

# Peace for the avaricious

## Amsterdam city council's Peace of Rijswijk medal

*Jan Pelsdonk*

DURING THE COMPILING of an inventory of the numismatic collection of the Dutch Boreel family,<sup>1</sup> an interesting medal came to light. This gold medal in a silver box has now been in the possession of the family (or, latterly, the family foundation) for over 320 years. It was discovered in a wooden chest measuring 51 x 30 x 28 centimetres, together with 237 coins, 116 medals, 9 decorations and 49 other small objects. It is likely that the contents of this chest were put together by the Haarlem mayor (and numismatist) Jacob Willem Gustaaf Boreel van Hogelanden (1852-1937). This essay presents the history of the gold medal together with its associated silver box (figs 1, 2).<sup>2</sup>

The history of the Boreel family dates back to the early fifteenth century. The oldest known family member was an Italian banker, who lived and worked in Ghent in Belgium. Several of his descendants held high positions. One of them, Jacob Boreel (1552-1636), was a founding member of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and, in 1613, was knighted by the English king James I. In 1645 his son William Boreel (1591-1668) was created a baronet by James's successor Charles I. William's son Jacob (1630-97; fig. 3) became ambassador to France and mayor of Amsterdam, and was also involved in the negotiations leading to the peace of Nijmegen in 1678 and the peace of Rijswijk in 1697; this last occasion has a direct connection with this medal. When the main branch of the family died out at the end of the nineteenth century, a foundation was created to preserve its archive of historical objects such as paintings, seal matrices and medals.

The peace of Rijswijk (or Ryswick) marks a particular moment in European history. For many centuries, the borders of the countries of Europe changed frequently. Peace was a rarity, as rulers made each other's lives miserable in pursuit of territorial expansion and monetary gain, and alliances could change like the weather. In 1697 the so-called Nine Years' War (1688-97) was concluded with the Rijswijk

treaty. This brought to an end a conflict between France and the Great Alliance, which consisted of the Holy Roman Empire, Denmark, Sweden, Savoy, Spain, England and the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (referred to here as the Dutch Republic and covering roughly the area of the modern country, The Netherlands). The peace brought a temporary stop to the French drive for expansion, and the principality of Orange was returned to the Stadtholder William III (1650-1702). However, this was also the time when the Dutch Republic began to lose its hegemony of the sea; the republic's heyday was now waning and the eighteenth century would mainly show decline.

As is customary, the Peace of Rijswijk is named after the place where the peace was concluded, in this case a town near The Hague in the Dutch Republic. The negotiations took place in Huis ter Nieuwburch (fig. 4), a palace of William III, who was also king of England, Ireland and Scotland in the period 1689-1702. Before they could begin, the house had to be renovated<sup>3</sup> and additional gates built to prevent the delegations from the different countries from disagreeing about who should enter first. The left gate was for the Allies, the middle gate for the mediator, and the right gate for the French (fig. 5).

In the Dutch Republic a medal was made to celebrate the treaty. It might be expected that this medal, commissioned by the Amsterdam city council, was intended to be given to the Dutch Republic delegation, but nothing could be less true. Both the medal and the box were meant for the thirty-six city councillors who then governed Amsterdam. So the medal was a gift from – and to – the city council.<sup>4</sup> How many of these thirty-six gold medals with their silver boxes have been preserved cannot be said with certainty. Experience indicates that there will not be many, as sooner or later most gold medals ended up in the melting pot because the precious metal was valued more highly than the medal itself. A second and third gold



1. Drappentier: *Peace of Rijswijk*, 1697, gold, 68mm., private collection.

medal – one of them also with a silver box – can be found in the collection of the Amsterdam Museum.<sup>5</sup> That museum also has in its collection a second silver box and the iron dies.<sup>6</sup> The original recipients of these medals and boxes are unknown.

The medal is signed on the reverse 'J: Drappentier'. Johannes Drappentier (d. 1765) was active at the mint of the province of Holland in the town of Dordrecht and was one of the most gifted die-cutters of his time. The obverse of the medal shows a figure of Europe making a sacrifice at the altar of peace: PACIS ARA. The surrounding text reads PAX ADES ET TOTO MITIS IN ORBE MANE (Come, peace, and stay gently throughout the whole world). On the reverse Europe sits in a chair, holding the olive branch

of peace and a caduceus symbolising trade, and with a cornucopia spilling out at her feet representing prosperity. The text reads TRANQUILLUS GAUDEAT ORBIS (The untroubled world may rejoice), with below PACE FRVGIFERA INTER GALLOS BATAVOS BELLIQUE SOCIOS RESTITVTIA CONSVLES SENATVSQVE AMSTELODAMENSIS NVMISMA HOC CVDI IVSSERVNT MDCLXXXVII (The fruitful peace between the French, Dutch and their allies in war having been restored, the mayors and council of Amsterdam have had this medal made, 1697). The rim is plain.

