

## RUBENS AS A PAINTER OF EPITAPHS, 1612-1618

This paper was first delivered on the four hundredth anniversary of Rubens's birth. On that occasion it seemed appropriate to begin the commemoration of his birth with an examination of the paintings he designed for the commemoration of others. Although the conference in Antwerp celebrated the beginning of his life, and the works to be discussed in the following mark the transition from this life to the next, the general purpose of this paper is to gain a clearer insight into how Rubens himself — and his milieu — conceived of the particular form of commemoration represented by his epitaph paintings. In the years between 1612 and 1618 Rubens produced a series of such paintings, and it is these which will be emphasized in the following. I propose to concentrate on them, rather than on the epitaph paintings of later years<sup>1</sup> and the great work he painted at the end of his life for his own tomb<sup>2</sup>, because they cast light on a major aspect of local patronage during a period when Rubens consolidated his reputation; because they form a fairly coherent group; and because they offer an unusually good opportunity for an examination of the relationship between form, iconographic and function. Although this is not to be an essay in rehabilitation, it is worth noting here that they have not been amongst the best loved works of Rubens, and have been persistently criticized for their *froidueur*. Fromentin responded to one of the most well known of these works, the Rockox epitaph (fig. 5)<sup>3</sup>, with the exclamation: 'Cela un Rubens? Quelle erreur!'<sup>4</sup> And Max Rooses even went so far as to denounce what he regarded as its academic banality and its complete lack of vitality and inspiration<sup>5</sup>.

But first a preliminary definition should be offered. By 'epitaph paintings' I refer simply to paintings which were intended to hang either above a tomb or a funerary plaque on a chapel wall and were commissioned either by the deceased themselves or their immediate families specifically in order to serve as epitaph monuments<sup>6</sup>. I do not, therefore, propose to deal with those designs for funerary monuments so

<sup>1</sup> Later examples included the Michielsen triptych of 1618 *Klassiker der Kunst*, V, ed. R. Oldenbourg, 1921 [henceforward *K.d.K.*], pp. 160, 161; (see also the article by Eisler cited in note 8 below) and the so-called *Christ à la Paille* painted for the tomb of Josine van der Capelle and Johannes de Pape ca. 1620 (*K.d.K.*, p. 91, and M. Rooses, *L'Oeuvre de P.P. Rubens, histoire et description de ses tableaux et dessins*, Antwerp, 1886-92 [henceforward *Rooses*], I, No. 82, pp. 89-90). It should be noted that all the paintings discussed here from the period 1612-18 represent scenes from the life of Christ after the Passion and will be discussed at greater length in my forthcoming volume (VII) of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*.

<sup>2</sup> *K.d.K.*, p. 426.

<sup>3</sup> See note 23 below.

<sup>4</sup> E. Fromentin, *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*, Paris, 1876, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> '... une peinture extrêmement soignée, ou le dessin est d'une régularité académique banale... la hardiesse et l'inspiration manquent complètement' (*Rooses*, II, p. 157).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the various meanings and interpretations of the word 'epitaph' itself, see P. Schoonen, *Epitaph*, in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, V, Stuttgart, 1967, col. 873.



2. Th. Galle after Rubens, *The Resurrection of Christ*, engraving from the *Itrevarianum Romanum*.

Antwerp, 1614



1. P. P. Rubens, *The Resurrection of Christ* (centre panel of a triptych).  
Antwerp, Cathedral

ably discussed by Held almost twenty years ago<sup>7</sup>, except in passing. The only other writer to consider this group of works as a whole has been Eisler, in the preamble to his illuminating discussion of the Michielsen epitaph<sup>8</sup> (upon which it will consequently not be necessary to dwell at any length here). In any case, the group of epitaph paintings which immediately precedes it will be seen to be closely related, both from the stylistic and the iconographic point of view. And one of the aims of this paper is to show that Rubens's epitaph paintings, despite their many roots in the Northern tradition, are far more innovative in both iconographic and stylistic terms than has generally been recognized.

One may begin with the earliest of these works, the epitaph painting for Jan I Moretus and his wife Martina Plantin (Fig. 1)<sup>9</sup>. Almost everything relating to the commission of this work in 1612 has already been published or can be found in the Plantin-Moretus archives<sup>10</sup>. But because we are so familiar with the iconographic type popularized by this very work and by the closely related engraving in the *Breviarium Romanum* (Fig. 2)<sup>11</sup>, it is easy to overlook its iconographic originality. The fact is that Rubens's treatment of the subject is highly unusual. There is no sarcophagus. In most of the preceding representations of this subject — although admittedly not all<sup>12</sup> — Christ steps or rises from his sarcophagus, but here he is shown stepping directly from his rocky sepulchre. He *may* have derived this idea from a few late sixteenth century precedents<sup>13</sup>, but it may equally have been motivated by a desire to avoid the contemporary controversy as to whether Christ's sarcophagus was open or sealed at the time of his resurrection<sup>14</sup>. For the use of the *Resurrection* as the subject of epitaph paintings throughout the sixteenth century,

<sup>7</sup> J. Held, *Rubens' Designs for Sepulchral Monuments*, in *Art Quarterly*, XXIII, 1960, pp. 247-70.

<sup>8</sup> *K.d.K.*, pp. 160, 161; C. Eisler, *Rubens's Uses of the Northern Past, The Michiels Triptych and its Sources*, in *Bulletin, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 1967, pp. 43-77.

<sup>9</sup> *K.d.K.*, p. 49; Jan Moretus (whose portrait surmounts the whole monument) died in 1610; although his wife survived him by six years, the monument and painting was paid for by Jan's son, Balthasar II Moretus (*Rooses*, II, pp. 148-50). For the inscription beneath the tomb, see P. Génard, *Verzameling der Graf- en Gedenkschriften van de Provincie Antwerpen*, I, Antwerp, 1876, p. 42.

