



Aelbert Cuyp
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

Horsemen and Herdsmen with Cattle

1655/1660

oil on canvas

overall: 120 x 171.5 cm (47 1/4 x 67 1/2 in.)

framed: 164.2 x 214.3 x 17.2 cm (64 5/8 x 84 3/8 x 6 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower right: A.cuijp.

Widener Collection 1942.9.16

ENTRY

This broad, panoramic view of a river valley has long been considered one of Cuyp's most masterful works.[1] The golden light of the late afternoon sun and the moist air in the broad valley soften the landscape, casting a quiet, peaceful spell over the scene. In the foreground two elegant horsemen, whose exotic costumes indicate that they have come from a distant land, pause to discuss their route. Behind them, in the shade of a group of large trees, two shepherds rest amidst their animals. Another herdsman and his cows appear at the left, while a lone rider on a galloping horse in the middle distance is the scene's only active element.

The pastoral quality of the painting reflects the influence of Dutch artists who had traveled to Italy and brought back images of the Roman *campagna*. Particularly important was the work of Jan Both (Dutch, 1615/1618 - 1652), who similarly set off views of distant river valleys with elegant trees grouped to one side.[2] Both also favored the *contre-jour* effects of the late afternoon light and frequently painted long diagonal shadows cast by the setting sun—atmospheric elements particularly apparent in this work. Still, the connections between Cuyp's pastoral scenes and Both's Italianate views can be overstated. Peasants with their donkeys pass through Both's mountainous landscapes, whereas in this work, elegant foreigners ride finely bred steeds through a broad, open landscape. The distinctive character of Cuyp's travelers indicates that his approach is fundamentally different from Both's, whose peasants fit comfortably into his landscapes as integral components of the artist's idealized vision of the Roman *campagna*. Cuyp's travelers, on the

other hand, do not belong to the land nor do they fit within it. The exotic horsemen provide striking visual accents for the composition, but they also engage the viewer, raising questions about the riders' identities, their travels, and their destination.

Despite the evocative quality of Cuyp's pastoral scene, the landscape is based on a real site: the Rhine valley near the towns of Kleve and Kalkar, not far from the Dutch border. The identifying features are two background hills: the Monterberg, the steep-sided hill on the left with twin towers at its summit, and the Eltenberg, surmounted by the partially ruined monastery of Hochelten. These hills, also depicted in other paintings, [3] are recognizable from drawings of these sites that Cuyp made on his trip to this area of the Rhine in about 1651–1652.[4]

Nevertheless, a comparison of *Horsemen and Herdsmen with Cattle* with these drawings indicates that Cuyp freely interpreted topographic elements in this painting. He depicts the Monterberg as a much higher hill than it is in reality, and the two towers are seen to such advantage only from the opposite viewpoint.[5] Finally, the Monterberg and the Eltenberg do not lie in such close proximity and cannot be seen together in the way that Cuyp has represented them.[6] Given the freedom with which the artist combined these landscape elements, the towns vaguely discernible in the river valley are probably Cuyp's own creations, intended to suggest the character of this beautiful stretch along the Rhine.[7]

Aside from reusing landscape elements, Cuyp also repeated figures and animal motifs in his paintings. The gray horse, for example, is identical to that in *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*,[8] and the galloping horse and rider reappear in *Michiel and Cornelis Pompe van Meerdervoort with Their Tutor*. [9] Cuyp's ease with recycling his motifs and the fact that he rarely dated his landscapes make it difficult to establish an exact chronology for his work. Nevertheless, the expansiveness of the panorama; the soft, atmospheric qualities of the river valley, which derive from Cuyp's broad, planar technique of applying paint; and the elegance of the riders are elements associated with paintings he started in the mid-to-late 1650s. An increasing artificiality of light effects and the introduction in the foreground of twisted saplings and large decorative leaves are other distinctive characteristics of Cuyp's mature style. This artificiality is particularly striking in this painting, in which diagonal shadows fall across rocks and foliage without any indication of their three-dimensionality. *Landscape with Horse Trainers* [fig. 1], which hung as a pendant to the National Gallery picture when the two paintings were together in the Van Slingeland collection in the eighteenth century, stylistically contains similar

characteristics.[10]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Aelbert Cuyp, *Landscape with Horse Trainers*, about 1655 (or 1660), oil on canvas, The Toledo Museum of Art, Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1960.2

