

# Wilhelm Bode and Dutch painting

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Fig. 1  
MAX LIEBERMANN,  
*Wilhelm Bode looking  
at a statuette*, 1890.  
Charcoal drawing.  
Private collection.

Already during his lifetime Wilhelm Bode was considered a great connoisseur of Italian, Flemish, Dutch and German painting and sculpture (fig. 1). His international reputation, his excellent connections to renowned art dealers and outstanding collectors, as well as his regular contact with upper class, often Jewish, benefactors laid the foundation for his expansion of Berlin's museums. Although at the time of his appointment in 1872, the Gemäldegalerie already owned an important group of works, these could hardly compare with the collections of Europe's other great cities: London, Vienna, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam or Munich. By the end of his life, however, the Berlin museums had achieved world fame. Bode's aim as director, and later general director, was to expand into new territories. He fostered the Islamic, Asian and ethnographic collections. He himself collected oriental carpets, and later donated them to the newly founded museum for Islamic art.<sup>1</sup>

This global perspective in collecting and museum practice grew out of the Empire's cultural and educational policies.<sup>2</sup> The extraordinary economic dynamism of the period – a result of both industrialisation and the high reparations demanded of France following the war of 1870-1871 – was



responsible for the country's renewed distinction in these areas. Like the sciences, public art collections, particularly in the capital, were strongly encouraged. This new, more universal approach to museums arose around 1870, and – after a somewhat slow start – reached a highpoint in the years between 1900 and the First World War. Bode played an important, perhaps even a decisive, role in these developments.

Much has been written in recent years about Bode as a museum director. A thorough examination of his scholarly work, however, has yet to be undertaken. In the past, it has often been rather too quickly dismissed as pure connoisseurship, and thus of little interest for art historians today.<sup>3</sup> In much of the recent literature on Dutch art, for example, particularly in the English language, he is no longer even mentioned in the bibliography. What follows here, too, is only indirectly concerned with his position in the academic hierarchy. The issues I wish to focus on are somewhat different, and – as far as I know – have never been addressed before: what was Bode's idea of Dutch art? What were the roots of his admiration for the Netherlands? What motivated his research into the painting of the 17th century? What fuelled his efforts to purchase the best possible works – above all by Hals and Rembrandt – for his museum in Berlin? And, finally, how did his image of Holland change in the course of his career, which spanned the period from the beginning of the Empire and the end of the Weimar Republic? When Bode was appointed assistant at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin in 1872, the collection already contained a number of Dutch and Flemish masterpieces. These had come mainly from the royal palaces, and had arrived in Germany thanks to the close familial ties between the Hohenzollerns and the House of Orange. The 'Orange Inheritance' – as the dowry of Henriette,

daughter of the Stadtholder, was called – had helped expand the artistic holdings of the Brandenburg court. Nonetheless, it was Bode who was responsible for bringing the Dutch collections in Berlin on a par with those of other European capitals. To understand his enthusiasm for this art we must first look back to the origins of his career as an art historian.

Bode came from Brunswick and had become acquainted with the superb collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings housed in the local museum already in his youth. His intimate knowledge of the works in Kassel, too, helped him form a picture of the history of Netherlandish art at an early age. Although later in his museum career he became known as one of the most important connoisseurs of Italian and German painting and sculpture, Dutch art always remained particularly close to his heart (fig. 2).

Unfortunately, we know of no private statements that could help to explain this preference. Bode was an ambitious, disciplined, formal and somewhat aloof man, and his memoirs, although an important source for museum history, reveal nothing in this regard. Nonetheless, we may regard his numerous scholarly writings as a kind of testimonial. He appears to have had an affinity not so much with the great Flemish masters as with the art and culture of the northern Netherlands. It is thus by carefully examining his written works that we may come to know his true sentiments. And only then can we begin to understand not only the personal, but also the more general intellectual and cultural implications of this love of all things Dutch, and the transformations it underwent in the years leading up to the Weimar Republic.

