

A re-assembled altarpiece by Bernard van Orley

by HILBERT LOOTSMA

OF ALL THE paintings in the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Willem van Haecht's gallery picture with *Apelles painting Campaspe* is likely to retain the visitor's attention for a long time (Fig. 1). The precision with which the artist has copied so many different paintings in miniature demands scrutiny. The most famous works are easy to identify, such as Rubens's *Battle of the Amazons* (1615; Alte Pinakothek, Munich) or Sebastiano del Piombo's *Portrait of Ferry Carondelet and his secretaries* (c.1510–12; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid). Yet there are a few paintings that are more difficult to recognise. One of these is the painting high up on the right wall, next to Correggio's *Jupiter and Antiope* (c.1523–28; Musée du Louvre, Paris). It depicts a warrior in fantastical armour gesticulating to a kneeling man, who, judging from his rugged and shabby appearance, is probably a workman (Fig. 3).¹ But its whereabouts are known: it is in the Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, where it is a star in the collection of early Netherlandish paintings.²

The painting was first discussed by the Dutch-born collector and art theoretician François-Xavier de Burtin (1743–1818) in his *Traité théorique et pratique des connaissances qui sont nécessaires à tout amateur de tableaux* (1808), which includes a catalogue of his own collection.³ Burtin considered the painting his most prized possession, and it decorates the frontispiece of his book (Fig. 5).⁴ Burtin attributed the painting to Michelangelo, an attribution that was already regarded as eccentric during his lifetime. In his account of his visit to Burtin's house in Brussels in 1815, the English poet and historian Robert Southey wrote that he did not pretend to 'knowledge of pictures; but I will venture to say that what he shows as Michel Angelo's was never painted by that master'.⁵ Jacques-Louis David, in self-imposed exile in Brussels after Napoleon's fall from power in 1815, was of the same opinion. This is reported by the Belgian historian Félix-Victor Goethals in an account of David's visit to the eccentric collector, of whom Southey wrote that nothing in his collection was 'half so extraordinary as [the man] himself'. On that occasion, Burtin asked David a few questions to test his knowledge of art before showing him the supposed Michelangelo, which he kept hidden beneath

a veil. After David had passed the test, Burtin uncovered the painting. When the artist admitted that he did not believe in the attribution, the offended collector threw him out of the house.⁶

After Burtin's death in 1818 the painting was bought by the Leipzig collector Maximilian Speck von Sternburg (1776–1856). Not long afterwards it lost its attribution to Michelangelo and was ascribed to Maerten van Heemskerck. By the late nineteenth century it was said to be by an artist from the Southern Netherlands, and subsequently was attributed to Bernard van Orley by Friedrich Winkler in 1916. This attribution was confirmed by Max Friedländer, who suggested the painting should be dated c.1530.⁷ Because several scholars questioned the quality of some parts of the work in the late twentieth century, the Leipzig museum has now catalogued it as 'Bernard van Orley (and studio)'.⁸

Stylistic comparison with certain works by Van Orley indeed leaves little doubt that he was the author, or, at least, co-author of the Leipzig painting. The same love of dynamism and dramatic tension can, for example, be found in Van Orley's turbulent Job and Lazarus polyptych of 1521, which also shows the kind of muscular figures in contorted poses that we find in the Leipzig panel. And when we look at the scene painted on the outer left wing of this altarpiece (Fig. 2), depicting Lazarus outside the house of the rich man, many similarities with the spatial organisation of the Leipzig painting also become clear.

More substantial evidence supporting the attribution of this painting to Van Orley, however, comes from a tapestry in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (Fig. 4). It belongs to a series of four illustrating the Passion, the so-called Alba tapestry series made by the well-known Brussels weaver Pieter de Pannemaker after designs by Van Orley.⁹ The tapestry in Washington showing the Crucifixion shares many stylistic parallels with the Leipzig painting, especially in the depiction of the figures. What is most immediately striking is the great similarity in pose and anatomy between the two kneeling men (Figs. 6 and 7). Not only do both figures have bulging muscles with prominent veins, the Leipzig figure's right foot and the Washington figure's left foot are almost mirror images of each other.¹⁰

This article is dedicated to Peter Hecht, without whose help the discoveries presented within it could not have been made. He had a hunch that was proved to be correct, as is so often the case with him. My thanks to Jan Nicolaisen and Rüdiger Beck, head curator of paintings and head restorer at the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig respectively, for kindly providing me with information on the Leipzig fragment. Maarten Bassens did the same for the fragment in Antwerp and he, like Ruben Suykerbuyk, also gave detailed comments on an earlier version of this article; thanks are therefore due to them as well. Finally, I would like to thank Jan Piet Filedt Kok for closely studying the painting with me and Marius van Dam for reasons explained in note 6.

¹ Van Haecht made at least two more gallery pictures featuring the painting now in Leipzig. One of them is a smaller version of the painting in the Mauritshuis, sold at Sotheby's, New York, 28th January 2010, lot 169. The other painting, which shows Anthony van Dyck's *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* (Royal Collection, London) in the foreground, is in a private collection in Scotland; see A. van Suchtelen and B. van Beneden: exh. cat. *Room for Art in Seventeenth-century Antwerp*, Antwerp (Rubenshuis) and The Hague (Mauritshuis) 2009–10, p. 123, no. 12.

² Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig, inv. no. 1639.

