



Angel Appearing to Elijah

Ferdinand Bol
(Dordrecht 1616 – 1680 Amsterdam)

ca. 1642

oil on canvas

162.6 x 177.8 cm

FB-104

Currently on view at: The National Museum of
China, Beijing

How To Cite

Schatborn, Peter. "Angel Appearing to Elijah." In *The Leiden Collection Catalogue*. Edited by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. New York, 2017.

<https://www.theleidencollection.com/archive/>.

This page is available on the site's Archive. PDF of every version of this page is available on the Archive, and the Archive is managed by a permanent URL. Archival copies will never be deleted. New versions are added only when a substantive change to the narrative occurs.



This extremely powerful and well-preserved painting, which was unknown until 2007 when it appeared at auction, is a prime example of Ferdinand Bol's early biblical representations. Executed soon after his apprenticeship with Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), *Angel Appearing to Elijah* is boldly executed with a tonal color scheme that lends the composition great unity.

The painting depicts an episode from the Old Testament (I Kings 16:29–34 and chapters 17–19). In this complex and rather gory story, Ahab, the king of Israel (reigned ca. 874–53 BC), and his wife, Jezebel, reject the God of the Israelites and build an altar for the worshippers of Baal. The prophet Elijah then challenges the priests of Baal to set up a sacrificial altar to rival his own. When only Elijah's sacrifice is consumed by fire, the people reject the false god, Baal, and turn again to the God of the Israelites. At Elijah's instigation, the people then seize the prophets of Baal, and Elijah kills them. After Jezebel subsequently threatens to kill Elijah, the prophet flees into the wilderness where he sits under a juniper tree and prays for death before falling asleep. The moment that Bol depicts is when an angel comes to Elijah and says: "Arise and eat." Elijah eats and drinks, but then he falls asleep again, whereupon the angel returns and exhorts him once more to get up and eat. Thus fortified, Elijah "went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

In Bol's painting the figures loom large in the picture plane. Elijah, lying under a tree, supports his head with his right hand and rests his left arm on the ground. In his lap is the end of the belt tied around his waist, a motif often seen in portrayals of biblical figures by, among others, Pieter Lastman (1583–1633) and Rembrandt.^[1] Behind Elijah hangs a gourd, while leaves and flowers fill the right foreground. The approaching angel looks at Elijah with slightly raised eyebrows as he prepares to waken the prophet with his raised left hand and provide him with water from the flask hanging from his right hand. Light falling onto Elijah's face and hands and onto the hair of the angel lends plasticity to their forms and anchors them firmly in the darkened landscape surrounding them.

The painting likely dates around 1642, as Sumowski has proposed. He rightly compared this work to Bol's *Jacob's Dream* in Dresden, which also depicts an angel appearing with a sleeping figure (**fig 1**).^[2] Bol gained his fascination with Old Testament scenes that stressed God's spiritual

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Ferdinand Bol, *Jacob's Dream*, ca. 1642, oil on canvas, 128.5 x 97 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, Gal.-Nr. 1604



Fig 2. Ferdinand Bol, *Judah and Tamar*, 1644, oil on canvas, 123.2 x 172.4 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 17.3268



Fig 3. Ferdinand Bol, *Elijah Resting under a Tree*, ca. 1642, pen and brown ink, 85 x 115 mm, Frits Lugt Collection, Fondation Custodia, Paris, inv. 2520

guidance in the interactions of a young, golden-haired angel in a white, flowing robe with an aged bearded patriarch from Rembrandt, particularly from the master's compelling *Sacrifice of Isaac*.^[3] Bol made other paintings depicting an angel and a biblical figure in the early 1640s that are similar in composition, including *Gideon and the Angel* of 1640/41^[4] and *Hagar and the Angel*, ca. 1650.^[5] The free and confident brushwork of the Leiden Collection painting, as well as its large-scale figures, also relate to Bol's *Judah and Tamar* of 1644 in Boston (**fig 2**)^[6] and his *David's Dying Charge to Solomon* in Dublin, 1643.^[7]

The Frits Lugt Collection, Fondation Custodia, in Paris has a preliminary drawing of this composition depicting Elijah (**fig 3**). The sheet was previously ascribed to Rembrandt,^[8] but Martin Royalton-Kisch called that attribution into question in 1992.^[9] Schatborn subsequently assigned the drawing to Bol, noting that Elijah's pose and clothing correspond to those in the painting.^[10] At the lower left of the drawing is a partial left hand that could be that of the angel, even though in the painting it appears in a different position.