It was his experience of Dutch art in Brunswick and Kassel that first led Bode to art history – very much against his father's wishes. But the decisive factor was certainly his en-



counter with Barthold Suermondt, an important collector from Aachen who accompanied Théophile Thoré on his visit to Bode's native town. The young man was allowed to join the two on their subsequent journey to Kassel. In 1868, Bode took his first trip to the Netherlands, stopping on the way in Aachen to visit his old acquaintance. Several years later, he was successful in acquiring Suermondt's fine collection of Dutch paintings for the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin.<sup>4</sup>

Bode owned Thoré's works and knew them inside and out, as he recounts in his autobiography, although he also notes that he found the Frenchman's spoken commentary even more exciting and inspiring.<sup>5</sup> It seems safe to say that Thoré's interpretation of Dutch art had a formidable influence on Bode from the very beginning. Thoré's struggle against academicism and his defence of the Realists were important elements in Bode's own thought, expressed time and again in his scholarly publications.

It is well known that Thoré's image of the art of Frans Hals and Rembrandt was profoundly shaped by his own republican convictions. Filled with a longing for a more democratic social order in his own country, he saw the 17th-century Netherlands as a lode-star. To him, Rembrandt's pictures expressed a kind of humanity that was only possible in a society in which political and religious freedom was guaranteed. Rejecting the princely art of the Italian Renaissance and Flemish Baroque, Thoré advocated Holland as a model for political change in France. This transformation would then be followed by the birth of a new art – namely, Realism. He summarised his vision with the phrase: *À société nouvelle, art nouveau*.

This concept of Holland was Bode's as well, and certainly complemented his own liberal-national views. His origins in the Guelphic city of Brunswick, and his affiliation with a class



that strongly identified with the ideals of the Revolution of 1848, made it easy for him to adopt Thoré's views as his own.

The same combination of connoisseurship and political idealism found in Thoré also characterises Bode's earliest scholarly writings. His first opus – aside from a catalogue for Brunswick – was devoted to Frans Hals, whom he took as the subject of his dissertation.<sup>6</sup> Completed in 1870, it sought not only to classify Hals's oeuvre, but also to present the artists and paintings of his 'school.' It is of little importance whether or not his findings remain valid today. Far more interesting and instructive is how Bode assessed Dutch art at this point in his career. He stressed that Hals and his pupils always emphasised the *characteristic* and the *individual* in their figures. At the same time, however, they also strove to create a *painterly effect*.

According to Bode, Dutch art had reached its zenith simultaneously with the triumph of the modern, Protestant state in the 17th century. The Netherlanders hard-won political indepen-

Fig. 2  
MAX LIEBERMANN,  
Portrait of Wilhelm  
von Bode. Lithograph.  
Private collection.



dence from Spain coincided with a new freedom in art, specifically: in the rejection of Italian models. The style now known as Mannerism was nothing more than a *misguided and unhealthy imitation* of Raphael and Michelangelo. Of all those who had made up the artists' colony in Rome, only the so-called *Carravaggisti* had avoided falling victim to this idealistic conception of painting by remaining faithful to the *naturalist tendencies of their native art*. Bode also expounded on the development of Dutch painting, which he felt was characterised by its growing concern for local motifs: *The intelligent leaders and brave warriors, the innumerable small episodes of the war, the increasing liberation of society, the freedom of the native soil, and the sea, animated and controlled by the Dutch fleet: these are the subjects of this burgeoning national art.*<sup>7</sup>

Frans Hals was the first in a long line of artists interested in 'the painterly,' surpassed only by Rembrandt and his pupils, who took his work as their starting point. In Hals's portraits, Bode recognised a new self-confidence, which he felt was an essential part of the Dutch national character in the wake of the Eighty Years' War. He was sceptical about contemporary Dutch paintings depicting specific events and personalities of the period. Hals's works, on the other hand, captured the true essence of these historical figures: *These are men who know the dangers of war and the sea, who are willing to give everything for their convictions, their freedom, their beliefs – or even for their economic advantage. We see before us a people full of the strongest passion, but who know how to control and direct it through reason and an iron will.* For Bode, Hals was the great master of naturalism: *Hals paints his figures just as they appeared before him, as he had become acquainted with them on the street, in the field, in public life (...).*<sup>8</sup>

