REMBRANDT

1606–1669

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn was born at Leiden, the son of a miller. He died at Amsterdam. He first studied in his native town with the obscure painter Jacob van Swanenburch from around 1621 to 1624, and then for about six months with Pieter Lastman at Amsterdam. He returned to Leiden around 1625 and worked there until 1631 or 1632 when he moved to Amsterdam, which remained his residence for the rest of his life. His output was prodigious. Today we know more than five hundred paintings, almost three hundred etchings, and around fourteen hundred drawings by his hand. Unlike most of his Dutch contemporaries, he was not a specialist. He depicted religious, historical and allegorical scenes, as well as portraits and group portraits, nudes, genre pictures, landscapes, studies of animals and still lifes. In each of these categories he created works which rank with the most impressive and moving in the history of Western art.

1958.35 S. BARTHOLOMEW

A half-length, bearded man with his head turned slightly toward the right. In his right hand he holds a knife.

Signed on the blade of the knife: Rembrandt.f (there is a flourish before the signature).

Oak panel attached to another oak panel which is backed with a cradle 24 7/8 x 18 3/4 (0.633 x 0.477). The support was thinned before application of the reinforcing panel and cradle; it is now about 3/16 of an inch thick. There is a vertical split about 8 7/8 (0.225) from the left edge of the original panel which runs from the lower edge to about 10 3/4 (0.274) from the top. The ground and paint layers show some losses along the split and at scattered points. There is overpainting along the split and on the lower left of the face. Infra-red photographs indicate that the latter area has been entirely cleaned of old varnish and slightly abraded. They also show some retouching on the right side of the face. There is also evidence of repainting on the fur collar, the background, and generally in the lower part of the picture. Examination under magnification shows that the painting is sketchy under the overpainting. The surface coating layer shows marked discoloration and variations in thickness; the background and lower part being thickly coated, while the face is less so.

The Saint is identified by the knife which he holds in his heavy—almost clumsy—right hand. The knife represents the instrument of Bartholomew's martyrdom.

Jakob Rosenberg first published the painting in 1948[1] as an authentic work by Rembrandt. Before he made this convincing attribution, another, slightly larger version formerly in the Michael Friedsam Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and now at S. Bonaventure University at Olean, New York,[2] was accepted by some specialists[3] and doubted by others[4]. But since Rosenberg's publication of the Worcester painting, it has been rightly accepted as the original. There can be no question that the version now at Olean, New York, is a rather crude copy[5].

The copy shows more of the figure of the Saint on the right, the left, and again below the hand. Perhaps the copyist invented these additions. On the other hand, the copy may show the original state of the Worcester painting which was perhaps cut down at a later date. The latter hypothesis is rather strengthened by an eighteenth century mezzotint, in reverse, of the painting inscribed "Rembrant Pinxit" and "J: de Groot Fe." De Groot's print also shows the picture in an enlarged state. Of course, it is possible that De Groot made his mezzotint after the copy we know—or even another one—and not Rembrandt's original. But the fact that this mediocre printmaker was able to bring out more of the modeling of the Saint's head than the artist who painted the Olean replica suggests he did not work from that version. Until a better copy of the picture turns up, it seems reasonable to assume that De Groot worked from Rembrandt's original painting.

It is noteworthy that earlier cataloguers of De Groot's prints did not list his mezzotint after this Rembrandt as S. Bartholomew. It was catalogued as "Bust Portrait of an Old Man, seen frontally with a knife in his left hand"[6] and "Man with a Curved Knife"[7].

One of Rembrandt's later representations of S. Bartholomew holding a knife received more imaginative titles. His portrait of the Saint, dated 1661, has been erroneously called "The Assassin," "Rembrandt's Cook," and "Portrait of a Surgeon"[8]. The idea that Rembrandt would have painted an Apostle holding the knife which was a symbol of his martyrdom was apparently inconceivable to some of his earlier critics. More recent scholars have shared this view. When the *S. Bartholomew*, now at Worcester, was exhibited in San Francisco in 1939 it was called "Portrait of an Old Man"[9].

