Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS

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This long-overlooked painting is a significant addition to Rembrandt’s painted oeuvre. It is in equal measure a product of his brush and his intellect, and all the hallmarks of his style while still in Leiden are revealed both in the visible painted surface and in the underlying layers uncovered by science. An artist who is as famous for his production of etchings and drawings in monochrome as for his paintings in colour, created this painting without any colour but with tone, a stunning achievement and a testament to his ambition as well as to his genius with the brush.

Because Rembrandt’s artistic personality was developing so rapidly in the years before his move from Leiden to Amsterdam in 1631, the chronology of his undated works might reasonably be described as a moving target, particularly since, in common with other great painters such as Rubens, he used a growing repertoire of ideas as he developed as an artist, sometimes re-using motifs from earlier paintings. The most likely dating for this nocturne is circa 1628, but it could date from the following year. In any event it predates the vast increase in output of portraiture that heralded his arrival in Amsterdam. Before this dramatic change in his career, he saw himself as principally a history painter, not a portraitist. His history paintings over the next few years are largely limited to ideas for etchings, the medium through which he expressed himself as an artist of religious subjects until his output of portraits began to flag after 1635 and he returned to narrative genres in paint.

This gives us a clue as to Rembrandt’s likely intention in painting this monochromatic work. It evolved during the process of creation, with numerous revisions, and part of the design worked out with a stylus in the wet ground and painted last, together with revisions in the form of pentimenti made clear by infrared imaging, though some are visible to the naked eye. The most likely reason for this is that Rembrandt was working out an idea for a possible etching, as he was to do with the near-monochromatic Good Samaritan in the Wallace Collection of 1630, which was turned into an etching with substantial changes two years later. The most likely reason why this Adoration of the Kings did not directly result in an etching (Rembrandt never made an etching of this subject) is that the subtlety of two separate light sources of different tones, one exterior and natural, one interior and artificial, together with the use of reflections of each source to model form and create depth would ultimately have proved an insurmountable challenge to transpose to the medium of etching.

Of the dwindling number of paintings by Rembrandt remaining in private ownership, most are portraits or tronies, and very few are history paintings, making this a work of extreme rarity.

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
Leiden 1606–1669 Amsterdam

THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS
oil on oak panel, en brusaille and grisaille
24.5 x 18.5 cm.; 9 ⅝ x 7 ¼ in.

£10,000,000-15,000,000
£12,000,000-17,000,000
$12,500,000-18,500,000

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PROVENANCE

Probably Constantyn Ranst, Amsterdam, in his inventory of 1714 (‘een slijper stuk, synde de drie Koningen van Rembrandt’), and his sale, 17 May 1715, lot 1 (‘een slijper stuk, vonhoudende de drie Koningen uit het Oosten tweek, om grootig gesignierte, door Rembrandt van zijn beste trant’);

Probably with Alexis Delahante (d. 1837);

Probably his sale, London, Phillips, 2–3 June 1814, (first day’s sale), lot 40 (no measurements given), for 215 Guineas to Dr Rainer or John Morant (annotated copies of the catalogue give different buyer’s names);

Probably anonymous sale (either Monsieur Vanoc or a Burgomaster residing in Rotterdam, although other lots seem to have been consigned anonymously by Delahante, including the Rembrandt and a Veronese of St. Jerome), London, Phillips, 28–29 June 1822, lot 379 (as ‘Rembrandt, The Adoration of the Magi, an extraordinary fine specimen of the master’);

Private collection, Paris (according to the Heldring catalogue of 1955);

Probably with Pierre Henri Landry (1898–1990), Paris, 1951;

With P. de Boer, Amsterdam, probably by 1951, possibly their stock number 4867 inscribed on the reverse of the photograph in the De Boer Archive, which is also annotated ‘Landry’;


His widow, E.M. Heldring-Talma (1892–1985);

By whom sold, Amsterdam, Christie’s, 3 December 1985, lot 155 (as circle of Rembrandt);

There acquired for a private family collection, Germany;

By whom sold, Amsterdam, Christie’s (online), closed 6 October 2021, lot 7 (as circle of Rembrandt).

EXHIBITED

Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Kunstschatten uit Nederlandse verzamelingen, 30 June – 25 September 1955, no. 99, reproduced fig. 18 in the catalogue (as Rembrandt);

Arnhem, Gemeentemuseum, Collectie J.C.H. Heldring te Oosterbeek, 6 April – 1 June 1955, no. 24, reproduced fig. 23 in the catalogue (as Rembrandt);


LITERATURE

Possibly A. Bredius, in Oud Holland, 28, 1910, p. 15 (referring to the small Adoration of the Magi in the collection of Constantyn Ranst in 1714; see Provenance);

D. Hannema, Catalogue raisonné of the pictures in the collection of J.C.H. Heldring, Rotterdam 1955, no. 24, reproduced pl. 27 (as Rembrandt);

I.Q. van Beijeren Almna, ‘Tekeningen van Rembrandt’, in Bulletijn van het Rijksmuseum, vol. 10, no. 5, May 1957, p. 120 (as Rembrandt, a little before 1627);

O. Benesch, The Drawings of Rembrandt, New York 1973, vol. 1, p. 3, under 01B (as Rembrandt pupil after 1630);

K. Bauch, Der frühe Rembrandt und seine Zeit, Berlin 1960, pp. 210–22, reproduced fig. 194 (as Rembrandt pupil after 1630);


9
In a partly ruined thatched stable with the Star of Bethlehem visible between the rafters, the Virgin and Child are seen towards the lower left, with St Joseph standing behind them, his crossed hands resting on the top of a staff. The Virgin wears a hat with a braided scarf descending from it, a sash around her waist and bound virago sleeves, voluminous at the elbow. The first of the Kings, Caspar, kneels before the infant Christ, presenting his gift of gold to His outstretched arms, the pot from which he has removed it next to him in the left foreground, its partly removed lid leaning against it.

The other two Kings, Balthasar and Melchior, stand behind Caspar, holding their gifts of frankincense and myrrh, Balthasar removing the lid of an urn. These figures are lit from a warm light source such as a lantern outside the picture plane to the lower left. Behind them are eight more figures, ranging from an archer to the left with a quiver and bow, to a moustachioed soldier with a cuirass and a soft hat with a feather plume, brandishing a pike or lance, to the right. Of these eight figures only the headgear of three of them may be seen, a helmet, a turban surmounted by a plume and a top hat seen from the side. Only one of them is prominent with significantly more than his head visible: a bare-headed man facing the viewer, his head bowed contemplating the Christ Child, his hands clasped in prayer. In the lower right corner are agricultural implements including a spade, wagon wheel, the blade of a plough and an overturned anvil.

