

# Seeking Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Father: Pieter Bruegel the Eldest (†1566), Pensioner in Sint-Janshuis Retirement Home, Bergen op Zoom

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## Abstract

In 1553-1554, one Pieter Bruegel retired to Sint-Janshuis, Bergen op Zoom: a home where former servants of the Marquises of Bergen could spend their old age. The main argument of the article is that this retiree, who was the former barber-surgeon of Marquis Jan IV (1541-1567), should be considered as the father of the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The latter's origins are almost completely unknown, yet heavily debated: was he the son of a peasant who painted scenes of life in the countryside, or was he born and raised in an urban environment and did he satirise peasants in his artistic work? An historical reconstruction of the background of the retired barber-surgeon, and the retirement home he spent his final years in, shows he is a strong candidate for having fathered the famous painter. Evidence from the discipline of art history provides further support for the claim that the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder was the son of a barber-surgeon and came from an urban social-middling-group background with close ties to one of the most important courts and artistic milieus in the Low Countries, the Renaissance palace *Markiezenhof* in Bergen op Zoom.

*Keywords:* Bruegel the Elder, Netherlandish painting, court life, retirement

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In her introduction to the Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, the art historian Nadine Orenstein writes that Bruegel's 'own story is still largely a mystery'.<sup>1</sup> She continues by explaining that 'it is usual to begin a biography with the date and place of its subject's birth', but that 'in Bruegel's case both of these facts are open to question'.<sup>2</sup> Bruegel lived before local authorities in the Low Countries began to record baptisms, marriages, and deaths, and as a result very little is known about his origins. Art historians are therefore still undecided about whether the painter should be regarded as the son of a peasant (in line with his nickname 'peasant Bruegel', or *Boeren-Bruegel*, referring to the rural scenes he painted) or as someone who came from an urban environment. This article presents new evidence of a Pieter Bruegel who passed away in a retirement home in Bergen op Zoom in 1566, and who had worked as a barber-surgeon at the court of the Marquis of Bergen – the *Markiezenhof* palace in the town of Bergen op Zoom. It is suggested he should be considered as the father of Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

There are a few theories as to where Bruegel was born. One is based on the painter's surname, which is linked to the villages Breughel and Brogel. Karel van Mander followed this line of reasoning in his *Schilder-boeck* (1604), claiming the painter came from the village Breughel, near Breda, and was most likely a peasant's son.<sup>3</sup> This view of Bruegel as a peasant's son is still upheld by some present-day art historians.<sup>4</sup> However, there are two problems with this interpretation. First, toponymic surnames do not necessarily refer to

1 Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 3. I would like to express my thanks to Bart van Eekelen and Jan Peeters. The research for this article was conducted in the project 'Gyllene år. Äldreomsorg och pension i Europa, c.1250-c.1800' ('Golden years. Understanding the retirement business in pre-modern Europe, c.1250-c.1800'), funded by the Swedish Vetenskapsrådet.

2 Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

3 Van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck*, fols. 233r-234r; Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

4 Recently Michel and Charles in their book on the Bruegel family wrote that 'it is clear that Brueghel was the son of a peasant': Michel and Charles, *The Brueghels*, 79, see also 11. In 2013, a local historian of the village of Grote-Brogel suggested this was the birthplace Guiccardini referred to – even though it was quite remotely located, at eighty kilometres south-east of Breda: Capals, *Over de geboorteplaats*.

the geographic origins of the person in question, but perhaps rather to that of an ancestor: although it is not unlikely that a forebear of Bruegel came from one of these villages, it is also not at all certain this means the painter was born there as well. Second, if the painter used 'Bruegel' as a toponymic surname, one would expect him to have used the preposition 'van' (meaning 'from').<sup>5</sup> Thus 'van Bruegel' – from the village of Breughel or Brogel – would have made more sense than just 'Bruegel'.<sup>6</sup>

Given these problems with reading 'Bruegel' as a toponym, scholars have also considered the validity of a contemporary report by Lodovico Guiccardini (1521-1589), an Italian who lived in Antwerp, toured through the Low Countries in Bruegel's lifetime, and published a travel journal. In this *Descrittione di tutti Paessi Bassi*, published in 1567, he described Bruegel as *Pietro Brueghel di Breda*.<sup>7</sup> Based on this, the town of Breda, to the north-east of Antwerp where Bruegel enrolled as a painter in 1551, has also been considered as his place of birth. Alexander Wied therefore saw Bruegel as 'a townsman and a highly educated one, on friendly terms with the humanists of his time'.<sup>8</sup> Placing Bruegel in an urban context also allows his work to be seen in a different perspective. Thus Manfred Sellink sees Bruegel as a painter 'who poked a little fun at the slightly backward countryfolk he portrayed'.<sup>9</sup> These authors were not the first to suggest the Bruegel family must be placed in a more wealthy and educated context: in the nineteenth century, the scholar André Wauters already suggested that the painter was related to a professor of medicine called Pierre Brugelio, who lived in Brussels in the 1570s.<sup>10</sup> Following Wauters' line of reasoning, this professor would have been a cousin of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. And in 2019 the art historian Jan van der Stock suggested during a public lecture that the painter was born in Breda, as the child of Adriaan Janss. van Breda and Petronella Rubbens, who moved to Antwerp in 1544. But why the painter adopted the surname Bruegel, rather than sticking to 'Van Breda', remains unclear, and seems to undermine the credibility of Van der Stock's thesis.<sup>11</sup>

No one can be blamed for coming up with such widely differing theories. Hard evidence of Bruegel's origins is scarce: apart from his surname, the contemporary Guiccardini's claim that Bruegel came from Breda, and his enrolment as a painter in Antwerp in 1551, there is little to work with. The emergence in 1553-1554 of a barber-surgeon named Pieter Bruegel in the records of Sint-Janshuis, a retirement home in the town of Bergen op Zoom, located midway between Breda and Antwerp, might therefore provide a new piece of the puzzle of Bruegel's upbringing. The main claim of this article is that Pieter Bruegel,

5 See the discussion in Wied, 'Pieter Bruegel'.

6 Another theory reads the entry in the ledger of the painter's guild of Antwerp, as *Peeter Brueghels, schilder*, as a patronym: the painter's father's first name was Brueghel (and Brueghel does not refer to a village). This too is a problematic line of reasoning, most of all since the first name Brueghel is not at all common in the medieval Low Countries. See Grossmann, 'Notes'; Koerner, *Bosch and Brueghel*, 13.