³ F.X. de Burtin: *Traité théorique et pratique des connaissances qui sont nécessaires à tout amateur de tableaux*, Brussels 1808, II, p. 156. Burtin acquired the painting from the Königsegg-Erps family in Brussels. Its earlier location is unknown, but since Van Haecht reproduced it around 1630, it is possible that at that time it was owned by the Antwerp collector Cornelis van der Geest (1577–1638), whose collection Van Haecht curated.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 155–64. For more information on De Burtin, see E. Koolhaas-Grosfeld: 'François Xavier de Burtin (1743–1818): promoteur de la peinture hollandaise en France', *Septentrion* 16, 3 (1987), pp. 29–39; and M. van Dam: 'François Xavier de Burtin (1743–1818): wetenschapper en verzamelaar', unpublished Ph.D. diss. (Utrecht University 2001).

⁵ W. Heinemann: *Journal of a Tour in the Netherlands in the Autumn of 1815 by Robert Southey, with an Introduction by W. Robertson Nicoll*, London 1903, pp. 76–77.

⁶ F.V. Goethals: *Lectures relatives à l'histoire des sciences, des arts, des lettres, des moeurs et de la politique en Belgique, et dans les pays limitrophes*, Brussels 1837–38, I, p. 278. The Leipzig painting was discussed in a review of Burtin's *Traité* by Johann Dominicus Fiorillo, who also recognised that the painting was not by Michelangelo, questioning the connoisseurship of those supporting Burtin's attribution: '*Hr. de B. beruft sich*



1. *Apelles painting Campaspe*, by Willem van Haecht. c. 1630. Panel, 104.9 by 148.7 cm. (Mauritshuis, The Hague).

As Winkler already noticed, the kneeling figure in Van Orley's Washington tapestry is most likely 'inspired by the figure of one of the executioners' in Raphael's cartoon for the tapestry of the *Stoning of St Stephen* (Fig. 12), part of the famous series of tapestries depicting the Acts of the Apostles made for the Sistine Chapel.¹¹ They were woven in the workshop of Van Orley's colleague and fellow townsman Pieter van Aelst between 1517 and 1521, so Van Orley could have seen Raphael's cartoon there.

We know that the *Stoning of St Stephen* tapestry was finished and sent to Rome in 1519. Because of this, but mainly because

the Leipzig panel shows such a strong stylistic resemblance to the Job and Lazarus altarpiece of 1521 and the Alba tapestry series of c. 1520, we should reconsider Friedländer's suggestion that the panel was made around 1530. It is far more likely that the painting in Leipzig was made some ten years earlier. That we should probably not date the painting before 1520, however, is suggested by the feathers on the soldier's helmet, which are believed to be from birds from Mesoamerica. It is because of these feathers that Paul Vandenbroeck in 1992 called the Leipzig painting one of the earliest reflections of the presence of 'Americana' in the

laut auf das Zeugniß der Kenner, ohne zu bedenken, daß man nach einem solchen Ausspruch berechtigt wäre, den Schafsinne dieser vermeinten Kenner sehr in Zweifel zu ziehen, see F.D. Fiorillo: 'Brussel', *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (4th February 1809), pp. 191–93. I would like to thank Marius van Dam for informing me about the comments of Southey, Goethals and Fiorillo and for sharing these texts and an image of the frontispiece.

⁷ For the painting's attribution history, see R. Hartleb: 'Bernart van Orley (?), Römischer Krieger und Knecht (?), um 1530', in H. Guratzsch, ed.: exh. cat. *Maximilian Speck von Sternburg: ein Europäer der Goethezeit als Kunstsammler*, Leipzig (Museum der bildenden Künste) and Munich (Haus der Kunst) 1998–2000, pp. 58–60.

⁸ See J. Nicolaisen and R. Beck: *Niederländische Malerei, 1430–1800: Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig*, Leipzig 2012, p. 237. The attribution to Van Orley seems to have been first seriously questioned at a colloquium held in Leipzig in 1996. According to most of the participants, the painting was not by Van Orley, but by an independent artist from his circle. One participant suggested the Master of the Güstrow Altar, a painter active in Brussels in the first half of the sixteenth century; see R. Hartleb and S. Petri: *Internationales Kolloquium zu Gemälden der Niederländersammlung 7–9 November 1996*, Leipzig 1998, pp. 8–11.

⁹ A preparatory drawing for the Washington tapestry is in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (Graphische Sammlung, inv. no. C.1720). The drawing was already connected to the Leipzig panel by Winkler; see F. Winkler: 'Über die Galeriebilder des Willem van Haecht und Barent van Orley', *Mitteilungen aus den Sächsischen Kunstsammlungen* 7 (1916), p. 43. For more information on the Alba tapestry series, see Maryan Ainsworth's entry in T.P. Campbell, ed.: exh. cat. *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence*, New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2002, pp. 304–21.

¹⁰ The stylistic correspondence between the Leipzig painting and the Alba tapestry series is also evident in the tapestry depicting the *Last Supper* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 1975.1.1915), which also contains muscular gesticulating figures in contorted poses. It is likely that the pose of the figure in the foreground pouring the wine was used as a model for that of the soldier in the Leipzig painting.

¹¹ See Winkler, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 43. See also M. Ainsworth: 'Romanism as a Catalyst for Change in Bernard van Orley's Workshop Practices', in M. Faries, ed.: *Making and Marketing: Studies of the Painting Process in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century Netherlandish Workshops*, Turnhout 2006, p. 106. For the tapestry of the *Stoning of St Stephen*, see M. Evans et al.: exh. cat. *Raphael: Cartoons and Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel*, London (Victoria and Albert Museum) 2010, pp. 96–99.



2. The left outer wing of the Job and Lazarus polyptych, by Bernard van Orley. 1521. Panel, 174 by 80 cm. (Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels).