A valuable gold medal such as this could not be presented to those involved without appropriate packaging. The silver box in which each of the medals was provided was expertly made by the medallist Jan Boskam (active 1687-1709)



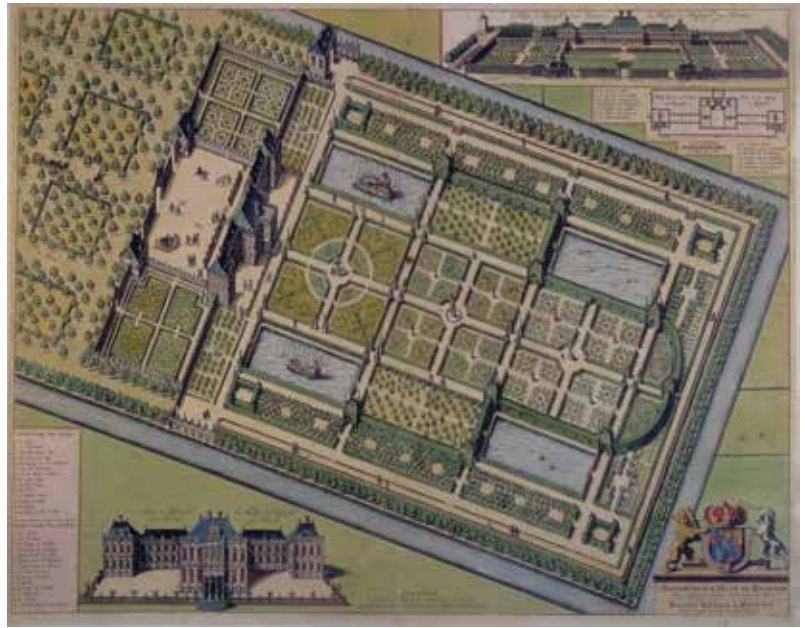
2. Boskam: *Box for the Peace of Rijswijk medal*, 1697, silver, 80mm., private collection.

and lined with red velvet. The box is highly detailed and both the obverse and reverse dies were later also used to produce medals. The obverse shows the coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam, with the imperial crown above and two crossed fasces behind. The coat of arms is surrounded by the coats of arms of the families of the four ruling mayors: clockwise from the right, Joan Corver, François de Vicq, Jacob Boreel (fig. 6) and Johannes Hudde. These mayors were responsible for the daily management of the city. Four were elected annually by and from the members of the Amsterdam city council; they served for one year, but could be re-elected indefinitely. The positioning of their arms on the box was no random arrangement: Corver was either the most important or the

first elected of the four mayors. Around the outer edge are the coats of arms of the thirty-six members of the council, including – again – the shields of the four mayors. This side is signed I. BOSKAM. F. The reverse shows the old city seal: a ship sailing to the right with two standing figures on board. The man on the left has a sword and a shield bearing the coat of arms of Hainaut and may be intended as Guy of Hainaut, who granted Amsterdam city status in 1300-01. In front of him a dog looks out over the sea to guard the ship. On the right a figure holding the flag of the city possibly represents Amsterdam. The ship itself also carries the arms of Amsterdam, on a flag, a fluttering banner and its hull. The text is TENET AEQUORA TUTA (It keeps the seas safe).<sup>7</sup>



3. Attributed to Arnold Boonen: *Jacob Boreel*, c.1690, oil on canvas, 49 x 41cm., private collection.



4. Anonymous, after Julius Milheuser: *Huis te Nieuwburch*, c.1697, coloured etching, 48 x 61cm., Royal Collections, The Netherlands.

Around the rim of the box, in quite a high relief and as if on a continuous scroll, are the names of the serving council members, the majority of whom were also mayors of Amsterdam at some point (fig. 7).<sup>8</sup> '36 R' stands for 36 *raadsleden* (councillors). As might be expected, these names, starting to the right of the shield inscribed '36 R', appear in the same clockwise sequence as the coats of arms on the obverse. It is intriguing to see that the coats of arms of the four mayors are not in the first four places. It seems that the authorities considered membership of the council of greater value than the fact that some of them were mayors. The sequence of names cannot be coincidental, but must reflect a pecking order within the council. It could, for example, be the order of their

accession to the council. In those days, Amsterdam formed almost a separate state within the Dutch Republic. The city was rich and powerful because of the flourishing trade, and the city administrators behaved accordingly. The city council consisted of people appointed for life, meeting to discuss important topics such as financial matters and elections. Favouritism was the order of the day and most of the gentlemen on the council were related to each other.

