



Meindert Hobbema  
Dutch, 1638 - 1709

## *The Travelers*

166[2?]

oil on canvas

overall: 101 x 145 cm (39 3/4 x 57 1/16 in.)

Inscription: lower right: m .hobbema . f 166[2?]

Widener Collection 1942.9.31

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### ENTRY

This wooded landscape view was formerly titled *A Watermill* because of the picturesque mill in the middle distance on the left. Presumably because many similar watermills exist in Hobbema's oeuvre, a new title was chosen to emphasize the distinctive staffage figures in this work, the two men on horseback who ride along the winding path in the center of the composition. A third traveler in the lower right rests on a fallen log, while others in the distant right walk toward a church whose steeple rises behind a dense group of trees.

This work, which was first published by Charles J. Nieuwenhuys in 1834, has an intriguing history.<sup>[1]</sup> The painting and its companion, *The Old Oak*, 1662 (now in Melbourne, see [fig. 1]), were discovered in 1829 by the president of the fine arts society of Groningen, P. van Arnhem, in the château of the Alberda van Dyksterhuys family, a fifteenth-century manor house situated in Pieterburen near Groningen. Van Arnhem, a collector of old paintings, was judging a local exhibition of new landscape paintings when he recognized that one of the finest works on show bore a great resemblance to paintings by Hobbema. Upon inquiry, he found out that the artist had copied a painting in the collection at château Dyksterhuys. Van Arnhem visited the château and eventually persuaded its owner, Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys, the last member of a family with a long and distinguished history, to sell his two large paintings by Hobbema. Shortly thereafter, however, Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys also received an offer from another "amateur" from Groningen, R. Gockinga. Before any transaction could be completed, Gosen Geurt died. The two interested parties eventually agreed to a joint purchase from the estate of the two paintings, which they then brought to auction in Amsterdam in 1833. At the sale Gockinga bought the present picture

outright for himself, while *The Old Oak* was bought by the dealer Nieuwenhuys.[2] Soon afterward the two Hobbema paintings were reunited in the collection of Colonel Biré in Brussels.

According to Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys, the two pictures represented views from the surroundings of the château, and were painted for the family by Hobbema. While the identical size of these extremely large paintings does suggest that they were commissioned pieces, no evidence exists to substantiate this family tradition. In any event, neither work was painted from nature, for both are clearly based on compositions by Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682). *The Old Oak*, signed and dated 1662, is derived from Ruisdael's etching *A Forest Marsh with Travelers on a Bank*. [3] The National Gallery of Art painting, which is also signed and dated, is a close variant of Ruisdael's 166[?]' painting of a watermill, now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam [fig. 2]. [4] In the Washington painting one not only sees a comparable watermill, but also the same large oak tree rising to the left of the path with its roots clinging to the river bank. Although the last digit of the date is obscured and difficult to read, it appears to be 1662. [5] That date is not only consistent with that of the Melbourne painting, it is also justifiable on compositional and stylistic grounds.

Among Hobbema's other works related to *The Travelers*, the most similar in composition is an undated painting formerly in the collection of the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio [fig. 3]. This painting is also Hobbema's closest adaptation of Ruisdael's *Landscape with Watermill* in the Rijksmuseum. With the exception of the staffage figures, Hobbema has here copied all of the compositional elements, including the cut logs strewn on the path by the woodsman. Since *The Travelers* is a freer adaptation of the Ruisdael composition than is this work, it almost certainly was painted later.

The evolution of this composition for Hobbema does not, however, begin with Ruisdael's work. At least three other paintings have similar compositions, but with a simpler mill and a differently shaped tree in the foreground. [6] Hobbema certainly painted the former Toledo and the Washington versions, which were influenced by Ruisdael, after he painted the three scenes with the simpler watermill; nevertheless, since one of these latter works is signed and dated 1662, [7] the time frame in which this evolution occurred must have been very narrow. Hobbema and Ruisdael may both have derived their compositions from an actual site, although Hobbema's earlier watermill compositions may more accurately reflect that site than do Ruisdael's. Ruisdael often freely altered the character of buildings to give

his scenes added drama and grandeur. The changes in Hobbema's conception of the scene are thus fascinating evidence of the nature of Ruisdael's influence on his young protégé at this stage of his career.