During the years of his investiga-

tion into Frans Hals and his school, Bode took drawing lessons in the studio of Karl Steffek in Berlin. It was here that he met Max Liebermann, who was to become one of his closest friends. Bode's judgement of Dutch art was thus strongly influenced by the realism of his own day, given critical recognition at the first Internationale Kunstausstellung in Munich in 1869. Several works from the Suermondt collection were also on view there, including Hals's *Malle Babbe*. Courbet, who not only exhibited in Munich, but also lived there for a short time, even made a copy of it.<sup>9</sup>

Liebermann shared Bode's opinions about Frans Hals and Dutch society in the 17th century. He often visited the new Frans Halsmuseum in Haarlem, and made around 30 copies after his works over the course of his career.<sup>10</sup> Liebermann's most important biographer has given an excellent characterisation of the artist's efforts to make Hals's technique his own by copying: *He turned himself into Hals's pupil, seeking – as the Haarlem master's apprentices had before him – to understand his art by copying it, to learn his technique and language; he did this with a piety that demonstrates how seriously he took his art and how little he cared about being a so-called revolutionary.*<sup>11</sup>

This formal aspect only explains Liebermann's fascination with the Dutchman's pictures to a certain extent, however. For Liebermann, as for Bode, Frans Hals and his sitters were representatives of a culture they deeply admired. Both men were convinced that there was a profound connection between a nation's artistic achievements and its political system. For them, it was the country's republican constitution that had transformed the 17th century into an era of freedom and prosperity, and the flowering of art was simply a natural result of these enlightened circumstances. Bode expressed the same view in his dissertation when he wrote on Rembrandt



and Hals: *The direction these artists took was (...) an artistic expression of the political developments then taking place in their country. The militia and regents' pieces by Frans Hals are the portrait of this era and a visualisation of the fight for liberty, which was fought in the name of personal ability.*<sup>12</sup>

Not everyone shared Bode and Liebermann's admiration for Hals, however. This is demonstrated by an anecdote in Bode's memoirs. The position taken by his staunch supporter, the crown prince and later Emperor Friedrich III, is an illustration of the critique of contemporary society their veneration implied. Although he agreed to Bode's request that some of the paintings from the royal collection be transferred to the museum, he felt the works by Hals were simply too unimportant to be put on public display.<sup>13</sup>

Bode and Liebermann's interest in Dutch painting was thus closely tied to their personal aesthetic and political convictions. They were no friends of the large-scale academic works being produced in the nation's art schools at the time. The popular history paintings and contemporary battle scenes of an artist like Anton von Werner were entirely foreign to them. In fact, throughout his entire career Bode remained in serious conflict with Werner, who was the director of the royal academy in Berlin.

Once he had concluded his studies of Frans Hals, Bode began to develop an interest in the art of Rembrandt; in the following decades, and up until his death in 1929, he purchased around 20 of the Dutchman's canvases for the Berlin museum. Even today, almost half of these are still considered to be original. Already in 1883, Bode published his first critical overview of Dutch painting: *Studien zur Geschichte der holländischen Malerei*.<sup>14</sup> The introductory section was written in collaboration with the director of the Gemäldegalerie, Julius Meyer, for the

catalogue of the Suermondt collection. The book continues with a presentation of Bode's latest research on Frans Hals, but is mainly devoted to an in-depth study of the work of Elsheimer and Rembrandt, as well as his followers. Bode expounds on the notion, already expressed in his earlier writings, that Dutch art was essentially an art of genre.<sup>15</sup> Hals is presented as the founder of the school of painting that had taken Dutch art to its greatest heights: *Clearly, the defining characteristic of this painting is its realism. If the art that went before drew its subject matter from the realm of fantasy, from mythology and the legends of the church, the new painting, by contrast, concentrates on real life in all its aspects, seeking to give full value and expression to the typical, to the everyday. This emphasis on the characteristic is its most important feature; there is an almost complete rejection of the ideal.*<sup>16</sup>

The extensive discussion of Rembrandt in this volume, which includes a catalogue of his works, cannot be considered an analysis of his development in the art-historical sense. What we are given instead is a kind of travel diary, in which Bode documents his innumerable visits to Europe's museums and describes the impressions they made upon him. His aim appears to have been to discover previously unknown works. And, indeed, he was able to add a number of pictures to those listed in Carel Vosmaer's monograph of 1870; others he rejected. The criteria for his decisions, however, remain largely unclear. His points of reference are those of the pure connoisseur, and are often incomprehensible to the reader without the luxury of having the pictures in front of him.