7 Guiccardini, *Descrittione*, 145.

8 Wied, 'Pieter Bruegel'.

9 Sellink, 'Pieter Bruegel', 57.

10 Wauters, 'La Famille Brueghel', 9.

11 At present Van der Stock has not published his research. A summary of his ideas is given in the 'Bruegel in Bokrijk' series published in *Het Belang van Limburg*, 8 April 2019, <https://www.dewereldvanbruegel.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/combine-bruegel.pdf> (Accessed on 12 July 2019).

the barber-surgeon of Marquis Jan IV of Glymes, should be considered as the father of the painter. The painter grew up in an urban environment as the son of a craftsman with access to one of the most important Renaissance palaces of the Low Countries. The article begins with an overview of what the historical records tell us about the barber-surgeon who retired to Sint-Janshuis. It proceeds by sketching the retirement home and its inhabitants, and uses this to arrive at a profile of the barber-surgeon. Then in a final step the evidence in support of seeing the barber-surgeon as the father of the painter is discussed.

### *Pieter Bruegel the Eldest (†1566)*

A Pieter Bruegel is mentioned in the account books of Sint-Janshuis in Bergen op Zoom. This was a retirement home that was founded for the former employees of the court of the lords of Bergen, so they could enjoy an untroubled old age. The institution's account book notes how between 17 March 1553 and 17 March 1554<sup>12</sup> an individual called Pieter Bruegel was admitted to the institution.<sup>13</sup> He was described as 'the former barber of Lord Jan lord of Bergen'.<sup>14</sup> Bruegel would 'enjoy for the rest of his life' a double corrody: a right to life-long food, drinks, clothes, and lodging in Sint-Janshuis. Receiving a 'double' corrody rather than an ordinary corrody means Bruegel was entitled to twice the rations that the other inmates of the retirement home received. It suggests he was quite well off.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that Bruegel was admitted to Sint-Janshuis by the Lord of Bergen. However, it also seems that the barber-surgeon thought the life of a retiree would be unfitting. In a document recorded by the aldermen of Bergen op Zoom in 1555, it is suggested Bruegel had filed a request to have a double corrody because 'on one corrody he would not be able to make a decent living': entering the retirement home would prevent him from maintaining his social status.<sup>16</sup> The lord, therefore, allowed him a double corrody 'on condition that

**12** 17 March is *Sint Geertruydendach*, the feast day of St. Gertrude of Nivelles, who was a much-revered saint in the medieval Low Countries. The financial administration of Sint-Janshuis started on her feast day.

**13** The first time he is mentioned his name is spelled 'meester Pieter Bruegel'. In 1565-1566 his name is written as 'Brueghel' on three occasions: Bergen op Zoom, West-Brabants Archief (hereafter WBA), BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1565-1566, fol. 2, fols. 7v-8r. In this article, I will simply refer to him as Bruegel.

**14** WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1553-1554, fol. 2: 'voortijts babier [sic] van wijlen zaliger memorien heeren Janne heere van Berghen'.

**15** The corrody was a contract between an institution and one or more individuals, who were entitled to life-long lodging, food, drink, clothing, and other necessities. Corrodies could be handed out, but could also be purchased: by paying a sizeable sum of money, one could secure a decent old age. Investing in a corrody was not at all unheard of in the later Middle Ages. Many convents and hospitals allowed a limited number of individuals to live on their premises, provided they paid for this. For instance, Geert Grote, the founder of the *Devotia Moderna*, the reform movement that started in the fourteenth-century Low Countries, was a corrodian in the Carthusian monastery Monnikenhuizen in Arnhem. See Gaens, 'Van woestenij', 70.

**16** WBA, BOZ-0005, 5188, Protocol van rentbrieven en recognities, 1554-1555, fols. 52v-53r: 'dat hij midts eender provene nijet genegelijck kunne gevuechelijck en soude kunnen doercommen ende bij leven'. Maintaining and demonstrating social status through food consumption, even when admitted to a retirement home, or even an orphanage, was considered of crucial importance in pre-modern society: Westerholt, 'Genoeg voor een heel weeshuis?', 92.

he should transfer an annuity of seven Karolusgulden' to Sint-Janshuis – the transfer was ratified in the aforementioned document.

The annuity was a common financial instrument in the sixteenth-century Low Countries. It allowed a debtor to attract funding on security of real estate – the annuity is comparable to a mortgage contract.<sup>17</sup> It was payable either to the original investor who had purchased the annuity or a third party that had come into possession of the financial instrument. Annuities could be transferred from the original investor to a third party, and this was exactly what Bruegel did to buy his way into Sint-Janshuis.<sup>18</sup> He handed over an annuity that yielded an annual revenue of seven Karolusgulden (Kg) – the equivalent of twenty day wages of a master craftsman.<sup>19</sup> The purchase price of such an annuity can be estimated to have been about 125 Kg – the equivalent of about 350 day wages of a master craftsman.<sup>20</sup> The annuity was secured on 'a house and yard called *Den Appelplucker* located in Steenberchstrate' – Steenbergestraat in the old city centre of Bergen op Zoom, and close to *Markiezenhof* palace. The annuity had been created in 1491, and the payment of seven Kg was due every year on 13 May (*Servati*, the feast day of St. Servatius), and had to be made by the current property owner (in 1555 this was one Franchois Cornelisz. Tijmmerman).<sup>21</sup> Before we move on to Bruegel's stay in Sint-Janshuis, it might be useful to point out that when the law court of Bergen op Zoom recorded the transfer of the annuity of seven Kg, it failed to record Bruegel's residence. Perhaps this is a telling omission: foreigners were often registered as coming from a certain town or village, but the residence of local inhabitants was not usually recorded. This suggests that Bruegel may already have lived in Bergen op Zoom before he moved to Sint-Janshuis.<sup>22</sup>

It seems Bruegel was able to spend his remaining years living quietly in Sint-Janshuis, because after his admission he is not mentioned in the hospital accounts until 1566, when he passed away on 24 February.<sup>23</sup> On his deathbed, Bruegel was cared for by a Cellite (a *cellebroeder*, a third-order friar devoted to caring for the sick and burying the dead), who was paid for attending to him for eleven days, and also for putting the deceased in his

17 See the overview in Briggs and Zijderdijn, 'Introduction'.

18 Transferring an annuity required ratification by the local court. In the account of 1554-1555, the steward noted that the annuity and ratification of transfer (*transportbrief*) were 'put in the room where the charters and other annuities' were kept (WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1554-1555, fol. 1v).

