

**Peter Paul Rubens**

Siegen 1577 – 1640 Antwerp

*Portrait of the Roman Emperor Aulus Vitellius Germanicus Augustus (15 – 69 AD)*

*Portrait of the Roman Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian (9 – 79 AD)*

Both oil on panel

33.3 x 26.7 cm.

**Provenance Vitellius:**

Probably Antwerp, collection Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)

Ghent, collection Thomas Jodocus Loridon de Ghellinck, by c. 1790

His deceased sale, Ghent, Goesin, 3 September 1821, lot 68 (40 francs to Murphy)

Paris, collection P.A. Chéramy, 1908-1913

Paris, collection Joseph Schnell, by 1922

His sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 18-19 May 1922, lot 91

Belgium, private collection

Sale Brussels, Galerie Georges Giroux, 15 March 1926, lot 41 (as 'Vespasian')<sup>1</sup>

Sale New York, Sotheby's, 29 January 2009, lot 14, where sold to Christian Levett

Mougins, collection Christian Levett, 2009

Mougins, Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins, inv. no. MMoCA.NC53

**Literature Vitellius:**

Anonymous, *Catalogue d'une très-belle et riche collection de Tableaux [...] qui composent le cabinet de Monsieur T. Loridon de Ghellinck [...] à Gand*, Ghent c. 1790, p. 20, cat. no. 71

E. Haverkamp-Begemann, *Olieverfschetsen van Rubens*, exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen 1953-1954, p. 69, under no. 48

M. Jaffé, 'Rubens's Roman Emperors', in: *The Burlington Magazine* 113 (1971), pp. 294-303, p. 298, fig. 4

A.J. Adams, in: E. Haverkamp-Begemann, A.J. Adams, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Private Collections*, exh. cat. New York, National Academy of Design 1988, p. 105, under cat. no. 40

M. Jaffé, *Rubens : Catalogo Completo*, Milan 1989, p. 298, cat. no. 870, ill. (erroneously as 'with Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1817')

M.E. Wiesemann, in: P.C. Sutton, M.E. Wieseman, *Drawn by the Brush : Oil Sketches by Peter Paul Rubens*, exh. cat. Greenwich (CT), Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Cincinnati, Cincinnati Art Museum 2004-2005, p. 150, under cat. no. 16

D. Alberge, in: M. Merrony (ed.), *Mougins Museum of Classical Art*, Mougins 2011, pp. 291-294, fig. 3

M. Merrony, *Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins : La Collection Famille Levett*, 2012, p. 78

K. Jonckheere, *Portraits after Existing Prototypes (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard 19-4)*, London 2016, pp. 37, 40-48, 104-106, 113, cat. no. 47, fig. 168

A. Libby, 'Julius Caesar', in: A.K. Wheelock Jr. (ed.), *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*, New York, note 6 (www.theleidencollection.com, accessed January 2019)



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**Provenance *Vespasian*:**

Probably Antwerp, collection Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)  
Ghent, collection Thomas Jodocus Loridon de Ghellinck, by c. 1790  
His deceased sale, Ghent, Goesin, 3 September 1821, lot 67 (40 francs to Murphy)  
Paris, collection P.A. Chéramy, 1908-1913  
Paris, collection Joseph Schnell, by 1922  
His sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 18-19 May 1922, lot 95  
Paris, with art dealer Alvin-Beaumont  
Brussels, collection Jean Decoen  
Berlin, collection Dr. Ernst Friedman  
His sale, Berlin, Paul Cassirer and Hugo Helbing, 23 November 1927, lot 71, where acquired by Dr. Ludwig Burchard (1886-1960)  
London, collection Wolfgang Burchard, by descent  
Sale London, Christie's, 5 July 1985, lot 78 (£16,200)  
Yattendon (Berkshire), collection Alec Cobbe Esq.  
Maastricht, Noortman Master Paintings, by 1995  
Amsterdam, collection Eric Albada Jelgersma, acquired from the above  
Mougins, collection Christian Levett, 2009, acquired from the above  
Mougins, Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins, inv. no. MMoCA.NC83

