ROB KATTENBURG

"OUDAEN"

The man-o'war
Maarsseveen

A masterpiece by

H. Dubbels. 1654

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HENDRIK JACOBSZ. DUBBELS
(Amsterdam 1621-1707)

The man-o'war Maarseveen

Canvas, 115 x 155 cm

Signed and dated: H. Dubbels 1654

Provenance:
Collection Merlo
Heberle/Lempertz sale, Cologne 9-11 December 1891, no 43, ill.

Literature:
Ulrike Middendorf, *Hendrik J. Dubbels (1621-1707). Gemälde und Zeichnungen mit kritischem Oeuvrekatalog, Freren 1989, p. 30, 114, cat. no. 39, ill.*

Jan Stalker, Portrait of Hendrik Dubbels, Grisaille on copper, after a drawing by Ludulf Bakhuizen

The marine painter Hendrik Dubbels is full of surprises. His *oeuvre*, published in Ulrike Middendorf's 1989 doctoral dissertation, displays such a diversity of style that Middendorf came to the plausible conclusion that in addition to pursuing an independent career Dubbels worked with such marine artists as Simon de Vlieger, Willem van de Velde, Jan van de Cappelle, Ludolf Bakhuizen and Abraham Storck. These collaborations appear to have been dictated by financial need rather than artistic subservience, for on several occasions Dubbels found himself seriously short of cash.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of daily practice in seventeenth-century artists' studios is still rather scant. Painters belonged to the Guild of St Luke, which had strict regulations governing the profession. There were few if any art academies in the modern sense, and pupils trained with a master-painter. They generally entered his studio around the age of 14, where they were initiated in the rules of art. They had to pay tuition fees, and the guild stipulated that the master had to give them a sound training and not just use them as errand boys. The advantage here, of course, was that a sound training ensured that the apprentices produced good work, which upheld the reputation of the profession. A master was not usually allowed to have more than two apprentices at any one time, but occasionally this rule was waived in return for a contribution to the guild funds. After two years, providing a pupil showed talent, he could be promoted to assistant. When an assistant was sufficiently advanced he could submit his "master's piece" to the guild. Only recognised masters had the right to sign their works and set up a studio of their own.

There was a huge market for paintings in Holland in the seventeenth century. There were no royal patrons, so artists worked instead for the more prosperous sectors of society. Prices were low, which is why painters often had a second source of income. Jan Steen, for example, ran an inn and a brewery, and Meindert Hobbema was an inspector of wines. Studios, too, often doubled as art galleries, selling not only their own output but also readily saleable pictures by other artists. Although special commissions and works by highly-rated artists could fetch hundreds, if not thousands of guilders, prices for an average painting ranged from a 1 or 2 to 20 or 30 guilders. For that kind of money there was no point in sitting around, brush in hand, waiting for inspiration to strike. Most artists needed other sources of income to put food on the table.

Given this situation, a young master would not always have been able to set up a studio immediately after completing his masterpiece, and a number of them had to be content with the position of master-assistant in a successful studio. Middendorf suggests that it is very likely that many artists found themselves

in the same position as Hendrik Dubbels, and had to lower their sights. The market may have been large, but competition was cut-throat.
It is not known when Dubbels registered as a master with the guild, but it was probably in the early 1640s. His first dated painting is from 1641. His earliest pictures were executed entirely in the style of Jan Porcellis's monochrome grey seascapes. Later, around 1650, his work betrays the unmistakable influence of Simon de Vlieger, the leading marine painter of the day, who was able to command high prices. De Vlieger's studio must have been a real breeding ground for new talent. Graduates included Willem van de Velde the Younger and Jan van de Cappelle. Dubbels probably worked as De Vlieger's assistant for several years, judging by the number of paintings from the 1650s which are either copies after the great master's work or display his influence. The status of an assistant who was also a registered master is not entirely clear. Did he have the right to sign and sell one painting a year, like an apprentice, or did he have to place his talents entirely at his employer's disposal?

