

# A visual Journey into the Bible

## The Book of Genesis

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## *Introduction*

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible, of the Old Testament. It starts explaining the creation of the universe, as we know it. Adam and Eve were the first humans but they were deceived into eating from the Tree of Knowledge. God had forbidden touching this tree that he had planted in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The act brought the first humans' fall, their expulsion from paradise. Hence they would be mortals and from then on starts the history of the human race as explained by the tradition of the Hebrew people. Here as stories as told over centuries by wandering poets and tellers, who recall the old tales over campfire in the evening. These stories form the tradition of a people that cared about its origins, its history and that was avid for explanations of why the world was as they perceived. Why were there humans, why were humans mortal, why were there languages and different kinds of people? Venerated stories were repeated and accepted as universal truths by generations.

Genesis talks about the brother feud between Cain and Abel and of the birth of Seth, last son to Adam and Eve. The descendants of Cain and of Seth are enumerated in an attempt to explain the various people in the known world of the Hebrews. The enumeration goes until the flood came. The story of the great flood that destroyed the world is Noah's story. Noah was the only to survive in the arch with his family and a small selection of all the animals. These stories have reverberations far into the memories of the people of the Tigris and Euphrates region.

With Noah the Book of Genesis tells of the first covenant of God with humans. Yahweh promised to Noah, the just, never to flood the earth again and as a sign of the covenant he drew the rainbow in the skies. The chapter on Noah contains again an enumeration of descendants. Now the list includes potentates and kings of the lands. One of these built the tower of Babel. God destroyed the tower because he saw that humans could do anything they put their mind to. But God created confusion by inventing the different languages. The tale of the tower of Babel is a masterpiece of folklore explanation of the existence of various languages. This was but one explanation of a puzzling fact of life. How many other tales of observation by the people on the strangeness and diversity of their world were lost?

One feels that the stories of the Book of Genesis try to explain anomalies of the world. Why was Egypt a land ruled by only one king? Joseph's story explains in Hebrew terms and in Hebrew origins the united state. There was a famine in Egypt but Pharaoh through Joseph was prepared for it. Joseph gave food for money. When the money was gone he gave food for livestock and then land for grain and cattle. Thus, the whole country came into Pharaoh's possession and Egypt became the land of one king, contrary to the political organisation of the Mesopotamian city-states with its various peoples living in the lands of Euphrates and Tigris where also the Hebrews originated. Only the lands of the priests did not go to Pharaoh. Was it priests that wrote the Book of Genesis? Other narratives tried to explain the diversity of the races that lived in the land of the Hebrews. The existence of two major races in Canaan was explained as the descendants of Isaac. Jacob became Israel and the Arabs

descended from Ishmael and were consistently called Ishmaelites in Genesis. Many other stories like these must have existed but were probably not recorded in the Bible. The pieces that have come to use are all the more precious because we feel clearly the eager for understanding of the world by an inquisitive people.

The Book of Genesis testifies to at least a double tradition of narratives brought together in it. At least two traditions are intermixed in Genesis. Remnants of these remain in the Bible stories. In the chapter on Joseph's life, Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites but it were Midianites that heaved him out of the well. When the Hebrews were invited by Pharaoh to dwell in Egypt, they can stay in the land of Goshen and later the site Rameses is mentioned, then Goshen again. Rameses could be the later name for in Exodus it is told how the Hebrews toiled at the construction of Rameses. Was this a site or the monuments of Pharaoh Rameses? Pieces of stories are inserted in the narratives and repeat what was already stated before. God is usually called Yahweh, but sometimes also El or El Shaddai. God caused Creation, but he is at first only called by that name and later on as Yahweh-God. Still later in the tales, one has the feeling that the deity that talks in dreams to Isaac and Jacob is not the God but a God. When that God speaks to Jacob, he calls himself 'the God of your father Isaac'. This God asks to destroy effigies of other gods, so Jacob buries Laban's house gods. Genesis is after the creation the tale of the interventions not of God but of one God among other. Only later, in the Book Exodus, will it be made clear that Yahweh means 'he who is', Yahweh probably being an old grammatical form of 'to be'.

The Book of Genesis contains in its last chapters four life stories of patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These are interspersed with what is no more than episodes on other characters like on a relative of Abraham, Lot. Joseph was a son of Jacob; Jacob was son of Isaac and Isaac son of Abraham. A direct line of descendants is told in Genesis and the line is a male line, though not always a line of first born but of the one chosen by Yahweh. How the Hebrews came to Canaan does not begin with Abraham however. Yahweh urged Abraham's father, Terah, to leave the city of Ur of the Chaldaeans, which was a region around the rivers Euphrates and Tigris.

The Book of Genesis repeats with emphasis for each of the patriarchs that although the Hebrew are foreigners in the land of Canaan, this is their Promised Land. Pacts with Yahweh are each time promised by the God of the Hebrews.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph form a male line. But remarkably, the chapters are not just stories of men. Genesis talks insistently of the wives. Abraham's Sarah, Isaac's Rebekah and Jacob's Rachel and Leah are strong characters. They are women with an own powerful will and proper desires. They are proud women, conscious of their status. They are faithful but not always loving and they dare to stand up against their husbands, even deceive them when they feel Yahweh's design better than their husbands. Yahweh speaks to these women as well as to the men and Genesis emphasises that only through the particular chosen women can a race of own kin be perpetuated.

These stories of the lives of the first patriarchs relate of nomads wandering in country and deserts between the towns. Terah may have originated from a town, but the people fled or left a town not to return to dwell in cities for many centuries. The nomads travelled and Genesis tells of the journeys. Camps were set up near wells,

camels were used and tents were their homes. The nomads sometimes split: Abraham and Lot started off together but go their own ways by common agreement when the land could not sustain them all. Towns were avoided. The nomad groups looked at cities with suspicion. Towns were places of corruption and of sin. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a tale of the evil that was considered to be in the towns. Nowhere have the writers or the ancient storytellers of the Book of Genesis sympathy for the towns. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob avoided them and lived in tents, though they lived near them and sometimes near the most mentioned large town of Shechem. In every story of the patriarchs do we read how often the groups changed camps. They were nervous, eager to travel. They were fertile however, grew rapidly in numbers and they were prosperous. They were indeed nomads that went from well to well and for which the cattle that accompanied them was small and sturdy. Genesis tells often of sheep and goats and occasionally of camels, not of oxen or of horses. The cities waged war on each other but Abraham, his children and grandchildren only intervened to save one of theirs or their honour. Abraham fought the kings that conquered Sodom because they had taken prisoner his nephew and companion Lot and Jacob's sons killed the people of Shechem because their sister Dinah had been raped. The nomads travelled and when they settled they were always the foreigners in the land that needed to ask permission to stay. There are numerous tales of pacts and treaties with the people of the land, increasingly also treaties among the groups themselves. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, Abimelech and Phicol swore a covenant with Abraham, Isaac made an alliance with Abimelech; Jacob concluded a treaty with Laban.

Yahweh was the God of the nomad tribes. Other Gods existed, but repeatedly Yahweh asked to throw away the other Gods. And in each generation, more than once, Yahweh promised Canaan to the true descendants of Terah. The most remarkable episode is the wrestling of Jacob with Yahweh. Jacob does not let go all through the night and only stops when a blessing is promised. Yahweh gives Jacob the name Israel, for Jacob has shown his strength to God and to men and he has prevailed. Israel will henceforth be the eternal struggling nation, struggling within, struggling with God and with other nations. But the covenant stays valid, God promised it; he protects Israel and makes it prevail.

The artists that took to themes of the Book of Genesis looked at the characters of the Bible. But more than in the figures they were interested in the land. They made pictures of paradise and of the countries that the nomads travelled in. Few painters had actually been to Canaan. Particularly in the seventeenth century, the high century of Old Testament pictures, Canaan was a stronghold of the Muslims and practically inaccessible for Westerners. The painters hence used their imagination. Sometimes a few details gave an impression of orientalism. For northern painters Italy and its romantic landscapes were enough to create the sense of distance that separated the Northern Countries from the Bible. Also the pastoral narratives of the wandering shepherds reached the imagination of the artists. Hence numerous paintings showed scenes of groups of cattle, sheep and goats that accompanied the Bible stories. But next to the arcadian, lovely surroundings also particular tales were taken up. The tower of Babel and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah thus were often used themes, but these were still views of landscapes in which the people were small. This was the general tenure that artists found in the Bible. The story of Genesis was a story of towering figures, of figures that lived thousands of years before our era, at the

beginning of times. These giants were felt close. The patriarchs were wanderers in vast countries and deserts. The stories came from far times, the characters of the giants were lost in the land. Only few of the most powerful artists looked directly at the people and tried to grasp some of their reality.

Thus we will find in pictures of the Book of Genesis two themes: landscapes and characters. We will see the tradition of landscape painting, how it started in the north and how the tradition descended into Italy. One patron stands out among all: Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan. We will encounter his promotion of the arts in many pictures. The other theme of pictures of Genesis is naturally focused on the patriarchs and the epic characters, often women, who lived around them. We have wonderful pictures in which the psychology of the actors and the intense drama that they lived are shown.

The story of Joseph is different from the other Genesis tales. Internationalisation enters the history of the Hebrews. Joseph is taken to Egypt and becomes the main governor of Pharaoh. When there is a famine in Canaan, the wealth of Egypt attracts the Hebrews to the shelter of the civilisation and administration of Egypt. Joseph is the only patriarch not to have married a woman of his own kin. Jacob expressly accepts Joseph's children into his Hebrew clan though, a rare act of absorption of non-Hebrews. With Joseph also the breadth and vision of the artists change. People come to the foreground, human and epic. And Yahweh seems to recede. Joseph merely interprets the dreams that Yahweh inspired. God is less powerfully involved in the story of the end of Genesis. Painters noticed.

Paintings of stories of the Bible were popular in Protestant Europe and mainly in the Netherlands. Pictures of the Old Testament are rare in Italy, especially during the Renaissance. Notable exceptions were pictures of the life of Joseph. The main reason for that was that many parallels could be drawn between Jesus's life and passion and the Joseph stories. Thus the life of Joseph was a softer version of the life of Jesus.

Genesis starts with the creation of the universe, the creation of the Garden of Eden and with the creation of man.

## *The Creation*

### **The Creation of Light**

Gaetano Previati (1852-1920). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. Rome. 1913.

The very beginning lines of the book of Genesis tell that first, God created heaven and earth. But the earth was without form, dark, and a wind swept over the seas. God said, 'Let there be light', and then there was light. God saw that light was good, so he divided the light from the darkness and called light 'day' and darkness 'night'. This was the first day.

Thus was created light, the fundamental feature of nature that painters need for their craft. Without light there can be no paintings and some painters of the nineteenth century reflected on this with new insight. How exactly did light create colours, how were impressions of hues created from areas of paint?

Gaetano Previati was born in Ferrara, Italy. In 1870 he followed the courses of the Academy of Fine Arts there, but was called to military service from 1873 to 1876 in Livorno. Only in 1877 could he continue to study at the Brera Academy of Milan. Previati first worked on Romantic history paintings but gradually he developed a strong feeling for the expressive powers of colour only. He worked at Christian themes, acknowledged and was sensitive to the powerful influences of the scenes of the New Testament, which fascinated him in a mysterious way. In this search and also abandonment to the mystic undercurrents in the themes of the Bible he approached the theorists of Symbolism. He participated in the first Salon of the Rose+Croix of 1892 founded by the Sâr Péladan. In the beginning of the 1890's his experimenting with colour led him also to the theory of Divisionism, as discovered somewhat earlier by French painters like Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. With the advice of an Italian art critic, Vittore Grubicy de Dragon, he elaborated on and applied the theory of Divisionism in his paintings. A Divisionist painting of his exhibited at the Triennale of Milan in 1891 provoked violent polemics in Italian art circles. From then on Previati continued to work in the Divisionist style of using just a few primary colours such as red, blue and green, and adding yellow. By separating and juxtaposing small strokes of these hues he created vibrating effects of luminosity in paintings, which had to be viewed from a distance of a few metres to really come to splendour. Which painter could more suitably make a picture on the creation of light?

Gaetano Previati made a picture of the moment when God created light, the beginning of creation. We must first note Previati's technique of applying colour paint on the canvas. Previati placed thin strokes of paint one next to the other. The juxtaposed strokes were mostly of a different hue, but one hue or a set of hues might dominate over a relatively large area. The overall hue of these areas then might contract strongly or contrast only in tone and intensity. Previati preferred in many paintings one dominant hue of just a few dominant hues, to create a dominant mood. That was his technique of Divisionism.



Previati's picture 'The Creation of Light' dates from 1913, when he was over sixty years old. This was a time in his career when he had perfected his style. By then also he had reached a moment when he was well known in Italy, did not have to prove anymore his skills and artistic value. He could freely depict scenes of high symbolic content. He painted many religious themes, which carried often a mystic meaning.

In the 'Creation of light' we see yellow-white, almost golden rays fill the frame from out of one point, which lies not in but out of the frame. Here, to suggest the rays, Previati applied very long brushstrokes, always thin, of bright, golden yellow and white lines. These become of a somewhat darker tone towards the top of the painting so that the viewer receives also an impression of a direction in the rays and of space, of an upwards movement of the easy. The rays also spread out from their origin, enhancing the perception of space. Light created space for Gaetano Previati. He used two main hues: yellow in the rays, soft purple or a close hue of soft red-orange in God and the angels. The mood of the picture radiates a kind of muted melancholy by which Previati reflected on the awakening of the creation. The mood of the painting shows how Previati painted not a realistic scene of God and angels, but expressed his profound personal feelings generated by the subject. The mind-image of Previati is as much emotion, sensitivity, and receptivity to the mysterious power that always radiates from the Bible when one reads it with a mind given over to its mysticism. The 'Creation of Light' is how Previati perceived the subject by emotion through his inner eye, and then expressed it in a particular form of art, Divisionism, which was very suitable for this expression.

We see God surrounded by angels, floating in the void of the light just created. Previati showed God in the traditional way, as an old man with a long grey-white beard. But except for an arm, a leg, God is rather formless. His body is hidden in a cloak of long curved blue-red, purple lines or brushstrokes, which we perceive also in the angels. Previati may be remembered from the Bible that the angels were simply a realisation of God on earth, in a form recognisable by humans. Previati painted the angels thus very much as an integrated part of God. Still, the angels are either a girl with wings or – again represented in a traditional way – little putti, children. The angels touch and tear at god, seemingly getting energy from his presence. God seems to drowse, as if he also were by the creation being created and taking form. This was not only an interesting and debatable concept for theology; it might have also been a reflection theme for Previati on the creation of paintings. Are the angels awakening God and his creation so that God takes conscience, knowledge of his work, or are they now also taking life and existence form God? Does light create paintings and was Previati just an instrument of the action of light? Did painters of Previati's time only, for the first time, understand the action of light? Could new mysteries be solved and effects of paint be discovered to create breakthroughs in the art of painting? Previati experimented with light and its effects. He was awakening to the secrets of light, like God in the surprise of his own creation of light. It was good to do so.

Gaetano Previati painted a picture that is a marvel of luminosity and splendour of colours when seen from a distance. By the technique he used the rays seem to shimmer and to move upwards. In this movement, God is suspended. God and angels float. The 'Creation of Light' is a stunning overdose of hues and brilliance that hits any viewer. Thus, Previati imagined the first moment of the creation and of light, and

God glorifying and warming in this radiance. Light was good for God and for Gaetano Previati. God created light and light made paintings possible.

*Other paintings:*

**The Creation of the World**

Ivan Aivazovski (1817-1900). The Russian Museum. St Petersburg. Russia. 1864.

## *Eden*

### **The Garden of Eden**

Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). Ca. 1620. The Victoria and Albert Museum – London.

At the time when God made heaven and earth, no wild bush nor wild plant had sprung for God had not yet sent rain or any man to till the soil. Water flowed out of the ground and from there watered the surface. Then God shaped man from the soil and blew the breath of life into him.<sup>G38.</sup>

God planted a garden in Eden, in the East, and there he put the man he had fashioned. God caused to grow every kind of tree, beautiful and good to eat, and in the middle of the garden he grew the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed from Eden to water the garden and that river divided to make four streams called the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Thus tells the story of the creation of the Garden of Eden, the story of the creation of all the animals and of man and woman. Every race seems to have origin stories and these are ours. No painter has brought these images better on the canvas than Jan Brueghel the Elder, an artist born in Brabant Brussels, who lived around the change of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century. Jan Brueghel was a northern landscape and flower painter. He formed the transition between the late Gothic and Renaissance Flemish painters and the new, flamboyant Baroque art of the great Antwerp masters Rubens and van Dyck. He was one link in a chain of a tradition that had started a hundred years earlier; a tradition that had not its equal in the brilliant Italian Renaissance. Jan Brueghel was a member of a very famous family of genius artists of Brabant in Belgium.

Jan's father was Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1528/1530-1569), called the Peasant-Bruegel for the many pictures he painted of the life and feasts of the Brabant villages around Brussels. Pieter's name was not then pronounced as today, the letter 'e' merely indicating a longer pronunciation of the 'u'. Pieter Bruegel was the most original and powerful artist of the family and Brabant's most important artist of the sixteenth century. He married a painter's daughter, Mayken, the daughter of his master Pieter Coecke van Aalst. Aalst is a small town also near Brussels and Pieter Coecke was married to a lady who was equally a painter, a miniaturist. It must have been the joining of these artistic genes that founded subsequent generations of artists.

Two sons of Pieter Bruegel were also painters. Pieter Brueghel II the Younger (1564-1638) was also a gifted artist. He was taught by Maria Verhulst Bessemer, his grandmother, and introduced by her in the art of miniature painting. The Italians because of his production of fire-red images of hell called this Pieter the 'Hell Brueghel' or 'Pieter degli Inferni'. His brother, Jan Brueghel I the Elder, painted many pictures of paradise so that he was famous for exactly the opposite themes of his brother, even though he would occasionally work together with his brother, also on pictures of the hell. Do many families also not have a dark and a bright side,

exactly as God had separated light from darkness? It is not surprising then that after a father – Pieter the Elder – so much dedicated to pictures of immediate reality of earth, one son – Pieter the Younger – would show pictures of the underworld and the other – Jan the Elder – of paradise. Pieter the Younger and Jan the Elder were born in Brussels, but both worked in Antwerp. They had sons in their turns that were artists. After Pieter I, his son, Pieter II, studied with his father. Jan I Brueghel had a son Jan II. This son mostly only copied his father and his technique is often indistinguishable from his father's. Jan II had a son Abraham (1631-1697) called the Neapolitan, who was a member of the San Luca Academy of Rome. Various other sons of the Brueghels continued the artistic tradition way into the eighteenth century. There was an Ambrosius Brueghel (1617-1675), Jan Baptist called Meleager (1647-1719), Philips (1635-1662), a Ferdinand (died 1637) and a Jan Peter Brueghel. The family did not only consist merely of artists in direct line of parentage. Jan van Kessel for instance was a grandson of Jan II while David Teniers (1610-1690), the son and pupil of David Teniers the Elder, married Anne, a daughter of Jan II. Their son, David III (1638-1685) was equally a painter.

Antwerp had become a metropolis port around the turn of the century, which burst of energy, of trade and it was a hub of overseas transport. It was a financial centre where the world's first stock trading house had been founded. This Antwerp would suffer much from the religious wars of the sixteenth century. Brabant was part of the Spanish kingdom then, a remnant of the empire of Charles V. The Netherlands fought for independence and for their Protestant views of Christian religion against the Catholic Spanish armies and Antwerp had had a very important Protestant community too. Flanders and Brabant were rich but caught between the Netherlands and France, separated from Spain by a thousand kilometres but still governed by it. The town would rise against Spain together with the Netherlands, but the Spanish armies conquered it definitely in 1585. The Antwerp Protestants were then more or less peacefully driven out and Antwerp would remain Catholic forever. Much wealth left with the Calvinist traders to Amsterdam, but sufficiently rich merchants and bankers remained to live in Contra-Reformist Antwerp to guarantee its splendour. These were avid for paintings to decorate their houses, churches and community buildings. Antwerp rolled on with its acquired wealth and still grew in splendour.

Jan Brueghel the Elder learned his profession not from his father, who had died young, but from the Antwerp masters Pieter Goetkint and Gillis van Coninxloo. He was inscribed in the Saint Lucas Guild of painters of Antwerp in 1557 already.

Two features linked all the painters of the Brueghel family: Italy and landscapes. Pieter Bruegel the Elder had been to Italy from 1551 or 1552 to maybe as late as 1555 or 1556. Pieter had travelled to Rome and he had been as far as Naples. He even visited Palermo on Sicily. Jan Brueghel the Elder also journeyed to Rome and he visited Milan from 1595 to the spring of 1596. He had met in Rome the Lombard collector Federico Borromeo. Pope Clement VIII appointed this Borromeo archbishop of Milan in that same year 1595. Federico admired Jan's paintings, bought many of his works and even stayed with him in correspondence after Jan's stay in Milan. Jan occasionally bought Antwerp landscape paintings for the archbishop and sent them to Milan. Federico Borromeo naturally also became a patron of Jan II. Archbishop Federico Borromeo (1564-1631) was a patron of many artists and he particularly liked northern landscape painting, notably of Paul Bril and Jan the Elder.<sup>18</sup> The archbishop

was a staunch defender of sacred art. He was also an avid writer and belonged to one of the most prominent families of Milan. One of his forefathers was Saint Carlo Borromeo. Federico founded a library in Milan in 1618, called the Biblioteca Ambrosiana after Saint Ambrose, the patron saint of the town. This library opened a gallery of paintings and Federico also founded there in 1620 an Accademia del Disegno or painters' school, annexed to the building. His collection would be the basis for the gallery now called the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. In 1775 the Austrian government transferred the academy of painting to Brera, so that another gallery opened there, becoming the contemporary Pinacoteca di Brera.<sup>18</sup> Milan is the proud possessor of two Pinacoteca galleries, unique in the world and leading back to the sixteenth century Maecenas Federico Borromeo.

Many sixteenth century painters of Flanders, Brabant, Germany and Holland travelled to Italy to study the Italian masters and to find patrons for their works. This was one of the first stages in the internationalisation of art. The opposite movement, from the South to the North, remained an exception. But many northern paintings found their way to Italy. This trend grew in the early seventeenth century and examples are the many landscape paintings of Flemish and Dutch artists that landed in Federico Borromeo's collection. The most beautiful landscapes of Paul Bril and Jan II the Elder are now in the Ambrosiana of Milan.

Landscape painting is a very old art. Ancient Egyptian frescoes exist of gardens, with birds and fowl depicted in two dimensions on the flat surface. Roman villas also contained frescoes or splendid mosaics with motifs of nature. But it was not evident for the early masters to dedicate a canvas or a wall or floor entirely and exclusively to plants and animals. The artists' first attention was on man, in a very egocentric view. In frescoes, murals, mosaics and paintings of up to the fifteenth century man was quite naturally the centre of the interest of artists. Trees, plants, and landscapes formed the background of paintings. Man was great; landscapes were small. This view did not change during the Italian Renaissance; it was strengthened. By the Renaissance's emphasis on the philosophies, on antique sculpture and architecture and on the glorification of man's realisations, man remained more than ever the main subject of art, of mind and eye. The great Italian Renaissance artists favoured portraits, religious scenes of the New Testament, and mythological themes. These had always images of man and woman as the principal element. Landscape painting, in which the main interest was with nature itself, was a northern realisation. For Italy, nature had been given in submission to man so nature was of a second rank, to be used but not to be the centre of admiration.

The Italian masters and collectors were fascinated by the often miniature-sized pictures of Flemish landscape art, even though so many splendid genius artists abounded in their own country. A landscape painting of Paul Bril or Jan Brueghel the Elder found an easy place in the Cardinal Borromeo's collection, next to the pictures of Bernardino Luini, of Titian and Raphael. Yet, Italian nature is as dramatic as the natural landscapes of Flanders or Brabant. Pieter Bruegel the Elder made engravings and drawings of the Alpine Mountains whereas the Tuscan artists apparently preferred their cities and the realms of their mind, even though the Florentine theorists proposed to draw 'according to nature'. Nature here was mostly man. Landscape painting did not originate in Flanders, Brabant or Holland. Dutch artists would discover and admire their flat country and their seacoasts mostly only in the seventeenth century. It

took a new family of artists originating from a region where man is indeed small and landscape great, where nature was grandiose and where not a tradition of grand human Gothic had overpoweringly impressed man, to start the art of landscape painting.

Joachim Patinir and Henri Blès (called Civetta) were born in the Walloon valley of the river Meuse. They came from around the town of Dinant on the Meuse, where the river cuts in dramatic views through high rocks. Here you can still see a steep valley with breathtaking cliffs surrounded and overgrown by luxurious woods. Nature was wild and untamed here in the fifteenth century and in heavy contrast with the cultured meadows near the sea, the vast fields of grains, the wide streams and the cities of Flanders that rose out of the lowlands. The land of Dinant was full of legends of giants that had shaped nature. You can still find near the town a needle-like high rock. A legend told that this rock was struck from the cliffs of the Meuse valley when four young knights, the Aymon brothers, seated on the back of their enormous horse Bayard sprang from one side of the river to the other to flee from Charlemagne's armies. The horse's hooves clashes separated the Bayard rock. No wonder that Patinir and Blès left this wild country that was not devoid of great art for it was known for its art of coppersmiths and blue enamels to live off their art in rich Bruges and Antwerp. They took with them the impressive images of their parents' nature. More importantly, they must have been astonished to remark the importance given to man and his work. People living in the Meuse valley lived intimately with their nature and soil. Here lived the artisans that worked iron and copper, the marvellous gold- and silversmiths of the Meuse valley. There were very few painters. The land was not rich. In the Flemish and Italian city-states, man was large and nature subdued. Joachim Patinir and Henri Blès – who may have been of the Patinir family himself since he is sometimes mentioned thus in archives – could not but depict the images of their youth and thereby create an entirely new kind of paintings.

Joachim Patinir and Henri Blès invented landscape painting in the fifteenth century. Flemish and Dutch artists after them continued the genre. Pieter Bruegel, so interested in the reality of life around him, also eagerly drew the landscapes he saw on his travels and his sons and followers continued the tradition. But the ideas of the Renaissance had caught up the North too and to landscape painting the Brueghels added mythological themes to create imaginary, fantastic views. Hence the pictures of hell of Pieter the Younger, his Orpheus scenes and the Paradise themes of Jan the Elder. Landscape painting was established firmly by then and successive generations of artists would devote their skills to the genre as well as to flower painting. Indeed, from landscape painting it was quite natural to devote an artist's interest more closely to the plants and flowers. Brabant painters were Frans Snyder, David Teniers, Hans Bol and Roelandt Savery. This Roelandt Savery, born in Kortrijk of Flanders, learned the genre in Antwerp with Hans Bol. He took the art with him to Utrecht where his pupils were Gillis d'Hondecoeter and Allart van Everdingen. This led to a proficient Dutch school of landscape painting in the seventeenth century, to such artists as Meindert Hobbema, Aelbert Cuyp and the greatest master of them all, Jacob van Ruisdael.

Jan Brueghel the Elder's 'Garden of Eden' is one of the finest of Jan's landscape pictures. He created a splendid paradise in which all animals live at peace. Lions, tigers, horses and deer are painted in the clearing of a forest to underscore the peace

of God's creation. Various other animals are shown, in one lower strip of the picture. The background of the forest covers most of the frame majestically. The green mass of the foliage on the right is matched by the oblique line of a tree that reclines to the left. This tree takes its root in the middle of the garden, so this must be the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The animals flock around this tree. Jan Brueghel made several pictures on this composition and Roelandt Savery also copied it. There are so many details to discover in this picture. Look at the exotic birds perching high in the tree of knowledge. See the pond with the swans, duck and other waterfowl. Find the rosebushes on the right and the tiny figures of Adam and Eve in the far. Imagine a loving Maecenas like Federico Borromeo walking past such a picture discovering these splendid details of miniature painting. Federico may never have fatigued from admiring the quality of the realism, the brilliant colours and the details of the leaves of the bushes and the branches of the trees. Jan also added symbolism to discover. The tree of knowledge is almost barren and its dark trunks contrast with the lush foliage of the forest. This tree bears no fruit but leads to death, whereas on the right and triumphantly growing are the trees with mature fruit. These trees form a natural corridor that led to life and to Adam and Eve. Man and woman are thus easily walking unhindered amidst the splendour of nature. These scenes are so smooth and fluid, that Jan Brueghel was nicknamed the Velvet Brueghel.

Pictures like this 'Garden of Eden' showed the beauty of idealised nature free from Sin. The pictures thus appealed not only to Federico Borromeo's aesthetic aspirations, but also to his practical character. For here were pictures of obvious religious content. Eden was the paradise of God, the image of a nature that could be the Promised Land for devoted believers in Christ. Pictures of the Terrestrial Paradise could be used in teaching as the images of the peace of mind and the rest of the soul that the Christians could hope for. The Paradise was a spiritual Eden, and Borromeo must have admired the devote northern painters who depicted and understood so well this concept.

*Other paintings:*

**The Garden of Eden.** Henri Blès (ca.1510-active until around 1555). The Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis – The Hague. Ca.1525/1530.

**The Garden of Eden.** Jacob De Backer (1570-1591). The Groeninge Museum - Bruges.

**The Garden of Eden.** Jacopo dal Ponte called Jacopo Bassano (ca. 1510-1592). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. Ca. 1570.

**The Garden of Eden.** Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. Ca. 1593-1594.

**The Terrestrial Paradise** Roelandt Saverij (1576-1639). The Royal Museum of Fine Arts - Antwerp.

**The Golden Age.** Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Nasjonalgalleriet – Oslo. Ca.1530.

**The Terrestrial Paradise.** Jacopo Il Ponte called Bassano (1517/1518-1592). Galleria Doria Pamphili – Rome.

**The Terrestrial Paradise.** Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1583.

**The Creation of the Animals.** Master Bertram. Hamburger Kunsthalle – Hamburg. 1379-1383.

**The Creation of the Animals.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. Around 1550-1563.

**Paradise.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961.

**Paradise.** Andrea Michieli called Vicentino (1542-1617). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Around 1700.

**Paradise.** Roelandt Savery (1576-1639). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1626.



## *The Creation of Adam and Eve*

God settled man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it. But God thought that it was not right for man to be alone, without helper. So from the soil he fashioned all the wild animals and all the birds of heaven. He brought these to the man and each one was to bear the name the man would give it. All the cattle, birds and wild animals were named but there was no suitable helper to be found for the man. So, God made the man fall into a deep sleep. While the man was asleep God took one of his ribs and closed the man's flesh up again. God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to man. Man and woman were naked, but they felt no shame before each other.

Many artists made paintings on the theme of Adam and Eve. We show some of the most remarkable pictures. And we start with paintings of one of the greatest geniuses, pictures of Michelangelo.

### **The Creation. The Creation of Adam**

Michelangelo Buonarroti. Cappella Sistina, Palazzo del Vaticano - Rome. 1508-1512.

The Vatican holds the greatest marvels in art. There is no equal on earth to the architectural complex formed by the Cathedral of Saint Peter, the Sistine Chapel and the Papal Apartments. Add to that the Pinacoteca, the Vatican Museum with the Belvedere and the Gallery of Statues and one has the most impressive collection of art of the western world. More astonishing is that the three main parts of the Vatican were constructed and have been given their contemporary aspect almost in the same period of the sixteenth century. Bramante and Antonio Sangallo were the major architects of the cathedral. The Sistine Chapel had already paintings of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, Perugino, and Luca Signorelli. Fra Angelico and Pinturicchio painted some Papal rooms before Raphael. Michelangelo also painted in the Pauline Chapel. The whole is really unsurpassed in beauty, power, symbolism and radiance. Two genius painters worked in the Vatican at the same time: Michelangelo and Raphael were both at times architects of Saint Peter and painters of the Vatican. Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; Raphael painted the rooms of the Papal apartments. Of course, such enormous works of art surpassed even them and many others worked in the Vatican, with names that are all synonyms of genius.

All the artists worked in the mystical obedience of their faith to serve Roman Catholicism. The men that had the vision of the whole were of the Rovere family. These men were first Francesco della Rovere, Pope Sixtus IV, and then his nephew Giuliano della Rovere, Pope Julius II. Julius II was a very realistic and pragmatic man but he also had an obsession. He wanted Roman Catholicism to be the major force on earth. He not only wanted that, he knew that had to be, and if necessary by arms. It was ordained. The Pope was given the keys to the Kingdom, so he had the responsibility to bring the heavenly kingdom to all. This could only be realised by

making the Papal States in Italy stronger than before. And by drawing the whole world to Rome to wonder at the marvels of the Seat of Saint Peter. Julius had the drive and the money. Italy has never engendered so many geniuses to serve the dream as while Julius II lived. So, the Pope employed the money and the geniuses to push the representation of the Divine as far as is humanly possible. He was a proud and strong man who could do it all unwaveringly. Julius II did not doubt the justification of his vision.

Michelangelo painted the Sistine ceiling on demand of Pope Julius II, whom he had known from before as Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere. Julius II was 30 years older than Michelangelo. Michelangelo himself was 33 years old when he started to paint. He found it a daunting task. The Sistine ceiling was ugly and high. Michelangelo tried to avoid the demand of the Pope by stating that he was a sculptor and not a painter, but Julius was not a man to take no for an answer. Michelangelo had not painted since a long time. He was essentially a fresco painter. He had the learned technique in Florence from Domenico Ghirlandaio and he mastered it. But fresco painting was a slow process. The ceiling was an enormous surface, high and ugly with many odd surfaces in uncommon angles. Michelangelo started working on the Sistine ceiling with helpers, but soon sent them away and worked alone on a scaffold that would make no holes in the walls, and that was also his own design. He worked from 1508 to 1512.

Michelangelo was painting at the same time as other artists in the Vatican. Raphael Sanzio was painting in the Stanza, the rooms of Julius II's apartments. These were also masterpieces, such as the School of Athens. The Pope wanted a new Saint Peter's cathedral. A competition was opened for the design and both Giuliano da Sangallo and Bramante, the most influential architects of their times participated in the contest. Although da Sangallo was the Medici architect, Bramante won. While Michelangelo painted the Sistine ceiling, he heard Bramante's teams tearing at the walls of the previous old Saint Peter cathedral and building new piers.

While these genius artists transformed the Vatican, the Pope was at war. Julius II saw it as one of his main tasks to enforce the Papal States in Italy. He first made an alliance with France and the German Emperor against Venice. Once Venice subdued, he became afraid of the growing power of France in Italy. He made a new alliance with Venice and Spain against France. During the painting of the Sistine ceiling, Julius waged war against the French in Northern Italy at the head of his fifteen thousand Swiss mercenaries. His hiring soldiers at times abandoned him because he couldn't pay them anymore. The Swiss would come back however and turn his luck. Mostly the Pope lost battles, such as the one at Ravenna, but in the losing he advanced.

Julius II also fought the Republic of Florence, the beloved hometown Michelangelo. The Tuscan Republic had not so much supported the French as grasped the opportunity of the struggles to be more independent. This ended the Republic of Florence. Its wise Gonfaloniere, Piero Soderini of the Signoria, had to resign so that the Medici family, who sided with the Pope, would again rule the city. The French abandoned Italy. Julius II died a few months after the inauguration of the Sistine ceiling. The next Pope would be the same Medici that had stood at his side in the wars

against Florence. Giovanni de Medici became Pope Leo X. Under the first Medici Pope the work of the splendours of the della Rovere Popes would be continued.

When Michelangelo first entered the Sistine Chapel, he saw already half the wonders of Florentine painting. The long rectangular room's walls were painted from higher than a man's height to where the windows started by magnificent, large scenes. The scenes ran like a frieze all along the walls. There were scenes from the life of Moses, painted by Perugino, Pinturicchio, Cosimo Rosselli, Luca Signorelli and Piero di Cosimo. There were scenes from the life of Jesus Christ by the same fresco painters, and by Domenico Ghirlandaio. There was a Last Meal by Cosimo Rosselli. Pope Sixtus IV had ordered these paintings as a pictorial program to the justification of Papal authority. The scenes from the lives of Moses and of Christ had been painted from 1481 to 1483. Michelangelo knew most of the painters; he had met some of them in Florence. Ghirlandaio had been the master from whom he had learned fresco painting itself. The paintings obviously showed in all their majesty the foundation of the power of the Popes. This justification was necessary in view of the growing Protestant contention of the position of the Papacy.

Michelangelo started working on the ceiling by painting in 'a fresco'. He would start by making cartons on light paper. These then were held against the ceiling and helpers would puncture the paper along the lines of the drawing and bring black contours on the surface. With the outlines of the drawing ready on the ceiling, the cinobiae, the real painting in colours could begin. This meant that Michelangelo had first to bring a layer of lime on the wall, but not on a larger surface than he could paint on in the time that he wanted to work. The colours were painted on the lime. They dried with and in the lime. Once the lime plastered on the wall, it had to be painted on before it dried. Painting over a previously painted zone was impossible. It had to be right the first time. In order to paint changing tones, Michelangelo would have to paint strokes of different shades next to each other. Essentially, each covered surface was in one colour tone only. This was the centuries old art of fresco painting, fresco meaning wet. It was painstaking, but the colours were marvellous after the lime had dried and would not disappear for centuries. It was the way of painting that Michelangelo had learned when at fourteen he had entered the workplace of Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Michelangelo would have to make use of the structures that supported the roof. He did not have just a flat surface, but he would have to paint between and on the protruding supports of the ceiling. He would have to paint the whole length of the ceiling, about 520 square meters.

The subject could only be Genesis, the creation of all things living and not living. God was the beginning of everything; Roman Catholicism had in the creation its start and its continuation. Much later, more than twenty-five years later, Michelangelo would finish the idea by painting the Last Judgement, the end of the world, in the same Chapel.