To the right is an arched entrance, through which can be seen armoured soldiery, presumably the entourage of one or more of the Kings, with pikes and banners. The internal structure of the stable may be made out: a rough wall ascending in stages to the left and an archway, the intervening space spanned by rafters, partly covered in thatch. Broadly speaking, the internal space is lit by warm light from the unseen source, and the external space by the cold white light emanating from the Star of Bethlehem, but as we shall see, the latter source penetrates the interior as well, and is reflected in objects inside the stable, in the middle ground and to the right, some of which reflect both light sources.

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Adoration of the Kings*. Oil on oak panel, en brunaille and grisaille, 24.5 x 18.5 cm.
REMBRANDT AND THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS

The lack of precise descriptions or measurements in 18th- and 19th-century sources makes it impossible to be sure that they refer to this painting, although there is no other known candidate for an Adoration of the Kings by Rembrandt. These sources include the 1714 inventory of Constantyn Ranst and his sale on 17 May 1715, and the Delahante 1814 and possibly Delahante 1822 sale catalogues – for the Delahante 1814 sale see the lengthy encomium of the painting, which is a master class in hyperbolic imprecision, but does dwell on the quality of light within the picture, a clear hallmark of the present work. The painting in the Ranst inventory has been claimed for the provenance of the Adoration of the Magi en grisaille in the Hermitage, St Petersburg (further discussed below see fig. 14), but that painting, acquired for the Vorontsov-Dashkov collection in the early 19th century, is substantially larger (it is currently 44.8 x 39.1 cm., but is believed to have been cut down so was probably larger still), and is on paper pasted to card, and thus hardly qualifies as ‘een klijnder stuck’ (‘a small piece’). For further information on the history of the ownership of this painting please see the essay on page 54.

CRITICAL HISTORY

The Adoration of the Kings was first published in the catalogue of J.C.H. Heldring’s collection in 1955, and then the following year by the great scholar of Dutch drawings, I.Q. van Regteren Altena, on both occasions as by Rembrandt. Van Regteren Altena gave a broad span of dating circa 1626–31. Van Gelder published it the following year, as Rembrandt, dating it sometime after 1627 (in particular, as datable after the Tours Flight into Egypt of 1627). Van Gelder linked it with a drawing of David and Abigail in Amsterdam, which he considered to be from the same hand (the drawing is now however thought to be from Rembrandt’s school; fig. 23). Benesch followed these scholars in his catalogue raisonné of Rembrandt’s drawings in the editions of 1957 and (posthumously published 1973), where he opted for an early dating of 1626, describing it as the only painting ‘which can claim to be a work of Rembrandt before 1626’. Benesch linked it on grounds of style with two drawings, the first in the Louvre, Paris (fig. 22), and the second in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, which he considered the earliest two surviving drawings by Rembrandt, citing the painting in his catalogue entry for the latter. This text returns to these drawings below. Rembrandt’s authorship of the Adoration was first challenged by Kurt Bauch in 1960, the asterisk in his publication denoting that he knew it only from a photograph, which is also the likely basis for Sumowski’s assigning it as a Rembrandt studio work of 1630. In fact, Sumowski gave the painting considerable critical attention, and was prescient in describing it as a high quality work of circa 1630, original in its staging and portrayal of mood. He connected it with the Flight into Egypt in Tours (fig. 1) and the fragmentary biblical or nocturnal scenes sometimes called The Denial of St Peter in Tokyo (fig. 2), both then recently re-admitted by the Rembrandt Research Project (‘the Amsterdammer Team’ as Sumowski described them), who considered them to be from the same hand (together with a third work, the Man writing by candlelight, now in the collection of Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario), and who had suggested Dou as a possible author for both. Sumowski decisively (and no doubt correctly) dismissed the attribution of all three paintings and the present one to Dou. The Tours Flight into Egypt has more recently been re-admitted to Rembrandt’s oeuvre by a subsequent generation of the Rembrandt Research Project, and by others (see below). Since Sumowski’s publication, no evidence has emerged which would support an attribution of either the present Adoration of the Kings or the Tokyo picture to early Gerard Dou, nor any evidence that would support an attribution to any other associate of Rembrandt in his early years. It has otherwise been completely ignored in the literature.
TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The support is a single plank of Western European oak (i.e. from the North or South Netherlands or Western Germany). The reverse was cradled many decades ago, but original bevels are to be seen at the top and bottom edges, though not the sides. A tree-ring analysis of the panel conducted by the dendrochronologist Dr Peter Klein shows that the latest hardwood ring is from 1573, yielding an earliest possible felling date from 1582 onwards, but a more likely terminus post-quem for use of the panel is in the mid-1590s.

The painting was conserved by Laurent Sozzani in Amsterdam in the autumn of 2021, and a layer of discoloured old varnish removed, but the painted surface is in good and largely original condition.

X-radiography and infrared imaging were done by René Gerritsen in the autumn 2021, and a further study on the materiality of the painting was done by Factum Arte in the spring of 2023. The cradling has hampered the efficacy of X-radiography; but infrared imaging has been very helpful. The edges of the panel are covered by strips of wood which have the double purpose of covering up roughness probably caused by damage to the right-hand edge and the lower left corner and permitting the painting to be framed so the extremities of the panel are visible.
HOW IT WAS PAINTED

The painted surface is set within black framing lines which may be partly original, although this is not certain. They do appear to have been painted around the perimeter of the front to the panel in two stages, which might suggest that framing lines were originally present. X-ray and infrared images show that the right-hand edge has losses all the way up and is thus rough, and there is a damage to the lower left corner (see fig. 3). The infrared images show that Rembrandt did not paint out to the edge of the panel, leaving a margin, which was then covered up by framing lines, perhaps in a second stage. It is not certain if Rembrandt intended framing lines or added them himself, but they have certainly been worked over and thickened later, because two distinct phases can be detected, of which the first phase is likely to be of an early date.

Rembrandt did use black framing lines in later paintings, such as at least two of the late Apostle series, but he did not apparently do so in other early works. To say that the foreground of the painting is largely executed en brunaille (bruinje in Dutch) would be something of an over-simplification, because the artist has used a mixture of grey, black, white and brown and ochre paint in the majority of the foreground of the painting, with a predominance of umber in the dead-colouring, in which a reserve was left for the figure groups. More muted tones of light and dark grey were used throughout the background, coupled with white for highlights and the Star of Bethlehem. As Rembrandt always did in his early history paintings, he has worked from the background towards the foreground, so the dark paint of the background does not run under the figures (the figures seen through the doorway excepted).
The part to the extreme right looking through the arched doorway is executed in something much closer to grisaille, again with white highlighting. This was certainly the last part of the painting to be executed and is a distinct exception to the background-to-foreground working method that applies to the rest of the painting and to Rembrandt’s other early paintings. This part is considerably sketchier and more rapidly painted than the rest, and the composition was marked out rapidly with a sharp point, possibly an etcher’s burin, in the still-wet ground. This is clearly visible to the naked eye, yet more so in the infrared imaging (fig. 4). This shows that the artist originally planned an additional soldier-figure above and to the right of the other figures and the banner, close to the edge of the picture plane. This figure was not included in the finished painting, perhaps because it would have made the space seen through the opening too congested, but also because that figure would have been higher than any of the heads of the foreground figures, undermining the low arc they form, which continues with the two completed figures seen through the arch. It would be a reasonable assumption that Rembrandt left this part of the painting last because he had not fully worked out how it should be. The use of a sharp point or burin to map out a compositional solution reveals how he arrived at its final form.

