



Dancker Donckese sculpsit. A. 1653.

Short notice

Dancker Danckerts's Etchings of Miseroni's Crystal *Pyramid*: New Evidence of the Artist's Presence in Prague

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The Rijksmuseum recently acquired a rare print of a finely decorated rock crystal vase by Dancker Danckerts (1634-1666) (fig. 1). This vase formed the base of the so-called 'Pyramid' of Emperor Ferdinand III (1608-1657), a precious *Kunstkammer* object consisting of five tapering crystal cylinders stacked on top of one another (fig. 2). The *Pyramid* was made by the imperial gem cutter, Dionysio Miseroni (1607-1661), in 1653, and is nowadays held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

Danckerts's print is of great rarity; the only other known impression is in the Albertina in Vienna.¹ That museum, moreover, holds four related etchings featuring the remaining cylindrical elements of the rock crystal masterpiece (fig. 3).² These unique impressions prove that the *Vase* in the Rijksmuseum was originally part of a larger ensemble of prints that reproduced the whole artefact in detail and at actual size. The Rijksmuseum's acquisition complements a second, comparable and equally rare print by Danckerts that has been part of the museum's collection since 1903 (fig. 4). It is a depiction of a hexagonal crystal jug, likewise made by Miseroni and deriving from the Imperial collections (fig. 5).³

< Fig. 1
DANCKER DANCKERTS
after DIONYSIO
MISERONI, *Base
of the Pyramid of
Ferdinand III*, 1655.
Etching and
engraving,
488 x 330 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-P-2018-3312;
purchased with
the support of the
F.G. Waller-Fonds.

The prints named here are remarkable examples of Danckerts's graphic oeuvre. Best known as a print publisher, Danckerts produced only a handful of original prints himself, including several maps and reproductive etchings after works by Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683), among others.⁴ His renderings of Miseroni's crystal vessels therefore stand out for both their subject matter and their aesthetic. This short notice aims to contextualise these works by providing some new information on Danckerts's activities as a printmaker and his ventures abroad.

New Evidence of Danckerts's Travels through Europe

The prints of the *Vase* and the *Crystal Jug* are both dated 1655, placing them relatively early in Danckerts's career. The artist, to our knowledge, took up the print publishing trade a year later, in 1656. When his father Cornelis Danckerts I (1604-1656) died, Danckerts took over the well-established print shop in the Kalverstraat, together with his brother Justus (1635-1701). Several documents pertaining to this period provide evidence of the artist's whereabouts and activities before he settled in Amsterdam, offering some context to the origins of the Miseroni prints.



<< Fig. 2

DIONYSIO MISERONI (gem cutter) and HANNS REINHARDT TARAVELL (goldsmith), *Pyramid*, 1653. Rock crystal with gilded silver and enamel setting, 145.4 x 29.3 x 23 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. Kunstammer 2251. Photo: KHM-Museumsverband

At the time of his father's death, Dancker Danckerts was twenty-two years old and not yet legally considered as being of age. So that he could take over the publishing business, he and his wardens requested a *venia aetatis* from the Court of Holland (Hof van Holland), which would give him the rights and liabilities of an adult.⁵ In his request, the young artist supplied information and evidence of his competence and work experience.

Danckerts mentions that he had been abroad for two years, and that 'he had been sent by his late father to various quarters of Europe, in order to represent his father's business'.⁶ At the time of his father's death he was in Venice. Evidence of Danckerts's presence in Italy is provided by a drawing of Minerva in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, signed 'Dancker Danckerts fecit in Venetien 1656'.⁷ In the preface to his 1658 edition *L'idea della Architettura Universale* – the third book of Antonio Scamozzi's (1548-1616) architectural treatise – Danckerts refers to his visit to Venice, where he acted as an agent for his

father to obtain the original wood-blocks for the illustrations for this publication.⁸

As first suggested by Jaap van Veen in 2011, Danckerts may have been on the look-out on his journey for more printable material to add to the stock of the Amsterdam print shop.⁹ His inventory of 1667 lists several portrait prints by Aegidius Sadeler (1570-1629). The estate of this former imperial printmaker had passed into the possession of his nephew, Marco Sadeler (active 1600-1650), who worked as a publisher in both Prague and Venice. It is highly likely that Danckerts, during his time abroad, acquired plates from Sadeler or his heirs.¹⁰

It can thus be determined from the *venia aetatis* that Danckerts's travels took place between around 1654 and 1656. The prints after Miseroni's crystal vessels, dated 1655, must therefore have been made during his time abroad. They suggest a visit to Prague, a journey that until now has not been recorded.

