



Geldorp Gortzius

(Leuven 1553 – ca. 1619 Cologne)

How to cite

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Information on the life of Geldorp Gortzius is summary at best. He is assumed to have been born in Leuven in 1553, but the identity of his parents is unknown. He might have been the father of George Geldorp (ca. 1590–1665), who was active in Antwerp in the first quarter of the seventeenth century and subsequently moved to London. Karel van Mander (1548–1606), the first to report on Geldorp, referred to him as “Gualdrop Gortzius gheseyt Geldrop” (Gualdrop Gortzius called Geldrop), which could indicate that his family came from the village of Geldrop in the province of Noord Brabant. We do not know his first name—it is not mentioned in any contemporary source—nor does his signature afford any clues, for when he signed his work he used only “GG,” the first letters of his surname.^[1]

According to Van Mander, Geldorp Gortzius trained with Frans Francken the Elder (1542–1616) and Frans Pourbus the Elder (1541–85).^[2] When he left for Antwerp in 1569, he was approaching eighteen years old, the age at which a prospective painter had usually completed the first part of his training. However, it is unknown who taught Geldorp the rudiments of his craft.

Geldorp’s earliest known picture, *The Last Supper as an Allegory of the Pacification of Ghent*, is dated 1576 and already reveals his skills as a portraitist.^[3] Around this time he was appointed court painter to Carlos of Aragon and Tagliavia (1530–99), Duke of Terranova, in whose company he traveled to Cologne in 1579, when the duke served as the ambassador of Philip II (1527–98) in the peace negotiations between the Netherlands and the Spanish crown. At the conclusion of the mission, Geldorp elected to remain in Cologne. In contrast to most other Catholic Netherlanders, Geldorp—who was not a refugee—acquired citizenship, although it is not known exactly when. Thanks to his talent, he fared well in Cologne and became a prominent burgher. During Christmas of 1609, he was appointed a representative of the Cologne painters’ guild, and he sat on the city council in 1610 and again in 1613. At present, no additional information on the artist can be traced. Geldorp Gortzius’s last known work dates to 1619,^[4] and he may have died shortly thereafter.

Approximately seventy pictures are attributed to Geldorp, most of them portraits, including copies of paintings by other contemporary artists. Geldorp seems to have become the local elite’s favorite portraitist quite soon after he settled in Cologne. For instance, in 1609 the Dutch-born writer Matthias Quad (1557–1613) noted in his history of German artists: “Geldorp, currently living in Cologne, is favored above all others for likenesses from life.”^[5] This standing is reflected in Geldorp’s oeuvre, which is notable for the fact that various members of the powerful Cologne Lyskirchen family sat for him repeatedly in the course of twenty years, as did other prominent Cologne families, such as the Jabachs. That his reputation extended beyond Cologne is suggested by several prints by Crispijn de Passe (ca. 1564–1637) after Geldorp’s painted portraits of German rulers.^[6]

Geldorp painted not only portraits, but also history scenes. His oeuvre includes several Madonnas, Mary Magdalenes, evangelists, and other saints.^[7] Particularly famous is the *Crucifixion* he painted for the Cologne city council between 1597 and 1603, one of his very best works, which was returned to its original location in the council chamber of the Cologne Town Hall in 1973.^[8] Geldorp must have already been a noted history painter when he was awarded this prestigious commission. Relying on Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641), who visited Cologne around 1600,^[9] Van Mander mentions some notable works in private collections in Cologne. For example, Johan Meerman owned “a very finely painted Diana.”^[10] Everhard Jabach III (1567–1636), a



native of Antwerp and later resident of Cologne, whom Geldorp portrayed, along with his wife, in 1600,^[11] had “a beautiful and very lifelike Susanna.”^[12] As there are various versions of this picture, the one referred to in the description cannot be identified. That Geldorp often painted several versions of the same subject emerges from Van Mander’s mention of “a very artfully done history of Esther and Ahasuerus.”^[13] The only known painting of this subject by Geldorp is in The Leiden Collection; however, as it is dated 1612, it cannot be the work mentioned by Van Mander, whose book was published in 1604. Given the close correspondence between the compositions of Geldorp’s preserved history paintings, the assumption that the version in New York resembles the *Esther* mentioned by Van Mander is not that improbable.

