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The Bulletin of The Cleveland Museum of Art

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JAN STEEN

Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman

One of the most dramatic and colorful stories in the Old Testament is the one which tells of the deliverance of the Jews in Persia through the good offices of Esther, who foiled the evil designs of Haman, King Ahasuerus' (or Xerxes') Grand-Vizier at the Court of Susa. The startling looks of Esther, whom the King had chosen as his new Queen in a nationwide beauty contest, the dramatic contents of the story, and its setting of Oriental splendor early struck the fancy of painters and appealed especially to some of the most imaginative artists in seventeenth-century Holland. *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*¹ (Cover) by Jan Steen (1626-1679), recently acquired from the John L. Severance Fund, is the first work by that master to enter the Museum's outstanding collection of portraits, genre, landscapes, and still lifes by Dutch seventeenth-century painters. It introduces in subject and treatment a new and interesting aspect of Dutch painting of the period.

The majority of Jan Steen's works depict jovial scenes of middle-class Dutch men and women, frequently including children, in homes, or in and outside taverns for feasting and merrymaking. Born in 1626, the son of a respectable brewer in Leyden, Jan Steen was registered at the local university in 1646 and became a member of the

St. Luke's guild two years later. His first teacher was the Italianate, Nicholas Knupfer. He was next taught, though little influenced, by Jan van Goyen, whose daughter, Margaretha, he married after moving from Leyden to The Hague in 1649. In 1654 Jan Steen moved to Delft, where he leased a brewery in a futile attempt to subsidize his income from painting, as many of his contemporaries were forced to do. Although Jan Steen was especially known for his love of gay times, he was hampered by the financial difficulties common among the painters of the period. The competition was keen in supplying the many demands of the proud bourgeoisie who were eager to decorate their homes, but paid only very moderate prices. Thus, for example, Meindert Hobbema added to his funds considerably by gaging wines; and Jan van Goyen traded in tulips, while his son-in-law, Jan Steen, tried his luck, mostly in vain, as an innkeeper and brewer. During 1661-1669, after a short sojourn in Warmond, near Leyden, Steen lived in Haarlem; and it was probably during the latter part of his stay that he painted his various depictions of the story of Esther. After the death of both his wife Margaretha and his father in 1669, Steen returned to his native Leyden where he became an innkeeper, married Maria van Egmont, and executed many paintings; but he died a poor man in 1679, leaving an inventory of some five hundred unsold panels and canvases.²

There are some fifty dated pictures of circa 1650 to 1677³; and little agreement exists among scholars on dates for the remaining works of that period. Steen was an extremely eclectic artist and, like all Dutch painters of his time, made ample use of engravings and works of other artists. Furthermore, being an extremely prolific painter, he was bound to repeat figures and details, as well as compositions, of his own pictures over a large span of years. It is, therefore, difficult to recognize a clear stylistic chronology in his work. Perhaps the most

COVER: *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*.
Oil on canvas, 24-1/2 x 36 inches. Jan Steen, Dutch,
1626-1679. John L. Severance Fund. 64.153

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distinctive difference exists between the majority of his paintings of the sixties—particularly the late sixties—and his second Leyden period, the seventies. The former generally share predominantly warm tonalities, strong highlights, few strong color chords, and well-balanced figure groups, among which one or two figures are given prominence in point of execution and composition. Their character is often intensely expressive, dramatic if not theatrical. The latter are distinguished by their lighter multiple colors and smaller figures disposed in larger, airier spaces, often on garden terraces. They are less compactly and coherently composed than his earlier works, and of a more decorative character. Some of these late paintings seem to be the direct forerunners of Watteau's "fêtes galantes."⁴

One of the most recent and successful attempts in dating Jan Steen's paintings of the sixties was provided by Dr. Wolfgang Stechow in an article which published Steen's *Merry Company*, acquired by the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin in 1957.⁵ Dr. Stechow draws a convincing parallel between the Oberlin painting and Steen's *Banquet of Cleopatra* of Goettingen, which is dated 1667. Comparisons are suggested, in turn, between the latter painting and a version of *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman* in the Barber Institute at Birmingham University (Fig. 1) on one hand, and the Cleveland version on the other. The painting in the Barber Institute seems a close-up version of the center group in the Cleveland picture, but the figures are reversed. The former painting is more theatrical, while the latter has a more genre-like character. Although the Oberlin picture is smaller than the Cleveland work, is painted on a panel, and its brush strokes are more rapid, the over-all warm tonality of brown to cinnamon with flashes of reds, the obvious prominence given to the female foreground figure, the more sketchy execution of figures in the background, and finally the stately archway and the wine cooler in the lower left corner (on the right in the Goettingen painting) point to a relationship with the Cleveland *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*, and place it into approximately the same period; i.e., the late sixties.

The Cleveland version of *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman* was not listed among the seven pictures dealing with either the Esther banquet or the scene of Esther before Ahasuerus in Hofstede de Groot's *Catalogue Raisonné*.⁶ However, it was mentioned as one of the two additional versions (No. 19a) in his unpublished supple-



Figure 1. *The Wrath of Ahasuerus*. Oil on canvas, 50-1/2 x 60-1/2 inches. Jan Steen. Courtesy, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The University, Birmingham.

ment written after the Cleveland picture, then in the collection of W. J. R. Dreesmann, appeared in the Jan Steen exhibition in the Museum de Lakenhal in Leyden in 1926. In 1927 A. Bredius published his comprehensive book on Jan Steen's *oeuvre*,⁷ in which he mentions only three of the nine versions: the Cleveland one, the one in the Barber Institute, and the third one (nearly identical with the Cleveland painting), then in the Count Potocki collection, which was described as a later but inferior copy of the Cleveland painting. Along with the *Esther before Ahasuerus* in the Hermitage and the *Wrath of Ahasuerus* in the Barber Institute, the Cleveland *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman* takes its place of first rank among Steen's Biblical paintings. All three share in varying degree a certain theatricality and stage-like composition of figures.

