

DAVID I RYCKAERT: A LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY *STOFFEERDER*¹

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Until today, David I Ryckaert (Antwerp, 1560² - 1607, Antwerp) has been considered the patriarch of three generations of painters living and working in Antwerp. Except for Manteuffel³, most authors⁴ agree that he was the first painter in the Ryckaert lineage. I have come to the conclusion that David I Ryckaert was not a painter of pictures — in the context of this paper, the term painter is used to designate one who paints pictures, unless indicated otherwise — but that he was a decorator of woodwork and sculptures. I would like to offer an explanation for my point of view, based on a re-examination of the meaning of the term *stoffeerder* current at the time of Ryckaert's registration which differs from the modern meaning of the term "staffage". To enhance the credibility of my proposition, I will demonstrate the doubtfulness of some alleged attributions of paintings to David I Ryckaert.

¹ In 1999 (Van Haute1999:216, note 6) I announced the publication of this article in the journal *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*, but subsequently withdrew the submission.

² According to Van Leries (1874:321), the year of David I Ryckaert's birth is around 1559. This date has been derived from the fact that his name does not appear in any of the registers of baptisms in Antwerp, the oldest of which do not antedate the year 1560. Van den Branden (1883:602), however, found proof that on 16 April 1602, David I Ryckaert declared that he was forty-two years old. This indicates that he was born in the year 1560. Woermann (1888, 111:515) accepts Van den Branden's date of 1560.

³ Zoege von Manteuffel (1915:58-59) is the only author who recognises the fact that "David Ryckaert I war überhaupt nicht Künstler". Writing on David I Ryckaert in Thieme-Becker (1935,29:251), he repeats this view: "Bedeutung als Kiinstler scheint er nicht gehabt zu haben".

⁴ Compare Van Leries 1874:321; Van den Branden 1883:601-602; Woermann 1888, 111:515-516; Van Puyvelde 1942:47; Benezit 1960, 7:446; Legrand 1963:159; Van den Steen 1986:1; Mai & Vlieghe 1992-1993:428; De Maere & Wabbes 1994:340.

In 1585 David I Ryckaert was admitted as a master in the guild of St Luke in Antwerp. He was registered in *De Liggeren* — the records of the guild of St Luke — as "David Rijkarts, brouwer en stoffeerder" (Rombouts & Van Lerijs 1872,1:291), meaning that he made a living as a brewer⁵ and *stoffeerder*. *De Liggeren* (Rombouts & Van Lerijs 1872,1:337, 398) mentioned him once more as "brouwer en stoffeerder" in 1588-1589 and again as "stoffeerder" in 1597-1598. In other sources, David Ryckaert the Elder was also recorded several times as a dealer in paintings.

It would seem that the term *stoffeerder* has been the source of the general confusion about his profession. In 1907 (19:612-613), Max Rooses raised the question as to the exact meaning of the word⁶:

Il n'est pas clair ce qu'il faut entendre par ce dernier mot [etoffeur (stoffeerder)]. Designe-t-il un artiste qui peignait des figures dans les tableaux de ses confreres ou qui garnissait d'accessoires les peintures dont d'autres avaient fait les personnages; ou bien faut-il donner a ce mot une signification plus materielle et entendre par la un artisan qui garnissait les tableaux des autres d'encadrements ou d'accessoires analogues? Il est impossible de le decider.

[It is not clear what should be understood by this last word [etoffeur (stoffeerder)]. Does it designate an artist who painted figures in the paintings of his colleagues or who provided the accessories for paintings of which others had made the figures? Or must this word be given a more material meaning and be interpreted as referring to an artisan who fitted out the paintings of others with frames and similar accessories? It is impossible to decide. (My translation)]

In 1969, Lydia De Pauw-De Veen published the results of her research on art terms current in the seventeenth century. This study provides a solution to the problem. She maintains that the

⁵ Van den Branden (1883:601) recorded that already from 1583, David brewed beer in his house "de Ketel" on the east corner of "het Brouwersstraatje" and "de Brouwersvliet".

⁶ It must be noted that Rooses only became suspicious of the term *stoffeerder* by 1907. In 1879 he was still convinced of its meaning as someone who paints figures, animals and objects in other artists' pictures (Rooses 1879:605).

meaning of *stofferen* as a painting term is, with a painted or drawn landscape or scene as object, to enliven, by applying or adding figures, animals, sometimes also objects. Usually it concerns a landscape or an architectural structure which is enlivened with staffage. She adds, however, that the use of *stofferen* in this sense was not yet known in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Before 1627, the more ancient meaning of *stofferen* as described in the Middle Netherlandish dictionary⁷ was still current. The term then referred to objects other than paintings or drawings. Sculptures, for instance, were *gestoffeerd*, meaning that they were gilded or polychromed. When frames, among other woodwork, were described as *gestoffeerd*, it was understood that they were decorated with paint (De Pauw-De Veen 1969:293-294).

