

cat. no. 9

Lambert Jacobsz

Amsterdam ca. 1598 – 1636 Leeuwarden

King David Rebuked by the Prophet Nathan

Oil on canvas¹
102 x 120 cm.

Provenance:

Sale Stockholm, Bukowskis, 3 December 2003, lot 379

Literature:

J. Hillegers, 'Lambert Jacobsz (ca. 1598-1636) en zijn werkplaats. Atelierpraktijk in Leeuwarden rond 1630', in: *Jaarboek De Vrije Fries* 89 (2009), pp. 67-91, pp. 78-79, 81, ill.

J. Hillegers, 'The Lambert Years : Govert Flinck in Leeuwarden c. 1629-c. 1633', in: S. Dickey (ed.), *Ferdinand Bol and Govert Flinck : new research*, Amsterdam 2017

E.J. Sluijter, *Rembrandt's Rivals : History Painting in Amsterdam 1630-1650*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2015, pp. 114-115, fig. 11B-30

Copy:

After Lambert Jacobsz, oil on canvas, 97 x 128 cm., sale The Hague, Van Stockum's, 16 May 1942, lot 69 (as Aert de Gelder, *Ahasverus, Esther and Mordechai*)²

The exact year of birth of the Mennonite painter Lambert Jacobsz is unknown.³ His father Jacob Theunisz, a cloth merchant from the Frisian town of Leer, became an Amsterdam citizen on 9 April 1592. Two days later he married Pietertgen Lubbertsdr, the daughter of the Mennonite preacher Lubbert Gerritsz (1534-1612). The couple's eldest child was the well-known physician and Mennonite teacher Anthony Jacobsz, named Roscius (1593/94-1624), who died tragically in January 1624, after falling through the ice of the Amsterdam IJ with his second wife and daughter. Lambert, who must have been the third son⁴, is first documented on 8 July 1620 in Leeuwarden, when he married local Aechje Thonisdr (?-1632) and settled there shortly afterwards.⁵ The celebrated poet Joost

van den Vondel (1587-1679), friend of Lambert's family, wrote a poem for the occasion. Since Lambert's name does not appear in the baptism registers of the Amsterdam Mennonite community, he must have been baptized in Leeuwarden shortly after his marriage. Given the fact that his younger brother Isaac was born in around 1600, and that Mennonite custom prescribed baptism at around 20-22 years old, one can place Lambert's year of birth at around 1598. Although no documentary evidence survives, there are indications that Lambert was taught in the Amsterdam studio of the Mennonite Amsterdam history painter Jan Pynas (1581/82-1631).⁶ A suggested apprenticeship in the Antwerp studio of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) remains highly uncertain.⁷



After settling in Leeuwarden, Lambert built up a painting career. His earliest dated work, a landscape on copper dated 1622, was mentioned at a sale in 1783.⁸ In addition to his painterly activities, Lambert established himself as a well respected Mennonite teacher, preaching within and beyond the borders of the Republic. While maintaining his work in the small-figure style of the Amsterdam history painters throughout his career, in around 1628 Lambert decided on a business expansion, when he started producing large-figure history paintings and busts, all of religious subject matter, inspired by Rubens, the Utrecht Caravaggists, Pieter de Grebber (c. 1600-1652/53) and the young Jan Lievens (1607-1674).⁹ Coinciding with this new direction he attracted two young and talented assistants: Jacob Backer (1608/09-1651), soon followed by the younger Govert Flinkck (1615-1660), whom Lambert recruited while preaching in Kleef.¹⁰ During the approximately four or five years of their presence – both Backer and Flinkck moved to Amsterdam in c. 1632/33 – Lambert's workshop produced many large figure paintings, several of them outstanding and highly individual works of art, on a par with the best of the period.¹¹ Lambert's last dated works are from 1635.¹² A year later, he and his second wife Hillegont Dircks Velius (1603-1636), daughter of the well-known historian Teodorus Velius (1570-1630), died of the Plague. From his estate inventory, made up in 1637, it becomes clear that in addition to his work as a painter, Lambert was also active as an art dealer, selling works by painters such as Rembrandt (1606-1669), Lievens, De Grebber, Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1656) and Cornelis van Poelenburch (1594/95-1667), in addition to copies after their work, often produced in the Leeuwarden studio. Lambert was in business with the Amsterdam Mennonite art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh (1587-1631), as both held each other's paintings in their stock. Lambert's son Abraham van den Tempel (1622/23-1672) proceeded into a prosperous career as a painter himself.