**Literature *Vespasian*:**

Anonymous c. 1790, p. 21, cat. no. 72  
Haverkamp-Begemann, in: Rotterdam 1953-1954, pp. 69-70, cat. no. 49  
Jaffé 1971, p. 297, fig. 3  
Jaffé 1989, p. 298, cat. no. 871, ill.  
Wiesemann, in: Greenwich/Berkeley/Cincinnati 2004-2005, p. 150, under cat. no. 16, fig. 1  
Alberge, in: Merrony 2011, pp. 291-294, fig. 4  
Merrony 2012, p. 78  
Jonckheere 2016, pp. 37, 40-48, 104-106, 113-114, cat. no. 48, fig. 170  
Libby, 'Julius Caesar', in: Wheelock, *Leiden Collection* ([www.theleidencollection.com](http://www.theleidencollection.com), accessed January 2019)







## Prelude

Little needs to be added about the genius of Peter Paul Rubens. The greatest Flemish artist of his time, Rubens grew up in an intellectual milieu, his fascination for the world of antiquity deriving from his erudite upbringing. His father Jan Rubens (1530-1587), a descendant of an Antwerp merchant family, travelled to Rome as an adolescent, where he obtained a doctor's title in canon law in 1554. After returning home he married Maria Pypelinckx in 1561, and upon climbing the social ladder became an Antwerp magistrate in 1562. His choosing sides with the Calvinists in the religious turmoil of these years eventually caused him and his wife to flee to Cologne, where Jan was appointed to the entourage of William of Orange's wife Anna of Saxony, with whom he started an affair. After fathering her illegitimate daughter, Jan faced the death penalty, but was pardoned through Maria's intervention. While living under house arrest in the small town of Siegen, Peter Paul was born as the family's youngest son in 1577. In 1578 Jan was allowed to return to Cologne, where Peter Paul and his older brother Filips (1574-1611) grew up amidst books on law and theology, while being taught Latin and Greek by their father. When Jan died in 1587, the Rubens family returned to Antwerp. Whereas Filips continued his studies at Leuven University under the humanist Justus Lipsius, Peter Paul attended Antwerp's Latin Cathedral school. After briefly serving Countess Margaret of Ligne as a servant in around 1590, Rubens embarked on his artistic career. Initially apprenticed to the landscape painter Tobias Verhaecht (1561-1631), he later studied under Adam van Noort (1562-1641) and Otto van Veen (1556-1629), respectively. It was particularly under the tutelage of the latter, a learned humanist artist who himself had worked in Rome between 1575 and 1580, that his fascination with the antique took further shape.

In the context of the *Vitellius* and *Vespasian* discussed here, it is noteworthy that between the year 1598, when Rubens became a master of the Guild of St Luke, and 1600, when he left for Italy, he had already painted an eighteen-part series of the Roman emperors of which several, such as the *Vitellius* (fig. 1) survive, while others, such as the *Vespasian*, are known through copies only (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> Rubens must have been thoroughly familiar with the emperors' characters and historical background from his study of such historical accounts as Tacitus' *Annales* and *Historiae*, Suetonius' *De Vita Caesarum* (*Lives of the Caesars*) or, of more recent date, Giovan Battista Cavalieri's *Romanorum Imperatorum Effigies* of 1583, which combined prints of the emperors with their biographies. In preparation for his ambitious



Fig. 1 Peter Paul Rubens, *Vitellius*, 1598-1600, oil on panel, 68.5 x 52.5 cm., Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie

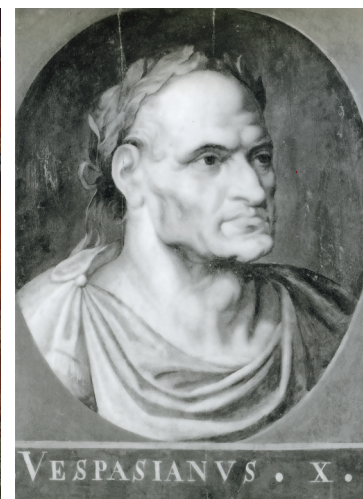


Fig. 2 After Peter Paul Rubens, *Vespasian*, oil on panel, 63.5 x 48.2 cm., sale New York, Christie's, 12 June 1981, lot 222-226

series, Rubens was able to consult a variety of pictorial sources. As both surviving paintings and prints reveal, as well as the study of archival sources of the latter sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emperor series grew increasingly popular in the Southern Netherlands during the period. In addition to series of foreign prints, Netherlandish artists such as Lambert Suavius (c. 1510-1567), Frans Floris (1519/20-1575) and Johannes Stradanus (1523-1605) also produced emperors, in painting and print. In 1557 Hubert Goltzius (1526-1583) had published a numismatic book with woodcuts after ancient Roman coins depicting emperors, and Antwerp inventories mention an abundance of anonymous series, mostly consisting of twelve, but sometimes of eighteen emperors, in media as diverse as paintings, water colours, prints, books, papier-mâché, German agate, silver statues, as well as large quantities of antique medals.<sup>3</sup>

