted many pictures of nudes, like the many paintings on the themes of Venus, Diana, Susanna or Bathsheba, which were made in all centuries. He also, like so many other, used a bible theme to paint a study of the female nude, a subject that usually pleases but also holds some connotation of daring for a viewer. Chassériau painted Esther like an Oriental Odalisque, even though he had not yet been to Algeria by then. He knew Egyptian frescoes and used these pictures to add a touch of orientalism in his Esther too. We can see how the servant on the right presents the box of jewels in the traditional Egyptian way, in a very formal gesture, with hands and arms high.

Théodore Chassériau painted Esther at her toilet. She makes up her hair and in a long, voluptuous movement draws her hands through her fine hair. She is a slim, elegant, fine, sensual woman with an elongated, lean body and that impression is enhanced by Esther's long arms that reach high in a smooth, sinuous line. Chassériau painted her in light colours, in hues that are very bright in tone and he used these hues also on the white shirt and her golden cloak. He matched the colour of her hair with the yellow of that cloak. Chassériau then pushed colour in the background. He painted darker tones there, but showed the three basic colours of blue (on the left), green (in the middle) and red (on the right). Blue and green are of course separated by the yellow-white of Esther's body, whereas the green and red, which are complementary colours that go well together, touch more but are also actually separated from each other by the brown arms of the servant. The green behind Esther has golden hints, suiting her body. Chassériau knew well the dangers of juxtaposing high-intensity hues and like



Ingres, he remained dedicated to harmony. Yet, we sense a freedom from the subdued hues of Classicism breakthrough in his paintings from 1840 on.

Chassériau had enough talent to paint in as many real details as Ingres. He showed marvellous chiaroscuro on Esther, but the transition from light to shadows is so soft in this painting that the picture remains quite flat to a high degree. Chiaroscuro in the background is practically non-existent. That also was a feature of Chassériau's figures. He detailed finely Esther's jewels, her pearls on her neck and arms and showed further nice details as well in the servants as in the hint of a landscape behind Esther, such as in the white flowers in the upper left. But Chassériau really had eyes and delight only in painting the nudity of Esther. She looks a little to the left, not at the viewer, in a coquettish view. She seems to be well aware of the viewer but she averts her eyes as if she were annoyed by that presence. This feeling a viewer might receive from the expression on her long face, and from her small mouth that does not smile but rather in which she closes together and protrudes her lips in defiance. Esther's body is wonderfully curved, like an ideal Venus, and the fluid lines that Chassériau showed in her are also a feature that he liked to apply in his various pictures of nudes. Ended were the plump ladies of Rembrandt and the stout matrons of Ingres. Chassériau and Moreau would paint the slimmer seductresses of modern times. Chassériau had learned to admire the paintings of nudes from his master Ingres. Ingres' famous *Odalisque* dates from 1814 and Ingres also repeatedly painted oriental nudes. But Chassériau had an altogether more Romantic, younger, new view on the female nude. Chassériau did not really live long enough to be able to break away from the examples he saw of Ingres and Delacroix but he certainly had the talent a great painter needs.

Chassériau's 'Esther at her toilet' is a fine painting but one that was not innovative and visionary enough in content to be a great masterpiece, even if he brought his subject, Esther, before a nicely contrasting background of the two servants and the fine golden-green colours. Chassériau's real novelty was in his introduction of these hard colours in the background. He inverted a tradition here that most often showed strong colours in the foreground. Like Delacroix, Chassériau tried to evolve, but he did it only very shyly.

### **The Swooning of Esther**

Antoine Coypel (1661-1722). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1704.

Antoine Coypel was a painter of a family of artists of France, who were all connected to the courts of the kings. His father was Noël Coypel (1628-1707), a well-known Parisian painter who had headed from 1672 on the Académie de France in Rome and who was a Director of the Académie Royale of Paris since 1695. Antoine's half-brother Noël-Nicolas Coypel (1690-1734) was a painter also, but he was the least famous of the family. Antoine's son Charles-Antoine Coypel (1694-1752) had also a famous career, being appointed in 1747 Director of the Académie Royale equally and First Painter of the king of France. He was not only a painter but also a play writer and an art critic.

Antoine Coypel received his first training from his father and also went with him to Rome from 1673 to 1675. Antoine learned to know the great Italian painters whose works were in Rome: Raphael, the Carraccis and Domenichino, and Caravaggio of course. He won a drawing prize at Rome's Accademia di San Luca. He met the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini and Carlo Maratta. While returning to France in 1676, he also studied the North Italian painters and the Venetians Titian and Veronese. He started immediately a brilliant career in Paris and was in his turn appointed in 1716 First Painter of the King. He received prestigious commissions for decoration works in Paris and in the palace of Versailles. The Coypel family of three generations of painters, Noël (1628-1707) and his sons Antoine (1661-1722) and Noël-Nicolas (1690-1734), with Antoine's son Charles-Antoine (1694-1752) were famously established and linked with the Parisian court as well as with the art academies of the capital during times of glory, splendour and wealth of the French royal regime. Their art therefore was naturally very academic.

Antoine Coypel's 'The Swooning of Esther' shows not only that academicism in the style of the Coypels in general but also his own extraordinary talent. The kings of France and particularly the Ministers of Louis XIV promoted the academies. The Royal Academy of Painting was founded in 1648 in Paris and the French Academy in Rome in 1666. Scientific academies also were founded then and the first Dictionary of the French Academy was published in 1694 after that academy had been founded in 1634. Antoine Coypel was a distinguished member of this establishment, so he had always to deliver imposing and dignified paintings.

The composition of the 'Swooning of Esther' is on a strong pyramid structure. We see Esther fainting and servants flank her. King Ahasuerus supports her, so that the mass in the centre forms a wide triangle. The top of that triangle is the high, white feather on Ahasuerus' headdress, added by Coypel purposefully to heighten the top of the pyramid. Coypel then showed Esther in light colours, surrounded by darker areas so that her fine figure would be more easily perceived and recognised by viewers. Coypel emphasised the base of the pyramid by painting a dark brown-red oriental tapestry on the marble floor and since the marble is of a lighter grey colour also, the masses of sombre colour around Esther form all the more a separate entity. If Coypel had only shown this scene, the painting would have had too strong and too obvious structure, and the picture would have lacked variety. So the painter added the figure of the Persian dignitary Hannan on the right and he balanced that figure on the left with a

fire stand. These two areas of colour balance the pyramid and make this structure a little less overpowering. Finally, Coypel also had to balance the lighter lower colours of the marble floor, so he painted an open window in the hall of the Palace of Susa and showed a lighter sky. Painting such open views through windows or doors of loggias was also a very traditional means to create space in a painting and it allowed Coypel also to show some of his talents at landscape painting. The trick with such traditional means was 'to get away with it', to place such elements of style in such a natural way that the viewer had not a perception of cold artifice. Coypel succeeded brilliantly in that. All in all, Coypel applied a design that could not be more academic and that could be explained with simple logic, as we did above, by showing the classic features of style that a painter could use, by using the style elements that were taught in the academies of France.

Antoine Coypel also used fine, harmonising hues. He stayed with the nice brown, orange and deep red hues that suit well any environment of large halls with white walls, red curtains and golden candelabras. He brought golden touches discreetly here and there too in his picture. He contrasted cleverly the lighter tones of Esther's magnificent dress with the background. He painted Esther's face and décolleté in very shrill, bright light and since her face is also almost in the centre of the painting, that face draws first attention. If a viewer looks thus at Esther's face, his or her eyes will follow the direction of her inclined head towards Ahasuerus and then again Ahasuerus' look towards Esther and also to the faces of the servants on the left will sway the view of the viewer over Esther again. Later still, the viewer will discover Hannan who holds the edict against the Jews in his hands, and from Hannan eyes will go to the fire stand on the left side. The edict will be burned.

If the structure of the middle scene is a pyramid, there is also a strong direction of the faces and looks of the servants, over Esther and Ahasuerus, which follow the left diagonal of the frame. This direction goes, by the faces, upwards and this gives a particularly fine elevating impression of spiritual uplifting to the viewer, an effect that was also promoted by the academy as one of the finest moods in paintings. This line is then further enhanced in the right upper corner, where Coypel showed the oblique lines of the massive throne of the king. Hannan is excluded from the centre scene and from this elevating impression, so that the viewer perceives him all the more as the odd-man-out, as the person that really does not belong to the intimacy of Esther, her servants and Ahasuerus. There is empathy between the centre figures but Hannan does not belong to that court. Besides the strong academic design of the painting, the viewer should not forget the fine colours of the painting, the details rendered in a very skilled and accomplished way, and the delicate way in which Coypel showed the narrative of Esther's fainting. Antoine Coypel masterly modulated the hues of his colours in tone and intensity. The mood that his colours evoke in viewers is of warmth and empathy, since the browns and reds dominate. There is hardly any blue or green in the picture, but also no black. All colours are varied in shades and the chiaroscuro on the folds of the robes, on Esther but also on Hannan, are painted as best as can be.

Antoine Coypel showed only a subdued, soft light in his picture. The light comes from the left front, and Coypel may have suggested it to come from the left side, from the coal burner. In the scene, Ahasuerus hurries down his throne to succour Esther. He steps towards the left, towards the fire of his passion. Coypel suggests by the fire the emotions of Ahasuerus. The king's concern is however finely shown and although the

scene may have a very strong confining structure, Coypel succeeded well in showing movement and action in his painting. He drew Esther forceless in her servants' hands. She holds her arms open and Ahasuerus cannot but go into those arms. He takes her delicately, courteously. Her servants support her and the pity shows on their faces. The body of Esther slumps lifelessly but Coypel then suggested her fine lines in female curves. He balanced her head that falls to the right of the frame pictorially with her knees, over which hangs and orange part of her robe, also to the right. Coypel was a master of equilibrium in colours and structure and yet all this was done so naturally as if nothing was artificial in his scene. Movement and moment are even shown also in the figure of Hannan. Even though this Persian dignitary stands still and massively in the right corner, we sense the surprise in his face and he also seems to thrust forward the papers of the edict rather than merely holding them. He stands rigidly, but rigidly of surprise and shock, not by error of depiction. Finally, from the fire on the left grow smoke fumes so that even here Coypel suggested some sense of movement. That movement then points to the landscape. Coypel contrasted the lively scene of the personages with the heavy architectures of the loggia door, of the large throne and of the curtains hanging further up.

It is easy to underestimate or even to denigrate a painting such as Antoine Coypel's 'The Fainting of Esther'. Such paintings are rather painted in sombre hues, which hit the viewer less immediately. They are discreet and warm colours. The picture of Coypel is not spectacular but very subtle in depiction. The contents of his painting have been designed to represent the scene of ancient times, of times of heavy clothes and tapestries, of times of former regimes of wealth that exploited the people that were not around the king at the court. The decorations are such as we now avoid in our rooms with large white and black surfaces and of hygienic forms. Yet, for the style analyst these paintings are a delight and when one makes abstract of some of the impression of old, the paintings of Coypel are indeed masterpieces. Antoine Coypel composed his painting intelligently and with love and keen observation. He treated his personages with sympathy. His colouring is fabulously rich and varied. The 'Fainting of Esther' is a silent masterpiece that once one studies it a little becomes sheer charm and subtlety for the viewer. How wonderfully discreet must this painting have hung or stood in a hall of Versailles or of the Louvre, waiting patiently to be discovered and admired. It stood humbly to win its glory at the eye of the interested, then captured and enamoured art amateur. Antoine Coypel showed that, whatever one may currently claim superiority for the divine impetuosity of lonely genius artists in contemporary expressive art that is supposed to show the emotions of the spur of the moment in rapid and hard colours, that academicist painting can be glorious and extremely rewarding to the lover of paintings.

**Esther chosen by Ahasuerus**

Filippino Lippi (ca. 1457-1504). Musée Condé. Chantilly. Ca. 1475-1480.

**The Fainting of Esther before Ahasuerus**

Filippino Lippi (ca. 1457-1504). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1475-1480.

**The Triumph of Mordecai**

Filippino Lippi (ca. 1457-1504). National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa. Ca. 1475-1480.

**Esther at the Palace Gate**

Filippino Lippi (ca. 1457-1504). National Gallery of Canada. Ottawa. Ca. 1475-1480.

Filippino Lippi painted in Florence around 1475 a series of panels on the story of Esther for two 'cassoni' or marriage chests. He was still young then, about eighteen years old. He had lost his father, the great Filippo Lippi, when he was twelve and he had travelled from Spoleto where his father had painted his last frescoes in the cathedral of the town, and where he himself had finished the works, to Florence. In Florence he would study with Sandro Botticelli (ca. 1445-1510). One of his first own commissions in Florence was to complete in 1481 the frescoes of Masaccio and Masolino in the Brancacci Chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine. He painted other major works, for which his father would have been proud. But he died in the prime of his art, merely forty-seven years old. Filippino Lippi also painted in Rome, where he made in 1488 the frescoes of the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. In his later years he compensated his lack of power of depiction by profusion of ornaments and bizarre decorations, continuing also the change in the style of Botticelli. He evolved his tastes for ornament to a sophisticated form of new mannerism. Giorgio Vasari tells in the 'Lives of the Artists' that Filippino Lippi also designed the marble monument for the tomb of his father in Spoleto. The Spoletans had not wanted to release the tomb of such a famous painter, but Lorenzo de Medici anyhow had paid for a fine tomb. Giorgio Vasari also wrote that Filippino Lippi was of a lovable nature, always courteous, affable and gentle. He died within a few days from a raging fever. Sandro Botticelli would even outlive him.

Florentine society of the fifteenth century definitely sought fine art for its town, palaces and churches. When a young couple, sons and daughters of wealthy merchants, married, they more often than not first obtained apartments in their parents' houses, which were more the sturdy fortified family lodgings than palaces. Florentine palaces were not very gracious, neither outside nor inside. They were massive square buildings with high and heavy walls in which few highly-set windows were heavily protected with iron bars. They looked like massive fortresses, tall, and with very thick walls. They had a patio however and the apartments received more light from that inner courtyard than from the outside, from the narrow streets. Their finest parts were this interior space and sometimes also the balustrades, which could be used for defence since they hang out over the walls but from which one had a fine view onto the streets where sometimes magnificent processions passed. The balustrades ran high also, almost at the top of the buildings, along the façades. The married couple sought some elegance and colouring in the interior decoration of its rooms. Walls could be covered with elegant frescoes. Curtains and tapestries could be hung. Fine furniture was brought in. It was a habit also to paint scenes on the panels of the doors and on the cupboards. The lady of the apartment protected expensive dresses by keeping them lying in chests or cassoni. The cassoni were often painted

also. When the furniture disappeared, the painted panels were recuperated. The most famous of such decorations that have been conserved are probably the Borgherini panels, made for this family of Florentine merchants by various painters in the sixteenth century.

Equally famous are the six cassoni panels painted by Filippino Lippi that have been conserved and which are now dispersed over several museums. Painters and married couple would necessarily chose religious scenes for the panels; but scenes of the Crucifixion of Christ or other scenes of Christ's Passion were not very sweet for interior decoration. Nicer scenes from the Bible were often preferred. The stories of Joseph the Egyptian were exotic and had similarities to the stories of Jesus. Scenes from the book of Esther were fine too, because these also had a touch of orientalism since they happened in Persia and they lauded the courteous passion of Ahasuerus for his poor Jewish wife. Esther's story was a Cinderella narrative *avant-la-lettre*. A poor girl that had been chosen to become Queen of Persia was a wonderful story. It was also a story of the loving care of a king for his wife, of her loyalty in marriage and of the nice entreaties of a wife to her husband. The story ended well, like in contemporary Hollywood films. It was a sweet scene of the court, and which Florentin merchant would not desire to be once a member of the Signoria of Florence and be in the political vicinity and of course even better still in the commercial vicinity of the Medici rulers? Like in the life of Joseph the Egyptian, symbols could be applied to Esther and Ahasuerus' marriage. The Virgin Mary had married an elder man. She had been chosen by God among so other women and by her child she had saved the Jewish people. So, Filippino Lippi painted for two cassoni fine scenes from the Book Esther. He still worked in the workshop of Sandro Botticelli and the great master may have let his talented pupil exercise his art on chests, whereas he reserved himself for the larger paintings. Six panels have been conserved. Two large panels are one each in the Condé Museum of the castle-palace of Chantilly near Paris and one is in the Louvre. This last panel also comes from the collection of Henri d'Orléans, the Duke of Aumale, who lived in Chantilly in the eighteenth century. Two panels, apparently side panels, are in the National Gallery of Ottawa. These represent the 'Triumph of Mordecai' and 'Esther at the Palace Gate'. Two other panels are in Rome, in the Galleria Casino dell'Aurora, Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi.

The cassoni panels painted by Filippino Lippi are particularly fine. They are drawn masterly and represent Florentine draughtsmanship at its best. They are painted harmoniously, finely and in somewhat subdued, warm hues that do not contrast sharply but yet remain clear well-defined. The panels show fine architecture in the scenes of an ideal world of courteousness. The Chantilly and the Louvre panels consist of three scenes each. The panel of 'Esther at the Palace Gate' shows a nice lady dressed in red robes, walking elegantly by the palace gates of a North-Italian town. Here Lippi painted a fine landscape of soft sloping meadows and a few trees, whereas the palace resembles the Florentine town fortifications. In the panel 'The Triumph of Mordecai' Lippi showed Mordecai on horseback, being led by Hannan. The scene here is also set inside a renaissance fortified castle and Lippi could paint a wonderful, dark horse with Mordecai, equally dressed in a red robe, crowned like a king. The two panels thus show figures dressed in red, which could mean that they were on each side of a chest and showed symmetrically the same red areas. The figures are dignified Florentine personages, drawn in all detail with fine skill.

The Chantilly panel shows on the left the feast of Ahasuerus, at which the king summoned Queen Vashti. On the right side is Vashti's own banquet. In the middle scene, Ahasuerus sits on his throne. His councillors are with him and he receives a procession of beautiful girls among which he will choose Esther for his bride. Esther just passes before him. There are also three scenes in the panel of the Louvre. On the left side, Esther talks to the miserable Mordecai. In the right part Ahasuerus has granted Esther's wish to save the Jews and we see the bad councillor Hannan hung from a tree in the background. In the middle scene, Ahasuerus again sits on his throne and Esther faints before him. In both the panels Esther is dressed in fine robes.

The two large cassoni panels of Chantilly and Paris have a simple and obvious composition. Ahasuerus sits in his throne in the centre and Filippino Lippi gave a fine impression of classic grandness by drawing a view of a colonnaded hall around the king. This hall then separates the right and left scenes. Lippi painted this architecture very open and light so that the whole gives an impression of airiness, of lightness and leisure. The hall is of a palace or of an open loggia, not of a fortified castle. In this ideal, exquisite landscape the figures move. Lippi painted all the figures finely, in detail, with wonderful chiaroscuro on all dresses so that the viewer can see easily knees bent, arms stretched, body curves in general. Lippi painted barely any shadows however, but we do see how he painted for instance in the Chantilly panel the shadows of the sides of the square columns. The sides that face the source of light are painted uniformly in white and the sides that are in the shadow are uniformly black. This is a quite naïve way to depict shadows and effects of light. Filippino Lippi had not yet remarked that shadows have colour too, other than white and black. In the two panels the background is painted in lighter hues than the foreground. This allowed Lippi to show the fine, miniature scenes there also in full detail, but in natural representations he would have had to paint here vaguer and more similar and softer hues. In later periods, painters would invert the tones and leaving the background in darker tones so that the front scene would be more immediately visible and drawn into the direct attention of the viewer. Lippi wanted the viewer also to have attention for and be able to admire the side scenes.

It is remarkable however how well the young Filippino Lippi knew already the rules of perspective and showed them in the cassoni paintings to create a wonderful, deep, far illusion of space. In the two panels the vanishing point of the perspective lines of the building is on the head of Ahasuerus, as if Ahasuerus saw the scenes and not the viewer. Nevertheless, the architectures are placed parallel to the viewer so that only the lines perpendicular to the viewer flee to the vanishing point. In composition this gives of course a very strong focus on Ahasuerus. Not only does Ahasuerus sit in the centre, on an imposing throne of royal curtains, but all lines of perspective end at him. The viewer's attention is inexorably drawn to Ahasuerus in this composition and a male viewer easily identifies himself with the king.

There are few round forms in the pictures, but for a few arches in the background. Such round forms would have made difficult shadowing and might have interfered visually with the straight forms of the chests. There is only one round tower in the picture of 'Esther at the Palace Gate' and the shadowing on that tower is very hesitating. Lippi painted the cassoni scenes to remain in harmony with the forms of the chests, but maybe also because he did not yet well master the effects of light on round shapes.

Filippino Lippi apparently wanted to charm and seduce the future owners of the cassoni with his skills. He was still a young man, well known already, but still not as famous as his master Botticelli. He worked diligently at the panels with extreme care and patience, to show all the fine details of the story of Esther. He must have read the Bible and chosen the scenes that could best evoke also in the viewers the whole story of Esther, Ahasuerus and Mordecai. Admire the fine landscapes each time in the left parts of the panels. He painted stylised trees and showed, especially in the Louvre panel, that he also knew aerial perspective for he painted in darker hues the upper part of the sky. Lippi painted all the scenes in a very lively way. All the personages move and show their emotions in simple but immediately recognisable poses. In the panel of Chantilly each lady that walks by moves differently and they can be seen talking to each other or otherwise engaged in some personal act. In the panel of the Louvre, as Esther faints, all councillors of Ahasuerus incline their bodies ready to intervene and they hold their hands in surprise at their faces. In the Ottawa panel, Esther walks by the gate but she holds one hand high to point to the heavens and she also elegantly draws on her robes so that they not hang on the ground and get dirty. In the other Ottawa panel, Mordecai sits not just on the horse; he also shows the way to Hannan with a stick. Lippi liked to tell, liked to show the action of the scenes.

The panels made by Filippino Lippi have many qualities of great art and they are nice pictures. They were obviously painted with care, love, dedication and delight. Whether the panels were made for a member of the Medici family itself must remain a conjecture. Centuries after Filippino Lippi painted these images, they continue to inspire delight in viewers. The panels wonderfully realised their objective to please, to finely decorate chests that a courteous husband or loving father would have offered to the lady of the house. The husband would have offered the panels to a wife he respected and loved. No man without respect and love would offer such delicate beauties to his wife. So the renaissance times continue to spread and prove their message of courteous feelings among men and women.

#### *Other paintings:*

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Courtauld Institute Galleries - London. 1620.

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Bernardo Cavalino (1616-1656). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. 1620.

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Konrad Witz (ca. 1400-144/1446). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1435.

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/1653). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York. 1622-1623.

**Esther before Ahasuerus.** Julius Friedrich Anton Schrader (1815-1900). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1856.



**The Marriage of Esther and Ahasuerus.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The Museum of Fine Arts, Tournai.

**Esther and Ahasuerus.** Jan Victors (1620-1676). Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister – Kassel. Ca.1640.

**The Story of Esther.** Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473-1531). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1528.

**The Banquet of Ahasuerus.** Domenico Fiasella (1598-1669). Palazzo Patrone. Genoa.

## *Part XI. The Books of Maccabees*

The Books of Maccabees are a record of the resistance of Judaism against Hellenistic influences. It is a history of the years from about 167 BC to 151 BC. Attempts to impose Greek religion and culture were successful everywhere in Near Asia, but the Jews opposed themselves to the change.

Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus, reigned over the kingdom of the Greeks. During his wicked times, a gymnasium was built in Jerusalem and some of the Jews disguised their circumcision, abandoned the covenant and submitted to gentile rules. Antiochus conquered Egypt, routing Pharaoh Ptolemy and then advanced on Israel and Jerusalem. He broke into the sanctuary of Jerusalem and stole all the silver and gold. Two years later he sent the Mysarch through all the cities of Judah and these armies settled in the city of David, storing arms and provisions and proving themselves a great trouble. The king then issued a proclamation that his entire kingdom had to become one nation; each nation had to renounce its particular customs. In Jerusalem the king built an idolatrous altar on top of the Jewish altar of burnt offerings. The Books of the Law were torn up and burned. Women who had their children circumcised were put to death with their babies hung around their necks.

### *Mattathias*

At that time Mattathias, son of John, was a priest of the line of Joarib. He left Jerusalem and settled in Modein. The king's commissioners wanted to force Mattathias to conform to the king's decree, but Mattathias refused and when he saw a Jewish man coming forward to offer sacrifice on the altar of Modein, he killed the man and the commissioners. Many people left then to the desert and hid there. A strong detachment of soldiers from Jerusalem pursued them, attacked the Jews on the Sabbath itself and they were all slaughtered, a thousand of them. When Mattathias heard of this he rallied his friends and the Hassidaeans, stout fighting men, joined them. Mattathias used his armed force to overthrow the foreign altars, to circumcise the boys they found uncircumcised in Israel and to wrest power from the control of the gentiles.

**Mattathias kills a Jew that worships Idols as well as an Officer of King Antiochus, who forced the People to sacrifice to Idols, and he destroys the Altar.**  
 Michel-Nicolas-Bernard Lépicié (1735-1784). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. 1793.

Michel-Nicolas-Bernard Lépicié was born in a family of pictorial artists. He first studied engraving with his father François-Bernard Lépicié (1698-1755). His father also wrote on art and his mother, Renée-Elisabeth Marlié Lépicié (1714-1773) was an engraver too. Michel Lépicié later studied painting in the studio of Carle Van Loo, the most famous painter of his generation. He entered the French Royal Academy as a member in 1764 and made historical and religious pictures. He became an assistant professor of the Académie Royale in 1770 and a full professor in 1777. He had a large workshop in Paris, in which many Parisian painters of the second part of the eighteenth century were trained.

Lépicié painted four vast pictures on historical themes just a year before his death, commissioned by the Superintendent of Buildings of France, the Count Angiviller. These paintings were destined for the official Salon exhibition of Paris, and they had to inspire virtue and patriotic feelings in the public. The paintings were also destined to be used as cartons for the Gobelins tapestry manufactories. They were rejected there however in 1794 for being of too fanatic a subject.<sup>F31.</sup>

Mattathias son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the line of Joarib lived with his five sons in Modein. The king's commissioners enforced apostasy also in Modein. The king then was Antiochus Epiphanes of the line of Alexander the Great's general Antiochus. Antiochus Epiphanes wanted the countries he had conquered all to follow Greek customs in religion. Mattathias however refused to forsake the covenant of his ancestors. When everybody had gathered in Modein, a Jew came forward to sacrifice on Modein's pagan altar, according to the royal decree. Mattathias then became fired with the holy zeal and he killed the Jew on the altar. He also slaughtered the king's commissioner who was there to enforce the sacrifice. Mattathias tore down the altar. He thus revolted against Antiochus Epiphanes openly, called all the Jews of Modein together and fled with his sons and people into the hills. Thus started the revolt of the Jewish people against foreign customs and against Antiochus Epiphanes. Michel-Nicolas Lépicié made a picture of this scene of religious upheaval and of revolt against foreign kings that wanted to impose Greek, pagan philosophy upon zealous Jews. The painting and the scene are propagandist in nature, and in favour of the Bible and of Christian religion. The picture had to remind the French people of the virtues of religion and it had to urge the people to stay true to religious traditions in the wake of the Rationalist reviving of the French Philosophers.

In the painting, Mattathias towers over a crowd of Jews. He stands on the dais of the pagan altar of the square lined with Greek and Egyptian architectures. The idolatrous Jew and Antiochus' officer lie dead at his feet. Mattathias still brandishes the stone with which he has executed the two men while with his left arm and hand he holds back the Jews from interfering. Mattathias makes a powerful, imposing figure. He is massive in his anger, tall, strong. He wears a square white beard, the sign as well of wisdom as of strength. He is determined, strong-willed and certain of himself. He stands robustly with legs spread for support. He does not waver but dominates in his

fanatic zeal for Yahweh. Michel-Nicolas-Bernard Lépicier showed the two murdered men lying one on top of the other, without dignity. The crowd then gesticulates wildly and shows its emotions of hatred, of surprise and of acclamation of the deed of Mattathias, their new leader. Jews are tearing down the pagan altar.

Lépicier situated his scene among buildings of Greek style and we also see an Egyptian obelisk. Also, the round tower in the far makes one think of Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo, even if that mausoleum was not built yet in Antiochus Epiphanes' times. These were for Lépicier the symbols of the Greek philosophers, the teaching of which Antiochus wanted to impose on the Jews. Lépicier obtained quite an epic effect by placing Mattathias against this grand landscape. Behind the buildings we see high mountains and a darkening sky with large, sombre clouds that seem to announce the fires of revolt.

In composition, Lépicier formed a pyramid structure around Mattathias and he enhanced the effect of the tallness of Mattathias by placing the high Egyptian obelisk right behind him. Most of the other figures around Mattathias are shown in slightly tilted poses and more oblique directions, which are indications for movement, are shown in arms and hands. It is by the movements of the arms, which go in all directions, that Lépicier evokes the chaos of the crowd and the strong emotions of the people. This then contrasts with the austere, straight lines of the architectures. A clear direction also goes from the boy in the lower left along the left diagonal of the frame, over Mattathias, to the altar and high up towards the upper right and to the point of the obelisk. This line forced the elevating impression that was often sought by academic painters.

Michel-Nicolas-Bernard Lépicier used overall warm, brown hues. But lower down he applied dark green and dark blue areas with just a few but strong colours. These dark tones balance well the dark sky in symmetry. Between the two areas of sombre tones, Lépicier then placed the bright figure of Mattathias, clad in white robe and light grey cloak so that in these lighter colours Mattathias could become the immediately remarked focus of all viewers. Around Mattathias, in the crowd, Lépicier brought brown and orange colours of almost the same shade so that Mattathias' figure stands well out, also in colours. These hues he gradually faded to less pronounced hues behind Mattathias, to give the effect of aerial perspective and more illusion of space in the crowd. Lépicier then forced an impression of far depth of vision onto the viewer by the perspective of the architectures, visible in the strongly slanting lines of the buildings. Of course, Lépicier also directed the eye of the viewer since with one hand Mattathias points at the killed men and with the other arm he holds back the Jews, but also seems to order to destroy the altar. At the Jews to which Mattathias points, Lépicier opened somewhat the scene, whereas at the killed men there is a chaos of curved lines and of details, in which we do not recognise so easily the murdered men. So, Lépicier drew more attention or at least more rapid attention to the surprised Jews than on the slaughtered men. He softened therefore somewhat the horror of Mattathias' act.

Lépicier made a very academic painting and yet the scene seems a natural one, in the spur of the moment of the anger of Mattathias. He applied all his knowledge of the academic style and yet made a fine painting. He knew how to play with the viewer, with his emotions and with how a viewer would look at such a picture. When we learn

of the story and the reasons of his painting we are of course taken somewhat aback. Yet, Lépicie was also honestly inspired by religious feelings and put his art to service of the propagation and respect of his faith. His 'Mattathias is hence not only a fine painting but also an interesting one.

### *Judas Maccabaeus*

When Mattathias died, his place was taken by his son Judas, known as Maccabaeus. All his brothers supported him and they fought for Israel. Judas Maccabaeus from 166 BC to 160 BC defeated Apollonius and then also Seron, commander of the Syrian troops. A new Syrian force of King Antiochus led by Ptolemy son of Dorymenes was then sent to Israel, led by Nicanor and Gorgias. Judas Maccabeus went with his army to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem. He then gave battle to the Syrians near Emmaus. The gentiles were defeated. Then Lysias attacked Israel but he was defeated also.