Nineteenth-century authors such as Van Lerijs, Rooses and Van den Branden were in ignorance of this more ancient meaning of the word. Van Lerijs (1874:321) argues that by including the word *stoffeerder*, the records of the guild of St Luke inform the reader that David Ryckaert the Elder's specialty consisted of populating the paintings of other artists, that is, decorating them with human figures and animals (staffage). Rooses (1879:605) maintains that "hij bepaalde zich meest bij het stoffeeren der schilderijen van andere meesters"⁸. Van den Branden (1883:602) also accepts that he painted small figures in paintings by other masters, and even credits David I with the creation of autonomous works. Rooses (1879:605-606) had done the same before him, stating that the first David also painted peasant scenes, the sort of pictures for which David III Ryckaert became famous.

⁷ The older meaning of *stofferen* as described in the Middle Netherlandish dictionary is the following: 1) to make up (*opmakeri*), to fix up (*in orde maken*); also to adorn (*opsieren*), embellish (*versiereri*), decorate (*decoreeren*); 2) More specifically, to paint with gay colours and to gild or polychrome woodwork and sculpture ("met bonte kleuren beschilderen en vergulden, polychromeren, hout- en beeldwerk) (De Pauw-De Veen 1969:293-294).

⁸ Although this remark could be interpreted in the more modest sense, implying that he supplied the frames for other painters' pictures, Rooses intended the term to be understood as providing pictures with staffage. See note 7.

The suspicion voiced by Max Rooses in 1907 was taken seriously only by Manteuffel (1915:58) who was indeed aware of the more ancient meaning of the word *stoffeerder*⁹. He was convinced that "Er [David I Ryckaert] besaß schon 1583 (funfzehn hundert drei und achtzig) eine Brauerei und scheint das Malen nur im Nebenberuf in handwerklicher Weise betrieben zu haben". He repeated his view in Thieme-Becker (1935, 29:251), specifying that David I made frames. This was the last time that David I Ryckaert was identified as an artisan, but the finding fell on deaf ears. David I's introduction as a Flemish painter became customary in the lexicons on seventeenth-century Flemish painting. In 1960, Benezit (1960, 7:446) mentioned David I Ryckaert in the capacity of painter. The notion that he was employed by other artists to paint figures in the works of his colleagues was again upheld and repeated in books, catalogues and dictionaries, the latest being the 1994 publication of De Maere & Wabbes (1994:340).

With the information gained from De Pauw-De Veen, it is now possible to define David I Ryckaert's position. The earliest source, namely *De Liggeren* of the Antwerp guild of St Luke, mentions David I Ryckaert as a *stoffeerder* on three occasions — in the 1580s and 90s, that is long before 1627. Not once was he recorded as a *schilder* (painter) in these registers. The surviving data thus clearly indicate that David I only handled the brush as an artisan and not as an artist. This proposition is corroborated by information provided by Van den Branden (1883:254)¹⁰ and Manteuffel (1915:58). They record that in 1594 David supplied gilded frames for two paintings by Frans Francken the Younger which were part of the festive decorations celebrating the state entry of Archbishop Ernst of Austria into Antwerp. With this, more evidence

⁹ He states that "stoffeerder aber bezeichnet gewöhnlich Leute, die Statuen bemalten und vergoldeten oder ähnliche Arbeiten ausführten". He obtained his information from the *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* by Verwys & Verdam (Zoege von Manteuffel 1915:58, note 4).

¹⁰ In this instance Van den Branden failed to mention his source. I was unable to trace the original document.

is proffered as to the correct status or occupation of David I Ryckaert as a decorator of woodwork and sculpture. As Manteuffel (1915:59) remarks: David I's painting career was probably limited to the gay colouring of his beer barrels!

This finding raises some questions. If David I Ryckaert was not a painter, who was responsible for executing the paintings accredited to him? It could be argued that all attributions of paintings to David I are false, because it has been established that he was not a painter in the sense of artist. But using this alternative explanation as an already indisputable premise is somewhat pedantic and presumptuous. If attributions can convincingly be refuted, the outcome of this investigation" will serve as additional proof that David I Ryckaert never created paintings.

