

Alfred Bader

Alfred Bader Fine Arts

Biblical Iconography
Belshazzar

[ca. 2007]

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Alfred Bader Fine Arts



To: Gary Schwartz (gary.schwartz@xs4all.nl)
Subject: Your June e-mail

Dear Gary,

I am sorry that I have been so long in answering your important e-mail of June 9th, but Isabel and I were in England, Austria and Germany most of June and July and I am only now catching up with all the correspondence.

I was truly amazed when I was reading about Maccovius knowing so much about Hebrew and becoming Rembrandt's brother-in-law. Of course it may be that Rembrandt got the information about the vertical lettering from him. On the other hand, Menasha published this shortly after the painting was completed and so you really cannot rule out that Rembrandt learned this from Menasha. Certainly there is no question that many years later they knew each other very well when Menasha asked Rembrandt to do the etchings for his book.

Despite all the arguments to the contrary I do believe that the *Jewish Bride*, such a very late work, depicts Isaac and Rebecca and that the drawing with the Philistine king watching is a drawing for that painting.

David de Witt and his wife Franziska will be visiting us in two weeks and then I will discuss all this with him for his opinion.

I have now received the catalog in Dutch from Dr. Joel Cahen and I wish I knew more Dutch. I have told Dr. Cahen that I would be happy to help him financially if he could have the book translated and then printed in English.

I wish I could persuade you to come and visit us in Milwaukee.

With all good wishes from house to house I remain

Yours sincerely,
Alfred Bader



Sanhedrin!

Subject: Sanhedrin!

From: "Gary Schwartz" <gary.schwartz@xs4all.nl>

Date: Sat, 9 Jun 2007 17:22:06 +0200

To: "Alfred Bader" <alfred@alfredbader.com>

CC: <mirjam@jhm.nl>, "Loekie Schwartz" <loekie.schwartz@xs4all.nl>

Dear Alfred,

Many thanks for sending me that page from the Soncino Sanhedrin. The editors don't say whether any of the commentaries they quote illustrate the lettering of the mene mene, but the way Samuel's interpretation of the writing on the wall is quoted in the Gemara itself makes the solution reproducible to anyone who can write Hebrew letters.

Your remark that Dutch Christians were unlikely to be aware of such an obscure piece of rabbinic lore led me to look for an edition of Sanhedrin in Rembrandt's time. And indeed, in 1629, in Amsterdam, appeared (from the Union Catalogue of Dutch libraries, Picarta):

Titel: Duo tituli Thalmudici Sanhedrin et Maccoth : quorum ille agit de Synedriis, iudiciis, suppliciis capitalibus Ebræorum; hic de pœna falsi testimonii, exsilio et asylis, flagellatione: cum excerptis ex utriusque Gemara, versa, & annotationibus, depromtis maximam partem ex Ebræorum commentariis, illustrata / à Ioanne Coch Bremensi
Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669)
Auteur(s):
Uitgever: Amsterodami : Apud Ioannem Ianssonivm [Franeker], : typ. F. Heynsii
Drukker: Janssonius, Johannes Amsterdam, 1608, 1613-1664
Heyns, Feddrick Franeker, 1615-1637
Jaar: 1629
Collatie: [32], 436, [2]. ; in-4
Collatieformule: *4* 4 A-3l 4
Annotatie: Tekst in het Latijn en Hebreeuws

This seems to be a Mishna translation with excerpts from the Gemara as well. It was not referred to by Littman in his article on the zayin-nun mistake, and I don't think Hersherr notes it either. He wouldn't have, since he thinks that Rembrandt's use of good Hebrew letters makes it likely that the Belshazzar was made for Dutch Jews.

As soon as I can I am going to take a look at the edition to see what it says about Belshazzar. But it isn't even necessary that this particular Gemara was published there. Coccejus was no slouch, and as publisher and translator of Sanhedrin we can be sure that even if he did not include this Gemara passage in his edition of 1629 he knew Samuel's solution for the mene mene perfectly well. So your assumption that Christians would not be aware of the passage is I'm sorry to say not correct. By this time Christian Talmud studies had reached a high degree of sophistication and quality, and Coccejus was one of the top specialists of the age.

