



Short Notice

Leonaert Bramer and Delftware: Additions and Missing Links

• DAVID DE HAAN AND FEMKE DIERCKS •

Since the end of the nineteenth century the city of Delft has been known culturally for two things: the painter Johannes Vermeer and Delftware. French connoisseurs played a major role in the rediscovery of both. Johannes Vermeer was re-discovered by the art critic Théophile Thoré (1807-1869) – writing under the pseudonym Wilhelm Bürger¹ – while the first scholarly study of Delft pottery was written by Thoré’s fellow countryman Henry Havard (1838-1921).² The two men had to leave France because of their political leanings, Thoré during the February Revolution of 1848, Havard as a consequence of the *Commune* in 1871. They both spent part of their time in exile in the Netherlands.

Havard’s research was pioneering; his research in archives dispelled the myth that had linked the two Delft discoveries. His predecessor, the German art historian, dealer and collector Auguste Demmin, who lived in France, had stated in his *Guide de l’amateur de faïences et porcelaines* (Paris 1867) that painters such as Jan Steen, Philips Wouwerman, Willem van de Velde and Johannes Vermeer himself, had painted on earthenware.³ Although this was wishful thinking on Demmin’s part, primarily intended to boost the sales of Delftware, the search for a link is certainly not entirely without founda-

< Fig. 1
Plaque with *The Prophet from Judah Killed by a Lion*, 1658.
Tin glaze pottery,
24.9 x 30.4 cm.
Delft, Museum
Prinsenhof Delft,
inv. no. B 45-61;
on loan from the
Stichting voor
Hulp aan Delftse
Jongeren (SHDJ).

tion: there were indeed a number of Delft painters directly involved with the production of Delftware. This Short Notice will further examine the relationship between one of those painters, Leonaert Bramer (1596-1674), and the Delftware potteries. Even though his relationship with the potters has been the subject of earlier research, we expand on it here on the basis of a number of new discoveries.

Painters and Potters in the Guild of St Luke

The two trades were both overseen by the Guild of St Luke; from 1648 onwards the syndics of the guild were two painters, two glass writers and two Delftware potters.⁴ However within the guild the two professions were more adjacent than intertwined. As in other cities, the Guild of St Luke oversaw a large group of decorative crafts. The working methods of these trades ranged from artistic and artisanal to pre-industrial. The potteries, along with the tapestry weaving mills, were the most industrially organized. In the Delftware factories different tasks were divided among specialists. By definition many hands worked on one object. The painters, but also the master turners, and the owner (or the foreman acting for the owner) were members of the guild.⁵

Pottery painters had to be able to rapidly paint objects that had been

moulded, fired and glazed by other specialists. This is why the test that the guild set for these painters consisted not of making a single object, but painting half a dozen large dishes and a fruit bowl.⁶ Another essential part of their training was to learn how to work with cobalt oxides on the porous glaze that was applied to the once fired (biscuit) earthenware. Since this is an entirely different speciality from painting in oils, the chance that a large group of Delft painters – including Vermeer – would have been able to devote themselves to painting on earthenware out of the blue seems extremely small.⁷

Earlier authors have remarked that, despite the technical differences in their crafts, it is striking that there had not been more artistic influence

between the painters and the potters.⁸ Even Vermeer's in-laws included owners of Delftware factories.⁹ Other factory owners, Wouter van Eenhoorn and Abraham de Cooge for example, owned work by Delft painters like Leonaert Bramer.¹⁰ Yet we only know of a few examples of direct cross-pollination between the Delft painters and the potters. As well as consumer goods, Delftware factories also made 'plaques', flat pieces of painted pottery which (framed or unframed) could be hung on walls as paintings.¹¹ These plaques were usually painted by Delftware painters, but in some cases by painters in oils who had also specialized in Delftware. Isaac Junius, Gijsbrecht Verhaest and Frederick van Frytom worked as independent painters in the Delftware industry.¹²

Fig. 2
Stencil with *The Prophet from Judah Killed by a Lion*, c. 1658-60. Pen and ink on punched-through paper, diam. approx. 12 cm. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Tichelaar Makkum Stencil Collection (accession no. 1686), box number 35.



