

A new light upon Hendrik van Deventer (1651–1724): identification and recovery of a portrait

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Early in 1996, both the artist and the patron of a beautifully painted portrait by an anonymous painter of the late seventeenth century were identified. The painting (Figure 1) was compared with works by other portraitists, and a thorough stylistic analysis by the Netherlands Institute for Art History finally showed that the portrait displays all the characteristics of a painting by Thomas van der Wilt (1659–1733)¹. In the autumn of that year the painting was restored and the signature and the date (1700) were recovered. This proved that the maker of the portrait was indeed Thomas van der Wilt.

More important to us, however, is that the portrayed man was identified as Hendrik van Deventer (1651–1724), a renowned Dutch obstetrician. An engraving by P Bouttats after a design by Thomas van der Wilt provided the key to the identification (Figure 2). It shows a man at half length in an oval with the subscript 'HENRICUS A DEVENTER, MED:DOCT.' Inscriptions in the left and right lower corners



Figure 1 Portrait of Hendrik van Deventer by Thomas van der Wilt (54.6 × 45.4 cm)

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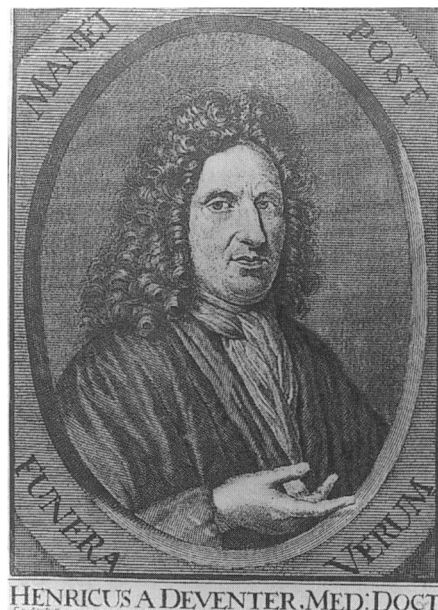


Figure 2 Engraving by P Bouttats in: van Deventer H. *Manuale operatien, zijnde een nieuw ligt voor vroed-meesters en vroed-vrouwen, haar getrouwelijk ontdekkende al wat nodig is te doen, om barende vrouwen te helpen verlossen* (Amsterdam: Jan Morterre, 1765) Inscription in the left lower corner reads 'T v.d. Wilt Pinx'.

read, respectively, 'T: v.d. Wilt Pinx' and 'P. Bouttats fct.' The man on the print has a striking resemblance to the one in the newly discovered portrait by Thomas van der Wilt. In fact, this portrait probably served as the model for the print. Philibertus Bouttats (1654–1700) was active as an engraver in Amsterdam (1678–1683), Antwerp (1683–1688) and The Hague (1691–1700). His son Philibertus Bouttats the younger was active as an engraver in The Hague in 1699 and 1700². The portrait engraving of van Deventer by Philibertus Bouttats the elder is depicted for the first time in 1719^{2,3} and, subsequently, in later editions of van Deventer's most important work, the *Manuale operatien/Nieuw Ligt* (New Light) or *Novum Lumen*². In the first editions of the *Manuale operatien*^{4,5} van Deventer included a, rather awkward, portrait by himself². Father and son Bouttats engraved the obstetrical illustrations in the text in all editions of the *Manuale operatien* and *Novum Lumen*. In the precursor of the *Manuale operatien*: *Dageraet der*

Vroedvrouwen (*Dawn for the Midwives*; see Table 1) van Deventer promised 32 engravings but these engravings (plus an additional six) appeared for the first time only in 1701^{2,4,5}. Most engravings are signed 'Phi Bouttats fecit'. Plate 33 is signed 'Philibertus Bouttats fecit' and only plate 20 is signed 'Phi: Bouttats Jun [the younger] fecit'. Philibertus Bouttats the elder must have made the portrait engraving of van Deventer in the last year of his life, since the portrait by Thomas van der Wilt is dated 1700. Another portrait by van der Wilt of 1703 was previously identified as Hendrik van Deventer¹. However, this identification becomes most doubtful, since the man in the 1703 portrait looks at least 10 years older than the 49-year-old van Deventer on the engraving by Bouttats and the portrait by van der Wilt.

THOMAS VAN DER WILT 1659–1733

Thomas van der Wilt was a pupil of the Delft artist Jan Verkolje (1650–1693). In his day, van der Wilt was a popular portraitist in the prosperous town of Delft. His elegant and refined manner of painting was very much in vogue with the wealthy Delft patricians. van der Wilt paid special attention to the depiction of the different materials, and his detailed manner of painting is closely related to the work of the Leiden *fijnschilders* (fine or precise painters). They came into fashion in the last quarter of the seventeenth century in reaction to the broad style of Rembrandt and his school. The commission that crowned his career was the group portrait *The Anatomy Lesson by Abraham Cornelis van Bleywyck* of 1727. Between 1690 and 1714 van der Wilt held several important functions within the Delft guild of painters.

The portrait

The painting (see Figure 1) is an excellent example of van der Wilt's artistic talent. By the end of the seventeenth century fashion was inspired by French tastes and had become far more colourful. The man is wearing a bright purple silk gown, with a scarf round his neck and a typically French wig. The robe itself, however, is more Dutch than French. Bales of silk were imported from Japan by Dutch merchants, and silken robes became a highly popular form of dress, particularly among the wealthy. These robes were called Japanese dress-coats and were a variation on the Japanese kimono. The setting of the portrait is somewhat unusual, but in the late seventeenth century the convention was to reserve this position, dress and setting for portraits of scientists, poets and men of letters.