And now comes the part for which I could kick myself in the butt: in 1629, when he published his Duo tituli Thalmudici, Coccejus was in Franeker, where he was a pupil of Johannes Maccovius. And in 1634 Maccovius, who was tested in Hebrew for his chair in Franeker, became Rembrandt's brother-in-law. So, here it is 1635 and Rembrandt needs advice for Hebrew lettering. To whom would he more likely turn? A controversial rabbi he didn't know or his own brother-in-law? And who would Maccovius consult if not Coccejus?

Although I still think it makes sense to look at the connections with the Amsterdam and Leiden Hebraists for which I argued in my book, I missed the most direct source for Hebrew available to Rembrandt, in his own family. That would have made my argument so much stronger that Dutch artists were more likely to consult Christian theologians than Jewish rabbis! Argghh! Well, it gives me material for a new publication of some kind, maybe a column to begin with. The secondary link with Coccejus also opens up new vistas on the tablet letters in the 1650s. On p. 325 in my book of 1984 I related the Moses to the dispute in the Dutch church about the Sabbath. Well, the leader of one of the factions was Coccejus.

Thank you for putting me on this track, Alfred, even if you might not agree with the thrust of my argument, which takes Rembrandt further away from direct, constructive ties with contemporary Jews. I am very pleased to



Sanhedrin!

share this idea with you.

I was also pleased, I must say, by the role of honor assigned to me in the introduction of Laurence Sigal's catalogue of the Paris exhibition: "Les passages relatifs à la question de "Rembrandt et les juifs" dans le récent, et par ailleurs remarquable, *Rembrandt* de Gary Schwartz constituent, à cet égard, une entreprise de démolition complète de cent cinquante ans de tradition historiographique." That's a different tone than the usual "We knew it all along anyway, what are you getting excited about?" and I completely agree.

With all good wishes,
Gary

Gary Schwartz, webmaster
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W www.garyschwartzarthistorian.nl



Dear Dr. Cahen,

My son Daniel has received your catalog De 'joodse' Rembrandt and has loaned it to me. The copy which you sent to me has been delayed in the mail but will arrive here soon. But Daniel and I live just a few blocks apart and so we can both easily study the catalog.

Unfortunately I understand only about 60-70% of the text, though undoubtedly the Bader Curator at Queen's, David de Witt, will be able to help me. But do you have any plans to republish this most important catalog in English?

With all good wishes I remain

Yours sincerely,
Alfred Bader

Joël Cahen wrote:

Dear Alfred,

Please let me know if the books arrived,

Thanks,

Joel Cahen

Van: Alfred Bader Fine Arts [mailto:baderfa@execpc.com]

Verzonden: Wednesday, May 09, 2007 8:31 PM

Aan: Gary Schwartz

Onderwerp: Your book

Dear Gary,

I have been reading books and articles on Rembrandt since 1948 and I bought my first perhaps Rembrandt, C-18, in 1959. But I must tell you that in all those years I have not really enjoyed and learned as much from one book as I have from your Rembrandt book which I just finished reading.

However, I have some serious questions about pp. 299-305 dealing with Rembrandt and the Jews and I hope that you can answer these questions.

In the last paragraph of p. 302 you wrote "There is only one documented instance of Rembrandt painting and etching portraits of Jews and that is the portrait disputed by Andrada." But, Gary, on that very page you illustrate Rembrandt's *Portrait of Bueno* who certainly was a Jew.

If I understand you correctly, you believe that Rembrandt did not get to know Menasseh ben Israel until long after Rembrandt's painting of the *Feast of Belshazzar* was painted. I have always believed that Rembrandt met Menasseh ben Israel before he painted that painting and that the Rabbi told Rembrandt about the writing being vertical, as the Rabbi published shortly thereafter.