Despite the relatively old provenance of the two works from the château Dyksterhuys, their attribution to Hobbema was initially called into question. In 1842 Smith wrote that when this painting and its companion appeared in the Amsterdam sale of 1833, they "were then considered by several connoisseurs to be by the hand of some imitator of Hobbema, in which opinion the writer then coincided." He added, however, "lining and judicious cleaning have since so greatly improved them, that he feels no hesitation in now recording them among the works of the master."<sup>[8]</sup>

Although the attribution of the painting to Hobbema has never been doubted in subsequent years, Smith's initial hesitation is understandable considering that the painting style lacks many of the nuances of touch found in Hobbema's other works from the early 1660s. Brushstrokes are quite regular, and forms are comparatively simplified, particularly in the reeds in the lower left and the foliage in the bushes on the right. As a result, the painting does not exhibit the warmth and seeming spontaneity of Hobbema's more characteristic landscape views.

Various explanations can be advanced for the relative dryness of the painting, and, to judge from photographs, its companion. Primary among them is that both works are exceptionally large in scale for Hobbema and are replicas of smaller variants he made of compositions by Ruisdael.<sup>[9]</sup> These factors may have affected Hobbema's manner of painting and rendered his style less spontaneous than usual. Although nothing is known of his workshop practices, it is also possible that these paintings were produced in Hobbema's studio under his direct supervision. The staffage figures, in any event, are by another hand, which is a common occurrence in Hobbema's paintings. One nineteenth-century reference plausibly suggests that they are by Barent Gael (before 1635–after 1681).<sup>[10]</sup>

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Meindert Hobbema, *The Old Oak*, 1662, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest 1949/50



**fig. 2** Jacob van Ruisdael, *Landscape with Watermill*, 1661?), oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



**fig. 3** Meindert Hobbema, *Landscape with Watermill*, c. 1662, oil on canvas, private collection

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## NOTES

- [1] Charles J. Nieuwenhuys, *A Review of the Lives and Works of Some of the Most Eminent Painters* (London, 1834), 147–149.
- [2] Detailed biographical info on Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys appears in Wiebe J. Formsma, R. A. Luitjens-Dijkveld Stol, and A. Pathuis, *De Ommelander Borgen en Steenhuizen* (Assen, 1987), 35–37, 330–337. (The full family name is Alberda van Dyksterhuys, i.e., the Alberda of the Dyksterhuys estate, to distinguish them from neighboring relatives, the Alberda van Menkema branch.) Gosen Geurt inherited Dyksterhuys in 1790 and proceeded to renovate it in 1791 and 1792. He died in 1830. The family fortunes dwindled; the château was sold in 1902 and was demolished by September 1903. Annotated copies of the 1833 sale catalog and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot give the prices fetched by each picture as fl 3,000, although Henri Hérís, “Sur la vie et les ouvrages de Meindert Hobbema,” in *La Renaissance: Chronique des Arts et de la Littérature* 54 (1839): 7, says that *A Watermill* fetched fl 4,000 and *The Old Oak* fl 3,225. A price of 3,000 guilders was quite high for a painting by Hobbema at that time.

