



GERRIT DOU

(1613 Leyde vers 1675)

Un ermite en prière. Vers 1670.

Huile sur panneau.

Signé en bas à gauche sur le livre : GDOV.

34,5 x 29 cm.

Provenance: - Verlassenschaft des churfürstli. (estate) Hofkammer- und Commecienraths Joseph van Dufresne, 1760 (according to label, now missing). - Collection of Kurfürstliche Galerie, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Inv. No. 578, until 1935. - Collection of Stadtresidenz, Landshut, 1935. - Kunsthandel Dr. Plietzsch, Berlin, October 1938. - Kunsthandel Cornelis B. de Bruin, Utrecht, 10.7.1951. - Collection of Jacques Salmanowitz, Versoix. - Important private collection in West Switzerland.

Literature:

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- John Smith: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters, vol I, London 1829, cat. No. 114, p. 39. - Wilhelm Martin: Leven en werken van Gerrit Dou, Leiden 1901, cat. No. 21, p. 186. - Catalogue of the Collection of Kurfürstliche Galerie, Alte Pinakothek, Munich 1904, Cat. No. 400. - Cornelis Hofstede de Groot: Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts, Esslingen / Paris 1907, Cat. No. 20, p. 346. - Louis Dimier: Gérard Dou, sa vie et son oeuvre, Paris 1911, Cat. No. 12. - Wilhelm Martin (ed.): Gerard Dou. Des Meisters Gemälde, Stuttgart / Berlin 1913, p. 6 (dated circa 1670). - Ronni Baer: The paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613-1675), Ph. D. Dissertation, New York 1990, No. 119. This painting of exquisite quality by Gerrit Dou, discovered in a Swiss private collection, Ronni Baer was recently able to examine thoroughly in the original for the first time, and she confirms that it is the one she lists in her catalogue raisonné of 1990 as no. 119 (see Literature). At that time it was known to her only through a black-and-white photograph. The painting was once in the collection of the Kurfürstlichen Galerie, Alte Pinakothek, before it was transferred in 1935 to the collection of the Stadtresidenz in Landshut and was then passed on to the art dealer Dr. Plietzsch in Berlin in an exchange of 1938 (written confirmation from the Alte Pinakothek is available). Through the Dutch art trade the painting then came eventually to Switzerland and reemerges now on the market after a long period. A hermit is shown in a grotto-like setting; in his hands, which are folded in prayer and rest upon a large open book, he holds a wooden crucifix. Before him are several vanitas objects: a skull, a toppled hourglass, a rosary, further books, and a withered, lifeless tree overgrown with moss, a lantern hanging from one branch. Next to the tree is placed his wicker basket and his leather flask is in the foreground. In the open book can be read in capital letters the title "de Prophet Jesaia", as well as the initial letter of the text: an intricately ornamented "H", to which Dou gave special attention. The eponymous Book of Isaiah, written by that prophet in the 8th century before Christ, addressed the messianic prophecy of Christ's birth (7:14), His Deity (9:6-7), His ministry (9:1-2, 42:1-7, 61:1-2), and

his death (52:1-53:12). It was the Prophet Isaiah, more than any of the other prophets, who extolled especially the redemptive acts of Christ and divine grace. So it appears to Ronni Baer not accidental that Dou places opposite the dead tree, as well as the vanitas objects, the holy scriptures and the crucifix. The hermit therefore illustrates the triumph over death through prayer and study of the Holy Scriptures. A similar painting of a praying hermit in the wilderness may also be found in a marriage portrait, which has traditionally been attributed to Gerrit Dou (Wheelock, Arthur K. Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogues, Washington 1995, 60, fig. 2). In an interior a married couple is shown surrounded by their secular interests and material possessions, while the painting of the hermit is mounted on the rear wall of the room. This is clearly understood as an allusion to the contemplative life as opposed to the active married life. The hermit was thus in the Netherlands of the 17th century the personification of piety and devotion, and was seen as a virtuous counterbalance against the turmoil of everyday life (see also Baer, Ronni (et al.): Gerrit Dou 1613-1675 Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt, New Haven / London 2000, p. 132). The picture of a hermit offered here sits temporally between two paintings of similar subject matter, both of which are in major public collections today: that dated to 1664 at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (see fig. 1; Baer, *ibid.*, cat. no. 91), in which the hermit is depicted in an almost identical manner and a similar ray of light falls from the left on the worshiper; as well as the one in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (see fig. 2; *ibid.*, cat. no. 120), which is dated 1670. Ronni Baer therefore proposes that our painting was created between 1667 and 1670. Gerrit Dou, one of the most important Netherlandish painters of the 17th century and founder of the Leiden school of fine painting, received his first artistic training as a glass painter from 1625 to 1627, before joining Rembrandt's workshop at Leiden in 1628. There he most likely remained until Rembrandt departed for Amsterdam in 1631 or 1632 at the latest, when Dou is listed as an independent master in Leiden. While his early painting style was strongly influenced by Rembrandt, his works are characterized by an exceptional fineness

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in the painting and their impressive lighting. In 1648 Dou became a founding member of the Leiden painters' guild. Among his pupils were Gottfried Schalcken and Frans van Mieris, as well as his sons. He refused an invitation to England from King Charles II and remained in Leiden until his death. The painting of a hermit in prayer offered here counts among his later works and illustrates in a splendid style the artistic perfection typical of Gerrit Dou. We thank Dr. Ronni Baer for her evaluation of the painting in the original and confirmation of its authenticity. We also extend our thanks to Dr. Bernd Ebert for providing the information on provenance from the archives of the Bayerischen Staatsgemäldesammlungen. The painting is archived in the RKD, The Hague, as an autograph work by Gerrit Dou.

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