Bode was convinced that Rembrandt's painterly exploration of all aspects of reality, even the ugliest, was evidence of a love of truth common to both the artist and his society. Liebermann, who visited the Netherlands regularly and was friends with Jozef



Israels, shared this belief. This vision of the nation's art gave rise to the notion of 17th-century Holland as the polar opposite of contemporary Germany, and as a model for change. For Bode, Rembrandt had more to say to the 19th century than Raphael and Michelangelo.<sup>17</sup> Max Liebermann expressed similar sentiments.

Bode and Liebermann's esteem for Rembrandt may be contrasted with the opinions of Jakob Burckhardt, a man Bode very much admired nonetheless. Following his early work as an art critic, Burckhardt had withdrawn into academic life in Basle. In his opinion, modern art was completely lacking in either artistic or humanitarian conviction. As far as he was concerned, the pinnacle of artistic creativity had been reached with the works of the Renaissance and Rubens. He rejected all forms of realism and naturalism. Bode, on the other hand, did intervene in the contemporary scene. He occasionally helped Liebermann sell his works to museums, and he wrote exhibition reviews. In an 1888 critique of the Internationale Kunstausstellung in Munich, published anonymously, for example, he lambasted German history and genre painters for paying too much attention to the expression of ideas and neglecting the technical, painterly aspects of their art. He also attacked the system of art education and the way artists were *pampered* by the state and society. He pilloried the antiquated teaching methods of the academy: *Our academies, (...) do nothing but force students into the mould of their teachers, drilling them year after year, through all the phases of their education, so that in the end they leave the 'master class' and go out into the world as consummate specialists in peasant scenes, ladies portraits, elegant landscapes, etc. What else could they become, in the best of all cases, but epigones? To become true, independent artists they would have to have enough talent and energy to forget*

*everything they had been taught, and to turn back to nature.*<sup>18</sup> Between the lines, we may again sense his admiration for the artistic achievements of the Dutch, who had remained unspoiled by the academic system, and had thus retained their unaffected, natural approach. As several of his statements reveal, Bode was becoming increasingly concerned with the formal and aesthetic aspects of the work of art. However, the brushwork, the immediacy of the reproduction of nature, and the artist's virtuosity in the use of colour also had a moral dimension. To his mind, subject and execution had to stand in a complementary, even harmonious, relationship to one another. It was this balance between artistic form and humanitarian content that was the essence of Rembrandt's great, supranational genius. His earlier vision of Holland, which had been shaped by his admiration for the republican virtues of the communal struggle against Spain, had now more or less given way to the cult of individual genius, focusing almost solely on the persona and art of Rembrandt. This transformation indicates not only a change in Bode's taste; it must also be interpreted in a broader historical context.

Bode's ideal was Dutch art of the 17th century, and in particular the works of its two greatest masters, Hals and Rembrandt. Their paintings exemplified true art, which could only be produced in a democratic and free society. We should not, however, be tempted to place Bode among the democratically-minded opponents of the Empire; he was much too much part of imperial society for that, despite his liberal-bourgeois background. Nonetheless, he saw the Netherlands and its art as representative of an intact world, which stood in sharp contrast to the shortcomings of his own era. Bode lived with this inner conflict.

So, too, did a large number of his



middle-class contemporaries, and this made them particularly susceptible to all kinds of half-baked theories. Since the beginning of the 19th century, this group had defined itself mainly through culture and science, and had contributed in important ways to their development. This meant that many of the movements demanding a rejuvenation of society that arose around 1900 found sympathisers among its ranks. A positivist, materialist and profit-hungry minority of the so-called *Gründergeneration*, on the other hand, pushed intellectual and moral issues into the background.

