

guild. When one was established in 1611, Wtewael was a founding member. He was also active in various spheres unrelated to the arts, notably local politics, serving on Utrecht's city council in 1610, and again from 1632 to 1636. A Calvinist and staunch patriot, he also assisted in 1618 in the overthrow of the Remonstrant magistracy of Utrecht and its replacement with a Calvinist administration loyal to the House of Orange. Other activities included running a flax and linen business—to which, Van Mander complained, Wtewael devoted more energy than he did to his art.

Nonetheless, as Van Mander acknowledged, he did find time to produce a considerable number of paintings. Surviving works range in date from the early 1590s to 1628 and vary considerably in size, support, and subject. Although the majority represent biblical and mythological subjects, Wtewael also executed portraits and genre scenes. Stylistically, he was influenced by a number of different schools, most notably Venetian, Tuscan, and Dutch (the Haarlem mannerists Hendrick Goltzius [1558–1617] and Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem [1562–1638]). He was one of the few Dutch artists who did not abandon mannerism after 1600, and his oeuvre demonstrates no clear stylistic evolution.

Wtewael died in Utrecht on 1 August 1638, having survived his wife, Christian van Halen, by nine years. He had four children, one of whom, Peter (1596–1660), was a painter who worked in his style.

Bibliography

Van Mander 1604/1618: 296–297.
Lindeman 1929.
Lowenthal 1986a.
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 501–502.

1972.11.1 (2610)

Moses Striking the Rock

1624
Oil on oak, 44.6 x 66.7 (17⁵/₁₆ x 26¹/₄)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Inscriptions

Signed and dated at lower left: *J Wtt/wael fecit / Anno 1624*

Technical Notes: The support is a single, horizontally grained oak panel with narrow, oak edge strips attached to edges beveled on the back. Paint is applied over an exceedingly thin, smooth white ground in small, precise fluid strokes blended wet into wet, with slightly impasted high-

lights. A history of flaking has resulted in scattered small losses throughout the paint layer, particularly in the trees, distant and shadowed figures, and horse. Losses are re-touched and design elements are reinforced with later repainting. No major conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

Provenance: H. C. Erhardt, Esq., London, by 1892; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 19–22 June 1892, no. 273, as by J. B. de Wael); “Leffer” or “Lepper.”¹ Francis Howard, Esq., Dorking, by 1955; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 25 November 1955, no. 52, as by J. B. de Wael); (Arcade Gallery, London);² Vincent Korda, London; (Arcade Gallery, London, in 1967); Vincent Korda, London; (Edward Speelman, London, in 1972).³

Exhibited: *A Loan Exhibition of Pictures*, Art Gallery of the Corporation of London, Guildhall, 1892, no. 99 (as by Jan Baptist de Wael). *Recent Acquisitions: Mannerist and Baroque Paintings*, Arcade Gallery, London, 1967, no. 23. *Gods, Saints, and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Detroit Institute of Arts; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1980 (only shown in Washington), 46–47.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL had found fault with Moses during their long exodus from Egypt because they had no water to drink. When Moses and his brother the High Priest Aaron appealed to the Lord for help, Moses was told to take the rod that he had used to part the waters of the Red Sea and strike the rock at Horeb. The Lord told him that he would be by him, and that when he struck the rock water would “come out of it, that the people may drink” (Exodus 17:6). “And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice, and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle” (Numbers 20:11). This dramatic miracle, so instrumental to the successful outcome of the Israelites’ strenuous voyage to the Promised Land, is the central moment of this highly evocative painting by Joachim Wtewael. Moses, accompanied by Aaron, is in the process of striking the rock. The water streaming from it has already created deep pools from which the surrounding Israelites and their animals drink and refresh themselves.

