

Alfred Bader

Alfred Bader Fine Arts.

From Rembrandt and his Studio: Two
Paintings from the Bader Collection - Georgia
Museum of Art

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David with the Head of Goliath before Saul
Oil on wood
30.3 x 38.1 cm
Collection of Dr. Alfred Bader, Milwaukee

FIGURE 1
Rembrandt van Rijn
David with the Head of Goliath before Saul, 1627
Oil on oak panel
27.5 x 39.5 cm
(Inv. Nr. G 1958.37)
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum
Legs Max Gähle, 1958
Photos: Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Martin Bühler



ADDENDUM

The analysis by the Rembrandt Research Project of *A Man Writing by Candlelight* was part of a lengthy program, begun in 1968, of creating a new catalogue of paintings by Rembrandt. Because of the very large number of paintings that had been attributed to the artist and despite the overwhelming amount of literature on this oeuvre, members of the Project believed closer attention to various kinds of evidence would provide a more precise and scientific approach to studying these works. Thus, the three subsequent volumes of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* include numerous reproductions and descriptions of X-ray studies and, to a lesser extent, other processes, including ultraviolet radiation and infrared photography. In their texts, the authors analyze in detail the scientific studies and how they relate to physical and stylistic features of the paintings. They also describe the subjects and publish their visual observations on the supports, grounds, paint layers, signatures, and varnishes of the pictures. Finally, they provide information on related documents and sources, on prints after the paintings, on copies, and on provenances. Presently, additional volumes of the corpus are in preparation.

PATRICIA PHAGAN
Curator of Prints and Drawings

This brochure was produced in conjunction with the exhibition "By or After Rembrandt: Two Paintings from the Bader Collection," which comprised "A Man Writing by Candlelight" and the oil sketch, "David with the Head of Goliath before Saul."

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COVER
A Man Writing by Candlelight
Oil on copper
13.9 x 13.9 cm
Collection of Dr. Alfred Bader, Milwaukee

FROM REMBRANDT AND HIS STUDIO: *Two Paintings from the Bader Collection*



Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia
November 7, 1998 – January 10, 1999



FIGURE 1

FROM REMBRANDT AND HIS STUDIO:

Two Paintings from the Bader Collection

S. WILLIAMS PELLETIER

A MAN WRITING BY CANDLELIGHT

A Man Writing by Candlelight (13.9 × 13.9 cm, illustrated on the cover) is a small, unsigned, and undated oil on copper attached to a wooden strainer, showing an old man sitting in a room behind a table. He is writing in a book with a quill pen by the light of a candle, or perhaps an oil lamp, partially hidden behind a large, open folio standing on end in the right foreground. He wears a dark cap with a narrow band over his gray hair, and over his coat is a dark gray cloak of thick material. To the right, behind the table, is a globe; behind and to the left of the globe, a sheet of paper bearing an illegible text is nailed to the wall, with a bottle hanging above it.

I first viewed this painting during a visit to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Alfred Bader in September 1985; I saw it again when I visited them in August 1993. My impression then was that the painting was probably a very early work by Rembrandt. I saw the painting again recently after a skilful cleaning by Charles Munch and Jane Furchgott. It now literally

glows with an inner radiance and luminosity. It is a work of extraordinary beauty, a veritable gem. Its chiaroscuro, the vivid contrasts between light and dark, is particularly impressive. Such handling of light and shadow was a common feature of Rembrandt's paintings in Leiden, where he worked until his move to Amsterdam in 1631 or 1632.

This painting has been a subject of debate among Rembrandt scholars for many years. Late in the eighteenth century, it belonged to the Parisian dealer and collector Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Brun, who had acquired a wonderful collection of paintings during the French Revolution. He was proud of his collection and had engravings made of his best paintings. Done in 1790, the engraving of this painting is described as after a work on copper of the same dimensions by Rembrandt.¹ At that time, the painting extended an additional 1.8 cm at the top. The copper panel was trimmed slightly some time after 1822. It is noteworthy that the engraving does not show the monogram GDF [Gerard Dou fecit], which appeared between the second and third lines of the sheet of

paper on the wall sometime after 1790. The monogram was found to be on top of the varnish layer, for it was quickly removed by Professor Josef Hajsmáček of Vienna in 1958 with petroleum ether, a very mild solvent, while the varnish layer remained untouched.² Gerard Dou was Rembrandt's first student in Leiden in the late 1620s. In the early nineteenth century, Dou's works were very popular and brought higher prices than Rembrandt's. Apparently, someone wanted to capitalize on this situation and added the monogram, GDF, to make the work more valuable. In 1896, Bredius³ recognized that the monogram was spurious. Surprisingly, Gerson (1935)⁴ and Van Gelder (1953)⁵ accepted the monogram as genuine and considered the painting to be a copy by Dou after Rembrandt.

