

# SALOMON LILIAN

## DUTCH OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

### **Pieter Lastman**

1583 – Amsterdam – 1633

*Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*

Signed middle right: PLastman fe / 1621 (PL in ligature)

Oil on panel

49.5 x 76 cm.

### **Copy:**

Oil on panel, 66 x 76 cm., sale Vienna, Dorotheum, 6 October 1999, lot 273 (as attr. to Pieter Lastman)

### **Provenance:**

Amsterdam, 7 July 1632, inventory of Pieter Lastman: 'Opde kamer achter [...] 't vroungen aende put vande zelve [Pieter Lastman] beide met een ebben lijst' ('In the back room [...] the woman at the well by the same [Pieter Lastman] both in an ebony frame')

Amsterdam, collection of Pieter Lastman's brother Segher Pietersz (1579-after 1650), by descent

Amsterdam, 14 February 1664, inventory of the latter's daughter Clementia Segers, widow of Dirck Vennekool, 'Een dito zijnde een Samaritaans vrouwtjen van Lastman' ('a ditto being a Samaritan woman by Lastman')

Amsterdam, taxation on behalf of Maria Sautijn (1671-1748), widow of Joan Blaeu (1650-1712), 31 December 1712 – 7 February 1713, 'Samaritaans vroutie van den zelve [Lastman] 15' ('Samaritan woman by the same [Lastman] 15')

Sale Monaco, Christie's, 15 June 1990, lot 23 (as dated 1623)

France, private collection until 2020

### **Literature:**

A. Bredius, N. de Roever, 'Pieter Lastman en François Venant', in: *Oud-Holland* 4 (1886), pp. 1-23, p. 16

K. Freise, *Pieter Lastman : sein Leben und seine Kunst : ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Holländ. Malerei im XVII. Jahrh.*, Leipzig 1911, p. 20, no. 38, p. 58, cat. no. 63/63a

S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, 'De familie van de schilder Pieter Lastman (1583-1633)', in: *Jaarboek Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* 45 (1991), pp. 110-132, p. 118

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S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, 'Pieter Lastman (1583-1633) : Een schilder in de Sint Anthonisbreestraat', in: *De Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 1991/2, pp. 2-15, p. 13

S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *De jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten*, Nijmegen 2006, pp. 101, 109

C.T. Seifert, *Pieter Lastman : Studien zu Leben und Werk : Mit einem kritischen Verzeichnis der Werke mit Themen aus der antiken Mythologie und Historie*, Petersberg 2011, pp. 57, 59, fig. 43, (as dated 1623), p. 316, no. 199

### **Pieter Lastman**

Pieter Lastman's family originally came from Leiden, yet by 1548 his grandfather Pieter Seghers (d. 1578) had moved to Amsterdam, where he registered as a 'poorter' (citizen).<sup>1</sup> The earliest we hear of Lastman himself is in 1588, when his father, the former envoy of the Amsterdam Orphan's chamber Pieter Seghers (1548-c. 1602), closes a bond on behalf of his then five-year-old son. From this document Lastman's year of birth can be deduced as 1583. A statement of 1619, in which Lastman himself attests to be 'around 36 years old', confirms this date. The Catholic Pieter Seghers and his wife, the sworn appraiser Barbara Jacobsdr (1549-1624) lived south of Amsterdam's Oude Kerk, in the Sint Jansstraat, in the house 'de oitmoedigen Coninck' ('the humble King'). They had six children. At the time the neighbourhood housed many painters and artisans, and this artistic environment might well have contributed to the career choices of the siblings: Pieter's older brother Segher Pietersz Coninck (1578-1650) was a prominent silver- and goldsmith; Pieter himself became the leading history painter of his generation; his younger brother Claes Pietersz Lastman (1586-1625) also turned painting, as well as engraving; and his sister Agnieta Pietersdr (1595-1631) married the painter Francois Venant (1590-1636).