The final phase of painting was not limited to the soldiery seen through the door, because a vertical incised line also marks out the shaft of the spade in the lower right corner. Because the spade belongs in the interior space lit by artificial light, it is painted using warmer tones, unlike the other parts of the last phase which are outside. Infrared imaging confirms that the spade is part of the last phase because it is painted over the original expanded form of the wagon-wheel lying on its side, seen in recession as an elongated oval. In order that it could still be recognizable after Rembrandt added the spade, the boss of the wheel was moved to the left (its original position can be seen in the infrared image), and it was painted in a rounder, less elongated form. Finally, the blade of the spade was painted with an exaggerated perspective so that it appears foreshortened.
Technical examination of Rembrandt paintings of around this date might well reveal further examples of the artist working out parts of the composition in the wet ground layer using a sharp point or burin, but one such is known. In *The Supper at Emmaus* in the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris of 1629 (fig. 5), a shoulder bag appears suspended from a nail in the wall above one of the Apostles in the centre of the composition. The X-radiograph reveals that Rembrandt did not originally intend it to be there, but drew it (or something similar hanging from a nail) with a sharp point or burin in the wet ground of the wall to the right, beyond the corner of the wall, so seen from a different angle (fig. 6). The indentations can just be partly seen with the naked eye, especially once you know they are there.

Also just visible to the naked eye is a pentiment to the profile of Melchior including his turban, which was originally larger, and extended to our left. There is an original reserve where the ground is visible above the figure to the right of Melchior wearing headgear with a feathered plume, suggesting that Rembrandt may originally have intended his headgear to be larger (for details see fig. 7). This is also indicated by a brushstroke in black above his feather, perhaps denoting a planned higher position for the feather (fig. 8). Perhaps more likely, Rembrandt may here have planned a second feather rising upwards, as he had done in the early tronie of 1626–27 (fig. 29). Finally, there appears to be a pentiment below and to the left of the quiver worn by the figure at the extreme left.

![Fig. 5 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1628. Oil on panel, 39 x 42 cm. Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris. © Musée Jacquemart-André](image1)

![Fig. 6 X-radiograph of Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1628. Oil on panel, 39 x 42 cm. Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris. © Musée Jacquemart-André](image2)

![Fig. 7 The present painting, detail showing Melchior and the figure wearing headgear with a feathered plume](image3)

![Fig. 8 Infrared reflectogram of the detail shown in fig. 7](image4)
Further pentiments in the Adoration of the Kings are revealed by the Factum Arte blended scans and imaging (fig. 9). The halo of the Christ Child was originally conceived as a fuller disc of light, and a few thicker radiating brush strokes may be seen to the left covering the Virgin's face and contributing to her slightly ungainly appearance because Rembrandt did not paint them out when he changed the form of the halo (see details infrared and normal). This disc is still visible, around the top of Christ's head, but reduced in intensity. The final form of the halo was created with patterns of radiating dots of lights. These have no obvious direct parallels in Rembrandt's paintings but are remarkably like the striated dots he uses in halos in his etchings. Although the result is rather different, Rembrandt experimented with the depiction of Christ's halo in another painting, the 1627 Flight into Egypt in Tours mentioned above. That solution – a flame-like burst of radiating solid light – works very well against the neutral dark background (see detail) but would not have done so in the present Adoration, whereas the solution that Rembrandt adopted here, using radiating points of light which extend in front of the Virgin's face, is far better suited to the present composition, since it does not argue with what lies beyond Christ's head.

This change in approach suggests that this Adoration is later in date than the Tours Flight into Egypt (fig. 1). The infrared imaging however suggests that what Rembrandt first set out to paint here was a halo that would have looked very like the one in the Tours Flight into Egypt (see detail of infrared imaging). He then painted over this first halo, replacing it with a few thick brushstrokes of radiating light over the Virgin's face. He abandoned this idea but did not paint it out before adopting the final form of radiating points of light around the Christ Child's head, which overlay the interim solution on the Virgin's face.
There are smaller changes in the folds of the drapery of the foreground kneeling King (Caspar). The infrared imaging also shows that Mary’s headgear originally ran almost straight in a few brushstrokes from the top of her head over her back near her right shoulder, but Rembrandt altered this to give her head a more rounded form and to allow a gap so that Joseph’s hands folded over the top of a staff on which they rest can be seen with deep shadow to demarcate the two figures. For the same reason he moved the curve of his robe back, extending this deep shadow between the two figures, whereas the infrared imaging shows that it originally intersected Mary’s robe.

One of the most significant changes revealed by infrared imaging, is in the position of the head of the figure to Balthazar immediate left. He now appears looking downwards towards the infant Christ but in the first phase he had his head raised, looking directly at Joseph (see detail figs. 10 and 11). This would have disrupted the compositional unity of the central group, so it is now only the third King (Melchior) to the right of the group who looks towards Joseph, binding the group in compositional unity. The physiognomy of Balthazar does not appear to be specifically African (as he is often shown to be in Rembrandt’s time) but the altered figure next to him does appear African, to the extent that the monochrome medium allows us to see him (his high forehead bounded by closely cropped hair reflects the light from the internal source), and since he is likely to be Balthazar’s page, this would perhaps be logical. Another change is to be seen in the figure to the right of Joseph. In the finished painting he is seen with head bowed looking at the Christ Child, his hands clasped in prayer. He is thinly painted, following the revisions. Infrared imaging shows that originally his head was turned to our right looking downwards but in a diagonal, his right hand resting on a staff.

These key changes alter and intensify the psychological focus of the painting so that all the figures in the first rank of those standing now gaze at the haloed head of the Infant Christ, with the exception of Melchior, who looks across at Joseph, who returns the gaze. These two figures thus tightly bind this intimate group, including the heads of kneeling Caspar and the Virgin and Child, into a shallow oval, thus marking its extremities. In its original form, Balthazar would have been staring out of the composition, as Rembrandt had a figure do in several of his earlier Leiden period history paintings. The change he made here marks a shift in the focus of his narrative technique, from the overtly theatrical, engaging the spectator directly, to a more internalized form.

There are further small changes to be seen throughout, but what the infrared imaging reveals throughout the underlying layers of paint are broad diagonals of brushwork in the imprimatura from lower left to upper right, with a counter diagonal from upper left to lower right.

One final clue to the genesis of the painting is also evident under ultra-violet light: some of the peripheral heads to the back of the central group and some of the alterations to heads were executed on top of the reserve, evidence that these were not part of the composition as originally conceived, but are part of its evolution.

