

ALMOST 450 YEARS old FLEMISH OILPAINTING

With several links to China.

For more than 226 years in one family

Since more than 200 years (almost '230') my family has an old painting (1525 – 1575) in her possession. This Flemish (Antwerp) painting, oil on wooden (oak) panel, has on his backside an handwritten declaration of succession.

In 10 Years SEARCH (2011-2021) made an interesting Journey through 5 Centuries

In the 10 years search now we didn't expect in the beginning that we would make an interesting journey through almost 5 centuries of time and history. Over all those years I have realised how many numerous wars (7) it has sustained: * the 80-years war 1568-1648, * the French – Dutch war from 1672 till 1678, the Austrian (Habsburger) domination of the Netherlands and Belgium, * the 7-years war 1756-1763 between Prussia and Austria, * the Napoleonic wars 1795-18 june 1814 (Waterloo) with * World War I 1914-1918 and * World War II 1939 – 1945 which ravaged the regions where at that moment our oilpainting had been hung at the walls plus the small fire in the family-owned Borgitter-castle in Kessenich – Neeritter (Dutch – Belgium border).

It was really amazing what the Belgium art-professor Raymond Bové told us in his revelations when he saw our old painting which had hanged already for over two centuries in our family of my mothers side. That was on the 27th of june 2011, our own beginning of an art-and history journey incredible full of events long forgotten.

At first glimpse he told us with his enthusiastic voice the painting was a typical old Flemish oilpainting, at first sight end 16th century – beginning 17th century. Further on – while examining the picture – he explained us that the coat of Maria is from Lapis Lazuli, the very precious ' blue ' glaze-stone mined in Afganistan and Turkestan even centuries before Christ has been born and used in Western Europe since the turn of the 14th century in the painting art and decoration of books. This tenacious and ingenious task, mostly performed by monks and nuns, ended in 1705 in Europe.

He told us also that the red paint in Maria's dress is madder. Original cultivated, since 1500 B.C., in Little-Asia and the Eastern part of the Mediterranean for its stability in natural (red) pigment (named " Alizarine"). Since 1300 A.D. the first cultivation of madder took place in Flanders in the polders of Brugge (Belgium). The roots (50 – 100 cm long) of the madder-plant are harvested after two years of growth of the entire plant. It prefers a mixture of sand and clay soil, which should be moist.

