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retirement home, Bergen op Zoom*

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Retainers and retirement

Pieter Bruegel (†1566), pensioner in Sint-Janshuis
retirement home, Bergen op Zoom

*Jaco Zuiderduijn**

Abstract

In 1553-1554 one Pieter Bruegel purchased a corrody in Sint-Janshuis, a retirement home for former employees of the Marquises of Bergen, where he would receive necessities of life and a place to stay until he would pass away. The paper reconstructs the early financial history of the retirement home, demonstrating how it was unable to cope with inflation, and struggled to provide for the inmates. It is suggested therefore Bruegel did not merely retire into Sint-Janshuis, but purchased an extra ration of food, clothes and fuel: apparently his background as a barber-surgeon at one of the most prestigious courts of the Low Countries allowed him to pay for a relatively decent old age. Further evidence corroborates that compared to his fellow-inmates, Bruegel was relatively wealthy. The paper also discusses evidence linking the barber-surgeon to the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, whose origins are almost completely unknown. Based on his name, estimated year of birth, and residence in Bergen op Zoom, the barber-surgeon is a strong candidate for the father of the famous painter. If we are correct in this, the latter would have come from an urban middle-class background with close ties to one of the most important courts in the Low Countries: the Renaissance palace *Markiezenhof* in Bergen op Zoom.

Keywords: retirement; investment behaviour; financial history; art history

JEL: G230, N23, N83, N93

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1. Introduction

In her introduction to the Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Nadine M. Orenstein writes that Bruegel's 'own story is still largely a mystery'.¹ She continues by explaining that 'it is usual to begin a biography with the date and place of its subject's birth', but that 'in Bruegel's case both of these facts are open to question'.² Bruegel lived before local authorities in the Low Countries began to record baptisms, marriages and deaths, and as a result very little is known about his origins. Art historians are therefore still undecided about whether the painter should be regarded as the son of a peasant (in line with his nickname 'peasant-Bruegel'; *Boeren-Bruegel*, referring to the rural scenes he painted). This article presents new evidence of a Pieter Bruegel who passed away in a retirement home in Bergen op Zoom in 1566, and who had worked as a barber-surgeon at the court of the Marquis of Bergen – the *Markiezenhof* palace in the town of Bergen op Zoom. It is suggested he should be considered as the father of Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

There are a few theories as to where Bruegel was born. One departs from the painter's surname, which is linked to the village Breughel or Brogel in the Duchy of Brabant. Karel van Mander, in his *Schilder-boeck* from 1604, already followed this line of reasoning, claiming the painter came from the village Breughel, near Breda, and was most likely a peasant's son.³ This view of Bruegel as a peasant's son is upheld by some art historians until the present day.⁴ It seems there are two problems with this interpretation. First, toponymic surnames do not necessarily refer to the geographic origins of the carrier, but perhaps rather to that of an ancestor: although it is not unlikely a forebear of Bruegel came from either village, it is also not at all certain this means the painter was born there as well. Second, if the painter used 'Bruegel' as a toponymic surname, one would expect him to have used the preposition 'van'.⁵ Thus 'van Bruegel' – from the village of Breughel/Brogel – would have made more sense than just 'Bruegel'.⁶

¹ N.M. Orenstein, 'The elusive life of Pieter Bruegel the Elder', in: N.M. Orenstein (ed.), *Pieter Brueghel the Elder: drawings and prints* (2001) 3.

² Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

³ Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

⁴ Recently Michel and Charles in their book on the Bruegel family wrote that 'it is clear that Brueghel was the son of a peasant' (E. Michel and V. Charles, *The Brueghel* (New York 2015)).

⁵ See the discussion in Alexander Wied, 'Pieter Bruegel I [the elder]', *Oxford Art Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T011669>.

⁶ Another theory reads the entry into the ledger of the painter's guild of Antwerp, as *Peeter Brueghels, schilder*, as a patronym: the painter's father's first name was Brueghel (and Brueghel does not refer to a village). This too is a problematic line of reasoning, most of all since the first name Brueghel is not at all common in the medieval

Considering these problems with reading ‘Bruegel’ as a toponym, scholars have also considered the validity of a contemporary report by Lodovico Guiccardini (1521-1589), an Italian who lived in Antwerp, travelled through the Low Countries in Bruegel’s lifetime, and published a travel report. In this *Descrittione*, published in 1567, he described Bruegel as *Pietro Brueghel di Breda*.⁷ Based on this, the town of Breda, to the Northeast of Antwerp where Bruegel enrolled as a painter in 1551, has also been considered as his place of birth. Alexander Wied therefore sees Bruegel as ‘a townsman and a highly educated one, on friendly terms with the humanists of his time’.⁸ Placing Bruegel in an urban context also allows for taking a different look at him. Thus Manfred Sellink sees Bruegel as a painter ‘who poked a little fun at the slightly backward countryfolk he portrayed’.⁹ These authors were not the first to suggest the Bruegel family must be placed in a more wealthy and educated context: in the nineteenth century the scholar André Wauters already suggested the painter was related to a professor of medicine called Pierre Brugelio, who lived in Brussels in the 1570s;¹⁰ following Wauters’ line of reasoning, this professor would have been a cousin of Pieter Bruegel the elder.

To be sure: no one is to blame for these widely ranging attributions. Hard evidence of Bruegel’s origins is scarce: his surname, his enrolment as a painter in Antwerp in 1551, and Guiccardini’s claim he came from Breda. This is not much to work with of course. The emergence of a Pieter Bruegel in the sources of Sint-Janshuis retirement home in the town of Bergen op Zoom, globally in between Breda and Antwerp, in 1553-1554, might therefore provide a new piece of the puzzle of Bruegel’s childhood.

2. Pieter Bruegel (†1566)

A Pieter Bruegel is mentioned in the account books of Sint-Janshuis in Bergen op Zoom. This was a retirement home that was founded for the former employees of the court of the lords of Bergen, so they could enjoy a untroubled old age. The institution’s account book notes how

Low Countries (F. Grossmann: 'Notes on Some Sources of Bruegels Art', *Album amicorum J.G. van Gelder* (The Hague, 1973), pp. 147-58; J.L. Koerner, *Bosch and Brueghel: from enemy painting to everyday life* (Princeton 2016) 13).

⁷ L. Guiccardini, *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania inferiore* (Antwerp 1567) 145.

