

Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis from the Rubens Workshop

In his *Metamorphoses* (VIII, 611–724), Ovid recounts how Jupiter and Mercury seek shelter in Phrygia in the guise of humans, but are rejected everywhere. Only Philemon and Baucis, an elderly and poor couple, welcome the strangers into their simple hut and provide for them. They serve them what at the time was a simple meal of olives, eggs, ham, and garden vegetables as well as a dessert of nuts, dates, plums, fragrant apples, and grapes in a woven basket (VIII, 674–676: ‘Hic nux, hic mixta est rugosis carica palmis / Prunaque et in patulis redolentia mala canistris / et de purpureis conlectae vitibus uvae...’). The hosts also serve wine, and the pitcher miraculously does not deplete. In Ovid’s narrative, this reveals the true identity of their guests to the couple. They react with readiness to sacrifice their only goose, but the gods decline. Eventually, the two peasants climb the mountain with the gods, who turn Phrygia into a morass as punishment for its inhabitants’ defiance of the right of hospitality (‘mersa palude’). The hut is turned into a temple, and the couple become the guardians of the temple. At the end of their lives, Philemon is turned into an oak, Baucis into a linden tree.

Rubens depicted two different moments from Ovid’s narrative: *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*¹ as well as their rescue from the punishing flood in the large-scale *Stormy Landscape with Philemon and Baucis*, which is also at the Kunsthistorisches Museum.²

¹ This text is based on my contribution for the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Elizabeth McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects*, XI/iii, which is forthcoming. I thank Elizabeth McGrath and Bert Scheepers for their stimulating remarks. The text of that publication was somewhat adapted and revised for this Point of View.

² *Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640. Ausstellung zur 400. Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages, exh. cat. Vienna* (Kunsthistorisches Museum) 1977, no. 41; Lisa Vergara, *Rubens and the Poetics of Landscape* (New Haven, CT 1982), 179–183; Wolfgang Adler, *Landscapes*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard XVIII/i (London, Oxford, and New York, 1982), no. 29; Gerlinde Gruber and Elke Oberthaler (eds.), *Rubens’s*

The painting addressed here shows the protagonists in a simple interior around a table on which the dessert has already been arranged: a basket with apples, quinces (?), pears, figs, and grapes. An oil lamp casts the scene in warm light from above.

Jupiter, the father of the gods, is seated on the very left, while Mercury is in the centre, holding a glass of wine in his hand as he talks with the elderly Philemon on his left. Baucis is chasing a goose in the foreground: she has already caught hold of the animal’s right wing, but the goose is fleeing towards Jupiter, who has raised his right hand in a protective gesture (fig. 1).

Sources of Inspiration

An important starting point for Rubens’s composition was provided by a print by his teacher Otto van Veen, which had been published in 1607 in his *Q. Horatii Flacci Emblemata* under the motto ‘Sors sua quemque beat’ (fig. 2). There, it is considered an allegory for the ability to be satisfied with one’s fate. That is probably one reason why, in that instance, the scene is designed with great serenity, showing an almost idyllic setting that places the acts of hospitality in the foreground. While the scene is set in an interior, it is viewed from an outside position. We even see the roof, on which the eagle of Jupiter is perched, holding the bundle of lightning in his claws. Like Rubens, Van Veen has an oil lamp suspended from the ceiling of the room, and the gods are seated at a round table. However, their positions are swapped in comparison with the Rubens depiction. Van Veen placed Jupiter at the centre of the composition; Baucis is on the

Great Landscape with a Tempest: Anatomy of a Masterpiece, with bibl. (Trento, 2020).



Fig. 3
Virgil Solis, 'Iupiter & Mercurius Hospites', in: Johannes Spreng, *Metamorphoses Ovidii Argumentis quidem soluta oratione [...] expositae* (Frankfurt 1563) fol. 101v

Fig. 2
Otto van Veen, 'Sors sua quemque beat', in *Q. Horatii Flacci Emblemata*, <https://emblems.hum.uu.nl/va1612040.html>

very right, turning to Jupiter with her hand reassuringly positioned on her chest and without chasing the goose that is under the table; in the Viennese painting, Philemon is making this gesture towards Mercury. Rubens altered the scene from a portrait to a landscape format and dramatized it by also depicting the goose chase, to which he could give more room in the landscape format. In doing so, he followed illustrations that had previously appeared in treatments of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, such as those by Virgil Solis from 1563 (fig. 3) or Pieter van der Borcht from 1591, as Stechow already noted.³ Rubens acquired the latter edition in 1637.⁴ In both instances, Baucis is chasing the goose; the difference is that Rubens shows her having already caught hold of one of the animal's wings.

An 'Italian' source has also been cited: a painting by Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610),⁵ in which Jupiter similarly frames the group from the side and in profile. That scene

is, in fact, set entirely in an interior that is only lit by a candle, making it the first instance where the depiction of this theme includes a focus on the interior. Chronologically, Elsheimer's painting is placed around 1608–09, thus after Rubens had left Italy. He could, however, have been aware of the print after it by Hendrick Goudt from 1612. It is also conceivable that Rubens saw Elsheimer's drawing itself (now in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin), as it shows Mercury resting his elbow on his thigh in a relaxed gesture that is similar to the depiction of Mercury in Rubens's painting.