Although Rubens had various sources at hand in Antwerp, the young painter was hungry for first-hand experience, and so he followed in his father's and teacher Otto van Veen's footsteps and headed for Italy in May 1600. During his eight-year sojourn there he proved to be a tireless student of antiquity, drawing arduously after antique sculptures.<sup>4</sup> He even formulated his ideas on its imitation in a separate part of his theoretical notebook, 'De imitatione statuarum' (*On the imitation of*

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*statues*), in which he asks the painter to imbibe only the best sculptures, and above all, to avoid the taint of the appearance of stone, as the artist's goal was always to imitate, or even perfect nature itself.<sup>5</sup> Painting, in that sense, was an ideal medium to surpass even antique sculpture, as it offered more convincing ways to suggest movement and life, and the ability to transform, or humanise, stone into flesh and blood. In Italy he sharpened his ideas on *aemulatio*, the honourable and creative emulation of predecessors and contemporaries, and *paragone*, the competitive comparison between the art of painting, sculpture and architecture. Likewise, he further immersed himself in the study of physiognomy, and the theoretical tracts that were published on this subject during the sixteenth century which championed the idea that a person's character was reflected in their physical appearance.<sup>6</sup> The fundamental importance that Rubens assigned to these art theoretical concepts, and his enduring dedication to them, would essentially lay the ground for the genesis of the present works. When the tidings of his mother's illness urged him back to Antwerp in the fall of 1608, Rubens returned a seasoned artist, fully equipped to ascend Antwerp's cultural throne. The next decades would bring him – and Antwerp as a cultural centre – unprecedented success and fame. In October 1609 Rubens married Isabella Brant, daughter of the prominent Antwerp humanist Jan Brant. A year later, in 1610, the couple bought a house and a considerable parcel at Wapper, a wealthy street in Antwerp, which in the following years was completely rebuilt into what we know now as the Rubenshuis, the epicentre of the artist's self-created universe, the studio where he created his work and the gallery where he displayed his collection.

### Rubens, Vitellius and Vespasian

Painted in Antwerp at the peak of Rubens's career, the present *Vitellius* and *Vespasian* fully exude this air of cultivated, artistic excellence steeped in Antiquity. Notwithstanding their relatively modest size, these oval portraits of two of the most (in)famous rulers of the ancient world immediately incite the beholder's marvel. Executed with the intuitive spontaneity of Rubens' most outstanding oil sketches – Rubens at his purest – yet at the same time completely convincing as sovereign portraits, they combine virtuosity with deeply personal psychological depth. As recently remarked by Koenraad Jonckheere in the *Corpus Rubenianum*, they are 'little panels by Rubens at his best'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there is plenty to enjoy in these ovals, which have benefited tremendously from a recent restoration.<sup>8</sup> Throughout all areas of the two paintings one observes the priming, over which Rubens with such apparent ease distributed his paints, transparent and opaque, modelling his figures

with admirable economy. Against a dark brown, patchy background and a daring green area to provide contrast to his facial contour, Vitellius stares to the right with glimmering, shiftily, unsound eyes. His face is rendered with a limited carmine, ranging from soft pink to rose pompadour, and Bordeaux in the darkest shadows, all to a spectacular, full-fed effect. Grey hatchings further model the bulging chin, and add a rugged element to the portrait. A neatly preserved ridge of tiny white hatchings of hair demarcates the face from the sketchily indicated laurel wreath that adorns the head. While the restoration revealed the original, fleshy quality of the chest, the emperor's tunic and toga regained their intense, sometimes translucent palette, with warm orange and even hints of greyish-blue. Vespasian's portrait, on the other hand, is brighter in atmosphere. The patchy background is lighter, fading from steel to pale blue grey, beautifully contrasting with the olive-green of the Imperial laurel wreath. In rendering Vespasian's face Rubens was even more sparing than with Vitellius, using lighter flesh tones and leaving plenty of transparency. The emperor confronts the beholder with a piercing, stern glance, seemingly reflecting his character formed in the military. Accordingly, Vespasian wears a bright red *paludamentum* (the iconic cape fastened at one shoulder by a *fibula* and worn by military commanders) over his *lorica*, or cuirass.