⁸ Wied, ‘Pieter Bruegel I [the elder]’

⁹ M. Sellink, ‘“The very lively and whimsical Pieter Bruegel”: thoughts on his iconography and context’, in: N.M. Orenstein (ed.), *Pieter Brueghel the Elder: drawings and prints* (2001) 57-66, 57.

¹⁰ A.J. Wauters, ‘La Famille Brueghel’, *Annales de la Société d’archéologie de Bruxelles* I, (1887-1888) 7-79, 9.

between 17 March 1553 and 17 March 1554¹¹ an individual called Pieter Bruegel¹² was admitted to the institution. He was described as ‘the former barber of lord Jan lord of Bergen’.¹³ Bruegel would ‘enjoy for the rest of his life’ a double corrody: life-long food, drinks, clothes and lodging in Sint-Janshuis. Receiving not an ordinary, but rather a ‘double’ corrody means Bruegel was entitled to twice the rations the other inmates of the retirement home received. It suggests he was quite well off.¹⁴

It seems that Bruegel was admitted to Sint-Janshuis by the lord of Bergen. However, it also seems that Bruegel thought the life of a retiree would be unfitting. In a document recorded by the aldermen of Bergen op Zoom in 1555, it is suggested Bruegel had filed a request to have a double corrody because ‘on one corrody he would not be able to make a decent living’: entering the retirement home would prevent him from maintaining his social status.¹⁵ Therefore the lord allowed him a double corrody ‘on condition he would transfer an annuity of seven Karolusgulden’ to Sint-Janshuis – the transfer was ratified in the aforementioned document.

The annuity was a common financial instrument in the sixteenth-century Low Countries. It allowed a debtor to attract funding on security of real estate – the annuity is comparable to a mortgage contract.¹⁶ It was either payable to the original investor, who had purchased the annuity, or a third party that had come in possession of the financial instrument. Annuities could be transferred from the original investor to a third party, and this was exactly what

¹¹ 17 March is *Sint Geertruydendach* – the feast day of St. Gertrude of Nivelles who was a much-revered saint in the medieval Low Countries. The financial administration of Sint-Janshuis started on her feast day.

¹² The first time he is mentioned his name is spelled ‘meester Pieter Bruegel’. In 1565-1566 his name is written as ‘Brueghel’ on three occasions (Westbrabants Archief (WA), BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1565-1566, f. 2, 7v-8). In this article we refer to him as Bruegel.

¹³ ...voortijts babier [sic] van wijlen zaliger memorien heeren Janne heere van Berghen... (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1553-1554 f. 2)

¹⁴ Investing in a corrody was not at all unheard of in the later Middle Ages. Many convents and hospitals allowed a limited number of individuals to live on their premises, provided they paid for this. For instance: Geert Grote, the founder of the *Devotia Moderna*, the reform movement that started in the fourteenth-century Low Countries, was a corrodian in the Carthusian monastery Monnikenhuisen in Arnhem (T. Gaens, ‘Van woestenij naar de stad. Connecties tussen Utrechtse en Amsterdamse kartuizers en stedelijke netwerken van moderne devoten ten tijde van het interne schisma’, in: H. van Engen and G. Verhoeven (eds.), *Monastiek observantisme en Moderne Devotie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden* (Hilversum 2008) 69-107, 70).

¹⁵ ... dat hij midts eender provene nijet ~~genegelijck kunne~~ gevuechelijck en soude kunnen doercommen ende bij leven... (WA, BOZ-0005, inv. nr. 5188, Protocol van rentbrieven en recognities, 1554-1555, f. 52v-53).

¹⁶ See the overview in: C. Briggs and J. Zuiderduijn, ‘Introduction: mortgages and annuities in historical perspective’, in C. Briggs and J. Zuiderduijn (eds.), *Land and credit. Mortgages in the medieval and early-modern European countryside* (Cham 2018) 1-16.

Bruegel did to buy his way into Sint-Janshuis.¹⁷ He handed over an annuity that yielded an annual revenue of seven Karolusgulden (Kg) – the equivalent of twenty day wages of a master craftsman.¹⁸ The value of such an annuity can be estimated to have been c. 125 Kg – the equivalent of c. 350 day wages of a master craftsman.¹⁹ The annuity was secured on ‘a house and yard called *Den Appelplucker* located in Steenberchstrate’ – Steenbergestraat in the old city centre of Bergen op Zoom, and close to *Markiezenhof* palace. The annuity had been created in 1491, and the payment of seven Kg was due every year on 13 May (*Servati*, the feast day of St. Servatius),²⁰ and had to be made by the current property owner (in 1555 this was one Franchois Cornelisz. Tijmmerman).²¹ Before moving on to Bruegel’s stay in Sint-Janshuis, it might be useful to point out that when the law court of Bergen op Zoom recorded the transfer of the annuity of seven Kg, it failed to record Bruegel’s residence. Perhaps this is a telling omission: foreigners were often registered as coming from a certain town or village, but the residence of local inhabitants was usually not recorded. This might suggest Bruegel already lived in Bergen op Zoom before he moved into Sint-Janshuis.²²

It seems Bruegel was able to spend his remaining years living quietly in Sint-Janshuis: after his admission he is not mentioned in the hospital accounts until 1566, when he passed away on 24 February.²³ On his deathbed, Bruegel was cared for by a cellite (a *cellebroeder*: a third order friar devoted to caring for the sick and burying the dead), who was paid for attending to him for eleven days, and also for putting the deceased in his coffin.²⁴ Bruegel was buried on 25 February at the expenses of Sint-Janshuis.²⁵ Data on Bruegel’s deathbed and burial indicate that he actually lived in Sint-Janshuis. (In the mid-1570s it was found out some of the

¹⁷ Transferring an annuity required ratification by the local court. In the account of 1554-1555 the steward noted that the annuity and ratification of transfer (*transportbrief*) were ‘put in the room where the charters and other annuities’ were kept (Sint Janshuis account 1554-1555 f. 1v).

¹⁸ J. de Vries and A. van der Woude, *The first modern economy. Success, failure, and perseverance of the Dutch economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge 1998) 610.

¹⁹ The rate of return or ‘interest rate’ on this type of annuity was about 5,5% in the 1550s (C.J. Zuijderduijn, *Medieval capital markets. Markets for ‘renten’, state formation and private investment in Holland (1300-1550)* (Leiden/Boston 2009)

²⁰ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1553-1554 f. 2r.