The central flat surface of the Sistine ceiling contains nine scenes, which represent the Genesis, the creation. The scenes start at the far end, above the altar of the Chapel with the 'Separation of Light and Darkness' (1). From there on, the scenes are: the 'Creation of the Stars and the Planets' (2), the 'Separation of Earth and Water' (3), the 'Creation of Adam' (4), the 'Creation of Eve' (5), the 'Original Sin' and the 'Expulsion

out of Paradise '(6), 'Noah's Sacrifice' (7), the 'Universal Deluge' (8) and finally 'Noah's Drunkenness' (9). The middle painting is thus the 'Original Sin' and the 'Expulsion out of Paradise', which reminds us of our mortality and transitoriness. Among these scenes there are full, large scenes that alternate with smaller ones which are held by large nudes and medallions. The large scenes are 2, 4, 6 and 8: the 'Creation of the Stars', the 'Creation of Adam', the 'Original Sin' and the Deluge. These are probably the most important ones for Michelangelo, the ones he wanted the devote invitees of the Popes, the privileged who were allowed to assist the High Masses of the Pope in person, the ambassadors, emperor, princes and kings, to remember.

Michelangelo knew that the wall frescoes already tried to establish the credibility of the Popes as inheritors of the Kingdom installed by God. He continued this idea by filling in the space between the walls and the central scenes with prophets and Sibyls. In front of the first scene he painted the prophet Jonas, on the other end the prophet Zachary. On the right side of Jonas started the Lybian Sibyl, and then came the prophet Daniel, the Cumaean Sibyl, the prophet Isaiah, and the Delphic Sibyl. On the left side of Jonas started scenes with the prophet Jeremiah, the Persian Sibyl, the prophet Ezechiel, the Erythreian Sibyl and the prophet Joel. So, each prophet has on the opposite side a Sibyl. There are five Sibyls and 5 prophets along the walls, but two supplementary prophets are at the ends. Next to the prophet Zachary, there are two scenes made possible by somewhat larger surfaces between the supporting structures of the roof: David and Goliath on one side, Judith and Holophernes on the other side. Next to Jonas are similar surfaces, the 'Punishment of Aman' and the scene of the Brazen Serpent. Between the prophets and Sibyls there are smaller scenes of precursors of Christ like the family of Ozias, the parents of King Jesse, many others.

Why the Sibyls, pagan symbols in a Catholic chapel? The Sibyls were women who prophesied while in ecstasy. So, just like the prophets they were announcers of wonders to come. In the Middle Ages, the Church adopted their sayings as foretelling the story of Christ. The 'Golden Legend' narrated of strange events that had happened during Jesus's birth and that had been prophesied by the Sibyls. In Rome, a fountain of water turned to oil and burst into the Tiber. A Sibyl had foretold that when a fountain of oil sprang from the ground, a Saviour would be born. The Sibyls had also shown to Emperor Octavian a most beautiful virgin that appeared in a golden circle around the sun. The virgin held a child in her lap. The Sibyls said that this child was greater than the emperor was and that Octavian should worship it. The Sibyls were thus considered ancient Roman counterparts of the Hebrew prophets.

Michelangelo emphasised with the Sibyls the link between pre-testament times and the Christian era. There are twelve Sibyls, of which Michelangelo represents five. These five Sibyls are also the best known. They were named after their places of origin. Michelangelo painted the Sibyls of Delphi, of Cumae, of Persia, of Erythraea and the Sibyl of Libya. The Sibyls are not shown with their usual symbols, which would be a crown of thorns for Delphi, a shell-like bowl for the Cumaean Sibyl, a lantern and serpent for the Persian, a lily for the Erythraean Sibyl and a candle or torch for the Libyan Sibyl<sup>G41</sup>. Each Sibyl holds a book or a scroll. These would be the Sibylline books, in which the proverbs and sayings of the Sibyls were recorded. A Roman, Tarquinius Superbus allegedly bought the Sibylline books from the last Sibyl, and then guarded by a college of priests that could only open the books on special

order of the Senate of Rome. The original books were burned in 83 BC, but reconstituted afterwards from Asian sources. The prophets also hold books or scrolls, referring to the Old Testament. Both the Sibylline books and the Bible underscore that the coming of the Kingdom was written, announced, prophesied. These figures continued the iconographic program of the walls of the chapel.

The first three scenes of the Genesis show God the Father. He is always clothed, and so are the figures of the prophets and the Sibyls. In the following scenes however, Michelangelo painted common men and women. All are naked. Many other nudes support each scene of the Genesis. Thus, for Michelangelo humankind was humbled in its nudity compared to the God and the prophets.

Michelangelo was a sculptor. He was obsessed by the structure of man. He would first draw a naked man and then paint clothes around and on the figure. He looked in the first place for power and movement in man. He liked tanned, large, hard muscles. Men's legs are always forceful, his hands large. Michelangelo's sculptures are awesome in force. By looking at the hands of Michelangelo's sculptures, such as the hands of the David, one can get sick of the impression of weight and force conveyed by the very realist power of expression of the artist.

Michelangelo painted as he sculpted, with the same preferences for the epic, the grandiose. The epic was always overwhelmingly expressed in man. Michelangelo seldom sculptured women. Women's figures were too soft, too delicate for him. Women were not the conquerors and shapers of civilisation. The women of the Sistine ceiling are definitely not gracious. Look at the Sibyls. Not one of them is painted slender or vulnerable. Look also at the scene of the 'Original Sin'. Eve is as strongly muscled as Adam is. She is not gracious but squat and built as a man. In the 'Exclusion from Paradise', Eve is small and thick, ugly.

So, in the 'Creation of Adam', man is naked and God the Father clothed. But the clothing is a transparent silk by which we can perceive the force of God. God has a white beard and white flowing hair, the symbols of wisdom. Both God and Adam are painted in long, but God is seen in the full action of creation whereby Adam is resting on one arm, relaxed. Children, putti, or angels surround God. God's cloak is white so that his figure stands out against the putti. The children, the angels, seem not so much to support him as to want to withhold him. They seem to be tearing at God, pulling him back. But notwithstanding these forces, God reaches out and touches man. Adam is lovingly posed, in all the splendour of a Michelangelo young male nude. God and Adam look into each other's eyes.

Michelangelo was both an artist who found in the mysticism of his Christian faith his inspiration and consolation. At the same time, however he was a very realistic, rational thinker, a true Florentine. He could sculpt a statue born out of one genial idea, like his David or Moses, and then work for a very long time at that, chipping away stones piece by piece for years like a common artisan. He was also an engineer, who would build defence walls for Florence under general Malatesta against the army of Pope Clement VII. This mixture of mysticism and rationalism can be found back in the 'Creation of Adam'.

The rationality is in the form and composition of the scene. The figures are well drawn, as fresco would allow, well delineated, in natural fluent poses. The whole is restive, a nice and warm painting, easy to look at. The painting is simply one scene among others of the Genesis, the birth of the universe. The scene is one normally to be expected as the creation of the first man. Adam is rising up out of the clay that God has just been touching. There is a long line between the outstretched arms of Adam and God, in harmony with the length of the bodies and the length of the rectangular frame of the painting. The iconography is striking so that the people who would come to the Sistine Chapel could imagine the creation and keep that picture in their minds for long.

The mysticism is in the ideas and feelings that are conveyed. A multitude of emotions is induced in the viewer of the scene.

Man is touched by God and man touches God. This is how we feel when we are all alone in front of a wonderful nature landscape. We are alone at dawn. A veil of mist is hanging over the land. There are shadows of forests far away. We look over meadows. Everything is silent. When we feel thus unified with nature and the universe, we feel we touch God. The universe comes close to us. In us, we feel to be part of the cosmos and at the same time this universe comes so close to us that we have a sense of possession of it. We look into the eyes of God.

The 'Creation of Adam' is a representation of love. It is the best image of pure love we know. Loving means being glued, linked to somebody, and not knowing why. One sees a person among many others and feels attracted to him or her. One looks closer, and then comes nearer. One feels interested and captured. It is as if one is touching, wants to touch, and knows that once one has touched one will be stuck and unable to withdraw. If one is married and the other person is not one's spouse, just before the moment of touching is still the moment one can withdraw. But don't touch or you will be linked inexorably and lost. You will be committed and you will seek the other person out, maybe in an obsessive way. This is the moment captured by Michelangelo. Has God really touched man, is he going to touch him or has he already touched and has he pulled away? Man does not seem afraid of the touching and willing to reach for God. But God seems afraid of the consequences of embracing man. His angels feel the same; they are drawing at God. This is an image of the 'Noli me Tangere' theme, the words that Jesus said to Mary Magdalene after his Resurrection; Do not touch me lest I be forced to stay. Do not touch me lest I would love you. There is no better, poignant image of love in European painting than the 'Creation of Adam'. God would want to touch Adam and love him, but knows that it cannot be and withdraws. And Michelangelo used images of men.

The 'Creation of Adam' remains an eternal image of unfulfilledness, of insufficiency, inadequacy and imperfection. God and man do not touch, cannot touch. Here is a search for perfection unfulfilled, the search of the artist for the perfect painting. The most perfect sculpture remains an illusion. The search of the Popes for the Kingdom of Heavens on earth will never be realised. Nothing is perfect; all is perishable. Man is never really touched by God and thus has not his entire resplendent nature. This is the sadness of the picture. Man is not perfect and cannot be perfect. He can reach out, but will never really be able to grasp, to touch the universe.

Michelangelo has brought in the paintings of the Sistine Chapel most of what he believed in, all the things that puzzle a man during his life and that he cannot fully understand or that he thinks he understands. This is the philosophy of Michelangelo. His beliefs were strong and honest, not hypocrite. He showed them to the visitors of the Sistine Chapel. He had the strength to open up and show them, he was not afraid and he must have had very much confidence in himself. Because people to whom one shows one's emotions in this way may hurt one's character. Michelangelo hid this maybe in the monumental. There are so many strong powerful nudes supporting the central scenes, that the general impression is not one of quiet, inner thoughts, but of exuberance and grandness. The weight of the powerful frescoes is so overwhelming that the inner emotions of Michelangelo are perceived as universal truths.

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born in Florence in 1475. He died in Rome in 1564, almost ninety years old. His life covers many generations of painters, sculptors, architects, poets and humanists. He knew them all, met them in Florence, Bologna, and Rome. He spoke and argued with them, an endless list. He knew the painters Filippino Lippi, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, Pietro Perugino, the young Raphael Sanzio, Piero di Cosimo, Lorenzo di Credi, Francesco Granacci, Andrea del Sarto and Sebastiano del Piombo. He was a pupil to the sculptor Bertoldo who himself had learned the art from the great Donatello. Other sculptors he knew were Baccio Baldinelli and Benvenuto Cellini. He met and exchanged ideas with the architects Giuliano da Sangallo, Andrea Sansovino, Antonio da Sangallo, Bramante, and Jacopo Sansovino. Giorgio Vasari worked a short time in his workshop. The poet Ariosto who wrote Orlando Furioso was his contemporary. So were Titian and the great Venetian artists Tintoretto, Veronese and Palma. Michelangelo remained very individual, a loner in art. He was first a sculptor and painted as he sculpted. He looked for a simple but profound idea and then developed much work as an artisan. Michelangelo's ideas were splendid however. They were true and honest, grown out of his own private genius and out of his own inner life. He had absolute confidence in his own craft and intelligence. He expressed spirituality in marble.

Michelangelo knew and worked for at least ten Popes, among the foremost Giuliano della Rovere, Pope Julius II, but also Giovanni de Medici as Clement VII and Alessandro Farnese as Paul IV. He is indelibly linked with the triumph of the message of Christian Catholic faith of the sixteenth century. The Popes needed images and powerful iconography to tell the splendour of God's works. Michelangelo, in a time without any other form of imagery, provided them just that in the most clear, direct and imposing way. He became the architect of Saint Peter at the end of his years, from 1546 on. He designed the cupola of the basilica, but the construction was finished after his death. He loved Florence dearly, whether it was ruled by the Signoria in the republic under the Gonfalonieres Soderini and Capponi or under the Medici. He built defences for Florence when the city was attacked. He knew Lorenzo II Magnifico when he was young and from then on his life was always connected with the Medici. Three Popes he knew had the name Medici: Leo X, Clement VII and Pius IV.

Michelangelo's most famous sculpture is the David, that can be found today in the Museum of the Academy of Florence and of which a copy still stands in the Piazza della Signoria, the marketplace of Florence. This sculpture is the symbol of Florence. He sculpted the Pietà in the Saint Peter cathedral. He painted the ceiling of the Sistine

Chapel, the Pauline Chapel and finally the 'Last Judgement' of the Sistine Chapel. He also wrote sonnets and poems, some of which were love poems to Vittoria Colonna, the Marchese de Pescara.

Michelangelo appears to us as a tower of a man, an all-genius artist, architect and engineer such as the world has not seen after him. He was a man who could do everything, a shaper of civilisation. He was impregnated with the spirituality of Roman Catholic religion, but he added a new dimension: the power of man, and the confidence, the triumph of man's deeds.

### **Adam and Eve**

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). The Courtauld Institute Galleries - London. Ca.1526.

The Italian Renaissance had started around 1400 in Italy, even though the first pictures of its sparkle came a quarter of a century later. From Italy the new ideas moved northward. Thus it reached Germany earlier than Flanders, Brabant and Holland maybe because the Gothic tradition was stronger and more brilliant in these last regions. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) were contemporaries. Dürer was totally open to international ideas in art and philosophy. He was a traveller. He went twice to Italy to study art and confer with Italian artists. He also went to Flanders and Holland. His style was courteous, refined, complex and delicate. But he was also a passionate man and a man who doubted and was uncertain of himself at times. His terrible engravings of the Apocalypse prove this. Dürer was the intellectual of the two. Lucas Cranach the Elder was more linked to his region. Cranach never travelled to Italy. He was rooted in popular German art, German character and morals. He perpetuated the spirit of the German soil. He knew the splendour of the Renaissance. He painted mythological scenes, especially his sensual Venuses. He knew the Renaissance's glorification of the human body but he did not want to leave the tradition of old to seemingly naively paint stylised images. He made a gradual transition to Renaissance, whereas Dürer jumped without neither bonds nor complexes nor restraint immediately into the new vision.

Lucas Cranach the Elder painted an 'Adam and Eve' around 1526, after an etching of Dürer.<sup>U4</sup> Cranach used Dürer's poses in several pictures. We notice the grace of Dürer, and his freedom in composition as compared to earlier Gothic, as well as Cranach's links with traditional German representation clearly in this picture. In Cranach's picture man and woman are indeed the focus of attention and landscape is still in the background, as one would expect of Renaissance and Gothic painters. Adam and Eve are pictured in attitudes that explain the scene of the Bible. Eve is still grasping a branch of the Tree of Knowledge and in a gesture further in time hands over the apple to Adam. Her poise is coquettish and her long legs show some of the sensuality of the spectator-artist Cranach. Yet, her forms remain spiritualised in a restraint that is respectful as necessary for a religious scene. Eve's forms are barely accentuated by shadows; her body is the pale colour of a fleshless symbol. Cranach showed more distance than the bold Dürer. Adam accepts the apple but he scratches



his head in doubt. He is not sure whether he should accept the apple and also give in to the temptation of the sensuous, sinuous snake above. This serpent has the colour of deceit: it is as green as the tree so as to blend in its environment, but it has a gold gleam of success. The serpent's head is definitely directed at Eve.

Around the first couple all the animals are still in peace with each other because the apple of the Original Sin has not yet been eaten. The animals seem to await the disaster that will disturb their harmony. They all stand still, as if frozen in expectation and intuition of something important that is going to happen. Lion and deer glance sadly at the viewer and confront him directly with the fearful expectation of the act that will kill. Cranach needed to add a small pond to be able to picture in water birds. The drinking of the pond is like the eating of the apple, and eating and drinking are the two activities of the sustenance of living. Behind Eve, in the far, a white horse is galloping out of the forest. The horse is white and could be the unicorn of the legends, an emblem of purity. The horse is the only animal that is in motion and it tries to leave Eden, because the Fall is being prepared.

The result of sin will be the multiplication of man, necessary to perpetrate the sin and necessary to continue man since Adam and Eve will become mortal creatures. Cranach represents this symbolically by growing the ranks of a vine to both the sexual parts of Adam and Eve. From these blooms the fruit, the grapes. The woods of the deer beneath Adam support Adam's sex and the spikes of the horns are a reference to the pain that will be induced by the Fall. Such immediate reference to sexuality was unusual for refined painters, but Cranach did this also in other pictures such as in his Saint Sebastian. Cranach hereby remained closer to earth, to popular images instead of to the refinement of intellectual art.

Remarkable in this picture is not just the narrative, the various gestures of Adam and Eve that tell a story in static poses. Gothic is turning into Renaissance in this picture. Gothic's static becomes movement. The emphasis on symbols and references is still medieval, but the figures of Adam and Eve are new in that Eve is really alluring. But her image remains stylised. So are the bushes behind the couple that form a screen behind their scene. All leaves are equally large; all apples are identical. Only after sin will there be decay and still more variety in nature. Such depiction may be considered naïve and indeed, naïve artists of the nineteenth century used the same representation as Cranach did. We need to understand that we have here a master as accomplished as Albrecht Dürer at work. But Cranach deliberately stayed with a very personal vision, in symbiosis with his common fellow men of the small towns of Germany. It is a very Protestant and German reaction to refuse the splendours of the Renaissance. Lucas Cranach was a friend of Martin Luther and made an altarpiece for the Wittenberg chapel where Luther preached. He also painted several portraits of Luther and his wife. Lucas Cranach worked in Wittenberg, as he had been invited there from Nuremberg by Frederick the Wise, the Prince-Elector of Sachsen. He had a workshop in Wittenberg and was elected three times mayor of the town.

Lucas Cranach painted Adam and Eve in the nude. So did Dürer before him, as well as Mariotto Albertinelli in an oil painting that is equally in the Courtauld Institute of London. Dürer's etchings had reached Italy rapidly. Jan Van Eyck had painted Adam and Eve as explicitly naked even earlier. The nakedness would shock generations later, but the early days of the sixteenth century was still the time before the Council

of Trent and pictures of Adam and Eve nude were not unusual. After all, the Bible noted explicitly that Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed. That was before the Fall, as in Cranach's picture. The clergy could hardly protest against a scene that had a sound theological basis. Puritanism set in later. The Fall had a special meaning for Luther and the Protestants. It underscored the frailness of humanity and original sin and illustrated some of the pessimism of the Protestants. The Renaissance had glorified man, built imposing monuments on majestic antique non-Christian examples. The Roman Catholic Church all too eagerly liked pomp and outward magnificence to show the power of its clergy more than the modesty of Christ. The Protestants would remark that man had to pray and be humble again. If the Renaissance tried to reach the skies, the German Protestants pointed at the reality of a hard life that was often miserable in feudal Germany. Cranach made several versions of the Fall, which became one of the preferred themes of the German Protestants.

### **Adam and Eve**

Vladimir Baranoff-Rossiné (1888 – 1942). Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza – Madrid. 1912.

The theme of Adam and Eve, representations of the first men but also types of all mankind, inspired artists of later than the early centuries of oil painting and other artists than of Western Europe. Vladimir Baranoff-Rossiné was born in the Ukraine, in the town of Kherson. He studied painting in Odessa and in Saint Petersburg. He moved in the group of Russian avant-garde artists where he met Larionov and Natalia Gontcharova among others. In 1910 Baranoff-Rossiné left Russia for Paris and tied friendships with the Parisian society of Russian émigrés but also with Hans Arp and Robert and Sonia Delaunay. From this period dates his 'Adam and Eve' in which the influence of the aforementioned artists can be felt in the strong, heavy colours and the encircling dynamism. Baranoff-Rossiné also sculpted and tended to a unity in the various arts of painting, sculpture, poetry and music. He combined these arts in stage performances. During the First World War he hid in Norway. He returned to Russia, now a communist nation in the growing, already in 1917. He met Marc Chagall and other Russian innovators of painting. In his later years Baranoff-Rossiné came back to Paris and he died there in 1942, in the middle of a new World War. Until his death he continued to experiment with colours.

Vladimir Baranoff-Rossiné's 'Adam and Eve' is all colours. His painting strikes with its embedded, concentric circles between which colours and subjects are trapped. The obsession of whirling circular movements that engulfed all subject matter was a characteristic of a style of painting of the beginning of the twentieth century called Orphism. The main artists who left the representation of figurative subjects for these circling colours were Frantisek Kupka and Robert and Sonia Delaunay, who all worked in Paris. Baranoff-Rossiné's 'Adam and Eve' can thus also be called an Orphist picture, even though the Orphists tended to complete abstraction whereas Baranoff-Rossiné remains mainly figurative in his painting.

For Baranoff-Rossiné the sun is the creator of life. It's warm and red light is central. It does not send out rays but life is created in concentric circles. All life is generated

from the sun's vortex, plants, animals and man and that sun is red as blood, the essence of life in creatures with a mind. There is not much difference between the species. Adam and Eve are simply part of the created universe as just one more manifestation and not much distinguishes them from the rest of Eden. The earth still is an Eden, where the animals are at peace. In the middle of the frame Baranoff-Rossiné painted a lake and animals that are at peace together, a lion and a pelican. These are all Christian symbols used in pictures of Saint Jerome and associated with Christ. They are brought together in a naturalistic vision of the creation.

Man as Adam stands to the right. He holds a flower of peace. He is light, a muscled Adonis and almost floats in the air, caught in the circles. Below him comes a dog, a symbol of loyalty. Eve lies down in an alluring, coquettish, seductive poise. She has very broad hips and full round breasts, the traditional signs of her seductive power. But she lies quiet in the scene, unaware of her force. Adam is standing, Eve lies down. We take these poises for granted. There are many pictures for instance of Venus and Adonis or of the nymphs, in which women are lying down and men stand up. Wassily Kandinsky remarked that horizontal lines indicate the restful female element, vertical lines the active male. Adam stands up to guard, to defend and he is ready to depart. Baranoff-Rossiné - maybe unconsciously - used these qualities of line and its universal symbols. Even more than man the sun's circles have shaped Eve. For Kandinsky circles were concentrating symbols, symbols of inner life, of inward movement, of feelings. Woman feels more profoundly, more subtly than man does. Her symbol is the peacock, whose colours are the same as the plants, trees and flowers of paradise. Adam and Eve both follow the rhythm of the lines and colours of the creation. These lines and colours penetrate the figures, emphasising the mystic symbiosis between man and nature.

Adam and Eve remain for Baranoff-Rossiné a man and woman that respond strangely to the classic Greek and Roman ideal. Adam especially is drawn according to the images reminiscent of the ancient classic sculptures. He is slender, noble, strong and young with the curls of hair around his head as Adonis was sculpted in Roman times. Baranoff-Rossiné was a sculptor also and he had the strong classic examples very tenaciously in his mind. Eve however is entirely different. She is the Ur-mother, Ur-woman, whose functions of fertility are obvious. Baranoff-Rossiné combined old and new images as he combined the Christian symbols of Adam and Eve with new interpretations of the creation as he emphasised the sun. In this way his picture can be seen as one more example of the search of artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to new truths about mankind and the mystery of life. No rational reason for the existence of man can be found however so that the essence of the picture is the mystic symbiosis of man and nature, Adam and Eve and Eden. Baranoff-Rossiné with this picture expressed his ideas of a mystic union of mankind and nature in the circles of the vortex of life. This was a very symbolist and spiritual vision even if it was not directly Christian, in line with the spiritual emphasis of the beginning of the twentieth century.

*Other paintings:*

**The Original Sin.** Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1562-1638). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1592.

**The Original Sin.** Hugo van der Goes (1440-1482). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna. Ca.1470.

**The Original Sin.** Marten de Vos (1531-1603). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

**The Fall from Paradise.** Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.

**The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man.** Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) and Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca.1615.

**Paradise with the Creation of Adam and the Fall of Man.** Monogrammist of 1576 (Joos de Beer?). Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. 1576.

**Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.** Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). The Royal Collections – London. 1615.

**Adam and Eve in Paradise.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. Ca. 1620.

**The Creation of Eve.** Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1609-1662). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**Adam and Eve.** Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1528.

**Adam and Eve.** Hans Baldung called Grien (1484/85-1545). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.

**Adam and Eve.** Hans Baldung called Grien (1484/85-1545). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. Ca.1525.

**Adam and Eve.** Hans Baldung called Grien (1484/85-1545). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. 1531.

**Adam and Eve.** Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/1498-1543). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1517.

**Adam and Eve at Work.** Domenico Fetti (1589-1623). The Courtauld Institute Galleries - London.

**Adam and Eve.** Jacopo Bassano (1510-1592). Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina – Florence.

**Adam and Eve.** Attributed to Marco Basaiti (ca. 1470-after 1530). Galleria Borghese - Rome. Ca. 1504.

**The Creation and Fall.** Mariotto Albertinelli (1474-1515). The Courtauld Institute Galleries - London. Ca.1513-1515.

**The Temptation of Adam and Eve.** Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1519-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. 1550-1553.

**From the Creation to the Judgement of Salomon.** Raphael's Bible. School of Raphael. Palazzo del Vaticano – Rome. 1512-1518.

**The Original Sin.** Jan II Brueghel (1601-1678). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**The Expulsion from Eden.** Jan II Bruegel (1601-1678). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**The Expulsion from Paradise.** Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-140). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. Ca. 1597.

**Adam and Eve.** Hieronymus Bosch (Ca. 1450-1516). Escorial – Madrid.

- Adam and Eve.** Jan Gossaert (Ca. 1478-1532). The Royal Collection. Hampton Court Palace – London.
- Adam and Eve.** Jan Gossaert (Ca. 1478-1532). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1505-1507.
- Adam and Eve.** Francesco de ‘Rossi called Francesco Salviati (1510-1563). Galleria Colonna. Rome. 1553.
- Adam and Eve.** Gustav Klimt (1862-1918). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. 1917-1918.
- The Fall.** Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. Ca. 1630.
- Elohim creating Adam.** William Blake (1757-1827). The Tate Gallery – London. 1795.
- Adam and Eve chased from Paradise.** Pol, Jehannequin and Hermant Malouel called the Limbourg Brothers. Miniature of the ‘Très riches heures du Duc de Berry’ Folio 25v. Musée Condé – Chantilly. Ca. 1414-1416.
- Adam and Eve chased from Paradise.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961.
- The Expulsion from Paradise.** Johann Heinrich Füsseli (1741-1823). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1802.
- The Fall of Man.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.
- The Fall of Man.** Hugo van der Goes (ca. 1440-1482). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1470-1475.
- The Fall of Man.** Follower of Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).
- Adam and Eve after the Expulsion from Paradise.** Johann Anton Ramboux (1790-1866). The Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln. 1818.
- Adam and Eve**  
Emile Bernard (1868-1941). Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1888.

## *Cain and Abel*

### **Cain and Abel**

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.  
Around 1550-1563.

The first-born child of Adam and Eve was called Cain and his brother was Abel. Cain worked the land and Abel became a shepherd. When they grew up, Cain brought the produce of the land to offer to Yahweh and Abel brought the first-born of his flock. Yahweh favoured the offerings of Abel but he did not look with favour at Cain's gifts.

Cain became very angry and depressed. Yahweh asked why Cain was angry, but Cain did not answer. He merely proposed to Abel to go out with him. When the brothers were well in the country, Cain killed Abel.

Yahweh asked to Cain, 'Where is your brother?' Cain answered that he did not know and that he was not supposed to be the guardian of his brother. But Yahweh knew, and told Cain that the blood of his brother was crying out from the ground. Yahweh told Cain that he would be banned and cursed. He told that the ground would no longer yield its strengths to Cain. Yahweh condemned Cain to become a wanderer.

Cain pleaded to Yahweh, complaining that this was an unbearable punishment. Not only would he have to wander about the earth, he had to hide from Yahweh and whomever he met would kill him. Yahweh then put a mark on Cain and told that whoever would kill Cain would suffer vengeance sevenfold.

Cain later had a son, Enoch, who became the founder of a city called after him. Enoch had a son from whose line emerged Jabal, the ancestor of musicians. Jabal's brother was called Tubal-Cain and he was the ancestor of the iron and copper smiths.

Adam however had another son, called Seth. From Seth would descend Noah and from Noah's sons the whole earth was peopled. From his direct lineage came Terah and his son Abraham.

Jacopo Robusti was born in Venice in 1519. His father was a dyer of silk materials, so Jacopo was called Tintoretto. The boy had talents for drawing, so he trained as a painter and may even have worked for a short time in the most famous workshop of Venice, Titian's. Already in 1539 he seems to have become a master of his own. The first works of Tintoretto also established his fame. They were a 'Last Supper' made in 1547 for the church of San Marcuola and especially the 'Miracle of Saint Mark' in 1548, painted for the Scuola di San Marco. In the beginning of the 1550's he worked for the Scuola della Trinità and at that time also he married a girl named Faustina Episcopi. She was the daughter of Marco Episcopi, who had been Guardian Grande of the Scuola di San Marco for which Jacopo also made his first major work. Through

this father in law Tintoretto must have become well introduced in the circle of the custodians of the Venetian Scuoli.

Jacopo Tintoretto worked for many Scuoli and churches of Venice. He delivered paintings for the churches of San Rocco, Maria del Gilglio, Santa Maria della Salute, Santa Maria Domini, Madonna dell'Orto and for the Scuola di San Marco. This was a relatively young Scuola, but a prosperous one. Its building was only finished in 1549. and it was not before 1557 that the decision was taken to decorate the halls of the building, starting with the Sala dell'Albergo, the hall of the hostel. This decision was only put in effect in 1564 and Jacopo Tintoretto received the commission for the first central, oval decoration of the ceiling. The most renowned painters of Venice entered the competition: Andrea Schiavone, Federico Zuccari, Giuseppe Salviati, and Paolo Veronese. But Tintoretto surprised the jury by not presenting a cartoon or study drawing, but the whole 'Glorification of Saint Roch' in oil on canvas, and donating it for free to the Scuola. Then, without being paid, he carried out the decoration of the rest of the ceiling. This would be the beginning of Tintoretto's lifetime work, as he could conclude a contract with the Guardians of the Scuola di San Rocco for more paintings in exchange for a yearly stipend. In all Tintoretto painted sixty large canvases for the Scuola. His work lasted until 1588. Tintoretto's paintings for the Scuola were all on religious themes. He painted from the New Testament scenes such as on the Crucifixion, on Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, the 'Adoration of the Magi', 'Christ praying in the Garden', and so on. But he also delivered scenes from the Old Testament such as the 'Sacrifice of Isaac', 'Jacob's Ladder', the 'Vision of Ezekiel', and several scenes of the life of Moses such as the 'Gathering of the Manna', the 'Pillar of Fire', the 'Brazen Serpent', and others. Jacopo Tintoretto knew the Bible well and he eagerly used its main stories. From early on in his career as a painter he studied the themes and showed them in his own particularly striking style.

Tintoretto's picture of 'Cain and Abel' is one of his early ones. It was part of a series of five paintings made between 1550 and 1553 for the Scuola della Trinità. The German Teutonic Knights instituted this Scuola. Its building was originally near the Dogana del Mar, the old custom-house of Venice. It was demolished in the 1600s to make place for the Basilica of Santa Maria della salute and rebuilt nearby.<sup>121</sup> Tintoretto painted five scenes from Genesis, among which the 'Cain and Abel'.

'Cain and Abel' is a very Michelangesque, Mannerist work, related in vision to the works of Rosso Fiorentino. We see the two naked bodies of strongly muscled men. The bodies are intertwined. Abel's body lies around Cain's and although Cain's figure dominates, Cain's body also draws around Abel's. Tintoretto studied bodies so contorted and turned. This is the intimacy of murder between brothers. It is the first violence that is shown here, when the nudity and the touching of bodies eliminates all distance between prey and predator. There is no mistake in the murder. The crime is immediate in the touching and the contact of flesh upon flesh, in the clash of the bodies and in the depiction of the sudden moment of the hideous act perpetuated without remorse and with unwavering determination. Cain blocks an arm of Abel on his knees. He pushes down the head of Abel and he holds a knife high for a powerful stroke on the body of his brother. Abel resists, but it is too late. He moves his body and turns it in an unnatural twist of stress, but he will not be able to avoid the blow. Cain is too strong and has been too quick for Abel to react well. Tintoretto knew

marvellously to show the tragic scene, the rapidity, the violence and the flesh-to-flesh intimacy of murder.

The crime takes place in a hidden place, behind rocks and trees, in a corner of Eden that lies in the darkness of the sins of humans. All the colours in the painting are browns and ochres. On the right Tintoretto's picture opens to a landscape. Here we see the calm waters of a lake or a sea. Here Cain wanders on the beaches, after the crime, hence a small and lonely figure. Tintoretto showed the murder but also the result of murder and sin: the remorse and the loneliness.

The scene is an early Bible theme, so Tintoretto has not given a knife to Cain, but a piece of spiky wood that can be driven into Abel. The brothers might have been hunting and the symbol of the crime, a decapitated head of a deer lies beneath a tree down on the right.

Tintoretto applied a strong composition. Cain is painted along the right diagonal. Abel's arms are along the left diagonal. Cain's bodyline leads down to the deer head, to the crime again, whereas Abel's bodyline brings the eye of the viewer to the innocence of the blue lake. The tree marks about one third of the picture; Abel's hand on the ground is on another third part of the frame length. The masses of the two bodies balance each other and the two bodies together balance the mass of the tree.

The two bodies of Cain and Abel are almost nude. They touch and the bodies flow one around the other in intimate touching. Such a depiction is definitely not Renaissance anymore. It is all showing of violent emotions of the flesh. Tintoretto's lines are all either oblique or curving directions. So much exposing of twisted, naked bodies exclaims the tension of a Mannerist picture. Violence is too tense, too direct for either Renaissance or Baroque depiction. Tintoretto's 'Cain and Abel' is a painting of the conflicts of the Mannerist period. This picture was made somewhat forty to fifty years before Caravaggio made his first paintings of dramatic contrasts of light and dark, but all Caravaggio's main elements of style are present in Tintoretto's 'Cain and Abel': strong composition, closeness of the theme to the viewer, powerful depiction of bodies in a very realistic way, importance given to the main theme with disregard for background decoration, and of course a new emphasis on the contrasts between light and dark. But Tintoretto's painting contains a direct contact of flesh that Caravaggio, even in his own main scenes of violence, avoided and that Caravaggio always showed with more restraint and distance. Tintoretto was a precursor of Caravaggio's art and it took only some relaxing of the violence to come to Baroque.

The effects of light and dark that are so reminiscent of the Baroque period are already entirely spectacular in this painting of Jacopo Tintoretto. The light comes from down left and rises from Abel's highlighted back to Cain's shoulders. Tintoretto's mastery of light and shadow is total. We cannot but remember Caravaggio's 'Sacrifice of Isaac' in which the innovative, emphasised dramatic use of light and dark is similarly impressive. The colours of 'Cain and Abel' are very dark. The two figures, even though the light is thrown on them, are painted in shades of brown and ochre. The trees on the left and the middle are very dark green. With Tintoretto's pictures it is often difficult to ascertain whether these colours were the original ones. Tintoretto's green paint became darkened over time to become brown. His blue colours became grey, his yellows greenish and darker also, his reds paled to pink. We may suppose



Tintoretto used lighter colours in the sixteenth century than what we say today. Still, we may reflect that he deliberately also wanted to show the first odious crime on the dark side. Hence, Tintoretto introduced a reference to a calm lake on the right. The crime had to be perpetrated in a sombre place and had to be contrasted with blue water and sky.

‘Cain and Abel’ is a relatively early work of Jacopo Tintoretto, but this picture proved Tintoretto to be a true genius and powerful master of an art that he would bring to full glory in the subsequent canvases of the Scuola di San Rocco.

### **Adam and Eve finding Abel’s Corpse**

Joseph Florentin Léon Bonnat (1833-1922). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Lille. 1861.

Léon Bonnat studied first at the Academy of Fine Arts San Fernando of Madrid in Spain. He was born in Bayonne, in the south of France and not so far from Spain. He returned from Spain to France when his father died. From 1854 on however he was in Paris, and continued to learn painting at the Académie there. He tried twice to win the ‘Prix de Rome’ to win a five-year stay in Rome, but failed. The town of Bayonne however financed his travel and living in Rome. He hired a small workshop and could also attend some of the courses given in the Villa Medici, where the French Academy of Rome was established. He admired much Michelangelo’s powerful works in Rome. He travelled to Florence, Venice and Naples. He made at first scenes from the Old and New Testaments and he had success with his representations. The ‘Adam and Eve finding the Body of Abel’ was thus made in Rome in 1861, sent to the Salon of Paris that year and bought by the French State to be sent to the Museum of Fine Arts of Lille. Léon Bonnat painted further historical scenes, scenes of Italian life. He returned to Paris after a few years in Rome and also worked on frescoes. He continued to visit Italy for shorter periods, in 1866 and 1875-1876, and he also continued to paint Italian country folk. He participated in the reforms of the French Académie in 1863. He might have kept a grudge against the official Academy for not having succeeded in getting the Price of Rome; he was very critical of Academicism. Still, in 1905, Léon Bonnat was appointed director of the Academy of Fine Arts of France; he had his revenge.

Léon Bonnat’s painting strikes by its strange colours and its overall appearance. The canvas appears as if worked over by a hard brush, or as if it were seen through a rough glass or through the dust of time. Bonnat certainly wanted to experiment with new techniques of representation, and he addressed colouring first. This way of working was far from French Academic practice. But then: why follow a practice when deviating from practice could give you an artistic advantage?

Beyond the striking colours, Léon Bonnat’s painting is an exercise in representation. Abel lies lifeless on the rocks. His head rests on the knees of Eve. This is like in a classical Pietà position, as we know from so many pictures of Mary and Jesus. Adam

sits on the right, in a pure Michelangelo attitude so that his powerful muscles show. The painting therefore, by its content and the poises of its figures could be considered as a typical academic work of a French scholar in Rome. But Léon Bonnat, through his use of light in the picture and through his deep colours, broke down the academic treatment of the subject.

Abel lies on the rocks. Here, Bonnat used magnificent golden colours. He let the light cover Abel and bring his fine, thin chest to the central area of the painting. Abel is indeed shown like a Jesus, a young, delicate man with slender traits and limbs, elegant long arms and legs. When we compare Abel with Adam, we are quite surprised since Abel is so much more exquisite, more vulnerable in the barren, terrible desert into which Adam and Eve and their family have been banished. Abel's head hangs over Eve's knees, lifeless but as if sleeping and caressed by his mother.