**SIZE**

Several early Rembrandt paintings of upright format are on panels of comparable dimensions to the present work (24.5 x 18.5 cm.). The Good Samaritan (1630) in the Wallace Collection, London (which may originally have been conceived as a monochromatic work) measures 24.2 x 19.8 cm. (see fig. 16, further on). The Study of an old man in Kingston, Ontario measures 24.3 x 20.3 cm., and the Self-portrait in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, measures 22.2 x 16.6 cm. 8

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Fig. 10 The present painting, detail showing the compositional unity of the central group.

Fig. 11 Infrared reflectogram of the detail shown in fig. 10.
ETCHINGS

The use of a sharp point of some sort such as a needle or a stylus, in the right-hand side of the painting reminds us that the making of etchings was an essential part of Rembrandt’s creative process throughout most of his career, but especially so from around 1630 onwards. He worked out ideas with the burin on the waxed copper plate, sometimes treating them as sheets of unrelated studies (as he did in his drawings), and often reworking them as part of the development of an idea. To follow his thought processes, or to find parallels with his paintings (and drawings), we need to reverse the finished etching so as to see how the copper plates appeared when Rembrandt was working on them.

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

Of particular relevance to the present Adoration of the Kings is Rembrandt’s etching of The Presentation in the Temple with the Angel which is dated 1630 (B.51) (fig. 12). When reversed it becomes apparent how closely the central figure groups in each work resemble each other (fig. 13), showing the reversed etching and the painting side-by-side. The similarity between them is striking. That both employ a dark background with openings of light, and repoussoir foreground devices, is of secondary importance to their striking compositional similarities, with directly comparable corresponding figures in each, despite the different subject. In both, the figures are cramped together in the lower half of the composition, the focus in the lower left. One can easily see that the composition of the etching could have been adapted with very few changes to make an Adoration of the Kings. The present painting is however likely to be a little earlier in date, which suggests that Rembrandt is may well have harboured ideas for compositions that subsequently materialized in etchings (or paintings) for several years. A strong indication that Rembrandt gestated compositions in this manner between their conception in painting and their appearance in etching is supplied by the Wallace Collection Good Samaritan, which is dated 1630 (fig. 16), and the etching of the same size closely based on it, which is dated 1633 (fig. 17). Why he did this may remain a mystery; that he did so is not. A discussion of the similarities between these two paintings follows below.

It is perhaps surprising that Rembrandt never etched an Adoration of the Kings. Possibly the transfer of the ideas in the present painting to the medium of etching presented too much of a challenge. He did however paint this nocturnal subject, well-suited to a monochrome or near-monochrome medium, on at least one other occasion, also in a combination of brunaille and grisaille, in a work (referred to above and discussed in more detail below) in the Hermitage, St Petersburg of 1632 (fig. 14), conceived as part of a Passion series of etchings of which only one reached the light of day.
THE PASSION SERIES FROM 1633–34

Rembrandt used the medium of grisaille and brunaille extensively in the 1630s when developing compositions for etchings to be executed by himself or J.G. van Vliet or jointly, especially for a planned Passion series, probably for Frederik Hendrik, of which only one came to fruition in etched form. There are grounds for thinking that Rembrandt considered how the reversed image would appear in etching - or at least that is the case with the only one that was completed - including in the direction of the light source: often, but by no means always from the left. Thus, his Ecce Homo in London, National Gallery, a brunaille in oil on paper of 1634, is lit from the right, whereas the etching by Rembrandt and J.G. van Vliet, is naturally lit from the left as Rembrandt presumably intended. The Ecce Homo is the only etching from the putative Passion series, but some, but my no means all, of the other brunailles on paper presumably intended for other etchings from the same Passion cycle - for example the Lamentation also in the National Gallery in London - are also lit from the right, indicating that the finished etching would be lit from the left. This practice appears however to be limited to the paintings made in monochrome oil on paper, most of them subsequently glued to panel or canvas supports (and sometimes enlarged) which was Rembrandt's chosen medium in the 1630s and later for the final preparatory sketches for etchings, whether completed or not.

When developing ideas for compositions that are less directly related to etchings, but which were probably envisaged with an eventual etching in mind, Rembrandt adopted a freer working practice, using wooden panel supports and a lighting that remains predominantly sourced from the left, as it does in The Entombment in the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow. In that grisaille, from circa 1633–34, the foreground is worked out, but the background remains unresolved – one is reminded of the late-stage resolution of the figures in the doorway in the present Adoration. The Glasgow Entombment found its final form some five years later, not in an etching but in a painting on canvas from 1639: one of the Passion series painted for Frederik Hendrik - a good example of how ideas sometimes took a lengthy period of gestation in Rembrandt's mind.

As indicated above, Rembrandt deviated from an intended lighting from the left in some other paintings for the presumed Passion series, including The Adoration of the Kings in the Hermitage, St Petersburg, more freely painted en brunaille than the others, but also on paper, and the even freer Joseph telling his Dreams, a brunaille on paper in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, both of circa 1633–34. These works were painted well into the 1630s, but it must be remembered that Rembrandt painted very few history paintings between 1630 and circa 1633, when demand from him for portraits in Amsterdam rocketed, and when he did resume history painting in depth, it was initially in monochrome and in connection with the putative Passion series.
THE ST PETERSBURG ADORATION OF THE KINGS

This brûnaillé (fig. 14) connected with the Passion series is in most respects not obviously directly related to the present, presumably earlier work. However, this is partly due to the condition of this work in oil on paper: it appears to have no background form but to be set in an undefined space, but when examined closely the structure of the stable, now worn or faded, can be made out. In a couple of respects however it does resemble the present work, in its use of negative foreground space. Rembrandt has brought the foreground figures to the front of the picture plane but left the space in front of them open and undefined. This is also seen in the Presentation in the Temple etching of 1630 (fig. 12), in the St Peter in Prison in Jerusalem of 1631, in The Good Samaritan of 1630, and earlier still in the David with the head of Goliath before Saul sketch in Basel dated 1627. One other etching is of possible relevance to the present Adoration of the Kings: the bald-headed old man, with a short beard, looking right, who (not reversed) bears a resemblance to the figure of Joseph in the painting. The etching is customarily dated circa 1635, which places it chronologically out of range of the present painting, but it could well be earlier in date. Parallels between Rembrandt’s paintings and etchings are made clearer when the latter are reproduced in reverse to mimic their image on the copper plate and found in other early works. One such is the figure of the agonised patient with hands clasped to his chest in The Foot Operation (Private Collection, Switzerland) of 1628, which Van de Wetering noticed resembles the figure of St Jerome kneeling in prayer, when reversed, in Rembrandt’s etching, which he dates circa 1628. In the St Petersburg Adoration Rembrandt painted Caspar kneeling and wearing a similar (and similarly implausible) heavy cloak with a wide embroidered border sewn with sequins that reflect points of light, an idea carried over from the present painting (fig. 15).
If The Good Samaritan of 1630 in the Wallace Collection, London (fig. 16), was intended from the outset for an etching, it does not anticipate a light source to the left in the resulting print, and indeed the etching of 1633 is in reverse to the painting, which is conventionally lit from the left (fig. 17). The Good Samaritan on a panel of very similar size to the present Adoration, is set in daylight and employs colour, albeit in a limited and muted palette, whereas Rembrandt’s monochrome sketches are nearly all of subjects seen at night, at dusk or at least in limited light. The Adoration of the Kings resembles it in aspects of its handling, including the shorthand delineation of heads and (clothed) limbs. The heads of the five central figures in The Good Samaritan each have parallels in The Adoration, such as the shorthand ear (discussed below in the context of drawings) in the figure of Joseph in the Adoration and in the man heaving the wounded victim off the horse in The Good Samaritan, in the peremptory sausage-fingers of each of these two figures and the kneeling King, and the long single brushstrokes that Rembrandt uses in the outstretched arm and cocked leg of the groom in The Good Samaritan, and (in among other places) the hem of the Virgin’s folded-back skirt in The Adoration. Although set in daylight, the luminous yellow-brown tones in the empty left foreground, and the brushwork with flecks of muted white in The Good Samaritan show striking parallels with the equivalent area in the left foreground of The Adoration.
THE BASEL DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH BEFORE SAUL