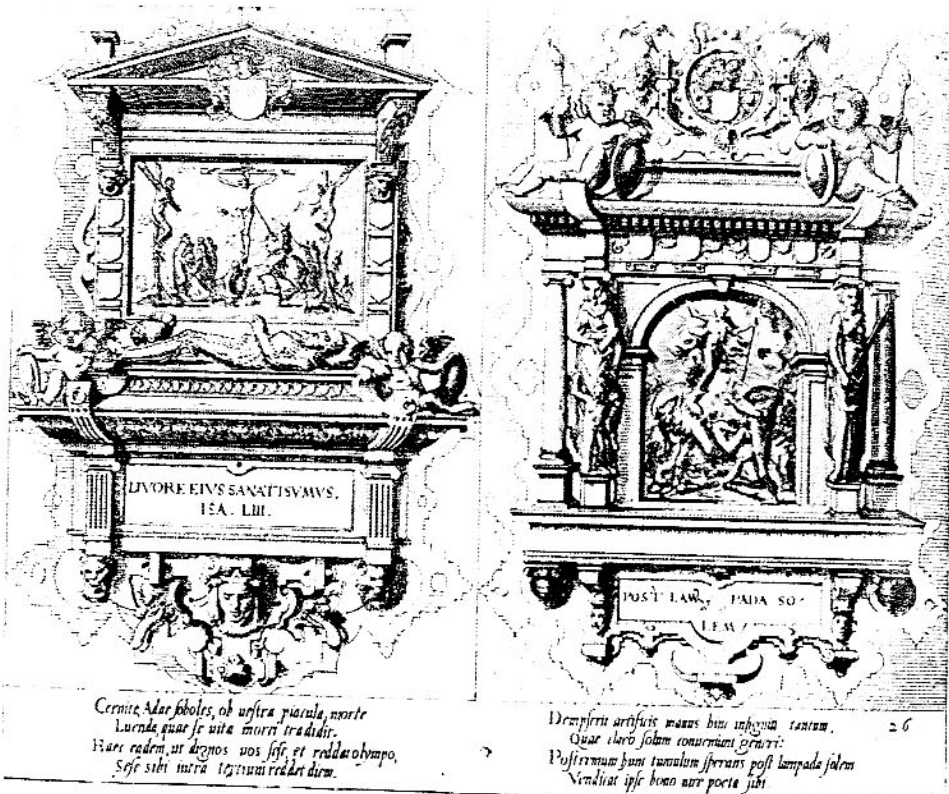
<sup>10</sup> The documents relating to the payments for both the painting and the sculpted work surrounding it (as well as incidental expenses) were published *in extenso* by *Rooses*, II, pp. 148-50, transcribing documents of which the current reference numbers are Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, *Archives*, No. 136, p. 154 and No. 102, pp. 227 and 236.

<sup>11</sup> J.R. Judson and C. van de Velde, *Book Illustrations and Title Pages (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XXI)*, Brussels, 1978, No. 9, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> For the absence or diminution in prominence of the sarcophagus, see the paintings by Jan Soens in Parma, signed and dated 1590, by P. Claeissins in St Salvator in Bruges, and the drawings by L. van Noort, signed and dated 1561, in the Teyler Museum in Haarlem, and the famous engraving by P. Galle after Bruegel (H. 114).

<sup>13</sup> See Tintoretto's painting of this subject in the Scuola di San Rocco (reprod. in H. Tietze, *Tintoretto, Paintings and Drawings*, London, 1958, Fig. 202), as well as the examples cited in the preceding note.

<sup>14</sup> See E. Mâle, *L'Art religieux... après le Concile de Trente*, Paris, 1951, pp. 292-94; P. Wilhelm, *Auferstehung Christi*, in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, I, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1968, cols. 215-17; and A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna. Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*, The Hague, 1974, I, pp. 149, 150 and II, pp. 236, 237 on the views of late sixteenth century theological writers on art such as Paleotti and Molanus. The basic work on the iconography of the Resurrection remains H. Schrade, *Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst. I. Die Auferstehung Christi*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1932.



3. J. Vredeman de Vries, *Designs for Epitaph Monuments*, engraving from *Pictores, statuarii... varias coenotaphiorum formas*. Antwerp, 1563

one has only to turn, for example, to Van Mander's references to such works in the lives of Jan Vermeyen, Pieter Vlerick, and Lucas de Heere<sup>15</sup>. And it is frequently to be found on the tomb designs of Cornelis Floris<sup>16</sup> and Vredeman de Vries (Fig. 3)<sup>17</sup>.

On the reverse of the wings of the Moretus epitaph (Fig. 4), two angels guard the doors of a tomb, holding them slightly ajar. While these figures would have been understood by the beholder as a reference to the angels who guarded Christ's tomb in Luke XXIV, 4<sup>18</sup>, they are in fact derived from antique prototypes — the left

<sup>15</sup> C. van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem, 1604, f<sup>os</sup>. 224v (Vermeyen), 251v (Vlerick), and 255v (de Heere).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the epitaph monument of Adolph von Schauenburg by Floris in Cologne, reproduced in R. Hedicke, *Cornelis Floris*, Berlin, 1913, II, Pl. XVI, Fig. 2.

<sup>17</sup> J. Vredeman de Vries, *Pictores, Statuarii... varias coenotaphiorum formas*, Antwerp (Hieronymus Cock), 1563, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Although the passage ('And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold two men stood by them in shining garments') in fact refers specifically to the moment in the gospel account when the Holy Women arrived at Christ's sepulchre to find the stone rolled away from it (Luke XXIV, 1-9), a moment also illustrated by Rubens in his painting now in the Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, California (formerly in the Czernin collection, *K.d.K.*, p. 79).



4. P.P. Rubens, *Two Angels Guarding the Tomb of Christ* (reverse of the wings of the *Resurrection* triptych).

Antwerp, Cathedral

hand angel from the Flora Farnese and the right hand probably from the Chiaramonti Ceres (with the hairstyle identical to that of the Apollo Belvedere)<sup>19</sup>. The whole motif of guardian angels holding the doors slightly ajar — already used in Rubens's design for the apparently unexecuted tomb of Jean Richardot<sup>20</sup> — is adapted from the two winged Victories who hold the half-open doors of Hades on a first century funerary altar in the Vatican<sup>21</sup>. It is unnecessary to dwell on these derivations — for we have come to expect such things from Rubens — but it is worth noting the novel but brilliantly apposite combination of the Christian theme of the Resurrection on the front of the altarpiece with its classical equivalent,

<sup>19</sup> These are close parallels rather than direct borrowings: in the case of the adaptation from the Flora Farnese noted here, for instance, the position of the angel's head and right arm differ slightly from the antique prototype.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Held, *Rubens, Selected Drawings*, London, 1959, I, Fig. 36, No. 171, pp. 163-65.

<sup>21</sup> From the Mattei collection; illustrated in W. Amelung, *Die Sculpturen des Vaticanischen Museums*, Berlin, 1908, Plates, Vol. II, Pl. 21; the parallel was first noted by Held with reference to the abovementioned drawing for the Richardot monument; Held, *Selected Drawings*, I, p. 164.

significantly executed in grisaille<sup>22</sup>, on the reverse.