With its strong narrative quality, confident brushwork, beautiful colouring and finely preserved details such as the scratches in the wet paint to suggest individual hairs (a technique adopted from Lievens), the present painting numbers amongst the most impressive large figure history works that left the Leeuwarden studio during the period of its expansion, c. 1628-1633. It depicts a scene from the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, which mainly deals with the Kingship of David. One day David, standing on the palace roof, observes the beautiful Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his officers, taking her bath. He summons her to him, and they sleep together. Soon afterwards Bathsheba discovers that she is pregnant. She informs David, who first tries to send Uriah

home to his wife, hoping that they will sleep together, thus explaining Bathsheba's pregnancy away. However, the pious Uriah twice decides to stay with the troops, forcing David to think of another solution to conceal his adultery: he orders his general Joab to manoeuvre Uriah into such a position in the battle that he will fall in action. Although Joab disobeys his King's demand, he cannot prevent Uriah's death. David then marries Bathsheba, who bears him a son. Displeased over this staggering cover-up, The Lord sends the prophet Nathan, confidant of David, to confront him. Nathan recounts a story of two men, one of whom is rich, with plenty of livestock, the other poor and owning just one lamb, which he cared for as if it were his child. One day the rich man had a visitor over, but he was unwilling to serve him one of his own sheep. Instead he took the poor man's lamb and prepared that for his guest. Hearing the story David, burning with anger, says that 'whoever did this deserves to die. He has to remunerate the lamb four times over for having no pity.'

Then Nathan said to David: "You are that man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you King over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. [...] Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan replied, 'The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.'
(2 Samuel 12: 7-14).

Our painting shows the dramatic moment that David recognises his sin. In shock from the implications of Nathan's words, he raises his eyes to the Lord, as he clasps one hand to his chest and makes a supplicatory gesture with the other. Lambert emphasized the narrative element of the parable of the poor man and the rich man – so essential to the story – by the contrast of clothing. Whereas Nathan is rendered in a sober, red garb, David is clad in a truly gorgeous silver and blue brocade mantle, luxuriantly trimmed with ermine. A heavy yellow silk cloak falls over his shoulder, and his turban is ornamented with gems and a crown. In

spite of his wealth and status, the Lord does not accept David's immoral behaviour. Still, all is not lost for David. On the one hand the story exemplifies the Lord's indiscriminate judgement, as he orders Nathan to rebuke David regardless of his status. On the other hand, as David shows sincere repentance, the Lord is forgiving, albeit with a price. The son Bathsheba bore David died soon afterwards, yet their second son, the wise Solomon, would later rule the Kingdom of Israel.

Positioned between the two protagonists we see a young man wearing a fine red hat topped with white plumes, and behind him a soldier with a helmet and a spear. Both are apprehensive witnesses to their King's penitence. Although the Bible does not mention any bystanders, the subject was traditionally depicted within a Royal Court setting, including courtiers and soldiers. Although not widespread – prior to the present painting the theme seems to have been exclusively depicted in prints and drawings – Lambert was surely aware of its pictorial tradition. An engraving by Philips Galle (1537-1612) after Maerten de Vos (1532-1603), in particular, seems to underly the present composition (fig. 1). Part of a series depicting penance and repentance in the Old and New Testaments,



Fig. 1 Philips Galle after Maerten de Vos, *David Rebuked by Nathan*, engraving, 20 x 22.7 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Fig. 2 Workshop of Rombout van Uylenburgh, *David Rebuked by Nathan*, pen in black, brush and wash in blue and grey, heightened with white on blue paper, 27.8 x 42.5 cm., Netherlands, private collection

the engraving similarly shows Nathan's admonishing gestures to his King, who again clasps his right hand to his chest and raises his left hand in the air while lifting his eyes to the Lord. Moreover, the engraving contains a number of pictorial elements also seen in the Lilian painting, including courtiers, soldiers and the balustrade in the upper left corner (the palace roof from which David first saw Bathsheba bathing, and thus referring to the genesis of his sin¹³), another indication that Lambert relied on De Vos' composition. Interestingly, a drawing book compiled by the Amsterdam merchant and deacon of the 'Waterlandse' Mennonite community Reyer Claesz (1577-1638), containing drawings from both Rombout van Uylenburgh (1580/85-1628), the brother of Lambert's business partner Hendrick, and Lambert Jacobsz himself, features a drawing of the subject that also relates to the present work (fig. 2).¹⁴ Attributed to Rombout's workshop, this drawing shows the prophet and the King in a palace garden setting. The pose of Nathan, especially, is reminiscent of Lambert's Nathan. Given the facts that Reyer Claesz was a prominent figure within Amsterdam's tight Mennonite community, that Lambert contributed to the book himself, and that Rombout was his business partner's brother, it seems likely that he knew of the latter's contributions. As for his David, Lambert might well have taken inspiration from Gerard van Honthorst's *David Playing His Harp*, now in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, a copy of which is mentioned in Lambert's inventory (fig. 3).¹⁵



Fig. 3 Gerard van Honthorst, *David Playing the Harp*, 1622, oil on canvas, 81 x 66 cm., Utrecht, Centraal Museum