The close similarity of the style and technique of the painting to works Rembrandt made shortly after he settled in Amsterdam dates it around 1633. By this early date the artist was an unrivalled master of the chiaroscuro device. His skill is particularly apparent here in the subtle handling of the transitional tones between the light areas and deep shadows which model the powerful head. Typical for these years too is the variety of his brushwork and the convincing way he suggests different textures as well as giving pictorial richness to the portrait by varying the weight of his paint from a thin liquid to a heavy impasto. The warm color harmony, reminiscent of Rubens' palette, supports a date in the early thirties; it was around this time that Rembrandt's paintings began to show the impact of Rubens' style. The agitated expression Rembrandt gave to S. Bartholomew is also characteristic of this phase of his career when the artist concentrated upon depicting physiognomies that show intense emotion. We sense that the young painter felt the Saint must have experienced great fear and trembling as he awaited his terrible martyrdom and that he wanted us to share emotions the Apostle felt before he was flayed alive.

Many years later Rembrandt made two other paintings of S. Bartholomew: one in 1657[10] and the other, already mentioned, in 1661. The mood of these imposing late works is quite different. The 1657 painting depicts the Saint with his inner struggle resolved; he appears undaunted by the test to which his faith will be put. Rembrandt's last representation of the Saint is even more restrained. The Apostle is seen deep in thought and we participate with him as he seems to think about our destiny as well as his own. The changes in these late paintings of S. Bartholomew reflect a deepening of Rembrandt's religious feeling and understanding. It is doubtful, however, if Rembrandt could have depicted the wide range of subtle inner emotions which we find in his profound mature works if during the early decades of his career he had not mastered ways of representing more emphatic expressions to show man's inner conflicts and thoughts.

PROVENANCE: Hofstede de Groot, no. 169a, lists a Rembrandt *S. Bartholomew*, on panel, which appeared in the Sale, J. M. Quinkhard, Amsterdam, March 15, 1773, no. 10, and the Sale, J. Caudri, Amsterdam, September 6, 1809, no. 62[11]. When the copy now at Olean, New York, appeared Hofstede de Groot gave this provenance to that painting[12]. There is, however, better reason to believe that the Worcester painting was the one listed in those sales, since its dimensions (24 7/8 x 18 3/4; 0.633 x 0.477) are closer to those given for the picture (24 1/4 x 19 1/4; 0.617 x 0.489) than are those of the enlarged Olean copy (29 1/2 x 21 1/2; 0.749 x 0.546). The painting is said to have entered the Fossard Collection, Paris, around 1835[13]. In the collection of Comte Guy de Leusse, Anet and Paris[14], and acquired from him in 1920 by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., who gave it to Harvard University in 1940[15]. Sold by Harvard University through Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York[16], to the museum in 1958, Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund[17].

EXHIBITION: At San Francisco in 1939 (Ref. h).

