

# 'FULL OF DETAILS AND VERY SUBTLY AND CAREFULLY EXECUTED': OIL PAINTINGS ON COPPER AROUND 1600

Edgar Peters Bowron



HIGHLY WROUGHT, brilliantly painted, exquisitely refined, paintings on copper have always dazzled collectors and connoisseurs. Created in response to the taste for the precious and exotic that prevailed in the courts of Europe in the late Renaissance, painting on copper flourished around 1600, and then diminished gradually in popularity to the point that one English eighteenth-century writer described copper plates as "seldom employed but for delicate and elaborate paintings."<sup>1</sup> Artists painted on copper with the deliberate intention of fashioning something that would be out-of-the-ordinary, and these small cabinet-pictures have always been treasured for their jewel-like surfaces and virtuoso brush-

Figure 1 Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638), *The Golden Age*, 1605, oil on copper, 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (22.5 x 30.2 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

work. The crisp, detailed handling and enameled perfection of Joachim Wtewael's *The Golden Age* (fig. 1),<sup>2</sup> signed and dated 1605, and painted on a copper plate that can be held in one's hands and viewed at close range, is typical of the medium. There is always an element of wonder in seeing an artist create on the smallest scale imaginable, and one of the delights of small coppers is the sight of dozens of figures painted within an area the size of a playing card. In this



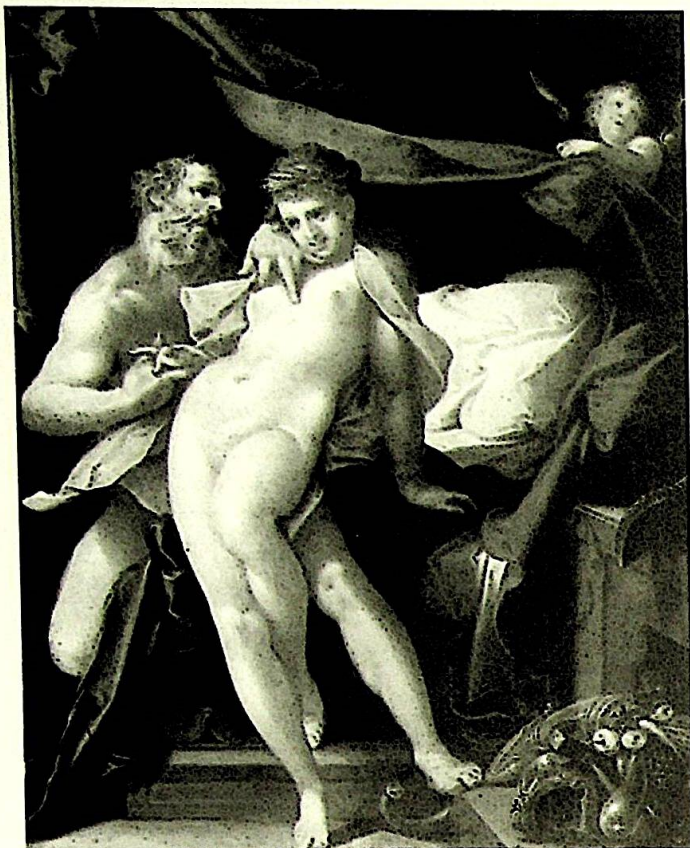
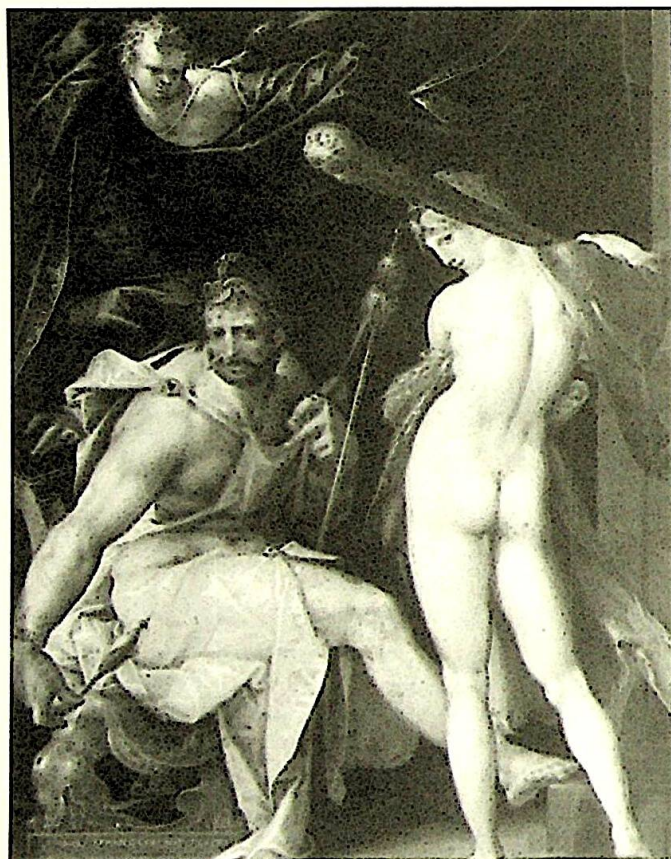


Figure 2 Bartholomäus Spranger (1546-1611), *Vulcan and Maia*, c. 1585, oil on copper, 9½ x 7½ in. (24 x 19 cm.), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



depiction of an Ovidian earthly paradise, measuring roughly nine by twelve inches, Wtewael has painted no less than thirty figures, and on a copper surface only slightly larger he once created a composition with more than a hundred gods, goddesses, putti, nymphs, and satyrs (*The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig).<sup>3</sup>

Wtewael (1566-1638) developed a great reputation for his highly finished oil paintings on copper, exemplified by this panel, recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His glowing palette, sinuous forms, and sophisticated composition emphasize the strength of the mannerist idiom in the Netherlands in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Like the best of his Dutch contemporaries, Wtewael possessed formidable drawing skills, a keen, if acidic, color sense, and an imaginative ability to combine the most improbable nude figures in convincing arrangements. Wtewael's artifice appears even more extraordinary expressed on the narrow compass of the copper plate, and between about 1590 and 1610, he painted more than two dozen oils on copper. The enthusiasm of collectors for these riveting little pictures is just as great in the late twentieth century as in the Netherlands in Wtewael's day, and in recent years his works on copper have been sought eagerly on the art market.