Eve is seated. She holds her hands to her breast. She looks at her son. She is still a young woman. She is serene, sullen, in apathy, in solemn sadness at so much hardness of life, east of Eden, and at the death of her son. The golden light plays a little also on her bare shoulders. Abel truly is her son, because he is as delicate as she is. Eve looks at her son only. She looks intensely and lost to the world. She is alone, isolated, and far from Adam. She makes no gesture of horror. Adam is not with her. She is one with her son.

Adam sits to the right. He sits in a position like Michelangelo could have imagined for a sculpture. Adam sits on his knees but his torso is turned so that Bonnat could paint all the muscles of his powerful back. Adam sits like a wrestler and he is out of the scene of Eve and Abel. He does not belong to the scene of grief, to the intimate symbiosis of mother and son. He is the Hercules, the Vulcan of later times. He did not choose Eve. Already the first couple, Adam and Eve, are distinct, separate, each lonely, and too different to be able to sit together to mourn. They mourn so differently. Eve is resigned; Adam drawing restless on his muscles, pulling them into tension as if he were preparing to fight fate. Adam is a brute who continues to turn and contort his body. Eve is softness and she is turned inwards; Adam is all outwardly but futile display of force. The force is useless, spent, and the protest, the overt show of power of Adam is in vain. Abel lies between Adam and Eve and both parents seem to know that this death is more the result of the old sin, the old trespassing of God's command than a battle of life. As compared to the act of sin, the roles are reversed since Eve is resigned and Adam revolts.

Léon Bonnat worked fully the contrasts between light and shadow in the Baroque way. That also was new in a period where the Academy was much given over to the legacy of Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres and Jacques-Louis David. One would have expected a clear scene, clear lines, and only fine indications of forms. Bonnat returned to the Caravaggesque use of light. The light on Abel is splendid and bright. It continues to flow over his body into the sandy valley beyond. Some light also falls on Eve, sculpting her round and soft forms, whereas Abel is all angular and sharper in the harsh light. Eve's head is in the shadows. Adam is much more in the dark, since grief of a man should not be shown. His bronze shoulders merely emerge from the night and the shadows seem to creep over him, engulf him from the right side so that he becomes one with the black rocks behind him. Caravaggio would still have painted Adam's face in all detail and in some light. Bonnat hides the face. Adam's

powerlessness in sadness was not to be shown. Adam's face must be as contorted as his body.

The difference in degrees of light on Adam and Eve again separates the two in solitude. That solitude is enhanced by the desolation of the desert. Bonnat did not paint a flat desert. He showed blue, sharp and thus menacing mountains without any plants or trees. Bonnat showed directly the difference with the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve have been banished by God. Bonnat painted the rough desert in a traditional 'Open V' structure in the space opened by the figures of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve are in the shadows, somewhat protected from the sun by the mass of rocks, but the dry sun catches Abel fully. Bonnat placed his figures, and of course Abel especially, rather low in the picture so that he could not only show the desert but also let the weight of the sky completely take its place in the painting. Here, Léon Bonnat applied many hues over which blue dominates but in which we also see many other hues such as orange to indicate the light of the sun. It is in this colouring of the sky that we remark another approach to Academicism. Bonnat did not separate anymore the colour areas but he let all colours of the sky flow into each other and merge to one global perception of splendour.

Léon Bonnat made 'Adam and Eve finding the corpse of Abel' in Rome. It was Bonnat's second painting there. Bonnat may have been somewhat set against Academism because he had not been selected for the Prix de Rome. He remained in criticism to painting ruled by strict and old directives, as taught at the French Academy. His picture is a strange image. He combined a traditional Pietà with a Michelangelesque view of an athletic body. Critics did not appreciate such reminders of fine themes, modified to other aims. Bonnat however may have done this knowingly, by purpose to emphasise a certain revolt against established taste. The painting may have been thus a personal experiment, as other French painters of Rome occasionally offered. Bonnat was still young. The picture may also have happened without much after-thought or fore-thought by an impetuous, angry young artist. In all cases, we feel that Bonnat was after experiments and evolution of the art of painting as he was used to be shown, away from the teachings of the French Academy into new directions and these were for Bonnat mostly in his handling of colour and light, not in a drastic change of themes and content. Other painters of course brought a much more profound revolution, towards Impressionism, and after a while these experiments became the new norm. Bonnat however much he wanted to evolve, nevertheless stayed a prisoner to his time and to what he had learned by academic his teachers. Bonnat sent paintings from Rome to the Parisian salon exhibitions, just like the students of the Villa Medici. He was obliged to set his art off against the academism of the Villa Medici. He was the odd-man-out. He tried to innovate, to present another style and other views, but he lacked the power to break away forcefully and decidedly.

Léon Bonnat became the Director of the French Académie in 1905, one of the last defenders of the great Academy tradition, when ironically, not much was left of the old, directive academic way of painting.

*Other Paintings:*

**Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel.** Frans Floris I (1519/1520-1570). Koninklijk museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp.

**Abel mourned.** Frans Floris I (1519/1520-1570). Koninklijk museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp.

**Cain.** Fernand Cormon (1845-1924). Le Musée d'Orsay. 1880.

**Abel mourned by his Parents.** Johann Liss (Ca. 1597-1631). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**The Lamentation over Abel.** Johann Michael Rottmayer (1654-1730). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. 1692.

**Cain and Abel.** Pietro Novelli called Il Monrealese (1603-1647). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome.

**Cain and Abel.** Nicolò Torrioli (1598-1651). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

**Cain and Abel.** Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1649). Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum. Braunschweig.

**Adam and Eve with Abel's Corpse.** Michelangelo Cerquozzi (1602-1660). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**Cain fleeing after the Murder on Abel.** Jean-Victor Schnetz (1787-1870). Accademia Nazionale di San Luca. Rome. 1817.

**The Remorse of Cain.** Giovanni Battista Biscarra (1790-1851). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna. 1817.

**Cain kills Abel.** Boccaccio Boccaccino (ca. 1465-1524). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Cain kills Abel.** Mariotto Albertinelli (1474-1515). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

## *The Ark of Noah*

The stories of the flood and the ark of Noah are known by everyone. We show a picture of the theme of the ark by Jacopo Bassano.

### **The Animals enter the Ark of Noah**

Jacopo Bassano (1510-1592). Museo del Prado – Madrid. 1590.

Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan was a Maecenas of Jan Brueghel the Elder. He also bought pictures of a Venetian artist Jacopo da Ponte, whom he knew as a good animal painter. Jacopo da Ponte was called Bassano after the town where he was born. Jacopo Bassano had first learned his art with his father, Francesco the Elder who had a workshop in Bassano. Jacopo further trained in Venice with Bonifacio Veronese, but he did not stay in Venice. He returned to Bassano so that the workshop founded by his father continued in a school. After Jacopo, his own sons Francesco the Younger and Leandro maintained the workshop so that like the Brueghel family in Flanders a family tradition lasted for three generations in Bassano.

Bassano lies close to Venice. The Venetian sixteenth century was the era of the great master Titian, but Jacopo Bassano was with Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594) and Paolo Veronese (ca. 1528-1588) one of Venice's major painters. Titian was the artist of Emperors and Popes, Tintoretto and Veronese were decorating the Venetian palaces. Jacopo da Ponte stayed in more rural Bassano. Like Pieter Bruegel the Elder he first sought his subjects among peasants, nature and animals and his sons perpetuated this genre. Tintoretto and Veronese emphasised the splendid monumentality of Venetian grandeur; Bassano painted people with not less refinement. He put shepherds in the foreground and even the Kings of his religious scenes have the earthiness of the Venetian countryside. Bassano used fewer figures, centred more on the aspect of human feelings and felt nearer to the actors of his themes. Bassano used the red ochre of the soil and the soft greens of the pastures. He started in an own style, then turned Mannerist and painted elongated figures in harsher colours, in redder ochre and more acid green. Then after 1560 he succumbed to the fashion of the grand Venetian scenes of Tintoretto and Veronese.

'The Animals entering the Ark' is a good example of Jacopo Bassano's mature art. Noah and his helpers are leading pairs of animals into the boat. The ark is painted in the darkness of the first heavy clouds that God is sending for the Deluge. Only a long entry to the door is seen, over which the animals go into the Ark. Jacopo Bassano studied these animals closely so that all are depicted in a very lively and detailed way. Noah is shown as the great wizard that manages and conjures all the animals in. The ark's entry plank forms an oblique line to the higher left of the painting, whereas the animals form a line that equally obliquely starts down on the left and then rises to the right. Slanting lines always induce a sense of movement. Bassano uses this style element here also, long before Caravaggio would exploit it to its fullest. In the darkness of the coming disaster fly the frantic birds that sense the bad weather. The leaves of the trees move in the first winds. Noah has to hurry, so he is all action and

energetically waves his arms. The animals stand out in the brown colours. Bassano painted in extra patches of light to accentuate the line of the animals and he added animals in white at regular intervals such as a white dog and a white horse. This was a painter who mastered light and darkness as well as Tintoretto.

Bassano was a precursor of the dramatic use of the contrast of light and darkness and in this late painting – it dates from around 1590, while Bassano died in 1592 – we sense fully the coming of Caravaggio and of Baroque. The scene is filled with epic and dynamism, emotion and movement. The disorderly animals, and the motions of the figures grasping the animals and driving them forward is eminently Baroque. Energy, motion, passion, involvement in the scene, contrasts of black and white are all the ingredients of the Baroque and these can be found accomplished in the Bassano picture. Jacopo Bassano combined the style elements of many other masters to the way of painting that would conquer the seventeenth century.

Where did Baroque art originate? It was probably only in the rich grand cities of Western Europe that had accumulated wealth that such an art form could thrive. Venice was in a period of slow decline. But because of the mass of funds in the city it continued to augment its revenues of trade. The same was true of Antwerp. And in Rome, the Roman Catholic Popes stood at the centre of a steady inflow of money from the sale of indulgences and of parts of the revenues of the European clergy. All this wealth was spent in the late sixteenth century and even more in the seventeenth century, to at least a significant extent on art. No art form represents more the spending of riches than Baroque art. Its flamboyancy declares a joy of living, a confidence in wealth, a desire to dwell in extravagant beauty and the will to boast with the acquired abundance. The middle class of traders and merchants could compete with the courts of Europe in magnificence and thus affirmed its power. In Venice, Tintoretto, Veronese and Jacopo Bassano were the foremost proponents of this movement.

### **Noah's Sacrifice**

Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Nationalgalerie – Berlin. 1814.

Joseph Anton Koch was born in the Tyrol region of Austria, but the German Bishop of Augsburg remarked him and recommended him to go to an art school. He first studied in Augsburg, and then could attend the Karlsschule of Stuttgart from 1785 on. In 1791 he ran away from this rigid and hard school and travelled through the Alps. In 1795 an English Maecenas gave him a scholarship to go to Rome and he became acquainted there with the painter Jakob Asmus Carstens. He shared a workshop with Carstens in Rome. He also learnt to know other German painters. He was particularly fond of a small village outside Rome, called Olevano Romano, and married the daughter of a winegrower there. He painted mainly the country landscapes of the Roman surroundings. Throughout his whole life he would thus remain a painter of

idyllic landscapes. The Lukasbrüder later called the Nazarenes, Johann Friedrich Overbeck, Wilhelm Schadow and Philip Veit arrived in Rome around 1810 and started a community workshop for painting in the San Isidoro abbey. They looked to Joseph Anton Koch to teach them landscape painting, but neither Koch nor his new friend the painter Reinhart, joined the group. From 1812 to 1815 Koch returned to Vienna but he himself and his Italian family could not get used to the climate of the city. He went back to Rome. Koch did not only paint there for Italian commissioners. King Ludwig I of Bavaria bought several pictures of his. Koch also made frescoes in the Roman palaces at a later age. He died in Rome in 1839. Koch sought his inspiration mostly in the Roman country side landscapes and if he occasionally painted on themes of classical antiquity or religious themes, the heroic landscapes of his pictures always had an important if not the first place. 'Noah's Sacrifice' is one of those works.

When the flood was over, Noah built an altar to Yahweh and, choosing from all the clean animals and all the clean birds, he presented burnt offerings on the altar. Yahweh smelt the pleasing smell and said to himself, 'Never again will I curse the earth because of human beings, because their heart contrives evil from their infancy. Never again will I strike down every living thing as I have done.' God blessed then Noah and his sons, told them to multiply and to fill the earth. He then established a covenant with Noah and with all the animals of the ark that never he would destroy the earth again by flood. As a sign of the covenant, Yahweh set his bow in the clouds.

Joseph Anton Koch painted a picture of this sacrifice of Noah. We see a stone altar and around that altar Noah and his sons and daughters offering to Yahweh. Noah's wife kneels behind him; a girl brings bushels of wood for the fire, his sons bring the animals and slaughter them. From the altar rises a white smoke, for Noah burnt only clean animals. All the animals have left the ark and Koch drew many of them in the scene: rabbits, peacocks, partridges, snakes and hedgehogs. A swan swims in a pond. To the right are lions and even a rhinoceros, but the deer play along the wild ferocious animals.

Koch presented the scene of Noah in the lower part of the painting, and as if the viewer looked down from a hill into the valley. He drew an almost horizontal and dark line under which he showed Noah's family and this scene, situated against the shadows, make that Koch's figures nicely stand out bright against a darker coloured background. Beyond this rim Koch painted a wide, imaginary landscape. To the left is Mount Ararat on which the ark has stranded and Koch painted the ark in a perilous position almost over the rim of the high rocks that dominate the valley. Koch's landscape furthermore consists furthermore of a lake, into which a low waterfall breaks its waters coming from the mountains. We see a promontory with a few trees and the far blue outlines of mountain peaks. Koch combined in this grand landscape various views of the Sabine mountains of Rome that he had seen and copied before. Above the landscape, in the upper left part, he placed a rainbow and a few horse-riders in the sky, which may be a reference to the sun, to Apollo's chariot.

The structure of Koch's landscape is that of an 'open V'. The sides of the V are on the left Mount Ararat and on the extreme right Koch painted high trees in dark tones. In between, the view opens wide to give the viewer an impression of enormous depth, to show the far mountains of the middle. Koch applied aerial perspective here since he

painted the sharply outlined Sabine mountains in light blue colours and the viewer remembers from other, Gothic and Renaissance pictures, how the elder painters also pictured far mountains in such light blue. Koch combined an intimate scene of Noah's family, all together around the altar to laud Yahweh, with the majesty of a splendid view of nature in poetic peace.

Joseph Anton Koch divided his picture in two parts with the lower part in the shadows and containing the personages of the theme, whereas the upper part contains the landscape painted in bright colours and in hues of delicate intensity. Here the sun stands majestically, as if it offered a pervasive light coming from all sides of the sky. Koch painted hardly a shadow of men, animal or plants, except in the chiaroscuro on the folds of the robes of the figures, which was indispensable to give the viewer a basic illusion of volume. Also in the personages Koch used delicate colours: light blue, light green, golden hues instead of fiery red or deep blue and intense green. Koch seems to have wanted to paint a picture like Perugino, Pinturicchio or Cosimo Rosselli made on the walls of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. He painted the personages in very clean lines and delicate, fresco-like chalky hues. He placed the figures as if seen from a distance. His personages are all in motion. Noah conjures the smoke of the sacrifice to the heavens and every other figure is engaged in other activities. Still, we only see a calm and dignified scene, a silent scene, and not with the obvious show of emotions that characterised the Baroque and Mannerism periods. Koch made his picture in 1814 and though he was never really a member of the Nazarene movement in Rome, the group of German-Austrian painters in Rome that followed Johann Friedrich Overbeck, he did here seem to share their ideas and their admiration for pre-Raphaelite styles.

Joseph Anton Koch was a very gifted painter. He painted his landscapes such as in 'Noah's Sacrifice' always in minute detail and with great patience. Look at how finely he drew the figures, the fine colours of the animals, the extreme details of the leaves of the trees. Koch made only nice pictures, which were simple and sweet landscapes and he often split up his paintings in landscape parts of light and darker parts where the figures are. Koch' figures are small in the landscapes, but they are part of nature and they are not overwhelmed by the grandeur of nature. Koch seemed to admire nature as God's work and also how God had placed people in the variety of nature's elements. His landscapes such as in 'Noah's Sacrifice' are impressive and grand, but they do not menace, so that his pictures remain a haven of peace. Koch liked, loved nature like it was, with the empathy of a wise man and not in the abandonment to Romantic feelings and atmospheres for which his countrymen of later times would become famous. If we regret some more Romantic involvement of Koch with nature in his pictures, we must recognise that the sweetness and innocence he brought in his views must have been the expression of his own character. His landscapes are lyrical and bucolic, but Koch took great care to evade too great a sensitivity. He always painted in harmony of composition and of colours.



*Other paintings:*

**The Eve of the Deluge.** John Martin. The Royal Collections – London. 1840.

**The Return of the Dove to the Ark.** Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896). The Ashmolean Museum – Oxford. 1851.

**The Deluge.** Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851). The Clore Gallery – London. 1805.

**Scene of the Deluge.** Joseph-Désiré Court (1797-1865). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Lyon.

**An Episode from the Deluge.** Francesco Coghetti (1802-1875). Museo Nacional de San Carlos. Mexico City. 1845.

**Landscape with the Return of the Ark.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). National Gallery – London.

**The Ark of Noah.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961-1966.

**Noah and the Rainbow.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961-1966.

**Scene from the Deluge.** Théodore Géricault. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1818-1820.

**The Deluge.** Antonio Carracci. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1616-1618.

**Entering the Ark.** Jan Brueghel I the Elder (1568-1625). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. 1615.

**The Animals enter Noah's Ark.** Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. 1613.

**Noah leaving the Ark.** Filippo Lauri (1623-1694). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1650.

**Noah's Sacrifice**

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione called Il Grechetto (1609-1664). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genua. Ca. 1635.

**The Animals enter Noah's Ark**

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione called Il Grechetto (1609-1664). Accademia Linguistica di Belle Arti. Genoa. Ca. 1655.

## *The Tower of Babel*

### **The Tower of Babel**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca.1525-1569). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam

Pieter Bruegel the Elder was a generation older than Tintoretto, Veronese and Bassano. His 'Tower of Babel' however is equally a work of monumentality, quite uncommon in the art of Flanders and Brabant. Bruegel's monumentality lies not in the individual traders who built the grand architectures for their own pride. With Bruegel, people are small and numerous as ants, working feverishly and anonymously. The people are driven by a common illusion to construct, much as the medieval period built cathedrals and churches to reach the easy living of the Baroque period. But the structure that is built in Bruegel's picture is menacing and evil. The tower is huge at its base, sheer solidity. Its arches resemble the bows of the coliseum of Rome in which so many Christians died. Bruegel visited Italy and he had certainly seen the coliseum. As compared to Renaissance refinement, this colossal ancient Roman building may have oppressed the artist with the awe of its robustness and weight. Bruegel was used to the delicacy of Gothic. He admired the Brabant rural landscapes and the alpine peaks. The heaviness of the coliseum and the solidity of the Pantheon must have left a lasting impression of the painter. The tower of Babel is a Roman coliseum heavily stowed one layer upon the other, with a labyrinth of interior corridors and halls as indeed one can find in the coliseum.

The activity around the tower is intense. Ships bring on materials. Much of the environment has been destroyed for the works. Ovens are burning to heat the bricks to hard stone. The tower is so large that it has engulfed a small river and it is standing partly in the sea. An inclined plane spirals around the structure. All walls are heavily buttressed. The spiral may seem narrow, but tens of people could stand side by side on it. Thousands of small figures can be seen on these flats and a hive of activity is taking place. There is even a procession advancing on the third floor, led by two high flags and a red baldaquin is brought forward. The people of the procession wear torches.

Bruegel has shown in miniature all large cranes that could be used in the sixteenth century. Since the tower is close to the sea, we think immediately of the port of Antwerp and of the multitude of cranes the Antwerp harbour must have had to handle the freights. A fort that remembers vaguely of Antwerp's 'Steen' guards the entry of the tower, as the Steen guarded the entry to Antwerp's inner ports. There is so much to discover in this painting. The red bricks are heaven upwards on the left so that Bruegel painted this part in red. Next to this scene is a white road, white probably of the mortar used for the masonry of the tower. Some of the cranes hang dangerously over the border of the spiral flats but they are housed in wooden structures fixed to the walls.

Why did Bruegel made such a painting, so different from all his other themes? Maybe he felt that Baroque would come. Bruegel worked for Rudolph II, the German Emperor and he had seen the growing wealth in Rome and Antwerp, maybe even of Venice. He had seen the works of the architects Bramante and Michelangelo on the Saint Peter cathedral of Rome. Bruegel's tower of Babel expresses maybe some of the premonitions of a man still linked more with the countryside and its villages and with the delicate spiritual refinement of Gothic. Bruegel may have feared the boldness, the internationalism of the new visions and the freedom of mind of the new artists. The picture is a work of horror, of surprise at wealth, of fascination with vanity, exactly as is told in the Bible. It is a very moral picture that understands well the message of the Bible. Bruegel could have painted a very slender tower, lightly buttressed as the Gothic cathedrals. Instead this is a brute architecture, rude, without imagination, solid and aggressive. Bruegel seems to want to indicate to his fellowmen of Antwerp that they were building a tower of Babel in their port. They were building a structure not based on spiritual values but on relentless and unforgiving trade. A structure based on loans and investments, on merchandise that is bought and sold various times while still at sea, a structure of speculation that could collapse at God's will. Bruegel sensed a disaster, a fear that is present in many Bible stories as well as in the New Testament. This was the fear that man could become so proud as to forget how humble he was in the elements and in the power of God. Bruegel sensed with artistic intuition a grandiose human structure that might fail at the whim of the Gods or nature. These feelings were very pessimistic when compared to the joy and outburst of colours and emotions of Baroque art. Jacopo Bassano showed not an Apocalypse, but a scene of saving. There is darkness in his painting but also much white of hope. Bassano's picture gave the message that God provided for the righteous. Bassano's optimism would win in the next century and Pieter Bruegel the Elder would be seen as a genius painter of course, but as one of a revolved time, a time of Medieval fear of a destruction of the world by the Apocalypse. The Renaissance would not forget this Apocalyptic vision, but transcend it and thus master it.

### *The Deluge and the Tower of Babel in the Bible*

The Deluge and the building of the Tower of Babel are very ancient stories told in the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

Before the Flood, God saw that human wickedness was great on earth and that human hearts contrived nothing but wicked schemes all day long. So he decided to rid the earth of humans. But a righteous man, Noah, pleaded to Yahweh and won his favour. God said to Noah to prepare an ark out of resinous wood, of reeds and to caulk it with pitch inside and out. The Bible cites details of the ark: how long it was and how wide. There had to be a roof, an entrance, and three decks.

God established a covenant with Noah and with Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives. All would go into the ark together with a male and female of all living creatures. A double quoting in the Bible specifies seven pairs of all clean animals and one pair of all unclean animals. Noah received only one week to board all the animals, but he succeeded although he was six hundred years old.

Then all the springs burst and all sluices of heaven opened. It rained for forty days and forty nights. The ark lifted on the water and all human beings perished except the ones in the ark. When the waters had subsided, Noah sent first a raven, then a dove but both returned to the ark since there was no land to be found. After seven more days Noah again sent a dove. This one returned, holding in its beak a freshly picked olive leaf. When he sent the dove a second time, it did not return anymore. Noah looked out and saw that the surface of the earth was dry.

Noah built an altar and burnt offerings to God from the animals. God was pleased with this. He promised never again to curse the earth because of humans or to strike down living things again as he had done. Then God again established the covenant with Noah. As a sign of this covenant he put his bow – the rainbow – in the clouds.

The Bible cites the descendants of Japheth, Ham and Shem, Noah's sons. One of Ham's grandsons was Nimrud, who was the first potentate on earth. The Bible tells that Nimrud was 'a mighty hunter in the eyes of Yahweh'. Nimrud's empire contained Babel, Erech and Accad all in the land of Shinar. Later, Nimrud's son Asshur built Nineveh and other cities. Of the cited cities one is quite well known by archaeologists. Erech was Uruk in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was Shinar, the land between and around the two rivers the Tigris and the Euphrates with the Euphrates on the West and the Tigris on the East. These rivers drain the Zagros Mountains into a delta. Upstream of the junction of the two rivers stood the town of Uruk, now in ruins. The ruins of Uruk were excavated and examined. The town consisted around 2500 BC of a few thousand houses surrounded by a broad wall. The town may have held between ten thousand to twenty thousand people. There was a high ceremonial mound in the town on which stood ziggurats. In Uruk scribes wrote on clay tablets in a cuneiform script. About half a million of these tablets were found, testifying of an intense economic and religious life.

The Book of Genesis tells that the whole world of these people still spoke the same language. In a valley of Shinar they made bricks and baked them in fire. They told themselves they would build a city and a tower with his top reaching heaven. For mortar they would use bitumen. God saw the city and tower and remarked that all the undertakings of the people with a single language would succeed, nothing they planned to do would be beyond them. So he went down and confused the people and their language so that they could not understand one another anymore. Yahweh scattered them all over the world and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel.

Pieter Bruegel made two paintings of the tower of Babel. In the second one, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna. The tower is indeed surrounded by a town and Nimrud supervises the works. Bruegel had not seen the ziggurats of old Babylonia that the Bible writers must have had in mind. In Babylonia, ziggurats with temples on the top could reach hundred meters high and must have been indeed almost a world wonder for the humble Jewish shepherds. These towers may have been called gates of the Gods or Bab-ili. The most ancient structure Bruegel recognised was Rome's coliseum and that was probably the example he used. Like in the Bible story, he showed the brick ovens and the tower reaching the clouds.

The story of Noah relates of a flood. There are many reminiscences of a great flood that occurred thousands of years ago before the written memory of history. Several floods must have happened around the Eastern Mediterranean or in ancient Sumeria near the Persian Gulf. Scientific evidence has been found of floods of large magnitude in the Near East. A complete flood of the earth may have happened as told in the bible, but that story may refer to the then known world of the Hebrews, which was the region of the Tigris and the Euphrates, old Sumeria and Mesopotamia. Floods happened before historical times when the Mediterranean was formed, when the waters of the Atlantic burst through the Straits of Gibraltar. The Caspian Sea may have been formed when the Mediterranean Sea burst through the Bosphorus. Or a huge tsunami may have flooded the coasts when a volcano of the Mediterranean exploded forming the Greek Island of Santorini. That disaster destroyed completely the Minoan culture of Crete.

Evidence has also been found of a flood that must have occurred around 3000 years BC at the cities of Ur and Shuruppak in Sumeria. Sumerian tablets speak of a flood and a priest-king Ziusudra or Utanapischtim who built a boat to survive. Several tablets have been found which give a consistent story of Ziusudra. His story resembles Noah's tale in many points such as the loading of the boat filled with animals, the flights of the dove and the offering after the flood. When mention is made in the Book of Genesis that Abraham came from Ur, one looks at these ancient stories as real memories of the people of the Tigris and Euphrates regions.

It is remarkable however how memories of these cataclysms remained in the minds of the people and then were recorded, also in the Bible but not in the Bible alone. The catastrophes may have induced a primeval fear in the tribes of the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean. We can imagine travelling storytellers recounting these ancient stories of such powerful origins that only the wrath of the Gods could be imagined to have caused them. Such catastrophes then formed part of the very nature of the Hebrew people and were the basis for the aescathology of the Bible, the waiting for a next overwhelming disaster. The Jews however could not accept such a horrible ending.

They combined the final disaster to a mystic union with their God Yahweh. This union was a consolation, a hope of redemption and of a heavenly paradise once lost but regained. The early books of the Bible do not speak of this union, but it is most clearly worded in the Apocalypse of Saint John in the New Testament. The Book of Genesis instead contains the promise of the Covenant. God promised that the earth would not be drowned again. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow, a tangible grand sign that could indeed permanently be used as a proof that the words of the storytellers were true. Yahweh of the Book of Genesis is endowed with human character traits or maybe Yahweh's traits were enforced on the Hebrews. God repents from having brought the Deluge. Such an attitude for a God is highly different from the attitudes of the Gods of the Greek, Romans or Babylonians. The Greek Gods did as they pleased, in calculated revenge or in anger and they did not repent. They couldn't care less for people. They did interfere frequently in human affairs however, also on demand of humans, as the Yahweh of the Bible. This concept of intervention of God or of Gods in the personal life of humans is thus also a very old concept that led to the belief in a personal God. The Hebrews combined the old divine intervention

with the morality of a God. This brought their God closer, more accessible and made him more reassuring.

The tower of Babel was a convenient way to explain the differences in languages and it holds something of the fascination of wandering rural tribes for the cities and the high structures of Babylonia's famous ziggurats. Like the Deluge it is a story of a disaster, as may have struck a ziggurat during an earthquake. Again we feel the power in these ancient stories of memories of important catastrophes and see how these stories were combined, explained and used by the Hebrew writers in their epic of God's acts.

*Other paintings:*

**The Tower of Babel.** Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Ca. 1525-1569). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna.

**The Tower of Babel.** Lucas van Valckenborgh (ca. 1540-1597). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Tower of Babel.** Lucas van Valckenborgh (ca. 1540-1597). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**The Building of the Tower of Babel.** Leandro da Ponte called Leandro Bassano (1557-1622). The Prague Castle Gallery – Prague.

**The Tower of Babel.** Jan Van Scorel (1495-1562). Casa d'Oro. The Giorgio Franchetti Gallery. Venice.

## *Abraham*

Abraham was the first patriarch of Genesis. Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews made a covenant with him and gave him the land of Canaan. Paintings on the life of Abraham centre on the character of this formidable figure.

### **The Meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek.**

Francisco Henriques. Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga – Lisbon. Ca. 1508-1511.

Abram descended from Shem, one of Noah's sons. His father was called Terah; his brothers were Nahor and Haran. Haran died early but fathered Lot. Abram married Sarai but he had no children of her. Terah took Abram and Lot with him to leave the land of Ur of the Chaldeans where they had lived, a region that lay in the country of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Ur is a historical Sumerian city. It has been excavated and the remnants of its streets and temple ziggurat were found. When Terah lived in Ur it could not have been a city of Chaldeans for these probably conquered the city much later. But the storyteller may remember it as a Chaldean city.

Terah wanted to travel to the land of Canaan. On the way, in Haran, Terah died. God told Abram to proceed to Canaan, as Terah had wanted to do. Abram travelled to Canaan slowly and settled in the Negeb. Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and promised to give him this land of Canaan.

There was a famine in Canaan however, so Abram set off for Egypt. He presented Sarai, who was a very beautiful woman, as his sister in order not to attract jealousy. Sarai was taken up in Pharaoh's household. But this displeased God and he sent plagues to Egypt. Pharaoh found out that the misfortunes that befell unto him were because of Sarai, so he scorned Abram and sent the group of Abram back on the road to Canaan. Abram went to between Bethel and Ai. By then Abram had grown prosperous, he had many herdsman with him as well as much cattle. Disputes broke out among the men as there was not enough in the land to accommodate both Abram's and Lot's flocks. Abram talked to Lot about this and the tribe split. Lot chose to go into the plains of the Jordan, which looked as green to him as the Garden of Eden, irrigated as it was everywhere. God promised once more all the land in sight to Abram and told him to travel the length and breadth of the country.

In the Jordan lay Sodom and Gomorrah and nine kings of that region fought a battle there. The King of Sodom was among the defeated and Lot, who had lived there, was captured. When Abram heard of this, he went with over three hundred men after the conquerors and beat them, recuperating Lot and his kinsmen. When Abram returned from having beaten Chedor-Laomer and his allies, the King of Sodom came to meet Abram in the valley of Shaweh, the valley of the King. Melchizedek, King of Salem, was a priest. He brought bread and wine to Abram and blessed him. Melchizedek proposed the spoils of the battle to Abram and asked him to leave the people in Melchizedek's care. But Abram refused to take the possessions and also to give up his people. Abram took nothing, but a share was given to the men who accompanied him.

God again then spoke to Abram. Yahweh told Abram that his descendants would be exiles in a land not their own. They would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But God foretold that after four generations Abram's descendants would come back to Canaan. And Yahweh repeated for the third time his covenant with Abram, 'To your descendants I give this country, from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the River Euphrates.'

This story of Abram's wanderings to Canaan is a story of shepherd nomads, of a small tribe of people that left Ur, passed deserts, went as far as Egypt, grew in number of men, split up when the land obviously could not support all and finally settled in Canaan, but still travelled 'the length and breadth' of the country. Abram's people thus remained nomads. Abram was the first patriarch of Israel, but it was not he who took the initiative to leave Ur. It was his father Terah who started the journey. Yahweh promised the tribe all the lands between the great rivers Egypt and Euphrates. The people probably travelled continuously between these borders. The Bible tells of battles or skirmishes between the indigenous people, between the leaders of the settlements. Abram's people moved between villages. Abram took only side in the fights between the settlements when his own people were involved. He took side then, defeated his opponents at the head of a couple of hundreds of men and was honoured by one of the local chiefs, the leader of Sodom.

This scene was painted many times. It was a scene of a meeting between kings, even though we know that the battles could have been merely local clashes between tens to a few hundreds of men that could not be called soldiers. The meeting between Abram and Melchizedek was the first peace treaty spoken of in the Biblical history. In medieval times and still later the meeting between Abram and Melchizedek was used as an example to prove that already in ancient biblical times peace treaties were signed that pleased God. One cannot but draw the parallel between the king of the land Melchizedek and Abram, the king of the exiles, to the events that have ravaged parts of Israel in our present history. Now also, peace is being painstakingly negotiated between the Palestine leaders and the Israeli leaders. Peace was possible four thousand years ago between two different people; peace and allies may be made again.

The Portuguese painter Francisco Henriques (active from 1508 to 1518) made around 1510 a picture of the meeting between Abram and Melchizedek. The early sixteenth century was one of Portugal's glorious periods of history. King Manuel I reigned from 1495 to 1521 and he was so lucky with the conquests of his seafarers and admirals that he was called 'Manuel the Great'.

Portugal sponsored captains to explorations around the globe. Portuguese ships had reached the Indies as well as South America. It had started earlier than King Manuel, and in fact maybe by a deed of jealousy, greed and fight for power. The Order of the Templar knights was destroyed at the beginning of the fourteenth century. But a Portuguese king repented and passed much of the treasures and lands of the Templars to a new order, the Order of Christ. This organisation of knights served much the same purposes as the Templars in Portugal. They formed the core of the Portuguese armies that fought the Muslims. In 1415 a young prince of Portugal called Henry led part of a Portuguese fleet to the Moor African port of Ceuta that faced Gibraltar.



Ceuta was taken by the audacity of Henry and the prince was richly rewarded by his father. He was appointed governor of the southern province of Algarve and more importantly, he became the Grandmaster of the Order of Christ. Thus he had at his disposal the enormous wealth of the order. He had also the duty to fight the Moors. He took the opportunity to launch naval discovery voyages to the African continent. He built a palace and an observatory, a Colonial and Naval Institute, all at Sagres near Cape Saint Vincent, one of the southernmost points of Europe. With his sea captains and geographers he set out to conquer the non-European world. Of course, all this was also an attempt to circumvent the Ottoman Empire that held the monopoly of the ancient trade routes over land to the spices of the Orient.

Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) sent out his ships from 1418 on. His expeditions found Madeira in 1420. The Azores were reached in 1431. In 1438 Portuguese seamen passed Cape Bojador. In 1445 they sailed past Cape Verde. Henry died in 1460 but he had founded Portugal's fame on the seas. Portuguese captains sailed ever further. In 1475 they reached the Equator and in 1482 they were at the Congo River. Bartholomew Diaz reached Cape Good Hope in 1487. Around 1480 a Genovese called Cristoforo Colon came to the court of John II of Portugal. Colon lived in Portugal then, had even married a Portuguese woman. But the Portuguese king refused Colon's proposal to sail straight to the West into the Atlantic Ocean. Colon then left Portugal to try his luck with the Spanish King and Queen Ferdinand and Isabella. In 1492 he would discover the Americas. In 1494, Pope Alexander VI divided the world in two spheres of influence at the Treaty of Tordesillas. All land discovered 350 leagues beyond the Azores belonged to Spain, all land to the East of that line belonged to Portugal. By chance, Brasil was found to lay to the East of the boundary and could thus later be claimed by Portugal.

King John II died in 1495 and Manuel I succeeded him. He reigned from 1495 to 1521. Portugal then reached its greatest triumphs on the seas. Vasco da Gama circumnavigated Africa and reached India in 1497-1498. Cabral sailed to Brasil in 1500. In 1505, Francisco d'Almeida was sent to the coast of Malabar. In 1510 the fleet of Alfonso d'Albuquerque took Goa in West-India.

Portuguese painting mirrored the success of the Portuguese kings in their wars against the Moors and in their domination of the African and Indian seas. Portuguese painting was already brilliant in the second part of the fifteenth century, but few pictures have remained. One of Portugal's greatest painters was Nuno Gonçaves, who worked a generation earlier than Francisco Henriques. The influence of Flemish painting on Portuguese Gothic art was strong and Henriques may have been of Flemish origins. He worked in Lisbon at the court of Manuel I. He probably died in 1518 during an outbreak of the plague, together with many of his artisans.

Francisco Henriques' picture is still in the Gothic, Flemish Primitives style. Abram and Melchizedek meet. Abram has returned from the battle with his soldiers. He is clad in armour, as a Portuguese general and not in the shepherds' clothes as the historical Abram would have been when he ran to the fight with his kinsmen. He receives the bread and wine from the priest Melchizedek. Henriques represented the scene as if a triumphant Portuguese general or king returned from a battle against the Moors and received the Eucharist from a Catholic priest. Yet also Melchizedek was a priest of local gods and certainly not a priest of Yahweh. The skills of the painter

Henriques were considerable as can be seen from this picture. He could compete with the best northern artists of Gothic. Remark the full splendid detail of the figures, all their different faces and attitudes. All gowns are depicted in the rich courtly style of Gothic. Abram's armour is rendered with great mastery of the various patches of brightness and shadows that generate the volume of the forms. Remark the brocade and lines of the robes of Melchizedek.

