

## CORNELIS CLAESZ. VAN WIERINGEN

Haarlem c. 1575 - 1633



### *The capture of Damietta, before 1628*

Oil on panel, 72.6 x 136.5 cm

Signed on flag lower right: CORNELIS W

#### Provenance:

Probably executed as a modello for the painting in the Calivermen's Headquarters, Haarlem before 1628; Collection Cl. Vignat, Neuilly, Paris 1953; with Galerie Marcus, Paris 1957; private collection, The Netherlands

Literature: E.J. Kalf, *De 'Val van Damiate' of het nut van vergissingen*, in: Haarlem jaarboek 1980; Wiepke Loos, *Willem Thybaut en een Haarlemse legende op Gouds kerkeglas, 1596*, Spiegel Historiae, Vol. 17 (1982) pp. 213-220; Wim van Anrooij, *Middeleeuwse sporen van de Haarlemse Damiate-legende*, 1993; Ron J.W.M. Brand, "Bedreven in de kunst van schepen ende see". *Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen en de zeeschilderkunst aan het begin van de zeventiende eeuw*, Pijnacker 1995; I. van Thiel-Stroman, *Cornelis Claesz van Wieringen*, in: *Painting in Haarlem 1500-1850*, Gent-Haarlem 2006, p. 343-346; Willem Frijhoff, *Damiette appropriée*, in: *Revue du Nord*, Vol. 88 no. 364 (jan-mrt 2006), pp. 7-42; J.J. van Moolenbroek, *De ketting van Damietta, een Haarlems zaagschip en Willem I van Holland. Over de wording en standaardisering van een kruistochtmythe*, in: *Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis* 14 (2011), Bussum 2012

Defence towers rise along the banks of the Nile. The one at the front is linked by a short pier to the shore at the left, while the second one on the opposite bank is part of the ramparts of the city of Damietta. A koggeschip flying a white and red flag smashes the chain strung between the two towers closing off the river. The ship is showered with arrows and cannonballs hurled by catapults from both towers. Turbaned Saracen troops take possession of the pier. Other ships are sailing in. At the right is one flying a *prinsenvlag* in the mainmast, while a Catholic flag with the Holy Virgin tops the mainmast and the flag of Holland the mizzen. In the foreground a seamonster crawls out of the water.

According to ancient chronicles, in 1188 a group of Haarlemmers captured the city of Damietta in the Nile delta as part of freeing the road to Jerusalem, a feat of that was rewarded by Emperor Frederik I and the Patriarch of Jerusalem: the arms of Haarlem were amplified with a sword and a Greek cross. The earliest printed mention of this story is in the volume compiled by Cornelius Aurelius, the *Cronycke van Hollandt, Zeelandt en Vrieslant* (fol. 147) that was published in Leiden in 1517. Naturally, Samuel Ampzing lavished attention on this illustrious deed in his 1628 *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem* (pp. 154-159).

One old Eastern source describes the capture of Damietta in extenso. It names the *Bordj es-Selseleh*, the chain-tower, that served as the 'key to Egypt'. It concerned a big tower, built in the middle of the Nile river, two chains hanging at both of his sides, one connected with the eastern shore where Damietta was situated, the other did lead to the city of El-Bohäreh. As soon as the son of sultan El-Kanul received the news about the fall of his town, he pushed himself severely on his brest and died.

The capture of Damietta (already depicted in a miniature of 1462) was frequently illustrated on commission for the town council of Haarlem in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. This feat of arms served as a symbol of the city's venerable age and its burghers' heroism, concord and virtue. The most important renderings include: the lost stained-glass windows of the churches in Edam (1518), Purmerend (1522), Enkhuizen (1522) and the still existing windows of the church in Egmond aan den Hoef; the engraving by Nicolaes Clock (1595); the *Goudse glazen* by Willem Thybaut in the St. Janskerk in Gouda (1596); the engraving by Willem Akersloot in Ampzing's book after a lost stained-glass window by Jan van Bouckhorst in the Council Chamber in the Haarlem Town Hall; the painting for the Calivermen's Hall (Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem); the present painting (possibly a modello for the Calivermen's Hall painting); the gobelin tapestry by Joseph Thienpont after a design by Cornelis van Wieringen in the new Council Chamber of the Town Hall (1629); and the etching by Romein de Hooghe (c. 1685). In 1603 the city of Haarlem commissioned a stained-glass window showing *The ship of Damietta* with Hendrick Cornelisz. Vroom, executed by Claes Abrahamsen, intended for the Gemeenlandshuis of Leiden. A painting with of the same subject was ordered some twenty years later from the same artist. Both of his designs didn't survive.

Since Ampzing describes the Frans Halsmuseum painting as an overmantel for the War Council Chamber of the Calivermen's Hall in his *Lof der stad Haerlem*, it must have been painted before its publication in 1628. How much earlier, though, is difficult to determine, but a date before 1620 is inconsistent with the current perception of Van Wieringen's artistic development.

Chr. Pierson executed a copy after Thibaud's modello for the *Goudse glazen*, adding a poem on the city legend:

Here conquers heroic virtue  
Damietta's violence  
When speaking of a broken fence  
One praises Haarlem too