Beyond that, a painting of the same scene (Davis Museum, Wellesley College, Massachusetts) by Abraham Janssen van Nuyssen (c.1575–1632) could well have been an inspiration for Rubens. Joost Vander Auwera quite rightly sets an early date for its creation; around 1608/10 is highly probable in light of the stylistic proximity to Janssen's *Scaldis and Antwerpia* (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten), which is documented in 1608.⁶

3 See Wolfgang Stechow, 'The Myth of Philemon and Baucis in Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, iv, 1/2 (Oct. 1940–Jan. 1941), 103–13, esp. 106, plate 25, figs. b (Solis) and c (Van der Borcht). He also already referred to Otto van Veen as source.
4 Prosper Arents, *De Bibliotheek van Pieter Pauwel Rubens: een reconstructie. De Gulden Passer, LXXVIII–LXXIX*, ed. Alfons K.L. Thijs & al., (Antwerp, 2001), 198, E 191.
5 Now Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 1977. Max Rooses, *Catalogus van Rubens' werken in gravuur en fotografie tentoongesteld in het Museum van Schoone Kunsten te Antwerpen*, (Antwerp, 1890), 151. On the painting, see Gottfried Sello, *Adam Elsheimer* (Munich, 1988), 91–6, fig. 56.

6 Vander Auwera, in Guy C. Bauman and Walter A. Liedtke (eds.), *Flemish Painting in America: A Survey of Early Netherlandish and Flemish Paintings in the Public Collections of North America (Flandria extra muros)* (Antwerp, 1992), 166.



Fig. 4
Detail from fig. 1



Fig. 5
Detail from Léon Davent, after
Luca Penni, *Mars and Venus
Being Served at Table by Cupid
and the Graces*. Washington,
National Gallery of Art (inverted)



Fig. 6
Detail from Peter Paul Rubens, *Adoration
of the Magi*. Antwerp, Collectie KMSKA –
Vlaamse Gemeenschap

Particularly notable in the comparison of the two hospitality scenes are the absence of the attributes of the gods and the congruence of the colour accents: each features on the left a deity with nude upper body and dark-blue toga-like cloak next to a deity fully garbed in red. Janssen has Mercury reveal his upper body; in the Rubens painting it is Jupiter. Both compositions place a basket of fruit at the centre of the table, which recalls Caravaggio's renowned *Basket of Fruit* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana). However, Janssen also directed the light entirely in the style of Caravaggio in stark chiaroscuro, and executed the scene as a knee-length portrait. Rubens forgoes this and sets the evening scene in warm candlelight.

Jupiter's pose (fig. 4) recalls an engraving by Léon Davent (active 1540–1556) after Luca Penni (1500/04–1557), *Mars and Venus Being Served at Table by Cupid and the Graces* (fig. 5), which was probably created in 1547. Mars adopts a similar pose, leaning on his elbow, and also has his other arm extended in a similar manner, with the back of the hand turned to the beholder, as is the case in the copy following an oil sketch by Rubens, which will be discussed later.

Dating

The way in which Jupiter is seated in the Viennese painting recalls the figure of Jupiter in a work from the Marie de' Medici cycle: *The Presentation of Her Portrait to Henry IV* (Paris, Louvre).⁷ The cycle was commissioned by Marie de' Medici for the Palais du Luxembourg; Rubens signed the contract in 1622 and delivered the paintings to Paris in 1625. In addition, Mercury has similar facial features to those of a boy from the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 6), which Rubens had created for the high altar of the Church of St Michael's Abbey in Antwerp in around 1624–25.⁸ These two examples suggest that the Rubens original of *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis* was created around 1625.⁹

⁷ I thank Bert Schepers for this information. See Nils Büttner, *The Medici Series*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XIV/i (Turnhout, 2024).

⁸ I thank Bert Schepers for this comparison. On the altar picture, see Hans Devisscher and Hans Vlieghe, *Youth of Christ*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard V/i–ii (Turnhout, 2014), i, 214–19, no. 43; ii, fig. 156.

⁹ Wolfgang Prohaska had already found this proximity to the Marie de' Medici cycle, but also considered it possible that the Rubens original had already been created around 1615, but the Viennese painting not until 1622–5. See exh. cat. Vienna 1977 (see n. 2), 95–6.

Provenance and Attributions

The Vienna painting is listed in the 1659 inventory of the collection of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm as a work in Rubens's own hand:

No. 746. Ein gro:[sses] Stuckh von öhlfarb auf Leinwat / warin die Historia von Philemon / vndt Bauxis original von Rubbens. / in Einer schwartzen ramen das Innere leistel / geflambt v.[nd] verguldt hoch 8 span 7 finger, und / 10 spann 2 finger braith¹⁰

This document, which was drawn up by Leopold Wilhelm's court chaplain and painter Jan Anton van der Baren (1615/16–1686), is mostly very trustworthy with regard to its assessments of Flemish Baroque painting. For example, it describes in great detail the collaboration of different artists on Rubens's *Madonna in Floral Wreath* (fig. 7), as follows:

No. 99. Ein gro:[sses] Stuckh von öhlfarb auff Leinwaeth / warin vnser Liebe fraw mit dem Christkindl / lein siczet zwischen vier getraidten Stainen / Säulen, mitt vnderschiedlichen blumen vndt / früchten geziehrth, obenahn vier Engl, welche / ein Feston von blumen, vnd früchten halten, / gancz oben in der höche stehet geschriben: / si Deus pro Nobis quis contra Nos? / Und vntenahn ligen vnderschiedliche waffen / dabey ein gro:[sse] fahnen in einer schwarz glatten / ramen hoch 17 spann 7 finger vndt / 11 span 8 finger bräidt. Das Liebefrawen / pildt ist ein original von Gerardo Seghers, / die blumen original von Johann de Heim, / die waffen original von Paulo de Vos, / der grundt original von Cornelio de Vos, / vnd die schlacht auff der seithen original von / David Teniers.¹¹



Fig. 7
Gerard Seghers and others, *Madonna in Floral Wreath*.
Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 6334

These are contemporaries and artists who worked for Leopold Wilhelm, but Van der Baren had been born at a time when Rubens was still alive and the workshop was flourishing. He was probably keenly aware of the latter's oeuvre.

It is not known where the painting had been before or how it entered the archduke's collection. As the governor of the Spanish Netherlands from 1647 to 1656 and resident in Brussels, Leopold Wilhelm had very direct access to the local art market. This was certainly facilitated by his choice of court painters, who also acted as art agents for him: first, Jan van den Hoecke (1611–1650) and, after his death, David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690). Teniers was personally acquainted with Rubens: Rubens and his second wife, Helena Fourment (1614–1673), were witnesses to Teniers's 1637 wedding to Anna Brueghel (1619–1656), the daughter of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625), for whom Rubens had taken on the

¹⁰ 'No. 746 A large item of oil on canvas / wherein the story of Philemon / and Baucis original by Rubbens / in a black frame the inner bar / mottled and gilded high 8 span 7 finger, and / 10 spann 2 finger wide' [180.98 x 212.16 cm, incl. frame]; inv. no. 1659, fol. 278r. See also the transcription in Adolf Berger, *Inventar und Kunstsammlung des Erzherzogs Leopold Wilhelm von Österreich: nach der Originalhandschrift im fürstlich Schwarzenberg'schen Centralarchiv*, Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses I, 1883, LXXIX–CLXXVII, esp. CL.

¹¹ 'No. 99. A large item of oil on canvas / wherein our Blessed Lady with the Infant Christ / sitting between four twisted stone / columns with various flower and/ fruit adornments, above four angels, who / are holding a festoon of flowers, and fruit / at the very top on high is written: / si Deus pro Nobis quis contra Nos? / And underneath are lying various weapons / among them a large flag in a black smooth / frame high 17 spann 7 finger and / 11 span 8 finger wide. The Blessed Lady's / image is an original by Gerardo Seghers, / the flowers original by Johann de Heim, / the weapons original by Paulo de Vos, / the background original by Cornelio de Vos, / and the battle scene on the side original by / David Teniers.'; inv. no. 1659, fol. 226v and 227r. See also the transcription in Berger 1883 (see n. 10), CXX.



Fig. 8
Detail from Jacob (Jacques)
Jordaens, *The Feast of the Bean
King*. Vienna, KHM, Picture
Gallery, inv. no. GG 786

guardianship after her father's death.¹² If the painting was described as a Rubens by people who actually knew him, then the attribution is rather convincing. Contemporaries obviously classified this painting as a work by Rubens. We will return to this issue later, for that would not be the case throughout.

One century later, under Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740), the painting was considered a work by Jacob (Jacques) Jordaens (1593–1678) – thus the byline of a drawing that was probably created by Anton Joseph Prenner (1683–1761) for a print for the *Theatrum Artis Pictoriae* in around 1730.¹³ How did this attribution emerge? Maybe the rough lines of Baucis reminded Prenner of Jordaens's old woman on the left in the Viennese *Feast of the Bean King* (fig. 8)? In fact, Christian von Mechel hung the two paintings in the same room at

the Belvedere when he was in charge of a new presentation of the imperial collection.¹⁴ This attribution was not altered until Eduard Ritter von Engerth, director of the imperial picture gallery, changed it in 1884 to 'largely in the hand of Rubens'. The work is nowadays generally accepted to be a workshop painting the quality of which has repeatedly been stressed, including by Burckhardt,¹⁵ Rooses,¹⁶ and Michael Jaffé,¹⁷ but for which there has not been a name put forward. A workshop execution is supported by the relatively simple design of the folds, for example in Baucis's dress. Her face also appears somewhat schematic. However, it must be noted that old restorations may have somewhat changed her appearance: her pupils are now two large dark stains that stand out from her eye sockets; in her hair and the shaded areas of her face later retouching appears to have exacerbated

¹² Hans Vlieghe, *David Teniers The Younger (1610–1690): A Biography*, Pictura Nova XVI (Turnhout, 2001), 14–16.