Lugt, who believed that Rembrandt executed the drawing, dated it to ca. 1635, and Otto Benesch, who concurred with that attribution, dated it to ca. 1638.^[11] Nevertheless, a date to the early 1640s is appropriate for Bol, for he continued to make rather sketchy, Rembrandtesque drawings after he left the master's workshop, particularly when they were preliminary studies for subject paintings.^[12] Indeed, a passage from Samuel van Hoogstraten's *Introduction to the High School of the Art of Painting*, 1678, reveals that Rembrandt's pupils were expected to work for a long time in the master's style. Hoogstraten, who had studied with Rembrandt in the 1640s, wrote: "You pupils must obey your master, and entrust your education to him. He who wishes to learn from his master's lips must follow him without question, until such time as he properly and correctly understands what has been taught." He goes on to say, "Therefore I should rather impose five years of silence on pupils and recommend constructive obedience . . . so that they first learn thoroughly to apply what is recommended to them."^[13] *Elijah Resting under a Tree* corresponds in several respects to other Rembrandtesque drawings Bol made at this time, such as *David on His Deathbed* in Besançon,^[14] a preparatory drawing for the above mentioned *David's Dying Charge to Solomon* in Dublin, 1643, and the drawing of *Two Marys* in Kraków,^[15] which is

probably a study for *The Three Marys at the Tomb*, 1644, now in Copenhagen.^[16]

Elijah is often seen as a prefiguration of Christ, which may explain why this subject appealed to Dutch patrons.^[17] Just who these patrons may have been is an intriguing question since in the seventeenth century there was practically no difference in the way the various religious denominations viewed the iconography of different biblical themes. Apart from portrait commissions and works ordered by civic authorities, such as those made for the Amsterdam Town Hall, little is known about the patrons who commissioned biblical scenes.^[18] Manuth, however, has posited that the theme of Elijah, owing to his prophecies and his role as a harbinger of the Messiah, was of particular importance in the Jewish faith.^[19] Elijah was considered the protector of the oppressed and persecuted people of Israel. The inventories of art in the collections of Jewish burghers in the seventeenth century also reveal a preference for subjects that include Elijah.^[20]

Around 1650 Bol painted another depiction of the angel appearing to Elijah, which differs from the present work in the way light falls on the figures, and in the detailed depiction of the foliage.^[21] The only other Rembrandt pupil to paint this subject was Govaert Flinck (1615–60), who did so in the early 1640s, although the lack of specific dates make it impossible to know which artist depicted the subject first.^[22] Interestingly, the theme of Elijah and the Angel does not occur in Rembrandt's painted and etched oeuvre, and he only turned to it in a drawing of the early 1650s (Frits Lugt Collection, Fondation Custodia, Paris).^[23] Several drawings that Sumowski assigned to Bol portray the same subject, but their attribution to Bol seems uncertain, even though they fit stylistically into the artist's circle.^[24] Moreover, Cornelis Bisschop (1630–74), one of Bol's pupils, made a painting^[25] and a drawing^[26] inspired by his teacher's work, thereby testifying to this painting's importance as a model for artists in Bol's orbit.

The painting was apparently once in the collection of the Elector Maximilian II Emanuel of Bavaria (1662–1726), a provenance history that was handed down by word of mouth in the family of Count Johann Franz Ignaz Seyboldtsdorff (1673–1711). It is said that Maximilian gave the painting to the count in gratitude for the count's political support. This



provenance is quite plausible considering that Maximilian collected paintings, particularly while serving as regent of the Southern Netherlands (1692–1701).^[27] In 1698 he acquired 101 paintings from the Antwerp collector Gisbert van Colen that are now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich and the Staatgalerie Schleissheim. There is no surviving inventory made before Maximilian's death, however, that confirms the provenance of *Elijah and the Angel* from his collection.^[28] In any event, the painting remained with the count's descendants until 1945.