Judas Maccabaeus now purified the Temple at Mount Zion by blameless priests. They pulled down the altar of burnt offerings that had been profaned and deposited its stones in a suitable place on the Hill of Dwelling to wait for the appearance of a Prophet who should give a ruling about them. They took unhewn stones and built a new altar. They thus restored the holy place. Then they built new high walls and strong towers around Mount Zion.

Judas Maccabaeus had to fight many battles, against the sons of Esau of Idumaea, against the gentiles of Gilead, against the people from Ptolemais, Tyre and Sidon. Judas and his brother routed their enemies but a large army of Jews led by Joseph son of Zechariah and also led by Azariah was defeated near Jamnia by Gorgias. Judas defeated however the Edomites and he destroyed Azotus.

King Antiochus died in Elymais of Persia and his son Antiochus Eupator succeeded on him. This King Antiochus V and Lysias marched upon Israel. The king fought with his armies and blockaded Judaea and besieged Mount Zion, Jerusalem. But Lysias saw that the army was growing weaker every day. So he persuaded King Antiochus to make peace with the Jews and the Assyrians withdrew, not without having demolished the walls that encircled Jerusalem.

Demetrius son of Seleucus came to Syria. He gave battle to Antiochus and captured Lysias and Antiochus. They were killed by the army and Demetrius ascended on the throne. Demetrius now sent Bacchides and Alcimus to fight the Israelites. These generals occupied Israel and did many wrongs.

Judas had been abandoned by the Hassidaeans, but when he heard of what Alcimus was doing in Israel, he took vengeance on the ones that had deserted him and he prevented their free movement about the country. The king then sent Nicanor, one of his cruellest generals, with a large army to Israel, ordering to exterminate the people. Judas gave battle to Nicanor near Caphar-Salama and defeated him. Nicanor went to Jerusalem to ridicule and defile the priests there. After that, a new army came from Syria but also that new army of Nicanor was crushed by Judas. Judas cut off Nicanor's head and the right hand that the general had stretched out in insolence at the altar of Jerusalem.

Judas then sent Eupolemus son of John of the family of Accos, and Jason son of Eleazar to Rome to make a treaty of friendship and alliance with these people. The Senate of Rome approved of the alliance.

Demetrius sent Bacchides and Alcimus a second time into Judaea with a strong army. Judas gave battle to them at Beer-Zaith. The battle became desperate and very many casualties fell on both sides. Also Judas Maccabaeus fell however, and so died one of the greatest generals of Israel since Joshua.

### **The Victory of Judas Maccabaeus.**

François-Joseph Heim (1787-1865). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1820-1825.

François-Joseph Heim was a French painter born in 1787. He studied first in Strasbourg, and then in Paris. He was a gifted young artist and won several prizes at the Academy of Paris. In 1807 he received a scholarship to continue to learn painting in Rome. After his return, he became a member of the Academy in 1829 and a professor in 1831. He made many historical and religious paintings. He made portraits of the establishment and of Parisian celebrities. He made paintings for official institutes. He was appointed a painter of the Institute of France and drew many portraits of its members. He worked for the Louvre and for the senate of Paris. He was a fine painter but not a great painter and he was squeezed between the masters of the Neo-Classical period and the new styles that were in the making. In between, there was turmoil and criticism and Heim was one of the focus artists of the times. He developed a romantic presentation of scenes for which he was only late in his life a little more appreciated. He exhibited much however in the official Salon exhibitions of Paris. He could live well of his art because he was so much linked to the circles of the Parisian establishment, and he accommodated with his art these people well.

There may be some confusion about the painting called the 'Victory of Judas Maccabaeus' in the Musée Magnin in Dijon. The picture holds that title on labels found on the rear of the frame and it was annotated as being a sketch in small format of a larger painting for which Heim received a Medal of Honour at the official exhibition of Paris in 1855. An art critic, J.-P. Cusin, saw in this picture one of the better drawings of Heim but thought it to be one of sketches made for a picture presented by Heim at the Salon of 1824, 'The Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans', which is now in the Louvre museum.<sup>F40.</sup> This last conjecture may be the right one because we find Roman standards among the attacking soldiers and the charge of the cavalry seems to be directed not only against an army but also to confront mountains or the base of fortifications. In the upper left corner, men seem to be falling down upon the assailants as they threw themselves down from mountain or ramparts. If we believe the title on the label, it remains difficult to discern which of the battles of Judas Maccabaeus is represented. He was a great general, won many battles and he was a fighter as victorious as Joshua, one of the heroes of Israel's history. Judas Maccabaeus won a first battle against a Samaritan army led by Apollonius and Judas routed those troops, killing Apollonius and taking his sword. In his second battle he also won with few men against a large Syrian army led by Seron, and Judas most probably fought with his countrymen, who were no professionals and he could not have had mercenary soldiers. The Israelites fought the larger army at the descent of Beth-Horon and since the odds were very much against Judas Maccabaeus, this might have been his greatest victory and hence the subject of the painting of François-Joseph Heim. From then on, Judas Maccabaeus became famous as a general; he was thought to be invincible and the numbers of his fighting men grew so that the Bible could state, 'His name resounded to the ends of the earth, he rallied those who were on the point of perishing'.<sup>G38.</sup>

François-Joseph Heim painted a picture of such a battle, in which a powerful army of cavalry attacks or is attacked by an apparently weaker force of less well armed men. In both of the interpretations of the painting, the men that fight with light arms and



without armour must be the Israelites. They cling like flees to their enemy, to the horses, and draw their opponents down. The battle takes place near a river - and also in another story of a battle of Judas Maccabaeus there is mention of a river – and the fight happens on the slopes of a mountain. God interfered in many fights of the Israelites and we see Jews holding only short swords fall down on the attackers as if they were angels from the skies. Heim painted the fierce melee of the warriors, in the heat of battle. He shows attackers and defenders in a frantic intermingling of men and horses. There are two kinds of men in this chaos: the horse-riders in armour and the lightly clad men. These last appear as if they had just come from their fields, from their lands or profession to defend their homes. They cling to the attackers bare-handed even, to draw them down. Such wild frenzy of figures was of course very Romantic in history painting. Heim obtained well and completely the expression of the violent movement of the crowd and of the chaos of close combat. He painted prancing horses, men falling, hands and arms outstretched, mix of lines of bodies and horses clashing, water splashing under hooves, men jumping and grasping and swimming and getting out of the river. Still, Heim managed to bring some structure in the chaos by his use of light since the central rider alludes to a pyramid structure. The horse is white. It draws therefore all attention first and the light area also is in the form of the pyramid, a traditional robust structure of composition around which chaos of lines and of colours can be painted, but which keeps by its lighter tones of hues a focus area in the picture. François-Joseph Heim also applied rapid, broad brushstrokes in places and he painted colours more vigorously in certain areas to underscore the rapidity of movement there. He gave a fine sense of space by gradually diminishing the height of his figures and by subduing his hues on the figures towards the far upper left, an effect of aerial perspective.

François-Joseph Heim succeeded well in depicting the heath of a battle of Judas Maccabaeus – or the siege and victory of the Roman army against Jerusalem. The painting does not show which side is on the winning hand: the heavy cavalry or the lightly-armed harassing men. But he did hint at interference from Yahweh by painting the Israelites as if they dropped down from heaven on the attackers of their territory and beliefs. Heim's message was that defenders of the homeland, even if less in numbers and less well armed can still win from larger forces by zeal. After 1815, the defeat of Waterloo, France had no Grande Armée anymore but Heim seemed to suggest that France could still be invincible when only all men were called to defend their homeland.

#### *Other Paintings:*

#### **The Martyrdom of the six Maccabeus Brothers**

Francesco Coghetti (1804-1875). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *Jonathan*

Jonathan and Simon took their brother Judas and buried him in his ancestral tomb at Modein. Jonathan then became leader and high priest of the Jews (160 BC – 143 BC). Their brother John was killed by the sons of Amrai of Medeba, but Jonathan and his brother Simon avenged his blood. Bacchides built fortifications in some of the Judaeen towns. Alcimus ordered the demolition of the sanctuary of Jerusalem but he suffered a stroke and died. Bacchides then returned to the king and Judaea was left in peace for two years. Jewish renegades now however argued on a plan to call back Bacchides, to arrest Jonathan and his friends, who were living in peace and confidence. But Jonathan and his brother Simon got wind of the plan, put the renegades to death and retired to Beth-Bassi in the desert. Jonathan and Simon defeated Bacchides there. Bacchides was furious but on Jonathan's proposal he made peace with the Israelites and went back to his own country, never to return. Israel had peace now and Jonathan ruled as a Judge from out of Michmash.

Alexander son of Antiochus Epiphanes raised an army and occupied Ptolemais. Demetrius marched off to do battle with Alexander and he asked Jonathan to raise an army to help him. Also Alexander sent a letter for Jonathan's help. Jonathan rejected Demetrius' offer, remembering all the great wrongs this king had done to Israel, and he favoured Alexander. Alexander raised a large army, advanced upon Demetrius, defeated and killed him. Alexander married Cleopatra daughter of Pharaoh Ptolemy of Egypt and Jonathan was invited to the wedding and dressed in purple as a guest of honour.

But Demetrius II son of Demetrius returned from Crete to the land of his ancestors. Demetrius made Apollonius governor of Coele-Syria. Jonathan and Simon defeated Apollonius at Azorus, much to the joy of King Alexander. Alexander gave Jonathan rights over Ekron and over the adjoining lands.

King Ptolemy of Egypt, Alexander's father-in-law came with a large army hoping to take possession of his son-in-law's territories. He became an ally of Demetrius, gave his daughter to this Demetrius and he broke with Alexander. Ptolemy entered Antioch and assumed the crown of Asia. King Ptolemy thus reigned supreme. Alexander had to flee to Arabia and Zabdiel the Arab cut off his head and sent it to Ptolemy. Sometime later King Ptolemy died and Demetrius became king.

Jonathan meanwhile mustered his men to besiege the citadel of Jerusalem that was held by renegades. Demetrius was angered at this and left with a strong army. He entered Ptolemais. Jonathan went to face the king there and King Demetrius favoured Jonathan and Israel, relieving the three Samaritan districts and Judaea from taxation. In Antioch later, the citizens rebelled against Demetrius. Jonathan sent a strong force to help the king and Demetrius could regain control. But soon he changed his attitude and broke all the promises he had made to Jonathan.

Trypho, one of Alexander's followers, put the boy Antiochus, son of Alexander, on the throne. The troops of Demetrius rallied to Antiochus and made war on Demetrius. Jonathan and Simon became allies of Antiochus and they fought battles against Demetrius' armies in Galilee. Jonathan was victorious.

Jonathan sent a new mission to Rome to confirm and renew his friendship with the Romans and he did the same with Sparta.

Jonathan and Simon won many battles and Jonathan heightened the walls of Jerusalem and rebuilt the city.

Trypho's secret ambition was to overpower Antiochus and become king of Asia himself. But he feared Jonathan. Trypho came with a large army to Beth-Shear. Jonathan had assembled a large army also so that Trypho grew afraid. So he called on Jonathan and told him he would hand Ptolemais to him and take the road for home. Jonathan trusted him, dismissed his troops and entered Ptolemais with only a thousand men. As soon as he had entered the town the people of Ptolemais closed the gates, seized Jonathan and put all those who had entered to the sword.

### *Heliodorus*

While Apollonius, son of Thraseos, was commander-in-chief of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia, Onias was high priest in Jerusalem. A certain Simon of the tribe of Bilgah came to be appointed administrator of the Temple. He came into conflict with Onias over the regulation of the city markets. He did however not get the better of Onias, so to revenge himself he went to Apollonius and told him that the treasury in Jerusalem groaned with untold wealth. Apollonius met the king and told him about the treasures that had been disclosed to him, whereupon the king selected Heliodorus, his chancellor, to go and remove the reported wealth.

When Heliodorus arrived in Jerusalem, Onias told him that some money had been set aside for widows and orphans and that some funds in the Temple belonged to Hyrcanes, a man of exalted position, but that the whole sum amounted merely to four hundred talents of silver. Onias also said that no injustice should be done to those who had put their trust in the sanctity of the Temple. But Heliodorus insisted that the funds be confiscated for the royal exchequer. The whole of Jerusalem mourned but Heliodorus set about his appointed task.

Heliodorus arrived at the Treasury with his bodyguard. But then, before their eyes appeared a horse, richly caparisoned and carrying a fearsome rider accoutred entirely in gold. The horse struck at Heliodorus, rearing with its forefeet. Two other young men of radiant beauty appeared at the horse rider's side and they started to flog Heliodorus unremittingly, inflicting stroke after stroke. Heliodorus fell to the ground, enveloped in thick darkness. Such was the power of the God of the Israelites. Heliodorus' men came to his rescue and they brought him away in a litter. They acknowledged the sovereign power of God.

The companions of Heliodorus asked Onias to entreat God to give life to Heliodorus, who lay at the very point of death. Onias was afraid of the king's anger so he indeed offered sacrifices for Heliodorus' recovery. The same young men then appeared again to Heliodorus. They told him to proclaim the grandeur of God's power and to thank the high priest Onias. Heliodorus recovered soon. He gave thanks to the God of Israel. He took a courteous leave of Onias and marched his forces back to the king, testifying to everyone of the supreme God he had seen with his own eyes. Thus the Treasury of Jerusalem was preserved.

### **Heliodorus chased from the Temple**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Palazzo del Vaticano, Stanza di Raffaello – Rome. 1512.

Raphael left Florence in 1508 for Rome. He was to work on frescoes in the new apartments of the Vatican palace for Pope Julius II Della Rovere. Raphael had to work on four rooms of the top floor, three smaller rooms and one larger one. The decorations are now called the 'Raphael Stanzas'. They are called the Stanza of the Signatura, of the Borgo Fire, of Emperor Constantine and of Heliodorus. The frescoes are major masterpieces of Rome. The paintings for the rooms were designed around religious themes.

The Stanza of the Signatura holds as major paintings the 'Dispute of the Blessed Sacrament' and the 'School of Athens'. These two frescoes handled the themes of religious truth and philosophic or natural truth. Two other, smaller frescoes, represented 'Mount Parnassus' and the 'Theological and cardinal Virtues', symbols of poetry or beauty and subjective good. Further frescoes were 'Saint Raymond of Penafort presenting the Decretals to pope Gregory IX' and 'Emperor Justinian handing the Pandects to Trebonianus', representing ecclesiastical law or justice and civil law giving. The Stanza of the Signatura frescoes were painted from 1508 to 1511 and if Raphael let in later works much painting to his assistants, these frescoes are truly his own. In this room of the Signatura were held the most important working documents of the Pope, hence its name. On the ceiling, there are medallions not painted by Raphael and these include allegories of philosophy, theology, justice and poetry as well as four rectangular scenes with 'Adam and Eve', 'The Judgement of Solomon', 'Apollo and Marcyas' and an allegory on astronomy. One might state that the overall subject of the room was that of wisdom and justice. Here the Pope worked most and among the documents might be his most important decisive and most secret ones.

The stanza of the Borgo Fire contains frescoes suggested by Leo X. These stanzas were painted from 1514 to 1517 and from 1514 on Raphael took over from Bramante the task of chief architect of Saint Peter's, so he let his two main assistants Giulio Romano and Gianfrancesco Penni paint the frescoes along his designs. The main fresco in this hall is of the 'Borgo Fire', a fire that occurred near the Vatican in 847 and that was extinguished by the blessings of Pope Leo IV. A second painting is the 'Battle of Ostia'. Other frescoes are the 'Coronation of Charlemagne by Leo III' and the 'Oath of Leo III'. The ceiling holds a fresco made from 1507 to 1509. By Pietro Perugino, who had been Raphael's teacher and master, so Raphael left them untouched. Perugino had painted on the ceiling 'God the Creator', 'Christ between the Baptist and Satan', the 'Holy Trinity and the Apostles' and also a 'Christ in glory'.

The Stanza of Constantine dates from later still, from 1517 to 1524. Raphael died in 1520, so that he only designed the frescoes but could not finish them nor supervise their making. They were mostly done and finished by his assistants and pupils. The 'Battle of Emperor Constantine at the Milvian Bridge' was painted by Giulio Romano, and Romano also made the 'Vision of the Cross', as well as the 'Donation of Rome'. This last picture was probably made in collaboration with Raffaellino del

Colle. The fourth fresco is the 'Baptism of Constantine', probably painted by Gianfrancesco Penni. The ceiling in this room was painted by Tommaso Siciliano, a pupil of Sebastiano del Piombo, and this painting was commissioned by the Popes Gregory XIII and Sixtus V.

The Stanza of Heliodorus was painted between 1511 and 1514. The frescoes in this room had to represent the protection of the Catholic Church by God. The scenes are 'Heliodorus pursued and felled in the Temple', 'The Mass of Bolsena', 'The Meeting of Pope Leo I the Good and Atilla' and the 'Liberation of Saint Peter'. The 'Mass at Bolsena' presents the miracle that occurred to a Bohemian priest who doubted the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and saw all too real blood issuing from the Host during his mass at Bolsena. The 'Meeting of Leo I and Atilla' illustrated the moment when Saint Peter and Saint Paul appear to Atilla the Hun to help and comfort Pope Leo in his confrontation with Atilla. After this encounter, Atilla mysteriously left Italy and even Europe, to return to his Asian steppes. In the 'Liberation of Saint Peter', an angel frees Peter from his Roman prison. All these paintings allude to divine intervention to protect the Popes or the Church. In the room of Heliodorus also the paintings of the ceiling date from before Raphael's times. The scenes here are the 'Burning Bush', 'Jacob's Ladder', 'God appears to Noah' and the 'Sacrifice of Abraham'. They may have been painted by Guillaume de Marcillat.

'Heliodorus pursued and felled in the Temple' shows the moment when the divine, fearsome rider of God enters the Temple of Jerusalem to punish Heliodorus. Raphael read the Bible story well, for he painted the exact moment that the horse of the rider, rearing violently, strikes at Heliodorus with its forefeet. The Bible tells how then two other young men of radiant beauty, magnificently apparelled, appeared at the same time and flogged Heliodorus. These angels are also arriving to the scene of the fresco. Raphael painted the horse-rider in golden armour, like told in the Bible. Heliodorus was the chancellor of the king, so he too is dressed in fine armour but now he has fallen to the floor of the Temple and his bodyguards are in disarray. Raphael painted this scene on the right of the fresco.

In the centre, Raphael represented the pious high priest Onias praying silently to god before his altar. The symbols of Jewish faith are the seven-branched candelabra and the scroll of the Torah on the altar, but Onias kneels and prays as if he were a priest celebrating a Catholic Mass.

To the left of the fresco appear the faithful to help in the punishment of Heliodorus. Here we see Pope Julius II being brought forward. The chair-bearers are Mercantonio Raimundi, an engraver, and Giulio Romano, who were pupils, friends and assistants of Raphael. At the Pope's side stands the prelate Giovanni Pietro dei Foliarii. But Foliari's face has much resemblance to portraits of Raphael himself.

The meaning and aim of the fresco are obvious. Heliodorus was a thief, albeit a highly-placed one, a chancellor and a dignitary of the lay king. Heliodorus attacked the church, represented by the piety and innocence of Onias. God punished the intruder, however important a man this was. Pope Julius II advances to help with the apprehension of the attackers of the goods of the Temple and Church. Julius is the defender of the Catholic Church.

Raphael painted in finely contrasting clear hues in his fresco. He also looked much not only at harmonising the hues but also at the symmetry of the coloured areas. He combined complementary colours on right and left. He used blue and yellow on the robe and cloak of the lady on the left and also blue and yellow on the angel of the right. In several other figures he combined red and green, on both sides. He brought golden and bluish-green together and red and white. He only juxtaposed blue and green on Onias, but he separated well the colours then by a golden belt and he may have put these ill-matched hues on the Jew to indicate exactly that Onias was a Jew and not a Catholic, and in order to diminish the figure of Onias. The hue that grasps the attention of the viewer on the right is the white area of the horse. Where does one find a prominent white area on the left? Of course on Pope Julius II being carried in the temple! It is almost as if Raphael adapted the colour of the horse to the robe of the Pope to be able to concentrate attention on Julius II.

Raphael let the light come from the top of the cupola of the temple. The light brightens up the golden ceiling of the Temple and Raphael painted here wonderful effects of gradual chiaroscuro. The light then pervades the Temple and we see shadows thrown to the left on the figures of the left side, to the right on the figures of the right scene. The heavens thus shine on the altar and it is towards the heavenly light that Onias directs his eyes and holds his folded hands in prayer. The light indicates the moment of the miracle, when god punishes Heliodorus. Raphael then used the bright light to bring clear, lively and strong hues in his fresco, and these hues are enlivening in the rather sombre room. He applied lighter hues also in the front and more heavy tones in the far, around Onias. Raphael was a master of volume and we see the fine chiaroscuro on the horse and on the lady in front of Pope Julius, as examples of how Raphael modulated the colours in tone and intensity to create illusion of volume of the figures and horse. All these colours are brought to enhance the grace of the figures.

Raphael's composition is in three scenes: Heliodorus and the divine rider on the left, piety of Onias in the far centre, and Pope Julius II coming to the rescue on the right. To left and right the structure is in a pyramid form. A pyramid is around the golden rider (with at the top the golden helmet of the angel) and a pyramid is also around Julius II (with at the top the head of the Pope). The eyes of the bodyguard of Heliodorus and of Heliodorus himself go naturally upwards, towards the rider and to the centre of the ceiling. Pope Julius II also looks upwards, but Raphael had to draw something there for Julius to be able to look upwards. So he painted two zealous men that climb to a column higher up. They may climb there by fright and Julius may look at them in anger, disagreeing with such behaviour. Or Julius may look in the direction of Onias. But as Julius Looks up, the viewer's eyes go also to the men on the columns and since there also one man in red colours is climbing upwards on the column, clinging to the one that is already higher up, there is a fine and subtle upwards direction from Julius towards the cupola of the Temple. So on both sides Raphael create a direction that elevates, that goes upwards, a direction sought eagerly by the painters that desired or tried to bring in their pictures a strong upwards spiritual élan.

Further symbols and details of interest that an observant viewer may discover are in the painting. The centre Roman arches of the Temple are covered with gold. They represent the heavenly realm. It may be strange to find Jewish symbols like the Rabbi Onias and the Jewish candelabra in the picture, but the holy Book of the Catholics still is also the Old Testament. In various ways however Raphael diminished Onias, even

though he situated the man in the centre of his picture. For one, he placed Onias far away from the viewer so that the viewer anyhow concentrates his or her attention first on Heliodorus and on Pope Julius II. Behind Onias, behind his back, Jews are praying and talking. Raphael painted the Jews however a rather ugly and small men, squat and hidden in large cloaks. He painted Onias and especially these Jews in the dark of the farthest recesses of the Temple. Two men are standing a little more in front, chatting, next to a rectangular column. They look like conspirators, spies, like slanderers and Julius may also look in their direction as if he will not tolerate such politics in his Church and no Jewish intrigues. The men form a strange contrast with the women around Pope Julius II. These women have fine clothes in light colours and they have fine, dignified faces, which also contrast with the way Raphael painted the Jews.

Christianism is based on Jewish traditions and also in other places of the Vatican, notably in the Sistine Chapel, one finds many references to the Old Testament. Raphael opened the temple rear, behind Onias, and showed a landscape and a piece of the sky there, so a piece of the natural order created by God. Pope Julius II is brought in on his chair. Around him are women and children, pointing to the Heliodorus scene. The pointing establishes the Heliodorus scene as the main one. But Pope Julius II is thus represented as the defender of the poor and weak and the helpless. He comes in to respond to the crying of the women and to their pointing. He hurries to the rescue. Julius II however does not simply stride in. he sits on his pontifical chair, the chair of peter. He sits on a throne and he enters like a monarch. Yet, he is the wise man with the white beard and a determined face of a judge that has come to solve the situation by his authority. The authority is all he needs: he can come without arms bearers. He is the representative of the divine powers that are at work on Heliodorus, on the other side. The chair-bearers of Julius are dignified and also dressed in the court robes of the Vatican. The two bearers look at the viewer, which is often a sign in Renaissance paintings that these figures have something to say to the viewer or that they are portraits of the makers of the fresco. Here, Raphael's assistants may have been at work and added their own portraits, maybe as well as a portrait of their master, to be eternalised in the Vatican.

In the Heliodorus scene, the men that punish the chancellor are fine-looking youth. Raphael painted the horse-rider with a flowing purple cloak. This flow gives an impression as of being wings to the viewer, and it suggests that the rider is an angel of God. Raphael brought also these flowing cloaks or tunics on the two young men that come in to flog Heliodorus and they literally fly in the church so that Raphael shows them like angels too. The horse-rider wears a golden armour and also the purple mantle of Roman Emperors, so that he could be taken for an incarnation of Constantine. Raphael emphasised Roma antiquity also in other details, such as in the heavy Roman architecture of the Temple, which continues the form of the Roman arch of the room within which the fresco was made. Heliodorus has fallen to the ground, but he also is clad in fine Roman armour and Raphael added of course the detail of a vase of gold spilling its golden coins to the ground, so that the viewer would well understand what Heliodorus had come to do in Jerusalem. He then also showed Heliodorus' servants going out, wearing the heavy boxes of the Jewish treasure.

We have pointed out that there are two spirit-elevating directions of views in the fresco of 'Heliodorus pursued and felled in the Temple'. These directions go from the



lower left and lower right to the top of the picture. Together with the base line of the fresco, a straight horizontal line, these form a wide triangle within which sits at the end Onias. This triangle is supported by the two side scenes, each in a pyramid or triangle, and these side triangles support the main triangle. They are the three main triangles of Raphael's composition. It is a rather strong structure, which gives its stability and eternity of the moment to the picture. The massive arches of the Temple also add to a sense of weight and immutability to the scene, even though Raphael kept them narrow and high.. But otherwise there is lively movement in the fresco. Many personages move. The women point, hold their children together, recline in surprise and horror. Men climb on columns. The horse prances and the angels fly. Heliodorus is not really fully lying down; he has fallen but still grasps his lance. His guards hinder each other; one man tramples on another and we see the open mouth of a shrieking soldier above Heliodorus. Heliodorus' servants hurry out, heavily laden with boxes. Raphael brought a strong structure of composition in his picture, but that allowed him to be free to position his figures and to depict the action on both sides. There is however another aspect to Raphael's composition that is the main element of his style in the Stanzas of the Vatican.

The room of the Stanza of Heliodorus is not a large hall and its ceiling is rather low since it is situated in old parts of the Vatican. Raphael tried to bring an illusion of deep space in his fresco and here also he used quite traditional means, or at least: means that belonged to the Renaissance and also to antique Roman frescoes and had only recently been re-discovered in Raphael's times, but that are well-known and recognised by style-analysts now. Raphael opened the scene in the centre and showed there, without figures, the marble floor of the Temple. On that floor are patterns that show the vanishing lines of perspective, which meet on the Torah scroll that lies on the altar of Onias. Raphael also painted such strong perspective lines in the columns and the arches around Onias. Raphael brought the columns more closely together in the distance and the arches are lower there. By such details he much enhanced the perspective of the architecture and thus evokes the illusion of great depth in the viewer that stands in the room. He opened the rear view of the Temple into a open window or door, showing the sky. Such detail always attracts the view of the spectator as if towards the far. The element brings a powerful illusion of space in the fresco, in the wall, so that the room looks much larger than it actually is. In this large space, Raphael placed his scenes of figures like in real, natural scenes. Raphael designed the fresco of Heliodorus with the mind of an architect. He had the space in mind, the view of his scenes in three dimensions. He conceived the space of the Temple and then he placed his groups like volumes in space. An architect is used to imagine in three dimensions. An architect imagines objects with volume in space and fine, genius architects can bring in their mind models of spatial arrangements and turn these, change objects in the space, as no other human can. Raphael seems to have imagined his three scenes and the Temple in three-dimensional space first and then staged his visions on the flat canvas. This is an aspect of Raphael's art that is shown not only in the fresco of Heliodorus, but also in other paintings of the Stanzas of Raphael, such as in the magic 'School of Athens'. Raphael could paint wonderful portraits and suave Madonnas. The finest characteristic of his grander scenes is his magnificent, powerful imagination of space and how to bring his vision into a perfect illusion on the canvas. Pope Julius II must have remarked Raphael's power of three-dimensional vision. He soon appointed Raphael the main architect of Saint Peter and it is after the paintings

in the Stanzas of the Signatura and Heliodorus that Raphael worked on the grandest church and largest, monumental space of Europe.

*Other paintings:*

**Heliodorus chased from the Temple.** Francesco Solimena (1657-1747). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1723-1725.

**Heliodorus driven from the Temple of Jerusalem.** Francesco Solimena (1657-1747). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna. 1720.

## *Simon*

Jonathan had disappeared with his men in Ptolemais. Jonathan's supporters, concluding that he had perished, encouraged each other and marched together in closed ranks. But the surrounding nations now thought that the Jews had no leader anymore and they readied for attack. Simon, Jonathan's brother, spoke to the people of Israel and he became high priest and etnarch of the Jews (143 BC – 134 BC).

Trypho had taken Jonathan a prisoner and he brought him with him with a large army to invade Judaea. As he approached Bashama he killed Jonathan. Jonathan was buried there. Trypho however had to return so Simon recovered the bones of his brother and buried him in Modein.

Trypho meanwhile also put to death young King Antiochus and usurped the throne. Simon then became the ally again of Demetrius. He could finally expel the last occupants of the citadel of Jerusalem that had opposed him. King Demetrius assembled his army and marched into Media to raise help for the fight against Trypho. But Arsaces, king of Persia, sent one of his generals to catch Demetrius alive. The general defeated Demetrius and brought him to Arsaces, who imprisoned him. The country of Israel was thus at peace throughout the reign of Simon.

Later still, Antiochus son of Demetrius II invaded the lands of his ancestors and he pursued the usurper Trypho, who had now few followers left. Trypho fled to Dona, where Antiochus besieged him. Simon sent troops to help Antiochus but Antiochus would not accept them. He wrote that Simon had occupied towns of his kingdom. The king sent Athenobus to talk to Simon, but Simon told he had not taken foreign territory and only taken the ancestral heritage of his family, unjustly wrestled from them by their enemies. The envoy went back to the new king in rage.

Trypho now boarded a ship and escaped to Orthonia. The king appointed Cendebaeus governor of the coastal regions. Judas and John, the sons of Simon, attacked Cendebaeus and defeated his armies. Judas' brother was wounded in this battle.

Ptolemy, son of Dok Adulos, had been appointed general in command of the plain of Jericho. He had high ambitions. Simon and his sons, Mattathias and Judas, had come down to Jericho to inspect the town. The sons of Adulos lured them into a fortress called Dok and when Simon and his sons were drunk they rushed upon him and killed him with his two sons.

Thus died the sons and grandsons of Mattathias.

## *Part XII. The Book of Job*

Job was an honest man of the land of Uz. He had seven sons, three daughters, and a large property. He lived in ease. Satan tempted Yahweh with Job. He said that Job was pious and honest only because he lived at ease. Satan said Job would not remain so for long if Yahweh took away his possessions. So Yahweh gave Job in Satan's power to test him. Job lost his family and his property but he continued to laude and to praise the wisdom of Yahweh.

