

A Rubens Assistant: Jan van den Hoecke

Apparently there was a version by the ascertained Rubens assistant Jan van den Hoecke that was close to the Rubens composition, but with a less dramatic design.⁴⁸ This pictorial composition is only known to us from an engraving (fig. 28) by Cornelis Galle I (1576–1650), following Jan van den Hoecke: *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon und Baucis* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-103.446).⁴⁹ It is possible that the source was only an oil sketch and not a finished painting – at least the former is documented in black and white in 1654 on panel in the estate of the painter Jan van Balen (1611–1654).⁵⁰ Inspired by depictions of Christ by Rubens, Van den Hoecke's Jupiter is sitting in the middle of the table, almost at the centre; he is being served wine by the upright Philemon. The scene is set in an interior the right half of which was clearly inspired by the Rubens painting: note the mantelpiece and the wooden shelf on which the plates are arranged. This engraving was so successful that it was issued by Martinus van den Enden (1605–1654/74), Rombout van de Velde (inscribed in the Guild of St Luke in Antwerp in 1645),⁵¹ as well as by Pieter de Bailliu (1613–after 1660). Joseph Vanloo (active in Paris 1703–1740) published an inverted version of the latter, cropped on the right side (fig. 29), naming Rubens as the creator.⁵² In addition, a version of this composition that had been



Fig. 28
Cornelis Galle, after Jan van den Hoecke, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-OB-103.446



Fig. 29
Joseph Vanloo, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery

⁴⁸ John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the most eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters; in which is included a short Biographical Notice of the Artists, with a copious Description of their principal Pictures ...*, I–IX (London 1829–1842), IX (Supplement), 1842, 326, no. 301, with reference to the engraving ‘in the manner of Meysens’ and to Vanloo’s print.

⁴⁹ F.W.H. Hollstein et al., *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, I–LXXII (Amsterdam, 1949–2010), VII, 59, no. 276.

⁵⁰ ‘Een wit ende swert op pannel Boucius ende Philemon geschildert van Jan Hoeck op Panneel’, in Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinsten van de zeventiende eeuw, Fontes Historiae Artis Neerlandicae. Bronnen voor de kunstgeschiedenis van de Nederlanden*, I, I–XIV (Brussels, 1984–2009), VII, 28, 265, Inventory of 1 April 1654, by Jan van Balen, painter, widower of Joanna van Werden.

⁵¹ Ad Rombout van de Velde: Hollstein et al. 1949–2010, XXXIII (1989), 179; on the engravings: Alfred von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexicon*, 1906–1911, I, 693, engravings no. 15–18.

⁵² Stechow 1940 (see n. 3), 109; Robert Hecquet, *Catalogue des Estampes gravées d’après Rubens* (Paris, 1751), XI. This version was titled *Jordaens* in the copy in Yale: even then there was confusion about Rubens and his workshop and succession. Yale University Art Museum, Prints and Drawings, inv. no. 1988.1.162



Fig. 30
Unknown engraver, after Jan van den Hoecke, *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis*. Vienna, Albertina, inv. no. H/II/38/15

extended at the top was engraved in 1665 (fig. 30); this version enhances the scene with several details from another Rubens painting, *Winter* (c.1618–1619, London, Buckingham Palace, Royal Collection Trust).⁵³

The pictorial conception was therefore still considered worthy of Rubens as late as the eighteenth century.

In light of these confusions around the attribution, there arises the question of whether Jan van den Hoecke might have been the workshop assistant who created the Viennese painting. We know that he worked with Rubens on the decoration of Antwerp for the Joyous Entry of Infante Ferdinand (the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi*) in 1635; Rubens's nephew Philip named him as a student of Rubens. It is quite possible that he joined the workshop as early as just after the summer of 1630.⁵⁴ Hans Vlieghe reconstructed the early work of Van den Hoecke; Arnout Balis and Bert Schepers also identified paintings he created in the Rubens workshop.⁵⁵ In 1637, the artist

went to Italy and devoted himself to Bolognese classicism.⁵⁶ He later worked in Austria for Ferdinand III (fig. 31) and in 1647 became court painter to Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in Antwerp (fig. 32) when the latter was made governor of the Southern Spanish Netherlands.

Typical of the early Van den Hoecke are a small mouth and a slim nose, like those of Mercury in the

⁵³ Wurzbach 1906–1911 (see n. 51), I, 693, no. 18.

⁵⁴ Frédéric A.F.T. de Reiffenberg, 'Nouvelles recherches sur Pierre-Paul Rubens, contenant une vie inédite de ce grand peintre, par Philippe Rubens, son neveu, avec des notes et des éclaircissements recueillis par le Baron de Reiffenberg', in *Nouveaux mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles X* (1837), 3–21, esp. 11; Gregory Martin, *Rubens in London: Art and Diplomacy* (London and Turnhout, 2011), 116.