True to his impetuous temperament and the Baroque taste for the dramatic, Jan Steen chose for his Cleveland painting (as well as for the one at the Barber Institute) the climactic moment at the banquet when the King, being told by Queen Esther that "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole Kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai" (Esther 7:7), springs up from the table, beside himself

with rage, while Haman, caught unawares, flings down his wine glass and shrinks away in shame and horror. In spite of the Oriental paraphernalia and colorful medley of guests from all lands, Steen, like all Dutch painters of the period, insists on including familiar aspects of Dutch life. The Achaemenian court of Susa has been exchanged for a Dutch locale—granted, of an unusual setting. Esther has become a Dutch Stella—her servants are old-time friends whom we encounter in many of Steen's family and tavern scenes. The wine cooler, goblets, vessels, and jugs are Dutch; and so is, above all, the still life on the banquet table, complete with pewter, Roemer and Delft, all of which tend to make King Ahasuerus look like a guest in his own palace. A strong spotlight focuses on the center of interest—the banquet table with Ahasuerus and Haman, and, most intensely and deservingly, on Queen Esther. Through the open gateway to the left falls a soft, late-afternoon light, while a faint beam of daylight models the outlines of a maidservant in the right background, indicating the existence of a second opening. Like a circular shadow around the dominant light move fifteen figures fulfilling their various functions as participants of the feast, emerging here and there from their penumbral existence. The foreground group forms a well-balanced diamond with Ahasuerus at the apex and Esther and Haman at the two opposite sides. Diagonally placed into the room, lined up with the checkered marble tile floor,

they lead the eye into the depth of the room, where a lively interplay of tone and color, light and shade, obscures the formality of the setting and denies all confinement and measure.

Like a conductor of a large chorus, Ahasuerus silences, with one mighty gesture, the tumult of the festive crowd. With studied ease each figure halts its step in its most photogenic pose: a head well posed, a figure erect, a face showing its delicate profile, a neck its softly modeled lines, hands their grace in holding a goblet, jug, or vessel, or in gathering the folds of a sumptuous cloak. Gestures and facial expressions are brought into focus by beams and flashes of light which model forms, determine color intensities, give metal and carved wood their gold and silvery shine, make jewelry and glass sparkle, give tactility to delicate skin and rich materials. A purplish-brown haze fills the room, from which emerge flashes of brilliant colors, among which the warm tones dominate. The bright brick red of Esther's chair connects her with the velvety red of Ahasuerus' cape and draws immediate attention to their royal rank and the importance of their role in the drama. The brilliance of the red upholstery on Esther's chair also brings into prominence the graceful young figure in blue directly behind her, to whom in point of execution, choice of costume, jewelry, and color, the artist has most convincingly reserved the role of the Queen's maid of honor. Another flash of bright red highlights the still life which

Figure 2. *Van Campens Amsterdamse Showburg*. Engraving, 1658. S. Savry, Dutch. Reproduced from *Oud-Holland*, LXVI (1951), 181.

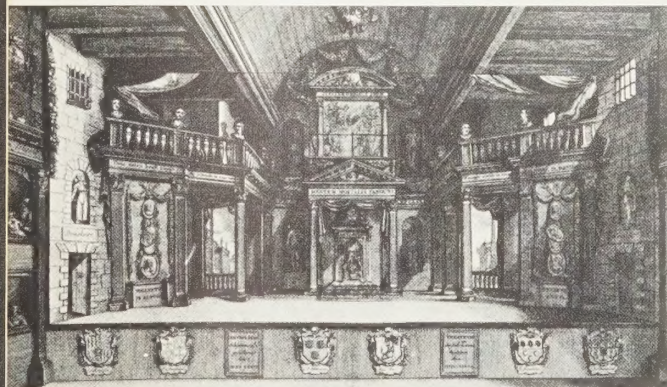


Figure 3. *Esther before Ahasuerus* (detail). Oil on canvas, 42 x 33 inches. Jan Steen. Courtesy, State Hermitage, Leningrad.



forms the nucleus of the diamond composition. A spot of luminous brick red flares up once more to the extreme right in the flat bonnet of the fool. All blue tones, in line with the blue sky visible through the open archway to the left, are kept in somber key, allowing the stronger warm blue of Esther's maid of honor and the intense cool blue of Esther's taffeta skirt of majestic bulkiness to stand out all the more. Her skirt is offset by the cinnamon color of her bodice of cascading silk and the looping white tablecloth to her right. Jan Steen has spared no means to portray Esther's feminine charms, which would make her Ahasuerus' choice all the more. The silky shawl-rug under the white linen tablecloth suggests the mauve of the floor to the left and the brick red of Esther's chair; and the gold ochre leads directly to the color of Haman's suit, which complements brilliantly the blue of Esther's skirt. The magnificence of Haman's white fur-trimmed cape of burgundy-colored satin draped artistically over the arm of his chair, together with the broken glass, strikes a note of irony stressing the fragility and temporality of mundane power and glory. The youthful naiveté of the page flanking Haman, clad in satin of pearly blue, gracefully carrying a precious covered goblet, offers a strong contrast to the defeated and sickly look of the crushed villain. Looking at him sternly from across the table is presumably Mordecai, Esther's guardian, Haman's rival, emerging from the shadow of Ahasuerus' left side. On the right, separ-

ated only by a delicately rendered peacock tail topping a *pâté*, emerges like a stately column the proud figure of an elderly dignitary in a fur-trimmed coat and hat. His features bear resemblance to Jan Steen, who so often appears in his paintings under some conspicuous disguise.

In spite of faces, objects, and habits at home in seventeenth-century Holland and in Jan Steen's own genre paintings, the picture defies definition of time and place. Dutch contemporary costumes mingle with those from centuries ago, at home in Spain, Italy, and Germany. Also fantastic are the various architectural elements, the Renaissance archways, the richly carved baroque throne, the marble columns implying a gallery above, and above all the curtain looped theatrically on both sides of the hall. The fool, totally unmoved by the dramatic events, appearing amidst the festive crowd to the extreme right of the picture, offers a clue. A longtime friend of the stage, in one hand his bauble with the ridiculous face and traditional asses' ears, the other hand tipping his flat red bonnet towards the spectator, he reminds him with a foolish grin that all is but a play—which indeed it is.

At the time of Jan Steen, theater played a vital part in Dutch life, influenced by the English and French traveling players. It owed its widespread popularity, however, to one of the most active guilds, that of the Rhetoricians or *Rederijkers*. Its most famous branch

Figure 4. Frontispiece of Joannes Serwouter's play, *Hester or the Deliverance of the Jews*. Engraving. Pieter Quast, Dutch, 1606-1647.



Figure 5. *Esther before Ahasuerus*. Engraving. Lucas van Leyden, Dutch, 1494?-1533.



was the Oude Kamer in Amsterdam, where the Schou-
burgh was built in 1638.⁸ A close study of the setting in
the Cleveland picture reveals that most of its major
architectural features are similar to that of the Schou-
burgh stage (Fig. 2), such as the slightly receding side
portions, the conspicuous center, the two columns sup-
porting a balustraded balcony (not visible in the paint-
ing), and the two exits allowing actors to move freely
on and off stage. There also is strung across the stage a
rod for a space-dividing curtain.