NOTES: **(1)** Refs. i, j. **(2)** Oil on panel 29 1/2 x 21 1/2 (0.749 x 0.546). It was given to the Metropolitan Museum by the executors of the Friedsam estate in 1931 (Ref. f). In 1941 the Metropolitan Museum returned the picture to the Friedsam estate, and they in turn gave it to S. Bonaventure University, Olean, New York (Ref. l, p. 7). **(3)** It was first published as a Rembrandt by Hofstede de Groot (Ref. b). Valentiner accepted it; he dated it around 1631 and stated: "Der Typus des Dargestellten erinnert an Rembrandts Vater" (Refs. c, e). Bredius also accepted it in 1936 (Ref. g); however, in 1921 he expressed doubts about its authenticity (see note 4 below). **(4)** In 1921 Bredius questioned the work and wrote that he repeatedly saw the picture now at Worcester when it was in the collection of Comte de Leusse in Anet: "Es machte auf mich den Eindruck eines echten Rembrandt" (Ref. d). K. Bauch attributed it to Lievens (see his *Die Kunst des jungen Rembrandt*, 1933, p. 220 and "Rembrandt und Lievens," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, Vol. XI, 1939, p. 252). **(5)** Rosenberg (Refs. i, j) calls it a contemporary copy by a pupil. If it is, Rembrandt was probably not very happy with his student's achievement. In the monograph Bauch published on Rembrandt's paintings in 1966 (Ref. k), he gave up his earlier attribution of the work to Lievens (see note 4 above), and calls it a copy after the Worcester painting. Bauch (Ref. k) erroneously lists it as in the Metropolitan Museum. It should be noted that H. Gerson, whose revised edition of Bredius' catalogue of Rembrandt's paintings appeared in 1969 after the manuscript of this catalogue was completed, reserves judgment about the authenticity of both the version now at Olean and the Worcester painting (see Ref. g). His tentative suggestion (Ref. g, p. 612, no. 606A) that the painting formerly in the Comte de Leusse Collection may be a third version must be discarded; the De Leusse and Worcester paintings are identical (see Provenance above). **(6)** A. von Wurzbach, *Niederländisches Künstler-Lexikon*, Vol. I, 1906, p. 620, no. 18. **(7)** J. Charrington, *A Catalogue of the Mezzotints after, or Said to be after, Rembrandt*, 1923, p. 44, no. 61. Hofstede de Groot (Ref. b) notes that J. de Groot also made a mezzotint of the head alone. This print is not listed by either Charrington or Wurzbach; the author of this entry has been unable to locate an impression of the print. **(8)** The painting is now in the J. Paul Getty Collection, Sutton Place, Surrey, and Malibu Beach, California; reproduced Ref. g, no. 615. For a discussion of the apocryphal titles given to the work see S. Slive, "Realism and Symbolism in Seventeenth-Century Painting," *Daedalus*, Vol. XCI (1962), no. 3, pp. 486–7. **(9)** Ref. h. **(10)** Now in the Putnam Foundation Collection, San Diego, California; reproduced Ref. g, no. 613. **(11)** Ref. a. **(12)** Ref. b. **(13)** A letter from Comte Guy de Leusse to Baron de Serlay dated at Anet, November 22, 1921, preserved at Dumbarton Oaks, indicates the picture was purchased by his wife's great-grandfather, M. Fossard, *agent de change*, probably about 1835 and hung with the rest of his collection in his house in the rue St. Georges. **(14)** Ref. d; Valentiner (Refs. c, e) places the Leusse Collection in Paris. Judging from the letter cited in note 13 this collection was in residences both at Anet and Paris. **(15)** Ref. l, p. 7. **(16)** Bill from Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., June 22, 1958, at WAM. **(17)** Refs. l, m.

References: **(a)** C. Hofstede de Groot, *Catalogue*, Vol. VI, 1915, p. 99, no. 169a. **(b)** Hofstede de Groot, English translation, Vol. VI, 1916, p. 120, no. 169a. **(c)** W. R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt: Wiedergefundene Gemälde (1910–1920)*, *Klassiker der Kunst*, Vol. XXVII, 1921, p. xvi, no. 21, called a repetition of the painting now at Olean, New York. **(d)** A. Bredius, "Wiedergefundene 'Rembrandts' ", in *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, Vol. XXXII, 1921, p. 148, suggesting the painting is a genuine Rembrandt and is superior to the picture now at Olean, New York. **(e)** W. R. Valentiner, *Rembrandt: Wiedergefunde Gemälde (1910-1922)*, *Klassiker der Kunst*, 2nd ed., Vol. XXVII, 1923, p. xxi, no. 22, called a repetition of the painting now at Olean, New York. **(f)** B. Burroughs and H. B. Wehle, "The Michael Friedsam Collection," in *Bulletin of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, Vol. XXVII, no. 11, November, 1932, p. 46, questioning the attribution of the picture now at Olean, New York, to Rembrandt. **(g)** A. Bredius, *The Paintings of Rembrandt*, Vienna, 1935, p. 26, no. 606, suggesting it is "possibly a copy by Lievens"; 3rd, revised edition by H. Gerson, London-New York, 1969, repr. p. 510, no. 606A, p. 612, note: "I have not seen the Worcester version for a long time, so I cannot put forward a considered opinion." **(h)** Golden Gate International Exposition, San Francisco, *Masterworks of Five Centuries* (exhibition catalogue), 1939, no. 88, exhibited as Rembrandt, "Portrait of an Old Man," repr. **(i)** J. Rosenberg, *Rembrandt*, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 203–4; detail reproduced, Vol. II, fig. 267; published as an original. **(j)** J. Rosenberg, *Rembrandt: Life and Work*, revised edition, 1964, pp. 324–5, detail reproduced fig. 267; published as an original. **(k)** K. Bauch, *Rembrandt Gemälde*, 1966, pp. 9–10, no. 154, repr.; accepted as authentic "um 1633 gemalt". **(l)** WAM *News Bulletin*, Vol. XXIV, no. 2 (November, 1958), pp. 5–7; repr., pp. 5 and 6. **(m)** WAM *Annual Report*, 1959, pp. vi, x.