Also, when writing about the so-called *Jewish Bride*, you seem to overlook the fact that this is really an illustration of the love of Isaac for Rebecca, because there is a drawing for this painting which shows, in the upper right hand corner, the Philistine king watching their necking. Do you not believe that this painting really depicts Isaac and Rebecca?

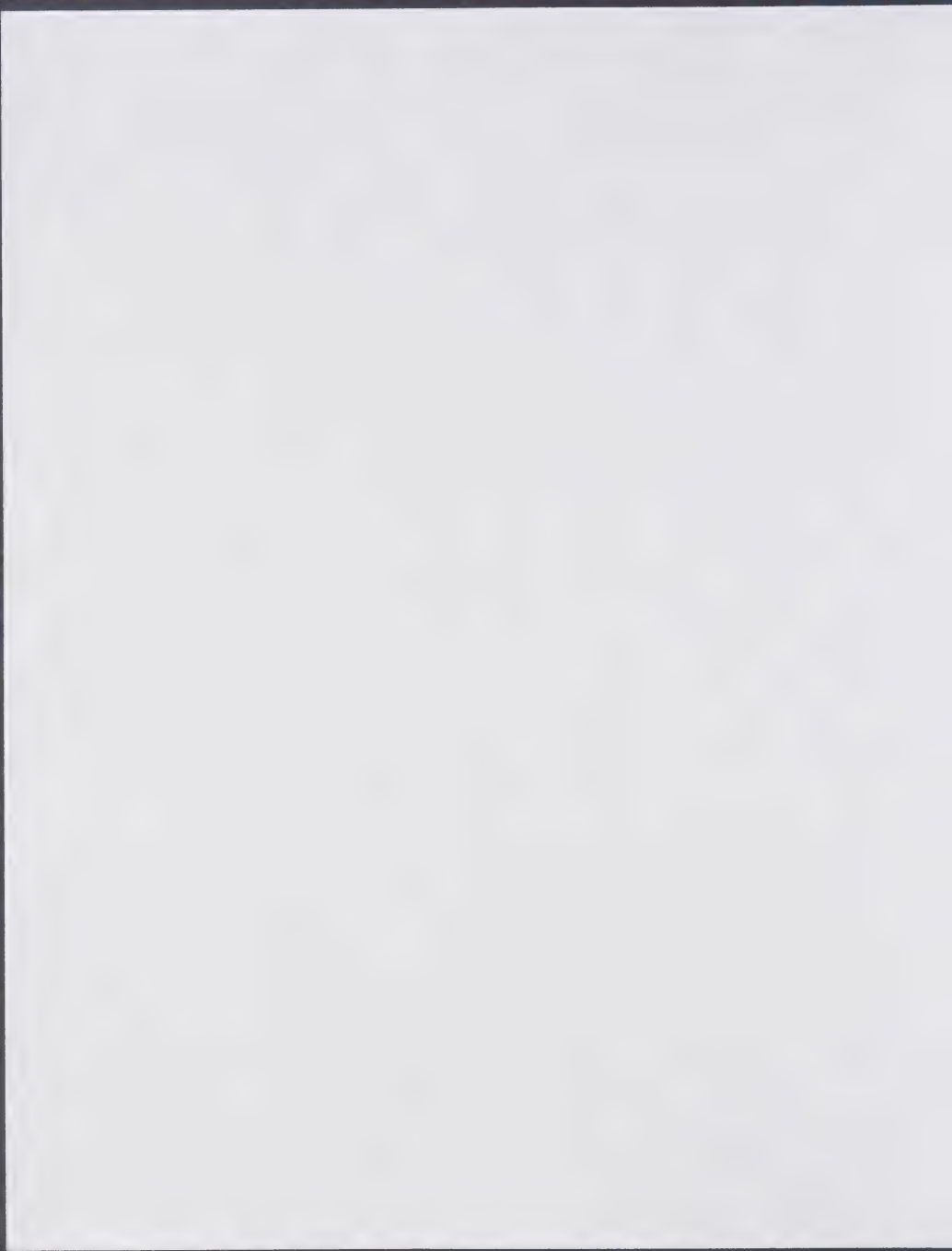
For many years I have given a talk entitled "The Bible Through Dutch Eyes" in which I talk about these very subjects. I actually gave that talk at the Rembrandthuis last year.