After the *Rederijkers* merged with the most important
of all guilds, that of St. Luke's, the art of the stage and
painting experienced a lively interchange of ideas. This
is testified not only by the large guild membership of
many of the most outstanding painters of the time, such
as Frans Hals, Jan Vermeer, Adrian Brouwer, and Jan
Wyants,⁹ but also by the ample evidence of this cross-
fertilization in many of their works, particularly in the
paintings of Jan Steen. Apart from the fact that many
individual figures, costumes, and poses in Jan Steen's
work relate to engravings dealing with the European
theater,¹⁰ some of his paintings show the direct influence
of Dutch plays performed during his time. The late
Dutch art historian, Albert Heppner, in a study devoted
entirely to Jan Steen's relationship to the theater,¹¹
named some eighteen works which illustrate this point.

Joannes Serwouter's play, *Hester or the Deliverance
of the Jews*, one of the most popular plays of the time,
found direct reflection in all major versions of Steen's
paintings of the same subject, including the Cleveland
one. To illustrate his point more specifically, Dr. Hepp-
ner used the *Esther before Ahasuerus* in the Hermitage
and compared the major group in that painting (Fig. 3)
with an engraved frontispiece by Pieter Quast (1606-
1647) for Serwouter's printed edition of the Esther play
(Fig. 4). In turn, both Jan Steen's figure group in the
Hermitage painting and Pieter Quast's engraved front-
ispiece closely relate to an engraving of the same sub-
ject by the early sixteenth-century master Lucas van
Leyden (1494?-1533),¹² whose work was greatly ad-
mired in and beyond Holland (Fig. 5); Jan Steen, in
particular, paid close attention to his style. It seems very
likely, therefore, that Jan Steen and Pieter Quast both
knew the engraving which in its own right may have
been influenced by the theater, since already by the first
half of the sixteenth century there were as many as 250
Rederijker chambers active in staging religious plays.
Jan Steen's Esther group in the Hermitage painting
shows a clear understanding of Lucas van Leyden's style
and reveals his affinity for it in his own work. Not only
did Steen reproduce competently the rich play of dra-
pery of the three female figures in the engraving, but

Figure 6. *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*.
Drawing. Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch, 1606-1669.
Courtesy, Szevmuvaszeti Museum, Budapest.



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Figure 7. *The Wrath of Ahasuerus*.
Oil on canvas, 16-1/2 x 19 inches.
Attributed to Jan Steen. Present location unknown.



above all, contrary to Pieter Quast, he captured Esther's humble simplicity and dignity. Moreover, the naïve and bewildered expression of the servant to the extreme right in Lucas van Leyden's print points directly to her seventeenth-century counterpart—Esther's beautiful, blue-robed maid of honor in the Cleveland canvas, looking on with a similar expression of incomprehension and naïveté.

The Cleveland painting reveals, as one would expect, that Jan Steen paid close attention to yet another native of Leyden—his contemporary, the great Rembrandt, seventeen years his senior. The figure of Ahasuerus, appearing in turban and osprey, is clearly reminiscent of Rembrandt's Orientals in his numerous portrait studies and Biblical scenes, including the banquet of Esther (Fig. 6).¹³ While the drawing may also be related to a work attributed to Jan Steen, possibly a copy after the one accounted for as No. 20 by Hofstede de Groot (see n. 6) (Fig. 7), it seems unquestionable that Jan Steen was familiar with Rembrandt's *Mene Tekel* (Fig. 8) when he painted his Ahasuerus in the Cleveland picture. King Ahasuerus resembles King Belsazar in Rembrandt's picture in face type, age, and attire, as well as in the intensely emotional expression bordering on theatricality. Although Belsazar's role as the prospective loser relates more to that of Haman's than to King

Ahasuerus', at first glance the two kings seem to act alike; each has abruptly arisen from a banquet, each outstretches his arm in menacing gesture, each fixes his glance sternly at the center of attraction, one in full, the other in lost profile. Jan Steen must have studied Rembrandt's *Mene Tekel* carefully and taken notice of the subtle difference in which the two kings should act their roles. Although Ahasuerus retained a touch of Belsazar's expression of incomprehension, he faces Haman with unrestrained rage, his left arm outstretched, while his right hand is clenched into a tight fist, suspended above the table. Belsazar's left hand is slightly arched, while his right recoils into an ugly claw. Ahasuerus' figure stands erect and proud, while Belsazar's body begins to arch, as if to shield himself from the wrath of God.

The subjects in Rembrandt's *Mene Tekel* and Steen's *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*, both treating stories from the Old Testament, suggest an interesting aspect of seventeenth-century painting in Holland. While one would expect that the continuous wars in which that country was involved throughout the better part of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would reflect in its art, Dutch still lifes—interiors of orderly and disorderly households full of leisurely life and frolicking—in no way betrayed the unrest of war, but rather mirrored a

Figure 8. *Belshazzar's Feast*.
Oil on canvas. Rembrandt van Rijn.
Courtesy, The National Gallery, London.



Figure 9. Detail of Cover.



peaceful existence. The revived interest in stories from the Old Testament, such as the one of Esther in particular, perhaps most directly reflected a national feeling of pride. The Dutch, like the Jews, had tenaciously fought for their freedom from a foreign overlordship, and the Old Testament offered, therefore, in many of its aspects, a convincing parallel between the victorious roads which the Jews and the Dutch had taken from oppression to liberation.

However edifying the story, and whatever its moral value may be, a painting depends on its painter as a play on its actors. Influenced by the theater and its enriched imagery, combining the real with the fantastic, Jan Steen exploited the story depicted in *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*, its wealth of drama and incident, and its Oriental flavor for his own intent as a Dutch painter: to display with the brilliancy of his accomplished technique the Dutch love for genre; for still life and portrait; for light, its magic and functional uses; for the fullness and solidity of forms and figures; for the sheen, luster, and opulence of surfaces, colors, and materials; for the simple dignity of the Dutch people and the refinement and earthiness of their life.

ANN TZEUTSCHLER LURIE
Assistant Curator of Paintings

¹64.153 *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*. Oil on canvas, 27-1/4 x 36 inches. John L. Severance Fund. Ex coll: Sale, Jolle Albertus Jolles en Hendrik de Winter, May 23, 1764, no. 30; Pieter Yver; W. J. R. Dreesmann, Amsterdam; Sale, Müller, Amsterdam, March 22, 1960; Douwes Brothers, Amsterdam, 1962; G. Cramer, The Hague, 1963.

²W. Martin, *Jan Steen* (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1954), p. 14.

³Eduard Trautscholdt, *Thieme-Becker Künstlerlexikon*, XXXI (1937).

⁴See: *Tuinfeest bij de Familie Paedts*, 1677, by Jan Steen, Private Collection, and *Les Plaisirs du Bal*, 1719, by Antoine Watteau, Dulwich College.