²¹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1554-1555 f. 1v. This Franchois Cornelisz. Timmerman also sold an annuity of seven Kg, secured on the house called *Den Appelplucker* to Adriaen Aernoutsdochter widow of Ghovert vanden Berghe on 23 September 1546. The contract also mentions ‘te warende met 7 Kg mr. Pieter Bruegel’, which suggests Brueghel already had an annuity secured on *Den Appelplucker* in 1546 (WA, BOZ-0005, inv. nr. 5183, *Protocol van rentbrieven en recognities*, 1546-1547, 18v.).

²² An analysis of the *Register van ingeschreven poorters*, which records new citizens of Bergen op Zoom, is available for 1472-1522, but not for the decades up to 1554. Between 1472-1522 there is no mentioning of a Pieter Brueghel.

²³ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1554-1555 f. 2.

²⁴ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1565-1566 f. 7v-8.

²⁵ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1565-1566 f. 8.

corrodians did not live in the hospital, but in Brussels, where they would receive (part of) their rations).²⁶ After Bruegel had died in Bergen op Zoom, his belongings fell to the retirement home. On 21 March 1566 his 'goods and furniture' were sold by a second-hand dealer (*appreciater*), raising almost 48 Kg.²⁷ In addition the janitor found twelve Kg cash in Bruegel's room.²⁸ The total sum of almost 60 Kg was added to Sint-Janshuis' money box; Bruegel's room was offered to another elderly individual.

To summarize: between 1553-1554 and 1566 a man named Pieter Bruegel, former barber of the lord of Bergen, lived in Sint-Janshuis in Bergen op Zoom. He purchased a double corrody and to this end he used an annuity yielding seven Kg per annum, secured on a house called *Den Appelplucker* in Bergen op Zoom. The annuity had been created in 1491 and must have been purchased by Bruegel before 1546. In 1555 Bruegel transferred the annuity to Sint-Janshuis to pay for a double corrody. He passed away in Sint-Janshospital 1566, leaving behind possessions of the value of nearly 60 Kg.

3. Sint-Janshuis retirement home

To gain a better understanding of this Pieter Bruegel, we should now turn to the institution he entered. Sint-Janshuis was a retirement home, founded in 1530 by the then 78-year-old nobleman Jan III van Glymes, lord of Bergen-op-Zoom (r. 1494-1532). He was a member of the Glymes family: one of the most prominent noble lineages in the Low Countries,²⁹ with the town of Bergen op Zoom as one of its main possessions. In Bergen op Zoom Jan III's father had ordered the construction of the town residence *Hof van Bergen*, which was built between 1485-1511, and is nowadays known as *Markiezenhof*³⁰ – the name given to it after the Glymes were raised to become marquises in 1533. It was one of the most prominent palaces in the duchy of Brabant, which was politically and economically speaking one of the most important regions in the Northwest of Europe, with the governmental centres of the Low Countries

²⁶ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1574-1575 f. 9.

²⁷ Goods and furniture raised 47 *Karolusgulden* 19 *stiver* 1 *blank*. After subtracting expenses, the hospital earned 46 *Karolusgulden* 1 *stiver* 1 *blank* (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1574-1575, f.2).

²⁸ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1574-1575 f.2.

²⁹ H. Cools, *Mannen met macht. Edellieden en de moderne staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse landen (1475-1530)* 11-14.

³⁰ See for *Markiezenhof*: C.J.F. Sloomans, *Markiezenhof, Bergen op Zoom* (Bergen op Zoom 1969) and W.A. van Ham, *Het Markiezenhof te Bergen op Zoom. Een overzicht vanuit de bronnen van zijn geschiedenis tot 1795* (Bergen op Zoom 1986) .

located in Brussels and Malines, and the important mercantile centre of Antwerp. Also, the first inhabitant of *Markiezenhof*, Jan III, was an important patron of the arts.³¹

Jan III intended Sint-Janshuis to be a home to be for his (former) employees, and thus appears to have provided a pension plan *avant la lettre*. To this end the lord first purchased an existing alms house,³² which he turned into Sint-Janshuis. He then provided it with a foundation letter that indicated how the inhabitants should spend their old age. Finally, he created a financial construction that would provide Sint-Janshuis with an income that was supposed to last until well into the future, and that could be used for corrodies and maintenance of the building. To this end Jan III invested in an annuity that would yield 300 Kg per annum. In addition, he stipulated the receiver of tithes in the surroundings of Bergen op Zoom (the *grain meester van Bergen*) would send some of the rye he collected from the peasants to Sint-Janshuis every three months,³³ where this could be used to feed the inmates.

In line with late-medieval Christian culture, Jan III decided there would be thirteen corrodians – their number being a reference to Christ and his twelve Apostles. However, in practise he thought it was necessary to provide one extra corrody because the janitor (*conciierge*) who was to oversee Sint-Janshuis, would receive a double corrody. This was mainly because the founder expected the janitor's wife to also help in running the institution: she would make the beds and wash the bedlinen, and naturally should be compensated for her work. So, Jan III provided funding for fourteen corrodies: twelve for former personnel, and two for the caretaker and his wife. In return, he expected the corrodians to attend mass four times a week, and to pray the *pater noster* and *ave maria* five times a week – this on behalf of the founder and his successors as lords and ladies of Bergen. The founder also determined that one of the inmates would be a chaplain, who would be responsible for religious services in the chapel of Sint-Janshuis. In addition to praying for the souls of the lords and ladies of Bergen, the corrodians were also expected to care for the sick inmates in the institution's small infirmary (*baaierd*).³⁴ The foundation letter does not indicate much with respect to what the men were

³¹ See for instance R.C. Wegman, 'Music and musicians at the Guild of Our Lady in Bergen op Zoom', *Early music history* 9 (1990), 175-249, pp. 211.

³² Called *hofje van Lijsbrecht Lambrecht*, which went to the lord in 1523 (W.A. van Ham, L.J. Weijs and J.L.C. Weyts, 'De Lievevrouwepoort te Bergen op Zoom en zijn omgeving', *Bulletin KNOB* 73 (1974) 19-33, 30).

³³ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2433.