The only painting from the 1620s for which it has been posited that Rembrandt may have had in mind an etching in the reverse sense is the David with the Head of Goliath before Saul in the Kunstmuseum, Basel, painted in oil on panel and not in monochrome (fig. 18). This very Lastman-esque painting is lit from the right as the foreground pictorial elements, figures and a dog clearly show. It is set in daylight, so the lighting of the background is more neutral. Because of the orientation of the lighting, combines with its sketch-like character, Volker Manuth suggested that Rembrandt might have conceived it in preparation for an etching, while acknowledging that its ‘relative colourfulness… contradicts the connection to a planned etching’.\(^\text{21}\) With dimensions of 27.2 x 39.6 cm., it would in any case be relatively large for a work made in direct preparation for an etching this early in Rembrandt’s career.
PURPOSE

It seems more likely that like the Wallace Collection Good Samaritan of 1630, the present Adoration of the Kings was conceived as an idea for an etching, worked out and adapted during the process of its execution, but not made in direct preparation for an etching. The composition that eventually emerged in etched form in reverse, and which arguably derives from it, was of a different subject: The Presentation in the Temple discussed above (fig. 12). While there is a visual relationship between them, both subject, final composition and its later date indicate that the idea which saw the light of day in the present Adoration underwent considerable transformation before it emerged in the same sense on the etching plate, for which this painting in a combination of grisaille and brunaille cannot be seen as directly preparatory. Unless the Basel painting was created in preparation for an etching, Rembrandt does not seem to have conceived preparatory paintings for etchings in reverse, anticipating the final appearance, until into the 1630s.

COMPOSITIONAL SOURCES

Like many artists before him, and some after, Rembrandt used Albrecht Dürer’s famous 1511 woodcut of The Adoration of the Magi as a source of inspiration for his composition, or rather of its mise-en-scene, with the Star of Bethlehem seen through the bare rafters of the ruined stable (fig. 19). Dürer’s print was much copied, and it may be that Rembrandt here drew on one of a number of anonymous copies in reverse after it, since their compositions are closer in reverse. Dürer’s print certainly influenced Altdorfer’s woodcut of The Adoration of the Magi, which in turn was clearly a more direct source for Rembrandt, both in its overall compositional arrangement and because it includes as here a star of Bethlehem seen through the slanting rafters of the partly ruined roof of the stable (fig. 20). Rembrandt was thoroughly familiar with German 15th- and 16th-century art, and as the inventory of his goods drawn up in 1656 shows us, he owned a number of examples. He acquired, for example, a complete set of Dürer’s Life of the Virgin woodcuts from Gommer Spranger in 1638 and derived the composition for his Visitation of 1640 in Detroit from the corresponding woodcut in the series. He drew on the compositions of Dürer prints in at least one other early painting: the setting of the Apostle Paul in Prison in Stuttgart of 1627, and in particular the light source from a window to the left, is clearly based on Düer’s 1514 engraving of St Jerome in his Study. Rembrandt drew on other earlier sources in prints, for example for his celebrated Standard Bearer of 1636, where the figure is derived from a woodcut of a Landsknecht made circa 1530 by Jörg Breu.
THE COLOUR OF LIGHT

From early on in his career Rembrandt developed a sophisticated understanding of the different colour properties of different kinds of light. He almost always used more than one light source in his many nocturnal paintings, often, as here, contrasting the cooler light from a celestial source – often the moon, but here the Star of Bethlehem – with the much warmer interior light from an unseen source outside the picture-plane to the lower left. Outside the ruined stable the Star of Bethlehem is the only source of light, but inside it we find both sources, so the highlights of the upper part of the lance held by the soldier to the right is lit by cool white starlight, whereas the other raised lance held by a soldier behind the main figure group to the left is lit by the warm interior light. Rembrandt has meticulously identified the source of light of each reflection with unerring logic. For example, the white highlights on the brim and central spine or comb of the helmet of the soldier whose head appears between the Kings Balthasar and Melchior (a very similar helmet is exhibited in the Rembrandthuis Museum in Amsterdam, though not believed to have belonged to Rembrandt; fig. 21), and folds on the hat of the otherwise unseen figure between him and Balthasar are reflections from the star shining down from above through the gap in the stable roof: they cannot be reflections of warmer light from the internal source to the left (because there are intervening figures), which does however illuminate Melchior’s turban and Balthasar’s elaborate headgear.

In this Adoration of the Kings, Rembrandt uses a sophisticated understanding of light to imbue compositional depth and to add bulk to his figures and solid form to the shape of drapery and other objects. He uses tiny points of reflected light throughout the central figure group as well as the spade and the receptacle for Caspar’s gift. The pattern of reflected dots of light in the hem of Caspar’s robe or cope may at first appear random, but they are points in the decoration which takes the form of a slightly squared-off floral motif: one in the centre and four in the notional corners of each. Their positions change and some disappear according to the folds of the heavy robe, but they serve to underscore the sense of depth. The points in the hem of Melchior’s outer garment mostly occur in shadow, where their role in articulating the folds and the fall of the fabric is essential, especially in the deeper shadow to the right.

