

“Unveiling
Anne de La Barre:
A Lost Portrait and Musical Score
Rediscovered”



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Introduction

This research paper stems from a personal journey of discovery after acquiring a 17th-century painting at an auction. As a beginner art collector with a focus on Old Flemish and Dutch Masters, I was initially unaware of the historical significance of the artwork. However, upon closer inspection, it became apparent that the painting held a hidden story connected to the baroque music scene in France. The depicted musical score, alongside other clues in the painting, led to the identification of Anne de La Barre, a prominent singer of the French court, as the subject.

With no previous experience in musicology, my research was driven by curiosity and a passion for uncovering forgotten histories. The findings presented here may provide a new visual representation of Anne de La Barre, contributing valuable insights for baroque music enthusiasts, opera singers, and scholars. By sharing this paper, I hope to revive interest in her legacy and inspire further academic exploration.

1. Background and context

The 17th century was a transformative period in Europe, characterized by an explosion of artistic and cultural achievements. Music, particularly in France, became a significant part of courtly life, with baroque compositions becoming central to both public performances and private gatherings. Within this context, figures such as Anne de La Barre emerged, known for her musical talents.

Anne de La Barre (1628–1688) was a celebrated court singer and a member of a prominent musical family in France. Her brother, Joseph de La Barre, was a composer and an influential figure in the French music scene. Although her musical career was well-regarded, very little is known about her personal life or appearance, as no surviving portraits (as far as I know) or definitive representations have been identified.

This research aims to shed light on a portrait of a lady. The painting, attributed to the Dutch artist Adriaen Hanneman (signed lower right), was acquired at auction without any prior context. The musical score, upon closer inspection, was found to contain verses from "Allez où le sort vous conduit," a piece associated with Anne de La Barre. This discovery suggests a connection between the painting and Anne's musical contributions.

Upon acquiring the painting, faint remnants of an inscription were observed on the pillar. Although the text is partly faded, close examination revealed the name *Madame de La Barre*. The sitter may not be just any lady of the court but could potentially be Anne de La Barre. This would be a remarkable finding, as no known portraits of Anne may have survived, and this painting might finally give her a face.

Historical context

1. Anne de La Barre

Anne Chabanceau de La Barre (1628-1688) was a distinguished French soprano singer from a notable musical family. Her father, Pierre de La Barre, served as a musician at the royal court of France, while her brother Joseph de La Barre was a talented harpsichordist and composer. The de La Barre family was well-regarded in aristocratic circles and was closely associated with the French court, performing for both King Louis XIII and later Louis XIV.¹

Anne's vocal talents made her a prominent figure in 17th-century French music. Her abilities were praised in contemporary poetry, including by the poet Tristan L'Hermite, who composed *Allez où le sort vous conduit* in her honor when she left the court in 1652. To accompany this verse, her brother Joseph de La Barre composed a *courante*—the very piece depicted on the musical score in this painting. Lisandro Abadie wrote a fascinating article in "The Revue de Musicologie," volume 94, on page 12, stating that the music was lost... until now..² Her performances, especially in private salons and courtly settings, were celebrated by influential figures of her time, such as Constantijn Huygens, a Dutch diplomat and poet who admired her greatly. Huygens organized several musical gatherings during her stay in The Hague, further illustrating her widespread acclaim beyond France.³

¹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Chabanceau_de_La_Barre

² Revue de musicology volume 94 pg 12

³ Briefwisseling Constantijn Huygens

The painting and the score

1. The description of the painting



The painting, signed by Adriaen Hanneman, is an oil on canvas dated 165(7)?, measuring 86 cm by 105 cm (excluding the frame). Over the years, the artwork has undergone multiple restorations, resulting in various overpainted and retouched areas that are now in need of careful renewal.

The composition depicts a woman, estimated age: late 20s - early 30s, holding a musical score, her arm resting on a classical pillar. The background features a rocky landscape, creating a dramatic setting that Hanneman frequently employed in his portraits. This specific composition style—incorporating the figure leaning against a pillar with a rocky landscape behind—is a characteristic element in Hanneman's work. An example can be seen in his 1658 portrait of Cornelis van Aerssen, now housed in the Rijksmuseum.⁴

⁴ <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/SK-A-1670>



Portrait of Cornelis van Aerssen in the Rijksmuseum.

About Adriaen Hanneman

Adriaen Hanneman (1601-1671) was a Dutch portrait painter known for his refined, elegant style, heavily influenced by Anthony van Dyck. Hanneman spent a significant part of his career in The Hague, where he became the preferred portraitist of the Dutch aristocracy and English exiles. His compositions often emphasize grace and nobility, using classical elements like pillars and distant landscapes to convey both stature and sophistication.⁵

This portrait, with its carefully balanced composition and use of a classical backdrop, reflects Hanneman's skill in depicting nobility and aligns with his artistic approach to conveying the elegance of his subjects.

⁵ https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adriaen_Hanneman

2. Analysis of the musical score



Written: Courante

La Barre Joseph

My research journey began with the discovery of the word *Courante* on the musical score in the painting. For someone familiar with musical notation or baroque music, it might have been an obvious clue, but for me, it was a real challenge. Without any background in music, everything on the score initially looked like a foreign language. However, after much effort, I finally recognized the word *Courante*, and that discovery became the starting point for unravelling the rest of the painting's story.

After deciphering *Courante*, the name *La Barre* below quickly followed. Even then, I had no clear understanding of the text or the identity of the sitter. Through persistent research, I came across another fascinating study by Elisabeth Belgrano, by searching on the words *Allez où le sort*.⁶ There, I found the text—a poem by Tristan L'Hermite—and for the first time, I read about Anne de La Barre. Suddenly, it became clear that her name was inscribed on the pillar. I had initially made out *Madame* quite quickly, followed by fragments that appeared as *e la* and *rre*. Without context, these letters meant little, but once I connected the dots, I realized the inscription read *Madame de La Barre*.