The liberal middle class, however, was by no means anti-Empire; it, too, had profited from the economic boom and German unification. Nonetheless, it found it difficult to accept the political and intellectual powerlessness that had been the price for its integration into the new state. Only against this background can we come to understand the various philosophical, aesthetic, artistic and 'alternative lifestyle' movements that sprang up at just this time, all hoping to quench the thirst for spiritual guidance. In this regard, Nietzsche was the most important – and most misunderstood – figure of the period, which, for all its outward brilliance, was, in fact, a moment of the deepest internal crisis. This feeling of uncertainty developed to the point where it seemed as if war was the only way out. The enthusiasm with which artists in particular greeted the outbreak of hostilities in the summer of 1914 was not only the result of their subservient imperialism. They, like their fellow citizens, hoped for a far-reaching transformation of society, which they believed could only be accomplished in the wake of total destruction, as Joes Segal has demonstrated in a recent study.

This is the context within which we should view the incredible German enthusiasm for Rembrandt in the

years around 1900 – a phenomenon that seems incomprehensible, even bizarre to us today. A variety of contemporary currents merged in the Rembrandt cult. The Realist, Naturalist and Impressionist painters – Leibl, Uhde, Lenbach, Stuck, Liebermann, Corinth and Slevogt – admired the great Dutch master for reasons that were primarily artistic, as Johannes Stükelberger has shown. What seems strange to us today is that Rembrandt could suddenly also be viewed as the wellspring of a spiritual, even political, renewal of society. This was the notion propagated by that intellectually undisciplined and fanatical muddlehead who liked to refer to himself as the *Rembrandtdeutsche*, but who was otherwise known as Julius Langbehn.<sup>19</sup> It was the artist's enormous popularity, stemming from the innumerable publications and spectacular acquisitions of the last third of the 19th century, as well as the large-scale exhibitions in Amsterdam in 1889, 1898 and 1906, that enabled him to make Rembrandt the hero of his new vision of society. The educated classes found the concept of a painter as a symbol of spiritual and intellectual regeneration extremely appealing. They hoped that with social change, art and science would come to set the parameters for a whole new system of values.

With this in mind, we may better understand Bode's not entirely uncritical enthusiasm for Langbehn's work. One could easily write off his support as a mere bagatelle. Why should a 'grand old man' be immune to the tricks of a young charlatan? But the opportunity for a closer examination of this episode is too interesting to pass up, and vividly illustrates the transformation in the image of Holland that began to take place around 1900.

It was Bode's colleague Von Seidlitz, director of the paintings gallery in Dresden, who first brought Langbehn



to his attention. After reading the manuscript of *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, Bode immediately set about trying to get it published. He corresponded with Langbehn and even met him on occasion. The book's enormous success appeared to justify Bode's zeal, and strengthened his belief that he had underwritten a work of crucial import. He – as well as Lichtwark and others – continued to support the young author, not only financially. Bode managed to arrange a meeting between Langbehn and Bismarck, who had just been forced to resign. The ex-chancellor is reported to have made some rather bitter remarks about the emperor during this little tête-à-tête, but he also had words of praise for Langbehn. He liked to read before going to sleep, he said, although of course one could not simply pick up the Rembrandt book like a novel by Zola, as it required *a certain amount of mental agility*.<sup>20</sup>

*Rembrandt dominated European culture*, wrote Émile Verhaeren, and even the most critical minds of the period were not immune to the fever. In his review of the Rembrandt exhibition in Amsterdam in 1889, Alfred Lichtwark, for example, commented: *For our generation, Rembrandt is the quintessential artist. He is closer to our hearts than anyone else. When compared with him, all others seem deficient. They are lacking his love*.<sup>21</sup> Statements such as this have little to do with art-historical analysis; they are instead expressions of a philosophy of life, a *Weltanschauung*. The cult of Raphael and Dürer had become a thing of the past. In this period, Rembrandt's art – and even Rembrandt himself – were perceived as the embodiment of truth, rectitude, honesty and humanity.