⁵Wolfgang Stechow, "Jan Steen's Merry Company," *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin*, XV (1957), 91-99.

⁶Following is a list of Jan Steen's paintings dealing with the story of Esther (Banquet, and Esther before Ahasuerus) according to Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century* (1908), I, 12-14; complete with additions and corrections listed in his unpublished supplement (ref. Trautscholdt, *Thieme-Becker*, XXXI, 511);

No. 17 *Esther before Ahasuerus*. 42 x 33 inches. State Hermitage, Leningrad. Ex coll: Hendrik Verschuuring, The Hague (Sale: September 17, 1770, No. 162).

No. 18 *The Wrath of Ahasuerus*. 50-1/2 x 60-1/2 inches. Barber Institute of Fine Arts, The University, Birmingham. Ex coll: R. Kann, Paris.

No. 19 *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*. 32 x 38-1/2 inches. Swiss Collection. Ex coll: Count Potocki, Paris (Sale: Dorotheum, Vienna, September 12, 1957).

No. 19a *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*, see n. 1.

No. 20 *The Wrath of Ahasuerus*. 16-1/2 x 19 inches. Present location not known. Ex coll: (Sale: May 14, 1851, No. 175); Ulrich Jager, Berlin, 1913; J. M. Hudig, Rotterdam, 1917; (Sale: Amsterdam, December 11, 1923, No. 503); J. Hageraats, The Hague, 1923. Note: A copy of this painting appeared in a sale in London in 1919. In as far as Hofstede de Groot's description of No. 20 (after the corrections in his supplement) fits the unidentified painting, reproduced under Fig. 7, excepting a jug in front of King Ahasuerus' plate, which is missing in the latter, and the figure of Haman which is much unlike Steen, this may be the copy of the London sale.

No. 20a *Esther and Ahasuerus*. Present location not known. Ex coll: (Sale: Amsterdam, September 17, 1727).

No. 20b *Esther's Banquet with Haman*. Present location not known. Ex coll: William Six; (Sale: Amsterdam, May 12, 1734, No. 125).

No. 21 *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*. 31-1/2 x 38-9/16 inches. Present location not known. Ex coll: D. Reus; (Sale: Amsterdam, May 24, 1752, No. 24).

No. 21a *Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*. Present location not known. Ex coll: J. Viet; (Sale: Amsterdam, October 12, 1774, No. 198); Wubbels.

⁷A. Bredius, *Jan Steen* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1927), p. 29, pl. 7. Note: Bredius lists the Cleveland picture as a signed work. To date, a signature has not been clearly identified.

⁸Heinz Kindermann, *Theatergeschichte Europas*, III, *Das Theater der Barockzeit* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, Verlag, 1959), p. 253.

⁹Albert Heppner, "The Popular Theatre of the Rederijkers in the Work of Jan Steen and his Contemporaries," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, III (1939-1940), 23.

¹⁰S. J. Gudlaugsson, *De Komedianten bij Jan Steen en zijn Tijdgenooten* (S. 'Gravenhage: A. A. M. Stols, Uitgever, 1945), p. 52 with particular reference to Jan Steen's hunchback dwarf as Pulcinello, such as in the Hermitage painting of *Esther before Ahasuerus*, in comparison with one of Jacopo Callot's engraved "Varie Figure Gobbi."

¹¹Heppner, pp. 22-48.

¹²Max J. Friedländer, *Meister der Graphik*, XIII, *Lucas van Leyden* (Leipzig: von Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1924), pl. XXXXIII, B. 31, dated 1518.

¹³*Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman*, drawing by Rembrandt, Szevmuvaszeti Museum, Budapest. Publ: Otto Benesch, "Die Rembrandtzeichnungen des Budapester Museums der Schönen Künste," *Belvedere*, IV, Bd. 8, 37-42 (1925), p. 128, pl. 11.

PIERRE PUGET

*Blessed
Alessandro Sauli*

Among sculptors of the seventeenth century, Pierre Puget can be assigned a position in the rank just below that of the great master, Bernini.¹ By virtue of his birth, training, and practice, Puget, alone among contemporary sculptors of equal importance, stood astride two great national schools of art, the French and the Italian. Born in Marseilles in 1620, he spent several formative years, from 1640 to 1643, working under Pietro da Cortona in Rome and Florence. Roman baroque art, thus experienced, persisted as an influence upon Puget's style throughout his career. In his work, however, that source was subjected to a certain geometric formalism of composition and restraint in the choice and representation of subjects, characteristics which have been associated with the French spirit in seventeenth-century art.

In 1659 Puget was called to Paris and shortly thereafter was commissioned by Fouquet, Louis XIV's minister of finance, to obtain sculptures for his estate of Vaux-le-Vicomte. For this purpose he went to Italy,

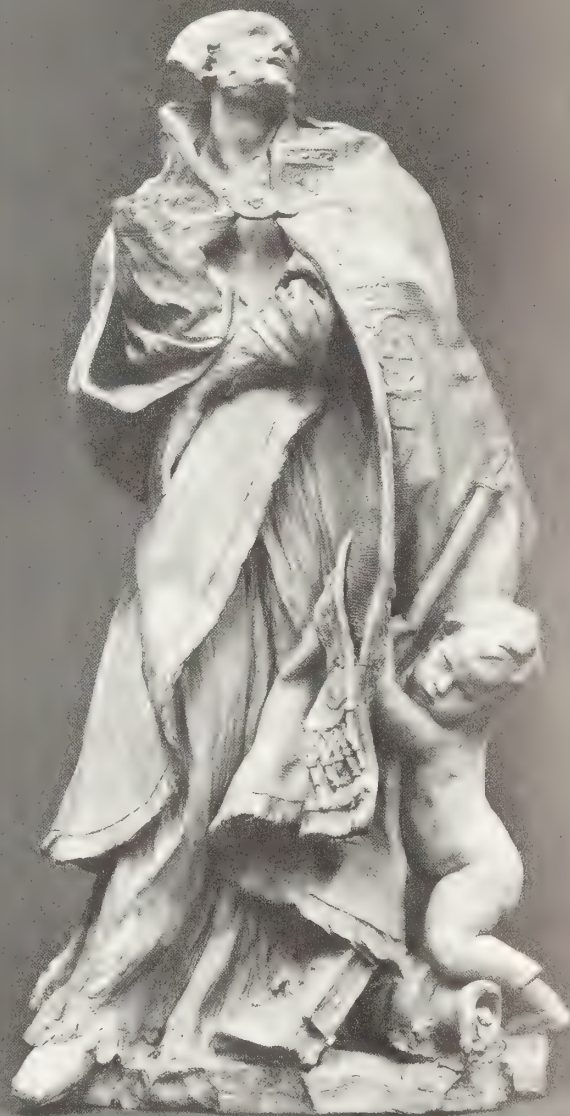


Figure 1. *The Blessed Alessandro Sauli*. Terra cotta, H. 27-7/16 inches, ca. 1665-1667. Pierre Puget, French, 1620-1694. Andrew R. and Martha Holden Jennings Fund. 64.36

Figure 2. Detail of Figure 1.

