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Jacob Ochtervelt

(Rotterdam 1634 – 1682 Amsterdam)

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The quality of much of Jacob Ochtervelt's work—his oeuvre counts around one hundred paintings—is so great that it is difficult to understand why Gerard van Spaan (1651–1711) makes absolutely no mention of the painter in the list of local artists in his 1698 history of Rotterdam.[1] While Arnold Houbraken (1660–1719) does refer to Ochtervelt, he does so only briefly and in connection with Pieter de Hooch (1629–in or after 1684). Houbraken wrote that unlike De Hooch, Ochtervelt painted his "Kamergezichten" (interior views) "without using much perspectival depth to the background views, which requires mathematical insight and close observation," talents that Ochtervelt evidently did not possess. He "derived satisfaction from the fact that he could depict small companies of young ladies and gentlemen or a woman sewing or lace-making naturally and elaborately."[2]

Ochtervelt's work garnered more appreciation from Jan van Gool (1685–1763). After noting with surprise (thus erroneously) in his *Nieuwe Schouburg* (1753) that "not a single writer has devoted attention to the man's origins and artistry," he describes Ochtervelt as a painter "whose manner and handling are very reminiscent of Metsu, and may have issued from that school," because "the images of clothing and household trappings are clear evidence that he must have lived around that time."[3]

Van Gool was only partly right. Although Gabriel Metsu (1629–67) and Ochtervelt were indeed contemporaries, Metsu was not Ochtervelt's teacher. According to Houbraken, Ochtervelt trained, together with De Hooch, under the Haarlem painter Nicolaes Berchem (1620–83). This statement, however, is now seriously doubted. The early work of both Ochtervelt and De Hooch displays so many stylistic parallels with that of the Rotterdam painter Ludolph de Jongh (1616–79) that an apprenticeship with their fellow townsman is far more likely.[4]

Jacob Ochtervelt was baptized in Rotterdam on 1 February 1634. His parents were Lucas Hendricks (d. 1657), a cobbler and the bridgekeeper of the Roobrugge over the Nieuwe Haven, and Trijntje Jans, a skipper's daughter.[5] He grew up in humble circumstances, as is indicated not only by his father's occupation, but also that of his brothers and brothers-in-law, who all but one were involved in seafaring. Two of them were employed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), including his brother Pieter, who was a gunner on the *Schiedam*.[6] Given Ochtervelt's modest background, it is ironic that our present appreciation of his work is based primarily on his faithful renderings of elegant companies in lavish interiors. It should be noted, however, that he became familiar with upper middle class circles when he married Dirckje Meesters in 1655. His father-in-law, Jan Meesters, made sails and compasses and his mother-in-law, Maria de Gelder, was the daughter of a Dordrecht merchant.[7] While the Meesters lived in comfortable circumstances, Ochtervelt's brother-in-law Dirck Meesters had a major impact on his career. This notary developed into an excellent administrator and held numerous public offices, including that of burgomaster.[8] Dirck's success was based on his marriage to Barbara Elsevier (1640–89), scion of a celebrated Leiden printers' family who was related to several Rotterdam regent families.[9] She would have introduced Ochtervelt to the merchant Isaack Elsevier—her father's first cousin—whose family the artist portrayed in 1664.[10] Moreover, Ochtervelt may have had the Elsevier family to thank for his most important patron. In that same year, Isaack's sister Maria Elsevier (1626–after 1680) married the Rotterdam landscape painter Willem Viruly IV (ca. 1636–78), a close relative of

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the wine merchant Hartlief van Cattenburgh, who owned no fewer than ten paintings by Ochtervelt, presumably all pendants, at the time of his death in 1669.[11]

Ochtervelt would also have been acquainted with Viruly, as well as with the painter Pieter de Bloot (1601–58), whose widow he accompanied when she had her will drawn up in 1661.[12] In 1667 Ochtervelt, together with Abraham Westerveld (ca. 1620–92) and Cornelis Saftleven (1607–81), was nominated for the headman of the Guild of Saint Luke, but he lost the election to Saftleven. In that same year he rented a house in the Hoogstraat for a four-year period. He was still in Rotterdam in 1672 when he witnessed the baptism of one of the children of his brother-in-law Dirck Meesters, but moved to Amsterdam shortly thereafter, presumably because the economic decline affecting the market for paintings that had set in earlier in cities such as Delft, Haarlem and Leiden was also now making itself felt in Rotterdam.[13]

