A chalice of Jacoba of Bavaria in Gouda

Part I: The chalice’s origin and style

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The silver-gilt chalice and paten of Jacoba of Bavaria, Countess of Holland, Hainaut and Zeeland (1401—1436) have fortunately survived the hazards of time (fig. 1). In regions where iconoclasts destroyed liturgical art with devastating thoroughness, such survivals are rare; the chalice and its paten had either been intentionally hidden or were lost until their rediscovery in 1872 on the loft of the townhall of Gouda.

Jacoba’s chalice rests upon a cusped, octagonal foot set with eight shaped plaques of translucent enamel depicting scenes of the Passion. Eight kneeling angels holding armorial shields are fixed to the corners of the foot (fig. 2). They display the arms of Jacoba of Bavaria as Countess of Holland, Hainaut and Zeeland; quartered: 1 and 4: Bavaria; 2 Hainaut; 3 Holland—arms identical to those borne by her grandfather Albrecht (died 1404) and her father William (died 1417). Jacoba’s arms alternate with those of Gouda: gules, a pale argent between six six-pointed mullets, or as used by the ecclesiastical authorities, whereas the town’s seal displayed only two stars. Placed above the chalice’s octagonal foot are eight tiny figures of bearded, seated prophets, cast in two slightly varied models, without attributes (fig. 3). The upper and lower shafts are flanked by columns with checkered black and white enamel, and the nodus between repeats rosettes seen also on the foot. The renewed bowl (see also part II of this article) is placed within a foliated calyx enclosing eight circular medallions with relief figures of bearded, seated prophets, again without attributes (fig. 4). We distinguish four models, each placed in front of identical lobed circular fields. The prophets are clad in softly draped gowns, some wearing the turban-like Burgundian headgear, others the pointed Jewish hat. The paten is plain, having lost its enameled plaque at the center.

Tradition has it that Jacoba presented this chalice to the Archers’ Company of Gouda, a corporation almost as old as the town itself. The chalice was intended for the Archers’ own altar, dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, in the church of St. John. The company’s members had supported Jacoba throughout many political struggles and prolonged periods of social unrest, caused in great part by the existence of two conflicting factions: the burghers called Kabeljauwen (codfish), and the nobility called Hoeken (fishhooks). The burghers were supporters of the House of Bavaria, whereas the nobility resented the foreign intrusion that had come about through Margaret, wife of Louis of Bavaria, Countess of Hainaut, Holland.
and Zeeland, and their issue, after 1358. Following a tradition initiated by John of Bloys, the corporation’s first patron and the town’s overlord, Jacoba frequently honored the Archers with her presence at festivities and granted them immunity from the law in case of accidents at shooting competitions. During 1427 and 1428, she spent most of her time in Gouda. How difficult her last year there turned out to be is evident from Jacoba’s correspondence. Two letters survive, in which she implores Charles VI, King of France, to help her against the Duke of Burgundy. On June 4, 1427, she appealed to the States of Hainaut to remain loyal to her, repeating her plea two days later, but to no avail. She had to leave Gouda on July 3, 1428, after the signing of the Treaty of Delft, when her first cousin (on her mother’s side), Philip the Good of Burgundy, forced her to accept him as

1 The chalice of Jacoba of Bavaria, h. 25, octagonal base 22.5 × 18 cm, Municipality of Gouda, on loan to the Sint Catharina Gasthuis Museum, Gouda. Foto Kunsthistorisch Instituut Leiden.