¹³ Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 3287; red chalk, 246 x 332 mm. Inscribed: *Alt: 62. Lat: 72 unc.* (left) *Jacob Jordans pinx.* (centre); *v. Prenner del.* (right). I thank Bert Schepers, who made me aware of this red chalk drawing. It is likely that the drawing was made for *Theatrum artis pictoriae*, but it does not appear to have been translated into print (at least it is not contained in the editions of the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the National Library in Vienna). On *Theatrum artis pictoriae quae in Caesarea Vindobonensi pinacotheca servantur ... 1728–1733* in general, see: Alexandra Matzner, 'Die Gemäldegalerie von Kaiser Karl VI. Theatrum Artis Pictoriae, Wien 1728–1733', in Agnes Husslein-Arco and Tobias G. Natter (eds.), *Fürstenglanz. Die Macht der Pracht*, exh. cat. (Belvedere) Vienna 2016, 99–109 as well as Astrid Bähr, *Repräsentieren, bewahren, belehren: Galeriewerke (1660–1800): von der Darstellung herrschaftlicher Gemäldeansammlungen zum populären Bildband* (Hildesheim, 2009), 141–9.

¹⁴ According to a reconstruction by Nora Fischer, the painting was hung in the first room with Netherlandish painters, in the top row on the second wall with the door at the right, *The Feast of the Bean King* on the third wall in the top row, therefore at right angles to *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*; they were only separated by the door. See Nora Fischer, 'Zur digitalen Rekonstruktion der Hängung der kaiserlichen Gemäldeansammlung im Oberen Belvedere 1781', in Gudrun Swoboda (ed.), *Die kaiserliche Gemäldegalerie in Wien und die Anfänge des öffentlichen Kunstmuseums* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar, 2013), i, 210–II. Christian von Mechel, *Verzeichniss der Gemälde der Kaiserlich Königlichen Bilder Gallerie in Wien* (Vienna, 1783), 87, no. 14 (as Jordaens).

¹⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *Erinnerungen aus Rubens* (Basel, 1898), 220–I.

¹⁶ Rooses 1890 (see n. 5), 151.

¹⁷ Michael Jaffé, 'Exhibitions for the Rubens Year – I', *The Burlington Magazine* CXIX (1977), 621–31, esp. 623.



Fig. 9
Detail from fig. 1



Fig. 10
Detail from Peter Paul Rubens, *Cimon and Iphigenia*.
Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 532

rather than improved on the not always entirely successful transitions from light to shadow. Philemon's face is also lacking the energetic brushstrokes of Rubens. Yet again, Jupiter's legs are convincingly rendered in a skilful foreshortening, for which, moreover, the artist barely needed to resort to the support of an underdrawing (on this, see *The Restorer's Viewpoint*).

Michael Jaffé already stressed the particular quality of the goose and the fruit basket, which he considered worthy of Rubens, although he did judge the painting overall more likely to have been a school painting.¹⁸ Indeed, the animal, like the fruit basket (fig. 9), is somewhat more detailed in the depiction of the surface structure, with clearer contours than those of the figures, for example. They therefore differ from the rest of the painting in a similar manner as the fruit and animal still life created by Frans Snyders in Rubens's *Cimon and Iphigenia* (fig. 10) do.¹⁹ This is not to say that the goose and still life are by Frans Snyders, they are not exact enough for that. It is, however, a reason to argue that there had probably been a first version of *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*, in which Snyders may himself have been responsible for the basket of fruit.²⁰ However, the infrared reflectography examination suggests that the Viennese painting is the first version of the composition following an oil sketch by Rubens (see *The Restorer's Viewpoint*). It is likely that one workshop member worked quite independently to create the Viennese painting following

this sketch and possibly in doing so took the freedom of taking inspiration from Snyders for the still life. How are we to imagine the emergence of different versions within the operation of the workshop?

An Aside on Rubens's Workshop Practices

Replicas, or rather workshop repetitions of a composition, are not unusual for Rubens (as well as other artists); there are several such cases. They frequently made use of a range of support media: Baltic oak as well as canvas (which was easier to transport), with the wooden panel now generally being considered by researchers to be the higher quality prototype.²¹ There are also frequently several versions on the same support medium.²² Interestingly, George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628), owned several paintings of which there are at least two extant versions.²³ The Viennese *Head of Medusa* is a good example; it is the canvas version that Rubens had

¹⁸ Michael Jaffé, *Rubens. Catalogo completo* (Milan, 1989), 299, no. 877.

¹⁹ On this most recently, Nils Büttner, *Allegories and Subjects from Literature, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, XII/i–ii (London and Turnhout, 2018), i, cat. no. 59, 435–43, ii, fig. 290.

²⁰ Prohaska, in exh. cat. Vienna 1977 (see n. 2), 95, 96, derives the basket of fruit from Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, but also refers to Rubens's *Satyr with a Basket of Fruit* in private collection.

²¹ On this, see Arnout Balis, "'Fatto da un mio discepolo': Rubens's Studio Practices Reviewed", in Toshiharu Nakamura (ed.), *Rubens and his Workshop: The Flight of Lot and his Family from Sodom, with bibl.* (Tokyo, 1994); Arnout Balis, 'Rubens and his Studio: Defining the Problem', in Joost Vander Auwera and Sabine van Sprang (eds.), *Rubens: A Genius at Work: The Works of Peter Paul Rubens in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium Reconsidered, exh. cat. Brussels* (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique) 2007, 30–51; Nils Büttner, 'The Hands of Rubens: On Copies and their Reception', in Toshiharu Nakamura (ed.), *Appreciating the Traces of an Artist's Hand*, Kyoto Studies in Art History, II, with bibl. (Kyoto, 2017), 41–53.