Middendorf assumes that when Simon de Vlieger died in early 1653 Dubbels finally decided to take the plunge and launch himself as an independent master. There are also signed works from this period, and at the end of 1653 the art dealer Pieter van Meldert had six pictures by Dubbels in stock, so he had definitely made a name for himself.

Artistically speaking this was the most successful period of Dubbels's career, when he produced his best and most original paintings. It was probably around this time that Ludolf Bakhuizen became his pupil. Bakhuizen was a calligrapher and draughtsman who came rather late to painting. Ironically, in later years Dubbels probably collaborated with Bakhuizen.

This ship portrait of 1654 shows the 44-gun *Maarseveen*. Middendorf regards it as a key work in the artist's *oeuvre* because of the fine balance he has struck between the influences of Simon de Vlieger and Jan van de Cappelle, which are here blended into a harmonious unity.

Dubbels's independence did not last long. There is no mention of a studio in the inventory of his possessions that was drawn up in 1656 prior to his second marriage. It is mystifying how an artist who produced some of the finest marines of his day ultimately failed to stand on his own feet. Was he a bad business-man, unable to cope with the fierce competition, or did he simply burn himself out? Whatever the answer, Dubbels never again reached the heights he had scaled in the 1650s.

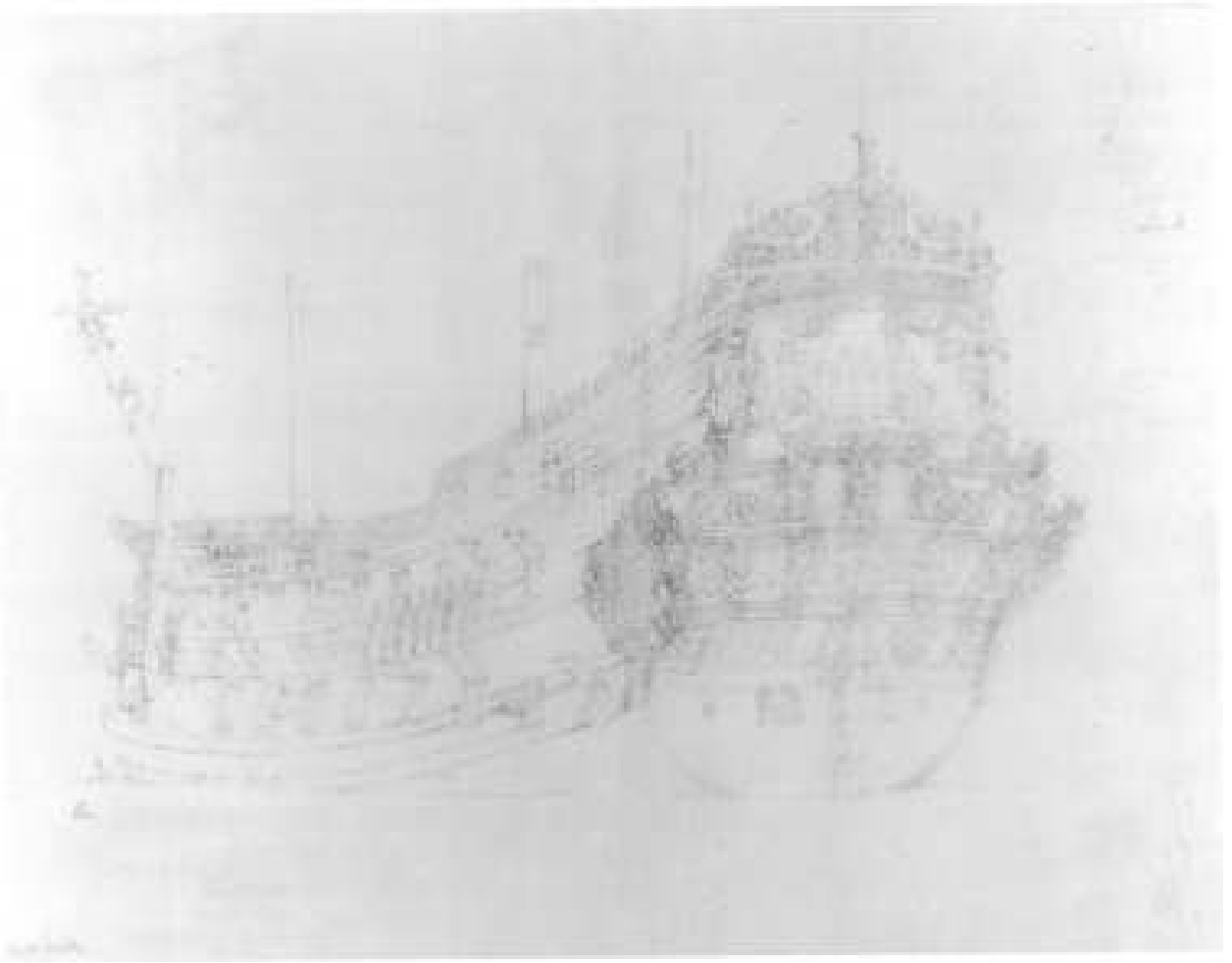
Hendrik Dubbels, The Maasmeuse, detail

Middendorf believes that Dubbels also worked for the Van de Veldes, and that this collaboration began in the late 1650s. The initial contact, though, must have been earlier, possibly when Dubbels was with De Vlieger, and it is intriguing that the portrait of the *Maartenveen* probably played a part in it.
The fact is that Dubbels's painting can be directly associated with a drawing, now in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, which Willem van de Velde the Elder made of the *Maartenveen*. The stern is identical in both cases, the only difference being that the ship is seen from a slightly different angle. The resemblance is so striking that there can