19 De Vries and Van der Woude, *The first modern economy*, 610.

20 The rate of return or 'interest rate' on this type of annuity was about 5.5 percent in the 1550s: Zijderdijn, *Medieval capital markets*, 243.

21 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1554-1555, fols. 1v-2r. This Franchois Cornelisz. Timmerman also sold an annuity of seven Kg, secured on the house called *Den Appelplucker* to Adriaen Aernoutsdochter, widow of Ghovert vanden Berghe, on 23 September 1546. The contract also mentions 'te warende met 7 Kg mr. Pieter Bruegel', which shows Bruegel already had an annuity secured on *Den Appelplucker* in 1546: WBA, BOZ-0005, 5183, Protocol van rentbrieven en recognities, 1546-1547, fol. 18v.

22 Ideally, it would be possible to find out when Bruegel moved to Bergen op Zoom by investigating the records of newly-arrived citizens. However, an analysis of the *Register van ingeschreven poorters*, which records new citizens of Bergen op Zoom, is only available for 1472-1522, not for the decades up to 1554. Between 1472 and 1522 there is no mention of a Pieter Bruegel.

23 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1554-1555, fol. 2r.

coffin.<sup>24</sup> Bruegel was buried on 25 February at the expense of Sint-Janshuis.<sup>25</sup> At his death, Bruegel's belongings reverted to the retirement home, as was the usual condition for retiring into a home. On 21 March 1566 his 'goods and furniture' were sold by a second-hand dealer (*appreciater*), raising almost 48 Kg.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the janitor found twelve Kg of cash in Bruegel's room.<sup>27</sup> The total sum of almost 60 Kg was added to Sint-Janshuis' coffers, and Bruegel's room was offered to another elderly individual.

To summarise: between 1553-1554 and 1566 a man named Pieter Bruegel, former barber-surgeon of the Lord of Bergen, lived in Sint-Janshuis in Bergen op Zoom. He purchased a double corrody and to this end he used an annuity yielding seven Kg per annum, secured on a house called *Den Appelplucker* in Bergen op Zoom. The annuity had been created in 1491 and must have been purchased by Bruegel before 1546, when he is for the first time mentioned as owner of this annuity. In 1555 Bruegel transferred the annuity to Sint-Janshuis to pay for a double corrody. He passed away in Sint-Janshospital in 1566, leaving behind possessions worth nearly 60 Kg.

### *Sint-Janshuis Retirement Home*

To gain a better understanding of this Pieter Bruegel, we should now turn to the institution he entered. Sint-Janshuis was a retirement home, founded in 1530 by the then seventy-eight-year-old nobleman Jan III van Glymes, Lord of Bergen op Zoom (r. 1494-1532). He was a member of the Glymes family, one of the most prominent noble lineages in the Low Countries, which boasted the town of Bergen op Zoom as one of its main possessions.<sup>28</sup> In Bergen op Zoom, Jan III's father had ordered the construction of the town residence *Hof van Bergen*, which was built between 1485 and 1511, and is nowadays known as *Markiezenhof*, the name given to it after the Glymes were elevated to the rank of marquis in 1533.<sup>29</sup> It was one of the most prominent palaces in the Duchy of Brabant, which was politically and economically speaking one of the most important regions in north-western Europe, with the governmental centres of the Habsburg Low Countries located in Brussels and Mechelen, and the important mercantile centre of Antwerp. Jan III, the first of the family to live in *Markiezenhof*, was also an important patron of the arts.<sup>30</sup>

Jan III intended Sint-Janshuis to be a home for his former employees, and thus appears to have provided a pension plan *avant la lettre*.<sup>31</sup> To this end the lord first purchased an

24 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1565-1566, fol. 7v-8r.

25 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1565-1566, fol. 8r.

26 Goods and furniture raised 47 *Karolusgulden* 19 *stiver* 1 *blank*. After subtracting expenses, the hospital earned 46 *Karolusgulden* 1 *stiver* 1 *blank*: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1574-1575, fol. 2r.

27 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1574-1575, fol. 2r.

28 Cools, *Mannen met macht*, 11-14.

29 Sloomans, *Markiezenhof*, Van Ham, *Het Markiezenhof*.

30 See for instance Wegman, 'Music and musicians', 211.

31 Similar initiatives were also taken by other rulers, such as Adolph I of Cleves, whose *arme diener hof*, founded in 1444, is comparable to Sint-Janshuis. See the overview of retirement homes in Metzler, *A Social History of Disability*, 135-136.

existing alms house, which he turned into Sint-Janshuis.<sup>32</sup> He then provided it with a foundation letter that indicated how the inhabitants should spend their old age. Finally, he invested in an annuity that yielded 300 Kg per annum to pay for corrodies and maintenance. In addition, he stipulated that the receiver of tithes in the area surrounding Bergen op Zoom (the *grain meester van Bergen*) would send some of the rye he collected from the peasants to Sint-Janshuis every three months, where this could be used to feed the inmates.<sup>33</sup>

In line with late-medieval Christian culture, Jan III decided there would be thirteen corrodians, their number being a reference to Christ and his twelve Apostles. However, in practice he thought it was necessary to provide one extra corrody because the janitor who was to oversee Sint-Janshuis would receive a double corrody. This was mainly because the founder also expected the janitor's wife to help in running the institution: she would make the beds and wash the bedlinen and should be compensated for her work. As such, Jan III provided funding for fourteen corrodies: twelve for former personnel, and two for the caretaker and his wife. In return, he expected the corrodians to attend mass four times a week, and to pray the *Paternoster* and *Ave Maria* five times a week – this on behalf of the founder and his successors as Lords and Ladies of Bergen. The founder also determined that one of the inmates would be a chaplain, and would thus be responsible for religious services in the chapel of Sint-Janshuis. In addition to praying for the souls of the Lords and Ladies of Bergen, the corrodians were also expected to care for the sick inmates in the institution's small infirmary.<sup>34</sup> The foundation letter does not indicate much with respect to what the men were supposed to do during the day (apart from attending masses and praying), only that they were supposed to return to Sint-Janshuis by six o'clock in winter, and eight in summer.

