



Pieter Codde

(Amsterdam 1599 – Amsterdam 1678)

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Pieter Codde, who was the fourth of nine children, was born in Amsterdam in 1599 to Maria Jans and Jacob Pietersz Codde. His father served as a *paalknecht*, a city official whose responsibilities included collecting port fees, registering vessels coming into Amsterdam, and delivering mail to and from shippers and merchants.^[1] Because of his official position, the family resided in the Paalhuis (no longer extant) near the river IJ on the Nieuwe Brug. In 1623, Pieter married eighteen-year-old Maritgen Arens. Shortly thereafter, the couple had a child, Clara, who was baptized in April 1624. By 1630, they were living in a comfortable house on the Sint Anthoniesbreestraat, in a neighborhood well known as an artists' quarter.^[2]

At the time of his marriage, documents list Codde's occupation as “painter.”^[3] Unfortunately, because records from the Amsterdam Guild of Saint Luke have been lost, the identity of the artist (or artists) with whom Codde trained is unknown.^[4] He likely began his training as a portrait painter, producing both single and group portraits throughout his career. Codde's pursuits in this period were not limited to painting but extended to literature as well. In 1627, the playwright Elias Herckmans (1596–1644) mentioned Codde in the dedication of his play *Tyrus*, based on a military campaign of Alexander the Great, while in 1633, a love poem by Codde appeared in the publication *Hollande Nachtegaelken*.^[5] These texts suggest that his literary interests ranged in subject matter from classical to amorous themes, as was also the case in his paintings.

Codde is best known for his genre scenes, which he executed throughout most of his career. Building on the popularity of similar subjects depicted by forerunners like Willem Buytewech (1591/92–1624) and Dirck Hals (1591–1656), and by his contemporary Willem Duyster (1599–1635), Codde produced pictures of elegant yet spare interiors featuring musical parties, soldiers at leisure, and merry companies. Within this area of specialization, Codde's works are distinctive for his use of a restricted palette featuring silvery tones of grays and browns, and for his compelling groupings of figures with carefully detailed accoutrements such as musical instruments, weapons, and domestic items. The significant number of



surviving copies after his genre scenes testifies to the commercial success of his imagery.^[6] Aside from his genre subjects, Codde also made portraits and history paintings, including *The Continnence of Scipio* in The Leiden Collection.^[7] Though he did not generally date his paintings after 1645, evidence suggests that Codde continued to remain active in artistic circles for much of his life. In 1672, he was among a group of professionals that the dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh (1626–79) asked to certify a number of Italian paintings.^[8]

A picture unique in Codde's oeuvre is the *Militia Company of District XI under the Command of Captain Reynier Reael and Lieutenant Cornelis Michielsz Blaeuw*, 1637, known as the "Meagre Company."^[9] Codde completed this large-scale group portrait of an Amsterdam militia company after Frans Hals (1582/83–1666), who had begun painting it in 1633, abandoned the commission because of a conflict with his Amsterdam patrons.^[10] Codde was likely hired to finish the group portrait because of his reputation as a portrait painter and, as well, because he resided in the same Amsterdam district as the militia company.^[11] It is probable that Hals and Codde both worked on the "Meagre Company" in the sizeable studio space belonging to Hendrick Uylenburgh (1587–1661) on Sint Anthoniesbreestraat, where Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) was also active in the early 1630s.^[12]

While Codde found great professional success as an artist, his personal life was fraught. Notarial accounts describe how in 1625, at a gathering of artists including Barend van Someren (1572–1632) and Michel van de Sande (1583/84–ca. 1630), he had an altercation with Duyster.^[13] A decade later, in 1635, Codde's young daughter died. In the following year Codde's maidservant, Aefge Jans, accused the artist of rape.^[14] Soon thereafter, Codde separated from his wife, at which time an inventory was made that lists fine household goods like porcelain, silver, and silk, as well as paintings. Many of these paintings, some of which were unframed, were by artists with ties to Haarlem, among them Frans Hals, Pieter Claesz (1596/97–1660), and Jan van Goyen (1596–1656), which suggests that Codde was an art dealer as well as an artist.^[15] He remained married after the separation, and in 1651 he asked witnesses to report on his wife's relationships with other men; among those mentioned was artist Pieter Potter (ca. 1597–1652), presumably the father of Paulus Potter (1625–54), who lived nearby.^[16]

Throughout this turmoil, Codde remained financially secure, purchasing a home on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam in 1657. He died in 1678 and was buried at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam. In his will, Codde left the house on the Keizersgracht to his housekeeper, Barentje Willems, who sold it in 1679 for 2,500 guilders.^[17]

- Elizabeth Nogrady, 2024

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