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Jan van Mieris was born in Leiden on 17 June 1660 as the “eldest son of the widely famed Frans van Mieris” and Cunera van der Cock.^[1] Like his younger brother Willem, Jan initially received instruction from his father. However, given “that his natural artistic drive tended most toward the painting of life-size objects,” his father wanted to apprentice him to Gerard de Lairesse (1640–1711), a plan he ultimately abandoned “because [Lairesse’s] conduct bore no resemblance whatsoever to his exemplary artistic ability,” whereupon Frans decided to train his son himself.^[2]

Jan’s name first appears in an official document in 1684. He witnessed the posting of the bans of his brother Willem and Agneta Chapman, at which time he stated that he was living on the Bloemmarkt. Two years later he joined Leiden’s Guild of Saint Luke. The buyers of his work came from the same families that patronized the other members of his artistic family.^[3] Petronella de la Court (1624–1707), for instance, in addition to a genre and history painting by Jan van Mieris, owned a portrait by him of her cousin’s son Pieter de la Court van der Voort (1664–1739).^[4] And Pieter, the most important benefactor of Willem van Mieris, owned five works by Jan. In his inventory, Pieter noted next to “a young woman feeding a “little sparrow [titmouse?]” and a “student with a tick-tack table” that Jan had “painted [them] here for me.”^[5]

Pieter’s annotation implies that Jan painted these two works before 1688, for in that year he left Leiden and traveled to Italy via Germany. He wrote a letter to his mother from Venice on 14 January 1689, in which he tried to reassure her and indicated that he had found himself in a position “to paint a little for the most eminent citizens of Venice, yet wished that they were as cordial and generous as they are polite.”^[6] Despite the cheerful tone of the letter, reading between the lines it is clear that he was lonely and sorely missed his daily visits to his brother-in-law, the painter Abraham van Eijck, in Leiden. His mother was charged with conveying Jan’s greetings to Van Eijck, as well as to “Mr. Heemskerck.”^[7] He also relayed to his mother that he had yet to sell the paintings he had taken along with him from Leiden. He thus conceived a plan to travel to Florence to investigate “whether better opportunities could be found there,” but noted “it appears that we are among the unlucky ones. It is rumored that the Duke of Tuscany wants to hand over power to his son and has become so devout that he is hardly involved in worldly matters anymore.”^[8] Jan was introduced to the grand duke’s court through friends of his father and, as noted by Johan van Gool, would



have done well “had he been able to reconcile his conscience with the religion of the court; but being firmly and irrefutably wedded to the precepts of his faith and unwilling to embrace any other religion than that into which he had been born and raised, he elected to follow the pure Truth.”^[9] When the grand duke realized that Van Mieris would not adopt his Catholic convictions, he withdrew his offer to take him into service, whereupon Van Mieris left for Rome. His stay in the Eternal City was short-lived, however: he died, unwed and childless, on 17 March 1690, just a few months before his thirtieth birthday. Shortly before his death, he had met in Rome the Leiden cloth manufacturer Jan Poelaert (1653–1701), brother-in-law of Pieter de la Court van der Voort, to whom he sold a “Samaritaansch vrouwtje aan de put” (Samaritan woman at the well). According to Allard de la Court (1688–1755), a later owner of the painting, it was “’t laatste stuk door hem geschildert” (the last picture that Van Mieris painted).^[10]

-Piet Bakker

Endnotes

1. “Outste Zoon van de alomberoemden Frans van Mieris.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburgh der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1750–51), 2:442.
2. “Zyn natuurlyke kunstdrift zich meest uitgestrekt [zou] hebben tot het schilderen van levensgroote voorwerpen”; “om dat deszelfs gedrag met zyn voorbeeldig kunstvermogen gansch geene overeenkomst had.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburgh der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1750–51), 2:443.
3. See also the biographies of Frans van Mieris and Willem van Mieris in this catalogue.
4. Amsterdam City Archive, Notarial Archives, not. G. Ypelaer, inv. 5338, fol. 553–642, 16 August 1707, inventory of Petronella de la Court. She also owned by him “Een suynigh huyshouden” (A frugal household), “Het pourtrait van den Hr. Pieter de la Court” (The portrait of Mister Pieter de la Court), and “Een Circe en Ulisses” (Circe and Ulysses). The latter description probably refers to: Jan van Mieris, *Odysseus and Circe*, 1680–85, oil on panel 32 x 43 cm, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden, see: Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 89. A much larger number of pictures by him, eight in total, and not including the portrait of Pieter de la Court, were in the auction of the paintings of Petronella de la Court held in Amsterdam on 19 October of the same year. Sale Petronella de la Court, 17 October 1707, Lugt 0207.



5. “Een Juffertje Eten gevende aan een mosje ... Student met verkeersbort ... voor mij hier geschildert.” Eric J. Sluijter et al., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 42. Refers to Regionaal Archief Leiden, Archief de la Court, inv. 132.

6. “Om voor de voornaemste van Venetia wat te schilderen, dogh wenste wel dat sy so cordiaal en mild waren als sy doorgaans beleeft syn.” He sent this letter along with the weekly post of “Heer Oortmans” (Mister Oortmans) to the Republic. The name of Oortmans suggests that in Venice he was staying with a relative of Adam Oortmans, the husband of Petronella de la Court who died in 1684. A transcription of this letter is found in the Bredius Notes at the RKD, Painters: Van Mieris.

7. This is most likely Willem Jacobsz van Heemskerck (1613–92), a cloth merchant and famous glass engraver, whose portrait Jan painted prior to his trip to Italy (oil on panel, oval, 13 x 10 cm, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden). On the relationship between the Van Mieris and Van Heemskerck families, see also the biography of Frans van Mieris the Elder in this catalogue, esp. note 3.

8. “Of daer beter gelegentheyd te vinden was, maer het schijnt, dat wy mede van d’ongeluckige syn, dewyl men hier spreekt dat den Hertoch van Toskanen [Cosimo III de’ Medici (1642–1723)] de regering aen syn soon wil overgeven, en so Devoot geworden is, dat hy sigh weynig met wereldsche saken meer bekommert.” Letter from Jan van Mieris to Cunera van der Cock, 14 January 1689. A transcription of this letter is found in the Bredius Notes at the RKD, Painters: Van Mieris.

9. “Had zyn geweten zich kunnen voegen naer den Godtsdienst van het Hof; maer pal en onwrikbaer staende op de grontslagen van zyn geloof, en geenen anderen Godtsdienst willende omhelzen, als daer hy in geboren en opgevoed was, besloot hy liever de zuivere waerheit te volgen.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe schouburgh der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1750–51), 2:444.

10. Eric J. Sluijter et al., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 42; Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, ed., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 10 vols. (Leiden, 1986–92), 2:447, no. 27.

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