Adriaen van Ostade, Frans Hals, and the art-loving Van den Heuvel family

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Adriaen van Ostade’s 1654 portrait of an unidentified family has always been one of the public favorites in the Louvre (fig. 1). A husband and wife lovingly hold hands while seated amidst a large family of children spanning a wide range of ages. Some are unable or barely able to stand, while others are clearly older, adults in fact. They are in a room with a wooden floor and whitewashed walls hung with several paintings. The roses and carnations strewn across the floor echo the dominant theme of a loving family.

The picture was bought in early 1785 by the Paris art dealer Alexandre-Joseph Paillet on one of his journeys to the Dutch Republic to buy works of art for the furnishing of the Louvre as a royal museum of fine art. In a report to Count d’Angiviller, who was responsible for the project as directeur des bâtiments du Roi, he stated that he had bought the picture for 2,600 guilders. He considered it to be a group portrait of the artist and his family, and felt that it was worthy of a special place in the Louvre for that reason alone. After the abolition of the monar-
chy and the beheading of Louis XVI in 1793 all the royal possessions passed to the new French republic. Since the opening of the Louvre as the national museum the group portrait has been displayed in the galleries devoted to the Flemish and Dutch schools of painting (fig. 2). It was there that the German playwright and diplomat August von Kotzebue saw it in 1804. After dismissing Gerard de Lairesse’s *Hercules at the crossroads* (fig. 4) and poking fun at a “fat Venus” by Rembrandt (fig. 3), he announced that he would happily part with three of those fat ladies for “that superb family picture” by the less well-known Van Ostade.

Van Ostade. Von Kotzebue embraced a fondness for bourgeois simplicity and apparent realism in his plays, a preference that was shared by some French revolutionaries, who had a high opinion of Dutch genre painting, of which Van Ostade was regarded as one of the leading representatives.

The appreciation that Van Ostade’s family portrait enjoyed in France rose to emblematic heights in the course of the nineteenth century. Louis Viardot regarded

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2 Alexis Chataigner and Joachim Jan Oortman after Pierre-Antoine Marchais after Adriaen van Ostade, “La famille d’Ostade,” from *Galérie du Musée Napoléon*, vol. 9, Paris 1813, pl. 596. Etching and engraving. 149 × 166 mm. London, British Museum, inv. nr. 1856.0308.1065

3 Studio or follower of Rembrandt, *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1660. Oil on canvas, 118 × 90 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. nr. 1743

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* The translation from the Dutch is by Michael Hoyle.


It as a “moral portrait of the Dutch family as a whole.” Charles Blanc went one better a couple of years later by describing it as a complete expression of “the genius of Holland — family feeling, tranquility of mind, interior life, rigid and simple.” On the latter point Blanc also spoke of the neat but austere look of the interior and, less flattering, of the individuals depicted and “the uniformity of their ugliness and of their costume.” The appeal of the scene was probably enhanced by the suggestion, first expressed by Paillet, that this was a portrait of Van Ostade himself and his family. This made the picture a symbol of what was thought to be the different, but more upright and natural self-image of seventeenth-century Dutch painters. That association is echoed in the letters of Vincent van Gogh, who expressed his love of the work on several occasions. However, it was established long ago that the family could not possibly be that of Adriaen van Ostade. It is known that he had no living children from his 1638 marriage to his first wife Machteltje Pieters, and just a single daughter, Johanna Maria, born in 1660 to his second wife Anna Ingels, whom he married in 1657. And his brother could not, as some believed, be standing in the background with his wife, because Isaac had been dead for five years in 1654. What follows is a detailed discussion of it, see exhibit. cat. Le siècle de Rembrandt: tableaux hollandaise des collections publiques françaises, Paris (Musée du Petit Palais) 1970, cat. nr. 153.

7 See also the so-called “self-portrait” that John Cassel engraved in 1858 after the man in the family portrait, now in the British Museum, London, inv. nr. 2006, U.1772.
10 A. van der Willigen, *Geschiedkundige aanteekeningen over Haarlemsche schilders, en andere beoefenaren van de beeldende kunsten, vooraf gegaan door eene korte geschiedenis van het schilders- of St. Lucas gild aldaar*, Haarlem 1866, pp. 170–76, was the first to write the biographies of Adriaen and Isaac van Ostade on the basis of documentary evidence. A. Rosenberg, *Adrian und Isack von Ostade*, Bielefeld 1900, pp. 60–63, was the first to employ Van der Willigen’s findings to disprove the old identification of the Paris family portrait. For a detailed discussion of it, see exhibit. cat. Le siècle de Rembrandt: tableaux hollandaise des collections publiques françaises, Paris (Musée du Petit Palais) 1970, cat. nr. 153.
The Merkman-Van Leeuwaarden collection. The painting had been more than a decade on the market when Paillet bought it in the Netherlands in 1785. On 21 September 1773 it was auctioned in Haarlem as the first lot in the public sale of “a particularly fine cabinet of artistic and pleasing paintings by leading masters, prints and drawings, as well as excellent musical instruments, fine printed music, garden ornaments and rarities” left on the death of Isabella van Leeuwaarden (1666–1773), the widow of Pieter Merkman Jr. (1699–1760). Van Ostade’s painting is described as follows in the sale catalogue:

“A finely furnished room with ten figures comprising a family. The parents are seated hand in hand, playing on the ground before them, which is scattered with flowers, are several children with cherries and flowers; behind and beside the parents are the eldest children in lively poses. This piece is superlatively executed in all these respects, and is one of the best pieces by A. van Ostade, height 2 feet, 6¼ inches, width 3 feet, 2¼ inches, panel.”

The following lots included two small portraits of boys, also by Van Ostade, which were recently acquired by the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.12 A family portrait by Frans Hals, to which we will return below, combined with the results of my own research, Pieter Merkman is there a family of which the composition bears even the slightest resemblance to those in this scene by Adriaen van Ostade, so there is no obvious clue here for identifying this family.

