

A Visual Journey into the Bible

Apostles, Saints and Spiritual Themes

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The Apostles

Introduction

Painters of religious art did not just paint scenes of the Virgin Mary and of the life of Jesus. The number of religious themes was far vaster. Jesus was accompanied by disciples among whom the twelve first who were called the apostles. After Jesus's death a few other disciples led the early Christian community. These were Stephen, the first Dean, Paul, Barnabas and others. They were the heroes of the first days of Christianity. Without their tenacity Christendom would not have existed. They were formidable figures. Over the centuries legends developed, constructed from folklore and often linked with real historical events and places. There were various sources for these legends in literature, but most of them were compiled in the 'Golden Legend'.

In the following chapters we will present each time one or a few representative or interesting pictures of these men. We start with representative paintings of the four Evangelists who wrote the New Testament, Mark and Matthew, Luke and John. Then we show themes of Peter and Paul, of the lesser figures Philip and Stephen. Finally, we could not address Christian spirituality without mentioning the most important medieval pilgrimage sites of Europe, Compostella and Rocamadour. Compostella is the supposed burial site of Saint James so we close this part with the warrior-knight of Christ and show his role as a symbol of the conquest of Spain on the Muslim Moors.

The teaching of Jesus as told in the Bible is very demanding. Jesus preached a very logical, extreme dedication to the adoration of God. Only few humans could live according to this message of Jesus. To those who did, miraculous feats were ascribed and their lives were examples for the Christian community. Such examples of zealous followers of Christ were called saints. Extraordinary people attract legends as the memory of them makes them still greater than reality and is added to with passing time to deeds ever more tantalising, ever more unattainable for most of the Christians. These saints were the examples of transcendence attained and thus the ultimate admiration of the Church.

The rich legends were a welcome subject for painters. The hundreds of churches and monasteries dedicated to the cult of the saints were as many commissioners of pictures. Thus there is a very ample art on the saints, most of who were martyred in violent death. We only present an extract of the many themes on the best-known saints.

This book is much about spirituality. We present some of the themes of spirituality that were not visually realised in themes of apostles or saints but as abstract ideas. Most of these themes were connected to Christianity and they handle recurrent scenes of emotions of humans placed, sometimes unconsciously, in a devotional perspective.

Matthew

The Calling of Saint Matthew

Claes Berchem (1620-1683) and Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-1660). Mauritshuis. – The Hague. Ca. 1657.

Jesus cured a paralytic in Capharnaum. Matthew the Evangelist recalled that as Jesus was walking from there he saw ‘a man called Matthew’, sitting at the tax office. Jesus said to him, “Follow me!” And Matthew got up and followed him and became an apostle^{G38}. Matthew was the only Evangelist to tell this story and it is supposed that this same tax collector wrote the first Gospel. Little is known of Matthew’s life. He is supposed to have been martyred in Ethiopia and the Norman adventurer and conqueror Robert Guiscard brought his relics to Salerno in Sicily.

Scenes of the life of Matthew the Evangelist are therefore rather seldom in the history of art. Since practically the only element that can be learned from Matthew was his calling by Jesus, this is almost the only theme that painters used for the apostle Matthew.

Claes Berchem (1620-1683) and Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-1660/1661) were two so-called ‘Italianates’. This was a movement of Dutch painting of the seventeenth century that was mostly centred in the town of Utrecht, although also painters of other towns of Holland participated. Utrecht was a town of Holland where an important Catholic community remained within the Protestant majority of the Northern Netherlands. In a more Catholic town, pictures of Rome were not refused. Many painters of Utrecht had visited Italy and Rome, or they had teachers who had been there. Neither Berchem nor Weenix worked much in Utrecht, though. Claes Berchem was born in Haarlem and worked there first, then he moved to Amsterdam. He had been on a tour of Italy before 1646. Jan Baptist Weenix the Elder was born in Amsterdam and worked also mostly in that seaport, though he died near Utrecht. He liked to paint seaports, beach scenes and landscapes with ruins. He had equally been to Rome from 1643 to 1647, around the same time as Berchem.

Italian landscapes and scenes from classic antiquity set in ancient Roman ruins were popular among the wealthy merchants of the Dutch towns. One of these examples is the ‘Calling of Matthew’ in which Weenix probably painted the landscape and Claes Berchem the figures.

The scene is shown through a Roman arch. The tax office of the Gospel is in full activity inside the Roman ruins. In the background are Renaissance buildings with the cupola that had become a prominent feature of the grandest Italian cathedrals of Florence, Venice and Rome, but that still reminded of the entirely Roman Pantheon. On the left in the background is a port. The buildings may be references to the three greatest Italian cities: the lagoon port for Venice, the cupola for Rome’s Pantheon and the more austere square buildings on the right for Florence. But the whole, except the ruins, could point to Venice. The sun drenches the scene of the far architecture and port so that the shadows of the building inside the arch are welcome. For Berchem and Weenix this offered an occasion to show their skills in depicting the play of the light on the figures and animals, as they had learned from the Caravaggists in Rome.

The many figures of Claes Berchem are dressed in the Italian fashion, yet we recognise all the elements of Dutch genre painting. There are various animals in the scene, even a cow and sheep although this is an urban scene. The animals stressed the pastoral character of Italy. There are various subthemes. A woman is suckling a baby in front of her husband. Two men are flirting with a well-dressed lady. Men are gambling on the street. Papers are being exchanged. A young boy is guarding a peacock in his arms to protect it from dogs in a hunting scene on the right. Everybody is engaged in some activity and all figures are painted differently. These scenes were occasions for the painters to show their skills as for example in the magnificent colours of the peacock.

The proper scene of the tax collection office is on a podium to the right. Several monumental stairs lead to the collectors. Matthew sits behind his papers and his helpers show stone tablets with the law, which is here a reference to the Law of Moses. Jesus comes up and stretches his arm to call Matthew away.

Jacobus de Voragine cites Isidore in the 'Golden Legend' to tell that the customhouse was a place at a seaport where taxes were paid on ships' cargoes and seamen's wages^{G49}. So it was quite natural for the painters to depict the scene in a seaport.

The painting of Weenix and Berchem has assembled all the ingredients that could be appreciated by the rich Dutch middle class traders. There is the port and the ships with the full-blown sails from which Holland had gained its wealth. There are the many separate genre scenes and the references to the Dutch countryside with its animals, cows and sheep. There is the hunting scene and one can imagine the better to do merchants and nobility of Holland taking delight in hunting. Of course, added is the exoticism of ancient Italy. This is a clever and very typical painting from the Dutch Italianate movement, which includes almost all style elements of the worldly art of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.

Berchem and Weenix were also intelligent artists, who knew the geometries of balance of composition in a picture. Thus one can admire how all the smaller scenes of figures lead in crescendo upward to the right scene, to the figure of Jesus. Even though Jesus is lost amidst the crowd, this natural movement of figures draws the view to him. The right part of the canvas is thus emphasised. This part lies under the diagonal that goes from the lower left to the upper right, as in many Baroque paintings. But Claes Berchem, who painted the architecture, broke this space intelligently with the ancient Roman ruins on the right. The left part of the frame has therefore been opened to the port view so that a natural blend of figures and landscape was created. This part of the picture is set under a particularly clear, very bright Italian sky. Thus there is a nice equilibrium between the bustle of the many figures and the open space created above the harbour. In many pictures Jesus is shown in the middle of a crowd. People are at their daily work; the Gospel scene is only one of the many activities of the picture. Artists stressed the human nature of Jesus in this way. They represented Jesus and what happened to Jesus as one of the many common events of life. The artists tried to convey the message that the extraordinary events of Jesus's life were small and intimate in the vastness of the historical upheavals of Roman times. Northern painters thus more than often brought the epic scenes of the

Gospels closer to the viewers in an attempt of direct communication between artist and spectator. In particular Dutch artists emphasised this view of Christ.

The 'Calling of Matthew' seems at first a dull, mannered genre picture made by lesser artists. But when one looks more closely, one is astounded at the intelligence and skills of these old masters. They were out to please but they did not compromise their art. There is so much to discover in a picture like this that it remains a joy. The picture is a happy way of presenting a Biblical scene, which must have delighted the commissioners. One can imagine the picture hanging in a Dutch interior with a merchant and his wife sitting side by side in their nicest room in front of it, maybe even in the house of tax collectors. The couple would be reflecting on their children, on the fortunes of trade and on their household. Once in every while there would be a silence between them. They would throw a glance on the Berchem and Weenix picture and discover a new surprise each time.

Other paintings:

The Calling of Matthew

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Church of San Luigi dei Francesi – Rome. 1599-1600.

The Martyrdom of Matthew

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Church of San Luigi dei Francesi – Rome. 1599-1600.

The Calling of Saint Matthew

Marinus van Reymerswael (1495-1567). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin.

The Calling of Matthew

Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Le Havre. Around 1600.

The Saint Matthew Triptych

Andrea di Cione called Orcagna (1320-1368) and Jacopo di Cione (1330-1398). Galleria degli Uffizi Museum – Florence. 1367.

Saint Matthew and the Angel

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Guercino (1591-1666). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori. Rome. 1647.

The Calling of Saint Matthew

Cornelis Engelbrechtsz (1468-1533). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

The Calling of Matthew

Solomon van Koninck (1609-1656). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1646.

Landscape with the Evangelist Matthew

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1640.

The Calling of Saint Matthew

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Mark

The Miracle of Saint Mark freeing the Slave

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Galleria dell' Academia – Venice. 1548.

Mark was the author of the second Gospel. He was not an apostle but one of the disciples of who is only told after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the 'Acts of the Apostles' is told that Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on the first mission. But Mark left them at Perga in Pamphylia and he turned back to Jerusalem. Later, Barnabas suggested taking Mark on a new mission, but Paul was not in favour of taking him along. There was heavy disagreement over Mark between Paul and Barnabas so that the two parted company. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas to Syria. Still later in the Acts, there is made a mention of Mark in Rome. Mark also accompanied or helped Peter and it is thought that Mark wrote down the Gospel as he had heard it from Peter. Mark allegedly travelled to Alexandria on demand of Peter, where he died.

Saint Mark's relics were preserved in Alexandria of Egypt. According to legend, two merchants brought Saint Mark's body in the ninth century, in 828, to Venice. They stole the relics of course. The 'Golden Legend' tells of many miracles that happened out at sea. Once in Venice, the relics had to be hidden for the clergy of Alexandria were making claims on them. The relics were put inside the San Giacomo pillar, close to the altar of the Sacraments in the chapel of the castle of the Doge. The relics stayed there but were 'found back' miraculously in 1094 under the Doge Vitale Falier and then brought inside the crypt of the basilica. According to the 'Golden Legend' of course, the finding was mysterious. For once the persons who had hidden at first the relics had died, no one knew anymore where they were. But after prayers the stones bounced from the column and the casket that contained the saint's bones was visible.

Various churches were built in Venice for the devotion of the relics of Mark. A first church was already erected in 978. The current imposing Basilica of Saint Mark was consecrated in the same year 1094 that the relics were recovered. Mark had become the patron saint of the most famous port of the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Hence most paintings of Saint Mark themes were made by Venetian artists like Giovanni Bellini, Palma Vecchio and Jacopo Tintoretto.

Many legends were told in the lagoon town on Saint Mark. Venetian painters have made many pictures of these themes. There is for instance Mark's shipwreck painted by Paolo Veneziano of the fourteenth century. And when the body of Mark was brought by the merchants through the lagoon, an angel would have pronounced the words 'Pax Tibi Marce, Evangelista meus', signalling that now according to the wish of God Mark would rest in peace for eternity in Venice. According to another legend Saint Mark gave the bridal ring of the Doges, by which Venice was married to the sea. In fact, Pope Alexander III would have presented this ring to the Doge as a symbol of the Venetian power over the Adriatic Sea. But legend superseded historic memory. The day of the marriage of Venice to the sea is on Ascension Day. Then is held the Vogalonga, or the 'long contest'. Competitors in all sorts of boats roam for thirty

kilometres to reach the island of Burano and then return to Venice. Venice was fecund with many vivacious legends, not just on it's Saint Mark but also on a relic of Jesus's cross. A piece of the Holy Cross was lost in the lagoon and miraculously recuperated by the Doge. The legends gave rise to many feasts, for which Venice is still famous.

One of the many stories of Saint Mark was 'Mark freeing a Slave'. Jacopo Tintoretto made a painting of this theme among many other scenes of Mark's life. Tintoretto (1518-1594) was a trueborn Venetian and he rarely left his hometown. He worked mainly for the Scuole of Venice. He was a contemporary of Titian (c.1490-1576), of Lorenzo Lotto (c.1480-1556) and of Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). In 1548 Titian was away from Venice and Jacopo Tintoretto received a commission for the Scuola Grande di San Marco that established his fame. Since this Scuola was connected to the patron saint of Venice, Tintoretto could not but paint a scene of Mark's life. The Scuole are very ancient institutions in Venice. They are guilds or confraternities founded for the mutual assistance of the merchants and for charity. Pietro Lombardo who had also worked on the palace of the Doges had built the house of the Scuola di San Marco in 1489. Tintoretto was the main decorator of the building.

Tintoretto chose the 'Miracle of Saint Mark freeing a Slave'; maybe to underscore the freedom of the Venetian Republic and the charity delivered by the Scuole. In the legend a slave was being drawn through the streets of Venice and being tortured. The slave was to be executed on the cross. Saint Mark descended from heaven to succour the slave and free him from his torturers. This legend may be a blend of two tales of the 'Golden Legend'.

One of the stories refers to the life of Mark himself. In Alexandria Mark built churches and the temple priests attacked him for that. They put a rope around his neck and dragged Mark through the city so that he was severely wounded. Straps of his flesh were torn away. When the Alexandrian priests wanted to repeat their act the next day, Mark expired. In another story, the servant of a provincial noble had made a vow to visit the body of Saint Mark. His master refused to let him go but he left anyway. The master ordered to have the servant's eyes put out. But as the ruffians were poking at his eyes, the man prayed to Mark and the torturers got nowhere with the sharp sticks. Then the master ordered to break the man's legs and to cut off his feet, but the iron of the tools melted to lead. When the cruel master commanded to smash in the teeth of the unfortunate servant, the iron of the hammers was blunted. Then the master recognised a miracle, begged God's pardon and together with his servant visited the tomb of Mark in true devotion.

Jacopo Tintoretto painted the exact moment at which Mark fell down like a hawk into the tumult of the streets of Venice. The picture is an astounding chaos. All figures are in frantic movement. All have various gestures of surprise, of cruelty, anger, curiosity, pain, of expectancy and of fright. People are standing, seating, kneeling, lying down, crouching from under each other's legs, and even flying (Saint Mark). Tintoretto sought dramatic effect as no other painter and he did it on a grand scale. Tintoretto stunned the viewer with movement, colours and nervous composition.

The background of the painting is an astonishing amalgam of classic and sixteenth century architectural structures, as well as of trees and bushes. The whole scene is set inside a square pergola so that it looks like a staged theatre scene. Saint Mark falls

down on the slave, as a person would be lowered down on a stage. Saint Mark's body is extremely foreshortened and the effects of the light that comes from the left side is particularly striking. The background in vague, light colours also resembles a theatre decoration. There are an astonishing variety of costumes, as one would only expect on the stage of an opera. There are oriental robes, soldiers' cuirasses, ladies in bright cloaks, and all sorts of hats. The scene could be set in Alexandria for all the Orientalism that is introduced in this picture. All this then is shown in brilliant and diverse colours. Tintoretto was still young and he had not yet reached his fierce hues but dark tones of later age.

As we found so many times in pictures of chaotic, emotional scenes however, there is a strong underlying structure in the painting of Tintoretto. He used a structure in 'V' form that has its lowest tip on the slave and the lines of which go to the two upper corners of the frame. Thus a right line goes from the whitely lit slave over a torturer who shows the useless hammer and peg to the slave owner. This cruel master almost reaches to the top of the right border of the frame. But Tintoretto also used the stage construction that can be found in many Venetian pictures as for instance of the younger artists Paolo Veronese. All figures are painted in the lower band, whereas the frontispieces and the garden architecture form a higher band. To balance on left and right the upward movement of the lines, Tintoretto painted two half-standing figures both clothed in red. The figure in red on the right is the owner of the slave overseeing the execution. The most dramatic movement of an executioner showing the instruments of torture, pointed pegs and hammer draws the view to this elder, throning man on the right. Most dramatic is Saint Mark homing in from above on the slave.

Venetian painting reached its zenith with Titian, Palma Vecchio, Lotto, Tintoretto and Veronese in the sixteenth century. The seventeenth century would be a period of decline of Venetian pictorial arts. Art rolled on from the impetus of Tintoretto and Veronese, but it did neither innovate nor reached the depth of emotions and spirituality of the previous times. Tintoretto with his epic scale of representation, his grandiose decorations was the last outburst of energy of a society. Venetian art would have a comeback in the eighteenth century with Tiepolo, Canaletto and Guardi, but then it would disappear as a particular school together with the destruction of the Venetian republic itself.

Saint Mark heals Ananias

Giovanni Battista da Conegliano called Cima da Conegliano (1459/1460-1517/1518). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1499.

Cima da Conegliano, who made the painting of 'Saint Mark healing Ananias', was of course also a Venetian artist. He was born in Conegliano near Venice around 1460. He worked first in Vicenza and Cima may have been the pupil of Bartolommeo Montagna there. From 1492 on however, he was in Venice and remained there all his life, until his death in 1518. His father was a 'cimador' or cloth-shearer, hence his name. He lived in the most splendid days of the high renaissance, just before its art

would evolve in mannerism, and he was a contemporary of Giovanni Bellini in Venice and of course of the great Florentines such as Andrea Mantegna, Raphael and Michelangelo Buonarroti. The painting of Cima that we present here was made for the chapel of the silk weavers in the church of Santa Maria dei Crociferi in Venice.^{D19}

Many Venetian painters made pictures on themes from the legends of the patron saint of their town. Cima chose a scene of Mark's life in Alexandria. A cobbler lived there close to Mark's house and one day the cobbler injured his hand with an awl. Mark healed Ananias miraculously. Ananias allowed himself to be baptised. He converted to Christianity he became Bishop of Alexandria after Mark's death.