Designs by Bramer

The pottery designs by Leonaert Bramer, a contemporary and friend of Vermeer's, are perhaps the most interesting example of interactions between the two disciplines.¹³ He made designs that were intended to be transferred on to pottery by Delftware painters. They used a *spons* or stencil (a corruption of the French *poncif* or Italian *spolvero*). The outlines of a drawing or print were transferred to another piece of paper by pricking holes through both sheets. The image was then transferred on to the earthenware surface by rubbing charcoal powder, known as pounce, through the perforations in the second piece of paper or stencil. The earthenware painter was then able to further work up the transferred outlines. This technique was widely known and had been used in various crafts since the Middle Ages. In earthenware reference is made to *moeder* and *werksponzen* (mother and work stencils). The *moederspons* contained the original drawing and was used to prick out several *werksponzen* by placing a number of sheets of paper on top of each other.¹⁴ Some of Bramer's surviving *moedersponzen* indeed show the tiny perforations (fig. 2).¹⁵ Various combinations of *moeder* and *werksponzen* have survived. When many pottery and tile factories had to close their doors in the nineteenth century, the stencils were acquired by factories still active or found their way into public archives as part of factory archives or into museum collections.¹⁶

Prints were widely used as mother stencils.¹⁷ A rich variety of print sources can be identified on both plaques and other earthenware products. This applies to biblical subjects, as well as to landscapes and interiors. Early European Chinoiserie prints were used as sources for Asian-inspired designs, in addition to the more evident Chinese porcelain.¹⁸ When it came to landscapes, prints after the work by Nicolaes Berchem were favoured.¹⁹ Nevertheless

it is important to realise that by far the majority of the scenes on Delftware cannot be traced back to a specific print. Many decorations on Delftware were based on porcelain or earthenware examples or made after drawings, whether or not prepared by a designer/draughtsman like Bramer.

Leonaert Bramer had frequently made designs for works of art executed in other media. Alongside oil paintings, he designed and made wall and ceiling paintings as well as designs for the Delft tapestry industry.²⁰ Perhaps it is not surprising that Bramer in particular was occupied with this range of disciplines. He is the only seventeenth-century Delft painter who was also a prolific draughtsman. A significant oeuvre of 1,100 drawings by his hand has survived. As an intermediary between design and execution, drawing was essential for the transfer of ideas between different crafts.

Surviving Stencils

In 1999 Michiel Plomp described Bramer's work for the earthenware industry in detail in an article in *Oud Holland*. He made an inventory of fourteen pieces of Delftware related to drawings by Bramer. He also described a set of mother and work stencils with compositions by Bramer, which are now in Tresoor, Leeuwarden (among them figs. 2, 5).²¹ Since Plomp's article, a large number of additional earthenware objects with designs by Bramer have come to light.²² Also, alongside the eight stencils described by Plomp, a second group of no fewer than six of Bramer's stencils were found in the same archive: *Moses and the Burning Bush*, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Tobias Catching a Large Fish*, *The Expulsion from Paradise*, *Joseph Thrown into the Well by his Brothers* and *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*.²³ This second group consists of unused work stencils that only contain outlines – none of them contain drawings by Bramer, but they are based on his compositions none-



theless. On the basis of the watermark of *Tobias Catching a Large Fish*, the paper of the second group can be dated to the end of the seventeenth century.²⁴ We can therefore conclude that these are work stencils made later in the century based on mother stencils by Bramer no longer known. Careful study of the work stencils shows how compositions could be simplified through repeated use (making copies from copies of the stencils meant that certain details were lost).²⁵ Plomp had already pointed out the difference in the quality between different paintings on earthenware after Bramer's drawings. This second group of stencils proves that the level of detail of the stencils also varied.

Missing Link

Plomp's study had yet to include a seventeenth-century piece of earthenware which could be directly linked to one of Bramer's surviving stencils. This missing link was found thanks to the acquisition of a plaque by Museum Prinsenhof Delft in 2015. This plaque is dated 1658 and shows *The Prophet from Judah Killed by a Lion* (fig. 1).

The reference to the corresponding passage from the Bible (1 Kings 13:24) appears on a tree trunk in the foreground of the object. On the left we can see the body of the prophet from Judah, accompanied by the lion that killed him and the ass which, according to the Bible story, looked on. On the right of the plaque, forming the foreground of the composition, are three reclining cows, a sheep and two figures. This part of the scene is based on a print by Nicolaes Berchem (fig. 3).²⁶ *The Prophet from Judah*, like other examples of Bramer's earthenware, is based on a set of drawings with scenes from the Old and New Testament which Bramer made in the mid-sixteen thirties. The drawing of the prophet from Judah from this series, which is also in Museum Prinsenhof Delft, shows the dead prophet and the lion, but not the ass (fig. 4). The corresponding mother stencil in Leeuwarden, though, does feature the ass (fig. 2).²⁷

A comparison of the dimensions of the stencil (approx. 12 cm) and the small scene from the Bible on the plaque makes it clear that this part of the