-Peter Schatborn

Endnotes

1. Kindly communicated by Marieke de Winkel.
2. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. 5, pl. 3 (1642); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 80, repro. (1642).
3. Oil on canvas, 193 x 133 cm., Hermitage, St. Petersburg, inv. no. 727.
4. Oil on canvas, 83 x 71 cm, Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, inv. no. RMCCs24. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. 11, pl. 2 (1641); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1, no. 79, repro. (1641); Robert Schillemans, *Bijbelschilderkunst rond Rembrandt* (Utrecht, 1989) no. 4, repro. This author reads the date as 1640.
5. Oil on canvas, 115.6 x 97.8 cm, Museum Pomorskie, Gdansk. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982) no. 1, pl. 11 (ca. 1650); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 89, repro. (ca. 1650).
6. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. 7, pl. 6; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 82, repro.
7. Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 5: no. 2005, repro.
8. Otto Benesch, *Otto Benesch Collected Writings*, ed. Eva Benesch, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1970–73), 1: no. 167, fig. 196 (Rembrandt).
9. Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Drawings by Rembrandt and His Circle in the British Museum* (London, 1992), under no. 90, note 2 (doubtful attribution); Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and His School in the British Museum* (online catalogue), no. 117, note 2 (doubtful attribution). (www.britishmuseum.org)
10. Peter Schatborn, *Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings in the Frits Lugt Collection* (Paris, 2010), no. 33, repro.
11. Otto Benesch, *Otto Benesch Collected Writings*, ed. Eva Benesch, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1970–73), 1: no. 167, fig. 196 (Rembrandt).
12. Ingrid Oud, “De tekeningen van Ferdinand Bol: De relatie tussen de stijl en de functie van de tekeningen,” *Kunstlicht* 13, no. 1 (1992): 9.
13. “Gy leerlingen zult niet alleen uwe meesters gehoorzaemen, maar hem ook in’t onderwijs gelooven. Die uit den mont van de meester wat leeren wil, moet datzelve naekomen, zonder

eenige onderzoekinge, soo lange totdat hij hetgeenige dater geleert is, wel en terecht verstaet.” “Daarom zoude ik de leerlingen liever een vijfjaerig stilzwijgen opleggen en een stiktelijke gehoorzaamheid aanbevelen ... op dat zij eerst te degen hetgene hen aanbevolen is, zouden leeren in 't werk stellen.” Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: Anders de zichtbaere werelt...* (Rotterdam, 1678), 26.

14. Pen and brown ink, brush and brown and white ink, 158 x 217 mm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon, inv. no. D.2756. See Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 5: no. 1277, repro.
15. Pen and brown ink, 157 x 115 mm, Ossolineum, Kraków; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 98, repro.
16. Signed and dated 1644, oil on canvas, 280 x 358 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, inv. no. 77; See Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 83, repro.
17. Christian Tümpel, “Religious History Painting,” in *God, Saints and Heroes: Dutch Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Albert Blankert (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; The Detroit Institute of Arts; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1980) (Washington, 1980), 54, n. 24.
18. On this subject, see Gabriël M. C. Pastoor, “Bijbelse historiestukken in particulier bezit,” in Christian Tümpel et. al., *Het oude testament in de schilderkunst van de gouden eeuw* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Joods Historich Museum; Jerusalem, Israel Museum, 1991), 122–33.
19. The significance of Elijah to the Jews is also apparent from the rite of circumcision in which the child is placed upon the “chair of Elijah,” who is thus present as a witness; Volker Manuth, “Ikonographische Studien zu den Historien des Alten Testaments bei Rembrandt und seiner frühen Amsterdamer Schule” (Ph.D. diss., Freie University, Berlin, 1987), 79–81; Gabriël M. C. Pastoor, “Bijbelse historiestukken in particulier bezit,” in Christian Tümpel et. al., *Het oude testament in de schilderkunst van de gouden eeuw* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Joods Historisch Museum; Jerusalem, Israel Museum) (Amsterdam, 1991), 125.
20. Kindly communicated by Marieke de Winkel. This is also true of representations of such subjects as Elijah Fed by Ravens.
21. Oil on panel, 48 x 35 cm, present whereabouts unknown. See Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 4: no. 2196, repro. Sumowski dates this painting close to the one in Gdansk (ca. 1650); see Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt’s Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982) no. 1, pl. 11 (ca. 1650); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 89, repro. (ca. 1650).
22. J. W. von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck, 1615–1660* (Amsterdam, 1965), no. 32+, repro. (1642?); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d.