In turn, Lambert's original composition was used by his chief assistant Jacob Backer as the template for one of his first independent history works (fig. 4).¹⁶ This large painting, probably executed shortly after Backer's arrival in Amsterdam in c. 1632/33, closely follows Lambert's example, yet intensifies its dramatic tension by amplifying Nathan's gesture and movement. Instead of Lambert's concerned paternal reprimand, Backer now has Nathan fiercely accusing David, who recoils in sheer fright. Indeed, Backer's adaption makes for a spectacular



Fig. 4 Jacob Backer, *David Rebuked by Nathan*, oil on canvas, 102 x 146 cm., private collection



Fig. 5 Rembrandt, *David Rebuked by Nathan*, c. 1650, pen in brown, heightened with white on paper, 18.6 x 25.4 cm., New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

painting; yet Lambert's take offers a more balanced reflection of the biblical text as a whole, which presents Nathan as a wise and trusted aide to David (after all Nathan blesses Solomon, and David names a son after Nathan), and exemplifies the Lord's forgiveness following genuine remorse. After Backer the theme remains rare, one painted example being a work from the circle of Salomon Koninck in the collection of the Utrecht Catharineconvent.¹⁷ Among the few artists who took a genuine interest in the theme was Rembrandt. He and his circle rendered the subject in at least thirteen drawings, mostly showing the prophet and the King engaged in a more tranquil conversation (fig. 5). A later painting of the subject by Rembrandt's last pupil Aert de Gelder (1645-1727) is kept in the Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo.¹⁸

Being a Mennonite teacher, Lambert had a preference for exemplifying imagery, once causing Paul Dirkse to dub his paintings 'painted sermons'.¹⁹ Especially in his large figure works, rhetorical hand gestures play an important role. Several paintings deal explicitly with admonition and feature similar gestures, such as the two versions of *Elisha and Gehazi* in Kingston and Hannover (the latter specifically showing the same combination of gestures seen in the present work), both datable to 1629, and *The Disobedient Prophet* in Stockholm, also datable to c. 1629/30 (fig. 6a-d).²⁰ Whereas these works show the scene taking place against an evenly coloured background, the present work



Fig. 6a-d The admonishing hand gesture in works by Lambert Jacobsz, c. 1629-1631

makes advances on this group, showing a more sophisticated spatial arrangement, including an architectural background and an increased ability to render contrasting, more elaborate fabrics. As such, it seems comparable with *Joseph's Blood-Stained Coat Shown to Jacob* dated 1630 in the Catharineconvent, Utrecht, and *The Parable of the Workers of the Eleventh Hour*, the best version of which is in Besançon.²¹ The model for the present Nathan, finally, also features as the prophet Elisha in the Kingston *Elisha and Gehazi*. Likewise, we also come across the young courtier of the present painting in the Stockholm *Disobedient Prophet*. Seeing that his adolescent features have not changed much, we are confirmed in our dating of around 1630/31 for the Lilian work.