Low Countries.¹² Feathers like these were extremely rare in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century, and it was probably not until 1520 that more than just a few of them were to be found there. In the spring of that year the so-called Treasure of Moctezuma arrived in Brussels, named after the Aztec king Moctezuma II (c.1466–1520), with whom most of these objects

¹² P. Vandenbroeck: 'Amerindiaanse kunst- en siervoorwerpen in adellijke verzamelingen: Brussel, Mechelen, Duurstede, 1520–1530', in P. Vandenbroeck and I. Pis-ters, eds.: exh. cat. *America, bruid van de zon: 500 jaar Latijns-Amerika en de Lage Landen*, Antwerp (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1992, p.109.

¹³ 'Und ich hab aber all mein lebtag nichts gesehen, das mein hercz also erfreuet hat als diese ding. Dann ich hab darin gesehen wunderliche künstliche ding und hab mich verwundert der

originated. Among them were many examples of *arte plumaria*. The treasure was presented to the Emperor Charles V, who put it on display in Coudenberg Palace, where, in late August, it was seen by Albrecht Dürer, who was travelling through the Netherlands at the time. In his diary Dürer wrote that in 'all the days of my life I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart so much as these things, for I saw among them wonderful works of art, and I marvelled at the subtle minds of men of foreign lands'.¹³ There is no doubt that Van Orley, who spent time with Dürer when the latter was in Brussels, also saw this treasure; if not, like Dürer, shortly after it arrived in Van Orley's home city, then surely later, when much of it came into the possession of Charles V's aunt, Margaret of Austria, for whom Van Orley served as court painter between 1518 and 1527.¹⁴

While we can be relatively certain of the painting's authorship and date, much is still unclear about its subject. The earliest known written identification of the painting is by Burtin, who believed it represented a scene from Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516–32), in which one of the characters, the English knight Astolfo, tries to break the spell placed on the palace he has found himself in while looking for his kidnapped horse. The

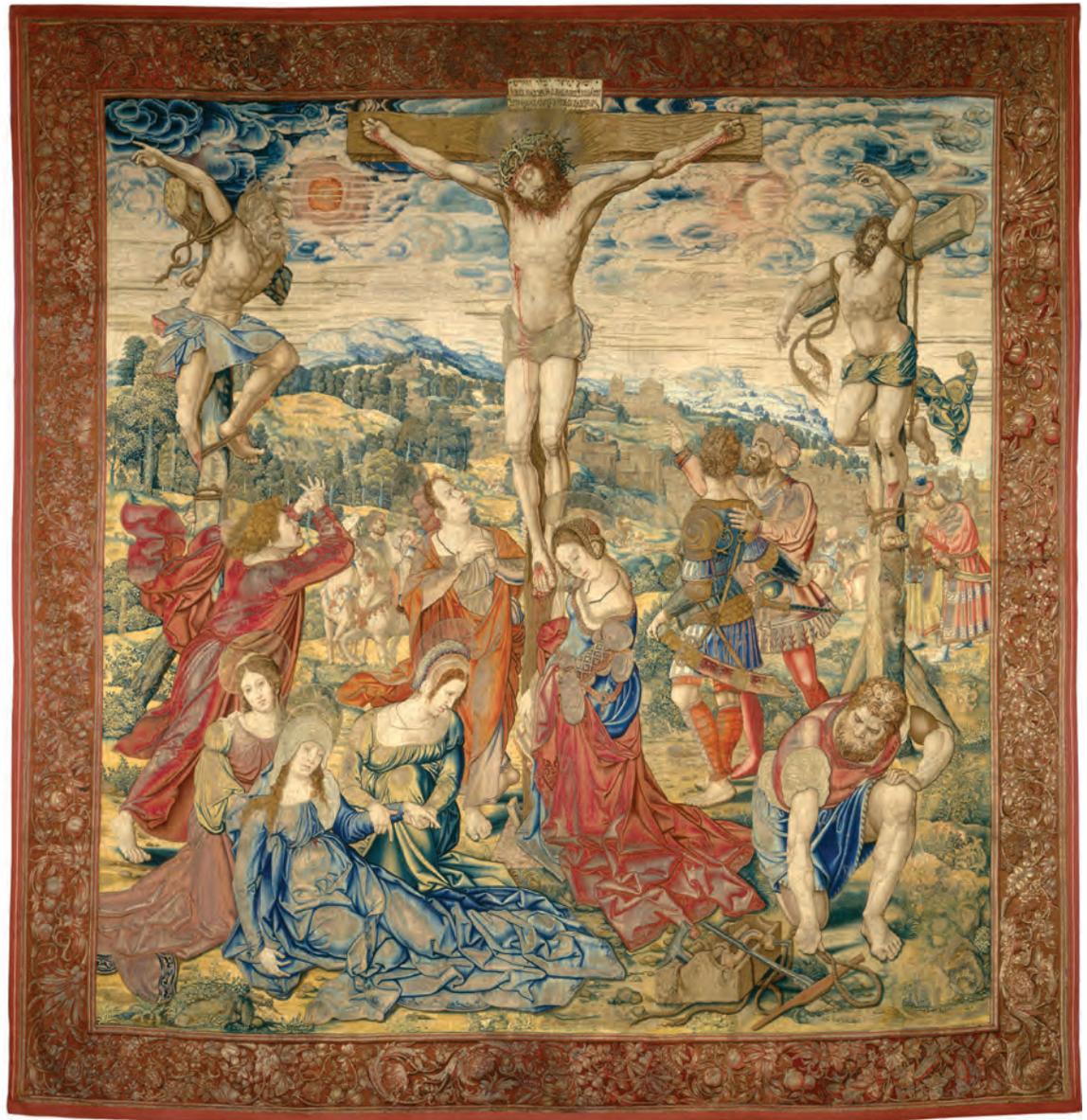


3. Roman warrior and kneeling figure, by Bernard van Orley (and studio). c. 1520. Panel, 130.9 by 92.2 cm. (Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig).

subtilen jingenia der menschen jn frembden landen', H. Rupprich, ed.: *Dürer: schriftlicher Nachlass*, Berlin 1956, I, p.155.