The Book of Job is a long poem. It describes the dialogue between Job and three friends. They discuss Job's fate. The friends are called Zophar of Naamath, Bildad of Shuah and Eliphaz of Teman. Later joins Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite but he merely restates the arguments. The men argue that Job must have sinned for God to punish him. But Job knows and pleads that he has not sinned. He remains confident in God despite all that happens to him.

In the end, Yahweh restores Job's condition and gave him double of what he had before. Job's trust in God was justified and Yahweh rebukes Job's three friends.

The Book of Job breaks with the elder beliefs of the Bible that only when the Hebrews sin does God punishes them. From the story of Job on, disasters may fall on Hebrews without them needing to believe that they might have sinned. Thus the view of the relations between the Hebrew and his God drastically evolves.

### **The Triptych of Patience**

Bernard van Orley (ca. 1488/1492-1542). Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. Ca. 1521.

Bernard van Orley, also called Barend van Orley in Flanders, was born in Brussels and he worked there all his life. He was born the son of a painter, Valentin d'Orley (ca. 1466-1532) and he had many sons, most of whom would also become painters. He was a master in Brussels and painted for Margaret of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands, aunt of the future Emperor Charles V, who would also elevate Charles V and bring him in contact with humanists and artists. Barend van Orley was appointed painter at Margaret's court of Mechelen in 1518 and he made many portraits. He was best known however for his realisations of cartons for tapestries. There were in the sixteenth century famous weaving factories in Brussels and Mechelen. During 1518 to 1519 he even directed the weaving of tapestries after cartons of Raphael and it may be through these contacts that he learned to know better the Italian style. He never travelled to Italy however, but he had colleagues that knew well Italian art and its evolving styles. When Margaret of Austria died, she was succeeded as Regent by

Mary of Hungary, Charles V's sister, who had been driven out of Hungary by the advancing Turks and whose husband, the King of Hungary, had died on the battlefield when his land was invaded by the Muslims. Barend van Orley became also her court painter in 1532. He was one of the pomading masters of Brussels, much linked to the dignitaries of the town so that when Albrecht Dürer of Nuremberg visited the Netherlands, van Orley gave a banquet for him and Dürer also made his portrait. Van Orley painted less after 1525 and he may have stopped altogether after 1530. He designed tapestries then and he made also drawings for the glass pictures of the windows of the cathedral of Brussels. He had a large workshop and many pupils, Flemish-Brabant artists, among whom Michiel Coxie and Pieter Coecke van Aalst.

Barend van Orley's best known and major painting is the 'Triptych of Patience' in the Museum of Ancient Art in Brussels. It was called the Triptych of Patience because van Orley's own devise 'Elx sync tyt' was found on the panel, meaning 'to everyone his time'. The painting dates from 1521 and it was probably commissioned by Margaret of Austria as a gift to her councillor Antoine de Lalaing.<sup>B12</sup> The painting is very strange, interrogates the viewer, and its panels can be interpreted in various ways.

The central panel of the Triptych of Patience shows the 'Destruction of Job's Children'. We see an extravagantly decorated building in which people fall and run, struck by a horrible plague sent by the devils. The scene is set inside an architecture of columns that support in the centre a set of roman arches. The columns are richly decorated with armouries, marble medallions, putti, statues of deities, and all sorts of intricate patterns. This decoration looks exaggerated and such prodigal ornaments contrasts totally with the Gothic restraint and austere lines we were used of Flemish masters of the times before van Orley. But the columns are also very rectangular and they evoke in the viewer an impression of angularity and sharpness, enhancing the feeling of cruelty and stress in the picture. The Roman arches are almost hidden because at the top of the panel the devils descend in avenging clouds of heavy and dark smoke. Under the black cloud of fate, van Orley painted personages in disarray. Here we only have to look at the arms to understand what happens. People are struck with terrible headaches, as their minds are being destroyed by the devils. The women and men all grasp their heads. Some have already fallen down to the marble ground, as if slowly struck by an invisible ail that inexorably creeps into their heads, make them stagger, loose equilibrium, and makes them sink to the ground. A lady on the left just brought wine in a fine wine-beaker but now the wine spills onto the marble floor. In the background, a table was dressed for dinner and is now overthrown by the falling hosts. The dishes glide from the table as people draw the white linen away while falling unconscious. Here, people run away to avoid the disaster, but although they hold their arms high, they also have the horrendous pain in their brains that will bring them death inexorably.

Barend van Orley represented rather faithfully the story of the Book of Job. In the prologue, the Book tells that Job was the most prosperous of all the Sons of the East. He had seven sons and three daughters and these had the custom to hold banquets in each other's houses in turn and to invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. On such a day a messenger arrived to Job to announce him that when his sons and daughters had thus held a banquet at the house of his eldest son, a gale had sprung up from the desert, bettered the four corners of the house so that the house fell down on

the young people, killing them all. The messenger furthermore told that the fire of God had fallen on earth and burnt Job's sheep and shepherds.

These scenes are all represented in the central panel for Barend van Orley not only painted the dark gale filled with Satanic devils that invades the house and he showed the distress of Job's sons and daughters, but he also painted a landscapes with minor scenes behind the central scene.. In a small scene on the left we see Job sacrificing to Yahweh. On the right is another small scene in which we see a house burning, and Job is sitting naked in front of the burning house. Van Orley painted indeed the moment when the house of Job's eldest son fell down, for we see broken columns destroying the dinner table and also in other places columns are overturned and lying on Job's children and their servants. There are but three women in the central scene but more men, more than seven, but servants also would have been at the banquet. Van Orley also alluded at the phrase stating that Job was the richest among the Sons of the East, for he apparently painted a Moor with a curved sword in front, an oriental host at the banquet. Van Orley showed a prodigal setting for his scene and he also painted all the gruesomeness of the striking down of Job's children. The expressions on the faces of the men and women are terrible. Van Orley shows a man trying to jump away, into the viewer, with face turned to ashen, drawn traits in his face, crying out in anguish and pain, and tearing at his head. This man runs over another one that has fallen to the ground and in a last spasm this man grasps the legs of the shrieking, running man, hoping to be dragged off by the other. In further places of the panel, fallen columns have crushed the invited brothers.

The right panel of the opened triptych shows how happy job was, the richest man of the East. He is dressed splendidly, holds court, and receives the men that have come to do him honour. Job is the sound and honest man who gives his due, presents, and is otherwise blessed by God. The left panel shows another part of the story that the messenger brought to Job. The Sabaeans had swept down on Job's possessions, put his servants to death and killed the donkeys that were grazing with them, and even the oxen with which the servants ploughed. Another messenger came in to tell Job that three bands of Chaldaeans had raided the camels and made off with them, killing Job's servants in the act. In the left panel we see the bands raiding and camels are being led away in the background. So, if the right panel shows Job's richness, the left panel shows the destruction of Job's wealth, and the central panel shows the destruction of Job's happiness: his children. There could hardly be a more terrifying scene and message to humans.

The closed panel also shows two panels with different scenes.

In the right panel we see an upper scene of a birth. There are several phrases in the book of Job in which Job deplores the day he was born. He says at the start of his poetic tale, 'Perish the day on which I was born and the night that told of a boy conceived'. And further in the text Job exclaims, 'Why did you bring me out of the womb? I should have perished then, unseen by any eye, a being that had never been, to be carried from womb to grave'. A mother in heaven holds the unborn child in this scene, which of course also reminds of the birth of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary in heaven. In the lower part of the panel we see a man floating among devils. We may suppose that the man is dead and that van Orley depicted a man from whom everything is taken. Job says, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall

return again'. <sup>G38</sup>..And also, 'But a human being? He dies, and dead he remains, breathes his last, and then where is he? The waters of the sea will vanish, the rivers stop flowing and run dry; a human being, once laid to rest, will never rise again, the heavens will wear out before he wakes up, or before he is roused from his sleep' <sup>G38</sup>. And elsewhere Job asks, 'Can the dead come back to life?' <sup>G38</sup>. Van Orley thus painted on the same panel birth and death, two recurring themes in Job's book. The man floats in a limbo among images of devils, water and heaven. Van Orley painted him as a fine man, well muscled and we sense here the end of Gothic, when painters showed thin, emaciated nude bodies of men that were merely symbols instead of real depictions of men. In Italy also, more emphasis was given to the anatomy of the male body and we cannot but think of Michelangelo's sculptures and paintings. In van Orley's painting we find Gothic elements, Renaissance style and also a very mannered way of depiction.

The left panel of the closed triptych contains a scene inside a house. People are seated at a table, gathered for a dinner, and one of the hosts or the master of the house steps down to look at what happens on the other side of a balustrade. There we see a beggar with hands folded in prayer, asking for alms and help. The scene has been interpreted as a depiction of the parable of the poor Lazarus, a parable from the New Testament. The scene can however also well be interpreted as the representation of other phrases of the lamentation of Job. For Job answers to Bildad of Shuah, 'He has alienated my brothers from me, my relatives take care to avoid me, my intimate friends have gone away and the guests in my house have forgotten me. My slave-girls regard me as an intruder, a stranger as far as they are concerned. My servant does not answer when I call him, I am obliged to beg favours from him!' <sup>G38</sup>.

It is not necessary to seek other stories from the Old or New Testament to explain all the scenes on the panels of the Triptych of Patience. All the scenes can be explained as representing images recalled in the Book of Job. Van Orley read the Bible lamentation, took elements that particularly impressed him, scenes also that inspired him most to pictures, and then he painted five panels in a coherent view. The open panel shows from left to right the wealthy and respected Job, the destruction of his children and of his possessions and servants. On the closed panel from left to right, in the same direction of story-telling that van Orley started in the open panel, he painted Job as a beggar, forgotten in his own house, and lastly the recurring theme in the lamentation of Job, of birth and death.

The theme of Job is rare in painting. It is a theme that was seldom taken up by painters of the late Renaissance, the sixteenth century. Job's fate does not make a joyous, triumphant theme. Painters in Italy preferred more victorious and nice scenes, in which the human figures were fine, powerful and in which they dominated nature and the natural forces. Van Orley showed a streak of the fantastic in the Northern character and the stronger feeling that it is man who is dominated by nature and fate. Only in Flemish, Dutch and German paintings does one find depictions of such sad themes in which man is not a winner but a loser, the plaything of fate. And in which horror is so openly shown, with the possible exception of paintings of the Last Judgement. The north had been for long the country of vast dark forests, of rain and fogs, of hazardous rivers, of spectacular mountains and impenetrable valleys. Here, wars waged, always and atrociously. The mood of this country, where ghosts and monsters were still easily imagined by its inhabitants, stayed in the mind of the people

for generation after generation and lingered in the imagination even when forests were cleared, the lands tilled, and life made more comfortable. Fatality was inherently present in the subconscious, in a strange combination with a ferocious will to survive and to create. Occasionally, the old images of fear and helplessness when confronted with the powers of nature came back to the mind. They came back in scenes of horror and in scenes of wild, sombre orgies, in extravagant scourges of the earth that were unleashed on humans. Barend van Orley's Triptych of Job's Tribulations is one such manifestation.

Van Orley used the style of the moment to help support his expression and he forced that style far to his aims. He painted in a Mannerist style of Antwerp, which several painters used after travels to Italy. Jan van Scorel, Jan Massys, Jan Gossaert and other artists had travelled to Italy and seen pictures from the Italian renaissance. They had been impressed by the splendour. Views had evolved in Italy too, ornament and decoration enhanced and the human body shown in unnatural poises. The Italians too had started to feel freer in expression, to less emphasise fine drawing. The Northern painters had picked up the first manifestations of the ending of an artistic era and the beginning of a new one. They brought with them images of the Italian Renaissance in engravings and drawings and they tried to develop their own new way of showing scenes by which they could surprise and touch their viewers. Bernard van Orley may never have been in Italy, but he picked up style elements from the drawings and from the pictures of his fellow-artists. He had been exposed to them particularly in the cartons for tapestries sent to him from Italy. He used then the new elements and wrought them together with his own ideas to the extravagant scenes. Hence the Roman architecture overloaded with ornament so as to become fantastic and mysterious, menacing and daunting. Hence the overt show of emotions of horror, the wild movements of the people shown with upheaved arms and the shrieking, open mouths. Hence the overturned tables, the faces turned to ashen colours, the chaos of oblique lines. Van Orley then added the images of devastation, of burning houses, of wild soldiers killing shepherds and cattle. Van Orley had heard and maybe even seen the wild bands of unpaid hired soldiers that brought depravation and destruction to Flanders and Germany. He showed how the end of all was death and the fear of hell. The end was a dead body surrounded by devils ready to devour its soul that always was to a degree not just virtuous but also sinful. The past desolation of the North, where life had not been as easy as in Italy and filled with fears and apprehension, sometimes broke through in this way in Northern painting, such as it had with Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) and would soon again in certain pictures of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1527-1569). From this spirit also came the daunting landscapes of Joachim Patenier (1480-1524) and Henri Blès (1480-1550).

Barend van Orley was a great master of painting. He was highly skilled in his profession. He painted all details to the finest, in the best tradition of the masters of Gothic that worked in rich Flanders and Brabant. He painted exact chiaroscuro to show features of faces and bodies. Look for instance in the central panel to the woman on the left, dressed in a green robe. The chiaroscuro on her face and neck is very realistic, and such realism is not easy to paint. Van Orley also used the colours that suited the theme: sombre shades of grey, red, green, blue. He did not paint in bright hues of full intensity. He needed full, pure red for fire of course, but on his figures he used colours that are combinations of the pure hues and that are therefore diluted and unusual. Such colours are blue-grey, ashen-green, purple. They always indicate



tension, awkwardness instead of joy and clarity. Van Orley subjugated his colours to the theme. His composition of inter-crossing lines represents chaos and movement well.

Barend van Orley's triptych represents scenes from the Book of Job. His panels are called the Triptych of patience because of his personal devise written on one of the panels, but van Orley thoroughly read Job's lamentation and he must have been much impressed by it. He let free a hidden part of his Northern character. He transformed the beginning Italian and Antwerp Mannerist style elements to an extreme that suited the theme and in that he went further than any Italian would have imagined in his times. The question that remains open is why he painted on such a sad, dark, moralising theme. Margaret of Austria commissioned the picture for one of her councillors. If she also gave the subject to Barend van Orley, it was quite an expensive way to give a message to her councillor. In any case, it must have been a theme that resounded in van Orley and by which he was affected. The lamentation of Job remains one of the most remarkable tales of the Bible.

**Job chided by his Wife**

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée Départemental des Vosges, d'Art Ancien et Contemporain. Épinal. Ca. 1650.

Georges de La Tour was a remarkable painter. He was born in 1593 in Vic-sur-Seille in the North-East region of France called La Lorraine. He was one of the sons of a baker family. He may first have studied in Nancy, the capital of the Duchy of Lorraine. He may have travelled in Italy before 1616, but that remains speculation. In 1617 he married Diane Le Nerf, the daughter of a dignitary of the Duke, who had lived with her family in Lunéville and the couple moved also to that town. De La Tour would stay there and paint the rest of his life. The French King Louis XIII sought to affirm his domination over the rich Lorraine region. This became a fact in 1634, but it brought also more peace to the region – for a time. In 1638 Lunéville was sacked and burnt and de La Tour may then have temporarily moved to Paris and gained there in 1639 the title of Painter of the King, an honorary title, but which opened more doors. He soon returned to Lunéville however, to work for notables of the Duchy, for the governor de La Ferté that Louis XIII had sent to the Lorraine. He could easily live of his art and he had a thriving business, so he grew to a quite wealthy man. He died in 1652 of an illness that struck Lunéville like a plague and that took first his wife before him.

Georges de La Tour is one of the most original painters of France's seventeenth century. He essentially painted two sorts of works: daylight scenes and night scenes. But he was mostly interested in figures only and his paintings lack scenery totally. He may have known the Caravaggesque style, which was still very new when he too started to paint, or he may have developed his own view close to the style of the Italian innovator. Caravaggio applied sharp contrasts between dark and light and Georges de La Tour was also interested in the effects of light. Caravaggio painted his figures without scenery and he could not be less interested in landscapes - and so did de La Tour. But Caravaggio copied from live models and painted his personages in a hyper-realistic way. Georges de La Tour however gradually abstracted his figures and reduced them to concepts. He was more interested in the impression of a figure or a story upon the viewer and he must have found out that realism was not always necessary to surprise the viewer and show clearly the essence, the meaning of a scene. A viewer could be interested by a new, striking style of depiction and in figures devoid of details, reduced to type-forms and still easily and rapidly understand the concept of a scene, the meaning of a narrative in images. De La Tour practised to that aim one of the most difficult types of paintings: scenes lit only by a point source of weak light, by a candle or a torch.

There is something magical in scenes lit only by a point source of light, when that source is not of a very bright light. A candle brings a light that may be difficult to look at in its core for a long time because it is sharp enough there, at the fire, but it does not bear its luminance far and it is not very powerful. It fades away rapidly and leaves the background of a room very dark. It only illuminates the objects that are in its vicinity. Because it is not very powerful it soon dies out and does not form strong and gradual shadows. As the light stops at the corners, it tends to stop abruptly there. It continues

to show volumes hesitatingly and as it is weak it does not lighten the background so that also no light is reflected back from the walls of a room back into the space. Candlelight and torchlight therefore tends to flatten objects in our vision. It leaves shadows harsh. It illuminates objects, but so little light makes side surfaces rapidly grey and it is able to show complementary colours on the sides. A viewer may observe chiaroscuro, but otherwise the dimensions of objects are simplified. A little away from an object, a viewer sees only the immediately lit surfaces; the rest remains black or very dark. Areas on which chiaroscuro is weak and that are surrounded by darkness, tend to be easily perceived as surfaces only, without volume. Even a weak chiaroscuro becomes a surface with light against a dark background, so chiaroscuro diminishes in value. Volume is less perceived. Softness of contours is reduced only with distance. The surfaces are seen by their geometrical shapes and the shapes tend to simplify, to be reduced in their contours to straight lines. So, candlelight reduces three-dimensional vision to two dimensions. This could be an ideal effect for rendering such views in paintings on flat surfaces were it not that few people really observed and analysed the effect, were aware of it. A few painters only throughout history have remarked the effect. They observed the particularities of vision in weak sources of light and remarked the flattening of objects, and the lack of reflection from objects. The sharpening and reduction of soft lines, the emergence of simpler shapes in the flattened surfaces, the sharper contrast between colour areas lit by the candle and between the black backgrounds have been shown by few painters. Even fewer among the few painters that truly observed these effects grasped the concepts at work, the specific properties of light of point sources and typified them, classified them, described them in words, analysed the concepts and then applied the ideas in pictures. De La Tour learnt all this gradually, as we can follow in the evolution in his works. Once the concepts understood and the effects named, the concepts could be used independently from life models or life views. After all, it would have been difficult if not impossible to paint in very feebly lit rooms.

Georges de La Tour knew the concepts of scenes lit by point sources of light. Once he had observed and analysed in his mind the effects, he kept the few main concepts as a new way of viewing and then he expressed them in a new way also of depiction. He showed his scenes in ever more purified, simplified means of depiction. The process at work of course is a process of abstraction. It was a process of abstraction of viewing, of effect on colours and areas instead of content. We use the word 'abstract' in painting nowadays mostly on the abstraction of the content, of the subject matter. But the process of abstraction in general means that one retains the main qualities of something and then represents that something by its main qualities alone. Georges de La Tour has observed and understood the effects of candlelight on an environment of a closed room. He abstracted the effects and then he applied the abstracted concepts in his paintings, ever more radically. 'Job chided by his Wife' is one of his pictures from the beginning of the period when he started to apply the principles. He advanced in this way of depiction, but after a while stopped in his process and returned even to easier figuration, easier for his contemporary viewers.

Job is seated on a box. A broken earthen pot is at his feet. He has broken off a piece of the pot. He is naked and holds his hands in prayer. He is emaciated, a thin man whose flesh is drawn over his bones. He has a long beard and this beard, as well as his unkempt hair gives the impression that he does not care for himself anymore, not for his body and not for his face. His wife approaches. She wears a candle, comes to Job,

but she has not stopped caring for herself. She is nicely dressed in a robe of orange and light brown colours, which are rather joyous hues. She has a white cap on her head and she looks still youthful. She has an apron, which might indicate that she also has not stopped working in her kitchen. She touches Job's head or seems to explain something to Job. Job looks at her and thus seems indeed to listen to her. She scolds Job for abandoning hope, for abandoning to a fickle God instead of to care for earthly matters, for her, for the house, for life. What does she say?

De La Tour painted a scene from the beginning of the Book of Job. Job was struck by Satan in his possessions, in his children and in his servants. Now, Job got malignant ulcers all over his body. He was struck by Satan in his own body. Job took a piece of a pot to scrape at his ulcers and he sat among the ashes. It was then that his wife said to him, 'Why persist in this integrity of yours? Curse God and die!' But Job refused to say a sinful word and he replied, 'That is how a fool of a woman talks. If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too?' De La Tour painted Job sitting in the ashes, maybe in a cellar, a broken pot at his feet, the pot from which he had broken a piece to scrape at his ulcers.

Georges de La Tour was only interested in his two figures. There is no background but the black void and even the box on which Job is sitting has disappeared to become a simple black mass under Job. De La Tour painted the light around the candle very bright, but the light then stops rapidly and radically on Job. We see for instance a bright crescent on Job's knee, but his legs are almost in complete black. His legs are only perceivable because of the contrast they make with the lighter areas behind them. Light falls on Job's nude chest and here de La Tour showed his considerable skills in realistically depicting the anatomy of a naked, muscled man. But higher up the light fades again and the face of Job is only hinted at, otherwise disappears also in the black, dark grey, dark brown shades of Job's beard and hair. Job is really a man who lives in the dark, in the shadows of life. He sits inertly. He is not at work anymore, not like his wife. He prays in the dark where he can be the naked human, naked like he came to life as he said himself so often and naked as he will return to God, in the two views that also Barend van Orley emphasised in his Triptych of Patience. Life is next to Job, life is the young wife. She stands there in clothes of nice, joyous, happy colours and although she towers above Job in pity but also in scorn, she leans towards him and consoles him while reproaching Job for his lack of hope in further life.

Georges de La Tour painted Job's wife in fine, bright colours. He contrasted these hues with the sombre brown and black colours of Job. De La Tour indicated some chiaroscuro on Job's wife, but very little. The areas of her robe give practically no illusion of volume; they remain flat to the viewer. The lines of the robe and apron are straight and clearly visible, as the areas of colours stop abruptly one against the other and against the black background. Because of the straight lines and flat surfaces of colour, the areas show simple forms, almost reduced to simple geometric shapes: to rectangles, triangles, simple combinations of these. Here de La Tour applied the concepts of the effects of candlelight on vision that he had observed.

'Job chided by his Wife' is a remarkable picture for its times. De La Tour observed specific effect of candle light on scenes of figures and then applied the concepts he had derived from his observation to a surprising new mode of depiction. The result is a picture with a style of the form of painting that looks very modern. But de La Tour

was far from Cubism or from Abstraction as we know it now, even though quite a few art historians have tried to explain in these terms his original style. Nevertheless, probably by an act of observation, he reached a new expression of his religious scenes that still strikes today for being original, individual and modern. His style of painting was well received in the Lorraine and in France. The King of France as well as the Governor of Lorraine owned works of de La Tour and he died a wealthy man. Georges de La Tour's works were not only masterpieces of depiction, of pictorial representation, and of rendering his messages. The style he developed suited marvellously his sensibility for showing certain scenes from the bible, scenes of intimate piety. The night scenes were like scenes from the soul of man, inner pictures. By reducing form and colours, by reducing ornament and decoration, de La Tour reached a sublimation of expression of spirituality that was very efficient to convey his ideas. Idea, form, content and expression became one and represented in the picture the essence of his message.

## *Part XII. The Prophets*

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the rulers of Assyria in 721 BC. The Southern Kingdom of Judah lingered on but had to yield to the Babylonian onslaught from 586 BC on. Before these upheavals, Prophets appeared in Israel that warned for the faults of the Jews and the inevitable wrath of Yahweh who would take revenge, punish and bring catastrophes on the heads of his favourite people. During and after the return from the Babylonian exile this tradition was continued and wise men assisted the Israelites. The sayings of these Prophets have been preserved. They were bundled in Books of the Old Testament.

The message in the prophecies is always the same. The Jews have offered to idols and have not lived according to the law of Yahweh. The Israelite Kings have abandoned the laws ordained by Yahweh and refuse to listen to the warnings. Therefore the people will be punished. The Houses of Israel and of Judah will be destroyed, Jerusalem burnt down, and the Jews taken off by God's servant Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldaean king of Babylon, to exile. Nebuchadnezzar is not just a conquering invader; he is the instrument of the God of the Jews, executing his sentence. Not all Jews will leave the land but those that stay will continue to abandon Yahweh and lose his favour. Therefore they will know only misery. Yahweh will set his hope only on the exiled. These Jews, humble, poor and enslaved, will again honour their God and be righteous. As a reward for their just life Yahweh will bring them back to the Promised Land of their ancestors after seventy years, and Yahweh promises them peace again in Israel. The message is that the poor Jews in exile, without a leader, who have nothing but their hope in Yahweh, will far more abide by his laws than the Jews living in ease at the court of the Jewish kings in the homeland. Religion in Yahweh comes from the humble people and so Yahweh cleansed Israel by disasters to bring the people back to him; the leaders that remained in Israel and Judah flocked to remnants of the kings' courts and these would not find the true religion.

The prophets were Isaiah, Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch, Habakkuk and Zephaniah in the North; Ezekiel and Daniel already in Babylonian exile, whereas the Book of Joel was written after the return of the Jews from exile and around 400 BC. Also Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were prophets after the return from exile. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah. The Book of Nahum is but a short poem on the fall of Nineveh, which happened in 612 BC.

## *The Book of Isaiah*

The Book of the Prophet Isaiah consists of three parts, written at different periods and probably by different people. The first part was written around 740 BC. Isaiah starts his prophecies by addressing the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He called them an ungrateful people. He laments on the coming destruction of Jerusalem, which he called a harlot city. Although Isaiah prophesies a magnificent vision of Yahweh's majesty and the ultimate peace that will arise out of the bloodshed of Jerusalem, he describes the anarchy of the city, the despair of the women of Jerusalem deprived of jewels and perfumes, and the total misery of the town.

Yahweh makes Isaiah sing a parable to his beloved. The beloved had a fertile vineyard. He expected it to yield fine grapes but wild grapes were all he obtained. The friend then tore out the hedges around the vineyard, for the land to be grazed upon so that it went to waste. The parable showed that the Houses of Israel and of Judah could be compared to a vineyard from which protection was withdrawn, for the land to be trampled upon. Yahweh thus brings curses to the people of Israel and of Judah, by summoning the invaders to lay waste the land and to drive the people away from the country of their ancestors.

When Ahaz was King of Judah, Razon King of Aram and Pekah King of Israel, these kings allied and attacked Judah and Jerusalem. The House of David was informed, and the advance of Aram was stopped in the land of Ephraim. Yahweh sent Isaiah to the King of Judah to calm him, for he had ordained that the invasion would not be dangerous for Judah. But at the same time Yahweh told Isaiah to predict a more devastating invasion coming from Assyria. At this time a son was born to Isaiah and they called him Maher-Shabal-Hash-Baz, as Yahweh had asked. Isaiah predicted the fall of Israel by the Assyrians.

The King of Assyria would be punished later however for his insolence and the House of Jacob would return to the Holy God of Israel. Isaiah prophesied that then a new shoot would spring from the root of Jesse, on which would rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and of insight, of council, power and knowledge. In this time, the wolf would live with the lamb, the panther sleep with the kid and all the wild beasts would be led by a little boy. This root of Jesse would be sought out by all the nations. The scattered people from Judah would gather again and the enemies of Judah would be suppressed.

Isaiah wrote also a proclamation against Babylon, warning these people for the wrath and power of Yahweh. He predicted the death of the King of Babylon and the return of the House of Israel to the Promised Land. Isaiah wrote proclamations against Assyria, against the Philistines, Edom, the Arabs, against Moab, against Damascus, Cush and Egypt. Isaiah wrote proclamations against the merchant city of Tyre. Isaiah prophesied the fall of Babylon but he also wrote against Shebna, the master of the palace of Jerusalem. He warned Jerusalem not to rejoice, because the defences of the town would fall too and Yahweh would punish the people of Jerusalem for building new houses on the old ones, new walls on the old ones and new reservoirs where there had been old pools. Isaiah told that the people of Jerusalem thus forgot the sentence of

the creator and that they forgot the creator of the old monuments, who finished them a long time ago. Isaiah predicted an apocalypse when Yahweh would emerge to punish the inhabitants of the earth.

The second part of the Book of Isaiah is a long prophecy of the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonian exile. This part was written about a hundred and fifty years later than the first part. Like the first Isaiah, this prophet called Isaiah talks of the fulfilment of the promise made by Yahweh to return Israel to the Jews and to the remnants of David's House, in the faith, glory and peace of Yahweh. In this second part also are four Songs of the Servant of Yahweh, in which the servant vows to follow Yahweh's ways and in which the writer expresses confidence in the final salvation of Israel by Yahweh.

The third part of the Book of Isaiah was written later still, after the return from the Babylonian exile. This Isaiah describes the splendour of the restored Jerusalem, the reward of a people that has acted onto what is pleasing to their God. The prophet meditates on the history of Israel in an allegorical text and he describes the fair judgement of Yahweh on all people.

The Book of Isaiah closes with a short discourse on the final judgement, when Yahweh will gather every nation and every language to glorify him. After this, Yahweh promises once more to endure the race and name of Israel.

### **The Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah**

Master of the Annunciation of Aix, Barthélémy d'Eyck (active around 1440 to 1470). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Musée d'Art Ancien, Brussels. Ca. 1442-1445.

Barthélémy d'Eyck was born in the Limburg region of Belgium or the Netherlands, like the most famous Jan van Eyck of which he may have been family. His mother married in second marriage a painter, Peter van Bijlandt, also called Pierre du Billant because the couple travelled to France and to the Provence, where van Bijlandt found work with the Duke of the Provence. Barthélémy may have learned to paint from his stepfather. He too worked then in the Provence, and more in particular for the rich and gentle King René d'Anjou (1409-1480) who has been called 'Le Bon Roi René', the good king.

René d'Anjou was not only Duke of the Provence. He was also in his glorious days King of Naples and Sicily, Duke of Anjou, Bar and Lorraine. King René was also a writer. He wrote a novel, 'Coeur d'Amour Épris', or 'A heart taken by Love' and a copy of this work in the Austrian National library contains miniatures made by Barthélémy. Pierre du Billant, stepfather of d'Eyck, was court painter of René d'Anjou and accompanied King René to Naples from 1438 to 1442. René d'Anjou had acquired the Neapolitan throne in 1438 and travelled to his residence in Naples shortly thereafter. Du Billant and maybe also Barthélémy d'Eyck may have been



exposed there to the Neapolitan painters such as Niccolò Colantonio. In 1442 René d'Anjou had to abandon the crown of Naples however, to his rival Alphonso V of Aragon and Naples came into Spanish hands.

