



Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem
Dutch, 1620 - 1683

View of an Italian Port

early 1660s

oil on canvas

overall: 48 x 59.5 cm (18 7/8 x 23 7/16 in.)

framed: 68.6 x 80 x 5.3 cm (27 x 31 1/2 x 2 1/16 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Berchem

Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art 1990.62.1

ENTRY

In this idyllic scene, Berchem captures both the beauty of the Italian landscape and the cool, crystalline light that imbues it with its distinctive atmospheric quality. [1]

Situated against a backdrop of towering cliffs that drop straight down to the calm waters below, the exotic character of this harbor setting is defined not by buildings or wharfs but by the various types of figures that have come together at the water's edge. The most prominent of these is the elegant couple who, fresh from the hunt, sit astride their steeds. Wearing wide-brimmed hats with flowing feathers, they talk to a standing gentleman while the woman's falcon airs its wings. The gentleman holding his staff is probably the keeper of the hunting dogs that are seen mingling, two of them being held by a young assistant in the lower left. What has brought them to the harbor is not clear, but they may well be awaiting a ferry to transport them either to one of the ships anchored in deeper water or to the far shore.

Behind them two wide-bottomed ferries are already loaded with cargo. In the one filled with cattle, two figures wrestle a recalcitrant goat along a gangplank, while before the other ferry two men in Oriental dress stand and talk, while a third sits in the boat, waiting for it to push off. In the right foreground, a shepherd tending to a

cow and some sheep also awaits transport.

Although no documentary evidence exists that proves that Berchem actually visited Italy, it seems probable that he traveled there sometime between 1653 and 1656, [2] because it is highly unlikely that he could otherwise have captured the special light and character of this faraway land with such seeming effortlessness. While *View of an Italian Port* does not represent an identifiable location, such details as the characteristic Italian ship anchored offshore, with its long red oars stretching out to either side, point to Berchem's careful observation of what, for a Dutchman, was an unusual type of vessel. Just where Berchem might have seen such cliffs is not known, but similar formations surmounted by large buildings appear in the background of a number of his paintings. Comparable cliffs can be seen in paintings by other artists, as in *Coastal Landscape by Moonlight*, attributed to Aelbert Cuyp, in the Six Collection, Amsterdam.

As with most of his Italianate paintings, Berchem executed *View of an Italian Port* in the Netherlands, probably in the early 1660s. [3] He painted for a Dutch clientele eager for idealized views of the Italian landscape. Judging from the various copies of this painting, the work struck a responsive chord. [4] Its qualities were greatly admired in the mid-eighteenth century, when the image was engraved in 1753 by A. Delfos, [5] and in the early nineteenth century, when the first written descriptions of it appeared. In the 1831 catalog of the famous collection of Chevalier Énard, for example, the catalog entry reads in part: "One admires in this painting . . . all the taste, [and] all the spirit of the celebrated Berchem. Its composition is appointed, [and] its groups are arranged and varied with much thought; air circulates everywhere, [and] the recession into space is perfect. The execution, [and] the preservation leave nothing to be desired." [6]

The classicism of this painting, with its strong horizontal and vertical accents in the landscape and the clear, crystalline light, compellingly places the work in the 1660s. The fluidity of Berchem's brushwork and the elegance of the couple on horseback are also consistent with this date. A comparison of *View of an Italian Port* to another harbor scene by Berchem, *Coastal Scene with Crab Catchers* [fig. 1], datable to about 1658, [7] demonstrates the evolution in style that Berchem's work underwent between the late 1650s and early 1660s. Although one encounters a comparable contrast between foreground figures and a distant vista of cliffs across a body of water in the earlier work, the foreground and background elements are not so closely integrated as they are in the Gallery's painting, while the distinctions of light and color are more pronounced. Another comparative work

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is Berchem's *Wild Boar Hunt* [fig. 2], signed and dated 1659, where a similar grouping of figures on horseback occurs. While the position of the white horse in both paintings is virtually identical, the horse in the Gallery's painting is somewhat more schematically rendered, which is characteristic of Berchem's style of the 1660s. [8]

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem, *Coastal Scene with Crab Catchers*, c. 1658, oil on canvas, York City Art Gallery, presented by F. D. Lycett Green, Esq., through the National Art-Collections Fund



fig. 2 Nicolaes Pietersz Berchem, *Wild Boar Hunt*, 1659, oil on canvas, Mauritshuis, The Hague

NOTES

- [1] I would like to thank Yonna Yapou for sharing with me the research she did on this painting while it was in the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Smith.
- [2] Despite the fact that Italianate-style paintings exist in Berchem's oeuvre as early as the late 1640s, it seems unlikely that Berchem had actually visited Italy by this date. It is more probable, as recent scholars have postulated for stylistic reasons, that Berchem traveled there between 1653 and 1656. In

any case, by the late 1650s he had become one of the most sensitive interpreters of both the pastoral and the exotic character qualities of Italy.