Unfortunately I have not yet received the catalog of the Rembrandt exhibition in the Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, but Dr. Joel Cahen has promised to send copies to my son and me and I much look forward to seeing the comments there.

Incidentally, I am glad to see at your illustration 533 you refer to that painting as *Moses with the tablets of the law* and not Moses smashing the Ten Commandments. I have learned a great deal from Professor Christian Tumpel, my good friend, but disagree with him in that one case which he calls "Smashing the Ten Commandments". I believe that it is Moses showing the second Ten Commandments.

I much look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,
Alfred Bader



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Dear Gary,

Thank you for your most interesting long e-mail of last Thursday.

Like you, I also no longer believe that the portrait etching of 1636 depicts Menasseh.

But I do believe that the lettering for the Belshazzar in London must have come from Menasseh. I do not think that any Christian scholar, no matter how well he knew Hebrew, would have known the discussion in Sanhedrin 22A which Menasseh certainly knew and on which he elaborated in his book published shortly after Rembrandt painted the lettering vertically. Thus, I believe that they knew each other and surely respected each other from the 1630s on.

The Jewish Bride is a very late work and it is most likely that the drawing is preparatory to it. And of course the drawing shows the Philistine king, so that we can be reasonably certain that it depicts the love of Isaac for Rebecca.

To turn to the major question - was Rembrandt a friend of the Jews? Certainly not generally because he had serious fights with his neighbor, Pinto, and with two Andrades who were probably related to each other.

Gary, I am a Jew and yet have had some serious fights with other Jews, though of course I respect a good many. Rembrandt must have respected Menasseh or would not have been willing to illustrate his book with four of his etchings.

I very much look forward to receiving the catalog for the Jewish Museum exhibition from which I am bound to learn a good deal.

I am mailing to you a Xerox copy from the English translation of the Talmud showing Sanhedrin 22A.

Best wishes,
Alfred

Gary Schwartz wrote:

Dear Alfred,

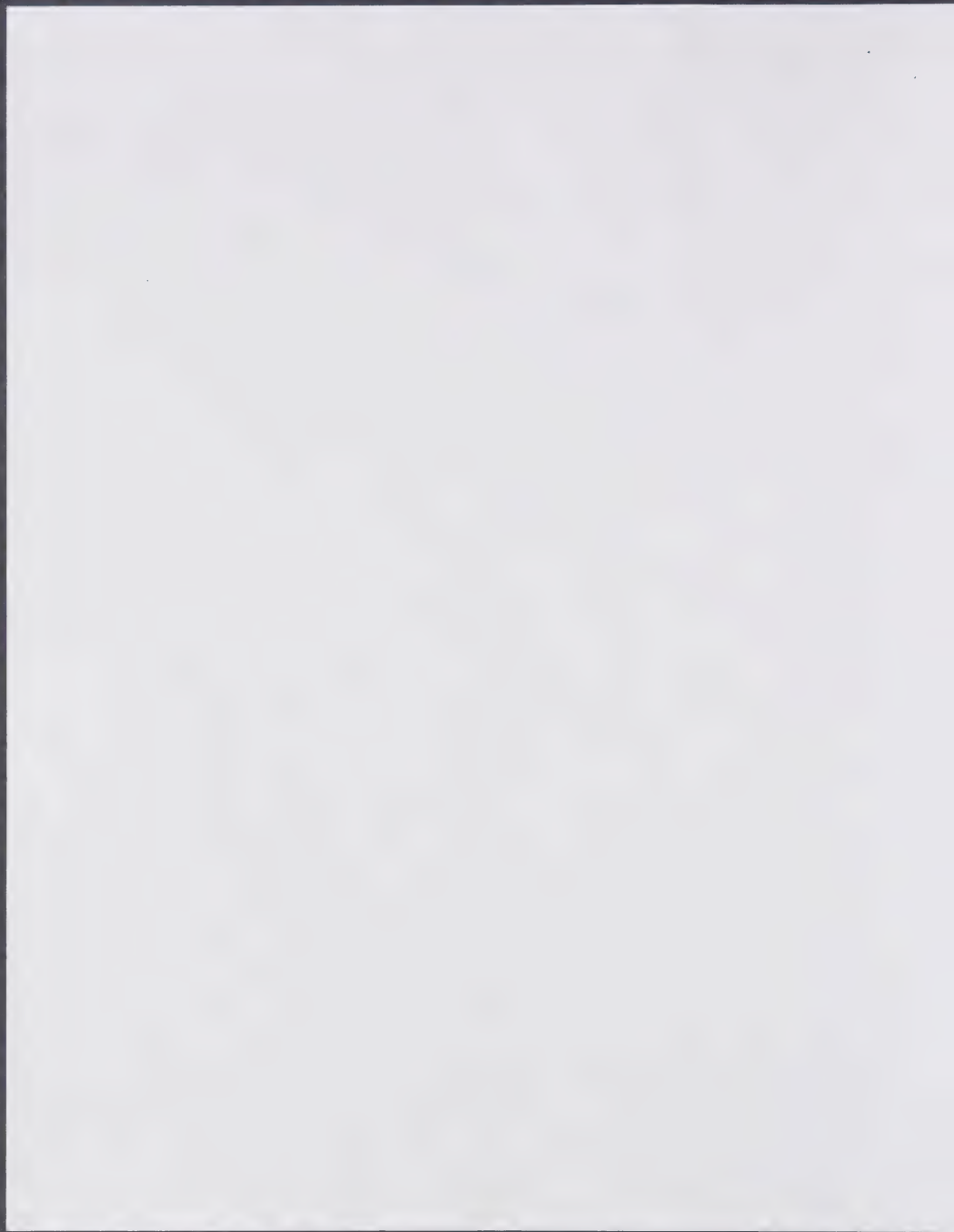
Thank you so much for this precious compliment. It means a great deal to me.

Thank you too for asking the questions you did, on a subject about which you not only know so much, but have enriched with your collecting, lending and donations. My answers follow.

P. 302: In that passage I was speaking of documented portrait commissions, in relation to the question of whether or not Rembrandt can be considered a friend of the Jews. We know of the Bueno portraits only from the etching and preparatory oil sketch, not from documents. In cases where documentation is available, such as that for the Wtenbogaert, which turned out to be ordered by a third party, or the rejected Andrada commission, you often learn things you could not possibly guess from the works alone.

Menasseh ben Israel: Like you, in 1984 I too still believed that Rembrandt knew Menasseh from the 1630s on. This was based on the portrait etching of 1636 and the lettering of the Belshazzar. However, I have become convinced by the arguments of Adri Offenberg and Bas Dudok van Heel that the etching does not show Menasseh, which takes away one of the pieces of evidence.

About the inscription: indeed Rembrandt adopts the same basic solution as Menasseh to the question of why Mene mene tekel ufasin was unreadable to Belshazzar and his advisors. However, this in itself, in the absence of corroborating evidence, is not enough to establish that Rembrandt knew Menasseh himself. He could have been given the information by someone else who knew it. (I have been told that the solution - the vertical disposition of the letters - was not original with Menasseh, but I have not checked this out.) Also, the mistake in the final letter is an indication that Rembrandt was not consulting Menasseh throughout work on the painting.



