



Pieter Lastman

(Amsterdam 1583 – 1633
Amsterdam)

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Pieter Lastman had the misfortune of being eclipsed by his most gifted pupil, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69). As a consequence, his work and reputation always stood in Rembrandt's shadow. Lastman's far-reaching influence is nevertheless visible in the early work of Rembrandt, who completed his training in a brief six months of 1625. Lastman had previously trained another famous Leiden painter in Amsterdam, Jan Lievens (1607–74). Lievens moved to Amsterdam as a ten-year-old in 1617 and stayed in Lastman's studio until 1621.

As Lievens and Rembrandt's moves to Amsterdam suggest, Lastman was highly regarded in his day and his work was widely praised.^[1] For instance, in 1618 the poet and diplomat Theodore Rodenburg (ca. 1574–1644) described him—together with Jan Pynas (1581–1631)—as the leading exponent of a new generation of Amsterdam history painters.^[2] Most of them had visited Italy and in Rome had come under the influence of Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610), who, entirely counter to the prevailing mannerist fashion, produced small-scale history paintings with great attention to detail and realism. Until recently, this generation was known as the Pre-Rembrandtists, an awkward appellation that does little justice to the singularity of this group of artists, which also included Claes Moyaert (1592–1655), Jacob Pynas (1592/3–after 1650), and Jan Tengnagel (1584–1631), as well as François Venant (ca. 1591–1636), the husband of Lastman's younger sister Agnietje.^[3] Within this group, Pieter Lastman—with his choice of themes, narrative style, and the introduction of subjects never before depicted in paintings (such as the story of David and Uriah, until then only seen in prints)^[4]—laid the foundation of Amsterdam history painting in the seventeenth century.^[5]

Pieter Lastman was born in Amsterdam in 1583. He was the fourth child of Pieter Segersz (1548–1603) and secondhand-goods dealer Barber Jacobsz (1549–1624), both devout Catholics. His elder brothers Jacob Pietersz (Hardingh) and Seger Pietersz (Coninck) were a sailmaker and a goldsmith, respectively. Lastman's younger brother, Claes, was an engraver. His father was a messenger who traveled abroad on various occasions to deliver messages to William of Orange, among others. In 1576 he became a courier for the Amsterdam Weeskamer (Orphan Chamber). He also administered the property of orphans and



managed the affairs of unmarried mothers and widows. After 1578, the year in which Amsterdam finally joined the Dutch Revolt, he was dismissed from his post for refusing to relinquish his Catholic convictions. This may have precipitated his move to the Sint Jansstraat, where Pieter was born soon thereafter.

According to Van Mander, Lastman was taught to paint by Gerrit Pietersz (1566–after 1612), brother of the famous organist and composer Jan Pietersz Sweelinck.^[6] Following his apprenticeship, which he must have begun about 1597, Lastman went to Italy via Antwerp around 1603. There he discovered the work of Caravaggio (1571–1610) and Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), and “den berühmten Pieter Lastmann” (the famous Pieter Lastman) became one of Elsheimer’s companions.^[7] Whether he met Rubens, who was also in Rome in 1605, is not known. A souvenir of Lastman’s stay in the Eternal City is a drawing of Palatine Hill bearing the inscription “Roma 1606.” A signed copy of Veronese’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice indicates that he may also have visited that city.

What is certain is that he was back in Amsterdam at the beginning of March 1607, when he was present at the sale of painting equipment and paintings belonging to Gillis van Coninxloo (1544–1607).^[8] He initially lived with his mother. The house in the Sint Jansstraat, where his brother and sister also lived, was probably too small, because in 1608 the family moved to the Sint Anthoniesbreestraat, a new street where affluent citizens were settling at the time. Lastman and his family moved into the house where Lievens and Rembrandt would later receive lessons. The Zuiderkerk, for which Lastman designed a stained-glass window, was being built on the opposite side of the street between 1603 and 1614. In February 1613, he was present when a maidservant and a seamstress made statements concerning the role of Jan Pynas in a tavern brawl. Two years later he himself was embroiled in a dispute with Hillegont Bredero, sister of the famous poet, possibly concerning a broken promise of marriage. As a Caravaggio connoisseur, on 25 November 1619 he was asked, along with Adriaen van Nieulandt (ca. 1587–1658), to verify the authenticity of a painting of the crucifixion of Saint Andrew that was said to be by Caravaggio. More than ten years later, he was again called upon to assess the quality of a copy by Louis Finson (ca. 1580–1617) of Caravaggio’s *Madonna of the Rosary*.^[9]

