

Bijl-Van Urk

Reinier Zeeman

1623/24 - Amsterdam - 1664

A Coastal Landscape Probably near Dordrecht

Oil on canvas 32.1 x 45.4 cm

Signed lower right: "R . Seeman"

Provenance

Sir John Campbell, 2nd Marquess of Breadalbane (1796 - 1862), Taymouth Castle (and possibly previously in his apartments at Holyrood house, Edinburgh), and by descent to his sister, Lady Elizabeth Pringle (d. 1878), and by descent to her daughter, The Hon. Mrs. Robert Baillie-Hamilton, Langton, Duns, near Berwick, Scotland (d. 1912), and by descent to her sister, Magdalen, Lady Bateson Harvey (d. 1913), and by descent to the great-nephew by marriage of Sir Robert Bateson Harvey, Lt.-Col. the Hon. Thomas George Breadalbane Morgan-Grenville-Gavin D.S.O., M.C., Langton, Duns., Berwickshire, and by descent to the present owner, by whom sold at: Sale London, South-Kensington (Christie's), 28 April 2016, lot 109

Under the canopy of a cloud-filled sky boats cast their reflections on the calm water. Cumulus clouds rise up, forming a magnificent backdrop against which the ships' rigging stands out as calligraphy.

Kaags and a small fishing boat enliven the water surface. The elongated type of boat in the foreground probably is a so-called samoreus. These cargo vessels were used to transport a variety of goods up and down the Rhine. The expanse of water appears to be a wide river estuary and it is plausible that Zeeman depicted a location near Dordrecht, which was and is surrounded by waterways, among them the Oude Maas, the Merwede, Dordtse Kil and the Hollands Diep. The vessel in the right middle-ground appears to carry wooden beams, supporting the idea that the scene indeed depicts the environs of Dordrecht.¹ Sitting in the Meuse-Rhine basin on the Merwede this town developed from the late thirteenth century onwards as a leading trade and distribution centre of wood. In spite of its diminished importance by this time, Dordrecht remained the most important port of call for merchants coming down the Lower Rhine, Waal and Meuse, and an important node in the network of intra-regional trade in the Republic until well into the seventeenth century.

Reinier Zeeman was one of the most important marine artists of the Dutch Golden Age. Best known under the name of Reinier Nooms, he is usually referred to as Reinier

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Zeeman in archival documents of the period. His career was short-lived but the versatile artist left behind a sizable body of paintings, etchings and drawings. Many of his paintings that portray Italian ports or other southern subjects are executed in warm, sunny colours. The present work is an exquisite example of that other part of Zeeman's painted output; realistic and, often, quiet scenes in which the emphasis is on a sensitively rendered atmospheric which effects reveal the artist's keen interest in the evocative power of weather conditions. The precise draughtsmanship of the vessels, especially the accurate detail that demonstrates the artist's great knowledge of shipping, is a hallmark of Zeeman's art.

It is difficult to give an exact date for our painting. The sophistication of the beautifully balanced composition and the subtleness of the palette however suggest it is a mature production from the 1650s. The calmness and contemplative mood remind of similar works by Zeeman's peers, Willem van de Velde the Younger and Jan van de Cappelle.

It is unknown with whom Reinier Zeeman trained and he may have been self-taught, but it has been suggested that Willem van de Velde the Elder was his teacher in Amsterdam. Reinier also spent time in Paris in the 1640s and possibly trained there under the guidance of Abraham de Verwer. In April 1653 he married in Amsterdam Maria Moosijn, the sister of the engraver Michael Moosijn, with whom the artist collaborated. Maria bore him two daughters, Neeltje and Liesbeth. In 1661 Zeeman accompanied admiral Michiel de Ruyter on his campaign along the North African coast, as etchings and paintings attest showing the Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian coast.

Notes

¹ With kind thanks to Mr Ab Hoving, for identifying the shipping and suggesting the location in Zeeman's scene (email correspondence 27 October 2016).