NOTES

- [1] The auction catalog of the sale held in Dordrecht in 1785 describes the painting as having “an unusually beautiful execution” and as being “one of the best of this master” (“dit Konststuk is van een ongemeene schoone uitwerking, en een der beste van deezen Meester”).
- [2] See Jan Both, *An Italianate Evening Landscape*.
- [3] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 29.
- [4] Also see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), nos. 91, 92. Cuyp based another painting on the view from the opposite direction. Several versions of this composition exist, the best of which seems to be that in the Castle Howard Collection, Yorkshire (Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. [Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928], 2: no. 71).
- [5] Cuyp originally painted the Monterberg as a somewhat lower hill. He seems to have enlarged it for compositional reasons.
- [6] Compare with the more topographically accurate depictions produced by Joris van der Haagen (drawing, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, inv. no. 11821) or Romeyn de Hooghe (engraving, reproduced in Friedrich Gorissen, *Conspectus Cliviae. Die klevische Residenz in der Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts* [Kleve, 1964], no. 106).
- [7] J. K. van der Haagen, former chief, museum and monuments division, UNESCO, Paris (letter, November 29, 1964, in NGA curatorial files),

tentatively identifies the towns as Griethouse (to the left) and Emmerich (immediately to the left of the pale horse, partly behind the twigs of the foreground sapling).

- [8] See Aelbert Cuyp, *Lady and Gentleman on Horseback*.
- [9] See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 29.
- [10] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols. (London, 1829–1842), 5:288, and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–1928), 2: no. 430. Both Smith and De Groot state that the two pictures were hung as pendants in the Van Slingeland collection, information that they would have gained from Gerard Hoet, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen . . .*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1752/1770), 2:495, who listed *Horsemen and Herdsmen with Cattle* as one of a “pair of landscapes,” the other of which was probably *Landscape with Horse Trainers*. The Toledo picture, moreover, came directly after the Washington picture in the 1785 Van Slingeland sale catalog (see note 2 above) and was described as “een Meesterstuk van konst en een weerga van de vorige” (“a masterpiece of art and a pendant of the previous [work]); see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., ed., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 39, 170 and 206.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original, medium-weight, plain-weave fabric support has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping on all sides indicates that the original dimensions have been retained. The ground consists of two layers: a lower layer containing white and red pigments and an upper midtone gray layer.^[1] The upper gray layer acts as a middle tone from which the artist worked both up and down, applying lighter tones to create the sky, ships, and buildings and darker tones to define foliage of the middleground.

The paint is applied in thin layers, both opaque and translucent, blended wet-into-wet with minimal brushmarking and no appreciable impasto. When creating the sky, Cuyp appears to have applied a lighter gray blue over the middle tone gray, and then scraped through it with the butt end of his brush to place the outlines of forms against the sky. This indented line is visible under magnification only in the sky, in the following areas: along the outline of the left mounted figure and in parts

of the left outline of his horse's head, in the left side of the cloud, and intermittently where the foliage in the trees at the top right meets the sky. This technique may have been used to refine outlines in places rather than as a tool for general placement, since the line is not apparent in all areas. It is also possible that this indented line was once more generally visible, but that it was occasionally covered up by succeeding layers of paint.

Cuyp left large areas of the foreground, the horsemen, the largest tree at right, and the hill with the tower in the left middleground in reserve. The sheep and seated figures at the far right were painted on top of the trees and foliage. In the middleground landscape, the artist painted a foreground sapling before adding the peach-colored tonality to the hills, an unusual sequence of paint application. Cuyp altered the position of the two towers on the Monterberg, the hill in the distant left, and raised the height of the hill.

Numerous scattered tiny losses, particularly along the edges but also in the face of the seated figure at the right, indicate a history of flaking, but abrasion is slight. The painting was lined in 1967. At that time varnish and inpainting were applied over the existing discolored varnish. In 1997, the discolored varnish layers and inpainting were removed when the painting underwent a thorough conservation treatment.

