

12-1980

The Flight into Egypt

La Salle University Art Museum

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Recommended Citation

La Salle University Art Museum and Wistar, Caroline, "The Flight into Egypt" (1980). *Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues*. 88.
http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/exhibition_catalogues/88

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THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

La Salle College Art Gallery
December, 1980 - February 9, 1981

The Biblical reference to the Flight into Egypt is brief and straightforward, appearing only in the Gospel of Matthew 11: 13-15 and 19-23. The Massacre of the Holy Innocents from which the Holy Family was fleeing is discussed in the intervening verses, 16-18. Thus, through the ages, one has relied greatly on the artist's imagination, and his interpretation of the Apocryphal stories¹ and The Golden Legend to expand and thereby enliven the Biblical text.

The four episodes which were developed pictorially were the Announcement of the Angel to Joseph to Flee, the Journey and Rest of the Flight into Egypt (the scene most frequently depicted), the Life of the Holy Family in Exile and the Return from Egypt to Nazareth seven years later. The Apocryphal miracles, concerning The Flight, written by theologians and mystics to emphasize the divine power of the Christ Child, all fall within the episode of the Journey: the growth and harvesting of the wheat-fields, the fall of the pagan statues, the bending down of the palm tree branch to provide fruit, the flowing of the spring in the desert to provide water, and the attack of the brigands. All but the latter miracle is represented in this exhibition.

During Early Christian and Medieval times, (5th - 13th centuries) the concern was to emphasize the triumph of Christianity over Paganism. Therefore, artists often concentrated on the depiction

of the arrival of the Holy Family at the pagan temple in Egypt, at the moment the divinity of Christ was revealed to the heathen citizens. Such compositions usually included the fall of the pagan idols from the altars or pedestals, the crushing of demons and the reception and homage of the Egyptian governor and his retinue.

Until the second half of the fourteenth century, the Flight into Egypt was recorded in a synoptic fashion whereby a number of episodes were represented simultaneously in one art work. (See reproductions of Medieval Manuscript Illumination). Before the invention of the printed word, the visual arts were the chief source of learning for the masses. The concern, therefore, was to include as much narration as possible within a single composition. With the availability of the printed book for religious instruction, artists were encouraged to simplify the visual image, concentrating on the naturalistic rendition of a single episode related to The Flight. Therefore, from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the Journey or the Rest on the Journey, alone, received the greatest artistic attention and development as evidenced in this exhibition. Mary and the Child on the donkey became the central figures, while Joseph walking at the side became a subsidiary figure. Moreover, the miracles of the Journey were now of secondary importance and were usually relegated to the background of the landscape.

During the height of the Counter-Reformation period, Baroque artists further dramatized the representation of the Journey by

giving careful attention to the realistic rendition of the landscape and by simulating the motion of the Holy Family as they traveled at a particular time of day or night. Although the Bible mentions the Journey taking place by night, it was not until the seventeenth century that artists such as Rembrandt and Elsheimer, through the effective use of the chiaroscuro technique, attempted to portray the Flight in such a manner. The miracles, with the exception of the Palm Tree branch, are now eliminated, while the central figures are given greater emphasis by the inclusion of guiding angels, seraphim and cherubim (see painting by Bourdon).

Hopefully, this small exhibition will indicate the significant role Christian iconography plays in our understanding of both Biblical literature and the life and thought of the past.

Caroline P. Wistar, Curator

1. "Arabian Gospel of the Childhood of Christ," and "Evangelium of Pseudo-Matthew."

References:

Louis Reau, Iconographie De L'Art Chretien, Volume II, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957).

Gertrud Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, Volume I, translated by Janet Selijman, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1969).

1. Jacques Callot (1592-1635), French

The Annunciation, The Visitation,
The Nativity, The Flight into Egypt,
from Life of the Virgin, Paris, 1633.