Fig. 3
NICOLAES PIETERSZ
BERCHEM, *Three
Reclining Cows*,
1630-83.
Etching,
177 x 242 mm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. RP-P-BI-895.

scene must have been applied straight on to the plaque using this stencil or a corresponding work stencil. The use of the stencil also explains the necessity of the addition of Berchem's group of animals. Bramer had made the mother stencil with a smaller flat base of a plate in mind. A comparison between the drawing and the stencil shows that the addition of the ass and a change in the prophet's pose makes the composition more compact and thus more suitable for the flat base of a plate. This shows how several stencils could be used for one scene and that the Delftware painters had a great degree of freedom in the combining of sources.

A plaque in the Rijksmuseum's collection, likewise dated 1658, depicting *The Prophet Elijah Fed by Ravens* has

exactly the same image after Berchem on the right side.²⁸ Plomp had already linked the scene from the Old Testament on the left with Bramer's set of drawings. In view of the fact that the plaques have exactly the same foregrounds, they would not have been intended to be a series, but rather stand-alone variations. An example dated 1660 in the Rijksmuseum's collection, built up from three different prints by Berchem, proves that plaques were frequently composed in this way.²⁹

Mythological Scenes

The stencils in Tresoar not only contain scenes from the Bible but mythological scenes too: *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Europa* and

Fig. 4

LEONAERT BRAMER,
*The Prophet from
Judah Killed by a Lion*,
c. 1635-40.
Ink on paper,
400 x 320 mm.
Delft, Museum
Prinsenhof Delft,
inv. no. PDT 1031-K.
Photo: Tom Haartsen



Ajax and Odysseus with the Armour of Achilles (fig. 5). Plomp argues that Bramer probably did not make his series of illustrations for mythological works with pottery in mind, because these tales were only known by a small well-informed audience.³⁰ Landscapes and scenes from the Bible do indeed predominate when it comes to pictorial scenes on Delftware. Nonetheless Plomp's assumption is open to question. A complete overview of the iconography of Delft representations is yet to be produced but mythological and literary scenes occur frequently. In the sixteen-seventies Het Moriaanshoof factory under Jacob Wemmersz Hoppsteyn even specialized in the use of mythological prints after Italian Renaissance artists.³¹ *The Rape of Europa*³² and *Venus and Adonis* regularly feature on earthenware.³³

However we know of no example of earthenware that depicts *Ajax and Odysseus with the Armour of Achilles*. The quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus over the armour of Achilles is an extremely rare subject anyway; as far as we know Bramer is the only artist to have painted it.³⁴ This painting, now in Museum Prinsenhof Delft (fig. 6), shows great similarities to the stencil. The composition and setting differ, but the concept is the same.

In 2005 Sotheby's in Amsterdam sold a drawing by Bramer, which formed the basis for the work stencil of the scene showing Ajax and Odysseus. The drawing is round, and the same size as the pattern; it is not the mother stencil as there are no perforations in it. But it was certainly designed by Bramer for a stencil. The drawing was sold as part of a



Fig. 5
Stencil with *Ajax and Odysseus with the Armour of Achilles*, c. 1658-60. Perforated paper, diam. approx. 12 cm. Leeuwarden, Tresoar, Tichelaar Makkum Stencil Collection (accession number 1686), box number 35.



Fig. 6
LEONAERT BRAMER,
*The Quarrel between
Ajax and Odysseus*,
c. 1623-27.
Oil on copper,
30.5 x 40 cm.
Delft, Museum
Prinsenhof Delft,
inv. no. PDS 13-B;
purchased with
the support of the
Rembrandt Society.

set of five, with two Old Testament and three mythological drawings by Bramer.³⁵ It is assumed that aside from Old and New Testament drawing series, Bramer also produced a series of scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* between 1635 and 1645, but too few of these drawings have been located to be able to reconstruct the series.³⁶ Bramer's choice of subjects from the Old and New Testament was also not standard. The fact that his subject matter stood out must have been a reason for the Delft potters to choose Bramer's drawings and not the more frequently used print sources.

Until now, matching a work stencil to a contemporary earthenware object was a missing link in the chapter of Leonaert Bramer and Delftware. Its discovery gives us new insight into the entire process from design to execution by way of the mother and work stencils. The discovery of the second group of stencils after designs by

Bramer not only confirms that the group of mother stencils must originally have been larger, it also shows that his designs circulated in the Delftware industry well after his death. It also sheds light on the production of secondary work stencils, on the basis of existing ones. Because those secondary stencils only contain outlines, and no longer the detailed drawing from the mother stencil, this may help to explain the large differences in quality between the designs and some of the representations on earthenware. Lastly, careful study of the designs reveals considerable large iconographic variety, which goes beyond the usual scenes from the Bible. Bramer's flexibility in his compositions and the originality in his choice of subjects must certainly have been reasons why the designs were commissioned. These insights bring the painters and the potters in Delft a little closer together.