Jan III thus created a retirement home where his former employees could spend their final years, and where they would generate constant prayer on behalf of the souls of the Bergen lineage.<sup>35</sup> Around 1560, when the inmates of Sint-Janshuis petitioned Jan III's grandson, Marquis Jan IV van Glymes (r. 1541-1567), for more financial support, the inmates claimed that they were to be found in the chapel of Sint-Janshuis almost every day, 'always praying for the deceased, Lord Jan van Bergen, and those who are still alive, Lord Marquis van Bergen and his wife'.<sup>36</sup> The institution must therefore be regarded as a hybrid of a religious foundation, where former employees lived a pious life that was to resemble the *vita apostolica*, and a social organisation where elderly men cared for each other, and were cared for by the lords of Bergen.<sup>37</sup>

32 The alms house was called *hofje van Lijsbrecht Lambrecht*, which went to the lord in 1523: Van Ham, Weijs, and Weyts, 'De Lievevrouwepoort', 30.

33 WBA, BOZ-0001, 2433.

34 Thus, the inmate *Hansken* was paid for providing care for *Jenijn de palfrenier*, another inmate: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1555-1556, fol. 4v.

35 Mol, 'Kruisheren', 327, mentions in this respect institutions that provided the founders with possibilities for 'insuring themselves against the risks in the afterlife'.

36 WBA, BOZ-0001, 2447.

37 Similar retirement homes emerged elsewhere as well, for instance in Amsterdam and Leiden: Zijderdij, "'Good, fresh air and expert medical service"; Zijderdij, 'Pap en brood'. See for a general discussion on corrodians Kossmann-Putto, 'Armen- en ziekenzorg', 261-262; Marechal, 'Armen- en ziekenzorg', 278-279.



## Retirees

Bruegel was one of the corrodians living in Sint-Janshuis 'who are or have been servants of the House of Bergen'. In his foundation letter Jan III leaves open the possibility of also admitting elderly men who had not worked for him, but he also stipulated that they would have to vacate their rooms as soon as a former employee expressed an interest in living in Sint-Janshuis. Apart from the professional background, there were no requirements for admission, not even age. However, given that the institution aimed to accommodate widowers or unmarried men, had an infirmary, and spent considerable sums on care giving, Jan III's intention was clearly to provide for the elderly.<sup>38</sup>

What type of former employees might Jan III have been thinking of? In his foundation letter he refers to the corrodians as 'officers', which on first sight may suggest the lord intended the home to be for officials such as the stewards and many sheriffs who were active in the various lordships he held in the area around Bergen op Zoom.<sup>39</sup> However, the accounts of Sint-Janshuis, kept since its inception in 1530, make clear it was mainly the retainers – the staff – of the lord's *Markiezenhof* palace who retired to the home.<sup>40</sup> For the preparation of this article, the financial records for the years 1530-1531 to 1581-1582 were consulted. Among the corrodians we encounter a *valet de chambre* – or to be more precise, a *valet de filles* who attended to the daughters of the Marquise of Bergen, Jacqueline van Croÿ (regent 1541-1550)<sup>41</sup> – and a lackey.<sup>42</sup> Among the retirees were also a gatekeeper, a halberdier, a footman (who attended to the lord while he was on horseback), and a clockman or knocker-up, who was responsible for ringing the bell at *Markiezenhof*.<sup>43</sup> Also among the corrodians was an apothecary, as were various artists: a painter, a carpet weaver (*tapissier*) and a goldsmith.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in 1573-1574, a real 'officer' became an inmate: the usher (*deurwaarder*) of the audit room of the Marquis of Bergen.<sup>45</sup> These

38 See for instance Jan IV's indignation when finding out married men inhabited Sint-Janshuis, discussed later in the text.

39 Van Ham noticed a similar use of the term *officieren* by the stewards of the town of Bergen op Zoom. This category also included various fairly unimportant functions: Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 230.

40 The number of people working at a court could be substantial. Mary of Hungary's court counted between 148 and 192 employees in the mid-sixteenth century – and this number is excluding those that were hired on an ad-hoc basis: Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije*, 114.

41 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1564-1565, fols. 2r and 8r (Jan van Suerendonck camerlinck geweest hebbende vanden eeldochters van mijnen Edele vrouwe de marquis alias crepel Hansken).

42 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1571-1572, fol. 10v (Jan Scheerman lakei).

43 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1552-1553, fol. 1v (Arnolet de oude portier and Melchior diemen hiet den hellebaerdier); WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1569-1570, fol. 2r (Janin de Betuijns palfrenier), WA, BOZ-0001, 1150, account 1571-1572, fol. 10r (Pierre Sorry clockman).

44 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1559-1560, fols. 1v-2r (Jan der Kinderen); WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1571-1572, fol. 10r-v (Pieter van Ghistel tapissier and Jan van Ronse schildere); WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1551-1552, fol. 1v (Hubrecht de Goudsmet alias den dooven).

45 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1573-1574, fol. 9 (Sebastiaen vander Hofstadt deurwaerder vanden rekenkamer tot Berghen). He was 'in between jobs' and was allowed a corrody in Sint-Janshuis until he could find another occupation. In 1575 he was appointed secretary of Wouwen but was allowed to stay in Sint-Janshuis until March 1577: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1574-1575, fol. 10. After 1572 Bergen op Zoom was caught up in hostilities during the Dutch Revolt, and during these years soldiers in the army of the Don Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo were also occasionally admitted to Sint-Janshuis.



elderly individuals formed a small community, together with the janitor who was responsible for daily affairs at Sint-Janshuis, his wife, and the chaplain who was responsible for saying mass.

