

7

## **Missing elements**

From the present painting to Vliet's engraving

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A further drawing by Rembrandt includes certain elements that suggest it may have played an intermediary role.

1- *This drawing may have played a determining role in the mechanical transfer, made by Vliet when he copied the present painting: (fig.1):*



Fig. 1 Rembrandt the Baptism of the Eunuch, ca 1630, Black chalk on paper 19.2 x 21.1 cm Munich, Graphische Sammlung, 145.3.

The Munich drawing, recently attributed to Rembrandt, and representing the same theme, was made circa 1630 in a square format. It shows the three main characters arranged in a single column.<sup>1-2</sup> Either this particular drawing or a similar one may have played an indicative role in the vertical composition of Vliet's engraving. Although there has been some debate amongst scholars about the date of this drawing, it appears that it may have been to an indicative sketch, provided by Rembrandt to help the engraver make the change from a horizontal composition to a vertical one.

<sup>1</sup> Rembrandt, *The baptism of the eunuch*, ca. 1630. Black chalk on paper, 19.2 x 21.1 cm. Munich, Graphische Sammlung, 145.3.

<sup>2</sup> Corpus: Rembrandt, *The complete Drawings and Etchings* cat. D. 66 p. 70.

*Coherence creation date of the Munich drawing:*

Gary Schwartz, in his book *A Rembrandt Invention, a new Baptism of the Eunuch* (January 2020), agrees with Otto Benesch, and emphasizes that the three artworks (the lost painting, the Munich drawing and Vliet's print) may be interrelated: "I agree with those who date the drawing about 1630, before the print was made. It was then that Rembrandt created not only the drawing but a large painting of the Baptism of the Eunuch, the "invention" copied by van Vliet."

*However, it is unlikely that the Munich drawing was used by Rembrandt for his own 1641 engraving, as it displays a radically different arrangement: instead of a vertical column lining up the three figures, in the drawing there is a space separating Philip and the eunuch from the commanding horseman, as is also the case in the present painting, Visscher's print, the Louvre drawing and Rembrandt's own 1641 engraving (fig. 2).*



Fig. 2 The drawing was probably made around 1630, to serve Vliet's print and not Rembrandt's own print of 1641.

*Continuity in the horizontal composition and in the arrangement of characters from the present painting to Rembrandt's 1641 engraving:*

With the exception of the Utrecht painting, Rembrandt's versions of *the Baptism of the Eunuch* all have square, horizontal compositions with a clear space separating the figures of Philip and the eunuch from the horse (fig.3).



Fig. 3 The present painting, Visscher's print 1631, *The baptism of the eunuch*, ca. 1638-1640 Rembrandt or workshop pen and ink, wash, 17.4 x 26 cm Paris, Musée du Louvre, RF 4691 and Rembrandt, *The baptism of the eunuch*, inscribed Rembrandt. f 1641. Etching on paper, 17.8 x 21.3 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1987-185 (2).

The purpose of the Munich drawing remains debatable. It may have been intended to teach a student how to arrange the three figures and the horse vertically or in a 'spiral' shape, but Rembrandt might just as well have provided this kind of sketch for Vliet.

## 2-*The missing of a possible preparatory print:*

To make a change of composition, the sketch may merely have represented a preliminary stage in the process. Van Vliet may then have proceeded to align the horseman on his mount, together with his company, above Philip's head by shifting the respective motifs on paper and/or on a primary etching, without making any further modifications (fig. 4).

