

“Samson threatens his father in-law” Rembrandt van Rijn
Oil on canvas 160 x 173 cm
To be dated 1635/36



Reflections on "Samson threatening his father in-law"

Reflections on Rembrandt's 'Samson threatens his father-in-law' by Jean-Pierre De Bruyn

Oil on canvas, 160 x 173 cm
To be dated 1635/36

This painting was e.g. exhibited in Berlin, Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen, August 4th – November 5th 2006, cat. Nr. 21.

Ernst van de Wetering in his contribution to the catalogue refers to the differences between a smaller version (canvas, 158,5 x 130,5 cm, signed and dated *Rembrandt. Ft. 163.*) in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (cat. nr. 802) and this painting which dates from the same period (about 1635). It is indeed clear that the version in Miami refers to an original concept by Rembrandt himself. It is also obvious that Rembrandt decided to create a second version in which his own hand is recognizable, e.g. in the part added on the left side.

Which brings us to the same problem occurring when studying masters like Rembrandt and Rubens. For example some modello's painted for Rubens's *Achilles-series* were clearly painted in Rubens's studio by Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678). All these modello's are accepted as originals by Rubens. Because of their high quality. Quellinus, one of Rubens's first-class assistants, often reaches the same quality-level. When I tried to publish one of the *Achilles-modello's* as by his hand, ... it was rejected! The world upside-down. Recently my ideas on this subject were accepted in Rotterdam.

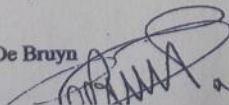
I further know about several 'concepts' by Quellinus, especially drawings, ... signed with Rubens's name.

Why this comparison ?

Because the same problem occurs in the case of Rembrandt. So-called 'second versions' are known of several of his paintings. For example of the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (oil on canvas, 193,5 x 132,8 cm, 1635) in St. Petersburg with a high-quality 'second version' with minor differences in München (oil on canvas, 195 x 132,3 cm, 1636). The hand of Rembrandt is recognizable in the final execution of this 'second version' which was done under his supervision in his studio. The same counts for the hereby studied *Samson threatens his father-in-law* which dates from the same period (1636). And there are many other examples. Last but not least we refer to *Joseph and the wife of Potiphar* (canvas, 113,5 x 90 cm, 1655) with its high-quality 'second version' with minor differences in Washington (canvas, 105,7 x 97,8 cm, 1655). The contribution of art historian Michiel Franken on this subject (see Berlin-catalogue p. 145-163) is very enlightening.

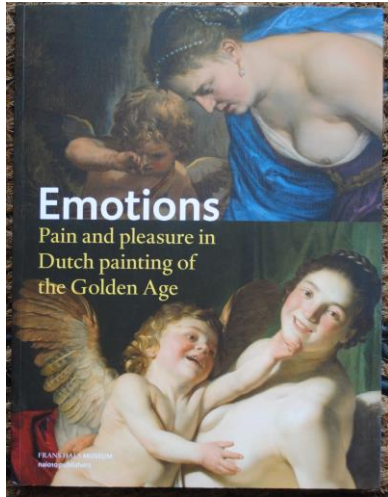
As in the case of Rubens, paintings from the size and quality-level of the above mentioned examples were always made under the direction of the master and with his approval. And should always be regarded from the same point of view as the so-called originals ('first versions'). Which gives a clear answer to the problems created by art historians concerning high-quality paintings as for example the *Sacrifice of Isaac* in München, *Joseph and the wife of Potiphar* in Washington and *Samson threatens his father-in-law* in Miami.