be no question of coincidence. Dubbels must have known Van de Velde's drawing. Now Van de Velde was notoriously reluctant to let other artists see his drawings, because he did not fancy the idea of other people profiting from his own work unless they had paid for the privilege. In 1654, the year of Dubbels's painting, the elder Van de Velde made a pen painting, now in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, in which the *Maartenveen* is seen with several other Dutch ships. The Rotterdam drawing, however, is an offset - a technique which Van de Velde often used when he needed more than one copy of a drawing. In other words there were probably several *Maartenveens* in circulation.

Dubbels's painting is boldly signed "H. Dubbels" and dated 1654. This supports the theory that Dubbels was working as an independent master at the time, for the head of a studio would always have put his own name to such an important work. What, though, was the relationship between Dubbels and Van de Velde?

Until now it has generally been assumed that the Van de Velde studio was headed by the father, because his signature appears on a large number of paintings. Van de Velde the Elder, however, was a draughtsman, not a painter, so he could not possibly have signed paintings, for he was not a member of the guild. It is sometimes suggested that he worked in oils in later life, but this has never been firmly established. In any event, that was certainly not the case at the time Dubbels painted his picture. Van de Velde the Elder, however, did specialise in what are known as pen paintings - an odd technique involving drawing with pen and ink on a ground of lead-white and linseed oil. It is possible that this term has helped muddy the waters. Van de Velde the Younger probably set up as an independent painter at an early date, for he was already being hailed as a fine marine artist before he was 20 years old. That, of course, does not preclude collaboration with his father. One possible explanation for the fact that both Van de Veldes used the same signature is that it was so well known that the son was the painter and the father the draughtsman that no one thought it could give rise to any confusion.