Among the most intriguing aspects of these portraits is that they are true studies of the supposed characters of these emperors: Vitellius, a disquieting glutton, Vespasian, a fierce 60-year old, conveying a law-and-order militarism. The former was killed by the army of the latter. Whereas Rubens' early emperor portraits made in Antwerp tended to caricature these characteristics (figs. 1, 2), the present portraits are rather diligent efforts in naturalism. Rubens clearly knew the individual emperors' personalities inside out – as well as their decisive roles during the so-called 'Four Emperor Year' of 69 AD – from his close-reading of Suetonius above all. The writer's account of Vitellius' life – objective or not – is utterly scandalous.<sup>9</sup> Born in 15 AD as the son of a Roman consul, Vitellius spent most of his youth at Capri, where he belonged to the perverted emperor Tiberius' catamites and answered to the nickname *Spintria*, 'sphincter artist.' Growing up 'stained by every sort of meanness,' Vitellius' wickedness – they said he poisoned his son and starved his mother to death – was exceeded only by his gluttony. Nevertheless, his fawning personality won him the intimacy of Caligula, Claudius and Nero. When Galba succeeded Nero after his suicide in June 68 AD, he sent Vitellius off to govern *Germania Inferior*. In January 69 AD, just weeks after arriving, Vitellius learned that Galba had been



murdered, and Otho proclaimed emperor. Supported by his troops he decided to march on Rome. After his army defeated Otho's at Bedriacum (Lombardy) in April 69 AD, and Otho committed suicide, Vitellius was declared emperor (the third that year!). As Suetonius states, Vitellius' reign was characterised 'by luxury and cruelty [...] delighting in inflicting death and torture on anyone whatsoever and for any cause whatever'. By taking emetics in order to throw up (Suetonius disapprovingly describes colossal banquets with 'two thousand of the choicest fishes and seven thousand birds' and prodigious platters on which were mingled 'the livers of pike, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingos and the milt of lampreys' brought from all over the Empire), he was able to feast night and day. Yet he overplayed his hand: in October 69 AD Vespasian defeated Vitellius' army. After his chicken-hearted proposal to abdicate was refused, Vespasian's soldiers entered Rome on 20 December, captured the hiding tyrant, dragged him to the forum, and tortured him until he died. His body was thrown into the Tiber.

Contrary to this debauchery, Suetonius presents Vespasian's life as a rags-to-riches story. Born in 9 AD, Vespasian was raised by a relatively modest Sabine equestrian family. After serving the military in Crete and Cyrene, he married Flavia Domitilla, with whom he fathered two future emperors, Titus (39-81 AD) and Domitian (51-96 AD). During Claudius' reign, Vespasian was appointed Legate of the Legions in Germany and Britain, respectively, where successful campaigns earned him a Consulship, and later the Governorship of Africa. Suetonius tragi-comically relates how Vespasian, whilst touring Greece in Nero's entourage, lost Imperial favour, either for absenting himself when Nero was singing, or falling asleep if he remained. Banished by the bitterly offended emperor and even fearing for his life, he was called back to suppress the Jewish revolt in Judea, in 66-68 AD. Leading two legions himself, his son Titus leading a third, he fought a tough war, ending with the sack of Jerusalem by Titus's troops. According to Suetonius, Vespasian did not shy away from danger, getting wounded himself (Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus, who knew Vespasian personally, writes of him as fair and humane in his famous *Antiquitates Judaicae*, which Rubens surely knew). As the chaotic years 68-69 AD evolved and Otho and Vitellius – following Nero's and Galba's violent deaths – battled over power, Vespasian started to believe that certain omens predicted that he would be the next emperor. While in Egypt to secure grain, the call amongst his soldiers for his emperorship surged, and finally he sent his troops to fight Vitellius. After the siege of Rome and Vitellius' subsequent murder, Vespasian was declared emperor at the

very end of 69 AD, the fourth that year. Reigning for another ten years, he contained the extravagance that had taken root in Rome, and restored peace. He founded the Flavian dynasty, which continued under Titus' reign (79-81 AD) and ended with the passing of Domitian in 96 AD.

