

The history of the filigree Zeeland button, characteristic of the regional jewellery (filigrain Zeeuwse knoop/ Zeeuwse knop) : Epilogue

By Trude de Reij

Last month I read the book 'The lives of Jan Six' (2016, non-fiction) by Geert Mak. For people like me who are always looking for historical sensations, it's a great book. The back cover says: "This is the story of Jan Six, his family and his many lives. His portrait is considered to be the most beautiful portrait his friend Rembrandt ever made (...). *The lives of Jan Six* describes the journey of an Amsterdam elite family through four centuries of history. At the same time it's the story of the city and the spirit of time, of ambitions and limitations, of grandeur and the eternal fear of decline.

Pendant 1645 - 1700

In this book, on page 37 there is a picture of 'Chloris', a small portrait of an unknown lady, by Gerard ter Borch (private Collection Six). She wears a brooch with a pendant. The image is too small to be able to see exactly what the pendant is. But it is very tempting to see a similarity to the design of our Zeeland button. Initially it appeared that our button was introduced, made and worn in the Netherlands from 1700 onwards. With most likely a Spanish origin, maybe Jewish. However, the little portrait of Chloris is older than 1700, so her brooch may be even older. From Geert Mak's book I learned that the portrait was painted maybe sometime after 1645. This could be some confirmation that the first Zeeland button 'arrived' here in the 2nd half of the 17th century.

Officers uniform 1670 - 1681

Between 1670 and 1681 Gerard ter Borch also painted 'Jacob de Graeff in officers uniform'. On this uniform, rows with decorative silver buttons are attached.



Rows with decorative silver buttons, at the painting of Michiel de Ruyter, 1667

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English translation: The history of the filigree Zeeland button, characteristic of the regional jewellery (filigrain Zeeuwse knoop/ Zeeuwse knop) : Epilogue p.1



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Ferdinand Bol paints a sea captain. We see rows of golden buttons on the uniform.

On the clothes of Michiel de Ruyter and on those of a sea captain (above a picture of both portraits by Ferdinand Bol from 1667) we also see rows of respectively golden and silver buttons. (Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)

Spanish origin

The second half of the 17th century, of our Golden Age, seems to be the period in which different types of decorative golden and silver buttons became fashionable for those who could afford them. I suspect that in those days there was little desire to wear jewellery (including golden and silver buttons) coming straight from the former Spanish occupier (the Eighty Years' War ended only in 1648). New designs must have been made. However, in theory it is possible that the typical, now called Zeeland button with its Spanish origin, was introduced here in the second half of the 17th century through trading activities by the Sephardic Jews from Amsterdam and Middelburg. And then evolved into the regional jewellery as we know it today.

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