²² Büttner 2017 (see n. 21), 43–5.

²³ McGrath, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Mc Grath et al., *Mythological Subjects, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, XI/i (Turnhout, 2016), 53. Next to *The Drunken Silenus*, she also cites *Three Graces with a Basket*, *Hero and Leander* as well as the *Head of Medusa*, but only refers to the Mythological Paintings. *Angelica and the Hermit* ought also to be added as a literary theme. See Büttner 2018 (see n. 19), 447–8.

heavily revised from the *Medusa* that is now in the Moravian Gallery, which had been executed on an oak panel.²⁴ Replicas by Rubens were accepted by collectors; one of the duke's art dealers, George Gage (c.1582–1638), remarked about the second version of a hunting scene created for Sir Dudley Carleton, First Viscount Dorchester (1573–1632), that the picture was better than the larger first version. This opinion is not, however, confirmed by an analysis of the painting in question.²⁵

How did Rubens' workshop operate, and what do we know about it?²⁶

As a court artist, Rubens was not obliged by the guild statutes and therefore not required to register apprentices, assistants, or students; as a result, there are no documents on his workshop operations. We only have evidence that in 1611, just a few years after his return from Italy in 1608, he had to reject more than a hundred applicants wanting to be his students.²⁷ There is also an account of a workshop visit: on 21 April 1621, the Danish

court doctor Otto Sperling visited Rubens and gave a detailed description of the artist as *pictor doctus*:

‘Nous rendîmes visite au très célèbre et éminent peintre Rubens que nous trouvâmes à l'oeuvre et, tout en poursuivant son travail, se faisait lire Tacite et dictait une lettre. Nous nous taisions par crainte de le déranger; mais lui, nous adressant la parole, sans interrompre son travail et tout en faisant poursuivre la lecture et en continuant de dicter sa lettre, répondait à nos questions, comme pour nous donner la preuve de ses puissantes facultés. Il chargea ensuite un serviteur de nous conduire par son magnifique palais et de nous faire voir ses antiquités et les statues grecques et romaines qu'il possédait en nombre considérable. Nous vîmes encore une vaste pièce sans fenêtres, mais qui prenait le jour par une large ouverture pratiquée au milieu du plafond. Là se trouvaient réunis un bon nombre de jeunes peintres occupés chacun d'une oeuvre différente dont M. Rubens leur avait fourni un dessin au crayon, rehaussé de couleurs par endroits. Ces tableaux, les jeunes gens devaient les exécuter complètement en peinture, jusqu'à ce que finalement M. Rubens y mît la dernière main par des coups de pinceau et des couleurs.’²⁸

Rubens also made no secret of his workshop operations, quite the contrary. In an oft-cited letter to Sir Dudley Carleton on 12 May 1618, Rubens lists paintings he has in store. In this list, he provides exact information about the degree to which these are in his own hand, giving the full range of possibilities from entirely in his own hand ('Original tutto de mia mano': *Daniel in the Lions' Den*); in his own hand and the hand of a specialist (for animals, still lifes, or landscapes – e.g., 'Originale de mia mano e l'acquila fatta dal Snyders': *Prometheus Bound*) up to begun by a student hand, but finalized by Rubens ('Cominciato di un mio discepolo ... non essendo finito si ritoccerebbe tutto de mia mano et a quel modo passaria per originale': *Judith*); or in the hand of a student, but entirely revised by Rubens ('fatto del miglior mio discepolo, i tutto ritocco de mia mano': *Achilles Discovered Among the Daughters of Lycomedes*). He was even providing this information in a sales situation – Carleton wanted to acquire Rubens paintings.²⁹

²⁴ On this, see Gerlinde Gruber, 'Medusa' in Elizabeth McGrath & al., *Mythological Subjects*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XI/ii (London and Turnhout, 2022), i, no. 79, 345–68, ii, figs. 235–51.

²⁵ 'Rubens for the gusto wich he takes in that peece of hunting [a very large painting that Rubens had offered to the Duke of Aarschot], is makinge another picture of it, but much lesse. For whereas the great picture is eighteene foote long and betweene eleven and twelve foote highe, this other is but ten foote long, and seaven foote highe. This later picture if you like to have for your chaine, you may; and he undertakes to make it of as much perfection as the other, if not more; and if you like the matche, Mr. Gage will see that he shall performe it. He hath already seene so much of it as is done, and likes it exceedingly, and saith he had rather geve threescore pound for this, then fowerscore for the other.' Max Rooses and Charles Ruelens (eds.), *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres*, I–VI (Antwerp, 1887–1909), II (1898), 93. Letter by Toby Matthew to Carleton, citing Gage, 30 December 1616. On this, see: Arnout Balis, *Hunting Scenes, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, XVIII/ii (London and Oxford, 1986), 44–45, cat. no. 2, 95–104. A painting in Corsham Court, Wiltshire is identified as Carleton's picture and classified as Rubens and Workshop (Toshiharu Nakamura (ed.), *Rubens and his Workshop: The Flight of Lot and his Family from Sodom*, exh. cat. Tokyo 1994, fig. 2). The stylistic analysis of this said replica does not, however, confirm the claim to being in his own hand. Balis 1994 (see n. 21), 106.