- Piet Bakker, 2019

Endnotes

1. See Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays par un groupe d'écrivains spécialistes français et étrangers* (Paris, 1976; rev. ed., Paris, 1999), 4: 196, for Geldorp's monogram of the double G, the remnants of which appear on the second line of the signature in the artist's *Esther and Ahasuerus*, 1612 (The Leiden Collection, New York); see also the entry in this catalogue.
2. Van Mander's words gain support from descriptions in the 1617 estate inventory of Frans Francken the Elder that was drawn up after his death in 1616. Among the copies after Rubens, Brueghel, and Mostaert and autograph works by Aert van Leyden, Pieter Pourbus, Frans Floris, and Quinten Massys were two pieces by Geldorp and a work by his son. These are: "Een Sint-Andries op doeck van Gelderop" (A Saint Andrew on canvas by Geldorp), "Het Conterfeytsel van de Huysvrouw van Gelderop" (The likeness of Geldorp's wife), and "Een Susanneke gemaect by den zoon van de voors(eyde) Gelderop" (A Susanna made by the son of the aforementioned Geldrop). Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Brussels, 1984), 1: 389–94, esp. 392; see also Hessel Miedema, ed., *Karel van Mander: The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* (Doornspijk, 1997), 5: 164.
3. *The Last Supper as an Allegory of the Pacification of Ghent*, 1576 (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven).
4. *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, 1619 (Private Collection).
5. "In Contrafacturen nach dem leben wirdt vor andern gepriesen Geldorpius jetziger zeit in Cöllen residierend." Matthias Quad, *Teutscher Nation Herrlichkeit* (Cologne, 1609), 433; quoted in Horst Vey, "Susanna und die Ältesten van Geldorp Gortzius in Budapest," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 48–49 (1987/88): 193. Matthias Quad (1557–1613) was born in Deventer and trained there as a cartographer with the Van Doetechem family. He settled in Cologne in 1587, and was active as a writer and cartographer. He became acquainted with other Protestant refugee engravers, including Crispijn de Passe, who engraved many works by Geldorp. Quad had already moved to the Palatinate in 1609, the year his history of German artists was published.
6. Horst Vey, "Susanna und die Ältesten van Geldorp Gortzius in Budapest," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 48–49 (1987/88): 194.
7. For a survey, see Horst Vey, "Susanna und die Ältesten van Geldorp Gortzius in Budapest," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 48–49 (1987–88): 198–201; see also Ilya M. Veldman, "Keulen als toevluchtsoord voor Nederlandse kunstenaars (1567–1612)," *Oud Holland* 107,

no. 1 (1993): 47.

8. *Crucifixion*, 1597–1603 (Town Hall, Cologne). According to Horst Vey this work, with a suffering, human Christ, made a deep impression on Rubens, who today is credited with inventing this type of Christ figure. Rubens, however, did not derive this type from Geldorp, given that he was in Cologne long before Geldorp painted the picture. Rubens was there as a child, between 1578 and 1587. Horst Vey, “*Susanna und die Ältesten* van Geldorp Gortzius in Budapest,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 48–49 (1987/88): 201–2, fig. 13; Ilja M. Veldman, “Keulen als toevluchtsoord voor Nederlandse kunstenaars (1567–1612),” *Oud Holland* 107, no. 1 (1993): 47.
9. Horst Vey, “*Susanna und die Ältesten* van Geldorp Gortzius in Budapest,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 48/49 (1987/88): 204, 207; see also Hessel Miedema, ed., *Karel van Mander: The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters* (Doornspijk, 1997), 5: 163.
10. “Een Diana die seer wel geschildert is.” Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 280v.
11. *Portrait of Everhard Jabach III* and *Portrait of Anna Reuter*, both 1600 (both Kölnisches Stadtmuseum, Cologne).
12. “Een schoon seer levende Susanna.” Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 280v.
13. “Een seer constich ghedaen d’historie van Hester en Asfuerus.” Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 280v.

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