

Hendrick Bloemaert

1601/02 – Utrecht – 1672

Democritus

Oil on canvas

95.5 x 73.9 cm.

Provenance:

Paris, collection Jules Porgès, c. 1880-1914 (Jan van Bijlert)
Paris, Galerie Charles Brunner, by 1919 (Hendrick ter Brugghen)
United Kingdom, private collection
Sale London, Sotheby's, 6 December 1989, lot 241 (Jan van Bijlert)
New York, Piero Corsini Inc., 1990 (Hendrick Bloemaert)
Turin, Galleria Caretto, 1992 (Hendrick Bloemaert)
Milan, collection Luigi Koelliker, 2006 (Hendrick Bloemaert)
Sale London, Sotheby's, 3 December 2008, lot 27 (Hendrick Bloemaert)¹
United States, private collection (Hendrick Bloemaert)

Literature:

B. Nicolson, *Hendrick Terbrugghen*, London 1958, p. 46, under nos. A3 and A4 (Anonymous)
G.J. Hoogewerff, 'Jan van Bijlert, schilder van Utrecht (1598-1671)', in: *Oud Holland* 80 (1965), pp. 3-33, p. 27, cat. no. 44 (Jan van Bijlert)
A. Blankert, 'Heraclitus en Democritus : in het bijzonder in de Nederlandse kunst van de 17de eeuw', in: *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 18 (1967), pp. 31-124, p. 62, fig. 18, p. 97, no. 30 (attributed to Jan van Bijlert)
B. Nicolson, L. Vertova, *Caravaggism in Europe*, 3 vols., Turin 1989, 1, p. 156, 3, pl. 1355 (Petrus Portengen)
F. Dabell, *Important old master paintings : within the image*, exh. cat. New York, Piero Corsini Inc. 1990, p. 70, pl. 14 (Hendrick Bloemaert)
L. Caretto, *Mostra maestri fiamminghi ed olandesi del XVI-XVII secolo*, 3 vols., exh. cat. Turin, Galleria Caretto 1992, 3 ('Collezionismo maggiore'), no. 4 (Hendrick Bloemaert)
M. Roethlisberger, M.J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and his sons*, 2 vols., Doornspijk 1993, 1, p. 443, under cat. no. H3 ('attribution [to Hendrick Bloemaert] is unconvincing')²
P. Huys Janssen, *Jan van Bijlert : Catalogue Raisonné*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1998, p. 196, cat. no. R. 10
C. Wright, in: W. Franits et al., *French, Dutch and Flemish caravaggesque paintings from the Koelliker collection, part II*, exh. cat. London, Robilant and Voena 2007, pp. 18, 19, ill. (Hendrick Bloemaert)

Exhibited:

London, Robilant and Voena, *French, Dutch and Flemish Caravaggesque Paintings from the Koelliker Collection*, 2007, no. 4 (Hendrick Bloemaert)



Hendrick Bloemaert

Hendrick Bloemaert was born at the dawn of the seventeenth century as the eldest son of that Nestor of Utrecht painters, Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651) and his wife Gerarda de Roij.³ It therefore comes as no surprise that Hendrick – as is confirmed by Arnold Houbraken – was taught the art of painting by his famous father. After his training, Hendrick must have travelled to Italy at some point, no doubt inspired by the exciting stories of those Utrecht painters who had recently returned from the South, such as his father's former pupil Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1656). In February 1627 the artist is mentioned as being in Rome, when he was one of the witnesses signing a document on behalf of the Utrecht nobleman Joannes Honorius van Axel de Seny. Among the other signees was another Utrecht painter: Johannes Moreelse (after 1602-1634), the son of Utrecht's leading portraitist Paulus Moreelse (1571-1638). Apparently Hendrick and Johannes, peers since both were born at the turn of the century, and the eldest sons of the two most prominent Utrecht painters, were seeking each other's company abroad. Without evidence, we can only speculate on how close they really were (whatever the case, their fathers are mentioned together on several occasions, and moved in the same social circles), and on whether or not they jointly undertook the journey from Utrecht to Italy, and back. After his return, Johannes must have worked for several years with his father, before succumbing to the plague in 1634. Hendrick returned to Utrecht in around 1630, where in October 1631 he married Margaretha van der Eem, whose father, the lawyer Cornelis van der Eem, had been one of the founders of the Utrecht Guild of St Luke, together with Abraham Bloemaert and Paulus Moreelse, among others. The couple had three children. Soon after his return, Hendrick set up his own studio and became a master of the Guild. He remained in Utrecht for the rest of his life, becoming one of the most prominent painters of the city, as well as a meritorious poet. In 1643 Hendrick was first elected as a dean of the Guild of St Luke, a position he would fulfil almost yearly until 1664.