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Notes

- Inscribed on the stretcher 'Salomon de Coninck fecit'
- See for this painting W. Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandtschüler*, 6 vols., Landau/Pfalz 1982-1994, VI (1994), p. 3718 under no. 2316. According to the sale catalogue the painting (N.B. as Aert de Gelder) was accompanied by certificates by Dr. J. Rijkvorseel and Dr. A.W. de Wild. The given title (*Ahasverus, Esther and Mordechai*) seems rather odd, as no woman is seen in the painting. I thank Robert Schillemans for bringing Sumowski's mentioning to my attention.
- For biographical references, see H.L. Straat, 'Lambert Jacobsz, schilder', in: *De Vrije Fries* 28 (1928), pp. 52-76; H.F. Wijnman, 'Nieuwe gegevens omtrent den schilder Lambert Jacobsz, I', in: *Oud Holland* 47 (1930), pp. 145-157; H.F. Wijnman, 'Nieuwe gegevens omtrent den schilder Lambert Jacobsz, II', in: *Oud Holland* 51 (1934), pp. 241-255; P. Bakker, *De Friese schilderkunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, Zwolle 2008, p. 197.
- Wijnman 1934, pp. 243-245.
- 'Lambert Jacobs, schilder der Jongman geboren ende wonachtich binnen Amstelredamme ende Aechtien Thonidr. geboren ende wonachtich binnen deser stede', Leeuwarden City Archive, marriage records 1618-1623, 1620, fol. 85. Quoted from M. van der Meij-Tolsma, 'Lambert Jacobsz (ca. 1598-1636)', in: *Dooopgezinde Bijdragen : nieuwe reeks* 15 (1989), pp. 79-96, p. 85.
- S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *De jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten*, thesis Radboud University, Nijmegen 2006, pp. 136-137.
- See for the arguments in favour of, and against an apprenticeship with Rubens, Hillegers 2009, pp. 83, 89, n. 64; Hillegers 2017, pp. 52, 63, note 40.
- Sale, The Hague, Mr. P. Steijn i.a., 7 October 1783, *Landscape*, 1622, oil on copper, 26 x 50.1 cm.
- The earliest examples, *A Penitent Mary Magdalen* and *a Contrite Peter*, both dated 1628, are mentioned in a sale, Alkmaar, Horstok, 27 July 1802, lots 44 and 45. Lugt no. 6484
- Various dates for Backer's arrival have been proposed by different authors. Von Moltke suggested 1622, Sumowski 1625/30, Van den Brink and Van der Veen 1626. See Hillegers 2009, pp. 75, 88, notes 38, 39, where a date of c. 1628 is suggested.
- Various Frisian painters seem to have been connected with the workshop as well. See P. Bakker, 'Een schilder en zijn netwerk : Lambert Jacobsz en een nieuw beeld van de zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst in Friesland', in: *De Vrije Fries* 88 (2008), pp. 31-64.
- Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*, oil on panel, 40.7 x 55 cm., signed and dated Lambert Jacobsz 1635, Johannesburg, Art Gallery. See W. Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandtschüler*, 6 vols., Landau/Pfalz 1982-1994, I, pp. 141, no. 8, 147; *Elisha Refusing the Gifts of Naaman*, oil on canvas, 133 x 160 cm., signed and dated Jacobs fecit 1635. See V.F. Levinson-Lessing (ed.), *Gosudarstvennyy Ermitazh : otel zapadnoevropejskogo iskustva (Musée de l'Ermitage, département de l'art occidental. Catalogue des peintures)*, 2 vols., Leningrad 1958, 2, p. 288.
- I thank Natasha Broad for sharing this observation.
- For Reyser Claesz, see J. van der Veen, 'Hendrick Uylenburgh, Factor van de Poolse koning en kunsthandelaar te Amsterdam', in: J. van der Veen, F. Lammertse, *Uylenburgh en zoon : kunst en commercie van Rembrandt tot De Laureesse 1625-1675*, exh. cat. Dulwich, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Amsterdam, Museum het Rembrandthuis 2006, pp. 12-59, pp. 40-41. For the album of drawings, see E.P. Löffler, 'The Drawing Book of Reyser Claesz., Merchant of Danzig', in: R. van Leeuwen, *Gerson Digital: Poland : Dutch and Flemish painting in European perspective 1500 - 1900 Part I*, digital publication 2013, see gersonpoland.rkdmonographs.nl.
- See for the inventory: Straat 1928, pp. 62-76, p. 72, no. 11: 'Een coninck Davit spelende op de harp en singende nae Mr. G. Honthorst'. This painting could be a copy after the Utrecht work, but might also be identical with Lambert's own variation, now in the Fries Museum.
- See Hillegers 2009, pp. 81-82. V. Manuth, in: P. van den Brink, J. van der Veen, *Jacob Backer (1608/9-1651)*, exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum het Rembrandthuis, Aachen, Suermond-Ludwig-Museum 2008-2009, pp. 92-93; cat. no. 4 relates Backer's painting to an engraving of 1575 by Philips Galle (not the present fig. 1).
- See R. Schillemans, *Bijbelschilderkunst rondom Rembrandt*, Utrecht 1989, pp. 77-79, cat. no. 6. The painting resides in the parish of St Mattheus in Warmond.
- See J.W. von Moltke, *Aert de Gelder, Dordrecht 1645-1727*, Doornspijk 1994, cat. no. 22.
- P. Dirkse, 'Jacob ontvangt het bebloede kleed van Jozef', in: P. Dirkse, *Begijnen, pastoors en predikanten. Religie en kunst in de Gouden Eeuw*, Leiden 2001, p. 39-44.
- 4a: *Elisha and Gehazi*, 1629, oil on canvas, 62 x 84 cm., Hannover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, see Hillegers 2009, pp. 75, 81. 4b: *The Disobedient Prophet*, c. 1629/30, oil on canvas, 107 x 136 cm., Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, see Sumowski 1982-1994, VI, cat. no. 2316; G. Cavalli-Björkman, in: I. Ember, *Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age*, exh. cat. Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum 2014-2015, cat. no. 72. 4c: *Elisha and Gehazi*, c. 1629, oil on canvas, 82 x 103 cm., Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, see Hillegers 2009, pp. 78-79, 81, and esp. J. Hillegers, in: J. Hillegers et al., *Salomon Lilian Old Masters 2012*, Amsterdam 2012, cat. no. 8. 4d: the present work.
- For *Joseph's Blood-Stained Coat Shown to Jacob*, see Dirkse 2001. For *The Parable of the Workers of the Eleventh Hour*, see Sumowski 1982-1994, VI, cat. no. 2315.