

In conclusion

The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos is thus a reconstruction of the memorial tablet which had been painted in the years around 1540. It was commissioned in or shortly before 1624 by *Meester* Adriaen Ploos, who then used it as evidence of his noble lineage. Although the 17th-century copy and the statement signed by the three lawyers in 1630 both reflect the overall appearance of the original memorial tablet, nothing more is known about it. For example, according to the description, the coats of arms were not in the picture itself, but on the frame. Similarly, the text may have been on the predella (the text speaks of the 'foot' of the painting). Neither is anything known about the central scene with the crucifixion. Was Hendrick ter Brugghen's original (now in New York) also commissioned by *Meester* Adriaen Ploos, and did he commission an anonymous painter to incorporate the same composition in the reconstruction? If so, did Ter Brugghen base his work on the original memorial tablet, and might this explain the old-fashioned nature of the composition?

A 17th-century watercolour (see display cabinet) appears to show the same memorial tablet. Compared to the copy in oils, however, this features some important differences. The watercolour is horizontal in format, and two kneeling male figures have been added. The only parts of the latter to have been painted in are the faces, the hands and the helmets, which lie against the foot of the cross. This watercolour is part of a book dated 1641 that contains copies of all the important notarial deeds regarding the recognition of the consanguinity of the Ploos and Van Amstel van Mijnden families. The book was compiled by Gerard, the eldest son of Adriaen, who sought admission to Utrecht's nobility and knighthood. Perhaps the watercolour is the design for a new memorial tablet, in which Gerard wished himself and his father to be depicted?

A painting from approximately 1800 shows the patrons once more, this time without the crucifixion. This, too, must have been commissioned by a member of the family. The fact that, for some centuries, the family had been interested in its descent is apparent from the surviving series of document books into which all items of evidence had again been copied. There are books from 1641 and 1660 (on view in the display cabinet), and two from 1738. The fifth and last (also in the display cabinet) dates from 1864, the year in which the noble house of Ploos is reckoned by Royal Decree to have belonged to the aristocracy of this realm, whether or not by relation to the Lords of Amstel.

Stichting Victor IV: 'The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos' after Hendrick ter Brugghen, 1624?

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This leaflet is presented to you by the Stichting Victor Heiloo

Commissioned by Adriaen Gerritsz. Ploos (1585-1639)

The painting by Willem Cornelisz. Duyster shows a company of elegant merry-makers. At left, a group of musicians play lute, cello and flute; at centre there are dancers. In the right foreground sit a husband and wife, long known to be Adriaen Ploos and Agnes van Bijler. The work may commemorate the wedding party of his brother Johan Ploos to Catharina van Westreenen in 1624, although it may also show a different occasion, one at which Adriaen, Agnes and their eldest son Gerard were witnesses.

Adriaen was the third child of Gerrit Willemsz. Ploos and Catharina van Leeuwen. Whereas his father was a brewer with a political career in Utrecht, Adriaen was in national politics. After studying philosophy and law at the University of Leiden, he was appointed advocate at the Provincial Lawcourts in Utrecht. A long succession of influential positions and political appointments followed, including his entry in 1610 to the First Estate of the States of Utrecht. In 1618 he was delegated to the States General by the States of Utrecht. The same period saw the start of the trial for treason – in essence a politically motivated show trial – of the statesman Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. Adriaen Ploos was one of the 24 who eventually pronounced the death sentence. In his satire of the trial, Cornelis Saftleven shows Van Oldenbarnevelt on a bench surrounded by his judges, each of whom he has given the face of a different animal. Several events reflect the high standing of Adriaen Ploos, among them his elevation to the French nobility (1621) and his induction as a Knight in the Order of St Michael (1629). A confidant of Prins Maurits and Prins Frederik Hendrik, he died in 1639 and was buried in the Dom in Utrecht.