Fortunately, though, thanks to a lucky discovery in the Merkman-Van Leeuwaarden archives, the identity of the family group is now revealed after all. Housed in the archives is a small dossier relating to the finances of Abraham van Halmael, a Mennonite cloth merchant and dyer of Amsterdam who was declared bankrupt in 1665. The dossier contains a letter dated 1 July 1631 to his father, Isaac van Halmael. It was written by Nicolaes van Heuvel of Haarlem, who was married to a daughter of Isaac van Halmael, to which someone added the following astonishing annotation: “N.B.: this Nicolaes van Heuvel represents the father in the family piece painted by Adr. van Ostade, as well as in the piece painted by Frans Hals” (fig. 12).14 The annotation is in the handwriting of Isabella van Leeuwaarden, whose art collection was auctioned in 1773.15 In other words, she felt certain that the father in the two family portraits by Van Ostade and Hals that she owned was one and the same person, namely Nicolaes van Heuvel.

Now, it is not always the case that an old identification of a portrait is correct. One regularly comes across instances of the wrong name being written on the back of a portrait, and one can also find someone adding the wrong coat of arms to a portrait at a later date, and incorrect identifications are also found in contemporary probate inventories, particularly of ancestors from two or more generations earlier. However, that does not mean that one should discount early identifications of that kind, because they can also be correct. In the case of the Van Ostade and Hals family portraits this is the only clue that we have.

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11 Catalogus van een extra fraai kabinetje konstige en plaisante schilderijen van voornaame meesters, prenten en tekeningen, als mede uitmuntende speelinstrumenten, fraaie muziek, tuincieraden en rarieteyten, alle nagelaten door oude I. van Leeuwaarden, wed. de heer P. Merkman, Haarlem (V. van der Vinne), 21 September 1773 (Lugt 2194), nr. 1: “Een fraai gemeubileerde kamer met tien beelden [figuren], verbeeldende een familie: de ouders zitten hand aan hand, voor haar op de grond die met bloemen bestrooit is, speelen eenige kinderen met kerssen en bloemen, agter en naast de ouders staan de oudste kinderen in een leevenige houding, dit stuk is in alle deene uitmuntend uitgevoerd en een der beste stukken van A. van Ostade, hoog 2 voet, 6¼ duim, breed 3 voet, 2¼ duim, paneel.” The only known copy of this catalogue, lacking the names of buyers and prices paid, is in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Estampes, nr. Yd-572 (4).

12 Inv. nrs. PD.23-2020 and PD.24-2020. I hope to return to the identification of these two portraits elsewhere.


14 Noord-Hollands Archief, Haarlem (henceforth NHA), access nr. 3424, Familie en firma Merkman te Haarlem 1595–1774, inv. nr. 87: “N.B.: deeze Nicolaes van Heuvel verbeeld de vaeder int Famielle stuk van Adr. van Ostade geschilderd alsmeede in ’t stuk geschilderd door Frans Hals.” I am very grateful to Ruud Lambour, who generously communicated this fact to me, together with his notes on the Van den Heuvel and Halmael families. I have made grateful use of this information below, combined with the results of my own research.

15 For comparison: ibid., inv. nr. 23, Journalen en kasboeken van Isabella van Leeuwaarden, 1748–64.
And although the name Nicolaes van Heuvel does not at first sight appear in the family trees of Isabella van Leeuwaarden and her husband Pieter Merkman, it is odd that his letter ended up in their family archive, so there must have been some relationship between the two families that could also account for the portraits entering Isabella's collection. So it is worth taking a look to see what can be learned about Nicolaes van Heuvel and his family.

The Van or Van den Heuvels came from the small town of Weert, called Overweert at the time, which had long been part of the seignory of Horn belonging to the counts of Horne. Nowadays Weert lies in the far north of the Dutch province of Limburg, bordering the province of North Brabant and Germany. Weert had a flourishing cloth industry in the late Middle Ages, of which the Van den Heuvel family were part, but when the Count of Horne was beheaded on the Grote Markt in Brussels in 1568 the seignory came under direct control of the Habsburgs. That must have been why the brothers Dirck (Weert c. 1536-Haarlem 1617) and Claes van den Heuvel (Weert c. 1540-Haarlem 1625), who had espoused the Reformation, left Weert. They moved first to Gogh in Germany, where they lived and worked for a few years before moving to Haarlem. Dirk is first recorded there in 1584. He was living in a house in Damstraat, “where nowadays the town sign of Weert hangs out.” And indeed, Haarlem had a large community of immigrants from Weert, Eindhoven and their surroundings, almost all of whom worked in the linen industry and cloth trade, and had arrived there with the influx of people fleeing from the southern Nether-


5 and 6 Frans Hals, Portrait of a man with a watch and his wife, possibly the Haarlem watchmaker Matthis Jansz Bockelts and his wife Maria Bastiaens van Hout, 1643. Oil on canvas, 82.2 × 66.2 cm and 82.6 × 67.3 cm. Philadelphia, The Barnes Foundation, inv. nr. BF 261, and Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. nr. 6421
lands for religious reasons. The Van den Heuvels traded in yarn from Silesia, which was used in Haarlem in the manufacture of linen.\textsuperscript{17}

One of Claes’s sons, Willem van den Heuvel (Weert c. 1570-Haarlem 1631), was also active in the yarn business, and had an international trading network that extended from Silesia in the north-east of what is now Germany and north-west Poland all the way to England and France.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1607 he bought two houses on the corner of Zijlstraat and Craaienhorstergracht (modern Nassaulaan) in Haarlem, to which he later added two neighboring houses on the canal. Most members of the Van den Heuvel family belonged to the Reformed Church, but Willem adhered to the hardline principles of the Old Flemish Mennonites. Around 1620 he and a slightly more moderate group among the religious community in Haarlem split off from

\textsuperscript{17} For a description of the use of Silesian yarn, see J.K. May, Koopmansverlastiging, of volledige beschrijving van alles, wat den koophandel en scheepvaart betreft, 2 vols., Amsterdam 1769, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 128–33. For Haarlem’s importance as a staple town for Silesian yarn and the part played by southern Netherlandish immigrants, see H. Kaptein, De Hollandse textielnijverheid 1350–1600: conjunctuur en continuïteit, Hilversum 1998, pp. 185–233, and H. Rombouts (ed.), Haarlem ging op wollen zolen: opkomst, bloei en ondergang van de textielnijverheid aan het Spaarne, Schoorl 1995, pp. 64–65. In NHA, access nr. 3993, Stadsbestuur van Haarlem, inv. nrs. 3874–85, there are several documents about the sale of Silesian yarn in Haarlem in which Dirck, Hendrick, Willem, Severijn and Nicolaes van den Heuvel are mentioned.