< Fig. 3

DANCKER DANCKERTS after DIONYSIO MISERONI, *Cylinders of the Pyramid of Ferdinand III*, 1653. Five etchings from an album, here mounted together, approx. 1660 x 200/400 mm. Vienna, Albertina Museum, vol. no. H 1/67.51, inv. nos. DG81974, DG81975 and DG81976.

> Fig. 4

DANCKER DANCKERTS after DIONYSIO MISERONI, *Hexagonal Jug*, 1655. Etching, 630 x 460 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-1903-A-23495.



>> Fig. 5

DIONYSIO MISERONI and anonymous goldsmith, *Hexagonal Jug*, 1653. Rock crystal with gilded silver and enamel setting, 51.3 x 30.5 x 19.5 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. Kunstammer 2276. Photo: KHM-Museumsverband



Proof of Danckerts's Presence in Prague

Proof to support Danckerts's presence in the capital of the Habsburg Empire comes in the form of another print by him: a portrait of the Austrian court official, Bernardo Ignacio Borzita, Count Martinitz (1603-1665) (fig. 6).¹¹ The print is based on a painting by Karel Škréta (1610-1674), one of the foremost Habsburg painters of his time, who had been working in Prague since 1638. Škréta himself supplied the print with a dedicatory text devoted to the sitter, which suggests that he was responsible for the commission. A hitherto unrecorded thesis print is proof of a second collaboration between Danckerts and Škréta, and establishes

his whereabouts even more firmly: the work is dated 1655 and signed: 'Carolus Screti delineavit/ Dancker Danckerts sculpsit Pragæ'.¹²

Danckerts's professional relationship with Škréta moreover places him in the immediate circle of the imperial gem cutter, Dionysio Miseroni, as these two Habsburg artists were good friends. Around 1653, Škréta had painted a large family portrait of Miseroni showing the artist sitting at a table, surrounded by his family and some of his most famous masterpieces (fig. 7). The crystal *Pyramid* features prominently to the left of the composition. Its individual elements are stacked on shelves, and one of Miseroni's sons is reaching for the monumental base.

Positioning Danckerts's Prints

It appears that, during his stay in Prague, the Dutch printmaker moved within the artistic circles at court and that he and Miseroni worked in close vicinity to one another. By that time, the imperial gem cutter enjoyed great prestige: at the completion of the *Pyramid* in 1653, he had received from the Emperor several monetary rewards as well as a knighthood. The above-mentioned family portrait by Škréta was in all likelihood commissioned by the artist to commemorate this success.¹³ The completion of the extremely large *Hexagonal Jug* in 1655 was another *tour de force*. Although we can only guess at the circumstances in which the manufacture of Danckerts's reproductive prints was decided upon, it is possible that Miseroni commissioned the works for the same reason: to document his achievements, increase his fame, and possibly even attract new patrons.

Both the *Vase* and the *Hexagonal Jug* were given a Latin text in the margin, elucidating the creation of the artefact and its exceptional properties.¹⁴ It reads:

Fig. 6
DANCKER
DANCKERTS after
KAREL ŠKRÉTA,
Portrait of Bernardo
Ignacio Borzita,
Count Martinitz,
Palatine of
Hungary, c. 1655.
Engraving and
etching,
238 x 168 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-P-1889-A-14186.





This crystal was found in Switzerland in 1651 and was given to the Emperor Ferdinand III, king of Hungary and Bohemia, by the honourable and esteemed lord and imperial general Sebastian Peregrin Zwyer von Evibach. In 1653, the imperial chamberlain, treasurer and stone carver Dionysio Miseroni de Lisone artfully crafted the vessel seen here, whereby he cut the other four cups, whose content amounts to 28 'Prague Schoppen', from the same block.¹⁵

The text accompanying the *Hexagonal Jug* is of similar content.¹⁶ In both instances, the large uncut rock crystals were discovered by the Swiss military commander and politician Sebastian Peregrin Zwyer (1597-1661) who subsequently presented them to Emperor Ferdinand III. In the years following, Miseroni fashioned from them the art objects displayed in the prints.