Rooses (1879:606) and Van den Branden (1883:602) recorded one work by the hand of David I Ryckaert, then in possession of Theodoor Van Leries. It is said to represent a *Kitchen with Three Smokers at a Barrel* and to be monogrammed and dated D.R. 1603. Because the authors do not provide sufficient empirical data of the work in question, it is impossible to trace or identify it with absolute certainty. A consideration of this painting is thus limited to the descriptions given by the various authors who had presumably seen the work.

Rooses (1879:606) describes it as a representation of a group of drinking and smoking peasants, seated around a barrel. As accessories a pot, kettle and vegetables appear on the floor. The lighting technique creates a pleasant effect. The author further comments on the particularly large heads of the figures which he recognises as a characteristic feature reoccurring in the paintings of the "later" David Ryckaert. In his concise description of the same painting, Van den Branden (1883:602-603) mentions the loose handling of the brush, the natural appearance of the figures and the faithful rendering of the household effects and the vegetables.

" This investigation does not pretend to be a complete survey of works attributed or ascribed to David I Ryckaert. Only the best-known examples are dealt with.

Manteuffel (1915:58-59) rejects this attribution. In his typically sarcastic manner he maintains that the researchers of the nineteenth century had created a historical miracle. How, he asks, could David I have created a peasant picture that already revealed all the characteristics of the works of his grandson, executed in the 1640s? Going on the still life with kettles and vegetables, and the excessively large heads, he argues that the painting was executed entirely in the manner of David III Ryckaert¹². But the work was dated 1603. According to Manteuffel (1915:59), it is entirely impossible that works of grandfather and grandson, separated by at least forty years during a period of the most intensive development in Flemish painting, could be so similar. Therefore, he claims, the date of the work should not be taken seriously. He conveniently brushes aside the problem of the date by assuming that it had been misread or tampered with during restoration.

As long as the painting cannot be identified and examined, any further discussion of it seems futile. But, a very important detail was pointed out by Rooses, Van den Branden and Manteuffel: the presence of a still life consisting of household effects (a pot and kettle) and vegetables. Klinge-Gross (1976: 38:68-91) cogently argues that the representation of a peasant interior with still life was a popular theme amongst the Netherlandish painters during the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The first Antwerp artist who produced such paintings was David II Teniers whose earliest work of this genre dates from 1633*

If cognisance is taken of this fact, then Manteuffel (1915:59) is correct in claiming that the date on the Ryckaert painting had been misread or tampered with and that it originally read 1643.

¹² Although Rooses (1879:606) also recognised the large heads as a typical element of David III Ryckaert's manner, he did not insinuate an attribution of the painting in question to David III, as Zoege von Manteuffel (1915:59) maintains.

Similar paintings by David III Ryckaert seem to justify such a date. One representative example is his *Drinking Peasants in a Barn Interior*¹³ signed and dated D.RYC.F. 1638

The painting corresponds closely to Rooses's description of the Van Lerijs painting in the depiction of the peasants whose faces are somewhat grotesque in a Brouweresque manner. It also displays a large still life, composed of vegetables and kitchen and barn utensils of wood, copper and earthenware. On the basis of its iconography and some stylistic features, the Van Lerijs painting may therefore be assumed to have been created by David III Ryckaert in the late 1630s or early 1640s.

Two other works were subsequently attributed to David I Ryckaert by Leo Van Puyvelde

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(1942:47). The first is a drawing¹⁴ representing a view of Rome/An inscription at the top dates it 18 June 1599. It also bears a monogram: "R in D" followed by "f" (fecit). Van Puyvelde probably based his view solely on the monogram, as no proof exists that David I Ryckaert ever went to Italy and visited Rome, either for study or business purposes. Hence the suggestion that he was the author of the drawing in question loses all credibility. This argument also serves to refute Van Puyvelde's (1942:47) second attribution of another, "anonymous drawing of the Panorama of San Onofrio with the Castello Sant Angelo" to David I Ryckaert.