Etching and engraving

76-G-562, 564, 565, 567

2. Designed by Gabriel-Francais-Louis Debrie (18th century), Flemish
Engraved by Claude A.O. Duflos (1700-1786), French

The Angel Warns Joseph to Flee into Egypt, 1728

Engraving

80-B-330(6)20

3. Unknown (17th century)

The Holy Family Prepares for the Flight into Egypt

Engraving

76-B-1(f)103

4. Jan Van Scorel (1495-1562), Dutch

The Flight into Egypt

Oil on panel

31-x-23 inches

70-P-72

A minor poet and musician but a major artist from Scorel, Holland, Van Scorel's portraits and religious paintings often illustrate the Mannerist style in the arts which was practiced by a number of artists between the High Renaissance and Baroque period (ca. 1525-1600). This Mannerist style developed as a reaction against the classical stability and scientific realism of the Renaissance. As seen in this painting, artists made a conscious effort to violate principles of clarity and harmony so as to produce images which suggest tension, anxiety, and even incomprehension. Here, the deliberately awkward pose and anatomy of the Madonna, the ambiguous motion of the figures and incomprehensible foreground space are evidence of such Mannerist

trends. Moreover, the exact subject matter is unclear, although the pyramid and obelisk in the naturalistic background suggest the arrival of the Holy Family in Egypt. The raised hand of Christ may refer to a Medieval image wherein a similar gesture was indicative of Christ's exorcism of the devil as he arrived in Egypt. The curious figure disappearing on the left, with the grotesque head and wings, is an additional ambiguity -- perhaps a representation of an agent of the devil over which the power of Christ has just proven victorious.

5. Jacques Callot (1592-1685), French

The Massacre of the Innocents, 1622

Etching

ii/ii

76-G-590

6. Johannes Jacobsz Folkema (17th century), Dutch

After a painting by Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594), Italian

The Massacre of Herod of the Infants of Bethlehem

Engraving

80-B-330(6)

7. Unknown (17th century), German

The Flight into Egypt

Etching

80-B-330(6)23

8. Andrea Scacciati, The Younger (1725-1771), Italian

Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Etching and aquatint

77-G-756

9. Sebastian Bourdon (1616-1671), French

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt, with an Angel

Etching

ii/ii

7-1/8 x 8-3/4 ins.

79-G-869

10. Sebastian Bourdon (1616-1671), French

The Return from Egypt

Etching

First state

79-G-866

11. Sebastian Bourdon (1616-1671), French

The Flight into Egypt

Oil on canvas

37-3/4 x 51-3/4 ins.

79-P-211

Bourdon, one of the founders of the French Academy (1648), adopted a variety of styles, but the orderly and logical composition seen in this painting points out his prominence as an artist working within the classical tradition of the Baroque style. Greatly influenced by Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin, Bourdon escaped the regimentation of the court of Louis XIV in Paris, and went to Rome (1634-1637).

It is interesting to note the seventeenth century treatment of the Flight: the addition of angels and cherubim, the effect of motion brought about through the use of chiaroscuro technique, and the incorporation of the falling pagan statue into the landscape.

Traditionally, the Flight into Egypt was recorded from left to right, and the Return from right to left. Here, Bourdon reverses the direction.

12. Nicolas de Son (fl. 1625-1626), French

Flight into Egypt

Etching

80-G-1088

Note the falling pagan statue in the niche in the tree at upper right and the Massacre of the Innocents on the far left.

13. Unknown, 17th century

Flight into Egypt

Engraving and etching

80-G-330

14. Stefano Della Bella (1610-1664), Italian

The Flight into Egypt, Rest at the Spring

Etching
ii/iii

70-G-295

Joseph draws water from the spring which issued forth from the root of the palm tree providing water for the Holy Family as they traveled through the desert.

15. Unknown (17th century), Dutch

The Flight into Egypt

Etching

76-B-1(f)

16. Cornelius Cort (1533/36-1578), Dutch
After Frederico Barocci (1526-1612), Italian

Rest on the Return

Engraving

73-G-466

18. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804), Italian

The Flight into Egypt

Mary holding the Child in her arms and Joseph with a basket. Plate 10

Etching
ii/iii

Lent by H. Shickman Gallery, New York

19. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804), Italian

The Flight into Egypt

Joseph and Mary passing a shepherd and his flock. Plate 11

Etching
ii/ii

Lent by H. Shickman Gallery, New York

20. Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669), Dutch

Flight into Egypt: A Night Piece, 1651

Etching
v/v

LEFT: 17th century impression pulled during Rembrandt's life time.

RIGHT: Re-strike impression pulled in 1906 by the owners of the plate (Basan-Bernard Publishers).