²⁶ Find a comprehensive overview of the discussion in Balis 1994 (see n. 21), 97–127. Also see Balis 2007 (see n. 21), 30–51; Anne-Marie Logan, 'Rubens as a Teacher: "He may teach his art to his students and others to his liking"', in Amy Golahny, Mia M. Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (eds.), *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam, 2006), 247–63; Toshiharu Nakamura, 'Rubens's Painting Practice: Some Considerations on his Collaborations with Specialists and his Relationship with Van Dyck as Workshop Assistant', in Toshiharu Nakamura (ed.), *Rubens: Inspired by Italy and Established in Antwerp*, exh. cat. Tokyo (Bunkamura Museum of Art) and Kitakyushu (Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art), and Nagaoka (Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art) 2013 [in Japanese], 218–234 [English supplement 5–20]; Marina Daiman, 'Telling What is Told: Originality and Repetition in Rubens's English Works', in Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard (eds.), *Concepts of Creativity in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2013), 151–79, esp. 151–3; Reinhold Baumstark and Guy Delmarcel, *Subjects from History: The Decius Mus Series*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XIII/ii (London and Turnhout, 2019), i, esp. 'Work in the Rubens Studio' (Baumstark), 149–234; Nils Büttner and Sandra-Kristin Diefenthaler (eds.), *Becoming Famous. Rubens wird berühmt*, exh. cat. Stuttgart (Staatsgalerie) 2021, 37–49; Annette Kollmann and Eva Tasch, 'Becoming Rubens? Becoming a panel painting! Die Entstehung der elf Imperatorenbildnisse', *ibid.*, 76–103.

²⁷ Rooses and Ruelens 1887–1909 (see n. 25), (1898), ii, 35. Letter from 11 May 1611 to Jacques de Bie.

²⁸ W. v. S. [Wilhelm von Seidlitz], 'Bericht eines Zeitgenossen über einen Besuch bei Rubens', *Repertorium für Kunstgeschichte* X (1887), 111; Henri Hymans, 'Une visite chez Rubens, racontée par un contemporain', *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique* (1887) LVI/iii, t. XIII, 150. <http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?q=sperling&dir=edoc%2Fed000083&qurl=wdb%2Fsearch%2Fsearch.xml&distype=results-transcript> accessed 5 Jan. 2024.

²⁹ Rooses and Ruelens 1887–1909 (see n. 25), (1898), ii, 135–8. Rubens to



Fig. 11
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Miracles of St Ignatius of Loyola*.
Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 530



Fig. 12
Peter Paul Rubens and Workshop (Jacob Jordaens), *The Miracles of St Ignatius of Loyola*. Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 517

Obviously, Rubens did not execute each brushstroke himself in repetitions, but left his assistants to copy a pictorial invention, so that they would simultaneously learn to work in his manner.³⁰ The workshop execution of the final product often started from an oil sketch, a bozzetto or a modello by Rubens,³¹ and Rudolf Oldenbourg considered this process conceivable for *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*.³² The Antwerp Jesuit altars created around 1618 are a good example for such a procedure; the Kunsthistorisches Museum owns both the modelli (fig. 11) and the finished altarpieces (fig. 12). A closer inspection of the altarpieces reveals slight

stylistic differences; while they have not been submitted to close analysis to date, it is my opinion that two different groups worked on each of the very large canvases (each 535 x 395 cm). Jacob Jordaens appears to have contributed to the Ignatius altar: note, for example, the blonde woman with the folded hands on the left (fig. 13), who is looking up to St Ignatius with tears in her eyes. The very smooth, almost moist and at the same time comprehensive, compact appearance of the carnation in the preferred shades of white, pink, and red can be found in very similar rendering in Jordaens's early works, such as his signed *Adoration of the Magi* at the Mauritshuis, The Hague (fig. 14), which was created in 1617. The stylistic analysis implies that Jordaens contributed to this altarpiece, but this is not documented. Moreover, Reinhold Baumstark also sees the hand of Jordaens in the two largest canvases of the Decius Mus cycle (*The Death of Decius Mus* and *The Funeral of Decius Mus*, Vienna, Liechtenstein Museum), which were executed at the same time.³³ Obviously, masters who were already renowned also worked in Rubens's workshop:³⁴ Jordaens had been

Carleton (28 April 1618), 137: 'Dodeci Apostoli con un Cristo fatti di mei discepoli dalli originali che ha il Ducca di Lerma de mia mano dovendosi ritoccare de mia mano in tutto e per tutto.' Alexander Liby, 'The Master as Manager: Rubens and The Carleton Exchange', in Sasha Suda and Kirk Nickel (eds.), *Early Rubens*, exh. cat. Toronto (AGO) and San Francisco (de Young Legion of Honor Fine Arts Museum) 2019, 72–82, with an English translation of the list on 80.

³⁰ On this most recently: exh. cat. Stuttgart 2021 (see n. 26), 37.

³¹ See Lammertse in Friso Lammertse and Alejandro Vergara (eds.), *Rubens. Painter of Sketches*, exh. cat. Madrid (Museo Nacional del Prado) and Rotterdam (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen) 2018, 46–7.