Although paintings on copper abound in museums, private collections, and the sale room, surprisingly little has been written about them. Keith Andrews in a two-page addendum ("Painting on Copper") to his monograph on the German painter Adam Elsheimer neatly summarized what most art historians know about the subject.<sup>4</sup> To attend an exhibition of oil paintings on copper would be gratifying, and thirty years ago the London art dealer Jack Baer organized an imaginative small show at Hazlitt Gallery of paintings on copper, slate, and marble, but no one has followed his initiative.<sup>5</sup>

Copper as a support for oil paintings was known early in the sixteenth century. Vasari in his life of Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547) reported the artist's experiments with painting on silver, copper, lead, and other metals.<sup>6</sup> Correggio (c. 1489-1534) painted a penitent Magdalen on copper that was considered one of his supreme achievements and enjoyed considerable fame and influence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden; destroyed 1945). (In Cecil Gould's view, nothing is easier than to imagine Correggio, in his restless technical experimentation, selecting metal as support for a miniature designed to explore the extreme delicacy of finish.)<sup>7</sup> Other sixteenth-century Italian artists painted occasionally on copper and other metals, but the practice does not appear to have become widespread in Italy until the 1570s and 1580s when artists began commonly using copper supports for oil paintings.

Painting on copper arose with the upsurge of appreciation for the precious and the remarkable, the unusual and the priceless that developed in cultivated humanist circles in the late sixteenth century and led to the creation of the *Kunstkammer*, or cabinet of marvels of art and nature. These

Figure 3 Bartholomäus Spranger (1546-1611), *Hercules and Omphale*, c.1585, oil on copper, 9½ x 7½ in. (24 x 19 cm.), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



collector's cabinets contained objets d'art, sculpture, coins, books, drawings, manuscripts, and paintings, and *naturalia* such as minerals, shells, fossils, and skeletons. Pictures on copper satisfied the refined taste of late Renaissance patrons like Francesco I de' Medici (1541-87), who for example in 1568 commissioned from Alessandro Allori (1535-1607) a *Hercules crowned by the Muses* (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) on copper as one in a series of small allegorical works provided by a variety of local Florentine painters.

The belief that the technique was introduced into Italy by northern artists was fostered by Karel van Mander in his *Schilderboeck, or Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* (1604). He noted in his life of Johann Rottenhammer (1564-1625) that when the German artist arrived in Rome "he devoted himself to painting on plates as is customary with the Netherlanders."<sup>8</sup> Van Mander, moreover, singled out a number of northern artists in Rome in the late sixteenth century who painted small pictures on copper: Hans Soens (1553-1611), Michel Gioncquoy (act.1573-d.1606), Hans von Aachen (c.1551/52-1615); Paulus Brill (1553/54-1626), and Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610).

In his life of Bartholomäus Spranger (1546-1611), Van Mander records in detail the artist's early use of the technique beginning with a *Last Judgment* on copper (Galleria Sabauda, Turin) for Pope Pius V, "so full of detail that five hundred faces appeared in it." Subsequently he painted "a *Garden of Gethsemane* by night on a copper plate, the size of a sheet of paper, and presented it to the Pope, which pleased him very much, so that he desired that Spranger should make the whole of the Passion in the same format."<sup>9</sup> In 1575 Spranger departed Rome for Vienna and, according to Van Mander, presented a small copper depicting a seated female personification of Rome, with the Tiber and the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus, as his first work to the new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Rudolf II (1552-1612). Spranger's journey to Vienna and Prague, along with several other northern artists who both worked in Italy and painted at the court of the emperor, was a significant source of transmission of the practice of painting on copper from Italy to other parts of Europe.

In fact, numerous Italian painters at the time—the Bassano in Venice; the Carracci in Bologna; Bronzino, Allori, and Jacopo Zucchi in Florence; and Cavalier d'Arpino, Scipione Pulzone, and other late-mannerist painters in Rome—painted on copper, and the practice appeared spontaneously and spread rapidly throughout northern and central Italy in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Why this was so may never be explained with precision, whether owing to changes in fashion (a new taste for the precious and exotic), technology (changes in the mining and manufacture of copper), or economics (increased availability and lower costs).

Copper was used in the sixteenth century for enamelling, engraving and etching, and painting on copper seems to have coincided with a revival, or an increase in the activity, of print-making in Germany and in Italy, where copper supports for painting became common.<sup>10</sup> The fact that many

Figure 4 Joseph Heintz (1564-1609), *Diana and Actaeon*, late 1590s, oil on copper, 15 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (40 x 49 cm.), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