As prints that reproduce precious objects from renowned collections, Danckerts's etchings can be ranked among the works by artists such as Aegidius Sadeler (1570-1629) and Jan Harmensz Muller (1571-1628), who likewise copied treasured drawings and sculptures from the Imperial Collections in print.¹⁷ An apt comparison can moreover be made with the nearly contemporary engraving by Paulus Pontius (1603-1658) after the so-called 'Rubens Vase', a Byzantine vessel cut from a piece of semi-translucent agate (figs. 8, 9). Both Pontius's and Danckerts's prints keep the middle ground between purely reproductive prints and ornament prints such as those by Agostino Veneziano (1490-1540) and Cherubino Alberti (1553-1615), or seventeenth-century series like the *Recueil de diverses vases antiques* (c. 1650) with prints by Georges

Fig. 7
KAREL ŠKRÉTA,
*Family Portrait of
Dionysio Miseroni*,
c. 1653.
Oil on canvas,
185 x 251 cm.
Prague, National
Gallery, inv. no. o 560.
Photo: © National
Gallery Prague 2022



Fig. 8
PAULUS PONTIUS
after PETER PAUL
RUBENS, *Front and
Side View of an
Antique Vase*,
c. 1626-40.
Engraving,
210 x 328 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, inv. no.
RP-P-08-9077.

Fig. 9
BYZANTINE,
The 'Rubens Vase',
c. 400 AD.
Agate and gold,
18.6 x 18.5 x 12 cm.
Baltimore, Walters
Art Museum,
inv. no. 42.562.



Tourier (active sixteen-fifties) after Charles Errard II (1606-1689).

When comparing Danckerts's prints with the actual crystal objects, it becomes clear that the artist attempted to convincingly convey the material properties of the translucent vases. Within the limited possibilities of the print medium, the artist tried to capture the shimmers, reflections and finely engraved bas-reliefs in this three-dimensional stone object. Especially interesting is the ensemble of prints that constitute the crystal *Pyramid*. The ornamental base and its cylinders were printed from five separate copper plates and intended to be cut along the edges and mounted on top of one another, so as to replicate the towering structure. When joined together, the prints of the crystal *Pyramid* measure approximately 150 cm in height, thereby equalling the size of the actual *Pyramid*. Likewise, Danckerts's etching of the *Hexagonal Jug* is true to the object's dimensions, and measures 50 cm tall. These true-to-life representations are highly remarkable and can only be

compared with the hand-illustrated and hand-coloured Wunderkammer inventories, such as the renowned codices of Manfredo Settala's Milanese collection of valued naturalia (c. sixteen-sixties) (fig. 10).¹⁸

As is clear from the Rijksmuseum's impression of the pyramid's base, the image of this lavishly decorated vessel can function perfectly as an independent print, just as the actual crystal object could be used as a vase without the additional mounts. To enable the owner to view this print separately as well as joined as a whole, the print-maker came up with a solution: the golden slab that joins the base and the subsequent cylinder could be cut along the curved edges, which would allow the individual prints to unite flawlessly with the monumental base (fig. 11).



Fig. 10
ANONYMOUS ARTIST,
Three Precious Stones,
c. 1660-70.
Pen and brown ink
and brown wash,
with watercolour,
in *Codex Settala*.
Milan, Biblioteca
Ambrosiana,
inv. no. 387 sup.,
vol. III, fol. 36r.
Photo: © Veneranda
Biblioteca Ambrosiana/
Mondadori Portfolio

Fig. 11
Detail of *Cylinders*
of the Pyramid of
Ferdinand III (fig. 3,
inv. no. DG 81975).
Generallandesarchiv
Baden-Württemberg,
Nachlass Truchsess
von Waldburg
Archives, inv. no. 14.



