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### Sebald Beham & Barthel Beham

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## Sebald Beham & Barthel Beham

Alison Stewart

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### **Beham** [Behem; Beheim; Bohm; Peham].

German family of artists. The brothers (1) Sebald Beham and (2) Barthel Beham, whose oeuvre consists mainly of prints, belonged to the third generation of this Nuremberg family and were among the artists known as LITTLE MASTERS because of the diminutive size of many of their engravings and etchings. They were much influenced by the work of Albrecht Dürer and are often referred to as his “pupils,” though it is unclear if the contact was solely through his prints rather than personal. Sources of inspiration included the work of artists such as Raphael and Marcantonio Raimondi, then widely available in engraved form. Following these Italian models Sebald and Barthel Beham often depicted subjects previously peripheral in German art, such as scenes from Classical mythology, history and everyday life. They and GEORG PENCZ, a colleague of their early years, shared the radical views on religion and government held by the reformers Andreas Karlstadt (c. 1477–1541) and Thomas Müntzer (c. 1490–1525), in which connection they were all three expelled from Nuremberg on 26 January 1525. At their trial these “godless painters,” as they were called in contemporary documents, asserted that they did not believe in baptism, Christ or transubstantiation; Barthel also refused to recognize the city council as the highest temporal authority (Vogler). However, on November 16 of the same year they were allowed to return to Nuremberg. Barthel soon departed to work for the Bavarian court in Munich; Sebald was based in Nuremberg, though frequently working elsewhere, until c. 1531, when he settled in Frankfurt am Main. Attempts to link the artists’ radical politics with their art (Zschelletschky) remain

unconvincing, and have been soundly refuted (Moxey, 1989). Nevertheless, subtle links with Sebald’s brother-in-law, the spiritualist Sebastian Franck, are under investigation (Stewart, in preparation).

### (1) **Sebald** [Hans Sebald] **Beham**

(*b.* Nuremberg, 1500; *d.* Frankfurt am Main, 1550). Engraver, etcher, designer of woodcuts and stained glass, painter and illustrator. In contemporary documents and prints (B. 73, 140, 254) he was nearly always identified as Sebald Beham although since the 17th century (Sandrart) and into the early years of the 20th he has mistakenly been called Hans Sebald Beham on the basis of his monogram: HSP or HSB. This reflects S[ebald] Peham/Beham with the *P* (Nuremberg pronunciation) changing to *B* c. 1531, when he appears to have moved to Frankfurt. Sandrart’s biography of him is illustrated with a printed portrait similar to Sebald’s painted *Self-portrait* in his *David* panel in the Louvre; around the Sandrart portrait is an inscription identifying him as painter and engraver. Only one of Sebald’s panel paintings has survived (the *Story of David*, 1534; Paris, Louvre), though documents cited by Hampe and Vogler refer to him as a journeyman for painting in 1521 and as having his own journeyman—i.e. running a workshop—in 1525. Sebald is best known to posterity, however, for his prints, of which he produced a prodigious quantity: approximately 252 engravings, 18 etchings and 1500 woodcuts, including woodcut book illustrations. Biographical information is scanty: Sandrart alleged that he was trained by Barthel and opened a tavern, the bad reputation of which derived from his own dissolute life. Unquestion-

ably, however, he was industrious and meticulous artistically. He began producing prints in quantity in 1519, though a few date to before then: a woodcut of *Lust* from a series of the *Ten Commandments* (Hollstein, no. 246)—a youthfully naive work produced in 1512 when Sebald was 12—and a sheet of sometimes awkwardly drawn pen-and-ink studies of male and female heads on red prepared paper (1518; Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Mus.). His first engraving (B. 204), dated 1518, is a diminutive *Portrait of a Young Woman*.

The works from Sebald's early years in Nuremberg show the influence of Albrecht Altdorfer, the most senior of the Little Masters, and of Dürer. Two landscape drawings attributed to Sebald (both Nuremberg, Ger. Nmus.) and published by Zink are indebted to the DANUBE SCHOOL and possibly Altdorfer. In composition and dramatic tone, Sebald's etching of the *Annunciation to Joachim* (1520; B. 66) demonstrates the influence of Altdorfer's woodcut of the same theme from c. 1513 (B. 4). Dürer's quieter style inspired some designs for stained glass done during these years, including an *Imperial Coat of Arms* (Nuremberg, Ger. Nmus.) and the *Coat of Arms of the Elector of Saxony* (Munich, Julius Bohler, 1961), subjects that bespeak important patrons. Some two dozen circular designs for stained-glass roundels of scenes from the Passion may date to 1522 (e.g. Berlin, Kupferstichkab.; Frankfurt am Main, Städel. Kstinst. & Städt. Gal.; London, BM; Oxford, Ashmolean). Other early works demonstrate his interest in representing scenes from peasant life: for instance, some small-scale drawings relating to engravings of 1520, including *Peasant Man Holding a Jar* and *Peasant Woman Carrying a Jug* (both Malibu, CA, Getty Mus.) and *Old Peasant Man Standing under a Tree* (Washington, DC, N.G.A.). These, in contrast to the more systematic and refined works he engraved in his later Frankfurt years, are free and exuberant in style, employing wiry, energetic lines,