Of the Rembrandt scholars who have examined this painting, Bode (1897),⁶ Bredius (1898),⁷ Trimmel (1904),⁸ Hofstede de Groot (1916),⁹ Bensch (1935),¹⁰ and Rosenberg (1948)¹¹ accepted the picture as autograph. Recently, the members of the Rembrandt Research Project¹² pointed to the similarity between the panel handling in this work (no. C18) and *The Flight into Egypt* (no. C5), dated 1627, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Tours that has been enthusiastically endorsed by most scholars as a work by Rembrandt. However, the Rembrandt Research Project concludes:

The great affinity there is between these two paintings, and their shared differences in quality and execution from the early work of Rembrandt make it likely that we are dealing here with someone from Rembrandt's immediate circle who has a style and temperament of his own. . . . Its pedigree and attribution to Rembrandt can be traced with certainty back to 1773, and perhaps to 1739 or even 1727. Its design and interpretation of its subject it comes close to some works by Rembrandt that can be dated to 1629 or 1629/30, though an unmistakable difference in quality leads one to conclude that it cannot be attributed to him. Together with the Tours Flight into Egypt (no. C5) and the Tokyo Nocturnal Scene (no. C10), both of which show a strong resemblance to it in manner of painting, lighting and depiction of form, it is probably by an artist from Rembrandt's immediate circle—possibly Gerard Dou—working around 1630.

Dou entered Rembrandt's studio on February 14, 1628. It is important to note that Dou's early oeuvre is substantially different from Rembrandt's. Dr. Volker Mannuth of Queen's University affirms this painting is not by Dou; he writes, "At any rate, Dou cannot be considered the author. His early works differ significantly in the rendering of individual details, the more evenly distributed lighting, and the choice of colours."¹³ David McTavish has concluded, "Trained initially as an engraver, [Dou's] painting retains a linear and descriptive quality which is alien to the dramatic and painterly approach of the present painting (and the Tours Flight into Egypt). While it may be wise to keep an open mind on the subject, it still seems likely that Rembrandt was responsible for this small painting on copper."¹⁴

DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH BEFORE SAUL (Old Sketch)

This unpublished, handsome *brunaille*¹⁵ on wood panel is exhibited here for the first time. It was bought by Dr. Bader from the Parisian dealer Lemnat Lundh, who had purchased it at a minor auction. Lundh and Bader recognized its close relationship to the colorful painting in the Öffentliche Kunstmuseum in Basel of approximately the same size (27.5 × 39.5 cm), signed and dated RH 1627 (Fig. 1). The latter (Bauch 3; Bode 4; Bredius 488; Hofstede de Groot 34) is accepted as autograph by the Rembrandt Research Project (AR),¹⁶ which reports no copies. The painting in Basel is on a panel that was originally somewhat larger, whereas the sketch has not been cut down and is beveled on all four sides.

Dendrochronology of this panel, conducted by Dr. Peter Klein in Hamburg, shows it to be from the first half of the seventeenth century. Professor Molly Faries of Indiana University made a careful study of the painting through infrared reflectography, which shows pentimenti and under-painting. An X-radiograph confirms these findings.

There are three possibilities for this *brunaille*:

1. It is a sketch by Rembrandt preceding the painting in Basel (A9). Dr. Bader thinks this is doubtful—unless the *brunaille* precedes A9 by a long period—because A9 is much better.¹⁷
2. It is a contemporary *aide-mémoire* by an artist such as Jan Lievens.
3. It is by a student of Rembrandt, done about 1630–40.

The *brunaille* sketch has an interesting three-dimensional quality with multiple paint layers and it generally conforms to the painting in Basel: the figures, however, are less clearly defined. For example, the dog is rather fuzzy in the sketch, and in the upper right quadrant, the man with the blue turban, who appears in the finished painting, is absent in the sketch. Likewise, the vertical lanes or spears that appear above the rear of the horse are absent. Also, the Basel painting extends the composition somewhat at the bottom and the right. These differences suggest that one should seriously consider whether the *brunaille* may possibly precede the Basel painting and be a very quick preliminary sketch by Rembrandt himself. If it were a copy after the Basel painting, one would expect the copy to reflect more accurately the details of the painting. A rough sketch, in which the elements of the picture are quickly put into place, need not bear comparison in quality with a carefully executed, finished picture. Both can be by the same hand. Regardless of its authorship, this beautiful sketch is a valuable document of the seventeenth century and presents an interesting puzzle from Rembrandt's studio.

THE COLLECTOR

Dr. Alfred Bader was born in Vienna in 1924, and fled to England in December 1938, ten months before the beginning of World War II. Although a Jewish refugee from the Nazis, he was interned in 1940, first in a camp in Huyton near Liverpool, and later in a prisoner of war camp near Montreal. After his release in 1941, he entered Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he studied engineering chemistry. Subsequently, he studied organic chemistry at Harvard University and received a Ph.D. in 1950. He then worked in Milwaukee as a research chemist for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. In 1951, he co-founded Aldrich Chemical Company, which merged in 1975 to become Sigma-Aldrich, now the world's largest supplier of research chemicals.