Ochtervelt must have hoped to find a healthier market for his art in Amsterdam, but even there the situation was no longer ideal. This notwithstanding, in 1674 he was engaged to portray the regents of the Leper House, and thus seems to have been faring reasonably well. He and his wife rented a house on the Keizersgracht, near the Spiegelstraat, and lived next door to the celebrated landscape painter Willem Schellinks (1623–78).[14] In 1677 Ochtervelt was owed money by a colleague, Lodewijk van Ludick (1627–ca. 1697). He only lived in Amsterdam for one decade. After trading the Keizersgracht for the “Schapemarckt bij de Munt” (Sheepmarket near the Mint) in the beginning of 1681, he died in 1682 and was buried in the Nieuwezijds Kapel on 1 May. His marriage had remained childless, and not long after Ochtervelt’s burial, his widow moved back to Rotterdam, where she died in 1710.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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Endnotes

1. For the list of Rotterdam painters, see Gerard van Spaan, *Beschryvinge der stad Rotterdam en eenige omleggende dorpen*, 3rd ed. (Rotterdam, 1738), 411–15.
2. “Zonder veel doorzichtkunde tot zyn agterwerken te gebruiken, ’t geen een maatkundig oordeel en naauwe opmerking vereist;” “genoegde [zig alleen] dat hy natuurlyk en uitvoerig kleine gezelschappen van Juffertjes en Heeren, of een Vroutje dat zit te naajen, of te speldewerken schilderen konde.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 2: 27.
3. “Men niets by eenig Schryver van ’s Mans oorspronk of kunstvermogen geboekt [vint] … wiens manier en behandeling veel gelykheit naer Metzu heeft, en die mogelyk uit die Schole is voortgekomen … al de vertoningen van klederen en huissieraden geven klaere blyken, dat hy omtrent dien tyt geleeft moet hebben.” Jan van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen* (The Hague, 1751), 2: 488–89.
4. Roland E. Fleischer, “Ludolf de Jongh and the Early Work of Pieter de Hooch,” *Oud Holland* 92 (1978), passim.
5. That Lucas Hendricks, in addition to being a bridgekeeper, was also a cobbler (for a few years) emerges from a deed dated 11 April 1650 in which he is called an “oud-schoenmaker” (former cobbler). In the same document, Trijntje Jans is called the daughter of a bargeman sailing the Purmerend route. See Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary Jacobus Delphius, inv. 383, deed 36/68. A deed dated 20 February 1662 confirms that the Lucas Hendricks and Trijntje Jans mentioned in this document are certainly the parents of the artist. See Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary Jacob Duyfhuysen, inv. 235, deed 14/24; and Alan Chong, “Jacob Ochtervelt’s Rotterdam Patron,” in *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, ed. Amy Golahny, Mia Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (Amsterdam, 2006), 114n20.
6. Pieter Ochtervelt worked for the Delft chamber of the VOC as a “busschieter” (gunner) on the “Schiedam” (*Schiedam*), and died in the East Indies in 1657. His brother Jan, presumably a sailor, seems to have died during the fleet’s return voyage from Batavia to Rotterdam in 1666. And his sister Aechje married a sailor. In 1666 her husband, Olivier Meyersz, was “aengenomen om te varen voor bootsgesel op ‘t schip ‘De Spiegel’ met den vice-admirael Van der Hulst” (was hired as a sailor on board *De Spiegel* under Vice-Admiral Van der Hulst). See Susan Donahue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), 4. The husband of Ochtervelt’s sister Sytge was initially also destined for seafaring. In a document from 1643 he was called a “koksmaat” (galley boy), and in 1646 a “bottelier” (steward). His time at sea, however, seems to have ended in 1653 when he was called an

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"arbeyder aen de weg" (road worker). The only non-seafaring relative was Willem Jans Verwissel, the husband of Henderickje Ochtervelt, who was a "schrijnwerker" (cabinetmaker).