In a seemingly cryptic fashion, the painter/biographer Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) – a former co-pupil with Hendrick's younger brother Adriaen (after 1609-1666) in Van Honthorst's studio – remarks in his *Teutsche Akademie* that Hendrick 'was a good draughtsman, but could not push ahead his sphere of fortune deftly enough ['Klücks-Kugel'], so that this Bloom [cf. Bloemaert] was smothered beneath the hedge of timidity.'⁴ Sometimes understood as an evaluation of Hendrick's artistic merit, Sandrart's curious remark seems, at least partly, to refer rather to the painter's presumably phlegmatic character, which the author

opposed to that of the heartier Adriaen.⁵ In fact, Hendrick's paintings – particularly his earlier production – display considerable talent. Deeply rooted in the art of his father and the Caravaggist style of his native Utrecht, his most compelling efforts are clearly the large single-figure genre and history works, such as the painting discussed here. With a smooth, loaded brush and a painterly ease betraying a life-long exposure to the practice of art, he endows his characters with a monumental yet natural appearance, and individual personality. In addition to his genre and history paintings, Hendrick was a well-respected portraitist. Whereas in later years his style evolved – in line with period taste – towards a more classicizing vocabulary, he received numerous commissions throughout his career, both public and private. After his wife Margaretha died in 1671, Hendrick followed in December 1672, and was buried the Jacobi church.

Democritus, Heraclitus and pendant pairs

The exceptionally spirited present work, which belongs to Hendrick's early period, depicts the Greek philosopher Democritus of Abdera (460-370 BC) dressed in a loose white shirt, a blue cloak lined with purple and a feathered velvet cap. Beautifully painted, with a gorgeous palette, loose ruddy brushstrokes in the whites of the shirt, rendered with smooth transitions, yet full of character and depth, this is one of Bloemaert's finest efforts. Democritus is positioned behind a terrestrial globe on which he has placed his right hand, while holding up the other hand as he grins at the beholder. This expression of mockery is hardly surprising, for

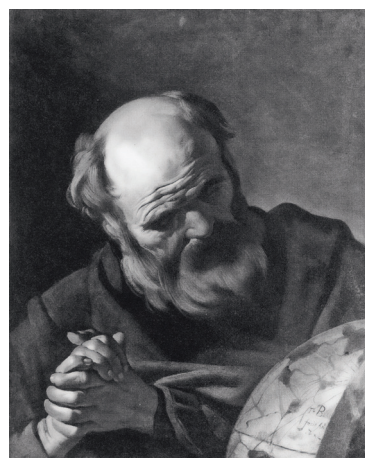


Fig. 1 Dirck van Baburen, *Heraclitus*, 1622, oil on canvas, 73 x 59 cm., present location unknown



Fig. 2 Dirck van Baburen, *Democritus*, 1622, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 57.2 cm., present location unknown