The retirees were entitled to a small room, to food and drink (rye, pottage, and beer), and fuel (peat).<sup>46</sup> On the most important religious holidays – Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, and Christmas – they would receive meat and wine. At Christmas, the corrodians also received woollen cloth for new stockings, as well as new shoes. And every second year they received a new coat.<sup>47</sup> The corrodies seem to have been meagre. The table below compares the rations at Sint-Janshuis with a so-called ‘subsistence basket’ containing the absolute minimum an individual required per year to survive. According to the foundation letter, inmates received 223 kg of rye per annum, which is more than the minimum requirement for human beings (155 kg).<sup>48</sup> In addition, Sint-Janshuis could serve inhabitants pottage to the equivalent of 63 kg of peas – three times the minimum requirement for vegetables. Other necessities of life, such as soap, textiles, and fuel, were around the minimum requirements as indicated by the subsistence basket. The inmates appear to have had all the necessary provisions, but we should also point out the rations were a long way from what an individual from the urban middle class would have been able to afford, as is indicated by the ‘respectability basket’ (table 1). Especially with respect to meat, clothing, and lighting, the rations in Sint-Janshuis were quite frugal. Perhaps this is why Bruegel decided to invest in a double corrody?

Given that this was a retirement home that was inhabited by the frail and elderly, Jan III made 25 Kg per annum available for healthcare: if they fell ill, the retirees were moved to an infirmary, where they would get ‘herbs and wine’ and would be cared for by their fellow inmates.<sup>49</sup> To this end the janitor could also hire a health professional, such as the Cellite who cared for Bruegel in his final days. The account books indicate that several inmates required extensive care, like crippled Hansken – the former *valet des filles* – who apparently suffered from a skin disease and frequently required his bandages to be renewed.<sup>50</sup> This bedridden inmate even received extra care ‘because he cannot maintain himself or earn anything on the side and has nothing in the whole world than his scant corrody’.<sup>51</sup>

Financially, Sint-Janshuis was well-endowed with the annuity of 300 Kg, and over time its administrators even managed to add to this starting income by selling excess rye, profiting from inheritances, and receiving annuities like the one Bruegel brought in. By the 1570s it was the recipient of another eight annuities yielding more than 65 Kg.<sup>52</sup> Sint-Janshuis had thus managed to increase its income by over 20 percent in the space of fifty years.

46 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1566-1567, fol. 2.

47 WBA, BOZ-0001, 2433.

48 The quantity of the *viertel* could be calculated by using the price Sint-Janshuis received when it sold rye to a local baker in 1571, for 38,5 st. per *viertele*. That year rye prices reported elsewhere in the Low Countries were 80.46 Kg per last of 3003 litres, which suggests 71.8 litres per *viertel* used in the account books of Sint-Janshuis. This comes closest to the *viertel* of Antwerp, of 77 litres, or 55.4 kg (calculations based on ‘De oude Nederlandse maten en gewichten’; ‘Prices and wages’).

49 WBA, BOZ-0001, 2433.

50 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1564-1565, fol. 8v.

51 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1557-1558, fol. 6.

52 WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1581-1582, fol. 2.

Table 1 Inmate rations provided in Sint-Janshuis Bergen op Zoom, 1531-1582.

	Rations in Sint-Janshuis	Subsistence basket	Respectability basket
Bread	-	-	182 kg
Rye	223 kg <sup>a</sup>	155-178 kg	-
Beans/peas	[63 kg] <sup>b</sup>	20 kg	34 kg
Meat/fish	4.2 kg <sup>c</sup>	3 kg	26 kg
Butter	-	3 kg	5.2 kg
Soap	2.4 l <sup>d</sup>	1.3 kg	2.6 kg
Linen/cotton	2.4 m <sup>e</sup>	3 m	5 m
Candles	-	1.3 kg	2.6 kg
Lamp oil	-	1.3 l	2.6 l
Fuel	4.6 MBtu <sup>f</sup>	3 MBtu	5 MBtu

Sources: De Zwart, Van Leeuwen, and Van Leeuwen-Li, 'Real wages', 75 (subsistence basket); Allen et al., 'Wages', 25 (respectability basket); 'Prices and wages' (price calculations).

<sup>a</sup> Inhabitants received 3.5 *viertelen* of rye (310 litres). If we assume a weight of 0.72 kg/litre ('Prices and wages'), we arrive at 223 kg of rye per person per annum.

<sup>b</sup> Inhabitants received 4 *pond* 10 *schelling* Brabants worth of pottage (*potagie*). According to the accounts, 18 Kg was spent per annum. Pottage is a vegetable-based soup, and was served daily. The ingredients are unknown, but we assume the soup met the demand for beans/peas. In 1531, 18 Kg bought 878 kg peas – about 63 kg per inhabitant per annum (prices of beans are not available). In reality pottage certainly included other ingredients (leafy vegetables, meat); the relatively generous budget – more than triple the amount required for subsistence – would probably have allowed the janitor to include these as well.

<sup>c</sup> Inhabitants received 6 *stuivers* worth of meat per annum. In 1531 this amount bought 4.2 kg of meat.

<sup>d</sup> The janitor received 12 *stuivers* per annum for soap to wash the bedlinen. In 1531 this bought 33 litres of soap, or 2.4 litres per inhabitant. The weight of 2.4 litres of soap can be estimated at 2.0 kg.

<sup>e</sup> Inhabitants received one *el* of woollen cloth for stockings every year, and five *el* for a coat every second year. Per annum they received 3.5 *el*: 2.4 metres of woollen cloth.

<sup>f</sup> Inhabitants received 0.5 *last* of peat per annum. Cornelisse, *Energiemarkten*, 330, states that a corrodian in Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Gouda, around 1500, received 0.5 *last* of peat per annum as well, and calculated that this quantity generated 4.9 gigajoules (which is equal to 4.6 MBtu, million British thermal units).

However, as fig. 1 demonstrates, this was not nearly enough for the retirement home to keep up with the general rise in consumer prices after circa 1550. To put it another way: after the mid-sixteenth century, Sint-Janshuis did not manage to increase its revenues sufficiently to keep up with the general level of inflation.

Unsurprisingly, in a petition to Marquis Jan IV van Glymes, most likely written in or shortly before 1560, the corrodians complained about their situation.<sup>53</sup> They pointed out that the cost of living had been low when Jan III had founded Sint-Janshuis in 1530. Thirty years later the cost of living was about 40 percent above that of the foundation year, which meant 'the poor inhabitants and former officials could hardly survive on the corrodies they were entitled to', because 'these were expensive times'.<sup>54</sup> Jan III had foreseen that the cost of living might increase in the future, however, and so tried to provide some sort of

53 See also Zijderdijn, 'De opkomst'.

54 WA, BOZ-0001, 2447.



Fig. 1 Income of Sint-Janshuis compared to the general price level, 1530-1582 (1530 = 100).