Barthélémy d'Eyck was in his turn, and probably from 1447 to 1470, court painter of René d'Anjou. He drew and painted miniatures but also on large altarpieces. One of these is the altarpiece of the Annunciation of Aix-en-Provence, King René's capital, so that in the beginning the master of these panels and other similar works was called the 'Master of the Annunciation of Aix' before being identified with Barthélémy d'Eyck. The various panels of the altarpiece have been dispersed, so that even today only the central panel remains in Aix cathedral. The exact composition of the altarpiece has been a subject of speculation and debate, but the portrait of the Prophet Isaiah may have been its left wing. 'Saint Mary Magdalene kneeling' was on its reverse side. The 'prophet Jeremiah' was the right-wing panel, with a Christ on the reverse. The picture of Isaiah is now in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen in Rotterdam, whereas the panel of Jeremiah is in the Brussels Museum of Ancient Art.

The triptych was foreseen for the Saint-Sauveur cathedral of Aix and commissioned by Pierre Corpici of Aix, a draper, who was in the service of René d'Anjou. The central panel was an Annunciation. On the opened side panels were the representation of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The two prophets are represented as if they were wealthy burghers of the Provence region. They are dressed in fine clothes. Isaiah wears a green robe and Jeremiah a splendid red one. Isaiah's headdress has a patch of red, while the inside of Jeremiah's robe is green. So, Barthélémy d'Eyck made the colours respond on left and right. Only Jeremiah wears a cap that could remind of a monk's dress. Jeremiah reads from a book, probably the Bible, whereas Isaiah seems to warn or indicate the importance of the Annunciation theme. On top of both pictures is a still life. The two still lives show a rack with books, ribbons, cases and pots, and are very lively in the assembly of various objects in all different positions.

The two panels were painted as if the figures represented statues. This was often the habit in Northern pictures, as many such altarpieces originally held statues whereas in later periods the statues were replaced by painted scenes. The painted statues, often in grisaille are illusions of the statues that originally adorned the triptychs. Triptychs also originally consisted of three panels so that the two side panels would close upon the central box of statues. Barthélémy d'Eyck, in the best Northern Flemish tradition, placed his Prophets on pedestals as if they were indeed sculptures. But he loved colours too much, so he painted the Prophets in fine, complementary and bright hues of red and green. Combinations of these colours with the yellow of flesh hue are also in the still lives.

Barthélémy d'Eyck was a colourist. He loves clear, pure hues. We remark that in the colours of the prophet's dresses, and also in his bright, high-intensity hues such as the light blue of Jeremiah's book. He painted in very fine chiaroscuro all the folds on the robes of the Prophets. He had a keen eye for the psychology of his figures and showed that in the faces of the figures. Isaiah is in tension. He has the face of a worrying and dignified man, but also of a man that knows when to decide. He is the most aristocratic personage. Jeremiah then is the clerical man, the monk, the reading, wise man with the round face and small somewhat sensual lips. He draws his mouth in reflection, in the way of a man who criticises while he reads. He may be the more

intellectual personage. Barthélémy d'Eyck painted Isaiah as the entrepreneur, the trader, the banker whereas Jeremiah is the religious man but anyhow also the one who most profits from good life.

D'Eyck showed illusion of space well: both Prophets are positioned in the corner of a room or chapel and in a niche, but d'Eyck knew the rules of perspective and especially in the niche of Jeremiah we see that the lines of floor and ceiling are not parallel but will cross at an imaginary vanishing point. Effects of perspective are also in the pedestals on which the Prophets stand. Together with the chiaroscuro the perspective creates volume. Barthélémy d'Eyck created space by his knowledge of perspective. He also painted well the shadows thrown by the light coming from the front left in both pictures on the walls behind the Prophets. Emphasis of shadows of figures was rare in Gothic and Renaissance pictures and Barthélémy d'Eyck belonged more to the former than to the latter period. Inside panels of altarpieces however, such shadows were common and Barthélémy d'Eyck may have seen and learnt from these polyptychs. The octagonal pedestals for instance were also used by Jan van Eyck in several of his niche paintings of grisaille figures in the creation of illusion of volume and depth. Barthélémy d'Eyck equally used such little means in a masterly way.

### The Dying Hezekiah

Domenico Fiasella (1589-1669). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1640.

Domenico Fiasella was born at Sarzana near Genoa in 1589. His father Giovanni was a silversmith. From the age of eleven he studied drawing and painting in Genoa, first with Aurelio Lomi (1556-1622) and then in the workshop of Giovanni Battista Paggi (1554-1627). He travelled to Rome in 1606-1607, where after a while Guido Reni admired his work and introduced him to other painters such as Giuseppe Cesari the Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640), with which Fiasella then also worked. He also learned to know Domenico Cresti, called Il Passignano. Fiasella returned to Genoa however, around 1615, to open his own workshop there and he became one of Genoa's best known artists. After the death of Giovanni Paggi (1627) and the departure from Genoa of Bernardo Strozzi and Giovanni Benedetto Castiglioni, Domenico Fiasella was the best known painter in Genoa. He worked for the government of the republic but also for the Dukes of Mantua. Many painters worked in Fiasella's times: Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari (ca. 1598-1669), Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657), Giovanni Battista Carlone (1603-1684), Giovanni Benedetto Castiglioni (1609-1664), Luciano Borzone (1590-1645), Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644), Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649) and the Flemish artists Lucas de Wael (1591-1666) and Cornelis de Wael (1592-1667), whereas also Pieter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck passed by Genoa, but Domenico Fiasella was Genoa's established value. Fiasella painted religious scenes, also from the Old Testament. He was an eminent Baroque painter, specialised in scenes of figures rather than landscapes. He painted frescoes in the Palazzo Lomellini from the stories of Esther. He died in Genoa in 1669. Many of his works are in his home town of Sarzana.

Hezekiah, the King of Jerusalem fell ill and his court feared for his life. Isaiah, son of Amoz, came to see him and told him that Yahweh had predicted that the king would not live. Hezekiah then prayed to Yahweh, told that he had always behaved in good faith and done what was right in the eyes of God. Hezekiah shed many tears. Yahweh relented and ordered Isaiah to go back to Hezekiah with the message that he had heard the prayers of the king and that he would cure him. Yahweh would add fifteen years to the king's life, save Jerusalem from the invasion of the Assyrians and defend Jerusalem for David's sake. Isaiah ordered a fig poultice to be brought and rubbed that over the ulcer of the king to cure him. Yahweh then told Hezekiah to go to the Temple three days later and he gave to Isaiah and Hezekiah a sign of his promise: the shadow cast by the declining sun on the steps of Ahaz' roof-room would go back ten steps. And so it happened. Hezekiah then sang a canticle of praise to Yahweh.

Domenico Fiasella painted the scene of the dying king Hezekiah and Isaiah's visit to the king. The King talks to the prophet. Hezekiah lies in bed, ill from the ulcer. Hezekiah's doctor is also at the bed, as well as two youth who could be Hezekiah's sons. Fiasella painted a scene of the conversation between Prophet and King. Hezekiah explains what happens with his illness, and he shows he has not deserved Yahweh's wrath. Hezekiah supports his good faith and his story with his hands. Isaiah hears and is the wise old prophet. He stands with one arm behind his back but bends his head towards the King, his friend. With his left hand Isaiah points towards the window, indicating the sign of Yahweh who made the sun retreat against its normal

course. Behind Isaiah one of Hezekiah's sons looks with pity to his father and with rue concern. Fiasella succeeded well in showing the illness of the King. He showed how the King lies with his head on the bed and Hezekiah's head inclines and rests, as if exhausted. The king does not sit upright and by the ways he supports his head we sense the fatigues of the illness on the king. Once Hezekiah was the powerful leader, dressed in magnificent robes of ceremony, covered with gold. Now he lies in bed and his night-shirt open on a meagre chest, where we can imagine the ulcer that made him ill. At the foot of the bed sits Hezekiah's court doctor, dressed in black. He too is wise, a grey-bearded man. But his beard is well kept, shorter and more sophisticated than the wild, ample beards of the king and of the Prophet. The doctor keeps his head to his front; he is thinking about what might be the reason for the king's ails. Between the heads of King and Prophet is another youth, who could equally be the King's son. This son protects his eyes from the sun with his left hand. He looks at the roof of Ahaz' house and must see there the sun reclining ten steps, as Yahweh had promised to do as a sign of his good will towards the king. Hezekiah is the king, for next to him, on the bed, Fiasella painted his crown.

Domenico Fiasella made a baroque painting of rather large dimensions, with lively drama in his figures. He painted a night scene with obvious contrasts between light and dark, as he may have seen in Rome from Caravaggio and his followers just a few years before he returned to Genoa. He still had some interest for the background and also for the sake of his story he had to paint the open window and a roof-top. The light does not enter through that window, but seems to come from the front and we see fine chiaroscuro on the king's bare chest, on the folds of the bed-covers and especially on Isaiah's pink robe. Fiasella painted a story; the essence of his picture is the rendering of a narrative. There is much content in the painting, yet the content stays in the five heads and Fiasella placed these five faces almost in the same horizontal band of the picture. In composition he used the right diagonal of the frame and positioned Hezekiah's bed along it. To the right and left Fiasella used vertical directions, impersonified on the left by the high figure of Isaiah and on the right by the doctor, whom Fiasella painted quite lower than Isaiah to support his diagonal. Thus the viewer seems to look at the painting from the left side, from close to Isaiah. Fiasella worked in broad brushstrokes but he nevertheless well depicted the details of the robes, bedcovers, even of a piece of cloth on the pail at the lower end of the frame.

Domenico Fiasella's strength was in his depiction of realistic figures and scenes of religious themes. He told stories well, and explained the theme in the expression of the faces of his personages. He was a fine professional. But we lack in him the power and genius of a new vision and of the unity of the action that was the force of for instance Rembrandt. Fiasella told a different story with each personage and this weakened his power of expression, diverted some the attention of the viewer. Fiasella was an excellent painter who represented the Baroque period in Genoa, making fine scenes of the Old Testament such as this the 'Dying King Hezekiah', a rare theme in painting.

### *The Book of Jeremiah*

The Book of Jeremiah covers a period from about 622 BC to 585 BC. The Book does not recall Jeremiah's deeds in chronological order. It seems to have been partly copied from a version maybe written by Jeremiah himself, copied by his secretary Baruch and notes added to maybe by Baruch himself.

Yahweh called Jeremiah to become a prophet under the reign of King Josiah. Jeremiah protested, but Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to become a man that saw in the future and through which Yahweh would speak.

Jeremiah urged Israel, the Northern Kingdom, to repent for its sins. Yahweh called Israel a disloyal but still upright people, compared with the utterly faithless Judah. Yahweh would send disasters from the north to destroy Israel to a desert. The whole country would be laid waste and Yahweh would annihilate its people. Yahweh told there was no one anymore in Jerusalem who did right and spoke the truth. Yahweh would not pardon Israel, and bring destruction. But even in this terrible prediction of horrors and destruction Yahweh reigned in his wrath and stated that that he would not completely annihilate Israel as a race. The people should serve aliens in a country not their own, but not perish all.

The prophecies of Jeremiah in the reign of Jehoiakim are texts about a series of worships ordered by Yahweh to the people of Israel, threats against the moral corruption of Judah and Zion, and laments of the Prophet over Israel's perversity. Yahweh orders Jeremiah to repeat to the people the terms of the Covenant.

Yahweh spoke sometimes in parables to Jeremiah. God told the Prophet to buy a linen waistcloth, not to dip it in water, and to hide it in a hole in a rock near the Euphrates. A long time after, Yahweh ordered Jeremiah to fetch the waistcloth. The cloth was of course ruined. Yahweh said that in the same way he would ruin the pride of Jerusalem and of Judah, and he would destroy the people that refused to listen to his words. God told the Houses of Israel and Judah to cling to him like a waistcloth and warned that the people could easily be ruined like Jeremiah's cloth.

In another parable Yahweh said that a jug could be filled with wine. Like a man could fill a jug, God could fill all the inhabitants of the country, everybody, with wine to drunkenness. Then Yahweh would smash them like jugs against each other and destroy them. Yahweh then gave an admonition against the impertinent Jerusalem and he threatened King Jehoiachim.

The Book of Jeremiah contains the prophecy of the great draught that happened in Judah and a description of the horrors of war that would befall on Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Yahweh also predicts in the book the return from exile and the ultimate conversion of all the nations.

Once, Jeremiah visited a potter and he saw a vessel the artisan was making came out wrong. The potter started all over again and shaped it right this time. Yahweh said that the House of Israel was like clay in his hands, which he could shape and destroy.

Yahweh told Jeremiah that he would send disaster on Judah and he warned the people to turn their back to their evil ways.

Yahweh ordered Jeremiah to buy a potter's jug, got to the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, and to address the Elders of Judah. Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to tell the Elders that he was displeased with their evil deeds. Yahweh would hand them over to their enemies and make the cities objects of horror. Then Jeremiah had to break the jug and tell the Elders that Yahweh would break the people and the cities just as one breaks a potter's jug. When the chief of the police in the Temple of Yahweh heard of this, he struck Jeremiah and put him in the stocks, in a prison in a gate leading to the Temple. The next day however the man released Jeremiah. Jeremiah then predicted to this man that he would not be called Pashhur anymore but Terror-on-every-side because he would be handed over to terror with the whole of Judah.

In later prophecies, after the reign of Jehoiakim, King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah to consult him on the war that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was making again on Judah. Jeremiah predicted that Yahweh would deliver Judah over into Babylon's clutches and that Jerusalem would be burnt down. This part of the book of Jeremiah contains several such prophecies, against various kings: against Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin, against false prophets. But like in most of the prophecy writings, the Book also contains an explicit Messianic prediction. In this, Jeremiah says that Yahweh would gather the people from all the countries whereto he had scattered them, to bring them back and to multiply their numbers. Then there would be no fear anymore and no terrors.

Yahweh once gave a vision to Jeremiah. The vision happened after Nebuchadnezzar had led the King of Israel, Jeconiah, into exile. Set out in front of the Temple Jeremiah saw two baskets of figs. One basket contained excellent figs; the other contained very bad, spoilt figs. Yahweh told Jeremiah that like the good figs, Yahweh would concern himself with the welfare of the exiles of Judah. He said these exiles would be his people and he their God, for they would return to him with their heart. But for the bad figs, Yahweh would treat Zedekiah, king of Judah, and those who had remained in the country with horrors and disasters. He would send them sword, famine and plague until they had vanished from the land given to their ancestors.

Jeremiah prophesied the fall of all nations around Israel and Judah and also Jerusalem's destruction. For this he was arrested and the priests and false prophets said that Jeremiah deserved to die. But Jeremiah continued to speak out for Yahweh so that the chief men and the people asked to spare Jeremiah since he spoke in the name of Yahweh. Another prophet, Uriah son of Shemaiah had said the same things. Uriah had fled to Egypt but he King Jehoiakim brought him back and killed him. Jeremiah had a protector in Ahiham son of Shephan, so he was not handed over to the people to be killed.

Yahweh spoke through Jeremiah. Jeremiah said that it was Yahweh who had given over Judah, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Tyre and Sidon to bend under the yoke of Babylon. In that time a false prophet, Hananiah, declared that two years from hence Yahweh would bring back the treasuries carried off by the Babylonians. Hananiah also said that Jeconiah would become once more King of Judah. Jeremiah objected to this, saying that he, as well as other prophets, only predicted war, disaster and plagues

for Judah. Jeremiah told that true prophets could be recognised only when Yahweh's words came true. Jeremiah had set on a yoke in sign of the prophecy of Yahweh. Hananiah tore the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah and broke it. Jeremiah went away, but Yahweh ordered him to go back and to tell to Hananiah that only a wooden yoke had been broken to be replaced by an iron yoke. Yahweh said he would now lay an iron yoke on the nations to be enslaved by Nebuchadnezzar. Yahweh also told that Hananiah would die that same year, since he had preached rebellion against Yahweh. Jeremiah handed over the message to Hananiah, who indeed died the same year.

Yahweh thus predicted that Israel and Judah would be laid waste. He also predicted that the exiles would return in the end and that in time Jerusalem would be rebuilt magnificently. This Jeremiah wrote in letters sent to the exiled. In these letters he expressed his and Yahweh's hope on the faithful people of exile. Yahweh promised to keep the Jews only seventy years in Babylonian exile and promised that then they could return to find peace and a future. Prophets would help the exiles in Babylon to keep Yahweh's laws and turn their backs on evil behaviour.

In the days of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, Jeremiah spoke out his prophecies of disaster for the people. Baruch, his secretary, noted them on scrolls and read them loudly to the chief men. The King was informed and he sent Jehudi to fetch the scrolls. Jehudi read the words of Jeremiah to the King and as the texts were read, Jehoiakim burnt the scrolls. Jeremiah heard of this and spoke out Yahweh's condemnation of the King. Jehoiakim would be punished, killed, and his corpse thrown out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. Baruch then copied once more all that Jeremiah had prophesied.

Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah King of Judah. Zedekiah however resisted the Babylonians. Zedekiah send word to Jeremiah to ask the Prophet to intercede with Yahweh and ask for Yahweh's help of Pharaoh's advancing armies against Babylon, and against the Chaldaeans. But Jeremiah told the King that the Chaldaeans would not leave the country. At that time Jeremiah was arrested by Irijah son of Shelemiah, commander of the Benjamin Gate of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was beaten and thrown in an underground vault. Zedekiah then sent for Jeremiah, but Jeremiah repeated his prophecy. Babylon would continue to prevail over Judah. Zedekiah nevertheless gave Jeremiah to eat and confined him to the Court of the Guard of his palace. Shephatiah heard what Jeremiah had predicted. He went to King Zedekiah and proposed to have Jeremiah killed. King Zedekiah then gave Jeremiah into Shephatiah's hands. They took Jeremiah and let him down with ropes into the storage-well in the Court of the Guard. Jeremiah sank into the mud of the well but there was no water in the well. A eunuch of the King's court, Ebed-Melech, now appealed to Zedekiah about the fate of Jeremiah, who would surely starve in the well. The King heard the words of his eunuch and changed his mind. He allowed Ebed-Melech to haul Jeremiah out of the well. Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah and asked his advice on the conflict with Babylon. Jeremiah answered stubbornly that Yahweh wanted Judah's submission and he urged Zedekiah to surrender. Nebuchadnezzar advanced on Jerusalem, laid siege to the city and soon breached its walls. Zedekiah and his court escaped in the dark but the Chaldaean army pursued the Jews, captured them and brought Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar. The King of Babylon slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, and put all the leading men of Judah to death. Nebuchadnezzar then put out Zedekiah's eyes and carried off the King in chains to Babylon. The royal palace was

burnt down. The prophecy of Jeremiah had come true and the men of Judah were taken in exile to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar ordered Jeremiah to be left alone, so the Prophet remained among the poorest people that stayed in Judah. Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, proposed to Jeremiah to join the exiles, but the Prophet went to Mizpah and remained in the country.

The King of Babylon appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam to governor of Judah. Gedaliah ruled out of Mizpah. The King of the Ammonites then sent a man, Ishmael son of Nethaniah to kill Gedaliah. Although Johanan son of Kareah, a military leader of Judah, warned the governor, Ishmael killed Gedaliah during a meal offered in his honour at the palace. Ishmael also killed many Judaeans who were with the governor. Ishmael threw the corpses in a large well. When Johanan heard of this, he mustered all his men and pursued Ishmael. But Ishmael had fled to the Ammonites. All the military leaders of Judah, led by Johanan, now assembled and were afraid of the revenge of Babylon. They consulted Jeremiah. Jeremiah spoke the message of Yahweh. Jeremiah urged Johanan to stay in Judah and not to be afraid of the King of Babylon. But of the Jews were to flee to Egypt, the sword would catch up with them there and they would be killed. Azariah son of Hoshaiah however claimed that Jeremiah was a liar and the other leaders also did not want to hear Jeremiah's words. So all the remnant leaders of Judah went with their men to Egypt, to the town of Tahpanhes. Yahweh told Jeremiah to take some large stones and bury them in cement at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace at Tahpanhes. Yahweh would defeat Egypt through his servant Nebuchadnezzar and the King of Babylon would set this throne upon Jeremiah's stones. Jeremiah told this to the Judaeans in Egypt. He told them that Yahweh would bring destruction to them. The people however were already offering to other gods in Egypt, so they told Jeremiah they had no intention of going back to Judah. Jeremiah merely repeated that Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, would be given over to Babylon and be killed.

The Book of Jeremiah then continues after the histories of the life of Jeremiah with his prophecies against the nations. It contains prophecies against Egypt, tells of the invasion of Egypt by the army of Babylon and of the defeat of the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish. Jeremiah also prophesied against the Philistines, against Moab, Ammon Edom, the towns of Syria, against the Arab tribes and against Elam. All these people would be destroyed by Babylon and by the Chaldaean King. But Jeremiah also spoke out against this Babylon, predicting the capture of Babylon and the return of the people of Israel from the Chaldaean exile. The fall of Babylon was thus predicted by Jeremiah, as proclaimed by Yahweh. Yahweh's vengeance would also come over Babylon in due time. The Babylonian god, Bel, would be smashed. Jeremiah sent Seraiah son of Neriah to Babylon with this message. Seraiah was Lord Chamberlain and Jeremiah told Seraiah to read out loud the prophecy on the fall of Babylon, then to tie a stone to the sheet and throw it in the Euphrates, saying, 'so shall Babylon sink!'

The Book of Jeremiah ends with five long poetic lamentations of Jeremiah over the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, daughter of Zion.



**Jeremiah lamenting over the Destruction of Jerusalem**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1630.

In 1630, Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn was still in Leyden, where he was born. He was twenty-four years old and had started to learn to paint about eight years ago with Jacob Isaacs van Swanenburgh. He stayed two years with this master, and then spent six months in the workshop of Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam. He had returned to Leyden and opened his own workshop there in 1625 with a friend, Jan Lievens. In 1628, at the end of the year, Constantijn Huygens, the secretary of Prince Frederik-Hendrik of the Netherlands came to Leyden and got interested in Rembrandt. Commissions would pour in from that moment. Rembrandt's father died in 1630, the same year that he painted his 'Jeremiah lamenting over the Destruction of Jerusalem' and a little later, in 1631, he would move to and settle definitively in Amsterdam.

When Rembrandt was still young, in his early twenties, he painted in marvellous, rich, pure and bright colours. In a few pictures already he had started to reduce his palette and to darken the backgrounds of his pictures. 'Jeremiah lamenting over the Destruction of Jerusalem' is one of his pictures of the transition period from between his style of bright colours and his later style of painting. He still showed fine, bright colours and most remarkably, he used blue, but he darkened the background. Jeremiah is dressed in a blue cloak and robe. Pictures of Rembrandt in which he showed so much blue are rare. His blue colour on Jeremiah is however not the bright Gothic or Renaissance lapis-lazuli, pure blue hue, but a blue that turns to grey.

Jeremiah sits against a massive column of what seems to be the remains of the destroyed Temple. He sits in thoughts. He is sad, worried and tired. He wrinkles his forehead and supports his head with his left arm and hand. He sits barefooted among the remains of the treasure of the Temple of Jerusalem. He has saved golden cups and bowls, richly embroidered tapestries and has brought these to the caves in a basket. He saved a few rests of Jerusalem's past glory. Nebuchadnezzar's army enters the burning Jerusalem and Jeremiah can see the devastation through an opening in the ruins. The Prophet does however not even look at that scene. He knows what is happening there, because he had premonitions of the disasters. He had seen and foretold the destruction. He warned the Jews of the coming devastation ordered by Yahweh, the God of Israel that was in anger, but nobody truly listened to him.

Rembrandt van Rijn painted the scene of Jeremiah in fine hues. He showed Jeremiah in a sumptuous blue cloak, and he lined that cloak with yellow-white mink and he showed golden glimmers on Jeremiah's chest. Blue and golden are almost complementary colours and match well and brightly. Then he contrasted the blue colour with the yellow, golden white of Jeremiah's head and flesh. Jeremiah has white hair, a white beard and this brightness became the focal point of picture, also as it is the true subject: Jeremiah's mind has predicted and seen the destruction of Jerusalem; now that same mind can only oversee the disaster and wait passively, sadly and also in anger and worry, now that the Jews are killed in the town and are dragged off in exile. Jeremiah's head has sunk to his chest. He looks downward in shame and frustration and anger also, for although he warned the Jews, he has not been able to

avoid the disaster that falls now on his town and Temple. Therefore Jeremiah also looks down at the treasure, but his eyes are not on these rests of past wealth he has been able to save. All is lost, so he sits alone in the ruins and the little gold will only help few in the passing of the Jewish nation and the end of its kingdom. How many times has Jeremiah said, 'They did not pay attention, they did not listen'? Jeremiah warned that Yahweh had told, 'Zion will become ploughland, Jerusalem a heap of rubble and the temple Mount a wooded height'. Jeremiah now sits in the rubble.

Rembrandt still shows Jeremiah's courage and determination however: Jeremiah plied his right arm behind his back in poise of defence but also of defiance. Jeremiah has grown so old that he cannot lose patience anymore. He has seen so many horrors of war, has seen so many deprivations already, that now he will simply wait, alone, lamenting over the fate of Israel, but then he will come out of the ruins and join the Jews in exile. Rembrandt showed Jeremiah in thoughts, in a static poise that lasts, but we expect Jeremiah to move, to stand up and accompany the Jews in banishment. He has been thinking about the future anyway, which is why he saved some of the gold. So the gold is as well a symbol in this picture of the past greatness of Israel as of Jeremiah's determination to continue his religion and mission with the Jews. Jeremiah laments, but like all Jews do when disasters come, he will stand up and live. The past belongs to Jeremiah, but he can take enough distance from that past to think of the future. He is not hopeless for he has faith in his God. And of course, he also had a premonition of the length of the exile and he knows that Yahweh as always will change his anger from Israel to its enemies and save his people after the punishment. Jeremiah would promise the recovery for Israel. He would send a letter to the exiles later, which started, 'Build houses, settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce; marry and have sons and daughters; choose wives for your sons, find husbands for your daughters so that these can bear sons and daughters in their turn; you must increase and not decrease.' And Jeremiah also told that Yahweh would intervene on their behalf after the seventy years granted to Babylon, and bring the Jews back to Jerusalem. After the Assyrian exile of the Northern Kingdom, which began around 721 BC, and the Babylonian exile that started in 586 BC, the Hebrews would return to their country around 520 BC.

Rembrandt continued the fine hues of Jeremiah into the red tapestry and the golden objects. The light shines on these objects too and the gold shimmers its last bright sparkles. The red tapestry hangs to the ground, carelessly thrown; it is the last symbol of the glory that was once the rich city of Jerusalem. Rembrandt detailed finely the parts he wanted to draw attention to. He detailed the head and left hand of Jeremiah, Jeremiah's cloak and the treasure. He marvellously painted Jeremiah's foot and brought light hue downwards also. He showed the delicate linings of Jeremiah's cloak, so that the viewer would not miss the observation that once, Jeremiah had been a rich and venerated dignitary of Jerusalem. But Jeremiah now sits in ruins.

Rembrandt brought a very strong structure of composition in his painting, stronger and more obvious than in any previous painting. Jeremiah sits and leans against a solid column, but he sits in a slanting poise. Rembrandt composed his picture along the left diagonal. Jeremiah's body is situated along this direction and above Jeremiah the line continues in the column. Rembrandt painted the lighted areas along the diagonal too. Jeremiah sits in full light and Rembrandt brought darkness to the left and right of the Prophet. He had a problem however. Blue does not suit well with

brown and deep red. He could not apply this colour brown of the background to the left of the figure of the Prophet. The blue would have been modified and look duller than it already was. He solved the issue by painting a hue constituted of light green and yellow so that the blue of Jeremiah's cloak would well contrast and be more vivid. Rembrandt could not use a pure blue on Jeremiah, for that would not well juxtapose to the green-yellow of the left. So he painted Jeremiah in blue-grey and enlivened that hue by a bright but rather non-determinate mix that went well with it. By painting the lighter area to the left of Jeremiah, he enhanced the strong structure of his composition along the diagonal. The effect was fine, at least to some tastes, but Rembrandt may well not have liked so much the result. He may have thought that now his structure of composition was too strong, too obvious, and he must have thus learned the difficulties of using blue together with the hues he preferred by now: brown, red, gold, white and their shades in different tones and intensities. By the composition along the diagonal however, Rembrandt discovered or sought the effect that painters often aspire to in religious paintings: he obtained a sense of elevation, of uplifting of the view, an epic effect of spirituality, which was often desired by painters of spiritual themes. In other pictures of Rembrandt, engravings and paintings, he would repeat compositions in which he amplified the meaning of a figure by placing a large column higher up and in the prolongation of his personage, making it grander to the viewer than it actually is in the picture. Elsewhere around Jeremiah, Rembrandt showed marvellous hues in rapid brushstrokes. Remark the golden shades of orange to brown on the column above Jeremiah and the borders of the tapestry at his feet. Nobody would dare to state after such a painting that Rembrandt was not a remarkable colourist.

The 'Jeremiah lamenting over the Destruction of Jerusalem' is a rarity and important painting in the evolution of Rembrandt's style. It is a picture of transition. The painting shows how Rembrandt could paint in marvellous colours and also using blue, in fine combinations and contrasting hues. It also shows some of the issues he had with this choice of hues against sombre backgrounds, which he could only save by bringing a green-yellow indistinct area of colours to the left of Jeremiah. That broke his background and looked artificial, not the colour of the cave ruins at all, even though directly lit. Blue was one of the hues he would now avoid in larger areas. He started in this painting to use less pure colours, diluting them to grey or brown. But his Jeremiah is a stunning painting that is impressive in the fine details with which Rembrandt worked on his figure, excellently imagined as the sad, old Prophet lamenting over the past glory symbolised in the golden treasure of the Temple. He left the rest of the picture without much detail, thus concentrating very forcefully the attention of the viewer on the essence of his subject.

### *Other Paintings:*

#### **The Prophet Jeremiah**

Alessandro Bonvicino called Il Moretto (1498-1554). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

## *The Book of Baruch*

The Book of Baruch is only a short text, attributed to Jeremiah's secretary, but probably written much later, mostly in the first century BC.

The first part of the Book is a prayer of the exiles in Babylon. The Jews in exile recognise that Yahweh has brought misery upon them to punish them for having deserted their God. They promise to abide in exile by Yahweh's rules, in hope of the return to the Promised Land of their ancestors.

The second part repeats these hopes and it praises the knowledge of Yahweh. This knowledge of Yahweh is called the fountain of wisdom.

The third text repeats the lamentations and also the hopes of the exiled Jews in Babylon, whereas the last part is a copy of a letter that Jeremiah sent to the people that were about to be led into captivity. The letter urges the people to live by Yahweh and to forsake foreign gods.

### **The Exile of the Hebrews in Babylonia**

Antonio Puccinelli (1822-1897). Galleria dell'Accademia. Florence. 1851.

Antonio Puccinelli was born near the town of Pisa in Italy. He studied in Florence, at the Accademia di Belle Arti and painted scenes of Italian life, genre scenes, and portraits. He also painted historical scenes, and on mythological and religious themes. He won a first prize at Florence's Academy, which allowed him in 1849 to live in Rome and work and study there in the Palazzo Toscana. The 'Exile of the Jews in Babylon' was painted during his stay in Rome.