Figure 3. *The Blessed Alessandro Sauli*. Marble, ca.1668. Pierre Puget. Church of Santa Maria Assunta di Carignano, Genoa. (Photo-Archivo Fotografico Soprintendenza Gallerie della Liguria, Genoa.)



arriving in Genoa in January 1661. Nine months later Fouquet fell from power. Colbert, who assumed direction of various royal architectural projects, employed the team of Le Brun the painter, Le Vau the architect, and Le Nôtre the landscape architect, all of whom had worked for Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte. It was these men who were primarily responsible for shaping Versailles into the great monument of the reign of Louis XIV. Puget was, however, neglected. It was only on the eve of Colbert's death, over twenty years later, that Puget received significant recognition at court. In the meantime, he had devoted himself primarily to work of an ephemeral nature—carved decorations for ships. In part, Puget's personality may have mitigated against his success in royal circles, for he was a man of volatile temperament who could not be easily persuaded to function within the tight bureaucracy constructed by Colbert. A factor of at least as great importance was his style. Its strongly Italian baroque flavor did not make it strictly compatible with the work of Le Brun, Le Vau, and Le Nôtre; all of whom, guided by the force of Pous-sin's classical example, practiced a style more rigid and controlled than that of Puget.

After Fouquet's fall, Puget decided, quite reasonably, to remain in Genoa.² He was not long in finding local

patronage. In 1662 or 1663 he was hired by the Sauli family of that city to provide decorations for their church of Santa Maria Assunta di Carignano. Surviving drawings show his design for a great central altar with a baldachino, which was never realized. He did, however, execute two large marble figures—*St. Sebastian* and the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* (Fig. 3)—which were placed in niches formed in the piers which support the central cupola of the church. Of these two sculptures, the *St. Sebastian* is by far the better known, having often been reproduced and long considered one of Puget's greatest achievements.³ The *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* is of primary concern here, however, since it is to this sculpture that the Cleveland Museum's recently acquired terra cotta (Figs. 1 and 2) is directly related.⁴ Among Puget's major works, this one shows especially clearly the influence of the Roman baroque style upon his sculpture. Bernini's *St. Longinus* (Fig. 4), which stands beneath the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, comes immediately to mind. A comparison of that early, relatively sober work by Bernini with the *Alessandro Sauli* reveals both similarities and differences which serve to define Puget's personal style. The compositions of both works are built up by the use of contrasting diagonals, but Puget's has a more complex and tightly knit design. Though both figures were intended to be placed in niches, Bernini's *Longinus* expands in space, while Puget's work seems to have been conceived as a fundamentally two-dimensional composition. The expressive content of the two sculptures is similar. Uprturned eyes, open mouths, and outstretched hands are used to suggest that a moment of profound religious feeling is being experienced by the persons represented. Among Puget's work, the *Sauli* constitutes an extreme in the representation of religiously inspired emotion; but Bernini, a few years after the *Longinus*, produced his *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, which moved far beyond, and approached closely the conceivable limits of the depiction of that emotion in sculpture.⁵

Our knowledge of the realization of Puget's marble figure of the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* is dependent upon one document, three terra-cotta sketches, and several

drawings.⁶ The document, which is dated May 12, 1668, records the final payment to Puget for the *Sauli* and the *St. Sebastian*.⁷ Since a payment for transportation of the sculptures from his studio to the Carignano church is included, they had by that date presumably already been placed in their final positions. We do not know the date of the beginning of Puget's work on these figures, but we may presume that several years had elapsed between their conception and final execution. The document specifically mentions a payment for the putto who kneels beside Sauli, indicating that its inclusion had not been intended at the time of the granting of the commission to Puget.⁸ However, all of the surviving preparatory drawings and terra cottas include a putto, and the document is, therefore, of no positive value in establishing the chronological relationship of these works. When attempting to understand the genesis of a work of art, it is always tempting, in the absence of documentation, to begin with the executed version and then work backward to designs which are sequentially more divergent from it. Following that procedure, it is possible to trace hypothetically a development of the composition of the *Sauli* from the *bozzetto*



Figure 4. *St. Longinus*. Marble, 1629-1638.
Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Italian, 1598-1680.
St. Peter's, Rome. (Photo—Alinari.)

in Aix-en-Provence (Fig. 5), through those in the Boehler Collection, Munich (Fig. 6), and the Cleveland Museum, to the marble in Genoa. The composition of the Aix terra cotta is made up of only two dominant diagonals. In the Boehler terra cotta the play of contrasting diagonals becomes more complex, and in silhouette the mass of the figure is essentially columnar. The Cleveland terra cotta differs from the definitive design only in one significant respect—the position of the putto's head—and in several minor details of Sauli's costume. Both of these versions make use of complex, contrasting diagonals, similar to those of the Boehler *bozzetto*, but the figures are grouped together to provide a pyramidal mass, rather than the columnar form of the Boehler example. So close in composition is the Cleveland terra cotta to the final marble that it should perhaps be described as a model (*modello*), rather than a sketch (*bozzetto*); that is a sculpture made by Puget as a guide for his own use and that of his studio assistants in the preliminary work upon the marble block from which the final sculpture was carved.⁹

Following the sequence which has been proposed on the basis of composition as the chronological develop-

ment of the design of the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli*, one can observe an iconographic enrichment of the sculpture.¹⁰ In the Aix terra cotta only his costume and a book held by the putto serve to indicate that Sauli is the person represented. A crozier and a vase from which coins spill forth have been added to the Boehler sculpture. These symbols, rearranged, are retained in the Cleveland and Genoa versions. Thus, factors of iconography, as well as composition, tend to confirm the proposed chronological sequence, but in the absence of documents and in view of the possibility that the known series of preparatory studies may be incomplete, this hypothesis remains tentative.¹¹ It seems obvious, however, that the Cleveland terra cotta, if possibly not the last preparatory study, stands very close in time to the beginning of work on the marble version.

Technically the terra cotta in Cleveland is among Puget's best works in this medium. The rapid but precise modeling of the clay, especially of the heads, is typical of his method. Puget often was content to leave his terra cottas less fully realized in detail than in this example, but its high degree of finish in no way impairs the vitality of its surface.¹² In fact, a comparison of the Cleveland



RIGHT: Figure 5.
The Blessed Alessandro Sauli.
Terra cotta, H. 19-3/4 inches,
ca.1665-1667. Pierre Puget.
Musée Granet,
Aix-en-Provence.
(Photo—Giraudon.)