\textsuperscript{18} Ora Haarlem, inv. nr. 290, fol. 92, 14 May 1607; ibid., inv. nr. 319, fols. 255v–56, 2 August 1647; NHA, access nr. 1617, Old Notarial Archives, Haarlem (henceforth Ora Haarlem), inv. nr. 235, fol. 50, notary Jan Davidsz Colterman, 28 January 1647; NHA, Stadsbestuur van Haarlem, inv. nr. 3149, Verponding 1650–52, fols. 32v and 33.
the rest, who were mocked as the “Breast Squeezers” by their opponents because their pastor, Lucas Philipsz, had dealt leniently with a member of the congregation who had acted improperly with a female member before marriage.\textsuperscript{19}

Like Willem van den Heuvel and his brothers and sister, his six sons and daughters followed their own separate religious paths. The writer of the letter of 1631 and presumptive father in the portraits by Van Ostade and Hals, Nicolaes van Heuvel (who never signed as Van den Heuvel) followed his father’s example. In 1627 he had himself baptized in the Old Flemish congregation in Dordrecht, where he was evidently living at the time. He returned to Haarlem a few months later.\textsuperscript{20} His sister Barbara married a man from a Mennonite family.\textsuperscript{21} Nicolaes’s two eldest brothers, Marten and Severijn, were certainly members of the public Reformed Church,\textsuperscript{22} but we have not the slightest idea of the religious convictions of his third brother, Godfried, to whom we will return below, or of his sister Anna.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{THE VAN HEUVEL-HALMAEL FAMILY} Nicolaes van Heuvel (Haarlem c. 1603-Haarlem 1661) was the sixth and youngest child of Willem van den Heuvel and Maij- cken Coppens. On 14 October 1628 he became betrothed to Susanna van Halmael (Amsterdam 1606/07-Haarlem 1667) of Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{24} The Van Halmaels were Mennonites, but most of them were far more liberal than the Old Flemish Nicolaes or his father Willem. Susanna’s elder sister Geertruyd had herself been baptized in the Mennonite congregation of the so-called Waterlanders, who held their services in a clandestine church known as “bij de Toren,” that is to say the Jan Rodenpoortstoren on the Singel in Amsterdam. Her brothers Isaac, Abraham and Adam followed her example.\textsuperscript{25} Their sister Rachel went a step further by having herself christened a Remonstrant in 1642.\textsuperscript{26} Susanna’s father Isaac van Halmael is recorded in 1641 in a list of the members of the moderate United Flemish, High German and Frisian Mennonite congregation “bij het Lam.”\textsuperscript{27} It is not known whether Susanna van Halmael transferred to the stricter Old Flemings in Haarlem when she married Nicolaes van Heuvel in 1628 or, conversely, whether her husband joined the less doctrinaire Waterland congregation, or whether they perhaps both joined the Flemish congregation in the “de Block” meeting-house in Klein Heiligland.\textsuperscript{28} In 1669 that group, which had by now merged into a single congregation of United Flemish, High German and Frisian Mennonites, listed the children of Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael as members.\textsuperscript{29} Nicolaes van Heuvel nevertheless kept up with his Old Flemish acquaintances, for in 1667 the painter Salomon van Ruijsdael, who adhered...
to the same convictions, was still one of the executors handling the estate of Nicolaes and his wife, together with the Amsterdam Waterlander David Rutgers Jr., who probably represented the Van Halmael side of the family. In line with the activities of his father and his brothers Severijn and Godfried, Nicolaes was active in the Silesian yarn business, for he is mentioned in connection with it in a wide range of documents. He conducted his international trading activities from the house on the corner of Zijlstraat and Craaienhorstergracht, where he and his wife lived until they died.

Since no seventeenth-century baptismal records of Mennonite children in Haarlem have been preserved it is not easy to reconstruct the precise composition of the family of Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael. We do, though, have a few clues. There is repeated mention of “children” in the will that Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael drew up in Haarlem on 6 November 1646, and in a codicil dated 6 April 1651 they declare that “among others of their children” there was a daughter called Maria who had first married the late Hendrick Abrahamsz Vlamingh, and was now wedded to Govert Bletij, the son of a cloth weaver from Woensel, who was on the point of leaving for Silesia, yet to whose parents’ estate after settlement of what she had received on her marriage, so in other words she can make no further claim on the estate. It emerges from the will of Govert Bletij and Maria van Heuvel, the widow of their deceased brother Willem van Heuvel, appeared before the notary. Govert Bletij was then authorized to sell two houses on the corner of Zijlstraat and Craaienhorstergracht. So instead of making do with the name of the daughter Maria we immediately learn those of five other children of the marriage, which are also recorded in other documents (fig. 8). Since the people present on this kind of occasion were usually listed in order of seniority, it can be assumed that Maria was the eldest daughter, followed by Catalina, Isabella, Rachel and Geertruijt van Heuvel, and Maria van de Putte, the widow of their deceased brother Willem van Heuvel, born between 1635 and 1640. He died in 1666, leaving his widow with two small children to bring up.

If we compare these facts with Van Ostade’s fam-

30 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 301, fol. 403, notary Willem van Kittensteijn, 10 December 1667.
31 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 137, fol. 168, notary Jacob Schoudt, 27 December 1643; Servaes Montenack, merchant, declares that his “cousin” Jacob Montenack, was well acquainted with Jan Bardoeel, Gillis de Koocker and Nicolaes van Heuvel Willemsz, whom he served in Silesia. There are also many documents in which Nicolaes van Heuvel invited others to make statements about the quality of Silesian yarn that they had received, among them three documents in ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 343, fols. 233v–35v, notary Maximiliaen Bardoeel, 16 October 1659.
32 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 149, fol. 243, notary Jacob Schoudt, 30 April 1640, regarding business contacts in Rouen; ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 228, fol. 98, notary Nicolaes van Bosvelt, 8 November 1660, declaration about his factor in London. For the house, see ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 101, fol. 16, notary Willem van Vriese, 19 January 1630, and fol. 46v, 22 January 1630, codicils to the will of Willem van Heuvel with stipulations regarding the ownership of the house in Zijlstraat and the residence there of his son Nicolaes and the latter’s family.
33 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 140, fols. 131–33, notary Jacob Schoudt, 6 November 1646.
34 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 143, fol. 75, notary Jacob Schoudt, 6 April 1651. This codicil places Maria van Heuvel in the compulsory due portion of her parents’ estate after settlement of what she had received on her marriage, so in other words she can make no further claim on the estate. It emerges from the will of Govert Bletij and Maria van Heuvel, the widow of their deceased brother Willem van Heuvel, who was now between 43 and 44 years old, was “most heavy with young.”