Other figures are almost solely delineated with dots and short fine brushstrokes of reflected light, such as the figure to the extreme left of the composition with a quiver of arrows over his shoulder, and presumably holding the bow that appears behind Joseph, his right arm bearing his weight, resting on an object such as a sack. His turban-like headgear is comprised of a central ‘boss’ and radiating lines entirely created with reflected light, his quiver only shown by a short curving reflection from its rim. His face, in shadow, is depicted in dim half-tones. The same is true of the corresponding figure to the right of the figure group, moustachioed and brandishing a pike. His face is only partly lit, from the internal light source coming from the lower left over the shoulder of Melchior, but the reflections on the outlines of his gorget are in cooler light from the external source of the star, again coming through the opening in the thatched roof.
ICONOGRAPHY

The depiction of the Three Kings adoring the Infant Christ on the Virgin Mary’s lap with St Joseph in attendance is conventional, the unusually large entourage within and without the stable notwithstanding. Caspar is traditionally depicted bringing a gift of gold, but it is not possible to see exactly what object he is presenting to Jesus. Balthasar and Melchior both hold vessels that plausibly could contain frankincense and myrrh. Of greater iconographical significance may be the barnyard objects in the lower right corner. The first of these, below the hem of Caspar’s robe, is an overturned anvil, the edges of its horn reflecting the light and revealing its metallic nature. Rembrandt may have intended an allusion to Christ, raised in the house of a carpenter and drawing on the verse in Isaiah 41: 7: ‘So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith. He who smooths with the hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil’. Next to it is the discarded blade of a plough, an emblem of the preparation of the earth by believers in the Lord, who brings the harvest of truth, for example in Hosea 10: 12 ‘Plough new ground for yourselves, plant righteousness, and reap the blessings that your devotion to me will produce. It is time for you to turn to me, your Lord, and I will come and pour out blessings upon you.’ The wagon wheel next to it may not have a specific Christian significance, but the spade most definitely does, alluding to Christ the Gardener whom Mary Magdalen encountered (John 20: 1–9), as seen for example in The Risen Christ appearing to Mary Magdalen of 1638 in the British Royal Collection (fig. 22).
DATING, WITH COMPARABLE DRAWINGS

While the relatively sophisticated understanding of the colour of light in this work might seem to point to a dating towards the end of the 1620s, it is in some respects closer in style to earlier works from around 1627–28. Two drawings considered by Benesch to be Rembrandt’s earliest might possibly be of some relevance here (figs. 23 and 24). Both have been completely ignored by Rembrandt drawings scholars since Benesch, although Martin Royalt-on-Kisch thinks they both merit reassessment, in general, and in particular in light of the present painting. Given that Van Regteren Altena considered them to be relevant to the present painting, they deserve to be considered.

The Rijksmuseum drawing (fig. 23), depicting an unidentified scene of justice, is worked up in brown wash with a dark, possibly nocturnal background, over black chalk. The foreground is lit from an unidentified source, and in the background, there is soldiery with pikes aloft emerging from the gloom. In the foreground there is a kneeling female supplicant in a pose reminiscent of the kneeling King in the present painting. As in other early works by Rembrandt, figures in turbans and other headgear abound. The principal difference is that in the drawing the artist retains a more conventional repousoir of figures in shadow in the left foreground. In publishing the Rijksmuseum drawing as by Rembrandt, Benesch, like Van Regteren Altena before him, was struck by the similarities with the present painting. Both scholars suggest that the painting can lay claim to have been painted before 1626, although Van Regteren Altena gave a broad dating of the Rijksmuseum drawing of 1624–29, whereas Benesch dates it circa 1625.

The painting does however appear to have a considerably more evolved composition, with its bolder use of light, and seems likely to post-date the drawing, perhaps by several years.

Fig. 23 Rembrandt (?), Unidentified subject, sometimes described as The Offering of Abigail, c. 1635–40. Black chalk, with brown and grey wash and opaque white, on paper toned with light brown wash, 33.9 x 28.8 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. © Rijksmuseum

Fig. 24 Rembrandt (?), A bigail offering gifts to David. Pen and brown ink, brown wash, white highlighting, 26.7 x 24.4 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Wikimedia

Fig. 25 Rembrandt van Rijn, Two Studies of the Head of an Old Man (detail), 1626. Pen and brown ink, torn down the center and rejoined, 9 x 14.9 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. © J. Paul Getty Trust
It must also be later than the Louvre drawing (fig. 24), also considered to represent an unidentified scene of justice (although Benesch dates it circa 1625 and Van Regteren Altena circa 1624–26). The two drawings are clearly related to each other, and both retain a left foreground repoussoir. They are in the same medium, although the Louvre drawing is more worked up, with white body-colour heightening. The standing potentate to whom several female figures supplicate is similar to the standing King in the painting and wears a similar turban. The close grouping of figures in a loose circle is also similar.

A distinctive feature of the painting is the head of Joseph, standing behind the Virgin, and in particular his angular ear painted with a single stroke of white acting as a highlight. This manner of rendering the ear is also seen in a pen and brown ink sketch of two heads of elderly men (now two sheets conjoined but probably once on a single sheet) in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, which is dated by Schatborn and others circa 1626 (fig. 25). The right hand of the two head studies must clearly reveal the similarity; probably because the head is angled more to its right, so the side of the head facing us is out of shadow. Rembrandt uses the bare paper as a highlight to delineate the angled ear in a manner reminiscent of Joseph's ear. Rembrandt used this drawing for one of the money-lenders driven by Christ from the Temple in Rembrandt's painting of the subject in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow, of 1626, whose ear was also cursorily indicated (detail, fig. 26). Of more direct relevance to the present painting, Rembrandt used the drawing for an etching in the same sense representing the Head of an old man looking down, which was traditionally thought to be by Rembrandt, but (like the present painting) omitted from recent catalogue raisonnés. Royalton-Kisch re-attributed it to Rembrandt, a view with which Erik Hinterding agrees, dating it circa 1626–27. When reversed (fig. 27), the similarity with the head of St Joseph in the present Adoration becomes clear, although in the etching the head is facing further down.
DATING, WITH COMPARABLE PAINTINGS

Paintings by Rembrandt dated 1626 and datable circa 1626 show some points of comparison with the present painting, although this work is one of only two monochrome paintings from this period of Rembrandt’s career (the other is the Samson and Delilah in Amsterdam; fig. 30). At that time Rembrandt’s paintings are characterized by a thick handling of paint, especially in the delineating of limbs, faces and costumes. A taste for exotic headgear, to be such a feature of his later tronies, is already apparent. Of the many turbaned heads in them, that of the figure playing a viola da gamba in the Musical Company on loan from the Rijksmuseum to the Lakenhal, Leiden (fig. 28). It presents a good comparison with the turbaned King, especially in the ways the artist delineates the bands of the fabric (detail, fig. 29).35

The only other wholly monochromatic work from this period is the predominantly en brunaillé Samson and Delilah of circa 1627 in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, also on a small (27.5 x 23.5 cm.) panel (fig. 30).36 Like the present work, this was thought to be by Rembrandt until published by Bauch (as by Lievens), and only recently returned by a number of scholars, starting with Jonathan Bikker, to Rembrandt.37 It is probably a preliminary idea for Rembrandt’s more finished Samson and Delilah dated 1628 in Berlin – which may perhaps also provide a putative purpose for the present work. As Volker Manuth points out, the figure of the Philistine matches Rembrandt’s early (probably earliest) painted tronie, a relatively freely painted work of a Man with a gorget and a feathered cap (fig. 31) of circa 1626–27 in a private collection, which like the Amsterdam Samson and Delilah is a key point of reference for the present work (fig. 30).38

46 47
The same figure occurs in the present painting as the soldier holding the tallest halberd to the immediate right of the turbaned King. He wears the same hat with slashes and a feather curving above it, as well as a gorget (detail, fig. 32). His head is turned so he appears at approximately the same angle as he does in the tronie. Being painted swiftly on a much smaller scale, his moustache appears more of a walrus type, and both it and his prominent nose are more caricatural, but that they share a common genesis, and were painted at about the same time, is clear. Rembrandt used a similar model a few years later for his Standard Bearer in The Rijksmuseum.

