Wouwerman on Delftware

• GERDIEN WUESTMAN •

'Of little importance.' It was with these words that Cornelis Apostool, director of the Rijksmuseum, dismissed the group of objects sent from the museum in Amsterdam to the royal collection of rarities, the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in The Hague, in 1825.[1] One of the objects in this consignment was a huge delftware plaque, decorated with a scene of an army encampment (fig. 1).[2] In 1875 the work was returned to Amsterdam and now, almost two centuries after Apostool's lukewarm assessment, it has pride of place in the gallery. At more than a metre wide it is one of the largest surviving examples of a faience panel. Producing a plaque this big without the painting running or smudging is an amazing technical feat. Neither the maker nor the provenance is known, and the earliest record of the piece that has been found is the document of 1825, in which this plaque and another almost as large were described as '2 Earthenware Paintings'.[3]

Detail of fig 1.

Fig. 1
ANONYMOUS,
Army Camp.
Plaque, c. 1660-75,
63.5 x 101 cm.
Amsterdam
Rijksmuseum
(inv. no. BK-NM-476).

The plaque has repeatedly been associated in the literature with the work of the Haarlem horse painter Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668).[4] Army camps like this, where soldiers

Fig. 2
JOHANNES VISSCHER AFTER PHILIPS WOUWERMAN, *Horsemen by a Sutler's Tent.* Etching and engraving, 34.5 x 39.2 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet (first sheet of a series of four, inv. no. RP-OB-62.014).

Fig. 3
JOHANNES VISSCHER AFTER PHILIPS WOUWERMAN, *Three Horsemen by a Sutler's Tent.* Etching and engraving, 35,8 x 41,7 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet (second sheet of a series of four, inv. no. RP-OB-62.016).

relax outside a tent selling provisions – a sutler's tent – are, after all, one of the artist's trademarks.[5] The diagonal composition of the image and figures like the trumpeter on horseback, the riders raising their tankards and the children and animals running about between the tents are typical of Wouwerman's paintings in this genre.[6] Until now, however, the example on which this luxuriously appointed encampment was based has not been identified.

The unknown delftware decorator appears to have created a new composition with the aid of the four-part set of prints of army camps by Johannes Visscher after Philips Wouwerman (figs. 2-5).[7] These etchings, made in the first half of the 1660s, are considered to be the most attractive prints after Wouwerman.[8] The four paintings on which this series was based each depict a company by a sutler's tent. One of them, the original of the last print in Visscher's series, is now in the Rijksmuseum collection.[9] The model for the scene on the plaque was not identified sooner because the faience painter took elements from different prints and merged them into a new composition.

At first sight the army camp appears to correspond most closely with the fourth print in Visscher's set, in which a mounted trumpeter takes centre stage (fig. 5). This horseman can also be found on the plaque, but there he is positioned further to the left. The couple on horseback seen from behind and the rider seen from the front by the entrance to the left-hand tent, who are on the trumpeter's left in the print, are to the right of him in the faience version. Among the other motifs derived from this print are the two tents, with three men beside a barrel lying on its side in the one on the left, the man scratching his armpit and the woman sitting in the centre foreground, the standing woman with the child behind them and the dog lying

beside them. Most of these figures are not in the same place as in the print.

The fact that the faience decorator chose a support significantly larger than the print tells us that his ambition extended beyond painting a variation on a given original. He enlarged the composition with the aid of two other sheets in Visscher's set. From the second print he took the figure group of the two horsemen in the centre, the woman with the tankard and the soldier at the entrance to the left-hand tent, the small boy on the far left, and the man with the mule to the right of the tree (fig. 3). The dog sniffing the ground in the centre, which is behind the dark horse in the print, is now in the foreground. The artist also found a number of elements in the third print. From this he took the group of soldiers playing instruments and watching the couple dancing, who have an unobtrusive place in the background in the print but have been moved to quite a prominent position in the left foreground on the faience panel (fig. 4). And lastly, the figure of the rider seen from behind with a tankard in his left hand also comes from this print. This plaque thus combines elements from three prints. The only print in Visscher's series that was not used is the first, probably because it is the only one of the four in which the tent is on the right, so that most of the figures are turning the wrong way for the faience painter's purposes (fig. 2).

In a number of cases the faience painter made minor alterations to the poses of the figures. The rider seen from the front outside the right-hand tent, for instance, does not have his arm raised as he does in the print. The most striking change, though, is in the horseman in the centre. In Visscher's print he is shown in profile, whereas here he looks out at the viewer; his hat and his pose have also been modified. Although the elements from the different prints have been put together skilfully and are in proportion to one

Fig. 4
JOHANNES VISSCHER AFTER PHILIPS WOUWERMAN, *Horse at a Trough in an Army Camp.* Etching and engraving, 35.8 x 39.3 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet (third sheet of a series of four, inv. no. RP-OB-62.018).