In 1613-15 Rubens painted a triptych<sup>23</sup> to serve as the epitaph monument of Nicholas Rockox and his wife Adriana Perez<sup>24</sup> which has so long been called the *Incredulity of Thomas* that one is not inclined to question this identification (fig. 5). But as Müller-Hofstede first noted<sup>25</sup> and Monballieu pointed out several years ago in an important article on this painting<sup>26</sup>, this is by no means clear. Why does Thomas not put his fingers into Christ's side, as specifically required by the biblical account?<sup>27</sup> Which of the three apostles is Thomas? And how are we to identify the other figures (who have been variously labelled in the standard literature)<sup>28</sup>, especially in view of the fact that the text recording Thomas's incredulity specifically requires the presence of eleven apostles?<sup>29</sup> There is of course no substantial reason why Rubens should not have chosen to limit the number of figures present purely in order to enhance their pictorial effectiveness (a concentration already marked by their representation in half length), but one is still left with the problem of what the subject really is. Not even the wound in Christ's side is visible, although it has possibly been painted out<sup>30</sup>. There are only a very few examples of the *Incredulity* which do not show the apostle thrusting his hand into Christ's side later on in the century<sup>31</sup>, but almost none before this work<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> In the case of these figures, the use of grisaille may for once have been intended to imitate stone (even taking into account the by then longstanding tradition of grisaille figures on the reverse of altarpiece wings; for the relationship between the epitaph paintings by Rubens and sculpted monuments, see below, p. 70).

<sup>23</sup> *Rooses*, II. No. 346. pp. 157-60; *K.d.K.*, pp. 84 and 457, 458.

<sup>24</sup> On Rockox (1560-1640) and his wife (1568-1619), see now F. Baudouin, *Nicolaas Rockox, 'vriendt ende patroon' van Peter Paul Rubens*, s.l., 1977, which full references to the earlier, relatively extensive literature on him. For the other works commissioned by or as a result of the intervention of Rockox, see *Ibid.*, chapter II. *Werken in opdracht van Rockox geschilderd of door zijn bemiddeling besteld (1609-1620)*, pp. 15-26.

<sup>25</sup> J. Müller Hofstede, *Beiträge zum zeichnerischen Werk von Rubens*, in *Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch*, XXVII, 1965, p. 309, note 130.

<sup>26</sup> A. Monballieu, *Bij de iconografie van Rubens' Rockox-epitafium*, in *Jaarboek, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen*, 1970, pp. 133-55.

<sup>27</sup> John XX, 24-29, especially verse 27: 'Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing'.

<sup>28</sup> For a summary of the various identifications, see Monballieu, *o.c.*, pp. 134-40. For the problems in identifying the apostles in the *Apostolado* series (which can therefore not be used as a sufficient basis for the identifications here), see H. Vlieghe, *Saints, I. (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, VIII)*, Brussels-London-New York, 1972, pp. 34, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Nor can this be the first appearance of Christ to the Apostles, because that event both required the presence of all eleven apostles and stated specifically that Thomas absent (John XX, 24); the third appearance to the apostles must also be excluded, because there too all the apostles were said to be present, and the account also refers to the actual handling of the wounds (Luke XXIV, 39: 'handle me and see'). For a full discussion of all the appearances of Christ, see I. Haug, *Erscheinungen Christi*, in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, V, Stuttgart, 1967, cols. 1291-1391.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Monballieu, *o.c.*, pp. 149, 150; but even if the wound was originally depicted, close examination of the painting itself reveals that it can only have been very small indeed.

<sup>31</sup> As in P. Soutman's painting in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, where Thomas peers intently at the wound in Christ's side but does not actually thrust his finger into it. The painting attributed to A. Janssens — which may more correctly be called *Christ Appearing to the Apostles with St Thomas* — sold in Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts), 30 January, 1950, No. 64, and illustrated in J. Müller Hofstede, *Abraham Janssens, Zur Problematik der Flämischen Caravaggismus*, in *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, XIII, 1971, p. 262, Fig. 30 (there dated to c. 1615-16) was probably painted very shortly after Rubens's painting.

<sup>32</sup> And even these probably represent the scene of Christ's appearance to his apostles before the revelation to Thomas (cf. note 29 above).



5. P.P. Rubens, Triptych of the *Incredulity of Thomas*.

Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor schone Kunsten

Monballieu offered a plausible identification of the apostles on the basis of an eighteenth century manuscript poem (by Jacob van der Sanden)<sup>33</sup> on the work; here I simply wish to suggest the fairly straightforward reason Rubens may have had for the particular way in which he has represented this scene<sup>34</sup>. It was probably meant to evoke a theme traditionally connected with the account of Thomas's incredulity, that of belief in the Resurrection of Christ which does need to depend merely on the evidence of sight<sup>35</sup>. The connection is reinforced by the fact that the theme may be found in the liturgy for the Feast of St Thomas both in the Missal<sup>36</sup> and in the Breviary<sup>37</sup>. It is spelt out most clearly in the words of Thomas himself *after* the scene of the Incredulity: 'Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have

<sup>33</sup> Jacob van der Sanden, *Oud Konst-tooneel van Antwerpen*, Antwerp (1771); Antwerp, *Stadsarchief*, Pk. 172. Another, less complete version of this manuscript exists in the Archives of the Museum Plantin-Moretus.

<sup>34</sup> Monballieu, *o.c.* (note 26), p. 140, suggested that it illustrated the *Christum videre* theme based on the emphasis laid at looking on Christ and seeing his wounds in the passage about Thomas's incredulity in John, XX, 20-29; this in turn provided the basis for those verses cited in note 39 below which stressed the importance of faith without seeing (i.e. without the need for visible proof).

<sup>35</sup> For the biblical passages which lay at the basis of this belief, see — apart from John XX, 29 ('Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed') — see also the passages cited in note 39 below; but it will also be found in the works of contemporary commentators such as Jacob Tirinus (*Commentarius in Vetus et Novum Testamentum*, III, Antwerp, 1632, sub *Index variarum materiarum et conceptuum, Propria sanctorum (in festo S. Thomae apostoli)*, no page) whom Rubens would certainly have known.

<sup>36</sup> 21 December. In the Missal, the whole account of Thomas's incredulity is read, concluding with the verse 'Dixit ei Jesus: Quia vidisti me, Thoma, credidisti: beati qui non viderint et crediderint' (John XX, 29).

<sup>37</sup> The verse cited in the preceding note is repeated frequently in the Antiphons of the Canonical Hours for the Feast of St Thomas as well. The Breviary also contains several allusions to the works of Saints Peter and Paul (where the theme is expanded, cf. note 39 below) in the eighth reading at Lauds on this day.



7. Alti. Rubens, *Christ's Charge to Peter*, drawing. Hamburg, Kunsthalle



6. P. P. Rubens, *Christ's Charge to Peter*. London, Wallace Collection



believed<sup>38</sup>, a theme which is again emphasized, and developed, in several passages from the works of Saints Peter and Paul<sup>39</sup>. And it is precisely these three apostles who are represented here, Saints Peter, Paul, and Thomas (although Thomas is most often shown as an older man, he is here wearing his usual green).