Cima da Conegliano showed an imaginary town's place of Alexandria. The cobbler Ananias sits on a low chair with his tools on the ground next to him, and he tends his hand to Saint Mark. A miracle is in the making, so a group of merchants and other bystanders dressed with white turbans have gathered. The scene is set against marvellous Renaissance buildings, on which the various coloured marbles show the grandeur of the largest town of the Mediterranean in Mark's times, Alexandria. Only in Italy of course were buildings thus covered with marbles, but Cima wanted to show mainly the wealth as his spectators knew it. Alexandria and Egypt were Mohammedan in Cima's fifteenth century. But Cima knew Venice's churches only, and saw how they were built with Greek friezes and columns, and covered with coloured marbles for the richest congregations of Venice. The use of such rich marble was less overwhelming in Venice than in Florence and Pisa, and Venetian churches were less grand. But Cima had to evoke in the viewer a good impression of Alexandria's wealth, so he drew the imposing Renaissance architecture behind Saint Mark. Since Alexandria was Muslim, he showed a minaret tower in the middle of the building, as if of a mosque. But Cima da Conegliano did not know well Muslim temples, which had very slim minarets, so he did his best but painted a broad, round tower on top of the building. Muslim minarets allow only the Mullah's on their minarets. They call all Muslims to prayer from the towers, and they call in all directions. Cima also drew a balustrade around the tower, but the balustrade is more used for sightseeing and several people walk there. The naïve way in which Cima thus painted a mosque is quite touching.

Cima painted a fine, richly decorated colonnade to the left of the frame and this architecture allowed him to draw a very strong set of fleeing lines, which from a very pronounced perspective. This perspective was necessary for Cima to create a feeling of space in the viewer, for the central buildings are parallel to the viewer, and so are the figures. The viewer has immediately, and by this aspect of the picture alone, a very strong sense of the space of the Alexandrian square. Of course, we see how the building's base is situated a little higher than the figures, in the illusion of how a viewer would see the square. We must admire the patience and dedication that Cima applied to make a picture of a grand scene that was worthy of the leaders and members of the 'Arte dei Setaiuoli' or Association of Silk-Weavers of Venice for which the picture was made. A marvellous bright light whitens the buildings, but Cima also depicted very soft shadows behind the front part, to the left, and also on the tower, suggesting that the light enters the scene from the right of the frame.

The scene of figures is centred on the cobbler Ananias. So Cima brought the attention of the viewer to the left lower corner. The figure of Ananias is a little isolated in the

group, so more easily perceived. If the viewer starts to look at Ananias first, his or her eyes will go over Ananias' outstretched hands towards Mark and over Mark's high profile to the horse-rider, who leads the eyes further upwards onto the towers of the mosque, the feature in the painting that must have been the pride of Cima. Cima guides the viewer thus nicely over the main features of the painting in a subtle way. Few painters take care of such details or have not learned enough from their predecessors and teachers to be even aware of such techniques. Cima had the knowledge, the intelligence and the intuition to design his placing of figures to thus guide the view. Guiding the view means holding the attention of the viewer longer; the viewer stays longer before the painting and admires it more.

In the scene of figures around the cobbler Ananias, most of the bystanders wear turbans and that is an element of Orientalism in the picture. Only Mark and his assistant wear no Muslim turban and thus are shown to be Christians. The scene is lively, as the men look at the cobbler, but they remain dignified. They all stand and do not move around. There are no women in the picture, since indeed in Muslim countries women were rather confined to the interior of their houses. Ananias shows his hand. He has just struck through it with his pick. A reference to a cutting knife is also with the figure behind Ananias; here a man prepares the pieces of leather that Ananias will use on the shoes, and that man holds a knife very visibly.

In the scene of the men, Cima da Conegliano used colours of high intensity but with nicely harmonising hues. Look at the foremost, leftmost man behind Ananias. This man wears a striped robe but between the green and the blue stripes, Cima drew a red band. Red harmonises in contrast with its complementary hue of green, but Cima's red is deep enough not to look harsh and wrong next to the blue. Putting green and blue together would have modified these hues and not be harmonious. The cobbler wears green and the complementary red too, while Jesus is clad in a blue cloak and a red robe but this red colour definitely tends to purple to harmonise relatively well enough with the blue. The Christian assistant of Mark wears blue and gold, which are complementary colours also. The rich Muslim in the middle wears a white robe but on this cloth Cima painted very dark blue motives and golden patterns. The horse-rider has a green robe and a red hat. It is almost as if Cima da Conegliano had discovered for himself the rules of complementarity of hues and the harmony of contrast of these complementary hues. When we look then at the buildings, we find here much broken white in various ones, soft orange and brown and these last with a vaguely green background. Since all these hues are in the same tone, Cima has used harmony of tones, which is usually also a very pleasant combination to the eye. He placed the softer tones and softer intensities of hues to show a less obtrusive background and concentrated intuitively the attention of the viewer on the vivid, strong hues of much higher intensity in the foreground. The main scene is thus emphasised in vividness, liveliness of hues and catches more the eye of the viewer, whereas the background – which was even maybe already too loaded with decoration – stayed more in the background.

Cima painted shadows beneath the figures. This was a rare element for the Renaissance. Cima did give the viewer thus a surer impression of the direction of light. Usually in Renaissance paintings, it is more by the chiaroscuro on the robes and cloaks of the figures that one guesses where the light comes from. Cima however was

very delicate and frugal with his chiaroscuro on the clothes of his personages, so he underscored the shadows on the ground.

Cima's composition is rather rigid, as he emphasised the vertical directions in his picture. He painted clear areas of colour, very well delineated areas, and even harsh contrasts of colours in his figures. His figures are long and slim, and their robes do not flow in any wind but are also drawn in long, straight lines. The result of this is that, although the scene is quite lively, the viewer receives an impression of coldness and dignified distance between the figures and the viewer. The viewer stays some way, is not really involved in the scene, and remains the outside spectator. No personage looks at the viewer. All the looks of the figures are held within the scene. These features allow the viewer not to commit to the emotions of the cobbler and of Mark, but also evoke in the viewer a feeling of cold, of a halting moment that perpetuates and that belongs to the world of legends, as well as of a scene of outworldly dignity. This effect was of course expressly sought by Cima and it was indeed a main feature of most Renaissance pictures. Were it not for the wonderfully strong hues, we might believe that Cima had been born and taught in Florence.

Cima da Conegliano's 'Markus heals Ananias' is not art that grips the viewer at his or her guts. The viewer is not immediately overwhelmed with strong emotions, but the painting belongs to those pictures that live by themselves in the world of self-sufficient masterpieces.

Other paintings:

The Translation of the Body of Saint Mark

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Accademia del'Arte – Venice. 1552-1665.

Stories from the Life of Saint Mark

Paolo Veneziano and his Sons Luca and Giovanni. Museo di San Marco – Venice. Ca. 1345.

The Corpse of Saint Mark is taken away by Christians

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Musée de d'art Ancien – Brussels.

The Theft of the Corpse of Saint Mark

Jacopo Robusti called Il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia - Venice

The Miracle of Saint Mark

Jacopo Robusti called il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan. 1562/1566.

The Dream of Saint Mark

Jacopo Robusti called il Tintoretto (1512-1594). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1585.

The Martyrdom of Saint Mark

Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516) and Vittore Belliniano. Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. 1515-1526.

Saint Mark Preaching in Alexandria

Gentile Bellini (ca. 1429-1507) and Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

The Tempest

Jacopo Palma Il Vecchio (1480-1528) and Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. 1528-1534.

The Presentation of the Ring to the Doge

Paris Bordone (1500 – 1571). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice.

Saint Mark and the Plague Saints

Fitoni (1488-1576). Santa Maria della Salute. Venice. 1511

The Death of Ananias

Raphael (1482-1520). Tapestry cartoon, Victoria and Albert Museum. London. 1515-1516.

Saint Mark

Lorenzo Veneziano (worked 1356-1372). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice.

Saint Mark baptising Ananias

Giovanni Mansueti (1465/1470-1526/1527). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Mark heals Ananias

Giovanni Mansueti (active 1485-1527). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1525.

Episodes from the Life of Saint Mark

Giovanni Mansueti (active 1485-1527). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1526-1527.

The Presentation of Saint Mark's Ring

Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1540-1545.

The Martyrdom of Saint Mark

Giovanni Bellini (1434/1439-1516) and Vittore Belliniano (active 1507-1529). Galleria dell' Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1515.

Saint Mark enthroned with Saints

Tiziano Vecellio. Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

Saint Mark

Master Giorgio (active mid 15th century). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Luke

Saint Luke painting the Madonna

Jan Gossaert (1478-1532). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna.

The Evangelist Luke was a Greek doctor as is said in a letter of Saint Paul. He probably came from the town of Antioch. Luke wrote the third Gospel and also the Acts of the Apostles. It is believed that the Evangelists questioned Mary about all the events that had happened to Jesus, so the 'Golden Legend' says that the gospel of Luke was disclosed to him by the Virgin Mary^{G49}. Luke accompanied Paul on the first conversion missions. Pictures feature him as writing his Gospels, but mostly as painting the Virgin. Luke has become the patron saint of doctors and surgeons as well as of painters. Especially in Flanders and Brabant most painters' guilds, medieval professional associations of painters were called 'Saint Lucas Guilds'. This was the case in Bruges, Antwerp and Louvain.

The theme of Saint Luke painting the Virgin was a popular one in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These pictures were often made for the painters' guilds. Legends tell that Luke made a picture of the Madonna and some of these pictures allegedly turned up by miracle in medieval times. The Saint Mark church of Jerusalem claims to hold this most ancient icon, which is today shown proudly to its tourists.

Jan Gossaert's picture of 'Saint Luke painting the Madonna' gives the immediate impression of being overloaded. The setting is in a Roman palace, in which even the walls and its columns are filled with bas-relief carvings or trompe-l'oeil drawings. Notice the sculpture of Moses on an elaborate round niche behind Luke and the Angel. Jan Gossaert liked Renaissance forms and elements and used them in profusion in his major panels.

Luke is shown painting and he uses the Virgin's writing desk as easel. Her book is still beneath. Luke is more drawing with a pen than painting, which is in line with the use of the writing desk. Luke is clad in a luxurious robe, the folds of which are painted meticulously. An Angel holds his hand, thereby underscoring the Godly or heavenly inspiration and origin of Mary's picture. The Angel also is magnificent, shown in flamboyant pure colours. Especially the Angel's hair is curled in a way quite uncommon in Flanders. The Angel definitely looks like a girl with its hair done so elaborately.

The Madonna is not posing for the picture during her lifetime. She appears to Luke in a vision, in a dream. Many baby Angels or putti hover around Mary. The Virgin is floating in a mandorla, an almond shaped frame (mandorla means almond). The mandorla were the clouds in which Jesus and Mary ascended to heaven. The mandorla in Gossaert's painting is very elaborate, fully surrounded by clouds and filled with little angels who hold the crown above Mary's head.

Jan Gossaert was born around 1470 to 1480 in Maubeuge, a town that is now in Northern France. Hence his nickname of Mabuse. He became a master painter in Antwerp however. He built up a huge reputation, travelled a lot and conversed with

many other painters thus influencing them with his ideas of new art. He worked for the court of the Dukes of Burgundy, painting for the Dukes and his courtiers. In 1508 he accompanied Duke Philip of Burgundy to Rome⁶⁹. There he learnt the Antique Ideal, beauty in nudity and in sculpture. Gossaert also worked for the King of Denmark, Christian II. Adolph of Burgundy kept him a while in Zealand, in the Netherlands, in the residence of Middelburg. And Gossaert also worked in Brussels, Bruges, and Mechelen. He was the first northern painter to bring the antique nude image from Italy to Flanders.

Gossaert's paintings were ambitious in their decoration and theme. But the man Gossaert lacked soul and originality. He tried to compensate these disadvantages by stunning the viewer, just as in the 'Luke painting the Madonna'. Gossaert had the skills of a master draftsman and the wealth of colours is harmonious in his pictures. He painted well and easily and knew it. Gossaert lacked however in force, expression and interior spirituality. He lacked the intelligence of innovative and original vision to make a powerful composition. Gossaert's language of forms was sculptural and very mannered and artificial. He was deeply impressed by the Renaissance's ornamental splendour and by the erudition of the Italians. But instead of judiciously absorbing what he had learnt and then render his own feelings and vision, he overloaded the viewer with the erudition and seemed to suppress his own intuition.

Gossaert's 'Luke painting the Madonna' has undeniable qualities, however mannered, cool and artificial the whole may look. The composition of the scene is strong and Gossaert certainly knew how to picture intricate detail. He lacked in this scene the power to express the spirituality of the moment, as well as the warm intimacy of a painter and his model. Jan Gossaert was a transition painter between the Flemish Primitives and the later Flemish Baroque period. We feel Baroque exuberance is being born here. Exuberance has been freed, restraint abandoned. Gossaert was a master artisan but he lacked the individuality and power of a great personal character.

Jan Gossaert is a fine example of a painter gifted with the aptitude to draw and to paint to perfection, but he was not gifted enough to imagine impressive scenes. He tried to make up for his deficiencies by adding elaborate decoration and detail, that is by showing off with his skills to the extreme. The result is often pedantic, artificial, cold and superficial. Gossaert was at his best in pictures of nudes. But even in his portraits, he usually set the figures against overloaded backgrounds. Yet, this kind of pictures may have well pleased the courts at which Gossaert worked. The pictures added to the monumental grandeur of the palaces. Although Gossaert has left us marvellous portraits, his other paintings are less attractive to our more humble tastes.

Other paintings:

Saint Luke

Master Theodoricus (active ca. 1359-1368). Chapel of the Holy Rood, Castle Karlstejn. Prague. Ca. 1360-1364.

Saint Luke painting the Virgin

Rogier Van der Weyden (ca. 1399-1464). Groeninge Museum – Bruges. Around 1500.

Saint Luke

Simone Martini (ca. 1284-1344). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1330.

Saint Luke painting the Madonna

Jan Gossaert (1478-1532). The Czech Museum of Fine Arts – Prague.

Saint Luke painting the Madonna

Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574). Frans Hals Museum – Haarlem.

Saint Luke painting the Virgin

Nicolas Régnier (1591-1667). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen.

Saint Luke Polyptych

Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1430 – 1506). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint Luke painting the Virgin

Derick Baegert (1440-1515). Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Geschichte – Münster. Ca. 1485.

Saint Luke the Evangelist

Gabriel Mäleskircher (1430/1440-1495). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. 1478.

Saint Luke painting the Madonna.

Hugo Van Der Goes. Museu Nacional de Arte Antigua. Lissabon. Ca. 1475-1480.

Saint Luke painting the Virgin

Jules-Claude Ziegler (1804-1856). Musée Magnin. Dijon. Ca. 1839.

Saint Luke painting the Madonna

Johann Edward von Steinle (1810-1886). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1838.

Saint Luke painting the Virgin

Jan de Beer (ca. 1465-1520).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

John

Saint John the Evangelist

Alonso Cano (1601-1667). Musée du Louvre- Paris. 1636.

Imaginary Landscape with John the Evangelist on Patmos

Hans Bol (1534-1593). Mauritshuis – The Hague. 1564.

John wrote the fourth Gospel and also three Epistles among which the Revelation. John was, with his brother James, the son of Zebedee. Jesus called them ‘Boanerges’ or ‘sons of thunder’ for their fiery temper. Their mother presented them to Jesus and Jesus asked whether they were willing to drink his cup of suffering with him, which they accepted. Maybe because of that vow they were with Peter the witnesses of the strangest and most intimate scenes of Jesus’s Passion, such as the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden. John followed Peter on his missions. He seems to have gone to Rome with Peter and suffered under the persecution of the emperor Domitian, but he survived that and lived the rest of his life in Ephesus. According to Saint Jerome, John stayed in Ephesus until extreme old age.

The ‘Golden Legend’ tells of John that he first travelled to Asia and converted many pagans to Christianity. The emperor Domitian summoned him to Rome and had him plunged in a cauldron of boiling oil. But John came out untouched, so the emperor exiled him to the island of Patmos. Many paintings show him thus in the fiery and strange landscape of Patmos writing his Revelation. Somewhat later Domitian was murdered and all his decrees were revoked so that John could return to Ephesus. When he preached in Asia, idol-worshippers stirred up a riot and dragged him to the temple of Diana. John challenged the rioters that if he could destroy the temple they would believe in Jesus Christ. When they consented, the apostle prayed and the temple collapsed. But the high priest Aristodemus was still unsatisfied. He challenged John to drink of his poison. If this would not harm John, Aristodemus would acknowledge that John’s God was the true God. John accepted, but Aristodemus wanted proof of the poison, so he bade the proconsul for two criminals condemned to decapitation. The criminals drank the poison and were killed. Then John drank and he suffered no harm. Aristodemus bade John to resuscitate the two criminals. John gave his cloak to the high priest, telling him to throw it over the corpses. The dead men arose. The ‘Golden Legend’ finishes this story by telling that the high priest now believed in Christ and so did the proconsul. John baptised them all and their families^{G49}.

Alonso Cano was a sculptor, an architect and a painter of the Spanish seventeenth century, the Golden Age of Spanish pictorial arts. He originated from Granada. Cano was born there in 1601 and he died in his hometown in 1667. He first settled in Sevilla in 1626. He then left in 1638 for the court of Madrid, for which he had already worked before. He was promoted to Painter of the King. He left Madrid in 1664 for Granada again. He had to flee from Madrid because he was accused of having murdered his wife. He became a monk, later a priest and due to his royal protection was appointed as the master architect of the cathedral of Granada. His paintings are in the realist Spanish fashion.

Alonso Cano made a portrait of Saint John the Evangelist around 1636. Many ingredients of the Spanish style of the seventeenth century can be discerned in this picture. The background is dark. Only a slight flame throws the shadow of John on the walls behind. Saint John is in the light. His robe is white as Jesus's. This strongest possible contrast between white and darkness was much used by the Spanish painters. Yet, they were also fine colourists: look at the light red of John's cloak that curls around him. John has a gesture of surprise as the vipers curl out of the poisoned chalice. He conjures the snakes. The pose of the figure is moreover quite static as John is seated. Spanish pictures are thus generally static, but slight gestures are always used to express feelings. Saint John is shown as if he were Jesus himself. John's face could be Jesus's face, young and noble, and his white robe and red cloak are in the colours usually associated with Jesus. The picture is eminently religious, which is also the predominant theme of the Spanish seventeenth century. It is one of the thousands of pictures of saints that adorned abbeys and churches in Spain.

Hans Bol's images are very different from Alonso Cano's. Hans Bol was of the North. He was born in 1534 in Mechelen of Brabant, now Belgium. Brabant belonged in Bol's painting's days, after the abdication of Emperor Charles V, to the Spanish Habsburg King. Bol had to leave Mechelen for the Spanish army was breaking the revolt of the Reformation of the Netherlands and the army had brutal success in the Southern Netherlands. Bol went somewhat more North, to Antwerp. He specialised there in miniatures of landscapes, for which he remembered the early Flemish and Walloon landscape painters like Joachim Patenier of Dinant.