Wtewael’s emphasis in this exquisitely refined painting, however, is not on the miraculous nature of the event, but rather on the life-sustaining character of the water that Moses and Aaron have released.⁴ Except for the agitated pose of a man in the background who directs a caravan to the pools of water, no one seems in the least astounded by the miracle. A woman in the left foreground lies languidly on her side while her child sips contentedly from a small cup. Most of the Israelites are intent on scooping up water from the ground with pails and pitchers: two



Joachim Wtewael, *Moses Striking the Rock*, 1972.11.1

mothers, each grasping her child with one arm, hold dishes under the stream of water coming from the rock; others drink the refreshing liquid from hats, cups, and pitchers. Despite the plethora of elegantly and brightly clothed figures, their animals, and the utensils in the setting, the mood is surprisingly quiet and subdued as man and beast alike pause to accept the goodness of God's bounty.

Traditionally, the water that poured from the rock and refreshed the Israelites was understood symbolically as the gift of God's salvation, salvation granted through the actions of their leader Moses. The rock was likened to Christ and the water that flowed from it was seen as the blood flowing from the wounds suffered at his crucifixion. Thus the episode was typologically associated with the Eucharist and with Christ's forgiveness and man's redemption.⁵

The story also had specific significance to the Dutch, who often found historic parallels between their own history and biblical narratives, associating the tribulations of the early Jews with their own

struggles for independence against Spanish domination. The leader of their revolt, William the Silent, was likened to Moses in that while he personified the identity of the nation he also failed to reach the promised land that he had envisioned.⁶ Even before his assassination in 1584, however, an association had been established between William the Silent and Moses, which became part of Dutch mythology. In 1581 Hendrick Goltzius surrounded his portrait of the Prince of Orange with scenes from the life of Moses, the pillars of clouds and fire, the burning bush, and the passage through the Red Sea (fig. 1). As with the miraculous scene depicted by Wtewael, the passage through the Red Sea focused on the powerful symbolism of water in the Moses legend. For the Dutch, whose land was both nourished and protected by water, the imagery suggested that God's beneficence had guided their destiny just as it had that of the Israelites.

The allegorical associations contained in this work are consistent with Wtewael's own religious and political convictions. Although born a Catholic, Wtewael became a fervent Calvinist and firm advocate of the House of Orange. He felt strongly that the Dutch republic, under the leadership of the House of Orange, ought to continue the struggle to fulfill William the Silent's original goal of a United Netherlands and should not accept the compromise solution manifested in the Twelve-Year Truce of 1609, whereby the southern provinces would remain under Spanish domination. He expressed these concerns in both his art and his political activities.⁷ As early as 1595 he designed a stained-glass window for the Cathedral of Gouda that depicted Holland's Chariot of Freedom of Conscience victorious over Spain and Idolatry. In 1605 he engraved a cycle of scenes of *Thronus Justitiae*, which depicted historical exempla of justice that had clear propagandistic overtones. Shortly after the Twelve-Year Truce was signed, he designed a series of political allegories, personified by the maid *Belgica*, that focused on many of the famous patriotic incidents in the Eighty Years' War and argued for a United Netherlands. Finally, in 1610 he participated in a revolt of Calvinist and Roman Catholic burghers against the domination of Arminian (also known as Remonstrant) officials in the Utrecht government. He subsequently served on the city council.

The decision to paint this scene in 1624 may reflect an effort to revitalize the allegorical connections between Moses and the House of Orange after the conclusion of the Truce in 1621, at a time when Prince Maurits and Prince Frederik Hendrik were renewing their military efforts against Spanish ag-

Fig. 1. Hendrick Goltzius, *William of Orange*, engraving, 1581, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen



gression. One may assume because of the complexity of the scene and refinement of the image that the painting was commissioned by, or at least was painted for, a specific patron. No surviving documents, however, elucidate this matter.⁸

Not much is known of Wtewael's working procedure, but in this instance a fragment of an elaborate preparatory drawing for the painting is preserved in the Albertina in Vienna (fig. 2).⁹ Surprisingly, given his penchant to reuse elements from his own works, none of the motifs in this richly varied painting appear to be exact quotations from his earlier images, although Lowenthal has identified close prototypes in a number of instances.¹⁰ Lowenthal also suggests that Wtewael adapted the child in the lower left from a painting by Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem.¹¹