A fourth work believed to be by David I Ryckaert was illustrated in 1965 in the journal *Duits Quarterly* (Winter 1965, 6:16). It is a *Still life*¹⁵ painted on panel with a *trompe l'oeil* frame

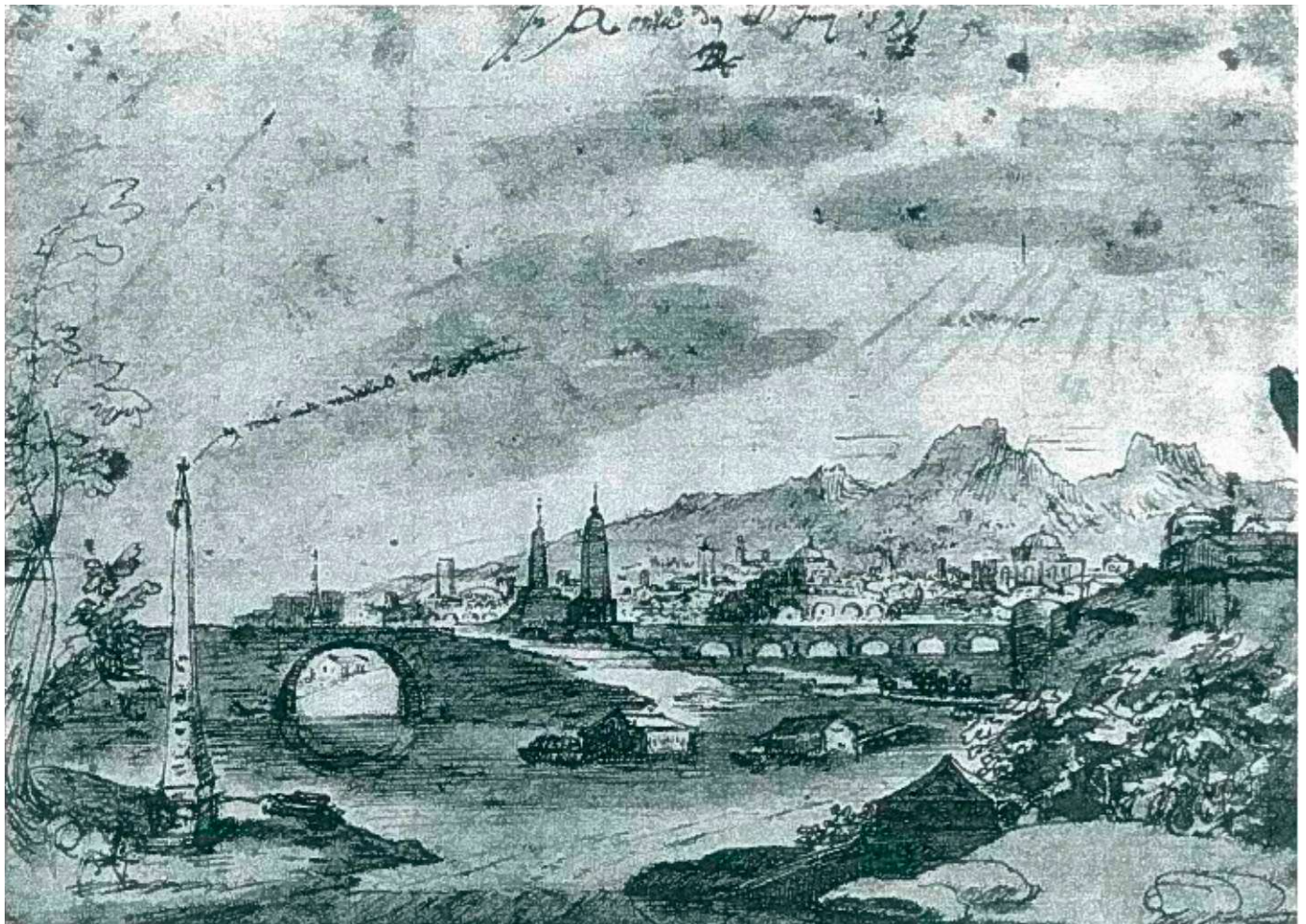
¹³ David III Ryckaert, *Drinking Peasants in a Barn Interior*, signed and dated D.RYC.F. 1638. Panel, 50,5 x 80,5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv.no. 1092.

¹⁴ *View of Rome*. White paper, pen and black ink, 20,5 x 27,5 cm. Windsor Castle, Collection of H.M. the Queen, inv.no.6132 (Van Puyvelde 1942:47, fig.283).

¹⁵ David II Ryckaert, *Still Life*. Signed D.Rykert. Panel, 44 x 65 cm. Formerly Dublin, Collection Lord Belleu; auction Berlin, Leo Spik 4-4-1973, no. 314; auction Vienna, Dorotheum 20-3-1995, no.74. (Photograph Leo Spik KG, Kunstversteigerungen, Berlin.)



1 David III Ryckaert, *Drinking Peasants in a Barn Interior*. Signed and dated D.RYC.F. 1638. Panel, 50,5 x 80,5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, inv.no. 1092.