³² P.P. Rubens. *Des Meisters Gemälde in 538 Abbildungen. Klassiker der Kunst*, V, ed. Rudolf Oldenbourg, 4th edition (Stuttgart and Berlin 1921), 452.

³³ Baumstark and Delmarcel 2019 (see n. 26), 185–95, 208, nos. 5a and 6a.

³⁴ On trained painters in Rubens's studio who were also recognized as



Fig. 13
Detail from fig. 12



Fig. 14
Jacob (Jacques) Jordaens,
Adoration of the Shepherds,
Den Haag, Mauritshuis



Fig. 15
Peter Paul Rubens, *St Ambrose and Emperor Theodosius*.
Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 524

recognized as ‘Waterschilder’ (sic) in Antwerp’s Guild of St Luke in 1615,³⁵ and Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) had been named a master there in February 1618. However, the latter is still mentioned in a letter from 1620 as being with Rubens; indeed, his name also appears in Rubens’s 1620 contract with the Jesuits of Antwerp for the ceiling paintings in the Jesuit church, which were to be executed by Rubens himself, Van Dyck, and workshop assistants.³⁶

In the aforementioned letter to Carleton, Rubens also says that *Achilles Discovered Among the Daughters of Lycomedes*³⁷ was ‘fatto dal meglio mio discepolo’ (‘made by the best of my students’)³⁸, probably referring to Van

Dyck. The latter was obviously particularly skilled at emulating his master’s characteristic style. There is a series of works that were variously attributed to Rubens and Van Dyck alternately over the course of time. In *St Ambrose and Emperor Theodosius* (fig. 15), the Kunsthistorisches Museum owns an impressive example for this: while Van Dyck may be author of the soldier with light brown curls behind Emperor Theodosius, the majority of the painting appears to originate from Rubens, and the face of the old man with a bald head on the right behind St Ambrose was most probably executed by another student hand. In the 1960s, the entire altarpiece was still attributed to Van Dyck, although doubts were already being voiced in this regard.³⁹

Nico Van Hout suggested that the role of such well trained assistants⁴⁰ – for it may be misleading to describe

masters in the guild, see Baumstark and Delmarcel 2019 (see n. 26), 159–97.

35 Philippe Félix Rombouts and Théodore Van Leries, *De Liggenen en andere Historisches Archieven der Antwerpsche Sint Lucasgilde, 1453–1615* (Antwerp 1864–1876), 514.

36 John Rupert Martin, *The Ceiling Paintings for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, I (London and New York 1968), 213–15. Rooses and Ruelens 1887–1909 (see n. 25), ii (1898), 250; the letter is probably from the secretary of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, probably Francesco Vercellini. See Friso Lammertse and Alejandro Vergara (eds.), *The Young Van Dyck*, exh. cat. Madrid (Prado) 2012, 25, 26, 65.

37 On this, see Gregory Martin, in Elizabeth McGrath et al. 2016 (see n. 23), i/1, 71–80, ii, figs. 1, 2, 11.

38 Rooses and Ruelens 1887–1909 (see n. 25), ii (1898), 137.

39 *Katalog der Gemäldegalerie, II. Teil, Vlamen, Holländer, Deutsche, Franzosen* (Vienna 1963), 48, no. 136. Elizabeth McGrath, *Subjects from History*, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard XIII/i, I, nos. 55, 297–308, II, figs. 204, 208, 210; Wolfgang Prohaska in: Johann Kräftner et al. (eds.), *Rubens in Wien*, exh. cat. Vienna (Lichtenstein Museum) 2005, cat. nos. 25, 114–119; Baumstark and Delmarcel 2019 (see n. 26), 165, 173. Ben van Beneden, in Gudrun Swoboda (ed.), *Idole & Rivalen. Künstlerwettbewerb in Antike und Früher Neuzeit*, exh. cat. Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) 2022, 150–1.

40 Reinhold Baumstark quite rightly suggested the term assistant: Baumstark and Delmarcel 2019 (see n. 26), i, 159–60.



Fig. 16a
Detail from fig. 1

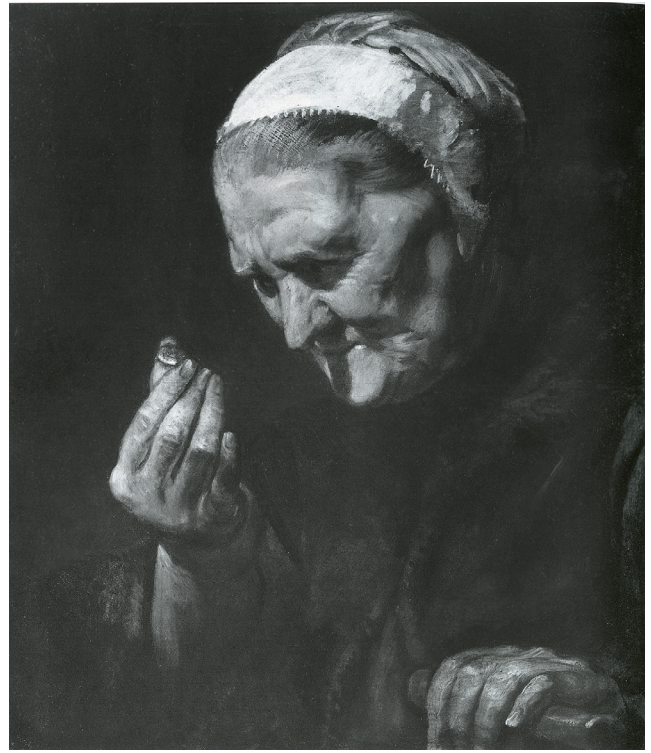


Fig. 16b
Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of the Head of an Old Woman with a Headscarf, Looking Downwards Towards the Left, Holding a Gem, a Coin or a Seal in her Hand*, location unknown