These strikingly opposing, strong characteristics, then, Rubens masterfully modelled into the physiognomies of his 'sitters', measured and realistic, without recourse to caricature.<sup>10</sup> Yet intimate as they are, the portraits also incite in us a sense of awe for the historic leadership they represent. Rubens's ability to convey this merging of emotional perspicacity and Imperial reverence must result from his long-term engagement with these emperors. Building on his initial Antwerp encounter, the present portraits reflect his increased, first-hand knowledge and understanding of antique examples. Since the



Fig. 3 So-called Grimani Vitellius, c. 130 AD, Venice, Museo Archaeologico



Fig. 4 Peter Paul Rubens, *Head of Vitellius*, black and white chalk, heightened with white on paper, 33.2 x 22 cm., Valence-sur-Baïse, Simonow Collection

early sixteenth century, the features of Vitellius were recognised in the physiognomy of a rather fleshy man with a double chin and short hair, as found in an antique bust known as the so-called 'Grimani Vitellius' and the many Renaissance copies after it (fig. 3). Twentieth century art historians have proven the identification to be incorrect – the bust actually dates from the first half of the second century<sup>11</sup> – but for Rubens and his contemporaries he was Vitellius, and a drawing datable to the Roman period clearly conveys Rubens' desire to grasp the bust's essence (fig. 4).<sup>12</sup> A set of drawings kept at Chatsworth House further exemplifies Rubens's fascination for the emperors, as they show him copying their profiles from antique coins. Again we recognise Vitellius (whose rather plump appearance makes the identification with the Grimani Vitellius understandable) and the sturdier Vespasian, who shares several features with the present Vespasian, such as the hooked nose, the skin folds and the pursed lips (fig. 5, 6). While not all scholars agree if the set was made before or after the artist's departure for Italy, they nevertheless underline Rubens's recurrent engagement with the subject.<sup>13</sup>

#### A special series for a special location

The existing literature on the two present Lilian portraits is relatively limited. The first to discuss the works was Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, who in 1953 authored the catalogue for the Rubens oil sketches exhibition in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The exhibition featured two oval emperor's heads by Rubens: the present *Vespasian* and the *Julius Caesar* that is now part of the Leiden Collection, New York.<sup>14</sup> The owner and lender of both panels to the Rotterdam exhibition was no less than the great Rubens scholar Ludwig Burchard (1886-1960), and it is interesting to read that Haverkamp-Begemann factually writes down Burchard's orally communicated opinion on works from his own collection. As the author explains, it was Burchard's idea that the portraits originally formed part of a series comprising the twelve earliest Roman emperors. This set was never recorded as complete, but the 1790 catalogue of the Ghent art dealer / collector Thomas Loridon de Ghellinck makes mention of six of these oval emperor portraits. In addition to the *Julius Caesar*, the *Vespasian*, *Augustus*, *Tiberius*, *Vitellius* and *Titus* remain. The anonymous author of the 1790 catalogue generously describes them as 'légèrement colorés, d'une belle couleur, bien définés, & peints avec vigueur; ils sont de forme ovale'. Haverkamp-Begemann, listing the works at that point



Fig. 5 Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of a Roman Coin: Vitellius*, pen and brown ink on paper, 7 x 5 cm., Chatsworth (Derbyshire), Chatsworth House, Devonshire Collection

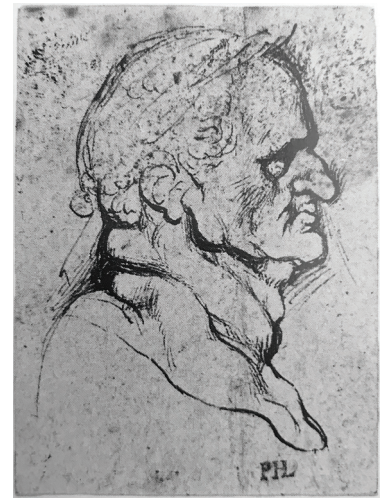


Fig. 6 Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of a Roman Coin: Vespasian*, pen and brown ink on paper, 7 x 5 cm., Chatsworth (Derbyshire), Chatsworth House, Devonshire Collection