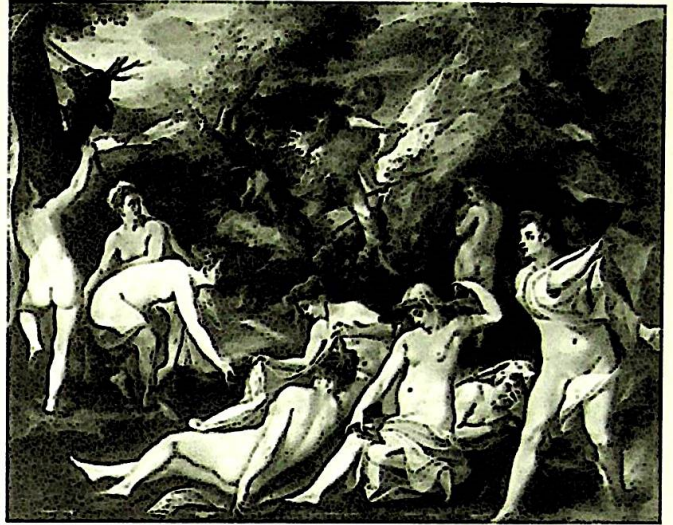
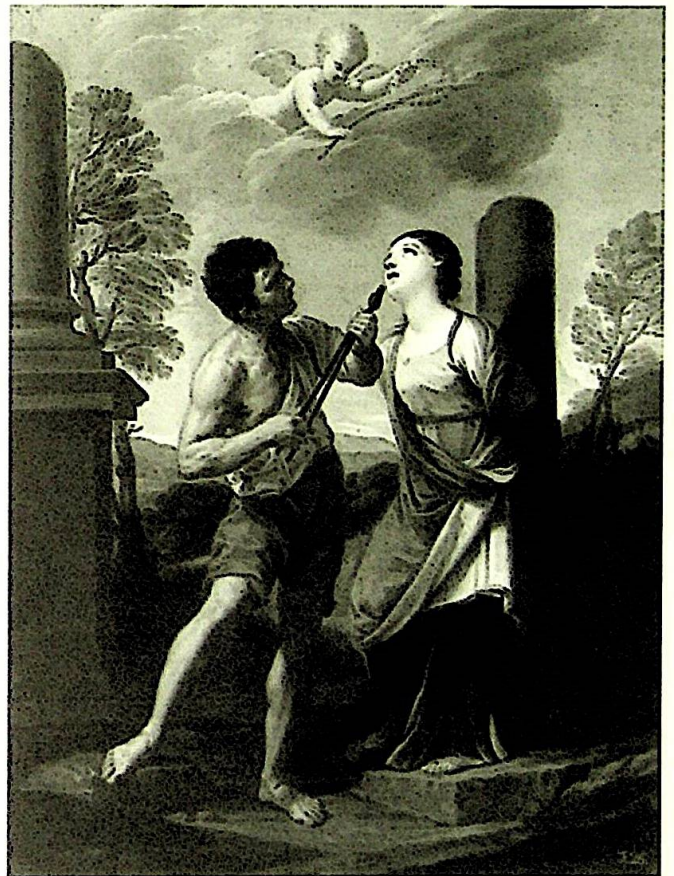


Figure 5 Guido Reni (1575-1642), *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia*, c.1606-07, oil on copper, 17 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 13 in. (44 x 33 cm.), M. Roy Fisher Fine Arts, New York.



print-makers were also painters made it easy and natural for them to use copper plates interchangeably for printing or as the support for a painting. The reason for this may have been economy, for compared with more commonly used materials such as wood and canvas, copper was (and still is) rather cost-





ly. There are relatively few instances known, however, in which a copper plate has been used for both engraving and painting: Thomann von Hagelstein's *Judith* (Friedrichshafen); a Flemish seventeenth-century work once attributed to Elsheimer, *Tobias and the Angel* (National Gallery, London); Lodovico Cigoli, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Private collection, Florence); style of Jan van Goyen, *View of the Zuider Zee* (Philadelphia Museum of Art).<sup>11</sup>

Although the handling of oil paint on copper does not vary nor the results differ much from painting on wood panels, copper plates had several advantages over wood and canvas: elaborate preparation of the surface for painting was reduced; the surface was extraordinarily smooth and uniform, ideal for fine brushes and delicate detail; the coefficient of linear expansion of copper compares favorably with that of wood and thus ensures greater stability and preservation; corrosion of the copper plate itself often does little harm to the oil paint, because the paint film isolates the copper from the air; and the small size of most copper plates made them suitable for easy transport, so that on occasion two painters

Figure 6 Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Guercino (1591-1666), *The Dead Christ mourned by Angels*, 1617-18, oil on copper, 14½ x 17½ in. (36.8 x 44.4 cm.), The National Gallery, London.

could collaborate on one composition, one painting the landscape, the other the figures. And although artists could not have known this at the time, paintings on copper that are well cared for generally survive in excellent condition, owing to the protection given the paint film by the solidity and durability of the support, and often appear as brilliant and fresh as the day they were created.

The disadvantage of the copper support for oil painting is that paint has a poor attachment to bare metal. Some paintings on copper have a history of blistering and flaking, and painters experimented with different techniques to ensure that there was no corrosion due to the chemical interaction between the copper and the oil priming.<sup>12</sup> Old technical manuals recommended roughening the copper with ashes or pumice stone before use in order to give it "tooth" and allow the oil paint to adhere to the surface; rubbing the surface of