Sources: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149-1150; 'Prices and wages'.

'inflation correction' by stipulating in the foundation letter 'that his son and his children would improve the corrodies'.<sup>55</sup> This improvement did not occur even though prices had risen considerably. To make matters worse, in 1557 the Marquis' receiver of the tithes had decided not to hand over rye to the corrodians of Sint-Janshuis, but rather to sell it on the market and give the profits to the lord. The inmates were left to their own devices when it came to acquiring their food. It seems that this was a one-off incident, as rye deliveries resumed after 1557 and would continue until the early years of the Dutch Revolt.<sup>56</sup>

Problems of a different kind came to light in a 1575 inquiry into the inmates, centring on the question of whether they actually participated in mass four times a week, observed the daily prayers, and had properly furnished rooms.<sup>57</sup> Of the ten corrodians of Sint-Janshuis, only three actually lived in the retirement home, two of whom were the janitor and the chaplain. Five corrodians were married and lived with their wives elsewhere in Bergen op Zoom but still collected their corrody. They probably did not bother to attend masses or pray the *Paternoster* and *Ave Maria*. The corrodians Gille Estieme and Nicolaes de Havre were nowhere to be found: they lived in Brussels 'yet they did receive their rations'. Even though the two were not former servants of the court, they had been admitted to Sint-Janshuis. After their absence had come to light it was immediately decided that they would be replaced by former personnel before 15 March 1575. As to the married men, they were former servants and would not be evicted immediately. However, the janitor was instructed to begin looking for other candidates who would be willing to furnish a room, attend the masses and say daily prayers 'except for if they have fallen ill, or their profession

<sup>55</sup> WA, BOZ-0001, 2433.

<sup>56</sup> Rye deliveries were also partly postponed in 1581-1582: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1581-1582, fol. 6.

<sup>57</sup> The furnishing of rooms seems to have been a requirement for inmates. The reason for this may be found in the opportunity it presented the institution to sell furnishings after corrodians had passed away: by forcing inmates to invest in this, Sint-Janshuis secured an additional income. Perhaps therefore a decree, dated 1555, prescribes what furniture should be in every room: a bed plus bedding, various pieces of furniture, crockery and kitchen utensils. See WBA, BOZ-0001, 2446.

or other means of existence prevent them from attending' – apparently corrodians continued to be allowed to combine living in Sint-Janshuis with other activities.<sup>58</sup>

The janitor's quest to find a new corrodian led to the admission of Gielis Stevensz. by the Council of Bergen in 1576-1577, and the ratification of this appointment by the lord of Merode.<sup>59</sup> Convincing former employees to enter Sint-Janshuis turned out to be difficult though: in 1578-1579 the Marquise Maria Margaretha van Merode (r. 1577-1580) took the remarkable step of allowing one of the corrodies to be assigned to a female servant, Magdalena 't Hoenderwijff, for her 'lengthy domestic service washing clothes and other things' and 'considering her old age, frailty and poverty'. Magdalena would not live in Sint-Janshuis, but rather would receive the monetary value of the corrody – 24 Kg per annum.<sup>60</sup>

Such problems were not yet apparent when Bruegel entered Sint-Janshuis, in 1553-1554. It is therefore likely that the barber-surgeon's reluctance to retire to the home Jan III had built, and consequent insistence on receiving a double corrody, was not so much out of fear of not receiving rations; rather, it seems Bruegel was truthful when he claimed retiring to Sint-Janshuis was not in line with his social standing. The barber-surgeon had managed to join the ranks of the social middling groups, and was probably used to consuming meat and fish, and to spending money on fancy clothes. At Sint-Janshuis the retirees could not indulge in such things: Bruegel's investment in a double corrody probably solved this issue.

### *Bruegel in Perspective*

The barber-surgeon must have served the Lord Marquis Jan IV van Glymes before moving to Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554.<sup>61</sup> What was the socioeconomic position of our candidate for the father of the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder? In the sources he is called 'master barber', which was the late-medieval term used to denote professionals who could give a haircut or shave, but who also practiced medicine and provided dental care.<sup>62</sup> In scholarship they are usually known as barber-surgeons: they were craftsmen who had had their education through the craft guild of barbers.<sup>63</sup> In the sixteenth century, barber-surgeons

<sup>58</sup> WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1574-1575, fol. 10.

<sup>59</sup> WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1576-1577, fol. 8v. The Lord van Merode was likely Johan Corsselaar van Witthem, who in 1577 married Maria Margaretha van Merode, the daughter of Mensia van Glymes, sister of Marquis Jan IV.

<sup>60</sup> WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1578-1579 fol. 9v; Account 1579-1580 fol. 7r. The first account after 1581-1582, the account of 1609-1610, mentions three women as corrodians: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1609-1610, fol. 10r-v.

<sup>61</sup> It was not unusual for barber-surgeons to have a position at Renaissance courts. In the Low Countries Mary of Hungary's court had a surgeon, and the same goes for the court of Adolf of Burgundy. William of Orange's court had a barber: Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije*, 64, 69; Sicking, 'Door Oranje overschaduwd', 112, Delen, *Het hof*, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Huizenga, *Een nuttelike practijke*, 247-248.

<sup>63</sup> Rudolph Ladan's study of sixteenth-century Leiden demonstrates that it took until the 1550s before 'surgeon' (*chirurgijn*) came into use. Before this time, medical professionals were generally referred to as 'barber' (*barbier*). See Ladan, *Gezondheidszorg*, 156.

were gradually replaced by medical professionals who had received training at a university. This also happened in Bergen op Zoom, where in the late fifteenth century the town government decided the town surgeon was to be a *doctor medicinae*: guild-trained surgeons were no longer considered for the position.<sup>64</sup> Bruegel the ‘master barber’ would likely have been one of these guild-trained barber-surgeons.