Conclusion

As printed reproductions of precious Kunstammer objects, Danckerts's prints after Miseroni's crystals fit into an early-modern tradition of imagery featuring rare and wondrous naturalia or remarkable man-made artefacts from renowned collections. The images not only advertised the treasures of the imperial collections, but also propagated the mastery of Miseroni's craftsmanship in transforming raw materials into shiny art objects. It is tempting to think the prints were commissioned by Miseroni, so as to allow his inventions to transcend the walls of the imperial Kunstammer and spread the artist's renown. The rarity of the works,

however, suggests a limited print run, and it may therefore be more likely that the commission was intended to be presented to a small circle of relations or clients. The plates for Danckerts's prints do not feature in his estate inventory of 1667, implying that they were probably left with his local patron when he left Prague. In all, the manufacture of these ambitious prints, together with the acquisition of various copper plates and woodblocks from important estates are testimony to the fact that the journey of this young and enterprising printmaker was a very fruitful one.

NOTES

- * I would like to thank Femke Speelberg for her thoughtful research suggestions and thorough editing of preliminary versions of this article.
- 1 Dancker Danckerts after Dionysio Miseroni, *Base of the Pyramid of Ferdinand III*, 1655, etching, 512 x 400 mm. Vienna, Albertina Museum, vol. no. H 1/67.51, inv. no. DG81976.
 - 2 These prints are not recorded in Hollstein. Their existence has previously been reported in a publication about the stone carvings of the Miseroni dynasty, but up until now has not been recorded in a print-related study. Cf. Rudolf Distelberger, *Die Kunst des Steinschnitts: Prunkgefäße, Kameen und Commessi aus der Kunstammer*, exh. cat. Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum) 2002-03, pp. 311-13, and Wolfram Koeppe (ed.), *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*, exh. cat. New York (Metropolitan Museum) 2008, p. 39 (no. 63). Figure 3 is a fictitious rendering of the five prints mounted together. The actual impressions are pasted on three different sheets in a print album. Their respective inv. nos. are DG81974, DG81975 and DG81976.
 - 3 Cf. F.W.H. Hollstein et al., *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1450-1700*, vol. 5 (1951), p. 127, no. 3. Only two impressions of this print are known: one in Amsterdam (see fig. 4, p. 215) and one in Vienna (Albertina Museum, inv. no. N.F. 777). The crystal jug is part of the Kunstammer collection (see fig. 5, p. 215).
 - 4 For an elaborate account of the Danckerts publishing dynasty, see Elmer Kolfin and Jaap van Veen (eds.), *Gedrukt tot Amsterdam: Amsterdamsche prentmakers en -uitgevers in de Gouden Eeuw*, exh. cat. Amsterdam (Rembrandt House Museum) 2011, pp. 59-119. Hollstein 1951 (note 3) lists 49 prints made by Danckerts (cf. pp. 127-32).
 - 5 Kolfin and Van Veen 2011 (note 4), p. 68.
 - 6 The Hague, National Archives, Requests addressed to the States of Holland to obtain *venia aetatis* (acc. no. 3.01.04.01, inv. no. 2086, fol. 27, 7 September 1656). Quote derived from Jaap van Veen, 'Danckers en Zonen: Prentuitgevers, plaatsnijders en kunstverkopers te Amsterdam, ca. 1625-1700', in Kolfin and Van Veen 2011 (note 4), pp. 58-119, esp. p. 68: '... van sijn vader salr. gesonden sijnde in diversche quartieren van Europa, omme aldaer met sijn vaders coopmanschappen te negotieren'.
 - 7 Dancker Danckerts, *Minerva*, 1656, black chalk, pen and brown ink, with grey wash, indented for transfer, Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, inv. no. Collezione Ortalli 18405. Cf. Giuseppe Cirillo and Giovanni Godi, *I disegni della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma*, coll. cat. Parma 1991, no. 13.