Langbehn's book is not really about Rembrandt. He is merely the shining example the author uses to expound on his confused socio-political theories, which pelted down, breathless and uncontrolled, on his contemporaries. Langbehn knew only too well

how to manipulate the artist's popularity to his own ends. The title, *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, was programmatic: it propagated education through art. It was certainly this notion that captured Bode's imagination as well. He was even convinced to write an in-depth review – a piece that not only demonstrates how easily an educated bourgeois of the period could be seduced, but also that Bode's admiration for Langbehn had its limitations. What is important here, however, is to note that Bode's image of the Netherlands and Dutch art had changed fundamentally; how else could he have found Langbehn's irritating and confusing opus attractive? Liebermann, for example, remained true to his convictions; it was not only the author's unappetising anti-Semitism that led him to reject Langbehn's obscure theories.

Let us now briefly examine Bode's 1890 review of Langbehn's book.<sup>22</sup> Bode shared the general assessment that the work's actual subject was somewhat vague, and that it was disjointed and exaggerated in its judgments; at the same time, however, he felt it made for a captivating read. He attempted to exonerate the text by emphasising its polemical character: *it issues from the depths of the German soul and seeks to define what is needed in order to achieve a rebirth of German culture and art by elucidating the often depraved circumstances of contemporary life*.<sup>23</sup> Bode was clearly impressed by the book's description of *the decline of the once-dominant system of scientific culture*, and by the hope it expressed for *the introduction of a truly artistic culture* in the near future. Langbehn had simply taken Rembrandt, whom he identified as *the most German of German artists*, as his model.

It remains unclear, however, what exactly it was that constituted this 'German-ness'. It is rather vaguely described as the essential inner quality of the spiritual and intellectual leaders of the Germanic tribes, which Lang-



behn thought had somehow been subsumed by the English and Dutch. Contemporary German culture was a sham. It lacked the naturalness, the native individualism and the folk character that he believed to have identified in Rembrandt's pictures. Bode does stress that it is difficult to understand what the book is actually about. Rembrandt is the outstanding figure, but he and his art are, in fact, discussed only peripherally. This was not a work about the artist, but rather a combative treatise, and its imperfect form and chaotic reasoning could therefore be excused. On the other hand, Bode notes that the author has a fine understanding of the Dutchman's work, and that much of what he had written was *surprising, always lively and full of the warmest and most sincere admiration for the artist*.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, he recognised that Rembrandt and his art were in some sense being misused, and he sharply criticised Langbehn's *battle cry for his broadsheet*. Yet there can be no doubt that Bode agreed with many of the younger author's remarks, particularly with his declaration of Rembrandt as the *most truth-loving and philosophical* of all artists. He also concurred with Langbehn's assessment of the contemporary art scene. In many passages, Bode clearly found his own ideas confirmed. The review continues with a critique of the teaching system employed at the academies, and of the training of art historians at university.

Bode sent Langbehn's book to his Dutch friend and colleague Abraham Bredius, who also found some of the observations quite stimulating. He was, however, outraged – and rightly so – by Langbehn's designation of Rembrandt as German: *Describing Rembrandt as 'the most German of German artists' is really a bit rich. You can't expect me, as a Dutchman, to agree with such a thing. Rembrandt was Dutch, [and] a Dutchman of 1640-60 was something quite different from a German of*

*the time. And he continues: I can't get as excited about this book as you are, but then again, you are German and I am Dutch, and this perhaps makes me a little more down-to-earth*.<sup>25</sup>