Many of those involved in the peace negotiations at Rijswijk received from the States General of the Dutch Republic a gift in the form of a gold medal on a gold chain.<sup>9</sup> The States General spent a total of 102,100 guilders on thirty-one gold chains, while in addition 20,000 guilders were paid for two gold jugs for the



5. Adriaen Schoonebeek:  
*Arrival of the ambassadors  
and authorised  
representatives at Huis te  
Nieuwburch*. 1697, etching,  
23 x 29cm., Rijksmuseum  
Amsterdam. The Allies'  
entrance is front left, the  
mediators' in the middle,  
and the French in the  
distance.



6. Detail of fig. 2.

Swedish mediators.<sup>10</sup> However, of the thirty-six Amsterdam city council members who received Drappentier's and Boskam's medal and box, Jacob Boreel – at that time one of the four ruling mayors of Amsterdam – was the only one who actually played a role in the peace negotiations. Sadly, he would not experience the signing of the peace on 20 September 1697. Somewhat obese and suffering from gout, he died almost a month earlier, sixty-seven years old, on 21 August. His medal was probably presented to a family member, his widow Isabella Coymans (1647-1705) or his son Willem Boreel (1675-1727).

The gentlemen of the city council had treated themselves to a luxury gift of more than 184 grams of gold. Multiplied by thirty-six, this comes close to seven kilograms of precious

metal. Whether peace would continue and prosperity rise was at that moment yet to be seen, but the councillors had taken a step forward and made sure not to leave themselves with empty pockets. M

7. Rim of fig. 2.



## NOTES

1. Jan Pelsdonk, *De schatkist van Boreel. Munten, penningen, ordetekens en varia in beheer bij de Stichting Cultuur Historisch Fonds Boreel* (Driebergen-Rijsenburg, 2019).
2. Gerard van Loon, *Beschrijving der Nederlandsche historipenningen*, 4 vols (The Hague, 1723-31), iv, pp. 213-15; French ed., *Histoire métallique des XVII provinces des Pays-Bas*, 5 vols (The Hague, 1732-37), pp. 271-3.
3. George Sanders, *Het present van Staat. De gouden ketens, kettingen en medailles verleend door de Staten-Generaal, 1588-1795* (Hilversum, 2013), p. 287.
4. Van Loon, *Beschrijving*, p. 214; *Histoire*, iv, p. 273.
5. Amsterdam Museum, inv. PBo15 (medal), PBo16 (box) and PB253 (medal).
6. Judith van Gent, 'De stad als verzamelaar. Gemeentearchivaris Pieter Scheltema (1812-1885)', *De Beeldenaar*, xlii-iv (2018), pp. 189-94, at pp. 189-90; Amsterdam Museum, inv. KA7583.1/2 (dies) and PA446 (box).
7. Virgil, *Aeneid*, v, 171. The principal legends on the medal are also from classical sources: PAX ADES ... from Ovid, *Fasti*, i, 711-12, and TRANQUILLUS ... from *Octavia*, formerly attributed to Seneca, 280.
8. Johan E. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1963). The council members are Joan Huydecoper (1625-1704), Joan Corver (1628-1716), Johannes Hudde (1628-1704), Jacob Boreel (1630-97), Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717), Nanning Cloeck (1643-1702), Cornelis Valckenier (1640-1700), Jan Six (1618-1700), Egbert de Vrij (1626-1701), François de Vicq (1646-1707), Gerrit Hooft (1649-1717), Joan de Vries (1633-1708), Jacob Jacobszoon Hinlopen (1644-1705), Dirck Bas (1640-1709), Adriaen Backer (1641-1702), Jeronimus de Haze de Georgio (1651-1725), Pieter Reael (1650-1701), François de Vroede (1641-1706), Daniel Bernard (1626-1714), Wouter Valckenier (1650-1707), Joan van Oosterwijck (c.1640-99), Coenraed Burgh (1656-1701), Daniel Hochepped (1630-1704), Jacob Scott (1647-1708), Dirk Munter (1648-1701), Gerbrand Pancras Michielszoon (1658-1721), Johan Deutz (1655-1719), Quirijn van Strijen (1660-1724), Joan Geelvinck (1644-1707), Ferdinand van Collen (1651-1735), Henrik Hudde (1660-1745), Cornelis Bors van Waveren (1662-1722), Joan Blau (1650-1712), Jacob Elias (1655-1701), Nicolaas van Bambeeck (1665-1722) and Caspar van Collen (1655-1704).
9. A.O. van Kerkwijk, 'De Vereeringspenningen, door de Staten-Generaal sedert 1628 toegekend', *Jaarboek voor Munt- en Penningkunde*, xxiii (1936), pp. 1-78.
10. Sanders, *Het present van Staat*, pp. 290-91, 496-8. Unfortunately, not everyone who received a present is known by name.