While Wtewael apparently derived his scene from careful readings of both biblical texts in which this story appears (Exodus 17:1–7 and Numbers 20:2–13), he carefully constructed his composition along mannerist principles outlined by Karel van Mander in *Den Grondt der Edel vrij Schilder-Const*, a long didactic poem on the rules of art that Van Mander published in his *Het Schilder-Boek* of 1604.¹² In the chapter entitled “Van der Ordinanty ende Inveny der Historien” [On the Composition and Invention of History Pieces], Van Mander describes how the corners of the composition should be filled with large *repoussoir* figures, while the composition should be arranged in a circular fashion around a central focal point “in such a way that a number of figures encircle the focus of the story, which remains standing as the center of the picture...” The painting should also have variety: “a profusion of horses, dogs and other domestic animals, as well as beasts and birds of the forest; but it is particularly pleasing to behold fresh youths and beautiful maidens, old men, matrons, and children of all ages.” Finally, Van Mander recommends discreetly introducing witnesses who appear behind and to the side of the central event and comment upon it. In every respect Wtewael has followed Van Mander's recommendations, enlivening them still further with striking colors and effective use of light and shade.¹³ Particularly remarkable in this work is Wtewael's delicate touch, seen in the way he has articulated the textures and people's expressions. The surface shimmers with light and color as the scene unfolds before us.¹⁴

Notes

1. Christie's in London no longer has its records from 1931 and thus was not able to help clarify the buyer's name. See correspondence from 25 September 1986 and 7 November 1986, in NGA curatorial files.



Fig. 2. Joachim Wtewael, *Moses Striking the Rock*, 1624, preparatory drawing, Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina

2. Information for this and the following provenance listing is taken from Arcade Gallery letter, 3 March 1987, in NGA curatorial files.

3. Anthony Speelman letter, 23 January 1987, in NGA curatorial files, states that Edward Speelman had bought the *Moses Striking the Rock* from Vincent Korda prior to selling it to the National Gallery of Art.

4. This observation was first made by Tümpel 1983, 314.

5. Lowenthal 1974, 134–135.

6. For a full discussion of the symbolic relationships the Dutch felt between themselves and the story of Moses see Schama 1987, 87–101.

7. For Wtewael's political attitudes see McGrath 1975, 209–217.

8. Lowenthal 1974, 135, speculates that the painting was commissioned for a “private chapel or a clandestine Catholic church.” Because of Wtewael's fervent Calvinist beliefs, however, it seems unlikely that he would have received a commission for such a location.

9. The drawing measures 9¼ x 12 in. (24.6 x 30.5 cm). It seems to have been trimmed on all sides. The four corners are later additions. It is inv. no. 8132.

10. Lowenthal 1974, 137–138.

11. Lowenthal 1986a, 151.

12. The following English translations of this text are taken from Broos 1975/1976, 202–203.

13. Lowenthal 1974, 136, identifies compositional similarities between this work and Venetian paintings by Leandro Bassano and Jacopo Tintoretto that Wtewael might have seen when he was in Italy in the 1580s. These Venetian connections, however, seem more generic than specific.

14. I would like to thank Karen Lee Bowen for her assistance in compiling this entry.

References

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|------|---|-------|---|
| 1892 | London: no. 99 (as by Jan Baptist de Wael). | 1985 | Bosque: 94, 95, repro. |
| 1974 | Lowenthal 6: 125–141, 124, fig. 1. | 1985 | London: 90. |
| 1975 | NGA: 358–359, repro. | 1985 | NGA: 440, repro. |
| 1980 | Washington: 46–47, fig. 1. | 1986 | Sutton: 454. |
| 1983 | Philadelphia: 18. | 1986 | Wansink: 3, 4, fig. 2. |
| 1983 | Hofmann in Hamburg: 314–315, fig. 15. | 1986a | Lowenthal: 41, 50–51, 55, cat. A–88, 151–152, color pl. 22. |
| 1983 | Tümpel: 314. | 1992 | NGA: 122, color repro. |
| 1984 | Wheelock: 9, repro. | | |