[1] The painting was treated in 1997, at which time the ground layers were characterized by cross-sectional analysis. The analysis was performed by the NGA Scientific Research Department (see report dated August 26, 1997, in NGA Conservation department files). During this same treatment, the NGA Scientific Research department also analyzed the pigments using polarized light microscopy and found them to be consistent with the period (see report dated May 19, 1997, in NGA Conservation department files). The medium was also analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using infrared microscopy and gas chromatography and found to be drying oil (see report dated October 8, 1997, in NGA Conservation department files).

PROVENANCE

Johan van der Linden van Slingeland [1701-1782], Dordrecht, by 1752;^[1] (his estate sale, at his residence by Yver and Delfos, Dordrecht, 22 August 1785 and days following, no. 71); Fouquet.^[2] Albert Dubois, Paris; (his sale, Le Brun and Julliot at Hôtel Bullion, Paris, 20 December 1785 and days following, no. 16, bought in). William Smith [1756-1835], Norwich;^[3] sold privately to Edward Gray, who sold it in 1830.^[4] Alexander Baring, later 1st baron Ashburton [1774-1848], Bath House, London, by 1834;^[5] by inheritance in his family to Francis Denzil Edward Baring, 5th baron Ashburton [1866-1938], The Grange, Northington, Hampshire;^[6] sold 1907 with the entire Ashburton collection to a syndicate of (Thomas Agnew & Sons, London; Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London; and Asher Wertheimer, London);^[7] sold 1909 to Peter A.B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania;^[8] 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.

[1] Gerard Hoet, *Catalogus of Naamlyst van Schilderijen*. . . , 2 vols., The Hague, 1752, 2:495.

[2] The entry in the sale catalogue for no. 71 reads as follows: "CUYP (ALBERT) Op Doek, hoog 46, breed 66 duim. Een zeer capitaal Stuk, verbeeldende een ruim Landschap in den vroegen Morgenstond; by een aangenaam Zonligt, zeit men, op den Voorgrond, ter regterzyde, twee Heeren te paard, en daar nevens twee Landlieden rustende by hun Vee; ter linkerzyde een Herder by een staande en leggende Koe, waar by een Man die te paard komt aanrennen; verder ziet men een Rivier met Schepen gestoffeerd, en in't verschiet verscheide Gebouwen en hoog Gebergte; dit Konststuk is van een ongemeene schoone uitwerking, en een der beste van deezen Meester." An annotated copy of the auction catalogue at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, notes that no. 71 was purchased by "Fouquet".

[3] Cited by Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Edward G. Hawke, 8 vols., London, 1907-1927: 2(1909):131, no. 430.

[4] John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 9 vols., London, 1829-1842: 5(1834):288. Perhaps this was the same Edward Gray, of Harringay Park, Hornsey, whose collections were auctioned at Christie's, London, May 1839.

[5] Smith 1829-1842: 5(1834):288. Baring, who was made Baron Ashburton in 1835, was a notable politician (architect of the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty with the United States), and connoisseur (trustee of the British Museum and of London's National Gallery).

[6] Bath House was sold in 1890 by the 5th baron Ashburton, and he had the orangery at The Grange converted into a picture gallery that doubled as a ballroom.

[7] "Ashburton Collection Sold," *American Art News* (19 October 1907): 1. Hofstede de Groot, in both the German (1908) and English (1909) editions, lists the painting as being with Agnew. The painting is listed among those handled by Asher Wertheimer in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *John Singer Sargent: Portraits of the Wertheimer Family*, exh. cat., The Jewish Museum, New York, 1999: 51.

[8] Widener collection records, in NGA curatorial files, list the painting as purchased from Sulley.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1990 Italian Recollections: Dutch Painters of the Golden Age, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1990, no. 28.

2001 Aelbert Cuyp, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, no. 38, repro.

2002 Loan to display with permanent collection, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis, The Hague, 2002-2004, no catalogue.

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- 1944 Cairns, Huntington, and John Walker, eds., *Masterpieces of Painting from the National Gallery of Art*. Translated. New York, 1944: 108, color repro.

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- 1961 Hutton, William. "Aelbert Cuyp: The Riding Lesson." *Toledo Museum of Art Museum News* 4 (1961): 81, 84, repro.
- 1965 National Gallery of Art. *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture*. Washington, 1965: 36.
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