Numerous documents show that, from the early 1620s, Adriaen Ploos assiduously collected information that would support his assertion of noble ancestry – evidence of blood ties between his family and that of Van Amstel van Mijnden. In 1634 he finally succeeded: Stadtholder Prins Frederik Hendrik recognised him as an aristocrat, and thereby entitled to hunting rights. On 22 March 1636, Frederik Hendrik formally recognised Ploos' consanguinity with the line of Van Amstel van Mijnden, from which time he and his family bore the name of Ploos van Amstel. Thus, when Ploos commissioned the copy of the 16th-century memorial tablet bearing the coat of arms of Van Amstel van Mijnden, it was in fact one of the means whereby he intended to furnish proof of his nobility. The same goes for the statement signed by the three lawyers in 1630 in which they testified to the existence of the memorial tablet and of the texts and coats of arms it bore (see display cabinet).

In search of a solution

The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos shows the patron of the painting together with his wife and a number of their children. Their identities and the dates of their deaths are given on the banderole. To the left of the cross kneel Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos, who died on 22 July 1540, and his son Gerrit Adriaensz. Ploos, who predeceased him on 31 December 1539. On the right we see Nelle (Cornelia) van Woerden van Vliet, the wife of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos, who died on 14 October 1515, and the couple's three daughters, who the text does not name, but whom genealogical research has identified as Anna, Alith and Wilhelmina. On either side of the banderole are the family coats of arms: Van Amstel van Mijnden (left) and Van Woerden van Vliet (right).

The text also shows that the painting was a memorial tablet painted to commemorate the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos, who during his lifetime was bailiff of Loosdrecht. The date of death suggests that the work was commissioned in, or shortly after, 1540. As it cannot possibly have been painted before 1620 – Ter Brugghen's original composition of the crucifixion is dated 162[.] – it must thus be a copy after an older original, which documents suggest may have hung near the family grave in the church at Nieuw-Loosdrecht until the wave of iconoclasm in 1566.

From one of these documents it transpires that Aernout van Buchell (1565-1641), a lawyer from Utrecht, recalled the original memorial tablet. Together with J.A. van Winssen and J. van Steenre, two of his colleagues, he declares in a sealed statement dated 7 August 1630 (on show in the display cabinet) to have seen 'a certain old Memorial tablet' showing a crucifixion with St Mary and St John and six kneeling figures. This document describes and illustrates the family coats of arms shown 'at the bottom of the frame'; it also states the full text 'on the foot of the aforementioned memorial tablet'. This statement was drawn up at the request of another lawyer, *Meester* Adriaen Ploos, the great-grandson of the Gerrit Adriaensz. Ploos depicted in the painting. According to a memorandum dated 19 February 1624, Adriaen Ploos also showed Van Buchell the copy of the old memorial tablet. It is clear that this Adriaen Ploos is a crucial figure in solving our conundrum, as he is the key to why and for whom *The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos* was painted.

Stichting Victor IV: 'The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos' after Hendrick ter Brugghen, 1624?

Stichting Victor IV is the fourth in a series of six minor biannual exhibitions featuring one or more paintings from the collection of old masters at the Centraal Museum Utrecht. The series is occasioned by a generous subsidy provided by Stichting Victor Heiloo for restoration and technical research. A total of 14 paintings are being restored and analysed, each of them part of the Museum's core collection. Some were painted by the group of Jan van Scorel and his contemporaries. Others are by Hendrick ter Brugghen and the other Utrecht Caravaggists, or are otherwise attributed to them.

Each exhibition focuses on a particular art-historical question, and gives visitors insight into the research methods that were used when attempting to resolve it. Upon its completion in 2007, the restoration and research work will be recorded in two volumes published in the Centraal Museum's Agnietenreeks series.