⁶ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/229531/229532>



Remnants of the text *Allez où le sort vous conduit* on the harpsichord music score.

The melody of La Barre's *courante*, *Allez où le sort vous conduit*, made a notable impression in the Dutch Low Countries. During my research, I found a few vocal scores featuring a different verse—a Dutch version—sung to the same melody composed by La Barre. Below two examples ^{7 8} This suggests that his composition not only resonated in France but also influenced the musical landscape in the Low Countries, highlighting a cultural exchange that extended beyond national borders.

In the "Liederenbank," 218 songs are recorded to the melody of "Allez ou le sort vous conduit." Often, the name listed is "Courante La Bare" instead of La Barre. There seems to have been considerable confusion historically about who composed the courante—Pierre or Joseph. Although the "Liederenbank" attributes it to Pierre, this seems to be incorrect.⁹

Ziet het Lam Gods.

Toon: *Courante La Bare.*



⁷ https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/tuin005meng01_01/tuin005meng01_01_0040.php

⁸ Godtvruchtige, sangh en rym stoffe door Aemilius van Cuilemborgh, Den II Psalm

⁹ <https://www.liederenbank.nl/resultaatlijst.php?limit=30&zoek=4873&actie=melodienorm&sorteer=jaar&lan=en&kaart=0&offset=0>

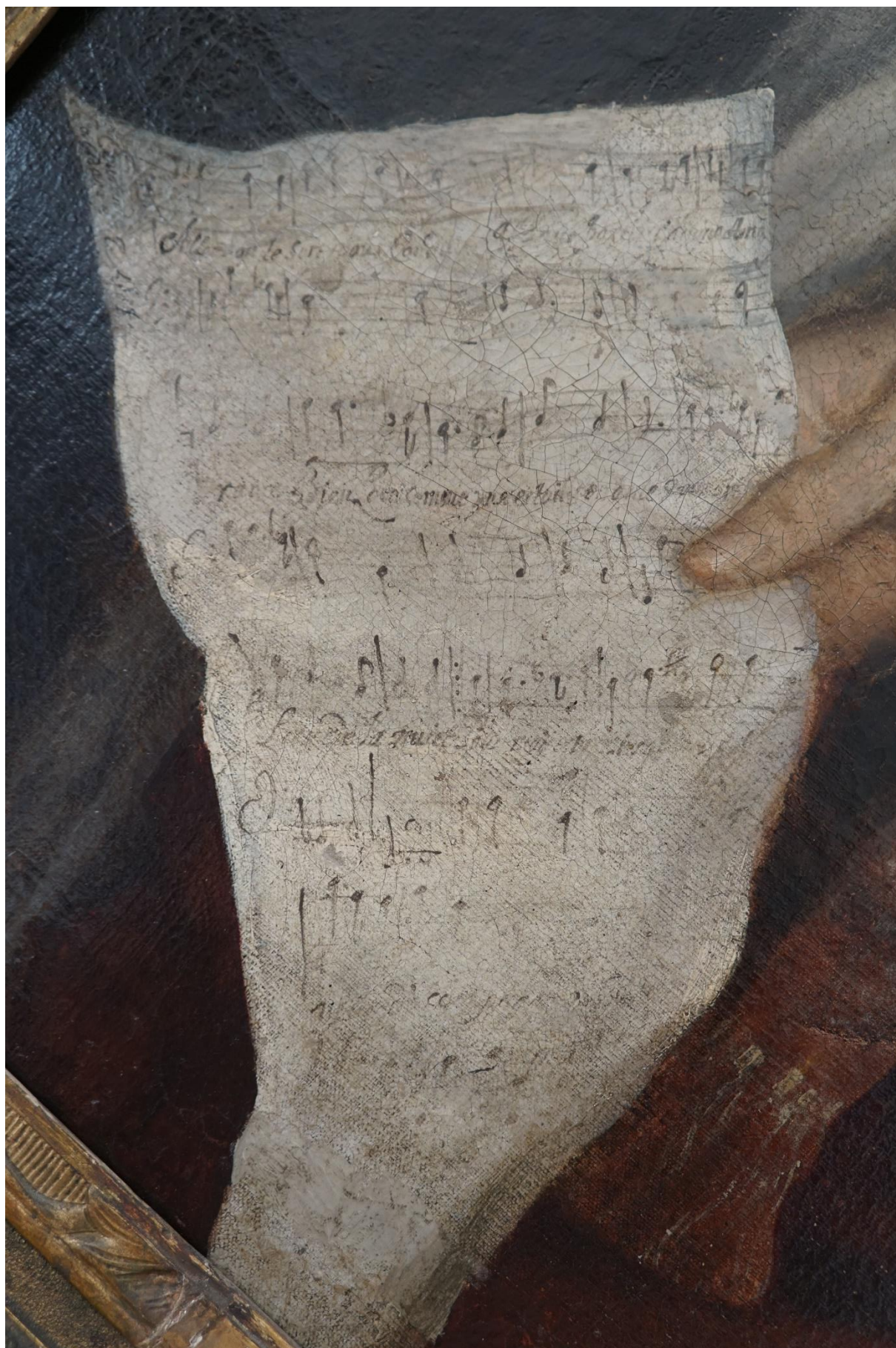
Den II. PSALM.