FAR RIGHT: Figure 6.
The Blessed Alessandro Sauli.
Terra cotta, H. 26 inches,
ca.1665-1667. Pierre Puget.
Collection, Dr. Julius
Boehler, Munich.

terra cotta and the marble in Genoa shows that in the former Puget has captured in a more lively and realistic way the particular characteristics of the thin fabric of which the alb worn by Sauli is made. This can be seen especially in the fluid folds of the right sleeve.

Anticipating in almost every detail Puget's final concept of the composition of one of his major works and displaying technical characteristics of the highest order, Cleveland's hitherto-unknown terra cotta assumes a significant position in the *oeuvre* of an important seventeenth-century sculptor.¹³ Much of his work was of a transitory nature. It is, therefore, not surprising that the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* is, apart from some drawings, the only work in an American public collection which is assuredly by Puget's own hand. Thus, both high quality and rarity contribute to the importance of this sculpture in the Museum's collection and in American collections as a whole.

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¹A good resume of Puget's life and a critical estimate of his work is included in Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 266-270.

²The most recent publication to review Puget's activities at the Carignano church in Genoa is Guy Walton, "Pierre Puget's Projects for the Church of Santa Maria Assunta di Carignano," *Art Bulletin*, XLVI (March 1964), 89-94. The present article has been based largely upon material published there. I wish to thank Mr. Walton for the advice which he gave before completion of purchase negotiations for this sculpture and during the preparation of the present article.

³The comparative neglect of the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* seems to have been caused by an unfavorable critical reaction to its more decidedly Roman baroque flavor. See Leon Lagrange, "Pierre Puget," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, XVIII (1865), 326.

⁴64.36 H. 27-7/16 inches. Andrew R. and Martha Holden Jennings Fund. In addition to the obvious damages sustained by this piece, it should be mentioned that Sauli's hand has been repaired and that the wings of the putto are missing. A mention of this terra cotta was published by Walton, p. 92.

⁵Important stylistic similarities also exist between the work of Puget and one of Bernini's followers, Melchior Caffà. A *St. Augustine* in terra cotta, given to Caffà and now in the Church of Sant' Agostino in Rome, is close in composition to the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli* (see Antonia Nava Cellini, "Contributi a Melchior Caffà," *Paragone*, VII,

no. 83 [November 1956], 17-31). Caffà's terra cotta was probably produced between 1660 and 1668, but since the precise date of neither his design nor Puget's is known, it cannot be determined whether one composition influenced the other, and, if so, which came first. It is possible that both were achieved independently on the basis of Bernini's example.

⁶A fine drawing in the Musée Grobet, Marseilles, published by Walton, fig. 2, is close in composition to the terra cotta in Aix-en-Provence. Walton, p. 92, n. 19, mentions two other drawings in the Musée Grobet, nos. 522 and 523, which, he states, are probably related to the putto who accompanies Sauli. Still another drawing in the Musée Grobet, no. 118, mentioned by Walton in the same note, and one in the museum in Besançon, seem to have been made by hands other than Puget's utilizing the marble as a model.

⁷Walton, p. 90, n. 11.

⁸In the document the word "fattura" is used to describe Puget's activities in connection with the putto. In its context this word might be interpreted as meaning either "making" or "working upon"—i.e., "altering"—the putto. For this activity Puget was paid L.1440, plus L.1133.6 for expenses. This price, when compared to the L.8000 which Puget received for making both the *St. Sebastian* and the *Blessed Alessandro Sauli*, indicates that considerable work was done; thus, I have interpreted the document as meaning that a putto was added to the composition after the original commission had been agreed upon.

⁹A curious feature of the Cleveland terra cotta is that its surface is, in part, covered with a thin layer of an almost white substance. The best explanation for this color seems to be that a white slip was applied to the terra cotta in order to render its appearance closer to that of the marble which was to follow. Presumably the kiln in which the piece was fired did not provide an even heat, and, as a result, the slip was burned away in certain areas, producing the uneven surface color now present. If this hypothesis is correct, the use of a white slip reinforces the suggestion that the Cleveland terra cotta was intended as a model.

¹⁰Possibly the Sauli family insisted upon an iconographic enrichment of the composition and, to that end, agreed to the additional payment for the putto, discussed in n. 8.

¹¹Three terra-cotta studies for the *Sauli* are mentioned in the older literature, Walton, p. 92, n. 17, but it is impossible to identify any of these with the presently known terra cottas; therefore, there is a good chance that other terra cottas exist.

¹²The terra cotta in Cleveland is technically similar to a terra-cotta study for the Carignano *St. Sebastian*, which is now in the Petit Palais, Paris (Walton, fig. 7). In terms of composition, the two terra cottas also occupy similar positions in relationship to their respective marble versions.

¹³At the time of its discovery, this terra cotta was described simply as "Italian, Seventeenth Century." It had, therefore, presumably not been previously recognized as having been executed by Puget.

Figure 1. *Portrait of Jan Six*.
Etching, burin, drypoint, Hind 228,
state III/III, plate: 9-5/8 x 7-9/16 inches,
paper: 11-1/8 x 10-1/2 inches, dated 1647.
Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch, 1606-1669.
Purchase, Dudley P. Allen Fund. 61.80
Ex collection: Six, Amsterdam.



Rembrandt: Chiaroscuro and the Etchings

Chiaroscuro, the magical representation of light and shadow and especially of the muted shadow and reflected light in the twilight area between them, is the commonly recognized quality of Rembrandt's art. It was stated as early as 1699, emphatically and succinctly, by Roger de Piles: "Il avoit un suprême intelligence du Clair-obscur."¹ It was as an artist of the Baroque period that Rembrandt developed his mastery of chiaroscuro, first as a youthful display of technical virtuosity, then in maturity as a tool expressive of his own most personal artistic concepts. Sensitivity to the expressive qualities of light and shadow is an important attribute of the baroque style as a whole. Wölfflin made the distinction that "light and shade serve classic art to define form," whereas in the Baroque period light "has become independent of the object, whether it be the light of a stormy sky driving over the earth in separate patches, or the light which, falling from above into the church, breaks against walls and pillars and where the twilight in niches and corners turns the circumscribed



Figure 2.
Portrait of Clement de Jonghe, Printseller.
Etching and drypoint, Hind 251, state III/VI,
paper: 8-1/4 x 6-7/16 inches, dated 1651.
Rembrandt van Rijn. Purchase,
Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Bequest. 64.362

space into something limitless and inexhaustible. The classic landscape knows light as the bond between objects... but the new style is only accomplished when light is fundamentally admitted as irrational.¹²

Painting is a medium completely sympathetic to the importance placed upon chiaroscuro by the baroque style. But etching before Rembrandt's time permitted only a restricted, mostly linear interpretation of light and shadow, with no margin for the infinite gradations between. From his early trials of the etching medium in the 1620's to his plates of the 1640's, Rembrandt revolutionized the process, eventually developing a technical facility in which he could use the etched line, the drypoint burr, and the delicate line engraved with the burin to the same effect for which he used glazes in oil painting.³ Though it is foolhardy to assign motives to an artist of such unusual genius, it is surely true that Rembrandt's remarkable development of the etching process was the direct result of the importance of light as an element and actor in his art.