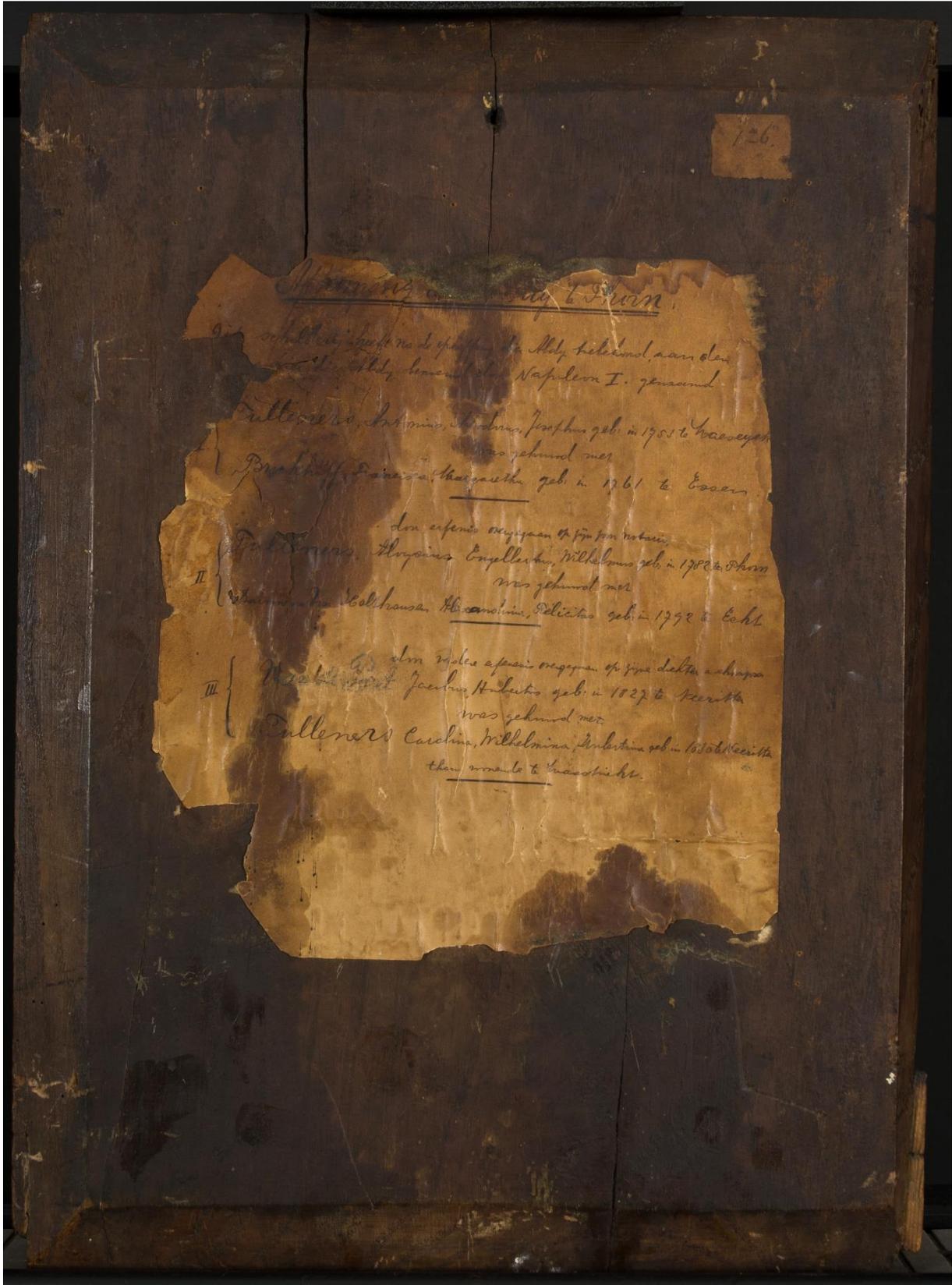
Round 1870 A.D. the cultivation of madder disappaered in short time due to a German process of chemical extraction of Alizarine (red dye) from coal-tar.

During our visit with the Belgium art-professor and after his interesting revelations, we have gone to an adjoint (dark-)room to put the painting under ultraviolet light to see how many times an four centuries-old painting has been restored. Astonishly, it has been only once and a little one. We were quite sure this little restoration has everything to do with the small fire in the family-owned Borghitter castle before 1900 AD.



This is the almost 450-years old Flemish oilpainting which has been hung at the walls from two nobel families, one of German royalty and the other of more modest Belgium-Dutch nobility. During our 10-years search to discover the ‘ why’s and who’s’ of this oilpainting from Antwerp (Belgium), we couldn’t even imagine how captivated all the long way was.

Certificate of Heritage



This certificate of heritage from 1795 has his beginning with a notary Anthony Tulleners (* 1753 in Maaseik (Belgium) – 1822 in Thorn (South-Netherlands) who had to be admitted as

‘notary and lawyer’ by the abbess of the (State-)Abbey of Thorn (exists from 999 till 1797). It was a very wealthy convent with only (20) ladies belonging to the highest nobility of North Western Europe. Each noble nun has had worldly goods as houses, estates, orchards, arable land and other landproperty at their free disposal to gain an considerable income every year. The monastic life in the (German) state-abbey of Thorn (Holland) wasn’t so severe as usual and elsewhere. The young noble ladies pursued also music and even science at that time and even undertook voyages.

The above-mentioned notary Anthony Tulleners is my direct 6th ancestor on the maternal’s side. This oilpainting had been hung on the walls in the family-owned Borgitter-castle in Kessenich – Neeritter (Belgium-Dutch border and only 10 Km from the abbey of Thorn) where the 5th and 4th generation (before myself) of my family was born. Even the Borgitter-castle was built by Jan von Waes in the year 1520, also a 13th or 14th generation family-member of mine. His ‘ coat of arms ‘ appears in our heraldic state of family-composition. The certificate of heritage ends with the parents of the father of my grandmother.