¹⁴ See Vandenbroeck, *op. cit.* (note 12), p.101.

¹⁵ L. Ariosto: *Orlando Furioso: A New Verse Translation*, transl. by D.R. Slavitt, Cambridge MA and London 2009, pp.518–19, verses 17 and 18; De Burtin, *op. cit.* (note 3), II, pp.155–56.



4. *The Crucifixion* from the *Alba Passion*, by Pieter de Pannemaker after Bernard van Orley. c.1520. Tapestry, 393.6 by 354.3 cm. (National Gallery of Art, Washington).

magic book he carries with him discloses that the sorcery comes from a spirit living under the threshold of the palace, and that the spirit will lose its power if the threshold is lifted.¹⁵ This story would be a most unusual subject for a painting, and there are many flaws in Burtin's identification, for the poem explicitly says that Astolfo lifted the threshold himself, while the painting would suggest that he made someone else drive out the spirit for him and that he was not even particularly grateful for the dangerous service rendered.¹⁶ Despite its obvious weakness, the museum accepted Burtin's interpretation until at least 1995, rejecting Ben Broos's suggestion that the painting represented Alexander the Great expelling the shoemaker from his palace who had criticised Apelles.¹⁷ Broos's identification does not seem convincing. Not only does the kneeling man not look like a shoemaker, it is also hard to imagine that the artist or his patron would have chosen this rare moment from an otherwise well-known story –

which, like the scene from *Orlando Furioso* suggested by Burtin as the subject, never seems to have been painted.

In 1996 the painting was subjected to a technical examination that shed new light on its subject. What became clear is that the upper board, which is about 20 cm. high, was added later, and that the painting was originally part of a much larger panel, something that was already suggested by the thickness of the wood (3 cm.). The most remarkable result of this investigation, however, was that about fifty per cent of the panel was over-painted. Infra-red and X-radiograph photography showed that neither the wall nor the stone floor is original (Figs.8 and 9).¹⁸ The technical pictures show that the tiles cover a rocky surface, which means that the scene was originally set outside. The photographs further reveal that the axe lying next to the kneeling man was originally a hammer and that a piece of rope and two nails lie beside it.

¹⁶ Fiorillo already questioned Burtin's identification on similar grounds; see Fiorillo, *op. cit.* (note 6), p.192.

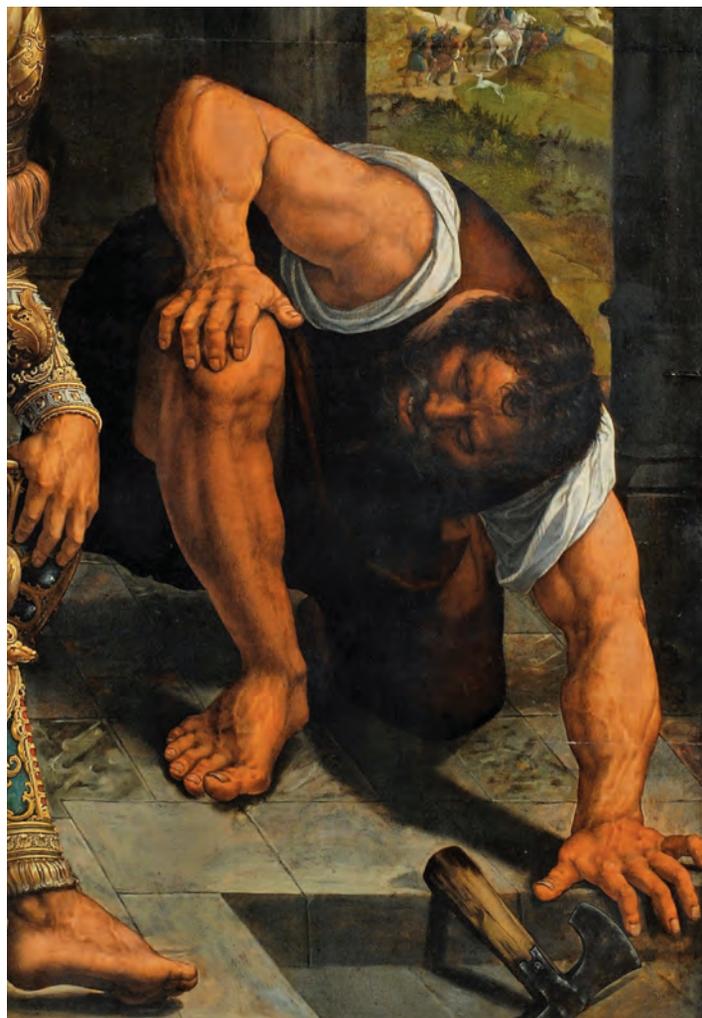
¹⁷ B. Broos: exh. cat. *Liefde, list & lijden: historiestukken in het Mauritshuis*, The Hague (Mauritshuis) 1993, p.143 and p.146, note 38.

¹⁸ At the bottom of the right pillar, an area that has been painted over, there is a

monogram which probably reads 'FMAB'. De Burtin, *op. cit.* (note 3), II, p.156, thought it stood for 'Michel-Angelo Buonaroti Florentinus', but this cannot be correct. It could be that the monogram consists of the initials of the person who made or ordered the changes. If the monogram refers to the name of an artist, it could stand for 'Fecit Mabuse', perhaps an attempt to increase the painting's saleability.



5. Frontispiece of vol. 2 of Franz-Xavier de Burtin's *Traité*, by Frédéric Théodore Faber. c.1808. Engraving, 19.3 by 11.5 cm.