Willem van de Velde the Elder,
The Maasmeven, Rotterdam,
Boymans-van Beuningen Museum



◀ A

B ▶

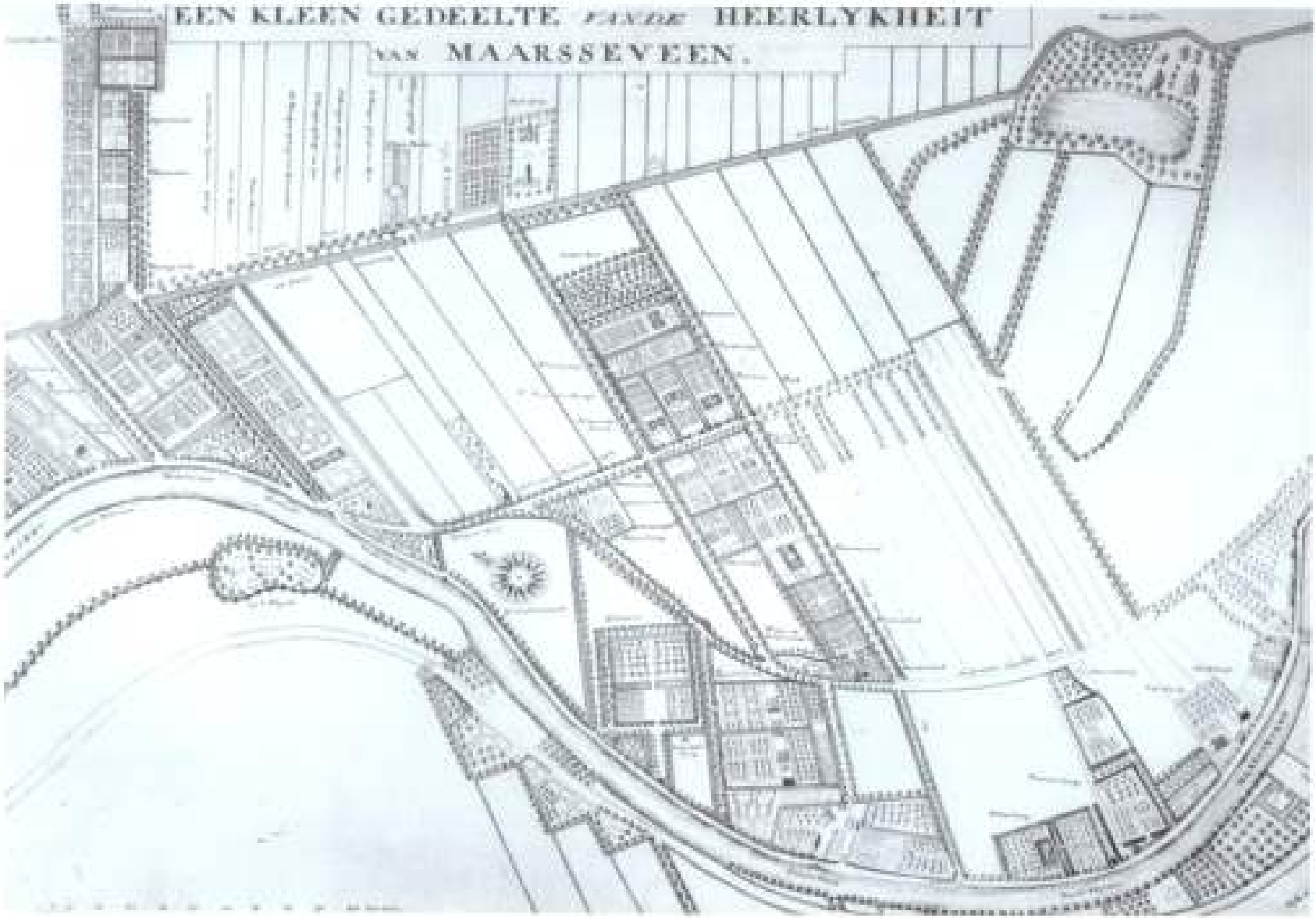
Willem van de Velde the Elder, Dutch ships coming to anchor close inshore, detail with the Maarsseveen. Greenwich, National Maritime Museum (A)