7. Jan Meesters seems initially to have been a merchant in French wines and semitropical fruit, and an associate of his brother-in-law Cornelis de Gelder, a merchant in Nantes. See Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, Notarial Archives, Notary Wagensvelt, inv. 140, deed 342/569, 7 April 1628. His name occurs regularly in the notarial archives as living on the Hoogstraat, and (starting in 1630) as a maker of sails and compasses.
8. He was town councilman and burgomaster until 1692, the year he took a second wife, Margrieta van Yck, whose father was Johan van Yck, councilman between 1658 and 1692 and burgomaster for several terms. See E.A. Engelbrecht, *De Vroedschap van Rotterdam, 1572–1795* (Rotterdam, 1973), 267–68.
9. Barbara Elsevier's parents were Louis Elsevier (1617–40) and Adriana Bosman, a burgomaster's daughter. See E.A. Engelbrecht, *De Vroedschap van Rotterdam, 1572–1795* (Rotterdam, 1973), 136. She was the granddaughter of Isaack Elsevier (1596–1651), the founder of the Leiden publishing house on the Rapenburg and the official printer of the Leiden Academy. Until his move to Rotterdam in 1629, he ran the company with his brother Abraham (1592–1652). Abraham continued running the business, and after his death in 1652 was honored by Leiden University with a special medal for his great contribution to typography. The medal is illustrated in Alphonse Willems, *Les Elzevier: histoire et annales typographiques* (Brussels, 1890), 188.
10. *Portrait of the Elsevier Family*, probably 1664 (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.); Susan Donahue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), 60, no. 19. The earliest known reference to the Elseviers family portrait is in an 1832 auction in Paris (Lugt 12703, lot 36). According to the description, the moment depicted is when "Elsevier" is being honored for his great contribution to typography; the medal hangs from the shoulders of the child at his knee.

    Donahue Kuretsky questioned the correctness of this description. See Susan Donahue Kuretsky, "Two Paintings by Ochtervelt in the Wadsworth Atheneum," *Bulletin of the Wadsworth Atheneum* 5 (1969): 46–49. Van Kretschmar, however, identified the family as being Isaack Elsevier (1627–1684), his wife, Anna Willemsdr van der Mast, and their four children. See Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht* (Leiden, 1990), 5: 188–90. Their eldest son, Abraham (1654–1707), who later was appointed burgomaster, was about ten years old in 1664 (the probable date of the painting), and the youngest child, Catharina, had just been born. The two portraits in the background in that case are of Isaack's parents: Abraham Elsevier, the original receiver of the mark of honor, see note 9, and Catharina van Waesbergen, the daughter of Jan van Waesbergen, printer for the Admiralty of Holland and

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West-Friesland. For the composition of Isaack Elsevier's family in 1664, see E.A. Engelbrecht, *De vroedschap van Rotterdam, 1572–1795* (Rotterdam, 1973), 264.

11. Willem IV Viruly's parents were Willem III Viruly (1605–77) and Aeltge Rijckwaert (d. 1657), a first cousin of Magdalena Rijckwaert, the wife of Hartlief van Cattenburgh. See Alan Chong, "Jacob Ochtervelt's Rotterdam Patron," in *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, ed. Amy Golahny, Mia Mochizuki, and Lisa Vergara (Amsterdam, 2006), 108–9; P. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk, "De schilders Viruly," *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 4 (1894): 180–81.
12. At the time of his marriage in 1655 Ochtervelt was living on the Westerwagenstraat, the street on which various members of the Viruly family owned various properties and continued to live well into the seventeenth century. See P. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk, "De schilders Viruly," *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 4 (1894), passim. For other Rotterdam painters he may have known, see Jan Briels, *Vlaamse schilders en de dageraad van Hollands gouden eeuw, 1585–1630* (Antwerp, 1997), 300.
13. Between 1650 and 1705 the number of inhabitants in Rotterdam grew from 30,000 to 50,000; P. Lourens and J. Lucassen, *Inwonerstaantallen van Nederlandse steden, ca. 1300–1800* (Amsterdam, 1997), 117. The Rotterdam painters' community reached its height in 1660, with sixty-four active painters. By 1674, the probable year of Ochtervelt's departure, this number had dropped to fifty. In 1682, the year of his death, only thirty-two painters were still active in Rotterdam, after which the situation remained stable until the first quarter of the eighteenth century, when it fell yet again. See Piet Bakker, "Crisis? Welke crisis? Enkele kanttekeningen bij het economisch verval van de schilderkunst in Leiden na 1660," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 27 (2011): fig. 2.
14. The "200ste penning" (a municipal tax of one penny on every two hundred) levied in Amsterdam in 1674 shows that Ochtervelt's assets were worth about 1,000 guilders. They must have consisted of securities, for he and his wife were living in a rented house on the Keizersgracht which the owner would sell for 4,100 guilders in 1681. See Susan Donahue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–1682)* (Oxford, 1979), 5; I.H. van Eeghen, "De Kerk het Vredesduifje," *Maandblad Amstelodamum* (1957): 145–49.

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