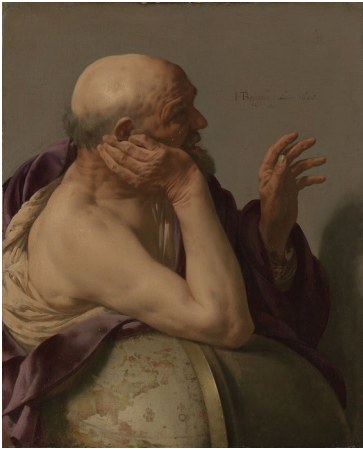


Fig. 3 Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Heraclitus*, 1628, oil on canvas, 85,5 x 70 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Fig. 4 Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Democritus*, 1628, oil on canvas, 85,7 x 70 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

he was known as the laughing philosopher. As such, he was paired with his counterpart Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 BC), the so-called weeping philosopher.⁶ Although the two never lived at the same time, they were nonetheless staged as physical counterparts by classical authors such as Sotion (first century BC), Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) and Juvenal (c. 60-140 AD). Whereas Heraclitus – best known for his alleged phrase ‘panta rhei’ (‘everything flows’) – was a true pessimist (his epithet being ‘ὁ σκοτεινός’, meaning ‘the dark’ or ‘the obscure’), Democritus was of a different complexion altogether. His interest was universal, as he is said to have written on subjects as diverse as mathematics, physics, the cosmos, music and civilisation. Best remembered for his elaborations* of his teacher Leucippus’s (fifth century BC) atom theory, he is often considered the father of modern science. According to Diogenes of Laërtius (180-240) he was an industrious and humble man: ‘The chief good he asserts is cheerfulness’ by which he [Democritus] understood ‘a condition according to which the soul lives calmly and steadily, being disturbed by no fear, or superstition, or other passion. He calls this state *euthymia*.’ Whereas Heraclitus regarded the world and the human condition with abhorrence, Democritus considered its folly with a pinch of salt.

During the Renaissance the pictorial tradition of the weeping and the laughing philosophers from Antiquity was revived in Italy. In the Netherlands a modest tradition flowered during the sixteenth century, as Democritus and Heraclitus were occasionally depicted, either

together or in pendant paintings. Yet it was only at the beginning of the seventeenth century that the duo gained widespread popularity, particularly in Utrecht, where the Caravaggists showed a predilection for life-size half length figures. The earliest Utrecht example is a pendant pair attributed to the joint workshop of Dirck van Baburen (1594/95-1624) and Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629) from 1622 (figs. 1, 2). Soon more Utrecht pendants followed, such as the famous pair by Ter Brugghen, dated 1628, in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum (figs. 3, 4), and the engaging set by Johannes Moreelse in the Utrecht Centraal Museum, generally dated c. 1630 (figs. 5, 6).⁷ The present Lilian work was part of



Fig. 5 Johannes Moreelse, *Democritus*, c. 1630, oil on panel, 59,5 x 68,8 cm., Utrecht, Centraal Museum



Fig. 6 Johannes Moreelse, *Heraclitus*, c. 1630, oil on panel, 59,5 x 68,8 cm., Utrecht, Centraal Museum

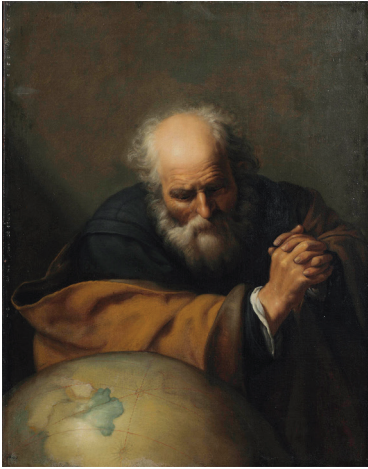


Fig. 7 Hendrick Bloemaert, *Heraclitus*,
c. 1630, oil on canvas, 95.2 x 74 cm.,
private collection