The most likely course of events is that Hendrik Dubbels simply bought a copy of the drawing from Van de Velde *père*. We know of other instances of when Van de Velde supplied documentation to painters in return for a fee, generally hefty - one of them being Simon de Vlieger.
The *Maarsseveen* is such a typical example of a ship portrait that it can safely be assumed that it was a special commission. This is also borne out by its large size. The catalogue of the Van de Velde drawings in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum suggests that the ship's godfather was the celebrated Joan Huydecoper I (1599-1661), Lord of Maarsseveen, who served several terms as a burgomaster of Amsterdam. In 1653 Huydecoper was appointed a director of the Amsterdam Admiralty, and it was in that same year that the *Maarsseveen* was built. This would have been reason enough for a patron of the arts like Huydecoper to commission the portrait of a ship which could symbolise his political power and personal wealth from a man who ranked with Jan van de Cappelle and Willem van de Velde the Younger as one of the leading marine artists of the day. Huydecoper and Dubbels could have met at the celebrations marking the foundation of the "Brotherhood of Painting" on 20 October 1653, where in the presence of at least a hundred artists Huydecoper placed a laurel wreath on the brow of the poet and guest of honour Joost van den Vondel.

The house depicted on the transom of the *Maarsseveen* cannot be firmly identified. Huydecoper owed his title of Lord of Maarsseveen to his ownership of Goudestein, a country estate on the River Vecht which his father had acquired in 1608, and which the son enlarged and refurbished in 1628. That, however, is not the house on the *Maarsseveen*'s stern. In the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum there is another drawing of a ship called *Maarsseveen*. This one was built in 1660 and belonged to the Dutch East India Company, which placed it at the Republic's disposal in 1665. There the house is quite recognisably Goudestein.

What, though, about the other *Maarsseveen*? Joan Huydecoper owned many estates around Maarssen in addition to Goudestein. His practice was to build country houses on them and then sell most of them - a sort of country seat developer, in other words. The house on the *Maarsseveen*'s stern most closely resembles Gansenhoef, another of Huydecoper's mansions. Here, though, there is a problem. Gansenhoef, which was designed by Philips Vingboons, the architect of Huydecoper's house on the Singel in Amsterdam, was not built until 1655. Was Huydecoper trying to kill three birds with one stone by showing off his new possession in Maarsseveen before it was even finished? Were the plans for Gansenhoef so advanced in 1654 that the final appearance of the house was already known? Or did the person who painted

Hendrik Dubbels, The Maarsseveen, detail showing the transom (B)


EEN KLEEN GEDEELTE VAN DE HEERLYKHEIT
VAN MAARSSEVEEN.

◀ *A small area of Maarsseveen Manor as mapped by Jacob Bosch in 1660. Printed examples of this map are dedicated to "Hr Joan Huydekooper, Ridder, Heer van Maarsseveen, Neerdyck &c. Burgemeester en Raet tot Amsterdam", a sign that Huydecoper, a well-known patron of the arts, financed the publication. As a country seat developer he would have been interested in opening up this part of the country. Huydecoper probably also commissioned Dubbels to paint the portrait of the man-o'war Maarsseveen. Eighteenth-century copy. Rijksarchief Utrecht, Huydecoper family archive*

Hendrik Dubbels, The Maarsseveen, detail with the lower

the scene on the ship's stern make it all up? Van de Velde certainly cannot be blamed, for according to contemporaries he was always utterly faithful to life, so he would have copied exactly what he saw.

These, though, are mere details. However fascinating it may be to try and unravel every little mystery, what remains is the painting itself. A great story can make a painting a little more interesting, but cannot add to its beauty. And in this case that is quite unnecessary. The picture is so superb that it needs no garnishing. It tells its own story.