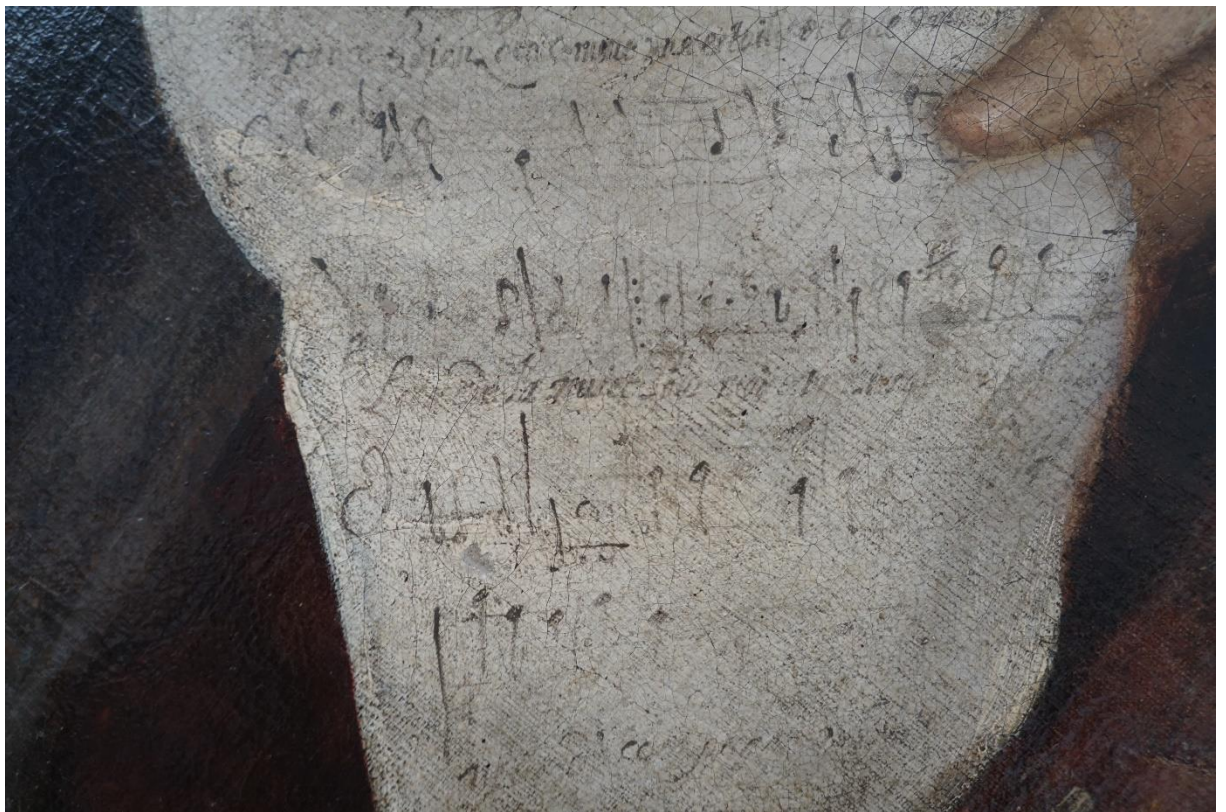
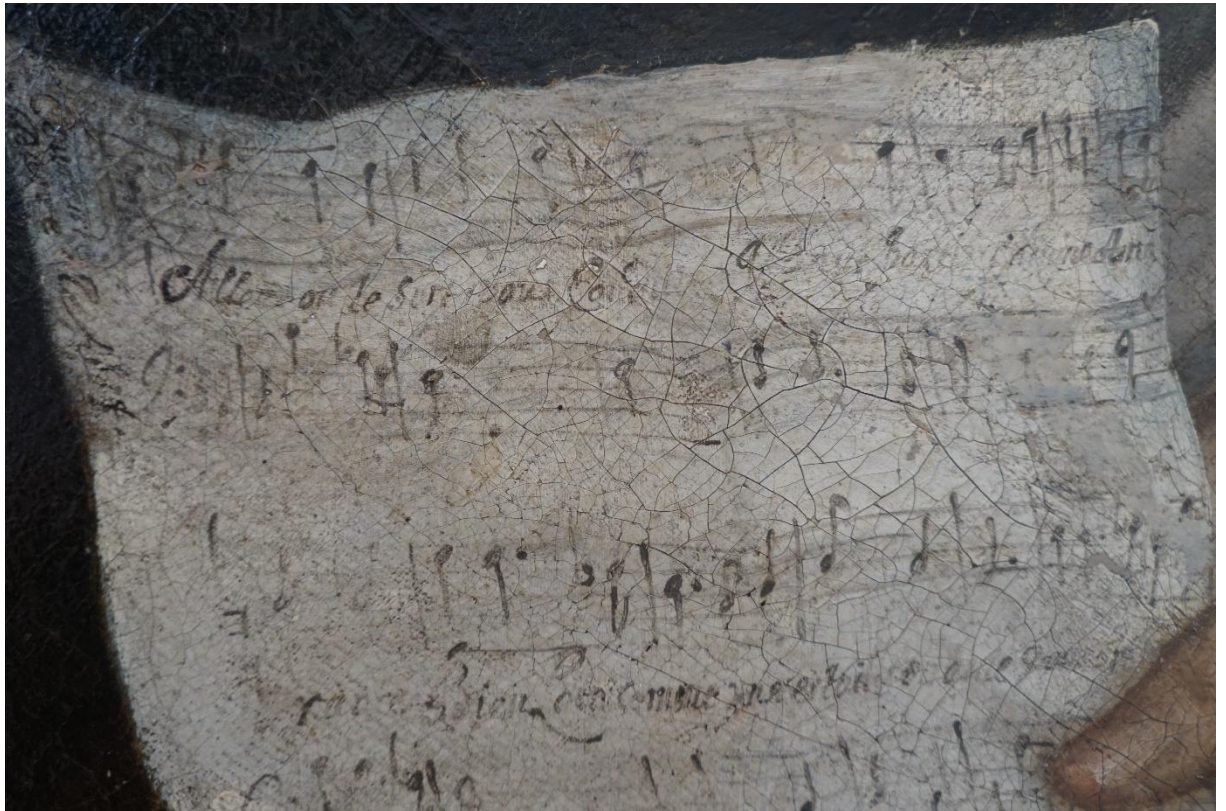
Toon : *Courante la Bare*