Over the past six years the Museum has made an effort to strengthen its collection of Rembrandt prints. A selection from these acquisitions, most of which exemplify Rembrandt's mature etching style, show not only his facility in the medium, but also how he varied its use to serve the subject at hand. No greater example exists of Rembrandt's technical skill than the *Portrait of Jan Six* of 1647 (Fig. 1). It is an unparalleled *tour de force* in its flamboyant exploitation of chiaroscuro effects. Here Rembrandt demonstrated to the full his ability to simulate the most difficult combinations of light and darkness. The head of the young man is emphasized by the brilliant light of the window behind it, while a gentle reflected light illuminates his face. Areas of deep black are constructed from interweaving and overlapping etched lines, with touches of drypoint and engraving added. But most remarkable of all are the areas of half-light and reflected light from which emerge objects that hint of the various interests of the young man absorbed in his reading. So cunning is the



Figure 3. *Portrait of Jan Lutma the Elder, Goldsmith and Sculptor*. Etching, burin, drypoint, Hind 290, state I/III, paper: 7-7/8 x 5-15/16 inches, 1656. Rembrandt van Rijn. Purchase, Dudley P. Allen Fund, 63.85. Ex collection: Henry Graves Jr., New York.

juxtaposition of light and dark that the illusion is created that the blank paper in the window opening is actually lighter than the untouched paper in the wide margins of the print.

The simplicity and directness of the *Portrait of Clement de Jonghe, Printseller* (Fig. 2), dated 1651, is the antithesis of the etching of *Jan Six*. The sitter alone confronts us, without attributes to hint at his environment or interests. Here the face is distinguished not by light but by shadow, within which the brows are beautifully modeled in reflected light. The form of the body is suppressed, reduced to surface pattern by a heavy cloak, so that the form of the head stands out with startling emphasis.⁴ In the *Portrait of Jan Lutma the Elder, Goldsmith and Sculptor* (Fig. 3), of 1656, something of the etching style of the *Jan Six* is repeated, but the drama is reduced to quiet intimacy. The face is modeled by light against the dark background of the chair and of the shadows on either side, the dark hat against the foil of bright wall behind. Emphasis is placed on Lutma's face, his hands, and the artifacts of his trade, while the little animal-head finials on the chair add a piquant auxiliary accent. In the second state⁵ a window etched behind increases the sense of the intimacy of an enclosed room.



Figure 4. *Landscape with Three Gabled Cottages Beside a Road*. Etching, drypoint, burin, Hind 246, state III/III, paper: 6-7/16 x 8-1/16 inches, dated 1650. Rembrandt van Rijn. Purchase, Dudley P. Allen Fund, 62.22. Ex collection: Earl of Northwick.

As the lights and darks follow a descending staircase pattern from left to right in the portrait of *Lutma*, so also the etching of the *Landscape with Three Gabled Cottages Beside a Road* (Fig. 4) uses the device of a stepped silhouette to great effect in a rich example of Rembrandt's mature landscape style. Here, obviously, light has nothing to do with form but everything to do with cloud shadow and sunlight chasing over the landscape on a summer day, thus fitting almost to the letter Wölfflin's definition of chiaroscuro quoted above.

But to Rembrandt, light and shadow served for a great deal more than a pleasing surface pattern or the reinforcement of pictorial composition. They stood as well for the light of spiritual truth and the eternal, as opposed to the darkness of evil, ignorance, and mortality. The etching of a *Philosopher in his Study Watching a Magic Disk* (Fig. 5), also known as *Dr. Faustus*, in a sense is the embodiment of Rembrandt's concept of the spiritual meaning of light.⁶ This etching of the 1650's is related to a number of painted, etched, and drawn scholars and philosophers in Rembrandt's work. The seeker of truth through study and contemplation long fascinated him. Here, however, the scholar is not deep in thought, but half rises from his desk at the appearance of a vision. A disk of light forms the head of a specter which holds in one hand a mirror toward which it points with the other, more clearly visible hand. The letters on the disk are an abbreviated, codified formula which was used on amulets to invoke divine intercession.⁷ Among the abbreviations of the formula are INRI, which stands for Christ, and a reference to the Tetragrammaton. If, as is probable, an element of magic⁸ is implied by the formula, it is "white" rather than "black" magic and has resulted from the dedicated study and meditation of the philosopher. The disk of light had a specific meaning in seventeenth-century theology as a symbol of the divine, as did the mirror as a reflector of that light to mankind.⁹ The mirror, the object of the scholar's intense concentration, most certainly also refers to St. Paul's description of earthly as opposed to heavenly knowledge (I Cor. 13:12): "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully." It is worth noting that in this etching Rembrandt, with much less obvious bravura, successfully created an optical illusion far more difficult than the lighting effects of the *Jan Six* portrait. He placed the spectral light of the

vision directly in front of a window that is itself bright with daylight. The light of the vision appears to diminish the ordinary daylight behind it. The light which illuminates the philosopher's head is other-worldly and that which falls on his desk and papers in the foreground is common daylight.

In Biblical illustration, as in the so-called *Faust* etching, Rembrandt used light time and again to symbolize divine revelation or divine intercession in earthly affairs. It was characteristic that when he etched *Christ Driving the Money-Changers from the Temple*¹⁰ Rembrandt did not encircle the head of Christ with rays of light, but his hand, which in that instance was the instrument of God. So in 1656 when Rembrandt had developed an etching style fully capable of portraying all the nuances of light and dark, he returned to the simple etched line

Figure 5. *Philosopher in his Study Watching a Magic Disk*. Etching, drypoint, burin, Hind 260, state I/III, paper: 8-3/8 x 6-7/16 inches, ca.1652. Rembrandt van Rijn. Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund. 61.317 Ex collection: Edward Rudge, Evesham.





Figure 6.
The Incredulity of Thomas.
Etching, burin, drypoint,
Hind 237, paper:
6-7/16 x 8-5/16 inches,
dated 1656.
Rembrandt van Rijn.
Purchase, Dudley P. Allen
Fund. 60.161
Ex collection:
Claude A. Mariette, Paris.