Fig. 7a-1 Peter Paul Rubens, Series of the first Twelve Roman Emperors, all oil on panel, c. 33 x 26.5 cm. (*Julius Caesar*, New York, Leiden Collection; *Nero*, present whereabouts unknown; *Galba*, Belgrade, National Museum; *Otho*, Scunthorpe, Normanby Hall, Country Park and Farming Museums; *Vitellius* and *Vespasian*, Amsterdam/Geneva, Salomon Lilian; *Titus*, present whereabouts unknown)

known to him from an image, mentions (in addition to the exhibited *Julius Caesar* and the *Vespasian*) a *Nero*, a *Galba*, a *Vitellius* (the present Lilian work) and a *Titus*. In 1971 Michael Jaffé, in an article in *The Burlington Magazine*, added a seventh panel to the group, an *Otho* in the museum in Scunthorpe (Lincolnshire).<sup>15</sup> Since then no other emperors from the same series have surfaced; the *Augustus* and *Tiberius* (both mentioned in the possession of Loridon de Ghellinck) as well as the *Caligula*, *Claudius* and *Domitian* are therefore missing (figs. 7a-1).<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the dating and function of these emperor busts, neither Haverkamp-Begemann nor Burchard come up with any suggestions. Michael Jaffé, on the other hand, dates the series to around 1625 and speculates that Rubens might have created the oval panels after his Paris meeting with

three antiquarians in the entourage of the special Legate of Pope Urban VIII, Cardinal Francesco Barberini: Girolamo Aleandro, Giovanni Doni, and Cassiano dal Pozzo.<sup>17</sup> As Jaffé does not expand on this idea further, it remains nothing more than a brainchild, playing upon the idea that such a series would be appreciated mostly by learned men with a deep knowledge and understanding of the art of antiquity. Yet Rubens knew many such people, of whom he himself was the most avid. With that in mind, Koenraad Jonckheere, in the *Corpus Rubenianum*, has recently proposed a substantiated and persuasive hypothesis; that Rubens painted the series for himself.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, in 1610, two years after his return from Italy, Rubens had bought the house and parcel at Wapper. Not long after, he started his great rebuilding project, which also foresaw a grandiose decoration program for the exterior of the house, including a combination of antique sculpture and

paintings by Rubens himself, as seen in a later print by Jacob Harrewijn (fig. 8). This decorative program intended to glorify the artist's creativity and allude to the emulative qualities of the art of painting in general, the *paragone* or creative competition with sculpture, and Rubens' own superb abilities in this field, thus creating a magnificent new personal synthesis.<sup>19</sup> Not without pretention, Rubens identified himself with Apelles, the most celebrated painter of antiquity, of whom Karel van Mander (1548-1606) wrote that 'his painted images were better and cleverer than the best sculptures of the ancients one still sees.'<sup>20</sup> Among the new additions was the so-called 'Pantheon', a semi-circular structure with an oculus in the top, based on the Pantheon in Rome. Rubens had it built as an extension to his picture gallery in order to display his sculpture collection, as his own private museum.<sup>21</sup> The Pantheon's construction was doubtlessly spurred by Rubens' acquisition in 1618 of the magnificent collection of antique sculptures owned by Sir Dudley Carleton, at that point the English ambassador in The Hague.<sup>22</sup> A year before, Carleton had (against his wish) become the owner of this spectacular collection in Venice. He had it shipped to London and subsequently to The Hague, and had found in Rubens the ideal buyer, who was willing to pay him with several of his own paintings. In return, Rubens received some 100 pieces of antique sculpture, among them (we know this from Carleton's two shipping invoices from Venice

to London, and from London to The Hague) a substantial number of Roman emperor busts, totalling fourteen emperors, including a Vitellius, and some duplicates.<sup>23</sup>