What guided me this time around was a re-evaluation of the common notion that European Christian artists would consult Jews at all on Hebrew inscriptions. When I found that letter from Constantijn Huygens to Cesare Calandrini that I refer to on p. 300, note 29, in which Huygens asked Calandrini for Hebrew lettering for a painting by Jacob de Gheyn, the scales fell from my eyes. Of course, I thought: how could a Christian artist who knew no Hebrew take the risk of consulting a Jew on something that might be doctrinally sensitive? Of course he would turn to a learned, trusted Christian. In the case of the Belshazzar that could easily have led through a third party to Menasseh, who was in contact with people like Barlaeus. For Huygens's letter, see http://www.inghist.nl/pdf/huygens/losse_maandbestanden/1617/1617_08.pdf#page=2, nr. 36. I am hoping to publish the complete letter one of these days, together with Mirjam Alexander of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.

Then, between 1636 and 1655, there is no further indication of contact between Rembrandt and Menasseh. Nor is anything said about it in the biographical literature on either of them, whereas it did go into writings on Barlaeus that he called Menasseh a friend.

The Jewish bride: I know the drawing, but I'm not convinced that it is a preparatory drawing for the painting. As you know, in my book of 1984 I launched the suggestion that the subject comes from a play by Jacob Cats, *Aspasia*. I am still inclined to believe that. Saam Nystad has picked up the idea and worked it out in further detail in a book he published last year. In any case, by leaving out the figure of Abimelech seeing the embracing couple, Rembrandt left the identification moot. I left out the reference to *Aspasia* in the new book by accident.

Have you seen Bert Natter's theory that the subject is Jephtha and his daughter? What it has going for it is that that is the name given to the painting in the earliest record of it, by John Smith. And in 1659 Vondel wrote a play on the theme, in which the description of Jephtha's daughter is close to the woman in the painting. He gives more space in his article disproving that the subject is Isaac and Rebecca than in supporting his identification. The court is still out on this one.

More in general about my chapter on Rembrandt and the Jews. In this book I decided to pick up Landsberger's question very pointedly: was Rembrandt a friend of the Jews of his time? Reviewing the evidence critically, I conclude that he was not, that he was a typical Christian of his time in this regard in his principled rejection of Judaism and lack of sympathy for Jews. A different tone can be struck with regard to the same subject matter, as is being done in the current exhibition in Paris, which phrases the question differently. See <http://www.artactu.com/rembrandt-et-la-nouvelle-jerusalem-juifs-et-chretiens-a-amsterdam-au-siecle-d-or-artic> If you ask: of what elements of Jewry and Jewish life was Rembrandt aware and how did he use them in his art? then another answer will emerge. At this moment, I found it more important to deal with the matter of Rembrandt's supposed friendship for the Jews, since I felt it was in need of revision.

This morning David de Witt sent me an update of his publications for his page on the CODART website: http://www.codart.nl/curators/member_page2/?person_id=376 I was delighted to see that his catalogue of your donated and promised Dutch and Flemish paintings will be published in December.