- Pfalz, 1983), 2: no. 620, repro. (1640). According to the museum's documentation, the dating to 1645 was assigned by Hofstede de Groot in "Govaert Flinck," *Thieme-Becker, Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler*, 37 vols. (Leipzig, 1916) 12: 28–30. With thanks to Tom van der Molen.
23. Peter Schatborn, *Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings in the Frits Lugt Collection* (Paris, 2010), no. 14, repro. (early 1650s). Willem Drost also made a drawing of this subject in the early 1650s (Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam).
24. These drawings comprise: 1) a copy in Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne, see Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–), 1: no. 210*, repro.; 2) a drawing, worked up later, which is now preserved in Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, see Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–), 1: no. 266*, repro; and 3) a variant in Buenos Aires of the drawing in Bayonne, Z. Bruck Collection, see Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–), 1: 268*, repro.
25. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 121.9 cm, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Moore, Kenilworth, Illinois. Alfred Bader, *The Bible through Dutch Eyes: From Genesis through the Apocrypha* (Exh. cat. Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Center) (Milwaukee, 1976), no. 52, repro.
26. Pen and brush and brown ink, traces of black chalk, 153 x 157 mm, with Martin Moeller, Hamburg, as by 2003. See Alfred Bader, *The Bible through Dutch Eyes: From Genesis through the Apocrypha* (Exh. cat. Milwaukee, Milwaukee Art Center) (Milwaukee, 1976), no. 52, repro.; Christian Dittrich and Thomas Ketelsen, *Rembrandt: Die Dresdener Zeichnungen* (Exh. cat. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kupferstich-Kabinett) (Cologne, 2004), no. 75B, repro. and p. 16, fig. 12.
27. Johann Georg Prinz von Hohenzollern, ed., *Staatsgalerie Schleissheim: Verzeichnis der Gemälde* (Munich, 1980), 8–9.
28. Oil on canvas, 128 x 97 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, inv. 1604. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680): Rembrandt's Pupil* (Doornspijk, 1982), no. 5, pl. 3 (1642); Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 5 vols. (Landau i.d. Pfalz, 1983), 1: no. 80, repro. (1642). *Jacob's Dream* also has an old German provenance, for it was recorded as early as 1722 in the inventory of the collection in Dresden of August the Strong, Elector of Saxony (1670–1733).

Provenance

- Probably purchased by Maximilian II Emanuel, Bavarian Elector (1662–1726).

- Count Johann Franz Ignaz Seyboldsdorff (1673–1711); by descent to Karl August Graf von Freyen-Seyboldsdorff (1867–1945), Schloß Seyboldsdorff, Germany, until 1945.
- Private collection, Germany (Sotheby's, London, 5 December 2007, no. 27 [Johnny van Haeften Ltd., London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Exhibition History

- Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, on loan to permanent collection, September 2009–November 2016 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Schatborn, Peter. *Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings in the Frits Lugt Collection*. 2 vols. Paris, 2010, 1:106; 2:127, no. 14.
- Schatborn, Peter, and Van Sloten, Leonore. *Old Drawings, New Names: Rembrandt and His Contemporaries*. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum het Rembrandthuis. Varik, 2014, 33, no. 2a.

Technical Summary

The support is composed of two sections of fine-weight, plain-weave fabric, joined with a vertical seam left of center, which has been lined.^[1] There are tacking margin fragments along all four sides and slight cusping along the upper and lower edges. No wax collection seals, import stamps, stencils, inscriptions or labels are located along the lining or stretcher reverse.

A dark-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by multiple glazes of paint applied to achieve volume and modeling. A cool underlayer delineates the veins and gives form to Elijah's proper left hand, followed by warm flesh-toned glazes. The drapery appears to have been similarly built up from undermodeling to final glazes. Feathered strokes, where one color meets another, further enhance the illusion of volume.



No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images or X-radiograph.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since acquisition in 2007 and remains in a good state of preservation.^[2]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Approx. 85.1 cm from left edge. The seam is not visible in the X-radiograph or infrared images provided.
2. Entry based on an examination report prepared by Yvonne Szafran, head of paintings conservation, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2011.