Hans Bol's picture of 'Saint John on Patmos' was an occasion for the artist to present an imaginary landscape. John the Evangelist is on the island of Patmos. John is seen on a small promontory in the sea. Huge boulders protect the island from the waves and a hopeful tree grows with full leaves to the skies. Beneath the tree is John with flowing red cloak. His symbol is an eagle and Hans Bol has painted that majestic bird next to John. The saint has his hand on the open book of his Revelation. He is letting the Apocalypse visions flow through his mind and he seems to conjure the cosmos. A vision in blue unfolds before his mind. John wrote in his Revelation that God was seated before a crystal blue transparent sea, so the artist Bol has applied this detail of the Bible to make blue the overall colour of his image, which was quite innovative for a landscape picture. The dominant blue part of the painting grows to the right in a 'V' shape from out of John's mind.

There is a port and ships trying with full sails to enter the harbour. But the high abrupt mountain rocks menace the small harbour. The skies are threatening. Very dark blue clouds have gathered and darkened the heavens. Even in the sea the whales threaten. There are shepherds guarding their sheep in the hills on the right, but these seem so small in this overwhelming nature. The port town is vulnerable too. A high citadel looks minuscule on the scale of the knife-shaped rocks. One fears the wrath of God over the scene.

It is the moment of the Apocalypse. The clouds break high above and from very far a figure steps out of the light: God will descend to judge the earth. An array of angels already precedes God and the angels fall down on the port. Hans Bol has made a hallucinating picture with the strange, alien blue mostly to the right, the green of life to the left. Blue is the vision of John's mind; natural green is John's environment.

Only Saint John seems to be saved by the green. John is painted in colours that contrast with the rest of the picture. His figure stands out in its grey and red colours like a wizard manipulating the universe. Whereas we feel that this scene is created only by John's mind, he is also the outsider of the scene. John is the contemplator of the drama.

The painting of Hans Bol is maybe not the greatest art, but we feel that the painter has profoundly thought about his subject. Bol tried to represent his emotions on reading the Apocalypse. He has well succeeded in presenting an individual vision of these feelings, of a fiery John who sees the world in danger of destruction. Ships are desperately fleeing for the coming storm into what they think is a safe harbour, but a more terrible danger still looms above. For Hans Bol, this image applies to humanity. People are working under dangerous threats for their daily bread and for the longer lasting fame. But all this is ephemeral, a force is manipulating the universe and when this force is unleashed apocalyptic events play with the frail humans.

This really is what must have been in John's mind when he wrote, "I, John, your brother and partner in hardships, in the kingdom and in perseverance in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos on account of the Word of God and of witness to Jesus. It was the Lord's Day and I was in ecstasy, and I heard a loud voice behind me, like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write down in a book all that you see, and send it to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.""^{G38}

Hans Bol's picture is of the moment when John tells, "All the kings of the earth, the governors and the commanders, the rich people, and the men of affluence, the whole population, slaves and citizens, hid in caverns and among the rocks of the mountains. They said to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us away from the One who sits on the Throne and from the retribution of the Lamb. For the Great Day of his retribution has come, and who can face it?""^{G38}

Thus, Hans Bol, lesser known painter of miniatures, small artist of small paintings, has made a picture of a tremendous vision. He did not just paint a landscape and added merely a Saint John to it. He did combine these elements, but he succeeded in giving a true view of the mind of John and of the Apocalypse without referring to monsters, horses, mystic lambs and the image of God in full glory of wrath. Bol used a landscape and colours to present his vision. His landscape painting is in line with the famous tradition of Northern landscape painters who showed great landscapes and small figures as if more than in Italy the artists had experienced the grandeur of nature and its powers.

Saint John raises Drusiana from the Dead

The Martyrdom of Saint John

Filippino Lippi (1457-1504). The Strozzi Chapel, Church of Santa Maria Novella – Florence. Ca. 1502.

The same year that Saint John wrote his Apocalypse, the emperor Domitian was murdered and John could return to Ephesus, where a crowd gathered and ran out to meet him, hailing him. As John entered the city, a woman called Drusiana, who had been a dear friend of his, was being carried out for burial. The kinsmen of the woman,

and the widows and orphans of Ephesus then appealed to John, saying that Drusiana had dearly wished to see the Apostle return. But now Drusiana was dead and could not set eyes on her beloved Apostle again. John ordered them to set down the bier, to unbind the body and he said, 'Drusiana, may Jesus Christ grant you life again. Arise, go to your house and prepare food for me'. Drusiana got up and went directly to her house, as if she had been awakened from sleep and not from death.

Filippino Lippi used this scene as well as the scene in which the Apostle is boiled in a cauldron by Emperor Domitian, to paint magnificent frescoes in the Strozzi chapel of the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. The frescoes were finished in 1502 and thus date from the last years of Lippi's life. Lippi painted two scenes from the life of Saint John. He painted the scenes of the left wall of the chapel, whereas two frescoes from the life of Saint Philip of his hands adorned the right wall, on the other side. The Strozzi chapel was assigned to Filippo Strozzi, whose patron saint was Saint Philip, and who would be buried in there later. But the chapel was previously dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist, so Lippi also honoured this saint in his paintings.

Like as with the scenes of Saint Philip, Filippino Lippi read a story from the apocryphal Gospels, maybe in the 'Golden Legend'. He read the story thoroughly and represented it faithfully. We see Drusiana on the bier, being raised by Saint John. On the left are mourning women, holding their children, exactly as mentioned in the story. To the right Lippi painted the rest of the death procession. Here we see the priest and a woman holding vases of anointments. Filippino Lippi applied the same structure in this fresco as in the one on the opposite wall. He drew a horizontal band of figures with the main theme in the centre and he showed a vertical composition of architectures, rising out of the horizontal band of figures further down. In the architectures we remark the same hang for excessive decoration and mannered representation of the buildings. All the figures are painted in different poises. All are shown in quite vivid movement and hence Lippi showed some of them reclined, in slanting positions.

Filippino Lippi worked meticulously on all details and he applied nice symmetry of forms around the central axis of the fresco. Look for instance at the bier-bearer on the left of the picture. The man is painted in a yellow-brown robe and green cloak. To the right, the second bearer is similarly dressed. A bit further to the right is a woman, holding her baby in her arms, painted in a green robe. That woman forms a kind of counter-weight to the green colour surface of the figure of Saint John. Saint John looks to the left and there stands another woman, coloured in a light blue dress. These colours stand out against the other hues of the scene and against the greyish background. Filippino Lippi also painted a round, small temple on the left and he balanced this mass with another temple, this one larger but painted in less pronounced grey hues on the right. The roof of the left temple answers the main golden-yellow colours of Drusiana's cloak (lying on her legs), and of the bearers.

Filippino Lippi painted all the figures in full show of emotions. There is still much rigid dignity in his figures, as we could expect of a major Florentine draughtsman, but Lippi introduced ostentatious show of feelings. The depiction is lively, livelier even than in the artist's scenes from the life of Saint Philip on the opposite side.

In the 'Martyrdom of Saint John', Filippino Lippi showed another story from the apocryphal writings. John stands piously in a cauldron of boiling oil and Emperor Domitian commands his aids to more fire. Here also, Lippi shows the figures in lively action. Profusion of decorative elements in this scene too adds aspects of picturesque.

The Renaissance was a period of rediscovery of the ancient Greek and Roman art and of the philosophies of Plato, Socrates and Aristoteles. Lippi worked very many symbols of Roman antiquity in the scenes. He situated the theme in Roman surroundings and even though 'Philip at the Temple of Mars' happens in Scythia, Roman emblems, monuments and soldiers entered his scene. Still, the Renaissance painters remained ultimately linked to their Christian religion. So much so that they did not only sought inspiration in the Bible but also in the now practically forgotten apocryphal narratives.

Filippino Lippi was a master painter. He had been a student of Sandro Botticelli, had been raised by him, and he was the son of Filippo Lippi, Botticelli's master. A double tradition of Florentine drawing style and Florentine admiration for graceful representation was instilled in him. Filippino Lippi evolved his father's and Botticelli's style into abundance of decorative details, taken from antiquity. He might have been a transition figure in the history of the art of painting. But his transition was a trial; one of the possible roads of evolution that remained un-followed, his style of elaboration taking too much time and being too meticulous. His transition example was not pronounced enough, and the moment of true change was not yet really at hand. His sophistication of depiction however makes a nice and impressive sight in the Strozzi chapel.

Other paintings:

John the Evangelist

Anonymous. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. After 1410.

John the Evangelist

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1615-1616.

Saint John writing the Book of Revelations

Paolo Veronese and Gerolamo Bassano. The Doge's Palace – Venice. 16th century.

The Martyrdom of Saint John the Evangelist

The Master of the Martyrdom of Saint John. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1525.

The Martyrdom of Saint John and the Vision of Saint John on Patmos

Michiel Coxie (1499-1592). National gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1578-1580.

John the Evangelist

Doménikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. Around 1600.

Saint John the Evangelist

Gian Pietro Rizzoli called Giampietrino (active 1508 – 1549). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

The Life of John the Evangelist

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel of the church of Santa Croce – Florence. Around 1320-1330.

John the Evangelist

Carlo Dolci (1616-1686). Private Collection Rau – Germany.

Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos

Hans Burgkmair (1473-1553). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. 1518.

Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos

Cosimo Tura (Ca. 1431-1495). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1470.

Saint John the Evangelist

Mariotto Albertinelli (1474-1515). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint John the Evangelist

Ambrogio da Fossano called Il Bergognone (1455-after 1522). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint John the Evangelist resurrects Drusiana

Francesco Bonsignori (1455-1519). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint John the Evangelist

Domenico Morone (1442-after 1517). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint John the Evangelist

Vittore Crivelli (ca. 1440-1501). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint John the Evangelist giving Alms in the Square of Alexandria

Francesco Gallizi da Santacroce (1516-1584) Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Peter

Jesus arrived in Caesarea Philippi and there he asked his disciples who the Son of Man was. They answered that some thought that this was John the Baptist, others the prophet Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asked who they thought he was. Simon Peter now spoke out and said that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus then called Peter a blessed man because no human could have revealed to him this. So Jesus said that Simon was Peter, the rock. On this rock Jesus would build his community and the underworld would have no power over it. Jesus also said he would give to Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever Peter bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever he loosened on earth would be unloosened in heaven. But Jesus then forbade the Apostles to tell to anyone that he was the Christ.

Handing over the Keys of the Kingdom

Pietro Perugino (ca. 1448-1523). Cappella Sistina – The Vatican. 1481-1482.

Pietro Perugino was born near Perugia, as his name indicates, in the middle of the fifteenth century. He was the son of a poor man called Cristofano. His full name was thus Pietro di Cristofano Vannucci and he was born in the village of Città del Pieve in Umbria. Giorgio Vasari wrote that Pietro was born among 'misery and want' but he inspired to greatness. He came to Florence and studied like many other painters of his generation under Andrea Verrocchio. He had quickly much success with his own paintings, for he had a fine talent and original views which appealed to the Florentines. He made frescoes but also some of the first oil paintings of Florence. His fame spread so much throughout Italy that in 1481 Pope Sixtus IV invited him to work in his chapel near the old Saint Peter's basilica. Perugino painted several scenes in this chapel, such as the 'Handing over the Keys'. He made a 'Nativity and Baptism of Jesus's', the 'Birth of Moses', an 'Assumption of the virgin' and a portrait of Pope Sixtus. These two last pictures were destroyed when Michelangelo prepared the wall for his Last Judgement. Perugino painted for other churches in Rome, which according to Vasari brought him large sums of money. From Rome he returned to Perugia. He painted many pictures in his home town but returned in 1486 to Florence. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Servite Friars of Florence wanted to have a painting for their main altar. They had first assigned this work to Filippino Lippi, but Filippino died young. Then they gave the rest of the commission to Pietro Perugino. When he had finished however, his work was very much criticised because Pietro had lost his originality of representation and had merely repeated the figures he had painted before. Whether this was true can be doubted, but Pietro had indeed a vision that he preferred, a strong vision of an ideal universe, and that view he repeated. He may have been accused of not varying his themes. He was attacked so vehemently that he left Florence in 1499 once more, in his old age, and moved back, definitely this time, to his sweet Perugia, where he was still admired and where he continued to work until his death in 1523. Here his pupil was Raffaello Sanzio of Urbino.

Giorgio Vasari wrote that Pietro Perugino was not a religious man and that he refused to believe in the immortality of the soul. Vasari tells that Perugino had many students among whom of course Raphael, but also Pinturicchio, Rocco Zoppo, Filippo Salviati, Francesco Bachiacca, Giovanni Lo Spagna and Andrea Luigi called l'Ingegno, who lost his sight at a young age. Perugino was a most famous and loved master of Tuscany and Umbria, of Italy's resplendent Renaissance.

Pietro Perugino not only painted the scene of the handing over by Jesus of the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Two other smaller scenes are in the background of Perugino's picture.

On the right is a scene told by John. Jesus in this scene also claims to be the Son of God. He said he did not seek his own glory, but the glory of his father in heaven. He said he knew God and he kept his word. He told that Abraham would rejoice seeing Jesus's day. The Jews screamed that Jesus was not yet fifty, so how could he have known Abraham. But Jesus answered with the terrible words, 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Then the Jews picked up stones to throw them at Jesus, but he hid and left and went to the Temple.

In the left background Perugino painted a scene of the Pharisees putting Jesus to the test. The Pharisees asked whether it was allowed to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor or not. Jesus called the men hypocrites and asked rhetorically why they wanted to put him to the test. When he asked to show him the coins with which they paid the taxes, the Pharisees showed him a denarius. Jesus pointed at the title of the piece, which was Caesar's, and said to pay Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God.

So in the right background of his fresco Perugino drew a picture of Jesus declaring himself to be the Son of God and on the left a scene where Jesus denies worldly aspirations. These themes flank the 'Handing over of the Keys of the Kingdom' to Peter.

Pietro Perugino used three horizontal bands of composition: one lower band with the main scene and a procession of figures, a second band somewhat higher up with the two lesser scenes from the New Testament, and a third band of Roman monuments set against the sky. In this upper band Perugino painted a central building that should represent the Temple of Jerusalem, but the master painted an octagonal or hexagonal Temple, not unlike many Italian Renaissance buildings or even like the Florence Baptistery. Perugino however drew a light structure, high and towering, which was however not choking the picture or too heavy in his composition since it had two open arches on either side. He also placed two monumental Roman arches, to the example of the arches of Constantine in Rome. Since these also are open and allow viewers to look onto the sky, with a rather low horizon, these structures also do not seem heavy and allow much impression of elevation of the mind, fine dedication to spirituality, and to vastness of God's space for any viewer. This vision was the particular, original mark of Perugino and he used it in several of his pictures. The arches bear inscriptions that praise Pope Sixtus for following on Solomon in building the Sistine Chapel (which had the same dimensions as Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem), and even announcing the Pope to be superior in religious piety to Solomon. The arches are

decorated with festive, golden threads and these answer the golden dome of the Temple.

The two arches of Constantine are of course placed symmetrically to the central Temple. So are the two minor scenes in the middle band, and everywhere in the painting one can discover symmetries in areas of colours. These symmetries have a remarkable effect. Although Perugino placed very many figures in his painting, the viewer has no impression of nervousness or lack of order. The viewer perceives each scene easily and can separate each scene easily, discover them one by one without each such visual element to confuse and encroach on the other. Perugino's view looks as if it is fixed in eternity. A great sense of orderliness, rest, peace, solemn grace radiates from the picture. That was Perugino's great finding in composition and this view epitomises the Florentine Renaissance. Man in Perugino's paintings is more than human, part of an immutable and divine grace.

Perugino painted each figure in clear hues, which are light, rather contrasting and hence easily recognisable. The areas of colour do not diffuse the one into the other. All areas are well delineated with the unwavering lines of a master draughtsman of Florence. The picture is a renaissance one; it marvellously represents man in dignity and solemn representation. Hence, Perugino used many vertical directions in his figures and his architectures, so that the vertical lines are preponderant, which also always gives to the viewer an impression of rest, rigidity, immutability, and aspiration to spirituality.

In the central scene we see Peter and Jesus. The face of Jesus is all tenderness and the robe he wears is purple, which contains the red of love but is also the imperial colour of worldly power. Peter has a face of wisdom. He has a white beard and spare white hair. Perugino gave Peter also a face of force and determination. The scene around Jesus and Peter is lively. Two Apostles are chatting; one Apostle turns his back to the viewer. Remark how Perugino then also placed an Apostle on the other, right side, with his back to the viewer. On the left of the frame are six Apostles. We do not know who the other personages are. But on the right are Peter and five more Apostles. Among these may be Sandro Botticelli. The youth resembles somewhat this great master. After the Apostles comes Perugino himself, accompanied by Pinturicchio. And these are followed by the two architects of the Sistine Chapel, Baccio Pontelli and Giovanni de' Dolci. They wear their architects' instruments. They also are engaged in talk, in a lively scene. The faces of the Apostles are all different of course, but we find as well aged men for instance like behind Jesus, as very young men just behind Peter. Perugino thus emphasised Jesus's youth in contrast, and Peter's age.

Peter receives the large keys to the Kingdom from Jesus. Perugino painted here much in light blue colours. Around the blue areas he used light green but in this green he applied yellow to show the volumes of the bodies so that the green does not contrast too much with the blue. Yellow is the complementary colour to blue and also in other places Perugino used this golden yellow to yellow-orange hue that matches many other colours well. Red and other hues are practically absent, so absent that the viewer obtains a very harmonious impression of the hues, but also a cold impression. The warmer hues are in deficit in Perugino's fresco, but this adds to the cool mood of distant dignity of the picture. Instead of pure red, Perugino used orange or brown hues.

Perugino created a strong sense of open space and he used various techniques for that. He had three bands of figures and each time diminished the height of his personages. Thus, three people are standing in the massive doors of the Temple and these figures are painted much smaller than the Apostles and Jesus in the foreground. The Temple and the arches are smaller also than the front figures, but Perugino showed their dimension by placing the three figures in the doors of the Temple so that the viewer has an easy grasp of the truly huge height of the construction. The most important effect of space however comes from the lines of the marble slabs that cover the floor before the Temple and arches. The golden lines flee to a vanishing point inside the Temple and also the horizontal lines are drawn more closely together as they near the Temple. This ladder pattern creates a very strong sense of perspective in the viewer. Finally, Perugino painted a fine landscape of green hills on the right and of blue mountains on the left. Look at these mountains: Perugino painted them gradually less pronounced blue, to lighter and more grey tones, in line with the hues of the horizon. The effect of hills and mountains becoming of bluer colours in the distance was noted and known by the Renaissance painters. Perugino also applied aerial perspective in the sky; the sky becomes darker towards the top. Perugino placed very many figures, scenes and architectures in his picture but he obtained a unity and clarity of depiction that is remarkable. He leaves few empty spaces, little visually negative space around his subjects, but reaches strong perspective by powerful visual means so that his painting is extremely light and open.