Fig. 8 Cat. no. 4

the same wave of production, and one might thus expect that a *Heraclitus* once accompanied our *Democritus*. Sure enough, a more than likely candidate is in fact available. A painting of identical measurements and with a similar background, showing the weeping philosopher behind exactly the same terrestrial globe seen in the Lilian work, was published by Bloemaert expert Marcel Roethlisberger as by Hendrick's hand in his 1993 *catalogue raisonné* on the Bloemaert family, and is here proposed as our painting's long lost pendant (figs. 7, 8).⁸

Hand gestures

The four sets by Van Baburen, Ter Brugghen, Moreelse and Bloemaert, although different in many respects, show clear iconographic parallels. For one, in all four sets the philosophers lean on globes (terrestrial globes, except for Ter Brugghen's *Democritus*, who curiously leans on a celestial globe), to express their respective attitudes towards the world and its inhabitants. In all four sets, moreover, Heraclitus is bareheaded, whereas Democritus consistently wears a beret. What's more, the philosophers communicate their emotions to a large extent through their gestures: in three of the four sets, Heraclitus clasps his hands, a well-known expression of sorrow, while in three of the four sets, Democritus is pointing his index finger in order to convey his mockery. Such gestures can be seen as culturally embedded semiotic codes, that were generally recognised and understood. The one instance in which Democritus makes a different gesture is in our painting, where he places his little and index fingers on the globe, while holding back his ring and middle fingers. In 1644, the English physician John Bulwer

published his *Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand*, a study in which he explored the field of gestural communication. Interestingly, Bulwer added a set of illustrations – so-called 'chirograms' – of different gestures and their meanings, and the gestures made by Democritus in the present work are depicted in them (figs. 9a,b, 10a,b). The gesture of his right hand is described in Latin as '*Stultitiae notam infigo*', meaning to detect signs of foolishness (*stultitia*), whereas the gesture of the left hand – still very common today – is described as '*dimitto*', to dismiss, but also to condone or to forgive. That this left hand gesture lends itself to a positive as well as a negative interpretation becomes all the clearer when one observes the same gesture made by Hendrick ter Brugghen's *Heraclitus* (fig. 3). The *stultitia* gesture is found again in another *Democritus* by Johannes Moreelse, now in the Mauritshuis in The Hague and datable to c. 1630 (fig. 11).



Figs. 9, 9a, 10, 10a
Chirograms, from J. Bulwer, *Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand*,
London 1644



Fig. 11 Johannes Moreelse, *Democritus*,
c. 1630, oil on canvas, 84.5 x 73 cm.,
The Hague, Mauritshuis

‘The Utrecht laboratory’

Such similarities and recycling of motifs are clearly no coincidence, and we might thus assume that Moreelse and Bloemaert saw each other’s work, which comes as no surprise since they grew up in the same artistic milieu and they were recorded together in Rome, as we have seen. On a broader level, the cohesive, interrelated group of Democritus and Heraclitus works produced in a relatively short period by a select group of Utrecht painters comprises a fine example of what Wayne Franits has rightly dubbed ‘the Utrecht laboratory’.⁹ Clearly, Utrecht painters were well aware of each other’s recent thematic choices, iconographic novelties and other artistic achievements, to which they reacted in their own work. They often did this so enthusiastically that it is sometimes difficult to make out who came first with what. The present *Democritus* testifies to these dynamics, not only in its subject and specific motifs, but also in its composition, for which Bloemaert carefully observed the examples of the older generation, i.e. Van Baburen and Ter Brugghen (figs. 2, 4): Democritus is positioned to the right behind a globe in the lower left corner, his hands gesturing at the globe, he wears a white shirt with a bared left shoulder and a cloak over the other, and a beret on his head. In turn, Bloemaert’s work seems to have been the template for a strikingly similar *Shepherd with a Flute* in the collection of the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (figs. 12, 13). Apart from the hands, which now hold the flute, the figure and his appearance – including the clothing and the feathered hat – has changed little. Who painted this work? The twentieth century attribution to Paulus Moreelse (N.B. the work is first