HENDRIK VAN DEVENTER (1651–1724)

van Deventer was born in Leiden^{2,6} and died in Voorburg. Several authors^{7–10} erroneously mention The Hague as the place of birth. van Deventer first trained to be a goldsmith, though at the age of 20 he became articled to the chemist and pharmacist Walter from Hamburg^{2,7,10}. Five years later he became a surgeon, and at the age of 28 he started in practice as a man-midwife in Wieuwerd, Friesland. In 1688 he journeyed to Copenhagen to see orthopaedic instruments being demonstrated, and while there was asked to treat the orthopaedic conditions of two of the King of Denmark's children. Later, he combined orthopaedics with obstetrics. Like Mauriceau and Celsus long before, he described the differences between male and female pelves, pointing out that the female pelvis is wider to allow the birth of a child. Probably it was his original training in orthopaedics that made him concentrate on the bony pelvis, as he was the first

Table 1 Chronological list of the first editions of van Deventer's publications on obstetrics, printed in the Netherlands

| Year | Publication | Comment |
|------|---|--|
| 1696 | Dageraet der Vroet-Vrouwen. Ofte Voorlooper van het Trachtaat genaemt <i>Nieuw Ligt</i> der Vroet-Vrouwen | Precursor of <i>New Light</i> of 1701 |
| 1701 | Manuale Operatien, Ie Deel, zijnde een <i>Nieuw Ligt</i> voor Vroed-Meesters en Vroed-Vrouwen, haar getrouwelijk ontdekkende al wat nodig is te doen om barende vrouwen te helpen verlossen | Dutch edition of the first part of <i>New Light</i> |
| 1701 | Operationes Chirurgicae <i>Novum Lumen</i> exhibentes Obstetricantibus, quo fideliter manifestatur Ars Obstetricandi et quidquid ad eam requiritur | Latin edition of the first part of <i>New Light</i> |
| 1719 | Nader Vertoog van de sware Baringen en van de Toetsteen en 't Schild der Vroedvrouwen. Zijnde een Vermeerdering van't <i>Nieuw Ligt</i> voor de Vroedmeesters en Vroedvrouwen. | Dutch edition of the second part of <i>New Light</i> |
| 1724 | Operationum Chirurgicarum <i>Novum Lumen</i> exhibentium obstetricantibus, Pars secunda. | Latin edition of the second part of <i>New Light</i> |

of the great obstetricians to do this⁹. Previously, most anatomical descriptions and discoveries were of the soft tissues, but van Deventer wrote about the shape and position of the coccyx as well as of the sacrum. He realized, possibly before others, that a small bony pelvis could cause delay and difficulty in delivery of a large baby. He was one of the first, if not the first, to talk about the 'mechanisms' and to adopt a mechanistic approach to labour, although rotation of the head did not seem to figure much in his description⁸. van Deventer prepared his doctoral thesis on a case of 'Furor Uterinus'—*de furore uterino*—under the guidance of D Walter and in 1694 the defence took place at the University of Groningen^{2,6} (not in The Hague, as recorded by Fasbender⁸). The promotion took place privately and, exceptionally, in Dutch, because van Deventer was not familiar with Latin^{2,6}. Despite his graduation the Collegium Medicum of The Hague refused him membership, mainly because of his lack of Latin. Subsequently, he moved to the nearby village of Voorburg, where he advocated the education of midwives. In 1701, however, the local magistrate allowed him to practise also in The Hague. van Deventer was one of the first scientific practitioners of obstetrics to use the term 'placenta praevia' and described the diagnosis and treatment of the condition. He did not describe the classic technique of delivery of the shoulders in breech extraction—lateral flexion and extraction of the posterior shoulder, followed by anterior shoulder delivery¹¹. In the Dutch textbooks on obstetrics and gynaecology¹² these manoeuvres are still erroneously named after van Deventer. van Deventer published several works on obstetrics, all of which refer to a 'New Light'—a new insight on obstetric practice (see Table 1). The first part of *Nieuw Ligt* was published in The Hague and Leiden in 1701, in Dutch and Latin, respectively^{4,5}. Regarded as the most lucid, useful and practical book for midwives at that time it was translated into German (1704), English (1716) and French (1733). The Dutch editions ('s Gravenhage 1701, Leiden 1734, Leiden 1746, Amsterdam 1765 and Amsterdam 1790) had a great influence on the practice of midwifery in the Low Countries. The English edition of van Deventer's book was printed in London by Edmund Curll at the Dial and Bible (over against Catherine-Street in the Strand) and is entitled at length: *The Art of Midwifery improve'd. Fully and plainly laying down whatever Instructions are requisite to make a Compleat Midwife. And the many Errors in all the Books hitherto written upon this Subject clearly refuted. Illustrated with thirty eight Cuts curiously Engraven on Copper*

Plates representing in their due Proportion the several Positions of a Foetus. Also a New Method, demonstrating, How Infants ill situated in the Womb, whether obliquely, or in a straight Posture, may, by the Hand only without the Use of any Instrument, be turned into their right Position without hazarding the Life either of Mother or Child. Written in Latin by Henry A Deventer. Made English. To which is added A Preface giving some account of this Work, by an Eminent Physician^{2,6,8,9}.

Hendrik van Deventer's device, inscribed on the frontispiece of *Nieuw Ligt* and *Novum Lumen*, was '*Ik verga maar de waarheit blijft*' or '*MANET POST FUNERA VERUM*' (I will pass away, but the truth will remain). The fact that his portrait by Thomas van der Wilt has survived the ages has importance both for the history of art and for the history of obstetrics and gynaecology.

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