‘Jesus handing over the Keys to Saint Peter’ is of course a venerable picture. It is probably among the hundred or so best well known paintings ever made. It had all the qualities of an original view when it was made and it is now a textbook example of renaissance composition. The picture brings us in a cool, solemn mood, as emotions are not expressed in it. But a major painting of the Sistine Chapel, made in the middle of the Renaissance and in the private chapel of the Popes, had to express grandeur and solemnity. This was the main picture of the chapel after all, the picture that justified the power and mission of the Roman Popes. We continue to look at this picture as an almost perfect masterpiece of balanced, clear composition, fine structure and strong perspective, perfect creation of space and volumes, wonderful detail in figures and architecture and harmonious colours.

Saint Peter and Malchus

Painter from Burgundy, first half of the 16th century. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon.

Matthew, Mark and Luke tell in their Gospels that when Jesus was arrested his followers wondered whether to draw their swords. One of them drew his sword indeed and struck off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus however told the men to put back their swords for, as he expressed, who would draw the sword would perish by the sword. Luke wrote that Jesus also healed the man whose ear had been wounded by touching him. John also tells this story, but he wrote that the man who had struck the servant was Peter and that the servant's name was Malchus.

The painting 'Saint Peter and Malchus' from the Museum of Fine Arts of Dijon was made by an anonymous painter, either an unknown Flemish master or a painter native from Burgundy. In the beginning of the sixteenth century Flanders had still strong ties with burgundy. German influences also show in the picture.

The picture consists of two scenes. To the left, Jesus is praying and suffering the fears of his coming Passion. This is a scene from the Garden of Gethsemane. While the Apostles are asleep, also Peter, Jesus receives a vision of his crucifixion. An angel appears to him, carrying the cross. In the right part of the painting, Jesus is arrested and led away by the men of the high priest. Jesus is already bound with ropes. Judas has just kissed Christ and thus betrayed him to the guards. He tries to escape like a thief in the night. Further down, Peter has thrown down Malchus and with a mighty blow prepares to cut off the ear of the unfortunate servant. The scene is very lively; the emphasis is on the narrative, on the stories of Jesus's Passion so that the first aim of this panel must have been to teach in vivid representation the arrest of Jesus. The painting may have been a panel made locally to instruct the devotees of a church, but it has qualities that go beyond a beginner's picture.

The anonymous master used marvellous colours of great intensity. He used vivid hues and even golden colours, even though the scene is situated at night. He applied deep blue in the soldier on the right and on Peter, dark green-blue in the sky. In the middle, another soldier wears a green tunic and that colour contrasts nicely with the red-orange, flowing cloak of Peter. The colour of treachery is yellow and that colour was in the Middle Ages and also in the sixteenth century of France and Flanders also the colour of Judas. The anonymous master obtained a nice effect with his use of this golden hue. We find yellow-golden areas in the lower left, in the robe of Malchus who was also a traitor in the story since he helped to arrest Jesus. Malchus had to be emphasised as one of the main characters of the story and thus the master painted him in a striking colour, and in the same hue as the traitor Judas. The next golden area is in this Judas, and then we find also gold in the flag to the extreme right. The viewer's eye naturally follows this bright direction of gold, from Malchus upwards, over Jesus's arrest, to the flag and the dim lantern above. This is the direction of treason, of mischief and of the tragedy. This movement indicates the main direction of the painting and leads the attention of the viewer from Peter to Jesus and then upwards, to the heavens. The golden flag also means here that Jesus is being imprisoned in the name of treachery and wrong-doing.

The anonymous Burgundian master not only used strong, vivid, even acid colours thus judiciously to sustain his visual composition. He also applied fine structure. He situated the scene of the arrest in the rightmost triangle, under the left diagonal of the frame and separated the two scenes – of Jesus's suffering in the Garden of olives and of his arrest – by a mass of rocks and trees. This landscape remained sparing, as it should be since it only serves as a background and separation, but it is positioned nicely and also holds some of the golden glows among its green-grey hues. The painter used the diagonals of the frame in his structure. The scene of Peter and Jesus is in the lower diagonal. Above that diagonal, the artist separated the upper triangle in two and placed the scene of the praying Jesus in the left part. That part is caught between the left border of the frame and the right diagonal. In the last part of the upper scene, he painted the dark night and a far view. Thereby his visual representation of the scenes was complete. The master balanced marvellously and logically this panel thus in three parts. And in the lower triangle he also separated the scenes in two: one part holding the arrest of Jesus, the other Peter slaying Malchus. This painter had thus a keen eye for balance and we remark this concern also in the fact that Peter, wearing a blue robe and inclined to the left, is finely balanced as a counterweight by the soldier on the right, also in blue, and inclining to the right. Various other such diligent symmetries, lines and structures can be found back in the painting, such as for instance the placement by the master of Judas just at the cross section of the diagonals. His picture is really a picture of treachery.

The procession of the soldiers, the intersecting lines of the lances and peaks of the soldiers, the expression of agony on Malchus' face, the way the soldiers are armed and shown in full armour, indicate German influences. It seems indeed that the two scenes were derived from two sketches made by the great master of Nuremberg, Hans Dürer.^{F39} And also in the flowing cloak of Peter we find a view typical of Nuremberg painters.

The painter of 'Saint Peter and Malchus' has remained anonymous but he was no simple, local, uneducated master. Even if he borrowed some of his structure from Dürer, he put the various scenes nicely together. He must have studied in good workshops of Flemish, Burgundian or German masters. He may well have studied in Nuremberg. He mastered completely the arts of composition, structure, use of splendid hues, and all that to support the narrative and the striking visual effects of his picture. He was also a marvellously skilled draughtsman, since all details of the faces and dresses are wonderfully painted. He made a humble jewel of Burgundy, a true delight for the viewer and a respectful honour to the New Testament.

The Denial of Saint Peter

The Master of Solomon's Judgement (documented in Rome ca. 1615-1630). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

The 'Master of the Judgement of Solomon' was an otherwise unknown painter active in Rome from around 1620 to 1630. Some of his paintings were attributed to Giovanni Lanfranco, Guercino, Orazio Gentileschi, Guy François, Valentin de Boulogne, Gérard Douffet and a score of others, until they were recognised as being from another and the same unknown master. This painter must have known very well Caravaggio's pictures. Yet he differed much in representation from that master. For instance, he liked putting more figures in his scenes than Caravaggio. The name 'Master of the Judgement of Solomon' was given by Roberto Longhi after one of similar works now in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. The unknown master made powerful paintings nevertheless and his pictures would have honoured his true name.

In the 'Denial of Saint Peter' we see on the far right Peter being accused of having accompanied Jesus. A woman points at Peter and at least one other man takes up on the accusation. The scene is set in a guards' room. Soldiers are playing at dice.

Luke tells in his evangelium that before Jesus's Passion, Jesus told Peter that he had prayed for him so that his faith would not fail. Peter replied that he would go to prison and to death for Jesus. Whereupon Jesus had dryly retorted that by the time the cock would crow that day, Peter would have denied him three times. When later in the day Jesus was arrested and led away to the house of the high priest, Peter followed Jesus from a distance. There were people in the courtyard, sitting around a fire and Peter joined them. When he sat near the fire, a maidservant suddenly cried out that Peter too had been with Jesus. But Peter denied that. Somewhat later another man said the same but Peter denied again. An hour later, another man insisted that he had seen Peter with Jesus. But Peter told the man he did not know what he was talking about. At that moment the cock crowed and Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. Peter remembered then what Jesus had said. He went outside and wept.

The Master of Solomon's Judgement painted the denial of Saint Peter entirely in the new way that Caravaggio had brought to Rome. He showed light falling dramatically on the figures so that their faces, and almost only their faces, are lit up. He showed a lively scene of figures drawn in a very realistic way, for which he may have used models as he might have found in the streets of Rome. He painted the background black and undecorated. We see Saint Peter on the far right of the frame and not in a central position even though he is the major personage of the picture, so that this master did not shy away from unconventional composition. And yet, like Caravaggio this master knew well the strength of structure in a picture. The master was also a fine colourist.

Saint Peter holds his hand to his chest as if to say, 'Me? No, you are mistaken; I am not the man that was there! I know of nothing. Leave me alone.' Peter is an old man and the Master showed him as a wizened and toughened person with a much wrinkled forehead, a grey beard the colour of steel and a dark grey robe that blends with the

background. The Master however painted Peter's face exquisitely in the scarce light, as well as the chiaroscuro on Peter's robe.

Looking to the left of Peter we see the maidservant accusing Peter with a pointed finger and even a man also suddenly saying, 'Yes, I remember seeing him too.' The Master depicted this scene with great realism and splendidly in the immediacy of the act of recognition and accusation. Further to the left we see an officer at a table. He wears a cuirass and again we remark the skill of the anonymous Master in showing the play of light on the steel armour. Three other persons, probably soldiers, look intently at the game of dice. So there are two scenes: one with Peter on the right but with the accusing maidservant as the central figure, and one on the left with the soldiers. The officer is a central figure between these two scenes.

The armoured officer of course represents the full danger, the menace to Peter. As long as the officer does not move or address Peter, Peter is safe. The whole attention of the scene must therefore be focused on the officer, even though he sits leisurely and seemingly oblivious of Peter. The Master Painter placed the potential danger right in the middle of the picture, to be noticed thus by the attentive viewer. And yet he placed the man in a very natural, relaxed, casual way there, playing a game.

The Master also linked the right and left scenes. There is a dice player at the extreme left with a red shirt. The man pointing to Peter also has a right sleeve, but somewhat going on brown hues, and the arm points at Peter so goes to this figure. Peter wears a brown cloak. The transition from red to red-brown to brown forms the link between the scenes. So the Master diligently used colours to draw the viewer's attention in a certain direction, to Peter. Remark also how the scene on the left well balances the scene on the right. In each scene there are three persons, on either side of the soldier in armour. One might also discover structure in the two diagonals used in the direction of the faces that are lightened up.

The force of the painting is found in the faces of the figures. All faces are very realistic, finely painted with great skill. It is marvellous to see the expression of faked incredulity on Peter's face, the naivety and suddenness yet also the mischievous accusation in the maidservant's face and the light on the bald, much wrinkled, old, powerful face of the squat man that points to Peter. The soldier at the table is the weary warrior who has seen many battles and who fears nothing anymore. This man rather ignores Peter and the woman, unhurried. He will be ready to enter into the act when something really serious happens; Peter is no danger for the moment. At the table, opposite the soldier, a man is looking at the dice intently. He may have wagered much money on the game and he seems to be calculating what to do next, supporting his head with his arm. The other two are rather young men and the one that has a hand on the table may be trying to hide something there. He looks as if he were the smart one. But the officer will not be caught. He does not look at the man but fixes his gaze on the dice. As long as these do not change position, the game will be fair. The exchange of looks and of gestures will bring the eyes of the viewer from centre point to left, to right, and back again, and thus give the impression of liveliness, and of the rapidity of the story that the painter needed to convey.

The Master of Solomon's Judgement as a great follower of Caravaggio's ways of painting, but he was not a slave of that fashion. He had a vision of his own, own

power of depiction, a keen eye and hand for representing his scenes in movement. He knew very well how to paint and could bring an original view in his pictures. It is a real pity we have not yet discovered his name. He showed the scene of Peter's denial in a masterly way, so at least he earned fully the title of 'Master' by which he is known today.

Saint Peter freed by the Angel

Johann Heinrich Schöpfung (1609-1683). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

Johann Heinrich Schöpfung was a German painter, born in Biberach-an-der-Riss in 1609. In his youth, from around 1635, he spent many years in Italy, mainly in Rome and Naples. In 1652 he settled in Augsburg and from there painted many religious pictures for churches of Bavaria and the rest of southern Germany. Little is known of his life. He was a Baroque painter, but his style announced German Rococo art.

Schöpfung's picture 'Saint Peter freed by the Angel' might have been painted in Rome or in Naples. It shows Peter in prison, being awakened by an angel and taken out of prison, into the light. Peter's deliverance is narrated in the 'Acts of the Apostles'. King Herod persecuted the Apostles of Christ. He beheaded James the Great and arrested Peter. Herod wanted to wait with Peter's execution until after the feast of Passover. The church of Peter meanwhile prayed for him. Peter had to sleep between two soldiers and he was fastened with two chains. But while the guards slept, an angel of God appeared and Peter's cell was flooded with light. The chains fell away from Peter. The angel told Peter to put on his belt, his sandals, and to wrap his cloak around him. The angel passed with Peter two sections of guards; they passed through the iron gates of the prison, into the city, and there walking in the streets the angel suddenly disappeared. Peter was in a dream and still thought he had received a vision of freedom, but then he saw that he was really free and out of the prison, walking in the city. He went to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered. All the people were amazed to see Peter and he told them how he had been liberated. Then Peter continued his way. Herod looked for Peter without success. He questioned the soldiers, left for his residence in Caesarea and gave orders to have the guards executed.

Schöpfung showed the two soldiers in Peter's cell. One is lying heavily on his back on the ground of the prison, the other sits asleep against a wall, behind the angel. There is another prisoner in the cell, but that might well be Peter himself, in chains, before the angel told him to stand up and dress. Schöpfung may have wanted to illustrate part of the narrative of the Acts, which states that Peter came out of the cell as if in a trance or dream. So we see Peter dressed, standing up as if getting out of the almost nude, enchained prisoner. We see this prisoner only in the back, so that Schöpfung left uncertainty on whether this could be Peter too.

The story told furthermore that the cell was flooded with light. Schöpfung let the light fall through the open door of the prison, promising freedom to Peter. Schöpfung painted this light nicely so that it falls on the angel, on Peter, on the back of the prisoner and on the wall behind. He treated the way the light falls in the cell quite expertly. And he showed vigorous colours but with great care. He used enough grey and brown colours to give an overall mood of desolation to the viewer. He even showed the walls with dark tones here and there to give an impression of dirt. But he painted two marvellous patches of red colour and of blue and these bring splendour to the picture. The angel wears a light, vermillion robe and Peter has put on his deep blue cloak. The blue is dark but of a strong enough hue to dominate the picture with the red of the angel. And then Schöpfung used splendid lead-whites on the angel's

shirt, on Peter's white hair and beard and on the prisoner's emaciated but muscular back, some even on the guard's armour. Schönfeld knew how only a few patches of strongly contrasting colours in judicious position might give an impression of rich colours in the entire picture. He did not have to bring such hues everywhere.

We noted already Schönfeld's mastership in depicting nude bodies in the prisoner in the front. This effect also adds to the fine tones of great professionalism. Schönfeld painted with rough strokes, which, if they were not in such pronounced, intense hues, could announce the Rococo style of for instance Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. But he modulated his brushstrokes and in places where he thought detail was necessary, such as in Saint Peter, he also knew to use lighter, closer and finer brushwork. Finally, he did not shy away from a few non-conspicuous details that show he read the story of the Acts of the Apostles well. Thus there is no window to the cell but a high, dark oval, which lets the viewer understand that it is night outside. So the light coming into the prison must indeed be miraculous, like told in the story. And Peter was fastened to the walls in two chains; these chains now hang along the wall behind him, unopened, so that Peter could not but miraculously have escaped from them. Schönfeld also painted Peter and the angel as elongated figures, which usually evoke in viewers feelings of respect. They show the angel and Peter as figures of power and of intellect.

'Saint Peter freed by the Angel' of Johann Heinrich Schönfeld is an accomplished picture of delicate colours, nicely following the story of the Acts of the Apostles. Schönfeld must have been a sensitive artist with a fine feeling of colour. He also brought good structure in his picture, since the main scene forms a pyramid. The angel's head is at the top of the pyramid. The left side goes over the guard who is asleep against the wall to the guard who lies on the ground. The right side goes over Peter to the seated prisoner. Schönfeld's use of dark and light is correct and dramatic. So Schönfeld made a picture that does not seem to be marvellously striking at first sight, but that has qualities that must be discovered. Once, when one has found out the subtle qualities of depiction of Schönfeld, one has to regard this picture as a fine masterpiece. It is a small jewel that the spectator discovers, of a painter who has been much under-rated.

Christ appears to Peter on the Via Appia

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). The National Gallery – London. 1601-1602.

In the history of art one discovers that at certain moments and in particular places there appear geniuses with clear vision, more intelligence and energy of expression than generations before could generate. Such was the case for the town of Bologna in the late sixteenth century. Bologna was then still one of the major towns of the Papal States in middle Italy. Lodovico Carracci, Agostino Carracci and Annibale Carracci were three members of the same family who innovated and inspired the long tradition of artistic Bologna. Agostino and Annibale were brothers; Lodovico was their cousin. Together they founded in 1580 in Bologna an academy of painting called the 'Accademia degli Incamminati'. Lodovico probably had the idea the first; Agostino was its theoretician. Lodovico was influenced by Italian Mannerism and by the great Venetian artists, Titian and Tintoretto. Agostino also had travelled to Venice and preferred the Venetian colours and light to Florentine Mannerism. Lodovico and Agostino remained mainly in Bologna and in particular Agostino favoured return to more rigorous pictures on classic themes. This return to a more austere, solemn style of painting was a reaction to the tension and disregard for artistic rules of harmony of Mannerism. The Carraccis preferred a calm, clear composition and well-delineated surfaces of colour.

Lodovico Carracci was born in 1555 and died in Bologna in 1619. Agostino Carracci was born equally in Bologna, in 1557, and died in Parma in 1602. Annibale, born in 1560, died in Rome in 1609. With the Carraccis the fame of the Venetian painting passed to Bologna for about twenty years.