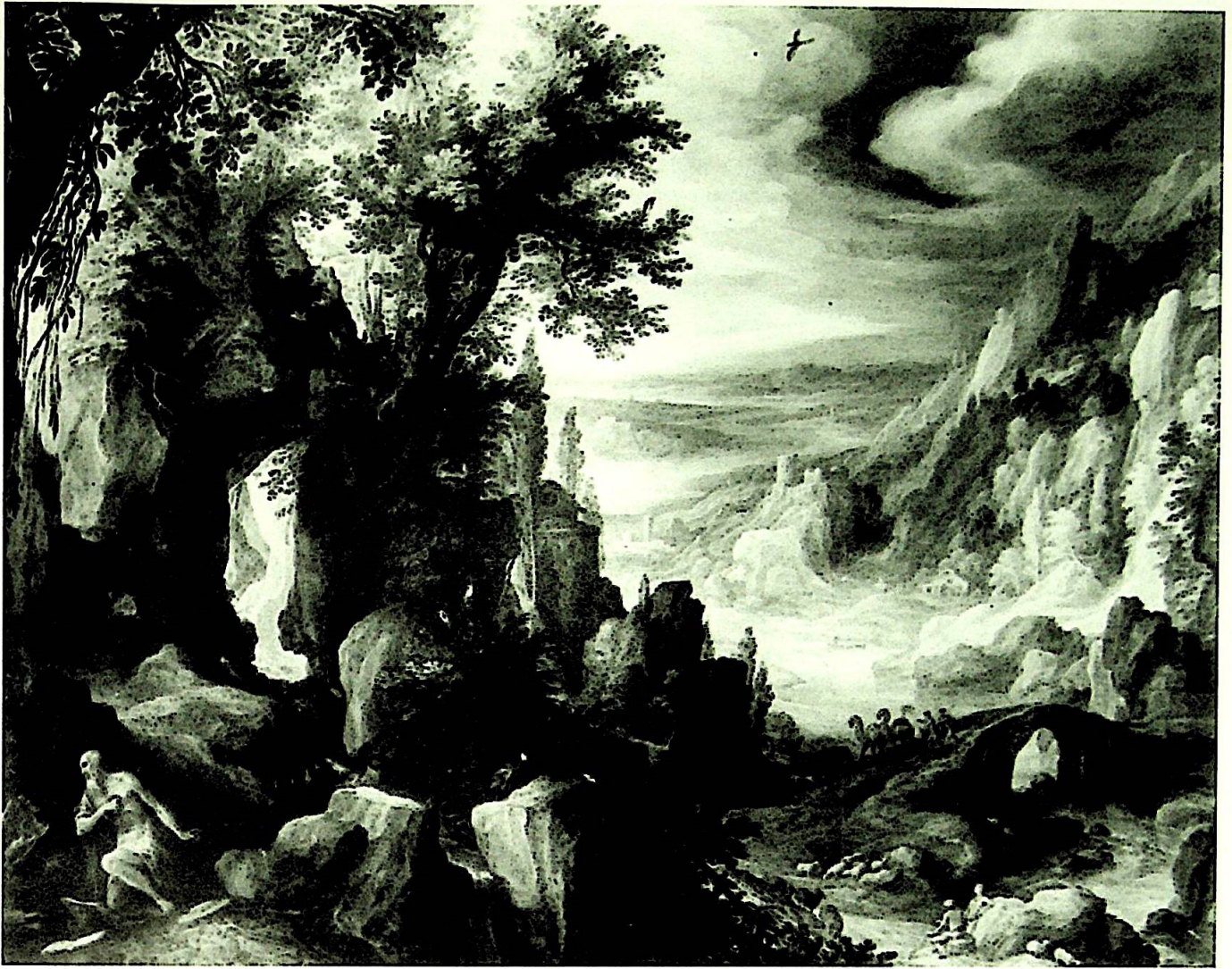


Figure 7 Paulus Bril (1553/54-1626), *Mountainous Landscape with St. Jerome*, 1592, oil on copper, 10 x 12 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (25.4 x 32.4 cm.), Private collection.

the panel with garlic was often mentioned as a means of improving adhesion. In the seventeenth century painters experimented with a variety of methods for preparing copper surfaces to prevent any harmful reaction between the metal and oil paint and to achieve a better bond between the support and paint layers: Adam Elsheimer often applied a silver film (actually a tin-lead alloy) to the surface of the copper plate before applying a ground (*Judith and Holofernes*, Apsley House, London); Scipione Pulzone (*Portrait of a Cardinal*, National Gallery, London) and Claude Lorrain coated their plates with tin (*Embarcation of St. Paul*, City Art Gallery, Birmingham); Domenichino used lead (*Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin); Guido Reni employed zinc (*Coronation of the Virgin*, National Gallery, London); and Rembrandt applied gold leaf for the ground in a painting on copper dating he made in his Leiden

years (*Old woman at prayer*, Salzburger Landessamlungen-Residenzgalerie, Salzburg). (These metal coatings may also have been applied to increase the reflectivity of the surface in the hope of creating a greater refractive index and thus increasing the overall luminosity through the translucent ground and colors.)

A survey of existing oil paintings on copper indicates that around 1600 painters associated the medium with several specific genres of painting: mythological cabinet paintings; private devotional images; landscapes; decoration of furniture and liturgical objects; and reduced records of larger, usually public paintings. For reasons ranging from the aesthetic effects achievable on copper to its malleability and convenience as a support to its inherent costly and precious nature, copper proved highly popular for these particular categories of work.

Mythological and allegorical subjects, often explicitly erotic, were routinely depicted on small copper panels. The taste for such cabinet pictures flourished under Emperor Rudolf II and became a stock-in-trade of the artists he gathered at his



court in Prague: Hans von Aachen, Matthäus Gundelach, Joseph Heintz, and Bartholomäus Spranger. A pair of small coppers by Spranger on the theme of the power of love, *Vulcan and Maia* and *Hercules and Omphale* (figs. 2, 3) is typical of the work produced by the Rudolfine court artists during their imperial service.<sup>13</sup> Spranger was born in Antwerp, and from about 1567 until 1575 was active in Italy, where he forged a highly original style based on Parmigianino,



Correggio, and Michelangelo. Beginning in 1575 he was court painter to Emperor Maximilian II in Vienna, and from 1580 worked in Prague in the service of Rudolf II. Mythologies, allegories, and personifications played a large role at the Prague court, and the presentation of this material in a sensuous, occasionally frankly erotic manner, has given rise to the view that Rudolfine painting is largely erotic in content.<sup>14</sup> What is certain is the frequency with which images of amorous couples and single nude figures were painted on copper, in part because of the silken handling painters could employ to describe the naked female body. And because these images were intended for private enjoyment, the small scale of the copper panel meant that its possessor could examine the work closely and intimately, holding the painting in his hands.

In Joseph Heintz's *Diana and Actaeon* (fig. 4), painted for Rudolf II in the late 1590s,<sup>15</sup> the artist's retelling of a myth from the ancient world barely disguises his intention to create a sensuous and provocative image that would appeal to the sophisticated tastes of his patron on a number of levels.

Figure 8 Paulus Bril (1553/54-1626), *The Campo Vaccino, Rome*, 1600, oil on copper, 8½ x 11⅝ in. (21.5 x 29.5 cm.), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.

