Ludolf de Jongh and the Early Work of Pieter de Hooch

The appearance in the 1920s of two landscapes attributed to Pieter de Hooch seemed finally to give validity to Houbraken's assertion that de Hooch had studied in the studio of Nicolaes Berchem. Berchem, a gifted painter of Italianate landscapes, was born in Haarlem in 1620 and was admitted to the guild there in 1642, shortly before leaving on a supposed two or three year trip to Italy. It was therefore presumably in Haarlem, following Berchem's return from Italy, that the young de Hooch spent his years of apprenticeship in the mid or late 1640s.

The two paintings in question, however, seem less related to the work of Berchem than they do to works of other landscape painters of the period. The Soldiers in a Camp (Fig. 1), which had been thought to derive from a composition by Berchem (Fig. 2), seems much more closely related to an earlier landscape attributed to Dirck Stoop in the Gemälde Galerie in Dresden (Fig. 3). The composition, with its strong recessional movement from the foreground forms at the left to the deep space at the right, is similar to the treatment found in the Stoop panel. The officer on horseback conversing with a woman standing before a tent seems related to the Stoop as does the dog sniffing the ground in the right foreground, while the general theme and the use of the skull in the corner may also owe something to an engraving after a composition by J. Marsen after Jonge (Fig. 4). Only the seated male figure in the lower left corner of the painting attributed to de Hooch seems closer to Berchem than to the Dresden panel or to the engraving after J. Marsen de Jonge. The second landscape attributed to de Hooch, The Cavaliers (Fig. 5) has also been regarded as evidence of his apprenticeship in the studio of Berchem. Brière-Misme has noted an apparent relationship between this canvas and a now lost work by Jacob Ochtervelt (Fig. 6), who, according to Houbraken, had studied alongside de Hooch under Berchem's tutelage. She observed that in stance and profile the horse of the male rider in the de Hooch is an almost identical reverse image of the white horse in the center of the Ochtervelt work and that the costumes of the women in the two works are quite similar. The correspondence in size and conception of the two canvases as well as the rarity of such large works in the oeuvres of the two painters further indicated to her the possibility of their having been companion pieces produced in the studio of Berchem.

While the similarities between the two paintings strongly suggest an interrelationship and the possibility that they were intended as companion pieces, we may question the supposition that they were produced in the studio of Berchem, for de Hooch and Ochtervelt found their common source of inspiration for these two works not in Haarlem but within their native city of Rotterdam. Both painters in their early

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2 I have not personally seen the Officers on Horseback and am therefore not in a position to express a firm opinion concerning its attribution to de Hooch. On the basis of available photographs, however, I must regard it as at least a doubtful attribution to de Hooch's oeuvre.

3 C. Brière-Misme, loc. cit.