Nicolaes van Heuvel was buried in Haarlem’s Grote Kerk on 20 December 1661, and his wife Susanna van Halmael was interred in the same grave on 31 October 1667. We learn more about their children from documents written after their parents’ death. On 10 December 1667, Govert Bletij, acting as the husband of Maria van Heuvel and for her younger sisters Catalina, Isabella, Rachel and Geertruijt van Heuvel, and Maria van de Putte, the widow of their deceased brother Willem van Heuvel, appeared before the notary. Govert Bletij was then authorized to sell two houses on the corner of Zijlstraat and Craaienhorstergracht. So instead of making do with the name of the daughter Maria we immediately learn those of five other children of the marriage, which are also recorded in other documents (fig. 8). Since the people present on this kind of occasion were usually listed in order of seniority, it can be assumed that Maria was the eldest daughter, followed by Catalina, Isabella, Rachel and Geertruijt. It is known that their brother Willem married Maria van de Putte in 1660, so he was probably born between 1635 and 1640. He died in 1666, leaving his widow with two small children to bring up.

If we compare these facts with Van Ostade’s fam-

35 ORA Haarlem, inv. nr. 915, fol. 162, 19 January 1648; ibid., fol. 178, 30 October 1650; Nationaal Archief, The Hague, access nr. 3.03.01.01, Hof van Holland, inv. nr. 3002, fol. 168, 3 September 1650 respectively. It is clear from the latter document that Maria’s marriage did not proceed smoothly. She and her parents denied that she had ever promised to marry Govert Bletij, who was on the point of leaving for Silesia, yet the marriage was celebrated a few months later. See also ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 143, fol. 21, notary Jacob Schoudt, 10 September 1650, in which Maria declared that after the death of her first husband she had moved in with her parents.
36 See note 34: “opt vuijstije bevrucht.”
37 DTB Haarlem, inv. nr. 73, p. 220, and inv. nr. 96, p. 293 respectively.
38 See note 30.
39 ORA Haarlem, inv. nr. 331, fols. 102–03, 21 April 1668; ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 303, fols. 80v–81, notary Willem van Kittensteijn, 25 August 1668.
40 ORA Haarlem, inv. nr. 915, fol. 247, 26 September 1660.
41 DTB Haarlem, inv. nr. 76, p. 89, 23 July 1666.
ily portrait of 1654, the provisional conclusion must be that Isabella van Leeuwarden's identification is certainly not impossible. It would mean that seated on the left are Nicolaes van Heuvel (c. 1603–61) with his wife Su-
sanna van Halmael (1606/07–67). The figure on the far left, to the right of his father, would be the only son Wil-
lem (d. 1666), aged between 14 and 19. Standing on the other side of the seated couple are their oldest daughter Maria (1629/30–95), presumably with her second husband, Govert Bletij (d. 1679). In front of them and to the right are five younger children, four of whom we now know by name: Catalina (d. 1708), Isabella (d. 1719), Rachel (d. 1678) and Geertruijt (d. 1720). It is impossible to say precisely which name belongs to which child. If this is indeed the family depicted by Van Ostade, there must either have been another child, probably another daughter, alive in 1654 who would have died before December 1667. Either that or the youngest of the children is a daughter of Maria van Heuvel and Govert Bletij, possibly Maria (d. 1681) or Susanna (d. 1721).

As Charles Blanc noted in 1861, Van Ostade's painting affords us a view into a simple room with bare wood-
en floorboards and white walls. A closer look, though, shows that there are more signs of prosperity than one notices in a cursory glance. The wooden bed in the back-
ground is a Classicist structure with pillars and luxuri-
hous hangings. On top of the bed and over the door in the background are Chinese porcelain vases and dishes. The paintings on the walls and above the mantelpiece appear to be by decent artists, and the mantelpiece itself has an ornate relief. These all match the description in the 1646 will of Nicolaes and Susanna, which speaks of "furnishings and household goods, with paintings, por-
celain, as well as unminted silverware and gold." We do not know whether the painting depicts a real room in the family home on the corner of Zijlstraat and Craaienhor-
stergaart, but it is certainly not impossible.

There are three drawings that Adriaen van Ostade made when preparing for the family portrait (fig. 9–11), and in them he mainly experimented with the placement...
and grouping of the figures.\textsuperscript{48} In all three the man is to the left of his wife, whereas in the finished painting their positions are reversed in favor of the more traditional arrangement. Maria, their eldest daughter and her husband are to the right of the seated couple from the very outset, but Van Ostade tried out several variants for the activities and positioning of the other children. In one of the drawings the son Willem is holding the doll belonging to one of his little sisters, and in the other two variants he is also grouped with them, each time on the right of the composition. In the painted version he has been moved to the other side, to his father’s right. Once again, tradition prevailed over Van Ostade’s originally playful approach. The same applies to the ultimate grouping of the children: in the painting they seem to have been arranged in a rather uninspired row by age from right to left. It is not inconceivable that Nicolaes van Heuvel and his wife had an important say in the final composition.\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{Hals and van Heuvel} Now that we have shown that it is by no means impossible, in fact probable, that Isabella van Leeuwarden’s information on the letter of 1631 are probably variation in the compositional program. A further striking detail is that in the painting and all the preliminary studies one of the children, and seemingly not the very youngest one, is sitting on the floor, so it may have been crippled.

\textsuperscript{48} For these drawings, see B. Schnackenburg, \textit{Adriaen van Ostade, Isack van Ostade: Zeichnungen und Aquarelle}, 2 vols., Hamburg 1981, vol. 1, p. 98, nrs. 83–85.

\textsuperscript{49} In one of the drawings, inv. nr. 5037, it seems as if one or perhaps two children have been inserted between the mother and father. These

\textbf{9–11} Adriaen van Ostade, \textit{Three preliminary studies for the family portrait of 1654}. Pen and brown ink over pencil, gray-brown wash, 122 × 232 mm, 160 × 201 mm and 126 × 213 mm respectively. Paris, Fondation Custodia, inv. nrs. 1190, 5096 and 5037.
by Nicolaes van Heuvel is correct, it is time to take a look at the family portrait by Frans Hals that she mentions, which was also in her collection (fig. 12). It is described as follows in the sale catalogue of 1773:

“A family piece: a woman seated at a table on which there is a rug and rummer of wine, with a man standing behind her who is looking with pleasure at two children leading each other by the hand, all artfully painted by F. Hals, height 44 inches, width 37 inches, canvas.”

