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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 the Elder (1635–81)” and Cunera van der Cock (1629/30–1700).^[1] Like his younger brother Willem van Mieris (1662–1747), 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 (1641–1711). Frans ultimately abandoned that plan, “because [Lairesse’s] conduct bore no resemblance whatsoever to his exemplary artistic ability,” and decided to train his son himself.^[2]

Van Mieris’s name first appears in an official document in 1684. He witnessed the posting of the banns of his brother Willem and Agneta Chapman (1663–1744), 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, including the De la Courts.^[3] In 1707, for instance, the sale of the collection of Petronella de la Court (1624–1707) included eight works by Van Mieris, among them “A little lady counting money, with a jolly old woman,” which is currently in The Leiden Collection.^[4] A *Portrait of Mr. Pieter de la Court* by Jan van Mieris, not among those works in the sale, had previously been mentioned in her inventory.^[5] This could be a portrait of Petronella’s cousin, Pieter de la Court the Younger (1618–85), or his son, Pieter de la Court van de Voort (1664–1739). The latter, the most important patron of Willem van Mieris, owned five works by Jan.^[6] In his inventory, Pieter noted next to “a young woman feeding a little sparrow [titmouse?]” and a “student with a trick-track table” that Van Mieris had “painted [them] here for me.”^[7]

Pieter’s annotation implies that Van Mieris painted these two works before 1688, for in that year he left Leiden and traveled to Italy via Germany. In a letter to his mother from Venice on 14 January 1689,^[8] Van Mieris wrote that he had already painted some works for “the most eminent citizens of Venice, yet wished that they were as cordial and generous as they are polite.”^[9] The letter shows that he was lonely and missed his daily visits to his brother-in-law, “swager van der Eijck” in Leiden. This “swager” has to be Mathijs van der Eijck, who was married to Van Mieris’s sister Christina (1657–85), and who made a living as an innkeeper at the Voorste Doelen.^[10] Van Mieris’s mother was charged with conveying her son’s greetings to Van der Eijck, as well as to “Mr. Heemskerck.”^[11] Van Mieris 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.”^[12] Van Mieris was introduced to the grand duke’s court through friends of his father and, as noted by the biographer Johan van Gool (1685–1763), 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.”^[13] When the grand duke realized that Van Mieris would not adopt his 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 in Rome, he had met the Leiden cloth manufacturer Jan Poelaert (1653–1701), brother-in-law of Pieter de la Court van der Voort, to whom he sold a



“Samaritan woman at the well.” According to Allard de la Court (1688–1755), a later owner of the painting, it was “the last picture that Van Mieris painted.”^[14]

- Piet Bakker, 2017; revised in 2020

Endnotes

1. “Outste Zoon van de alomberoemden Frans van Mieris.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlantsche Kunstschilders en Schilderessen: Waer in de Levens- en kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene Schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander Schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worden* (The Hague, 1751), 2: 442.
2. “Zyn natuurlyke kunstdrift zich meest uitgestrekt [zou] hebben tot het schilderen van levensgrootte voorwerpen”; “om dat deszelfs gedrag met zyn voorbeeldig kunstvermogen gansch geene overeenkomst had.” Johan van Gool, *De nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlantsche Kunstschilders en Schilderessen: Waer in de Levens- en Kunstbedryven der tans levende en reets overleedene Schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander Schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worden* (The Hague, 1751), 2: 443.
3. See also the biographies of Frans van Mieris and Willem van Mieris in this catalogue.
4. “Een geldtellend Juffertje, met een vrolyk besje.” See the entry *Courtesan Counting Money* in this catalogue. The other works by Jan van Mieris in this sale were: “Een Binnenhuys met verscheyde beelden” (An interior with various figures), no. 4; “Den Roomse Papirius, en [zijn] moeder” (The Roman Papirius, and [his] mother), no. 17; “Jan Mieres (zyn Potrait) door hem braaf geschildert” (Jan van Mieris [his portrait] well painted by himself), no. 79; “Een Liefhebber met een Romer in de hand” (An enthusiast holding a roemer), no. 80; “Ulisses en Circe” (Ulysses and Circe), no. 96. The latter work probably refers to *Odysseus and Circe*, Leiden (Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden). See Peter Hecht, ed., *De Hollandse fijnschilders: Van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1989), 89; “Een Roomse Historie” (A Roman history scene), no. 97; “Beelden in een Landschap” (Figures in a landscape), no. 98. Sale Petronella de la Court, Amsterdam, 19 October 1707, Lugt 207.
5. “Het pourtrait van den Hr. Pieter de la Court.” Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Inventory of Petronella de la Court Notarial Archives, Notary G. Ypelaer, inv. 5338, fol. 553–642, 16 August 1707. Two other works by him are also listed in this inventory: “Een synigh huyshouden” (A frugal household), probably no. 4, note 4, and “Een Circe en Ulisses” (Circe and Ulysses), no. 96, note 4. The latter description probably refers to the work *Ulisses en Circe*, which was in the sale of Petronella de la Court’s collection the same year (see note 4).
6. Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Nieuwenhuizen, eds., *Leids fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat., Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 42, 54n246 refers to the inventory of Pieter de la Court van de Voort. Regionaal Archief Leiden, Archive de la Court, inv. 132, fol. 171.
7. “Een Juffertje Eten gevende aan een mosje”; “Student met verkeersbort”; “voor mij hier