- [3] Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael* (The Hague, 1981), 108.
- [4] Pieter van Thiel, ed., *All the Paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: A Completely Illustrated Catalogue* (Amsterdam, 1976), inv. no. C213, indicates that the Ruisdael painting is signed and dated 1661, but Seymour Slive has informed me that the last digit of the date is no longer legible.
- [5] P. A. Koppius, "Meindert Hobbema," *Drentsche Volksalmanak* 3 (1839): 117, described the Washington painting as being dated 1662 in his enthusiastic account of the work's pictorial and aesthetic qualities. Over the years, however, the date has become difficult to read. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot and Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner, *Pictures in the Collection of P. A. B. Widener at Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania*, vol 1, *Early German, Dutch, and Flemish Schools* (Philadelphia, 1913), acknowledged the ambiguity of the date, stating that the picture is inscribed: "M.Hobbema 1660 (the last figure is uncertain)."
- [6] Georges Brouhiet, *Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709)* (Paris, 1938), 33; Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928), 4:401, no. 88; oil on canvas, 57 x 72 cm, J. Hage Collection, Nivaa, Denmark, 1908. Georges Brouhiet, *Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709)* (Paris, 1938), 34; Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928), 4:408, no. 108; oil on panel, 61 x 83 cm, sale *Important Old Master Paintings*, Sotheby's, New York, January 11, 1986, lot 109, as "from the Collection of an East Coast Museum." Georges Brouhiet, *Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709)* (Paris, 1938), 35; Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928), 4:403, no. 93; oil on panel, 52 x 66 cm, National Trust, Petworth House, England.
- [7] See Georges Brouhiet, *Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709)* (Paris, 1938), 34.
- [8] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–1842), 9:727, no. 25. Although it seems probable that Smith's comments relate to the two Hobbema paintings, it should be noted that provenance information he provides about these paintings is inaccurate.
- [9] A smaller version of the Melbourne painting is in Schloss Rohoncz, Lugano (Georges Brouhiet, *Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709)* [Paris, 1938], 224).
- [10] Barent Gael was a pupil of Philips Wouwerman and sometimes painted staffage figures for Jan Wynants as well. (Walter Bernt, *Die niederländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. [Munich, 1948–1960], 1:295.) Although no documentary evidence exists that Gael worked with Hobbema, a

collaboration between the two painters would have been possible. The figures in Gael's *Travelers at a Village Well* (sold Christie's, London, February 20, 1986, lot 237) are quite similar to those in *The Travelers*. Gael also painted horses in motion in comparable ways: see *Peasants Merrymaking Outside an Inn* (sold Christie's, London, October 25, 1974, lot 136) and *Horsemen Halting Outside an Inn* (National Trust, Dyrham Park, near Chippenham).

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a heavy-weight, loosely and plain-woven fabric. It has been lined and the tacking edges have been removed. The current stretcher is slightly larger than the original fabric and as a result, extends the dimensions by approximately 1 centimeter on all sides. The presence of cusping indicates that the size of the original support was not reduced before the painting was lined. The fabric was prepared with a light tan-colored ground. The paint layer is moderately thick and the somewhat pastose paint was applied with free, clearly defined brushmarks. X-radiographs indicate that the two horses were painted on top of the landscape.

Small losses are scattered overall, but more are located in the foreground and around the edges. The sky is abraded, particularly in the dark cloud at top left, while the foreground is well preserved. The rear end and left hind leg of the white horse are discolored, possibly due to abrasion of a dark glaze. Prior to acquisition, two linings had been attached to the support. In 1981 a third lining was added. At that time discolored varnish and old inpainting were removed where possible. Aged insoluble inpainting in the sky, the damaged dark cloud and the rear end and hind leg of the white horse were toned.

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## PROVENANCE

Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys [d. 1830], Château Dyksterhuys, Province of Groningen, by 1829; R. Gockinga and P. van Arnhem, Groningen, after 1829; (sale, Amsterdam, 5 July 1833, no. 11);[1] R. Gockinga, Groningen. Colonel Biré, Brussels;[2] (sale, Bonnefons de Lavialle, Paris, 25-26 March 1841, no. 2); William Williams Hope [1802-1855], Rushton Hall, Northamptonshire, and Paris;[3] (sale, Christie & Manson, London, 14-16 June 1849, no. 124); purchased by Fuller or

perhaps bought in;<sup>[4]</sup> (William Williams Hope sale, Pouchet, Paris, 11 May 1858, no. 2). William Ward, 1st earl of Dudley [1817-1885], Witley Court, Worcestershire, by 1871; by inheritance to his son, William Humble Ward, 2nd earl of Dudley [1867-1932], Witley Court; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 25 June 1892, no. 9); (P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London);<sup>[5]</sup> sold 1894 to Peter A.B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; inheritance from Estate of Peter A.B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; gift 1942 to NGA.<sup>[6]</sup>

