

Dutch society in the age of Vermeer (De Hollandse samenleving in de tijd van Vermeer), Donald Haks and Marie Christine van der Sman eds., Haags Historisch Museum, Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, n.d. (1996), 144 pp.

The essay on "Delft in the Golden Age" by Kees van der Wiel, who is identified only as a "historian and journalist", makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of Delft's economy and society, in part based on original archival research. I will not comment in detail on the data he has assembled on fluctuations in the price of bread, on the number of burials "in the church" (which cost three gulden each) and "outside the church" (which were free of charge), on the location of breweries, and so forth, beyond saying that I wish I had had these useful data at my disposal when I previously wrote on artists and artisans in Delft and on Vermeer. Besides, there is one "find" which will put Mr. Van der Wiel's name in the roster of significant contributors to Vermeer studies: he is apparently the first scholar to have consulted the *Kobier van het groot familie geld van 1674 voor de stad Delft* in connection with the life of Vermeer and his family. Because this register is conserved in the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague and not in Delft's archive, it had escaped my attention (as well, apparently, as that of other researchers in the field). This register contains the names of 1269 citizens of Delft who paid a tax of 0.5 percent on their wealth.³ Vermeer's name is absent from the register, probably because he was too poor – or at least too indebted – to be the target of the collectors.⁴ But "Maria Tins huisvrouw van Reijnier Bolnes" does appear in the *Kobier*. She was taxed 130 gulden, corresponding to a total wealth or assets worth 26,000 gulden.⁵ Interestingly enough, one of the joint editors of the volume, Donald Haks, tried to estimate Maria Thins's wealth independently (without reference to Van der Wiel's finding) (pp. 96-7). He estimated that her property in Oud-Beyerland alone was worth about 20,000 gulden in 1670 (thus four years before the tax on the "familiegeld" was levied.) In addition, he reckoned "a slightly lower amount" for her other property (presumably the fief in Schoonhoven known as Bon Repas). If we add a rough estimate of 5,000 gulden for the house on the Oude Langendijck and a minimum of 2,900 gulden in interest-bearing obligations,⁶ Maria Thins's assets clearly exceeded the amount on which she was taxed. She is likely, therefore, to have concealed some of her assets, although we should also consider the possibility that tax-payers bargained with the collector for a lower assessment. There is no question that Maria Thins was well-off. But if she did not help Vermeer in the moment of his need – when he was overloaded with debts in the last two years of his life – the reason must surely be sought in her solicitude for the future of her grandchildren (of whom there were eleven in 1674: seven or eight girls, all but one unmarried, and two or three boys, all too young to earn a living). Whatever sums of money she could have given or lent Vermeer to settle his debts would have reduced the amount available after her death to take care of her grandchildren. When I consulted the *Kobier*, I found many names of Delft citizens connected with Vermeer, but not the name of Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven, who died in August 1674, or of his widow Maria de Knuijt or even of his only daughter and heiress Magdalena Pieters. I have no explanation for these omissions (which of course may be due to my failure to spot one or more of these names). Since I speculate elsewhere⁷ that the wealth of Vermeer's patron had been inherited by his wife, it is worthy of note that the widow of Maria de Knuijt's brother, Vincent de Knuijt, was taxed on the basis of assets evaluated at 95,000 gulden, one of the largest fortunes in Delft.⁸