The central work in Stichting Victor IV is *The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos* after Hendrick ter Brugghen. Restoration has made it possible to show the work to the public for the first time since it was acquired in 1987. The CMU wishes to express its deep gratitude to Stichting Victor Heiloo for its role in bringing about this unique project. We would also like to thank the following for the support they have provided to this exhibition: *Jonkheer* A.C. van Haften; N. Plomp (Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague), *Jonkheer* J.K. Ploos van Amstel, Laurent Sozzani, The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; and Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

How the Centraal Museum acquired a copy after Hendrick ter Brugghen

In the United States, the Utrecht masters of the early 17th century have been studied and collected since the Second World War. In the Netherlands, only one public collection has actively sought to acquire the work of Utrecht painters: the Centraal Museum, which has been doing so ever since its foundation in 1921. Thus, when a painting of a crucifixion by Hendrick ter Brugghen, the most important Utrecht caravaggist, appeared on the London art market in 1956, it was hardly surprising that it was snapped up by an American museum. At that time the collection of the Centraal Museum already contained four undisputed masterpieces by Hendrick ter Brugghen.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York publicised its new acquisition on the front cover of its Bulletin, which also contained an article explaining its significance. This contained a reference to a smaller but very similar painting that had just appeared on the Dutch art market. One important difference between the two works was an addition to the central composition of the second: a number of patrons dressed in early-16th-century costume. The banderole and coats of arms identified the kneeling patron, his wife, son and three daughters as Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos and family.

At that time, the painting of the crucifixion and patrons was in the possession of F. Parry, an art dealer from The Hague, who, between January and June 1957, showed it to a great number of experts, perhaps as a result of the sale of the original, which had fetched £ 15,000 guilders at the Sotheby's auction in November 1956. Parry's visitors included not only Benedict Nicolson, the great Ter Brugghen connoisseur and monographer, but also Dr. M. Elisabeth Houtzager, the then director of the Centraal Museum. In a letter thanking him for the opportunity to view the work, Houtzager expressed her appreciation for the priority the Museum would receive if it were ever sold. It remained in Parry's possession, however, and it was only upon the closure of his business several years after his death that the Museum was able to acquire it when it was auctioned for 13,000 guilders at Christie's in Amsterdam.

A conundrum

The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos is a strange work. An unknown painter copied the central scene from Hendrick ter Brugghen's *Crucifixion with St Mary and St John*, which is dated 162[.], and then added patrons who had been alive in the early 16th century. But why? And for whom? For by the time this work was commissioned, the people it depicted were long dead. Furthermore, as it combined figures in 16th-century dress with the 17th-century style of the Utrecht caravaggists, its composition was hardly harmonious.

Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629) studied under Abraham Bloemaert. Like many of his fellow painters from Utrecht, he then travelled to Italy. Here he fell under the spell of the work of Caravaggio (1571-1610), the great master who in the years round 1590 had made a revolutionary break with the dominant style, Mannerism, replacing its idealism with a realism that many experienced as shocking. Although seen by some as an over-extreme naturalism, one of the most important innovations of Caravaggio's work was its faithful reproduction of nature and its sharp contrasts between light and dark surfaces (*chiaroscuro*).

Nothing is known about Ter Brugghen's Italian travels, and no works remain from the early years he spent in Utrecht after his return. His known oeuvre was painted between 1619 and the year of his death, 1629. Although his paintings reflect a personal interpretation of his great exemplar, Caravaggio's influence is unmistakeable throughout. In the *Crucifixion with St Mary and St John*, the treatment given to the body of the suffering Christ is naturalistic, certainly compared to that of the 16th-century examples shown here. However, the overall composition is so old-fashioned that the painting bears a greater resemblance to a 16th-century altarpiece than to a work from the second decade of the 17th century.

Nonetheless, it is due precisely to its archaic nature that the central scene in *The crucifixion with members of the family of Adriaen Willemsz. Ploos* seems so appropriate to the patrons it depicts. According to Willem Vogelsang (1875-1954), Professor of Art History at Utrecht University (in which capacity he acted as advisor to the Centraal Museum), the style of the figures evokes compositions by the Utrecht painter Jan van Scorel (1495-1562).