

JAN ABRAHAMSZ BEERSTRATEN

(Amsterdam 1622 - Amsterdam 1666)

A Mediterranean Harbour with Men-o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower

signed and dated on a stone 'J. Beerstraaten 1664' (lower centre)

oil on panel

48 x 65 cm (18 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ in)

THIS DELIGHTFUL MEDITERRANEAN PORT, FILLED with men-o'war gallantly displaying the red, white and blue stripes of the Dutch flag, epitomises the mercantile success of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. On the right, a resplendent man-o'war leaves the harbour with full sails, whilst to the left three further men-o'war are anchored in the harbour, their cargo presumably being tended to. In the foreground, figures standing on the quayside are seen gesturing towards the moored vessels. Two figures, most likely Dutch merchants, distinctively dressed with wide brimmed black hats and white ruffs, are in deep discussion under an arch. The arch forms part of a tower, with a bell perched on the top, clearly in a state of disrepair as creeping plants grow within the stonework. In the right foreground, a small wooden vessel can be seen unloading wares via a wooden plank. On the bow end of the boat, a man wearing a white turban and tunic converses with another man, suggesting that this port is a hub for international trade.

The background is dominated by a Mediterranean urban landscape. Though a *capriccio*, the visible fortifications in the harbour and towering mountain in the distance allude to Naples.

It is not known whether Beerstraten journeyed to Italy during his career, though his portrayal of dappled, southern light is particularly accurate. He may have copied drawings from Johannes Lingelbach (see inventory), an Dutch-Italianate painter who had visited the Mediterranean. The so-called 'Golden Age' of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century was, in part, associated with the significant mercantile wealth accrued from their dominance of world maritime trade. The Mediterranean was the gateway between European and Eastern trade, and *A Mediterranean Harbour with Men o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower* portrays the considerable presence of Dutch shipping on the trade route.

Beerstraten is thought to have been a pupil of the Flemish maritime painter Claes Claesz Wou (1592-1665) and is best known for his southern seaports, battle scenes and winter townscapes. His depictions of southern ports and seashores, such as *A Mediterranean Harbour with Men-o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower* were influenced by the Dutch Italianate painters Nicolaes Berchem (1620-1683) (see inventory) and Jan Baptist Weenix (1620-1660/1). Unlike his townscapes, Beerstraten's ports were entirely imaginary though sometimes well-known buildings were incorporated on the seashore.



Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten, *A Mediterranean Harbour with Men o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower* (Detail)



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