It was, therefore, not only a matter of pictorial tact that Rubens omitted the scene of Thomas thrusting his fingers into Christ's side, and why the wound is so reduced in significance (if not omitted altogether). True faith in the Resurrection, as Thomas was made to realize and the passages from Saints Peter and Paul emphasized<sup>41</sup>, did not require proof of this kind. This is the idea that Rubens expressed in this painting; and this is why he turned the standard form of the *Incredulity* into a brilliantly concise expression of an idea which transcended the specific narrational moment and was self-evidently appropriate for a funeral monument — in a manner that was entirely without precedent.

Nicholas Rockox and Adriana Perez, without whom the scene would necessarily lose much of its meaning<sup>42</sup>, occupy the wings of the triptych<sup>43</sup> (rather than their patron saints, as on the Moretus epitaph), and they are given an earthly setting, as opposed to the plain and timeless background of the main scene<sup>44</sup>.

A critical look, then, at the subjects of these two great epitaph paintings by Rubens should warn us against taking the iconography of such works for granted. When one turns to the so-called *Pasce Oves* in the Wallace Collection (Fig. 6)<sup>45</sup>,

<sup>38</sup> *John XX*, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Especially *I Peter I*, 8 ('whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'), *2 Corinthians IV*, 18 ('While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal'), and *Hebrews XI*, 1 ('Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' — a passage repeated in the reading at Lauds on the Feast of St Thomas).

<sup>40</sup> Most representations of the doubting figure of Thomas admittedly show him as an older man, but there are exceptions, such as the painting by Santi di Tito in the Cathedral at Borgo San Sepolcro. The figures are also identified thus in the manuscript by Van der Sanden (note 33 above), but this cannot be regarded as more than corroborative evidence, in view of its late date and the fact that it was evidently written on the basis of an engraving (cf. Monballieu, *o.c.*, p. 144).

<sup>41</sup> See note 39.

<sup>42</sup> The fact that the apostles look so intently at Christ on the centre panel may seem to run counter to the theme of the work proposed above; but it was precisely those who did *not* see the actual wounds of Christ who are blessed in *John XX*, 29. The presence of Rockox and his wife (separated from the main scene by virtue of the triptych format and by their earthly — as opposed to timeless — setting) not only established the function of the work as an epitaph monument but also implies their association with passages such as *John XI*, 25-26 ('I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die') read in the Mass for the Dead.

<sup>43</sup> Although only the central panel appears on the painting of Rockox's collection by Frans II Francken in Munich (Alte Pinakothek, No. 858), it seems unlikely that it ever hung, or was intended to hang independently of wings (it will be noted that the left panel is dated 1615, changed from 1613 — dates which probably indicate the beginning and completion of the work and which accord well with the dating of the central panel on stylistic grounds). The painting seen through the doorway of this *Cabinet d'Amateur* must either have been a copy or simply a *ricordo* of this particular commission from Rockox to Rubens.

<sup>44</sup> On this feature of Rubens's epitaph paintings, see below, p. 71. On the reverse of the wings are the arms of Rockox and Adriana Perez, a feature to be found on the reverse of any number of fifteenth and sixteenth century Netherlandish painted epitaphs. Here the arms are painted above a scrolly cartouche, from which hang garlands of fruit and which are surmounted by a putto's head.

<sup>45</sup> *Rooses*, II, No. 351, pp. 160-62; *K.d.K.*, p. 71.

two main problems arise, the first presenting considerably less difficulty than the second. What is being represented here? Is it Christ's order to Peter 'Feed my sheep' as expressed in John XXI, 15-17 (which took place *after* the Resurrection) or is it the Giving of the Keys as described in Matthew XVI, 13-19 (which took place *before* the Resurrection)? One may incline to the former, because the wound in Christ's side is clearly visible and he wears the characteristic white mantle of his life after the Resurrection. But the sheep are included, because the scene is in fact a conflation of the two events: it represents, both according to the liturgy and the commentators<sup>46</sup>, the fulfilment in John XXI ('Feed my sheep') of the prophecy expressed in Matthew XVI ('Tibi *dabo* claves')<sup>47</sup>. This conflation had already occurred in Raphael's famous cartoon, and there is a drawing in Hamburg (Fig. 7)<sup>48</sup> which must have preceded the present work and makes the connection with Raphael even clearer than may appear at first sight.

Here is another instance where the traditional description of a painting does not tell the whole story; but there is a further more significant problem which has always, as far as I know, been overlooked. Why was this particular subject chosen? It is most unusual — if not entirely unprecedented — for the conflation just described to occur outside the context of the *Primatus Petri*.<sup>49</sup> even the two keys (symbolizing not only the two degrees of remission but also the *summa potestas tum ordinis tum iurisdictionis*)<sup>50</sup> are consciously differentiated by colour, one brown, the other a steely grey. We know that this work served as an epitaph for Nicholas Damant<sup>51</sup> above a side altar in the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament in Saint Gudule in Brussels<sup>52</sup>, and it seems likely that it was commissioned by Damant himself before his death in 1616<sup>53</sup>. But why should a subject emphasizing Peter have been chosen? Clearly it cannot be justified simply in terms of the presence of

<sup>46</sup> For a full discussion of the conflation of these passages, together with early christian, medieval and contemporary sources, see J. Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen and the Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel*, London, 1972, p. 65 and notes; in Rubens's time, texts such as Cornelis à Lapide, *Commentarii in Scripturam Sacram*, VIII, Lyons-Paris, 1864, *Commentaria in Matt. XVI*, p. 319, provide further evidence of the conflation of these two passages. I am grateful to Professor Shearman for having discussed with me the iconographic problems raised by this painting at some length.

<sup>47</sup> The future tense, both in the Vulgate and in the Authorized Version, in *Matthew XVI*, 19 ('And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven') already makes it clear that the reference is to a future fulfilment of the promise.

<sup>48</sup> Hamburg, Kunsthalle, Inv. No. 2243, pen and brown ink with bistre wash over black chalk, 27.2 : 20.4 cm. See M. Jaffé, *Figure Drawings... in the Hamburg Kunsthalle*, in *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, XVI, 1971, No. 30, p. 47; J. Müller Hofstede, *Two Unpublished Drawings by Rubens*, in *Master Drawings*, XVI, 1974, pp. 133-37, and pl. 6; J. Held, *Some Rubens Drawings — Unknown or Neglected*, in *Master Drawings*, XII, 1974, p. 254. While this drawing has been attributed to Rubens in the past, I believe it to be a copy after a lost drawing by Rubens. My reasons for this and for a dating ca. 1614 (as proposed by Müller Hofstede) will be outlined at greater length in my forthcoming volume of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludvig Burchard*.

<sup>49</sup> See Shearman, *o.c.*, p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> See Cornelius a Lapide, *o.c.*, p. 319, returning to a distinction made in St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Additiones ad tertiam partem, Quaestiones XVII-XXII*.

<sup>51</sup> On Damant (1531-1616) see the text below, and note 54.