6. Detail of Fig. 3.

These objects contributed to the museum's identification of the panel as a fragment of an altarpiece depicting the Crucifixion.¹⁹ The piece of rope, nails and hammer are after all traditionally found in paintings of this subject. The kneeling figure is not only very similar to the kneeling figure in the Washington tapestry, but originally also played the same role, that of one of Christ's executioners. This identification also fits well with the background, which in the distance shows parts of a city resembling depictions of Jerusalem. The soldiers returning to the city are also commonly found in the background of Crucifixion scenes, as can be seen, for example, in the Washington tapestry. It is the warrior in the foreground that causes a problem, however, for it is unclear what his role would be in a depiction of the Crucifixion. His somewhat aggressive attitude towards the kneeling man is reminiscent of some portrayals of the executioners fighting and gambling over Christ's clothes.²⁰ But there are almost always more than two soldiers, and the technical photographs do not reveal Christ's clothes or a pair of dice – standard attributes in this narrative.

One option is that the warrior represents the centurion in

command at Golgotha. After witnessing the terrifying earthquake that accompanied Christ's death, he exclaimed: 'Truly this was the Son of God!'²¹ But his demeanour and appearance are hardly appropriate for a junior officer. If present, the centurion is more probably the older man in the background, who has a less grotesque face and wears a cape. He is looking in the direction to which the soldier in the foreground points and seems about to speak. If the source for the scene in the foreground can be found in the Bible, it is more likely to refer to an earlier passage in the Crucifixion story, when Christ cries out: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Some of the bystanders who heard him said: 'This man calleth for Elias'.²² In the gospels of Matthew and Mark we read that one of the bystanders then took a sponge, drenched it in vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink.²³ Might this be what the soldier is telling the kneeling man to do?

Proof that the Leipzig panel was originally part of a Crucifixion scene is provided by another painting, a fragment from the same work (Fig. 11).²⁴ This piece was sold in 2013 to a private collector in Antwerp, after having been in British hands for at least a century and a half. Its earliest known provenance is the

¹⁹ See Nicolaisen and Beck, *op. cit.* (note 8), p.237.

²⁰ For example, a painting of a *Crucifixion* by an anonymous Netherlandish artist c.1520 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. no. B173). In the middle foreground there is a kneeling figure that reacts in a similar fashion to the one in the Leipzig panel and this

man is also accompanied by a soldier in richly decorated armour.

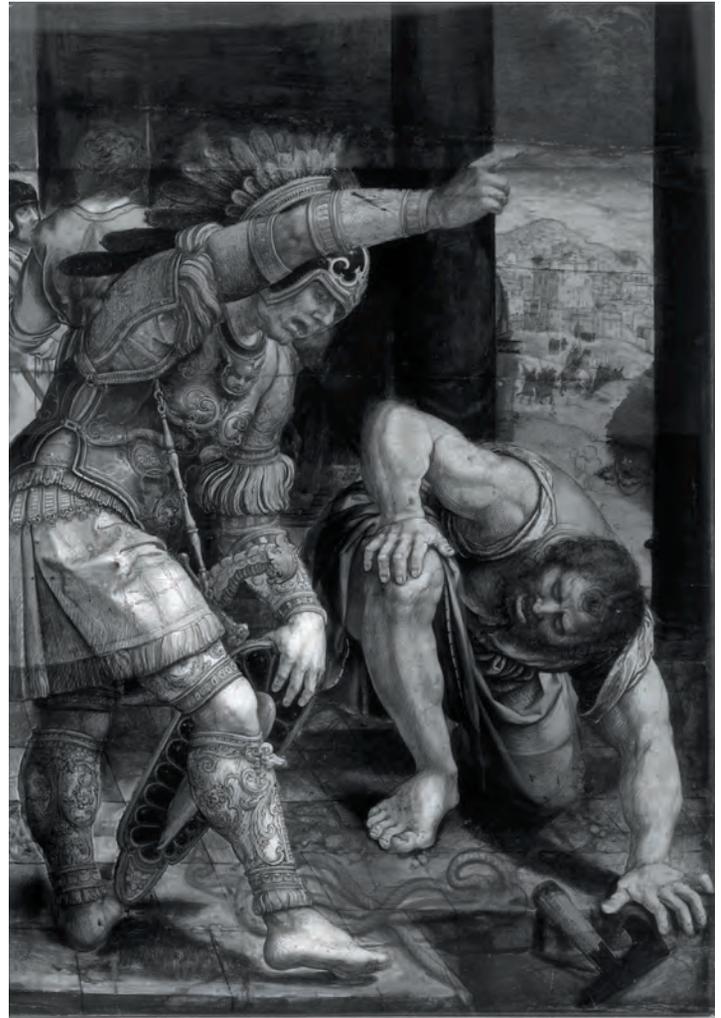
²¹ Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39.

²² Matthew 27:47; Mark 15:35.

²³ Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36.



7. Detail of Fig.4.



8. Infra-red photograph of Fig.3.

collection of Sir Francis Cook (1817–1901), arguably the most important collector of old-master paintings in Great Britain in the nineteenth century. Before its recent sale, it was in the collection of Sir Marcus Worsley (1925–2012) of Hovingham Hall, Yorkshire, who acquired it in 1955 with proceeds from the sale of the ‘Hovingham Giambologna’ to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.²⁵ Unlike the Leipzig painting, it is clear that here we are dealing with a fragment of a Crucifixion scene. The group is easily identifiable as the mourners beneath the cross. The figures are portrayed in a conventional manner, the grief-stricken Mary having swooned in the arms of St John. The kneeling woman wearing a green dress with a gold-embroidered and jewel-studded trim who throws up her hands in despair is dressed appropriately for Mary Magdalene, but, as will become clear below, is more likely to be one of the other Holy Women. Like St John and the woman behind her, she was clearly originally looking up towards the cross.²⁶ The similarities in style between this painting and the one in Leipzig, noticeable especially in the rendering of the figures’ feet and hands, the use of bright colours and the attention to detail, leave little doubt that they were made

by the same artist. The figures on the two panels are of the same size and the landscapes in the background align precisely (Fig. 13). When seen as a whole, the background landscape is quite similar to that of the Washington tapestry.