Annibale Carracci, the youngest of the three, was the more gifted. His genius and talent were too strong for any tradition. As occurred with so many of the very great painters who worked immersed in a certain paradigm of arts, he could not but be influenced in his youth by the style of the moment. He nevertheless grew out of any style and developed his own way of representation and of colouring. He was also more rigorous in his concepts, like Agostino, but he observed nature with a fresh, uncomplicated eye and he found sweetness and gentleness there. Since he was the youngest he was the one to discover the world outside Bologna. He worked in other towns and mainly in Rome. Annibale's major work was the decoration of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, especially the ceiling of the Galleria of that palace. The palace is currently the French Embassy. For this the rich Cardinal Odoardo Farnese commissioned him. But Annibale had issues over money with the cardinal. Cardinal Farnese paid him badly or not at all. The already melancholic artist became desperate and depressed over the cardinal's ingratitude so that although he had worked in the Palazzo Farnese since 1597, he stopped that work altogether in 1605. Annibale's painting 'Christ appears on the Via Appia' dates from this period, while he was also working in the Palazzo Farnese.

Saint Peter was among the first apostles, chosen together with his brother Andrew. Peter was a fisherman and the most humble, deeply human figure in the Gospels. He combined courage and cowardice, perseverance and despair. Jesus told the disciples that Peter would lead the church and as is told in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter indeed took charge after Jesus's death. There were probably more intelligent and

learned men among the disciples, but when inaction paralysed the group Peter took charge with the courage instilled to him by Jesus. Peter started the real missionary work. Paul was the giant that shaped Christian religion, but without Peter the movement would have died out in Jerusalem.

Many scenes of Peter's life, as narrated in the Gospels and as passed by generations in legends, have been painted. Annibale Carracci made a picture of one of those legends that happened in Rome. When Peter was preaching in that city the Emperor Nero persecuted the Christians. Peter fled from the town over the Via Appia. He encountered Jesus on that same road going in the opposite direction. Peter asked, "Domine, quo Vadis?" Where are you going? Jesus answered; "I'm going to Rome to be crucified again." As had happened before, Jesus had rebuked Peter and shown him what really needed to be accomplished. Peter interpreted Jesus's words as an order to return to Rome. Peter went back and was crucified on Nero's command. He told the executioners that he was not worth of dying the same way as Christ; he asked to be crucified upside down. This scene of Peter's martyrdom has been painted repeatedly.

In the picture of Annibale Carracci, Jesus is seen on the Via Appia wearing his cross. Peter is astonished and obviously in fear at the sight of Jesus. The question, "Quo Vadis" and the answer of Jesus pointing back to Rome are in the moment. Annibale Carracci made a sober picture, a style that we would now call Classicism, but this was just the way Annibale liked to paint; this was his way. The figures of Peter and Jesus are shown in full and they are very realistically detailed without elements of ornament. The action is vivid, yet credible and not mannered. The scene is natural. The landscape of the Roman Via Appia is held simple and true. Peter is the grey-bearded apostle; Jesus is half nude as in his Resurrection and as he was on the cross. Both figures are elegantly dressed; Peter wears a coloured toga and Christ a red cloak that curls in the wind next to his body.

The picture of Annibale Carracci is clean and uncomplicated, its message as directly conveyed as could be. Even though further painters of the generation after the Carraccis would be Baroque painters, the Carracci family inaugurated a way of depiction that impressed very much the French painters like Nicolas Poussin. The French artists favoured these presentations instead of the passionate scenes of Caravaggio and founded their own style in this manner. This style suited perfectly well the spiritual representations of Gospel scenes for intimate pictures as well as for the grand paintings that could decorate the French palaces and churches of the splendid courts of the kings Louis XIII, Louis XIV and Louis XV.

The paintings in the style of the Carraccis were one answer to the Italian Mannerism. Mannerism showed a profusion of contorted bodies, preferably entangled, painted in drastic foreshortening, ready to burst out of the frames in violence and in hard tension. The Carraccis' calm art relaxed Mannerism. Classicism in the style of the Carraccis was a solution to Mannerism, a reaction to it and a logical evolution. Another logical evolution to Mannerism was Baroque. Baroque had all the qualities of an equally passionate art, but the passions were resolved and often a quietness and a lively sweetness, even sentimentality, hangs over Baroque's pictures. This style was an antithesis to the tensions of Mannerism also.

And such was the case even with the scenes of Caravaggio.

Saint Peter and the Centurion Cornelius

Bernardo Cavallino (ca. 1616-1656). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1645-1650.

The scene of 'Saint Peter and the Centurion Cornelius' is the representation of a story from the 'Acts of the Apostles' in the Bible and a rare theme in painting. Yet, the scene shows one of the most important moments of Christianity.

The Acts of the Apostles tell how, after Jesus's Passion and Resurrection, Peter travelled to many places in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria to spread the word. Peter went also to the town of Lydda, preached and performed miracles there, then went on to Jaffa and stayed for some time in the house of a tanner called Simon.

Meanwhile, there lived in Caesarea a centurion called Cornelius. He was God-fearing and sympathetic to Jewish causes. One day, Cornelius saw an angel of God coming to him and calling out his name. The angel told that Cornelius that his gifts and prayers had been well accepted by God. Now Cornelius was to send men to Jaffa and fetch there the man called Peter, staying in the house of Simon, near the sea. Cornelius ordered two of his servants to go to Jaffa and bring Peter to him.

In Jaffa, in the morning, Peter went on the roof of Simon's house to say his prayers. He was hungry and looking forward to his meal, but he fell in a trance. He had a vision then. He was how the heavens opened and a big container was let down to earth, to his roof. It contained all kinds of animals, birds and reptiles, animals that Peter was not allowed to eat by ancient Jewish custom. But a voice said to kill and eat. Peter refused to eat things so profane and unclean. Three times the voice answered that what God had cleaned, Peter should not call profane. Then the container was drawn up to the heavens again.

Cornelius' men arrived right after this vision of Peter. The men called out, asking for Peter. The voice of heaven told Peter to look at the man and to go with them. The servants of Cornelius delivered the same message. Peter invited the servants to enter the house, and he lodged them. The next day he went with them to Caesarea.

Cornelius had been waiting for Peter. When Peter reached the centurion's house, Cornelius went out to meet the Apostle. He fell at Peter's feet and gave him respect, in front of many of his relations and friends that he had also asked to come. But Peter said, 'Stand up, I am only a man.' Peter then said that he knew it was forbidden for Jews to mix with other people. But he told everybody that God had made it very clear to him that he should not call anyone profane or unclean.

Cornelius now told Peter how the angel had ordered him to fetch the Apostle to his house and he asked for Peter to give his advice. Peter repeated he had understood that God would accept anybody, of any nationality and language, who feared God. Peter then explained to the people all that had happened to Jesus. He told them about Jesus's death and gave witness of his resurrection.

While Peter was thus speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all who listened. The Jews were really astonished to see how the Holy Spirit came upon the gentiles. These suddenly spoke all foreign languages, and proclaimed the greatness of God. Peter said that now, as all had seen how these gentiles had received the Holy Spirit; they would not be withheld from Baptism. So Peter ordered the gentiles to be baptised with water like the Jews, in the name of Jesus Christ. Cornelius and his friends asked Peter to stay for a while with them.

Bernardo Cavallino was a Neapolitan painter of the seventeenth century. He studied with Massimo Stanzione but little more is known of him and the artists with whom he worked afterwards. He probably died from the plague in Naples in 1656, merely forty years old. He made smaller paintings from scenes of the Old and New Testament and of Roman antiquity. His picture 'Saint Peter and Cornelius' was made in his easily recognisable style. He was fully a Baroque painter and his work announces in many aspects the Rococo movement.

Cavallino's painting looks like a rough sketch until we discover the details of the colours he used, and truly see the elegance of his figures.

We see the centurion knelt before Peter. Peter urges the man to stand up, and he blesses the centurion. The centurion is accompanied by his friends, his household, and his neighbours and these form a dense crowd behind him. On the right Cavallino painted an elegantly dressed young nobleman in blue clothes. This seems to be an auto-portrait of the artist. Cavallino drew himself thus often in his pictures.

Cavallino applied predominantly cool hues in his picture: soft blue, much grey, diluted yellows and green. When we study these closely we see great richness in variation of hues. Cavallino let light play luxuriously on all the cloaks and costumes. He used slightly brighter hues on the left and right of the centurion but placed the man in the shadows, to show his humbleness in front of Peter. He painted the centurion in subdued brown colours so that the man, who kneels before Peter and shows him his respect, is almost hidden in the crowd. On the left side of the picture Cavallino showed further full shadows and here he used almost monochrome very dark, even black colour. The further his figures are from the central scene, the less clear and pronounced did Cavallino paint them, thus using a form of aerial perspective, which created a good sense of space although there is no landscape in the background to show the width of the land.

Cavallino's style is well apparent in this picture, though the painter was at this moment still studying with Stanzione in Naples. Cavallino painted in soft tones but with a rich and varied palette. He showed his personages with mannered grace and liveliness. His picture is charming, delicate, sophisticated in representation. Cavallino knew the necessity for some composition since he placed the centurion centrally and symmetrically of him we find Saint Peter on one side and on the other side the young man in blue clothes. Further off, towards the extremes of the frame, there are groups of people. All these figures are painted in different poises, looking, talking, and pushing forward. There is a soft melancholy in this picture, as of an old tradition ended in rapid grace. Naples must have been like this in the middle of the seventeenth century: wealthy and graceful, a city of old families and a city also of great poverty, a

city that lived rapidly so that all things had to be made and delivered in a quick way, also paintings. Life was short and rapid under the Vesuvius. Yet, Cavallino's painting had to be delightful, tender, and somewhat mysterious. Cavallino balanced the poverty of Peter, whom he painted almost clad in rags, with the haughty elegance of the wealthy youth – the artist himself. Naples thus was a city of contrasts. Cavallino witnesses a major scene from the New Testament; hence he contrasted also himself in brighter hues set off against the smoother, more subdued hues of the old theme.

The scene that Cavallino chose to depict, the meeting between Saint Peter and the centurion Cornelius, is rare in painting. Yet it is one of the most important stories of Christianity. By this scene from the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity was opened to the whole of humanity and stayed not a sect of Judaism. In this scene, the miracle of Pentecost is repeated, a major moment of Christianity since non-Jews and also people that were not disciples of Jesus receive the Holy Spirit. The Apostles had continued to live in the habits of the Jews. By the vision of Peter, wherein God urged him to eat all food and also food that was forbidden to the Jews, God installed a Christianity that was for all men of whatever race and beliefs. Bernardo Cavallino captured this most important feature of Christianity, its universality, in a picture of relaxed loveliness. Neapolitans might cherish the moment and live at the surface of things, but they were not people without depth of feeling and they understood maybe more than many other what was essential in the Bible.

The Crucifixion of Saint Peter

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Santa Maria del Popolo – Rome. 1601.

Caravaggio was one of the painters that made the Baroque style. But Caravaggio was no theoretician like the Carraccis. He painted as he felt with all the maturity of a man who was almost detached from the world because of his loneliness, even because of his living as an outcast, but who lived profoundly with images of the reality of his times.

Caravaggio's Crucifixion of Saint Peter is very different from Annibale Carracci's picture. Saint Peter is painted in dramatic foreshortening. But like the Peter of Carracci, this Peter is strangely not in stress and tension. Peter is an old man and he is already nailed to the cross, but he seems more to be worried over the whole act of raising the cross and he seems to wonder whether the structure and the nails will hold. He does not seem in pain, or to be a tortured man like the suffering Christ.

Just how much a genius Caravaggio was can be seen in the total skill with which he painted Peter and the workers who are dressing the cross. Caravaggio knew the human body and all the lessons of Michelangelo. The way he showed Peter's body in Mannerist foreshortening, a faint light from the lower left shining on the body showing all the lines of Peter's muscles and all the lines of age of Peter's old face, is simply remarkable. Caravaggio preferred to situate the scene at light so that no superfluous details could distract our view from the essence of the scene.

Caravaggio shows his famous composition based on slanting lines. There are two such directions here in the painting. One direction is the line of the cross of Peter. The other is almost perpendicular to the cross and Caravaggio emphasised this direction by drawing the line of the rope with which one of the helpers pulls on the cross. Caravaggio had to fill in the space under the cross, so he put here a man who heaves on the wood with his bent back. We also only see the back of the man who pulls the rope and indeed, as compared to Peter, these figures are relatively unimportant, as would be any landscape. Thus the drama is centred on Peter and on Peter alone. Remark how the main directions do not follow the main diagonals. This was yet another means of Caravaggio to denote instant movement, the brink of the action, and the difference between his views and tradition.

Classicism and Baroque were two answers to Mannerism. Classicism was static dignity, whereas Baroque was liveliness in action. Caravaggio certainly was a genius, but unlike the Carraccis he did not paint from out of an intellectual, logical reasoned choice. He painted with his guts, based on his own particular feelings for composition. He was probably also a very intelligent man, and endowed with a talent that he could master instead of letting it grow wild as for instance Rosso Fiorentino and Giulio Romano did. Therefore Caravaggio resembles the Carracci's style, maybe even more than his style resembles the style of later Baroque phases. Caravaggio did not theorise

on his art, but it was taken up as a major art that in the Baroque would be the main way of representation of at least a hundred years to come.

The Crucifixion of Saint Peter

Jacopo Negreti called Palma Il Giovane (1548-1628). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1614.

Palma Giovane's real name was Jacopo di Antonio Negreti. He was a great-nephew of the other Jacopo Negreti, now called Palma Vecchio. Palma Giovane probably learned to paint in his father's workshop in Venice, but in 1567 the Duke of Urbino already acted as his Maecenas and supported him to live in Rome. Palma Giovane worked there until about 1573, and then returned to Venice. After a fire in the Doges' palace in 1577 he worked with Veronese and Tintoretto on the new decoration of the palace. He had his own workshop in Venice and after Titian's, Veronese's and Tintoretto's deaths he remained the greatest of the Venetian painters of the sixteenth century. He painted mainly scenes from ancient mythology after 1600. Before that he had mostly worked for churches and Scuole of Venice. The 'Crucifixion of Saint Peter' is a late work of Palma Giovane: he was about sixty-six years old when the painting was made.

The painting shows a double view: of Saint Peter's crucifixion on earth and a glory in heaven above. The scene is painted in a view that goes upward; it must have hung high in a church or Scuola, or having been a cartoon for a work on a high wall or ceiling. It is very much a Venetian image.

Palma Giovane painted Saint Peter's crucifixion below. Peter asked to be crucified upside down because he felt he was so much the less than Jesus. So Peter's cross was reverted and we see men nailing the old Peter to the cross. A large crowd of soldiers and Romans has gathered, among whom are also men on horseback. Palma Giovane painted elements of a landscape here. The scene is very lively and dramatic, with all figures showing great energy in action. The scene is painted in brown and yellow hues, almost like a camaieu. Above the lower scene on earth are white-grey-blue clouds and these separate the earth from the heavens. Palma Giovane was a very accomplished painter. He painted all the figures with much vigour and he used just a few white touches diligently to indicate the play of light coming from the Trinity, to sculpt the bodies of Peter and of the soldiers. Admire for instance the fine detailing of the Roman centurion on the left, and the head of his horse.

The scene in heaven is equally grand. God the Father thrones on clouds and Jesus the Son sits next to him. Above is the dove that represents the Holy Spirit. So here Palma Giovane represented the Trinity. The Virgin Mary is on the left, under and next to her son Jesus. Around this scene are angels with trumpets and other angels showing the instruments of Jesus's Passion. Palma Giovane conceived the scene as an adoration of the Trinity, but the Trinity and the saints and angels have come to witness a major event on earth. The scene is also very lively in heaven, with all angels engaged in some action, in different poses and in movement. The image here is also painted in brown, yellow and white hues. We might imagine the picture of Palma Giovane as his own private vision at a late age of the Trinity and the grandeur of Peter's crucifixion. Mary and the saints in heaven have gathered at a scene of horror but that scene saw also a triumph of the church and of Christian faith.

Palma Giovane must have been influenced much by other compositions and scenes of crucifixions. His picture makes us think of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Pauline Chapel of the Vatican and also of Tintoretto's paintings in the Scuola Grande di san Rocco in Venice. Palma Giovane used the darker, brown hues of ochre that one finds also with many Venetian painters such as Titian and Tintoretto. The picture resembles very much the dynamic, theatrical staging of Tintoretto. Palma Giovane did not use however Tintoretto's touches of bright colour; by which this artist brought further liveliness in his palette and pictures. Palma Giovane's painting may have remained unfinished and merely a sketch that concentrated on the composition of figures, before the painter would have applied the last touches of brighter hues here and there.

Palma Giovane's painting is not a picture anymore of the Venetian renaissance. It is a Mannerist and Baroque painting of the seventeenth century. The overt, demonstrative show of emotions is complete in the picture, fully in the style of Tintoretto, like Tintoretto used also in the Scuola di San Rocco. It announces the large works of fantastic, grand glory of the heavens as painted by for instance Giovanni Lanfranco in the domes of Roman churches.

With Palma Giovane, who worked with Titian during the latter's last years and who finished Titian's last Pietà, the era of the great Venetian painters stopped virtually. There would be painters from abroad who would still work in Venice, attracted by the city's wealth and avidity of pictures, but the energy of Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto had fled from the town. One would have to wait until the eighteenth century to find back a renewal and originality in Venetian art. Venice had by then declined, but this decline seemed to have called for a last burst of creativity in Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734), Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini (1675-1741), Francesco Guardi (1712-1793), Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1683-1754) and of course the greatest of all, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770).

Saint Peter heals Saint Agatha in her Prison

Alessandro Turchi called il Orbetto and Alessandro Veronese (1578 - 1649). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1630.

Saint Agatha was a virgin and a martyr, who died in Catania of the island of Sicily. She was a wealthy girl but the Roman Consul Quintinian tried to seduce her. She refused to give her to the Roman Consul, so he handed her over to a brothel but there also and miraculously she kept her virginity intact. The Roman then tortured her with fire and beat her with sticks. Her breasts were pinched and cut off. In her prison she had a vision of Saint Peter, who came in her cell to heal her. She died on a grid of hot coals and that after an earthquake. Her life remains a gruesome legend of torture, no dates are documented, but her stories were assembled in the Martyrology of Saint Jerome and she is prayed to in Sicily against earthquakes.

Alessandro Turchi was born in Verona around 1578 and hence also called Alessandro Veronese. He was also called 'Il Orbetto' or guide, because as a young boy he had guided his father who had become a beggar after being afflicted with blindness. When he was about ten years old, Turchi was already apprenticed to a painter, to Felice Brusasorzi, and he worked in this studio in Verona. When his master died around 1605, Alessandro Turchi opened his own workshop. Verona is not far from Venice and Turchi may have travelled to Venice, but he was in Rome in 1614 and stayed there until his death in 1649. He worked in Rome for the famous cardinal Scipione Borghese and for other wealthy Romans. Alessandro Turchi was a member of Rome's Accademia di San Luca and he even became its director in 1637, so he was also well accepted in Roman notable circles.