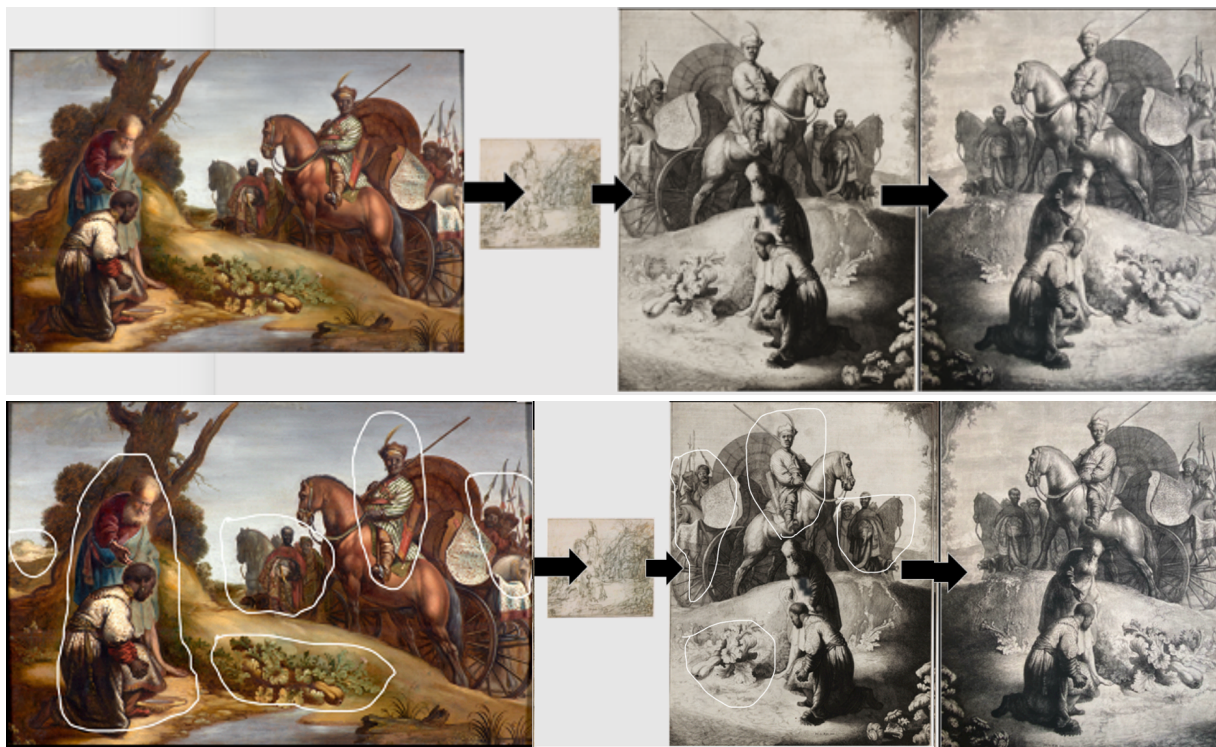


Fig. 4 The present painting, the intermediary drawing to indicate a possible vertical arrangement of Philip, the eunuch and his entourage, the preliminary etching, and the final print of Vliet in mirror image. Hypothesis of a rearrangement, motif by motif, exported from the present painting to a vertical print.

This direct transfer produces an interesting graphical effect, but the engraver would have noticed that all the eyes of the eunuch's entourage were now systematically turned towards the void on the right, in a way that made no sense (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 The mechanical transfer, maintaining the original posture in which all the gazes are turned to the right.

### *Retouching the eyes in Vliet's print:*

Vliet then had to make a new engraving (in mirror image), in which he only reworked the eyes and gazes so that they were no longer directed towards the void, but rather into the space of the image, while the contours of the figures' heads remained unchanged. Vliet would have noticed that none of these figures was looking at the scene of the baptism, and that everyone in the upper half of the picture was squinting (fig. 7).<sup>3</sup>

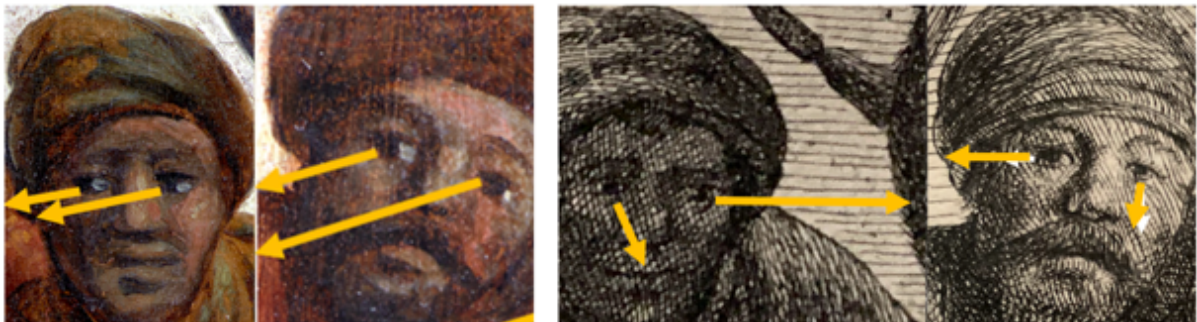


Fig. 7 The initial direction of the gazes, the transfer of composition and the retouching of the eyes has generated divergent gazes.