That painting, which is now in the Cincinnati Art Museum, is generally dated around 1635 on the evidence of the costumes. It is by far the smallest of Hals's known family portraits. The figures in the other three, in London, Madrid, and as fragments in Brussels, Toledo (Ohio) and elsewhere, are life-sized. For a long time the identity of the families in all four portraits was unknown until some years ago, when Pieter Biesboer discovered that the family in the fragmentary picture was that of the Catholic cloth merchant Gijsbert Claesz van Campen. We are now in a position to identify the sitters in one of the other three portraits.

We know that Nicolaes van Heuvel was well over 30 years old in 1635 and that Susanna van Halmael was approaching that age, and that they had at least one daughter, Maria who was around six years old. The similarity between the likeness of the mother in Frans Hals's portrait and the one in Van Ostade's painting is striking, and is made all the more so by the fact that their heads are posed in the same way in both pictures. In the eldest child in Hals’s portrait of c. 1635 one can already recognize the features of Maria van Heuvel, the eldest daughter whom we got to know from Van Ostade’s painting. At first sight the resemblance between the young standing father in the Hals and the seated older man in the Van Ostade is less evident, but there are enough similarities to confirm that it is the same person. The younger girl beside Maria might perhaps be the Catalina who is mentioned in 1667 as being the second oldest daughter, but the difference in the ages in the Van Ostade of 1654 suggests that she must have been quite a bit younger than her eldest sister, so it is more likely that the girl whom Hals painted around 1635 is the one whom Nicolaes van Heuvel had to bury in December 1636, which immediately supplies a *terminus ante quem* for this family portrait.

The background of the painting, though, does pose puzzles. In the first place, there is a discussion in the art-historical literature as to whether Frans Hals did actually paint this view of a garden with a large towered building in the background. In 1970 Slive suggested that it be the hand of Pieter de Molijn. Some authors believe that the background was painted by someone other than

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50 See note 11, nr. 4: “Een familie stuk: een vrouw zit aan een tafel, waarop een tapijt en wynroemer, agter haar staat de man die met ge-noeg na twee kinderen aanziet, die elkander by de hand lyden, alles konstig geschildert door F. Hals, hoog 44 duim, breed 37 duim, d[oe]k.”


54 DTB Haarlem, inv. nr. 70, p. 255, 6 December 1636.
Hals, whereas others maintain that it is indeed by Hals over a bold underpaint.\(^{55}\) Grimm’s view that the entire family portrait is the work of a son of Frans Hals has not found general approval.\(^{56}\)

Leaving aside the question of attribution, we are left with the question of what is actually depicted in the background. It is known that Nicolaes van Heuvel owned a garden beyond the Kruispoort to the north of Haarlem,\(^{57}\) but the only monumental complex around there was the Leper House, and that did not look anything like this building. Perhaps the background has something to do with Van Heuvel’s trade with Silesia, or is a reference to the family’s connection with Weert or Goch, for in 1641 Nicolaes’s brother Marten still owned the family home there.\(^{58}\) Or is it a reference to Van Halmael’s connection with Emmerich? But those places, too, do not have a building like this one. It can of course, be a playful fantasy dreamed up by the artist as a more general allusion to the blithe outdoor life of summer enjoyed by the still small family of Nicolaes van Heuvel, Susanna van Halmael and their two young children.

Another point worth noting in both paintings is the sitters’ costumes. It is striking that Van Ostade’s men (father, son and son-in-law) are not wearing any cuffs, and the same is true of the father in Hals’s picture. That could be due to Nicolaes van Heuvel’s originally Old Flemish convictions. In those days its adherents observed very strict dress codes that banned anything that even hinted at frippery. By contrast, the mothers and daughters in both paintings do have cuffs, albeit plain ones. The same applies to the flat collars with only restrained decoration that all Van Ostade’s women are wearing, and the lightly goffered ruff of the mother in Hals’s earlier portrait and the sparingly decorated collars of her two daughters. In most of the painted portraits of Mennonites of this period the women have no cuffs or at most a narrow border that peeks out from the sleeve. Recent research focusing on Govert Flinck’s 1636 portrait of Dirck Jacobsz Leeuw has shown that a small, usually very rich minority of Amsterdam Mennonites had far freer dress codes. Five percent of the probate inventories of Amsterdam Mennonites from the period 1625–70 mention cuffs and tasseled collars.\(^{59}\)

**Provenance**

There are clearly defined clusters among the works of art in the estate of Pieter Merkman and Isabella van Leeuwarden: family portraits, quite a few works by seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Haarlem painters, but also pictures by French and Italian masters. Not many citizens of Haarlem would have owned a painting by Boucher at the time, but they had two.\(^{60}\) One suspects that this type of painting was acquired by Pieter Merkman. He was an active though not very talented poet and a keen amateur musician with an international taste. The estate included a harpsichord, a clavichord, three basses, six violins, a lute, two horns and twelve different kinds of flute, as well as masses of contemporary sheet music, printed and in manuscript, by many great and less well-known contemporary Italian composers, and a few by Handel and Telemann. These were complemented by objects recalling the profession of many of Isabella’s forebears, who were prominent watchmakers in Haarlem and Amsterdam.\(^{61}\)

Isabella van Leeuwarden and Pieter Merkman were not direct descendants of Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael, so how did they end up owning the portraits by Van Ostade and Hals? Since Nicolaes van Heuvel and his wife had stipulated that the surviving spouse could remain in “restful and peaceable”\(^{62}\) possession of the estate until his or her death, we can assume that the portraits remained hanging in the house in Zijlstraat on the corner of Craaienhorstergracht until

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58 *ONA Amsterdam*, inv. nr. 1004, unfoliated, notary Gerrit Coren, 12 June 1641.


60 See note 11, nrs. 39–40: “Diana en eenige jagtnimphe, door Boucher” (“Diana and some nymphs of the hunt, by Boucher”) and “Bachus [sic] en Ariadne, door dezelve, zynde een weerga” (“Bacchus and Ariadne, by the same, a companion piece”).