Turchi made many versions of 'Saint Agatha visited in Prison by Saint Peter'. Other copies are in the Walters Art gallery of Baltimore, in the galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Rome, in the Musée des Beaux Arts of Nantes and in the Fitzwilliam Museum of the University of Cambridge. The version conserved in the Musée des Beaux Arts of Strasbourg is one of the finest. It is remarkable how pictures of one and the same theme of Alessandro Turchi are thus conserved in France, England, Italy and the USA. Turchi is thus considered among the greater masters of painting. The painting is also remarkable because it belongs to a rather rare category of pictures of night scenes, lit only by candlelight. Only few painters took on such difficult subjects, among whom we should cite Luca Cambiaso of Genua (1527-1585), Gherard van Honthorst (1590-1656), George de La Tour (1593-1652), who worked in the Lorraine region of France, Francesco Bassano (1549-1592) and the great Antonio Allegri called Correggio (1489-1534). Most of these painters were of the same period. The theme of Saint Agatha in prison is not too rare, but Turchi worked in Rome where Saint Peter's prison was and scenes of Peter in prison were common there.

Turchi's scene represents Saint Agatha sitting on the stones of her cell. Saint Peter visits her and he is accompanied by an angel who may have answered Agatha's pleas and called Peter. The angel holds a torch and he presents a pot with healing balsam to Peter. Paintings in candlelight or torchlight are difficult to make because the artist has to imagine the effects of a point source of light and he or she can use only few colours. In feeble light the colour red should rapidly fade away to black, but Turchi

painted his while picture in warm red and brown hues and rather turned to black the blue cloak of Agatha. The wonderful skill of Turchi however is in his depiction of the effects of the light falling on the naked bodies of Agatha and of the angel. Turchi painted these in full, bright light, and he used delicate and gradual shadows to shape the bodies. Saint Peter remains somewhat more in the shadows but also on him we must admire how Turchi painted the play of light, on the robe of Peter, on his cloak, and how Turchi gradually forced parts of Peter's cloak into the sombre background. If the painting was indeed made around 1630, Caravaggio had already painted his strong masterworks of contrasts between light and shadow so that Turchi was also more inclined to paint such effects.

In the composition of the painting the masses of light to the left of Agatha and to the right of the angel balance each other in symmetry. Turchi made the angel offer the pot of balsam and holding the torch, gestures which evoke a movement forwards towards Agatha. This movement then is prolonged in Saint Peter, who inclines towards Agatha. Saint Peter almost touches Agatha's head with his right hand, and Agatha's foot is close to Peter's foot. The two figures are thus linked, but Peter cannot touch the human, like Jesus could not touch Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. Peter remains a creature that belongs to the heaven, the scene a vision of Agatha. Agatha inclines her head in discouragement, but by that movement she puts her face in line with Peter's hand and also with his face. Thus Turchi in a subtle way joined his figures. His composition may be rather rigid, but the movements of his actors – though very soft – make the scene sufficiently vivid. Turchi added to the movement by depicting the robes of Agatha and of the angel flow freely, as if in a sudden divine wind, around their bodies. Such delicate touches show that Turchi was an accomplished, intelligent and subtle painter. We cannot but admire the play of light on the bodies of Agatha and of the angel. Turchi showed the bodies quite similar, slim, with delicate young traits and he painted Agatha a pure, innocent girl with forms of chest that are hardly different from the angel.

There are three ways to arrive at religion. One can become a religious person because of logic reasoning. They reason about the complexity and beauty of nature and argue that such nature cannot have come to be without the action of a supernatural being. That reasoning must be flawed, because no logic can prove the existence of a God, but it remains one means whereby persons indeed convince themselves the existence of a Deity. A second way to have religious feelings is through mysticism and asceticism. People may be very sensitive of character, and through this sensitivity arrive at the intuition of a Godly presence. They want and desire to become one with this mysterious presence, sometimes impersonified in the grandness of impressive or strange natural landscapes. Such extremely distinct sources of religious behaviour as logic and intuition will always exist and fuel religions.

The third road to religion comes from the seeking of solace from suffering. Life is not easy and with age one can bear less well all the small challenges of life, the setbacks and disappointments of human life. Tragedies can happen: one may lose shelter and health, grow blind; dear ones may die, be unhappy or suffer greatly in flesh and spirit. Such feelings of suffering ask for a catharsis, which can most often not be found with fellow-humans but must and can only be sought inside in the person only. Religion then offers the ready alternative: the image of a God or saint that could promise solace. This image is always present and can be called upon at will. The person knows

that such existence is accepted and taken for truth by so many other humans, that there is always the hope that indeed such a presence is ready to hear appeal in praying. This third and last way to arrive at religion drives most of the common believers. Christian religion presented many saints and for women the cruel faith of Agatha, hurt in her very womanhood because her breasts were cut off, epitomised the suffering woman rescued by the heavens, by Saint Peter himself. Such images were thus many and powerful in European Christianity. It is symptomatic that in times of crisis, of war or of natural disasters, the churches of Europe fill with people whereas in times of abundance the churches are empty. Then only the elder women, always the first to be forgotten and to be alone, shyly enter the buildings that we call and use then as historical monuments, and pray silently before the marble altars, now devoid of the marvellous paintings such as Alessandro Turchi's 'Agatha and Saint Peter', but always with these pictures in mind.

Other paintings:

The Calling of Saint Peter

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1520-1525.

The Calling of Saint Peter

Circle of Domenichino. Galleria Borghese. Rome. First half 17th century.

The Assignment of the Keys to Saint Peter

Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867). Musée Ingres. Montauban.

Christ gives the Keys of the Kingdom to Peter

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Museen, Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1613-1615.

Saint Peter liberated from Prison by an Angel

José de Ribera (1591-1652). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1639.

Quo Vadis Domine?

Giovanni Batista Gaulli called Il Baciccio (1639-1709). Collezioni Zerbone. Genoa. Ca. 1675.

The Martyrdom of Saint Peter

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). Cappella Paulina– The Vatican. 1550.

Saint Peter repentant

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Nasjonalgalleriet – Oslo.

Saint Peter in Penitence

David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

The Liberation of Saint Peter

Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629). Mauritshuis. – The Hague. 1624.

The Liberation of Saint Peter. Gerard van Honthorst (1590-1656). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1616-1618.

The Liberation of Saint Peter. Gian Domenico Ferretti (1692-1768).

Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1736.

The Martyrdom of Saint Peter

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Musée de d'art Ancien – Brussels. 1615-1616.

Scenes of the Life of Saint Peter

Masolino da Panicale (ca. 1387-1447), Masaccio (ca. 1401-1428) and Filippino Lippi (1457-1486). Frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel of the church of Santa Maria del Carmine – Florence. 1425-1427 and around 1485.

Saint Peter

Ludovico Brea. Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1481-1490.

The Apostles Peter and Paul

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). The Hermitage – St Petersburg. 1587-1592.

The Crucifixion of Saint Peter

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1660.

The Crucifixion of Saint Peter

José Antolinez (1635-1675). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1660.

The Martyrdom of Saint Peter the Apostle (after Titian)

Théodore Géricault (1791-1824). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1814.

Saint Peter and Saint Elisabeth of Hungary

Jan Provoost. Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

Saint Peter released from Prison

Follower of Caravaggio. Galleria Borghese. Rome. First half of the 17th century.

The Denial of Saint Peter

Manner of Gherard Seghers called Gherardo delle Notti (1591-1651). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Saint Peter weeps

Francesco Solimena (1657-1747). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

Saint Peter heals Saint Agatha in Prison

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

The eighteenth Centenary of the Martyrdom of Saint Peter

Alexander Maximilian Seitz (1811-1888). Città del Vaticano. Musei Vaticani, Palazzo Apostolico Lateranere. 1867.

The Communion of the Apostles

Jules-Elie Delaunay (1828-1891). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Nantes. 1861.

Saint Peter Preaching in Jerusalem

Charles Poërsen (Ca. 1609-1667). Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Los Angeles. 1642.

Saint Peter

Fra Carnevale (active 1445-1484). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Peter and Saint Paul

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1605.

Saint Peter (Polyptych of Scanzo)

Bartolomeo Vivarini (ca. 1432-after 1491). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Paul

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). Cappella Paulina – The Vatican. 1542.

Saul was a Roman centurion who nourished a special hatred against the followers of Christ. He was a witness to the stoning of Stephen, the first Dean of the church appointed by the apostles, and he approved of the execution. The ‘Golden Legend’ tells that when Dean Stephen was stoned, the Jews who cast the stones took off their garments lest they be made unclean in contact with the blasphemer. They laid their clothes at the feet of the young man called Saul who guarded the garments and thus shared in the guilt of the stoning. John tells in the Acts of the Apostles that Saul began doing great harm to the church; he went from house to house arresting men and women and sending them to prison. John said that Saul was breathing threats to slaughter the Lord’s disciples. Saul went to the high priest of the Jews and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorise him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he might find.^{G38} So, Saul was on his way to put the Christians in chains and take them bound to Jerusalem.

It happened that while he was travelling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light from heaven shone all round him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” “Who are you, Lord?” he asked, and the answer came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless, for though they had heard the voice they could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes they could see nothing at all, and the men had to lead him into Damascus by the hand. For three days he was without sight and took neither food nor drink.^{G38}

Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence painted a fresco of this scene in the Vatican Palace.

Pope Paul III had caused a chapel called the Pauline after his name to be built by Antonio da Sangallo. The Pope asked Michelangelo to paint in this chapel two large pictures. In one scene Michelangelo painted the ‘Conversion of Saint Paul’; the other scene contained the ‘Crucifixion of Saint Peter’. These scenes were made in fresco by Michelangelo at the age of seventy-five. They were the last pictures he painted. Giorgio Vasari remembered in his ‘Lives of the Artists’ that Michelangelo furthermore arranged for another artist, Perin de Vega, to decorate the vaulting with stucco and various other pictures, following Michelangelo’s designs. But that work was not finished. Still according to Vasari, the frescoes caused a great deal of effort for the artist in his old age.

The scenes were a remarkable lesson in humility for the Popes. Peter was crucified head down before their eyes and the formidable warrior of God, Paul, was stricken to the ground. In the magnificently decorated Pauline chapel the Popes were always

confronted with the vulnerability of all human power including their own. The conversion of Saul was also a grand lesson of the Church, for it showed that no sinner, however grievous his act, could despair of pardon. For Saul, whose sins were so great, became so much greater in grace. Or, as the 'Golden Legend' tells, Christ had cured Saul of his pride, offering him the depths of humility, to bring him to the heights of majesty.

Michelangelo painted the massive frescoes in the Pauline Chapel in the period dating from 1542 to 1550. Pope Paul III had commissioned them right after the artist had finished the 'Last Judgement' of the Sistine Chapel, on which Michelangelo had already worked from 1536 to 1541. The 'Last Judgement' was inaugurated in October 1541. So there is an almost uninterrupted line of pictorial work by Michelangelo in the Vatican from 1536 to 1551. After that, he worked mostly as an architect on Saint Peter's cathedral in Rome. But he still sculptured and also continued architectural work on various other projects in Rome and Florence.

The 'Conversion of Paul' and the 'Crucifixion of Peter' were the final evolution in Michelangelo's art as a painter. Whether Michelangelo himself thought it as such and whether he worked as if these pictures were his testament can hardly be believed. His genius was far from exhausted and though the physical effort was great at his age, he continued to lead a very creative life for fifteen years after the frescoes in the Pauline Chapel. Thus, the frescoes should more be regarded as a next stage in the evolution of a painter who probably grew tired, but who must have felt that he could be very creative still for many years. Therefore we should look for power instead of for lassitude in Michelangelo's last pictorial work.

The overall view of the picture is one of complexity and disorder. Many figures are moving in a dramatic scene of anguish and panic. There is a double scene in the fresco. Beneath, Paul has fallen from his horse. The animal frantically runs away, prances, but turns back its head to the tumult it is leaving. Various figures of Saul's companions are on both sides of the horse. They are struck with fear. Some have been thrown to the ground. Others cover their ears for the deafening thunder. Still others look in fright at the skies. On the left people are running away; they are pointing to the heaven. A man tries to hold up a shield to cover his eyes and protect him from the intense lightning.

Together with the 'Last Judgement' this scene epitomises the new art of Mannerism as brought about by the vision of the elder Michelangelo and then taken on to an entire style by subsequent painters. Such scenes express what has been called Michelangelo's 'terribilità', his terrible power to create tension of human bodies in a very powerful painting.

In the scene above the humans, God has broken through the clouds. He sends down a shaft of light, his lightning, to Saul. Angels and saints accompany God. Deep below lies Saul terraced by God's sign. He is blinded and holds up a helpless arm to avert the wrath of God.

Michelangelo has painted low sloping hills in the background. He was no landscape painter. He could not be interested in painstakingly picturing in details of bucolic nature. Landscape painting was not in his domain of interest and it was not what he

was good at. Michelangelo was an urban artist. He needed to live in the large towns, in Rome and Florence, even if he stayed in their outskirts to seek calm. He was a very tactile man who would touch, embrace, hold people and of course who did so too with his sculptures. His sculptures are almost exclusively of human male bodies.

Michelangelo needed to hold living human flesh in his hands, he needed the soft touch of skin that remains firm under a touch. He liked hard muscles and he knew that under all clothes lay the core of man, his most intimate self. Michelangelo was concerned with the soul of his figures, but as much with their human substance.

With the 'Conversion of Paul' Michelangelo created a fearful scene. God's power over man is all encompassing, without recourse, without pity and without escape. The powerful Roman centurion Saul keeps his arm protectively in front of his face. But how frail and helpless, does he look in this scene. Saul is utterly subdued and abandoned to God.

Michelangelo made a self-portrait in Saul. He also represented himself in the second fresco, in the 'Crucifixion of Saint Peter'. There he seems to be an artisan, a worker in simple workman's clothes with a cap over his old but very powerful head. He crosses his arms and does not look at Peter's crucifixion, but he confronts the viewer in an attitude of pain. Here Michelangelo is not the actor as in the 'Conversion of Paul', but the spectator. Michelangelo always felt very linked to the Popes, even when he disobeyed them or defended his Florence against their armies. It is no coincidence that in one fresco he painted his own downfall, in the other the death of the first Pope with himself a close, passive but sad witness.

In the 'Conversion of Paul', Michelangelo is the down stricken Saul. Many men accompany Saul, and Michelangelo too had many people who accompanied him, esteemed him, and tried to profit from a powerful man who was in the favours of the Popes and the Medici of Florence. Yet, God has humbled that same proud and authoritative genius of a man in the midst of his companions. Which powerful man would depict himself as such, humble himself before the viewers? Only a man who had suffered in the flesh, pleaded and begged for help in prayers would have been able to show such an image.

The 'Conversion of Paul' is a very different picture from anything Michelangelo painted before. The scene is more raw, nervous, angry, and obsessive. Michelangelo's communication of the power of God to the viewer is more immediate than in the 'Last Judgement'. The figures in this fresco on Paul are more basic, rough, represented in a more primeval way than in the graceful images of the Genesis on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo painted a thoroughly well understood scene, with the same power as the Isenheim altar panels of Matthias Grünewald. Thereby, his work is one of the greatest masterpieces of expression in the most direct, sensual means possible. And it created Mannerism. One can feel Michelangelo's hands going over the bodies, the strength of his own emotions towards God and his awareness of the frailty of the human nature in Saul. This was really how a conversion of Saul must have happened, with these emotions in the actors.

Michelangelo had no need for structure, no need for landscape in his pictures. The only element that counted was the depiction of the human bodies under stress and the conveyed emotions. There is interest neither in geometries nor in structure when

human emotions are the essence of a picture. In that, Michelangelo was very far from most other Florentine painters like Piero della Francesca and Leonardo da Vinci. He had abandoned a tradition of Florentine pictorial representation and found his only own. Few painters and pictures thus concentrate on emotions and sensuality alone.

The French historian Daniel Arasse wrote that scenes of the conversion of Paul suddenly became commonplace in the sixteenth century. It was the conversion of a combatant of the true faith to Catholicism, to the original Christianity and to a religious vision of the world in which Paul and Peter led the church hand in hand to how Catholics knew it. The message of the image was clearly directed to Martin Luther, the Paul that had to be converted to Catholicism, to the church of Peter. Michelangelo made of the conversion of Saint Paul a scene with soldiers and tumult, as if an immense battle would come.

After Saul had been stricken down, Jesus told a man of Damascus called Ananias to go to Saul. Jesus told to Ananias, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Ananias went, entered the house where Saul lay, and laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, I have been sent by the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the way here, so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." It was as though scales fell away from Saul's eyes and immediately he was able to see again, and he got up and was baptised and after taking some food he regained his strength. ^{G38}

Paul became the most forceful missionary of Christian faith. His epistles created the further practical foundation of Christianity.

Saint Paul at Ephesus

Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655). Musée du Louvre. Paris. 1649.

Eustache Le Sueur was born in late 1627 in Paris. He was the son of a wood-sculptor, Cathelin Le Sueur, and was brought at the age of sixteen, in 1632, into the workshop of Simon Vouet, France's foremost Classical and Baroque painter. Le Sueur may have stayed for more than ten years in the Vouet workshop, for he became an independent master only in 1644 or 1645. Contrary to many other Parisian masters, he never left Paris for Rome. He studied by himself the elements of his art, by studying other paintings. In 1645 he received a commission to paint a series of twenty-two paintings of the life of Saint Bruno, the founder of the Chartreuse Order. The commission came from the Chartreuse of Paris, and it is in this series that we find the most original visions and pictures of Le Sueur but also his most austere and depleted ones, which proved his deep spiritual involvement in the subject. Le Sueur was a Classicist painter of the Baroque period. He painted mostly for the wealthy and for the courtiers of Paris, who preferred rather strict, grand and dignified pictures that were representative for their view on and control of French society of the mid-seventeenth century. Le Sueur also decorated walls, ceilings and cupolas for more frivolous halls than

churches and abbeys. He decorated for instance the Cabinet d'Amour for the financier Lambert de Thorigny at the Hotel Lambert in Paris, around the same time of 144 to 1646. Here he painted love scenes in very light mythological themes. He decorated also Lambert's Room of the Muses and other such places. After 1653, Le Sueur worked at the Louvre and for the apartments of Anne of Austria and even for the young Louis XIV. He was a rather discreet painter, and of course he had to be that, since he worked for the very leaders of French society and the royal court of France. Le Sueur died in 1655, only thirty-eight years old.