Figure 9 Jan Brueghel (1568-1625), *A Road with a Ford in the Wood*, 1608, oil on copper, 13 1/4 x 19 in. (33.7 x 48.3 cm.), Private collection.





(Given the emperor's wide learning and taste for complicated imperial allegories, the Rudolfiner painters presumably used erotic mythological imagery to express deeper meanings.<sup>16</sup>) Ovid describes at length the misfortunes of the young prince who stumbled accidentally upon the grotto where Diana and her companions were bathing, and his *Metamorphoses* was a popular literary source for themes involving Diana and Actaeon, Jupiter and Antiope, Venus and Adonis, Diana and Callisto – each an opportunity for the painting of the nude. Not all mythologies of course were painted on small-scale coppers but for about twenty years, 1585 to 1605, such pictures proliferated in collector's cabinets across Europe and they share in common the playfulness and artifice of Heintz's painting and its fine facture and imaginative effects of scale, lighting, color, and perspective.

In Rudolfiner Prague and other cultivated humanistic courts, paintings on copper with allegorical or mythological

Figure 10 Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610), *Saint Paul on Malta*, c. 1600, oil on copper, 6 7/8 x 8 5/8 in. (17 x 21.3 cm.), The National Gallery, London.

subject matter took precedence over works with a religious cast. But elsewhere, especially in Italy, copper was widely used for religious narrative and small-scale, personal, devotional images. The late-sixteenth-century Bolognese, in particular, frequently painted religious pictures on copper, and the practice especially appealed to Annibale (1560-1609) and Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619) and their pupils, Domenichino (1581-1641) and Francesco Albani (1578-1660). Guido Reni (1575-1642) learned to paint on copper in the studio of his first teacher, the Flemish painter, Denys Calvaert (c.1540-1619), with whom he was apprenticed from 1585-95, and thereafter he employed copper supports for devotional pictures. Reni's pictures on copper were often commissioned as gifts by patrons with a taste for religious works of a luxurious and high finish, and were admired for their detailed handling and enamel-like surface. He appears to have made in the first decade of the century a number of small devotional images on copper of the lives of the saints and the Virgin. One of the most popular compositions among these was the *Martyrdom of St. Apollonia* (fig. 5),





painted about 1606-07, possibly for Cardinal Emilio Sfrondato (1561-1618), the artist's first important Roman patron, and a serious scholar interested in early church history and archaeology and the cult of the early virgin martyrs, Saints Cecilia, Catherine of Alexandria, and Apollonia.

There was obviously a demand for small cabinet-pictures of a religious nature in Rome in the early seventeenth century and the inventories of the large collections, the Barberini, Aldobrandini, Ludovisi, Doria-Pamphilij and Borghese list many small coppers by both northern and Italian artists. Reni painted for several of these families, and the earliest recorded owner of the *St. Apollonia* was Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1607-1671), nephew of Pope Urban VIII, in whose family it remained until the early 1970s. Reni intermittently produced devotional images on copper throughout his life, mostly of Christ crowned with thorns and as the Man of Sorrows, and bust- and half-length saints.<sup>17</sup>

Guercino (1591-1666) is another Bolognese painter who appears to have favored copper for his early religious paintings, of which none is more memorable than the *Dead Christ mourned by Angels* (fig. 6).<sup>18</sup> One of the finest and most successful of Guercino's small religious works, the fluidity of handling belies to some extent the argument advanced here that artists chose copper because it enabled them to handle paint with great control and precision. However, the reduced scale of the work, restricted palette, simplified composition, and few figures are entirely characteristic of intimate devotional works produced for private use.

When painters discovered how sensitively they could render nuances of light, shade, and atmosphere on copper, they quickly employed the material for landscape painting. The practice of painting landscapes on copper was established by Paulus Brill (1553/54-1626), a Flemish painter who traveled to Rome before 1582 to assist his older brother Matthiös (1550-1583) in the execution of frescoes in the Vatican and Lateran. He spent his mature in career in Rome and painted a number of landscape interiors in fresco for the Church in the last two decades of the century. Although Brill's activity

was largely devoted to mural painting, his fame rests on the small-scale coppers in oil he began to paint in the 1590s.

His earliest work on copper, a *Mountain Landscape with St. Jerome*, signed and dated 1592 (fig. 7), is characteristic of the northern mannerist landscape tradition with its bird's-eye view and infinite vistas.<sup>19</sup> However, within a few years he abandoned these old-fashioned mountain panoramas in favor of a more modern conception of landscape that proved highly influential among northern artists in Italy around 1600.

He painted many small landscapes on copper plates, one of which Van Mander particularly admired, "a subtle little piece on copper with subtle, handsome ruins and little figures in the genre of the Campo Vaccino, that is, the ancient market of Rome."<sup>20</sup>

The composition exists in several versions, one of the most brilliant of which is signed with his monogram – a pair of spectacles ("Bril" in Dutch) – and dated 1600 (fig. 8), and characterizes the artist's success in this field.

Bril's influence on northern painters in Rome in the 1590s appears to have been substantial. In 1592-94

Jan Brueghel (1568-1625) was in

Rome and the two appear to

have collaborated on a painting dated 1593, and in the following year Brill painted the landscape for a Christ with Martha and Mary for which Johann Rottenhammer supplied the figures (Museo Civico, Treviso).<sup>21</sup> One of the attractive characteristics of small copper panels was the ease with which they could be transported, and as a result Brill, Brueghel, Hendrick van Balen (1575-1632), Hendrick de Clerck (c.1570-1630), and

other artists collaborated on small landscapes, one painting the landscape,

the other providing the figures. Brill was also friends with Adam Elsheimer, and although it will probably never be established with precision the precedence of one artist over the other in the creation of paintings of copper, there seems to be little doubt that the small-scale landscape on copper was a firmly-established genre in Rome around 1600.