After his expulsion from Nuremberg and his return in late 1525, Sebald Beham worked there intermittently for several years, incurring censure from the city council again in 1528 for publishing a book on the proportions of horses (Pauli, nos 1262-9), which was believed to plagiarize Dürer's manuscript on the same theme. Once more he had to leave Nuremberg. Around 1530 he was in Munich, making a commemorative woodcut of *Emperor Charles V's Entry into Munich* (B. 169). He also illustrated at that time a prayer-book (completed 1531; Aschaffenburg, Schloss Johannisburg, Hof- & Stiftsbib.) for Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg (1490-1545), Archbishop of Mainz. It was for Cardinal Albrecht that, in 1534, he made his only surviving painting: the *Story of David*. It was executed on panel as a table top and includes a portrait of the Cardinal with the artist at the lower right of the side depicting David and Bathsheba. Preparatory drawings for each of the four sides have also survived (1531; Paris, Louvre) and demonstrate

Sebald's interest in Renaissance architecture and perspective. Together with the inclusion of portraits, these elements indicate that he was a more self-conscious Renaissance artist than his prints alone would suggest. A second important supporter in Frankfurt was Christian von Egenolff (1502-55), for whose publications Beham provided many woodcut illustrations (e.g. B. 1-73).

The subjects of Sebald's prints were various: traditional scenes from the Old and New Testaments and from lives of the saints, portraits, allegories, secular and historical subjects and Classical themes and motifs. In form they range from tiny and simple woodcut illustrations depicting scenes from *Genesis* (Hollstein, p. 167) to expertly crafted and finely engraved scenes from Classical antiquity, which often exploit the erotic potential of the subject (e.g. Cimon and Pero, 1520-25; Pauli, nos 76-7; see fig.). His small engravings are highly accomplished and may have been collected even in his lifetime. He also designed prints of extremely large size and fine craftsmanship, for example the *Fountain of Youth* (1531; P. 1120) and the *Large Village Fair* (1535; P. 1245), each of which measures 305 × 914 mm and features peasant and festival subjects (for illustration see Stewart 1989 and 1993). He also made more utilitarian prints to serve as ornament and decoration of various kinds: on playing cards, title-pages, wallpaper, coats of arms, and as patterns for use by architects, metalworkers and other craftsmen.



Sebald Beham: *Cimon and Pero*, etching, diam. 50 mm, 1520-25 (Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina)