For definite proof that both panels were once part of the same painting we must, however, look beneath the surface. Infra-red imaging we must, however, look beneath the surface. Infra-red imaging of the fragment sold in 2013 revealed that in the far-left corner there was originally a fifth figure (Fig. 10). The contours of this figure betray that this was a Mary Magdalene holding the cross, a traditional motif in Crucifixion scenes that can also be found on the tapestry in Washington. Looking more closely at this part of the photograph, we can see Mary Magdalene’s face pressed to the cross (a), her bare neckline (b) and left sleeve (c). The cross was also painted over, but is still partly visible on X-radiograph imaging of the Leipzig panel (Fig. 9, d). This in itself is already an interesting find, but it becomes even more so when we look more closely at the X-radiograph of the Leipzig panel. If we focus above the head of the kneeling figure on the right, we can detect part of an arm and a hand (e). These clearly belonged to the figure of Mary Magdalene on the Antwerp fragment.

²⁴ Peter Hecht told me about the painting and suggested it might be associated with the painting in Leipzig. It was shown in K. Jonckheere, ed.: exh. cat. *Michiel Coxiae (1499–1592) and the Giants of his Age*, Leuven (Museum M) 2013–14, pp.186–87, cat. no.14.

²⁵ For the painting’s provenance, see Sale catalogue, Christie’s, London, *Old Master and British paintings*, 2nd July 2013, p.70, lot.20.

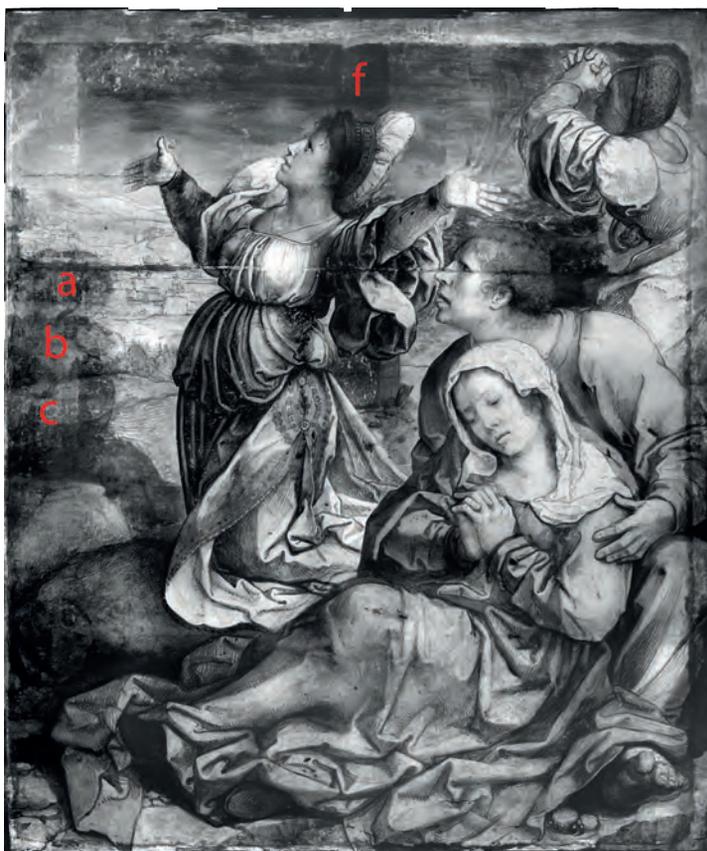
²⁶ A preparatory drawing for this figure is in the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich, inv. no.10943; M. Ainsworth first noticed the resemblance and suggested that this figure, like that of the kneeling man in the Leipzig panel, might have been inspired by the tapestry of the *Stoning of St Stephen* (Fig.12); see Ainsworth, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.106.



9. X-radiograph photograph of Fig. 3.

The other fragment also gives us a clue of the original width of the painting. Both fragments are about 90 cm. wide, and since, perhaps, only a centimetre or so is missing between the two panels, which seem not to have been cut on the outer left and right, the original panel must have been about 180 cm. wide.²⁷ The original height of the painting is more difficult to determine, but we can arrive at a rough estimate by referring to the technical pictures. From these images it becomes clear that originally a cross stood in the centre of each fragment. In the fragment with the mourners one is visible just behind the woman dressed in green (f), in the fragment from Leipzig another is just visible behind the column forming the right part of the wall (g). These crosses are surely those on which the good and bad thief were crucified. This would also explain the toes that have been found just below the hand of the warrior (unfortunately not visible on the image published here).²⁸ Apart from confirming that there used to be a body hanging from the cross behind the warrior, the position of the toes also gives us a fair indication of the size of the cross. Assuming that, as in the Washington tapestry, the cross to which Jesus was nailed was near the top of the scene, the painting must have originally been approximately two metres high, that

²⁷ Proof that the Leipzig panel was not cut on the left and lower side is that the original edge of the paint layer is preserved along the left edge, and also in areas that were not painted over. There is no way of establishing if the right side of the panel has been cut, but the overall composition of the two combined fragments makes it



10. Infra-red photograph of Fig. 11.

is, roughly square. This would mean that the original painting had yet another thing in common with the Washington tapestry, although it is just as possible that it was rounded at the top, as were so many Netherlandish altarpieces from that period.