According to Karel van Mander (1548-1606) in his *Schilder-Boeck*, Lastman studied with the mannerist history- and portrait painter Gerrit Pietersz (1566-1612), a former student of Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (1562-1638), and the younger brother of the famous composer and Amsterdam organist Jan Pietersz Sweelinck (1562-1621). Before establishing himself as a master painter in Amsterdam, Gerrit Pietersz had visited Italy, and around 1603 Lastman followed his teacher's example. Lastman's drawing after Paolo Veronese's (1528-1588) *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the church of SS Giovanni e Paolo in Venice indicates his presence there, probably around 1603. However, Lastman's travel goal was Rome (and possibly Naples<sup>2</sup>) where he befriended other aspiring artists such as Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610) from Frankfurt, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) from Antwerp and his peer and fellow Amsterdam townsman Jan Pynas (1581/82-1631), probably his travel companion. Together they made drawings of the

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ancient ruins and Rome's countryside, and eagerly studied the work of Italian predecessors such as Raphael (1483-1520), Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Caravaggio (1571-1610).

At the latest in March 1617 Lastman is back in Amsterdam, where he is among the buyers at the sale of the painter Gillis van Coninxloo (1544-1606). In 1608 he moves with his mother, brother and sister to a large house in the Breestraat (opposite the Zuiderkerk, completed in 1614), with a comfortable studio on the north. There he establishes himself an ambitious, innovative history painter, and starts producing erudite colourful works, clear in narrative, filled with medium-size figures and accurate detail, in a monumental style reminiscent of Elsheimer's, but bolder in execution. As the Breestraat rapidly became the epicentre of Amsterdam's booming art scene, Lastman accordingly gained his reputation as the most prominent among the Amsterdam history painters (sometimes anachronistically called the 'Pre-Rembrandtists'). During the next 23 years a steady flow of paintings – almost invariably on panel – leaves the Breestraat workshop. Lastman's extant painted oeuvre numbers eighty-seven autograph works, plus eight compositions known through copies, prints and drawings; however, archival sources document a considerable number of presently unknown works as well. Most of the extant paintings (78%) depict a Christian subject: 36 render a theme of the Old Testament, 37 show New Testament themes. In addition, Lastman painted mythological subjects (12), themes from ancient history (5), Arcadian landscapes with shepherds (4) and even a religious allegory. As one might expect, Lastman took on pupils. Although undocumented, we might suspect some of the younger Amsterdam history painters, such as the already mentioned Francois Venant (Lastman's brother-in-law) and fellow Catholic Claes Moyaert (1591-1669), who both worked in a Lastman-*esque* style, to have at some point been active in Lastman's studio, be it as an assistant or a pupil. Still, two of Lastman's most famous pupils came from not from Amsterdam, but from his grandfather's hometown, Leiden. Around 1619-1621 the child prodigy Jan Lievens (1607-1674) was taught by Lastman, followed, around 1625, by Rembrandt (1606-1669). Whereas Lievens stayed with Lastman for two full years, Rembrandt spent a mere six months with him, a decisive period nonetheless for the aspiring young painter, as we shall see.

Lastman never married, although a court case of 1615 dealing with his unfulfilled marital commitment to Hillegont Adriaensdr Bredero, the sister of the poet Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero (1585-1618) indicates he initially had plans to do so. His broken promise had no doubt to do with Hillegont being protestant. The Lastman family were active Catholics, and Pieter's mother Barbara would not have allowed a marriage with a protestant girl, just as she refused her daughter Agnieta permission to marry the Remonstrant Francois Venant. Significantly, their marriage took place mere months after Barbara's death in 1625. Lastman's later years seem to have been a struggle, as is also indicated by a gradually declining production. Soon after his mother's passing, his younger brother Claes unexpectedly died as well.

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Following illnesses in 1628 and 1629 Lastman twice states his will, but recovers. In 1631 – the year of his last dated painting – his sister Agnieta dies, and Lastman gets ill again. He subsequently moves back to his house of birth ‘de oitmoedigen Coninck’ where he passes in 1633. Lastman’s inventory shows him to have been affluent, not in the least it includes many paintings by him and others.