- 1 Wilhelm Bürger, *Van der Meer de Delft*, Paris 1866. See about the rediscovery of Vermeer, among others A. Heppner, 'Thoré-Bürger en Holland: De Ontdekker van Vermeer en zijn Liefde voor Neerland's Kunst', *Oud Holland* 55 (1938), pp. 17-34, 67-82, 129-44.
- 2 Henry Havard, *Histoire de la faïence de Delft*, Amsterdam/Paris 1878. Havard himself also wrote about Vermeer, where he, more than Thoré, made use of biographical research in the Delft archives. For the rediscovery of Delftware see, among others, Jan Daniël van Dam, 'Van een verwaarloosd naar een nationaal product: het verzamelen van Delftse faïence', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 49 (2001), pp. 72-83.
- 3 Auguste Friedrich Demmin, *Guide de l'amateur de faïences et porcelaines: poteries, terres cuites, peintures sur lave, émaux, pierres précieuses artificielles, vitraux et verreries*, Paris 1867. See also Van Dam 2001 (previous note), p. 76.
- 4 Loet Schledorn, 'Delftse plateelbakkers in het Lucasgilde', *Holland: Historisch Tijdschrift* 36 (2004), pp. 83-96.
- 5 *Ibid.* The master Delftware painters, assistants and master pottery turners were also members of the guild. Other employees in the factories, such as the turners' assistants, were members of another guild.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 7 The nineteenth-century Frisian painter Christoffel Bisschop though actually did this. We know of small tests he made, which he had fired at De Porceleyn Fles in Delft.
- 8 John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*, Princeton 1982, p. 310; Michiel C. Plomp, 'Leonaert Bramer (1596-1674) als ontwerper van decoratie op Delfts aardewerk', *Oud Holland* 113 (1999), pp. 197-216.
- 9 Catharina van der Wiel, a second cousin of Vermeer's mother-in-law Maria Thins, had married Lambertus Cleffius, son (and successor) of the Delftware potter Willem Cleffius. John Michael Montias, *Vermeer en zijn milieu*, Baarn 1993, p. 303, note 4.
- 10 Marion S. van Aken-Fehmers et al., *Delfts Aardewerk: Geschiedenis van een nationaal product*, Zwolle/The Hague 1993, vol. 1, p. 21; Plomp 1999 (note 8), p. 198.
- 11 See, among others, Robert D. Aronson and Suzanne M.R. Lambooy, *Dutch Delftware. Plaques: A Blueprint of Delft*, Amsterdam (Aronson Antiquairs) 2008-09.
- 12 We also know of a number of oil paintings by Van Frytom in addition to his signed plaques as well as a number of oil paintings by Junius. See A. Vecht, *Frederik van Frytom 1632-1702: Life and Work of a Delft Pottery-Decorator*, Amsterdam 1968; Jeanne de Loos-Haaxman, 'Isaac Junius als plateelschilder', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 4 (1956), pp. 102-08.
- 13 Bramer visited Maria Thins to convince her that Vermeer was a good potential husband for her daughter Catharina. Montias 1993 (note 9), p. 118.
- 14 See Plomp 1999 (note 8), p. 209.
- 15 The stencil with *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* in Tresoar in Leeuwarden shows a second transferred image by means of a pattern on the same paper (the outlines are visible as stipple lines). However the second scene is not perforated, which makes it hard to identify. It could be about *Peter Freed by the Angel* as we can see a reclining figure with a foot extending into the air and a hurrying figure, alongside a balustrade.
- 16 The stencils in Tresoar came from the archives of the Frisian Delftware pottery Tichelaar, but were probably not used by this factory.
- 17 Examples of perforated prints, among others, can be found in the painter's workshop of the Meissen porcelain factory, where the same method is used.
- 18 See Aronson and Lambooy 2008-09 (note 11).
- 19 Gerdien Wuestman, 'Nicolaas Berchem in Print: Fluctuations in the Function and Significance of Reproductive Engraving', *Simiolus* 24 (1996), pp. 19-53. Wuestman also devoted attention to prints after Wouwerman as sources for Delft pottery, see Gerdien Wuestman, 'Wouwerman on Delftware', *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 57 (2009), pp. 236-43.
- 20 Michiel C. Plomp et al., *Leonaert Bramer 1596-1674: Ingenious Painter and Draughtsman in Rome and Delft*, Zwolle 1994, pp. 63-67.
- 21 Plomp 1999 (note 8), p. 208. Three of the stencils in Leeuwarden described by Plomp were donated to Museum Prinsenhof Delft by Mr Tichelaar in 2003: the mother pattern and two work patterns of *Jacob's Dream*, inv. nos. PDT 1026-A, -B and -C, diam. c. 13.5 cm.
- 22 One of the most interesting examples is a vase with scenes from the Bible acquired by Museum Prinsenhof Delft. Museum Prinsenhof Delft Collection, on loan from the Stichting voor Hulp aan Delftse Jongeren (SHDJ), inv. no. B 45-63, h. 54 cm, diam. 27 cm.