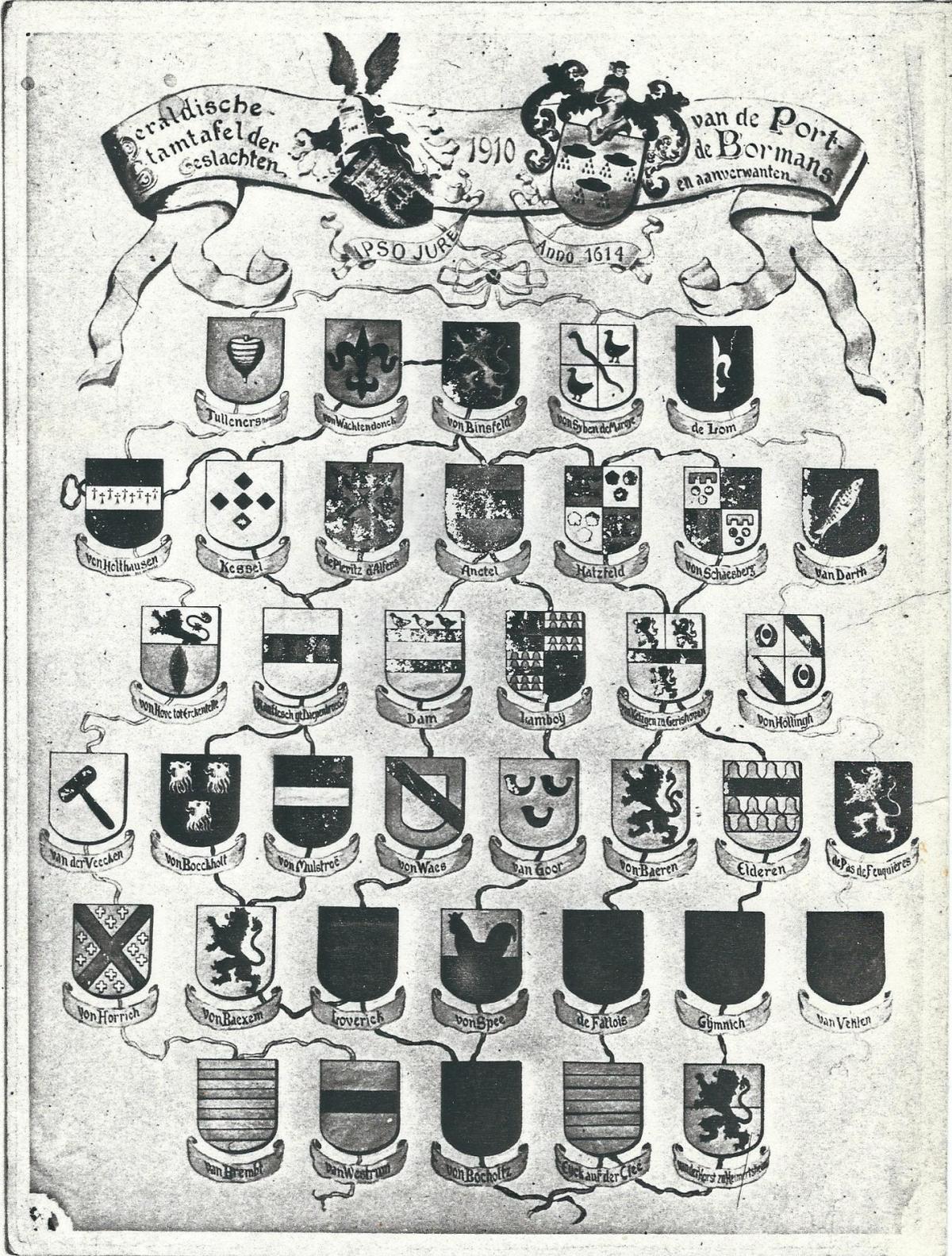


The Borgitter-castle where the oilpainting had been hung on the wall for at least 3 generations and ‘ survived ‘ at least four wars and a small fire in the castle.

My (maternal) 6th great-grandfather has been bought this oilpainting in 1795 from the last sovereign-abbess of the state-abbey of Thorn, the royal-princess Maria Kunigunda of Saxony (* 10th november 1740 in Warsaw (Poland) and died in Dresden (Germany) on the 8th april 1826). She was in her time almost even famous for her artcollection as her worldfamous father Frederic August II, Kurfürst (monarch) of Saxony and King August III of Poland, who founded in 1741 his worldfamous Gallery of Old Master Paintings in Dresden.