[1] Both Van Arnhem and Gockinga had individually offered to buy the two pictures by Hobbema, including NGA 1942.9.31, that Gosen Geurt Alberda van Dyksterhuys owned. Before either had closed the deal, however, the owner died. It was later arranged that the two would purchase the paintings together; see Charles J. Nieuwenhuys, *A Review of the Lives and Works of Some of the Most Eminent Painters*, London, 1834:147-149.

[2] The catalogue of this sale bears the title *Catalogue d'une riche collection de tableaux des écoles flamande et hollandaise, recueillie par M. Hérís de Bruxelles...*, but although the collection was "recueillie" (collected/gathered) by Hérís and was offered for sale under his name, he may not himself have been the owner of the paintings. In the copy of the sale catalogue at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the words "Recueillie par M. Hérís de Bruxelles" in the title are followed by the handwritten addition, "pour M. le Colonel Biré," and alongside the title in the Victoria and Albert Museum's copy is written "mais c'est la collection de M. le Colonel Biré," which suggests that Hérís may have been acting as Biré's agent in acquiring and selling the pictures.

[3] The buyer's name is noted in the Philadelphia copy of the sale catalogue as "hoppe," which is probably a misspelling of Hope. (The 1858 Hope sale catalogue states that Hope bought the picture at the Hérís sale.)

[4] Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century...*, 8 vols., trans. by Edward G. Hawke, London, 1907-1927: 4:406, lists the 1849 sale in the provenance of his no. 100, a painting that may or may not be identical with his no. 94, 4:403-404 (which is

definitely *The Travelers*). The compositional descriptions given in both these Hofstede de Groot entries are similar, but the dimensions listed for no. 100, 51 x 54 inches, are impossible for the National Gallery picture. The identity and whereabouts of Hofstede de Groot no. 100 remain unclear; it is possible that Hofstede de Groot was mistaken in the dimensions that he gave for this picture, and that it was indeed the same painting as his no. 94. Hofstede de Groot further confuses the issue by listing part of the provenance of *The Travelers* under no. 94, and part (the 1841 Hérís sale) under no. 100. The 1849 Hope sale catalogue does not give dimensions, so it is impossible to establish whether the painting offered there was *The Travelers* or the unknown, and perhaps apocryphal, "Hofstede de Groot 100." The picture in question fetched £367.10, and Hofstede de Groot, citing as his source a handwritten note in Smith's own copy of his *Catalogue Raisonné*, says that it was bought in. (In this copy, which is at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, Smith gives the buyer as "Fuller," but this is not necessarily contradictory, as Fuller may have been a Christie's employee.) Smith's statement is probably correct, for the National Gallery of Art's painting remained in the possession of W.W. Hope until 1858, when it was sold in Paris.

[5] Colnaghi lent the painting to the Royal Academy of Art's 1894 Winter Exhibition, which ran from January to March. The sale to Widener must have occurred later in the year.

[6] A label from the Art Institute of Chicago shipping room, dated 27 January 1943, was removed from the painting's stretcher in 1981, but neither the Art Institute nor the NGA registrar's office records this movement.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1871 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1871, no. 369, as *A Landscape: travellers passing through a wood*.

1894 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1894, no. 60, as *A Watermill*.<sup>[1]</sup>



1997 Rembrandt and the Golden Age: Dutch Paintings from the National Gallery of Art, The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, 1997, unnumbered brochure.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY NOTES

[1] The Royal Academy label, removed from the stretcher during conservation in 1981, is now in NGA curatorial files. The label identifies Colnaghi as the lender. A label from the Art Institute of Chicago shipping room, dated 27 January 1943, was also removed from the stretcher at this time, but neither the Art Institute nor the NGA registrar's office records this movement.

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