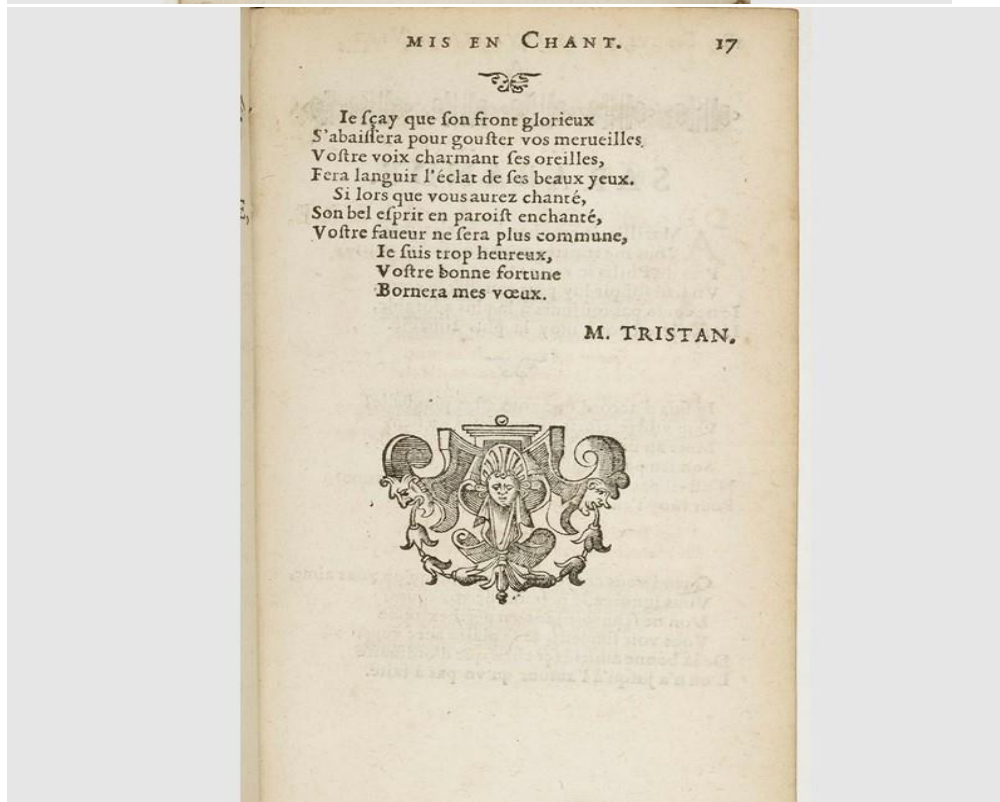
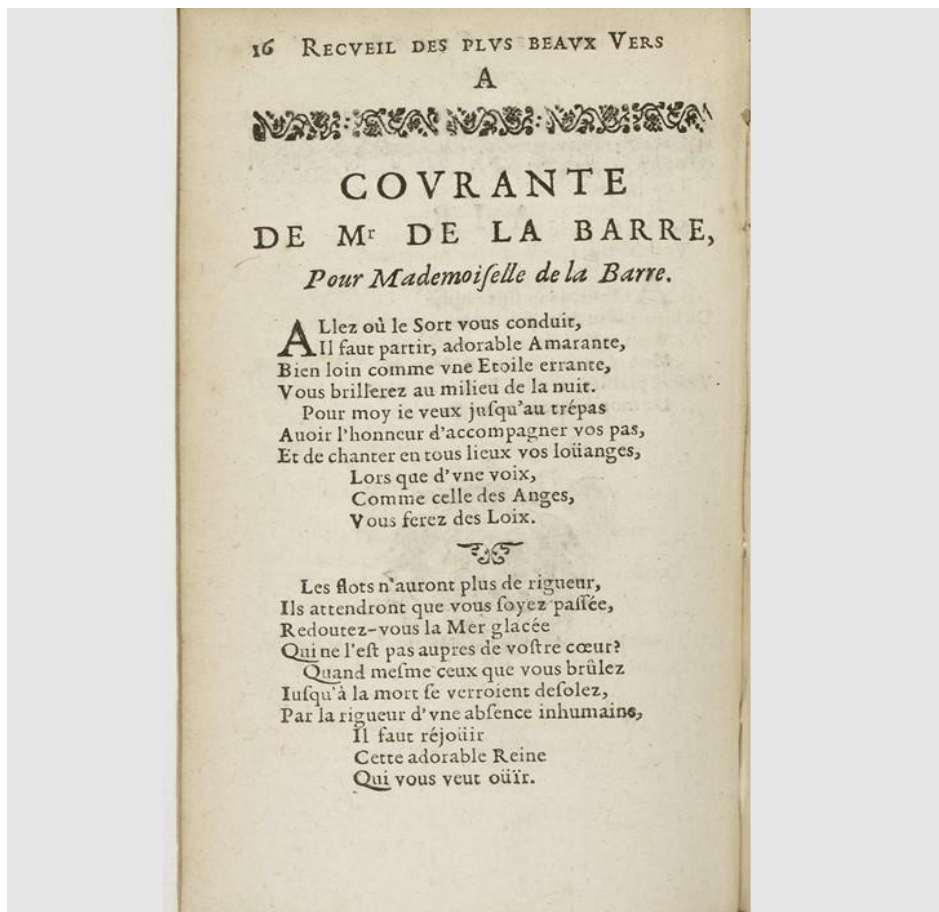
W **W**erom is doch het Heydensch Rot,
soo woedend? waerom dencken hier beneeden/
De Aertische volcken Idelheeden? En span-
nen sich te samen tegens Godt; Gecroonde
Dorsten muiten t'saem soo tegens God als
sijns Gesalfdes Naem. Sa laet ons breecken
sonder 't minst berouwen / Haer banden bryp;
En al haer touwen / wegh-doen / seggen sp.