The Guild of Goldsmiths of Paris commissioned each year in the month of May a painting to be made for Notre Dame Cathedral. The paintings had to be large if not huge, to be hung in the nave of the cathedral. These paintings were made by the most important and often young new talents of Paris. Many of the paintings have now disappeared, and the remaining ones are dispersed over several French museums. In 1649 it was Eustache Le Sueur's turn to receive a commission for such a May painting. He made 'Saint Paul preaching at Ephesus', a picture that hangs now in the Louvre Museum of Paris. This work was painted some time after Le Sueur had also become, with eleven other artists, one of the founders of the French Academy. These two accomplishments say much about how much at his relatively young age he was already considered one of the greatest artists of his time. The work shows the solemn vision of the wealthy society that had a grandiose and powerful vision for France, a vision of people who ruled with totally centralised and unified power over a large country.

Eustache Le Sueur's work 'Saint Paul at Ephesus' relates of Paul's life at that town, as told in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul travelled overland from Corinth to Ephesus. He met a number of disciples there, twelve in number, like the number of Jesus' apostles, all people that had been baptised in Saint John the Baptist's way. Paul baptised them in the name of Jesus Christ and the men received the Holy Spirit so that they could speak prophecies and foreign languages. Then Paul preached Christendom in the Jewish synagogue of the town for three months, until some of the Jews openly attacked him with his teachings on Christ. He preached then daily in the lecture room of the Tyrannus for two years, and converted many people. Paul did many miracles at Ephesus. Certain men started however to speak in Paul's name and they tried to drive out evil spirits that way. The spirits recognised Jesus and they knew Paul, but they neither recognised nor knew the self-made exorcists, so the evil spirits attacked and did violence to the Jews that had spoken in Paul's name without involving him in person. Only Paul could perform miracles. This came to be known at Ephesus, and Paul's prestige grew. Soon a number of men that had thus used spells and magic came forward to Paul. They threw down their books on a pile and burned them in public. These books had been very expensive, so a large amount of money disappeared in ashes that day. This scene was painted by Le Sueur. While Paul was at Ephesus, a silversmith called Demetrius organised a revolt in the town because he and the other silversmiths feared that they would soon receive no commissions anymore for silver shrines to the honour of the goddess Diana. The mob ran to the theatre, taking prisoner Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's companions. There were several attempts to silence the people in the theatre, because there was so much shouting that nobody still knew what was going on. These attempts did not succeed. Finally, the town clerk silenced the people saying that Diana, whose statue had fallen from heaven to Ephesus, would continue to be honoured in the town. He said nobody had really

blasphemed against Diana with the new faith, certainly not Gaius and Aristarchus, and the town clerk told that if Demetrius wanted to complain about something, he should take the case to court with the proconsuls. He dismissed the men in the theatre. When this was over, Paul encouraged his disciples, but he himself left for Macedonia and Syria. He left accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus, by Aristarchus and Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus. They travelled to Troas ^{G38}.

Eustache Le Sueur made his enormous painting for the nave of Notre Dame Cathedral on this subject of the magicians burning their books of exorcism and maybe also partly on the mob in the theatre of Ephesus.

Paul stands on the stairs of the synagogue or of the Tyrannus. The magicians throw down their books at his feet and start to burn the paper. Paul stretches his right arm upward, pointing to the heavens. With his left arm the Saint holds a heavy book, which could be the bible. Le Sueur made an impressive, grand figure of Paul. His depiction is very strict, very austere and static, as would be best suited for the Notre Dame nave in Le Sueur's opinion.

Eustache Le Sueur drew a strong structure for his 'Saint Paul at Ephesus'. He applied the pyramid structure, with the head of Paul at the summit. Two lines go down from the Saint's face to the two lower corners of the frame, building the strongest and most obvious basic construction one could design in a painting. He positioned his figures along these two lines. In the triangle made by the two slanting lines and the basis of the pyramid – the lower horizontal border of the frame – he drew the books and the fire, his central theme. Saint Paul stands on marble stairs, and his face is situated not exactly in, but somewhat above the centre point of the picture, above the point where the diagonals cut. This gives an immediate impression of greatness to Saint Paul. Paul imposes in this place of higher than the centre of the painting. He is also longer in height than one third of the height of the frame. So, Paul is taller and longer than the natural lengths that the symmetry of the frame would impose on the painter. These were all elements that le Sueur applied to ensure that his Saint Paul dominates in the scene and on the viewer.

Le Sueur emphasised Saint Paul's authority with every means available. He dressed him in a long, grey-white robe, to support Paul's long stature. He made Saint Paul wear a long, red cloak, which equally accentuates the length of the Saint, and which is the largest mass of pure hue in the painting. This draws the eye of the viewer rapidly to the figure of Paul. Paul stands then with outstretched right arm pointing upwards, with a gesture that elongates the figure of the Saint even more. If that was not enough, Paul's finger is continued in the long, ascending line of a column of the synagogue and this is a vertical, dark-coloured narrow area that mounts to the top of the painting. It would be hard to invent more style elements to make of the figure of Paul a figure of more drama, epic and imposing greatness. One could hardly find a more rigorous example of French Classicist principles applied in their most obvious form. We have a feeling of exaggeration with this design of Le Sueur. It is simply too much of the stiffness and strictness, too much of verticals in a painting. The verticals are emphasised in the columns of the temple – and/or theatre – to the left and right of Paul. Also the horizontal lines are stressed, such as in the stairs below Saint Paul, and these lines underscore the rigour of the Parisian painter a little too much.

Le Sueur also emphasised the symmetry in his painting in the way he placed his colours. The viewer will find areas of blue colour to the extreme right and left of Paul, and patches of white on either side too. There are also balanced masses of brown on both sides. With these, Le Sueur tried to break a little the equilibrium of areas, for he placed larger areas of blue and white to the left side of the painting. The effect of this is obviously to better lead the spectator's view and to centre the view of the spectator on Paul's face. Yet, there might even be an error of judgement and of composition in this left side of the frame. Le Sueur drew the man on the left side, the man dressed in blue, too large in comparison with the effect he sought on Paul, and that diminishes Paul's tallness. Le Sueur painted this magician however not in light blue hues – contrary to the colour of the old Jew on the right – but he darkened the colours of the man's robe, bringing also some less circumspect brown shades on the man's clothes. With this man however, Le Sueur attracts the eye of the viewer first to the left side and then he makes the viewer look upward, over the white figure, to Paul. The spectator's eyes do not start on the figure of the old, bent Jew on the right and then over the brown cloak of a man to Paul, because this line is more broken by open spaces.

Le Sueur draws the attention of the viewer to Paul's face. The Saint has slightly reddish cheeks and his face is crowned with heavy hair and he has a full beard. Paul's face does not have the long face with the obsessive traits we would have expected of the intelligent and very energetic preacher. Furthermore, Le Sueur placed many figures of other men at the height of the Saint's face, behind and around Paul. The men form a horizontal band of rather nondescript, brown colours along Paul's shoulders. This mass makes that our view lingers there, but it also makes the structure top-heavy and it dilutes much the effect of elevation to the head of Saint Paul and towards the skies, a feeling that would have enthralled the viewer.

Le Sueur placed higher up, on the right side, a Greek temple, which could be the theatre of the story in the Acts of the Apostles, in lighter colours, to give the picture altogether a sense of deeper perspective. But Le Sueur's lines are very strictly horizontal and vertical there, and he clearly favoured the darker area above Paul, as an extension of the Saint's figure. So much verticals stress too much the tight rigidity of the depiction.

Eustache Le Sueur's painting of Saint Paul at Ephesus has qualities of composition and structure, supported by a judicious use of lines, colours and combination of areas, but also weaknesses. He made this picture in 1649, when he was certainly already at the height of his fame. He must have wanted to show he was worth this reputation. He was only thirty-two years old then, however. He seems still to have been learning, especially for his largest pictures such as the 'Saint Paul at Ephesus', which was his first enormous picture. He had made perfect, intimate paintings of intense devotion before. He had shown he could represent depth of feelings well enough. He still had to learn how to be great in grace and naturalness. There have been painters who found this balance immediately, at young age. This is how one discerns genius from talent. Le Sueur was a very talented painter, who proved strokes of genuine genius in some paintings, but he showed only his potent talent in other pictures. His 'Saint Paul at Ephesus' belongs to the latter works. The 'Saint Paul at Ephesus' was a fine picture to hang in Notre Dame, not only because of its huge dimensions. It represented the victory of Christendom over paganism, Hebrew faith and popular superstition. Saint

Paul was to incarnate the authority of the church over all matters of belief. It was a fine subject for the guild of Goldsmiths of Paris to offer to their cathedral.

Other paintings:

Peter and Paul

Masolino di Panicale (ca. 1387-1447). Philadelphia Museum of Art – Philadelphia. Around 1428.

Saints Peter and Paul

Juseppe de Ribera (1591-1652). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.

Saint Paul on Malta

Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610). The National Gallery – London.

Saint Paul in Ephesus

Maarten De Vos (1531-1603). Musée de d'art Ancien – Brussels. 1568.

The Sacrifice at Lystra

Michel Corneille the Elder (1602-1664). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Arras. 1644.

The Ecstasy of Saint Paul

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota (Florida). 1643.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Santa Maria del Popolo – Rome. Around 1601.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Laurent de La Hyre (1606-1656). Cathedral Notre Dame. Paris. 1637.

Saint Paul as a Hermit

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1640.

Landscape with the Conversion of Saint Paul

Paul Bril (1554 – 1626). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Bartholomeus Spranger (1546-1611). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Francesco Mazzola called Parmigianino (1503-1540). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1527/1528.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (ca. 1476-1559). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1545.

Saint Paul struck down on the Road to Damascus

Francesco Maffei (1605-1660). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Paul at Malta, grasping the Viper

Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691/1692-1765). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. 1727.

Saint Paul preaching at Athens

Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691/1692-1765). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. 1727.

Saint Paul thrown over and lapidated in the Town of Lystius

Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne (1631-1681). Musée Magnin. Dijon. 1667.

The Martyrdom of Saint Paul

Giovanni Antonio Molineri (1577-1645). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1625-1630.

The Apparition of Christ to Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus

Ercole Procaccini (1515-1595). Chiesa San Giacomo Maggiore. Bologna. 1753.

Saint Paul

Ambrogio da Fossano called Il Bergognone (1455-after 1522). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Paul

Geminiano Benzoni (active 1489-1513). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Andrew

The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew

Jean-Baptiste Deshays (1729-1765). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1758.

Saint Andrew was the brother of Saint Peter. He was really the first apostle. Very little is written in the Gospels on Andrew, except in reference with Peter. But in the 'Golden Legend', many stories of his life are told. He seems to have been on conversion missions in Greece and in Asia Minor. The 'Golden Legend' mentions Scythia, Ethiopia where he would have liberated Matthew, then Achaia or Greece. He found his death by martyrdom in Greece.

According to the 'Golden Legend', Andrew converted Maximilla, the wife of Aegeus the Roman Governor of Patras in the Peloponnesos. When he heard of this, Aegeus commanded the Christians to sacrifice to the idols. Aegeus and Andrew argued over this. Aegeus particularly asked Andrew how the apostle could state that Jesus suffered death freely, when everybody knew that Jesus was denounced by one of his own disciples, imprisoned and crucified. But Andrew proved that Jesus's passion was indeed voluntary and he explained the mystery of redemption to the proconsul. But Aegeus only called all this inanities and again wanted to force Andrew to offer sacrifices to all the Gods. Andrew refused. Aegeus threw Andrew in prison, had him flogged and bound hand and foot to a cross so as to make his agony last longer. Andrew hung alive on the cross and preached to thousands of people. He was not crucified on a cross in the normal shape, but on a cross in the form of an X, a saltire. On the third day like this, the crowds started to threaten the proconsul, saying that such a gentle man as Andrew should not be made to suffer so. Aegeus wanted to release Andrew, but nobody could even touch the saint for Andrew had prayed to the Lord to not let him come down alive. Andrew died as a dazzling light shone out of the heavens and enveloped him. Aegeus was seized by a demon and died in the street. Maximilla buried the saint.

The martyrdom by crucifixion on the saltire of Andrew was a frequent theme of painters. It was the single best-known legend of Andrew's life and always spectacular for devote viewers. There are many further legends also about the relics of Saint Andrew, among which one that tells of the relics being brought to a place in Scotland in the fourth century, to a site hence called Saint Andrews. Andrew became the patron saint of Scotland and he remained that also of Greece. The Saint Andrew saltire is in the national banner of Scotland.

Pictures of Andrew's martyrdom were made for churches dedicated to the Saint. Such was also the case of Jean-Baptiste Deshays' painting 'The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew at the Moment when, before being attached to the Cross, one demands of him to adore Idols.' The large painting was made in 1758 for the altar of the church of Saint Andrew, or Saint-André-de-la-Porte-aux-Fèvres, of the French city of Rouen. Rouen is a town laden with history. Joan of Arc was burned here on the marketplace in the fifteenth century. Rouen lies halfway between Paris and Le Havre, between the largest capital and one of the largest seaports of Europe. Large ships could fare into the Seine at Le Havre, sail up to Rouen and come thus closest to Paris. Rouen was

always a rich town as it formed the link between Normandy, France's seacoast and Paris. Rouen has preserved much of its medieval charm. Its cathedral, painted by the Impressionist artist Claude Monet in all shades of light and colours, is a splendour of Gothic architecture.

Jean-Baptiste Deshays was born in Colleville of France in 1729. France was still in the Ancien Régime under the frivolous regent and kings that had succeeded to Louis XIV. In 1753 Deshays was already a laureate of France's Prix de Rome and he left for Italy. He returned to France around 1758 and had received before he left for Italy the commission to paint three panels for the Saint Andrew church of Rouen that had been newly built.^{F10} He first made the 'Martyrdom' in that same year 1758, then the 'Entombment' in 1760 and the 'Flagellation' in 1761. Deshays died young in 1765. Too young, for Jean-Baptiste Deshays was a painter of great intelligence and force, and he had a fresh, individual taste, although he remained rooted in the French Academic tradition.

The picture of 'Andrew's Martyrdom' is very dramatic. As we have seen in many Baroque paintings, oblique lines create movement. Deshays applied this structural element to its summum. Many oblique lines intersect and depart from each other. One such line is formed by the direction of the body of Saint Andrew and this is a diagonal of the lower half of the frame. From along Andrew's head starts another oblique line; one of the beams of the saltire cross. On the other diagonal the Roman proconsul Aegeus shows the statue of Jupiter. An angel drops from the sky in another intersecting line and various other directions can be discerned in the sticks and beams of the lower part of the painting. These lines support the theatrical, dramatic, dynamic effect of the scene.

In the core of the painting is Saint Andrew's emaciated, long, pale body. Andrew throws his arms to heaven in a gesture of abandonment, answered by the angel who brings him already the crown of martyrdom. Andrew seems to invoke God as a witness to his pains. The invocation is of course the contrary of what the proconsul Aegeus at the left, dressed in a Roman toga, wants of the saint. Aegeus shows Andrew the statue of Jupiter and commands Andrew to adore the idol. Aegeus and the statue are painted in dark colours and so are the other figures. Thus, the complete light is brought on the body of Andrew, as the 'Golden legend' told, and the Christian scene forces the old idolatry into the shadows.

Jean-Baptiste Deshays has mixed several scenes in the altarpiece. Andrew is forced on his knees by a slave guard, in front of the idol statue. His martyrdom looms behind him on the X cross. And an angel brings him the crown of the martyrs together with a promise of salvation of his soul. Andrew is standing on a platform to which lead stone stairs. Downward is his tomb and the apostle already wears the white linen of the shroud. This element also contrasts with the high blue sky, out of which falls the angel. Heaven and earth are thus emphasised. The sky is a wonderful blue, which is repeated symmetrically by a blue cloak thrown over the stairs. This may be a symbol of the Roman emperor's blue. Further details are interesting. The saltire on the back looks like crossed Roman columns, the symbol of a world that temporarily prevails over Christianity, but will ultimately be destroyed. A furious, wild dog claws over the blue cloak, maybe a reference both of the near end of the Roman Empire and of the ferocity of the flagellation of Andrew.

Jean-Baptiste Deshayes painted a picture with a sound structure of intersecting lines, with an intelligently thought out scene, in marvellous colours and in a dynamic composition. Remarkable about this picture is that it was made in times when François Boucher and Jean-Antoine Watteau were painting frivolous scenes in Rococo style. These painters worked in Paris and at the court of the king, whereas Deshayes worked in provincial Rouen. A more austere Classicism was being revived, yet more natural and spiritual and this style influenced some of the visions of the Baroque. Deshayes was one of the main representatives of an innovative trend that never left French artistic spirit. He definitely died too young.

Other paintings:

Saint Andrew

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1630-1633.

Saint Andrew

Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494). Groeninge Museum – Bruges. Around 1500.

Saint Andrew

Tommaso di Giovanni Guidi called Masaccio (1401-1428). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. 1426.

The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1628.

The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew

Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671). The National Gallery – London. 1645.

The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). The Cleveland Museum of Art – Cleveland.

Saint Andrew before the Cross

Carlo Dolci (1616-1686). Palatine Gallery of the Pitti Palace – Florence. 1646.

Triptych of Saint Andrew

Master of San Lorenzo della Costa. Santa Margherita. Ligure.

Saint Andrew's Martyrdom

Carlo Maratta (1625-1713). Galleria Corsini. Rome.

Saint Andrew kneeling before his Cross

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1637-1638.

Philip and the Apostles

The Apostle Philip

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1516.

The Four Apostles

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. 1526.

Albrecht Dürer was the third of eighteen children of a Hungarian goldsmith who had settled in the German imperial free town of Nuremberg around 1455. Albrecht was born in 1471. He worked young in the Nuremberg workshop of the engraver and painter Michael Wohlgemut. Engraving was the art that Dürer preferred, probably due to Wohlgemut's early instruction. Around 1491 Dürer started to travel. He went to Holland and Flanders and then to Colmar in the Alsace region to meet Martin Schongauer, the foremost German painter. Schongauer had died however just before Dürer arrived. Dürer travelled on to close-by Swiss Basel, where he worked for some time making woodcuts and engravings for a printer, Johann Amerbach. He returned to Nuremberg, to be married by his parents' arrangement to a lady called Agnes Frey. There would be no children of this marriage. In 1494, when there was an outbreak of the plague in Nuremberg, he left for Italy. He arrived and worked in Venice, where he met Giovanni Bellini whom he seems to have much admired. Dürer went back to Nuremberg in 1497 and opened his own workshop. He then worked in Nuremberg with one of his brothers, Hans Dürer, who was equally a painter and who became in 1525 the court painter of King Sigismund of Poland. Albrecht Dürer liked the classical ideals of the Renaissance and he longed for the refinement of Italy. He made a second voyage to Italy and Venice in 1507. He visited Mantua and Milan then.