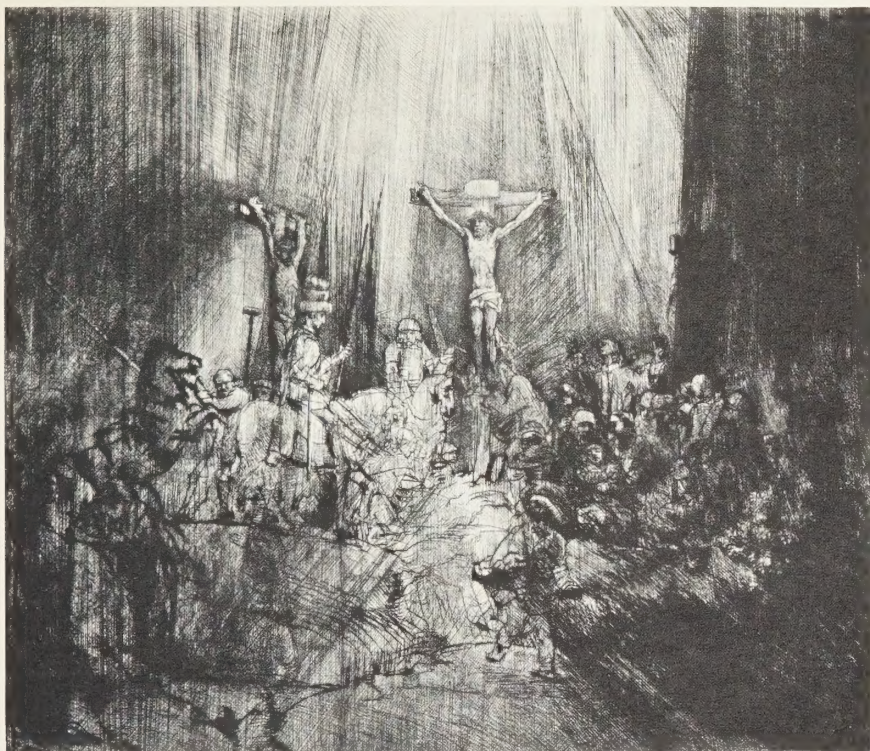
Figure 7.
*Christ Crucified
Between the Two Thieves.*
Drypoint, burin, etching,
Hind 270, state IV/V, paper:
14-3/4 x 17-3/8 inches,
after 1653.
Rembrandt van Rijn.
Bequest of Ralph King and
Purchase from the J. H.
Wade Fund. 59.241
Ex collections:
Hauslab and Liechtenstein,
Vienna.

for *The Incredulity of Thomas* (Fig. 6).¹¹ He eliminated shadow entirely and suffused the scene with a blinding light that originates in the figure of the risen Christ, suddenly present among his disciples. Christ points with his upturned hand to the spear wound in his side and Thomas, actually here not incredulous but at the moment of belief, kneels in adoration. The intensity of light breaks into the outlines of the disciples on either side of Christ; those in front of him shield their eyes from it, and those behind him are obscured by its brilliance. This is truly a climax in the printmaker's use of ink against white paper, for here it is the ink itself which is transformed into pure light. In fine, early impressions such as this one, the plate was carefully wiped to leave a very light, over-all, transparent ink tone which helps to bind the lines together and lessens the contrast between line and paper, thus paradoxically heightening the illusion of all-encompassing light.

From the large compositions among Rembrandt's etchings the Museum is fortunate in having been able to acquire the impression formerly in the Hauslab and

Liechtenstein collections of the fourth state of *Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves*, or *The Three Crosses* (Fig. 7). Some recent scholarship¹² has tended to accept the theory that this almost complete revision of a plate originally etched in 1653 was made some years later and belongs among the final examples of Rembrandt's work in etching. The revision of the plate was so drastic and the technical means Rembrandt used to accomplish it so broad, so arrogantly disregarding what had gone before, that the plate barely skirts the edge of failure. Forsaking the subtlety and the delicacy of the medium he had so completely mastered, Rembrandt drew boldly and strongly, directly on the plate. Here and there the great slashing strokes of drypoint only half obliterate the forms of the earlier composition, but above these confused murmurings soars a noble and overpowering design. Here, finally, the light is literally divine, penetrating a darkness which is not mere shadow but is literally the night of the spirit.

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¹*Abrégé de la Vie des Peintres, Avec des réflexions sur leurs Ouvrages* (Paris, 1699). Quoted by Seymour Slive, *Rembrandt and his Critics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), Appendix G, p. 218.

²Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., n. d.), pp. 199, 200-201.

³For Rembrandt's printmaking techniques see Ludwig Munz, *Rembrandt's Etchings* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), II, pp. 11-30; Woldemar von Seidlitz, *Die Radierungen Rembrandts* (Leipzig: E. A. Seeman, 1922), pp. 81-83, and *passim*.

⁴Besides the third state here illustrated, the Museum owns an impression of the first state: 41.659 Gift of Leonard C. Hanna Jr.

⁵Of which the Museum also owns an impression: 42.759 Bequest of John L. Severance.

⁶Recent studies continue to illuminate the meaning of the etching. See especially Lotlisa Behling, "Rembrandt's sog. 'Dr. Faustus,'" *Oud-Holland*, LXXIX, no. 1 (1964), 49-77; also H. van de Waal, "Rembrandt's Faust Etching," in the same issue, pp. 7-48, listing previous bibliography.

⁷Such amulets are illustrated in a book published in the seventeenth century. See illus., Van de Waal, p. 9.

⁸Rembrandt may have learned something of cabbalistic lore from his neighbor, Manasseh ben Israel, who was a student of the subject. However, the magical denotation of the etching has been exaggerated through the long-standing tradition confusing it with the Faust legend.

⁹Behling, *Oud-Holland*, LXXIX, 67-69.

¹⁰41.655 Gift of Leonard C. Hanna Jr. (not illustrated).

¹¹This "open" etching style is as characteristic of Rembrandt's prints as are his most complex etching methods. Comparable subjects in the Museum collection are: 41.151 *Christ Disputing with the Doctors*, Gift of Mrs. Gilbert P. Shafer; and 22.280 *Christ at Emmaus*, Gift of The Print Club of Cleveland.

¹²For instance: Munz, II, 103, no. 223 (ca. 1660-61); Karel G. Boon, *Rembrandt, das graphische Werk* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1963), p. 28 (ca. 1660); Rotterdam, Museum Boymans, *Rembrandt Etsen* (exhibition catalogue, 1950), cat. no. 57 (between 1653 and 1660).

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