<sup>52</sup> See *Rooses*, II, pp. 160-62, and — in addition to the usual eighteenth century travellers' accounts — guidebooks such as J.A. Rombaut, *Het Verheerlijkt Brussel*, Brussels, 1771, I, pp. 186-89.

<sup>53</sup> Even on stylistic grounds the work could hardly be dated much later than 1616.

the resurrected Christ. For an answer to this question one has to turn to an examination of the life of Damant. The facts are not especially difficult to find, but they provide almost all the clues to the present problem and have not all been discussed in connection with this work before. His biography is full of interesting sidelights on the career of a figure in the upper echelons of the administrative service of the Spanish Netherlands, but here it is best to confine oneself to the relevant details<sup>54</sup>.

Born in 1531, Damant was trained as a lawyer, and then rose rapidly in the service first of the Duke of Alva and then of the Archduke Ernest. In April 1585 he was appointed to the presidency of the Council of Flanders, and it is the events surrounding this appointment which may be reflected in the choice of the subject for his epitaph. The members of the judiciary body of the Council objected to his appointment as its president, on the grounds that he had been born in *Brabant*. But these objections were rendered invalid by granting him the privilege of *ubique natus* on the grounds that his father had also been in the service of the state<sup>55</sup>. It seems possible, therefore, that the present subject was intended as a final justification of his office, especially in view of the notion, emphasized by the symbolic significance of the keys, that political office, like religious office, ultimately depended on the order of God<sup>56</sup>. Be this as it may, there are two further details which could also account for the choice of subject. In the first place, we know that after having been made Chancellor of Brabant and a member of the Council of state, Damant was called to Madrid to serve as *Garde des Sceaux* for the affairs of the Netherlands until 1596, when he was sent back to serve as advisor to the Archdukes<sup>57</sup>. Secondly — and this may have been the operative factor — it appears that his father, who was named Peter<sup>58</sup>, was buried in front of the same altar. This was recorded on the same inscription which reveals that Damant had restored the tomb of his mother and father after its destruction by the iconoclasts in 1581<sup>59</sup>. It is unnecessary to select any one of these explanations as a justification for the choice of subject in this epitaph monument; taken together they made any other subject far less suitable than the present highly appropriate one.

There is one other aspect of this painting which deserves to be remarked upon. As in the case of the Rockox epitaph, Rubens has here concentrated on only a few of the protagonists in the event; he has again reduced the number of apostles

<sup>54</sup> These are conveniently collected in the article by L. Galesloot, in *Biographie Nationale de Belgique*, III, Brussels, 1872, cols. 647-49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 648.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Müller Hofstede, *Two Unpublished Drawings* (note 48), p. 135.

<sup>57</sup> Galesloot, *o.c.*, col. 649. For his relations with Spain and the Archdukes, see H. Lonchay and J. Cuvelier, *Correspondance de la Cour d'Espagne sur les affaires des Pays-Bas au XVIIe siècle*, I, Brussels, 1923, p. 128, and J. Cuvelier and H. Lefevre, *Correspondance de la Cour d'Espagne sur les affaires des Pays-Bas*, VI (supplément), Brussels, 1937, pp. 10, 22, 100.

<sup>58</sup> See Galesloot, *o.c.* (note 54), col. 647.

<sup>59</sup> The full inscription recorded in *Basilica Bruxellensis sive monumenta antiqua inscriptiones et coenotaphia...* Mechlin, 1743, pp. 73, 74.



9. P.P. Rubens, *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death*.  
Whereabouts unknown



8. P.P. Rubens, *The Giving of the Keys*.  
East Berlin, Staatliche Museen



10. P.P. Rubens, *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death*.  
Strasbourg, Musée

required by the canonical account from eleven to three. A similar reduction in the traditional number of figures is to be found in an epitaph which must have been painted very slightly later — the epitaph above the tomb of Peter Bruegel the elder in the Kapellekerk in Brussels (Fig. 8)<sup>60</sup>. Although the wound in Christ's side hints at the conflation discussed above, the need to show Christ *after* the resurrection must obviously be related to its function as a funerary monument. But otherwise the subject is a fairly straightforward *Giving of the Keys*, and the reason for its choice as an epitaph for Peter Bruegel is perfectly clear. It should be noted simply because of its position in the sequence of works under discussion here.

What follows may be regarded as the slightly more speculative part of this paper. It deals with a group of works of rather different iconography, although in all of them the central figure is that of the resurrected Christ. A painting of *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death* by Rubens is recorded as having hung over the tomb of Jeremias Cock and his family in the Parish Church of St Walburga in Antwerp<sup>61</sup> (the work survives in a much restored state in a private collection in Antwerp<sup>62</sup>, while the sketch (Fig. 9)<sup>63</sup> was stolen from the Brooklyn Museum in

<sup>60</sup> *Rooses*, II, No. 258, pp. 35-36; *K.d.K.*, p. 86. A copy now hangs above the Bruegel tomb in the Kapellekerk; the original was bought by A. S. Drey (Munich) at the Marzell von Nemes Sale, Munich, 1931, No. 70 and is now in the Staatliche Museen, East Berlin, No. B 116.

<sup>61</sup> *Rooses*, II, No. 378, pp. 200-201.

<sup>62</sup> Antwerp, Private Collection, canvas, 181.5 : 229.5 Illustrated in J. Held, *A Protestant Source for a Rubens Subject*, in *Liber Amicorum K.G. Boon*, Amsterdam, 1974, pp. 78-93, Fig. 2.

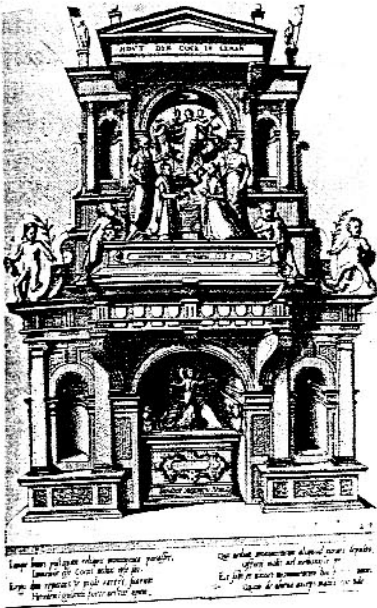
<sup>63</sup> Canvas (transferred from panel), 30.5 : 28.5; the work discussed at length in Held, *A Protestant Source*, pp. 79-93.