The broad handling of the present sketch-like monochromatic painting also finds a parallel in the sketch-like figure groups rendered in colour in the backgrounds of other early works, and in particular in the figures grouped around the column to the right background of the History Piece in Lakenhal, Leiden (detail, fig. 33).39

In discussing the Amsterdam Samson and Delilah, Volker Manuth noticed that the artist used scratches in the wet paint, for example in the moustache and stubble beard, as he did in both the Parable of the Rich Man of 1627 in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin,40 and the unidentified History Piece of 1626 in Lakenhal, Leiden, as well as other works. Their function may differ from its use in the present work to plan the soldiery seen through the arch (as its purpose varies in other works), but the technique is similar: Rembrandt painted a handful of other night scenes early in his career. The Flight into Egypt in Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tours (mentioned above in the context of Christ’s halo) is dated 1627. Also, on a small panel (27.5 x 24.7 cm.), its handling is markedly sketchy (fig. 1). The background is completely dark, but it is strongly lit from an unspecified light-source outside the picture plane to our left, with hints of a repoussoir. Were it not for the Virgin’s prominent blue cloak, this would also be an entirely monochromatic work. Its 1627 date would suggest a slightly later dating for the present painting.

Rembrandt retained a rougher, sketchier mode for paintings that are later in date. A good example is The Good Samaritan in the Wallace collection, London, which is dated 1630 (fig. 16), already discussed above. It is in reverse to Rembrandt’s etching of the same subject, which is dated 1633, and which displays a number of significant changes. It is more likely that the Wallace collection painting is a sketch made with the likely intention of basing an etching on it, not taken up for another three years, as suggested earlier. This too may provide a possible intention for the present work, the changes in design during its creation revealing Rembrandt’s creative process as he worked out the design.41 As with The Adoration of the Kings, X-radiography reveals that The Good Samaritan also underwent a number of changes and revisions during its creation, although Van de Wetering considered the Wallace collection painting to be a fully independent realized work which Rembrandt only decided to turn into an etching at a later date.42
While elements in the *Adoration of the Kings* show similarities with paintings by Rembrandt of 1626 and 1627, the greater degree of sophistication that it shows mean that a slightly later dating, circa 1628 and perhaps 1629 is to be preferred, particularly in the ways that it anticipates the Wallace Collection *Good Samaritan* of 1630. Most Rembrandt scholars will readily admit that Rembrandt’s undated works often defy an easy chronology, as do those of other great artists possessed of complex artistic personalities. Artists have always tended to paint in different styles or moods according to the different purposes of each work – Van Dyck’s rough and smooth styles of portraiture in the years before and around 1620 would be a case in point. That this is a nocturne painted in monochromes of black and white and brown without colour inevitably mean that it will not resemble paintings conceived with a full palette. A reproduction of *The Good Samaritan* in black and white illustrates this point (Fig. 34).
REMBRANDT AND PETER LASTMAN

Lastman’s influence on his pupil was enduring, although it manifested itself somewhat erratically with the passage of time. Rembrandt would have known Lastman’s modellos for etchings done both en grisaille and en brunaille, such as the Christ on the Mount of Olives of circa 1607–8 in the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, the Sacrifice of Abraham of circa 1610 on loan from the Rijksmuseum to the Museum Het Rembrandthuis in Amsterdam, and the lost Preaching of St John the Baptist. The Sacrifice of Abraham (fig. 35) reveals a number of similarities with the present picture, including dual light sources, and the modelling of form using light and shade. Given that Rembrandt was Lastman’s pupil, it is hardly surprising that the latter exerted a lasting influence. For example, Rembrandt’s Susannah and the Elders in Berlin, painted in stages between circa 1638 and 1647 is based on Lastman’s 1614 painting of the same subject (also in Berlin). Rembrandt made a drawn copy after Lastman’s painting in red chalk in circa 1636 (also in Berlin), showing that 22 years after Lastman’s painting, and well over a decade after he is most likely first to have seen it, Rembrandt was still thinking about his teacher’s work, and developing compositions based on them for a likely further decade.

REMBRANDT AND HIS LEIDEN CIRCLE

This Adoration of the Kings has none of the hallmarks of the style of Rembrandt’s contemporary, friend and rival in Leiden, Jan Lievens, to whom (for example) the Amsterdam Samson and Delilah had been attributed in the past. It clearly has nothing to do with his early pupil and assistant Isaac de Jouderville nor his possible pupil Willem de Poorter. The only other pupil or acolyte of Rembrandt in his Leiden years that we are aware of is Gerard Dou, to whom the Tours Flight into Egypt was tentatively attributed by an early iteration of the Rembrandt Research Project, who linked it with the present picture and an unidentified night scene on copper in the Artizon Museum, Tokyo (until 2020 known as Bridgestone Museum of Art), which has been little-seen in recent years and which as many scholars agree, merits further research (fig. 2). The Dou attribution of both the Tokyo and the Tours paintings (and the present work) was decisively rejected by Werner Sumowski, and indeed there is no early work that we know of by Dou that would support an attribution to him. Dou entered Rembrandt’s workshop aged 15 in February 1628 with no previous experience as a painter. His earliest signed or documented painting, a Reading Oriental in The Hermitage, St Petersburg, generally dated circa 1628–30, is a hesitant work that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the present painting, to which no other work by Dou bears any resemblance.

A careful examination of this brunaille / grisaille in natural light reveals a remarkable degree of complexity and subtlety. The array of eight heads, some only seen by their hats, in the third row behind the heads of Joseph, Balthasar and Melchior, for example is an extraordinary achievement, painted in strict monochrome and mostly given form and depth by reflections. The use of points of light, perhaps in anticipation of the medium of etching, to create depth and form is hugely ambitious and wholly successful. The numerous changes in the design revealed by infrared imaging and the working out of the final part of the composition using a stylus reveal an intelligent mind constantly at work throughout the creative process. The parallels with so many facets of Rembrandt’s work in the years before 1630 indicate that the creation of this painting is deeply interlinked with his output in these few years. Taken together these characteristics bind this painting so closely to Rembrandt’s artistic personality that it would be beyond reason to conceive that anyone else could have painted it.