Although Rubens' Pantheon does not survive, we have a fairly accurate idea of its appearance. In his *Teutsche Akademie*, the painter Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) stated that Rubens built himself a "Kunst-Cammer" in the form of a Rotunda, with light falling down from above, containing well-ordered curious paintings and statues, both from his own hand and other artists, alongside several collected curiosities.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, two visual sources inform us of its appearance as well. One is Rubens' former pupil Willem van Haecht's (1593-1637) *Alexander the Great Visiting the Studio of Apelles* in the Mauritshuis, executed around 1630, in which a grandiose artist's studio featuring an abundance of paintings – many alluding to Rubens – opens up onto a gallery and Pantheon in the background (figs. 9, 10). It is more than likely that Van Haecht referenced Rubens here (who was, after all, the Apelles of his time), and that the Pantheon resembled that of his teacher. That this is indeed the case also follows from a detail in Harrewijn's print of the Rubenshuis, which depicts the actual Pantheon (fig. 11). Both painting and print show that the space was divided into separate bays, with niches for the display of busts. Whereas it was not necessarily Van Haecht's intention to literally document the Rubenshuis Pantheon, Van Harrewijn's print of 1692 – which does precisely that – was executed during a period in which the house was owned by the rich canon Hendrik Hillewerf, who had turned Rubens's Pantheon into a chapel. However, on combining the information of the two sources, it becomes clear that there were twelve niches, in which twelve busts were originally displayed, and that above every niche hung an oval portrait. When one re-considers Rubens's fascination with antiquity, his fundamental interest in imitation, *aemulatio* and *paragone*; the exterior decoration program, which displayed both classical sculpture and Rubens's own paintings; and the fact that Rubens had just bought a brilliant collection of emperor busts and other precious antique sculptures, Jonckheere convincingly argues that the oval emperor series, to which the present works belong (fig. 7a-l), were painted by Rubens after and as complements to the busts in his possession, as part of the interior decoration program of his Pantheon. As observed in Van Haecht's painting and Harrewijn's print, the ovals hung above the niches which displayed the emperor busts, where they formed the perfect embodiment of Rubens' art theoretical ideas and demonstrated how painting – especially *his* painting – through its colouristic possibilities, and the depiction of character through physiognomy, could render life and emotion to otherwise lifeless marble. As such, they form a highpoint in Rubens' on-going dialogue with Antiquity. They functioned as pendants for his sculptures, accolades to Rubens



Fig. 8 Jacobus Harrewijn after Jacques van Croes, *The Rubenshuis*, 1692, engraving, 34 x 43.3 cm., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum





Fig. 9 Willem van Haecht, *Alexander the Great Visiting Apelles's Studio*, c. 1630, oil on panel, 105 x 149.5 cm., The Hague, Mauritshuis



Fig. 10 Detail of fig. 9, the 'Pantheon'

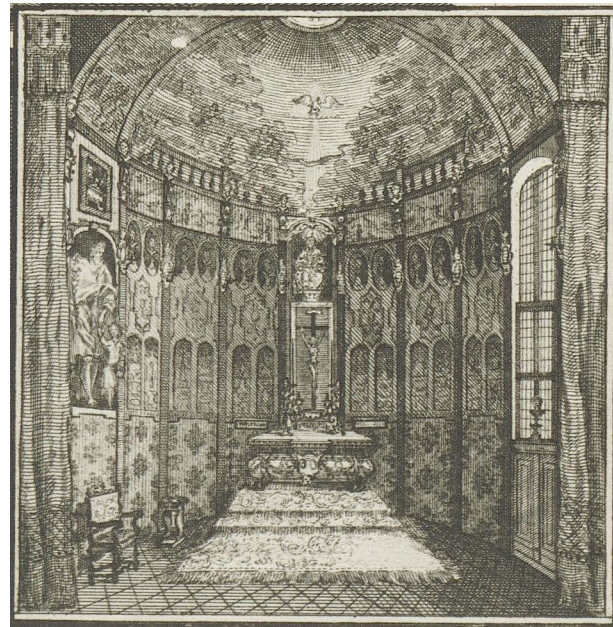


Fig. 11 Detail of fig. 8, the 'Pantheon'

himself, demonstrations of his art theoretical ideas and furnishing ultimate conversation pieces for visitors to the house.