The Gothic style can be recognised in the details of the picture, the static composition and in the favour of the artist for decorum. The lines of the lances held by the soldiers from a decorative effect not unlike the fine interlaced lines of the stonework of a Gothic window. Henriques painted plants in the foreground such as can be found in pictures of the 'Adoration of the Magi' in Flanders, such as in pictures of Van Der Goes. The landscape is mannered but it forms the background to fill the picture and it is arranged to suit the composition. Thus, the line of the mass of the heads of the soldiers goes down to the middle, to the face of Melchizedek and the landscape was necessary to have a line that went to the face of the knelt Abram. Thus the centre of the composition is in the form of a 'V', which brings airiness in the picture and draws attention immediately to the two main personages, Abram and Melchizedek.

This was a painting that stood on the altar of the church of San Francisco in Evora. The Portuguese armies had fought many battles against the Moors and since the 1470's they had been successful in their wars. This picture may have been made to commemorate the victory of a battle. Henriques however transformed the meaning of the Bible scene into a Catholic religious theme so that it could be exhibited on the altar of a church, a very rare example of a Bible Old Testament scene used so prominently in a Catholic Church. However, the picture shows a king knelt before a priest and it was thus an example of the subordination of the secular powers to the church authority, a principle that of course the Catholic Church cherished.

### **Sarah presenting Hagar to Abraham.**

Adriaen van der Werff (1659-1722). Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen – Schleissheim. 1698.

Abram's wife Sarai had remained barren. So she brought an Egyptian slave girl called Hagar to Abram and proposed to her husband to have children by Hagar. Soon Hagar conceived. But Sarai treated Hagar badly then, so Hagar fled to the desert. An angel of Yahweh found her at a spring in the desert. The angel told her to go back to her mistress but he foretold her also that she would have many descendants. The angel predicted her that her son would be a 'wild donkey of a man', he would be with his hand against every man and live in defiance of his kinsmen. Hagar had to call her son Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore his son.

Adriaen van der Werff (1639-1722) was an excellent painter of the later Dutch seventeenth century. Van der Werff painted in the Baroque style but he was evolving towards a style that was later called Classicism. He used scenes of classic antiquity. The austere Calvinist times of his country had given way to an opulent and settled

bourgeoisie that continued the puritanism but that was now more concerned with consolidating its power and traditions than with a newly found spiritualism. Van der Werff moralised in his pictures, as was usual for painters of that period. But he liked exhibiting the wealth in silk gowns and in splendid ancient monuments. He liked brocades and golden hues and strong tones. He knew well all the style elements of art history and applied them with much intelligence. While doing this he lacked in emotion and involvement but in some pictures some of his individuality are indeed shown, as in his painting of 'Sarah presenting Hagar to Abraham'.

Van der Werff's picture would do well as a French picture of Classicism, even as one not from Poussin's times but from the period of Ingres and David. The painting emphasises strong static vertical and horizontal lines. Not only are Abram, Sarah and Hagar in strict vertical attitudes but the rich draperies underscore the vertical direction. Thus we see an astonishing style in a period from which we do not expect such strictness of form. The horizontal lines of the bed and the blue cloth covering Abraham's legs contrast directly with the verticality. This combination inspires the viewer a feeling of cold, of a frozen scene. The feeling conflicts with the obvious sensuality of the image.

Sarah presents a very erotic Hagar to Abram. Abram has already too eagerly accepted Hagar for his hand rests on her shoulder in a gesture of possession. Abram's uplifted hand seems to refuse the gift and want to reassure Sarah, but the naked, powerful and young torso of Abram is too like Hagar's young flesh to make the viewer believe in the refusal. Abram's bright nakedness matches the splendid golden hues of Hagar's belly and breasts. Above the brightness of the flesh are the faces of Abram and Sarah. These faces are old, wrinkled and withered. The moral message of van der Werff is thus very clear. Abram will possess Hagar with his body but he will stay with his old mind with Sarah. Elder men may desire, but the advance of time also leaves scars in the mind. The result of the conflict would appear afterwards, when Abram would be confronted with the dilemma to have to choose between Hagar's son Ishmael and Sarah's son Isaac. And Sarah would hate Hagar, for Abram accepted Hagar instead of refusing outright relation with the Egyptian slave.

We hear from the Bible text that God solves the dilemma in all magnanimity, as if again we had a God regretting his own acts. Yahweh apparently did not intervene in the gift of Sarah. But since he had a covenant with Abram he covers Abram's weakness. Yahweh takes pity on Hagar when she has fled into the desert. He tells her to go back to Abram's tent and to Sarah's scorn, but he also promises her many descendants for Ishmael.

Van der Werff's painting is very smooth, clear, strict and cold in outer appearance. The contrasting austere vertical and horizontal lines and the strong composition induce those feelings. But the theme and the figures convey passion and seduction. This conflict is Abram's conflict. Van der Werff was not so well known as a painter, but this picture is particularly successful in its contrasting combination of style and content, a feat in Classicism that has only rarely been reached in the right balance. A painting like this fifty years earlier would have been condemned by Calvinist preachers so we cannot but reflect upon the changes in Dutch society from the beginning and middle of the seventeenth century to the end of that period and the beginning of the eighteenth century. Views on seduction and on puritanism had

evolved. They would continue to evolve to a society of bourgeoisie that lived at the surface of the important issues that would rack France for instance, but barely touched the Netherlands. Van der Werff painted this picture in a period when France knew the frivolous rococo pictures of Antoine Watteau.

### **Abraham and the three Angels**

Juan Fernández de Navarrete 'El Mudo' (c.1538-1579). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1576.

When Abram was ninety-nine, Yahweh appeared again to Abram and repeated his covenant. God said that his name would henceforth be Abraham and Sarai should be Sarah. God pledged to a covenant with Abraham's descendants for all generations. He again gave the land of Canaan to Abraham. He blessed Ishmael, but told Abraham that Sarah would bear a child although she was in old age and this son Isaac would father the further descendants of the covenant. As a sign of that covenant, all males had to be circumcised.

In a double story in the Bible, the Book of Genesis tells that Yahweh appeared to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre. While Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent, three men suddenly stood next to him. He gave the men bread and pieces of a calf to eat, curd and milk to drink. One of Abraham's guests said that he would come back in a year and then Sarah would have a son.

Juan Fernández de Navarrete called 'El Mudo' made a picture of the scene of Abraham and the three angels. In the Bible, Yahweh is impersonified in the three angels and God speaks only through one angel but the story sees the three visitors as one, with one voice. So Navarrete showed the three angels identical. And the three have the traditional faces of Jesus. The angels are young men, with long brown-light hair and a fair face. The story of the Bible and Navarrete's presentation prefigures the Trinity of the New Testament of Father, Son and Spirit. One appreciates the significance of this very old Biblical tale for the later Christian theologians, where Yahweh comes in the appearance of three angels. This picture was therefore an important illustration of one of the central dogmatic themes of the Catholic Church and Juan Fernández de Navarrete must have known the controversies on the Trinity between the Roman and Greek or Byzantine Churches that were one of the central themes of theological dispute in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Juan Fernández de Navarrete (1538-1579) was a Spanish painter. He was deaf mute. Hence his nickname of 'El Mudo'. He was in poor health but as can be seen from this picture he was highly gifted as a painter and artist. He knew well his Bible. He painted mainly for the basilica of the Escorial in Madrid. The picture we show was made a few years before his death in Toledo in 1579. Spanish painters applied mostly a technique of dark colours in their religious paintings, and dominant browns. Navarrete was not an exception to this tenebrist style, but he brought personal contrasts in his picture. Navarrete was trained in Venice and he was later known as the Spanish Titian.

Abraham kneels before the three angels and begs them in. Abram still was a nomad shepherd who lived in a tent, but Navarrete dressed him in a golden coloured gown on which shimmers a late sun. This showed Abraham's prosperity as told in the Bible, and his position as the first Patriarch. The silvery light shimmering on the shoulders of the angels answers the golden colour. The gold and silver lines over the ochre and greyish general colours induce a strange, ethereal emotion. Other artists of the fifteenth century used this effect of strokes of silvery white colour. One such painter was Marinus van Reymerswael who lived in the same period as Navarrete, but worked in Antwerp, very far from Spain. The fine, bright accents of light are found also on the hands of the angels and on their feet. In this painting we recognise the harsh contrasts of El Greco more than the soft tones of Titian, even though these contrasts are not in the bright blues, greens and reds of El Greco. El Greco was somewhat younger than Navarrete but he too worked in Toledo. El Greco and Navarrete must have known each other's works. Navarrete recognised more attention for the environment than El Greco did. He painted tree and barn in full detail in this picture of Abraham and the three angels.

Navarrete had a good feeling for balance of composition. The three angels form a united area on the right, which is balanced by the barn and the figure of the eavesdropping old Sarah on the right. This is a vertical symmetry in the composition, but Navarrete also brought a horizontal balance. Here, the long horizontal lines of the kneeling Abraham match the mass of foliage of the massive tree higher on the canvas. The result is a static but colourful, harmonious picture that is calm and nice to watch and in which the painterly details such as the light on the robe of Abraham can be discovered at ease.

The central angel holds his hands in a gesture of soothing. This is also the traditional poise of the blessing Jesus. Navarrete matched the gesture of the central angel with the gesture of Abraham, who equally opens his arms and almost touches the angel's hands in an embrace. Abraham is shown as a very old man, even though for the Patriarchs an age of ninety-nine years was not old. But Abraham's elder appearance enforces the miracle of the pregnancy of Sarah.

Abraham received the visitors courteously. He offered them to eat and to drink. This was a theme of hospitality so that Navarrete's picture could be hung in the guestrooms of the royal Escorial palace.

### **Abraham repudiating Hagar**

Giovan Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. 1657.

Yahweh treated Sarah as he had told. Sarah conceived in her old age of a child that Abraham called Isaac. When the boy was eight days old Abraham circumcised his son as God had commanded.

Isaac grew and was weaned. Abraham gave a great banquet that day. When Sarah saw Isaac play with Ishmael, Abraham's son by her Egyptian slave Hagar, she saw danger. She asked Abraham to drive away Hagar and her son so that Ishmael would not share Isaac's inheritance. Abraham was distressed at this, but God told him to do as Sarah had asked. Yahweh promised also to make Ishmael into a great nation. Yahweh thus again in this tale takes upon him the weakness of the human Abraham. One can understand, though the Bible does not mention this, that God preferred the son of the Hebrew Sarah instead of the son of an Egyptian. The word 'jealousy' therefore is not mentioned in the Bible story and Sarah's act receives an epic meaning since the race of Abraham and the wife of his tribe and family alone (since in a way Sarah was Abraham's sister) would be the chosen people. Yahweh said that Sarah was right. But the Bible story again lends to God moral features so that he must repair the damage of injustice to Hagar and Ishmael. Even though the chosen race must be pure, Yahweh cannot excuse injustice. So God promised also to make a great race out of Ishmael, but that would not be the chosen race. The race of Ishmael would be the Arabs, living in the deserts.

Francesco Barbieri called Guercino because he squinted with his right eye, was a painter of Bologna. He was born near Cento in Ferrara in 1591 but his masters were Paolo Zagnoni in Bologna and then also the Carracci brothers, mainly Ludovico Carracci. The Carracci's had a famous workshop in Bologna as well as an academy. In 1618 Guercino travelled to Venice and met the painters of the Venetian school led by Tintoretto and Veronese. In 1621 he was called to Rome by Pope Gregorius XV but two years later already he returned to his native Cento. Guercino was most influenced by Ludovico Carracci's ideas. Italian Mannerist and Baroque pictures were evolving through these painters in a more formal, static style that later was called Classicism. Guercino made tender and warm pictures without much apparent passion and he also made many landscape paintings in sombre tones. Landscape painting was still an exception in Italian art. Guercino died in 1666. His picture 'Abraham repudiating Hagar' dates from around 1657 when it was commissioned by the community of Cento as a gift to Cardinal Lorenzo Imperiali, the legate of Ferrara.

The picture is very much a realistic painting. In the style of the Carracci academy all details of the folds of the robes are splendidly drawn and appropriately coloured with shadows to denote the volumes. As to the theme, Abraham pushes Hagar away with one uplifted arm and he tells with a pointing finger to take Ishmael with her. The boy is crying, hiding near his mother. Hagar has already hanging over her shoulders her small sack with the water and the bread. Hagar's face bears an expression of sadness. Her eyes and cheeks are reddish of tears. The white cloth she wears in her hand may have been used to wipe her eyes. Yet, she looks intently at Abraham and hears his words.

Abraham looks sternly. He is magnificently dignified, patriarchal and firm. He wears a turban like an eastern potentate, the touch of exotics added by Guercino to indicate an oriental scene. A sign of Abraham's wealth may be the massive column behind him. This column furthermore gives the spectator an impression of solidity and dignity. Abraham will not waiver and his authority is as formidable and decided as the column.

To the left of Abraham is Sarah. She turns her back on the scene. She turns her back to Hagar and repudiates her more than Abraham. Because Abraham's steadfastness lies entirely with Sarah. And Sarah is turning her back in hard determination against any feeling of pity that Abraham might have for his son Ishmael.

Once again Yahweh will have to redress his own necessary injustice and the weakness of Abraham. Either one believes the Bible in that God indeed intervened for Ishmael and Hagar. Or one has to admire the consistent need of the original writers of the Book of Genesis for happy endings of stories. Stories without some form of catharsis might have been too formidable to bear for the listeners or readers of Hebrew historic tales and have made the narrators unpopular. Yahweh had to intervene to make life and its miseries bearable.

Guercino shows us an uncomplicated picture. Yet in its apparent simplicity it is subtle. The artist painted the figures in clear details of their psychological roles. Sentiment is present, but not sensibility. Guercino's composition of the scene is harmonious and balanced. Thus, Hagar's figure finds a balance in Sarah and Abraham is torn between the two women. Guercino painted in fine colours, using thin layers of paint with a sure hand. He is concerned with the characters, not with the landscape. He shows his intelligence in the composition, in the use of the column as a decorative element but also as an element of psychology. The solemnity with which he handled the scene is in line with the Classicist orientation of the Carracci's of Bologna. But to explain this trend we can best look at an example of an art that is completely the opposite of Guercino's line of work.

### **Hagar and the Angel.**

Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. ca.1637.

Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, gave that to Hagar, put the child on her shoulder and sent her away. Hagar wandered off into the desert of Beersheba. When all the water was gone, she abandoned the child under a bush. But she could go only a little further, then sat down, and thought that she could not bear to see the child die. Yahweh heard the boy cry and the angel of God spoke to Hagar. He said, "Do not be afraid. Pick up the boy and hold him safe for I shall make him into a great nation." Yahweh opened Hagar's eyes so that she saw a well. She gave the boy to drink. The boy grew up, lived in the desert of Paran, became an archer and Hagar found him an Egyptian wife. <sup>G38.</sup>

Pietro Berrettini called Pietro da Cortona because he was born in that town in 1596, mostly worked in Rome. He arrived in Rome in Rome already in 1612 and received after his apprenticeship many commissions as a decorator of the Roman churches and palaces. He had been quite some time in Rome when Guercino arrived there. From 1636 to 1639 Cortona worked on decorations in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome. From 1640 to 1647 he worked in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence for the Medicis. In his last

years he was an architect; he built churches in Rome and he must have known intimately the other great Roman Baroque architects of that time, Bernini and Borromini.

When you compare the picture of Guercino with da Cortona's painting, the differences between the two conceptions are striking. That is on Guercino's side the Classicist tendency of the Carracci brothers of Bologna and on the other side the lyrical, imposing splendour of the Roman Baroque. Guercino's picture is clear and solemn. His image carries a moral message. Guercino chose to depict the very act of the repudiation of Hagar. In his picture the meaning is conveyed through a few figures. Guercino's composition is simple, easily read, limpid and without unnecessary decorative elements. But for the columns, there is no background. And the column supports the drama. There is no landscape in Guercino's painting because superfluous for the moral meaning.

Pietro da Corona's picture is all poetry, soft feeling, a joy for the eye and the figures are a decoration by themselves. Whereas the lines in Guercino's picture are strict and almost all vertical, Cortona is all fluidity. Guercino's picture is about reason and psychology, about individual actions. Cortona's is about sensuous emotions induced by the whole form to an impression of well being and of aesthetical pleasure. Cortona needed a luxurious landscape to convey feelings of aesthetical unity.

Cortona's 'Hagar and the Angel' has nothing to do anymore with any religious meaning. The scene is a mythological, allegorical image. Hagar lies at her ease like a Roman Goddess and the angel resembles a Cupid. Yet, the Bible speaks of the angel as being the 'Angel of God', the breadth and appearance on earth of Yahweh himself. We can hardly accept God himself depicted as the ballet dancer that Cortona showed. Ishmael was added like the other sweet putti or young children. These were introduced in Rococo paintings to induce sweet emotions of tenderness in any viewer, however hard or closed his or her hearth. Cortona wished only to please the spectator's senses. The mood of the picture is lyrical. The gestures of the figures are elegant. They do not express any narrative but are used simply to create fluid lines in the picture and to guide the viewer's eye over the canvas. The outstretched arms of Hagar and of the angel merely connect the two figures in the composition in a gracious form.

Cortona's composition is well balanced in the colour areas of Hagar and the angel and also the golden colours of their robes correspond nicely. The walking angel creates an impression of movement and Cortona applied a slant line in the composition since he followed the diagonal that runs from the lower left to the upper right. The picture could not be left without a beautiful landscape. The trees, bushes and their foliage were painted in detail. Cortona took his profession of decorator seriously and honoured his commissioners. This was not a rapid painting, but one that proved to be worth its money. Moreover, an impression of airiness and lightness pervades the picture.

A wide-open panorama in the middle always enhances the impression of lightness in a painting. So Cortona opened the scene centrally and in the open space between the two figures, the traditional open 'V', he painted a patch of happy blue sky. A few white clouds also decorate the sky without being the dangerous, dark clouds of storm.



All is peace, elegance, brightness and magnificence in Cortona's picture. Pietro da Cortona enhanced the lightness in his picture by the open wings of the angel so that the angel-child seems to dance over the ground. He intelligently accentuated the open space as created by horizontal long patches of light green-and-yellow that are interspersed by darker strokes. The bright surfaces grow more slender towards the horizon, thus creating perspective. Only an artist with a genius eye could bring such delicate and sophisticated detail in his work. The angel has the curly blond hair of a girl and so is the hair of the baby Ishmael. There is no epic feeling in 'Hagar and the Angel'. The painting of Cortona was purely made as a decoration, made very efficiently to please only. Pietro da Cortona succeeded well in that objective.

The only detail that might link this scene to the Bible story and also to Guercino's picture is the oriental turban draped around Hagar's head. Much later, in the nineteenth century, Neo-classicist Auguste-Dominique Ingres would use this same element on his nude Odalisques. But where Guercino's picture tells about a departure and a refusal, sad feelings, Cortona showed a saving and a happy encounter. One can sense in the choice of subject the difference in aims of the two artists.

Cortona's picture contains as few figures as Guercino's, but his figures remain expressionless. The two figures of Cortona are linked by emotions; they are not separate. They hold both arms open and this same gesture connects them in the mind of the viewer. In Guercino's picture, the gestures of Abraham and of Hagar are in conflict. We can find nothing in Cortona's Hagar or in the angel's face but the sweet surprise and expectation of salvation. Hagar's face in Guercino's picture has a common face and lacks the elegance of Cortona's Hagar. But such common faces often can be brought to the expression of feeling of the great actors. The great actors also seem to have a common face but when feeling needs to be conveyed, their face subtly changes and shows the emotions with a skill that seems miraculous. Guercino's Hagar expresses in plain features surprise, sadness, detachment already and acceptance of fate, but also a silent scorn and overt disapproval. Our own moral feelings are all concentrated on a few inconspicuous traits of a face. Herein lies the greatness of Guercino. Pietro da Cortona used the simplicity and clarity of the Bolognese Classicists to bring us sensuous poetry in such a smooth, splendid way as to be impossible not to love. But he externalised the emotions in his picture and these emotions were light. The pathos or feelings became so apparent, brought to the surface as to become a decoration. With Guercino emotions remain interiorised and the painter used only very subtle means such as the look of an eye, a half-hidden face, to show only to the attentive viewer the depth of the inner drama.

The two painters used the Bible figures in a very different way to express emotions. Pietro da Cortona made simple emotions completely obvious in clear drama that is not a tragedy anymore but a catharsis. Guercino kept complex emotions under the surface but he let the viewer discover the psychology of the characters in a subtle way. Guercino was a Classicist painter, da Cortona a Baroque artist.

What was the Baroque like? Our next picture of a theme of Abraham will lead us entirely into mature Baroque art.

### **The Sacrifice of Isaac**

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570/71-1610). – Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. Around 1600.

One day, God put Abraham to the test. He called, “Abraham, Abraham”. God said, “take your son to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains.”<sup>G38</sup>.

The next morning Abraham saddled a donkey, took two servants and set on his way. After three days he saw the place Yahweh had indicated. Abraham left his servants behind, took Isaac and loaded the boy with wood for the offering. He carried himself the fire and the knife. Arrived at the top, Abraham arranged the wood, bound his son and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill Isaac.

But the angel of God right at that moment called from heaven, “Abraham, Abraham”. The angel said, “Do not raise your hand against the boy. For now I know you fear God. You have not refused your own beloved son.”

Then Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham slaughtered the animal and offered it as a burnt offering. Then the angel of Yahweh called Abraham again. Yahweh declared that because Abraham had not hesitated to kill his beloved son, he would shower blessings on Abraham and make his descendants as numerous as the stars from heaven of the grains of sand on the seashore. God told that Abraham’s descendants would gain possession of the gates of his enemies, and all nations on earth would bless themselves by Abraham’s descendants. Abraham returned and settled in Beersheba.

Michelangelo Merisi’s ‘Sacrifice of Isaac’ is a typical picture of the mature years of this artist. It is violent, powerful, very realistic, energetic, a scene of strong movement and emotions, immediate and painted undeniably by one of the greatest geniuses. What strikes our view first is of course the use of light and darkness. That is what Caravaggio is most known for and in this picture also the contrasts are very apparent. Light falls from the higher left. It illuminates the bald head of Abraham, the shoulders of the angel and then it falls on the face of the suffering Isaac. The light accentuates the main facets of the drama and thus immediately throws the meaning of the scene at our face. The light immediately gives the strong points of the action.

Abraham is merciless, almost thoughtless and surely cruel in his detachment from Isaac. Abraham could be killing a lamb without more reflection. The killing is a necessity, just as easily performed as a butcher kills to distribute meat. If Abraham had had emotions he would not have been able to murder Isaac, so emotions are not allowed.

The angel is sudden, knows the urgency of stopping the crime. The angel grasps the killing arm of Abraham and he points to the ram. Isaac is kept down.

Isaac is not subdued and consenting as might be induced from the Bible story. Isaac knows he is being slaughtered. He revolts in the act and cries out as his father is choking him. Isaac struggles in vain against the strong, pitiless arm that has thrown him on the hard offering stone. The drama is complete, rendered with great realism and with all the direct horror of a killing.

Caravaggio was always the painter of action. He was one of the first painters to seek action foremost in his pictures and he discovered or more precisely re-discovered techniques that realised energy and motion in pictures and then he brought this technique to its furthest possible expression. His main technique was to use slant lines and the diagonals of the frame. Here also, the diagonal that connects the higher left to the lower right contains the action. A slant secondary line runs from the angel to the ram but this line only follows the action line and thus emphasises it. The movement that softens the direction of the drama seems to be the pointing finger of the angel. It should indicate the ram, but the finger shows the landscape instead, the landscape beyond the main scene. This landscape is peaceful. It is the pastoral quietness and calm, the freedom of liberation for Isaac. The movement of the angel's hand and finger shows the balance between violence and peace. By this the picture gains an additional meaning. Caravaggio rarely used landscapes in his paintings, or any other background of substance. Caravaggio was a painter who concentrated on man's emotions and then background details were inconsequential. But here, landscape had a particular meaning.

The direction of the line from Abraham to Isaac runs downward and so goes the eye movement of the spectator. Our view starts naturally at the prominent face of Abraham, then we discover Isaac. Isaac's head needs to be discovered for it is hidden in various lines in the right lower corner of the canvas. There is the line of the cutting arm of Abraham, the line of the upheld knife that goes in another direction and the line of the hand that holds Isaac's head down. There is a confusion of lines around Isaac's face. So Isaac must be sought and discovered as if Caravaggio draws the viewer into the surprise of the horror. The viewer does not want to be drawn there; we want to avoid the pain and suffering of Isaac. But Isaac's eyes are directed at the viewer, out of the canvas straight to the spectator.

The ram's eyes bring us back to the angel and to release of the tension. Tension however is everywhere. The act of the angel could be an act of serenity and love, but it too is full of anticipation and strength. The only calm in the picture is to be found in Abraham's face and in the ram. Yet the ram will soon be slaughtered. Abraham's face is wrinkled. The wrinkles are the signs of old age. There is a calm determination in Abraham and almost tender surprise in his expression when he hears the words of the angel. We find in Caravaggio's Abraham figure the same feeling for character as in Guercino's picture.

Caravaggio painted once more a masterpiece with this picture. It shows his formidable skills in the details of the faces and hands, depicted in all realism of youth and age. Remark the faces and hands of Abraham, the finer detail of the hair of Isaac and of the angel. The ram's head too is magnificent, also fully concentrated on the action. Remark how Caravaggio let the light play in Abraham's rough beard. Caravaggio used models for his pictures and the man who posed for Abraham can be found in other of his pictures. But we may interrogate ourselves on whether

Caravaggio really needed models. He must have had an unwavering sure eye that only needed to catch once an image to be able to reproduce it at will.

No genius before or after Caravaggio equalled the force that is shown in this picture, nor dared to show such violence with the immediacy of such realism. Pictures should be made to please; they should be aesthetical. Caravaggio's first aim was obviously not to please at all. He wanted to shock. He showed the cruel, dirty violence of murder with the intimacy of the cutting. This is not a painting to hang in one's living rooms. And yet, there is so much to admire and to discover as greatness in this picture.

The 'Sacrifice of Isaac' dates from about 1600. Caravaggio, born near Milan, was about thirty years then. He would die in 1610 on a lonely beach near Naples, from sickness but maybe also from murder. Caravaggio arrived in Rome around 1592. He learned painting in the workshop of Giuseppe Cesare d'Arpino. He soon lived in the palaces of the nobility of Rome. He received commissions for works for churches and he had made Biblical scenes such as this picture. Caravaggio was at the height of his fame and career then. The nobles of Rome and Milan admired him already. The Maecenasses who ordered pictures from him during this time were the Roman Cardinals Francesco del Monte and Mateo Contarelli and the Milanese Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, the same one who founded the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. Yet, Caravaggio could not curb his temper. He had already been detained for a short time for slander in 1603. Then in 1605 he quarrelled with a notary, had to flee to Genoa but he apologised and was allowed to return to Rome. In 1606 he would be involved in a brawl, accused of being an accomplice in manslaughter. He was forced to hide in exile. He first hid in the palace of a nobleman near Rome. Then his road of escape led to Naples and the Island of Malta.

Caravaggio had the skills and the age to bring a wonderful palette of colours. His first paintings as a young man prove his knowledge of the harmonious use of strong and also bright colours. But at his thirty years he had reduced his colours as in 'Abraham sacrificing Isaac'. His colours darkened not unlike what Titian had done in his later years. Now he showed less tones, more balanced and softer. Caravaggio possessed of course such a great eye for the various shades of one colour that the best artist of any century could ever master. He used this mastery to overwhelm the viewer. But the details of Caravaggio's colours are always subservient to the theme. Herein lies the greatness of the painter. Caravaggio was able to convey concepts and feelings so powerfully that his artisan skills play second role. Yet these skills were utmost realised in this artist. We may not like Caravaggio's scenes, but we are fascinated to admiration and the artist draws us in the drama of his scene so that he possesses us more than we possess the image.

We have seen several pictures of themes of the life of Abraham, each made by a different painter. Remark the evolutions from subtle elevated Classicism in Guercino to obvious display of light emotions in da Cortona and then to powerful tragedy in Caravaggio, back to cold depiction in Van Der Werff. The expression of feelings evolved over the times but traditions were remembered and taken up again to try innovations.

*Abraham's Death*

Sarah died. Abraham went to the Hittites and asked them for a cave belonging to Ephron, son of Zohar in Machpelah to bury his dead. Abraham paid Ephron four hundred shekels of silver for Ephron wanted to give not only the cave but also the land on which was the cave, but Abraham refused and wanted to pay for it. The Bible story explains the transaction.

Then Abraham buried Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre – now Hebron. Later when Abraham died Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham likewise in the cave of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the field of Ephron the Hittite, son of Zohar.

Abraham was a hundred and seventy years old when he died. Ishmael lived in a territory stretching from Havilah-by-Shur just outside Egypt on the way to Assyria. As God had told, Ishmael held his own against all his kinsmen. As for Isaac, at that time he settled near the well of Lahai Roi.

*Other paintings:*

**Abraham and the Angels.** Aert De Gelder (1645-1727). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**Abraham and Melchizedek.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. Ca. 1615/1618.

**Abraham and Melchizedek.** Gerbrandt Van Den Eeckhout (1621-1674). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1664.

**Abraham and Melchizedek.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca. 1625.

**Abraham and Melchizedek.** Konrad Witz (ca. 1400-1444/1446). Kunstmuseum Basel. Ca. 1435.

**Abraham and Melchizedek.** Lionello Spada (1576-1622). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

**Melchizedek gives his Benediction to Abraham.** Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione called Il Grechetto (1609-1664). Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola. Genoa. Before 1652.

**The Angel visiting Sarah.** Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Archiepiscopal Palace – Udine. 1725/1726.

**Sarah bringing Hagar to Abraham.** Matthias Stomer. Musée Condé. Chantilly.

**Hagar presented to Abraham.** Joseph Wintergeist (1783-1867). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1809.

**Abraham and Hagar.** Jan Mostaert (ca. 1472-1556). Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid.

**Abraham repudiates Hagar.** Jan Pynas (1583-1631). Suermondt Ludwig Museum – Aachen. 1613.

**Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert.** Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. Ca. 1700.

**Hagar in the Desert.** Giovanni Carnovali called Piccio (1804-1874). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

- Hagar and Ishmael.** Circle of Pietro Francesco Mola (1612-1666). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).
- Hagar and Ishmael.** Pier Francesco Mola (1612-1666). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1655-1659.
- Hagar in the Desert.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). Ca. 1630-1632
- Hagar in the Desert.** Pietro Angeletti. Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.
- Landscape with Hagar and the Angel.** Giuseppe Zais (1709-1781). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.
- Landscape with Hagar, Ishmael and the Angel.** Claude Gellée called le Lorrain (1604/1605-1684). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1668.
- Hagar and Ishmael succored by the Angel.** Giambattista Tiepolo. Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1733.
- Hagar and the Angel.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1660.
- Abraham and three Angels.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Städelsches Institut – Frankfurt am Main.
- The Apparition of three Angels to Abraham.** Giandomenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. Ca. 1764.
- Abraham and the three Angels.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1961-1966.
- Abraham and the three Angels.** Domenico Fiasella (1589-1669). Collezioni d'Arte di Banca Carige. Genoa. 1647.
- Abraham visited by the Angels.** Giambattista Tiepolo. Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1734.
- Abraham and the three Angels.** Josse Lieferinx. Denver Art Museum. Denver. Ca. 1495-1500.
- Abraham and the three Angels.** Antonella da Messina (ca. 1430-1479). Museo della Magna Grecia. Reggio di Calabria. Ca. 1450-1455.
- The Angels with Abraham.** Bernhard von Neher (1806-1886). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1832.
- Abraham's Offer.** Johann Liss (ca.1597-ca.1630). Museum Bredius – The Hague.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (ca.1570-1610) – Piasecka-Johnson Collection – Princeton New Jersey. 1605.
- Abraham sacrifices Isaac.** Giovanni Battista Pittoni (1687-1767). Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. Around 1720.
- Abraham's Sacrifice.** Jacopo Amigoni (1682-1752). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1475.
- The Offer of Isaac.** Il Domenichino (1581-1641). Museo del Prado – Madrid. Ca. 1620-1621.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Alessandro Allori (1535-1607). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Domenico Zampieri called Il Domenichino (1581-1641). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Johann Liss (ca.1595-1629). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1682-1754). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1715.
- Abraham's Sacrifice.** Pieter Lastman (1583-1635). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1616.
- The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1960-1966.

**The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Orazio Gentileschi (1593-1630). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1625.

**The Sacrifice of Isaac**

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1625.

**Abraham's Sacrifice.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). The Ermitage – St Petersburg. 1635.

**The Sacrifice of Abraham.** Andrea del Sarto (1483-1531). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Delia E. and L.E. Holden Funds – Cleveland. 1524-1529.

**The Sacrifice of Abraham.** Charles-Emile Callande de Champmartin (1797-1883). Musée Magnin. Dijon. P56.

**The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Johann Liss (Ca. 1597-1631). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**The Sacrifice of Isaac.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. 1577/1578.

**Hagar and Ishmael chased by Abraham.** Pieter Joseph Verhaghen (1728-1811). The Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. 1781.

**Sarah brings Hagar to Abraham.** Matthias Stom (ca. 1600 -after 1641).

Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

**The Repudiation of Hagar.** Claude Gellée called Le Lorrain (1660-1682). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1668.

**Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness.** Karel Dujardin (1622-1678). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. Ca. 1662.

**Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert.** Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1585.

**Landscape with Hagar and the Angel.** Jan Lievens (1607-1674). ). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen.

**Landscape with Hagar and the Angel.** Giuseppe Zais (1709-1781). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

**Hagar and the Angel.** Pierre Pignon (1744-1814). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. 1780.

**Abraham, Sarah and the Angel.** Jan Provoost. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1520.

**The Return of Hagar.** Pietro Berettini called da Cortona (1596-1669).

Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1637.

**Abraham and Ishmael.** Jean-Charles Cozin (1841-1901). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Tours. 1880.

**Abraham and Isaac in a Landscape**

Abraham Govaerts (1589-1626). ). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1615.

## *Lot*

Lot was the son of Abraham's brother. Lot accompanied Abraham on the latter's voyage from Ur to the land of Canaan. He separated from Abraham when returning from Egypt, after a famine in Canaan, they decided that the land could not sustain them all. Lot preferred to go to the Jordan, to the region of the cities Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible tells that when kings conquered Sodom, Abraham took three hundred of his men to defeat the army that had risen against Sodom to save Lot. Melchizedek, the leader of Sodom, thanked Abraham for defeating Sodom's enemies. So the stories of Lot and of Abraham are interwoven in the Book of Genesis and Lot's episode is written within Abraham's life story.

The Bible talks of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It talks about three angels that visited Abraham in his tent, to announce him that the old Sarah would bear a son, Isaac, who would be heir to the covenant of Yahweh. These angels proceeded to Sodom and Gomorrah.

### **Landscape with the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah**

Joachim Patinir (ca.1480-1535). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam.

Abraham accompanied the angels-men to speed them on their way. The men left near Sodom but Yahweh remained in Abraham's presence. God did not want to hide from Abraham what he would be doing. God said that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was so great and their sin so grave that he needed to go down and see whether or not this was true. Abraham pleaded insistently not to destroy the upright with the guilty. Finally, Yahweh promised not to destroy the city even if there were only ten upright people left in Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>G38</sup>

Meanwhile, the two angels continued their way to Sodom. Lot invited them in. During the night, men calling out that they wanted to have intercourse with the arrived foreigners surrounded Lot's house. Lot came out and proposed his virgin daughters to the mob, but the crowd wanted to force their way in. The angels pulled Lot back into the house with them and dazzled all those who stood at the door of the house with such a blinding light that they could not find the doorway.

The angels told Lot to take his men and relatives at dawn and to flee from the city. Lot's future sons-in-law thought he was joking and refused to come with him. Lot however went with the angels. The angels said, "Flee for your life. Do not look behind you or stop anywhere on the plain." The angels told Lot to flee to the mountains, but Lot pleaded to save a small town near that was since called Zoar. The angels granted. When the sun rose over the horizon, Lot entered Zoar.



Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire of his own sending. God overthrew the cities, the people living in the cities and everything that grew in the whole plain.

Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.

The two great Walloon landscape painters of the early sixteenth century, Joachim Patinir and Henri Blès made paintings of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Henri Blès was inscribed in the book of the Guild of Painters of Antwerp as a Patinir also, so the two may have been related.<sup>G9</sup> They came from near Dinant on the river Meuse in Wallony but they worked in Antwerp and spent most of their professional life there.

Patinir became a master in Antwerp in 1515 and he worked there a mere ten years, until his death in 1524. But his fame since then has been great as one of the first true masters of landscape painting. He was not the first artist to show nature in landscapes. But he was certainly the very first to make of landscapes the central theme of his life work. That made him stand out and be almost a curiosity among his contemporaries. Albrecht Dürer visited him on his trip to the Netherlands and made a portrait of Patinir in 1521. Karel Van Mander as well as Guicciardini mention him in their biographies of painters. Quinten Massys, Joos van Cleve and Adriaen Ysenbrant collaborated with him. Patinir painted background landscapes for these artists.

Patinir did not reproduce actual nature. He painted the landscapes he had in his mind and many of these images remind of the rocks, the high slopes and the narrow valleys of the Meuse valley he was born in. Patinir's picture 'Landscape with the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah' in the Boymans - van Beuningen Museum of Rotterdam is a good example of his work.