12. P. Rubens, *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death*.  
Potsdam. Formerly Bildergalerie Schloss Sanssouci



11. P.P. Rubens, *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death*.  
Columbus, Ohio, Gallery of Fine Arts



IN CHRISTO OMNES VIVIFICABUNTUR. LAMBERTUS

13. J. Vredeman de Vries, *Design for an Epitaph Monument*, engraving from *Pictores, statuarii ... varias coenotaphiorum formas*. Antwerp, 1563

14. M. Sadeler after M. de Vos, *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death*, engraving

1933). And it was precisely in the period we have been considering that Rubens appears to have been most preoccupied with this theme. The Cock painting is probably the latest<sup>64</sup> in a series of works which begins with the painting of this subject in Strasbourg<sup>65</sup>, dateable to c. 1613-15 (Fig. 10), and continues through the slightly later works in Columbus, Ohio<sup>66</sup> of c. 1616-18 (Fig. 11) and the studio piece formerly in Potsdam (Fig. 12)<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Held, *A Protestant Source*, p. 81, dated the work to a little before 1627, largely on the basis of a reference to the tomb of a Jeremias Cockx, paid for in 1627, recorded in *Génard, o.c.* (note 2), II, Antwerp, 1856 p. CIII; but the reference is in fact taken from an eighteenth century chronicle of the *St George's Church* ('Chronycke ofte Beginsel ende Voortganck van de parochiale Kercke van St Joris binnen Antwerpen'), and not the Parish Church of *St Walburga*, where the present work is known to have hung. My own view is that the stylistic characteristics of the work suggest a dating late in the second half of the second decade, possibly ca. 1618-20, a dating which would to some extent be corroborated by the close resemblance it bears to the other works of this subject referred to below. The problems relating to this work will also be discussed at greater length in my forthcoming volume of the *Corpus Rubenianum*.

<sup>65</sup> *Rooses*, II, No. 379, No. 202; See also Held, *A Protestant Source*, p. 80 (with references) and Fig. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Illustrated *ibid.*, fig. 7, and see pp. 80, 81 (with references).

<sup>67</sup> Panel, 189 : 143; M. Bernhard, *Verlorene Werke der Malerei in Deutschland in der zeit von 1939 bis 1945...*, Munich, 1965, p. 56. Another work which should perhaps be included in this group on the grounds of its stylistic and iconographic similarities is the painting in the Pitti Palace referred to below and in note 77. It is discussed separately, however, because of the *divergencies* in its iconography (the absence of the symbols of sin and death, the presence of sheaves of corn on the sarcophagus; see Fig. 15).

The High Altar of the *Shod Carmelite Church* in Antwerp, painted at the end of the 30s after a design by Rubens, also showed Christ Trampling over Sin and Death; but the eucharistic and specifically Carmelite implications of

The possibility that some of these works served as epitaph paintings is strengthened by the repeated presence of precisely this subject — or a closely related one — in the engraved designs for funeral monuments by both Cornelis Floris and Vredeman de Vries (Fig. 13)<sup>68</sup>, as well as in a number of the sculpted monuments which were actually executed after designs by Floris<sup>69</sup>. The iconographic relevance of the subject is nowhere more succinctly put than in the caption to the engraving after Marten de Vos which must also be accounted as a forerunner of Rubens's treatment of this theme: 'In Christo omnes vivificabuntur' (Fig. 14)<sup>70</sup>. Once again one is confronted with an instance of Rubens's indebtedness to the Netherlandish tradition<sup>71</sup>. It also raises an important issue which is not often discussed and can only be alluded to here. This particular subject of Christ trampling on Sin and Death has its roots in a specifically Protestant iconography<sup>72</sup>. Indeed, the transformation of themes with Protestant origins into acceptable Catholic ones is characteristic of much Counter Reformation iconography<sup>73</sup> and is exemplified in several other works by Rubens as well<sup>74</sup>. Here is an aspect of Rubens research which, apart from a brief discussion by Held<sup>75</sup>, has not received the attention it merits.

While Rubens's paintings of *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death* may not all have served as epitaphs, they do bring into prominence another problem which must concern anyone dealing with the production of painted epitaph monuments. This is the fact that it is sometimes difficult, if not actually impossible, to distinguish between a painting's function as an epitaph and as an independent devotional work<sup>76</sup>. In many cases the distinction will not have been intended, especially where a painted epitaph also served as the main altarpiece in a chapel.

the subject were naturally stressed in such a location, and the work need not be discussed here (Rubens's preparatory sketch survives in the Metropolitan Museum in New York; see J. De La Croix, *La Glorification de l'Eucharistie de P.P. Rubens et les Carmes*, in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, II, 1969, pp. 179-85).

It should be noted that the title *Christ Triumphant over Sin and Death* is to some extent a catch-all. While the elements justifying the title are certainly present in all of them, it will be seen that different elements are stressed in each: the angels of the Last Judgment are present in the Cock epitaph; the *Majestas Domini* theme is emphasized by the globe in the Strasbourg picture; and the notion of the resurrection receives strong visual emphasis in the Potsdam work. Cf. G. Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, II, Gütersloh, 1971, pp. 32-41, 85.

<sup>68</sup> See the engravings by Floris reproduced in Hedicke, *o.c.* (note 16), II, Pl. XII, figs. 4 and 5 (although the embodiment of sin is not clearly depicted — if at all — in these engravings, the formal similarities are very close indeed and presumably have similar iconological origins) and by Vredeman de Vries, *o.c.* (note 17), p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. the monument of Adolf van Bausseel in Louvain, reproduced in Hedicke, *o.c.* (note 16), II, Pl. XVI, Fig. 3. Epitaph paintings with this subject are also mentioned by Van Mander in the lives of B. Spranger and P. Vlerick.

<sup>70</sup> Engraved by Sadeler after M. de Vos, dated 1589.

<sup>71</sup> This aspect of Rubens's work is well discussed with relation to paintings of the fifteenth century in Eisler, *o.c.* (note 8), pp. 49-55, 59-73.

<sup>72</sup> See Held, *A Protestant Source* (note 62), pp. 81, 82 and notes 9-12 for further bibliographic references as well as specific examples from earlier Netherlandish and German art; cf. also Schiller, *o.c.* (end of note 67), pp. 41-42, 85.

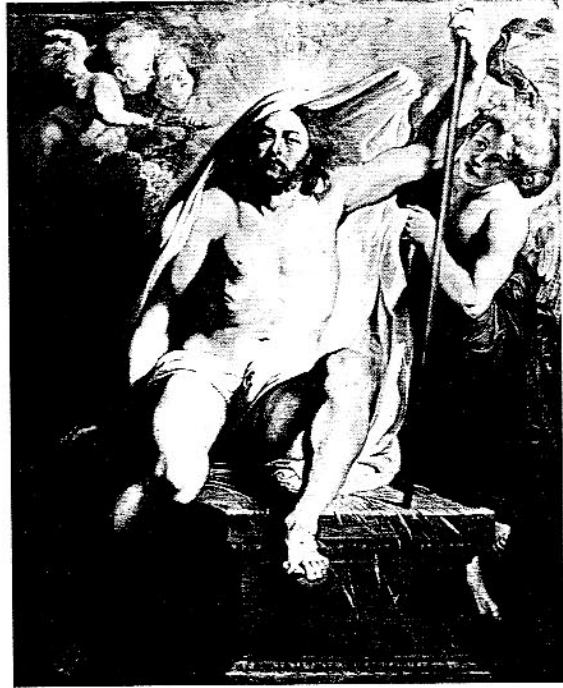
<sup>73</sup> See Schrade, *o.c.* (note 14), pp. 299-304.