### **Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well**

In 1621, the year in which the present painting was executed, all that hardship was still ahead. In fact, Lastman was at the height of his career. In the previous years he had produced masterpieces such as *Paul and Barnabas at Lystra* (1617) now in the Amsterdam Museum, *David Making Music in the Temple* (1618) in Braunschweig, *David and Uriah* (1619) in the Leiden Collection, New York (fig. 1), and the *Baptism of the Eunuch* (1620) in Munich.<sup>3</sup> In our monumental picture – one of three works known from 1621, the others being *Jonah and the Whale* now in Düsseldorf, and *Hagar in the Desert* in Jerusalem<sup>4</sup> – Lastman depicts a subject of the New Testament, more specifically of Christ’s early ministry as recounted in the Gospel of John 4: 4-26. Travelling from Judea to Galilee, Christ passes through the town of Sychar. Being tired, he sits down at the old well that Jacob once built there.

*‘When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”’*

While the inspiring conversation between Christ and the woman continues, this essential passage fully encapsulates the story’s message: the well and the water it holds here are the metaphor of life, eternity and faith. By giving Christ what he asks her for – i.e. her life and devotion – Christ promises her eternal life. Moreover, Christ does not distinguish between Jews, Samaritans or any other race or colour, a message at the core of Christian belief, and as vital then as ever. Lastman’s rendering of the subject is situated in a hilly Levantine landscape with a bright view into the far distant hills. Central to the picture is the classicising figure of Christ on the right, seen against the background of the well’s pulley and foliage. A handsome figure of idealised monumentality, he is dressed in a simple purple tunic and a grand red cloak. While emphatically leaning his imposing right hand on the ledge of the well, he points his left index finger

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with an elegant, rhetoric hand gesture, at the Samaritan woman. She – a woman of the land – stands before him in a rather straightforward manner, her skirt tied up around her waist, holding a jug in her right hand, and pointing to the well while asking Christ with slight disbelief ‘Where can you get this living water?’ Behind her one sees the apostles returning from Sychar in the distance.

By 1621 the subject’s pictorial tradition was substantial. In Italy, masters such as Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594) and Paolo Veronese from Venice, and Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) in Bologna had painted the subject. In print its depiction predominantly dated back to early sixteenth century Northern masters such as Lucas Cranach (1472-1553), Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533) and Hans Sebald Beham (c. 1500-1550). Late sixteenth century Northern artists – e.g. Maerten de Vos (1532-1603), Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617) – likewise produced prints of the theme. During the first decades of the seventeenth century Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651) from Utrecht painted it twice.<sup>5</sup> Lastman, though, rather relied on an Italian example, that of Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) (fig. 2). Whereas the general composition of Michelangelo’s design, engraved by the French-Roman printmaker Nicolas Beatrizet (1501-1565), merely matches the present composition superficially, the truly engaging similarity is found in the figure of Christ, whose pose and features present a prime example of Italian High-Renaissance idealism (fig. 3, 4). However, if Beatrizet’s print was Lastman’s prime source, it wasn’t his only one. Having worked in Rome for years, Lastman knew well that Christ’s pose essentially repeated Michelangelo’s own *Moses* sculpture of c. 1513/15, conceived for pope Julius II’s tomb, and housed in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli (fig. 5). Described by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) as ‘unequaled by any modern or ancient work’, the *Moses* was a ‘must-see’, and Lastman undoubtedly went to admire it many times. He might well have brought drawings of it, done *in situ*, back to Amsterdam, but if not he could easily rely on prints, such as those by Cornelis Bos (1506/10-1555) or Jacob Matham (1571-1631), the latter published around 1605. That, prior to 1621, Michelangelo’s *Moses* was already on Lastman’s mind is demonstrated by its adaption elsewhere in his oeuvre, namely in the figure of King David in the above mentioned Leiden Collection’s *David and Uriah* of 1619 (fig. 6).

As for the eloquent left hand gesture of Lastman’s Christ (fig. 7), this can likewise be traced back to Michelangelo. Not only does it directly cite the hand of the *Moses* (fig. 8), it recalls the iconic image of God’s and Adam’s fingers nearly touching in mid-air in Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (fig. 9). Again, Lastman had doubtlessly visited the Sistine Chapel in his Roman years, but would have surely had access to prints after the frescoes, for instance the engraving by Gaspare Ruina (active c. 1500-1540) (fig. 10). That Lastman had already been thinking about the hand gesture and its strong rhetorical implications follows from his *The Angel with Manoah and His Wife* of 1617, now in the Bader Collection (fig. 11).<sup>6</sup> As in the present *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the*