The Bible and the Book of Genesis are composed of stories of people of towering characters. Most paintings on themes from the Old Testament centre on the lives of the patriarchs. Only two tales strike by the fact that they have landscapes or cities as their main actor. These are the narratives of the Tower of Babel and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Pieter Bruegel, a generation younger than Joachim Patinir, painted on the theme of the Tower of Babel. He too loved landscapes although he used them more as main scenes in his drawings. Patinir and Blès preferred the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Patinir's picture the towns are burning in the background. Brimstones fall from the sky and cause explosions that throw reddish light on the gruesome spectacle. The whole valley is fiery and smoking. Patinir recalled here the words of the Bible, given to the subsequent sight of Abraham. The incandescent brimstones lighten up eerie rock formations of the mountains into which flee Lot and his family. Two angels in dazzling white – again, Patinir recalls the Bible – lead Lot and his daughters forward. Lot's wife is already a pillar of salt.

The scene is truly frightening and that not just by the red destruction of a world, but also by the mountain rocks that look so alien and menacing. Patinir loved these rock formations that remind of legends of old and that have a strange romantic attraction. He also developed the imaginary vast panoramas we see in this picture; He knew well

how to create vast and deep space and how to bring perspective in a landscape. Here the artist shows his art in bringing the viewer close to the rock formations, whereas one town also is closer and hence drawn larger than the other in the distance. The viewer is in a safe place, in the mountains, not amidst the destruction. We remain a spectator of the drama and do not participate in it.

The reddened sky in the upper part of the painting is hallucinatory. So are the small, very white angels in the right foreground. Men and angels are indeed tiny in these dangerous surroundings where all the frightful destructive elements of God and nature have come down. The viewer does not look from a viewpoint that lies in the valley. We stand on a hill that dominates the valley and that is at least as high as the rocks on the right. This high view was also not really a new invention of Patinir. Vast open panoramas and views from below were well known by the Flemish Gothic painters of the fifteenth century. But this kind of incandescent furnace of a landscape as the main theme of a painting and in which the main figures of the narrative were so small, was without doubt a new vision. Patinir made pictures that brought to the mind of his contemporaries images of the Apocalypse, the so much feared and seemingly so close ending of the world predicted in Saint John's visions.

The next morning Abraham saw the place where had stood Sodom and Gomorrah. He saw the smoke rising from the ground like smoke from a furnace. But God had not forgotten Abraham for Lot had been saved.

### **Lot and his Daughters**

Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1618.

During the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Lot had arrived in the town of Zoar. Lot dared not to stay in Zoar so he settled in the hill country with his two daughters. He lived in a cave. There were no men around to marry Lot's daughters.

The elder daughter said to the younger, "Our father is old and there are no men to marry here. So let us ply our father with wine and sleep with him. In this way the race will be preserved." The next night they made their father drunk and the younger sister slept with him. Lot was unaware of his daughter coming to bed and leaving it. The following night again the sisters made their father drunk and the elder now slept with him.

Hendrik Goltzius (1558-1617) was a Dutch painter of the town of Haarlem. He made a voyage to Italy in 1590 and he travelled to Bologna, Venice and Florence. He was a Mannerist painter but he did not have this style from the pictures he saw on his voyage. Already in Haarlem he had seen works of Frans Floris and of Maarten van Heemskerck. These artists painted mythological and allegorical, Italianate scenes in this style. Goltzius' paintings are close to Baroque. Contrary to Patinir, Goltzius was a great portrait painter and some of these skills can also be seen in his picture of 'Lot and his Daughters'. Goltzius again brought his figures in the foreground and in the centre of attention.

The old, bearded Lot and his two daughters are in a cave. The plain of Sodom and Gomorrah is still burning. Red smoke rises to the skies. The world is destroyed but Lot and the two women are safe and oblivious of what happens outside. They are in a separate world. This scene is extraordinary. It stresses the difference between the chosen of Yahweh and the rest of the mortals.

Lot's daughters are making their father drink. The daughter on the left pours his wine and the picture shows bread and a typical half round Dutch cheese. Close down is a dog, symbol of loyalty and of faith, while in the far a fox peers in, the symbol of cunning.

Lot and his daughters are naked. This is not a scene as one could expect of Italian artists. Goltzius painted the bodies very realistically and sensuously. Italian painters would have drawn stylised nudes of perfect ethereal beauty, bodies that can be admired platonically as the ancient Greek statues, without all the earthy hollows and movements of bones and flesh that indicate imperfection. The Italian artists of the Renaissance believed in the Platonic ideal of beauty and elegance in man. Hendrick Goltzius however painted the women with all the realism of human direct nudity. He thus created an immediacy of sensuality that is enticing. This was how the Baroque painters of the Netherlands and of Flanders and Brabant saw nudity. Pieter Paul Rubens of Antwerp preferred this plump realism and saw another kind of palpitating beauty in the voluptuous full forms. So did the painters of Haarlem, like Hendrick

Goltzius and Cornelis Cornelisz. Van Haarlem. The flesh they painted had the colours of the bed, not of antique marble but of sex.

Goltzius brought a moral message in his picture, a message that we can find in so many Dutch paintings of the late sixteenth and of the seventeenth century. The Netherlands was mostly Calvinist then, but for large communities in certain cities. Goltzius could paint lush nudes but unlike Rubens, who wallowed in a natural way and without shame in luxurious flesh, some of the suspicion of sin of the Protestant preaching remained in Goltzius' mind. Hence the dog and the fox. Still, the sensuality of the scene is obvious.

The Bible story says that Lot's daughters made their father drunk and only then one slept with him. In Goltzius' picture all three are nude and Lot has not yet fallen asleep. He is very much aware of what the girls are up to and he has already one arm and hand in an act of possession around a girl's shoulder. The lascivious tension of the scene is shown also by the silken, coloured cloth on which the three are seated.

Goltzius' picture is typical of Dutch Haarlem Baroque but not of the Dutch styles that would prevail: the genre scenes, the church interiors, the marine paintings and the flat landscapes of the country. Examples of the art of Goltzius came however not only from the Baroque masters of Brabant but also from other Dutch painters that worked at the Bohemian and German imperial court of Prague like Bartholomeus Spranger. Goltzius knew this artist. Dutch art of nude painting was always very explicit and thus was in conflict with its Calvinist structure of society. The pictures were often realistic, explicit so as to be almost pornographic. Yet these pictures were made for the courts of the noble and for some of the rich burghers. The pictures were just tolerated but eagerly bought, as a secret relish and maybe also as a defiance to a too strict puritanism. Excuses could always be found for these subjects since these were images of Biblical or of mythological scenes. The Old Testament is full of stories of patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac or David and these men had wives and concubines. Sexuality was naturally needed for mankind and forgiven in the Bible, forgiven by Yahweh too. What did the Dutch artist do more than reminding society of these undercurrents in the Bible? The excuse had a solid base, but the basis was a thin one. In later sixteenth century the excuse was not valid anymore and nudity was completely banned. But there remained a streak in Dutch painting to show a brink of vulgarity, a hang for a scene that was only just allowed and just not too explicit. Sensuality again had to be shown through symbols and double meanings.

Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The elder gave birth to a son she called Moab. He became the ancestor of the Moabites. The younger daughter gave birth likewise to a son and she called him Ben-Ammi. He became the ancestor of the Bene-Ammon.

*Other paintings:*

**The Departure of Lot and his Family from Sodom.** Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota.

**Lot and his Daughters leaving Sodom.** Guido Reni (1575-1642). ). The National Gallery – London.

**Lot and his Daughters fleeing Sodom in Flames.** Jan Brueghel (1568-1625). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

**Lot and his daughters.** Francesco Furini (1600-1646). Museo del Prado – Madrid.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Felice Ficherelli (ca.1605-1669). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1621-1623.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Anonymous Painter of Antwerp. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1520.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Otto Dix (1891-1969). Suermondt Ludwig Museum – Aachen. 1939.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Marcantonio Franceschini (1648-1729). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**Lot and his Daughters.** Joachim Anthonisz. Wtewael (1566-1638). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Strasbourg. 1633.

**Lot and his Daughters.** Jacopo Amigoni (1682-1752). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1475.

**Lot and his Daughters leaving Sodom.** Giovanni Francesco Guerrieni (1589-1659). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1617.

**The Family of Lot fleeing from Sodoma.** From the workshop of Paolo Caliari called Veronese. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1580.

## *Isaac and Rebekah*

When Abraham was an old man and felt his last days come near, he saw it was necessary for his son to marry. Therefore he made the senior servant of his household swear to him that he would not choose a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites among whom they lived. Abraham asked the servant to go to their native land and to choose there a girl among their kinsfolk. But Abraham also did not want his son to go there himself for God had promised the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. Abraham wanted Isaac to stay in Canaan.

The servant Eleazar therefore took ten of Abraham's camels, loaded them with gifts and departed for the city of Nahar in Aram Naharaim. The servant came with the camels to a well. He prayed to Yahweh to let a girl come and give them to drink. That would be the sign of God the servant would be waiting for. He had not finished speaking when Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah who was married to Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with a pitcher on her shoulder. The girl was very beautiful and she was still a virgin.<sup>G38.</sup>

Eleazar ran up to her, asking for water from her pitcher. She granted wholeheartedly and also gave to drink to the camels. The servant observed her and when she had finished watering the camels he put a gold ring through her nose and put two bracelets on her arms. He asked who she was and when the servant heard that she was of Abraham's kin he thanked God. The girl ran home. Her brother Laban saw the bracelets and ring. Laban ran to Eleazar and offered him shelter as well as room and fodder for the camels. While the servant was eating, he explained his story to Laban. He told Laban how his master had forced him on his way to seek a spouse for Isaac, how he had prayed to Yahweh for a sign and how exactly as he had wished Rebekah had come to the well. Laban and Bethuel then recognised Yahweh's design. Eleazar stayed for the night and in the morning Eleazar, Laban and Bethuel asked Rebekah what she thought of the story. Rebekah accepted to go with Abraham's servant to marry Isaac. The servant took Rebekah and departed.

Isaac had been living in the mountains. But he had left the well of Lohai Roi and he was at that time in the Negeb. He saw camels approaching. When Rebekah saw Isaac, she jumped down her camel and asked the servant who that man was. Eleazar answered, "This is my master". Rebekah then took her veil and covered herself up.

Eleazar told the whole story to Isaac. Then, Isaac took Rebekah with him in his tent. He married her and made her his wife.

After the death of his wife Sarah, Abraham married Keturah and this woman also bore him sons. But Abraham left all his possessions to Isaac. To the sons of his concubines he made grants but sent them away to the East, far from Isaac.

### **Landscape with Rebekah at the Well**

Paul Bril (1554-1626). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

We cannot leave this Book of Genesis without a painting of the Brabant artist Paul Bril. His 'Landscape with Rebekah at the Well' illustrates our proposition that the painters of the late fifteenth and of the seventeenth centuries used the stories of the first patriarchs mostly to depict landscapes. That is also the interest of Paul Bril's picture. We see a vast landscape through the opening of a forest. On the left the vast trees grow high. They grow almost around the canvas at the top. On the right, the forest holds the ruins of ancient Roman temples and churches. The trees build an open oval and through this opening we are allowed to peer at a glorious light land that stretches out to a horizon where sky and earth merge. In this landscape converging lines merge to the middle point of the canvas. The light blue streaks coming together thus create a vanishing point that enhances the perspective effect of wide and far space. A weak sun on the right throws a diffuse brightness on the village. This village is only drawn with a round tower of an oriental temple or mosque-like structure. Such round temples remind of the Pantheon of Rome and thus of Roman antique towns.

The principle interest of Bril's painting lies with the landscape, not just with the open space but also with the details of the forest, the trees and their marvellous foliage. These create an atmosphere of intimacy and of cosiness out of which our view escapes to the vast perspectives of a splendid, bright cosmos. The overgrown ruins in the forest from a romantic touch. Paul Bril made many views of nature that generate these feelings of intimacy, of romantic isolation and of a mysterious nature filled with a silent wonderful life. The Romantic painters of the nineteenth century could not add much to such views. The openness of the central downward perspective is offering a journey of light to the soul seeking spirituality. The soul rises to the skies, hovering over the lightened landscape.

The figures that Paul Bril added are a mere excuse for the landscape but they enhance the feelings of a pastoral life near forests where mystic ancient ruins attract the loving ones. The figures are small and painted in full length. In the centre Rebekah wearing a pitcher filled with water on her head in the oriental manner, arrives to the open land. She will leave the forest and go down to her father's village. Another woman, a child and a dog in a small scene that may symbolise Rebekah's future marriage and loyalty to Isaac accompany her. On the left is a separate scene, hidden in the woods, where we see a well and a source of water. In this other time Rebekah may be giving water to Eleazar. To the right then is Eleazar's arriving armed party. This group travels with horses and camels.

Two men are seated in the foreground, arguing and drawing on the ground, pointing to Bethuel's village. Rebekah is on her way to the village; she is descending from out of the forest, out of the darkness. In the far we see other small figures on their way on the road to the temple. All these details enhance the effect of the travel to the wondrous, ethereal end of a journey, of the soul's journey to the brightness of transcending spirituality. These references to the soul's aspirations in the picture must have attracted the admiration and seduced Paul Bril's Maecenas, Cardinal Federico Borromeo. The picture was in his collection and it is now in the gallery the Cardinal founded in Milan, the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana.

Paul Bril (1554-1626) was born in Antwerp. Paul's elder brother, Matthijs Bril (1550-1583) went very early to Rome to work there, around 1574, and Paul accompanied him merely twenty years old. Matthijs found work after some time at the decorations of the palace of Pope Gregorius XIII. The Pope was building from 1578 to 1580 the Torre dei Venti or 'Tower of Winds' in the Vatican. This tower was to serve for the Pope's astronomer, the Dominican Friar Ignazio Danti (1536-1586). Danti had been working on the Julian Calendar. This calendar was deviating too much from the time position of the sun and the stars. The Torre dei Venti was to house the meridian instruments devised by Danti to calculate a calendar that better fitted the movement of the sun and stars. The tower had a ceiling with a picture of the star of the four directions of the earth. Matthijs Bril painted in fresco the decorations around this image of science. He terminated these already in 1581. Matthijs' brother, Paul Bril, also entered into the service of Pope Gregorius. He decorated for instance the ceilings of the Sala degli Scrittori, the old hall of scriptures in the Vatican.

A patron of Paul Bril soon was of course Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan, who frequently travelled to Rome. Paul Bril was one of the first professors of the painters' Accademia di San Luca, of which also Federico Borromeo was an official patron. This was in 1593, the year that also Jan Brueghel the elder was in Rome. The three lovers of landscapes, Paul Bril, Jan Brueghel and Federico Borromeo must have met. It may well have been Federico who talked with the Brabant-Flemish artists Paul and Jan about the spiritual quality of nature and on how contemplation of nature could lead the soul to a mystic elevation to Christ. These aspirations can be found in Paul Bril's picture and both Jan and Paul must have been marvelled at how the learnt Cardinal of the church transcended their images into a design they had suspected but not attempted to show so clearly. Paul Bril did, in many pictures and he enchanted Federico Borromeo who had a collection of many of the best paintings of the artist. Paul Bril and Jan Brueghel were encouraged in their art. Paul Bril gave his ideas to his Roman pupil Tassi. We should not forget that one of the most gifted painters of mythological and mystic landscapes, a Frenchman that had also arrived in Rome to learn the art of Roman painting, Claude Gellée called Le Lorrain, was a pupil in his turn of this Tassi. Thus, generations of landscape painters in two such wide apart lands of Europe were linked.

### **Suite of Eleazar and Rebekah. Rebekah consents to follow Eleazar**

Maarten De Vos (1532-1603). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen. Ca. 1560.

The city of Rouen ordered a painting of the story of Abraham's servant, called Eleazar, and Rebekah. The commission was given to a young Flemish painter called Maarten De Vos (1532-1603) who had been a student in Antwerp of the renowned painter Frans Floris. De Vos had just returned from a long sojourn in Italy. He was not without credentials. He had worked for three years in Venice in the workshop of Tintoretto. He was a contemporary of Paul Bril and Jan Brueghel. The panels that De Vos made, six in all, were placed in a chapel of the church of Saint Patrice.<sup>F9</sup>

Maarten De Vos painted the panels in the style of his masters, Frans Floris of Antwerp and Tintoretto of Venice, who were both Mannerists. De Vos worked with



the joy and the love of decorum of Venice and with the buoyancy of Antwerp. The six panels are predominantly in the ochre and yellows of Tintoretto, but brighter and sharper colours appear. De Vos painted many figures, all in various attitudes as the Venetian artists did. He showed a main scene in each panel, usually featuring only two or three of the persons of the story. But around that main theme he spun a myriad of secondary narratives and many other figures of Bethuel's household and of Eleazar's suite that tell their own story. The gestures bring graceful, elegant fluid lines in the pictures as also Tintoretto used to prefer. De Vos painted with an obvious pleasure. He introduced many scenes in each panel so that the spectator never gets bored but always discovers new details. The viewer is tempted to search and discover and point a new detail out in surprise and delight.

Especially the scene of Rebekah telling her father Bethuel that she will follow Eleazar is well succeeded. Bethuel, Eleazar and Rebekah hold hands and seal the agreement. Bethuel's robes are painted magnificently in red and golden hues. The draped golden robe is painted with much skill so as to bring volume in the picture. In order to underscore Bethuel's position of head of the house, De Vos painted a solid dark background behind him. This is a style element that was common in many Dutch pictures. The darkness brings out splendidly the colours of Bethuel's figure. Rebekah's bodylines are sensually marked and curvilinear, as Tintoretto liked. Her forms are marked through an almost transparent, light, silken gown. A red cloak floats around her shoulders, in answer to Bethuel's red. Eleazar is painted in darker tones, indicating the servant of a lesser status and his role as a go-between. He is depicted in the middle.

In this picture also, many figures are around the three main characters. These personages all embrace. Thereby they heighten the general atmosphere of happiness in ostentatious emotion and sensibility. But the embraces are more than a mere outburst of pleasure. The embraces are sensual and arduous because it is men and women that eagerly clasp each other. De Vos anticipates the marriage with those scenes. He added camels loaded with the trunks and the camel drivers in the background so that there is a whole bustle of activity on the right where Bethuel's household and Eleazar's men fraternise. The figures are clothed in an oriental manner, but De Vos dressed them more or less as he liked. In some panels Eleazar wears the leather armour of a Roman soldier. By this the spectator forgets that the Bible story is a narrative of nomad desert tribes. Many details point to that in the Bible. Eleazar travels on camels, Rebekah wears veils and Eleazar puts a ring through her nose. De Vos conveniently uses some of these details where they added an oriental touch and he mixed Arab dresses and the fashion of his own time and he diligently discarded other details. Thus Bethuel wears oriental robes, but Rebekah is elegantly clothed as a wealthy Antwerp merchant's daughter. And De Vos made a town scene with a house of bricks whereas Bethuel and Laban's camp were probably tents.

De Vos varied colours in each panel. He used less Tintoretto's and Veronese's monumentality that might have been out of place in the more modest city of Rouen. He preserved Tintoretto and Frans Floris' profusion of figures. The panel scenes are theatrical and the Mannerist explicit form dominates over feelings. Yet the picture is not devoid of emotions and De Vos' naïve sensibility is depicted without complexes. This can be seen in the expressions of the three figures in the panel of Rebekah consenting to follow Eleazar. We are thus already in an evolution away from

Mannerism and entering the Baroque period with its obvious enthusiasm. Maarten De Vos was a precursor of the great Baroque Antwerp artists among whom Pieter Paul Rubens.

### **Isaac and Rebekah**

Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621-1674). The Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1665.

‘Isaac and Rebekah’ of Gerbrand van den Eeckhout shows the first encounter of the future spouses of our story of the Book of Genesis. Eleazar presents Rebekah to Isaac. The scene is not in the desert but in a wood and a marvellous green landscape unfolds in the far.

Eleazar holds Rebekah’s hand with his right hand and with his other presents the girl to Isaac. Eleazar is as young as Rebekah, though in the Bible he is called Abraham’s senior servant. We suspect a personal drama and a romantic love in the scene. The young Eleazar could not but have fallen in love with Rebekah himself. He presents the girl to Isaac in a rare act of self-denial. Eleazar renounces Rebekah in the pure respect for the elder Isaac, his master. He knows that a great race is in the making for the descendants of Isaac and Rebekah will own the land of Canaan. Yahweh chose Isaac to build a people, not Eleazar. Eleazar is only the servant and he can be nothing more. He has to withdraw in the shadows of the Bible history, the perfect servant. He is so much the servant that his name is not even mentioned in the Book of Genesis and he has to remain humbly in the background. There is no sweeter love or greater individual tragedy than love denied.

Van den Eeckhout makes it clear that Rebekah and Eleazar form a couple. These belong to each other. Rebekah looks at Isaac, but that look crosses over Eleazar. She looks tenderly at Eleazar and she has confidence in him, feels close, remains close and seeks his re-assurance. Eleazar also watches Rebekah with obvious tenderness. The painter has brought many details in the picture to show the understanding between Eleazar and Rebekah. The two figures are dressed alike, like Dutch citizens in the seventeenth century. Light falls from the left on the two, and only on them. This is a pair as they are centred apart in the exact middle of the canvas.

Then there is Isaac. He stands stiffly, still, patriarchal in all his dignity. He faces the couple but he looks intently at his future bride and now he discovers that the eyes of Rebekah and Isaac also cross. Isaac and Rebekah really face each other directly. In Rebekah’s eyes there is apprehension and fear. In Isaac’s eyes there is cold emotionless determination, a view we have discovered in many pictures of the patriarchs. Isaac’s descendants will come from a marriage of reason; there will be no love. Van den Eeckhout gives the love to Eleazar. So much proves also the rest of the Genesis stories of Isaac, for instance when Rebekah repeatedly conspires and sides with her son Jacob to deceive Isaac.

Van den Eeckhout may have had no idea on how people could be dressed in Isaac’s time. He might not have known what the Near East looked like in Biblical times. But he read his Bible well and cannot but have well grasped the stories of wandering shepherd tribes in the deserts of Canaan. He wanted to paint the scene, as his Dutch

countrymen could naively understand it. He brought oriental details in his picture. There is a negro boy as Rubens could have drawn. There are camels in the scene, and Isaac wears the turban that many artists, as we have already seen in previously discussed pictures, associate with the East. The camel driver near the right of Eleazar wears a sunshine umbrella as was used in Indonesia by elephant drivers. Indonesia was becoming a Dutch colony in the seventeenth century.

The composition of the picture is clever. Eleazar and Rebekah are in full light in the middle. Isaac stands to the right, somewhat in the shadows. Yet, the line of the view of Rebekah goes to Isaac. Eleazar's head is above that line, indicating his moral authority. The backgrounds on left and right are dark, although van den Eeckhout painted here many interesting details. Right and left backgrounds open to a landscape of soft hills and meadows. This gives the painting its space and epic character for the scene itself is in the intimacy of a forest clearing. The open landscape promises vast territories, the wealth and land of Isaac.

Van den Eeckhout added subtle symbols. A servant maid sets right the blue cloak of Rebekah. This gown resembles a long bridal veil and thus refers to the coming wedding. But the cloak is blue as the Virgin Mary's maphorion, a sign of virginity and purity. A dog representing loyalty is near the maid so that the two symbols of the wedding are close. Directly behind Rebekah is an old woman with a parrot. That may be a sign of vanity and of the coming difficulties, pains and fights of marriage. Like the parrot Rebekah may become a nagging, unloving, hard and bickering wife who will more annoy Isaac than support him. This not so nice perspective looms for Rebekah and van den Eeckhout well understood the strong character of Rebekah from the Genesis story.

Gerbrand van den Eeckhout was a student of Rembrandt. He worked with the great master of Amsterdam from 1635 to 1640. This was just later than Govert Flinck of whom we will see a picture later and who may have been with Rembrandt from 1632 to 1635. We recognise Rembrandt's style in the picture of 'Isaac and Rebekah', but Gerbrand van den Eeckhout had mastered his own style too. His picture dates from 1665. Rembrandt was still alive; he would die in 1669. But although the light-dark contrast and the theme is like many of Rembrandt's pictures, van den Eeckhout brought sweetness and less immediate expression of emotion in his picture. The painting is less forceful than the Bible pictures of his master. Yet, van den Eeckhout made this painting with as much artistic skill as Rembrandt. Van den Eeckhout added subtle detail and composed the scene intelligently. His picture is more modest than Rembrandt's images, but 'Isaac and Rebekah' is certainly a painting to respect and to admire. Van den Eeckhout understood the subtle ambiguity that many sensed in the story of Eleazar and Rebekah, the romantic theme that attracted many painters to this scene.

Van den Eeckhout was one of Rembrandt's students with a rare, own vision. He borrowed style elements from his master, then developed his own colours in which he brought more bright tones than his master. Look at the beautiful touch of blue amidst the predominant brown and red tints. He painted all scenes in detail and liked to bring in the fine landscapes, to fill the background with the trees and foliage so luxuriously painted.

We forget sometimes what marvellous students and masters by their own right came from Rembrandt's workshop. Govert Flinck, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Arent de Gelder, Gerard Dou, Nicolaes Maes all worked with the master of Amsterdam and developed their own character as their master really would have wanted to instil in them

### **Isaac blesses Jacob**

Govert Flinck (1615-1660). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1638.

Rebekah was barren at first but Isaac prayed to Yahweh. Yahweh heard Isaac's prayer and Rebekah conceived. While she was pregnant, the children inside her struggled so much that she consulted Yahweh. Yahweh said to her that there were two nations in her womb. The two children would be two rival peoples. And Yahweh predicted that one nation would have mastery over the other. The first child to be born was red, altogether like a hairy cloak. They named him Esau. His brother was born, grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob. Isaac was then sixty years old. Esau became a hunter, a man of the open country. Jacob was a quiet man. He stayed at home among the tents. Isaac preferred Esau because he had a taste for wild game. But Rebekah preferred Jacob.<sup>G38</sup>

Once, Esau returned from the countryside exhausted. Jacob had cooked a stew. Esau asked for some of the stew. But Jacob said, "First give me your birthright in exchange". Esau answered that he was at death's door, so what good was a birthright to him then. So Esau gave his oath to Jacob and thus sold his birthright to Jacob. Then only did Jacob give some of the bread and the lentil stew to Esau. Esau didn't care much for his birthright.

When Esau was forty years old he married Judith, daughter of Bieri the Hittite as well as Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. Both these women were a bitter disappointment to Isaac and Rebekah.

When Isaac had grown old, his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see. One day he summoned Esau and asked him to take his weapons, his quiver and bow and to go hunt some game for him. Isaac asked Esau to make for him an appetising dish he liked and then Isaac would give Esau a special blessing before he died. Rebekah overheard what Isaac had promised.

Rebekah told Jacob to bring back to her two good kids of the flock. She would make from them a dish as Isaac liked. Jacob could bring the dish to Isaac and receive his blessing in Esau's place. But Jacob saw a problem to this scheme. Esau was hairy. So if his father would touch him, he would feel that Jacob was cheating him and would curse him. But Rebekah answered, "The curse is on me then. Just fetch the kids." So, Jacob went and took the kids. His mother made a delicious stew out of them. She took her elder son's best clothes and put them on Jacob. She covered his arms and the smooth part of his neck with the skins of the kids.

Jacob went into the tent of Isaac. He brought the stew. Isaac was surprised for he heard the voice of Jacob but touched the arms of Esau. He did not recognise Jacob though, and as Jacob said this was Esau, Isaac's first born, Isaac blessed him.

Soon after Esau arrived with game and made an appetising dish for his father Isaac. He entered Isaac's tent and asked for his father's blessing. Isaac was seized then with a violent trembling for he understood what Jacob had done. But the blessing had been given.

Isaac told Esau he had given his blessing to Jacob. On hearing his father's words, Esau cried out loudly that Jacob had taken his birthright twice now. But Isaac did not want to bless Esau too. He told Esau that henceforth his home would be far from the richness of the earth and the dew of heaven. Esau would have to live by the sword and serve his brother. But Isaac also told that Esau could win his freedom and shake his yoke off his neck. Esau hated Jacob then. He cried out that as soon as Isaac had died he would kill Jacob. Rebekah overheard these words too. So she sent Jacob away to her brother Laban in Haran.<sup>G38</sup>

Govert Flinck (1615-1660) was another pupil of Rembrandt, like Gerbrand van den Eeckhout. Flinck worked with Rembrandt in Amsterdam for three years from 1632 on. Flinck was older than Van den Eeckhout was. He was a painter who lacked Rembrandt's power or who did not want to perpetuate his master's very expressive style. His picture 'Isaac blesses Jacob' can be situated between Rembrandt's force and van den Eeckhout's subtlety. Govert Flinck painted less in light-dark contrasts of the Dutch Caravaggists and of his master. He less imitated Rembrandt as the great master's last pupil, Arent de Gelder, and less even than Gerbrand van den Eeckhout. Govert Flinck's colours are lighter and purer than Rembrandt's, and the colours are more visible in separate surfaces. But Rembrandt's influence is obvious in the theme.

The old, blind Isaac is weak. He is sitting in bed. A heavy red, rich cloak has been thrown over his shoulders to keep him warm. He is blessing Jacob with one hand. Isaac's other hand is on Jacob's hairy arm. Rebekah has covered Jacob's arms and hands with the furs of the kids. Flinck remembered well the Bible scene. Isaac's sight is gone. But Jacob's eyes are very intent, sly and filled with fear at the same time. The tension in the air is heavy as Jacob and Rebekah try to deceive Isaac, but all remains still to be proven. Will the deception be a success or not? The tension is hard for the blessing has not yet been given. Isaac is on the brink of just touching Jacob's head and gives him the eagerly awaited heritage of birthright. Much is at stake, for with the birthright will come the Promised Land of Canaan. Jacob presses his lips together and he brings his head forward to be nearer to his father, maybe afraid of the touch of Isaac's hand to his head. In the back, on a plate, lie the stew and the drink that Rebekah prepared. Isaac cannot see through the deception and he will bless Jacob instead of Esau. Jacob is dressed in beautiful, bright clothes as Dutch wealthy dandies may have worn and a golden sword hangs by his side. This also is a sign of deception.

'Isaac blessing Jacob' is one of the best if not the best picture of Govert Flinck. Flinck made a strong composition. He used the diagonal of the canvas that rises over a detail of colourful cloth on the lower left, over Jacob to Isaac in the upper right. The highest head is of course Rebekah. She was the brain behind the deception. The colours of the

bed cloth in the lower left repeat the blue of Jacob and the red of Isaac, but here these colours are intertwined. Like Rembrandt would have done, Flinck painted Jacob and Isaac in full light whereas Rebekah is already in the darker tones and rougher brushstrokes of the background. That background was kept frugal as Isaac's tent probably was. Like Rembrandt, Flinck did not find it necessary for this scene, which is so strongly focused on the three characters, to detail a decoration behind. In this he and de Gelder followed Rembrandt's style, whereas van den Eeckhout had more eye for the landscapes, was a marvellous landscape painter who filled the picture with more figures and more views of nature.

Maarten De Vos, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout and Govert Flinck painted Biblical scenes of the story of Isaac. They pictured their figures in contemporary clothes. They made very intent images, filled with tension, apprehension, fear, but also with bright expectancy. This was an optimistic century. Their main character was definitely Rebekah. These artists imagined themselves in their characters, in Eleazar and in Jacob. They saw themselves in young men, nicely dressed and well to do. Yet these were pure of heart and well intentioned. The artists told the wonderful story of Isaac. They produced paintings of beauty and thereby showed each in his way the spirituality they had reached. The paintings were well reflected upon, earnest, true and honest. The artists intended to spread the spirituality of Yahweh's design. Like Rembrandt they shied away from painting themes of Jesus's life for too laden with mystery. The Bible with its straightforward themes appealed more to them. They found their own nature of humility better and more intimately in the first patriarchs. The return to the sources of the first Genesis stories was a Calvinist trait, in line with the stern religious atmosphere of the Dutch society of the seventeenth century. But the paintings also so very much mirror Dutch character, the humbleness and the solidity of the men that formed a new country and tore it away from Catholic Spain.

*Other paintings:*

**Rebekah at the Well.** Giovan Battista Piazzetta (1683-1754). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Gioacchino Agricola. Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Pier Francesco Mola (1612-1666). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1655-1659.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Antonio Travi (1608-1665). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genua.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Antoine Coypel (1661-1722). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1701.

**Rebekah's Journey to the Well.** Giovanni Francesco Castiglione (1641-1710). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. 1698.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1648.

**Rebekah at the Well.** Carlo Francesco Nuvolone called Panfilo (1609-1662). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**The Meeting between Rebekah and Eleazar at the Well.** Carlo Maratta (1625-1713). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**Rebekah at the Well receiving Gifts from Eleazar.** Paul Bril (1554-1626). Castle of Fontainebleau. Peintures P39.

**Eleazar and Rebekah.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Blois.

- Eleazar and Rebekah.** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1648.
- Eleazar and Rebekah at the Well.** Johann Anton Ramboux (1790-1866). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1819.
- Rebekah and the servant of Abraham.** Francisco Solimena (1687-1747). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1710.
- The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah.** Claude Gellée called Le Lorrain(1604-1682). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.
- Jacob and Rachel.** Francisco Solimena (1687-1747). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1710.
- Esau selling his Birthright.** Hendrick ter Brugghen (ca. 1588-1629). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1627.
- Esau sells his Birthright.** Matthias Stom (ca. 1600 – after 1641). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.
- Esau sells his Birthright.** Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.
- Isaac blessing Jacob.** Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). ). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen.
- Isaac blessing Jacob.** Jan Victors (1620-1676). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1640.
- Isaac blesses Jacob.** Giovanni Battista Pittoni (1687-1767). Abraham sacrifices Isaac. Museum im Schottenstift. Vienna. Around 1720.
- Jacob receives the Benediction of Isaac.** José de Ribera (1591-1652). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1637.
- Isaac blessing Jacob.** Jan Sanders van Hemessen (ca. 1504-1567). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1544.
- Isaac blessing Jacob.** Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London.
- Isaac blessing Jacob.** Gerrit Willemsz. Horst (Ca. 1612-1652). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1638.
- Isaac and Jacob.** Imitator of Giambattista Longetti (1625-1676). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

## *Jacob*

The two last chapters of the Book of Genesis are dedicated to the life stories of Jacob and Joseph. Jacob was a shepherd and a quiet, peaceful man. Scenes of Jacob's life were therefore a welcome theme for bucolic landscapes and pictures of shepherds and sheep. As a continuation of these themes, artists sometimes turned to Joseph to paint in the seventeenth century pictures of animals and landscapes. Jacob's themes were combined with love scenes for Jacob had many wives.

Esau had threatened to kill his brother Jacob once Isaac dead, for Jacob had deceived their father in receiving the blessing of heritage. Esau had lost his birthright to Jacob. Rebekah had overheard Esau calling out the threat. Always the sly, she told her husband Isaac to send her favourite son Jacob to her brother Laban. She told Isaac that Jacob should not marry Hittite women like Esau had done, but that Jacob was to marry one of their own kin. Isaac summoned Jacob and told him, "You are not to marry one of the Canaanite women. Go off to Paldan-Aram, the home of Bethuel, your mother's father, and there choose a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother." Jacob did so and left Beersheba for Haran.<sup>G38</sup>

In the meantime, Esau realised how much his father disapproved of his Hittite wives. He chose in addition to the wives he had also Mahalath, daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael.

### **Jacob's Dream of the Ladder to Heaven**

Domenico Fetti (1588/1589-1623). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna. Around 1618-1620.

Jacob left Beersheba and travelled to Haran. He stopped for the night, lay down and used a stone under his head as pillow. He had a dream. He saw a ladder planted on the ground that reached heaven with its top. The angels of God were going up and down on the ladder. Then, suddenly, Yahweh stood at his side and said that God would give the ground on which Jacob was sleeping to Jacob and his descendants. Yahweh promised to keep Jacob safe wherever he went and to bring him back to this country. Jacob awoke from the sleep and was afraid. He thought how awe-inspiring the place was, nothing less than the abode of God and the gate to heaven. Jacob took the stone he had laid on, put it on a pillar, poured oil on top of it and called the place Bethel. He made a vow. He said that if Yahweh indeed would keep him safe on his journey back to his father, Yahweh would be his God. Jacob would faithfully pay to God one-tenth part of everything he received and the stone on the pillar would be a house of God.<sup>G38</sup> Once again Canaan had been given as the Promised Land to Jacob's descendants and a covenant signed.

Images of Jacob's dream and the theme of the ladder going to heaven is a very old theme as represented in paintings. Images of Jacob's ladder can be found in the Roman Catacombs. John, a monk of Palestine also took up the image, in the second



half of the seventh century. John became a hermit at Thole in Egypt and he wrote there a treatise on monastic spirituality and on the rules of eremitic life. John loaded the state of passive disinterestedness of the world as all the hermits sought<sup>E5</sup>. This treatise was very influential in determining the life of hermits and abbeys. It was called 'The ladder to Paradise'. Ladder is in Latin the word 'Climacus', so this John is now known as Saint John Climacus. Later, at an old age, he became the abbot of the Mount Sinai abbey but at eighty he retired again as a hermit. The image of a ladder to heaven as a representation of spiritual life inspired many painters.

Domenico Fetti made a picture of Jacob's dream in the beginning of the sixteenth century. Jacob lies down on the ground in this picture, on the stones as in the story of the Bible. He keeps his head as in thoughts and the dream starts there. A stairway goes to heaven and angels ascend the steps. Fetti was a Baroque painter and some of the elements of this style can be found in his picture. Jacob lies from left to right in an oblique position. From his head then grows the dream, going from right to left, also in a slanting way. Using such slanting directions was one of the main style elements of Baroque, which preferred oblique lines to the vertical or horizontal compositions of previous periods. Fetti also painted a night scene, which allowed him to marvellously play with the scant light on Jacob's body and in the part of the angels ascending the stairs. Remark the shades on Jacob and Fetti's great skill in depicting the light on Jacob. Fetti also used beautiful hues in the light as contrasting with the darker tones of the night. This is how we can imagine ourselves having dreams, as a scene coming out of opening clouds in the sky. The angels then ascend in heavenly, eerie light, as in a strange fear-inspiring vision, towards a transcendental image of spirituality. Fetti had a way of showing his figures in peasant's clothes so that his pictures are not unlike the genre scenes of certain other Italian painters and the Dutch pictures of the seventeenth century. But Fetti had no intention to develop this in a particular style. He simply painted figures from the Old and New Testament as he knew them from his own Italian countryside and as he imagined the figures from the Bible to have been.