I I.

Unfortunately, a harpsichord score has not been found, making the score on the painting, the only evidence, so far, of the existing score in my opinion.

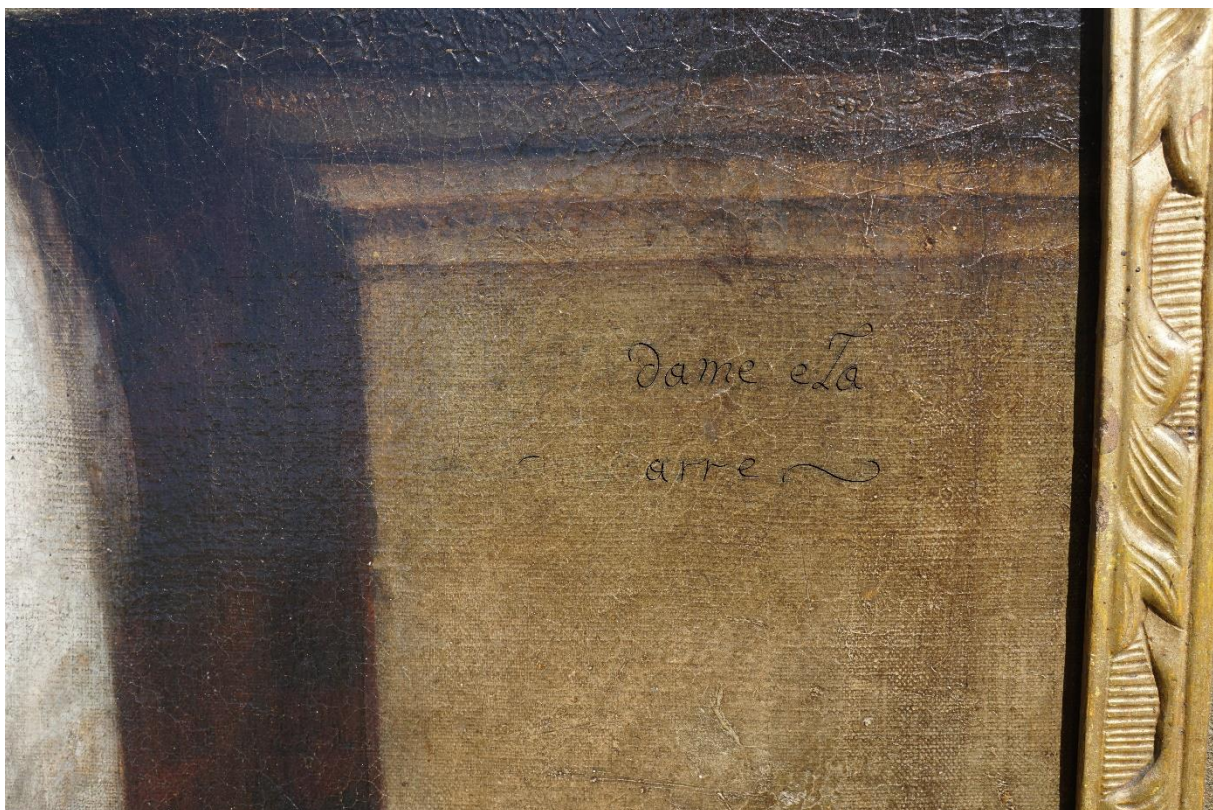