Fig. 5
JOHANNES VISSCHER AFTER PHILIPS WOUWERMAN, *Army Camp with a Trumpeter.* Etching and engraving, 34.5 x 39.2 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet (fourth sheet of a series of four, inv. no. RP-OB-62.019).

Fig. 6
ATTRIBUTED TO PIETER WOUWERMAN, *Frederick Henry Watching the Departure of Troops from a City, Possibly the Surrender of Maastricht, 22 August 1632*, after c. 1660. Canvas, 138 x 201 cm. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (inv. no. SK-A-1794).

another, the composition appears a little unbalanced here and there. The interaction between the figures, which seems logical in Wouwerman, has in some cases been lost. The figure of the trumpeter, for instance, looks rather odd now that he is sounding his instrument in the direction of an open tent.

In contrast to the set of prints after Wouwerman, the landscape setting plays an important role in the composition created on the plaque. The faience painter located the camp in an extraordinarily detailed rolling landscape with trees and plants. He may also have used print examples for this. The two trees on the right, each with a distinct character, create a frame for a vista. The man and the mule from Visscher's second print walk behind the foremost tree. The landscape is enlivened by a few small figures and scattered houses. The attention devoted to the trees and the vegetation in the foreground and the phenomenal execution betray the hand of a specialist.

It was common practice to use prints as inspiration for the decoration of Delft pottery, as the large number of plaques, plates and dishes bearing scenes taken from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prints testifies.[10] The faience painter usually transferred the composition to the earthenware body by means of a process known as pouncing. He would make a stencil by taking a sharp needle and pricking tiny holes in the paper, following the lines of the design. This was then laid on the earthenware panel and fine charcoal powder was dusted over it; the powder penetrated the perforations, transferring the outlines on to the plaque. The painter could then fill in the outlines and work up the details of the composition. The plaques were often roughly the same size as the print, but there are several examples like this one,

where the faience painter combined elements from different sources to create a new, more elaborate picture.[11] For this army camp, however, the faience painter must have used a different technique, since the figures range from slightly to considerably larger than those in the prints. He probably prepared the composition by drawing a full-scale sketch that he then used as his stencil.

The plaque is dated to around 1660-75.[12] In this period the Haarlem Italianate painter Nicolaes Berchem was a favourite model among faience decorators. There are countless delftware objects featuring pastoral scenes derived from the many prints after his designs.[13] Seventeenth-century faience decorated with motifs derived from Wouwerman, in contrast, is very rare, essentially because only a few contemporary prints after his work were published.[14] This fact alone makes the plaque extraordinary, but it is above all the outstanding quality and charm of the composition, in conjunction with the dimensions and the exceptionally good condition, that make the Rijksmuseum's earthenware painting such a valuable example.

The painter who decorated this plaque was not the only one to recognize the attractions of the army camps after Wouwerman. Other craftsmen and artists also borrowed freely from Visscher's prints. Some artists simply painted copies of the prints in their entirety; others picked out interesting motifs here and there and incorporated them in their own compositions.[15] In the Rijksmuseum there is, for instance, an unsigned painting depicting one of Prince Frederick Henry's victories with Spanish troops retreating from a town in the background (fig. 6).[16] The artist, probably Philips Wouwerman's younger brother Pieter (1623-1682), composed the scene with the aid of prints.[17] One of them was the last sheet in Visscher's series of army camps after Wouwerman, for on the right we again see the figure group of the man scratching his armpit and the woman with her child who also feature on the large plaque in het Rijksmuseum (fig. 7).

Visscher's prints after Wouwerman continued to be widely used as models until well into the eighteenth century, both in the Netherlands and beyond.[18] Meanwhile there were many other, predominantly French engravers who had devoted themselves to reproducing Wouwerman's work,[19] but the popularity of Visscher's army camp set, which was reissued for the umpteenth time in 1762 by the Parisian publisher Basan, remained undiminished.