Since retiring from Sigma-Aldrich in 1992, he has continued a fruitful career as an art collector and dealer. Dr. Bader's personal philanthropy is directed to aiding students of chemistry and providing fellowships for art history students to study in Europe. Recently, he provided \$6,000,200 to Queen's University to purchase and renovate Hertrunxoux Castle in Sussex, England, to serve as a center for studies in European politics, economics, law, and art.

In July 1992, Dr. Bader, with Dr. Otto Naumann, purchased Rembrandt's magnificent *Portrait of Johannes Uytenboogaert* (1633) at auction at Sotheby's, London, and in December sold it to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, where it is exhibited now in the great gallery with *The Night Watch*.

Dr. Bader purchases an average of two hundred paintings each year. He prefers seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, specifically those based on scenes from the Old Testament. Occasionally, he collects works addressing other areas of the Bible and history, as well as genre, landscapes, portraits, and still-lives. Rembrandt, his contemporaries, and his students are Bader's consuming passion. One of his great joys is in discovering hidden masterpieces.

Alfred Bader is a remarkable man—kind, gentle, unassuming, generous, and a model of integrity. I treasure his friendship of many years. Alfred's greatest asset is his *viele Tüchel*, a charming lady of grace, dignity, vision, and keen intellect. She shares his passion for collecting art.

For more details about Dr. Bader's life and work and about his collection, see his autobiography, *Adventures of a Chemist Collector*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995 (ISBN 0 297 834 61 4).

Dr. S. Williams Pelletier is an Alumni Foundation Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and director of the Institute for Natural Products Research at the University of Georgia as well as an internationally recognized connoisseur and collector of Dutch works on paper.

ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Bader purchased this painting in 1939 from Norbert Mayer, the grandson of Franz Xaver Mayer of Vienna. The painting was listed by Mrs. Franz Xaver Mayer to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in 1898, for an exhibition honoring Queen Wilhelmina. The painting was no. 1 in the exhibition.
2. The inscription reads: "Rembrandt pinxit. — Gravé par J. B. P. Le Brun Peintre et M. 1780/104 Philippe-évoque / Gravé d'après le Tableau de Rembrandt. Point sur cuivre de milieu grandeur que / L'Europe. Tit. du Cabinet du Citoyen Le Brun, Peintre et M. de Tilléaux / A Paris chez l'Auteur, rue du Gros Chêne No. 47, et chez Poiran, rue Serpente No. 14."
3. A. Bredius, *Königliche Bibliothek der Amsterdamer Rembrandt-Ausstellung*, *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* 10 (1898): 166, no. 425.
4. A. Bredius, *Rembrandt, The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, revised by H. Gerson, first ed. (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1935; third ed., 1969), 588, no. 425 (illustrated on p. 54); "excavation . . . seems to be too weak for Rembrandt."
5. J. G. van Gelder, "Rembrandt's vroegste ontwerpskilling," *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, afd. letterkunde, nieuwe reeks, deel 16, no. 5 (1953): 293, note 53; J. G. van Gelder, "Rembrandt and his Circle," *Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953): 37, note 9 (as C). (See after Rembrandt).
6. Wilhelm Bode, *Rembrandt*, vol. 1 (Paris: Charles Sedelmeyer, 1897), no. 4 (illustrated).
7. Bredius, "Königliche Bibliothek," 166, no. 425.
8. Th. v. Frimmel, "Ein Rembrandt aus der Galerie Le Brun," *Blätter für Gemäldekunde* 2 (1905): 21–3.
9. C. Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painter of the Seventeenth Century*, vol. VI (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1916), 153, no. 240 (as about 1627). See also *Burlington Magazine* 47 (November 1925): 265.
10. Otto Bensch, *Rembrandt, Werk und Forschung* (Vienna, 1935), s. Otto Bensch, opinion of 23 January 1958, given to Norbert Mayer, grandson of Franz Xaver Mayer of Vienna.
11. Jacob Rosenberg, *Rembrandt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 244; this painting was included among the authentic Rembrandts, but was marked as uncertain. However, in 1959, Bredius removed the painting from Dr. Bader and, after a week of careful study, concluded the painting was autograph.
12. J. Brnoy, B. Haak, S.H. Levie, P.J.J. van Thiel, and E. van de Wetering, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings I, 1625–1631* (Stichting Foundation, Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague; Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), no. C18.
13. Volker Mannuth, "Scholar Writing by Candlelight," in *Widom, Knowledge & Magic: The Image of the Scholar in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Kingston, Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1997), 50, no. 14 (illustrated).
14. David McTavish, *Pictures from the Age of Rembrandt* (Kingston, Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, 1984), 14, no. 7 (illustrated).
15. The author thanks Patricia Fragon, curator of prints and drawings at the Georgia Museum of Art, for these measurements.
16. *Brunaille* is a word that indicates a brownish effect.
17. Brnoy et al., *Corpus*, 129, no. A9.
18. Letter from Alfred Bader to author of 21 September 1998.