- 23 The stencil can be linked to drawings by Bramer: *The Expulsion from Paradise, The Sacrifice of Isaac, Tobias Catching a Large Fish* (Courtauld Institute, London, inv. nos. D.1952.RW.2951, D.1952.RW.2955 and D.1952.RW.2889); *Moses and the Burning Bush* (sale, Amsterdam (Sotheby's), 16 November 2005, part of no. 63); *Joseph* (current whereabouts unknown; RKD, image no. 109231). In his turn Bramer was inspired by a print by Albrecht Dürer for *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*. The fence in the stencil and on a vase in Museum Prinsenhof Delft (note 22), however, are clear additions by Bramer.
- 24 Theo and Frans Laurentius, *Watermarks 1650-1700 Found in Zeeland Archives*, Houten 2008, comparable with no. 675 A (1696). *Moses and the Bramble Bush* has an IV as the watermark, which may have been part of this mark.
- 25 *Joseph Thrown into the Well by his Brothers* is particularly relevant, because Plomp had already linked it to a dish from a group that until a few years ago was attributed to the Haarlem Delftware potter Willem Verstraeten. Plomp's discovery had already called this attribution into question. Van Aken-Fehmers et al. 1993 (note 10), vol. 1, pp. 228-29. The fact that a corresponding later work stencil is to be found in a little group of Delft stencils makes it even more unlikely that Verstraeten took a number of Bramer stencils with him to Haarlem.
- 26 See Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. RP-P-BI-895. There is a smaller plaque with just the cows in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (inv. no. C.2469-1928).
- 27 The decorative border in brown ink is a later addition. On the back of the pattern there is a fragmentary text in a late seventeenth-century hand which has not as yet provided any new clues for research.
- 28 See Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-NM-12400-3, approx. 24.5 x 30 cm. See also Jan Daniël van Dam, *Gedateerd Delfts aardewerk*, Amsterdam/Zwolle 1991, pp. 12-13.
- 29 See Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-NM-12400-4, approx. 25 x 30 cm. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. See also Wuestman 1996 (note 19).
- 30 Plomp 1999 (note 8), p. 206.
- 31 See, among others, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-16386 (vase with paintings after Guilio Romano in the Sala di Constantino in the Vatican) and BK-1961-45 (dish with the castration of Uranus by Chronos after Polidoro da Caravaggio); London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. C.767-1936 (dish with the rape of the Sabine women after Polidoro da Caravaggio). Jan Daniël van Dam, *Delffse Porceleyne: Delfts aardewerk 1620-1850*, Zwolle/Amsterdam 2004, pp. 68-69.
- 32 See Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-NM-12400-286 (dish with the rape of Europa) and Museum Arnhem, inv. no. GM 04187 (bowl with Venus and Adonis?).
- 34 See Apeldoorn, Paleis Het Loo, inv. nos. RL 1025 1-2 (a pair of tabletop fountains); Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-18930 (plate); Amsterdam, Aronson Antiquairs, object no. D2203 (a dish attributed to Het Moriaanshoof). With thanks to Esther van der Hoorn (Museum Prinsenhof Delft).
- 34 Plomp 1994 (note 20), p. 78.
- 35 *The Prophet Elisha Curses the Children of Bethel and Moses and the Burning Bush* as Bible scenes and *The Rape of Ganymede, Orpheus Playing to Pluto and Proserpine* <https://www.richardgreen.com/orpheus-playing-to-pluto-and-proserpine/p/573> and *Ajax and Odysseus with the Armour of Achilles* as mythological scenes. Following sale, Amsterdam (Sotheby's), 17 November 2005, no. 63.
- 36 Plomp 1994 (note 20), p. 316 (no. 26).