The middle of the nineteenth century was a time during which academic painting was in fashion in Rome. Many painters studied there, of all nationalities, the most supported by stipends from their countries and living in international academies established in palaces of Rome. They worked in the palaces occupied by their countries in promotion of the national arts: sculpture, painting and music. Historical, classical and religious themes were practised and Rome was the centre of an important art trade. To the painters and sculptors came many rich aristocrats, tradesmen, wealthy industrialists and intellectuals in quest for culture. Rome and travels to the other great cities of art in Italy such as Florence, Genoa, Venice and Naples, were in fashion. The artists that lived from their academies in Rome obliged, created and sustained the fashion. The result was an odd mix of artists and seekers of culture that formed an atmosphere in which snobbery was mingled with real interest for the arts. The theme of the exile of the Jews in Babylon was well known by the public in 1850. Giuseppe Verdi had written his opera Nabucco on this subject and also

other painters but Puccinelli had taken up scenes of the Jews enchained like slaves, deported through the desert to Babylon.

Puccinelli painted a picture in the purest Neo-Classical, academic tradition. He showed the Jews enslaved, being led to Babylon. He painted in soft, warm, pastel colours, as was often the fashion of the Neo-Classical painters. He also had to show the Orient, and Orient could mean a desert, so that Puccinelli used the colour of sand to create an overall mood in his painting. All shades of yellow and brown are in his picture, as well as broken white, to a gentle mood. Puccinelli obtained a fine harmony of these shades in the light of the desert. He painted a camel to suggest that the Jews had travelled through the deserts to reach the green oasis of Babylon and the rivers. He caught well the light of the desert. A cool light pervades the picture and like in old Renaissance paintings Puccinelli applied little shadows and he kept chiaroscuro delicate. He painted some aerial perspective, using a dark zone in the lower part of the picture lighter areas towards the background. He faded the figures in the centre to indicate distance. In this distance is a wide, flat landscape of the low hills of the desert. Puccinelli then set a calm sky with a little blue, but also dominated by the sandy colour of the earth.

We see several families of Hebrews, resting from the long journey in Puccinelli's painting. Women hold babies, and men console them. The group is guarded by Babylonian warriors wearing long lances. Puccinelli focused the drama on one family. He made this family the centre of the attention by situating them in the middle of the picture and in its brightest spot. Here we see a man, his wife and child standing. They are the only family that stands upright; the other families are sitting down. She holds her hand before her face, hiding her tears in a melodramatic gesture. She has a son by her side and in this child Puccinelli brought the only pure blue patch of the picture, to attract the viewer's attention. The viewer will pity the child. A little more to the right, Puccinelli showed another woman leading away an old man, maybe the grandfather of the family, so that the viewer would understand that a whole nation with young and old was led into exile.

Antonio Puccinelli painted all the figures in fine detail and nice harmonious colours, but except for the scene of the family, which he positioned in the centre of the frame, it is hard to discover strong structure of composition. He placed the centre family in what could vaguely be considered an 'Open V' structure, but the landscape that one would expect there is actually situated on the right. Puccinelli was obviously less interested in strict academic composition and we sense a freer, more Romantic depiction of emotions at work that Neo-Classical rigour. Puccinelli made a picture of a scene from the Old Testament that was in the air of the times, hoping for a Maecenas to be charmed by its content. That was the best he could do with his talent.

### *The Book of Ezekiel*

Ezekiel prophesied in Babylon during the Babylonian exile of the Israelites. Ezekiel was more a mystic than Isaiah and Jeremiah. Yahweh gave him fantastic visions and these are presented in the Book.

In a first vision, Ezekiel saw four creatures. Each creature had a human form. Each was winged and had four faces: a human face, a lion's, a bull's and an eagle's. The creatures moved at the command of the spirit. Next to each creature was a wheel, and within each wheel was another wheel set perpendicular to the first so that the wheel had not to turn to run in another direction. The wheels moved with the creatures. Above the creatures was a solid surface and above that Ezekiel saw a throne, upon which were a brilliance and the form, the appearance of a human being. A voice spoke to Ezekiel then and told him to get to his feet. The voice of Yahweh ordered that Ezekiel would be sent to the Jews that had been stubborn and obstinate. Yahweh took out a scroll on which were written lamentations and cries of grief. Yahweh told Ezekiel to eat that scroll and start speaking the contents to the exiles. Yahweh furthermore told Ezekiel that when Ezekiel would warn a wicked man and the man did not renounce evil, then that man would die. If Ezekiel however failed to warn somebody for his wickedness, then the man would die also, but Ezekiel would be held responsible for his death. Thus Yahweh called Ezekiel to be his Prophet.

Ezekiel foretold the siege of Jerusalem and even more than Jeremiah, Ezekiel is the Prophet of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel predicted the coming of famines and plagues, of bloodshed and wild animals jumping on the Israelites. Ezekiel spoke out against the Mountains of Israel and gave a horrible picture of the punishments that would fall on the Israelites. Yahweh told that the end was coming to the four corners of the country. Ezekiel described all the sins of Israel he had seen committed so that the Jews well understood why they were condemned.

Ezekiel had a vision of the form of a human being that downwards was fire and upwards shone with light. The spirit took Ezekiel by the hair and lifted him through the skies to Jerusalem. There, Yahweh brought Ezekiel into the court of the Temple. There was a reptile in the Temple, a repulsive animal, and all the foul idols of the House of Israel carved all around the walls. Seventy elders were worshipping the idols. Ezekiel saw the scourges of the city approaching, carrying weapons of destruction. Six men advanced then, each holding a deadly weapon. One of the men was dressed in white linen and he had a scribe's ink-horn in his belt. Yahweh told that man to mark with a cross on the forehead all the ones that grieved at the loathsome practices of the city. The armed men hacked down all the people that had no mark on the forehead, starting with the Elders that had been worshipping idols. The winged creatures were still there, around Yahweh. Yahweh ordered the man in linen to take burning coals from between the creatures and scatter it over the city. Thus Yahweh brought his justice on Jerusalem. Yahweh however promised to collect the people when they had been scattered and to give back to them the land of their ancestors. The winged creatures then raised their wings; the wheels moved with them, and the glory of Yahweh rose from the centre of the city and halted on a mountain to the east.

Yahweh spoke to Ezekiel. He spoke against the false prophets, against false prophetesses, against idolatry. Yahweh told that although he would send his four scourges: sword, famine, wild beasts and plagues, to denude the land of human and animal, a few humans would be left in which Ezekiel could take delight. These would comfort Ezekiel with their conduct and their actions. Yahweh explained in allegorical fashion then the whole history of Israel, a story of granting life, installing a law, then of infatuation with idols and of punishment.

Yahweh told parables to Ezekiel. In one of these, a great eagle came to the Lebanon and flew to the top of a cedar tree. The eagle took off a branch and brought it to a city of merchants. Then he took a seed of the country and put it in a fertile field next to a stream. The seed became a vine. Through the presence of another eagle, the vine twisted its roots and branched out, bore fruit and became a noble vine. Yahweh asked whether the vine would succeed, whether the eagle would not destroy it. Yahweh addressed Ezekiel and explained how he had brought Israel's kings and princes to Babylon so that the Kingdom would remain modest. A prince rebelled and sent envoys to Egypt to ask for help by troops. Would he succeed? Would the prince remain unpunished? Yahweh said the prince would not be saved.

These messages of Yahweh are repeated in several texts and allegories in the Book of Ezekiel. They all bear the same message. They contain first a description of the sins of Israel, then they describe in horrible terms the scourges brought by Yahweh on Israel and the Babylonian captivity. But always Yahweh promises to bring back the exiles that have found in Babylon new piety and solace in abiding by Yahweh's ways.

The Book of Ezekiel also contains a series of prophecies given by Ezekiel against the nations, like in the Book of Jeremiah. Yahweh speaks against the Ammonites, against Moab, Edom, Tyre, Sidon and Egypt. All these lands would be ruined by Yahweh's punishments and anger.

Ezekiel again had a vision of attacks on Jerusalem, of the taking of the city and of the ravaging of the country. He saw dreadful images of the destruction and desolation. But always Yahweh gave him also the image of a flourishing country to which the Israelites would one day return.

Ezekiel spoke out against Gog, prince of Mesheh and Tubal in the country of Magog. Ezekiel predicted his destruction by the armies of the other nations. He warned Gog against attacking Israel and wanting to loot it. The Prophet promised Yahweh's revenge on Gog. He promised him a place in the Valley of Obarim for his grave and for his court so that the place would be called the Valley of Hamon-Gog.

The last part of the Book of Ezekiel is dedicated to a vision of Ezekiel on the return of the exiles from Babylon. Ezekiel sees the Temple of Jerusalem restored with gates and courts, the various Temple buildings, the Ulam and the Hekal. Ezekiel saw the sanctuary and the wooden altar, as well as the consecration of the altar. He saw the rules of admission to the Temple, the new functions of the priests and of the Levites. He described the various feasts to the honour and glory of Yahweh such as the Feast of Shelters and Passover. Through Ezekiel, Yahweh ordained how these feasts were to be held after the return to Israel. Finally, Ezekiel told which frontiers Yahweh decided for the new Holy Land. Yahweh, through his servant Ezekiel, then proposed a

distribution of the Holy Land among the tribes of Israel. Yahweh fixed the limits of the portions and he reserved a lot for the priests, but Yahweh also commanded that the Israelites should draw lots among the tribes for the portions of their heritage.



### The Vision of Ezekiel

Francisco Collantes (1599-1656). Museo del Prado – Madrid. 1630.

Francisco Collantes was a Spanish painter, who was born in Madrid and who also worked there. He painted landscapes and devotional pictures. Little more is known of his life but his remaining paintings. Spain also owned the Kingdom of Naples in the seventeenth century and in Collantes' paintings one senses influences or at least full knowledge of the Baroque, Neapolitan, Italian and Flemish styles. Collantes painted Roman landscapes, so he may have visited Italy, Rome probably and maybe also Naples with which the court of Madrid had close relations. Nevertheless, nothing of those travels or of his supposed teachers of painting can be asserted with certainty.

Francisco Collantes painted a picture of the haunting visions of Ezekiel. The prophecies of Ezekiel are of the most terrible of the bible, the most dreadful and apocalyptic. Ezekiel was witness to the destruction of Jerusalem after the first siege of 598 BC. He was taken away in exile and he prophesied in Babylon between 593 BC and 571 BC. His visions are fantastic, mysterious and based on the duality of punishment and redemption. Yahweh promised to destroy Jerusalem, but he also promised to bring forth a new nation from the ashes of the devastated one. Collantes has understood this theme well, and so instead of painting a scene of destruction he painted a scene of resurrection, for which however there existed a tradition well before him. The scene has been misunderstood by some writers, who have seen in the painting a picture of the end of Jerusalem, a Last Judgement, an Apocalypse theme. The picture is terrifying enough, but Ezekiel's vision is one of the up-rising of the new Israel.

Yahweh said to Ezekiel, 'As I live I swear it, those in the ruins will fall to the sword, those in the countryside I shall give to the wild animals for them to eat and those among the crags and in caves will die of plague. I shall make the country a desolate waste, and the pride of its strength will be at an end. The mountains of Israel will be at an end. The mountains of Israel will be deserted and no one will pass that way again.'<sup>G38</sup> Collantes showed the desolation of the ruins in his painting. He showed the remains of imposing buildings, maybe the rests of the Temple of Jerusalem. Columns of glory and strong walls have collapsed, roofs have fallen down. Yahweh has reduced Israel to rubble. The sky is menacing and agitated above the ruins. There is no clear sun shining on the broken arches. The desolation is all around, and no one seems to be living anymore in Jerusalem, not even animals. The ruins have the colour of ash and the destruction has happened a long time ago, for nature is crawling in on the stones. Bushes grow at the highest parts of the walls that still stand.

But the Prophet Ezekiel also heard other words of Yahweh. Ezekiel was sitting in a valley full of bones, with vast quantities of dry bones spread on the floor of the valley. Ezekiel there had a vision that Yahweh said, 'Come to the four winds, breath; breathe on these dead, so that they come to life.'<sup>G38</sup> Yahweh told, 'The Lord Yahweh says this to the bones: I am now going to make breath enter you, and you will live. I shall put sinews on you, I shall make flesh grow on you, I shall cover you with skin and give you flesh, and you will live; and you will know that I am Yahweh'.<sup>G38</sup> Ezekiel did as Yahweh had ordered him to do and the breath of Ezekiel entered the bones.

They came to life and stood on their feet, a great, an immense army. Then Yahweh continued, 'I am now going to open your graves; I shall raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel. And you will know that I am Yahweh, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, my people, and put my spirit in you, and you revive, and I resettle you on your own soil.' <sup>G38</sup>.

Francisco Collantes thus painted Ezekiel conjuring the bones in the ruins of the valley of the bones. He breathes upon them and calls the dead to life with roused hand. Collantes showed the bones assembling to skeletons, flesh growing upon the bones, men forming. He showed graves opening and the dead crawling out of the tombs. Heavy tomb lids are being pushed away and the dead come out, protecting their eyes from the meagre light in the valley, which is yet blinding those who have been rotting in their graves and darkness for so long. Slowly, the men come to their feet and will soon become a mighty new army for Israel.

Collantes painted a scene of classical ruins, among devastation and in a wasted land of rocks and broken walls. He may have seen the ruins of Rome and kept this desolate scene well in his mind. Collantes' vision was grand, as grand as the vision of the Prophet. The scene of the dead rising from their tombs and the bones assembling is a terrible view. Collantes might have painted this as a triumphant scene of hope and life, but he chose to show a scene of ash-colour and of terror, a view of pessimism and gloom, as might have dominated the Spanish soul in his times. He painted in overall grey colours, only modulated some in the lower part of the picture where men come to flesh, and in the upper part where the blue sky is perturbed by heavy clouds. The only pure colour in the painting is on the Prophet Ezekiel, dressed in a blue robe and brown cloak. Collantes nowhere used bright orange, yellow, pink, red or pure green. His colours are the hues of death, as must have suited his mood while he read the story from the Book of Ezekiel with its dark and horrifying prophecies.

Collantes used also an imposing composition. He used the right diagonal for this. The diagonal starts in the lower right corner on a dead figure opening a tomb, one of the major images of Ezekiel's vision. Then the line goes upwards over Ezekiel, who towers over the scene of the resurrecting men, to the high walls of the destroyed Temple, and towards the left upper corner of the frame. The viewer has no doubt about the direction of this line because Ezekiel points with his hand upwards, towards the tall ruins but also to the skies. Such upwards direction was often desired by painters because it creates a strong spiritual feeling of elevation and of epic in viewers. Collantes succeeded in his picture with this effect, since the Prophet awakens up the dead by his breath, challenging and changing through God the laws of nature and arousing the dead to bring forth a new army for Israel.

Francisco Collantes painted an impressive scene. He represented one of the most epic narratives of the formidable visions of Ezekiel. It would be hard to represent these stories from the bible more powerfully in a large, open scene. Collantes enhanced the scene by his composition and by the mood evoked in viewers by the ashen-grey hues of his picture. When one reads again the Book of Ezekiel, it is hard not to have in mind another image than this painting of the Spanish artist. Yet, there was a tradition among painters to show exactly this theme from the Book of Ezekiel and there is a fine example of half a century before in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco of Venice, in Italy.

### The Vision of Ezekiel

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

Jacopo Tintoretto started to paint in the Scuola di San Rocco in 1564. He worked for the Scuola until 1587, more than twenty years long and he even drew up a contract with the Scuola for an annual allowance instead of being paid picture by picture. The last payment was made in 1594, the same month he died. The complete work of paintings on the ground floor, the hall of the hostel and the upper hall is one of the most grandiose undertakings of human culture and of the pictorial arts. On the ceiling of the upper hall Tintoretto painted scenes from the lives of Moses and of Jesus but also of various scenes from the Books of the Prophets: from Elisha and Elijah, Jonah, and Ezekiel. Tintoretto painted these around 1577 to 1578, more than fifty years before Francisco Collantes made his 'Vision of Ezekiel'. Tintoretto painted his own 'Vision of Ezekiel' on the same theme from the Book of Ezekiel, the moment when God orders Ezekiel to breathe over the bones that cover the Valley of the bones, to bring to life a new army for Israel. Apart from the theme, there could be no greater difference between Collantes' and Tintoretto's pictures however.

Jacopo Tintoretto handled his painting with all the power of imagination and the all the power of a completely free style of depiction, owing no influence to no other painter of before his times. Tintoretto had a long oval to cover on the ceiling. So he painted a long scene, with God at the top hovering in the sky above Ezekiel and above the Dead. God hangs in the skies and orders Ezekiel with an outstretched arm. Viewers in the hall have to bend their neck on their shoulders to look upwards, so much so that now mirrors are provided in the Scuola so that viewers can sit down and look at the ceiling in the mirrors. Tintoretto made God look down so that he also has to bend his neck to look down upon Ezekiel. Golden rays emanate from his face and reach the Prophet. Ezekiel stands among the dead, enveloped by a divine wind that makes his red cloak flow around him and away from him. Ezekiel towers above the dead. He opens a grave to let the skeletons out. Beneath him, the bones of other skeletons gather, take on flesh and turn into men. This is one of the strongest scenes of creation in the Bible and Tintoretto grasped the grandeur easily and totally. The scene is so grand that it seems to pass beyond the borders of the picture: Tintoretto painted God not entirely inside the frame but only partially so that the viewer intuitively imagines an image larger than the actual surface. Tintoretto showed Ezekiel in full effort of opening the lid of a tomb, look up at God, over his shoulder, so that the eyes of Ezekiel and of Yahweh touch. God's glorious rays drive into Ezekiel and the divine power pours into the prophet to bring the dry bones to life. Ezekiel is not the fine wise man, not the wizard, but the Herculean force that is at work as much as God.

Tintoretto painted no background behind Ezekiel and God. He would only paint the essence of the scene, so high up on the ceiling, so that the scene could be still rapidly be perceptible to viewers and as God comes down from the skies; the sense of space that is already magnificent in the high Scuola hall is amplified still by Tintoretto's picturing. Tintoretto needed no landscape, for the force of his expression is so powerful that it makes details superfluous. Therefore also, Tintoretto could use raw

brushstrokes, rather large patches of colour, which blend marvellously when seen from below. And yet he used strong combinations of hues in a wealth of shades. God wears a red robe and a green cloak. The cloak entangles God, envelopes the robe so that the red and green areas alternate around the figure of God. Tintoretto painted a deep red and a dark green and he showed contrasting chiaroscuro with bright red and brighter green areas. The warm colours of red and green dominate in the scene also on Ezekiel cloaks. Here the red glows, brighter, and with golden touches to indicate the light falling on the folds. On Ezekiel too the shades of colours are powerful, broad and refined. Tintoretto showed even in yellow-golden hues the muscled knees and legs of Ezekiel. Finally, chiaroscuro in yellow, golden and some green shades are also on the bodies in the making, low in the painting. To show the shadows Tintoretto used a wealth of hues so that the Impressionist painters of centuries later could not claim to have discovered the power of uncommon hues in shadows on flesh. No one painted so freely and seemed to experiment in colours with unrelenting certainty as to their effects of juxtaposition as Tintoretto.

Jacopo Tintoretto's pictorial vision was totally un-traditional. Tintoretto reached out for the limits of the art of painting. His scene of Ezekiel is the most dynamic as could be shown on a canvas and as splendid in expression of colours as one could bring. The 'Vision of Ezekiel' is a fine picture, but very conventional. Collantes made Ezekiel stand nicely in the valley, commanding the dead. Ezekiel stands there, vertical and normally. Collantes painted ruins and the landscape around the Prophet and all this is finely painted, but so predictable after all. Tintoretto however broke every rule of convention. His energetic vision is entirely different and far more powerful. Tintoretto was a painter from the transition period between the Renaissance and its Mannerism alternative, and the Baroque. Tintoretto could have been creating the Baroque in the Scuola. He showed how forceful energy could be shown in a picture, how illusion of movement not from before or from after the action but in its very moment could be drawn and how colours could be used to enhance the effects of dynamic lines. In his 'Ezekiel', all members of the bodies of Ezekiel and of God and even of the dead are shown in action. Arms are outstretched, faces turn, robes flow and there is not one strictly vertical line in the picture, for all lines and directions are slanting. Francisco Collantes' picture is however dominated by long vertical lines and although the scene seems therefore epic, it lacks in energy. It remained a static scene. Tintoretto's energy was the quintessence of Venice, where people were accustomed to move, to be inventive, to look far and into the future, to break rules in trade and industry, and yet work together in a highly regulated society.

Had Francisco Collantes, the Spanish painter who made another well-known version of the same scene in Madrid known of Jacopo Tintoretto's picture? Spain was much connected to Italy, and certainly to the Neapolitan court. Collantes may have travelled to Italy. His first stay would have been in Naples and he may have seen drawings, copies of Tintoretto's paintings there, in Naples. He could have travelled further on, to Venice. But it is almost impossible for a painter not to have been influenced then by Tintoretto's compelling visions of painterly innovation. Collantes' composition is so calm and so far from Tintoretto's style that we may assure ourselves of the fact that Collantes never saw Tintoretto's paintings in real or in engravings, or that if he had seen them he had rejected the style as being unfit for the Spanish mind and royal court.

*Other paintings:*

**The Vision of Ezekiel.** Bonaventura Genelli (1798-1858). Schack Galerie. Munich. 1857.

*The Book of Daniel*

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel and Judah. The king ordered Asphenaz, his chief eunuch, to select a number of Jewish boys of royal or noble descent to be educated at the Chaldean court of Babylon. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Daniel asked not to be polluted by the food and wine from the Babylonian table but to live entirely on vegetables and water. When Daniel and his friends, after a trial period of ten days, looked even better than the other boys, Asphenaz allowed them to continue this regime. The boys were presented to the king after their education at the palace of Babylon and soon became members of the king's court, for when the king questioned them he found their advice better than of his own magicians and soothsayers.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. The king called for his magicians and asked what he had dreamt and also how the dream could be interpreted. None of the magicians knew what the dream had been, so the king ordered them to be put to death. Search was also made for Daniel and his companions to be killed. Daniel asked Arioch, the king's executioner, when they were being executed. Arioch told him of the king's dream and how none of the magicians had guessed what the king had dreamt. Daniel then prayed to Yahweh and told Arioch that he should stop the executions because he, Daniel, knew not only the dream but also its meaning. Daniel was brought to Nebuchadnezzar and he explained the dream. The king had seen a great, bright statue of a man. The head was of gold, the arms and chest of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron and the feet were part iron and part clay. A stone broke away and struck the feet of the statue, shattering them. Then the whole statue broke into fine pieces, so fine that the wind blew them off like dust. The stone however grew into a mountain that grew and grew until it had filled the whole world. That had been the dream and now Daniel explained its meaning. Nebuchadnezzar was the golden head. The other pieces of the statue's body were the succeeding kingdoms, until the feet represented a kingdom that was split in two like the feet were part iron and part clay. In the time of this kingdom, Yahweh would set up a kingdom that would not be absorbed by other races and that would absorb all the previous kingdoms and last forever. Daniel asserted that the dream was true and his interpretation exact. Nebuchadnezzar believed Daniel, and made him governor of the province of Babylon and head of the wise men of the country. Daniel however proposed to entrust the province of Babylon to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. He himself stayed at the service of the king, at the court of Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar built a large golden statue and set that up in the Plains of Dura in Babylon. The king called all his courtiers together and ordered them to prostrate themselves and worship the golden statue at the sound of any musical instrument. All men did so but Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. The king was informed and shaking with fury he ordered the young men to be brought to him. The boys, however, told the king that even if they were thrown in punishment in a fiery furnace, they would not care if they died and they told their God would save them. The king ordered the young men to be thrown in a furnace. The furnace was so hot that the men

that carried Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were burnt to death. The three Jews were thrown in the furnace but they prayed. The Angel of God came down beside the men in the furnace, drove away the flames and brought coolness in the centre so that the fire did not touch Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. The three men sang a poem of praise to Yahweh. Nebuchadnezzar was not a little amazed and he acknowledged the miracle. He told the young men to come out of the furnace and showered them with favours. He also ordained anybody to be killed who spoke disrespectfully of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. He saw a very tall tree in the middle of the world. It bore fruit, was beautiful, and offered shade to the animals. An Angel came down and shouted to cut the tree down, throw away the fruit and let the animals flee from the shelter of the tree. The stump with its roots in the ground was bound in irons and that should be thus preserved. The stump should receive the dew, cease to have a human heart but given the heart of a beast. And seven times should pass over it. When Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel to translate the dream, Daniel was confused at first. Then he explained the dream after some hesitation. Daniel told that the tall tree was Nebuchadnezzar himself. The verdict of God was that the king would be driven from the humans and would become an animal until he would understand that God rules over the humans and until the king recognised that only God could confer sovereignty on whom He pleased. Leaving the stump in chains meant that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be kept for him until he came to the understanding of God's superiority. After twelve months, the king sat on the roof of his palace and he oversaw his empire with pleasure, saying that all these splendours had been built by his force alone, and to his glory. Then a voice came down, saying that the empire was immediately taken away from him; Nebuchadnezzar would be driven from humanity and become a beast until he understood that all might was with the Most High alone. Nebuchadnezzar then grew mad and like an animal, he grazed in the meadows. He stayed that way until his reason returned to him and he started praising the King of Heaven.

*Other paintings:*

**Nebuchadnezzar restored to Royal Dignity.** Jacob Pynas (ca. 1585-after 1656). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. P407.

*Belshazzar's Banquet*

King Belshazzar of Babylon was the successor to his father, Nebuchadnezzar. Once, he gave a great banquet for a thousand of his noblemen. There was plenty of good wine to drink, but the king found his beakers very poor. So Belshazzar ordered the gold and silver vessels taken from the sanctuary of the Temple of Jerusalem to be brought to the banquet so that all could drink out of richer vessels. While they were drinking, suddenly the fingers of a human hand started to write on the plaster of the palace walls. The king turned very pale then and he was much afraid at this extraordinary event. He called for all his soothsayers to read what was written, and he promised that the one that could read the words would receive a purple dress, a golden chain around his neck, and the man would be one of the three governors of the kingdom. None of the king's sages however could read the writing and Belshazzar turned ever paler, ever more alarmed and ever more angry. The queen then remembered to him how his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had in difficult moments always asked the advice of Daniel the Hebrew. Daniel was called in and he told that he could easily read the message. He started by saying that he refused the king's gifts. He then reminded Belshazzar of his father, who had been mighty but had turned into an animal that grazed like an ox until he had recognised who really was the Almighty. Daniel told that Belshazzar had defied the same God by drinking out of the vessels of His sanctuary. Belshazzar had not humbled himself and praised idols instead. The words that the hand wrote were, 'mene, mene, tegel, parsin'. 'Mene' meant that god had taken the measure of Belshazzar. 'Tegel' meant that the king had been weighed and found wanting. 'Parsin' meant that the kingdom of Babylon would be given over to the Medes and the Persians. Daniel received what the king had promised: he was dressed in purple, received a golden chain around his neck and was chosen as one the three men that governed the kingdom. But that same night the Chaldaean King was murdered and Darius the Mede received his kingdom.



**Belshazzar's Banquet**

Andrea Celesti (ca. 1637-1711). The State Hermitage State Museum – Saint Petersburg. Ca. 1705.

Andrea Celesti was a painter of the Veneto region. Born in Venice, he painted for rich commissioners and decorated churches and palaces. Celesti painted Biblical scenes, but also of Roman and Oriental antiquity. He was a painter of the beginning of the Italian Rococo period, which was founded in Venice. His 'Banquet of Belshazzar' is one of his best pictures. It was originally one of a set of four that arrives in Saint Petersburg, the others being an 'Adoration of the Golden Calf', the 'Family of Darius before Alexander' and 'Solomon between his wives sacrificing to Idols', all themes well known by painters. Celesti painted two other pictures on the theme of Belshazzar. Andrea Celesti was not a very great painter but he knew how to charm his commissioners with fashionable pictures of show of wealth, painted in delicate colours, and with many details and figures, which would have been fine decorations in any palace. The 'Banquet of Belshazzar' reminds of the glorious banquet painted by Paolo Veronese, of Veronese's 'Marriage at Cana (the Louvre, Paris) or his 'Supper at the House of Simon' (Sabauda Gallery, Turin). And we sense the airy and pictorial sweet refinement of the Tiepolos in his paintings.

Andrea Celesti showed a table in the form of a half circle. The table is splendidly dressed with the golden and silver vases and dishes of the Temple treasure of Jerusalem. The guests sit around this table, engaged in gossip and intrigues. There are men and ladies in sumptuous, gaudy oriental and Venetian dresses. The oriental touches are on the men, who mostly wear turbans and some have the long, white beards to which we are accustomed to see in older dignitaries of the sultans. A few of the guests point to a hand that writes on the frieze of a Roman architecture the famous words, 'Mane Tecel Phares'. Belshazzar sits at the head of the table. He is dressed in a golden-coloured robe over a white shirt and he wears a splendid red cloak. He also suddenly points to the hand at the ceiling.

Like in paintings of banquets of Paolo Veronese, Andrea Celesti divided his picture in bands. In the lower part he painted the banquet scene. He reserved the upper part for a grand view of Roman temples and high, sharp towers. He painted the foreground rather dark, especially in its centre part and gradually brightened his tones towards the background, where the far view of the lane ends in almost pure white. He thus obtained a nice and strong effect of aerial perspective, a fine sense of space and airiness. Celesti enhanced the illusion of deep space in the background by showing strong perspective of lines in the architecture above. He placed the Roman columns and imposing upper structures of the halls parallel to the viewer, but showed the very reclining lines of the friezes that come together at a vanishing point in the open part almost in the centre of the picture. The vanishing point lies somewhat to the left of the centre but way above the table and Celesti thus could show all the guests at the table, also those on the back side, as well as present most conspicuously the host Belshazzar, who sits at the right, in full view of the viewer. The effect of perspective is well realised and Celesti also opened the buildings, letting the viewer look straight into the far in a fine illusion of wide and deep space. Opening up the view in the

middle of a painting to a deep landscape or cityscape was a well known element of style, particularly much applied in Venetian vedutoes. Celesti applied it well. His structures remind of Pietro Perugino's views of opened temples and this effect makes of the Roman buildings or walls a weightless structure as of a garden pleasure palace. Celesti placed a white angel, barely recognisable, behind the table, announcing the words of Yahweh. But otherwise Celesti's effect of space is very far and well succeeded.

Andrea Celesti used a wealth of colours, which mostly remain gentle and subdued except in the foreground. He showed Belshazzar in splendid, bright and pure yellow-orange-golden hues and he contrasted these nicely with the blue dress of a boy sitting beneath the Babylonian King. Here also we see the traditional dog, a symbol of loyalty, which can often be found in Venetian pictures of suppers. Celesti used gentle, almost chalky hues at the table, but he delineated his figures, faces, robes, with fine darker strokes so that it is as if the original drawing in black colours come through. This is not altogether a less-desired effect; it brings a touch of originality in the work, as if the painter had drawn in strong composition and then painted in water colours. In the foreground centre Celesti painted two figures in darker colours: deep blue and purple-red. One of these, probably the standing figure in the ample blue cloak, must be the Prophet Daniel. Daniel seems already to be explaining the words 'Mane, Tecel, Phares' to a courtier and he also points down, indicating the downfall of Belshazzar.