The range of visual effects obtainable on copper was extraordinarily wide. Jan Brueghel exploited the medium to the maximum in a series of brilliantly colored, lush woodland scenes, none more impressive than a *Road with a Ford in a*

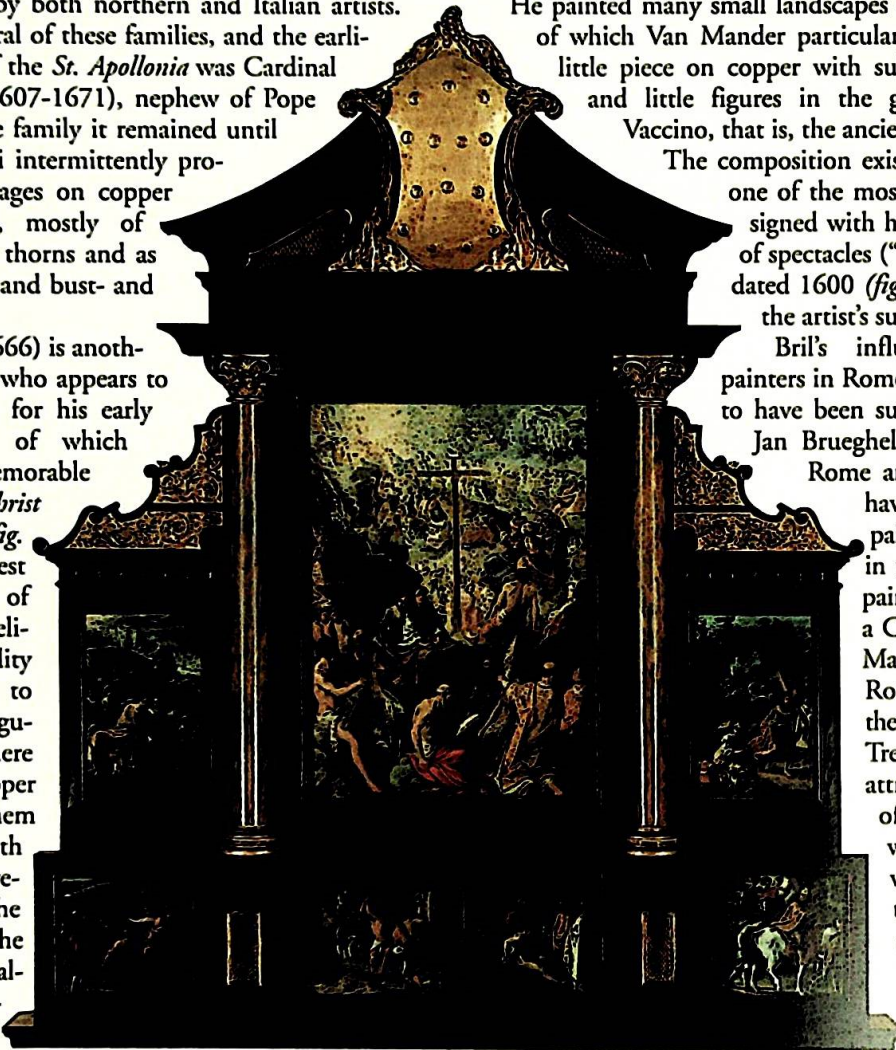


Figure 11 Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610), *The Finding and Exaltation of the True Cross*, 1603-05, oil on copper, 48 3/4 x 42 1/8 in. (124 x 107 cm), Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.



Wood (fig. 9), signed and dated 1608.<sup>22</sup> His meticulous handling of the brush and virtuoso skill at depicting delicate textures earned him the nickname "Velvet" Brueghel. Copper was ideally suited for painting on a miniature scale, and Brueghel has delineated every blade of grass, tree, and hair on the hides of the oxen and horses with astonishing fidelity. The mark of one of Brueghel's favorite copper panel-makers, Pieter Stas, of Antwerp, is on the back of the panel. By the seventeenth century the panel makers' guilds in the Netherlands also regulated the manufacture of copper as well as wood panels, an indication of how widespread the practice of painting on copper had become.

In contrast to Brueghel's scene of a road through a peaceful wood is Adam Elsheimer's summation of the dreadful power of a storm at sea on a tiny copper plate (fig. 10) in the National Gallery, London.<sup>23</sup> Elsheimer had already painted on copper before he came to Italy in 1598 and he used the support almost exclusively throughout his career. This scene of St. Paul's shipwreck on Malta was painted around 1600, when Elsheimer settled in Rome, and demonstrates the extraordinary range of natural effects he was capable of depicting: lightning, fire, wind, and waves. His tender religious and mythological scenes in a landscape setting and the intense effects of light and shade he achieved in "night-pieces" like this influenced Rembrandt, Rubens, Claude Lorrain, and numerous Northern landscape painters and made him one of the founders of Baroque painting.

Copper plates were ideally suitable for letting into furniture, in particular for inlaying into household cabinets, and furniture of a devotional nature. One of the most frequent uses for copper was as a support for the pictorial decoration of liturgical objects. A ciborium or tabernacle on

the high altar of San Cristoforo della Certosa in Ferrara, consecrated in 1597 is an example. The ciborium itself, made of wood decorated with intarsia and gilded bronze, was the work of two Bolognese artists, Marco Antonio Maldrato and Nicolò Donati. Set into it were two small coppers by Agostino Carracci, *The Last Supper* (a reduced variant of a painting now in the Museo del Prado), and Ludovico Carracci, *The Gathering of Manna*, both c.1595 (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Ferrara).<sup>24</sup>

The use of copper for this purpose is so common that it is hardly necessary to cite the number of painters who produced work of this kind. Adam Elsheimer supplied the pictorial decoration for several portable altars, none so spectacular as the tabernacle, or house-altar, in Frankfurt depicting the search for and final restitution of the Holy Cross (fig. 11).<sup>25</sup> The *Kreuzaltar* consisted of seven silvered copper panels, several of which miraculously surfaced one by one over several decades after 1950, enabling the altarpiece to be reconstructed on the basis of a contemporary sketch that showed the disposition of the individual scenes and the appearance of the original frame.