Lastman’s only documented commission also dates from 1619. Through Pieter Isaacs (1569–1625), court painter to the Danish King Christian IV, Lastman was asked to paint three scenes from the life of Christ for the king’s private chapel, to which Adriaen van Nieulandt and Jan Pynas also contributed.^[10] In October 1623, he was present at the testimony given by the slandered Cornelia Brouwers, wife of the portrait painter Cornelis van der Voort (1576–1624), who was a close friend of Lastman. Two years later, Lastman bought three inexpensive *tronies* and some artist’s supplies.^[11] Lastman’s mother was buried in the Oude Kerk on 7 December 1624. She must have been a woman of means, because when her estate was auctioned in April 1625 it proved to be worth around 23,000 guilders. Lastman drew up his will on 5 May 1628; he left a considerable inheritance to his nephews and nieces or cousins and his possessions to his brother Seger and sister Agnietje. He became seriously ill the following year, and although he recovered, from then on his work never again achieved its former level. In 1632 he fell ill again and amended his will once more. On 7 July he had an inventory made of all of his possessions which, in addition to his own paintings and drawings, contained work by Moyaert, Jordaens, Badens, Vroom, and Goltzius; the name of Rembrandt,



however, does not appear.^[12] Lastman died in the spring of 1633 and was buried in the Oude Kerk on 4 April.

-Piet Bakker

Endnotes

1. In a poem in memory of Hendrick Goltzius from 1620, the diplomat and painter Balthasar Gerbier (1592–1667) described Lastman as one of Amsterdam’s leading history painters, as did the poet and statesman Constantijn Huygens in 1629. Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) even regarded him as the greatest history painter of his age. Around the same time, the writer Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) cast doubt on Huygens’s judgment, but could not decide who was the greatest between Rubens or Lastman. However, in his praise of Thomas de Keyser’s portrait of Lastman, painted at the end of the 1620s, he called Lastman “den Apelles onzer eeuw” (the Apelles of our century). S. A. C. Dudok van Heel, “Pieter Lastman (1583–1633); een kathoeliek schilder in de Sint Anthoniebreestraat,” *De Jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten. Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Nijmegen, 2006), 53–54 (with an illustration of what may be De Keyser’s portrait of Lastman on page 52.) See also: Amy Gohlany, “Pieter Lastman in the Literature: From Immortality to Oblivion,” in *Dutch Crossing* 20 (1996): 87–115.

2. For this poem, see N. De Roever, “Drie Amsterdamsche schilders,” *Oud-Holland* 3 (1885): 172.

3. Astrid Tümpel and Christian Tümpel, *The Pre-Rembrandtists* (Exh. cat. Sacramento, E. B. Crocker Art Gallery) (Sacramento, 1974); A. Tümpel, “Pieter Lastman and the Other Pre-Rembrandtists,” in P. Schatborn, Astrid Tümpel, and Christian Tümpel, *Pieter Lastman: The Man Who Taught Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 1991), 16–53.

4. Peter Schatborn, Astrid Tümpel, and Christian Tümpel, *Pieter Lastman: The Man Who Taught Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 1991), cat. no. 12, “David and Uriah,” 108–9.

5. Peter Schatborn, Astrid Tümpel, and Christian Tümpel, *Pieter Lastman: The Man Who Taught Rembrandt* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 1991), 15.

6. Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), 294.

7. Arthur R. Peltzer, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild-, und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675* (Munich, 1925), 160, 163.



8. A. C. Dudok van Heel, "Pieter Lastman (1583–1633); een katholiek schilder in de Sint Anthoniebreestraat," *De Jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten. Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Nijmegen 2006), 73.
9. A. C. Dudok van Heel, "Pieter Lastman (1583–1633); een katholiek schilder in de Sint Anthoniebreestraat," *De Jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten. Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Nijmegen 2006), 84–85.
10. A. C. Dudok van Heel, "Pieter Lastman (1583–1633); een katholiek schilder in de Sint Anthoniebreestraat," *De Jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten. Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Nijmegen 2006), 81.
11. Abraham Bredius, *Künstler Inventare: Urkunden zur Geschichte der holländischen Kunst des XVIen, XVIIen und XVIIIen Jahrhunderts*, 4, (The Hague, 1917), 1180–82.
12. For a transcription of the paintings in Pieter Lastman's estate, see S. A. C. Dudok van Heel, "Pieter Lastman (1583–1633); een katholiek schilder in de Sint Anthoniebreestraat," *De Jonge Rembrandt onder tijdgenoten. Godsdienst en schilderkunst in Leiden en Amsterdam* (Nijmegen 2006), 100–2.

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