finished masters as students – might have had an even wider scope: they may also have contributed to the composition by a form of brainstorming. After all, the number and quality of large-scale commissions Rubens completed within a relatively short time period between 1617 and 1625 is impressive.⁴¹ It is likely that the very high-ceilinged studio he used from 1615/16⁴² in his house on Wapper increased productivity. In light of the sheer number of large-scale commissions, it must furthermore be assumed that Rubens needed to use other locations too. Reinhold Baumstark suggested that the two largest canvases from the Decius Mus cycle mentioned above may have been executed in Jordaens's workshop, among others, because they bear no verifiable Rubens retouchings.⁴³ They were also considered Rubens's works by contemporaries and are still described as such in depictions of the cycle today.

A number of auxiliary devices guaranteed the efficiency of the workshop operation, including, for example,

head studies, known as *tronies*,⁴⁴ but also drawings and other resources. It appears that these were also used for *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*. The way in which Baucis casts her eyes downwards is reminiscent of a *tronie* attributed to Rubens, *Study of the Head of an Old Woman with a Headscarf, Looking Downwards Towards the Left, Holding a Gem, a Coin or a Seal in her Hand* (location unknown, fig. 16).⁴⁵ The way the light is cast as well as the viewpoint correspond to this head study, which was skilfully reproduced into a new context in the Viennese painting. This is the environment in which the Viennese painting was created.

41 Nico Van Hout, "Rubens" and the Passion. Composition on the Basis of a Brainstorm Session?, in Gerlinde Gruber et al. (eds.), *Rubens: The Power of Transformation*, exh. cat. Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) and Frankfurt am Main (Städel Museum) 2017, 17–77, with references to earlier works by Van Hout on this theme.

42 Koen Bulckens, 'The Bigger Picture: Rubens and His Workshop during the Twelve Years' Truce', in exh. cat. Toronto and San Francisco 2019 (see n. 29), 85–101.

43 Baumstark and Delmarcel 2019 (see n. 26), 186–8.

44 On this in general, see: Nico Van Hout, Koen Bulckens, and Lizzie Marx (eds.), *Turning Heads: Rubens, Rembrandt and Vermeer*, exh. cat. Antwerp (KMSK) and Dublin (National Gallery of Ireland) 2023; Dagmar Hirschfelder, *Tronie und Portrait in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2008).

45 See Nico Van Hout, *Study Heads, Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, XX/ii, ed. Bert Schepers and Brecht Vanoppen, I–II (Turnhout and London 2020), I, 197–8, no. 76, II, figs. 261–4.

Oil Sketch and Subsequent Prints

It is probable that there was an oil sketch for this composition, which is unfortunately now only known to us from a copy (fig. 17).⁴⁶ In the copy, the faces are lacking expression and there are some incongruous details, such as the shadow cast by the foot of Philemon, which takes on an almost physical appearance in the sketch as if it stood on something; the contours are devoid of the energetic brushstrokes of Rubens.

Jan Meyssens (1612–1670) engraved an inverted view that names Rubens as the creator of the composition (fig. 18). It differs from the Viennese picture in several aspects, however. On the whole, the composition generally shows more of the room: there is a fringed curtain hanging over the bed, the ceiling is higher, and an open door in an additional wall overlaps the fireplace, creating the impression that the fireplace is facing the viewer; in the oil sketch and the picture, the fireplace is situated in the wall on the right side. In the engraving, the gods bear their traditional attributes – Jupiter his bundle of lightning, which he almost hides from the elderly couple behind his back in his right hand, and Mercury is wearing his winged hat with his peasant shirt – so that it is easier to decipher the story.

The stool on which Jupiter is seated has one leg that tapers into the shape of an arrow point in both the oil sketch and the engraving, while it takes the shape of a cube in the painting. Jupiter's cloak was placed somewhat higher up in the Viennese painting, as in the sketch, but this was altered so that more of Jupiter's back is visible. The Viennese painting clearly depicts a box-bed with its edge parallel to the pictorial field – this is not so obvious in the sketch.

⁴⁶ Held already listed it in his groundbreaking work on Rubens's oil sketches as a copy after a lost original. Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens: A Critical Catalogue*, National Gallery of Art, Kress Foundation Studies in the History of Art, 7, I-II (Princeton, NJ, 1980) I, cat. no. 246, 334–5, II, fig. 444.



Fig. 17
Copy after Rubens, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*, panel, 24 x 30.5 cm. Location unknown



Fig. 18
Jan Meyssens, after Rubens, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*, Paper, 304 x 400 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-68.088