



Left, one of the women from the Painted House. Like the other figures from this frieze, she is about two feet tall. She wears elaborate earrings and holds her hand to her face in a gesture of respectful silence. De Jong shows the original plaster fragments in outline and in darker colors to distinguish them from the areas of reconstruction. UPM Image #153718. Middle, a group of three women from the Painted House on the Gordian Citadel. Thousands of plaster fragments were found in the demolition debris of the building, a small semi-subterranean structure, probably a shrine. UPM Image #153729. Right, one of the few figures who face left and probably decorated the wall opposite the procession of right-facing figures. UPM Image #153724.

# his golden touch

*The Gordian Drawings of Piet de Jong*

BY ANN BLAIR BROWNLEE



Above, Piet de Jong drawing a vase from the excavations of the Palace of Nestor, Pylos, Greece, 1955. He is working with a preliminary pencil drawing on tracing paper as well as what will be the finished watercolor. Photo by Robert A. McCabe, from *Greece: Images of an Enchanted Land* published by Patakis Editions (Greece) and Quantuck Lane Press (USA). Below, Piet de Jong was renowned for his watercolors of archaeological objects, such as this bronze ram-headed situla from Tumulus MM. A lion-headed situla, (see p. 19), is also from Tumulus MM, which was excavated in the summer of 1957, when de Jong was at Gordion. UPM Image #153690.



**I**N 1957, THE renowned archaeological illustrator, Piet de Jong (1887–1967), made his way to Gordion. Well known for his work at archaeological sites in Greece, particularly the Athenian Agora, he was invited by Rodney S. Young, Director of the Penn Museum’s excavations at Gordion, to prepare a series of drawings of artifacts and also to reconstruct the remarkable wall paintings that decorated the so-called Painted House. It was an extraordinary summer at the site, for the excavation of Tumulus MM, the so-called Midas Mound, the largest of the many tumuli that dot the landscape of Gordion, was commencing, and de Jong was to draw two of its most famous objects, the ram- and lion-headed bronze situlae while he was there.

Remembered as good company, a generous teacher, and a consummate storyteller, de Jong established a place for himself at Gordion, preparing object drawings and working with hundreds of plaster fragments that once formed the astonishing wall decoration of the Painted House (ca. 500 BCE). As he did at the Athenian Agora, de Jong made his reputation as an archaeological illustrator with his extraordinary watercolors of excavated objects, as well as with elaborate architectural reconstructions at sites in Greece, most notably the Palace of Minos at Knossos and the Palace of Nestor at Pylos. Trained as an architect, he brought a scientific clarity and architectural sensibility to his work that, when coupled with his artist’s eye, succeeded in portraying the true character of an object, as one sees in the fine series of pencil drawings of the miniature wooden animals from the child’s tomb, Tumulus P.

Some 35 watercolors of his reconstructions of figures in the processions that decorated the walls of the Painted House survive and form the bulk of his work at Gordion. These watercolors as well as his object drawings form the centerpiece of an exhibition, “His Golden Touch: The Gordion Drawings of Piet de Jong,” in the Museum’s Merle-Smith Gallery (September 26, 2009 through January 10, 2010). The exhibition is curated by Ann Blair Brownlee, Associate Curator in the Mediterranean Section and Alessandro Pezzati, the Museum’s Senior Archivist, with assistance from Peter Cobb and Colleen Kron, graduate students in Penn’s Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World program, and Gareth Darbyshire, the Gordion Archivist.

The watercolors show the many figures that must have made up the procession that decorated two sides of the Painted House’s main room and then probably converged on a third wall. Thousands of plaster fragments were recovered in the excavation and were painstakingly assembled into larger pieces, which de Jong incorporated in his reconstructions. There are a number of right-facing figures that form a long line, and they wear brightly colored clothing and often elaborate crowns and jewelry. De Jong reconstructed only a few left-facing figures,

Below, a preliminary pencil drawing for one of the figures from the Painted House. It shows something of de Jong's method, with grid marks along the sides and a study of the woman's hand. This figure is the left one of the pair of women in the finished watercolor, on the next page. UPM Image #182132.



Above, De Jong did a number of watercolors of the heads of figures. This figure wears a crown with griffin heads. He would have used the more complete griffin heads from the headdress of another female figure to complete the griffins on this crown. UPM Image #153703. Below, an extraordinarily fine pencil drawing of one of the miniature wooden animals from Tumulus P. De Jong sketched and did preliminary drawings in pencil, but finished pencil drawings are somewhat rare in his oeuvre. UPM Image #153694.





# HIS GOLDEN TOUCH

The Gordion Drawings of Piet de Jong

Penn Museum's Merle-Smith Gallery

September 26, 2009 – January 10, 2010



Above, two women from the procession on the walls of the Painted House. The figure on the left is also shown in the preliminary pencil drawing on page 41. UPM Image #153732.

Right, several watercolors show more than one figure. The kneeling figure holds a pitcher and a drinking tube. UPM Image #153733.

Far right, three women stand in front of a seated figure, whom de Jong has shown as male. UPM Image #153734.





Above, Peter Cobb and Colleen Kron, graduate students in Penn's Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World program, study Piet de Jong's Gordion watercolors. Below, watercolor reconstruction of a glass bowl from Gordion. The bowl, in gold sandwich glass technique, is a tour de force of Hellenistic glass-making. De Jong shows the transparency of the glass and also emphasizes the bowl's hemispherical shape with bold highlights. Apparently lacking a suitable supply of colored papers, de Jong has here used the blue back cover of an issue of *Museum Monographs*, probably the excavation house's copy. UPM Image #153692.



Left, De Jong often signed his drawings with his full name set in a cartouche. The multi-figure drawings from the Painted House have this cartouche (top left: detail of UPM Image #153729). The single figure watercolors have a simpler signature, with only "P de J" in the frame (bottom left: detail of UPM Image #153718).

which must have decorated the opposite wall. He also did a number of heads of figures, which he was not always able to incorporate into the complete figures. There are also several watercolors that preserve lively multi-figure compositions. Most of the figures are women, although some men take part in the procession, and it has been suggested that the Painted House—actually a windowless partly subterranean structure—was a site of cult activity.

De Jong delineates the preserved plaster fragments in dark (or sometimes white) outline and in more intense colors; this makes clear how much of his reconstruction is conjectural. We learn something of his method from a series of preliminary pencil drawings on tracing paper that de Jong did as he attempted to position the many plaster fragments in their correct places in his reconstructions. They are full-scale drawings and are more than mere sketches. These drawings show grid marks as well as numerous corrections and notes and are a vivid evocation of the complicated process of drawing and reconstruction that precede the finished watercolors. Some of these preliminary drawings show the figures delineated in pencil on both sides. They demonstrate how de Jong transferred his preliminary drawing onto a sheet of paper in preparation for the final watercolor. He usually brought his own equipment and supplies, although in at least one instance, he acquired his paper locally, when he painted the glass bowl illustrated to the left.

Piet de Jong signed his drawings in several different ways, but the most distinctive is the version in which his initials or his full name are enclosed in a cartouche. The single-figure Painted House watercolors show the simpler version of the cartouche signature, while the multi-figure drawings show the more elaborate one, enclosing his full name. Simple and elegant, they recall his architectural side.

Piet de Jong has long been admired as an artist and archaeological illustrator, and his extraordinary drawings from Gordion, heretofore little known and studied, add much to our understanding of his work and his method. 🏠

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### For Further Reading

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Digital Gordion: the Website of the Gordion Archaeological Project <http://sites.museum.upenn.edu/gordion>