

Pieter Anthony Wakkerdak, Portrait of Kenou Simons Hasselaer, c. 1750, mezzotint in black on paper, 180 x 125 mm (image and plate), 186 x 132 mm (sheet), inscription in the plate “Kenou Simons Hasselaer / P. A. Wakkerdak Fecit” and below with a pencil “13/32”. On the backside the collector’s stamp of Horst von Rabenau.

The print was provided – in museum quality – with a new passe-partout (50 x 35 cm) of the company HALBE. A fitting frame – in museum quality – with museum glass (anti-reflective, very high UV protection, anti-static, abrasion resistant) of the company HALBE can be provided on request.

This absolutely extraordinary mezzotint is not only extremely rare, especially in such excellent quality, it also depicts one of the most interesting women in Dutch history.

Kenau Simonsdochter Hasselaer (Haarlem 1526 – 1588 unknown) was the daughter of Simon Gerritsz Hasselaer (1504–1562), a brewer and mayor of Haarlem. At the age of 18, she married Nanning Gerbrantsz. Borts, who came from a family of shipbuilders and left her a shipbuilding business after his death in 1562. Countless signed contracts and legal documents prove that she actually ran the business herself – something quite unusual for a woman at that time. The siege of the city by the troops of the Spanish governor of the Netherlands, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo (1507–1582), in December 1573 initially brought this success story to an abrupt end. The people of Haarlem refused to surrender, partly because this would have had devastating consequences for the uprising led by William of Orange (1533–1584).

Now the 46-year-old Kenau enters the scene. While her support was initially limited to supplying wood for the construction of four galleys to fight the Spaniards on the Haarlemmermeer, the first reports emerge from the besieged city of how she and 300 women under her command defended the city with all means at their disposal. The “manly women,” as they were still referred to during the events and whose fame is based primarily on the 1573 publication *Historie ende een waerachtich verhael [...]* published in Delft in 1573, not only helped repair destroyed parts of the city wall at night, but also allegedly taunted the enemy troops loudly during the day in order to demoralize them. They also poured boiling water and pitch over the Spaniards, threw burning straw, stones, and roof tiles at them, and are said to have fought the attackers with firearms, spears, and swords. In July 1573, however, Haarlem was no longer able to withstand the siege, surrendered, and fell to the Spaniards. Despite prior agreements, the Spaniards executed more than 2000 residents, including many high-ranking dignitaries. Contemporary sources also report mass rapes of women in Haarlem.

Immediately before or shortly after the surrender, Kenau was able to flee the city and did not return home until 1579, after having held the office of *waagmeester en collecteur van de impost op turf* (weigher and collector of the tax on peat) in Arnemuiden (province of Zeeland) thanks to family connections to William of Orange, among others. Back in Haarlem, she resumed shipbuilding and filed a lawsuit against the city to obtain payment of the outstanding bill for the wood used to defend the city in 1573. However, the money was not paid to her heirs until years later, taking into account her “heroic status” and thanks to the personal intervention of Maurits of Orange (1567–1625). Kenau's death is said to have been as extraordinary as her life. She did not return from a sea voyage to Norway in 1588 and remained missing. According to her daughter, she had been kidnapped and murdered by pirates.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her actions, which were atypical for a woman of her time — as an entrepreneur and defender of her homeland during the Eighty Years' War — Kenau became the embodiment of Dutch virtue. As the leader of a “women's company” during the siege of the city, she represents both its population and a Calvinist-influenced national ethos, but on the other hand, she is particularly interesting for gender studies because the ambivalent perception of Kenau by her contemporaries and subsequent generations continues to this day — in the Netherlands, for example, her name is still used to describe a woman who acts like a man, a “mannish woman” (Pawlak 2020).

In the portrait by Pieter Anthony Wakkerdak (Rotterdam 1729–1774 Delft), scraped around 1750, Kenau is depicted with weapons and symbols of war, emphasizing her strength and resistance and drawing on the pictorial tradition of the personification of Fortitudo and Constantia. The print shows her as a heroine who challenges traditional gender roles. Wakkerdak's mezzotint was probably based on a painting by an anonymous artist from around 1600 (inventory number SK-A-502), now in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, which was formerly attributed to Adam Willaerts (1577–1664).

Only a few works by Pieter Anthony Wakkerdak have survived. Auction catalogs and literature from the 19th century already emphasize how rare Wakkerdak's prints are, especially in such excellent condition. And within Wakkerdak's oeuvre, the portrait of Kenau Simonsdochter Haselaer is particularly rare, so much so that even some major museums do not have a copy. Little is known about Wakkerdak himself. He seems to have specialized primarily in the mezzotint technique, although also a few etchings by him have survived.

Provenance

The print was once part of the Collection of Horst von Rabenau, which became apparent by the collector's stamp (Lugt 4427) on the backside. It was most likely acquired from the Düsseldorf art dealer C. G. Boerner.

Horst von Rabenau, who came from an aristocratic family first mentioned in documents in the 13th century, was born in Rybnik in Silesia in 1899, but spent his youth in Pyritz (Polish: Pyrzyce) in West Pomerania. After serving as a soldier in the First World War, he studied dentistry at the University of Greifswald, received his doctorate in 1923 and set up as a dentist in Stolp (Polish: Słupsk). During this time, he began to collect African art in particular, partly as a result of several trips to Africa, but also prints, and became friends with the painter Walter Timmling (1891–1948). Von Rabenau fought on several fronts during the Second World War. Afterwards, his family had to flee their homeland, which had now become Polish, and found a new home in Wuppertal, where his wife was from. He lost his entire collection during the Second World War.

From the 1950s onwards, von Rabenau built up a new collection, concentrating now primarily on German, Dutch and French prints and — to a lesser extent — drawings from the 15th to 19th centuries. He acquired these mainly from the Düsseldorf art dealer C. G. Boerner. Horst von Rabenau's collection remained in the family until his death in 1993 and was only gradually broken up in the last two decades.

Inscriptions on the enclosed former passepartout of the Collection Horst von Rabenau:
43/399

cf. Müller 2197c, v. Someren 2294, Wurzb. 3, hc Bl. 4

Kenou Simons Hasselaer

Anführerin der Frauen in der Belagerung Haarlems 1573

Kniestück, Waffen tragend.

Nach J. Houbraken. / Schabkunst

Kulturhistorisch interessantes Blatt in ausgezeichnetem Abdruck mit Rand.

Pieter Anthony Wakkerdag.

1729 Rotterdam – Delft 1774

Boerner

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