Domenico Fetti was born in Rome and may have been a pupil of Cigoli. He became the court painter of Mantua in 1613 and realised monumental frescoes there for the ducal palace and the cathedral. He left Mantua rather soon, in 1622, and settled in Venice where he had been before to buy art for his patron the Duke of Mantua. Domenico Fetti particularly enlivened the art of painting parables so that no other artist like him treated these themes. His picture 'Jacob's Dream' is also a kind of parable, a symbol of an idea, of the idea of the spiritual life that will lead the devote to heavenly compensation. Fetti died in 1623, still a young man in his thirties so that his career was short and few paintings remain of his hand.

### *Jacob at Laban's home*

Jacob arrived at Laban's home and Genesis recalls a story of shepherds all having to wait until enough of them were there to roll away a heavy stone from a well to give to drink to their sheep. Jacob helped them with the stone and met Laban. When Jacob had stayed for a month with Laban, his uncle asked him what he wanted for pay.

Jacob replied he had seen Laban's youngest daughter and wanted to marry her. Laban had two daughters. The elder was named Leah and she had lovely eyes. But the younger, called Rachel, was shapely and beautiful. Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel. Laban asked Jacob to work for him for seven years and then Jacob could marry Rachel.<sup>G38</sup>

Jacob worked for seven years for Laban and these years seemed for him like a few days because he loved Rachel so much. When the time was up, Jacob asked for his wife. Laban gathered all his people and held a banquet. But when night came he brought his elder daughter Leah to Jacob and Jacob slept with her. When morning came Jacob found out he had been tricked. He confronted Laban, but Laban told it was not his custom to marry first a younger daughter. But Laban also promised that if Jacob finished the marriage week with Leah, he would also give him the youngest daughter in return for another seven years of work. Jacob agreed and when the week was finished, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. Jacob slept with Rachel and he loved her more than Leah.

When Yahweh saw that Leah remained unloved, he opened her womb whereas Rachel remained barren. Leah gave birth to Reuben, to Simeon, to Levi and to Judah. Rachel, seeing that she herself gave no children to Jacob, became jealous of her sister. She presented her slave-girl Bilhah as a concubine to Jacob and told him to sleep with her so that she, Rachel, would have children too. Bilhah soon gave birth first to Dan and then to Naphtali. Leah, seeing that she had ceased to bear children, took her own slave-girl Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a concubine. Zilpah conceived of Gad and of Asher. One day Reuben found mandrakes in a field and Rachel asked for these to Leah. But Leah said, "is it not enough to have taken my husband, do you want to take also my son's mandrakes?" So Rachel said, "Well, all right. Let Jacob sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes". Leah went to Jacob and told him she had hired him at the price of her son's mandrakes. Yahweh heard Leah and she conceived and gave birth to her fifth son, Issachar. Later she gave birth to Zebulun as well as to a daughter named Dinah. Only then did God remember Rachel. She too finally conceived and gave birth to a son, which she named Joseph.<sup>G38</sup>

After the birth of Joseph, Jacob asked Laban to leave to return to Canaan. Laban wanted to pay Jacob. Jacob only asked for the black sheep and the speckled or spotted goats. Laban promised so, but before Jacob could choose he hid all his black sheep and speckled goats, entrusted them to his sons and put three days of journey between him and the rest of the flock that Jacob tended. Jacob got fresh shoots from poplar, almond and plane trees and peeled them in white strips. He put the shoots near the pond where the goats came to drink. The goats mated there in front of the shoots and produced striped, spotted and speckled young. Jacob kept apart the ewes and made them face whatever was striped or black in Laban's flock. Thus he built up droves of his own. Thus Jacob grew wealthy of his own flock.

But Laban's sons conspired against Jacob. They were saying that Jacob had taken what belonged to their father. Yahweh spoke to Jacob and told him to flee to Canaan, to the land of his ancestors. Forthwith, Jacob took his children and his wives and put them on camels. He took all his possessions and his flock and left while Laban was away, sheering his sheep. Rachel in the meantime had appropriated the household

idols belonging to her father, but Jacob did not know of this. Thus, Jacob outwitted Laban the Aramaean so that he would not be forewarned of his flight.<sup>G38</sup>

After three days Laban heard that Jacob had fled and that his idols were gone. He pursued Jacob, caught up with him and searched his tents. But Rachel had hidden the idols inside a camel cushion. She was sitting on the cushion and asked her father to forgive her for not rising in his presence because he was as women are from time to time. Laban searched everywhere but found nothing. Finally, Laban and Jacob made a treaty. Jacob had to promise to care well for Rachel and Leah and he and Laban delineated their lands with a stone cairn.

### **Landscape with Jacob, Rachel and Leah**

Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1633.

The Genesis story of Jacob contains several episodes of domestic animals, of sheep and goats. Paintings of groups of animals driven in a wide landscape are a genre that artists of the Netherlands but also of Italy and more rarely of France exercised. We offer two examples of these. There was especially a tradition in Rome of pastoral scenes with animals in the seventeenth century. A name to be mentioned is the Genovese painter Benedetto Castiglione, who also worked in Rome. Several Dutch artists, who knew a tradition of landscape painting that went even earlier in history, to Flanders and Antwerp, came to Rome. They either stayed there for many years to introduce their new fashion genres, or they stayed only for a short while but were captivated by the Italian styles and by Italy's romantic landscapes. Lucas de Wael (1591-1661) and Willem van Nieulandt (1584-1635) had been in Rome. Cornelis Poelenburgh (1590-1667) and Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1600-1657) also were in Rome around 1620. Pieter van Laer (1599-1642) arrived in Rome somewhat later, around 1642, but he had a surprising success. This van Laer established a genre of pictures called Bamboccio. He made scenes of landscapes and interiors with gypsies and shepherds, land thieves and beggars, soldiers fighting off bandits on the roads. He made pictures of animals. These picturesque themes were the delight of the Romans of the seventeenth century, eagerly sought and copied by Italian painters themselves. Jan Miel (1599-1663), another artist of the Netherlands working in Rome painted this way and had much success too. These artists had been preceded however in landscape and genre paintings.

Maybe the whole tradition goes back to Pieter Bruegel from Brabant. Bruegel had pupils called Hendrick Avercamp (1585-1634) and Gillis van Coninxloo (1544-1617) who worked in Antwerp and who were skilled landscape painters. One of the students of Gillis van Coninxloo was Herkules Seghers (1589-1639) and this artist inspired painters from Haarlem. Dutch landscape painting henceforth was a powerful trend in northern art and it was mostly born in Haarlem. Pieter van Laer and Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683) came from Haarlem.

Nicolaes Berchem had learned to paint with various masters of Haarlem, among whom maybe the most famous now was Claes Moeyaert. Berchem was inscribed in the Painters' Guild of Haarlem in 1642 and that same year he also travelled to Italy, to Rome. He came back to Holland with a sketchbook of Italian landscapes and with a mind forever lost to the Roman arcadian countryside. He first stayed on in Haarlem, and then quite later in 1677 settled in Amsterdam. He was an example for many of the artists of his native Netherlands.

Nicolaes Berchem's 'Landscape with Jacob, Rachel and Leah' was painted around 1643, so right after his stay in Rome. Berchem painted a landscape of one of the marvellous Italian rivers, hidden in a romantic mountainous area. Ancient ruins and the towers of villages can be seen on promontories on the valley side. These try to dominate by their signs of human presence the lovely, quiet river. But high slopes and mountains majestically yet softened reach into the clouds. This must be evening for the feeble yellowish light of the low sun colours the sky.

The lines of the mountains come down to Leah. She is sitting in bright colours on a donkey and seems to drive her servants forward to cross the river. If this is indeed evening, she will want to be in the village and over the river before nightfall. Maybe a part of Jacob's companions have already traversed the ford. Or another group of travellers has discovered the place on the river where the water is shallow, conveniently close to a village. Leah points forward to the rest of her group. They are arriving behind her. She points forward. She talks to a servant or to a guide who has shown her the ford. This character and also Leah, comes straight out of a Bamboccio picture. He wears a large hat worn in the Italian countryside. Leah also is dressed in the bright, wide robes of Italian country girls. But she directs energetically her servants.

A bit further to the right and down a woman and man rest and sit behind a boulder. They are relaxed, seem to be flirting like a shepherdess and her young admirer. These must be Rachel and Jacob. Rachel is facing the viewer. Jacob has his back to the viewer even though he should be the main figure of the scene. It was a characteristic of Bamboccio pictures to have to search for details and apparently Nicolaes Berchem could not resist that temptation. The less shapely Leah is doing all the work and driving the group forward while Rachel and Jacob are in love. But what will come from love alone? A black and white speckled goat has returned from the ford and peers above the boulder. Goats were always a symbol of lechery. And this one refers cleverly to the other story of the spotted goats that Jacob could take on his way from Laban. Nicolaes Berchem remembered his Bible stories well.

Berchem made not only a beautifully composed landscape but also a scene of animals watering through a river and a young bucolic flirting scene. Berchem combined themes in the splendid Italian landscape. And the powerful Leah hovers above it all. She commands the scene like a sorceress. That is why Berchem lets the mountains bring our view to her and also why here are the brightest spots of colour.

Nicolaes Berchem was a very active painter. He had many students who perpetuated his style. His importance in Dutch seventeenth century art cannot be neglected. His pupils were Karel Dujardin, also a gifted artist of animals and landscapes, Dirk Maes and Dirk van Bergen. We also mention the landscape and animal painters that worked

in Berchem's lifetime. These were painters of Holland or of Antwerp. There was Salomon Ruisdael (1600-1670), Aelbrecht Cuyp (1620-1691), Jan-Baptist Weenix (1621-1660), Jan Asselijn (1610-1652), Paulus Potter (1625-1654) and Jan Both (1615-1632). Of a somewhat later generation were Jacob Ruisdael (1628-1682) and Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709). Jacob van Ruisdael was the best known artist among these. His master had been Cornelis Vroom who came from the Haarlem of Nicolaes Berchem. The tradition of northern landscape painting had come to its greatest splendour and sophistication with these artists.

### **Jacob buries the Idols of Laban**

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). The State Ermitage Museum – Saint Petersburg.

With the painting of Sébastien Bourdon 'Jacob buries Laban's Idols' we continue our series of paintings of the seventeenth century. And we continue to look at pictures of groups of animals, in the line of pictures of Nicolaes Berchem.

Sébastien Bourdon was however quite another artist than Berchem. Bourdon stayed in Rome too, from 1634 to 1639 and he, like Pieter van Laer, was sufficiently successful there not to return soon to France. Bourdon was still very young during this period. He was only from eighteen to twenty-three years old. He was much influenced by the style of the Bamboccianti and probably also by Benedetto Castiglione. Bourdon was easily influenced by a style that was easy to imitate and that appealed to young playful minds. Castiglione painted many scenes of groups of animals, drawn from themes of the Bible and thus also of Jacob's narratives.

Sébastien Bourdon was French, born in Montpellier from a Protestant family. He was to become a many sided artist and he touched several styles. He painted Bamboccio scenes, mythological scenes as a classical artist, Bible scenes and scenes of the life of Jesus from the New Testament. He painted historical pictures and in his later years (he died in 1671 in Paris, twelve years earlier than Nicolaes Berchem) he also took to landscapes. Bourdon painted much. He had a good gift of composition, a universal mind and he preferred to make his pictures in broad colour surfaces without always detailing to the finest degree his figures and scenes. Yet, he could be a very dedicated and slow painter too. He showed magnificent finished detail in jewels of portraits.

In the picture we show, an already elderly Jacob is setting up the altar of which is spoken in the Bible. We see no idols and the burying of the idols of Laban is an earlier story, but Bourdon needed to situate in time an otherwise common scene of an offering as close to the story of Laban's idols. Jacob has come with all his family, his wives and his slave-girls. He is still on the move as can be seen in the white horse laden with heavy packs and house utensils such as the copper cooking pots. Jacob has brought mainly sheep, but also an ox and camels are in the scene. Bourdon however forgot that the Bible does not speak of horses and that Jacob's sheep had to be mostly black.

Bourdon was a master in composition. Jacob burns hastily gathered wood, on an improvised altar on a stone near a well. The well is maybe a reference to Rebekah's meeting with Eleazar. The servants of Jacob are helping him. A tree grows high to the left out of this scene. On the right is another scene of figures, almost symmetrically composed. Here are Rachel and Leah with their small children and babies. Old and new thus confront each other. Over Rachel and Leah grows sideways a heavily foliated tree. This tree is associated with Rachel and Leah. The tree above Jacob also grows obliquely but to the other side and it is merely a dead trunk. This is one more indication of the contrast between young and old. The smoke of Jacob's burning offer rises in the open 'V' between the two trees, upwards to God but against a background of blue menacing rocks.

Sébastien Bourdon also used a diagonal in his composition, the same one as Nicolaes Berchem. Our eyes indeed start on the lower left where the naked flesh of a slave-girl and her baby son attracts a male view. Then the view can rise over Jacob to a prancing camel. The line continues over to Rachel and then goes towards the upper right and the imposing autumn foliage of the tree.

The group of animals steals the show of this picture and even here we see the skills in composition of the young Bourdon. The sheep, horse, ox and camels beneath form a horizontal band that brings solidity and firm foundation in an otherwise nervous scene of movement. Remark how Sébastien Bourdon cleverly adjusted the positions of the animals to the triangle he had under the diagonal. The sheep on the left are mostly lying; the leftmost sheep even keeps its head to the ground. Where there was more space, to the right, the sheep are standing. Then Bourdon added the white horse, the standing ox and the even higher camels to fill the rightmost scene. For a very young painter, just in his twenties, such a masterly composition denotes a future great master. Moreover the whole scene is in soft diluted pastel colours, almost of a water colouring. And yet. A few surfaces of harder colours, deep red on Jacob's servant and the dark blue robe of the seated slave-girl on the left try to keep the attention of the viewer to this more open, less crowded left scene. This part of the picture might otherwise have remained less noticed than the beautiful disordered happy youthful play around Rachel and Leah. We also better understand now why Bourdon brought the nudity of the slave-girl in this corner.

Sébastien Bourdon made a fine picture, strongly composed and painted in harmonious soft colours. Such pictures are a joy for the eye. We saw that Bourdon did not look closely at the Bible story but he was still young and the obvious enthusiasm of the youthful joy in this picture make us forgive him. Jacob looks like an ancient patriarch. The scene is almost a theme of classical antiquity. The static Jacob contrasts with the Baroque scene of movement on the right. Sébastien Bourdon combined various styles cleverly. He would indeed later paint as well pure classicist scenes as pictures of pure Baroque. We feel something of the austere search for purity in this scene, the discipline of mind that is spirituality.

*Jacob's fight with God*

Jacob continued his journey to Edom, the land of Esau. He sent messengers in front to win the favour of his brother. But he heard from them that Esau was already on his way to meet him, with four hundred men. He sent many goats and sheep as a gift to Esau then, split his camp in two and waited greatly afraid and distressed.<sup>G38</sup>

A night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, their two female servants and his eleven sons and took them across the stream at the ford of Jabbok. Jacob stayed alone. Then someone wrestled with him until daybreak. Seeing that he could not master Jacob, the other struck him on the hip so that Jacob's hip was dislocated. But Jacob still wrestled on. Then the other said, "Let me go for the day is breaking". But Jacob replied that he would not let go unless he received his blessing. The other said, "What is your name?" "Jacob", he replied. "No longer are you to be called Jacob", the other said, "but Israel since you have shown your strength against God and men and have prevailed." Then God blessed Jacob and left. To this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh sinew which is at the hip socket, because God had struck Jacob there.<sup>G38</sup>

When Esau met Jacob, he was not angry at all. He did not need Jacob's gifts for he had plenty. Esau ran to meet his brother and took him in his arms. Jacob and Esau parted a little while after. Esau returned to Seir in Edom. Jacob settled in front of the city of Shechem and bought a piece of land of Hamor, father of Shechem. He erected an altar there, which he called 'El, God of Israel'.

**The Fight of Jacob and the Angel**

Paul Baudry (1828-1886). Musée Municipal. La Roche-sur-Yon.

Paul Baudry was born in France, in a small town called La Roche-sur-Yon. He received money from his town to go to Paris in 1844, merely sixteen years old, to study at the French Academy of fine Arts in the capital. He had much talent and immediately tried to win the 'Prix de Rome' to be allowed on a state stipend to continue his studies at the Villa Medici, the seat of the French Academy in Rome. He tried several times, and succeeded to win the prize in 1850. He could stay in Rome for five years, be lodged and fed at the former Medici palace. He travelled to Venice in 1852. Baudry studied and liked many styles, not just the Raphaelism lauded by the academy, but also Michelangelo and the classicist painters of Italy. When he returned to Paris he had no great success, but anyhow painted monumental frescoes in the Parisian Opera house. He returned to Italy also, and copied for instance there Michelangelo's frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. His project for the pantheon of Paris remained at the stage of project when he died in 1886. Baudry first offered the 'Fight of Jacob and the Angel' to the Museum of Fine Arts of the town of Nantes. When this museum refused to pay for it, he gave the painting to the town where he was born.

Paul Baudry's 'Fight between Jacob and the Angel' is an eminently Neo-Classical work with Baroque undertones. We see Jacob wrestling with an angel. Jacob wrestled with God, but as throughout the Bible angels are manifestations of God on earth,

Baudry's interpretation is plausible. In the early pages of the Bible, angels are not creatures that were separate from God, but truly God's actions made visible to man.

Baudry emphasised the two aspects of the battle between Jacob and the angel. Jacob is the human, powerful, magnificent human in his physical nudity. The angel represents spirituality, the idea. Jacob is nude, very sensual and present. The angel is clad with a flowing, white toga or robe, always a sign of the intellectual or refined noble. Jacob contorts his strong back and he pulls on all muscles. The angle curves more under the tension; he is more flexible still and seems to withstand terrible force by leaning and curving around the stress. Jacob holds the angel but the angel's body yields where the arms hold it. The angel is finer, more elegant than the man. The angel has the face of a woman but also the strong, thick, male arms of a prize fighter. He or she pushes Jacob's chest away but Jacob also does not yield, does not loosen his grip so that the angel cannot but curve its body through Jacob's arms. With the powerful arms the angel will later in the fight strike Jacob's hip. Baudry particularly curved Jacob's back at the hip, where later the angel would strike Jacob and hurt him. Baudry showed the muscles and sinews of Jacob's back, his thighs, legs and arms. He painted the man Jacob like a strong, still youthful man that likes to fight and likes to win. Although the angel pushes at Jacob's breast and neck so that Jacob's head also is forced backwards, Jacob stands forcefully and does not yield. Jacob's hair is loose; the angel's hair is dressed up like a woman's. Baudry definitely showed the fight not only between Jacob and the angel, but between masculinity and femininity. He may have also wanted to express in a hidden way the perpetual antagonism between male and female.

The painting of Paul Baudry is a picture of a fight, a scene of immediacy and of movement. Yet, it shows strong structure. He used the directions of the two diagonals. Jacob's body is along the right diagonal of the frame; the angel's body is along the left diagonal. Therefore the picture has the stability, balance and rigidity of a true Classicist painting. The scene of the battle was in the night, so Baudry showed a low, dark landscape and only the beginning of dawn. We must admire of course the skill with which this artist sculpted the volumes of the body of Jacob and of the angel in the dim light. Baudry mastered fully his rendering of shadows on the bodies so that the picture is a marvel of force. Baudry also painted all in golden-yellow hues to accentuate the bronze flesh colours of the vigorous bodies.

Baudry showed that he was a great painter. His *Jacob and Angel* is a fine show of force. Michelangelo could sculpt naked bodies with power, Baudry could paint bodies this way. His picture is a study of the human male nude. He used a theme of the Bible to present a study but succeeded well in making an impressive picture.

### *The Birth of Benjamin*

Shechem son of Hamor raped Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. Hamor visited Jacob and asked Dinah's hand for his son. Jacob's sons gave a crafty answer to Hamor and told that only when the people of Shechem were circumcised could they ask for women and intermarry. Hamor was so in love with the girl that he agreed. Hamor and



Shechem talked to the townspeople. They pleaded that the newcomers were friendly and that there was livestock to share and to become a single nation if only the males of the town circumcised. The citizens of the town agreed to the proposal and all the males were circumcised. But Simeon and Levi took their swords three days later and killed Hamor and Shechem. They advanced unopposed against the town and slaughtered all the males. Then their brothers, Jacob's sons, treacherously pillaged the town in reprisal for the dishonouring of their sister. Jacob feared reprisals then.<sup>G38</sup>

Jacob departed again. Yahweh ordered Jacob to travel to Luz, which is Bethel, in Canaan and to dress an altar there for him. Jacob named the place El-Bethel since it was there that Yahweh had appeared to him while he was fleeing from his brother. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse died there. God then appeared again to Jacob, blessed him and said that from now on he would not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel. God said that he was El-Shaddai and that from Jacob's loins would come kings and an assembly of nations. Jacob raised a monument where God had spoken to him and he called the place Bethel.

Jacob left Bethel with his family and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel gave birth to a second son. The midwife told her not to worry and announced her she had again a son, but Rachel breathed her last. Rachel died in the effort of giving birth and she breathed her last. Rachel called her son Ben-Omi, but Jacob named him Benjamin. Jacob raised a monument to Rachel. Jacob had now twelve sons.

### **The Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel**

Jacques Pilliard (1811-1898). Musée de Grenoble. 1841.

Jacques Pilliard was born not so far from the town of Lyon in France. He studied and worked in Lyon at first, without going to the Paris Academy. When he was about thirty years old, in 1840, he left for Rome and stayed there until his death. He was primarily a painter of Biblical scenes, of martyrdoms of saints, of Christian themes overall. Pilliard worked in Rome but he sent also his paintings to France, to the Salons, the official exhibitions organised in Paris and he also exhibited in other towns of France, re-enacting the lives of the great French Baroque painters that worked from out of Rome like Nicolas Poussin. Jacques Pilliard's picture of the 'Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel' is one of his first pictures made in Rome and sent to France. Pilliard was thirty years old.

Jacques Pilliard showed Rachel lying on her bed, just after having given life to Benjamin. She died in the effort and lies now already pale, cold and white in body and face. God has given her a child but he has taken her life. The midwife holds the newborn baby in her lap. She sits at the end of Rachel's bed. A slave-girl of Jacob's household helps to cover the baby. On the right and in the complete dark sits Jacob, hooded in mourning and in grief. On the other side, equally hooded in mourning,

stands Rachel's sister Leah. She also is in the dark but her face is quite visible, as the light in the painting comes from the lower right.

Pilliard used an 'Open V' structure in his composition. One side of the V, the right side, is formed by Jacob and the structures higher up on that side. The midwife and Leah form the other side of the V. In the opening of this composition we see the bed and the corpse of Rachel. Pilliard filled the space behind Rachel sparingly with a vase and a long, straight lamp-stand. This lamp-holder indicates the main direction of the painting. We would have found such indications also in pictures of Jacques-Louis David. Leah, the midwife, Jacob, and the servants, sit or stand upright and this feature gives an impression of austerity, solemnity and rigidity in the painting, which is typical for many Neo-Classical pictures. Nevertheless, Pilliard knew he had to ease, to relax this rigidity. So he gave his figures lively poses. From right to left, Jacob inclines his head and holds one of his children in an embrace; the midwife opens her arms and one arm is in an oblique position; she holds her head also somewhat slanting, in an imploring expression and she takes God witness to the sorrow; a servant or daughter holds her hands in prayer but curves her back in doing so, while looking at Sarah. An attention point further away from these structures, is the prayer shawl that lies on the ground, futile and useless since God has taken Sarah despite the praying.

Pilliard was a very professional painter. He knew the form of art that was painting well and had received good scholarship with other painters in the school of Lyon. So he had learned the power of the use of light to draw attention on the central scene of Sarah's death and her midwife with the child. These figures are in full light and shows, almost like in a traditional Pietà view. Pilliard placed the mourning Jacob and Leah in the shadows of the sides. He also used symmetries of colour in these two personages: Jacob and Leah wear a deep brick-red robe and these areas are on both extremes of the frame. He gave them also dark hoods and cloaks, painted in the same tones. Pilliard also placed a pyramid structure in the painting. This is the area made by the midwife and the two servants. One servant is placed on either side of the midwife; they form the sides of the pyramid. Pilliard placed this scene somewhat to the left and balanced then this area with the horizontal figure of Sarah on the bed. Finally, as in many Neo-Classical pictures, Pilliard kept the background very frugal, undecorated and so discreet as to be mostly remaining unobserved by most viewers. He showed here the neutral, dark green of the curtains that separate Sarah's space in Jacob's tent. We must admire the draughtsmanship of Jacques Pilliard. He painted nicely and correctly the play of light and shadows on faces, robes, cloaks.

Jacques Pilliard's 'Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel' is thus almost a textbook example of the accomplished, academic painting. It handles a tragic scene of the bible and it evokes sympathy and even grief in viewers that see the beautiful but lifeless, pale Sarah on the bed and the gestures of sadness and powerlessness of the midwife. Pilliard brings these feelings over to the viewer with delicate means and not of overt sensibility. Furthermore, he painted his picture in soft tones of a global, restrained mood. Pilliard well created a mood of grief in using subdued hues, creating the mood of brown, sombre silence in the death room. He played well with contrasts of light and shadows. Yet, of course, in view of so much professionalism, we miss something when we experience his painting. We miss the surprise of a genius picture. We miss the warmth and the capacity of the painter to inspire truly instantaneous

empathy with the figures. The viewer now has an impression of pure contemplation of a scene to which he or she remains just that, a viewer and not a participant.

Pilliard was a very good painter but he lacked the sparkle of originality and genius to bridge the distance between scene and viewer, so that the coldness that is often the problem with Neo-Classical scenes remains a dominant impression. That is not a problem and even an advantage for scenes of epic heroism, but less indicated for a theme of grief. The lack of empathy of the viewer is nothing more than also the painter's lack of empathy, which we can somewhat feel also in the way Pilliard showed Sarah. Sarah is dead but he shows her breast, and lies like an oriental beauty, whereas he could have covered her and shown her more in the drama of her powerless death.

### *Jacob in Canaan*

The sons of Jacob were now twelve. Jacob reached Mamre where Isaac lived. His father was one hundred and eighty years old when he died. His sons Jacob and Esau buried him. Esau left far from Canaan and from his brother Jacob and went to live with his three wives and five sons in Seir. Esau settled in the mountainous region of Seir and was called Edom. Esau's descendants reigned as kings in Edom before an Israelite king.

But Jacob settled in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.<sup>G38</sup>

### *Other paintings:*

**Jacob and Rachel at the Well.** Spanish School, Francisco Collantes (1599-1656). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

**Jacob and Rachel at the Well.** The Master of the Twelve Apostles (Giacomo Panicciani?). First half 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara.

**Jacob's Dream.** José de Ribera (1591-1652). Museo del Prado – Madrid. 1639.

**Jacob's Dream.** Marc Chagall (1887-1985). Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1960-1966.

**Jacob's Dream.** Arent de Gelder (1645-1727). Dulwich picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1662-1664.

**Jacob's Vision.** Donato Creti (1681-1749). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

**Jacob's Ladder.** Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1577/1578.

**Allegory of Spinning, Weaving and Lace-making. Jacob's Dream.** Gerolamo da Ponte called Gerolamo Bassano (1566-1621). The Prague Castle Gallery – Prague.

**Jacob at Laban's House.** Jean Restout II (?). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen – Rouen. 1720.

**Jacob with Laban and his Daughters.** Claude Gellée called le Lorrain (1604-1682). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1676.

**The Departure of Jacob.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). Nationalmuseum – Stockholm.

**The Departure of Jacob for Mesopotamia.** Giovanni Francesco Castiglione (attributed to, 1641-1716). Castle of Fontainebleau.

**Laban searching for his Idols in Jacob's Baggage.** Laurent de la Hyre (1606-1656). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1647.

**Laban in Search of the Terafin.** Jan Jansz. Van Brochorst (1627-1656). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

**The Return of Jacob with his Family.** Jacopo Bassano. The Doge's Palace, Sala dell' Anticollegio – Venice.

**Jacob fights with the Angel.** Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. Around 1850-1860.

**Jacob fights with the Angel.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1659-1660.

## *Joseph*

### *Joseph's story*

Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, for he was the son of his old age. But Joseph was not well loved by his brothers. Joseph brought to his father bad reports about his brothers. Furthermore, he had strange dreams about himself and his brothers. He had a dream when he was seventeen years old, in which he saw himself and his brothers binding sheaves in the fields. He saw how the sheaves of his brothers bowed to his own sheaf. In another dream he saw the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. His brothers understood well the dreams, and they came to hate Joseph. They could not say a civil word to him.

One day, when Joseph's brothers went to pasture Jacob's flock at Shechem, Jacob sent Joseph out to them to hear how they were doing. Joseph found his brothers at Dothan. The brothers saw him coming from a distance and they discussed a plot to kill him. Reuben pleaded not to murder Joseph themselves. So when Joseph arrived, they only caught hold of him and threw him in a well. The well was empty; there was no water in it. Then the brothers sat down to eat. Looking up, they saw a group of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead with camels loaded with goods they were taking to Egypt. Judah proposed to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Some Midianite merchants were passing and they pulled Joseph out of the well. They sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites and these men took Joseph to Egypt.

Reuben had proposed to throw Joseph in a well because he intended to save Joseph and restore him to his father. But when Reuben came now to the well, Joseph was gone. Reuben tore his clothes in distress, wondering what he was going to do. They took Joseph's tunic, a decorative tunic that Jacob had given him, slaughtered a goat and they dripped the tunic in the blood. They brought then the tunic to Jacob. When Jacob saw the blooded tunic he cried out that a wild animal had devoured Joseph. Jacob mourned his son for many days.

Meanwhile, the Midianites had sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and commander of the guard. Potiphar was very pleased with Joseph for Yahweh was with Joseph so that he was successful in everything he undertook. Potiphar made Joseph his attendant and put him in charge of his household, entrusting him with all his possessions.<sup>G38</sup>

### **Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar**

Lionello Spada (1576-1622). Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille. 1615/1620.

Joseph was well built and handsome. Potiphar's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and wanted Joseph to sleep with her. But Joseph refused. Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not agree to sleep with her.

One day Potiphar's wife even caught hold of him by his tunic and again enticed him to sleep with her. But Joseph left the tunic in her hands and fled.

Potiphar's wife then ran out screaming to her servants that Joseph had burst in on her. She said she had screamed and Joseph had left his tunic beside her and ran out of the house. When she told the same story to her husband, Potiphar had Joseph arrested and committed to the goal where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept.<sup>G38</sup>

Many painters made fine works on the theme of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Here could be painted a sensuous scene, and one that was not so common, for contrary to the mythological Venus who seduced men into action merely by looking alluringly, and contrary to so many pure women that were seduced by men, Potiphar's wife had actively pursued a virtuous male. Traditional roles were inverted in this story.

Scenes in which women seduced men like that made one remind of prostitutes, of women of light morality. The pictures would be licentious scenes certainly to be condemned by good manners and the clergy. But when such a scene had actually happened in the Bible, once could frown but hardly object to its representation. Moreover, such pictures could then be commissioned safely by cardinals who were official leaders of the Church community and who had to guarantee the moral example of the clergy, but who were also wise men. These cardinals were silently tolerable of certain worldly morals, as they were always reticent of drawing religion into unbearable extremes of chastity. They of course sometimes had their own mistresses, flaunted them more or less openly, and they also without doubt liked to share the piquant of a pious but sensual picture with an educated and respected lady.

Lionello Spada (1576-1622) was a Bolognese artist. He knew the great tradition of the Carracci family and their academy. Spada's Maecenas was the Cardinal Alessandro d'Este of Modena. The Spada picture we present was made for this cardinal that Spada had met in Rome.<sup>F4</sup> Spada delivered an elegant picture, not entirely in the Bolognese style, for Caravaggio's vision of the art also had entered Roman fashions.

The Carraccis of Bologna had installed a very classicist view of the visual arts. Lionello Spada painted just a few figures, here only Joseph and Potiphar's wife, which was in line with what the Carraccis taught. The picture certainly conveys a moral message and was intended for a devote public. But Spada understood well what the cardinal wanted: a picture to adorn a Maecenas' refined private collection, a picture that could ravish attention, but also not one that was so austere as to cool off rapidly the interest of the higher-class audience gathered in the cardinal's halls. Still, Spada had to make a painting for a cardinal. So he showed an image that was all soft desire, a picture of longing and sweet seduction, as of a soul longing for heavenly paradise. Well, ... more or less.

There is no hard sexual urgency in Potiphar's wife in this picture. She does not lie challenging in the nude on her bed, attracting Joseph. There is no tough battle against the seduction in Joseph. Spada only dared to show a naked leg in Potiphar's wife, and a bare shoulder. But for that, Potiphar's wife remains completely dressed. She grasps Joseph, but the expression on her face is one of imploring the pity and sympathy of Joseph. She is begging Joseph to hear her out, more than to come to her. The way she

clings to Joseph is not an act of a sensual woman in the heat of passion, but the grasping of a human being desiring merely love and tenderness. Therefore there is no nudity. And even if Joseph loses his cloak, he will escape far from naked from the room.

Joseph is an angel. He just passes by and does not heed much attention. He passes by, and holds the hand of the woman more than he refuses it. But he is indeed an angel, a boy with angelic looks. He is too beautiful and too young, too preoccupied with other things but the earthly pleasures to understand fully what the woman wants. This angel has no wings, but his brown cloak floats in the wind like wings. The artist made a very intelligent, elegant, wise picture. Lionello Spada gave a meaning that suited a cardinal's collection. He provided thus an interpretation of the theme that was surprising and respectable, so that the most fervent Catholic critic could object nothing, and he gave a new view of the theme.

Spada as a painter was an excellent technician. His painting is full of movement, for which he applied the slant lines Caravaggio used so much as the basis of his designs. Spada had rapidly absorbed the innovations of this great master and he applied the contrasts between dark and light intelligently, with discernment, in his picture. He used the effect, but stayed in the clear message of his Carracci teachers. Spada used Caravaggio's warm colours. He built his picture merely in blue and brown, even if that were dark blue and dark brown in Joseph and almost white and golden in Potiphar's wife. Spada worked diligently at the folds of the robes of Joseph and the woman, at their shadows in a light that seems to come from the lower left. This technique allowed the artist to create the volumes. Spada was as skilful a painter as the best of his century.

But the major effect that will stay with the viewer is the elegantly flowing movement of the two figures and the longing, supplicating mouth and eyes of Potiphar's wife. This is an eternal scene. Joseph's life was often compared to the life of Jesus. Here Lionello Spada painted also a 'Noli me Tangere', 'Do not touch me' lest I be forced to stay. In doing this, this lesser known artist entered his work in a gallery of great pictures.

### *Joseph in Egypt*

Yahweh did not forsake Joseph in prison. Soon, the chief gaoler put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. So, Joseph came to meet in prison Pharaoh's cupbearer and Pharaoh's baker. Pharaoh was angry with them and had put them in custody in the goal where also Joseph was a prisoner.

The cupbearer and the baker each had a dream. Joseph interpreted the dreams. He said that Pharaoh would lift the head of the cupbearer in three days and restore him to his position. But to the baker Joseph said that Pharaoh would also lift his head in three days, however by hanging him on a gallows. And so it happened. But contrary to what

he had promised, the cupbearer did not remember Joseph when he left prison and forgot about him.<sup>G38</sup>

Two years later it happened that Pharaoh had a dream. He saw seven cows, sleek and fat coming up from the Nile and then seven cows, wretched and lean. The wretched and lean cows devoured and ate the seven sleek and fat cows. Pharaoh had another dream. He saw on one stalk seven ears of grain, full and ripe. Sprouting up behind then came seven meagre ears of grain. These swallowed the seven full and ripe ears. All of Pharaoh's magicians and wise men could not interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Then the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph. He talked to Pharaoh about what had happened in goal and how Joseph had interpreted his own dream and fate. Pharaoh then sent for Joseph.

Pharaoh explained to Joseph what dreams he had had recently. Joseph said to Pharaoh that the two dreams had the same meaning. Joseph interpreted that seven years were coming, bringing great plenty to the whole of Egypt. But then seven years of famine would follow them; He proposed to Pharaoh to take action and appoint supervisors for the country, to impose special taxes during the years of plenty and to store the grain under Pharaoh's authority keeping it as a reserve for the seven years of famine. Pharaoh and all the ministers approved of what Joseph had said.

Pharaoh saw that Joseph was endowed with the spirit of God. He appointed Joseph as his chancellor. Joseph was to be governor of the whole of Egypt. Pharaoh gave him his ring. He dressed Joseph in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. Pharaoh named Joseph then Zaphenath-Paneah and he gave Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife.<sup>G38</sup>

Joseph travelled throughout the length and breadth of Egypt. He collected food during the seven years of abundance and stored it in Pharaoh's storerooms. Before the years of famine came Joseph had two sons with Asenath. He called the first Manasseh and the youngest Ephraim. After seven years came the famine. People came to Egypt from all over the world to get supplies from Joseph, and Joseph opened the granaries of Pharaoh and rationed out the grain.

In Canaan, Jacob also lived in the famine. Seeing that there were only supplies to be had in Egypt, he sent out his sons, Joseph's brothers, to Egypt, except Benjamin the youngest. Joseph's brothers went and they were among the people trying to get supplies from Pharaoh's governor.

The brothers bowed down deeply to Joseph. Joseph recognised them, but they did not recognise him. Joseph remembered his dreams then. Joseph did not make himself known and he spoke harshly to them. He told the men he suspected they were spies. They replied that they were all sons of the same man in Canaan but had left their youngest brother with their father. Joseph put them all in custody for three days. Then he had them brought before him. He told them one brother would have to stay in prison and he chose out Simeon for that. The other brothers would have to leave for Canaan and fetch their youngest brother to prove that what they had said was true. Joseph gave them grain and he filled their baskets, returned even their money and sent them back to Canaan.