When this work was sold at auction in Amsterdam in 2021 as ‘Circle of Rembrandt’, the catalogue entry referred to the Hermitage Adoration of the Magi, highlighting the undoubted differences between the two paintings. It drew comparisons with the work of Willem de Poorter, who may have been a pupil of Rembrandt circa 1630, and Jan van Staveren, who is thought to have been a pupil of Rembrandt’s pupil Gerrit Dou, referring in particular to Van Staveren’s Circumcision of circa 1640, and Esther before Ahasesurus, probably painted in the early 1640s. There is no polite way of saying that these are risible works by an artist of limited talent and stunted imagination. Willem de Poorter was perhaps a better painter than Van Staveren, but was wholly dependent on Rembrandt, and was neither thoughtful nor inventive. Neither would have been remotely capable of the subtlety, creative imagination, or commanding intellect of the creator of this work.
REMBRANDT’S ADORATION OF THE KINGS AND ITS OWNERS

Constantijn Ranst the Younger (1635–1714) was born into a family of emigrants from Flanders who settled in Amsterdam by 1585. Various investments made by Constantijn’s father Hieronymus were clearly successful because by 1644 he owned several houses in and near Amsterdam, including a country house near Edam designed by Philips Vingboons. In 1650 his brother-in-law became Ambassador in Venice. As a young man Constantijn joined the employ of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), where he evidently flourished. In 1656, at the age of twenty-one, he married Hester Hartsinck in Batavia (now Java) and in 1659 arrived in the Cape Colony where he met Jan van Riebeeck. He was chief of Tonkin from 1665–67, opperhoofd in Deshima (or Dejima – the Dutch trading post on an artificial island in Nagasaki harbour) in Japan in 1667–78, 1683–84 and 1686–87, Council in Batavia in 1666 and 1675, and Director of Bengal from 1669–1673. By 1668 he was back in Amsterdam, living in a substantial townhouse at Herengracht 527 (fig. 36), which was subsequently rented by Peter the Great in 1717, and owning seven warehouses on the Prinsengracht. He was one of the wealthiest men in The Netherlands, and his assets, houses and warehouses eventually passed via his daughter to his grandson Jacob Hinlopen. One may reasonably assume that he did not start collecting art until after his return from the Far East, towards the end of the 17th century. Following his death in 1714, and his posthumous inventory, his collection was dispersed in an anonymous sale in Amsterdam on 17 May 1715, which included several pictures by Dutch Italianate painters such as Nicolaes Berchem, Jan Both and Jan Asselijn. The first lot, and by far the most expensive at 2,010 Florins was a Rembrandt Adoration of the Three Kings (fig. 37), almost certainly the present picture.

Alexis Delahante (1767–1837) was a French painter and art dealer, who imported numerous pictures from France and the Low Countries to London in the wake of the French Revolution, by 1813 trading in Great Marlborough Street in London. He was one of a generation of dealers who imported works from the Continent to Great Britain, sometimes working in concert, fulfilling a demand which was certainly then fuelled by the rich supply of masterpieces from collections that were being dismembered or sold en bloc. Like his peers, he sometimes sold at auction, and the title page of the 1814 sale catalogue stated that the sale was occasioned by Delahante’s imminent return to settle in Paris (which happened the following year). The lengthy description of lot 40, Rembrandt’s Adoration of the Magi, is so prolix that it is hard to be sure if it is describing the present picture or not, but it dwells at length on chiaroscuro, tone, golden tint, and ‘the unexampled brilliancy of light’ that it is plausible. Delahante also seems to have anonymously consigned works, including a Rembrandt Adoration of the Kings, probably the same picture, to a subsequent sale at Phillips in London in 1822.

According to the Heldring catalogue the painting was in a private collection in Paris, but an inscription on the reverse of a photograph in the De Boer archive indicates that it was acquired from ‘Landry’. This is most likely Pierre Henri Landry (1886–1990), who was best known as a tennis player on the international circuit in the 1920s and ’30s, but was also a collector, dealer and specialist in Old Masters. He is considered to be with Hermann Voss the rediscoverer of Georges de la Tour: he discovered De la Tour’s Card Sharps in circa 1926 and sold it to the Louvre in 1972. He started his art dealership in Paris in 1925 and continued to trade as a picture dealer in Paris from his premises at 1, rue de Chardin until at least the 1970s. Landry was investigated after the end of the Second World War for his activities during the Occupation. This painting is not recorded as a Nazi-era loss in any of the relevant lists and databases of losses, including the Art Loss Register and the dossier on Landry.55

J.C.H. Heldring (1887–1962) assembled a superb and refined collection of some thirty-five Dutch and Flemish Old Masters at his house in Oosterbeek, near Arnhem, and its dispersal at Sotheby’s in March 1963, following his death the preceding year, was one of the highlights of the season. It included Albert Eckhout’s famous depiction of two Brazilian tortoises, now in The Mauritshuis in The Hague; seven works by Adriaen Brouwer; a Hendrick Avercamp skirling scene now on loan to the Frans Halsmuseum, three Ruisdaels, including a winter landscape, and pictures by Jan van de Cappelle, Adriaen and Willem van de Velde, Adriaen van Ostade, Paulus Potter, Jan Steen and Hercules Seghers, an artist he was captivated by. He owned two paintings by Pieter Saenredam of sites in Haarlem, including an interior of the St Bavokerk, now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the exterior of the Town Hall, most recently sold at Sotheby’s in New York in 2016.
ABBREVIATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

RRP Corpus I

RRP Corpus II

RRP Corpus VI

Manuth 2019

Schatborn & Hinterding 2019

Giltaij 2022
J. Giltaij, Het grote Rembrandt boek, Zwolle 2022.

Royalton-Kisch
23 Woodcut, 7.9 x 5.6 cm., Winzinger 36; Hollstein 11. From a set illustrating
22 Woodcut, 29.6 x 20.8 cm., B.85; Meder 169. From the
21 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 73, no. 8, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 482–83; Manuth
20 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 103, no. 42, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 501–2; Manuth
19 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 83, no. 17, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 486–87 (the
16 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 132, no. 108, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 531–32; and
13 The putative Passion series is discussed and reproduced by Van de
8 RRP Corpus VI, pp. 96, no. 32, reproduced. Walter Liedtke did not believe
7 RRP Corpus VI, pp. no. 25, reproduced; Manuth 2019, pp. 520–21, no. 39,
6 The term used in The Netherlands in the 17th century is '
5 A.K. Wheelock,
4 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 78, no. 13, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 484–85; Manuth
3 See under literature:
2 P. Schatborn,
1 RRP Corpus VI, vol. 1, p. 109, no. 109, reproduced, vol. 2, pp. 532–33; Manuth
ENDNOTES
58
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23, nor in the
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