³⁴ Thus, the inmate *Hansken* was paid for providing care for *Jenijn de palfrenier*, another inmate (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1555-1556, f. 4v).

supposed to do during the day – apart from attending masses and praying – only that they were supposed to return to the Sint-Janshuis at six o'clock in winter, and eight in summer.

Jan III thus not only created a hospital where his former employees could spend their final years, but also a religious institution that generated constant prayer on behalf of the souls of the Bergen lineage.³⁵ Around 1560, when the inmates of Sint-Janshuis petitioned Jan III's grandson, the Marquis Jan IV van Glymes (r. 1541-1567) to ask for more financial support, the inmates claimed that almost every day they were to be found in the chapel of Sint-Janshuis 'always praying for the deceased, the lord Jan van Bergen, and those that are still alive, the lord Marquis van Bergen and his wife'.³⁶ The institution must therefore be regarded as a hybrid of a religious foundation where twelve former employees lived a pious life that was to resemble the *vita apostolica*, and a social organization where elderly men cared for each other, and were cared for by the lords of Bergen.³⁷

4. Retirees

Bruegel was one of thirteen corrodians living in Sint-Janshuis 'who are or have been servants of the house of Bergen'. To be sure: in his foundation letter Jan III leaves open the possibility to also admit elderly who had not worked for him, but he also stipulated that they would have to vacate their rooms as soon as a (former) employee would indicate to be interested in living in Sint-Janshuis. Apart from the professional background, there were no requirements for admission, not even age. However, given that the institution aimed to accommodate widowers or unmarried men,³⁸ had a sick ward, and spent considerable sums on care giving, Jan III's intention was clearly to provide mainly for the elderly.

³⁵ The historian Hans Mol spoke in this respect of institutions that provided the founders with possibilities for 'insuring themselves against the risks in the afterlife' (H.A. Mol, 'Kruissheren op de Friese zieleheilsmarkt in de vijftiende eeuw. De vestiging van de kloosters te Sneek en Franeker', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 16 (1990) 327-348, pp. 327.

³⁶ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2447.

³⁷ Similar retirement homes emerged elsewhere as well, for instance in Amsterdam and Leiden (J. Zijderduijn, "'Good, fresh air and expert medical service". Old age pensioners in Leiden's St. Hiëronymusdal retirement home, sixteenth century', *The history of the family* 21 (2016) 195-213; J. Zijderduijn, 'Pap en brood tijdens de oude dag. Gepensioneerden in Amsterdam, c. 1500', *Low Countries Journal for Social and Economic History - Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 12-3 (2015) 23-49. A general discussion on corrodians is provided in: J.A. Kossmann-Putto, 'Armen- en ziekenzorg in de Noordelijke Nederlanden' in: D.P. Blok et al (ed.), *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 2 (Haarlem 1982) 254-267, 261-262; G. Marechal, 'Armen- en ziekenzorg in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden', in: D.P. Blok et al (ed.), *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 2 (Haarlem 1982) 268-280, 278-279.

³⁸ See for instance Jan IV's indignation when finding out married men inhabited Sint-Janshuis, discussed later in the text.

What type of (former) employees might Jan III have been thinking of? In his foundation letter he refers to the corrodians as ‘officers’, which on first sight may suggest the lord intended the home to be for such officials as the stewards and many sheriffs that were active in the various lordships he held in the surroundings of Bergen op Zoom.³⁹ However, the accounts of Sint-Janshuis, recorded since its inception in 1530, make clear it was mainly the retainers – the staff – of the lord’s impressive *Markiezenhof* palace that retired into the home.⁴⁰ For the preparation of this paper the financial administration for the years 1530-1531 to 1581-1582 was consulted. Among the corrodians we encounter a *valet de chambre* – or to be more precise: a *valet de filles* who attended to the daughters of the Marquise of Bergen, Jacqueline van Croÿ (regent 1541-1550)⁴¹ – and a lackey.⁴² Among the retirees were also a gatekeeper,⁴³ a halberdier,⁴⁴ a footman (who attended to the lord while he was on horse-back),⁴⁵ and a clockman or knocker-up, who was responsible for waking the people at the court.⁴⁶ Also among the corrodians was an apothecary,⁴⁷ as were various artists: a painter,⁴⁸ a carpet weaver (*tapissier*)⁴⁹ and a goldsmith.⁵⁰ Finally, in 1573-1574 a real ‘officer’ became an inmate: the usher (*deurwaarder*) of the audit room of the Marquis of Bergen.⁵¹ These elderly individuals formed a small community together with the janitor who was responsible for daily affairs at Sint-Janshuis, and the chaplain who was responsible for masses.

³⁹ Van Ham noticed a similar use of the term ‘officiëren’ by the stewards of the town of Bergen op Zoom: this category also included various fairly unimportant functions (Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 230).

⁴⁰ The number of people working at courts could be substantial. Mary of Hungary’s court counted between 148 and 192 courtesans in the mid-sixteenth century – and this number is excluding those that were hired on an ad-hoc basis (J. Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije en haar hof 1505-1558: tot plichtsbetrachting uitverkoren* (Verloren 2008) 114).

⁴¹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1564-1565, f. 2, 8 (*Jan van Suerendonck camerlinck geweest hebbende vanden eelochters van mijnen Edele vrouwe de marquis alias crepel Hansken*).

⁴² WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1571-1572, f. 10v (*Jan Scheerman lakei*).

⁴³ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1552-1553, f. 1v (*Arnolet de oude portier*).

⁴⁴ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1557-1558, f. 1v (*Melchior diemen hiet den hellebaerdier*).

⁴⁵ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1569-1570, f. 2 (*Janin de betuijns palfrenier*).

⁴⁶ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1571-1572, f. 10 (*Pierre Sorry clockman*).

⁴⁷ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1559-1560, f.1v-2 (*Jan der Kinderen*).

⁴⁸ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1571-1572, f. 10v (*Jan van Ronse schildere*).

⁴⁹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1571-1572, f. 10 (*Pieter van Ghistel tapissier*).

⁵⁰ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1551-1552, f. 1v (*Hubrecht de Goudsmet alias den dooven*).

