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Quiringh van Brekelenkam

(Zwammerdam? 1622 – ca. 1669 Leiden)

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Quiringh Gerritsz van Brekelenkam was born in 1622. His parents were Gerrit Adriaens de Plutter and Magdalena Crijnen, both of whom were probably Catholic. His place of birth may have been Zwammerdam, a village near Alphen aan de Rijn, where his father worked as a tailor.[1] The painter thus grew up in an environment that most likely inspired him to paint the kinds of scenes on which he had a veritable patent and on which his present fame rests: the shops of tailors and cobblers, around twenty-five variants of which he produced from 1653 to 1664.[2] Brekelenkam may have received his artistic education in Leiden. According to an anonymous eighteenth-century biographer, he was “een discipel van Dou” (a pupil of [Gerrit] Dou), however since the similarity with the latter’s work is only superficial, an apprenticeship with Dou (1613–75) is now seriously doubted.[3] Nonetheless, a previously overlooked signature on a document does point to a close connection with that Leiden master. When Dou accompanied his parents to draw up their will before a notary on 16 February 1646, they were joined by Van Brekelenkam, who signed the document: “Quiringh Gerritsz van Breeckelenkam, schilder” (Quiringh Gerritsz van Brekelenkam, painter).[4]

Van Brekelenkam entered the newly founded Guild of Saint Luke in February 1648, the year from which his earliest dated painting also stems.[5] Moreover, in April 1648 Van Brekelenkam and Maria Jansdr Charle (d. 1655) were married in the Catholic church of Rijnsaterwoude.[6] Quiringh and Maria had six children, all of whom were baptized in the clandestine Catholic church in the Bakkersteeg. The baptism of Van Brekelenkam’s first child, Magdalena, on 9 April 1649, was witnessed by Johannes van Oudenrogge (1621/22–53), another Catholic painter.[7] Van Oudenrogge had married Van Brekelenkam’s sister Aeltje (ca. 1622–67) in Leiden one month earlier. In 1651 the couple moved to Haarlem, where Aeltje ran a paint supply shop after Van Oudenrogge died in 1653. Death also visited the house of Quiringh van Brekelenkam, who buried Maria in the Pieterskerk in Leiden in August of 1655 shortly after the baptism of their sixth child.

A mere year later, on 24 September 1656, Van Brekelenkam took a second wife, Elisabeth de Beaumont, widow of Willem Simons Romeijn and probably the daughter of a cobbler.[8] From 1657 to 1668 the couple had at least three children who, like their half-brothers and sisters before them, were all baptized as Catholics in the clandestine church in the Bakkersteeg.[9] According to some of his biographers, around 1656 Van Brekelenkam acquired a license from the city council to sell beer and brandy. Angelika Lasius, however, offers a plausible explanation that this request is based on a misunderstanding and, moreover, no document attesting to a liquor license has been found.[10] Two court cases in 1660 concerning overdue debts suggest that the artist had financial problems, however the amounts are not high.[11] Still, he does not seem to have been prospering. According to the above-mentioned, anonymous eighteenth-century biographer who was certain that Dou had been Van Brekelenkam’s teacher, “[Van Brekelenkam] had a difficult situation at home with children and a most austere life, leading him to produce many bad paintings, which he simply dashed off to earn some money. What is unfortunate about various painters from the school of Dou is that in their time there were so many highly talented artists comparable to their master [Dou], Frans van Mieris and others, that they were disregarded.”[12] However, judging from the extant seventeenth-century Leiden estate inventories, the contrary seems to have been the case: no fewer than fifty-five paintings by Van Brekelenkam are listed in twenty documents. It is noteworthy that two individuals even owned a remarkable number of works by him: the Catholic merchant Hendrick Bugge van Ring (d. 1667) had eighteen paintings and the innkeeper Pieter van

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Grient certainly had eleven, possibly even as numerous as sixteen works.[13]

The exact date of Van Brekelenkam's death is unknown. He paid his contribution to the Guild of Saint Luke for the last time in 1667. His youngest child was baptized one year later, on 29 May 1668, and a few dated paintings by him are known from that same year. No subsequent traces of the artist have been found, and he is thought to have died shortly after 1668.

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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Endnotes