Andrea Celesti made a fine, delicate painting that could easily be used as a fine decoration for a palace in which people lived in wealth and leisure. The whole painting inspires sophistication, ease of life, exotics, grandeur and courteousness. Celesti sought harmony of colours, symmetry in the architecture, openness and airiness of the view. The hand of Yahweh writes words high up on a frieze of a Roman or Greek temple. The hand is barely visible and nobody really cares about the miracle and its terrible message; it looks as if the hand is just one more marvellous effect of the feast. There is nothing but playfulness in the picture, and this might reflect the life in Venice in the very beginning of the eighteenth century, when fortunes had been made in previous times and now for a few generations more Venetians could profit from the past efforts. Of course, the hand is there and it heralds the passing of the wonderful times of leisure, but for the moment no one really cares. The sense of tragedy and fear is missing in the painting, but Andrea Celesti was clearly not out to represent a tragedy, but a feast. However lively his scene, showing epic and profound emotions was not his aim. He merely suggested in an almost hidden way that the leisure would end. Such paintings are of course pure delight, decoration first and foremost, ornamental, harmonious, bright, splendid and light-headed. Like Venice had become. Could Andrea Celesti paint otherwise than his extravaganza? He could. He made quite more dramatic, Baroque paintings in which his figures were positioned more closely to the viewer and where he also showed half naked, full muscled men in action. One such a painting is also in Saint Petersburg, the 'Massacre of the Innocents' in the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts. With this kind of paintings, late in his life, Andrea Celesti opened the way for Giambattista Tiepolo's Rococo pictures.



**Belshazzar sees the Writing on the Wall**

Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn (1606-1669). The National Gallery. London. 1635.

Rembrandt painted his scene of Belshazzar's banquet in 1635 to 1636. He had moved to Amsterdam since a few years only and married two years before Saskia van Uylenburgh. He had become a member of the guild of Saint Luke, had the right to hold the title of Master and he had a workshop of painting with many pupils, some of whom are now also well known painters such as Govert Flinck (1615-1660) and Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680). His first child had died soon after its baptism, but altogether these were not unhappy years for the couple and more children could be expected. Rembrandt still painted in fine, light colours although he had already abandoned details in his backgrounds and discovered the power of bright, pure hues placed against darker surfaces.

Rembrandt was a painter of the human figure. In his 'Belshazzar sees the Writing on the Wall', there are only figures and the few objects that are shown are absolutely needed for the understanding of the scene and the psychology of the actors. There is the writing on the wall, but there is no wall. There is nothing behind Rembrandt's personages: no architecture, no walls, no decoration, no window, nothing. There is a table in the picture and on that table is food on platters to indicate that the scene is during a banquet. There is a splendid golden dish on the table and Belshazzar has one hand on the gold to make the viewer understand that Rembrandt has not forgotten that this gold was of the treasure of the Temple of Jerusalem, that Belshazzar would be punished because of his sacrilege, and that Belshazzar still clung to this gold. But there is no further decoration. The picture contains only the bare necessity of the meaning of the Bible story.

Rembrandt made a painting of instantaneous, culminating action. Belshazzar sees suddenly the fiery letters that a divine hand writes. His surprise is sudden; he jumps up from his chair. His eyes open wide and he has a fearful gesture to avoid an aggression. He stretches his arm so as to protect himself from the possible anger that the words may hold. That gesture and the surprise will not last for long, but Rembrandt captured it at its height of drama and we suspect –we know – that this is a moment caught at the very instant, that it will not last even a second more. Rembrandt went as far in his depiction of action as to draw a servant lady on the right, bending her back in fear and apprehension, hiding under Belshazzar's arm, avoiding being hit by the King's rash and unexpected movement, dropping some wine from an overturned cup. We see even a drop of wine just coming out of the sumptuous golden beaker. Once could not show in a more direct way an act caught in the exact moment of movement. And as if this did not suffice, Rembrandt painted almost exactly the same scene to the left, using the same trick of depiction, which is an element of form in the art of painting, since he showed a lady there at the banquet overturning another golden cup of wine. Here too the wine spills out from the cup, on the table. The wine still pours out. On the faces of the personages in this left part of the picture we also see surprise, fear, apprehension and the mouths fall open. It seems Rembrandt repeated effects twice in his painting to make himself perfectly clear to the viewer, for also the mouth of the Babylonian old councillor of the king falls open. Rembrandt wonderfully expressed these instantaneous emotions in his personages.

There is no doubt that the figure in the centre of the painting is the King. He wears a magnificent, heavily gold-brocaded cape over a rich robe and over a heavy golden chain studded with precious stones of various colours. Gold is not just on the table, it is all over Belshazzar. He wears a high turban with a gaudy and bejewelled knot that hangs down, ending in rare feathers. On top of the turban the crown looks more like a Western crown than to an ancient oriental symbol of power. Such splendid jewels, rich dress and gold can only adorn a king. No viewer could have small doubt that the central figure is the King of Babylon.

The composition that Rembrandt brought in the painting is very roughly a pyramid, by Belshazzar, but Rembrandt applied a structure that is much modulated and his pyramid is very opened, wide, by the movement of the King's arm. Rembrandt applied symmetry. He placed figures to the left and right of Belshazzar and even the Queen in front of him, but these masses of colour are very different. This composition helps the main characteristic of the picture, the movement caught in the act. There is not one straight vertical direction in the painting, except in the very central pattern on Belshazzar's chest and some to the extreme left, on the Queen. All other lines and directions of the figures are slanting, to indicate movement. Belshazzar also leans to his right and these directions tower in the painting but are equally in non-equilibrium, unstable and sudden. Rembrandt followed the left diagonal, which direction goes over the King's arm that touches the gold plate, to the richly brocaded gold cape of the king and then to the letters of fire in the upper right corner. Rembrandt avoided symmetry in colours, to break the symmetry of figures. The servant lady on the right is thus dressed in red but she shows her bare shoulders in wonderful golden hues, whereas on the opposite side, to the left, the figures are painted in sombre, black tones and hues. The letters on the wall are very bright, but opposite them, in the lower left corner, sits the Queen, much less conspicuously, half-hidden, dressed in black. In this way Rembrandt did show symmetries but use colour to modulate them, bring them in contrast rather than in harmony.

Besides the main aspect of the painting, its movement, one must admire Rembrandt's colours. The golden cape of Belshazzar, the golden plates on the table, the velvet red colour of the servant, the pearls and white coughs of the Queen and on Belshazzar's turban are not only wonderful hues; they are also endlessly varied in tone and intensity. There is only deep red on the servant lady in the lower right corner; otherwise Rembrandt used black, yellow and white, but he varied much these hues to splendour for the eye. The painting of 'Belshazzar seeing the Writing on the Wall' is a picture of a point source of light; here the source is the letters of fire. From there, light falls dramatically on the scene and Rembrandt painted all the difficult contrasts of light and darkness in total detail, like few other masters would have been able to do. He sculpted for instance in light the bare shoulders of the servant girl and showed marvellously how the light could play on the golden beaker she holds in her hands. Rembrandt's hands are always masterly painted and that is also the case in this painting, from Belshazzar's right hand that still grabs at the gold of Jerusalem on the table and seems to keep on to that despite everything, to the open fingers of the servant's left hand. Moreover, we see here again the great talent of Rembrandt in depicting tiny details, such as in the jewel chain on Belshazzar's chest. We see also in detail Belshazzar's face, his sophisticated beard and thin moustache, signs of the sensual man, his long but forceful broad face, which denotes pleasure instead of determination and will-power.

Rembrandt was about thirty years old when he made this painting, but at that time he had gained a mastery of depiction which most other painters only reached late in age – or never. Rembrandt knew how to paint in the slightest detail and we can see how he must have loved bringing in some of them in his painting. He knew marvellous pure hues, the rich gold and tactile red, and the splendid white hues. But he knew very well how to use all these elements of style with moderation and to subdue, modulate this talent entirely to his vision of a scene. Rembrandt's 'Belshazzar' remained unequalled.

*Other paintings:*

**Belshazzar's feast.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1543/1544.

**Belshazzar's Feast.** Hyacinthe Collin de Vermont (1693-1761). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1730-1735.

**Belshazzar's Feast.** Vittorio Maria Bigari. Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

### *Daniel in the Lions' Den*

Darius appointed a hundred and twenty satraps and among the three governors of his kingdom he kept Daniel. Darius even considered giving the governance of this entire kingdom to Daniel. The satraps sought for a trap on Daniel then, so they went to Darius asking him to publish an edict that anyone who within the next thirty days prayed to anyone else but Darius, divine or human, that person should be thrown in the lion's pit. Darius signed the edict. Daniel continued to pray to Yahweh three times a day, so the satraps denounced him to Darius. The king was much distressed and caught in his own words, but however he racked his brains to find a solution to save Daniel, he could not but condemn Daniel. The king ordered Daniel to be brought in and be thrown into the lion's den. But he said to Daniel that his God would surely save him. The pit was closed with a heavy stone and Darius sealed it with his own signet. The next morning at dawn, Darius went to the pit, opened the stone, and called out for Daniel. Daniel was still alive. He said an Angel of God had sealed the lions' jaws. Daniel was harmless. Darius was overjoyed and ordered Daniel to be hauled from the pit. The king now threw the men that had denounced Daniel in the lions' den, as well as their families, and the lions devoured them instantly. Darius then wrote a letter to all nations to acknowledge the glory of Daniel's God. Daniel went well under the reign of Darius the Mede and also under Cyrus the Persian.

### **Daniel in the Lions' Den**

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. 1610.

Jan Brueghel the Elder, called the 'Velvet' Brueghel, lived in the town of Antwerp. He was the son of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, the brother of Pieter Brueghel II the Younger, the uncle of Jan van Kessel, the father-in-law of David Teniers the Younger, the father of Jan Brueghel II the Younger, the friend of Pieter Paul Rubens and of Sir Anthony van Dyck and, more importantly, the friend of Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan. Jan Brueghel studied first in Antwerp, then travelled to Italy in 1589 and visited several cities there, among which Rome and Milan. In 1596 he was back in Antwerp, where in 1602 he became the Dean of the Antwerp Guild of Painters. He was an esteemed citizen of the largest metropolitan port town of Western Europe. Jan Brueghel was also a court painter of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella of Brabant and Flanders. He painted marvellous flower pieces so that he earned soon the nickname 'velvet' Brueghel, as well as landscapes. Many other painters asked him to paint landscapes behind their figures, it was his main specialty. During his stay in Rome he met Cardinal Federico Borromeo, who was always avid to meet talented painters, especially the ones that answered to his tastes. Cardinal Borromeo was a Maecenas, founder of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana and the Accademia del Disegno in Milan, patron of Caravaggio and of Bernardino Luini among other artists. Jan Brueghel was the guest of the Cardinal in Milan in 1595 and later, when back in Antwerp, for many years he and the Cardinal corresponded and stayed in touch. Brueghel bought paintings of landscapes for the Cardinal and sent them to Milan. It was for Flemish landscape pictures that Cardinal Borromeo admired Brueghel and the artist regularly

made such paintings for the Cardinal. The Pinacoteca Ambrosiana of Milan now houses one of the largest collections of paintings of Jan Brueghel the Elder, and certainly the best, in the world. Jan Brueghel died in 1625.

‘Daniel in the Lions’ den’ is a painting on copper. Copper is a fine medium to paint on in the smallest detail and to obtain a brilliance that is harder to get on canvas. Jan Brueghel indeed made an astonishingly rich picture, a ‘tour de force’ of details as only Flemish-Brabant painters took the patience to deliver.

We see Daniel in a very large cave or pit in the ground, surrounded by lions, which apparently leave him unharmed. Daniel sits on one knee and he prays with folded hands to his God. A large crowd of courtiers, led by the King, has gathered around the hole. Brueghel painted a great multitude of people, shown in a half-circle around the pit. He used all light colours here, all the pure hues he could find; so that we see people dressed in blue, red, white, and the King wears robes of golden hues. Behind this scene is a landscape of green grass and trees, which contrasts nicely with the colours of the people. Behind the green woods lies a farther landscape, which Brueghel painted in gentle blue so as to blend with the skies. The soft blue evokes far perspective, in aerial perspective of hues, and Brueghel opened the view here wide and deep to lend an impression of very far space to the viewers of his painting. There is much to discover in way of details in the picture, details of people, natural landscapes and cityscapes, so that Cardinal Borromeo could look at the painting endlessly and still discover new elements.

Jan Brueghel showed a composition in the form of a flat, horizontal X. He curved the pit but in symmetry around the horizontal central axis he placed also the skyline of the green wood and the blue far landscape. He used brown colours predominantly for the pit, fine pure hues of all variety on the people and then, higher up, green and blue. Brueghel may thus have painted an allegorical theme of hell, limbo, earth and heaven. Daniel sits in the pit, which is a deep hole in the round earth. The pit could represent the hell. Daniel sits among the lions and tigers and in a fearful view large bones lie around there too. But Daniel courageously dares to kneel, in the middle of the pit, dressed in fine blue and with a pure red cloak. The theme then of Daniel climbing out of the pit, out of hell, may have charmed Cardinal Borromeo as an allegory of Easter, of the Resurrection of Jesus. The people around the pit then represent the church, led by the King, who is here in admiration of God’s works and in sympathy with Daniel. Daniel could represent the martyred saint, and hence the clergy.

Brueghel painted a crowd of people, but all are dressed otherwise and set in different poises. People are sitting as well as standing around the pit. The King leans down with caution. A boy and a dog stand next to him and these images always mean loyalty and dependence, in this case maybe also the loyalty of the king to Catholic faith. The king is compared to a young child, for which the Church cares. People are chatting and pointing and two men in the background have even climbed up a hill to see better what happens in the front.

Brueghel painted a marvellous dream palace to the left in a pleasure garden of green grasses and bushes, near a lake. Then to the right he showed wonderfully detailed green trees, painted in various shades of green to yellow hues, lightly brought on the metal medium. Under the trees he painted other people, either walking or riding on



horseback. Finally, we have a soft view in a blue light haze of a broad river, which might be the River Schelde, and a port town such as Antwerp might have been, with high Gothic cathedrals and a proud bridge. Brueghel even painted birds flying in the air, so that together with the lively scene of the curious court he provided a perfect illusion of a moment in time, caught in colours on the copper. In the sky too Brueghel demonstrated his fine sense of colour; we find here all the shades of white from the left, to the darker blue on the right.

All the details were painted in the tiniest element and only copper allowed such fine drawing and colouring. Brueghel detailed dresses, poises, hats, bright cloaks, lances, arms, boots, leaves on the trees, rocks, and animals in a real miniature masterpiece. Only on a copper plate could one obtain such rich detail and variation of colours. Yet, Jan Brueghel wonderfully preserved order in his painting, in the natural order of the elements and also of the spiritual concept of the world. 'Daniel in the Lions' den' could not but have enchanted Federico Borromeo by its clever meaning, content and by the skill of the strange Brabant artist that had come from so far to sell his art. It was a rare masterpiece that the Brabant master sent to Milan, and it was kept there lovingly to be admired like a rare delicacy of a piece of art for centuries.

**Daniel in the Lions' Den**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The National Gallery of Art. Washington.

Pieter Paul Rubens was Antwerp's most important master of Brabant's seventeenth century and probably the most prolific, best known, dishful, gentle, proud, and grand painter of Belgium ever. He was an artist who epitomised Baroque art like no other. Nobody but Rubens could depict the emotions of personages in such a fine way and so ostentatiously, yet often also subtly, and get away with the obviousness of the sensibility. The ornamental aspect of his paintings still charms instead of enervating viewers. It is impossible to be angry with a painting of Pieter Paul Rubens, gentleman and ambassador, because this master showed such an enthusiasm for life, for all things beautiful and gracious without afterthought, without bitterness, and without blame. Rubens told to enjoy life, to enjoy nature and sensuality and to do that without shame or remorse. If his exuberance sometimes weighs heavily on the conscience, we have seen so many other sophisticated pictures of his hand or from his workshop that we gracefully forgive him. Rubens' nudes were opulent; they were not the slim aristocratic ladies of the Renaissance Italian painters. But Rubens taught to accept them as they were, to love them and cherish them.

'Daniel in the Lions' Den' is one of his more restrained pictures, in which decorative elements do not overwhelm the scene. Daniel sits in the centre of the Lions' den and we see him from downwards, from low under Daniel and the lions. Jan Brueghel the Elder made a picture of this same theme, in which he took the contrary point of view: Brueghel overlooked a grand scene from above and placed the horizon low. Rubens however, entirely Baroque, brought the view closer to his subject, to the sole figure of the drama and no other people divert the viewer's attention from the scene. The viewer is with Daniel in the pit and with Daniel he or she looks up, higher up, to the clear sky. The sky is really far away, unreachable for Daniel, and the opening of the pit is small – whereas Jan Brueghel painted a wide hole in the ground that spectators could watch from all sides. Rubens painted Daniel all alone, looking up in despair at the far and small opening of the den. Daniel is alone and he prays fervently to his God. He is naked but for a white loincloth or shirt and a red cape. He prays desperately, eyes uplifted in awesome fear and hopeful expectation, given over to Yahweh. He stands with more apathy than with determination. He knows he can do nothing else but rely in his God. As Daniel is naked, Rubens could of course show a powerfully muscled, fine young man, so that he could prove his skills at depicting anatomy.

The lions are all around Daniel. Rubens painted them so marvellously that we can hear one or two of the roar with frustration. Most of the lions are calm however: one even dozes off. Yet bones and skulls lie around. Rubens here also preferred to show the feline, easy power of the animals, which might charge in a fraction of an instant to aggression and mean the end of Daniel's life on earth. Rubens painted the lions in wonderful chiaroscuro and as realistically as we might desire. In composition, he painted the lions and the pit in brown colours, which form a uniform mood. The mood is earthy and relaxed due to these colours, but also of course because the viewer remarks easily that no lion leaps or seems to move rashly. Then Rubens positioned Daniel in very bright colours in their midst, contrasting his figure nicely against the lions so that the viewer's attention goes immediately and effortlessly to the young

Prophet. The red patch of colour of the cape is the only pure, bright hue in the picture so that it is a marvellous area of colour in the painting. If one wants to draw attention to a part of a painting, one has to use one bright and pure area of colour like this: it is a very efficient way of focusing and drawing the viewer's eye. Rubens then seemed to have used the left diagonal as the main direction in his picture since both Daniel's figure is along that line and also the higher part of the red cloak. Rubens suggested with this direction, along which also Daniel looks, the aspirations of the hero of his picture: to be saved from the pit as quickly as possible, and his spiritual hopes and pleas to God, who Daniel sees situated higher up, in the heavens. Daniel sees only a small patch of that heaven, but deliverance and rescue must come from there.

Pieter Paul Rubens painted a picture with a simple theme, in a simple depiction, which has however maximum effect on the viewer. The viewer sees all the strength of the fierce animals and pities the helpless, young Daniel. Yet all his calm indicates that eventually Daniel will be succoured for his reliance on God. It is a marvellous painting, which shows also Rubens' mastery of drama and mastery of the reserve by which he could depict emotions if he only wanted to.

*Other paintings:*

**Daniel in the Lions' Den.** Giambattista Cima da Conegliano (ca.1459/1460-ca.1517/1518). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

## *Visions of Daniel*

While Belshazzar was newly King of Babylon, Daniel had a vision in the night. He saw the four winds stir up the Great Sea. Four beasts emerged from it. The first beast was a lion with wings of an eagle. While Daniel was looking, its wings were torn off and the beast stood on its feet like a human and it was given a human heart. The second animal was a bear, with three ribs between its teeth. A voice told the beast to get up and eat much flesh. The third beast was a leopard with four wings and four heads. The beast received authority. The fourth beast was the most terrifying. It was a real monster. It crushed its victims. It had ten horns and among these sprouted another horn that had human eyes. This animal boasted loudly. Now thrones were set up and God took his seat. He wore a white robe and his throne was of burning fire. The multitudes waited on him. The beast with the boastful horn was put to death and the other beasts were deprived of their empires but they received a lease on their lives for a season and a time. Daniel was deeply disturbed. He asked a person that was standing by what all this meant. The person replied that the four beasts were four kings that would rise up from the earth. The three that had received royal power would keep their kingdoms forever. The fourth beast was the fourth kingdom. This would devour the whole world. The ten horns represented ten other kings that would rise from this one kingdom. The last horn would be one more king. This king would bring down three kings and insult the Most High, and plan to alter the Law and Time. But finally this kingdom would be destroyed and all its splendours would be given to the Holy Ones of God. Every empire then would serve God. Daniel had to keep this vision a secret.

In the third year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had another vision. He stood in his dream at the Ulai Gate of Susa. He saw a ram standing in front of the gate. The ram had two horns, but the second horn was taller and higher than the first. The ram butted in all directions and it became very strong. Then a he-goat came from the west, encroaching on the entire world but never the animal touched the ground. The he-goat had one large, splendid horn between its eyes. The he-goat was enraged at the ram, charged it and furiously broke its horns. The he-goat threw the ram on the ground and trampled it. The he-goat grew so strong now that its great horn snapped off. In its place sprang four other magnificent horns, which pointed to the four winds of heaven. From the smallest of these horns sprang another one, which grew and grew towards the east and the south. It grew to the armies of the heaven and flung them and the stars to the ground so that the he-goat could trample them. The horn and goat challenged the sanctuary and the Holy Sacrifices. It installed iniquity and thwarted truth. A voice said that it would last two thousand and three hundred days. But then the sanctuary would be restored in its power. The Angel Gabriel suddenly stood besides Daniel and Gabriel interpreted Daniel's vision for him. He said that the ram with the two horns were the Kings of Media and of Persia. The he-goat represented the King of Greece. From this kingdom would raise, like the four horns, four kingdoms. These kingdoms were however not as strong as the first. Lastly, one King would rise who would be arrogant, and self-sufficient. This king would challenge the power of God. But in the end this king would be broken by God. Gabriel told Daniel to write this down but to keep the vision a secret.

Daniel prayed to God, repented his sins, and asked for forgiveness. He asked God to turn away his anger and to smile again at his sanctuary in the city. Gabriel appeared once more to Daniel with the message that God had heard Daniel, and decreed a time of seventy weeks. During these seventy weeks the people and their Holy City had to expiate their crimes, and to abandon sin. Then they would receive sixty nine weeks to rebuild Jerusalem. After that the sanctuary would be destroyed once more by a prince. The end of that prince would be catastrophic. For the time of a week he would have alliances with many peoples. For the time of half a week the prince would stop the sacrifices to the sanctuary and put an abomination of an idol in the Temple's wing. But in the end, this prince would meet doom.

In the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, Daniel had a vision. Daniel saw a man dressed in linnen with a belt of gold around his waist. His face looked like lightning, and his arms were as if of bronze. He spoke to Daniel. He said he had been fighting the King of Persia and had received assistance from one of his chief princes, Michael. God then told Daniel that he had come to tell him what was written in the Book of Truth. God said that three more kings would rise in Persia, and then a fourth. This fourth would be powerful and rich and make war on Greece. Then a king would rise to govern over a vast empire, but this empire would rapidly be broken up and parcelled to the four winds of heaven. The parts would not be ruled by his descendants. The King of the South would grow powerful but one of his princes more powerful still. These would conclude a treaty and the King of the South would give his daughter to the King of the North. A sprig from her roots would then force the stronghold of the King of the North and overcome him. This man would carry off treasures to Egypt. The King of the North would then gather his armies and invade the kingdom of the south. Enormous armies would clash between north and south. The King of the South would prevail and win the battle. But the King of the South would not stay strong for long. The King of the North would come back, two times even, and the forces of the south would lose ground. God explained to Daniel further in detail what would happen over time with the kings of the south and of the north. In the end, the King of the North would invade Egypt and Israel but Moab and Edom would escape. Attacked from the east and the north by other countries, he would halt and then be destroyed. The Angel Michael would rise in this period of distress to save the Jews. Daniel had to keep these words of God secret and seal his prophecy until the end had come.

### **The Fall of the Rebel Angels and the Archangel Michael**

Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). Ca. 1720.

Sebastiano Ricci was born in Belluno in 1659. He studied painting in Venice with several masters, among which Federico Cevelli and later in Bologna with Giovanni dal Sole. He then travelled widely and painted in numerous North Italian cities such as Florence, Milan, Parma, Modena, and Bologna but also in Rome. In 1712 he event went to England with his younger brother Marco (1676-1730), who was equally an accomplished painter. He returned in 1716, leaving unfinished work of decoration in

England. While returning from England he stayed a while in Holland, then in Paris and visited Antoine Watteau. He was even elected to the French Academy in 1716. He also worked in Vienna of Austria and worked in the Schönbrunn Palace there. He had several illicit love affairs, which made him often flee the places where he worked. He made a woman pregnant in Venice, and then tried to poison her, but she had him imprisoned. In Bologna a papal official forced him to marry; Cardinal Antonio Pignatelli performed the marriage but this Cardinal would later become Pope Innocent XII, so that Sebastiano had also some powerful protectors. The scandals had little influence on his support by patrons; after all, he was an artist. Sebastiano Ricci was one of the most important painters and precursors of the revival of art in Venice of the eighteenth century and his scenes were as passionate and spectacular as the gallant episodes of his life.

The 'Fall of the Rebel Angels' was a picture made a few years after his return to Venice. Sebastiano Ricci's pictures are usually very dramatic, with extraordinary views, but often also a little too well thought out, and such is also the case with this painting. The Archangel Michael defeats the rebel angels; so we see him triumphantly hovering with magnificent open wings over various nude bodies of the rebels, which he forces back into the fire of hell. The picture is very mannered and obviously Baroque in inspiration, in its obvious display of violent movement and drama, but the flowing lines and chaotic representation forebodes the last years of the baroque era and the beginning of Rococo.

Sebastiano Ricci painted Michael in full action, with drawn and long sword, open white wings, dressed in blue armour and with flowing bright-red cloak and white robe. His shield radiates the divine light that pushes the devils down into hell. Ricci applied a brick-red in the angel's cloak and an un-pure blue that suits well with the red. Moreover, for his chiaroscuro on Michael's armour and on the cloak he used not only various shades of red and blue, but also many white hues, which are in both areas and thus make the red and blue areas also have similar, harmonious features? Nevertheless, the global harmony of hues as taught by Titian and Tintoretto was the past by now: a new era had started and Sebastiano Ricci had not just worked and studied in Venice but in almost the entire known Europe, so he had the dash and power to show the Venetians less suiting hues. Ricci showed Michael as a wonderful, strong youth with luxurious blonde, flowing hair. And the Archangel does not look at the viewer, but he is at work driving back the rebel angels.

In his composition Ricci made a large pyramid of the Archangel Michael, of which the left side is formed by the figure of Michael himself and his legs that slant to the left, whereas the right side is formed by the rays that emanate from Michael's shield. The pyramid is supported by the horizontal band of the rebel angels. Here we find no restful horizontal and vertical lines; the bodies are intertwined and there is chaos here of oblique lines, which intersect, none of which is parallel to the other, and the lines are a mixture of short and long segments that clash and cross. Ricci painted the rebel angels like Titans, with heavy muscled bodies, all are strong men. The angels indeed remind us of men, far more than the divine Archangel. The men are falling, pushed back by the Archangel. They are in obvious pain, holding their heads with their hands, throwing their arms upwards in vain attempts to avoid the intense light of the shield. Extremely dramatic also is the opened hand of a rebel and its long hand and fingers, which Ricci painted just in front of the white shield. The shield and its very bright

light is really the centre view of the picture and Sebastiano Ricci's commissioners must have been satisfied with dramatic view of God's power, symbolised by the rays of light. This light then is thrown to the falling angels so that Ricci could sculpt the muscles of the men beneath to spectacular power, to images which owed to Michelangelo and Giulio Romano. The rebel angels were angels indeed, but Ricci could not show them in the same splendour as the young warrior Michael. So he painted them nude, more like men than as angels, linking the rebels to humanity, and giving them but short, feeble wings, which he coloured with the same brown and ochre hues that he used on the defeated rebels, everywhere in the lower part of the frame. These hues of course make one remind of the earth and make the viewer understand that humans are being thrown back to their realm. The humans are driven back to earth and hell. Sebastiano Ricci contrasted in the painting the bright colours of the avenging Archangel with the earthy hues of ochre. These colours were more suited to evoke an impression of doom, as contrasting with the splendour of the divine.

Sebastiano Ricci painted a spectacular picture in the Archangel Michael that drops from the heavens on a pack of rebel spirits. The painting could forcefully appeal to the imagination of his commissioners and of the faithful that came to see it. Ricci knew his job and he delivered drama and impact with the ease and intelligence of a travelling master painter of the eighteenth century.

*Other paintings:*

**Saint Michael Archangel.** Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**The Archangel Michael.** Workshop of Guariento. Museo Civico Correr. Venice. Piazza San Marco.

**Saint Michael.** Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617/1618-1682). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna.

**The Archangel Michael forces the faithless Angels into the Abyss.** Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1655.

**The Archangel Michael;** Altarpiece. Gerard David (ca. 1460-1523). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1510.

**Saint Michael killing the Dragon.** Antonio del Pollaiuolo. The Bardini Museum. Florence. Ca. 1465.

**The Fall of the Rebel Angels.** Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. Ca. 1665.

**The Archangel Michael.** Ercole de'Roberti (1450-1496). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**The Archangel Michael.** Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Around 1610.

**The Archangel Michael.** Giovan Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (1567-1672). The Sforza castle Museums. Milan.

*Susanna and the Elders*

In Babylon lived a rich man called Joakim. He was married to a very beautiful woman called Susanna, daughter of Hilkiah. She was very devout and God-fearing. That year, two elderly men had been selected from the people to act as judges and as Joakim opened his house to many, these elders were often in Joakim's house. Susanna used to take walks in her garden and the two judges saw her frequently there. They began to desire her. They also admitted their desire for Susanna to each other.

On a hot day, Susanna came again to the garden, only accompanied by two young maidservants. She asked these to bring some oil and to shut the garden doors while she bathed there. The two elders had concealed themselves in the garden, and as Susanna was alone, they rushed upon her. The elders proposed a choice to her. She could either let the elders have her there, or the elders would give evidence that a young man had been with her in the garden and that this was the reason why she had sent her servants away and closed the doors. Susanna sighed. She knew that she was trapped, but she did not want to sin. So she cried out loud. The elders now also cried loudly. When all the servants came into the garden, the two elders brought forward their accusations to the appalled servants.

The next day too, the elders accused Susanna to her husband Joakim and pleaded to put her to death. Susanna was summoned to her husband and she came in, very beautiful, but veiled. The elders repeated their story and Susanna was condemned to death. Susanna then prayed to her God.

The Lord appealed to the Holy Spirit in Daniel and suddenly Daniel, who had been looking at the woman being led away to be killed, shouted out that he wanted to be innocent of this woman's death. Everybody was surprised and Daniel had some respite to tell to the people that the elders had given false evidence. Daniel asked to take the elders separately and to interrogate them. The people granted Daniel his wish.

Daniel asked to the first elder under what tree he had seen Susanna and the young man lying. The first man told it had been an acacia tree. Daniel then asked the same question to the second man, and this elder answered that it had been an aspen tree. Daniel now denounced them to the people and the punishment that was given to them was the same as they had schemed for Susanna: they were put to death by stoning. Susanna was acquitted of any crime.