Fig. 12 Cat. no. 4



Fig. 13 Here attributed to Johannes Moreelse, *Shepherd with a Flute*, c. 1630, oil on canvas, 94.8 x 72.7 cm.,
Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland

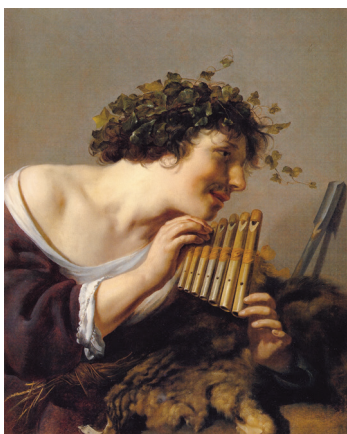


Fig. 14 Johannes Moreelse, *Shepherd with a Flute*, signed, c. 1630, oil on panel, 73 x 57.8 cm., New York, private collection



Fig. 15 Detail of fig. 13



Fig. 16 Detail of fig. 14

recorded in Florence in 1722 as by 'Murillo', which might very well be a bastardization of the name Moreelse) is no longer accepted.¹⁰ Yet given the almost complete compositional overlap with the Lilian work, an origin in Utrecht seems likely. Could it be that Johannes Moreelse, and not Paulus, is the painter of the Edinburgh *Shepherd*? Connections between him and Hendrick have been demonstrated¹¹, and another *Shepherd with a Flute* by Johannes' hand, signed JPM (fig. 14), presents us with some interesting comparisons.¹² For instance, the rendering of the fingers and nails in both works shows a remarkable correspondence (figs. 15, 16), as does the way in which the sheepskin is painted. In fact, the shepherd, with his high, glossy cheekbones, dreamy eyes and thin moustache, might well be the same model in both works. It is our hope that further research will shed new light on this matter. Be that as it may, the Lilian *Democritus* has shown itself to be a fascinating work of art, an intriguing puzzle piece within the network of the seventeenth century artistic production of Utrecht.