Barber-surgeons were not necessarily wealthy. Data on the wealth of occupational groups are not available for Bergen op Zoom, but a property tax levied in 1498 in Leiden can help us understand the economic position of barber-surgeons. That year, a 1 percent tax was levied on property. Of the 2457 households that were assessed, the average was 310 lb.<sup>65</sup> Fourteen barbers were assessed at 180 lb. on average; only three out of fourteen barbers exceeded the town average of 310 lb.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in late fifteenth-century Leiden barbers were among the large group of ordinary skilled workers. More than sixty years later, in 1561, when Leiden levied a real estate tax, their position had improved. The average for the whole town was 10.2 lb., and for the barbers 11 lb.<sup>67</sup> The latter were still not very wealthy though, considering that their average wealth ranked 138<sup>th</sup> out of 223 occupations taxed in 1561.<sup>68</sup>

These findings suggest that the economic position of barbers was not very remarkable: compared to other occupations, they were not very wealthy. In terms of social standing their position was perhaps even worse: according to Huizenga, barbers were among those occupations without honour (*unehrliche Leute*) because they dealt with ‘death, waste and disease, and secretions’. As a result, barbers sometimes even lacked legal personality – they could not conduct certain legal acts – or could be excluded from political positions.<sup>69</sup> Stuart, however, in writing about the German Empire, points out that the position of barbers could vary from honourable in one region to dishonourable in another, and also that it is not impossible that their social position changed over time.<sup>70</sup> The exact social position of barbers in Bergen op Zoom is difficult to determine, but the existence of a craft guild for surgeons since 1493 suggests barbers at least had the right to organize themselves and thus may have been relatively well off.<sup>71</sup>

We do not know anything about Bruegel’s position at the court. He may have been a barber-surgeon working full-time for the Marquis, but he may also have been hired on an ad-hoc basis, combining his position at court with other commissions.<sup>72</sup> We can be sure Bruegel was relatively affluent though, because to pay for his retirement he was able to transfer the above-mentioned annuity worth seven guilders, with an estimated purchase

64 Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 381.

65 18.4 percent of the heads of households were deemed poor and were not assessed.

66 One was assessed at 400 lb. and the two wealthiest barbers at 600 lb. See Noordam (ed.), ‘Vermogensbelasting’; Noordam, ‘Leiden in last’, 23.

67 Noordam, ‘Leiden in last’, 30.

68 Noordam (ed.), ‘De tiende penning’.

69 Huizenga, *Een nuttelijke practijke*, 249.

70 Stuart, *Defiled trades*, 105.

71 Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 381.

72 Which is also a serious possibility, considering that the lords are known to have spent considerable time outside Markiezenhof: Van Ham, ‘Bergen op Zoom’, 26.

price of about 125 Kg – equivalent to about a year's wages of a skilled worker. Bruegel's wealth is also apparent when we compare the value of his belongings that were sold after he passed away. All in all, the possessions of twenty-six deceased inmates were sold between 1530 and 1582, for an average value of 21.9 Kg (median 17.2 Kg). Bruegel's possessions were worth 48 Kg, a value that was only surpassed by that of the chaplain Jan van Tournhout (61.3 Kg) and of the apothecary Jan der Kinderen (88.2 Kg; his apothecary's inventory alone was worth 46 Kg). Finally, Bruegel died in possession of 12 Kg in cash. The average sums found in the purses of seven deceased was 6.9 Kg (median 6.5 Kg).<sup>73</sup> In terms of possessions and cash Bruegel was clearly among the wealthiest inmates.

### *Bruegel the Barber-Surgeon and Bruegel the Painter*

The Pieter Bruegel who retired to Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554 had worked as a barber-surgeon at the court of the Marquis Jan IV van Glymes. Although Bruegel did not have a very prestigious profession, he appears to have been relatively affluent. He can be characterized as a guild-educated master craftsman, as well as someone with access to Marquis Jan IV and his *Markiezenhof*. If he had a son, would the child have had access to his father's employer's palace? Could he have admired the monumental *Christoffelschouw* or some of the sixty-eight tapestries that were reported in an inventory of *Markiezenhof* from 1570?<sup>74</sup> Was this where he came into contact with Renaissance art for the first time, and found the inspiration to pursue a career as a painter? I will end this article with five elements from the life of Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon that seem to fit with what little we know about the youth of the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and a sixth element connecting the painter to Bergen op Zoom. Considering the evidence, it seems that the barber-surgeon who died in Sint-Janshuis in 1566 is a good candidate for the father of the painter.

First, let us begin with the name. If one were to ask ten genealogists to guess the name of the father of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the grandfather of his first-born son, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, they would probably all say: Pieter Bruegel. Late-medieval people usually stuck to names that ran in the family.<sup>75</sup> If our line of reasoning is correct, 'Pieter' may have been a family name that the barber-surgeon passed on to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who then did the same when Pieter Bruegel the Younger was born in 1564-1565.<sup>76</sup> There appears little room for confusing one family with this surname with another, first of

73 The only other corrodian who paid for his stay, just as Pieter Bruegel did, was a Wouter Lefevre. When he passed away his possessions were worth 30.45 Kg, and he had 11.85 Kg in cash in his room: WBA, BOZ-0001, 1150, Account 1569-1570, fol. 1v. See for his purchase price of 46 Kg WBA, BOZ-0001, 1149, Account 1554-1555, fols. 2r-v.

74 'Wisselende bondgenootschappen', 78-79.

75 Gerritzen, 'De voornaam', 21. Contrary to this naming practise, it has also been claimed that medieval people did not name the living, as this was believed to bring bad luck, but whether this superstition was still very strong by the sixteenth century is doubtful. It did not prevent Pieter Bruegel the Elder (†1569) from giving his first-born son the name Pieter in 1564-1565.

76 Pieter Bruegel the Younger named his son Pieter as well: this Pieter Bruegel III (1589-1638/1639) was a painter, like his father and grandfather.

all because the surname Bruegel was quite uncommon: up to now the name has not been identified before the lifetime of the painter, and it hardly features afterwards either. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons the surname was uncommon may be because it was a rather curious name, in the sense that one would expect a toponymic surname to include 'van': Van Bruegel. The preposition being absent in the names of both the barber-surgeon and the painter makes it unlikely we are mixing up two unrelated surnames.