### Susanna and the Elders

Grigori Ignatevich Lapchenko (1801-1876). Russian State Museum. St Petersburg. Ca. 1831.

Alexander Andrejevitch Ivanov and Grigori Ignatevich Lapchenko, two young Russian artists, arrived in Rome in 1830. They had received funds from the Society of Painters of St Petersburg and from wealthy patrons, and they intended to study Roman and Italian art. In Rome they met other foreign painters, among whom many German painters, and a group that looked at the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen as the newest prodigy of the arts. They met not just the artists, they also shared their models. One of the models of Thorvaldsen was an Italian girl from Albino outside Rome, called Vittoria Caldoni. This Vittoria had been a model for an impressive list of artists, among whom Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), the Nazarene painters Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872), for Franz Ludwig Catel (1778-1856), for Wilhelm Hensel (1794-1810), for Theodor Rehbenitz (1791-1861), for the French painter Horace Vernet (1789-1863), for the sculptor Rudolph Schadow (1786-1822), and of course for the young Russians Ivanov and Lapchenko. The girl had been discovered in 1820, when she was only about fifteen years old, by a German diplomat in Rome, an ambassador of the Hanoverian House, a Maecenas and a collector, called August Kestner (1777-1853). Kestner had seen in the girl the impersonification of the Roman ideal beauty and he had brought her to Rome with him. She stayed in the Villa Malta, which was then the consulate of Hanover, and Kestner showed her a few hours a day to the artists. He reported already of 44 portraits made of her.<sup>D10</sup> The artists saw in her the ideals of females painted by Raphael and Botticelli.

Grigori Lapchenko equally painted Vittoria Caldoni, and he did more than that: he married her in 1839 and took her with him to Russia.

Lapchenko's 'Susanna and the Elders' contains merely and only the figure of the nude Susanna against a background of a fine garden. Susanna is Vittoria Caldoni. Lapchenko did picture in the Elders of the bible story, but he hid them in a background of dark colours not only for Susanna but also for the viewer. Lapchenko had to paint a scene with a story, and preferably a Bible story. The theme was even less an excuse for the portraiture of a nude than it was in any other picture of this theme. But Vittoria Caldoni was worthwhile painting alone and not much more was needed to make a splendid painting. The St Petersburg painters and professors were only half duped.

Vittoria-Susanna sits. She is slim, elegant, and proud. She is unaware of any harm in the garden, believing her privacy undisturbed but for the painter. She sits near the fountain in which she will take her bath. She has laid off her clothes and holds a last white cloth high in her hands. She may already have taken her bath and be drying her body with the white linen. Therefore she offers her arms, her long legs, and her ivory body to the eyes of Lapchenko, who could paint her nudity completely. Vittoria looks expectantly from under the linen, and she draws the white cloth over her back and over her head so that she can peer from under it joyously and teasingly. Yet, she is all innocence and simplicity. There is coquetry in her gesture, but it would be hard to

blame her or to accuse her of hard sexuality. She crosses her legs prudishly and she holds one hand on her lap, drawing the cloth together there. She protects herself from the viewer's looks, Lapchenko's looks, which she knows to be there and watching her intently.

Lapchenko painted his Susanna holding thus one arm high, in a poise that would have ravished Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. Ingres painted a nude called 'The Source' and in this picture also balance of poise was masterly sought. Lapchenko balanced with Susanna's gesture her long, gracious legs which equally are set somewhat aside. Lapchenko drew Vittoria's body fine, sensuous curves. She is the incarnation of the classical Venus, of the unblemished ideal of Greek and Roman classical beauty. Lapchenko painted a wonderful nude; the theme was merely an excuse devised after the nude had been painted. Lapchenko admired Vittoria already, but the nude is of a prim, modest yet splendid young woman.

The rest of Lapchenko's painting therefore is insignificant, though Lapchenko painted it with great skill. He showed water dripping from the fountain in the foreground; he painted the red clothes of Susanna, her sandals, her cloak, with very great and detailed attention. The chiaroscuro in the red robe is magnificent, as best as could be. He painted a cityscape of a Roman architecture discreetly in the right upper corner and also a fine view of the green bushes of the garden behind his model. The Elders are among the green foliage on the left side, hidden in the dark colours. They are only in the picture to create a reference to the theme.

Lapchenko painted his Vittoria Caldoni like a marble statue, yet in delicate bright fleshy hues. Vittoria Caldoni is an ivory statue, sculpted by a genius Greek artist into a mind ideal. Her figure shimmers with light and here also Lapchenko sculpted her nudity in light and in gentle shadows with love and talent. Lapchenko was clearly falling in love, otherwise he would not have shown Vittoria so sympathetically simple and innocent and some of the empathy of the young woman for the painter shows also in her attitude of ease combined with just a touch of flirtation. Schnorr von Carolsfeld once wrote that only Vittoria's face responded to the classical ideal, that nothing was to be done with her body; she could really not be admired in that.<sup>D10</sup> Schnorr wrote that after he had seen Overbeck's picture painted in 1821. Caldoni was then only fifteen. She had grown up. Lapchenko's Vittoria Caldoni was perfect. She was still the chaste Susanna. We sense in Lapchenko's picture the respect he had for the model, the admiration and affection that would lead him to ask her to come with him to Russia.

### **Susanna and the Elders**

Jacopo di Antonio Negreti called Palma il Giovane (1548-1628). Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

Jacopo di Antonio Negreti was called Palma Giovane because he was the great-nephew of another famous painter of Venice, Palma Vecchio. He was born in the lagoon town in 1544. Palma Giovane worked in Venice and completed Titian's *Pietà*, which the master of all Venetian masters had left unfinished at his death. Palma Giovane worked for the Scuola's and churches of Venice, for the Doge's Palace and he had a large workshop. He painted on mythological subjects, as well as at religious and historical pictures. He worked in the times when Venetian painting was till at its best, alongside Titian, Paolo Veronese and Jacopo Tintoretto.

Palma Giovane made a painting of the theme of 'Susanna and the Elders' and that picture is a sheer Venetian joy. He painted an ample, nude Susanna in the centre of the frame, stepping into her garden bath. She is a fine Venetian lady with long blond hair that flows down her amber shoulders, long and luxurious and which underscores her sensuality. She has a nice filled face and body, a body made to invite for sweet loving. She is not a very young girl, but the maturer Venetian courtesan, well in the flesh, like the powerful Venetians must have preferred. Her forms are of a mature woman with strong thighs and full legs, a belly ample for bearing children. She might be the chaste Susanna, but she looks as if she couldn't care less for the word. She has lain off her white shirt and holds that elegantly, entreating gracefully her maidservant to leave her alone in the garden. The maid has brought a basket with perfumes, oils, a sponge and washing cloths, and that basket is now set alongside Susanna on the marble bath. The servant leaves, but Palma Giovane placed her high in the painting so that she bends her head and shoulders, and in doing that she also exposes some of her alluring nudity. Palma Giovane knew how to seduce his male viewers and add sensual touches wherever he could. Palma Giovane made Susanna move her right arm in the direction of the servant, and this girl also with her right hand proposes the bath to Susanna. If Susanna inclines her head to the left, the servant slants to the right and thus balances the natural movement of Susanna.

The figure of the maidservant also balances the scene of the left side, of the two Elders that hide between the trees. One of them wears an oriental turban and the Elders conspire, looking from behind a green bush. Palma Giovane also applied symmetry in the colours because he used red colours to the left in the Elders and as well that same hue on the servant. He placed Susanna in full light and let that light sculpt the woman lavishly and sensually. He also used fine contrasts of shadows on the folds of the dress of the maidservant and we see all lines curb and flow there. Such is also the general mood: as most of the lines in the picture are curved and smooth, equally of course on Susanna, on the garden trees and on the Elders, the viewer receives an impression of gentle elegance and ease. The only hard lines in the picture are in the marble bath, but even there Palma Giovane painted an ornamental sculpture with curved lines on the left side. The bath is a fountain and Palma Giovane showed the water that was so much present everywhere in Venice.

The artist painted Susanna in full. She and the servant fill the picture, close to the viewer. Yet, no figure looks at the viewer so that the viewer is not really taken as a witness, is not involved in the scene: the viewer is not a part of the painting and it is as if he or she does not exist. Even the Elders, though they conspire and engage in interested conversation, seem still to be wondering what to do and do not really take part in the action. They are as yet the silent admirers, more than the men that will encroach on the woman and come closer to her. Palma Giovane painted a scene in which Susanna retains her innocence and in which the two Elders are merely the old man that have passed by and discovered the glorious nude that is Susanna. The Elders do not leer at the lady. Palma Giovane painted one as a wise old man with a long white beard, the other with a high turban, which makes something of an elegant, dishful courtier of him rather than the ugly criminal. Their admiration remains platonic so far.

Palma Giovane made a nice, admirable picture of the Bible story, which allowed him to paint a Venetian nude. Nudes were one of his specialties and he could paint them sweetly and sensually as no other. Nothing in his picture however is intrusive, hurting, obsessive or moralising. Palma Giovane only dwells on the magnificent nude woman in pure esteem for female beauty and attractiveness, in wonder of the elegance and splendour of nature, without afterthought. In this way, Palma Giovane seduces the viewer with Susanna. His painting thus has become a sheer joy for the senses.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jan Massys (active 1531-1575). Musée d'Art Ancien. Brussels. 1567.

Jan Massys was the son of Quinten Massys, a well known painter of Antwerp. Little is known of his life but that he became a master in the Guild of painters of Antwerp in 1531, was banished from the town in 1543 from heresy, then spent long years in Italy before returning to Antwerp around 1567 or 1568. His brother, Cornelis Massys (1513-1579) was also a painter.

The theme of Susanna and the Elders was extremely popular with painters. Scenes of the naked Susanna, like scenes of Bathsheba in her bath, were themes from the Bible that allowed showing the female body in splendid nudity. They joined themes from classical antiquity like pictures of Venus, Diana and her nymphs. Although paintings of 'Susanna and the Elders' was a depiction of a Bible story, they were often handled exactly in the same way as pictures of Venus and Diana, with the added touch of lechery and voyeurism which made it just the little bit more dangerous, intriguing, enticing, and erotically more appealing than the pictures of classical themes. And because the theme came from the bible, it offered always some relief of conscience, some excuse, for justifying the expense to one's wife and friends. Jan Massys' painting is such a picture and one of the best examples of the real reason of existence of such images. But Jan Massys had in some way or other also to demonstrate that he had remained the rebel that had been banned from Antwerp. There is a theme upon a theme in his picture, a moral story upon another moral story.

The picture must have been made right after Massys' return to Brabant. Massys had seen the Renaissance paintings in Italy and the growing Mannerism in that country. He may also have worked in France and since the largest single workplace there had been around first the French King Francis I and then his successors' castle of Fontainebleau, some of that style is also visible in his painting. In Fontainebleau worked Rosso Fiorentino, Il Primaticcio and Niccolò dell'Abate, and some of their exaggerations of representation show up in Jan Massys' work. He placed a very nude Susanna sitting as if on a throne, gloriously, in a luxurious exotic garden. She is naked but she still wears her jewels, among which the arm band that links her to her husband. She is merely covered by a white lace cloth and entreats her servants to leave. She sits against a very ornamented, decorative sculpture and puts forward elegantly but alluringly a long, equally naked leg. Susanna sits and her body forms a traditional pyramid structure, which Jan Massys enhanced by the marvellous blue velvet, heavy cloak that she had laid off and on which she sits. She sits like an arrogant queen on her rich dress, firmly, rigidly, inviting to be admired.

Susanna sits to display her feminine attractiveness, like live and a true Venus. She sits calmly, with straight back, with dignity and defiance, like a goddess, with fine golden necklaces around her long neck and her hair elaborately worked up. She glorifies in her nudity and she catches the sun on her body. She is slim, with small straight breasts, not really a symbol of full sensuality as Pieter Paul Rubens would later paint, but still alluring enough to tempt any man.

Massys placed secondary scenes to the right and left around Susanna, in a symmetrical way. On the right of the frame he placed Susanna's servants and to the left he shows the two elders. In these scenes he brought lively movement and drama, for the two lady servants are leaving and the two Elders bend, hide and whisper to each other. In the centre, Susanna is quite a static figure, as she sits, and Massys painted her mainly in a strict vertical poise. So Jan Massys allows the viewer to admire and relish Susanna, and to continue admiring her since he introduced no illusion of movement on her. He showed her fine leg and she opens her arms, opens her body to contemplation, but does not move. The lady servants however are in full action. They run and Massys painted them in slanting lines. They leave and that way in which their bodies recline show their intentions, their actions. He made heads and faces slant too, and cloaks flow elegantly around them in a direction opposite to where they go, again indicating action. Slanting lines are always powerful means to depict movement, so Jan Massys also painted the two Elders basically in slanting positions.

The two Elders hide behind the marble sculpture. Jan Massys painted the Elders really like the lechers and voyeurs they are: old, ugly, bending to hide and conspiring against a lady. They are dressed in simple brown robes and they incite each other to silence, as conspirators do. The Elders wear simple brown robes, but one of them shows a leg, just like Susanna does, and here the viewer discovers fine, light boots that shape leg and foot like so many signs of hidden sensuality. They are both heavy-bearded and we cannot but compare them to monks. The decorative sculpture behind which they are separated from Susanna looks much like an altar. On the altar stands a vase but instead of the wine of Holy Mass this contains the balms or perfumes for Susanna's body. The two elders are monks hiding behind an altar to relish at Susanna, conspiring to rape her. The picture of Jan Massys then becomes not just an allegory of lechery and voyeurism but also an allegory on the sins and hypocrisy of the clergy, a Protestant pamphlet. The monks vowed to chastity but Massys shows their lust for the nude Susanna. This theme is eminently Protestant then, disguised in a bible scene that might have been commissioned even by Catholic traders of Antwerp.

Jan Massys was a fine painter. He knew well how to detail his figures and decorations and he also brought fine chiaroscuro on the folds of the robes and cloaks and he sculpted with light Susanna's nice, slim body. The scene of Susanna and the Elders is placed in the lower part of the picture, but it covers about three fourths of the horizontal space. In the upper part Jan Massys shows a wide landscape of an Italian Renaissance town, with towers, as he might have seen in Florence or Venice, and early Baroque façades of churches, covered with expensive marble. He painted the cityscape behind the trees, which are as well the leaf trees of the North as the palm trees of the South, which should add an oriental touch. The skies above the trees are agitated with white but heavy clouds, finely detailed.

Jan Massys may not be known as a great master of Antwerp, and just as the son of the famous painter of Brabant that Quinten Massys was, but he made with 'Susanna and the Elders' a very fine, elaborate picture that is well designed, nicely coloured in harmonious hues and that contains a strong, double moralising theme. Massys disguised a direct, fervent critic on the morals of the Catholic church of his town in an already not too innocent Bible scene. But Susanna is a glorious lady who will win and Massys painted like her an unreachable, glorious beauty. Susanna dominates everything in the picture. The power is with her, not with the Elders, who are nothing

but creepy and feeble old men. The ideals of the Renaissance Protestants are in this picture impersonified by Susanna, the hypocrisy of the Catholic clergy of his times by the Elders.

### Susanna and the Elders

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652). Graf von Schonborn Kunstsammlungen. Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden. 1610.

Artemisia Gentileschi painted 'Susanna and the Elders' to a very powerful picture. It is one of the first paintings that clearly formulate the condemnation of the aggression of men on female and the message came from a woman who had felt the aggression herself. Two elders creep over a marble frieze to assault the very young Susanna. Gentileschi's Susanna does not sit in a garden filled with luxurious flowers and exotic trees, where she might be considered a classical Venus or Diana utilising her nudity to triumph over the world. She is a true, simple girl, not the stylised slim deity, but a common Italian woman, well in flesh and with normal, lusty breasts. Artemisia Gentileschi painted however as a victim, in a contorted, twisted position of pain. Artemisia's Susanna averts her head extremely to the left side and she extends her arms towards the other side to rebuke, repulse the Elders. She is not tall; she has not the long legs of a fashion model. She plies her legs under her, in a broken poise which however is a marvel of balanced composition because the legs form a counterweight to the outstretched arms. The poise of Susanna is one of a broken and frightened bird, but it is also very efficient in the academic way of presenting a female nude, like Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres would have admired two centuries later. Susanna is not the goddess that exposes her body proudly and with defiance. She is caught in the gaze of the Elders and the poise expresses her distress at the looks. She is horrified by the eyes that imprison her and from which she cannot escape. Her body is not captured by the Elders, but her mind is. Still, she resists and refuses the invasion of her privacy. In this painting, nudity is not a glory but an object. She is a vulnerable and frightened girl, but only an object for the Elders. Artemisia Gentileschi painted one of the first pictures that can be considered to be a pamphlet of the growing conscience of the value of women, of women as humans that can exist and live and have status in society independently of men. But the painting is still a denunciation of the fact that women often are purely seen as objects by men, objects that can be consumed and have no rights of their own.

The two Elders look from behind a frieze. Gentileschi painted them only partly in view. The Elders are hidden behind the frieze. They embrace like predators. Artemisia Gentileschi painted Susanna in a vertical position, very close to the viewer. She painted the Elders horizontally and wide, hanging in a horizontal band over the frieze but slightly in a triangle. Susanna and the Elders thus form an arrow, in which Susanna is the shaft and the Elders the arrowhead. The effect of this very new and untraditional from on the viewer is sharp and angular, and effect of pain, anger and tension, which strongly contrasts with all other paintings of this theme, in which flowing, curved, delicate, elegant sensuality is usually expressed. Gentileschi painted sharp terror and her composition supports her view. The Elders still discuss on what they plan to do to Susanna. They loom menacing over the frieze, and they leer at the nude girl. One man urges to silence but his gesture is also one of reflection, of premeditation on how Susanna could be caught, what could be done to her and how. The assault is not sudden and passionate but cold and well thought out. The two men



know what they are doing when they will come over the frieze, in complete and full responsibility. Gentileschi demonstrates that there is no excuse of sudden passion for their act.

The very disturbing element of the picture is not just the lechery of the old men. One of the men looks at the viewer, while the other urges to silence. So there are three personages on the painting but the fourth personage, the viewer, is equally very present and plays a role in the scene. For Artemisia Gentileschi, the third man in the picture is the viewer and the viewer must be a man. Susanna, in her nakedness and distress, is not caught in the looks of two pairs of eyes but also by the viewer. And Artemisia seems to claim that the act of aggression on Susanna happens over and over again, for her picture remains, does not move, does not go away and is thus a permanent accusation on what all men of the world do sometimes to all women. The viewer is taken for more as a witness, the viewer is but one more man involved in the tragedy that causes the obvious pain on Susanna's face.

Artemisia Gentileschi did not place Susanna in a surrounding of warm mood, of green and red colours of a fine garden. She sits against a background that must be very cold, the white marble. There is a decoration in the marble just behind her back, a drawing in stone of many curbs that looks very intricate, nervous, and that reflects only the perturbation in Susanna's heart caused by the Elders. No decoration or ornament otherwise disturbs the hard vertical and horizontal directions and lines in the picture. Susanna sits against hard, cold stone with warm and soft flesh. She cannot escape the coldness of being taken for an object either. Artemisia Gentileschi painted all the more Susanna in fine, sweet and soft colours, with slight shades of pink on body and face. The Elders then are painted in hard red and deep green colours, contrasting as the dark powers of the picture. No background otherwise confuses the theme: Gentileschi concentrated on the psychology of the scene, on the figures, like she had seen from Caravaggio in Rome, and she painted in full realism of the figures, bringing the personages extremely close to the viewer.

Artemisia Gentileschi was born in Rome in 1593. Her father was a painter too, and a very good one: Orazio Gentileschi. She painted 'Susanna and the Elders' when she was barely seventeen and the painting is one of her very first pictures, at least one of the first that have remained of her hand. She was already caught then and harassed or even assaulted sexually by the painter with which her father worked, Agostino Tassi, and in whose studio she studied. Tassi apparently had raped her but promised marriage and Artemisia would stay with him and be his mistress for a while, until her father accused Tassi. There was a trial during which Artemisia was tortured with thumbscrews, for a woman could not be but a temptress and have seduced the man. Tassi accused her of having been a whore, having had intercourse with other men and even with her father. But confronted with witnesses, Tassi finally confessed and was imprisoned. The painting caused a sensation by its power of expression, even though few knew the poignant story behind the painting. Artemisia Gentileschi would marry another Florentine painter during the trial, but she would leave also this man and travel, living from her art, to various cities of Italy and even England. Few painters have come to power of expression as this female painter, yet she still has not gained the recognition of being a formidable genius such as other, male painters have received.

*Other paintings:*

**Susanna and the Elders.** Pietro della Vecchia (1603-1678). Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Martino Altamonte (1659-1745). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. 1709.

**Susanna in her Bath.** Jean-Baptiste Santerre (1658-1717). The Louvre – Paris. Around 1704.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Paolo Caliari called Veronese. Musée du Louvre – Paris.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jacob Ernst Thomann von Hagelstein (1588-1633). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**The Story of Susanna.** Hans Schöpfer the Elder (ca. 1505-1569). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1537.

**The Chaste Susanna.** Gustave Moreau (1836-1898). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.

**Susanna and the two Elders.** Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1647.

**Susanna and the Elders and the Stoning of the old Men.** Albrecht Altdorfer (ca. 1480-1538). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1526.

**Susanna.** Cristofano Allori (1577-1621). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

**The chaste Susanna.** Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480-c.1556). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1517.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (1675-1741). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. Ca.1708/1711.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1601-1602.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1608-c.1662). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Susanna.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). The Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1636.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Sisti Badalocchio (1585-c.1620). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca.1610.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1555-1556.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jacopo Chimenti called da Empoli (ca. 1551-1640). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1600.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Pieter Lastman (1583-1633). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1614.

**Susanna in her Bath.** Jean-Jacques Henner (1829-1905). Musée d'Orsay. Paris.

**Susanna in her Bath.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1550.

**Susanna in her Bath.** Giovanni di Ser Giovanni (Scheggia). Museo di Casa Davanzati. Florence. Ca. 1478.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jacopo Amigoni (1682-1752). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1475.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Michel Dorigny (1616-1665). Musée du Château. Annecy. Ca. 1655-1660.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Giovanni Antonio Burrini (1656-1727). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**Susanna before Daniel.** Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna. 1724.

**Portrait of Vittoria Caldoni.** Victor Orsel (1798-1874). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

**Susanna and the Elders.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1512-1594). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

*Daniel and Habakkuk*

When Cyrus was King of Babylon, he offered every day much food to the god Bel in his temple. Cyrus was convinced that Bel was a living god for everyday the food disappeared, eaten by the god. Cyrus asked Daniel why he also did not offer to Bel. Daniel replied that he only worshipped a living God and not a statue made by human hands. This made the king angry. He proposed to bring food to Bel and to seal the door. Daniel would see for himself that the food disappeared, eaten by Bel. Daniel and the king did so, but Daniel spread ashes all over the temple floor. Daniel and the king sealed the door after them. In the night, the priests came through a secret door in the temple and ate with their wives and children from all the food. In the morning, the king opened the doors, gave a quick look and saw with satisfaction that the food had gone behind the sealed doors. But Daniel pointed to the ashes, in which the king could not but notice the imprints of the feet of men, women and children. Cyrus angrily ordered the priests to be arrested. The priests showed the secret door under the altar table. The king put the priests to death and gave the statue of Bel to Daniel, who destroyed the idol and its temple.

The Babylonians also worshipped a great dragon. Cyrus said to Daniel that now even he had to recognise that this was a living god, no statues of bronze as Bel had been. Daniel merely replied that he would kill the dragon without a sword and thus prove that the dragon was not a god. The king gave Daniel his permission to try. So Daniel took pitch, fat and hair, boiled that together into balls and fed the balls to the dragon. The animal ate the balls, burst and died.

The Babylonians were so angry about this, that they against the king and forced him to hand Daniel over to them. They threw Daniel in the lions' den, into which were seven hungry lions. Daniel stayed in the pit for six days.

The Prophet Habakkuk was in Judaea then. An Angel of God appeared to him, told him to get food to Babylon and give Daniel to eat. But Habakkuk had never been to Babylon and he told Babylon was far away. So the angel took the Prophet by the hair and brought Habakkuk near to the pit into which Daniel had been thrown. Habakkuk gave the food to Daniel, who was much comforted at the knowledge that Yahweh had not forgotten him. The Angel brought Habakkuk back to Judaea.

When the king saw the next day that Daniel was still alive, he praised the God of Daniel and released him from the lion's den. The Babylonians that had schemed against Daniel were in their turn thrown in the lions' pit and they were immediately devoured by the hungry animals.

**Daniel and King Cyrus before the Statue of Bel**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. 1633.

Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn painted 'Daniel and Cyrus before the Statue of Bel' in 1633. Rembrandt, born in Leyden in 1606, lived in Amsterdam then. He had worked in Amsterdam before, but only for a brief time, while he studied in the workshop of the history painter Pieter Lastman, in the beginning of the 1620's. In 1628 he had met Constantijn Huyghens, the secretary of the Prince of the Netherlands and through him Rembrandt had access to the court and its commissioners. Orders for paintings had arrived abundantly. Encouraged by this success, Rembrandt installed in Amsterdam, living in the house of his art dealer Uylenburgh. In 1634 Rembrandt would marry the niece of this art dealer, Saskia van Uylenburgh. In 1633 he was a well known artist already. He had started a workshop of his own in Amsterdam and he had many students. He painted very many pictures and the rapidity with which he worked can also be observed in his 'Daniel and Cyrus'. Rembrandt had also begun to find his own style: scenes set against dark backgrounds, of Biblical themes, and in which the moment was caught in the depiction of his figures.

The centre of the painting is formed by the King. He stands, dressed in heavy robes and cloak, which glimmer with gold. He shows with his sceptre the altar of Bel and the offerings brought there: the food on a platter and the beaker of wine. The table cloth is of brocaded red cloth, and here also the gold lining show lavishly. Behind the table is the statue of Bel, enormous and massive but Rembrandt showed it only in half, and hid it almost completely in darkness. Rembrandt would want to have been accused of showing pagan gods. Daniel bends before the King. He is a divine Prophet, but he is abject before the powerful King, small, whispering the poisonous words into the King's ear, which will make Cyrus doubt his god. For Cyrus hears with surprise that Daniel tells him that stone statues do not eat, something he would not have doubted a second.

The King is majestic and towering before Daniel, imposing in his full regalia of the monarch of the east. Rembrandt gave Cyrus a high turban and even a gold crown, and the King wears golden dresses, a golden sceptre. Yet, this imposing King is puzzled by the dwarf's, Daniel's words. He shows his incredulity to Daniel. The empty bowls and cup are on the table and Cyrus points at them, responding to Daniel and entreating him not to doubt. He seems in that instant to tell to the young Prophet that what Daniel claims cannot be true. Bel looms on the right side. Rembrandt showed the instant, the true moment when Daniel astonishes the King and when doubt enters the mind of the monarch, and it is as in many pictures of those times, that Rembrandt promises the action: the King points at the table, turns his face in sudden surprise, and Daniel humbly holds his hands to his heart, in a gesture of protection but also of asserting that yes, what he, Daniel, has just told, must be the only truth. The psychology of the figures and the action are thus depicted instantaneously with very little means, one of the wonders of the art of painting that Rembrandt had discovered early on in his career and for which he was famous.

Rembrandt painted a scene inside a dark hall. He built a composition around the left diagonal, because the main direction goes from the face of Daniel to the King and then to the chandelier that hangs down the ceiling. This line would go to Bel's head, but Rembrandt did not show the heathen god and the main line of the picture thus ends at the candles, not on the statue. The light of the chandelier is shown splendidly. It is thrown on Cyrus, whose golden hues shimmer in the light and thus catches the attention of the viewer in all his magnificence. The light then continues more feebly onto the face of Daniel, but Rembrandt did not detail the features of the Prophet. The power of God and of the heavenly light is with Cyrus, and not with the indistinct Daniel. Yet, the King is the fool and Daniel holds the truth, the intelligence, the wisdom, presence of mind and also the divine power of prophecy. It is with such conflicts in depiction and narrative, and in psychology, that Rembrandt van Rijn captured the attention of the viewer. The viewer is puzzled at the apparent submissiveness of Daniel, who should really tower in this painting with his spiritual authority, and dominate the King. Cyrus towers over Daniel, so the viewer ponders and is caught in the act of comprehending the situation. That means the viewer will look longer at the painting, the effect desired by the artist.

The line of light follows the left diagonal but Cyrus diverts the light. He points with his sceptre to the table and here also the light comes profusely. Rembrandt worked with rapid brushstrokes on the table cloth, but therefore he made the viewer literally feel the texture of the brocaded, heavy red cloth. This cloth forms the balance in the painting with the King's rich white and golden hues and the thin sceptre also links the two areas of brighter colours against the darker background. The high, equally red and brown curtain continues to enforce then the elevating direction of Daniel and the King, and answers to the colours of the red table.

Rembrandt applied rapid, nervous brushstrokes also on the King, yet from a distance the details seem to fall into place and be discovered as the details of lining by the viewer. Rembrandt did not spend much time on the details in this painting, so that he could finish the work in not too long a time. Yet, the expression of the moment on Cyrus' face, even if only shown in a few strokes, sufficed for the theme. The narrative was dense enough, the scene easily comprehensible for any viewer of the seventeenth century. Rembrandt had read his Bible with attention and chosen one of the crucial moments of the story. He painted several stories from the book of Daniel, among which two years later 'Belshazzar's Feast'. This later painting is more finely detailed than his 'Daniel and Cyrus' but Rembrandt remembered the image of 'Daniel and Cyrus' with the King painted in golden hues in the centre. In 'Belshazzar's feast' he also gave the King these colours, a high turban and a golden crown, and a knot with feathers on the turban. He also put a headband of white pearls in the hair of the women at the table, as he did on Daniel in 'Daniel and Cyrus'. So, either Rembrandt remembered well his earlier pictures, or he had 'Daniel and Cyrus' still with him, maybe not totally finished, or he had drawings, the sketches of 'Daniel and Cyrus', still in his possession.

'Daniel and Cyrus before the Statue of Bel' is a fine painting of Rembrandt but we sense the artist's urgency at making this work. It may be a picture that Rembrandt made as a study for other work. It has however many of the excellent qualities of a true and glorious Rembrandt picture.



**The Prophets Daniel and Habakkuk, an Angel and Saint Andrew**

Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

Paris Bordone was a Venetian painter, born at Treviso. He must have worked in Titian's studio and Bordone continued to work in Venice, but he was a restless man. He travelled to France at the invitation of King Francis I; he painted decorations in the Fugger Palace of Augsburg. He painted many religious pictures and he worked also on mythological themes, allegories and portraits. Bordone painted in the soft colours of Titian and Venice, and it was in his portraits that he excelled most.

In his picture of the 'Prophets Daniel and Habakkuk, an Angel and Saint Andrew', Paris Bordone shows a scene from the Book of Daniel. When Daniel was in the lion's pit, an Angel of God took the Prophet Habakkuk by the hair and brought him from Judaea to Babylon, to feed Daniel. Paris Bordone painted the young man Daniel among the seven lions. The Angel is shown grabbing Habakkuk at the hair indeed, and Habakkuk brings bread and wine to Daniel on God's command. The Angel still flies, dragging Habakkuk with it. To the left side stands Saint Andrew with his cross, on which he was martyred like Jesus.