2 Attributed to David I Ryckaert, *View of Rome*. White paper, pen and black ink, 20,5 x 27,5 cm. Windsor Castle, Collection of H.M. the Queen, inv.no 5132 (Van Puyvetde 1942:47, fig. 283).

surround and is signed D.Rykert V) • The author of the announcement in the *Duits Quarterly* wrote that

the style of painting suggests a date of about 1605-10 and must therefore be [sic] David Ryckaert I, the grandfather of the well-known Teniers follower His son and pupil David Ryckaert II was born in 1596 and could therefore hardly have painted in this early style (*Duits Quarterly* 1965, 6:16).

Why a date of 1605-1610 should be suggested remains unexplained. Furthermore, David II Ryckaert was not born in 1596, but in 1586¹⁶. Since he was registered in the painters' guild in 1607-1608, he could, purely on chronological grounds, be the author of the still life. That is, if the painting was indeed executed at such an early date.

An alternative view was presented by Walter Bernt. When the work was auctioned in Berlin in 1973 (auction catalogue Berlin, Leo Spik 4-4-1973, no. 314), Bernt expressed the expert opinion that David III Ryckaert created this still life. Although David III showed a definite delight in painting still lifes, no other paintings resembling the present *Still Life* can be ascribed to him.

What is interesting about this still life, is that it can be related to a painting referred to in a document drawn up on 10 December 1657 by notary Antoon De Costere on request of David III Ryckaert and his brother-in-law Gonzales Coques. It reads as follows:

Ten versueke van Srs David Ryckaert ende gonsalis cocques constschilderen alhier - Compareerden Sr Abraham Snellinx ock constschilder alhier out 55 jaeren my notario bekent Ende heeft verclaert... alsdat dhr Boudewyn Vanheck inden jaere 1632 aen wylen david Ryckaert doude geleent heeft op obligatie de somme vantwelff ponden vlems eens tot versekeringhen vande voors. Twelff ponden vlems den voorseide wylen Ryckaert aende voors. Vanheck terhandt ende in pandt was stellende twee stucken schilderyen, te weten deen stuck inhoudende een druymet manden ende met vogelen daerin ende dander een Rolbaene van boeren geschildert by den voorseide Ryckaert naer Brouwer. (SAA, Costere, De, Antoon. Protocollen, 1657, NOT. 800, f° 136).

¹⁶ SAA, *Parochieregisters O.L. Vrouw*, 9: Dopen (1580-1592), f° 128.



3 David II Ryckaert, *Still Life*. Signed D.Rykert. Panel, 44 x 65 cm. Formerly Dublin, Collection Lord Belleu; auction Berlin, Leo Spik 4-4-1973, no. 314; auction Vienna, Dorotheum 20-3-1995, no. 74. {Photograph Leo Spik KG, Kunstversteigerungen, Berlin.}

[On request of David Ryckaert and Gonzales Coques painters present - Abraham Snellinx painter present 55 years old declares that Boudewyn Vanheck lent twelve Flemish pounds on obligation to the late David Ryckaert the Elder in 1632, for which he [Vanheck] received as security two paintings, namely one piece containing a [bunch of] grape[s] with baskets and with birds in it and the other Peasants playing bowls painted by the aforementioned Ryckaert after Brouwer. (my translation)]

Although the notary's description of the first piece is somewhat confusing, essentially it is said to contain grapes, baskets and birds. The present *Still Life* comes close to the description in that it contains exotic fruit in the form of oranges and a lemon as well as birds arranged in a metal plate that is decorated with a border of basketry. The paintings mentioned in the document were executed prior to 1632, when the transaction took place. The artist responsible for their creation was David II Ryckaert, since he is explicitly named the Elder ("doude") and referred to as deceased ("wylen"). On the basis of this written evidence, it may thus be assumed that David II Ryckaert created the still life in question¹⁷, once again denying David I the authorship of a fine painting.

In conclusion, it may be inferred that not one of the works considered can, with any certainty, be attributed to David I Ryckaert. This finding corroborates the view that David I Ryckaert was a *stoffeerder*, meaning a decorator of woodwork, an artisan who has no claim to recognition as a Flemish painter.

¹⁷ Despite the evidence pointing to David II Ryckaert as the author of the *Still Life*, the attribution remains problematic. The present painting is the only still life of its kind in the known corpus of signed Ryckaert pictures. Secondly, there is no certainty regarding the field of specialisation of David II Ryckaert (Van Haute 1999:8-10).

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