<sup>74</sup> Some other examples will be found in D. Freedberg, *L'année Rubens, manifestations et publications en 1977*, in *Revue de l'Art*, XXXIX, 1978, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Reference as in note 72 above.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the discussion in Eisler, *o.c.*, (note 8), p. 46.

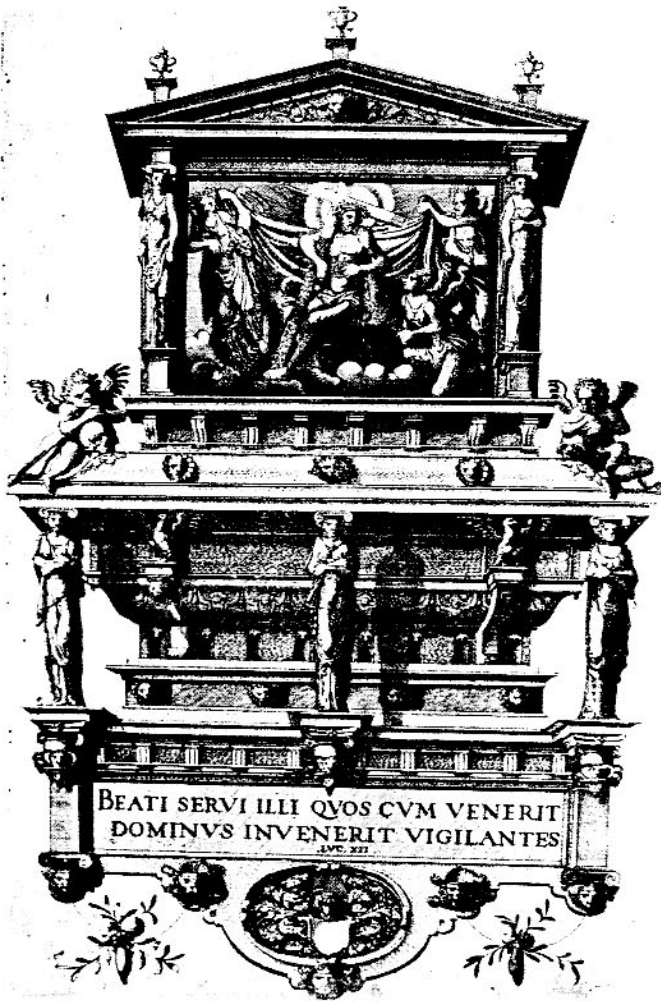




15. P.P. Rubens, *The Resurrected Christ Triumphant*.  
Florence, Palazzo Pitti



16. P.P. Rubens, *The Michielsen Triptych*. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten



17. C. Floris, *Design for an Epitaph Monument*, engraving

Sometimes, the renovation of chapels, or the destruction of their furnishings, means that the inscriptions providing the evidence that particular altarpieces served as epitaphs have been lost. On other occasions — and here one sees the two functions merge quite clearly — inscriptions were simply added to existing altarpieces, thus making them serve as epitaph monuments as well<sup>77</sup>. In addition, many such works partake of the nature of *Andachtsbilder*:<sup>78</sup> this is how one might

<sup>77</sup> This problem concisely discussed in K. Pilz, *Epitaphaltar*, in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, V, Stuttgart, 1967, cols. 921, 922.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. the discussion (with regard, however, to a completely different set of objects) in A. Weckwerth, *Der Ursprung der Bildepitaphs*, in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, XX, 1957, pp. 147-85, especially pp. 170-72, *Das Bildepitaph als Andachtsbild*.

describe almost all of Rubens's painted epitaphs, with their extraordinary concentration on the essentials, both expressive and pictorial, of the iconographic moment. This is why there may still be other works by Rubens which were originally intended as epitaph monuments, but whose function as such we no longer recognize. It seems possible, for example, that a work such as the *Resurrected Christ* in the Pitti (Fig. 15)<sup>79</sup> may have served as an epitaph: it combines elements of the resurrected Christ Triumphant theme with an emphasis on its eucharistic significance, as one finds in the slightly later Michielsen triptych (Fig. 16)<sup>80</sup>. In any case, the transition from the Man of Sorrows theme so often used as epitaphs in the sixteenth century (Fig. 17)<sup>81</sup> to works of the kind we have been considering was not very great. And we are confronted once again with an implicit blurring of the distinction between the functions that such a work fulfilled.

But a work which in pictorial terms at least is much closer to the ones discussed at the beginning of this paper is the Munich *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* (Fig. 18)<sup>82</sup>. The appearance of Christ to the four great Penitents<sup>83</sup> seems to be an appropriate one for an epitaph, and it shows the same pictorial concentration as the other painted epitaphs by Rubens. The protagonists are seen in three-quarter length dominating the picture surface against a relatively plain background. It must have been painted towards the end of the period we have been considering, ca. 1616-1618. But here too one sees that the borderline between epitaph, altarpiece and *Andachtsbild* must be very thin indeed, and one should perhaps not press the point. The suggestion is made simply to demonstrate that Rubens was more preoccupied with themes of death, resurrection and commemoration in the years between 1612 and ca. 1618 than has generally been recognized.

Although the works in the latter half of this paper may not all be of the same kind as the Moretus, Rockox, Damant, and Bruegel epitaphs, they have been discussed because taken together they all demonstrate Rubens's activity as a painter of epitaphs in these years. They form one of the most important aspects of local patronage in the formative second decade, and as such they deserve to be discussed together. Their coherence as a group is amply demonstrated by the close iconographic and stylistic links between them. Almost all of them emphasize, as one might expect, the presence of the resurrected Christ, and in one way or another bring out