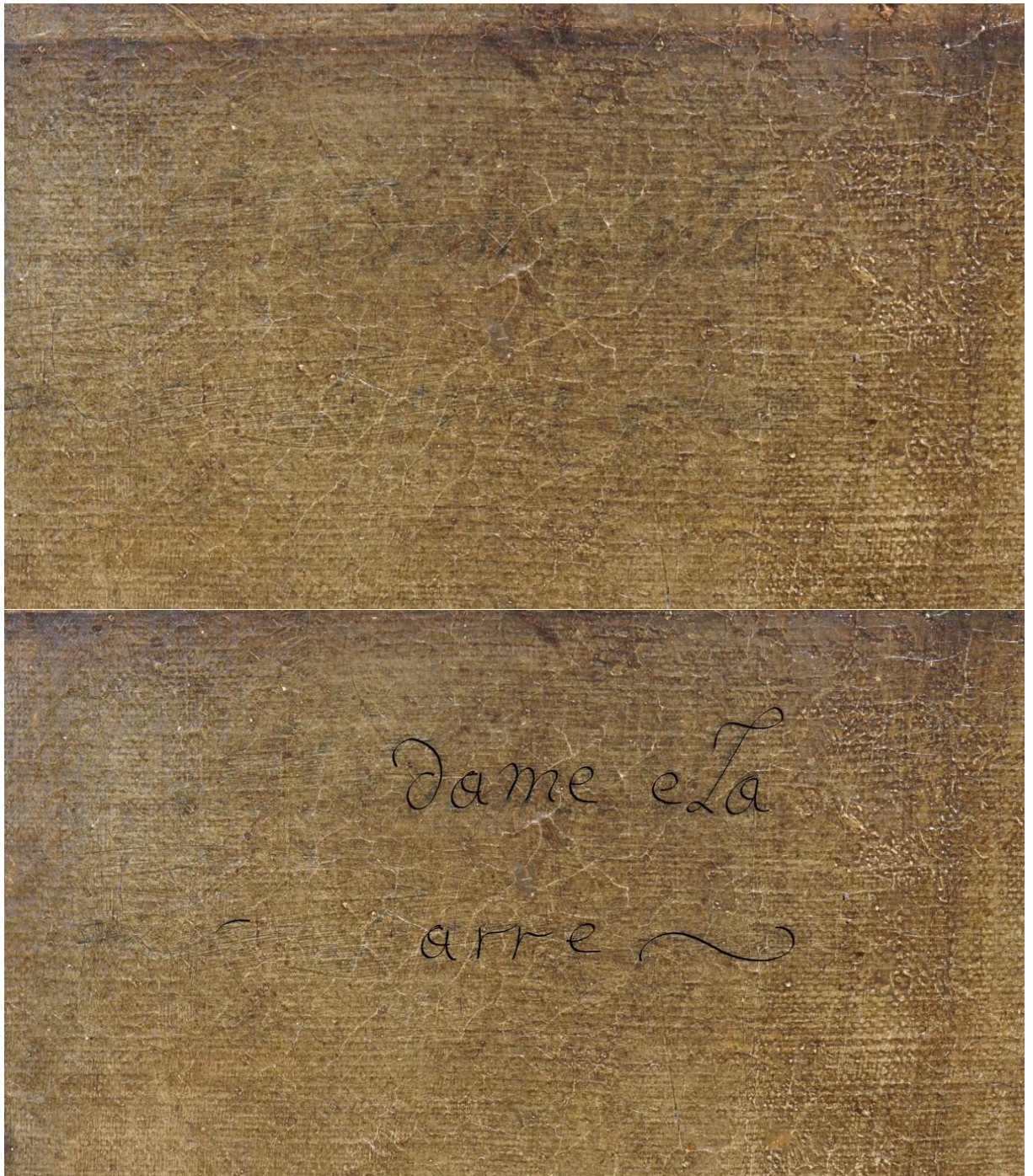




¹⁰ https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86184332#pg_16_and_17

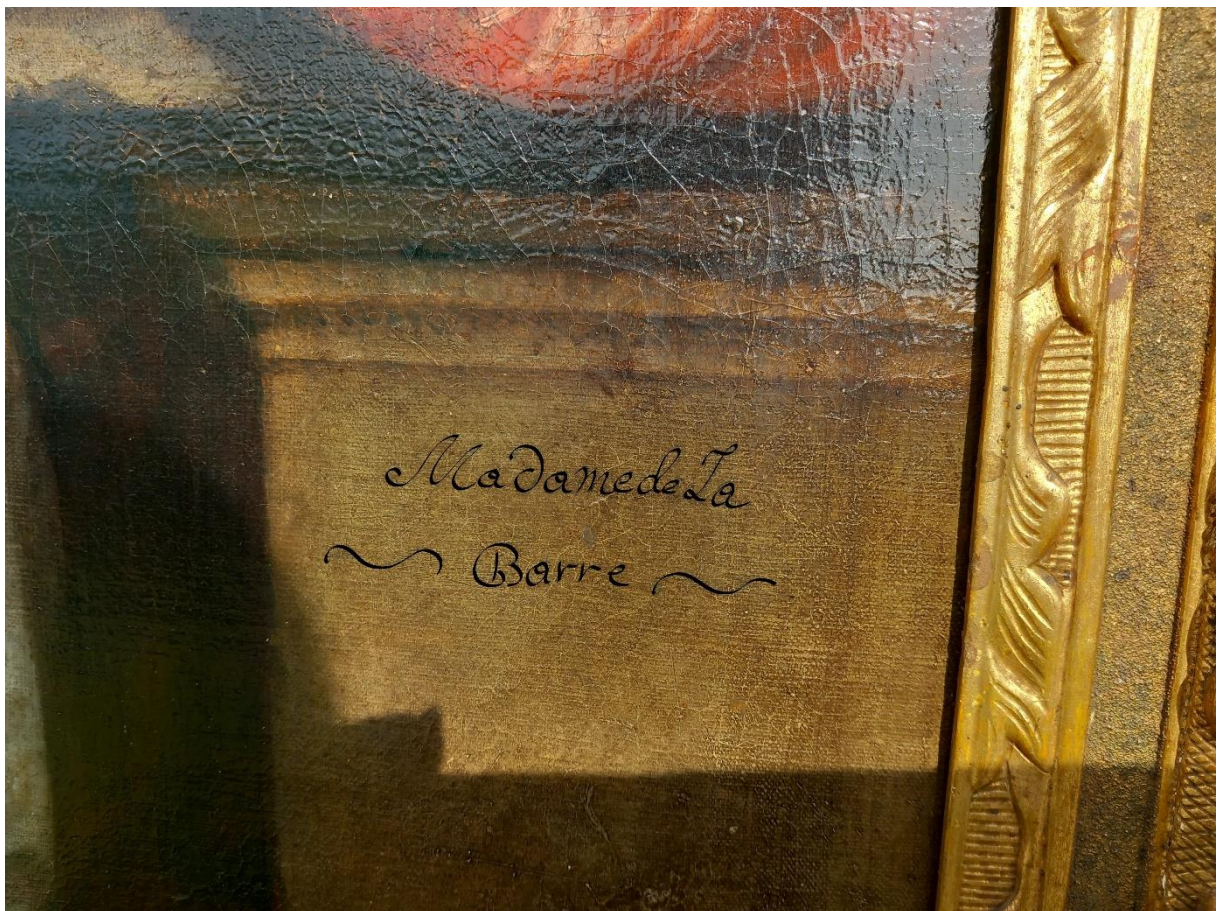
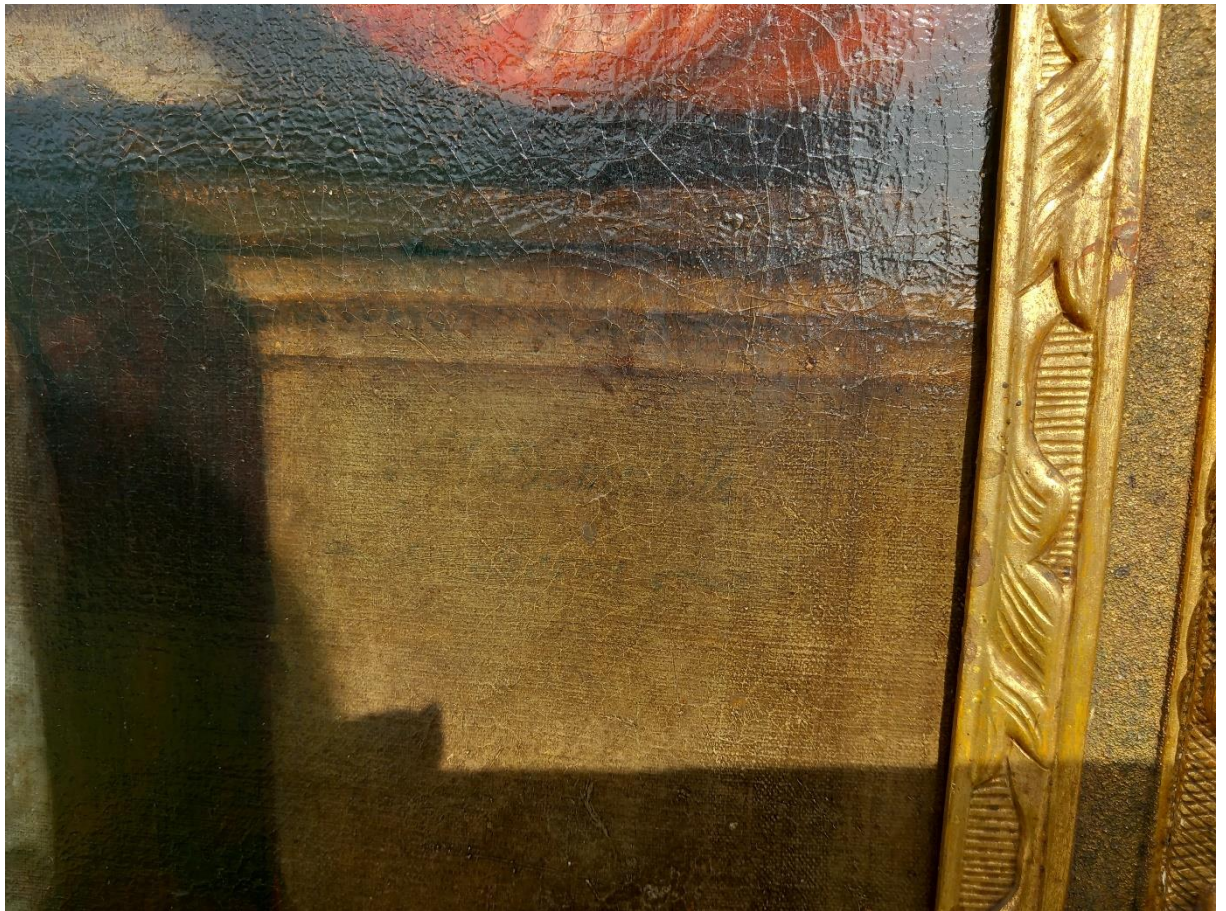
3. Remnants of the sitter's name