Dr. Jean-Pierre De Bruyn
Art Historian

 November 12th 2006

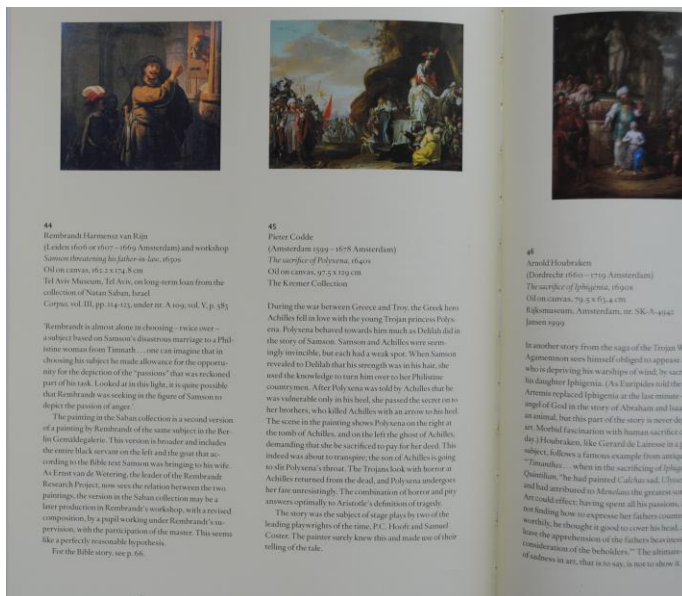
Catalogue

Front page catalogue Franz Hals Museum



Catalogue

Emotions-Dutch Painting Golden Age



44
Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn
(Leiden 1606 or 1607 – 1669, Amsterdam) and workshop
Samson threatening his father-in-law, 1630s
Oil on canvas, 46.2 x 67.4 cm
Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, on long-term loan from the
collection of Natan Scharf, Israel
Corpus, vol. 10, pp. 114–115, under no. A.103, vol. V, p. 381

Rembrandt is almost alone in choosing – twice over – a subject based on Samson's disastrous marriage to a Philistine woman from Timnah... one can imagine that in choosing his subject he made allowance for the opportunity for the depiction of the "passions" that was reckoned part of his task. Looked at in this light, it is quite possible that Rembrandt was seeking in the figure of Samson to depict the passion of anger.¹⁷

The painting in the Schab collection is a second version of a painting by Rembrandt of the same subject in the Rembrandt-Gemäldegalerie. This version is broader and includes the same black servant on the left and the goat that, according to the Bible text, Samson was bringing to his wife. As Erwin van de Wetering, the leader of the Rembrandt Research Project, now sees the relation between the two paintings, the version in the Schab collection may be a later production in Rembrandt's workshop, with a revised composition, by a pupil working under Rembrandt's supervision, with the participation of the master. This seems like a perfectly reasonable hypothesis.
For the Bible story, see p. 66.

45
Pieter Godde
(Amsterdam 1594 – 1678, Amsterdam)
The sacrifice of Polyxena, 1640s
Oil on canvas, 97.5 x 139 cm
The Kröner Collection