⁵⁵ Hans Vlieghe, 'Nicht Jan Boeckhorst, sondern Jan van den Hoecke', *Beiträge zum internationalen Colloquium 'Jan Boeckhorst – Maler*

der Rubenszeit' im Westfälischen Landesmuseum Münster (November 1990), Westfalen. Hefte für Geschichte, Kunst und Volkskunde. Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde Westfalens, des LWL-Landesmuseums für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, des LWL-Amtes für Denkmalpflege in Westfalen und des LWL-Museums für Archäologie LXVIII (1990), 166–83; Balis 1994 (see n. 21), 115–16; Natasja Peeters and Hélène Dubois, in exh. cat. Brussels 2007 (see n. 21), 203–5, no. 68; Jahel Sanzsalazar, 'Jan van den Hoecke: Quelques précisions et nouvelles propositions pour le catalogue de son oeuvre', *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Oudheidkunde en Kunstgeschiedenis LXXXII* (2013), 45–78; Jahel Sanzsalazar, 'Jan van den Hoecke (1611–1651), the painter of Sibyls: the success, inspiration and dispersal of a very personal iconography / Jan van den Hoecke (1611–1651), el pintor de Sibilas: éxito, inspiración y dispersión de una iconografía muy personal', in *Philostrato. Revista de Historia y Arte V* (2019), 5–32; Bert Schepers, in Júlia Tátrai and Ágota Varga (eds.), *Rubens, Van Dyck and the Splendour of Flemish Painting*, exh. cat. Budapest (Szépművészeti Múzeum) 2019–2020, 244–7, no. 60; Elizabeth McGrath and Bert Schepers, in McGrath et al., *Mythological Subjects II (CRLB)* (2022), I, 19–20 and 24, no. 52; II, figs. 11–12; Jeremy Wood and Bert Schepers in *ibid.*, I, 77 and 90–92, no. 53a; II, figs. 59 and 62; Elizabeth McGrath in *ibid.*, I, 421–7, nos. 85 and 85a; II, figs. 282 and 283.

⁵⁶ Günther Heinz, 'Studien über Jan van den Hoecke und die Malerei der Niederländer in Wien', *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien LXIII* (1967), 109–64, esp. 109–40.

Viennese painting. The series of sibyls that Vlieghe convincingly attributed to Van den Hoecke⁵⁷ shows certain similarities to the Viennese Mercury in this regard, but they do not have his soft contours and surfaces.⁵⁸

Van den Hoecke was born in 1611; he could not have made the painting earlier than 1630, when he entered the Rubens workshop.

The entry by Jan Anton van der Baren in the collection inventory of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm also speaks against Van den Hoecke being the author of the painting. As Van den Hoecke was the archduke's court painter, it is most likely that his authorship would have been listed there. The inventory is so exact that in other places it very much does name copies by Van den Hoecke, namely after Veronese (a *Temple Visit of the Virgin Mary*, no. 1) and after Titian (a *Landscape with Madonna, Infant Jesus and Infant St John as well as St Catherine*, no. 3 as well as the *Bacchanal*, no. 9, and a *Madonna with Infant Jesus, St Joseph and St John the Baptist*, no. 16).

However, it is also conceivable that Van den Hoecke did not claim authorship for works that had been created in the Rubens workshop. After all, all contributors within the workshop were obliged to work in the style of Rubens and under Rubens's name for these pieces. They may not have been entitled to call these works their own; indeed, contemporaries also did not conceive them as such.

The Viennese painting *Jupiter and Mercury with Philemon and Baucis* is a workshop piece for which there is no immediately apparent attribution at this point in time. We still know too little about the work of the very well trained Rubens assistants or the development of such artists as Jan van den Hoecke during this period. The Decius Mus series and the Viennese Jesuit altarpieces give grounds for hope, however, that in due time we will be able to differentiate with greater insight in this matter.



Fig. 31
Jan van den Hoecke, *Emperor Ferdinand III*. Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 3283



Fig. 32
Jan van den Hoecke, *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm*. Vienna, KHM, Picture Gallery, inv. no. GG 3284

⁵⁷ Vlieghe 1990 (see n. 55), 166–71, figs. 2–11. On his *Sibyls*, also see Sanzsalazar 2019 (see n. 55).

⁵⁸ It is possible that the Viennese painting is of the same hand as a *Holy Family with St Elisabeth and St John the Baptist* (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum), which Burchard attributed to Jan van den Hoecke. Görel Cavalli-Björkman, in Görel Cavalli-Björkman et al., *Dutch and Flemish Paintings III (Flemish Paintings)* (Värnamo, 2010), 180–2, no. 95 (as 'attributed to Jan van den Hoecke').