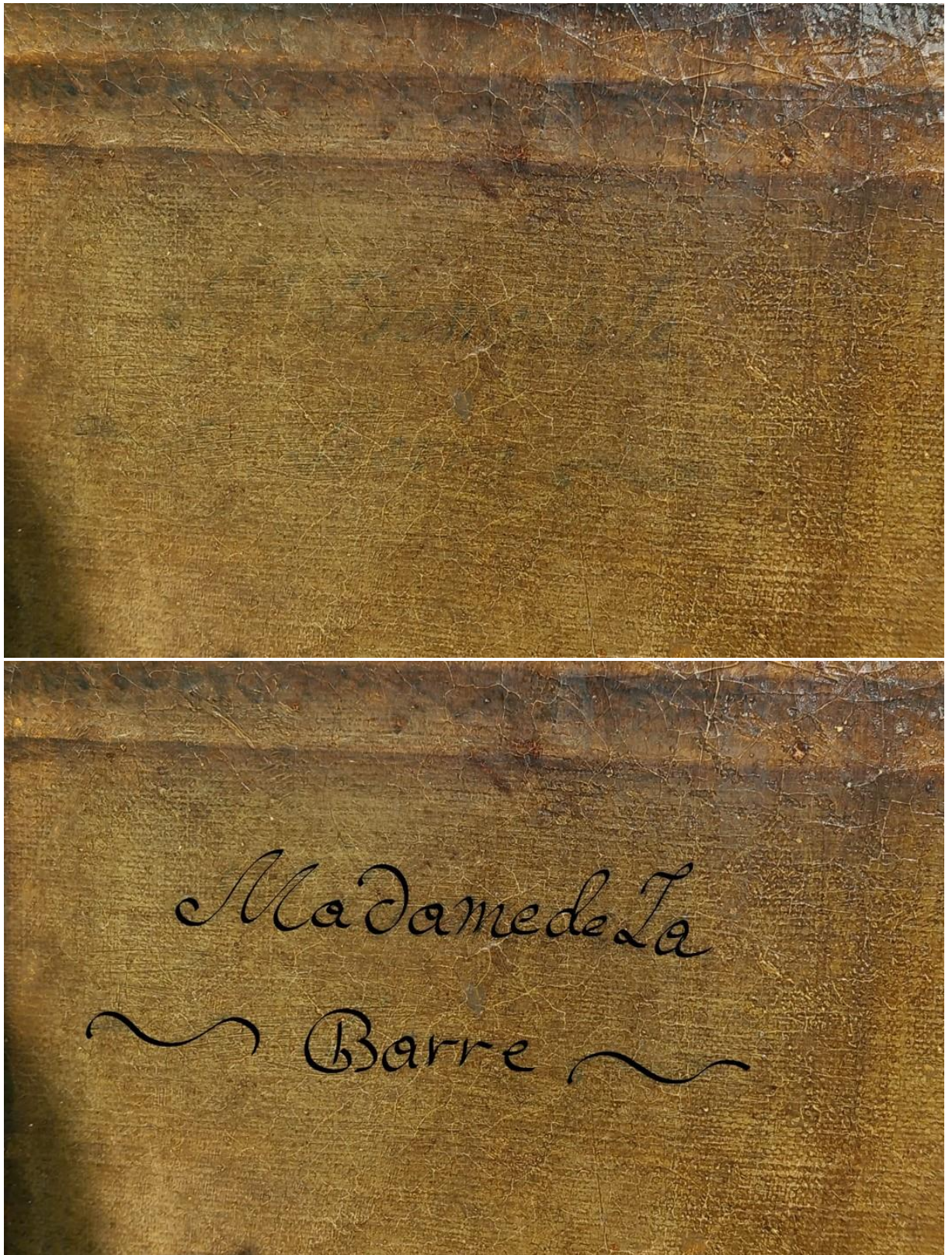




This is what I could read under a flashlight.

The following photos were taken under a different light.





It was the mystery surrounding the painting that convinced me to purchase this painting. Who is the sitter? What song does she show us? What is the history behind this painting?

Discussion

1. Possible Ownership of the Portrait

The connection between her and the Huygens family could provide valuable insights into the origins of this portrait. Anne began her famous tour of Northern Europe in 1652, first stopping in Antwerp before heading to The Hague. In my opinion, there can be no doubt that this painting was created while she was staying in The Hague. Given the era's customs of exchanging paintings as gifts among acquaintances or admirers, it is plausible to consider that this portrait was commissioned as a gift.

Given Constantijn's profound appreciation for Anne's musical talents, the hypothesis that the portrait once belonged to the Huygens family merits consideration. The portrait could have been a cherished item, possibly commissioned by Constantijn to honour a favoured musician and to keep a memento of her voice and presence, aligning with his interests in both music and poetry. In 1653, Anne stayed at Constantijn's house. They must have spent a great time talking and singing together. If the song "Allez où le sort vous conduit" held special meaning for Constantijn, perhaps due to its poetic and emotional depth, the portrait could have served as both a personal and cultural treasure. It is known that Huygens was in possession of a portrait of Anne de La Barre, apparently given by Beaubrun in 1661.¹¹ The only thing I know about the provenance of the painting is that it comes from an important Nobel Flemish family...

Who else could have acquired a painting of Anne de La Barre? Beatrix de Cusance? Amalia van Solms? Constantijn was not the only admirer of Anne.

I have asked the auctioneer if he could contact the seller and inquire whether they would be willing to relinquish their anonymity or if they could provide more information about how this painting came into their family. Hopefully we will get an answer to this.

2. Restoration

The musical score depicted in the portrait of Anne de La Barre presents unique restoration challenges. Given its historical significance and delicate state, careful consideration must be taken to preserve its legibility and authenticity. Over the years, the score has suffered from fading and damage due to environmental factors and previous restoration attempts.

- **Visibility and Legibility:** The main difficulty lies in enhancing the visibility of the faded musical notes without compromising the original artwork. This requires advanced restoration techniques that can differentiate between original and later additions or alterations.
- **Material Degradation:** The materials used in the original painting, such as the type of ink or paint for the score, may have degraded differently from the rest of the artwork. Specialists need to assess the chemical stability of these materials and use appropriate solvents.

¹¹ https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/965365/83663_thesis.pdf pg 103