Second, Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon moved to Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554. Although there was of course no official retirement age in the later Middle Ages, it was unusual for people younger than fifty to move into a home: only in specific circumstances, such as disability, were they allowed to do so.<sup>77</sup> The accounts of Sint-Janshuis do not provide evidence that Bruegel required any special medical attendance, though; it rather seems he lived there quietly between 1553-1554 and 1566. It is therefore safe to assume he was over fifty when he entered, which means he would have been born around 1500. That date would fit nicely with him fathering Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who is usually estimated to have been born between 1525 and 1530.<sup>78</sup>

Third, the barber-surgeon was relatively well-off. If he had children, he would surely have sent them to Bergen op Zoom's Latin school (*Latijnse School*), where children were educated in reading, writing, arithmetic, and in the liberal arts.<sup>79</sup> His wealth would also have allowed him to have his sons continue their studies by becoming an apprentice with a master craftsman, and perhaps by travelling.<sup>80</sup> The latter was expensive, as was getting a proper education: aspiring artists looking to learn the trade from an Antwerp master craftsman paid tuition fees of two Kg per annum – five day wages of a skilled labourer.<sup>81</sup> This was not an enormous sum, but at the same time not something every parent would have been able to raise.<sup>82</sup>

Fourth, the barber-surgeon lived and worked in Bergen op Zoom. The first time he is mentioned in sources from Bergen op Zoom is 1546 as the owner of an annuity. Before that there appears to be no mention of him. Bergen op Zoom is about forty kilometres west

77 Previous research indicates late-medieval retirees entering a retirement home were usually over fifty: Zuiderduijn, 'Pap en brood', 36, n. 48.

78 Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

79 On the subject of Bergen op Zoom's *Latijnse School*, see Mooij, *Geloof*, 204-205.

80 According to Van Mander, Pieter Bruegel the Elder travelled to France and Italy shortly after enrolling as an apprentice in Antwerp. See Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5. It was not uncommon for aspiring artists to travel to the cradle of the Renaissance.

81 Based on the tariff in Antwerp. In 1551, when Bruegel registered as member of the guild of St. Luke, the tuition was 2 *gouden guldens* per annum: Rombouts and Van Lierius, *De liggeren*, I, 177; De Vries and Van der Woude, *The first modern economy*, 610-611.

82 In Antwerp apprentices did not require citizenship, which is probably why Pieter Bruegel the Elder is not mentioned in the lists of new citizens of Antwerp (*poortersboeken*). Apprentices usually waited to acquire the very expensive citizenship (close to a month's wages of a skilled labourer) until they could establish themselves as masters. See De Meester, *Gastvrij Antwerpen?*, 46, 48. The argumentation that Bruegel's absence in the *poortersboeken* suggests he must have been born in Antwerp, as is suggested on the website of the Mayer van den Bergh Museum, is not entirely correct: he may well have lived in Antwerp without acquiring citizenship until 1563 when he moved to Brussels. See 'Bruegel van Antwerpen?', <http://ww.museummayervandenbergh.be/nl/pagina/bruegel-van-antwerpen> (Accessed on 11 May 2020).





Fig. 2 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Peasant Dance*, c. 1569, oil on panel, 114 × 164 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

of Breda, where his contemporary Giucciardini suggested that Pieter Bruegel the Elder was born. Could the Bruegel family have lived in Breda, and then moved to Bergen op Zoom, likely before 1546, where the barber-surgeon took up a position at *Markiezenhof* and Pieter Bruegel the Elder spent a substantial part of his youth and education, before he moved on to Antwerp?

Fifth, Bergen op Zoom is about forty kilometres north of Antwerp where Pieter Bruegel the Elder entered the guild of St. Luke in 1551. Moving from Bergen op Zoom to Antwerp to become a painter was perhaps a logical step, even more so for the son of a barber-surgeon who worked at the one of the most prominent courts of the Low Countries, the *Markiezenhof*. The court of the Marquis of Bergen fits in nicely with claims of Pieter Bruegel the Elder coming from an educated and urban environment, rather than being the son of a peasant, as has been claimed since Karel van Mander portrayed him as such in the seventeenth century.<sup>83</sup> Depending on the age at which Bruegel the painter left home, then, and on the extent to which the son of the barber-surgeon could gain access to the building, the *Markiezenhof* may well have been where he first laid eyes on Renaissance art.

Sixth, up to now our evidence has been mostly circumstantial, moving from Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon who retired in Sint-Janshuis, to Pieter Bruegel the painter. But there is also evidence going in the other direction, linking Bruegel the painter to Bergen

83 Wied, 'Pieter Bruegel'.



Fig. 3 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Peasant Dance*, c. 1569 (detail), oil on panel, 114 × 164 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

op Zoom. The art historian Jan Peeters established a link between Bergen op Zoom and an object Bruegel painted in *The Peasant Dance* (c. 1569; fig. 2). Hanging outside the building, a banner displays a coat of arms showing three red St. Andrew's crosses on a white background, and the saints Gertrude of Nivelles and Sebastian (fig. 3). According to Peeters, this is a unique combination of saints and a coat of arms that can only be attributed to the archery militia of Saint Sebastian of either Bergen op Zoom or the village of Borgvliet, located one kilometre to the south of Bergen op Zoom and ruled since 1481 by the Lords of Bergen.<sup>84</sup> It is difficult to imagine Bruegel being able to paint this banner had he not been familiar with Bergen op Zoom and its immediate surroundings. Peeters' finding

<sup>84</sup> Peeters, 'Bergen in Bruegel?'. His article is a response to Zijlderduijn, 'De markies, de barbier... en de schilder?'.

thus suggests a connection between a painting made by Bruegel the Elder and Bergen op Zoom. Taken together with the historical evidence of Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon who spent his final years in the retirement home of the Marquises of Bergen, the banner in *The Peasant Dance* might indicate the painter reminiscing about his youth in Bergen op Zoom.

### Conclusion

The identification of the coat of arms suggests Pieter Bruegel the Elder was familiar with either Bergen op Zoom or the nearby village of Borgvliet. This lends additional credibility to our claim that the barber-surgeon Pieter Bruegel, who had worked at *Markiezenhof* and retired to Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554, should be considered as the father of the painter. If this reading of the sources is correct, the latter would have spent part of his youth in Bergen op Zoom, where he would have attended school, and may well have had his first taste of Renaissance art during visits to *Markiezenhof*. Although this line of reasoning fits well with the school of thought that sees Pieter Bruegel the Elder as coming from an urban environment and having had a proper education, additional research is required to strengthen the link between the painter and the barber-surgeon. Who knows what else a fresh look at Bruegel's work, taking into consideration his possible link with Bergen op Zoom, might reveal?

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