Recent literature on Pieter Mulier the Elder, while enlarging our limited knowledge of his art, still confirms a date of birth of about 1610/1615. We hope that the present study shall demonstrate that Mulier seems to have been active considerably earlier than hitherto believed and that his contribution to Dutch marine painting was more significant than presently realized. A distinguished group of marine drawings erroneously attributed to Hendrick or Cornelis Vroom exists. Several of these drawings are here ascribed to Pieter Mulier the Elder. Their connexion with Haarlem and the Vroom atelier is evident. The earliest of the series is influenced by Cornelis Vroom’s rare marine subjects, but the majority derives directly from Jan Porcellis. The character of these drawings and their reliance on Porcellis suggest that Mulier was active by 1630 or slightly earlier and must have been born closer to 1600 than 1615.

Only one painting by Mulier is dated and the authenticity of this date is disputed. Despite the absence of dated material, we believe it possible to establish a viable working chronology of Mulier’s paintings based on stylistic analysis. First we must become cognizant of Mulier’s salient characteristics before ascribing drawings to him. Fortunately he signed many works—almost invariably with his characteristic \( Ph \) monogram. Two similar monogrammed paintings represent Mulier’s style admirably:

*Ships in a Breeze*, Arnhem, Gemeentemuseum (Bol, fig: 146).

*Choppy Sea*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Röthlisberger, no. 58). In both pictures the artist renders detail meticulously. Ships are relatively small in relation to the vastness of the sky and sea. Tiny human figures, often accented by brightly coloured clothes, man the boats. Water may be choppy or tempestuous, but never calm. Usually Mulier sets a dark foreground strip of tossing waves before an intensely illuminated middle distance. The cloudy sky provides a different realm of movement and becomes a graceful counterpart to the agitated sea.


2 I have dealt with much of this material in my monograph, *Cornelis Vroom: Marine and Landscape Artist*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1975.

3 This solution does not apply to his earliest marines or to one striking group of mature works that can be considered a variation of his repertory (Röthlisberger, nos. 49, 50, 52) and *Ships in a Breeze*, monogrammed, panel, 40.2 × 60.6 cm., The Hague, Dienst voor ’s-Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen, inv. NK 2900, on loan to Sneek, Fries Scheepvaart Museum (illus. 32).
Mulier’s lighting system in the Amsterdam and Arnhem marines popularizes a system evolved by Jan Porcellis in the 1620’s (Bol, figs. 96, 99). By spotlighting sections of sea and sky, Mulier creates a staccato of contrasting light and shadow. Nevertheless, pervading tone binds the entire subject into a concentrated, cohesive unity evoking the fluctuating and often tempestuous North Sea climate. What was an exuberant invention in the hands of Porcellis has become a successful Mulier formula. The thrill and immediacy of the subject are tinctured by Mulier’s fastidiously represented, minutely scaled objects. Ultimately this characteristic proved constricting because Mulier’s fastidiousness supplanted invention and substantially explains his almost imperceptible stylistic development. We may interpret Mulier’s art as a ‘correcting’ and refining of Porcellis. In the Arnhem and Amsterdam paintings, Mulier’s cloudy skies, although they derive from a type invented by Porcellis, have evolved to a degree so far beyond the basic Porcellis prototype that the connexion between the two is not immediately apparent. We do not wish to intimate that Mulier’s skies are more successful than those of Porcellis or that they evoke the dramatic force of Porcellis’ marines. No Mulier painting embodies the scope and excitement of Porcellis’ Shipwreck off a Beach of 1631 in the Mauritshuis: such brilliance eluded him. Mulier’s art is characterized by restraint and a self-conscious balance. His paintings may even appear unnecessarily calculated and synthetic; they certainly tend to be repetitious. One work, the monogrammed Ships off a Pier, reputedly dated 1639 (Solingen, Collection K. J. Müllenmeister: Müllenmeister, p. 28), raises the problem of his chronology. It is a characteristic Mulier painting and presents no problems of attribution. This picture may be compared to Jan Porcellis’ Small Craft sailing before a Pier in Rotterdam (Bol, fig. 94) – a prime prototype. Even if the present inscribed date of 1639 proves spurious, it seems plausible, given the relationship of this work...