At the end of june 1794 the French “ Sambre and Meuse”-army invaded in the Southern-Netherlands (Belgium and the south of Holland) and annexed the whole region (inclusive the State-Abbey of Thorn) as a part of the newly-founded First Republic of France. In 1795 the newly installed government wanted 100 million Dutch guilders as a ‘reparation of war ‘ and in every church and convent the most valuable paintings were noted on a official list by a French army-officer to send them later on to a museum in Paris “ as part of the war-reparation – payments. The state-abbey of Thorn was a (very little) part of Germany. Therefore the French took the most valuable possessions there at the very last moment, risking a war with

Germany. In the tangle of wartime my 6th great-grandfather bought this oilpainting from the last abbess of Thorn, Maria the princess of Saxony who sent her part of her artcollection as fast as possible to Germany. In 1797 the French occupation closed the abbey of Thorn.



In the middle of our heraldic family-composition the builder of the Borgitter castle, Jan van (von) Waes, who has build the 'white' castle in 1520, has his own 'coat of arms' (fourth row from above and third row from beneath). Such a 'pedigree chart ' is the genealogical repre-

sentation of all direct ancestors of a person belonging to the nobility. In Europe this was in mode since the end of the Middle – Ages but gained in importance after 1490 A.D.. Since the beginning of the 16th century grew the origin of noble families to a greater extent of importance than ever before. For the persons of the nobility-class it was a very need to be able to proof that you are descended from at least eight noble families. Several knighthoods and certainly convents with only noble members urged 16 parts full of nobility of your pedigree chart. At the end of W.W.II (1945) the importance of ‘ noble’ pedigree charts in Europe came to an end. In China many genealogies (pedigree chart of families) were destroyed during the cultural revolution (1966-1976) in which too many published and manuscript genealogies of the clan-families since the Qing – dynasty (1600 A.D. to present) got lost forever. In China the genealogy record or “ Jia Pu “ spans many centuries and has been found as early as the Shang – Dynasty (1523 – 1028 BC). Family trees of the clans were a few and were found with their beginning before the Song – dynasty (960 A.D.). As you see, in China the pedigree charts has the longest history over all other parts in the world.



Sitting is Franciscus van de Port (1863-1910) and father of my grandmother. He was born in Maastricht but grew up at the family-castle Borgitter (above). There he learned the art of fencing from an old militaryman. In the 1880's he was a -regional- champion in fencing while in military-service (see picture). He was the last generation of my family growing up at the Borgitter-castle. After his marriage he lived in Maastricht (South-Netherlands). He has seen the Flemish oilpainting all his life, from birth till death just as his parents and grandparents before him and his daughter and granddaughter after him. That is the importance of keeping safely old art in the same family for century's.

Oak from the Baltic region

The oilpainting has been painted on oak (29 cm large and 40 cm high) from the Baltic region. The oaken panel is from a Baltic oaktree which latest annual (grow-) ring was in the year 1512 A.D.. Since the year 1241 A.D. commercial and merchants traders in cereals, wood, mechanical iron tools and sheepwool co-operate in the HANSEATIC CITIES (in general all port-cities) round the North- and Baltic-seas. This co-operation served as protection for the merchants but also as a solid condition to expand and extend the sales to make more profits. Their conditions of selling goods and their (ship)delivery were even regulated by commonly recognized 4 courts of justice (London – U.K., Brugge – Belgium, Bergen – Norway and Novgorod – Russia).

Over the years one trade grew enormously fast: wheat and barley from Belgium and the South-Netherlands in exchange of oaken and beech-wood from the Baltic region (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania). The high quality of the wood from the gradually grown oaken tree-trunks of this region, was significantly in demand by the Belgium cabinet-makers (furniture) and the workshops of (art-)painters for the solid wooden panels to (oil) painted on. Certainly in the ‘Golden Age’ of the Flemish artpainters (the year 1420 A.D. till 1600 A.D.) in which this oilpainting had been arised in the period 1525 A.D. – the year 1575.