1. No birth certificate has been preserved. The year of birth is derived from a list of names related to the collection of the Poll Tax in Zwammerdam in 1622, in which Gerrit Adriaensz stated that he had three daughters, namely Aeltje, Hillegont, and Grietje. Thus, Quiringh must have been born in 1622 or later. For a reconstruction of the family and the changing of the name “De Plutter” into “Brekelenkam,” see Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk, 1992), 7. The fact that Brekelenkam’s father was a tailor has never before been noted. Gerrit Adriaens, however, is called a “kleermaker” (tailor) in two successive documents of 10 February 1620. See Streekarchief Rijnlands Midden, Protocollen Zwammerdam 1618–22, inv. 17, fol. 69v, p. 70.
2. This kind of imagery was unprecedented and, moreover, found virtually no following. 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), 87.
3. Van Brekelenkam, together with Jan van Staveren (1613/14–69), Abraham de Pape (ca. 1620–66), and others, ranks among the Leiden painters who are not mentioned in 17th- and 18th-century literary sources. His name first appears in an anonymous late 18th-century manuscript. See the biography of Jan Adriaensz van Staveren in this catalogue, in which he is called “een discipel van Douw” (“a pupil of Dou”). Regionaal Archief Leiden, Bibliotheek 254 (portefeuille 41a); also in Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk, 1992), 10–11. Sluijter, however, doubts that Brekelenkam studied under Dou because his later style is too independent for this to have been the case. Sluijter believes that the similarities with Dou’s work can be attributed solely to “bepaalde stilistische en iconografische karakteristieken die onder de Leidse schilders van hun generatie algemeen waren” (“certain stylistic and iconographical characteristics that were shared by the Leiden painters of their generation”). He does not suggest an alternative teacher (see also note 6). For the question of Brekelenkam’s teacher, see Thomas Bodkin, “Quiringh Brekelenkam’s Master,” *The Burlington Magazine* 44 (1924): 26–41; and Angelika Lasius, “Quiringh van Brekelenkam” (PhD diss., University of Göttingen, 1987), 82–97.
4. Regionaal Archief Leiden, Notarial Archives, Notary J. J. Verwey, inv. 114, 16 February 1646 (the documents are unnumbered and not ordered chronologically). This is the earliest document in which Brekelenkam’s name appears. The will of Dou’s parents, Douwe Jansz van Arentsvelt (ca. 1584–1656) and Marritge Jansdr van Rosenburg (ca. 1585–1651), is recorded in Bredius’s notes, but was not subject to further investigation.
5. *Woman Combing a Child’s Hair*, 1648 (Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden); Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk, 1992), 116–17, no. 129.

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6. The numerous variations for the spelling of the name Carle (Charle, Sjerlée, etc.) made it impossible to trace Maria's parents. Maria's parents probably emigrated from the southern Netherlands and had found employment in Leiden's cloth industry. Many people with a variant of her name came from places in the southern Netherlands (such as Belle or Poperinge) that had a flourishing cloth industry prior to 1585.
7. On Van Oudenrogge, see Neeltje Köhler et al., *Painting in Haarlem 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum* (Ghent, 2006), 263–64. Johannes van Oudenrogge, who moved to Haarlem shortly before he married, trained in Leiden under his uncle Adriaen Jansz van Witveld (ca. 1581–1638). He was probably also a Catholic, since he wed before the aldermen. Because of the family relationship, the shared faith, and similar artistic specialty—workshop interiors—the possibility that Oudenrogge and Brekelenkam also had the same teacher and that Brekelenkam thus (partly) studied under Van Witveld should be considered. For the time being, however, there is no evidence for this hypothesis, in part because no work by Van Witveld has come down to us (see also note 4).
8. The marriage certificate of Quiringh van Brekelenkam and Elisabeth de Beaumont calls Elisabeth the widow of Willem Simons van Noortwyck. In the certificate of 1643 relating to Elisabeth's marriage to Willem, however, is listed a "Willem Symons Romeijn" from Noordwijk. In this document Elisabeth van Beaumont is called "Elisabeth Garbrants" and her mother "Annetje Thomas." The Leiden marriage registers list only one "Garbrant" who married an "Annetje Thomas," namely Garbrant Auckes of Dokkum, a cobbler. He married the Danish Annetje Thomas in Leiden in 1612. While they might be Elisabeth van Beaumont's parents, this is not certain, because in various documents Elisabeth is mentioned with the patronymic "Willems." No "Willem van Beaumont" is found in the Leiden death, marriage, or baptism registers.
9. From 1657 to 1665 there is no mention of a child. During this time a son, Willem van Brekelenkam, was probably born. He was a cobbler, mentioned in a few notarial documents. See, for example, Regionaal Archief Leiden, Notarial Archives, Notary D. de Fries, inv. 1230, docs. 72 and 103 (1679). In another document he is called the "neef" (nephew/cousin) of Albert Eysing, the husband of Aeltje van Brekelenkam, Quiringh's sister. However, since Quiringh did not have a brother, Willem must have been his son.
10. Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk, 1992), 9.
11. Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk, 1992), n7.
12. "Hadde [Van Brekelenkam] een swaar huijshouden met kinderen en meest sober teeren, 'tgeen oorzaak is geweest dat veele slegte stukjes van hem inde wereld zijn gekomen, die hij maar schielijk afgeroffeld heeft om maar geld in handen te krijgen. Het ongeluk van verscheide Schilders uit 't School van Douw ist geweest, dat er in hunne tijd zo veele grote bazen in de kunst als hun meester [Dou], Frans van Mieris en anderen in wezen waren, en er dus niet veel om hen gedagt wierdt." Angelika Lasius, *Quiringh van Brekelenkam* (Doornspijk,

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1992), 11.

13. Inventory of Pieter de Grient, innkeeper, and Catharina Verhaven (Regionaal Archief Leiden, Weeskamer, WK 1391d, 13 December 1656) and inventory of Henric Bugge van Ring and Aeltgen Henricxdr van Swieten (Regionaal Archief Leiden, Notarial Archives, Not. L. van Swieten, 1005 [deed 10], 30 March 1667).

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