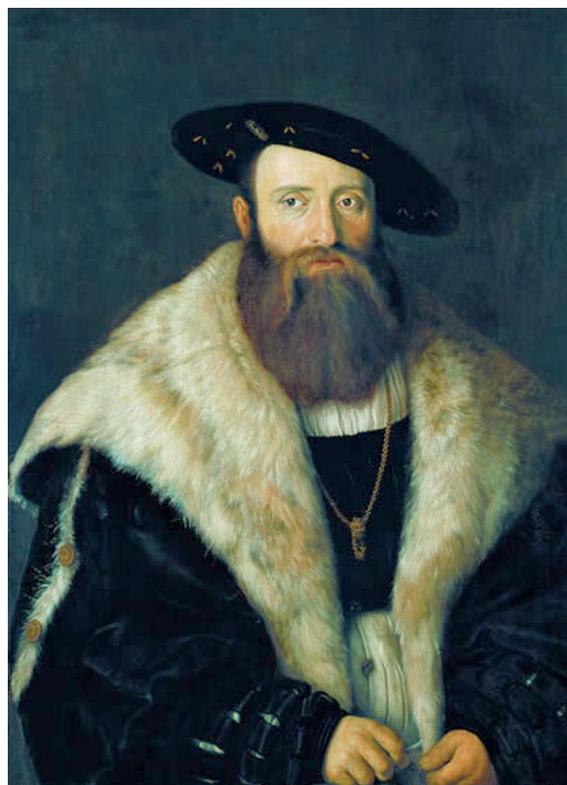
## (2) Barthel Beham

(b. Nuremberg, 1502; d. Italy, 1540). Painter, engraver, etcher and possibly designer of woodcuts, brother of (1) Sebald Beham. He is best known for his painted portraits and for his superb small engravings of Classical themes. The year of his birth is verified in a portrait of 1531 by Ludwig Neufahrer (d.1563), which gives Barthel's age as 29. His early works (c. 1520) are engravings obviously influenced in choice of subject, composition and graphic means by Albrecht Dürer and by his brother Sebald, both of whom are considered to have been his teachers. Barthel's interest in antiquity, as transmitted through the engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi, is evident as early as 1524 in subjects that are Classically inspired and erotic (e.g. *Cimon and Pero*, B. 11; *Cleopatra*, B. 12) and in figures that, though still in Dürer's manner, are fuller in form. Barthel's representations of peasants (1524; B. 46,47) continued the tradition of small engravings featuring one or two peasants begun by Dürer around 1497 (B. 89-90) and continued by Sebald Beham (B. 191-5). If Röttinger's attribution to Barthel of a dozen or so woodcuts (Geisberg, nos 251-62) is correct (Stewart, 1993, favors Sebald), then it would seem that in the 1530s the brothers developed this theme into large woodcuts depicting rural festivals, with many peasants celebrating together. These works are uncharacteristically clumsy, perhaps due to lack of skill on the woodcutters' part. Altogether Barthel created 92 engravings and etchings, the subjects and styles of which often coincide with Sebald's, and indeed vice versa, for his elder but longer-lived brother often used Barthel's designs as models in later years. The intaglio prints are small and finely engraved, but only a few bear his monogram. As with Sebald, the form of this changed from an early BP, reflecting Nuremberg dialect, to BB from 1531.

After Barthel's expulsion from Lutheran Nuremberg (by 1527), he moved to Catholic Munich to work for the Bavarian dukes William IV and Ludwig X and remained in their employment until his death. In Munich he produced numerous painted portraits, the earliest known being that of the Chancellor of Bavaria *Leonhard von Eck* (1527; New York, Met), of whom there is also an engraving from the same year (B. 64). For this Barthel used the Italianate half-length format of Dürer's engraved *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (1524; B. 107), reputedly for the first time in a German painted portrait. The coolly objective, three-dimensional image is typical of Barthel's portraits of the middle and upper classes (listed by Fudickar), which include a dozen, dating as early as 1530, of members of the Wittelsbach family (see Erichsen), for example *Duke William IV of Bavaria* with a pendant of his wife *Maria Jacobaea of Baden* (both Landshut, Staatsgal. Stadtresidenz). Some of these portraits, including his *Duke Ludwig X of Bavaria-Landshut* (1530; see fig.) and *Count Palatine Otto Henry* (1535; both Munich, Alte

Pin.), are monumental, impressive portraits comparable to those of Hans Holbein the younger. Around 1530 Barthel sketched Emperor Charles V and his brother King Ferdinand I, then ruler of Hungary and Bohemia, for engravings dated 1531 (B. 60, 61). There are also painted versions, which may, however, be copies (Munich, Alte Pin.; Vienna, Gemaldegal. Akad. Bild. Kst.). There is also a history painting dating from 1530, the *Finding of the True Cross* (Munich, Alte Pin.), commissioned by Duke William as part of a series of history paintings for the Residenz in Munich.

Barthel's engravings increasingly drew on Classical subjects and types. At least 11 of his prints were influenced by Marcantonio, according to Oberheide, including the well-known *Virgin and Child at the Window* (B. 8), after the Italian artist's *Pensive Woman* (B. 460). Sandrart alleged that Barthel worked for many years with Marcantonio in Rome and Bologna and that many of his prints were issued under the latter's name. The tritons and nereids, dolphins and sea gods (B. 23-4, 33-4) and designs for ornaments and daggers (Pauli 1911, nos 30-33, 78-80) used by goldsmiths demonstrate the widespread interest these classicizing subjects held in early 16th-century Germany. Barthel was an early creator of *vanitas* representations, including sleeping children with skulls (B. 27, 31) and women surprised by death (B. 41,42). Barthel died in Italy, according to Sandrart, while undertaking a trip sponsored by Duke William.



Barthel Beham: *Duke Ludwig X of Bavaria-Landshut*, oil on panel, 960 × 710 mm, 1530 (Munich, Alte Pinakothek)

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