On the basis of this exciting and stimulating idea it follows that Jaffé's dating of c. 1625 should be reconsidered, and that a dating immediately following the purchase of Carleton's collection in 1618, when the Pantheon was built, is historically a far more logical option. Obtaining such a treasure so suddenly must have inspired the never-tiring Rubens to indulge even more in the world of antiquity so dear to him. That the present ovals are the result of that intense period seems not only historically and stylistically more apt, but all the more logical since around the same time Rubens also contributed a *Julius Caesar* (now in Brandenburg), to a series of the twelve Roman emperors ordered by the House of Orange, for which the best painters of the time were commissioned, among others Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617), Abraham Janssens (1567-1632), Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629) and Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1656).<sup>25</sup> Datable to 1619, the Brandenburg *Julius Caesar*, albeit of a larger format, shares much in common with the *Julius Caesar* belonging to the present oval series (fig. 7a), suggesting a similar dating. Yet – quoting Jonckheere – although the Brandenburg *Julius Caesar* 'is doubtlessly related to Rubens's intimate oval portraits, it lacks the finesse enlivening those little sketches.'<sup>26</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 Sold with certificates by Wilhelm von Bode and Ludwig Burchard. See Jonckheere 2016, p. 113, note 1.
- 2 See for this so-called 'Stuttgart series' Jonckheere 2016, pp. 84-104, cat. nos. 21-38.
- 3 E. Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, 14 vols., Antwerp 1984-2009, 14 (2009), p. 175, provides an index with mentions of the subject in Antwerp inventories. See for a more elaborate and annotated overview of Emperor series in different media in Antwerp J. Hillegers, in J. Hillegers et al., *Salomon Lilian Old Masters 2013*, Amsterdam 2013, pp. 80-83, cat. no. 20, Otto van Veen, Nero; Jonckheere 2016, pp. 88-89.
- 4 M. van der Meulen, *Rubens : Copies after the Antique (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard 23)*, 3 vols., London 1994, 1, pp. 25-39, 'Introduction'.
- 5 See J.M. Muller, 'Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art', in: *The Art Bulletin* 64 (1982), pp. 229-247; J.M. Muller, 'De verzameling van Rubens in historisch perspectief', in: K. Belkin, F. Healy, *Een huis vol kunst : Rubens als verzamelaar*, exh. cat. Antwerp, Rubenshuis 2004, pp. 10-85, p. 19.
- 6 Jonckheere 2016, pp. 35-37.
- 7 Jonckheere 2016, p. 41.
- 8 Restoration carried out by Studio Redivivus, The Hague. Report available at request.
- 9 The fact that Suetonius' father was an officer in the army that was defeated by Vitellius' army at Bedriacum might explain certain biases.
- 10 Jonckheere 2016, p. 106, describes Vitellius' physiognomy as 'fairly sympathetically limned'. I fail to see much sympathy in these features.
- 11 See A.N. Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, 'A Creative Misunderstanding', in: *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 23 (1972), pp. 3-12.
- 12 Van der Meulen 1994, 2, pp. 150-151, cat. no. 131. See also Jonckheere 2016, fig. 120.
- 13 Van der Meulen 1994, 2, p. 215 argues for an Italian dating, whereas Jonckheere 2016, p. 88 suggests a dating c. 1598-1600.
- 14 See Libby, op. cit.
- 15 Jaffé 1971, p. 294, fig. 1.
- 16 See for this series Jonckheere 2016, pp. 104-115, cat. nos. 39-50. It has rightly been pointed out by some authors that some identifications of Emperors from this series might have been mixed up over time. See, for instance, Haverkamp-Begemann, in: Rotterdam 1953-1954, p. 69; Wieseman, in: Greenwich/Berkeley/Cincinnati 2004-2005, p. 150.
- 17 Jaffé 1971, p. 300.
- 18 Jonckheere 2016, pp. 40-48, 104-107.
- 19 See E. McGrath, 'The Painted Decorations of Rubens's House', in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978), pp. 245-277.
- 20 Quoted from Jonckheere 2016, p. 44.
- 21 B. van Beneden, in: B. Uppenkamp, B. van Beneden, *Palazzo Rubens : de meester als architect*, exh. cat. Antwerp, Rubenshuis 2011, pp. 13-20.
- 22 See J.M. Muller, 'Rubens's Museum of Antique Sculpture: An Introduction', in: *The Art Bulletin* 59 (1977), pp. 571-582; Muller 2004, pp. 43-48.
- 23 Muller 1977, pp. 581-582, Appendix, the lists name busts of 14 of the 18 first emperors (including Julius Caesar). Missing are Vespasian, Titus, Nerva and Commodus. The Vitellius is found in crate 28, no. 11.
- 24 J. von Sandrart, *L'Academia Tedesca\* della Architettura Scultura e Pittura oder Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, 3 vols., Nuremberg/Frankfurt 1675-1680, 2 (1679), p. 292.
- 25 See Jonckheere 2016, pp. 115-118, cat. no. 51.
- 26 Jonckheere 2016, p. 41.