When Jacob's sons arrived in Canaan they told Jacob that the governor of Egypt wanted them to bring Benjamin to Egypt as a proof that they were honest men. Then Simeon would be released from prison and could, as all, move freely about in the country. But Jacob despaired. He did not want to listen. He said Joseph was gone, and also Simeon. He did not want to bear also the brunt of losing Benjamin.

But the famine in Canaan grew worse. Then Israel could not refuse any longer. He sent his sons again on their way to Egypt. He loaded their baggage with the best products of Canaan: balsam, honey, gum trafacarth, resin, pistachio nuts and almonds and he gave them double the amount of money they had taken the first voyage. The brothers set off again. Benjamin accompanied them.<sup>G38</sup>

The men arrived in Egypt and were brought before Joseph once more. They offered him the gifts at his house. Joseph invited them to have a meal together for he was much affected at the sight of his younger brother. They feasted with him and drank freely. Then Joseph instructed his chamberlain to fill the men's sacks with grain but also to hide his silver cup in the sack of the youngest brother.

The brothers left with their donkeys fully loaded. After a while Joseph sent out his chamberlain to catch up with the caravan and to search their sacks, saying that a silver cup was stolen. The chamberlain reached the brothers. He told them they were suspected of theft and that the one on whom the cup would be found would become his slave, the rest to be set free. The cup was found on Benjamin.

The brothers protested now. Judah spoke out and all returned to Joseph. Judah talked to Joseph for all the brothers. He said their father Jacob would grieve atrociously for Benjamin. Judah told that if they returned without Benjamin, Jacob would surely die. Judah spoke with many words and pleaded passionately. Then Joseph could not control his feelings any longer. He sent away his servants and when he was alone with his brothers he made himself known to them.<sup>G38</sup>

Joseph forgave his brothers. He told them this was all God's doing so that he, Joseph, could preserve their lives in the famine and thus assure the survival of their race on earth. Joseph revealed that this was only the second year of the famine and that five more years of hardships were to come to the world.

News reached the Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had arrived. Pharaoh ordained Joseph to load his brothers' beasts with grain and to hurry them away to Canaan. He told, 'Fetch your father and your families and come back to me. I will give you the best territory in Egypt, where you will live off the fat of the land.' So the brothers left Egypt, loaded with food and rich presents.

When his sons arrived in Canaan with all Pharaoh's wagons, Jacob was stunned. And when he heard from them what had happened and that Joseph was alive and well, he decided to go to Joseph and see him back before his death. So, Israel set out with his possessions, as Pharaoh had proposed.

Arriving at Beersheba, Jacob offered sacrifices to God and to his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel, 'I am El, God of your father. Do not be afraid of going to Egypt for I will make you into a great nation there. I will bring you back again. Joseph's

hand will close your eyes.’ Jacob really left Canaan then without hesitation. He sent Judah ahead of him to announce his coming to Joseph. When he heard his father was arriving, Joseph took his chariot and drove it to Goshen to meet his father there. He threw himself in his arms and both wept for a long time.

Joseph brought his father and presented him to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was clement once again and offered Israel to stay in the best part of the country in the region of Rameses. Thus Israel settled in Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They grew numerous, were fruitful and they acquired property there.

When Jacob’s time to die had come, he made Joseph promise him to carry him back to Canaan and bury him there, and not in an Egyptian tomb. When Jacob was taken ill and in his last moments, Joseph took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim to Jacob. Jacob blessed the children. Jacob told these children would be his, as much as were Reuben and Simeon. Israel laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, his left on the head of Manasseh. Joseph wanted to change that for Manasseh was the elder, but Israel told he knew. Manasseh would grow into a great nation, but Jacob predicted the younger brother would be greater, his offspring sufficient to constitute nations. Then Jacob bade farewell to his sons, who would make up the twelve tribes of Israel, giving each an appropriate blessing. He gave them his instructions to bury him in the cave of Machpelah, and died.<sup>G38</sup>

### *The Borgherini Panels*

#### **Joseph led to Prison. Joseph presents his Brothers and his Father to Pharaoh**

Francesco Granacci (1477-1543). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1515.

#### **Episodes of the Life of Joseph the Hebrew, Canaan and Egypt**

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530). Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina – Florence. 1515.

#### **Joseph sold to Potiphar. Pharaoh with his Butler and Baker. Joseph’s Brothers beg for Help. Joseph with Jacob in Egypt.**

Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1557). The National Gallery – London. 1515 and 1518.

#### **Joseph receives his Brothers. Joseph pardons his Brothers.**

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557). The National Gallery – London. 1515.

#### **The Sale of Joseph, The Arrest of his Brothers, The Search for the Stolen Cup, The Finding of the Stolen Cup.**

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557). The Borghese Gallery – Rome. 1515.

In 1515 Pier Francesco Borgherini, a wealthy nobleman of Florence furnished an apartment of his Borgherini Palace with fine panelling, chests, chairs and a bed all carved in walnut wood by Baccio d’Agnolo.<sup>G46</sup> Giorgio Vasari tells in his ‘Lives of the Artists’ that the Borgherini wanted to ensure that the paintings for these apartments corresponded in excellence to the rest of the palace. Pierfrancesco Borgherini, or perhaps Pierfrancesco’s father Salvi Borgherini, therefore ordered a series of paintings from four Florentine artists. The work was for the marriage apartments of Pier Francesco Borgherini and Margherita Acciaiuoli who was also of

one of the best-known families of Florence. All scenes on the chests and also on the paintings were to be on the themes of the life of Joseph.

Francesco Granacci, sometimes called Granaccio (1477-1543), was then thirty-eight years old. Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530) was twenty-nine. Jacopo Carrucci called da Pontormo (1494-1556) and Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557) were only twenty-one. They were all still very young artists, though well accomplished already. They were all among the very best artists of their generation.

Of course, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) were still alive, but too famous and too far from Florence.

Michelangelo sculpted desperately the tomb of the Rovere Pope Julius II and in 1515 he feverishly worked for the new Medici, Giovanni de' Medici, Pope Leo X.

Michelangelo was quarrying marble for the façade of the Medici church of San Lorenzo in Rome. He quarried in Carrara and Pietrasanta and was thus too occupied to take on a commission in Florence. Besides, Florence was under Medici reign again and one could not compete with a relative of Giuliano de' Medici, especially since the Medici Pope had put Giuliano in command of Florence.

Piero di Cosimo (1461-1521) and Lorenzo di Credi (1459-1537) were definitely of the elder generation and so was Pietro Perugino (1448-1523), whose best period was past. Furthermore, Perugino had left Florence in 1505 for his native Perugia, his reputation slightly damaged. The only other great name of Florentine painting that could have worked at the rooms was Fra Bartolommeo (1472-1517), but he too was not of the new generation, a devote friar of San Marco, and thus maybe not so appropriate to decorate bridal chambers. Fra Bartolommeo was in Rome too for a while, then sick, more and more paralysed on one side of his body, and he would die only a little later than a year after the Borgherini paintings were finished.

Florence in 1515 was in a precarious period of peace. Its history of the end of the previous century had been dramatic.

The ruling Medici family had had to leave the town in 1494 when the French King Charles VIII fought an expedition in the north of Italy. Piero de' Medici obviously did not know how to handle the armies of the French King. The Florentines remarked his weakness, loathed his irresolution, and threw him out of the city. Charles VIII entered Florence. Piero fled the town, accompanied by his brother Giuliano. Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, the most intelligent of the family, fled in monk's clothes. The Republic of Florence was re-installed and the Signoria and its Gonfaloniere della Giustizia ruled once more. During this period, the monk Fra Gerolamo Savonarola became the virtual ruler of Florence until the nobility and the Signoria could take full control again, imprisoned and tortured Savonarola, and finally burnt him publicly in the Piazza della Signoria in 1498. The Signoria then ruled Florence for a few years as a renewed republic. It fought until 1509 a long war to recapture Pisa. The Florentines felt they needed a more stable government than a council of Priors elected for only one year. Piero Soderini was appointed Gonfaloniere for life.

In 1512 Pope Julius II warred once more against the French. His condottieri, plus the Pope's confident for war, Giovanni de' Medici, had a hard time to defeat the French armies, but could accomplish at least the withdrawal of the French to the territories around Milan and Turin. Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, who had diligently supported

the Pope, returned to Florence. The republican Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini, fled the city and abandoned it to the Papal armies, thereby avoiding a bloodbath, as had happened just days earlier to the town of Prato, which had been pillaged and massacred by the mercenary army of the Pope. Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici entered Florence triumphantly with the Pope's army commanded by the Spanish Neapolitan General Raymond of Cordona. Florence received a new constitution. Cardinal Giovanni installed Giuliano de' Medici at the head of the Signoria.

This happened at the time when Michelangelo finished painting the Sistine ceiling in the Vatican. In 1513, the warrior-Pope Julius II died, and Giovanni de' Medici was elected as the new Pope. He chose the name of Leo X, following the example of previous Popes named for great conquerors such as Alexander for Alexander the Great and Julius for Julius Caesar. The name Leo also was a reference for the symbol of Florence, the Marzocco, and lions were still kept in a cage behind the Signoria of the home town of the new Pope.

In 1515 Francis I, King of France attacked the north of Italy, fought the Swiss armies, defeated them at the Battle of Marignano, and took Milan. But Florence was left untouched and at peace. Giuliano de Medici could continue to rule Florence in the protection of the Medici Pope Leo X, who lived until 1521.

Giorgio Vasari writes on various accounts of the Borgherini panels.

He recalls them in the life of Jacopo Pontormo. He told that Jacopo painted panels on the chests, but foremost made a picture that hung in a corner on the left as one entered the living room of the Borgherini.<sup>G46</sup> Vasari gave account of an anecdote about what happened to the paintings later on. The city of Florence was besieged in 1529 after the Signoria had banned once more the Medici and restored republic government under the Gonfaloniere Niccolò Capponi. Pier Francesco Borgherini, who had sided with the Medici, had to leave for Lucca, leaving his wife alone. Giovan Battista della Palla, who had already in the past been an agent of Francis I the King of France, wanted to present to the king in the name of the Signoria the panels of the Borgherini, though he proposed to pay Margherita. But when the party arrived at the house, lady Margherita poured upon Giovan Battista the worst abuse ever offered to any man. She called him a 'low class second-hand dealer, a cheapskate two penny trader' and so on. She showed the bed that was her nuptial bed bought by her father-in-law Salvi, told them that if they wanted to give presents to the King of France they could strip their own houses bare to send him ornaments, and take the beds from their own rooms. The men drooped off, so that the paintings and furnishings remained in Florence.

Vasari also talks on the panels in his life of Andrea del Sarto. Here he said that Andrea made small figures of the stories of Joseph. Andrea devoted an extraordinary amount of time to the paintings so that his scenes would be more perfect as those of Jacopo Pontormo.<sup>G46</sup>

Fourteen panels are extant and currently dispersed over various museums.

The panels of Jacopo Pontormo and two panels of Bachiacca are in the National Gallery of London. These panels of Bachiacca are entitled 'Joseph receives his Brothers on their Second Visit to Egypt' and 'Joseph pardons his Brothers'.

The four paintings of Jacopo Pontormo are 'Joseph sold to Potiphar', 'Pharaoh with his Butler and Baker', 'Joseph's Brothers beg for Help' and finally also 'Joseph with Jacob in Egypt'. This last painting dates from around 1518, so it was made a few years after all other panels.

Four additional panels of Bachiacca are in the Borghese Gallery in Rome: 'The Sale of Joseph', 'The Arrest of his Brothers', 'The Search for the Stolen Cup' and 'The Finding of the Stolen Cup'.

The two large panels of Andrea del Sarto are in the Palatine Gallery of the Pitti Palace in Florence. They are entitled 'Episodes from the Life of Joseph'. These panels were the ones particularly sought after by Francis I of France, but bought in 1584 by Grand-Duke Francesco I de Medici and exhibited in the Tribune of the Uffizi Gallery, from where a century later they were brought to the Medici's private palace, the Pitti Palace.<sup>115</sup>

The two panels by Francesco Granacci are in the Uffizi. These have as titles 'Joseph presents his Father and Brothers to Pharaoh' and 'Joseph led to the Prison'.

The Granacci and the Bachiacca panels are somewhat less interesting for art history than the paintings of del Sarto and Jacopo Pontormo.

### *The Granacci paintings*

Francesco Granacci, who was originally also known as Francesco d'Andrea di Marco, was a student of Domenico Ghirlandaio. He painted in Ghirlandaio's workshop and thus he saw also Michelangelo Buonarroti arrive there, when Michelangelo made his first apprenticeship in painting. Granacci became a youth friend of Michelangelo. Michelangelo left Ghirlandaio's workshop early because he wanted to sculpt, but Granacci remained and stayed on as assistant to Ghirlandaio. Later, in 1498, Michelangelo engaged Granacci to help him on the Sistine ceiling. But Michelangelo soon dismissed all assistants, and Granacci returned to Florence. Granacci worked then alone as a painter and received commissions like the panels for the Borgherini rooms. He did not have the personality of an innovator in art, and he continued to work on examples he had seen from Ghirlandaio, Perugino and Fra Bartolommeo. Few pictures remain of this lesser known artist.

Pietro Perugino had left Florence in 1505, but his sublime images were not forgotten. Francesco Granacci remembered Perugino's views of the vast open squares in which this artist situated his major scenes such as the 'Marriage of the Virgin' (now in the Museum of Caen) or the 'Presentation of the Keys to Saint Peter' (in the Sistine Chapel).

Granacci's painting 'Joseph presents his Father and Brothers to Pharaoh' is made entirely in the composition and style of Perugino. Granacci used also tempera painting on the wood panels, whereas the other artists applied oil painting. The ideal of an open space where notables of an imaginary town meet to walk and discuss politics and trade can be found immediately in Granacci's scene. This was the ideal of living in an urban environment as the ancient Greek philosophers and their views were re-discovered in the beginning of the Florentine Renaissance. Granacci thus imitated

Perugino, and painted in line with the atmosphere of admiration of an idea of classical art that was a hallmark of Florence in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Perugino, and hence also Granacci, were painters of the tradition of the Renaissance, not really of the High Renaissance, the period of the first half of the sixteenth century, even though Granacci modernised his style after 1510, after having helped for a few months Michelangelo at transferring the cartoons for the Sistine ceiling.

On the left of the panel Joseph intercedes between the men of the court of Pharaoh and his father and brothers. Granacci did not know much of Egypt except the story in the Bible, and anyway the story of Joseph had to be recognised by the Florentine citizens, so he represented the Egyptian court much as Florentine court of his own times. Pharaoh wears a heavy beard, always a sign of wisdom and nobility for the Italians, and Pharaoh in the Bible story was a wise potentate. Pharaoh wears a headdress that is more Persian than Egyptian, but this detail adds the oriental note that was needed to situate the scene. The court that accompanies Pharaoh is dressed as Florentines were. On the other side of Joseph are Jacob and his eleven sons. They have come with their shepherds' staffs and kneel in front of Pharaoh, for they have a plea and they stay at a respectable distance. Further to the right and in the middle background, Granacci painted other 'Egyptians'. They point in surprise to the left scene, so that the viewer's attention is directed back again to the left, to Joseph, in this long panel.

Remark the beautiful landscape in the background. Perugino had also painted a thin blue line of a landscape at the end of his 'Marriage of the Virgin', but nothing like the lush view that Granacci added. Landscape painting had become more fashionable, though still indeed as background. Granacci painted mostly in ochre hues, but his picture may have been more colourful when he made it. The tempera technique Granacci used may have faded his colours on the wood. Still, some of the remaining bright tones indicate the skills in harmony of colours of Granacci, and also other known panels of this painter show his preference for the soft pastel yellow-born hues. On or near wooden chests, these colours would have better suited in the rooms of the Borgherini.

### *The panels of Bachiacca*

In the right part of the National Gallery panel 'Joseph pardons his Brothers' of Bachiacca, Joseph receives his brothers. They abjectly kneel and deeply bow to the ground before him. Joseph reveals himself as their brother and he pardons them. In the left scene, the brothers are led to Joseph. Benjamin, the brother of the same mother and the youngest, is brought in as a prisoner.

In the middle scene of the picture 'Joseph receives his brothers on their Second Visit to Egypt', Joseph's brothers present gifts to him, as if he were an Egyptian prince who holds their fate in his hands. On the left one can see Joseph's brothers advancing into Egypt, respectfully bringing the gifts of Jacob. On the right the brothers leave again. They have not recognised Joseph as their brother.

'Joseph receives his Brothers' is an interesting picture when looked at as an evolution from Francesco Granacci to Andrea del Sarto. Bachiacca used the Perugino hexagonal temple, a structure that this painter depicted several times, but he did not anymore

show this architecture in the far, as Perugino had done. Bachiacca brought the temple to the foreground, and Joseph thrones in the middle of it. Bachiacca brought thus the horizon much closer to the viewer, involving the spectator more directly in the picture. The figures all cover the foreground, so that there is no landscape or wide square anymore in the back. The figures receive full attention, and move before us as if in a parade. Indeed, the timeline is respected from left to right, since the brothers arrive, are received, and leave again.

The temple building is in the foreground and it is filled with people. As a result, the elevated sense of cosmic space is gone, an effect eagerly sought by Perugino, and replaced with the intimacy of figures. The viewer is placed close to the action, amidst the crowd that fills the panel. This feeling of togetherness is different, but not less interesting or less nice than the Perugino image. It gives a much more human and warm feeling to the viewer, and creates a more sympathetic symbiosis between artist and spectator. We almost are led into believing we are in a marketplace amidst the bustle of sellers and buyers. If these panels were in a living room, they must have given a sense of warm presence in the room, so that even a lonely visitor would have felt accompanied.

Remark how intelligently Bachiacca painted a landscape symmetrically on the left and right of the panels, and how skilfully he used the little free space he had in the long panels to generate yet a sense of far lands. The landscape also is painted in all fine details. Vasari told how Bachiacca took delight in painting little figures and later in depicting grotesques.<sup>G46</sup> The figures are placed with this landscape in an imaginary universe. These details are the ones by which Bachiacca communicated the dignity of the Bible story.

Bachiacca took an obvious delight in presenting his figures. And so do we. He was a lesser-known artist, but what he did on the two Borgherini panels is remarkable. All figures are in different natural poses and all are in movement. On the left the donkeys are being relieved of their packs and the gifts are being brought to the middle, to be presented to Joseph. All is life, but strangely enclosed within the concern for the scene itself and for the work that is going on. None of the figures look at the viewer; none tries to attract his or her gaze into the scene. The scene is confined to itself, happily committed to its own life and although the story is so warmly close to us, we remain on the outside, as neutral spectators, and the viewers remain excluded from the scene. The scene is oblivious of the viewer. Even Joseph does not look straight at the viewer; he looks sideways. Therefore the spectator is kept at a distance, and the scene may give an impression of coldness. We remain unfulfilled. We forget that these scenes were probably painted for chests, which indeed were set in a closed, intimate and private space with a life of its own.

Granacci painted one scene but Bachiacca combined three scenes in one. Bachiacca gave much more attention to the figures so that the viewer is interested in the lively scene. Bachiacca also used much brighter colours, and he painted in oil on the wood. The pure colours make a wonderful cortège of the most splendid Renaissance dresses. The figures of the panel are all in movement, so that this picture gives a very different sight than the static, frozen impression of Granacci's painting.

Bachiacca thus seems a more accomplished artist than Granacci. Bachiacca knew how to take traditional images of Florentine art and to adapt them in an innovative,

personal view. All his figures are harmoniously assembled in a lively, natural long scene in which all figures are in different movements and in which also animals are depicted. Thereby the painter wonderfully used the dimensions of the panels he had. Few paintings of Bacciacca have survived, but we see here a painter with much skill and imagination, who also dared to show his personal idea on the scenes of Joseph.

Bacciacca wonderfully distributed his colours to a harmonious whole. A far comparison with pictures of Fra Angelico might come to mind when we look at the delicacy of these hues. Bacciacca painted equally in very light, pure tones: pure red, blue, green and even golden. But his colour surfaces are always small, and he painted the clothes in all details of folds and in endless patterns of colours varying with the shadows of the light.

One can detect horizontal symmetries in the colours on both sides of the temple. Look for instance to the edges of the frame or the edges of the temple and to the colours that are used there.

Bacciacca made a marvel of the two panels, entirely in the Florentine style of rational composition and clarity of design in line and form. He first drew complex scene of all the figures with well-designed contours, and then he filled in the surfaces with his wonderful colours. His colours are bright and Bacciacca let a bright sun shine from the left, so that he could sharply mark the shadows on the temple, enhancing the effect of space and volume. In such a long and small panel this is almost genial skill.

Bacciacca's second panel of the National Gallery, 'Joseph pardons his Brothers', is equally wonderful. Here Bacciacca showed that he was really as good a landscape painter as the best Flemish or German artists. We remark again the same symmetry and the open space in the 'V' form, as he applied in the first panel. But he gave still more attention to the landscape, which represents a river in the middle and two valley flanks to left and right. Again, the soft harmonious colours and the details of this landscape are marvellous. In the figures, Bacciacca varied his tones. Whereas in the first panel the red tones dominate, here that dominance was granted to the olive greens.

It is only after having well looked at the details of Bacciacca's two panels of the National Gallery that we start to understand why the Borgherini rooms had panels by a lesser name as Bacciacca. The artist was still young, but Pier Francesco Borgherini must have known of the great potential of this artist. We can only regret that Bacciacca did not perfect the skills he showed in the two Joseph panels, and that so few other works have come to us of this artist. Bacciacca's panels however were not less worthy than the works of the other three artists.

Four of the panels on the life of Joseph the Egyptian made by Bacciacca have entered the collection of Cardinal Scipione Borghese and are now in the Borghese Gallery in Rome. It is not known how the panels arrived there, but they seem to have been already in Rome in 1650 when they were mentioned by Giacomo Manilli.<sup>140</sup> The panels relate the sale of Joseph, the arrest of his brothers, the search for the stolen cup and its finding. The panels are rather small and seem to have been located in the lower level of the Borgherini- Acciaiuoli bridal rooms.



The first panel in the Borghese collection relates the Sale of Joseph, an early episode in Joseph's life, whereas the other panels represent various episodes of the story of the stolen cup leading to the arrest of the brothers. They show each a different set of figures and form by that a different class. Still, there are similarities. The Sale of Joseph and the Arrest contain four figures. The two other panels have many more figures in them. So, although the first panel is on another episode than the three others, it makes with the second a visual symmetry as compared to the two other panels, so that the positioning of the paintings was probably more visually striking on the walls in the Borgherini rooms.

Bachiacca used warm and bright colours: a pink going to red, golden yellow, green with golden folds and a greyish blue lined with white. In the three paintings on the scenes of the Stolen Cup appears a man dressed with a wide brimmed hat. This man searches for the cup, seems to have found it and arrests the brothers. Bachiacca may have suggested that this was Joseph himself, disguised with a wide hat, the more so since in the first panel the young Joseph is shown also dressed in a pink-red robe. All the figures are nicely painted and they are in vivid action. Bachiacca presented the scenes in such a way that they can be easily recognised. Also the symmetry of colours in the three last scenes of the Stolen Cup is the same: yellow-golden to the left, red in the middle and blue on the right. This allows the viewer to classify each panel as belonging to its group. In the first panel, the order is reversed and slightly modified in hues: blue-purple is painted to the left, a yellow-red in the middle and a brown-yellow on the right. A painter that has thus thought of indicating differences of scene but similarities in visual effects had to be a master artist. Bachiacca certainly was that. He handled the panels graciously in fine detail. The landscapes in the background are nicely composed and drawn with minute attention.

In the 'Arrest of Joseph's Brothers' Bachiacca even painted a personage disappearing into a panel, thus creating illusion of a space hidden behind the wooden frame. Viewers such as the Borgherini couple might have amused themselves at discovering other small details, such as how the figures move from one position to another in the various panels. Indeed, in the three last paintings Bachiacca represented the same figures, in the same clothes and wearing the same hats, but in different places and poses. The paintings are thus not only a visual delight, but also a delight for the curiosity of interested viewers.

### *The panels of Andrea del Sarto*

Andrea del Sarto was ten years younger than Francesco Granacci. In his two panels, so devotedly painted taking enough patient time, del Sarto recalled many scenes of the Bible stories of Joseph. Granacci showed only one scene in each of his panels. Del Sarto made a countryside painting, which we will call the 'Canaan' panel and a city view, which we will call the 'Egypt' panel, for these paintings also refer to these sites and to these parts of the stories. The Egypt panel refers to the life of Joseph in Egypt, but like Granacci, the buildings show a Florentine Renaissance setting. The many figures of the two del Sarto panels are also dressed as Florentines, but for a few details that denote the oriental side.

In the Canaan panel of Andrea del Sarto, one can see mainly stories of the crime of Jacob's sons. In the foreground, Jacob and Rachel are talking. Rachel's son and brother to Joseph, Benjamin, points to a scene of the background. Benjamin walks towards the well in which Joseph's brothers have thrown Joseph to drown in, and where they all are discussing his fate. There is thus no unity of time, since various scenes that happened at different moments of time are shown in the same picture. Andrea Del Sarto tried to bring a spatial line in the narratives. Benjamin points to the start of the stories. A bit further than the scene of the well, Joseph's brothers sell him to travellers on their way to Egypt. Then we should look at the imposing promontory of the background, the hill with trees that Andrea del Sarto majestically placed in the middle of the panel. Here Reuben kills a sheep and drenches Joseph's cloak in the blood. Then he descends the hill with the reddened cloak. This scene makes one think of course of Golgotha, also a hill outside Jerusalem.

Jesus Christ was crucified on the hilly site of Golgotha, and Jesus was represented in the Middle Ages as the slaughtered Lamb of God. Del Sarto succeeded in combining Joseph's story and the symbols of the death of Jesus. Therefore the hill mounts to the heavens in his panel. The story of Joseph bears much parallel likeness to the passion of Jesus. Joseph was betrayed and thrown in a well. Jesus also was betrayed. Pharaoh imprisoned Joseph. Caiaphas imprisoned Jesus. A lamb was slaughtered to redden Joseph's cloak. Jesus was compared to the Lamb of God. Joseph had to flee from the seduction by the wife of Potiphar, whereas Mary Magdalene was a converted harlot. Joseph interceded for his brothers to Pharaoh, while Jesus interceded for all mankind to God the Father.

This likeness between the two stories, in which Middle Age theologians saw mystic parallels, may be the reason why Pier Francesco Borgherini ordered the paintings of Joseph. Many pictures of Jesus's passion in one living room might have been too directly religious and shown too many cruel scenes, which might have hurt the sensitivity of Margherita Acciaiuoli. Pictures of the life of Joseph could be more picturesque, less obvious than pictures of Christ, and could give the owner of the house a status of intellectual for seeing the symbolic parallels. That may be the reason why the series on the life of Joseph is a not so rare subject in the Italian Cinquecento, a period in which few pictures were made of the Old Testament. The parallel can in particular be seen in the Granacci picture, where Joseph is depicted as the incorporation of Jesus.

In the right foreground of Andrea del Sarto's painting, Reuben shows the bloodied cloak of Joseph to Jacob. Jacob tears at his garments. On the left foreground is the home of Jacob. Here the family weeps over Joseph's presumed death and over the coming famine. Benjamin also can always easily be found.

Del Sarto's paintings are in beautiful colours, subdued and yet bright and contrasting, so that the scenes and figures stand well out from the background. The figures can be recognised because they keep the same clothes in the same colours throughout the various scenes. So we can easily follow Jacob, Benjamin and Reuben. Reuben can be seen in almost all the scenes: he wears a red robe, a wide hat, and a yellow short cloak on the shoulders.

Del Sarto and Granacci tell stories. But remark the difference in vision. Granacci uses Perugino's elevated image of the imaginary, ideal Town Square that inspires feelings of the sublime. But this figure was now a traditional one. Perugino had used the image several times already and Raphael, a Perugino student, had copied it. Granacci's figures are static, moving yet poised as if in a halted dream, caught in a moment of slow motion. Granacci's picture shows the grace of old Florence, the dignity and the aspirations of the Renaissance. But the picture remains an ideal, far from Florentine reality. And Granacci did not innovate nor did he show his own personality. He remained traditional and also painted but one scene.

Del Sarto also did not reject traditional views on the art of painting, and he certainly continued the Florentine tradition of giving prominence to drawing, lines and form over colour. But we detect an evolution, which makes historians call this period the High Renaissance. Del Sarto introduces a liveliness that forebodes the Baroque. His figures are all in motion and more expressive. Even when the persons are talking and standing still, their arms and hands move. In the front scene of the Canaan picture, Benjamin is all nervousness and impatience. He is pointing to the crime scene of the well. Del Sarto liked to tell much of the life of Joseph, and so capture the interest of his viewers. So he showed many scenes and diligently combined these in the space of his panel in a fluent timeline. As we saw, he made obvious the parallels between Joseph and Jesus in an intelligent way. He brought the various stories in a well-balanced composition. Thus in front are three scenes, presented in a symmetric way around the centre family scene. By depicting his figures in smaller dimensions higher on the panel, he created perspective and a vast panorama. Del Sarto created an illusion of a very wide landscape in his Canaan panel.

Joseph is not present at all in the Canaan picture, Del Sarto succeeds in hinting at Joseph's presence, so that although invisible Joseph becomes present in the panel but only in our minds.

In the Egypt panel of Andrea del Sarto, Joseph takes part in various scenes. Joseph is imprisoned, he leads his father in, and in a final scene Joseph kneels before Jacob and reveals who he really is. On the left are a small scene of a bedchamber and a splendid small image of a nude man. This may be a reference to the bridal room for which the picture was made, and a reference also to the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in which Joseph had to flee away nude.

The evolution from Granacci to Del Sarto is obvious. Granacci showed the Platonic ideal of elevated concepts. Del Sarto brings the viewer back to reality. Granacci represented an ideal, whereas Del Sarto told stories in a more expressive way, and introduced symbols in a subtle way. Granacci's message is simple; del Sarto's messages are dense. Both artists transported the stories into their own times and dressed the actors in Renaissance attire. But del Sarto's aim was not to depict refined courtiers. He told many but simple stories of everyday people.

In these paintings landscapes obtained ever more importance, and that may have been under the influence of northern art. In the Granacci picture the landscape is far behind. Perugino also reduced his landscape behind the temple to a thin blue line of far hills. Granacci emphasised it already more and added details of trees and fields. Del Sarto developed the landscape as an important element of the symbolism of his Canaan

picture, since the central promontory recalls Golgotha. He too finished trees and bushes of the hills in all detail. He gave much more attention to nature, and honoured it with minuscule details.

### *The four paintings of Jacopo Pontormo*

Jacopo Pontormo made his pictures for the Borgherini Palace when he was twenty-one years old. He had studied with the best masters of Florence, starting with Leonardo da Vinci. He learned his profession with Piero di Cosimo and with Mariotto Albertinelli. When he was eighteen years old, around 1512, he entered the workshop of Andrea del Sarto but he had left Andrea already when the Borgherini rooms were furnished. Pontormo never stayed long with one and the same master and he was known as a good artist at very young age.

Giorgio Vasari wrote in his 'Lives' that Andrea del Sarto worked to make his pictures better than the ones of the other artists. But we may doubt on whether del Sarto made his pictures after Pontormo, to compete with his erstwhile pupil. Moreover, we are certain that Pontormo made his 'Joseph in Egypt' panel two to three years later than the other paintings of the Borgherini apartment. Was in fact not Vasari competing with Pontormo and denigrating his competitor?

In 'Joseph sold to Potiphar', the scene shows Joseph as a young boy standing before his new master, Potiphar the Egyptian. On the left are the Ishmaelites who sold Joseph, grappling for their payment. Pontormo painted Roman statues on high columns in his pictures. Here he painted a statue of charity and may have emphasised the moral message of the Bible story. In 'Pharaoh with his Butler and Baker', Pontormo showed the butler descending the stairs to be saved whereas the baker is brutally taken from his cell and then on the lower left led to his execution. 'Joseph's brothers beg for Help' is a smaller and longer panel. One sees Joseph seated on a parade car and his brothers knelt before him, begging for food. On the right in this panel the opulence of Joseph's good management is seen for people wear the sacks of wheat on their shoulders. This panel is inscribed with the words in Latin for 'Behold the Saviour of the World' and 'Behold the Salvation of the World'. This is a reference, this time of Pontormo, to 'Ecce Salvator Mundi' or 'I am the Saviour of the World', one of the titles of Jesus Christ.

The four panels made by Pontormo are in the same style, but his last picture, 'Joseph in Egypt', is the most accomplished.

Jacopo Pontormo was much inspired by the Canaan picture of del Sarto for his own last and largest panel of 'Joseph in Egypt'. Pontormo painted here on the left the episode where Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh. On the right foreground Joseph is seated on a parade cart and he listens to someone who is giving him a petition. The parade car could be seen as an extraordinary extravagancy here. But Giorgio Vasari himself talks in his 'Lives of the Artists' and in particular in the life of Andrea del Sarto of such parades and cortèges.<sup>G46</sup>

Vasari recounts how in the same year 1515 when the Borgherini panels were made, Giovanni de' Medici, the true ruler of Florence, now Pope Leo X, wished to grace his native town with an official and triumphant visit. The city of Florence, of course by Giuliano de' Medici, offered a reception worthy of a king. Vasari tells of the wonderfully decorated arches and gates that were on the way of the Pope, as well as the statues that greeted him everywhere on the road. He tells how Antonio da San Gallo made a temple with eight sides, which must have been like the Perugino-Granacci temple. Granacci himself built and decorated together with Aristotile di San Gallo an arch between the abbey and the palace of the Podestà. The façade of the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore was made of wooden panels decorated by Andrea del Sarto. Other artists, all the best of Florence, worked at the decorations: Baccio Bandinelli, Rosso Fiorentino, Jacopo Sansovino and many others. When Pope Leo entered Florence in September of 1515, Vasari wrote that this spectacle was judged to be the most grandiose ever devised, and the most beautiful. Jacopo Pontormo of course must have participated in this feast and it almost certainly inspired him for his pictures.

Behind the scene of the cart in his picture, Joseph and one of his sons, who is probably his eldest son Ephraim, climb the spiral stairs. On top of the stairs Ephraim is well received. Finally on the upper right the dying Jacob receives Joseph and blesses Joseph's sons.

Jacopo Pontormo painted on the left in this picture a scene in which Joseph presents himself before his father Jacob. We prefer to adhere to this, Vasari's interpretation of the scene. Another explanation can be that the scene is Joseph presenting his father to Pharaoh.

The same scene, even with Joseph dressed with a cloak in almost the same colours, can be found as the main scene of del Sarto's Egypt painting. Del Sarto pictured stairs on the right to show scenes of the imprisonment of Joseph. Pontormo also painted stairs with episodes on the right. Del Sarto placed buildings on left and right. He painted a palace on the right and a bedchamber on the left. The palace has low stairs that lead to the door.

Pontormo also used buildings on left and right and also low stairs. But the bed scene is on the right and the stairs are the stairs of a parade car on the right. Del Sarto leads a natural promontory to the skies in the Canaan picture. Pontormo also used an image of elevation, but he showed the spiralling stairs to heaven. Pontormo thus used separate elements of del Sarto's picture and re-arranged them. The references to del Sarto are clear however. It is as if Pontormo had wanted to take del Sarto's picture and use it to show how differently he, Pontormo, could handle such a same subject.

We saw an evolution from the Perugino vision of Granacci to the multitude of figures of Bachiacca and to the combination of landscape and storytelling in many scenes of del Sarto. We have to admit that with the pictures of Pontormo altogether forces of a higher level were at work. Here is an entirely new vision. Figures play a dominant role with Pontormo, as in Bachiacca's panels or as in del Sarto's, but immediately we obtain an impression of aesthetic elevation, such as hinted at in the Granacci views. Pontormo combined these feelings to an extraordinary fantasy. His pictures seem to elevate the soul to a sublime, aesthetic dream.

How did Pontormo inspire such feelings of spiritual transcendence? The effect is mostly created by the long, narrow spiral stairs that ascend to the top of the frame, and by the long slender Greek columns that rise to the heavens. Even more, Pontormo painted the leftmost antique statue in a poise in which it is groping and reaching out for the skies. This statue elegantly indicates the direction of a noble soul seeking beauty and spiritual values of another nature than the economic values of the Florentine traders. The same line of ascending aspiration is to be found in the scene of 'Joseph revealing his father and brothers to Pharaoh'. The figures there creep over the stairs, then kneel, then hesitantly advance, as a soul ascending in humility to God.

Pontormo represented the lightness of the soul also by his colours. He used very bright hues, the shades of water-colours or of the chalky colours of early fresco painting. In this too, he contrasted consciously with del Sarto's heavy oily colours. Pontormo maybe took del Sarto's picture as example, and then he set his own picture off against this example of his former master, to create a vision that could not be further away from del Sarto's concepts. Thus to del Sarto's warm, even sombre colours, Pontormo applied the very light tones of fresco. Against the dense landscape he put the bright colours of his own middle landscape, in which there is neither green of meadows nor brown of trees but merely the light yellowish tones of the desert or of a sun-scorched rock. Pontormo showed that he too could picture in various scenes in a balanced, natural composition in the same frame, and yet stay consistent in vision. But he replaced the warm earthiness of del Sarto and del Sarto's appealing density of narration with the elevation of mind of Perugino. In doing this he surpassed Perugino, and created something entirely new.

In del Sarto we found the realisation of the rational, economic, down-to-earth almost immediate materialistic Florentine mind. Pontormo was the radical, mystic thinker, the impulsive and melancholic lonely genius and poet, who drew the images of figures and scenes into extremes of the bizarre and of fantasy. Of course, youth is inclined to such daring excesses, and Pontormo was quite younger than del Sarto when he painted this last scene. Pontormo's first three panels testify to this same vision, but he pushed the vision deeper and thus introduced yet another stage in the art of painting, now called Mannerism.