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*Well*, this painting deals with the encounter between humans and the divine. Seen in reverse, the Bader work offers a striking blueprint for the present work (fig. 12, 13). However, in the present work the figure of Christ and his formidable hands take on a more fundamental role, visually, narratively and conceptually. Christ's left hand gesture primarily informs us visually about his rhetoric. Yet as in Michelangelo's fresco, the gesture takes on theological significance, as it performs the divine act of giving eternal life to a human (who, it should be noted, also points her finger), thereby essentially re-enacting God's giving life to Adam, and thus reconciling Adam's original sin. Within that perspective, Christ's equally eye-catching right hand, so firmly leaning on the well (the metaphorical 'spring of water welling up to eternal life', John 4: 13), further articulates his seminal role as the intermediary between God, eternity, humanity and redemption, the core idea of Christianity.

### **Lastman and Rembrandt**

In conceiving his *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well* Lastman thus, as artists do, drew from the work of his predecessor. In turn, Lastman's work deeply influenced the artists working around him, and the younger generation. His impact on Rembrandt, in particular, has been much emphasized.<sup>7</sup> As said, Rembrandt was with Lastman around 1624/25, thus about four years after the present work was executed. Still, he will have seen it in Lastman's studio. The painting apparently never left the Breestraat house, as it is described in Lastman's 1632 inventory: 'Opde kamer achter [...] een crucifix van Pr Lastman / 't vroungen aende put vande zelve, beijde met een ebben lijst' ('In the back room [...] a crucifix by Pr Lastman / the woman at the well by the same, both in an ebony frame'). The detailed inventory lists around 60 paintings in this room (which has been identified as Lastman's actual studio<sup>8</sup>) and remarkably our painting is one of only five works mentioned with a frame. Does that imply that, rather than the painting remaining unsold, Lastman wished to keep it for himself? Quite possibly. At least it had significance to his family, for it stayed in their position until at least 1664, when it is recorded in his niece's inventory (see provenance).

Over the period of Rembrandt's career, one can discern two peaks in his emulation of his master. The first is around 1626/27, when Rembrandt is back in Leiden, and starts to digest what he had seen and learned in Amsterdam the year before. The result of this first encounter is found in paintings such as the so-called *Leiden History Painting* of 1626, now the Lakenhal, Leiden, which strongly depends on Lastman's *Coriolanus* of 1625 in Dublin; the *Bileam and the Ass* of the same year in Paris (fig. 14), a painting with a rare subject that is based on Lastman's rendition of the same subject of 1622 in Jerusalem (fig. 15); and the *St Paul in Prison* of 1627, now in Stuttgart, referencing Lastman's *Hermit Reading* of 1611.<sup>9</sup> A second wave of Lastman emulation occurs when Rembrandt is already a fully established painter in Amsterdam, during the period following Lastman's death, in the middle of the 1630s. Famous examples from this

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period are the 1635 dated *Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac* in St Petersburg, which relies on Lastman's grisaille of the subject of around 1612 in the Rembrandthuis (Lastman's grisaille was in turn inspired by Caravaggio's *Matthew and the Angel* and his *Sacrifice of Isaac*, which he had seen in Rome); and the drawing (c. 1637) and painting of *Susanna and the Elders* (c. 1638/47), both in Berlin, that closely follow Lastman's *Susanna and the Elders* of 1614, also in Berlin.<sup>10</sup>

