

# True history of Ferdinand Bol paintings revealed

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Digital reconstruction with the original setting of Bol's paintings in the reception room of Jacoba Lampsins in Utrecht. At the time, the paintings would be standing directly on the ground under the ceiling beams. In the 18th century, they were pushed up between the beams, to create space for panelling below.

Reconstruction: Jonathan Gration, Amsterdam

For the past 100 years, four gigantic paintings have hung in the Peace Palace in The Hague. Together with a fifth painting in the State Room in Den Bosch they form an impressive series. This series, painted by Ferdinand Bol in the 17th century, has always been shrouded in mysteries. Why was the series commissioned and who commissioned it? How did the paintings originally hang? And why is there no apparent connection between the subjects of the paintings? With the help of an innovative interdisciplinary approach, NWO researcher Margriet van Eikema Hommes discovered that the paintings are the result of the ambitions of an incredibly rich widow from Utrecht who decorated her

spectacular reception room with them.

Due to attributes such as their size, Bol's works are unique for their time. By combining historical research with a technical study of the materials, Van Eikema Hommes has successfully reconstructed the history of the paintings' development. The research proves that Jacoba Lampsins commissioned the series. Lampsins was the widow of the rich tax collector Carel Martens. She lived in Utrecht, but was born in Zeeland and came from a distinguished family in the Dutch Reformed Church who had fled the Southern Netherlands during the Eighty Year War due to the approaching violence of the Spaniards. Lampsins commissioned the [paintings](#) by Ferdinand Bol to acquire status and power for her family.

Van Eikema Hommes investigated various attributes such as the nail holes, old varnish remnants and paint remnants from frames on the canvasses. These revealed how the canvasses have been stretched and framed. For example, she found cuts which ensured that the canvasses could be pushed between ceiling beams. In a prominent house along a canal in Utrecht Van Eikema Hommes found the ceiling beams that fitted the canvasses. Further research revealed that the widow Jacoba Lampsins had resided in this house during Bol's time. The canvasses formed a spectacular decoration that covered all the walls of a large reception room.



## From small to large

The technical research also revealed that the series grew slowly at both the level of the individual canvasses as well as the entire series. It was discovered that Bol had later enlarged several of the paintings by sewing new pieces onto them.

## Underlying theme

Up until now the connection between the subjects in the five paintings had not been clear. Linking the different scenes to Lampsins' biography revealed that they all allude to her ambition of restoring her family's

position in the regents' patriciate. Just like Aeneas, one of the key figures in the paintings, her family had been forced to flee. Jacoba Lampsins therefore strongly identified herself with Aeneas whose mission was to settle elsewhere and to once again acquire power. Van Eikema Hommes also demonstrates that other subjects are related to the widow's efforts to restore former rights. For Jacoba Lampsins it was self-evident that her family must now belong to the ruling class in Utrecht just as they had in the Southern Netherlands and in Zeeland. In the [17th century](#) newcomers could not simply climb their way up. The only way to gain admission to the ruling class was for a son to marry a regent's daughter. In the end Lampsins succeeded: her son married a regent's daughter and that marked the start of the family's 200-year-long participation in the governance of Utrecht.

The results of Margriet van Eikema Hommes' research are presented in the publication: *Art and Allegiance in the Dutch Golden Age. The ambitions of a wealthy widow in a painted chamber by Ferdinand Bol*, Amsterdam University Press 2012, ISBN 9789089643261, price €45.00. Her book was officially presented in the Peace Palace on 24 January 2012. Van Eikema Hommes' study was part of her Veni research funded by NWO. She received a Vidi grant from NWO in 2010 that she is using to continue her research.

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

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