With all good wishes to you and Isabel,
Gary

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www.codart.nl

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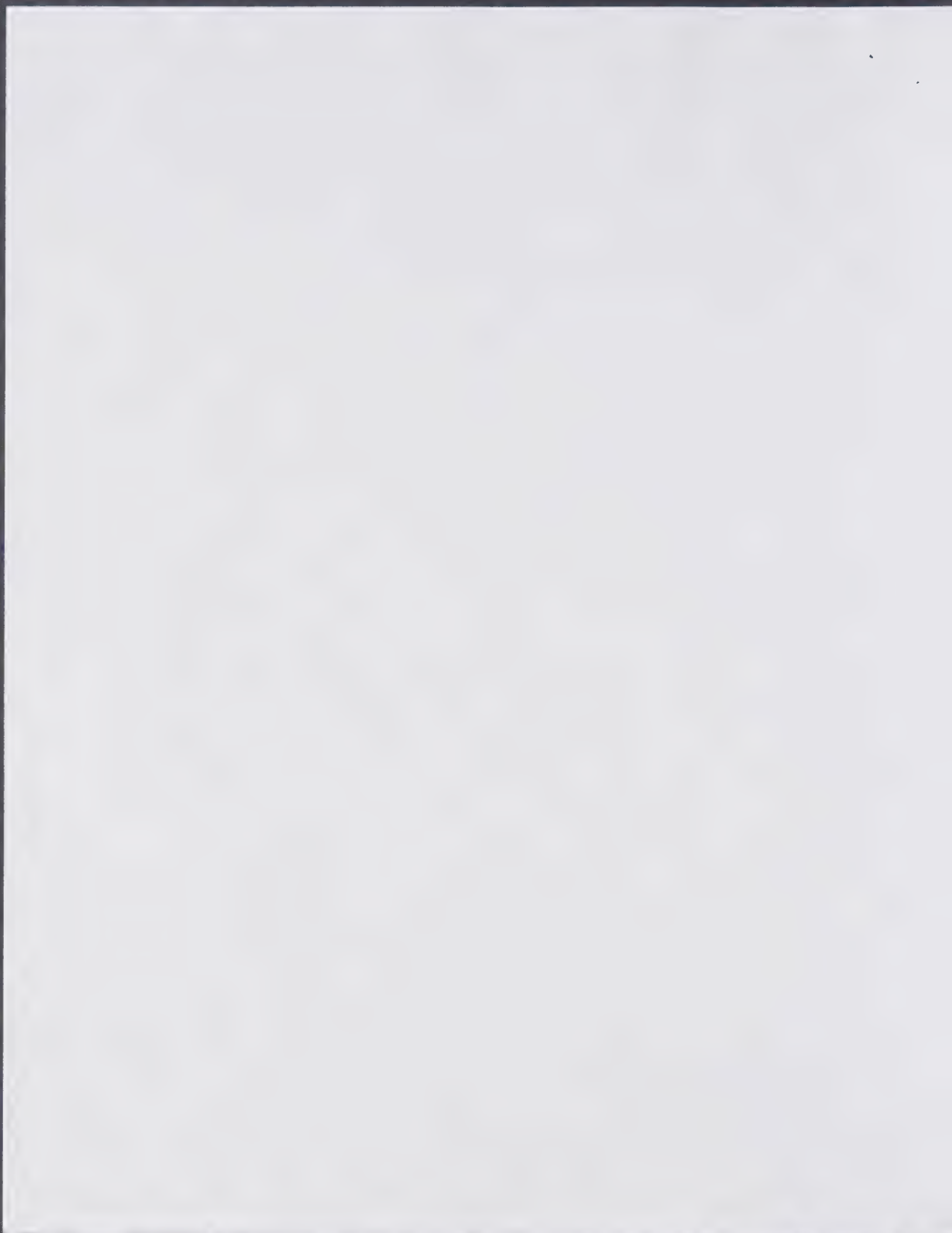
Van: Alfred Bader Fine Arts [<mailto:baderfa@execpc.com>]