geschildert.” Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Nieuwenhuizen, eds., *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 54n246.

8. According to Jan van Mieris, he sent this letter along with the weekly post of “Heer Oortmans” (Mr. Oortmans) to the Republic. The name Oortmans suggests he was staying in Venice with a relative of Adam Oortmans (ca. 1624–84), the late husband of Jan’s patron Petronella de la Court. Adam Oortmans died in 1684 in Amsterdam. For a transcription and translation of this letter see Appendix.
9. “Voor de voornaemste van Venetia, dogh wenste weld at sy so cordiael en mild waren als sy doorgaans beleeft syn.” Letter from Jan van Mieris to Cunera van der Cock, 14 January 1689. See Appendix.
10. Mathijs van der Eijck married in 1638 in Leiden to Christina van Mieris, the eldest daughter of Frans van Mieris and Cunera van der Cock. They were the parents of Abraham van der Eijck (1684–1727), who would become a painter, just like his uncles Jan and Willem and grandfather Frans. See also Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) the Elder* (Doornspijk, 1981), 1: 233, who wrongly assumes that Abraham passed away shortly after his birth. Abraham was undoubtedly trained as a painter by his uncle Willem van Mieris, who in 1697 was named his guardian in the testament of Abraham’s parents. See Regionaal Archief Leiden, Notarial Archive, Notary Isaac van Cingelshouck, inv. 1564, deed 27, 20 June 1697.
11. This is most likely Willem Jacobsz van Heemskerck (1613–92), a cloth merchant and famous glass engraver, whose portrait Jan van Mieris painted prior to his trip to Italy (*Portrait of Willem van Heemskerck*, 1685, Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden). Willem Jacobsz van Heemskerck’s son Jacob van Heemskerck (1643–64) was portrayed by Jan’s father in 1663. See Rudolf E.O. Ekkart, “Frans van Mieris en het portret van Jacob van Heemskerck,” *Leids Jaarboekje* 77 (1985): 47–51. On the relationship between the Van Mieris and Van Heemskerck families, see also the biography of Frans van Mieris in this catalogue, especially note 3.
12. “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. See Appendix.
13. “Had zyn geweten zich kunnen voegen naer den Godtsdienst van het Hof; maer pal en onwrikbaer staende op de grontslagen van zyn geloof, en geen en 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: Waer in de Levens- en Kunstbedryven der tans levende en*

reets overleedene Schilders, die van Houbraken, noch eenig ander Schryver, zyn aengeteekend, verhaelt worden (The Hague, 1751), 2: 444.

14. "Samaritaansch vrouwtje aan de put"; "'t laatste stuk door hem geschildert." Eric Jan Sluijter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Niewenhuizen, eds., *Leidse fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge, 1630–1760* (Exh. cat. Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal) (Zwolle, 1988), 42; Theodoor Hermann Lunsingh Scheurleer, Cornelia Willemijn Fock, and A.J. van Dissel, eds., *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht* (Leiden, 1987), 2: 447, no. 27.