The only documented painting by Van Orley that can be identified with the altarpiece to which the two fragments may have belonged is the one he made for the Confraternity of the Holy Cross at Veurne. He received the commission in 1515 but did not complete the painting until 1520. In a bill from the confraternity, drafted in the year of the painting's completion, it is referred to as '*de tafele van den Cruuce*' ('the picture of the Cross'). The painting was installed above the confraternity's altar at the church of St Walburga, but its fate is unknown. An undated description from the eighteenth century probably refers to it. If this is the case, the altarpiece discussed here can no longer be considered as a candidate since we know it was dismembered before then.²⁹

Two questions now arise: when were the changes to the original painting made and, more importantly, why? We may safely assume that the painting was cut up at the time it was overpainted and that all this must have happened in the early seventeenth century at the latest, given that the Leipzig fragment appears in

unlikely that the Antwerp fragment was originally much bigger on the right. As is clear from the alignment of the two fragments, the Leipzig fragment was cut on the lower side.

²⁸ X-radiograph images shows that to the right of the soldier, above the kneeling fig-



11. *The Holy Women and St John*, by Bernard van Orley. c.1520. Panel transferred to canvas, 108.3 by 89.2 cm. (Private collection, Antwerp).

Van Haecht's painting of c.1630 in the Mauritshuis. It is important to mention, however, that Van Haecht's copy is slightly different from the original in Leipzig, the upper-right corner showing a stone lintel where there should be a cloudy sky. Van Haecht could of course have made a mistake, but since he was usually quite accurate in copying, we should also consider the possibility that the Leipzig fragment was overpainted a second time. That change must then have been made between c.1630, when Van Haecht painted his gallery picture, and 1808, the date

of the engraving made after the painting, in which the stone lintel is missing. If Van Haecht was not mistaken, this could explain the addition of the upper board, which, unlike the other boards that make up the panel, does not show any overpaint. Perhaps the painting was damaged and the restorer removed the upper part of the painting and replaced it with a new board. The counter-argument to this theory is that the age of the added upper board is virtually identical to that of the other boards that make up the panel, which means that it was most likely added not long after

ure, there was a large piece of red drapery (Fig.9, h). It might be part of the clothing of another figure, probably another mourner, because both the Washington tapestry and the drawing in Stuttgart include six mourners, one of whom is standing near the cross opposite Mary Magdalene. Another possibility is that the red cloth belongs to a

flag, not an uncommon motif on Crucifixion scenes.

²⁹ See A. Galand: *Flemish Primitives: The Bernard van Orley Group*, Brussels 2013, pp.53–56, 405, docs. 8 and 9 and p.407, doc. 12.



12. *Stoning of St Stephen* from the *Acts of the Apostles*, by Pieter van Aelst after Raphael. 1519. Tapestry, 450 by 370 cm. (Musei Vaticani, Vatican City).

the panel was overpainted.

When studying the changes made to the original painting, it becomes clear that they were meant to hide its original subject, but still present a plausible scene. In the case of the fragment with the mourning figures this restyling was not very successful, but to transform it into a scene which does not immediately remind us of the mourners beneath the cross would have been almost impossible without painting over most of it. The fragment now in Leipzig was more fundamentally altered, and the artist evi-

dently thought it useful to make some additional changes apart from removing the crosses. If it were not for modern technology, we would have been unlikely to have discovered that the painting was once part of a Crucifixion scene.

Why exactly the painting was modified will perhaps remain unknown, but given the nature of the changes, we might best look for the reason in the context of the Reformation. One possibility is that the changes to the painting were already made when it was still in Van Orley's workshop. After all, we know that Van

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.67–70.

³¹ Close study of the style of the overpainted areas does not provide a definite answer as to their date, but both Jan Nicolaisen and Rüdiger Beck, respectively head curator of paintings and head restorer at the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, are inclined to date the overpainted areas to the end of the sixteenth century.

³² See J. van der Veen: 'Galerij en kabinet, vorst en burger: schilderijencollecties in de Nederlanden', in E. Bergvelt *et al.*, eds.: *Verzamelen: van rariteitenkabinet tot kunstmuseum*, Heerlen 1993, pp.145–49.

³³ See M.J. Bok: 'Art-lovers and their Paintings: Van Mander's "Schilder-boeck" as a Source for the History of the Art Market in the Northern Netherlands', in G. Luijten, A. van Suchtelen *et al.*, eds.: *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish art, 1580–1620*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum), pp.152–63, appendix I and II.

³⁴ For Hadrianus Junius' observations on artists in his *Batavia* (written between 1566

and 1575 and published posthumously in 1588) see I. Zinman: 'From Ausonia to Batavia: the artists of Hadrianus Junius reconsidered', *Simiolus* 37, 3/4 (2013–14), pp.204–26.

³⁵ For Van Vaernewijck's texts on the Ghent altarpiece, see E. Dhanens: *Het retabel van het Lam Gods in de Sint-Baafskathedraal te Gent*, Ghent 1965, pp.107–15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.109: 'In de bovenste duere, buten dees tafele, zijn ander schilderijen: onder andere ziet men, duer zeker veinsteren, in een strate van een stadt, niet alleene den dach ghewacht, maer die claeheijt der zonne boven up den dach. Die schilders weten wel wat ic zegghe'; see also H. Miedema: 'The Appreciation of Paintings around 1600', in Luijten and Van Suchtelen *op. cit.* (note 33), pp.122–35.

³⁷ H. Belting: *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago and London 1994, p.470. The book originally appeared in German in 1990 under the title *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*.