In the year 1620 the young Swedish king Gustav the Great had conquered in a war the whole Baltic region included several Prussian port-cities in Poland. He even founded the Swedish city Göteborg to put an end to the prosperous co-operation in the Hanseatic Cities of the North- and Baltic-seas.



Exactly thirty years later than the beginning year (1241 A.D.) of the Hanseatic Cities, the then 17 years old Italian Marco Polo began his 3 years journey with his father Niccolo and his uncle Matteo to the court of Kublai Khan (1215 – 1294), the first Mongol ruler in China and the founder of the Yuan dynasty in China. These three Europeans have taken in 1271 (A.D.) the old route of the worldknown ‘Silk-Route’ from China to the Middle-East and Mediterranean area. This network of caravan-routes exists since the Ancient Times till the late Middle-Ages when the transport route over sea increased.

In this aspect – but in opposite direction – the *Lapis Lazuli* (the blue glaze stone) of the coat

of Maria in this painting goes from the century-old mines in Afganistan and Turkestan to Europe via the worldknown Silk-Route. Even 4000 years B.C. these mines exists ! Our art-discovering journey over 5 different centuries ‘forces’ yourself to think and discover the past, even to the Middle-Ages when a family-owned oilpainting has clear traces to this period by the crush lapis-lazuli bluepaint. It was at the time the Han-dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.) flourished in China with a population of near 50 million people. An incredible number of people in comparison with the number of people living in Europe at the same time. Almost 2000 years later, in 2013, this oldest trade-route in the world gained a new spirit as the Chinese president, mr. Xi Jinping, favored a new infrastructure of merely railways over land from China to Europe, called the “ New Silk-Route “. So in the past lies our nowadays and even our future. It has been proven all the time over. Even ask historians about this ! It makes it more interesting also.

The ‘ not-explainable ‘ number “126”

As you can see in the above picture of the backside of the panel a **number “126”** is written on the same piece of durable paper as the certificate of succession. Investigation at the Saxony State Archives in Dresden (Germany) learned us from a research-operator that this 446-year-old painting was once . . . stolen, with other paintings, in the night from the 21th and 22nd October 1789 at the worldfamous Gallery of Old Master Paintings in Dresden. Fortunately the police of Dresden has find the next day all the stolen artworks in Dresden herself on their way to Vienna (Austria).

Almost the last three generations of my family were convinced that the ‘ not-explainable ‘ number “ 126” has something to do with the French army occupation (1794 – 1814 with the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte and his army at Waterloo (Belgium)). After the churches and convents were ‘ robbed’ from their most valuable paintings to sent them to Paris (France), richest civilians and nobility had to pay their part of the 100 million guilders war-tribute, but have had an exceptional ‘right of refusal’. In that case you had to pay the value in currency. Even these refusal-events were listed by the French administration of occupation.

A two months research (february – april 2021) at the French National Archives in Pierrefitte – Paris (France) has had as result that they have found « no -trace « of possessions of Mr Anthony Tulleners of Thorn.

Therefore I became more and more convinced over the years that this ‘ old and obscure ‘ number “ 126” has something to do with a stocklist / inventorylist or a saleslist from an auction of paintings BEFORE the year 1795, certainly before it came to my family 226 years ago.

From an 2006-article in the Dresder State-Archives of Saxony (Germany), I have learned that every transaction of oilpaintings and other artworks likes sculptures for the worldfamous Gallery of Old Master Paintings of the Kurfürst (Monarch) Friedrich August II von Sachsen (and King August III of Poland) were noted IN DETAIL by an art-agent of Germany who has had his residence for several years in Paris (France). Even in numerous art-catalogues you are able to find notes of « who, which painting(s) and for how much acquired “! Even centuries back. That is really amazing to discover, while we think nowadays that ‘ our generations’ noted everything since ‘ a century or so ‘, but that is a false supposition.

From all the searches, explanations and even investigations the ‘old’ number rest maybe ‘ unexplained ‘ forever. Who knows.

The great restoration from november 2018 till april 2019

In June 2011 our oilpainting on an oaken panel has traces of being dirty, mostly from the burning of candles from several centuries. Even in August 2018 when the painting was X-rated by a special art-photographer with X-ray equipment in Amsterdam (Holland) it became clear to us it was time to remove the traces of the candle-lights with the old varnish. All the dirt has been removed in the great restoration from November 2018 till April 2019 and a new layer/coat of varnish has been applied on the painting to conserve it for the years to come. It felt for myself as an obligation to my ancestors who cherished it in 226 years and all the generations of people before 1795 AD.