62 See note 34: “rustelijck ende vredelijck.”
the death of Susanna van Halmael in October 1667. Their eldest and only son Willem had already died by then, so it is not likely that the paintings descended through that line.\(^63\) The Zijlstraat house was sold by the children in 1668, after Susanna’s death.\(^64\) It is conceivable that the portraits then passed to the only married daughter, Maria, who had been living with her husband Govert Bletij in Grote Houtstraat since 1659.\(^65\) She had already received her due portion from her parents’ estate, so no longer had a legal claim on it, but we have no way of knowing whether that provision would have been applied so strictly to family heirlooms of this kind.\(^66\) Govert Bletij was declared bankrupt in 1678, and was forced to sell his house in Grote Houtstraat, “where the great stork hangs” that year, together with its entire contents.\(^67\) If that included the portraits they would have come on the market then, but that would probably not have been the case, for items of that kind were usually excluded from forced sales because of their commemorative value.

Another possibility is that the remaining sisters, Catalina, Isabella, Rachel and Geertruijt, kept the paintings. After the sale of the parental home in 1668 they moved to a smaller house nearby on Craaienhorstergracht, which had also belonged to their parents. That house was sold in turn in 1683.\(^68\) Thirty years later we find the two surviving sisters living in the less genteel street of the Nieuwe Gracht, opposite the Ossenmarkt. It is not known where they had lived in the interim.\(^69\) Rachel was the only one of the four to marry, taking as her husband Cornelis van Mekeren of Amsterdam in 1671.\(^70\) When she died in 1678 she left a daughter called Susanna, who as the widow of George Roeters lived in great state in Drakenburg Castle near Baarn until her death in 1768. There are no indications that Susanna van Mekeren or her descendants ever owned the paintings.

The most probable scenario is that sometime after the death of Susanna van Halmael the paintings passed to her sister Maria in Haarlem (Amsterdam c. 1608-Haarlem 1676) or to her only living brother Abraham van Halmael (Amsterdam 1614/15–89). It was his bankruptcy that led to the creation of the file in which Nicolaes van Heuvel’s letter with Isabella van Leeuwarden’s inscription was preserved. The painting must therefore have passed by way of Abraham van Halmael’s wife Maria Noortdijck (Amsterdam 1620/21–94) into the possession of Isabella’s father Jacobus van Leeuwaarden (Haarlem 1654/55–1726), because on 9 February 1692 he declared that he owned the rights to Maria Noortdijck’s entire estate.\(^71\)

Whereas the family portrait by the internationally renowned Adriaen van Ostade left the Dutch Republic when it was bought by Paillet for the French king as early as 1785, the one by Frans Hals, who was then far less well-known, remained in his native country. In 1782 the artist Anthonie Waldorp drew copies after the figures in the portrait,\(^72\) at a time when the picture must have been in a private collection in the Republic, possibly that of the Amsterdam collector Jan Danser Nijman. It was at the sale of his art collection on 16 August 1797 that it was sold for 32 guilders and 10 stuivers to the Amsterdam banker Otto Willem Johan Berg,\(^73\) who owned it until his death in 1825.\(^74\) It can then be followed through a succession of

63 Documents relating to the settlement of Willem van Heuvel’s estate are in Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 378a, fol. 332, notary Lourens Baert, 24 October 1674; inv. nr. 378b, deed nr. 20, notary Lourens Baert, 21 February 1674; inv. nr. 382a, fol. 27, notary Lourens Baert, 9 February 1678.

64 See note 39.

65 Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 325, fols. 280v-81v, 11 March 1659.

66 See note 34.

67 Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 382a, fol. 91, notary Lourens Baert, 11 May 1676; Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 337, fols. 99v-100: “...waar de grote ooevaar uithangt,” 17 December 1678. Govert Bletij had already sold part of this house; see Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 333, fol. 49, 27 February 1670.

68 Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 341, fols. 125v-26, 1 June 1683.

69 Ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 663, acte 222, notary Casparus Noppens, 21 October 1713, will of Isabella and Geertruijnt van Heuvel.

70 DBT Amsterdam, inv. nr. 688, p. 187, 24 January 1671.

71 Ona Amsterdam, inv. nr. 5716, unpaginated, notary Nicolaes van Loosdrecht, 9 February (22 January deleted) 1692, probate inventory of Maria Noortdijck, widow of Abraham van Halmael. Several paintings are mentioned in the inventory, but there is no explicit men-
European collections until it ended up with the American
Mary Emery-Hopkins, who bequeathed it to the Cincin-
nati museum in 1927, where it has been a valued part of
the permanent collection ever since, but until now with-
out the names of the sitters.75

MARTEN AND GODFRIED VAN DEN HEUVEL. Having
linked both family portraits to the name of Nicolaes
van Heuvel and his family, it is worth taking a look at
the possessions of his brothers and sisters, two of whom
left their mark on the history of art. His eldest brother
Marten (Goch 1582/83-Amsterdam 1661), traded in any-
thing he could lay his hands on. Eloy Koldeweij, who has
thoroughly researched his business dealings, mentions
marine insurance, pepper, herrings, pearls, pewter, blue
dye, beaver pelts, paper, aniseed, grain, wool, yarn, linen
and hats. He was active in Amsterdam from 1627 at the
latest, and around 1632 Marten set up his Rising Sun gilt
leather works behind Prinsengracht near Lauriergracht.
Thanks to his spectacular bankruptcy in 1640, with loss-
es of more than 470,000 guilders we know a great deal
about his business and possessions.76

Koldeweij has already pointed out that Marten van
den Heuvel had a vast library, with books that were val-
ued at a total of 10,000 guilders in 1641. On his death in
1661 he still had 190 books in Latin, French, German,
English, Italian, Spanish and Dutch, as well as diction-
aries to help him read them. Even that relatively small
collection, which was probably just a fraction of his origi-
nal library, covered a wide spectrum of the humanities,
ranging from editions of the Bible in various languages,
to works by Caesar, Virgil, Seneca, Augustine, Aretino,
Tasso, Macchiavelli, Erasmus, Lipsius, Spieghel, Bacon,
Hugo de Groot (Grotius), Hooft, Huygens, and so on and
so on. Marten van den Heuvel must have been a very
well-read man.77