The impression on the right was pulled from Rembrandt's original plate 255 years after he executed it. Thus, by 1906, the plate was so badly worn it was necessary for the printers to re-work it ~~to~~ compensate for the loss of detail. Note the obvious differences in quality of the two impressions. The modern impression on the right has lost all of the rich velvety ink tones, its closely hatched lines are no longer crisp and the whole image has a dull, matte-worn effect when compared to the original impression on the left.

Lent by Kennedy Galleries, Inc.

21. Caspar Luyken (1672-1718), Dutch

The Flight into Egypt

Engraving for illustration in Historiae Celebriores Veteris et Novi ... Printed and published by Christopher Weigel, Nuremburg, 1708.

80-B-25

CASE

Biblia Saera

Lugduni, Gulienus Rouilius, 1588

The Lovain edition of The Vulgate, edited by Johannus Hentenius, Lovenij, 1547

77-B-240

Became the authorized edition of The Vulgate until publication of the Sixtine Bible of 1590.

Evangelia and Epistolen

Strasbourg, Grueninger, 1513

Anonymous woodcut illustration of The Massacre of the Innocents

80-B-322

The plenarium, in Germany, denotes a popular book, which gives the German translation of The Gospels and Epistles for the Sundays and festivals of the entire year, together with a short exposition.

Biblia Pauperum (Blockbook)

Opera Nova Contemplativa
Venice, G.A. Vavassore (ca. 1516) or earlier

Anonymous woodcut illustrations

Celebrated as the last of the Blockbooks where the text and illustrations are cut from the same block of wood. Here The Old Testament illustration on the right page, showing David escaping from the wrath of Saul who seeks his life, parallels The New Testament illustration on the left page, showing The Holy Family as they escape the wrath of King Herod who seeks the Christ Child's life.

Lent by The Robin Collection of Bible and Art from The Donglomur Foundation.

L'Exercice De L'Ame Devote Pendant Son Pelerinage En Ce Mond,
by Claude Cordemoy de Francaumont, ca. 1600

Folio Manuscript in French with 90 Sonnets (Meditations on the Life of Christ and the Virgin Mary) illustrated with five full

page watercolors and 70 engravings. Dedicated to Princess Isabel Clara Eugenia, Infanta of Spain, daughter of Philip II of Spain. The engraving by Johanus Stradanus (1523-1605), Flemish, shows the miracle of the wheat fields in the background which was a favorite theme of Northern artists in the 15th and 16th century.

Lent by The Robin Collection of Bible and Art from the Donglomur Foundation.

The Holy Bible containing The Old Testament and The New,...

Birmingham, Printed by John Baskerville, 1769, 1771, 2nd edition

Engraving by J. Moreau, The Younger (1791-1814), French

80-B-262

Known for his simplicity of typography, Baskerville was one of the most influential printers of the 18th century. He set a new standard of design and "modern" type face. Although "laid" paper has been used for this edition of the Bible, Baskerville was one of the first to introduce the use of "wove" paper (devoid of laid lines on the screen of the mold).

The Holy Gospel According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Editiones Officinae Bodini, Verona. July, 1962.

80-B-302

The woodcuts were recut by Bruno Bramanti after the original illustrations by Bartolomeo di Giovanni for "Epistole et Evangelii et Lectioni Vulgari in lingua Toschana," 1495.

The Gospels in Arabic and Latin

In Typographia Medicea: Rome, 1591

Interlinear Latin translation ascribed to Antonius Sionita

79-B-237(1)

Woodcut illustrations attributed to Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630), Italian

The Holy Bible (Authorized King James Version)

Conteyning the Old Testament, and The New ...

Printed by John Bull and Christopher Barker, London, 1669.

78-B-11

Engraving by Frederick-Henrik Van Den Hove, (c. 1628-1698),
Dutch.

A Compleat History of The Holy Bible

by Laurence Howel, London, 1718, Vol. III

77-B-88(3)

Engravings by J. Sturt (1658-1730), English

Biblia Ad Vetustissima Exemplaria ...

Nicholas Bevilaquae, Venice, 1578

80-B-286

The artist for the woodcut illustrations is unknown but it is
felt they show the influence of Biblical illustrations by Hans
Holbein, Bernard Soloman and Pierre Eskrich.

La Sainte Bible

Contenant Le Vieil et Le Nouveau Testament ...

Paris, 1703

78-B-95

Illustrated with engravings and etchings by Gerard Jollain
(? - d/ 1683), French