⁵¹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1573-1574, f. 9 (*Sebastiaen vander hof stadt deurwaerder vanden rekenkamer tot Berghen*). He was ‘in between jobs’ and was allowed a corrody in Sint-Janshuis until he would find another occupation. In 1575 he was appointed secretary of Wouwen but was allowed to stay in Sint-Janshuis until March 1577 (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1574-1575, f. 10). After 1572 Bergen op Zoom was caught up in warfare activity during the Dutch revolt, and during these years soldiers in the army of Don Fadrique de Toledo were also occasionally admitted to Sint-Janshuis.

The retirees were entitled to a small chamber⁵² and food and drinks (rye, pottage and beer) and fuel (peat). At the most important religious holidays – Easter, Pentecost, All Saints and Christmas – they would also receive meat and wine. At Christmas the corrodians also received woolen cloth for new stockings, as well as new shoes. Every second year they would also receive a new coat.⁵³ To be sure: the corrodies seem to have been sparse. The table below compares the rations at Sint-Janshuis to a so-called ‘subsistence basket’ containing the absolute minimum an individual required per year to survive. According to the foundation letter inmates received 223 kg of rye per annum, which is more than the minimum requirement for human beings (155 kg).⁵⁴ In addition Sint-Janshuis could serve inhabitants pottage to the equivalent of 63 kg of peas – three times the minimum requirement for vegetables. Other necessities of life, such as soap, textiles, and fuel, were around the minimum requirements as indicated by the subsistence basket. The inmates appear to have had all the necessary provisions, but we should also point out the rations were a long way from what an individual from the urban middle class would have been able to afford. Perhaps therefore Bruegel decided to invest in a double corrody?

⁵² WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1566-1567 f. 2 (...*inde camer des selfs overleden gevonden...*; ...discovered in the room of the deceased...).

⁵³ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2433.

⁵⁴ Allen et al (2011) suggest 155 kg rye sufficed for a man. The quantity of the *viertel* could be calculated by using the price Sint-Janshuis received when it sold rye to a local baker in 1571, for 38,5 st. per *viertele*. That year rye prices reported elsewhere in the Low Countries were 80,46 Kg per last of 3003 liter, which suggests 71,8 liter per *viertel* used in the account books of Sint-Janshuis. This comes closest to the *viertel* of Antwerp, of 77 liter, or 55,4 kg. Sources: Measures <http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/mgw/>; Prices <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>.

Table 1: Rations in Sint-Janshuis

	Rations in Sint-Janshuis	Subsistence basket
Rye	223 kg ^a	155 kg
Beans/peas	[63 kg] ^b	20 kg
Meat/fish	4,2 kg ^c	3 kg
Butter	-	3 kg
Soap	2,4 l ^d	1.3 kg
Linnen/cotton	2.4 m ^e	3 m
Candles	-	1.3 kg
Lampoil	-	1.3 l
Fuel	4,6 Mbtu ^f	3 Mbtu

Sources:

Subsistence basket: P. De Zwart, B. van Leeuwen and J. van Leeuwen-Li, 'Real wages since 1820', in J.L. van Zanden (ed.) *How was life? Global well-being since 1820*, 73-86, 75.

Prices: dataset *The prices of the most important consumer goods, and indices of wages and the cost of living in the western part of the Netherlands, 1450-1800*, <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>.

^a Inhabitants received 3,5 *viertelen* rye: 310 litres. When we assume a weight of 0,72 kg/litre (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>) we arrive at 223 kg rye per person per annum.

^b Inhabitants received 4 *pond* 10 *schelling* Brabants worth of pottage (*potagie*) – according to the accounts 18 Kg was spent per annum. Pottage is a vegetables-based soup, served daily. The ingredients are unknown, here we assume the soup provided in the demand for beans/peas. In 1531 18 Kg bought 878 kg peas – about 63 kg per inhabitant per annum (prices of beans are not available). In reality pottage certainly included other ingredients (leafy vegetables, meat); the relatively generous budget – more than triple the amount required for subsistence - would probably have allowed the janitor to include these as well.

^c Inhabitants received 6 *stuivers* worth of meat per annum. In 1531 this amount bought 4,2 kg meat.

^d The janitor received 12 *stuivers* per annum for soap to wash the bedlinen. In 1531 this bought 33 litres soap, or 2,4 litres per inhabitant. The weight of 2,4 litre soap is unknown but is unlikely to have diverted much from 1,3 kg.

^e Inhabitants received one *el* woollen cloth for stockings every year, and five *el* for a coat every second year. Per annum they received 3,5 *el*: 2,4 meter woollen cloth.

^f Inhabitants received 0,5 *last* peat per annum. Cornelisse indicates a corrodian in Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Gouda, around 1500, received 0,5 last peat per annum as well, and calculated this quantity generated 4,9 Gigajoule (which equals 4,6 Mbtu- million British thermal units) (C. Cornelisse, *Energiemarkten en energiehandel in Holland in de late middeleeuwen* (Hilversum 2008) 330).

Considering that this was a retirement home, and therefore inhabited by the frail and elderly, Jan III made available 25 Kg per annum for healthcare: in case they fell ill, the retirees were moved to an infirmary, where they would get ‘herbs and wine’ and would be cared for by their fellow-inmates.⁵⁵ To this end the janitor could also hire a health professional, such as the cellite that cared for Bruegel in his final days. The account books indicate several inmates required extensive care, such as *crepel Hansken* – the former *valet des filles* – who apparently suffered from a skin disease and frequently required his bandages to be renewed.⁵⁶ This bedridden inmate even received extra care ‘because he cannot maintain himself or earn anything on the side and has nothing in the whole world than his scant corrody’.⁵⁷