Appendix

Transcription and translation of a letter from Jan van Mieris to Cunera van der Cock, 14 January 1689. Abraham Bredius transcribed the letter when it was in the Kneppelhout Collection. This collection, including other papers from the Van Mieris family, was auctioned in March 1920 (the Kerling sale). The original letter's present whereabouts are unknown. Bredius's transcription is located at the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), The Hague, Abraham Bredius Archive, folder: family Van Mieris. Katy Kist and Jennifer Kilian provided the translation below.

Waerde Moeder! Saluijt

Hebbende gelegentheijt gevonden om te schrijven dewijl Heer Oortmans alle weken brieven op Holland send, so dient desen om UE onsen stand te doen verstaen sijnde Gode sij danck nog gesont, en hebbe gelegentheijd gevonden om voor de voornaamste van Venetia wat te schilderen, dogh wenste wel dat sij so cordiaal en mild waren als sij doorgaans beleeft sijn, soude dan misschien in eenige tijd UE een troostelijker brief mogen toesenden, niet tegenstaende doe ik mijn devoor sodanig dat wij gantsche weken op onse kamer blijven zitten sonder uytgaan, het welk in't begin een grote verandering gaf, dewijl ik t'huys sijnde, dagelijks swager van der Eijck plag te bezoeken waeraen wij altemet nog dickwils denken, hebbe ook nog niet een van de stukjes die ik mede nam verkogt, hoewel sij yder hier wel aenstaan, maer het geldt nog meer, beware deselve nu om te Fiorenza te voeren of daer beter gelegentheyd te vinden was, maer het schijnt, dat wij mede van d'ongeluckige sijn, dewijl men hier spreekt dat den Hertog van Toskanen de regering aen sijn Soon wil overgeven, en so Devoot geworden is, dat hij sigh weynig met wereltsche saken meer bekommert, dog men sal t' ondersoeken, wenschende onsen vorderen reijs met so goeden gesontheyd en waer t'mogelijk, met meer geluk te doen. De Goede Godt wil geven dat wij in vrolijkheid en goeden stant onsen vrienden weder sien, hiermede UE alle tesamen een geluksalig Nieuwe jaer wenschende, blijve waere Moeder

UE toegenegen soon

Johannis van Mieris



Venetia den 14ste Januarius 1689

[In margin:]

Werd ook de Groetenis gedaen aen susters [,] broeder en swager met sijn huysvrouw [,] Mons. van der Eijck en huijsvrouw, Mr. Heemskerck, Meutje [=tante] en familie en alle welke gij weet vriende te sijn die wegens de weijnige plaets niet genoemt konden sijn.

Translation of the letter from Jan van Mieris to Cunera van der Cock, 14 January 1689.

Dear Mother! Greetings

I have occasion to write you because Lord Oortmans [Adam Oortmans the Younger] sends letters to Holland every week, so this one serves to apprise you of our circumstances, which, thank God, still find us in good health. I had the opportunity to do some painting for the most eminent citizens of Venice; yet I wish that they were as cordial and generous as they are usually polite, for then perhaps in time I might send you a more cheerful missive. This notwithstanding I do my best such that we spend entire weeks in our room without going out; in the beginning this was a considerable change because while at home I tried to visit my brother-in-law Van der Eijck daily, which I think about quite a lot. While we have yet to sell any of the pieces that I brought along with me, everyone here likes them, although perhaps it would be more useful to take them to Florence and see whether better opportunities can be found there. But 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, yet I will look into this in the desire to continue our trip in good health and where possible find better fortune. May the good Lord grant that we will see our friends again in good cheer and in fine fettle. With this, wishing you and everyone a happy New Year, I remain, my dear mother,

Your devoted son,

Johannis van Mieris

Venice, the 14th of January 1689

[In margin:]

Please convey my greeting to my sisters [,] brother and brother-in-law and his wife [,] Mr. van der Eijck and his wife, Mr. Heemskerck, Meutje [=auntie] and family and everyone you know to be friends who cannot be mentioned here because of the limited space.

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