Jacopo Pontormo took del Sarto's picture, analysed the scenes, dissected them and then re-assembled them differently with the composition of a wizard into a new painting, with an entirely new vision. This vision was inspired by a deeper sense of religion and of the Bible story of Joseph, and influenced by the stress and horrors of the continuous strifes that racked Tuscany and Florence. Pontormo took his concepts as far as he possibly could, in a daring magic. He probably never went further in his subsequent pictures, as of course his youth matured. Therefore this panel of his has remained an oddity, regularly printed as an extravagancy from the times of Pier Francesco Borgherini.

We agree with Giorgio Vasari, himself a Mannerist painter, when he stated in his 'Lives', 'It would be impossible to find another picture executed with as much grace, perfection and excellence as this painting by Jacopo'.<sup>G46</sup>

Jacopo Pontormo created hereby a new style of art in Florence, which other painters – such as Rosso Fiorentino - would take further yet. His Borgherini panels so impressed, that he brought Mannerism quite further along.

The fame of the Borgherini panels passed the borders of Italy. Today the Borgherini's are practically forgotten as a marvellous collection, and so are the Palazzo Borgherini and its furniture. But the Borgherini panels still exist and were preciously preserved over the centuries.

One of the great artists that would understand and continue Pontormo's style was a young child that accompanied Pontormo already everywhere. Jacopo Pontormo painted his young friend, pupil, confident, later assistant and lifelong companion, Agnolo Bronzino, in the form of the child seated in brown clothes on the stairs of Pharaoh's palace, down beneath the stairs of art that Bronzino was to ascend brilliantly. Bronzino is seated among the angels and already talks happily to the aristocrats of Florence, like the young Christ among the Doctors. These noblemen would be the later commissioners of Bronzino for the wonderful portraits that would constitute his renown.

*Other paintings of Joseph's Life***Joseph selling Wheat to the People**

Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657). Barber Institute of Fine Arts – University of Birmingham. 1665.

We are hundred and fifty years later than the Borgherini panels. Bartholomeus Breenbergh (1598-1657) was a Dutch painter of Amsterdam. He had worked in Italy for a while and had returned to his native Amsterdam in 1633. Several painters introduced paintings on Italian models, so much so that these artists are now categorised as a group by the name of the Dutch Italianates. Breenbergh made a picture in 1655 of another popular theme of the life of Joseph, a scene in which Joseph distributes wheat and cattle to the famished people of Egypt.

Bartholomeus Breenbergh worked of course in his own style and for Dutch artists of the seventeenth century the moral message conveyed by the subject was as important as the picture itself. Here the message was one of prudence and of preparedness for worse times. Joseph had foreseen bad years and he had prepared Egypt for them. Dutch merchants took risks, but a good advice was to hedge the risks and to look far in the future to be prepared for catastrophes in business. The Calvinist Netherlands preachers said the same. Charity had to be organised. One had to live a prudent economic life in order to be prepared at any time to stand before the Last Judge.

As a judge indeed Joseph stands above the whole picture in Breenbergh's work. Joseph towers over the sale of wheat. Joseph rules over the scene like an eastern potentate. Beneath him his administrators keep counts. Breenbergh had seen enough in the industrious Netherlands just how important accounts were. Beneath the accountants the people are receiving and taking away the sacks of wheat, and the cattle. They load their donkeys for far travel over Egypt. Remark the composition of Breenbergh in the now well known open 'V'. In the lower open space we see no vast landscape but the blue sky and a far cupola reminding of the Roman Pantheon. Dutch Italianates liked landscapes with ancient Roman ruins and scenes of shepherds with their grazing flocks. On the two sides of the 'V' are scenes of Joseph and the Egyptians. On the left is a scene of camels, maybe of Joseph's brothers arriving in the land. The camels, the obelisk and the eastern dress of Joseph are some of the details whereby Breenbergh situates the scene indeed in Egypt.

Most importantly, look at the similitudes between the picture of Bartholomeus Breenbergh and the painting of 'Joseph in Egypt' of Jacopo Pontormo. Even though more than a century had passed, Pontormo's panels of the Borgherini rooms were still exercising their influence. Breenbergh may have seen the panels in the Uffizi or in the Medici's Pitti palace. We find many elements of Pontormo's picture in Breenbergh's painting. Breenbergh obtained the general feeling of elevation by the same effects as Pontormo. There are stairs on the right that rise high. A statue that reaches even higher and puts man on an elevated pedestal tops the stairs. The statue is not one of antiquity anymore, but the statue of an Italian statesman. Nevertheless, the concept of



aspiration to the heavens has been preserved. An obelisk on the left points to the heavens. This obelisk is an Egyptian symbol. It is the most important element in the picture to remind that this was a tale of Egypt. But the obelisk also plays its role as a sign that markedly warns of the power of God. Pontormo knew obelisks but he had not used one in his picture, maybe because he sensed a mixture of Egyptian and Roman elements were not in harmony. Also, Pontormo's structures are not of any period specifically.

We find in Bartholomeus Breenbergh's picture the same open 'V' structure of symmetric composition with a scene of the left and the right as in Pontormo's picture.

Jacopo Pontormo was dead since a very long time in 1655 and Breenbergh was already more than twenty years back from Florence and back from having seen Pontormo's original picture. Yet we have here a significant testimony to the power and fascination of remarkable pictures of genius. Jacopo Pontormo's vision continued to exert fascination over European artists.

Other influences were at work in Breenbergh's painting. The scenes of the figures are Baroque. The people on the balcony, the free movements of the figures, the blue sky with the vaguely indicated clouds are all elements that point to Venetian painting. The picture of Breenbergh uses Pontormo's vision but the warm colours are part Veronese and Tintoretto. Breenbergh, as many of the growing number of Dutch Italianates absorbed various Italian images and styles and we see here an interesting mix of Florentine and Venetian features.

### **Judah and Tamar**

Aert De Gelder (1645-1727). The Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts. Vienna. 1682/1684.

Judah, Joseph's brother, had not wanted to kill Joseph and therefore had proposed to sell Joseph to the Midianites. After that, Judah left his brothers and settled with a Midianite called Hirah. Judah married with a daughter of a Canaanite called Shua and he had three sons by her, called Er, Onan and Shelah. When his sons had grown up, Judah chose a wife for his first son, a woman called Tamar. But Er offended Yahweh and Yahweh killed him. Judah gave Tamar to Onan then, telling that thus Er's line would be continued. But Onan knew that if a child were born the line would not be his so he spilled his seed on the ground every time he slept with his brother's wife. This displeased Yahweh so Yahweh killed Onan too. The third brother of the family, Shelah, was still too small, so Judah sent Tamar back to her father to wait until Shelah had grown up.

Judah's wife died. He buried her and when he was comforted, one day, he went to Timnah for the shearing of his sheep. That was near the house of Tamar and when Tamar heard that, she reflected that she was still not given to Shelah although Shelah had grown up. So she wrapped a veil around her to disguise herself, and sat down at

the entrance to Enaim on the way to Timnah. Judah, seeing her, took her for a prostitute and asked to sleep with her. He did not recognise Tamar as his daughter-in-law. To allow Judah to sleep with her, Tamar agreed to receive a kid of his flock but she asked for a pledge to this promise. She asked Judah to give her his seal and cord and the staff he was holding, as a pledge of his promise. Judah slept with Tamar and later sent the kid by his friend, Hirah the Adullamite, begging him to recover the pledge. But Hirah did not find Tamar anymore and a prostitute was unknown in the village. Judah told Hirah not to care for the pledge.

About three months later, people came to tell Judah that his daughter-in-law had been playing the harlot and that she had become pregnant because of her misconduct. Judah ordered her to be brought to him, to be burned alive. But Tamar then sent a word to her father-in-law, telling that the man whose seal and cord and staff she had here, had slept with her. Judah recognised them and said that the woman was right since he, Judah, had not given her to his son Shelah. But he also had no further intercourse with Tamar.

When Tamar gave birth, a first-born stuck out a hand out of her womb. The midwife tied a scarlet thread around the hand, indicating that it was the first to arrive because Tamar was pregnant of twins. But the child withdrew his hand and his brother came out first. The midwife then said that the first baby had opened quite a breach for himself and she called him Perez. But she called the baby with the scarlet thread Zerah.

Aert De Gelder made a painting that is presumably of Judah and Tamar. De Gelder was a student of Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn from 1661 on and afterwards he lived and worked in the town of Dordrecht. De Gelder continued to work in Rembrandt's style, though modulated with his own views. He used dark brown hues often, used little blue and applied also contrasts between light and dark parts of a scene. His painting 'Judah and Tamar' is no exception on this technique. Moreover, De Gelder sought much less-known stories from the bible and represented these without much reference to the story itself so that it is not always easy to find back what story exactly he referred to.

In 'Judah and Tamar' Aert De Gelder obviously shows an elderly man in full lust kissing and hugging a young woman of which he has already opened the shirt.

Aert De Gelder painted a simple scene in a simple composition and in simple colours. We see only the two figures, Judah and Tamar. The composition is a traditional pyramid used in many portraits. De Gelder used only ochre, brown and deep yellow and orange colours. All the importance of the scene lays in the psychology of the two figures. We see the old Judah with a heavy turban as also Rembrandt sometimes represented his Bible personages. Judah tenderly hugs Tamar's face with his hand and he smiles in lechery. De Gelder used a dark green colour on Judah's robe, an indiscriminate, neutral colour. Tamar, dressed in a broken white but orange-lined robe, all too eagerly and happily abandons herself to the caresses. As only decoration De Gelder painted a few lines of plants behind the couple, to indicate that the scene happened on a road.

Aert De Gelder made a picture that was not very ambitious, completely in the style of his master Rembrandt. He was a good painter, but with such themes lacked the imagination of his teacher to bring new surprising views and handling of the subject. But his 'Judah and Tamar' proves that almost any story from the Bible has been taken up at one time or other by painters.

### **Joseph in Prison**

Anonymous. Abbey of Saint Savin – Saint Savin, France. Second half of the eleventh century.

We have so far looked at two series of paintings of Joseph's life. To close this book, there is a last series of Joseph to mention. With this last cycle we could also have opened the Book of Genesis in a grand way because the frescoes of the church of Saint Savin in the middle of France are the earliest surviving grand pictorial monument to Genesis in Western Europe.

There was already at the beginning of the ninth century an abbey at Saint Savin, situated inside a castrum built by Charlemagne, the first Frankish emperor. The abbey was dedicated to two martyrs, Savin and Cyprien, of whom no account of their lives really exists and who are known only from legends that have come out of the nebula of time. The abbey of Saint Savin shone over the whole of Aquitaine in the ninth century, close to the city of Poitiers. Various abbots reformed the monastery and added to its splendour.<sup>F19</sup>

The interiors of Romanesque churches were usually extensively covered with polychrome paintings but these have almost all disappeared. The earliest Western European frescoes that were preserved are in the Saint Savin church. The porch, tribune, nave, crypt and axial chapels contain remnants of frescoes made by anonymous artists. The porch contains pictures of the New Testament, of the apostles and of the benefactors of the abbey that is of Charlemagne, Louis Le Pieux and Benedict of Aniane. Here also are impressive scenes from the Apocalypse, showing that the eschatological images remained important in the darker Middle Ages. The four walls of the tribune were covered with frescoes from the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. The crypt was covered with scenes from the very vivid but legendary lives of Saint Savin and Saint Cyprien, two brothers from Roman times who were tortured and martyred by a Roman proconsul called Ladicius and his relative, Maximus. Here in the crypt were probably kept the relics of the saints. The marvel of Saint Savin is this crypt, but also in a grand way the decoration of the church's nave. Decoration is not the right word, for really artistic pictures are to be found in the nave.

Hundreds of square metres of Saint Savin's walls and ceilings were covered with paintings. The nave vault is a surface of 42 metres long and with a semi-circumference of 11 metres. The nave has a total surface of 462 square metres.<sup>F19</sup> It is entirely covered by scenes from the Books of Genesis and Exodus. There are sixty different scenes and most of these have been preserved and can still be admired today.

The pictures date from the second half to the end of the eleventh century. There are about twelve scenes from the Creation; three on Abel and Cain, and about ten are on the stories of the Deluge and Noah. The series on Noah contains a marvellous large picture of the ark, which is very visible and particularly strikes the attention of visitors who look up high against the vault. The church was considered a kind of ark offering spiritual solace in a secular sea of wars and persecution. The nave also holds a scene of the Tower of Babel. There are furthermore twelve scenes on Abraham and Lot, one on Isaac and Jacob. And then there are not less than nine scenes from Joseph's life, showing again the importance Joseph's story received in Middle Age times. Finally, there are ten pictures of Moses' life from the Book of Exodus.

The colours of the frescoes of Saint Savin have much faded but the drawings can be readily recognised. Especially the red and brown, yellow and ochre colours have survived; here and there a patch of green remains. It is difficult to imagine how the vault must have looked like in probably very bright and varied colours, freshly painted in the eleventh century. The effect must have been astonishing and impressive. No other buildings but these churches could have presented such grand effect. These buildings were the focus of work and attention of the community, their pride and hope for divine intervention. We discover very narrative scenes that represent a very lively, poignant tale of Genesis and Exodus. Many of the figures are in movement and the painters of Saint Savin knew how to show the exact moment of action as told in the Bible. These artists were storytellers first, so that the devote that came to pray in the church could follow the scenes like a long strip of pictures on the nave vault. Here priests and monks could point out the Bible stories to the young that came to be instructed in the abbey.

The figures of Saint Savin are painted in a style that may be called naïve, as artisans did in a rather primitive way. But much more is at work. The aim of the painters was not to excel in art, but to tell and to find resonance for their stories in the viewers. Therefore they worked quickly, adding not too many details but anyway presenting striking scenes in an easily recognisable way. Still, the works at Saint Savin must have taken many years, maybe five or more years, to finish. The painters were maybe artisans, but then artisans who were more than just local people of the village or the abbey who could paint. The pictures from the Bible show that these masters knew well the Bible. And that meant they could read Latin, the only language in which the Bible could be read in the eleventh century. They knew old symbols. They had seen pictures from many parts of Europe. They must have had little or no instruction in the techniques and patience of art, the beauty that can be generated by detail and by realist forms. Therefore they concentrated on the narrative. But they did start to apprehend and appreciate nice details and the power of expression of emotions. Wassily Kandinsky wrote in 1911, 'The object (the real object) need not be reproduced with precision. On the contrary, its imprecision only intensifies the purely painterly composition. The timely (or truly contemporary) work of art reflects, inter alia, its epoch.' These words apply splendidly to the works of the masters of Saint Savin. Their frescoes touch still our souls a thousand years later.

One of the scenes of Saint Savin is 'Joseph in Prison'. Joseph is shown literally caved in, with round walls of bricks closely all around him. Joseph is wretched, deep in thoughts. He supports his head with his right arm and one with one elbow on his knee. Joseph represents the true image of a man in a state of depression, walled in from all

sides and pitying on his own fate. The artists of Saint Savin expressed thus clearly emotions as Joseph may have felt in the Bible story, but the poignancy of his state is not told as directly in the Bible. The artists of Saint Savin knew that words could not express emotions as clearly as pictures. They took ample advantage of this to emphasise their own art. The structure of the prison can be seen around Joseph, of course without the sophistication of perspective, but lines are reclining towards the back. Pharaoh is sitting majestically on his throne. Joseph is brought to Pharaoh in his prisoner's clothes. A courtier of Pharaoh leads Joseph in and in a vivacious gesture he indicates Joseph to Pharaoh. Joseph is brought in with a small beard, his hands bound. The artists drew finely an expression of fear and astonishment on Joseph's face. Joseph has to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

Various decorations can be found in this fresco. Above Pharaoh is a Roman arch; this arch continues in an arch of Joseph's prison on the right and between is a wall on which is written in clear letters the name of Joseph. Pharaoh's throne is made from two mythical creatures; one has the head of an eagle and the other the head of a cat. So the painters knew the place the cat played in Egyptian mythology. Pharaoh is seated at ease but with great dignity of power. He holds a long staff or sceptre and he holds one hand closed to a fist against his leg in a gesture of arrogance and of scepticism. Pharaoh is dressed like a Byzantine emperor, like for instance in the well-known mosaics of the East-Roman Emperor Constantine. Further decorations can be seen in the columns with the Romanesque wave patterns and in the same motif of decoration under the picture.

The scene of 'Joseph in Prison' is a lively narrative scene in which the artists of Saint Savin proved their worth. We see a scene that expresses with great immediacy the crux of the story. The artists did not miss the act but gave the very moment of the drama. They started to introduce decorations and symbols in their pictures. However naïve the technique, they gave their viewers one of the first wonders of pictorial art: how to choose from reality to represent feelings. They knew very well to express how their figures felt in a particular situation, how to express the essence of a story and they added the first elements of decorative beauty to their pictures.

### **Jacob blessing Joseph's Children**

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen. Kassel. 1656.

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn was one of the greatest painters of the seventeenth century. Yet, he did not have an easy life. He was happy at first and then intensely sad. He was born in 1606 in the town of Leyden in the Netherlands. He started to study philosophy at Leyden University, but abandoned these courses for the art of painting around 1622 already. He studied painting with various masters: Jacob Isaac van Swanenburgh and Jan Lievens in Leyden and for a short while also with Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam. In 1631 Rembrandt travelled once more to Amsterdam, already a well known painter, and he would live there for the rest of his life. In 1634

he married Saskia van Uylenburgh, the niece of the arts dealer in whose house he lived then. These years were happy for Rembrandt and he adored his young bride. He had many successes in painting. Then, the same year in which he made the now world famous 'Night Watch', in 1642, his wife died. To keep his household and raise his children, a first servant and then a second, Hendrickje Stoffels, entered his house. Rembrandt lost money, could not pay anymore his expenses with his painting alone. He contracted loans and made debts. Hendrickje Stoffels became his mistress.

Rembrandt painted 'Jacob Blessing Joseph's Sons' in 1656. Rembrandt was in deep financial trouble then. So much so, that he transferred the property deed to his house to his son Titus, who was barely sixteen years then, so that his creditors would not take away the house. In that same year 1656 Rembrandt was declared bankrupt. His paintings and his house were publicly sold anyway, but the resulting amount of that sale was even not enough to pay off all his debts. Rembrandt and his family moved to another house in Amsterdam. From then on he worked not for his own account, but for Hendrickje Stoffels and for his son Titus, who had become an arts dealer. Titus received a tutor, who was not his father the painter, and after long trials this tutor would recuperate Titus' belongings. Hendrickje Stoffels and Titus managed Rembrandt's production so that each new painting would not automatically fall in the hands of the creditors.

In 1663 Hendrickje Stoffels died, in 1665 his son Titus. Rembrandt was practically alone then and he lived with his daughter-in-law until his death in 1669.

The year 1656 was tragic for Rembrandt. And yet he painted a scene of a happy family, even though the mood of the picture is sad. Jacob lies in bed, dying. Joseph and his wife have brought their two children and Jacob blesses them even though they are not the children of a fully Jewish couple, since Joseph's wife was not a Jew.

Rembrandt shows Jacob as a very old, wise man that has remained strong and robust to the very end. He has a long white beard that proves his wisdom and he wears a long white fur cloak as a sign of his hierarchy over the Jews. Rembrandt painted Jacob with sagging head, head deep into his shoulders and by that feature indicates to the viewer that Jacob is sick. Therefore his head comes somewhat forward, and in front of Joseph. Joseph lovingly leans toward his father. He wears an oriental turban, which Rembrandt uses to tell the viewer that Joseph was different from the Jews since he had lived such long time in Egypt, far from Canaan. Jacob and Joseph are close and loving, whereas Joseph's wife stands further off. She knows that she is not a Jew and she does not enter into the symbiosis between father, son and grandchildren that will continue Jacob's generation. Thus quite openly, Rembrandt shows the psychology of the scene.

All figures in the painting look tenderly. Joseph is the central figure, the figure that viewers will examine first, maybe attracted also by Joseph's turban. Joseph looks at his father. Jacob then looks at the children and Joseph's wife also looks at these. So Rembrandt guided the view of spectators always back to the children. These are the real importance in the picture since they are the future of the race. Rembrandt isolated Joseph's wife in the picture. That isolation is also in the composition. The outlines of the figures of Joseph, Jacob and the children form a triangle shape. That triangle is placed somewhat to the left, not in the middle, and is balanced by the shape of

Joseph's wife. But the woman is not part of the triangle of male tenderness. Furthermore, the light of the scene is shed on Jacob, the children and somewhat lesser to Joseph. Here is the triangle of light. Rembrandt painted Joseph's wife in black. Thus she is more part of the background, and again, by the contrasts of light and dark Rembrandt marked the isolation of the woman. Her tender face however is not a face in anger, but a face as loving and tender as all the other faces in the painting. Rembrandt used all harmonious colours, hues and tones in his picture. The colours change very gradually and harmoniously evolve into similar, neighbouring hues. Rembrandt used no blue, a colour he almost never applied, and spare green. But the blanket on the bed is a splendid red. This red area forms the prolongation of the triangle of Jacob, Joseph and the children and thus stabilises even more this surface, turning it into a larger three-dimensional pyramid structure. We see here Rembrandt's formidable intelligence of design at work.

It is always dangerous to make conjectures on parallels between this picture and Rembrandt's life. But if the artist did not deliberately chose this subject to reflect on his own position, he could not but have thought tenderly about the image. He might have seen himself as an old patriarch surrounded as a happy family by his son, his son's wife and his grandchildren. Maybe in 1656 he saw an end to his life, since all tragedies bore down on him and imagined or dreamed himself in this scene. The image of Joseph resembles somewhat Titus, but Titus would marry only much later, in 1668, to die six months later and only a year or so before Rembrandt's own death.

*Other paintings:*

**Joseph and his Brothers.** Antonio del Castillo (1616-1668). Museo del Prado – Madrid.

**Joseph sold by his Brothers.** Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). National Trust – Patworth.

**Landscape with Joseph sold by his Brothers.** Flemish Painter of the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Galleria Colonna. Rome.

**Joseph is thrown into the Well.** Michael Pacher (active 2<sup>nd</sup> half 15<sup>th</sup> century). Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere. Vienna. Before 1498.

**Joseph the Egyptian saved from the Cistern**

Francesco da Ponte called Bassano (1549-1592) and School. Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

**Jacob receives the Cloak of Joseph.** Il Guercino (1591-1666). Burghley House – Stamford. Ca.1625.

**Joseph's Brothers bring back Joseph's Tunic to Jacob.** Auguste Leborg (1812-1854). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

**Jacob receiving the News of the presumed Death of Joseph.** Antonio di Donnino del Mazziere (late 15<sup>th</sup> cy – 1547). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

**Joseph interpreting Dreams.** Friedrich Wilhelm von Schadow (1788-1862). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. 1812.

**Joseph interprets the Dream of Pharaoh.** Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867). Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kunstbesitz. Berlin. 1816.

**Joseph explaining the Dreams of the Baker and the Cupbearer.** North Netherlandish School (Jan Mostaert or Jacob Jansz van Haarlem?). The Mauritshuis – The Hague. Ca. 1500.

**The Dream of Joseph.** Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1645.

**Joseph receiving Pharaoh's Ring.** Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1733-1735.

**Joseph and Potiphar's Wife.** Master of the Legend of Joseph (active ca. 1490-1500). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

**Joseph and Potiphar's wife.** Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). The Royal Collections – London. Ca. 1632.

**Joseph and Potiphar's Wife.** Ludovico Cardi called Cigoli (1559-1613). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1610.

**Joseph and Potiphar's wife.** Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1519-1594). Ca. 1555.

**Joseph and Potiphar's wife.** Giovanni Battista Caracciolo (1578-1635). Private Collection Rau – Germany. 1618.

**Joseph and Potiphar's Wife.** Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1615.

**Joseph and Potiphar's Wife.** Giovanni Bilivert (1585-1644). Galleria Palatina. Florence.

**The Golden Vases of Egypt.** Frans Francken the Younger (1581-1642). Musée des Beaux-Arts – La Rochelle.

**Joseph selling Corn in Egypt.** Pieter Lastman (ca.1583-1633). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1612.

**Joseph sells Cattle in Egypt.** Claes Cornelisz. Moeyaert (1592/93-1655). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest.

**Joseph appointed Judge by Potiphar, Joseph refuses the welcome of Asenath, Joseph thrown in the Well by his Brothers, Joseph sold to the Ishmaelites.** Master of the Life of Joseph (active in Brussels around 1490/1500). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.



*The Casa Bartholdy Frescoes***Joseph recognised by his Brothers**

Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867). Nationalgalerie. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Preussischer Kulturbesitz – Berlin. Around 1816-1817.

**Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867)**

Joseph explains Pharaoh's Dreams. 1816-1817.

Joseph reveals himself to his Brothers. 1816-1817.

**Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869)**

The seven Bad Years (lunette). 1816.

Joseph sold by his Brothers. 1817

**Wilhelm Schadow (1788-1862)**

Joseph's Lamentation. 1816-1817.

Joseph in Prison. 1817.

**Philipp Veit (1793-1877)**

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife. 1816.

The seven Years of Abundance (lunette). 1817.

The Borgherini panels were a landmark of late Renaissance painting. They inspired artists of later periods than Breenbergh. The fame of the Borgherini panels echoed throughout the centuries. Their images stayed in the minds of artists. In 1810 a group of German and Austrian painters left the town where they had just founded yet another Guild of Saint Lucas, a 'Lukasbund'. They left Vienna, Austria's capital, for Rome. They lived in community in the ancient abbey of Saint Isidore, now secularised. Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) and Franz Pforr (1788-1812) were the leaders. Their companions, some of whom came to Saint Isidore years after, included , Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867), Wilhelm von Schadow (1788-1862), Joseph Führich (1800-1876), Johann and Philipp Veit (1793-1877), Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872) and Ferdinand and Friedrich Olivier (1791-1859). They took to wearing their hair long and separated in the middle, as they had seen in old pictures of Jesus. So the Romans quickly called them the 'Nazarenes' and that is the name by which their school is now known in the history of art.

The Nazarenes were romantics. They were very much under the influence of the first German romantic landscape painters like Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and Philipp Otto Runge (1777-1810). But they did not want to seek their spiritual renewal in the contemplation of nature or in the landscapes of the creation. They went to Rome not to revive Classicism but in a return to the Christian traditions of the Middle Age and the Renaissance. Overbeck wanted to renew fresco painting and he admired the transcendental images of Fra Angelico and Pietro Perugino. The Nazarenes made only few great and lasting realisations in fresco. One of those was the decoration of the Palazzo Zuccari in Rome. This was in 1816-1817 the residence of the German Consul General, the Prussian General Jacob Salomon Bartholdy. Bartholdy ordered the Lukasbund painters to decorate his residence with frescoes. The Palazzo Zuccari

was on the Piazza Trinita de' Monti in Rome, now the Bibliotheca Hertziana. The Consul-general wanted to help the German painters in Rome. Several artists were invited to participate in the works: Peter Cornelius, Wilhelm Schadow and Philipp Veit, to whom also later came Friedrich Overbeck.

Peter von Cornelius and his friends decorated a room of the Casa Bartholdy. Von Cornelius was an intellectual who knew the force of references and symbols and he thought maybe in a mystical way that he could be linked spiritually to the Borgherini artists. He decorated the room with frescoes of the life of Joseph the Egyptian. Peter Cornelius painted two panels: 'Joseph explains Pharaoh's Dreams' and 'Joseph reveals himself to his Brothers'. Wilhelm Schadow made 'Joseph's Lamentations' and 'Joseph in Prison'. Friedrich Overbeck painted 'Joseph sold by his Brothers' and 'The seven Meagre Years'. Veit made 'Joseph and Potiphar's Wife' and 'The seven Years of Abundance'. Philipp Veit started to work in September 1816 and the frescoes were completed about a year later. The painters did not work on their scenes in the chronological order of the story of Joseph as told in the bible. Overbeck should have first worked on the selling of Joseph by his brothers. Then Schadow should have painted Jacob's laments and Joseph in prison, followed by Veit's Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Peter Cornelius should then have painted the two last scenes. The lunettes could have been painted at any point in time. As it happened, Veit started first.

The hall with the frescoes was impressive and became rapidly famous, as once the rooms of the Borgherini must have been. Jacob Salomon Bartholdy died in 1825 and the palace was rented to several people. German officials urged to bring the frescoes back to Germany. Only in 1885, on orders of the Emperor Wilhelm I, an Italian fresco specialist was commissioned to detach the paintings from the walls of the Palazzo Zuccari. In 1887 the paintings were brought by train from Rome to Berlin. They were presented already in 1888 in the new German national Gallery.

The National Gallery was Berlin's museum dedicated to German painting of the art of the nineteenth century. It was then the museum of contemporary art, since the building of the museum had started in 1865 and was finished in 1876. Germany had then been united from the many smaller regional states and the fewer larger states like Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and Württemberg, under Emperor Wilhelm I and his chancellor Count von Bismarck. The National Gallery was an imposing mausoleum to German art, built on Berlin's Museum Insel, an island of museums formed by arms of the rivers and canal of Berlin and on which stood already since 1830 the Museum of Ancient Arts. The same museum complex also comprised the New Museum, in which were housed the archaeological collections, and that since 1857. The basis of the National Gallery were the paintings collected by the banker and Consul Joachim Heinrich Wilhelm Wagener, and offered to him in 1859 to the Prussian Crown Prince and future King of Prussia.

Von Cornelius painted Joseph and in doing so joined a tradition that had reached its fame with the Borgherini rooms. This linking with Christian Catholic tradition of the Renaissance was one of the main features of the aspiration of the Nazarenes. Van Cornelius also would reach fame by these frescoes. His paintings and daring echoed back to Germany. He was called to Munich and would work there for Ludwig I, King of Bavaria. Later still, from 1840 on, he would realise the plans for the Camposanto of

Berlin and stay in this city until his death, a renowned and recognised artist in his country.<sup>G68</sup> Cornelius was invited to Berlin by Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm IV.

Cornelius died in 1867, so he could not see the return of the Casa Bartholdy frescoes in the National Gallery, brought back by the Museum's Director Max Jordan. The frescoes are all painted in the same style, which now would be called typical for the whole Nazarene movement. The paintings are very narrative, literary in style. They tell a story in a simple, clear, straightforward way as one could expect from medieval pictures. The scenes comprise various figures, which are shown in well-delineated forms, crisp colours, and in areas of just one hue, whereby that hue is varied only slightly in tone for shadowing. Peter Cornelius' pictures are the most monumental in concept, even though they still are also very narrative. Friedrich Overbeck's scenes are the clearest, crisp and fine. Wilhelm Schadow's frescoes are the most Baroque, in which emotions are shown more ostentatiously than in the other pictures. Philipp Veit made the more intimate scenes of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, the fresco with the fewest personages and he drew his figures closer to the viewer than the other artists. But it is remarkable how on a work on which so many artists co-operated the unity of depiction could be so well preserved. The frescoes were painted in the somewhat chalky colours typical for early Renaissance frescoes. The painters must have agreed on the schemes and colour hues before embarking on the work.

In Cornelius' 'Joseph recognised by his Brothers' we find on the left a scene as we have admired already in Pontormo and del Sarto. Joseph is standing. His brothers surround him. All brothers kneel before Joseph, the Egyptian dignitary. One of the elder brothers kisses Joseph's hand. Joseph tenderly kisses the young Benjamin. To the right von Cornelius painted Egyptian soldiers and also a shepherd. The shepherd holds the Israelian shepherd's staff. Egyptians and Hebrews stand in peace. Von Cornelius created much depth in his picture. He did this first by drawing a checker pattern of tiles on the ground so that perspective lines are clear and enhanced, and recede together to a distant invisible point. These strict lines give an impression of austerity and coldness and this feeling contrasts with the fluid curves of the figures. The lines underscore the static setting but all figures form a scene where motion is everywhere. Then von Cornelius made the perspective lead to an open courtyard of classic Roman style. Where have we seen these images? The temple part of open temple grounds is of Pietro Perugino and Granacci. The checker pattern refers to Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation'. The long, broad and white cloak of Joseph is a reference in its own right. Here we look at Giotto's image of the Judas kiss in the Arena Chapel of Padua. Peter von Cornelius linked his decoration of Joseph in this way to the great Tuscan artists of the Renaissance.

The genuine emotions of a romantic artist are in this painting. Emotion is in the embrace of Joseph and Benjamin. Contrary to the Judas kiss, this scene is a happy reunion. Von Cornelius combined romantic emotion of the hearth nicely with the Florentine straight lines and the ethereal Perugino images to a mystical effect. There is feeling and classic restraint in a rare combination in von Cornelius' Joseph recognised by his Brothers', one of the ultimate aims of many a great artist. Von Cornelius thus in a worthy manner continued and perfected the tradition of the Borgherini panels.

The choice of the themes from the life of Joseph the Egyptian came natural to the Nazarenes. They were Catholic and had a program of pictures on Christian themes. They painted in a style that was inspired by the renaissance artists. They may have known the Borgherini panels, and they certainly knew the parallels made between the lives of Jesus and of Joseph, which were common themes in the Renaissance. The depiction of Joseph's life was sweeter and less cruel than many of the scenes of Jesus's Passion, so could be more appropriate for a waiting room of the German Consul-General. The stories of Joseph's imprisonment, his miraculous deliverance and rise to glory, and especially the moment when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, were eminently Romantic.

Peter Cornelius arrived in Rome in 1811 and he appealed for membership of the Nazarene group at that time. Friedrich Overbeck and Franz Pforr had founded in Vienna, where they had both been students at the Academy, with a few friends the Lukasbund. The first Lukasbund members were Overbeck and Pforr, Joseph Wintergerst (1783-1867) and a few others. Overbeck and Pforr and some of their friends travelled to Rome in 1810 and soon settled in the abbey of San Isidoro. Franz Pforr died young, just two years after their arrival in Rome. Wilhelm Schadow also came to Rome in 1810 and joined the group. Philipp Veit arrived later, only in 1815. Schadow came from a famous German family of artists. His father was Johann Gottfried Schadow, a very famous sculptor and Director of the Berlin Academy of Art. His brother Ridolfo Schadow was equally a known sculptor, who worked with his father. The Nazarenes had contacts with other German and Austrian painters in Rome and in their homelands. These gravitated around their group: Carl Philipp Fohr (1795-1818), Theodor Hildebrandt (1804-1874), Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872) (but Schnorr fell out with the Nazarenes, exasperated by their catholic zeal), Joseph Anton Koch (1768-1839), Ferdinand Olivier (1785-1841) and Johann Anton Ramboux (1790-1866). The Consul-General Bartholdy praised much the young painters. He had them made drawings of their paintings and sent these with recommendations to the Prussian King.

The Nazarene painters became part of the German establishment in the arts. They also were Catholics. Overbeck had been a Protestant from the free town of Lübeck, but he converted to Catholicism in 1813. Cornelius, Schadow and Veit were Prussians. Cornelius and Schadow were knighted so that their names became von Cornelius and von Schadow. Von Schadow became a Professor at the Academy of Berlin, then Director of the Academy of Düsseldorf. Peter von Cornelius was called to Bavaria to paint the walls of the new Glyptotek of Munich. Then he became Director of the Academy of Düsseldorf and afterwards he was called back to Berlin by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Philipp Veit became Director of the Städelsches Kunstinstitut of Frankfurt. Friedrich Overbeck was the only one to stay and die in Rome. Schnorr von Carolsfeld was called by the Bavarian King Ludwig I to decorate his residence and he became a Professor at the Academy of Munich. Joseph Wintergerst became a Professor at the Academy of Düsseldorf.

*Epilogue - Joseph's Death*

Jacob's sons did what their father had asked them. Joseph buried his father and with him went all Pharaoh's officials, the dignitaries of his palace and all the dignitaries of Egypt. They held a great mourning in Canaan at Jacob's burial place. They put Jacob in the cave of Machpelah. Then Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all that had come up with him to bury his father.

Joseph stayed in Egypt with his father's families. He lived a hundred and ten years. He saw the third generation of Ephraim's and of Manasseh's lines. When Joseph was about to die he made Israel's sons swear an oath, saying, 'When God remembers you with kindness, be sure to take my bones away from here and take them back to Canaan.'

When Joseph died he was embalmed and laid in a coffin in Egypt.

With the death of Joseph ends the Book of Genesis. We have seen throughout this text scenes of the Creation of the Universe and of the lives of the patriarchs. We started our themes with the Garden of Eden and we saw various paintings of landscapes for the artists used Genesis themes often as an occasion to show marvellous landscapes. We saw how Jen Brueghel and Paul Bril excelled in this art and how Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan appreciated their views. The Hebrew nomads of Genesis were shepherds and they wandered through the land with their herds. We saw how painters used also these details to make pictures in which animals were splendidly drawn. We saw such pictures of Jacopo Bassano and of Sébastien Bourdon. First of all however, the Book of Genesis is a set of stories of grand characters that were larger than nature, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The artists of the seventeenth century showed these men and let us understand in images something of the grandeur of the figures and of their feeling as the Bible not always did.

The Bible does not just talk of the men but also of the women. Lot's daughters, Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah are as formidable characters and leaders as the patriarchs. These women also appear powerfully in many pictures.

Finally, we saw how Genesis was often also not taken up in its particular scenes but as a whole. The anonymous artists of the abbey of Saint Savin painted the whole nave of their church with scenes from Genesis and so did Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. Thus, when Michelangelo painted Genesis in the Sistine Chapel, he merely continued a tradition that existed in the Roman churches from before the tenth century.

Such traditions in Christian painting of Europe lasted as artists admired and honoured the work of their predecessors. This was proven at its clearest in the scenes from the

life of Joseph the Egyptian. We saw scenes from Joseph in Saint Savin, but also in the Borgherini panels and in the master pictures of Bartholomeus Breenbergh and Peter von Cornelius.

The stories from Genesis have become so well known and referenced as to be eternal myths. These themes inspired the artists. The artists have not just taken up the themes to show aesthetical, intriguing or decorative pictures. The artists delved into the spirituality of the characters or of the landscapes in which they set their figures. Art is a spiritual work, the scenes come from out of the souls of the greatest artists and we feel when viewing the pictures how the artists brought their own spirituality, their own soul and profound reflections on the bible characters into their images.