Verzonden: woensdag 9 mei 2007 20:31

Aan: Gary Schwartz

Onderwerp: Your book

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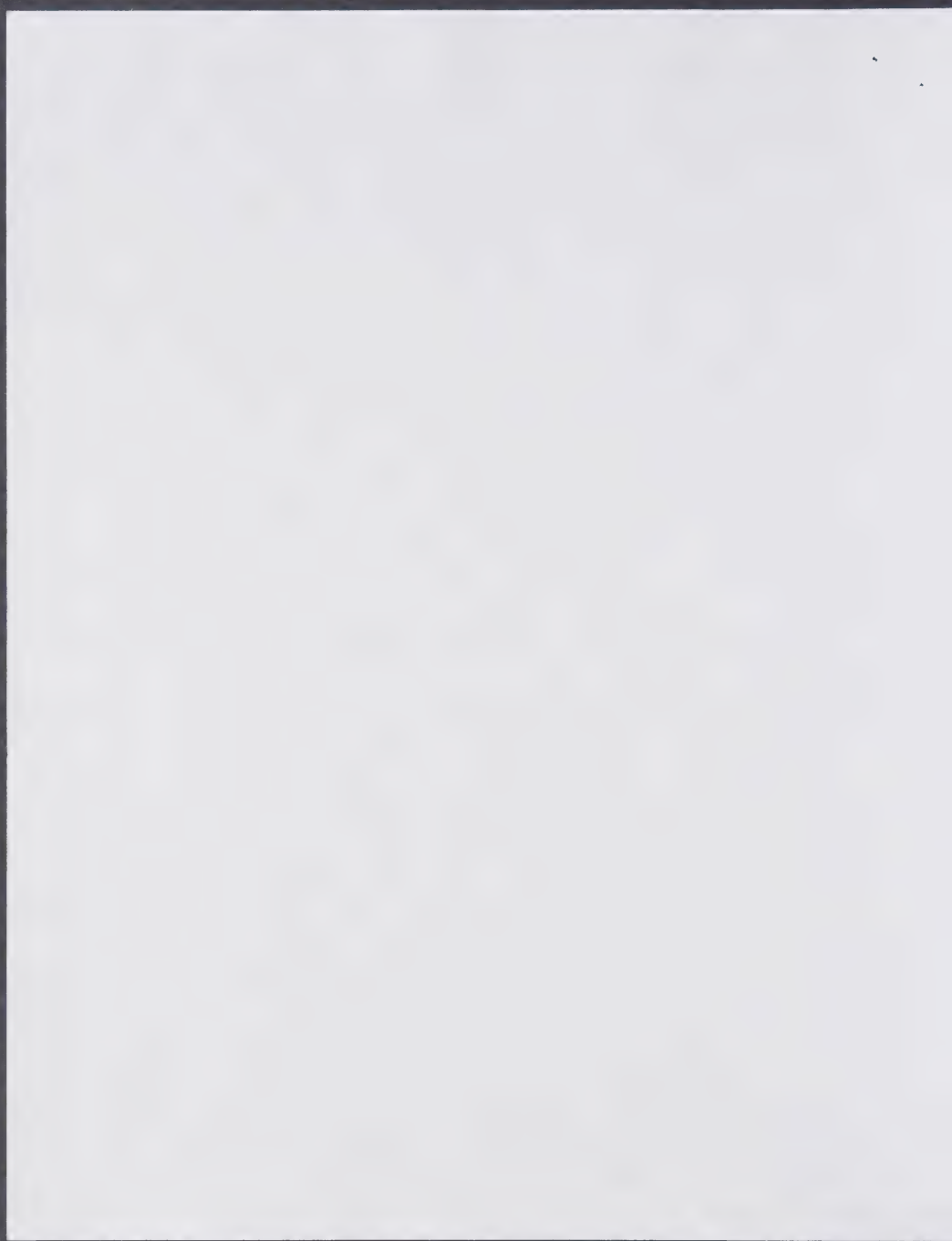
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Best wishes,
Alfred Bader



Alfred Bader Fine Arts

To: David De Witt (david.dewitt@queensu.ca)
Attachments: Schalken.jpg

Dear David,

I hope you won't mind bringing the manuscripts and CDs back from Dr. Akenson when you visit us at the end of August. Do you plan to arrive on Friday morning, August 31st and leave on Tuesday, September 4th? Do you have that French book on Schalken at Queen's? If so, could you please check whether the painting I bought at the last Dorotheum sale, picture attached, is in that book.

This painting was in the collection of Herbert Girardet, at Lempert's in Cologne on June 5, 1975 and then again at Paul Brand in Amsterdam on the 30th of November 1976. Do you happen to know how I might get to look at these two auction catalogs?

We certainly look forward to your and Franziska's visit.

All the best,
Alfred