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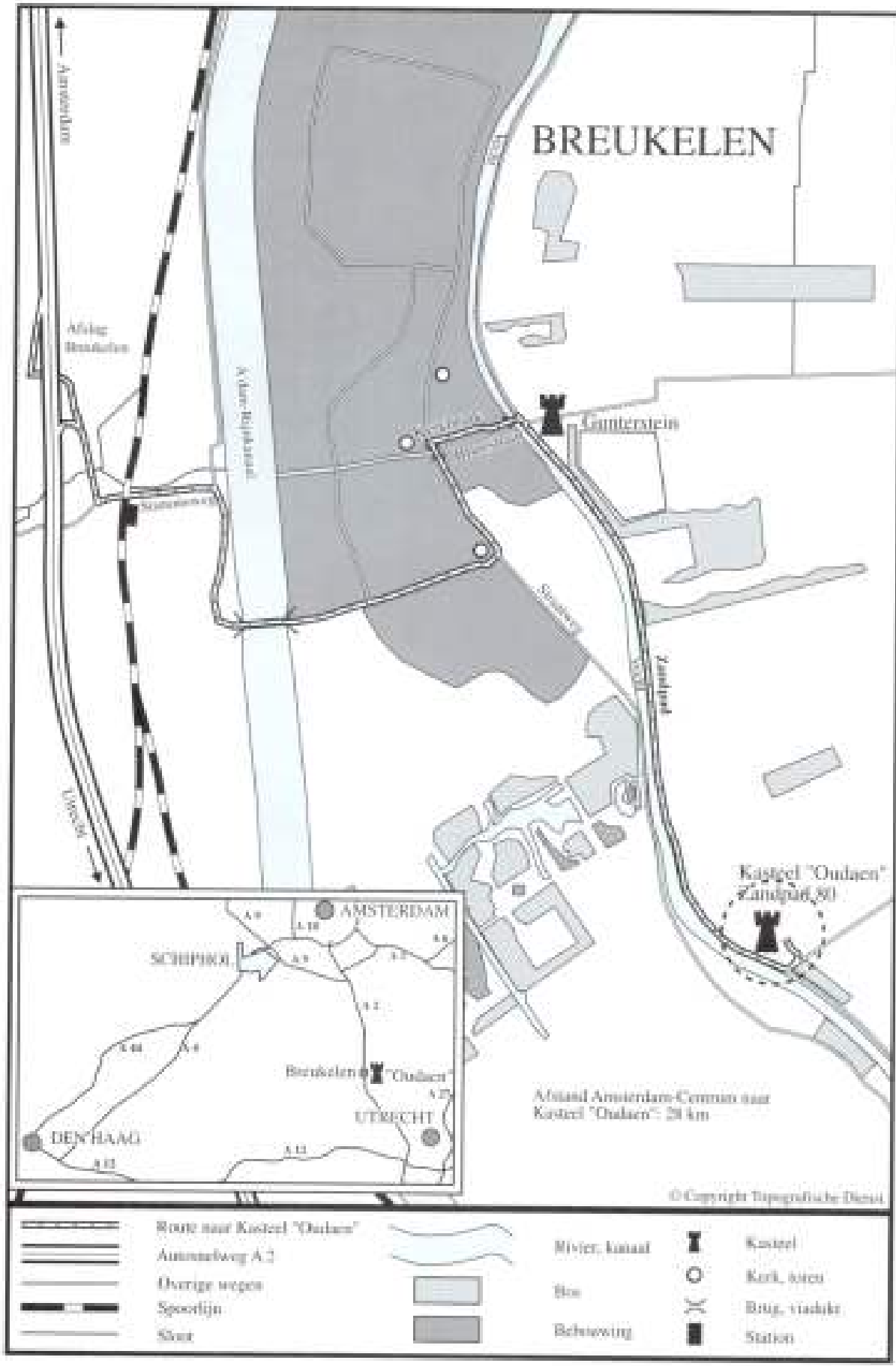
Kunsthandel Rob Kattenburg BV
Oudaen
Zandpad 80
3621 NG Breukelen
The Netherlands

Tel: (0)3462 65098
Fax: (0)3462 66437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