Paris Bordone painted in soft brown and ochre colours with a granular texture, in light paint that allows the texture of the canvas to remain visible. His colours are very warm: soft reds and oranges overall and especially in the right part of the scene, which contrast nicely with the bright red and green on the left. Bordone painted Daniel with an orange cloak and also the Angel is dressed in orange, a nice symmetry – whereas Daniel is drawn vertically, the Angel and Habakkuk horizontally. Habakkuk is between the Angel and Daniel his robe is of the colour red, the colour that matches the cloak of Saint Andrew. Thus Bordone varied his hues in a symmetrical and yet contrasting manner. The most marvellous aspects of the painting are the colours on Saint Andrew. His green robe contains a splendour of green and yellow hues, which are painted in a chiaroscuro that builds Andrew's body. Look at how, using variations of green and yellow colours only, Bordone sculpted the illusion of the volume and contours of Andrew's left knee.

All Bordone's figures hold their arms in another way. Daniel accepts the bread and wine; Habakkuk offers the plate and holds the cup. The Angel holds Habakkuk at the hairs, as told in the Bible, but also grabs the Prophet's robe. Saint Andrew holds the cross behind his back in a graceful gesture, which allows his body turning in part and which balances the three figures on the right. Paris Bordone painted no background but for the lions, preceding in this aspect other painters of the later Baroque era. He showed Daniel among the lions, but the lions are calm and do not hurt the Prophet. Paris Bordone even painted naively the lions down beneath licking Daniel's both legs. The commissioners of the painting probably asked Bordone to make a picture that could be shown to the faithful, and impress the naïve souls that came to pray before the picture.

The 'Prophets Daniel and Habakkuk with Saint Andrew and an Angel' was an altarpiece. Paris Bordone remembered from the bible the presentation to Daniel, the young man in distress, of the food. God called Habakkuk from far to rescue Daniel



and bring him the divine food. Paris Bordone used this Old Testament scene to show Habakkuk bringing the bread and wine of Holy Mass to Daniel. The wine and bread are symbols not just of earthly succour but also of spiritual solace. The wine and bread of the sacrament was the representation of Christ and that wine and bread would save the soul and be the hope at help in distress. All the eyes of the figures focus on the bread and on the cup of wine, so that these symbols of Christ are the true centre of meaning of the painting. Thus Paris Bordone combined a scene from the Old Testament with the Patron Saint of the church in a surprising, original idea that referred to Christ's Passion. The altarpiece was originally made for the Dolfin family altar in the church of Santa Marina in Venice.<sup>123</sup>

The 'Prophets Daniel and Habakkuk with Saint Andrew and an Angel' is a picture of a fine theme and a nice finding of an original reference. The picture proves the intelligence of the painter. Bordone painted in the marvellous soft, rather brown, subdued hues that Titian and Tintoretto had brought to the Venetians. In the painting we recognise Bordone's skills at colouring and sculpting volumes of bodies in chiaroscuro, as well as his talent for drawing and painting the faces of the Saint, the Prophets and the Angel. Paris Bordone could paint in detail. He must have had his real joy however in the original idea of the painting. The painting is of fine quality, without great power but nicely made, very effective in the communication of its message, so that Bordone's commissioners – the Dolfin family of Venice – must have been satisfied at having received among so many pictures a new view in an allegorical scene. Yet, this was but one of very many religious scenes that Bordone made and its lack of background also meant that the artist did not spend time lovingly and caringly on this picture, as he did with so many portraits. This was an altarpiece that would stand high above the altar and that was not intended to be a painting of great art but just a picture with a religious message.

### *The Book of Hosea*

Yahweh ordered Hosea to marry a prostitute and to have children with her. Hosea married the whore Gomer, daughter of Diblaim.

She bore him a son and Yahweh told Hosea to call this son by the name of Jezreel because he would punish the House of Jehu for the bloodshed at Jezreel. Then Gomer conceived of a daughter and Yahweh told Hosea to call her Lo-Ruhanah because he would have no pity anymore for Israel, but hold his pity for Judah. Gomer later gave birth to a second son and Yahweh ordered Hosea to call the boy Lo-Ammi for the people of Israel were not his anymore and he did not exist for the people any longer.

The prophecies of Hosea are one long poem delivering the recalling of Yahweh of all the crimes of Israel and the ensuing promise of punishment by God. The poetic lines form a short book, in which also Hosea compares his own love for his faithless wife with Yahweh's love for faithless Israel. Hosea tells that Yahweh's love will in the end be stronger than his vengeance. Hosea hopes for Israel to be repentant, so that Yahweh would once be reconciled with his people.

### **Mountain Landscape with River Valley and the Prophet Hosea**

Gillis III van Coninxloo (1544-1606). Museum Mayer Van Den Bergh – Antwerp.

Gillis van Coninxloo was an Antwerp painter. He learned to paint with several Antwerp masters, among which Pieter Coecke van Aelst. He worked for a while in France, but returned in 1570 to his home town. He became a member of Antwerp's Guild of Painters. He was a Protestant however, and when Antwerp fell to the Spanish troops led by Alexander Farnese in 1585, he had to leave the town. With a few other artists he settled in Frankenthal, a town of the Palatinate of Germany. He stayed there until 1595, then moved as so many Antwerpers to Amsterdam and lived there until his death in 1606/1607. Gillis van Coninxloo was one of the most important landscape painters of the Netherlands and Antwerp. He developed a variety of styles in landscape painting, going from Antwerp mannerist to more intimate and Baroque views. His 'Landscape with the Prophet Hosea' is in water colours and may be from the Frankenthal period, from his earlier period in which he showed rather vast, heroic scenes. Still, there is a lyrical and reflective quality in his picture which may see us Gillis as thinking with sympathy and regret of his life in Antwerp. Van Coninxloo painted a Bible scene from the Old Testament. The Prophet Hosea was a tragic figure, an outcast and a Prophet who wrote with bitterness also of abuses in worshipping, themes that appealed to the banished Protestants of Antwerp. The Calvinists moreover may have stressed the passages from the Book of Hosea, and van Coninxloo may thus have remembered the passages.

Van Coninxloo showed a grand view. He painted a riverscape. A great river flows through a landscape of spectacular mountain views but man is present everywhere. There are houses on all the slopes of the hills and even perched on and against high rocks. On all the mountain tops are houses of several stores and high churches as well. There are towns along the river and villages and houses built even in the middle of the stream. There are villages in the forests and there is a port town. We might even discover the image of a tower of Babel, of which only two stores stand and which is covered with a cupola. Van Coninxloo painted houses close and in the far. He showed parish churches and cathedrals, farms and castles, high defended villages, built on promontories and accessible only over bridges. His landscape of nature is very varied also. Van Coninxloo painted the river of course, first broad and then tightening between the mountains, then widening again in the far and probably flowing into the ocean behind the farthest hills. He painted lush forest views and meadows, then green hills and high bare rocks, going to very high, inhabitable mountains even though town walls curve upwards against their rocky needles. And then van Coninxloo painted the blue sky with tender clouds darkening it in.

Van Coninxloo used marvellous, light colours in his picture. The river is deep blue in front, and then it becomes lighter of hue towards the horizon, so as to blend with the colours of the sky. He used deep blue down below and symmetrically, deeper blue also in the upper left corner of the sky. Van Coninxloo thus obtained an effect of aerial perspective and to enhance this sense of space in the river that flows to the right side of the frame, he brought here the lightest blue colours, almost going to pure white, to indicate a river flowing to the light of the heavens. This sense of elevation towards the very bright heavenly light was an effect sought often by painters of these centuries and van Coninxloo imagined it masterly and naturally in his landscape view. Van Coninxloo also lightened the blue hues on the hills and on the port town towards the far, and he brought these lighter colours in the 'open V' structure of composition in the centre, where the river disappears in the horizon. The two slopes of the 'open V' are made by the hills of the right and left side.

Van Coninxloo brought his horizon high, but the horizon is almost only a point towards which flows the river that is broad in the lower part of the picture, then the borders of which close in. The river meanders, but its closing lines give a strong sense of perspective and as van Coninxloo also painted the houses smaller and smaller towards the centre, a strong sense of open, wide, deep space is evoked in the viewers. Viewers take in automatically such illusions of space, taking it for granted. Still, it is always a wonder to discover with which frugal means of colours and lines only such illusions are created. Van Coninxloo really played with the illusions: birds drawn in the upper part of the picture give an illusion of the cosmos and of extreme heights. He painted in the right upper part houses built on wooden stakes that hang over the abyss, evoking the dangers of heights in the viewer; he showed long steps of stone stairs mounting to a rock village on the left; he placed his horizon high and yet lower than the eye of the viewer, and so on.

Water colour painting is tedious. Water colours in patches of juxtaposed areas flow into each other readily when they are wet. So if one wants to colour in the smallest detail, as van Coninxloo did in his picture, one has to wait for each individual small area to dry up before putting in the next colour. Nevertheless, van Coninxloo worked like a miniaturist. There are a great number of small figures in the painting and on

these figures van Coninxloo brought different, pure hues: light red, orange, green, blue, brown. The Prophet Hosea sits in the low foreground, observing God's wonderful nature and yet complaining about his fate. He is the single largest area of bright red colour in the painting. Therefore of course he catches the viewer's attention. Around Hosea, van Coninxloo painted a very lively genre scene of figures. Much is to be discovered in the small scenes; a mother sits with her children near the water, and van Coninxloo even added a dog being patted by a child. Two young, wealthy men look at the woman and one wears a gaudy feather in his hat. A couple climbs up the long stairs to the village on the left. To the right, people walk under the shade of high trees and one man seems to want to cross the river at the wade and he maybe even talks to the Prophet. A child is fishing near Hosea, which might be just a genre detail but also alluding to the fish, the ancient symbol, the Greek letters of which also were the letters of the name of Christ. Hosea is a thin man with a long and sharp beard. Van Coninxloo even painted his trousers and his light brown boots.

Gillis van Coninxloo painted a wonderful landscape in water colours. He continued a Flemish-Brabant tradition of such views. Since this is a water colour picture made on parchment, it is a viewer's delight and a gem of a picture created by the patient techniques of the artist. Making such a water colour picture in such intricate, miniature detail, was a real prowess. We can look many times at this painting and still discover new objects, houses, elements of nature, figures, to arouse our imagination so that we finally really live ourselves in the view. Van Coninxloo had that talent of a true magician of pictures.

### *The Book of Joel*

The prophecies of Joel, son of Pethuel, were written around 400 BC. Joel warned about the Day of Judgement of Yahweh and called on the people of Israel to repent for their sins. Joel's text is very short and ends, like Hosea's prophecies, with a vision of a glorious future for Israel.

### *The Book of Amos*

Amos and Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel, just before the invasion by the armies of Assyria. Amos was a shepherd of Tekoa. He had visions about Israel in the time of Uzziah, King of Judah, and Jeroboam, King of Israel. His text is written in poetic and epic lines. Amos gave us a very pessimistic view of the plagues of locusts, droughts, darkness and famines that Yahweh would send as punishment for the sins of the Israelites. Amos' text is a lamentation and mourning over Israel's fate.

### *The Book of Obadiah*

The Book of the Prophet Obadiah is but a short prophecy, dating from around 580 BC. It tells Yahweh's sentence pronounced on Edom. Yahweh will annihilate Edom and warns its people. Obadiah predicted no one from the House of Edom would survive from Yahweh's wrath. The house of Jacob would destroy Edom by fire.

### *The Book of Jonah*

Yahweh spoke to Jonah, son of Amittai. He told Jonah to go to Nineveh and to announce to the city that its crimes would bring about its downfall.

Jonah tried running away from Yahweh and he wanted to get to Tarshish. In Jaffa he found a ship for Tarshish. He paid his fare and went aboard. Once at sea, Yahweh sent a great storm into which the ship was caught and from which it could not escape. The crew threw its cargo overboard and everybody prayed to his god. The men of the crew then drew lots to find out who should be blamed for the bad luck they had. Jonah had been fast asleep below decks, but the men awoke him and he drew lots too. The lots of course pointed to Jonah. He had to confess that he had tried to escape Yahweh. The men were very afraid then. They asked Jonah what had come into his mind to board their ship while such a powerful god as Yahweh was looking for him. They asked Jonah what they could do now. Jonah answered he knew well it was all his fault. He had brought Yahweh's anger on the crew. He could only propose to the men to simply throw him overboard. The men at first did not want to do that; they rowed hard trying to reach the shore but the storm just became rougher as they approached land and their attempt was in vain. So at last they all called on Yahweh and in despair threw Jonah in the boiling sea. As soon as they had done this, the sea calmed and the storm was over.

Yahweh ordered a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Jonah remained in its belly for three days and three nights. Jonah then prayed to the glory of God and promised to sacrifice to him. Yahweh then spoke to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah on land.

Yahweh spoke again to Jonah, entreating him to go and preach in Nineveh. Jonah went to the city and called out loud the message that after forty days Nineveh would be overthrown. The people of Nineveh believed Jonah's message. They mourned for their crimes, fasted, put on sack-clothes in repentance and sat down in ashes. God saw all the efforts of the people of Nineveh and of their king, and he relented. There would be no disaster on Nineveh.

Jonah however was very angry now. He said he had tried to flee to Tarshish because he knew that Yahweh was a compassionate god and would relent. So, Jonah left the city and sat down outside the gates, to the east, to ruminate. He made himself a shelter and sat in the shade. Yahweh ordained that a castor-oil plant should grow to give more shade for Jonah and to soothe Jonah's anger. Jonah indeed loved the shade. But the next day, Yahweh ordained that a worm should destroy the plant and he also sent a very hot eastern wind on Jonah, and he let the sun shine so hard that Jonah begged to die. God asked Jonah why he was so concerned about a castor-oil plant that had grown in the night and withered in the next night without Jonah's least effort. Yahweh then asked why he also should not be concerned then about Nineveh, of which the people could not tell their right hand from their left.

**The Shipwreck of Jonah**

Paul Bril (1554-1626). Palais des Beaux-Arts. Lille.

Paul Bril was one of the many excellent landscape painters born in Antwerp in the sixteenth century. His father Matthijs was also a painter, so Bril may have learned his art with his father. His elder brother, Matthijs the Younger (ca. 1150-1583), was also a landscape painter. Together with this brother Paul travelled to Rome in 1574, passing by the French town of Lyon. The brothers worked on frescoes in the Italian city and Paul Bril became a member of Rome's Accademia di San Luca in 1582. He worked for the Popes in the Vatican and for churches in Rome. He seemed to have started to make oil paintings on canvas only after 1594 but it are mainly these pictures that are best known today. He stayed a while in Naples, from 1602 to 1603, but otherwise lived and worked in Rome. He stayed in Rome, married even with an Italian girl in 1592, and one of his sons also became a painter too. He worked for a time together with Jan Brueghel the Elder in Rome, from 1592 to 1595. He thus never returned to his home town and country and he died in Rome in 1626. Yet, he remained the painter inspired by the style of the Brabant landscape painters and for this style also he was most appreciated in Rome. Mostly in Holland then Marine painting flourished also, and Paul Bril too painted many Marine scenes, often scenes from the book of Jonah. Bril may not have returned to Antwerp, but he could easily have followed the evolution of picture making in the Netherlands through impressions from visiting artists and from engravings, which now were widely spread in Europe.

Paul Bril was one of the best landscape painters of Brabant and Rome, but in a picture such as 'Jonah's Shipwreck', one senses a beginning of Baroque and other influences but the traditional Brabant miniaturist pictures. Bril's painting is all emotion and mood and less focused on the narrative. Bril showed a sea in torment, a tempest of dark and menacing clouds in the sky, of dangerous and sharp rocks with mighty towers of magicians and terrifying pirates on the coast. He painted the picture in very dark colours, with only a small hint of light blue and yellow-white at the horizon on the right side. Otherwise, his painting is almost a night scene. There are heavy, black clouds in the sky and the masses seem to move, to curb their black, ominous masses down to the ship. The clouds contain a menace of fate. They seem to attack and reach the boat and catch it in their tempestuous whirls. The clouds come down from over the land. Here, Paul Bril did not paint a lush landscape of green hills and green forests, maybe of a silvery port town. The viewer sees only high rocks, promontories on the coast that rise steeply out of the water, sharp and uninviting. The sharp angles and the needles of the rocks that Bril painted here always give a feeling of tension, of nervousness, of stress and of danger in any viewer and Paul Bril continued to draw such oblique, sharp lines and angles in the far background of the left side of his painting, in the mountain scene he showed there. There is not one sign of any organic life there, nothing but rocks and towers. Paul Bril employed very effective style elements here, to induce in the viewer emotions of threat.

Paul Bril applied a composition based on the right diagonal, the line going from the lower right corner to the upper left corner. He placed the coastscape entirely under this line, and then placed the battered ship smack above the line, in conflict, but in the smaller, more open part in the sea. This feature further enhances the sense of tension

in the painting. If Paul Bril's coastscape and seascape show the turbulent natural elements, he painted the ship even more in great distress. The elements of form that Bril used to show this were oblique, intersecting, clashing lines and areas of colour. Such lines always are signs of chaos, movement, conflicts and of tension. Paul Bril painted the sails clashing, the masts of the ship in various directions but not parallel, and no lines are parallel overall to each other or vertical or horizontal. The boat's lines clash with the angles of the waves and the viewer is amazed at how the boat keeps afloat in such turmoil; the viewer expects a disaster any second. Yet, the picture is eternal and of course does not change. Bril attained the summum of illusion of violent movement of the storm and of evoking strong emotions in the viewer of the peril of the small boat. Composition, clashing lines and the dark mood of the picture are all elements directed at evoking the impression of the violent sea, which leads to Jonah's shipwreck. Finally, the sea whale, the monster of the seas, looms to engulf Jonah, accomplishing thus the tragedy.

Paul Bril was one of the masters of a new art for Rome and since he came from Antwerp and had contacts with Brabant and German painters, he was also one of the great artists of Northern European painting. He particularly invented the landscape that lives like a human being, breathing its emotions, menacing or pastoral, but always moving deeply the viewer and engulfing him or her in its mood. He was one more step in the evolution of landscape painting, further than for instance Gillis III van Coninxloo. And he was hugely successful in Rome, accepted there as a true and pure roman artist, becoming even in 1620 'Principe' of Rome's Accademia di San Luca.

### **Marine with Jonah rejected by the Whale**

Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675). ). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen.

Gaspard Dughet is truly a French name. Gaspard's parents were French, but he was born in Rome and all his life he stayed in that city. In 1630 the great Nicolas Poussin married his sister, Anne-Marie Dughet, so Gaspard Dughet knew Poussin very well and may have studied painting with him. He was even called, or called himself Gaspard Poussin, after his illustrious brother-in-law. Yet, Nicolas Poussin was no landscape painter, whereas Gaspard Dughet practically only painted such scenes in frescoes or on canvases for Rome's churches. With that, Gaspard Dughet obtained fine success in the Rome of the seventeenth century that was avid for decoration in landscapes.

Gaspard Dughet painted a scene of 'Jonah rejected by the Whale'. Dughet was a generation older than Paul Bril and since he worked on the same town he could easily have seen Bril's frescoes and paintings. Still, Dughet's depiction is very different from Bril's and there is a difference of more than a degree in appreciation of the scene and in Dughet's skills and character, with Dughet not having the upper hand.



Dughet showed a seascape and a coastscape like Paul Bril in a similar picture of 'Jonah's Shipwreck'. If Bril focused on the mood, on the emotions invoked in viewers, Dughet concentrated more on the narrative, the literature aspect of the Bible scene. He shows the whale, like Bril's sea monster and Jonah runs out of the beast, evidently happy, and on to the shore. Dughet showed a small scene of the moment earlier in time when Jonah's ship was caught in the storm. We also see in another scene the shipwreck, when the boat is thrown against the rocks of the lighting tower. So, Dughet showed several scenes from Jonah's adventures in one picture. Now, Jonah literally runs away from the whale. Dughet painted Jonah as a running figure in the foreground, running towards two other small figures on the left side. Dughet painted these figures in fine pure red and blue colours, whereas the rest of the picture is painted in rather dark grey, black or brown hues. Dughet used the same means of colours as Paul Bril to create the atmosphere of menacing nature that turned it storms and its largest sea animal on Jonah.

Dughet's scene is far less dramatic and tragic than in Bril's picture. There are waves in the sea but they are not that huge. The clouds are dark and heavy, but they come down only in the far on the small ship and a large part of the sky is of a fine blue, ample colour. The rocks are rounded, not all sharp, and not very high. The rocks are not painted in grey or black colours, but in brown and white hues which are not as menacing as could be. There is a town above the rocks and a robust tower, but these seem so massive and protected as being able to withstand any angry element of nature. The whale lies horizontally in the water, quite at rest in a not too turbulent ocean and its tail graciously and playfully heaves out of the water. There are fewer oblique lines and the oblique lines do not cross or intersect but are parallel to each other. We see that for instance in the outlines of the rocks and in the lines of the sandy shore, as compared to the shore of rocks. Dughet used vertical lines also (in his figures) and horizontal lines (in the whale). He showed a long horizontal line at the calm horizon. He showed the scene as looked at from below, from the earth, a more re-assuring point of view than the high point from which the viewers have to watch Paul Bril's picture. Of course, this virtual viewer's point is all illusion, but that is indeed also one element by which the restfulness in Dughet's picture differs so much from the danger in Paul Bril's. Viewers will always feel more comfortable at a low viewpoint than at a high one. These lines are always lines of rest, of static. He lets Jonah run out on a flat sandy shore. Such style elements indicate rest instead of conflict. The scene thus gives an impression of only a little danger to the viewer, and not nearly so much as Paul Bril's emotionally laden painting. Dughet's picture gives a strange impression of static, even of rigidity to the viewer.

Gaspard Dughet used as composition a diagonal of the frame, like Paul Bril. He used however the left diagonal and placed both his scene of Jonah and of the coast under this line that goes from the lower left corner to the upper right corner. Only the lighting tower in the centre grows out of the details of the whale and the coast, but that feature is too small to break the strong structure of the picture, so that the structure is over-powerful in its rigidity.

Gaspard Dughet made a nice picture and in certain details he certainly showed his skills, such as in the way he depicted the waves of the sea or the clouds in the sky. But he did not reach at all Paul Bril's inspirational breath or Bril's powerful depiction of emotions in the seascape. Gaspard Dughet was a teller of stories in his landscapes and

gave just as much as his commissioners asked of him, whereas Paul Bril gave his landscapes a soul.

*Other paintings:*

**Jonah falls into the Sea.** Jan Provoost workshop (ca.1465-1529). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna.

**Jonah and the Whale.** Paul Bril (1554-1626). Casa d'Oro. The Giorgio Franchetti Gallery. Venice.

**Jonah leaves the Whale's Belly.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

### *The Book of Micah*

Micah of Moresheth had visions during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He had a vision of the judgement of God on Samaria and Jerusalem and he lamented over the ruins and the destruction of these lands. He prophesied the ruin of Zion, the ruin of the House of Jacob. He then had a vision of the return of the people to Yahweh's Temple Mountain. But later many nations would again lay siege to Zion.

Micah prophesied that a future ruler would come, whose origins would come from Bethlehem, from Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah. Thus Micah wrote one of the clearest predictions of the Messianic message. Yahweh would destroy Assyria and destroy then all Israel's enemies. Yahweh would bring his vengeance over the nations that disobeyed him. Micah prayed for the confusion of Zion's enemies and he expressed his hopes for forgiveness and for a wonderful future in God's love for his people.

### *The Book of Nahum*

This Book of the Bible holds a short poem written or spoken by Nahum of Elhosh. The prophecy contains a psalm on the wrath of the jealous and vengeful Yahweh, God of the Israelites. Nahum delivered a prophetic judgement on Assyria, Judah and Nineveh. The poem dwells on the fall of Nineveh and on Yahweh's sentence brought over the Lion of Assyria. It is a lament on the destruction of Nineveh, dating from around 612 BC when Nineveh was taken.

### *The Book of Habakkuk*

Habakkuk's vision is also a short text, dating from around 600 BC. Habakkuk offers a dialogue between the Prophet and Yahweh. Yahweh tells that he saw wrongs being done, violence and lawlessness in the world. So Yahweh stirred up the Chaldeans to march and conquer Israel. These were just the instrument of God's anger. But the Prophet complained to Yahweh on the tyranny of the Babylonians, and he cursed the oppressors of Israel. Habakkuk then prayed to Yahweh for deliverance and in a last vision he was an enraging battle of Yahweh, who now marches to save his people. This vision inspired faith in God and Habakkuk ended his prophecy with a rejoicing in the strength of Israel's God.

### *The Book of Zephaniah*

Zephaniah, son of Cushi, prophesied in the reign of Josiah, King of Judah, somewhat earlier than Habakkuk. His text is also very short and Zephaniah proclaimed through Yahweh judgements on all nations. He preached against idols like Baal, against unbelievers and against the merchants of Jerusalem. He predicted that the great days

of Yahweh was near, the day when Yahweh would bring ruin on those who sinned against Yahweh. Zephaniah called on the Judaeans to convert. He spoke against the Philistines, against Moab and Edom in the east, against Ethiopia and Assyria. But he also predicted disasters for Judah. Lastly, he drew a picture of an ideal Zion of humble people that take refuge in Yahweh. His last lines are a psalm of joy in Zion and a promise of Yahweh to bring back the people from exile.

### *The Book of Haggai*

Haggai received a message from God that he addressed to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Josiah son of Jehozadak, the high priest, in the second year of the reign of King Darius, around 520 BC. Haggai asked to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. He said that the Israelites had returned from exile, sown much but harvested little because they had not fully honoured Yahweh. Yahweh's house was left in ruins and Yahweh therefore brought droughts on the land. Zerubbabel and Josiah then started to work on the reconstruction of the Temple. Yahweh now promised prosperity for the people, and Zerubbabel would be the chosen leader for which Yahweh would destroy the power of the other nations that confronted Israel.

### *The Book of Zechariah*

Like the book of Haggai, the Book of Zechariah is in prose and it offers also prophecies given in the second year of Darius' reign. The prophecies are given to Zechariah, son of Berechiah. Like in Haggai, its first part is a text from just after the return from exile. In the first part of the text, Zechariah told his eight visions.

In his first vision Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse among the myrtles. Other horses in red, white and brown colours followed on him. An Angel told Zechariah that these men were sent out by Yahweh to patrol the earth. The men reported that the earth was at peace. The Angel then addressed Yahweh and asked him how long he would inflict the cities of Judah with his anger. Yahweh answered that he was now jealous for Jerusalem and dissatisfied with the nations that were at peace. Yahweh would therefore restore prosperity to Jerusalem and see to it that his temple would be rebuilt there.

In a second vision, Zechariah saw four horns. Then Yahweh showed him four smiths. The Angel told Zechariah that the four horns were the horns that scattered Israel. The smiths came to throw down these horns, these nations.

In a third vision, a man was measuring Jerusalem. Another Angel arrived however, telling that Jerusalem was to remain un-walled for the moment because of the large number of men and animals that were in the city. Yahweh declared that he would be himself the wall of fire around Jerusalem.

Yahweh gave a fourth vision to the Prophet. Zechariah saw Joshua standing before the Angel. The Angel told to Satan, who was standing there also, that he was rebuked.

Joshua was dressed in dirty clothes. The Angel offered splendid clothes to Joshua and said that his guilt was taken away. Yahweh said that if Joshua obeyed to his orders, Joshua could govern the temple, God's House. Yahweh would then hold a stone with seven eyes before Joshua with the inscription that Joshua was truly the Temple's governor, so ordained by God.

The Angel asked Zechariah for the fifth time to see. Zechariah saw a golden lamp-stand with seven lamps. To each side of the lamp-stand stood an olive tree: one on the left, one on the right. The Angel told Zechariah that the seven lamps were the eyes of Yahweh that looked at the whole world. The two olive branches that poured oil through two openings of gold were the two anointed people that attended on Yahweh: Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor. Yahweh praised Zerubbabel and called him the keystone that had founded and rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem.

In a sixth vision, Zechariah saw a very long flying scroll. The Angel said that the scroll was Yahweh's curse over the country. Yahweh sent the curse into the house of every thief and perjurer.

Zechariah had a seventh vision of several successive scenes. He saw a bushel measure happening and the Angel said that this was the measuring of the guilt of the country. Then a disc of lead raised and Zechariah saw a woman seated inside a barrel. The Angel called her Wickedness. The Angel rammed the lead disc hard down on the woman and closed the barrel with it. Then two women appeared. They had wings and lifted the barrel in mid-air. The Angel they were taken to the land of Shinar in Babylon and would build a temple for it there, so that purity only would remain in Israel.

Zechariah then saw his eight and last vision. He saw four chariots coming from between two mountains of bronze. The chariots had horses of different colours and the Angel told that these chariots were the four winds of heaven that were leaving after having attended on Yahweh. Each set of horses was leaving for one of the four corners of the land, to patrol the world. Yahweh said that the horses that went north brought his spirit to rest on the land of the north. Yahweh then ordered Zechariah to collect gold from the exiles and make with that a crown for Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Joshua would be the man who would rebuild the Temple, as sent by God. Finally, Yahweh told Zechariah that there would be a time in the future when many peoples and cities would come to Jerusalem. All these would entreat favours of Yahweh and in these days ten men from nations of every language would take a Jew by the sleeve and ask to go with him because they had learnt that God was with the Jew.

The second part of the Book of Zechariah is a proclamation against the enemies of Israel, against the Philistines. This part must have been added much later. It tells about the restoration of Israel, about its deliverance and on the strength of the New Jerusalem. Zechariah thus also told about the Day of Judgement, the Day of Yahweh, when God would gather all the nations to fight Jerusalem. But Yahweh would protect Israel and strike down all the nations that rose against Jerusalem. Later, all the survivors of the nations that attacked Israel would come each year to worship Yahweh Sabaoth at the Feast of Shelters.

### *The Book of Malachi*

The Book of Malachi is a short text in prose of six parts. 'Malachi' means 'Messenger', so this last text of the Old Testament is anonymous. It was written shortly after the return from the Babylonian exile of the Jews.

In the Book of Malachi, Yahweh calls the land of Esau, which is Edom, the land of Wickedness or the Nation-with-which-Yahweh-is-always-in-anger. Yahweh therefore turned Edom into a desert.

Yahweh told the priests to offer respectful sacrifices and he complains that the priests had not honoured him justly. He promised to lay a curse on the priests that did not sincerely glorify his name.

The Book of Malachi contains a short text that speaks against mixed marriages. Yahweh urged the Jews not to marry the daughters of foreign gods. He also said not to break faith with the wives of their youth, so not to divorce.

Malachi's text also tells of the Day of Yahweh, the day of his coming, when god would take the seat of a purifier.

Yahweh said that the Jews were still the children of Jacob, so although the Jews had evaded statutes of Yahweh and had not observed his rules, he promised that if the Jews returned to Yahweh, God would return to them. God urged the Jews to bring tithes in full to the treasury of the Temple, and not to cheat on the tithes. On the Day of the Yahweh, the upright people would be rewarded.

The last words of the Old Testament are on Moses. Yahweh asks to remember the Law given at Horeb to Moses, in which Yahweh prescribed decrees and rulings for Israel. Yahweh says he will send the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the Day of Yahweh. Elijah will reconcile parents to their children and children to their parents, to save the country from the curse of destruction.