This was a less clumsy solution, and the direction of the gazes became a little less absurd, giving the impression that all the figures in the entourage were lost in thought. Seen from a distance, this defect is not too noticeable. If viewers did not notice the retouching and the crossed eyes at close range, they might assume that Rembrandt had already used these pensive gazes himself in some earlier paintings.

Despite its awkward effect, this retouching would have required less work than the engraver would have needed to perform in order to redo the heads, making them bend to face the principal scene, as we would expect. There is no evidence that Vliet would have been able to do this on his own. Rembrandt could have done it easily, ( for example the drawing *The*

<sup>3</sup> In Vliet's print, the head of the archer with his gaze directed to the right may have been retained from the preparatory engraving. The engraver would have only needed to change his left eye.

*Angel Preventing Abraham from Sacrificing his Son*, Rembrandt 1634-1635) but in that year of 1631, he must have been busy with other works and with his recent move to set up his studio in Amsterdam (fig.8).



Fig. 8 *The Angel Preventing Abraham from Sacrificing his Son*, Rembrandt 1634-1635. BM, [1897,1117.5](#)

There is no indication that Rembrandt supervised the execution of the engraving. His probable absence would explain why Vliet was not able to reposition the heads to make them face the principal scene and thus maintain the dramatic tension of the painted original.

*Speculation of a procedure of mechanical transfer, based on the moving of motifs from the present painting and readjusting them in a vertical composition, following Rembrandt's sketch and a missing intermediary print (fig. 9)*

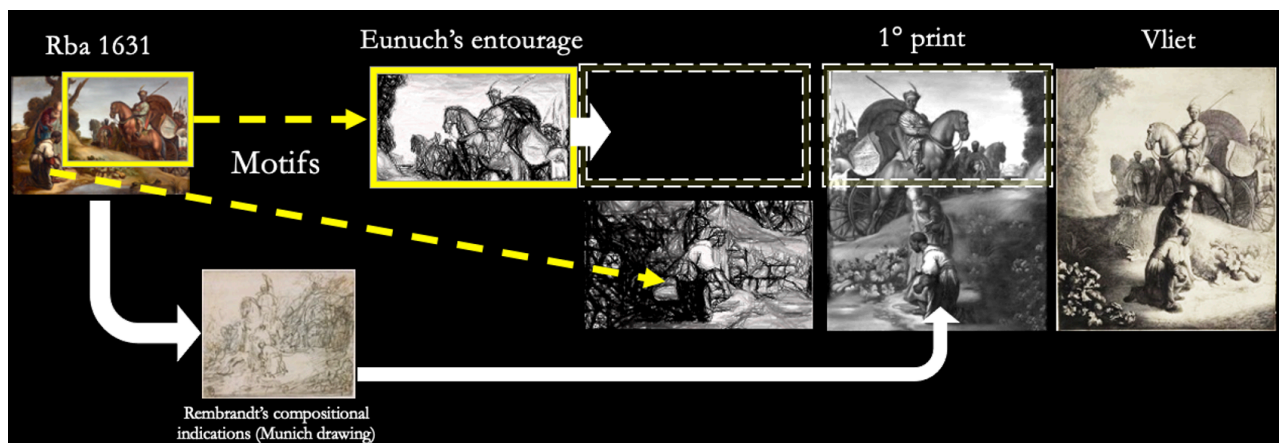


Fig. 9 The present painting divided in motifs, the intermediary drawing, the preliminary missing print, and Vliet's final print.

*No comment:*