The prevalence of series of small copper panels in uniform sizes depicting saints and figures from the Old and New Testaments, and scenes from the life of the

Virgin and Christ, suggests that they originated as decorations for furniture of a devotional nature.<sup>26</sup>

Orazio Gentileschi's *David with the head of Goliath* in Berlin (fig. 12) represents another category of work for which artists frequently employed copper supports: reductions of large-scale easel paintings and altarpieces. The crystal-clear forms and precise handling of this small copper is characteristic of Gentileschi, one of Caravaggio's most important Roman followers. The painting was identified in 1927 by the

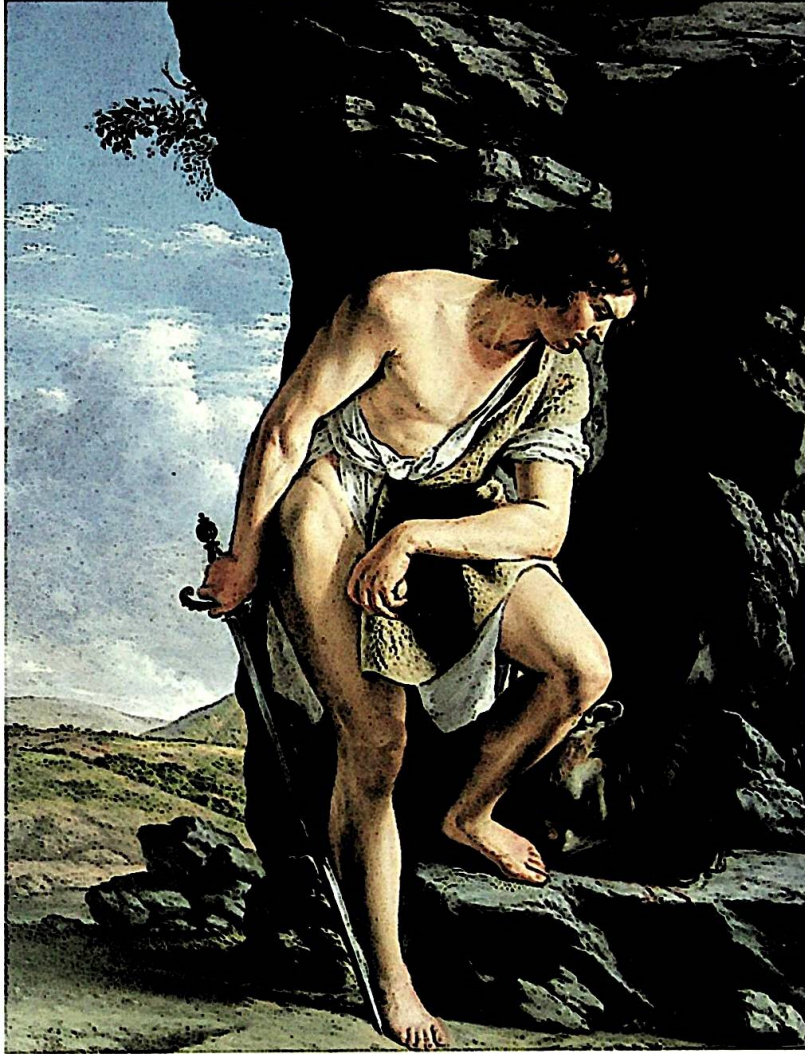


Figure 12 Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639), *David with the Head of the Goliath*, c. 1610, oil on copper, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 11 in. (36 x 28 cm.), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.





Figure 13 Roelandt Savery (c. 1576-1639), *Flowers in a Roemer*, 1603, oil on copper, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 9 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (32 x 23 cm.), Private collection.

Italian scholar Roberto Longhi as an autograph, small-scale version by Gentileschi of his large picture in the Galleria Spada, Rome.<sup>27</sup> There are minor differences of detail between the two paintings (the larger picture is clearly cropped at the bottom) and the landscape background varies in each, but Gentileschi clearly conceived the Berlin painting as a precious, highly wrought replica of the larger work. (Not surprisingly, the smaller version on copper for many years bore an attribution to Adam Elsheimer, although the connection with the Spada painting was well known.)

Copper was often employed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for small-scale reprises of larger works, occasionally as in the case of Gentileschi by the artist himself, but more often by anonymous copyists. The scale of most of these paintings was small, and a fine brush allowed the tiniest detail to make its effect on an extremely smooth surface. One suspects that contemporary beholders of such works admired these reductions both for their miraculous translation in miniature and the semi-precious nature of the support, which meant that the object was of greater significance than a mere copy and indeed something to be inspected at close hand and treasured.

Even without excessive pedantry, one could extend the examination of oil paintings on copper to include other categories such as still life painting. Although Roelandt Savery (c.1576-1639) is usually considered a *Landschaftsmaler*, he produced the earliest extant dated independent flower painting by a Dutch artist (fig. 13) on a small copper plate, signed and dated 1603.<sup>28</sup> Savery was a naturalist who painted at the imperial court in Prague and produced a number of small alpine views on copper. Whether this still life is a depiction of the theme of *Vanitas*, a Christian interpretation of nature, or merely a straight-forward representation of the natural world is open to question. However, it probably is significant that the support is copper (which, like panel, allowed the artist to paint the individual elements with extreme delicacy and precision), and the entire subject of flower still lifes on copper, which includes such marvels as the *Flowers in a Roemer* that Jan Brueghel painted for Cardinal Federico Borromeo in 1608 (Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan), requires investigation.

Painting on copper was not systematically pursued in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the practice never really died out. In Rome, for example, Benedetto Luti, Placido Costanzi, Sebastiano Conca, Francesco Trevisani, and Pompeo Batoni all painted small pictures on copper. Canaletto unexpectedly employed copper plates in the 1720s for a series of views of well-known Venetian sites in which he deliberately seized advantage of the artistic properties of the material to lighten his palette and sharpen his focus to appeal to British milords and other grand tourists visiting the city. And for certain painters such as Louis-Jean François (1724-1805) Lagrenée copper was an ideal surface for their silken and sentimental cabinet pictures.