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Notes

- The 2008 Sotheby's auction catalogue mentions that the attribution to Hendrick Bloemaert 'has been fully endorsed by Dr. Albert Blankert and tentatively supported by Prof. Marcel Roethlisberger on the basis of photographs.' See also note 8.
- Roethlisberger later reconsidered his objections to the attribution to Hendrick Bloemaert. See notes 1, 8.
- Biography based on M.J. Bok, 'Hendrick Bloemaert', in: A. Blankert, L.J. Slatkes, *Nieuw Licht op de Gouden Eeuw: Hendrick ter Brugghen en tijdgenoten*, exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum 1986-1987, pp. 218-220.
- J. von Sandrart, *L'Academia Todeca della Architectura Scultura e Pittura oder Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, 3 vols., Neuremberg 1675-1680, 2, Buch 3, p. 298: 'Heinrich Blomart/ ware ein guter Zeichner/ konte aber seine Klücks-Kugel nicht vernünftig genug fortschieben/ daher diese Blum unter den Hecken der Zaghaftigkeit ersticket.'
- Bok 1986-1987. That Sandrart actually refers to Hendrick's mood, becomes apparent in his estimation of Adriaen, whom he knew well, and describes as 'much more alive and heartier than his brother' ('viel lebendiger und herzhafter als sein Bruder'), after which ascribing this as the reason why Adriaen often quarrelled with students, which finally resulted in his being stabbed to death. Sandrart 1675, loc. cit.
- For an overview of the history and pictorial tradition surrounding Democritus and Heraclitus, see the still indispensable Blankert 1967.
- Paintings with the philosophers depicted together were produced in Utrecht as well. Cf. Jan van Bijlert (1597/98-1671) in the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, inv. no. 2250 (Blankert 1967, cat. no. 29); Dirck van Baburen, attr. to, in the State M Ciurlionis Art Museum, Kaunas (Lithuania); attr. to either Abraham or Hendrick Bloemaert (Blankert 1967, cat. no. 26, attr. to Abraham Bloemaert; Roethlisberger/Bok 1993, cat. no. H3, as Hendrick Bloemaert; at the RKD the work is attributed to Paulus Moreelse by C.J.A. Wansink, 1996).
- See Roethlisberger/Bok 1993, cat. no. H41. Roethlisberger knew the work only from a black and white photograph, and based his attribution in part on an alleged signature in the upper right of the painting. The work came up at auction in Amsterdam in 2008, as attributed to Bloemaert, without the previously recorded signature, attributed to Hendrick Bloemaert. I thank Mr. Roethlisberger for confirming the attribution of both the *Heraclitus* and the present *Democritus* to Hendrick Bloemaert, on the basis of colour photos. Email conversation September 2018. See also notes 1, 2.
- Franits introduced the term in 2009. See W. Franits, 'Laboratorium Utrecht. Baburen, Honthorst und Terbrugghen im künstlerischen Austausch', in: J. Sander, B. Eclercy, G. Dette, *Caravaggio in Holland: Musik und Genre bei Caravaggio und den Utrechter Caravaggisten*, exh. cat. Frankfurt-am-Main, Städel Museum 2009, pp. 37-52.
- Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, inv. no. NG52. The *Shepherd* is first recorded when acquired by Marchese Andrea Gerini (1691-1766), Florence, 12 July 1722 (as Murillo, 8 ducati). In 1786 a print after the work by Lorenzo Lorenzi (see *Raccolta di ottanta stampe rappresentanti* i quadri più scelti dei SS. Marchesi Gerini di Firenze*, 2 vols, Florence 1786, 2, pl. XXI) attributes it to the Genoan artist Andrea Morinello (b. 1490). The work is next recorded at the sale of Marchese Giovanni Gerini (1770-1825), Florence, 1 December 1825, lot 278 ('Morillo. Pastore in atto di suonar* il Flauto: mezzo Figura al natural.'). Purchased for the Royal Institution by Andrew Wilson in Florence, 13 January 1831, it was transferred to the National Gallery of Scotland in 1859. Exhibited in Edinburgh in 1832, 1833 and in 1845 as by the Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682), the painting was again displayed from 1854 onwards as Andrea Morinello. In 1957 the attribution to Paulus Moreelse followed, which is presently doubted by Eric Domela Nieuwenhuis. See E. Domela Nieuwenhuis, *Paulus Moreelse (1571-1638)*, 2 vols., diss. Universiteit Leiden 2001, vol. 2, p. 743, no. SZH100 (as not by Moreelse, possibly Dutch). Edinburgh senior curator Tico Seiffert agrees with Domela Nieuwenhuis. Clearly, the frustrated attribution history stems from confusion over the name: Morillo, Murillo, Morinello and Moreelse are all quite similar,

yet the earliest attribution 'Murillo' might well have been the Italian corruption of the Dutch name Moreelse. I am much indebted to Tico Seiffert for his kind willingness to provide me with the specific provenance data (email and verbal communication May 2018).

- 11 Hendrick and Johannes's artistic proximity is also made evident by their joint use of the same model, a greybeard found in Bloemaert's *St Jerome* of 1624 in Munich (Rothlisberger/Bok 1993, cat. no. H1) and in Moreelse's *Alchemist* (sale Zürich, Koller, 28 September 2018, lot 3024).
- 12 See for discussions of this painting P. van den Brink, in: P. van den Brink et al., *Het Gedroomde Land : Pastorale schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum, Frankfurt, Schirn Kunsthalle, Luxemburg, Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art 1999-1994, pp. 216-218, cat. no. 39; E. Domela Nieuwenhuis, in: J.A. Spicer, L. Federly Orr, *Masters of Light : Dutch Painters in Utrecht During the Golden Age*, exh. cat. San Francisco, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery, London, National Gallery 1997-1998, pp. 326-329, cat. no. 65.