During our last part of the visit at the Belgium art-professor I dare to ask “ How old is the painting ?” on which he answered: “ 1575 A.D. or 50 years before “.

At the end of our visit the art-professor took a little sample of white oilpaint for the chemical analyse of the white-lead. How much zinc (Zn) is present, how old the white-lead is in reality and with that the oilpainting. The procedure to obtain white-lead was in that time difficult and the white-lead has lots of traces of zinc.

Therefore professor Bové has confirmed in an – separate- email to me of the 23th of August 2011 that this panel has been painted in EARLIER the second half (1550 – 1575) of the 16th century.



The yellow spot indicates where the little sample of white-paint was taken for the chemical analyse of the white-lead. This to determine how much Zinc (Zn) is in it and to see how old the oilpainting is in reality.

At the end of a 10-years discovery-journey: time to go on

Now the ten years of our search are over, we have realised that it was a real pleasure to discover all the ‘ who’s and why’s ‘ behind and in the 446-years old Flemish oilpainting. Even the oaken panel with his Baltic origin from an oaken tree that has been growing up between one and two centuries before 1512 A.D.

During these 10-years I became – more than ever before – beware of the immense responsibility to all the generations in my family who have cared for and cherished this oilpainting and even the generations of people before 1795 A.D..

Now the time has come to pass it on to a new owner in the hope he or she will have the intense pleasure of owning such an old Flemish oilpainting of the ‘Golden-Age’ of Belgium artpainters with Maria and her holy Child and cherish it with proud and honor. Just like we have done since 1795, 6-generations long of one family. Each year passed of those 226 years, it was worth it.

Objet : RE: onderzoek naar loodwit en gronding van "Madonna van Thorn"
Date : 23/08/11 16:40
De : "Raymond Bové" <hebolabo@hotmail.com>
A : hubert.vandorrestein@sfr.fr,
Cc :

Geachte heer van Dorrestein,

Afgaande op de zinkaanwezigheid in het loodwit kan worden aangenomen dat het paneel eerder in de tweede helft van de 16de eeuw dan in de vroege 17de eeuw tot stand kwam.
Nochthans zekerheid is er nooit: het is altijd mogelijk dat een leerling of zoon de materialen van zijn meester (vader) erfde en ermee verder werkte.

Vriendelijke groet,
Raymond Bové

Date: Tue, 23 Aug 2011 10:09:45 +0200
From: hubert.vandorrestein@sfr.fr
To: hebolabo@hotmail.com
Subject: Re: RE: onderzoek naar loodwit en gronding van "Madonna van Thorn"

Zeer geachte heer Bové,

Een bijzonder grote en hartelijke dank voor uw deskundig rapport. Voor ons is het opvallend tekenend voor uw enorm vakmanschap en decennialange ervaring dat hetgene u al vaststelde tijdens ons bezoek in Tongeren ook uit de resultaten onder de microscoop is vast komen te staan.

Rest nog een vraagje: in uw verslag maakt u melding van "begin 17de eeuw en daarvoor": HOEVEER is dat? Moet ik dan denken in 20 à 25 jaar (dus omstreeks 1575) of verder terug? Ik herinner mij nog tijdens ons bezoek dat u het jaartal 1575 liet vallen. Ik realiseer mij terdege dat dit niet gemakkelijk is om een exact jaartal vast te stellen.

In afwachting van uw zeer gewaardeerd antwoord, verblijf ik in erkentelijkheid en vriendelijk groetend,
Hubert van Dorrestein.

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ENGLISH Translation of IMPORTANT EMAIL of 23 August 2011 at 16H40 :

« Dear Mr van Dorrestein,

Rely on the Presence of Zinc (Zn) in the white-lead it is confirmed that the panel (oilpainting on wood) has been achieved EARLIER in the second Half of the 16th Century than in the early 17th Century.

Nevertheless sureness isn't there never: it has also been possibly that an apprentice or a son with the materials of his master (father) has been continued.

*Sincerely Yours,
Raymond Bové*