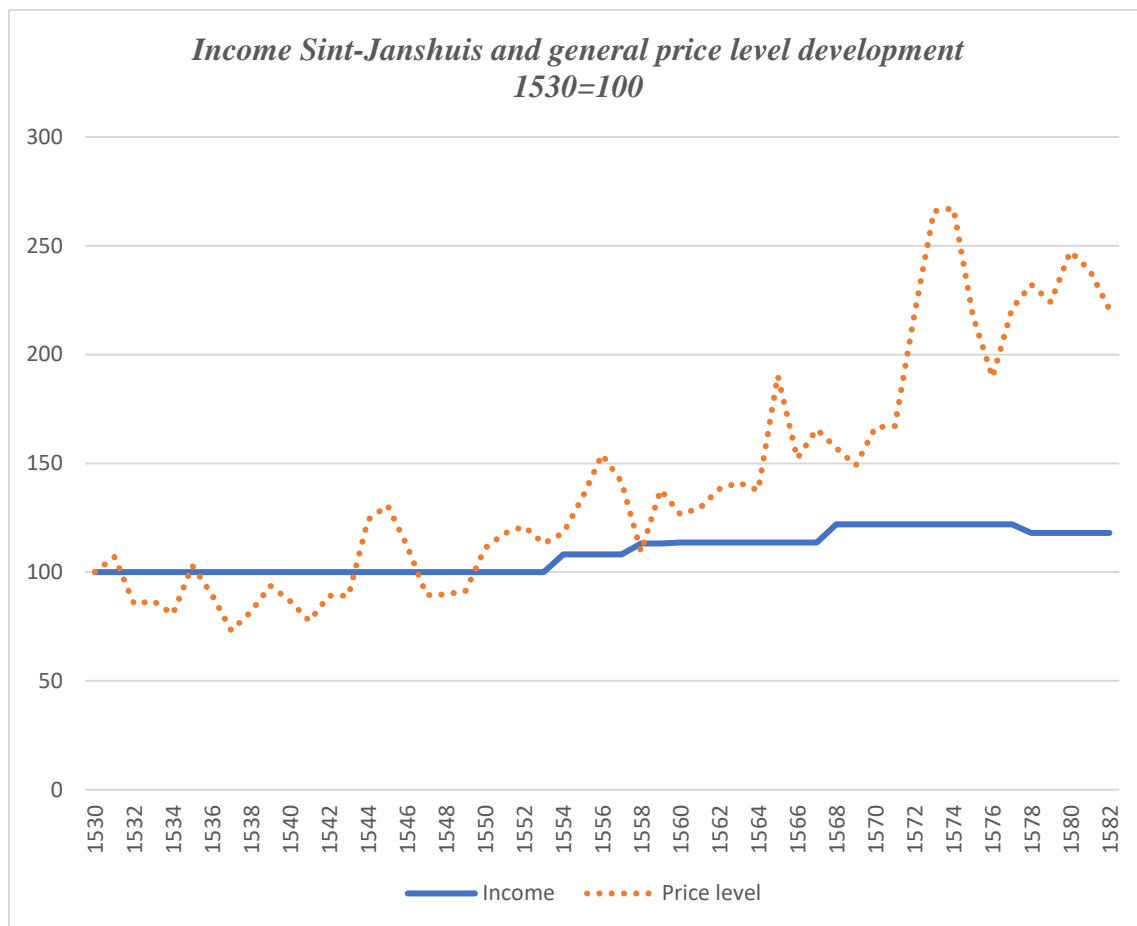
Financially Sint-Janshuis was well-endowed with the annuity of 300 Kg, and over time its administrators even managed to add to this starting capital by selling excess rye, profiting from inheritances, and receiving annuities like the one Bruegel brought in. By the 1570s it was the recipient of another eight annuities yielding more than 65 Kg.⁵⁸ Sint-Janshuis had thus managed to add more than 20% to its income in 50 years’ time. However, as the figure below demonstrates, this was not nearly enough for the retirement home to keep up with general rise in consumer prices after c. 1550.

⁵⁵ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2433.

⁵⁶ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1564-1565 f. 8v.

⁵⁷ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1149, account 1557-1558, f. 6.

⁵⁸ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1581-1582, f. 2.



Sources: WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nrs. 1149-1150; <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/>.

Unsurprisingly, in a petition to Marquis Jan IV van Glymes, most likely written in or shortly before 1560, the corrodians complained about their situation. They pointed out that the cost of living had been low when Jan III had founded Sint-Janshuis in 1530. Thirty years later the cost of living was c. 40% above that of the foundation year, so ‘the poor inhabitants and former officials could hardly survive on the corrodies they were entitled to’ because ‘these were expensive times’. Interestingly the founder, Jan III, had foreseen that price levels might change in the future, and tried to provide some sort of ‘inflation correction’ when he stipulated in the foundation letter ‘that his son and his children would improve the corrodies’. The latter did not stick to Jan III’s instructions to correct for inflation, even though prices had risen considerably. What was even worse, in 1557 the Marquis’ receiver of the tithes had decided not to hand over rye to the corrodians of Sint-Janshuis, but to sell it on the market and give the profits to the lord. The inmates were left to their own devices for acquiring their food.

It seems that this was an incident though, and rye deliveries were resumed after 1557 and would continue until the early years of the Dutch revolt.⁵⁹

Problems of a different kind came to light in a 1575 inquiry into the inmates, centering on the question whether they did participate in mass four times a week, observed the daily prayers, and had properly furnished rooms.⁶⁰ Of the ten corrodians of Sint-Janshuis, only three actually lived in the retirement home, and among these were both the janitor and chaplain. Five corrodians were married and lived with their wives elsewhere in Bergen op Zoom but did collect their corrody. They probably did not bother to attend masses or pray the *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*. The corrodians Gille Estieme and Nicolaes de Havre even were nowhere to be found: they lived in Brussels ‘yet they did receive their rations’. Even though the two were no former servants of the court, they had been admitted to Sint-Janshuis. After their absence had come to light it was immediately decided that before March 15, 1575, they would be replaced by former personnel. As to the married men: they were former servants and would not be immediately evicted. However, the janitor was instructed to begin looking for other candidates, who would be willing to live in a furnished room, attend the masses, and do daily prayers ‘except for when they would have fallen ill, or their profession or other means of existence would prevent them from attending’⁶¹ – apparently corrodians continued to be allowed to combine living in Sint-Janshuis with other activities.

The janitor’s quest to find a new corrodian led to the admission of Gielis Stevensz. by the Council of Bergen in 1576-1577, and the ratification of this appointment by the lord of Merode.⁶² Convincing (former) employees to enter Sint-Janshuis turned out to be difficult though: in 1578-1579 the Marquise Maria Margaretha van Merode (r. 1577-1580) took the remarkable step to allow one of the corrodies to a female servant, Magdalena ‘t Hoenderwijff for her ‘lengthy domestic service washing clothes and other’ and ‘considering her old age,

⁵⁹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2447. Rye deliveries were also partly postponed in 1581-1582 (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1581-1582, f. 6).