Bode could certainly appreciate his friend's gentle warning. Nonetheless, his works on Rembrandt composed after the turn of the century indicate that he, too, had bought into the new heroic image of the artist. He even appears to have been infected to some extent by the pan-Germanic virus, and to have shared in the notion that a renewed emphasis on *völkisch* values would lead to a rebirth of culture. In his completely revised study of the history of Dutch painting, first published in 1917 under the title *Die Meister der holländischen und flämischen Malerschulen*, we find a vision of the Netherlands quite different from that of his earlier writings. *In the works of Rembrandt, he writes, Dutch art found its purest, most characteristic expression. He represents the apogee of its development. Today, Germans love to describe Rembrandt as one of their own; be that as it may, it is certainly true that he is the descendant of a purely Germanic line, and that his art is truly Germanic in nature. It is the most powerful expression of Germanic culture ever produced, and German artists know of no better representative*.<sup>26</sup> Gone are the discussions of the Dutch struggle for freedom, and Bode devotes only a few pages to the paintings of Frans Hals. Such statements are evidence of his new interest in the national and indigenous, and in the idea of a common Germanic heritage that extended beyond the country's borders – a notion that became widespread in the years around 1900.

Such an insightful contemporary, as Liebermann, remarked astutely on Bode's change of heart. In his review of the *Malerschulen*, he made fun of his friend's hyper-Germanness: *Bode sees in Rembrandt the culmination of Dutch art, and states that exceptions*



*like Böcklin, who cares nothing for his painting, only prove the accuracy of this now widespread opinion. When, however, he stresses the 'Germanic' element in Rembrandt's work, it is more on the principle of 'after this, therefore on account of this' than anything else. Goethe was absolutely right when he said that genius is universal. Rembrandt's work developed the way it did because he was a Dutchman living in Amsterdam; his 'race' had nothing, or at least very little, to do with it.<sup>27</sup>*

In his memoirs, written at the end of his life, Bode makes no mention of Langbehn. Did he thereby hope to wipe out the memory of both the man and the ideas that had once so impressed him? We do not know. In any case – as a perusal of the editions of the *Malerschulen* published the 1920s demonstrates – as far as Bode was concerned, Rembrandt remained the most illustrious painter of the 17th century, perhaps even of the entire history of art. Nor did he ever bother to qualify his claim that Rembrandt was a 'Germanic' artist. Much had changed in Bode's understanding of Dutch art. Having begun with a liberal-national, social-critical view, influenced by the work of Théophile Thoré, he now upheld the pan-Germanic perspective. The great attraction of these foggy 'Germanic/German' virtues was precisely their extraordinary ambiguity. We now know Bode mainly as a great connoisseur, as 'the Bismarck of museums,' as Karl Scheffler once called him. Between the lines, however, it becomes clear how much this great man and his writings were determined by the political and cultural tenor of the times. The transformation in his image of Dutch art is an excellent example. He remained devoted to the Netherlands and its pictures, but the reasons for his preference changed, as times had changed.

It is too easy to dismiss the intellectual work of previous generations

based on what we know today. Far more rewarding for the historian is instead to investigate the political and cultural context in which it took place. In some ways, Bode was part of the general mainstream. From the 1860s to the 1920s, as we have seen, he was both dependant on and participated in the creation of very different scholarly narratives of Dutch culture.