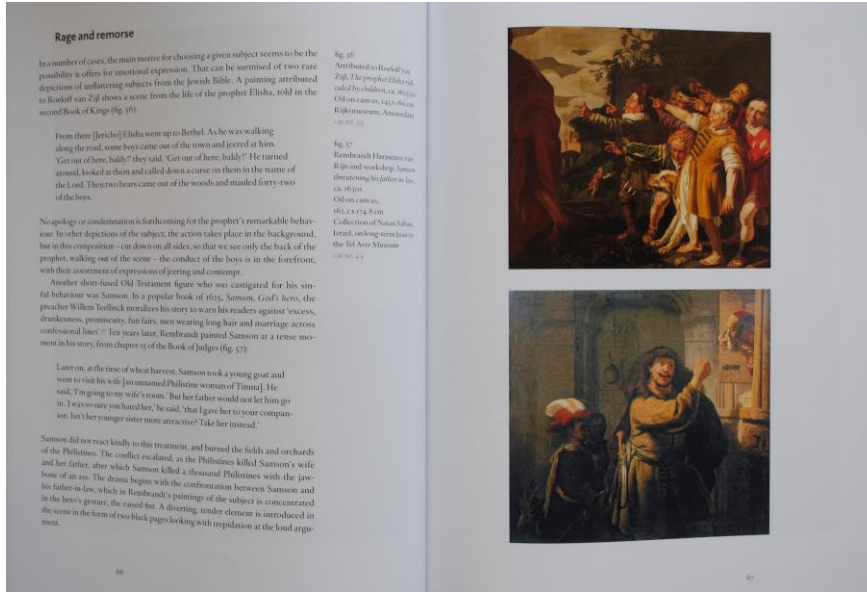
During the war between Greece and Troy, the Greek hero Achilles fell in love with the young Trojan princess Polyxena. Polyxena behaved towards him much as Delilah did in the story of Samson. Samson and Achilles were seemingly invincible, but each had a weak spot. When Samson revealed to Delilah that his strength was in his hair, she used the knowledge to turn him over to her Philistine countrymen. After Polyxena was told by Achilles that he was indeed the only man his age, she passed the secret on to her brothers, who killed Achilles with an arrow to his heel. The scene in the painting shows Polyxena on the right at the tomb of Achilles, and on the left the ghost of Achilles, demanding that she be sacrificed to pay for her deed. This indeed was about to transpire; the son of Achilles is going to die Polyxena's chosen. The Trojans look with horror at Achilles returned from the dead, and Polyxena undergoes her fate unflinchingly. The combination of horror and pity answers optimally to Aristotle's definition of tragedy.
The story was the subject of stage plays by two of the leading playwrights of the time, P.C. Houff and Samuel Coster. The painter surely knew this and made use of their telling of the tale.

46
Arnold Houbraken
(Dordrecht 1660 – 1719, Amsterdam)
The sacrifice of Iphigenia, 1690s
Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 124 cm
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, nr. SK-A-4142
Juni 1939

In another story from the saga of the Trojan War Agamemnon sees himself obliged to appear before his wife in depriving his warships of wind, by sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia. As Euripides told them, Artemis replaced Iphigenia at the last minute... the angel of God in the story of Abraham and Isaac... an animal, but this part of the story is never depicted. Arnold Houbraken, like Gerard de Lairesse (a 17th-century subject, follows a famous example from antiquity: "Iphigenia" – when in the sacrificing of Iphigenia... "Quintilian," he had painted Callisto and Iphigenia and had attributed to Menelaos the greatest scene... An overall effect, having spent all his passions, and not finding how to express her father's countenance, he thought it good to cover his head and have the apprehension of the father's bewitching consideration of the beholders." The ultimate effect of such an art, that is to say, is not to show it.

Catalogue

Emotions by Gary Schwartz



Rembrandt Harleem Exhibition



Whright's Certificate Transcription

Transcription of Christopher Wright's Certificate on Rembrandt's Samson Threatening His Father-in-Law

I have examined this painting, Samson Threatening His Father-in-Law (oil on canvas 160 X 177cm) in October 2006 when it was in the Rembrandt exhibition held in the Gemaldegalerie, Berlin, where I was able to compare it with the version belonging to the Gemaldegalerie, Berlin. In my opinion the Samson Threatening His Father-in-Law here is by Rembrandt and should be dated in the mid-1630's. Ernst van der Wetering in the Berlin exhibition catalogue: "Rembrandt, ein genie auf der Suche" 2006, pp 278-79, no. 21, illustrated p. 231 considered that only the left third of this composition was by Rembrandt-i.e. the part of the composition not included in the Berlin version, which is itself an integral composition. In fact the handling of the paint is entirely consistent throughout the canvas. It is freely painted without any obvious changes between the left part and the rest of the composition, which indicates that Rembrandt painted the whole picture. It is to be included in my forthcoming catalogue raisonne of Rembrandt's work, as an original Rembrandt.

Christopher Wright
10th January 2007

Whright's Certificate Hand write

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Arthur Wright

10th June 2007