- 8 Preface to Danckerts's edition of *Gronregulen der bow-const, ofte, de uytnementhuyt vande vyf orders ...*, Amsterdam, 1658: 'Maer zijnde dese de selve, ende originele Platen van Scamozzi, met zijn eygen hand geteeckent, het Originaal ende Principaal selver; die ick, in den Iare 1655. In Venetien zijnde, met groote vleyt hebbe na gespeurt, op gesocht, de Erfgenamen af gekocht, ende met my mede uyt Italien gebracht.' (But these are Scamozzi's same, original plates, drawn with his own hand, the original and the principal the same, which in the year 1655, being in Venice, I tracked down and sought out, bought from the heirs and brought back with me from Italy.) Scamozzi's treatise was first published in Venice in 1615, a year before the author's untimely death. It comprised only six of the ten planned volumes. Cornelis Danckerts had published a Dutch translation of volume six of Scamozzi's treatise in 1640, and was likely planning to publish the complete treatise in 1655. Danckerts obtained 35 of the 42 original woodblock illustrations, together with at least eight others that were still unpublished. Cf. Andrew Hopkins and Arnold Witte, 'Van luxe architectuurtraktat tot praktische handleiding: De Nederlandse uitgaven van Scamozzi's *L'Idea della Architettura Universale*', *Bulletin KNOB* 96 (1997), pp. 137-53, esp. pp. 137-39, no. 15.
- 9 Kolfin and Van Veen 2011 (note 4), pp. 77-78.
- 10 Ibid. The prints, re-issued by Danckerts, are inscribed 'D. Danckerts excud', but lack a date or place of publication. For Sadeler, see Dorothy A. Limouze, *Aegidius Sadeler (c. 1570-1629): Drawings, Prints and Art Theory*, PhD dissertation Princeton University 1990, pp. 268, 352-53. Marco is presumed to have been Aegidius's nephew. His address appears frequently on both first and second editions of Aegidius's plates.
- 11 Hollstein 1951 (note 3), p. 127, no. 2.
- 12 I am grateful to Dr Petra Zelenková (National Gallery, Prague) who shared with me her recent discovery of this rare print, now in a private collection in the Czech Republic.
- 13 Cf. Distelberger 2002-03 (note 2), pp. 311-13. Miseroni was well-rewarded by the Emperor: on 15 November 1653 the artist was paid 3,900 guilders and two solid golden chains. He also was elevated to the rank of Knight of Bohemia, whereby he was granted the predicate 'De Lissone'. The *Pyramid* is recorded in the 1677 inventory of the *Kunstkammer* as being valued at 20,000 Reichstaler. For Miseroni, the creation of this masterpiece meant a new stage in his career, in which his workshop expanded and precious rock crystal became his foremost material.
- 14 The margin of the Rijksmuseum print has been trimmed; the inscription can still be found on the print in the Vienna Albertina Museum, band no. H 1/67-51, inv. no. DG81976.
- 15 The original inscription reads: 'Anno 1651 hæc crystallus in Heluetia repertæta Per illustri ac Generoso Domino Sebastiano Bilgein Zwaier de Eürbach s.c.m.tis/constituto Colonello FERDINANDO III. Electo DEI gratia Roman: Imperatori Semper Augusto Hungariæ ac Boëmiæ Regis dono da/ taper Dionysium Missiron de Lisone, Eius dem s.c.m.tis. cubicularium Thesaurarium necnon Gemmicidam in presentem Poculi formam una cumalys/quator exeadem massa excisispoculis quorum cauitates uiginti octo Sextary mensure Pragensis explent affabre erat elaborata Pragæ Anno 1653'.
- 16 The text on the *Hexagonal Jug* reports that the piece of rock crystal used here was likewise found by Zwyer von Evibach in Switzerland in 1652, and was shaped into its current form by Miseroni in 1655.
- 17 Around 1597, Sadeler was ordered by Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) to make several engravings after drawings by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) in the imperial collections. The original drawings are now held in the Albertina Museum, Vienna (e.g. *Head of an Apostle Wearing a Cap*, 1508, brush and grey ink with grey wash, heightened in white, on blue prepared paper, inv. no. 3111). Muller famously reproduced Adriaen de Vries's statue of *Mercury Abducting Psyche* from various viewpoints in three large-scale prints (cf. Ger Luijten (ed.), *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450-1700: The Muller Dynasty*, 3 vols., Rotterdam 1999, vol. 2, pp. 224-25, nos. 82-84).
- 18 Three codices, recording Settala's collection of 3,000-odd specimens were compiled during the sixteen-sixties. Some drawings are life-size records of the objects. One of the albums is held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (inv. no. 387 sup.), the others are in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena (inv. no. gamma.h.01.21 and 22). For an introduction on Settala's collection, see Germana Perani (ed.), *Il Museo Settala*, 2020 (*Nuova Museologia*, no. 42).