Translation by Rachel Esner



## NOTES

- 1 For information on the life and work of Wilhelm von Bode see Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben*, (Thomas W. Gaetgens and Barbara Paul eds.), commentary by Barbara Paul, Tilman von Stockhausen, Michael Müller and Uta Kornmeier (*Quellen zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 4), Berlin 1997, 2 vols.; Manfred Ohlsen, *Wilhelm von Bode, Zwischen Kaisermacht und Kunsttempel*, Berlin 1995; exh.cat. *Wilhelm von Bode, Museumsdirektor und Mäzen, Wilhelm von Bode zum 150. Geburtstag*, Der Kaiser-Friedrich-Museums-Verein, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 1995.
- 2 Thomas W. Gaetgens, *Die Berliner Museumsinsel im Deutschen Kaiserreich, Zur Kulturpolitik der Museen in der wilhelminischen Epoche*, Munich 1992.
- 3 In this context see the contributions of Karl Arndt in *Konstellationen: Bode, Tschudi, Friedländer, Winkler. Die altniederländische Malerei in den Berliner Sammlungen* and Jaynie Anderson, 'The Political Power of Connoisseurship in Nineteenth-century Europe: Wilhelm von Bode versus Giovanni Morelli', in: Peter-Klaus Schuster and Thomas W. Gaetgens (eds.), *Kenntnis, Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* (1996).
- 4 For further information on the history of acquisitions for the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin see Tilman von Stockhausen, *Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Die Geschichte ihrer Erwerbungs politik 1830-1904*, Berlin 2000.
- 5 Bode, *op.cit.* (note 1), vol. 1, p. 21. Peter Hecht, 'Rembrandt and Raphael back to back: the contribution of Thoré', *Simiolus* 26 (1998), pp. 162-178.
- 6 Wilhelm Bode, 'Frans Hals und seine Schule', *Jahrbücher für Kunstwissenschaft* 4 (1871), pp. 1-66. On Bode and Holland see also the important contributions by Ger Luijten, 'Wilhelm von Bode und Holland', *Kenntnis, op.cit.* (note 3) and Barbara Gaetgens, 'Holland als Vorbild', in exh.cat. *Max Liebermann, Jahrhundertwende*, Nationalgalerie Berlin 1997, pp. 83-92.
- 7 Bode, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 5.
- 8 *Ibidem*, pp. 25-26.
- 9 Exh.cat. *Courbet und Deutschland*, Hamburg (Kunsthalle)/Frankfurt, 1978-79, p. 305, no. 289; Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, *French Realism and the Dutch Masters*, Utrecht 1974, p. 51ff.; Frances S. Jowell, 'Die Wiederentdeckung des Frans Hals im 19. Jahrhundert', in: exh.cat. *Frans Hals*, Washington (National Gallery of Art) etc. 1989-1990, pp. 61-85; Angelika Wesenberg, 'Holland als bürgerliche Vision. Bode und Liebermann', in: exh.cat. *Wilhelm von Bode als Zeitgenosse der Kunst*, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 1996-97, p. 43.
- 10 Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, 'Nineteenth-Century Visitors to the Frans Hals Museum', in: Gabriel P. Weisberg and Laurinda S. Dixon (eds.), *The Documented Image. Visions in Art History*, Syracuse 1987, p. 111ff.; Gaetgens, *op.cit.* (note 6), pp. 84-86.
- 11 Erich Hancke, *Max Liebermann, Sein Leben und seine Werke*, Berlin 1914-1923, p. 104.
- 12 Bode, *op.cit.* (note 6), p. 62.
- 13 Bode, *op.cit.* (note 1), vol. 1, p. 54.
- 14 Wilhelm Bode, *Studien zur Geschichte der holländischen Malerei*, Braunschweig 1883.
- 15 *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- 16 *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- 17 Wesenberg, *op.cit.* (note 9), p. 50. Wilhelm von Bode, *Die Meister der holländischen und flämischen Malerschulen*, (Eduard Pletzsch ed.), 9th edition, Leipzig 1958, p. 1. See also the important publication by Johannes Stükelberger, *Rembrandt und die Moderne*, Munich 1996, p. 40ff.
- 18 See exh.cat. Berlin 1996-1997, *op.cit.* (note 9), p. 92.
- 19 Hilmar Frank, 'Übereilte Annäherung, Bode und der Rembrandtdeutsche', in: *ibidem*, p. 77-82. Stükelberger, *op.cit.* (note 17), p. 47-53.
- 20 Cited in Ohlsen, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 151.
- 21 Both quotations are found Stükelberger, *op.cit.* (note 17), p. 55. For the later exhibition in 1898 see P.J.J. van Thiel, 'De Rembrandt-tentoonstelling van 1898', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 40 (1992), pp. 11-93.
- 22 Wilhelm Bode, 'Rembrandt als Erzieher, von einem Deutschen', *Preussische Jahrbücher* 65 (1890), no. 3, pp. 304-314.
- 23 *Ibidem*, p. 301.
- 24 *Ibidem*, p. 303.
- 25 Cited in Ohlsen, *op.cit.* (note 1), p. 149.
- 26 Bode, *op.cit.* (note 17), p. 2.
- 27 Max Liebermann, *Die Phantasie in der Malerei, Schriften und Reden*, (Günter Busch ed. and intro.), Frankfurt am Main 1978, p. 93.