Rembrandt's prints, too, reveal his indebtedness to Lastman. That the 1641 dated *Triumph of Mordechai* directly relates to Lastman's 1624 painting with the subject in the Rembrandthuis is well known (fig. 16, 17).<sup>11</sup> So far, Rembrandt's reliance on the present *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well* for his own etching of the subject (fig. 18) had gone unnoticed. A close inspection reveals, however, that Rembrandt had our picture in mind when conceiving his composition. As the etching is dated 1634, it seems one of Rembrandt's earliest – if not *the* earliest – adaptations of Lastman's work after his death, kick-starting the second period of Rembrandt revisiting his former master's oeuvre (Rembrandt's *John the Baptist Preaching* in Berlin, which reflects on a Lastman composition of the subject known through a later drawing, is usually dated c. 1634/35<sup>12</sup>). One could imagine that, following Lastman's death, Rembrandt visited the studio, possibly accompanied by Lastman's brother Segher Pietersz or his wife Grietje Cornelis (who had shown around and assisted notary Lamberti when he made up the 1632 inventory). He would have then again seen the painting he knew from the period of his apprenticeship, and decided he wanted to try his hands at it. Although Rembrandt did bring about significant changes – he situated the scene against an old, somewhat dilapidated building structure reminiscent of the building in the 1633 *Good Samaritan* etching, thus creating a more intimate environment – he must have been very impressed with Lastman's work. In fact, although he moved away from the classicising character of Lastman's Christ, he kept the main figures largely as they were. Note, for instance, the position of Christ's hand on the well, a telling detail nowhere to be found in other renditions of the subject. He did, however, move the Samaritan woman closer to the well and let her stretched hand hold the pulley's rope, again with the aim of creating more intimacy. Other than that, he kept the image largely in tact, as can be seen in a comparison of the etching and a digitally edited detail image of the painting, in which the Samaritan woman is likewise moved closer to the well (fig. 19, 20).

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<sup>1</sup> For biographical references, see Dudok van Heel 2006, ch. 2, 'Pieter Lastman : een katholiek schilder in de Sint Anthonisbreestraat', pp. 52-123 (genealogy on pp. 99-110); Seifert 2011, 'Pieter Lastman – "Constrijcken history Schilder tot Amsterdam' (ch.2), pp. 21-68.

<sup>2</sup> Dudok van Heel 2006, pp. 81-85 points out Lastman's connection with the Amsterdam milieu of painters who had stayed in Naples for longer periods. In this respect, he also points to Lastman's pupil Rembrandt's first teacher Jacob van Swanenburgh (1571-1638), who had worked in Naples between 1600-1615, and who Lastman might have acquainted there.

<sup>3</sup> See for these

<sup>4</sup> *Jonah and the Whale*, oil on panel, 36 x 52,1 cm., Düsseldorf, Museum Kunst Palast, see Seifert 2011, pp. 126, 128, fig. 112; *Hagar in the Desert*, oil on panel, 51.6 x 45.8 cm, Jerusalem, The Israel Museum, see C.T. Seifert, in: M. Sitt (ed.), *Pieter Lastman : In Rembrandts Schatten?*, exh. cat. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle 2006, pp. 94-97, cat. no. 17; Seifert 2011, pp. 163, 166, 168, fig. 171.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Roethlisberger, M.J. Bok, *Abraham Bloemaert and his sons : paintings and prints*, 2 vols., Doornspijk 1993, 1, pp. 149-150, cat. nos. 108, 109.

<sup>6</sup> See D. de Witt, *The Bader collection*, Kingston 2008, pp. 177-178, cat. no. 106.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, C. Tümpel, 'Pieter Lastman and Rembrandt', in: A. Tümpel, P. Schatborn, *Pieter Lastman : the man who taught Rembrandt*, exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rembrandthuis 1991, pp. 54-84; M. Sitt, 'Pieter Lastman und Rembrandt – von der stummen Sprache des Körpers zur Verdichtung von Emotion', in: Hamburg 2006, pp. 72-85. Although Lastman painted the present work during the period that Jan Lievens presumably studied with him, it has left no significant traces in that artist's work.

<sup>8</sup> For the full inventory, see Dudok van Heel 2006, pp. 100-102; Seifert 2011, pp. 52-62, 312-320, Anhang A, with a discussion of its content.

<sup>9</sup> For these examples, see Tümpel 1991; Sitt 2006. For Rembrandt's little known, yet convincing citation of Lastman's *Hermit Reading*, see Seifert 2011, p. 61, fig. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Tümpel 1991; Sitt 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Amsterdam 1991, pp. 118-119, cat. no. 17; M. Sitt, in Hamburg 2006, pp. 124-127, cat. no. 28.

<sup>12</sup> See E. van de Wetering et al., *A corpus of Rembrandt paintings*, 6 vols., Amsterdam etc. 1982-2014, 6 (2014), cat. no. 110, c. 1634/35. For the drawing, done by Tethart Philip Christian Haag (1737-1812) and currently with Tak Labrijn Fine Art, Amsterdam, see for instance Amsterdam 1991, p. 77, fig. 25; Seifert 2011, p. 202, fig. 220.