An artist for whom the copper support is practically synonymous, and whose artistic output consisted almost entirely of cabinet pictures on copper, silver, and other metals was the Viennese Rococo painter, Johann Georg Platzer (1704-1761). He painted genre, historical, and mythological subjects, influenced strongly by Dutch and Flemish painters around 1600. His *Rebecca at the Well* (fig. 14), epitomizes his conscious revival of the mannerist practice of painting on copper, and his velvety surfaces indeed seem to be inspired by the works of Wtewael, with whom he has been occasionally confused.<sup>29</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Robert Dossie, *Handmaid to the Arts*, 2 vols. (London, 1758), 1: 204.
2. Signed and dated on the rock at lower right center: *JOACHIM. VTEIWAELE FECIT* 1605. *Agnew's: 1982-1992* (London, 1992), repro. 72, as in the Ortiz-Patiño collection; Anne W. Lowenthal, *Joachim Wtewael and Dutch Mannerism* (Doornspijk, 1986), 212, cited several early inventory references to paintings of the theme, but did not know the present painting at the time she wrote.
3. Lowenthal 1986, 100, no. A-20, pl.31.
4. Keith Andrews, *Adam Elsheimer* (Oxford, 1977), 169-170: "Appendix: Painting on Copper". For technical discussions, see J.A. van de Graaf, "Development of Oil Paint and the Use of Metal Plates as a Support," in *Conservation and Restoration of Pictorial Art*, ed. Norman Brommelle and Perry Smith (London, 1976), 43-53; Isabel Horowitz, "Paintings on copper supports: Techniques, Deterioration, and Conservation," *The Conservator* 10 (1986), 44-48; and David Scrase, "Paintings on copper at Apsley House," *The Victoria & Albert Album* 5 (1986), 40-48.
5. *Sixteenth to Eighteenth-Century Paintings on Copper, Slate and Marble* [exh. cat., Hazlitt Gallery] (London, 1967).
6. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti Pittori, Scultori ed Architettori*, ed.



- Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1878-85), 5:580. Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo* (Oxford, 1981), 123-125, discusses the artist's search for supports other than the traditional wood or canvas.
7. Cecil Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio* (London, 1976), 93-94, 279-280, pl.97c.
  8. Karel Van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*,..., ed. Hessel Miedema (Doornspijk, 1994), 442.
  9. Van Mander 1994, 341-342.
  10. Andrews 1977, 169.
  11. Andrews 1977, 169; Michael Levey, *National Gallery Catalogues: The German School* (London, 1959), 40; Miles Chappell, "Cigoli's Rest on the Flight into Egypt," *antichità viva* 14 (1975), 11-16; *Pictures in the collection of P.A.B. Widener at Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania: Early German, Dutch & Flemish Schools*, intro. C. Hofstede de Groot and Wilhelm R. Valentiner (Philadelphia, 1913), 98-99, repro. 351.
  12. Van de Graaf 1976, 51, noted that, on the other hand, corrosion on the surface of the support, perhaps caused by the reaction of the paint medium with the copper that formed a layer of copper oleate or copper resinate, actually caused the paint to adhere more firmly to the surface of the copper plate as in Guercino's *Angels Weeping over the Dead Christ* (National Gallery, London).
  13. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolf II* (Chicago and London, 1988), 260-261.
  14. Kaufmann 1988, 59
  15. Kaufmann 1988, 189.
  16. Kaufmann 1988, 59.
  17. D. Stephen Pepper, *Guido Reni* (Oxford, 1984), nos.56-58, 160, 162, figs.83-85, 185,187.
  18. Michael Levey, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Italian Schools* (London, 1971), 141-143; *Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, Il Guercino (1591-1666)* [exh. cat., Pinacoteca Nazionale, Schirn Kunsthalle, National Gallery of Art] (Bologna, Frankfurt, and Washington, 1991-92), no. 14.
  19. Luigi Salerno, *Landscape Painters of the Seventeenth Century in Rome*, trans. Clovis Whitfield and Catherine Eggass, 3 vols. (Rome, 1977-78), 1: 12, fig. 2.1.
  20. Van Mander 1994, 426.
  21. Salerno 1977-78, 1: 13.
  22. Peter C. Sutton, *The Age of Rubens* [exh. cat., Museum of Fine Arts and Toledo Museum of Art] (Boston and Toledo, 1994-95), 461-463, no.82.
  23. Andrews 1977, 143, no.10, pl.30; Alistair Smith, *The National Gallery Schools of Paintings: Early Netherlandish and German Paintings* (London, 1985), 112-113.
  24. *Mostra dei Carracci* [exh. cat., Palazzo dell'Archiginnasio] (Bologna, 1956), 133, 156-158, nos. 27, 44 repro.; Gail Feigenbaum, *Ludovico Carracci*, ed. Andrea Emiliani [exh. cat., Kimbell Art Museum] (Fort Worth, 1994), 90, no. 41, repro. 91.
  25. Andrews 1977, 26-27, 146-147, no.16, pls.47-54; Christian Lenz, *Adam Elsheimer: Die Gemälde in Stadel* (Frankfurt, 1989), 36-74, with earlier bibliography.
  26. Andrews 1977, 148-149, pls.55-63.
  27. R. Ward Bissell, *Orazio Gentileschi and the Poetic Tradition in Caravaggesque Painting* (University Park and London, 1981), 148-150, nos.18-19, figs.35-35.
  28. Kaufmann 1988, 228-229, nos.19.1, 19.2, repro.
  29. Lowenthal 1986, 65.

Figure 14 Johann Georg Platzer (1704-1761), *Rebecca at the Well*, c.1730, oil on copper, 14½ x 19½ in. (37.5 x 49.3 cm.), Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna.