⁶⁰ The furnishing of rooms seems to have been a requirement for inmates. The reason for this may be sought in the possibly for the institution to sell furnishings after corrodians had passed away: by forcing inmates to invest in this, Sint-Janshuis secured an additional income. Perhaps therefore a decree, dated 1555, prescribes what furniture should be in every room: a bed plus bedding, various pieces of furniture, crockery and kitchen utensils (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 2446).

⁶¹ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1574-1575, f. 10.

⁶² WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1576-1577, f. 8v. The lord van Merode was likely Johan Corsselaar van Witthem, who married Maria Margaretha van Merode (the daughter of Mensia van Glymes, sister of Marquis Jan IV) in 1577.

frailty and poverty'. To be sure: Magdalena would not live in Sint-Janshuis, but rather receive the monetary value of the corrody - 24 Kg per annum.⁶³

5. Bruegel in perspective

Bruegel spent his final years in Sint-Janshuis. He is described as the former barber of lord Jan van Bergen – this must be the lord Marquis Jan IV van Glymes (r. 1541-1567), who Bruegel served before he moved into the home in 1553-1554. His occupation – barber – was likely the late-medieval term used to denote professionals who could give a haircut or shave, but also practiced medicine and provided dental care.⁶⁴ In the historiography they are known as barber-surgeons: they were craftsmen who had had their education in the context of the craft guild of the barbers.⁶⁵ In the sixteenth century barber-surgeons were gradually surpassed by medical professionals who had received training at a university. This also happened in Bergen op Zoom, where the town government in the late fifteenth century decided the town surgeon was to be a *doctor medicinae*.⁶⁶

In late-medieval Bergen op Zoom a few town surgeons are known to have also worked as personal surgeons of the lords of Bergen.⁶⁷ Bruegel is unlikely to have combined his work at court with a position as town surgeon though: according to the historian Van Ham the sixteenth-century town government of Bergen op Zoom considered guild-trained surgeons a safety hazard and was keen to make sure the town-surgeons would be university-trained. Bruegel the 'master barber' would likely have been a guild-trained barber-surgeon who the

⁶³ WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1578-1579 f. 9v.; account 1579-1580 f. 7. The first account after 1581-1582, the account of 1609-1610, mentions three women as corrodians (WA, BOZ-0001, inv. nr. 1150, account 1609-1610, f. 10-10v).

⁶⁴ E. Huizenga, *Een nuttelike practijke van cirurgien: geneeskunde en astrologie in het Middelenederlandse handschrift Wenen, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, 2818 (Hilversum 1997) 247-248.

⁶⁵ Rudolph Ladan's study into 16th-century Leiden demonstrates how it took until the mid-century before 'surgeon' (*chirurgijn*) came into use: before medical professionals were generally referred to as barber (*barbier*) (R. Ladan, *Gezondheidszorg in Leiden in de late middeleeuwen*, 156).

⁶⁶ W.A. van Ham, *Macht en gezag in het markiezaat: een politiek-institutionele studie over stad en land van bergen op Zoom (1477-1583)* (Hilversum 2000) 381.

⁶⁷ Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 381. Indeed, it was not unusual for barber-surgeons to have a position at Renaissance courts. In the Low Countries Mary of Hungary's court had a surgeon, and the same goes for the court of Adolf of Burgundy. William of Orange's court had a barber (J. Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije en haar hof 1505-1558: tot plichtsbetrachting uitverkoren*, 64, 69; L. Sicking, 'Door Oranje overschaduwd. Het hof van Maximiliaan van Bourgondië, heer en markies van Veere', in: M. Damen and L. Sicking (eds.), *Bourgondië voorbij: de Nederlanden 1250-1650: liber alumnorum Wim Blockmans* (Hilversum 2010), 99-122, 112; M.-A. D. Delen, *Het hof van Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam 2002) 41). Sicking points out the contemporary court of Maximilian of Burgundy did not have a surgeon (Sicking, 'Door Oranje overschaduwd' (Hilversum 2010), 99-122, 112).

town government would no longer have considered for a position. Apparently, the Marquis' standards were not as high, and he appointed Bruegel as his personal barber-surgeon.⁶⁸

Barbers were not necessarily wealthy. For Bergen op Zoom data on occupational wealth are unavailable, but a property tax levied in 1498 in Leiden, in the Northwest of the Low Countries, can help us understand the economic position of barbers. That year a 1% tax was levied on property. 18.4% of the heads of households was deemed poor and was not assessed. 2457 households were assessed, at an average of 310 lb. Among them were fourteen barbers, whose wealth was assessed at 180 lb. on average; only three out of fourteen barbers exceeded the average of 310 lb.⁶⁹ Thus, in late fifteenth-century Leiden barbers were among the large group of ordinary professionals. More than 60 years later, in 1561, when Leiden levied a real estate tax, their position was quite similar. The average for the whole town was 10.2 lb., and for the barbers 11 lb.⁷⁰ Among the 223 professions taxed in 1561, the barbers' average wealth ranked 138.⁷¹

These findings suggest barbers' economic position was not very remarkable: compared to other professionals, they were not very wealthy. In terms of social standing their position was even worse: according to Huizenga barbers were among those professionals without honor (*unehrliche Leute*) because they met with 'death, waste and disease, and secretions'. As a result, barbers sometimes even lacked legal personality – they could not conduct certain legal acts – or could be excluded from political positions.⁷² However Stuart, writing about the German Empire, points out that the position of barbers could vary from honorable in one region, to dishonorable in another, and also that it is not impossible that their social position changed over time.⁷³ The exact social position of barbers in Bergen op Zoom is difficult to determine, but the existence of a craft guild for surgeons since 1493 suggests barbers at least had the right to organize themselves.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 381.

⁶⁹ One was assessed at 400 lb. and the two wealthiest barbers at 600 lb. (www.oudleiden.nl); D.J. Noordam, 'Leiden in last. De financiële positie van de Leidenaren aan het einde van de Middeleeuwen', *Jaarboek Dirk van Eck* (2001) 17-40, 23).

⁷⁰ Noordam, 'Leiden in last', 30. Noordam's data on www.oudleiden.nl mention an average of 12,1 lb.

⁷¹ www.oudleiden.nl.

⁷² Huizenga, *Een nuttelijke practijke*, 249.

⁷³ K. Stuart, *Defiled trades and social outcasts: honor and ritual pollution in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge 1999) 105.

⁷⁴ Van Ham, *Macht en gezag*, 381.