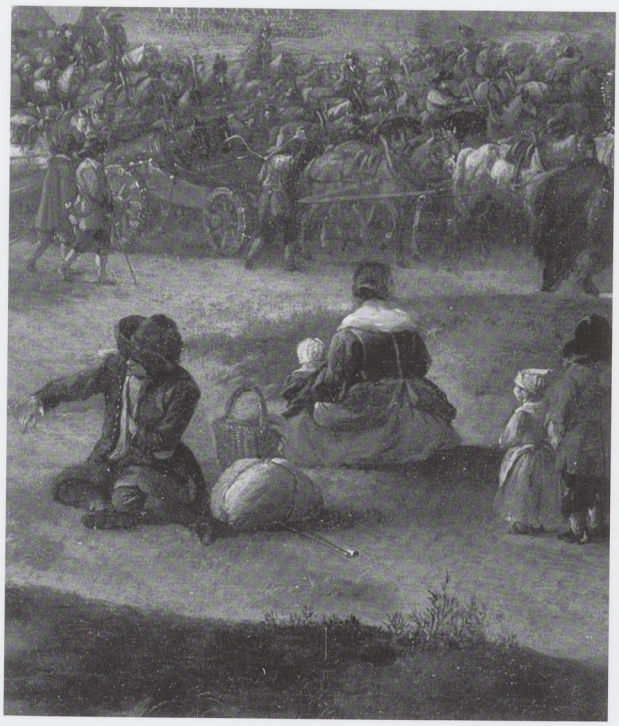

Fig. 7
Detail of fig. 6.

NOTES

1 RMA, inv. 36, Kop, pp. 160-163, letter from Apostool to Adm OK&W, 8.2.1825 (transcription Ellinoor Bergvelt.). With thanks to Jan Daan van Dam for his comments on an earlier version of this article.

2 The plaque and its provenance are described in J.D. van Dam, *Delffse Porceleyne, Dutch delftware 1620-1850*, Amsterdam 2004, pp. 51, 52-53, no. 24.

3 Van Dam, op. cit. (note 2), p. 52. The other faience panel is a landscape attributed to Frederik van Frytom (BK-NM-475).

4 D.F. Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Delfts blauw*, Bussum 1975, p. 36; Van Dam, op. cit. (note 2), p. 51.

5 Two recent important publications about Wouwerman are B. Schumacher, *Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668): the Horse Painter of the Golden Age* (2 vols.), Doornspijk 2006 and cat. Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister & The Hague, Mauritshuis, *Philips Wouwerman 1619-1668*, Zwolle 2009.

6 On the army camp as a subject in art, see E. Spaans, 'Legerkampen op zeventiende-eeuwse schilderijen: beeld en werkelijkheid', in cat. Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, *Beelden van een strijd: oorlog en kunst vóór de Vrede van Munster 1621-1648*, Delft 1998, pp. 164-81.

7 Hollstein XLI, pp. 27-29, nos. 26-29.

8 On this subject see G. Wuestman, 'Prints after Philips Wouwerman' in *Philips Wouwerman 1619-1668*, in cat. Kassel & The Hague, op.cit. (note 5), pp. 54-65. The prints can be dated to after c. 1660 and before 1666, the year in which Dancker Danckerts, the first publisher of this series, died.

9 P.J.J. van Thiel, *All the paintings of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A completely illustrated catalogue*, Amsterdam/Maarssen 1976, p. 615, no. A 484.

10 On this phenomenon see R.D. Aronson & S.M.R. Lambooy, *Dutch Delftware. Plaques: A Blueprint of Delft*, Amsterdam 2008.

11 One well-known example is the plaque in the Rijksmuseum, on which an etching by Nicolaes Berchem has been combined with a drawing by Leonard Bramer, see J.D. van Dam, *Gedateerd Delfts aardewerk*, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1991, pp. 12-13, no. 4. See also pp. 22-23, no. 9, for an example in which two different prints by Cornelis Visscher after Berchem have been amalgamated.

12 Van Dam, op.cit. (note 2), p. 52.

13 Aronson & Lambooy, op.cit. (note 10), pp. 26-36 illustrate a number of examples; see also note 11.

14 Wuestman, op.cit. (note 8), p. 54.

15 For the painted copies after Wouwerman's *Army Camp* in the Rijksmuseum (inv. no. SK-A-484) see for example Schumacher, op.cit. (note 5) 2006, I, p. 286, who always states whether or not the copies are reversed. For tiles and plaques with scenes of military life see J.W.L. Hilkhuijsen, 'Soldaten op tegels tussen 1590 en 1650' in cat. Delft op.cit. (note 6), pp. 218-49.

16 Van Thiel, op.cit. (note 9), p. 616, no. A 1794.

17 The greater part of the composition is copied from a print in the form of a frieze by Jan van de Velde II after Jan Martzsen of 1633; for this print, which is composed of six separate copper plates, see Hollstein XXXIII, p. 42, nos. 102-07.

18 In 1770, for instance, Guillermo Anglois in Spain produced tapestries with designs loosely based on Visscher's etchings after Wouwerman. See J. Held, *Die Genrebilder der Madrider Teppichmanufaktur und die Anfänge Goyas*, Berlin 1971, pp. 93-94, nos. 42-43.

19 In Wuestman, op.cit. (note 8) there is an overview of the output of prints after Wouwerman in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Detail of fig 1.