In his letters Grotius occasionally mentions an Am-
sterdam merchant called Marten van Heuvel who sup-
posedly wrote an introduction to the third volume of
the collected works of Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert. The
literature on Grotius and Coornhert is always slightly
noncommittal as to whether this is our Marten,78 but to
my mind there can be no doubt that it is. Not only is his
vast library evidence of his wide reading and great inter-
est in humanism, but it is also known that in 1640 he had
a “framed print of Coornhert” hanging on his wall,79
possibly the engraved portrait by Goltzius, by whom he also
had a drawing. In the introduction to the third volume
of Coornhert’s Wercken, Marten van den Heuvel, as a sup-
porter of Coornhert’s moderate ideas with their teach-
ings about reconciliation, openly took issue with Luther,
Zwingli, Calvin and Menno Simons, the four “popes”
of Christendom who were constantly denouncing each
other as heretics, and with the “schismatic hunger” of the
Old Flemish Mennonites, to whom his father Willem and
brother Nicolaes belonged.80

Marten van den Heuvel is also interesting as an art
collector. There is an engraving by Pieter van Sompel
after a painting by Rubens with a remarkable dedication
by the publisher, Pieter Claesz Soutman (fig. 13): “To the
celebrated merchant Marten van den Heuvel, far-famed
for his fine wit, Pieter Soutman, filled with love and good
benevolence, dedicates this Ixion deceived by Juno.”81

Soutman did not choose this scene by chance, for Van
den Heuvel undoubtedly owned this painting by Rubens, which is now in the Louvre (fig. 14).\footnote{Foucart-Walter and Foucart, op. cit. (note 1), p. 243, inv. nr. rF 2121.} In the estate inventory drawn up immediately after his bankruptcy in 1640, the painting, albeit without the artist’s name, is described as “1 painting, in which nude figures and Juno with her peacock.” In addition to this large picture, the portrait of Coornhert and the Goltzius drawing, Marten van den Heuvel had a portrait of his deceased father Willem van den Heuvel, a landscape with the Good Samaritan, scenes of Sts Peter and Paul and of Judah and Tamar, an allegory of vanity, two landscapes by Joos de Momper, and several other paintings.\footnote{Koldeweij, op. cit. (note 76), p. 522: “1 schilderije daerin nae-cete beelden en Juno met haer pau.” See also F. Lammertse and J. van der Veen, Uylenburgh & zoon: kunst en commercie van Rembrandt tot De Lairesse, Zwolle 2006, pp. 121, 123–24.}

His brother Godfried (Haarlem 1594/95–1669) was also interested in art. Bredius had already discovered that Jan Miense Molenaer and Cornelis de Bruyn had testified in the presence of a notary in November 1637 that they had seen 22 paintings belonging to Godfried with the book dealer Hans van Wesbusch at the Grote Markt in Haarlem, and that he was connected with the Amsterdam art dealer Johannes de Renialme.\footnote{A. Bredius, Künstler-Inventare: Urkunden zur Geschichte der holländischen Kunst des xviten, xvitten und xviitten Jahrhunderts, 8 vols., The Hague 1915–21, vol. 1, p. 11.} After Godfried’s death in 1669 an advertisement appeared in the Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant in which his heirs announced that on 10 April 1670 in the Prinsenhof in Haarlem “they desire to sell paintings left by the same, by various excellent masters whose names shall be specified in bills hereafter.”\footnote{Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant, 22 March and 3 April 1670: “…begeeren te verkoopen desselfs naergelaten schilderyen, van diversse uytsteeckende meesters; waer van de namen by biljetten hier naer sul- len gespecificeert werden.”} It is not known whether the auction ever took place and who the “excellent masters” were.\footnote{In his will of 23 September 1662, which was drawn up in his house in Koningsstraat (ona Haarlem, inv. nr. 291, fols. 228–29, notary Willem van Kittenstijn), Godfried van den Heuvel appointed his sister Barbara or her descendants and the descendants of his dead brothers Marten, Severijn and Nicolaes as his heirs. Other documents state that Pieter van Sompel after Peter Paul Rubens, Ixion deceived by Juno and Jupiter. Engraving, 25.8 × 33.3 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. nr. RP-P-1937–1723.
Adriaen van Ostade, Frans Hals, and the art-loving Van den Heuvel family

Adriaen van Ostade, Frans Hals, and the art-loving Van den Heuvel family

den Heuvel, had a large number of paintings, including works by such artists as Salomon de Bray, Cornelis van Haarlem, Jan van Goyen, Honthorst, Lastman, Pieter de Molijn, Hendrick Mommers, Adriaen van Ostade, Frans Post, Rembrandt (a small figure of a man and a story of Tobias), Moyses van Wtenbrouck, Esaias van de Velde, Cornelis Vroom and Philips Wouwerman. It is not known if they included works that had belonged to her uncle Godfried. In any event she had “the portrait of the late Geurt van den Heuvel by Frans Hals, as well as a small ditto of the same Van Heuvel.” From this it is clear that Frans Hals not only painted a portrait of Nicolaes van Heuvel and his family around 1635, but also that of his brother Godfried van den Heuvel. The second half of the description is evidence that there must also have been a smaller portrait of Godfried, possibly also by Hals, although that is not stated explicitly. Within the corpus of unidentified portraits by Frans Hals there is just one painting with a sitter who could be identified as Godfried van den Heuvel. It is a large painting of 1630 that is now in the collection of the Queen of England (fig. 15). It shows a ruddy-faced, balding man recorded in the inscription as being 36 years old. This fits with the statement that Godfried made to a notary on 15 April 1675. At the settlement of her insolvent estate Jacob van Beverwijck was paid for his work valuing the paintings, see ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 679, 8 May 1694. See also P. Biesboer and C. Togneri, Collections of paintings in Haarlem, Los Angeles 2002, pp. 239–41.

87 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 461, fols. 183–200, notary Pieter Baes, 28

88 The inventory of the estate of Martinus van den Heuvel, a grandson of Marten van den Heuvel, and his deceased wife and first cousin Margaretha van den Heuvel (ONA Amsterdam, inv. nr. 3021, fols. 597–620, notary Hendrik Vinkel, 30 April 1682), states that “1 portrait with its frame of G. van den Heuvel” hung “in the large salon” of their house (“in de groote Sael... contrefeijtsel met zijn lijst zijnde G. van den Heuvel”). See also Koldewey, op. cit. (note 76), p. 539.
July 1642 that he was 47 years old, meaning that he must have been born in 1595 or 1594. It is not known what Godfried’s religion was. There are no indications that he was a Mennonite, but we also do not know for certain if he was a member of the Reformed Church. If he was then he could be the man in the London portrait. The ornate ruff, full cuffs and extremely self-assured pose and gaze do not argue for a Mennonite way of life. The portrait has no known female pendant. There is no evidence that Godfried married or had named children, although in 1641 a notary did say that he had given a message to a son of Godfried. If that is correct, the child must have died before 1662, for no children of Godfried are mentioned in his will of that year, and there were also no children among the heirs after his death in 1669.