We do not know anything about Bruegel's position at the court: he may have been a barber-surgeon working full-time for the Marquis, but he may also have been hired on an ad-hoc basis, combining his position at court with other commissions.⁷⁵ We can be sure Bruegel was relatively affluent though: to pay for admission to Sint-Janshuis he was able to transfer the above-mentioned annuity worth seven guilders, with an estimated purchase price of c. 110 Kg – equivalent to about a year's wages of a skilled worker. This annuity bought him a double corrody – meaning he received twice the food, drink, clothes and allowances of the other inmates – which set him apart from the other inmates.

Bruegel's wealth is also apparent when we compare the value of his belongings that were sold after he passed away. All in all, the possessions of 26 deceased inmates were sold between 1530 and 1582, for an average value of 21.9 Kg (median 17.2 Kg). Bruegel's possessions were worth 48 Kg, a value that was only surpassed by that of the chaplain Jan van Tournhout (61.3 Kg) and of Jan der Kinderen, an apothecary (88.2 Kg; his apothecary's inventory alone was worth 46 Kg). Finally, Bruegel died in possession of 12 Kg in cash. The average sums found in the purses of seven deceased was 6.9 Kg (median 6.5 Kg).⁷⁶ In terms of possessions and cash Bruegel was clearly among the wealthiest inmates.

6. Bruegel the barber-surgeon and Bruegel the painter

The Pieter Bruegel who purchased a double corrody with Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554 had worked as a barber-surgeon at the court of the Marquis Jan IV van Glymes. Although Bruegel did not have a very prestigious profession – barber-surgeons were not held in high esteem in the late Middle Ages – he appears to have been relatively affluent. Bruegel could pay for a rather luxurious retirement in Sint-Janshuis, receiving a double portion of food, drink, clothing and fuel. Compared to his fellow-inmates, Bruegel's wealth is also apparent: only two other corrodians were worth more when they passed away, and Sint-Janshuis sold their possessions.

Was Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon of the Marquis of Bergen also the father of the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and grandfather of Pieter Bruegel the Younger? Although this is

⁷⁵ Which is also a serious possibility, considering that the lords are known to have spent considerable time outside Markiezenhof (W.A. van Ham, 'Bergen op Zoom. Residentie en stad', *Virtus. Journal of nobility studies* 22 (2015) 10-35, 26).

⁷⁶ The only other corrodian who paid for his stay, just as Pieter Bruegel did, was a Wouter Lefevre. When he passed away his possessions were worth 30,45 Kg, and he had 11,85 Kg cash in his room (WA, BOZ-0001, account 1569-1570, f. 1v; see for his purchase price of 46 Kg: WA, BOZ-0001, account 1554-1555, f. 2-2v).

impossible to know for sure, the corrodian who died in Sint-Janshuis in 1566 seems to be a good candidate. First because of his name: Pieter may well have been a family name that the barber-surgeon passed on to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who then did the same when Pieter Bruegel the Younger was born in 1564-1565.

Second, Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon moved to Sint-Janshuis in 1553-1554. Although there was of course no official age at retirement in the later middle ages, it was unusual for people younger than 50 to move into such a home:⁷⁷ only under specific circumstances, such as disability, were they allowed to do so. The accounts of Sint-Janshuis do not provide evidence that Bruegel required any special medical attendance though: it rather seems he lived there quietly between 1553-1554 and 1566. Based on this it is safe to assume he was over 50 when he entered, which means he would have been born around 1500. The latter would fit nicely with him fathering Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who is usually estimated to have been born between 1525 and 1530.⁷⁸

Third, the corrodian lived and worked in Bergen op Zoom, c. 40 km west of Breda, where Pieter Bruegel the Elder is suggested to have been born by the contemporary Guicciardini. We might ask ourselves if it would make sense, in the light of the new evidence, to assume the painter was born in Bergen op Zoom, rather than Breda. This is not impossible of course, depending on whether the barber-surgeon already lived in Bergen op Zoom in the 1520s, or moved there later. The first time the barber-surgeon is mentioned in sources from Bergen op Zoom is 1546 as owner of an annuity: before that there appears to be no mentioning of him. On the other hand, it remains unclear whether he was a life-long resident of Bergen op Zoom or moved from his place of birth to Bergen op Zoom somewhere during his lifetime (for instance from Breda, which would be in line with Guicciardini's comment).

Fourth, Bergen op Zoom is c. 40 km north of Antwerp where Pieter Bruegel the Elder emerges in historical sources for the first time when he entered the painter's guild in 1551. Moving from Bergen op Zoom to Antwerp to become a painter, was perhaps a logical step, even more so for the son of a barber-surgeon who worked at the one of the most prominent courts of the Low Countries: *Markiezenhof*. The court of the Marquis of Bergen fits in nicely with claims of Pieter Bruegel the Elder coming from an educated and urban environment⁷⁹ –

⁷⁷ Previous research indicated late-medieval retirees entering into a retirement home were usually over fifty (Zuijderduijn, 'Pap en brood', 36 note 48).

⁷⁸ Orenstein, 'The elusive life', 5.

⁷⁹ Wied, 'Pieter Bruegel I [the elder]'.

and not being the son of a peasant, as has been claimed since Karel van Mander portrayed him like this in the seventeenth century. Also, and depending on at what age Bruegel the painter left home, and to what extent the son of the barber-surgeon could gain access to the building, the *Markiezenhof* may well have been where he came in touch with Renaissance culture.

7. Conclusion

Regardless of whether there was a link between Pieter Bruegel the painter and Pieter Bruegel the barber-surgeon, the latter provides an interesting example of a sixteenth-century retiree. He moved into Sint-Janshuis, an institution that provided the former employees of *Markiezenhof* with a safety net for old age. The analysis reveals that after its foundation in 1530, the retirement home was unable to cope with rising costs of living after c. 1550, and the inmates could barely survive on the rather sparse single corrodies they were entitled to. When Bruegel entered Sint-Janshuis, he may have been aware of the financial problems. He claimed that he had to maintain his social status in Bergen op Zoom, and therefore invested in a double corrody: Bruegel demanded more from retirement and was willing and able to pay for this. In the sixteenth century other elderly followed suit: an increasing number of ageing individuals purchased corrodies, often even entering specialized retirement homes that allowed them to maintain their middle-class life style during old age.