Orley was an adherent of the new religion and spent some time in prison because of it.³⁰ Perhaps the sale of the original painting did not go through, and Van Orley thought he might be able to sell part of it (the fragment now in Leipzig) to a Protestant art lover after having removed the elements that indicated its original subject. It is, however, just as likely that the changes to the painting were made after it had left Van Orley's workshop.³¹ Indeed, it is possible that the painting served its original function as an altarpiece. If we accept that it did, the most likely scenario is that the church in which the painting was installed fell into the hands of Protestants who ordered it to be removed. The owner, perhaps a Protestant himself, could have decided to have it changed to make it more acceptable, and therefore more saleable, in a time when – to put it mildly – there were mixed feelings about religious imagery. If so, the painting would most likely have been changed sometime between 1576 and 1585, when Antwerp and Brussels, the cities in which Van Orley received most of his commissions, were under Calvinist control.

The nature of these changes, as well as the fact that they appear to have been made in the sixteenth century, makes the painting an important document in the history of the emancipation of art in the Netherlands. The new paintings created by splitting the original in two and repainting parts of it are either iconographically meaningless or they show only part of a subject and are recognisable as fragments. It must have been for purely artistic reasons that they were kept. While there must always have been people who kept or acquired a work of art for its artistic qualities alone, this took a long time to develop into a well-established practice. For

the Netherlands, like many other European countries, the beginning of this development can be dated to the early 1500s. It was then that the first collections of art in the modern sense of the word began to be assembled, first by the nobility and later by the non-aristocratic rich.³² In the last quarter of the sixteenth century collectors were no longer rare in the Netherlands, for Karel van Mander mentions dozens of them in his 1604 *Schilder-boeck*.³³

The texts written on art in this period also indicate that works of art were appreciated for their artistic qualities alone in the sixteenth century, especially those written after 1550, such as Hadrianus Junius' *Batavia*, where there are several thoughtful observations on artists and their works.³⁴ A particularly erudite example is the Ghent historian Marcus van Vaernewijck, who wrote about the Ghent altarpiece in the 1560s. He discusses in detail what contributed to the supreme skill of the Van Eyck brothers, writing about the rich diversity they achieved in landscape and in the faces of the figures, the intriguing iconographic details, the beautiful colours and the convincing naturalism of the work.³⁵ When explaining the beauty of the light in and above the street depicted on one of the outside panels of the triptych, he writes that 'the painters know what I am talking about'.³⁶ As Hans Belting has argued, the Reformation may also have played a role in this process of paintings being appreciated for their artistic quality alone, writing that: 'As images fell from favour, they began to be justified as works of art. Being unable to use them in the old, straightforward manner, people now wanted to admire them with the eye of a painter to prove their own taste'.³⁷ Although there is much to criticise in this theory, the re-use of



13. Figs. 3 and 11 juxtaposed to show the alignment of the landscape.



14. *The Circumcision* (the front of a double-sided panel), by Bernard van Orley. c.1520(?). Panel, 115.5 by 72.5 cm. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).



15. Fragment of an *Ecce Homo*, the reverse of Fig.13, by Bernard van Orley. c.1520(?). Panel, 115.5 by 72.5 cm. (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

the fragments of Van Orley's altarpiece suggests that the Reformation functioned as at least one of the catalysts for the emancipation of art in the Netherlands.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in the entry of the 2013 auction catalogue, the fragment with the mourners is connected with a double-sided fragment by Van Orley in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, one side of which shows a *Circumcision* (Fig.14), the other the lower right-hand part of an *Ecce Homo* (Fig.15).³⁸ There is no doubt that this fragment originally formed part of a polyptych, and that the *Circumcision* probably decorated the inner right wing with the *Ecce Homo* the outer right. The entry in the auction catalogue is confident that the Antwerp fragment must have formed part of the same painting to which the double-sided fragment in Vienna once also belonged. The scale of the figures on the Vienna panel match the size of the fragment with the mourners and many of its stylistic features are echoed in it too. Mention is made in the catalogue of the resemblance in the modelling of the drapery and the similarity of the painting of the curls of St John the Evangelist and

the hair and beard of Joseph in the *Circumcision*.

Iconographically, an altarpiece with the Crucifixion as its main subject combined with an *Ecce Homo* and a *Circumcision* (and at least one other scene) would be unusual, but not impossible. The combination of a Crucifixion and an *Ecce Homo* is quite common in early Netherlandish altar painting, but a combination of the Crucifixion and the *Circumcision*, although these episodes are linked by the spilling of Christ's blood, is not. Yet, the combination of an *Ecce Homo* and a *Circumcision* is also unusual, and there is no doubt that the two sides of the fragment in Vienna belong to the same painting. If one were looking for a central panel to go with shutters depicting the *Ecce Homo* – and a close study of the fragment in Vienna suggests that indeed we should – one would expect it to depict the Crucifixion.³⁹ The fragment in Vienna needs to be subjected to dendrochronological analysis to see if the wood used for the panels is the same as that used for the panel in Leipzig. This might then bring us one step closer to discovering the original appearance of what must have been a very impressive painting, and one that has quite a story to tell.

³⁸ Inv. no.GG893. The panel has been in Vienna since at least 1783, when it was mentioned by Christian von Mechel in his catalogue of paintings in the imperial collection, see C. von Mechel: *Verzeichniß der Gemälde der Kaiserlich Königl. Bildergallerie in Wien*, Vienna 1783, p.255, no.77.

³⁹ From an iconographic point of view it would make more sense if the panel with the *Ecce Homo* originally constituted the inner left wing and the panel with the *Circumcision* (which perhaps originally also included another scene from the life of

Christ above or underneath the one with the *Circumcision*) the outer left. Otherwise the scene with the *Circumcision* follows the one of the *Crucifixion* on the central panel, which does not accord the chronology of the story. That it is nevertheless more likely that the panel with the *Ecce Homo* originally formed the exterior right wing is suggested by the figure of a clothed man, half of which survives, who cannot possibly be Christ. Another panel on the left would have been needed to provide space for the figure of Christ.