- [3] This date is also suggested by Eckhard Schaar, *Studien zu Nicolaes Berchem* (Cologne, 1958), 86.
- [4] Copies and versions include: Collection of the Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth; sale, Christie's, New York, June 15, 1977, no. 117 (in 1996 with Daphne Alazraki Old Master Paintings, New York); sale, Galerie Le Brun by Bonnefons de Laviolle and George, Paris, June 7, 1853, no. 4; sale, Artaria and others, Vienna, January 12, 1886, no. 8; and possibly sale, P. van den Bogaerde, Amsterdam, March 16, 1778, no. 3.
- [5] For a discussion of the print, see F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, 72 vols. (Amsterdam, 1949), 1:271, no. 111. It is described as a "Harbour, on the right nobleman and lady on horseback. oblong format."
- [6] "On admire dans ce tableau . . . tout le goût, tout l'esprit du célèbre Berchem. La composition en est bien ordonnée, les groupes en sont disposés et variés avec beaucoup d'intelligence; l'air circule partout, la dégradation des plans est parfaite. L'exécution, la conservation ne laissent rien à désirer." *Catalogue des tableaux italiens flamands, hollandais et français: Des anciennes écoles, qui composent la magnifique galerie de M. le Chevalier Érard* (Paris, 1831), 83. The collection was sold the following year, in 1832, and the sale catalog was based on this one.
- [7] See Albert Blankert, *Nederlandse 17e eeuwse Italianiserende Landschapschilders* (Utrecht, 1965), 158–159, cat. 81; and the expanded, English edition Albert Blankert, *Dutch 17th-Century Italianate Landscape Painters* (Soest, 1978), 158–159, cat. 81.
- [8] The same white horse appears in Berchem's *A Hawking Party Halting at a Farrier's Shop*, formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, reproduced in Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1932, cat. 896 (see John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. [London, 1829–1842], 5:99, cat. 310), and in a related drawing in the British Museum, London (see Arthur Mayger Hind, *Catalogue of Drawings by Dutch and Flemish Artists Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 5 vols. [London, 1915–1932], 3:33–34, no. 34, pl. xviii).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, is loosely woven of irregularly spun threads. Part of the original tacking margins were retained at the time of lining

and incorporated into the picture plane, slightly expanding the dimensions on all four sides. Lining has reinforced the weave texture.

Paint is applied over an off-white ground in thin opaque layers worked wet over dry. Minor losses are confined to the edges. The upper right corner of the sky is abraded, as are the edges. No treatment has been undertaken at the National Gallery.

PROVENANCE

Johan van Lanschot, Leiden, by 1753;^[1] by inheritance to his son-in-law, Pieter Cornelis, baron van Leyden [1717-1788, known during his lifetime as the Heer van Leyden van Vlaardingen], Leiden;^[2] by inheritance with the paintings in his collection to his son, Diederik van Leyden, [1744-1810/1811], Leiden and Amsterdam;^[3] sold, with the rest of his father's painting collection, for 100,000 florins to a consortium formed by L.B. Coclers, Alexander Joseph Paillet, and A. de Lespinasse de Langeac;^[4] (sale of the van Leyden painting collection, A. Paillet and H. Delaroche, Paris, 5-8 November 1804, 1st day, no. 8);^[5] H. Delaroche. John Parke, Esq., London; (his sale, Peter Coxe, London, 8-9 May 1812, no. 37). (John Smith, London); sold to John Webb, Esq., London. Chevalier Sébastien Érard [1752-1831], Château de la Muette, near the Bois de Boulogne, Paris; (his estate sale, at his residence by Lacoste and Coutelier, 7-14 August 1832 [originally scheduled for 23 April and days following], no. 62);^[6] purchased by Alexis-Nicolas Pérignon, Paris, for Jonkheer Johan Steengracht van Oostcapelle [1782-1846], The Hague;^[7] by inheritance to his son, Hendrik Steengracht van Oosterland [1808-1875], The Hague; by inheritance to his nephew, Hendricus Adolphus Steengracht van Duivenvoorde [1836-1912], The Hague; (his estate sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 9 June 1913, no. 4); Mr. Boyer.^[8] by inheritance from the collector's grandfather to private collection; (sale, Adar Picard Tajan, Paris, 9 April 1990, no. 82); Robert H. and Clarice Smith, Washington; gift (partial and promised) 1990 to NGA; gift completed 1996..

[1] Van Lanschot is identified by the inscription on an engraving of the painting executed by Abraham Delfos in 1753. Given the family connection between Van Lanschot and Van Leyden, it is probable that the painting engraved was the Gallery's, although, as Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann has noted, it is possible that

one of the copies after *View of an Italian Port* was the model for the print.

[2] See the description of Sale F-80, by Benjamin Peronnet, in The Getty Provenance Index© Databases, accessed 17 February 2012, and J.W. Niemeijer, “Baron van Leyden, Founder of the Amsterdam Print Collection,” trans. Patricia Wardle, *Apollo* (June 1983): 461-468. As Niemeijer explains, in Van Leyden’s own day the title of baron was not actually used; when alive he was known as the Heer Van Leyden van Vlaardingen. He is given the title of baron in later publications, a title that was indeed his, as an ancestor was created a baron of the Holy Roman Empire in 1548.

[3] Niemeijer 1983, 468. While his son inherited the paintings, Van Leyden’s large and important print collection was bequeathed to his grandson, after whose death in 1789 it became the property of the young man’s mother. Sold in 1806 to Louis Napoleon, it was first housed in The Hague, then Paris, and was eventually returned in 1816 to Amsterdam, where it formed the nucleus of the print collection at the Rijksmuseum.

[4] This information is given in the catalogue for sale 6323 at Christie’s, London, 7 July 2000, as part of the provenance for lot 17 (Jan Both, *An Italianate evening landscape with a muleteer and goatherds on a wooded path, a river and mountains beyond*, now NGA 2000.91.1, *An Italianate Evening Landscape*), but no source is cited.

[5] The sale was originally scheduled for 5 July 1804, and rescheduled for 10 September 1804 (the date printed on the sale catalogue), before finally taking place in November.

[6] The catalogue incorrectly described the painting as being on panel.

[7] The information about Parke’s ownership through that of Steengracht is found in the 1913 sale catalogue.

[8] An annotated copy of the auction catalogue housed at the NGA library notes that Boyer purchased the picture for Fr 7,900.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1991 Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991, unnumbered catalogue, repro.

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