- **Historical Accuracy:** Restoring the score also involves ensuring that any reintroduction or reconstruction of missing elements is historically accurate. This might require consulting music historians and experts in baroque music to verify the notation and composition style typical of Joseph de La Barre's works.

3. Madame-Mademoiselle

On the pillar, I read "Madame," but normally, since Anne was unmarried, she should have been addressed as "Mademoiselle." I am not sure if there were differences in the usage of French in the Low Countries compared to France regarding forms of address. In letters from 1648, Constantijn addressed Anne as "Mademoiselle."

What I have found is that in January 1653, in a poem, Huygens referred to her as "Madame de La Barre." This might indicate that the painting was created around the end of 1652 or early 1653, if we consider how Anne was initially addressed in the poem when she arrived in Den Hague.¹²

4. "Réunion de famille"

When I contacted Elisabeth Belgrano in September this year, she told me that she had been searching for a painting of Anne for a long time but had not found any. She suspected that the girl in "Réunion de famille," a painting by Le Nain now in The Louvre Museum, could be Anne. She compared our portrait with the girl and found the eyes to be very similar. The Centre de Musique Baroque also strongly suspects that the family depicted could indeed be the Barre family. Could this be an opportunity to more clearly identify Anne?

¹² Gedichten Constantijn Huygens www.dbnl.org

Conclusion

This research has been the most fascinating project I have undertaken since my university days. It has been quite some time since I wrote a -paper-, and I admit that I've had to relearn much of the process along the way. The history I've uncovered during this research has profoundly moved me, and it has been an eye-opening experience delving into the life and legacy of Anne de La Barre. I hope this study reaches others who share a passion for uncovering hidden stories in art and music.

In conclusion, this study proposes that the portrait is not only a rare artistic representation of a female musician from the Baroque period but also a crucial piece of evidence in understanding the cultural exchange between France and the Dutch Republic during the 17th century.

The restoration will be a challenge. We have only one chance to get it right, and the last thing we want is a failure. A well-prepared presentation of the *courante*, rewritten by a musicologist, will certainly assist us in this effort. Additionally, after the restoration, I would very much like to loan the portrait to a museum so that the public can enjoy it, learn from it..

This research is ongoing, and as I continue to uncover more about Anne de La Barre and the historical context of this portrait, I welcome collaboration and communication from fellow researchers and enthusiasts who are interested in this fascinating period. If you wish to receive updates on this research or contribute to its development, please feel free to contact me. Feel free to share my story.

Warm regards,

Plovie Sofie

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