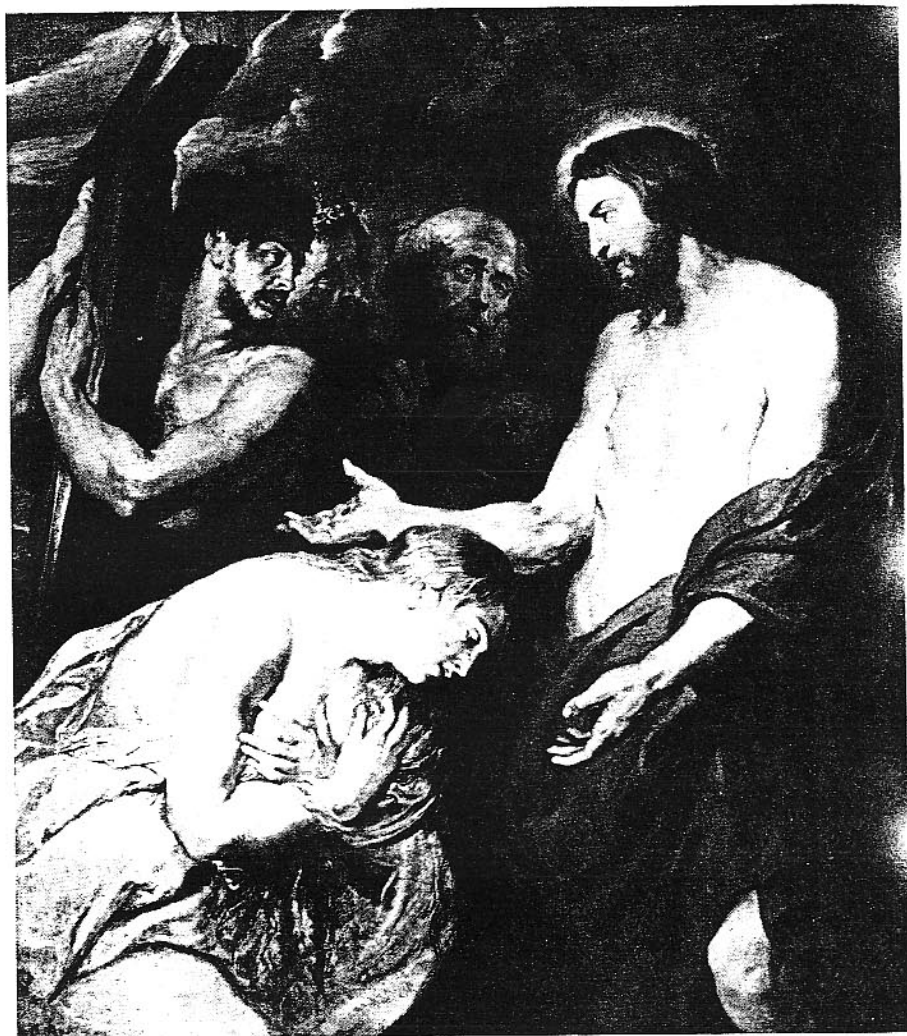
<sup>79</sup> See *Rubens e la pittura fiamminga del Seicento nelle collezioni pubbliche Fiorentine*, Florence, Palazzo Pitti, 1977 (Catalogue by D. Bodart), No. 89, p. 214. Inv. Pitti, No. 479.

<sup>80</sup> *K.d.K.*, p. 160, and *Rooses*, II, No. 327, pp. 140, 141.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. the engraved designs by C. Floris, reproduced in Hedicke, *o.c.* (note 16), II, Pl. XII, Figs. 1, 4, 5, and 6, as well as earlier Netherlandish paintings such as those reproduced by Held, *A Protestant Source* (note 62), Figs. 10-12.

<sup>82</sup> *Rooses*, II, No. 381, pp. 204-05, and *K.d.K.*, p. 176.

<sup>83</sup> The same subject occurs in Otto van Veen's 1608 Mercers' altarpiece now in Mainz (illustrated in *Aus Alertumsmuseum und Gemäldegalerie der Stadt Mainz*, Mainz, 1962, Pl. 123) which Rubens would almost certainly have known; the painting in Kassel of the *Penitent Saints before the Virgin* (*K.d.K.*, p. 129), which is probably a collaborative work by Rubens and Van Dyck, shows the Magdalen in an almost identical pose to the one she adopts here, although all the figures are shown in full-length. But the subject is a fairly common one in the seventeenth century and will be discussed by me at greater length elsewhere.



18. P.P. Rubens, *Christ and the Penitent Sinners*.

Munich, Alte Pinakothek

the implications of his Resurrection in a manner entirely suited to the function of an epitaph monument. The people who commissioned them chose not to have their monuments carved in stone, as one might perhaps have expected<sup>84</sup>. They turned instead to the one painter who was capable of painting works which could match the monumentality and timelessness of stone. These works are stripped of all incidentals, both iconographic and stylistic. The three-quarter length figures in them

<sup>84</sup> For an excellent survey of sculpted sepulchral monuments in the Southern Netherlands in the seventeenth century, see now S. Durian-Ress, *Das Barocke Grabmal in den südlichen Niederlanden*, in *Aachener Kunstblätter*, XLV, 1974, pp. 235-330.

totally dominate the picture space and are set in austere relief against a plain dark background. The severe modelling of the flesh tones and the large expanses of relatively undifferentiated colour are devoid of the colouristic nuances of later works. The construction of these paintings is such that the figures in them seem almost to be locked together. They may be described as formal, almost hieratic images, and more than any other group of works by Rubens may be said to partake of what we are pleased to call the classical. There is nothing that may be called informal in them.

I would like to suggest that all these characteristics were determined by their function as epitaph monuments, and have little to do with the requirements of setting up a workshop, as Oldenbourg suggested in a now well-known article<sup>85</sup>. His explanation of the style of these works and the reasons for its origin has been commonly accepted by Rubens scholars, but it fails to take into consideration the function of almost all the paintings commonly used to exemplify the stylistic tendencies of the years between 1612 and 1618. Of course Rubens was occupied with many other projects in these years, but it seems to me that his activity as a painter of epitaphs formed a significant part of his work at this time and accounts sufficiently for the style described above. Rubens's stylistic and iconographic contribution to the genre and to its format was extraordinarily innovative. But at the same time these innovations grew out of a profound understanding of the native tradition. The epitaphs are timeless in a very specific sense;<sup>86</sup> they had to be, because of the very nature of their function. A work such as the Rockox triptych does not depict a particular biblical incident, but represents a scene which transcends the purely narrational moment; the same may be said of the epitaph of Nicholas Damant. The fact that these and the other works discussed above are timeless because of the sheer quality of their art makes them ideally and perfectly suited to fulfil the function of commemorative monuments. In a year when the artist himself was widely and justly commemorated, it seemed appropriate to recall the context in which that art was made.

<sup>85</sup> R. Oldenbourg, *Die Nachwirkung Italiens auf Rubens und die Gründung seiner Werkstatt*, in *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, XXXIV, 5, 1918, pp. 159-218, reprinted in R. Oldenbourg, *Peter Paul Rubens*, ed. W. von Bode, Munich-Berlin, 1922, pp. 58-131, especially pp. 112-31.

<sup>86</sup> Compare the notion of the *arte senza tempo* detected as a distinctive trend in Italian art of the late sixteenth century by F. Zerì, in his *Pittura e Controriforma. L'arte senza tempo di Scipione da Gaeta*, Turin, 1957.