In short, members of the Van (den) Heuvel family clearly loved art, whether they were Mennonite or Reformed. Marten worked in his gilt leather workshop with the artist Pieter Serwouters, was evidently a friend of Pieter Soutman, and owned paintings by Rubens and other

89 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 149, fol. 357v, notary Jacob Schoudt, 5 July 1642.

90 ONA Haarlem, inv. nr. 167, fol. 183, notary Jacobus van Bosvelt, 13 July 1641; see also note 86.
Adriaen van Ostade, Frans Hals, and the art-loving Van den Heuvel family

artists. Godfried may have had his portrait painted by Frans Hals in 1630, was in contact with the leading art dealer De Renialme, and owned a number of paintings by well-known masters. And the Mennonite Nicolaes van Heuvel commissioned two group portraits with his children—around 1635 by Frans Hals and in 1654 by Adriaen van Ostade, as well as other works of art, according to his will and the Van Ostade.

HEUVEL-HALS-VAN OSTADE It is not so odd that Nicolaes van Heuvel decided to get in touch with Frans Hals around 1635. He was by far the best portraitist in Haarlem at the time, was highly respected in the upper echelons of Reformed brewers and local officials, by rich Mennonites as well, and Nicolaes would certainly have known Hals’s portrait of his brother Godfried. In addition, Willem van Heythuijsen, who sat to Hals more than once, was a relative of the Van den Heuvels and also came from Weert. In 1613, when he became a member of the Reformed Church in Haarlem, he stated that he was living with Willem van den Heuvel in Zijlstraat.

It is far more surprising that Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael turned to Adriaen van Ostade in 1654. He was not regarded as an experienced portraitist, and apart from a few study heads and a limited number of possible portraits he is only known for the group portrait of around 1650–52 of Hendrick de Goyer, steward of the manor of Heemstede, his wife Anna Questiers and her sister, the poet Catharina Questiers. Van Ostade included himself in that picture, so he was probably acquainted with the three other sitters (fig. 16).

It is not known if that was also the case with Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael. Van Ostade was certainly not a Mennonite. He came from a Reformed family, and on his second marriage in 1657 (or possibly even earlier) converted to Catholicism. Nevertheless, there are two reasons to suspect that there may have been a connection between him and Nicolaes van Heuvel. In the first place there is their common background: Adriaen’s father, Jan Henricksz, was a weaver from Ostade, a hamlet north of Eindhoven, and his mother came from Woensel, which is now part of Eindhoven proper. The Van den Heuvels and Van Ostades would have met each other in the Brabant community in Haarlem. In addition, Van Ostade was a pupil of Frans Hals, who very probably painted his portrait (fig. 17), and it is possible that Hals recommended his former pupil to Van Heuvel in 1654. The second connection is provided by the figure of Salomon van Ruisdael. We have seen above that he was an executor of the will of Nicolaes van Heuvel and his wife Susanna van Halmael, and he was probably a relative and confidant of the family of Salomon van Ruisdael, which originally bore the surname De Goyer; see H.F. Wijnman, “Het leven der Ruysdaels I, II en III,” Oud Holland 49 (1932), pp. 49–60, 173–81 and 258–75.

92 Biesboer and Togneri, op. cit. (note 87), pp. 115–16.
93 On this painting see A. Bredius, “Een en ander over Adriaen van Ostade,” Oud Holland 56 (1939), pp. 241–47. I have not been able to find any connection between the Hendrick de Goyer depicted in this paint-
from the Old Flemish Mennonite circle. On top of that we know that Adriaen van Ostade was painting with Van Ruysdael around 1640.

It is rare to find several group portraits of a single family in the seventeenth century. As with individual and pendant portraits, the family group was usually a one-off commission. There is no way of making out why Nicolaes van Heuvel and Susanna van Halmael decided to order a second family portrait, but it does testify to a deep-rooted love of the family in moments of relaxation out of doors and domesticity within. The Louvre website suggests that the painting in the left background of Van Ostade’s scene is a depiction of the New Testament subject “Suffer little children to come unto me,” and at first sight that does appear to be a fitting illustration for this group with its many children, but on closer examination it turns out that that it not what is depicted here (fig. 18). It is a scene of the Old Testament prophet Elisha saving the two sons of an impoverished widow for enslavement through a miraculous increase of her stock of olive oil (1 Kings 4:4–7). If we are meant (or wish) to see a reference that fits a family portrait this is more an allusion to the broad theme of trust in God. The painting beside it seems to be a landscape, while the picture by the fireplace is a large figure piece, possibly in the manner of Frans Hals, Judith Leyster or Jan Miense Molenaer, and the one on the chimneypiece, is a history, possibly of a biblical subject. Together with the Chinese porcelain, the ornate carved mantelpiece and the delicately worked four-poster bed, these paintings nevertheless bear witness to the comfortable bourgeois life that the family must have led, and are thus a fitting decor for the actual depiction of loving family life.

Reliability, equilibrium and peace and quiet appear to have had more of an appeal to Nicolaes van Heuvel than they did to his brothers Marten and Godfried. Marten, with all his humanistic desire for religious tolerance, was playing for high stakes with his gilt leather factory. The impressive painting that he owned by Rubens, one of the best-known and most expensive painters of his day, may have been intended to impress his clients, but in the end was not enough to keep his business afloat. Their brother Godfried must have had a fine collection of paintings that provided a suitable home for his portrait by Frans Hals.

It is thanks to the existence of Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers, tax assessments and the administration of real estate conveyances and the like that we can generally form a reasonably well-documented idea of the formal aspects of the lives of rich individual citizens in seventeenth-century Dutch towns. Notarial and other archives give an idea of the high and low points in their personal and business affairs, both within and outside their immediate family circles. Sometimes, as it has proved to be in the case of the Van den Heuvel family, this provides a richly patterned picture of the variations in lifestyle that could be found within a single family, and thus also, albeit fragmentarily, the importance that some
works of art could have had within all those connections. Portraits play a very specific role in that context, as a form of self-presentation and group identity during a lifetime and as a medium for commemorating the individual and the family after death.

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