Dürer became a respectable man in his community. He was a member of the Town Council of Nuremberg and he received commissions from the German emperor Maximilian. The emperor granted him a stipend so that he had no financial problems. From 1509 to 1521 Dürer mostly made engravings, which were printed by the growing editing industry of Europe and thus distributed to many countries. His fame as an engraver grew. In 1521 Dürer travelled once again to Flanders and Brabant, the Southern Netherlands, probably to ask for renewal of his stipend to the new emperor Charles V. He met many painters and humanists on this trip, of which he held a diary. He met Lucas van Leyden, the best engraver of the Netherlands, as well as Joachim Patenier the landscape painter, and he was received with honours in Bruges where the guild of painters offered him a royal banquet. He also met Erasmus in Rotterdam.

Dürer was a very intelligent scholar. He lived in a most cultural town and was open to the many new ideas that he encountered during his trips. He knew the Humanists and their theories; he sympathised with Martin Luther. He knew the classic authors and had spoken to many painters in North and South. He was certainly one of the most travelled and learnt artists of his time. He liked to depict himself as such in various self-portraits. He showed himself as a Renaissance prince, with a somewhat haughty, sensual, refined, face. Dürer was aware of his good looks. He was aware of his learning and talents. He worked little for churches, more for the emperor, the notables of his hometown and for the printers of Nuremberg. He had a keen interest in seeing his art reproduced by prints for a larger audience. He also wrote books on

architecture, for instance on military engineering of fortifications of towns in times of war. He was a many-sided personality, a true Renaissance man.

Albrecht Dürer made a picture of the apostle Philip, one of the first followers of Jesus. Philip is mentioned a few times in the Gospels, such as in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves of bread and he was present at Pentecost, but very little is known of him. The Acts of the Apostles talk of a man called Philip who undertook early missionary work in Samara, Caesarea and Gaza of Palestine, but this would be the newly elected dean Philip and thus not the apostle. The apostle Philip came from Bethsaida in Galilee. According to tradition Philip converted people in Phrygia and he would have died and buried there at Hierapolis. The Golden Legend quotes from a book called 'On the Life, Birth, and Death of the Saints', written by Isidore, to state that Philip died in Hierapolis. His relics were allegedly translated to Rome, to the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles, a church that was originally dedicated to the saints Philip and James. Philip is supposed to have died by Crucifixion in the same way as Peter, that is upside down.

Dürer's Philip is a man of wisdom and of suffering. The long, curly, grey beard and the high forehead indicate his wisdom. His clothes also are grey-white, which gives the whole picture a cool feeling. Philip has a sad, melancholic personality. He keeps his head inclined as if the weight of the world is put on his shoulders. His mouth is half-open in a gasp of pain and his eyes look weary. His eyes are sunken in the wrinkles that characterise his whole face. He does not look at the viewer, but averts his eyes in a downward glance. This man may be asking for our pity, imploring indulgence and pleading for support of Christ's word. Dürer thus seems a master of portraiture and psychology.

Dürer made the picture of Philip in 1516. The same mastery can be found in his painting of the Four Apostles, which he made in 1526, two years before his death. Dürer painted these panels for the Communal House of Nuremberg. The title of the panels is slightly wrong, for John and Peter on the first panel were indeed apostles, but Paul and Mark of the second panel were only disciples of Christ, though important ones. Paul and Mark contributed to the New Testament, as did John. Seen from this aspect Peter is the odd man out.

With the Four Apostles Dürer has painted four different characters, so that the panels are sometimes referred to as representing the four temperaments or phlegms.

John is a tranquil man. He is at ease and intent on his book, the Gospel, that he wrote. John is the scholar who is oblivious of the world around him. He is still young, with a handsome face and full rosy cheeks. He looks healthy and somewhat sensual. He has thrown a red cloak nonchalantly but elegantly over his shoulders. The cloak envelops him cosily. Dürer has shown John not with the usual symbol of the apostle, a chalice with vipers, but with his Gospel book. The attentive viewer can read the open book. The pages are opened on the first words of a chapter of the German text of Martin Luther's Bible. This indicates Dürer's sympathies for Luther's new learning.

Another indication of Dürer's favour for Protestantism can be found in the apostle Peter who is placed behind John. The positioning alone is already indicative. Peter holds the keys of the church. But he stands behind John and behind the open Gospel.

Peter is in the shadows of the living Book. He is looking at the Bible with his head bent downwards in humble submission. Peter seems to have been subdued, as Luther wanted the Popes to be. Luther did not accept the infallibility of the Popes of Rome. Peter, the impulsive, strong man who kept always hope in the faith and who called to start the missionary work when the disciples were lost after Christ's Resurrection, that strong man has become a hidden, humbled old man. He has a very bold head, which gives him a tired and forlorn countenance. Peter's authority has been taken away from him and the young man of learning has gained first place.

On the other side, equally in the shadows, stands Paul. This is the violent Paul with the weird, piercing eyes. Paul was the obsessive preacher of the faith, and the warrior of God. Paul is depicted with his sword, his usual symbol. He holds the sword strongly and decidedly. His mouth is half opened as if he were willing to preach once more or were still shouting commands. Paul is a wizard, looking out from the darkness as God has brought him forward out of the evil of violent persecution to use him as his instrument.

Mark is the scholar again, like John, so he is equally brought forward. Mark is watching the viewer suspiciously with one eye turned towards us. He seems a nervous man; he is on his guard. He is the doubter, the inquisitive, the one who is looking in all directions. Mark is not innocently studying the bible as John. He holds the book well closed and firmly in his hands. He is guarding the Bible. Mark and Paul seem to work at a plot, they look as if there was a special link between them. They were no apostles and they came not from the apostles' original grounds. Paul was a Roman citizen, Mark a doctor who spoke Greek. They stand apart from John and Peter. Jews stand on the left side, gentiles on the right. Paul and Mark are the future.

Mark is dressed in a wonderful flowing white cloak, which answers John's red dress. Dürer in this painting blended styles. The long, elongated form of the panels and the clear lines refer to International Gothic style. The wonderful colours could have been learnt both from the Gothic pictures and from Italian painting. The way of representation of the passionate characters is German. The design of the picture is strong as Florentine art. The four figures are connected by their hands and by the two Bibles, which are at the same level to each other. The visual affect is as of a cross.

Most striking about these panels is the representation of the figures. They are turned inward, though Paul and Mark maybe less so. The figures seem oblivious of the viewers; they have their own inner life that shows on their faces. This aptitude and tendency for inward, melancholic reflection on one's own mind and motives is maybe the most important characteristic of the German mind. Martin Luther reflected on himself and his own feelings as a human confronted with the Christian teachings. Then he drew the necessary conclusions and defended them with the fierceness of his unbridled, passionate German nature. Still in our own century, Pope John-Paul was most criticised by the German theologians, who like Eugen Drewermann invited to new possible explanations for Christianity. Dürer perhaps tried in this way to capture and represent some of the German soul that still lies at the basis of German theological revolutionary reflections in the Catholic Church.

Saint Philip at the Temple of Mars

The Crucifixion of Saint Philip

Filippino Lippi (1457-1504). The Strozzi Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria Novella – Florence. Ca. 1502.

The Golden Legend tells that Philip preached for twenty years in Scythia. After that time the pagans thrust Philip before a statue of Mars and forced him to sacrifice to the god. Then a huge dragon emerged from the base of the statue. The dragon killed the pagan priest's son, who tended the fire for the sacrifice, and slew two tribunes whose men held Philip in chains. The dragon infected the bystanders with the stench of its breath so that all became ill. Philip then said to the people that they had to worship the true Lord, for the dragon to disappear and the sick to be cured. The suffering cried out that if they would but be cured they would smash the statue of Mars. Philip commanded the dragon into the desert; he cured the sick and even brought the three men that had been mortally wounded by the dragon back to life. All the people present then accepted Philip's faith.

When Philip was eighty-seven years old the infidels seized him and nailed him to a cross. The Golden Legend quotes again Isidore, who wrote that Philip was crucified and stoned at Hierapolis in Phrygia. Philip was buried there together with his daughters.

Filippino Lippi used these two stories from the apocryphal Gospels to illustrate scenes from the life of Saint Philip in the Strozzi Chapel of the church of Santa Maria Novella of Florence. This chapel had been commissioned by Filippo Strozzi. Filippino Lippi completed here his frescoes of the lives of Saint Philip and Saint John in 1502. Filippo Strozzi was buried in the chapel. His porphyry tomb, made by Benedetto da Maiano, still stands behind the altar. Strozzi must have asked scenes from the life of Saint Philip because Saint Philip was his patron saint, of the same name, and we may wonder whether it was a coincidence that also his painter had the name of Filippino, from Filippo, his own name.

The fresco 'Saint Philip at the Temple of Mars' is an excellent example of how well the Middle Age and Renaissance painters knew the apocryphal texts, such as their compilation in the 'Golden Legend' of Jacobus de Voragine. All the details of the narrative are shown. We see the statue of the Roman deity Mars, the god of war, in a sumptuous monument. The god holds the Roman symbol of the wolves with his left hand, whereas in the other he brandishes the flame of war high. The statue looks down on Philip, who commands the dragon. The story tells that the dragon broke out from under the temple and indeed, stones are broken from that marble stairs. The dragon is not the huge monster from the Golden Legend, since that would have taken up too much space in the painting and have been too ugly a scene for a refined fresco. But the son of the priest of Mars lies lifeless in the arms of oriental bystanders on the right. Filippino read that the story played in Scythia, so he let his imagination loose on the robes, cloaks, headdresses and even faces of the infidel people that came to sacrifice to the Roman god. Rome is present also on the left of the painting, where a centurion holds the standard of its army.

Filippino chose a scene of action and he painted Philip at the moment of highest drama in the story. Around the soldiers people are either suffering under growing sickness, such as the forefront old man with the white-grey hair, or they are pinching their noses at the stench of the dragon. In the centre, Philip commands the dragon and the miracle, whereas the priest of Mars looks in awe at the slumping body of his son. Lippi made a picture of action, a narrative in a painting, in the very old tradition of church frescoes that wanted to instruct the pious into the wonderful religious stories of the Bible and the lives of the Saints.

Filippino Lippi made this fresco in the middle of the Renaissance period, but we see that this art style of painting was evolving already towards a more complex, sumptuous kind of representation. We feel with this fresco that the Renaissance was ending, and in a state of transition to another style. Expression of ideas, simple but forceful display of figures in a scene was not enough anymore. Lippi added a wealth of decoration. The monument of Mars is so loaded with statues, vases, friezes, free-standing Corinthian columns, false arches, golden decoration and symbols, that we might recognise a fully Baroque or even Rococo mindset. The Roman standards on the left and the Scythian standards on the right also are painted in this fantastic, extravagant vision, and so are the decorations on the extreme sides of the painting. Filippino Lippi was raised by Sandro Botticelli, but whereas his master always held his fecund and strange imagination in check, Filippino Lippi wholly surrendered to the magic of ornament. More than the contents, Lippi astonished his audience by this display of wealth and outwardly, imaginative overdose.

Lippi remained in all this show of details however a master of rigid structure. In his composition he drew a horizontal scene of figures, a band about a third of the fresco's dimensions high. The statue of Mars is planted in the centre and at about two thirds of the frame's width. It is positioned as the vertical counter-balance of the band of horizontally placed figures. Lippi furthermore introduced symmetries around the central axe, as much as he could, in forms and in colours. Thus the monument of Mars is wholly symmetric around the central axe and so are the high walls of black and white marble on the sides. The figures are in two groups, symmetrically placed on the left and on the right. We remark how also the golden to brown colours respond on either side. Saint Philip wears a green cloak and he faces the right side. In that right scene we find the green colour back in two figures: in a woman and in the oriental man holding the priest's son. Some green is also to be found on the left, but in much smaller proportion. On the other hand, the priest of Mars is dressed in golden-brown robes and cloak and this mass of colour is balanced on the left by the same colours in the sick man. This figure on the left looks remarkably like the priest of Mars. Maybe Lippi has indicated here just an image of the same priest at another point in time and as an even more suffering man, suffering also from the sickness brought by the dragon. Finally, the priest's son is also dressed in a golden-coloured dress so that the link father-son is madder more explicit for the viewer. Here Lippi used a little bright blue in the boy's cloak, as if to indicate the boy's youth and innocence.

Most remarkable are the details of the Scythian people on left and right. Filippino Lippi drew them in fresco – a difficult medium – with a wealth of differing colours, forms and movements. Any viewer cannot but be very impressed by the skills and imagination of the new vision of Filippino Lippi. But then Filippo Strozzi knew what he was doing when he chose this painter for his chapel and Filippino Lippi was

obliged to show his best art and skills in one of the main churches of Florence, where already other masterpieces decorated the walls.

The 'Saint Philip at the Temple of Mars' announces an evolution of the Renaissance. We now know that the Renaissance evolved into the force of the depiction of the human body, as proposed by Michelangelo, and into the force of harsher visualisation of figures and of cruder colours of Jacopo Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. Had Michelangelo and Pontormo not existed, the Renaissance might well have evolved towards pictures in which decorum would have prevailed over force and intensity. Filippino Lippi used strong structure in his fresco and that structure is quite apparent so that the fresco remains controlled and solemn. It would have sufficed for the painter to break the symmetries to have reached baroque features fully.

Filippino Lippi could however also paint simpler and immediately expressive scenes. His fresco 'The Crucifixion of Saint Philip' in the same chapel of Santa Maria Novella is such a picture. Here there are fewer figures, less decorative elements and the attention of the viewer is more easily held on the central theme. The depiction remained naïve, straightforward and feels somewhat old for a Renaissance representation. Lippi must have concentrated here his mind on the message of the scene only, more than on the painterly expression or than even on his painterly skills. Again however, the details are fine and betray a master painter and draughtsman of Florence.

Other paintings:

Saints James the Younger, Bartholomew and Philip

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

The four Evangelists

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Musée du Louvre- Paris. Around 1625.

The Apostles (Peter, John, Philip, Andrew, James Major and James Minor, Matthew)

Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717). Musée des Beaux- Arts – Rouen. 1792.

The Apostle Philip and the Chamberlain

Hans von Marées (1837-1887). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Nationalgalerie. Berlin. 1869.

The Martyrdom of Saint Philip

Simon De Vos. The National Gallery – London. 1663-1676.

The four Evangelists

Artus Wollfort (1581-1641). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Bordeaux.

The four Evangelists

Pieter Aertsen (1508-1575). Suermondt Ludwig Museum – Aachen.

Stephen

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610). The National Gallery of Scotland – Edinburgh. Ca. 1603-1604.

Stephen was one of the Deans of the first church. The ‘Acts of the Apostles’ gives an account of his election, which recalls the first disputes among Jewish members and non-Jewish members of the early community. The Acts explain how the apostles solved the issue, and thus also give account of the first separation between the worldly and the spiritual organisation of the church.

When the number of the disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them. “It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty. We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.” The whole assembly approved of the proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, and after prayer they laid their hands on them.^{G38}

Stephen preached and began to work miracles. He had great wisdom and the Jews of the synagogue could not stand up to him. The elders and scribes took Stephen by surprise and brought him before the Sanhedrin. In the Sanhedrin he continued to give a speech and threw at the priests that there was not one prophet their ancestors had not persecuted.

They were infuriated when they heard this, and ground their teeth at him. But Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into the heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God’s right hand. “Look! I can see heaven thrown open,” he said, “and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.” All the members of the Council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him, thrust him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses put down their clothes at the feet of a young man, called Saul. As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and said aloud, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And with these words he fell asleep. Saul approved of the killing.^{G38}

Adam Elsheimer made a picture of the ‘Martyrdom of Stephen’. Stephen was a Dean of the church and also the very first martyr to die for his faith. Stephen is seen knelt, at the moment when he invokes Jesus to receive his spirit. At the same time the executioners throw the stones at him. They have indeed taken off their garments as told in the New Testament. One young executioner at the right of Stephen will thrust the stone onto Stephen’s head that will kill him. Such men who hold stones in their hands surround Stephen, but no actual stone is seen hitting the martyr. This is the

moment before death. Stephen looks somewhat naively, with open mouth, and in surprise at the scene that plays above him. God has sent his angels to get Stephen to the heavens. A shaft of light has broken through the clouds and this cone of God's light envelopes Stephen and the angels. The angels have brought laurels to honour the Dean. Roman soldiers are seen in the background. But also oriental viewers have arrived, as on the left, the normal witnesses of death of Christians in the times of Elsheimer.

Adam Elsheimer was a German painter. He only painted for a period of about thirteen years and only twenty-seven pictures are known of him. He worked almost exclusively on copper; hence his pictures remained of small dimensions. But copper was a marvellous substrate on which to paint. Thus, Elsheimer was able to bring more than fifty figures on this miniature-like plate. Copper allowed to apply paint in very fine strokes, so that detail could be elaborate. Elsheimer also exploited fully the medium to chose very brilliant colours.

Adam Elsheimer came from Frankfurt. He was born there in 1579. He first worked with Dutch painters who had left Catholic Antwerp for Protestant Frankfurt, then in 1598 he travelled to Venice where he worked with another German painter who worked on copper, Johann Rottenhammer. He lived in Rome from 1600 on. He was popular in Italy, in particular among other painters, and many prints were made of his scenes. This copper plate seems to have belonged to Paul Bril^{N9}, a Flemish landscape painter who lived in Rome and also worked on copper plates. Elsheimer died in Rome in 1610.

We cannot but admire Elsheimer's skills at picturing in so many figures on such a small plate, all in different costumes and attitudes. Several people are on horseback. The angels are particularly finely painted, with marvellous open wings and curling white cloaks. The painter put in the background a nice Italianate landscape. Admire the Roman ruins and the delicately painted trees. There is also quite some structure in the picture. There is a line going from the stooped guard on the left who picks up a stone, over Stephen's head to the guard on the left who lifts high the stone to hit Stephen. Another line goes from the lower right over Stephen to the turbaned oriental horseman. The light sent by God also follows a diagonal of the plate. These oblique lines create movement, even though all figures are in a static position either knelt or standing. The cruelty of the scene of the half-naked guard who holds the final stone high above his head is very dramatic.

Elsheimer's painting is particularly brilliant by the marvellous colours on the copper medium. His picture is a formidable display of masterly skills. Thus it must have testified to the wonders of the natural genius of humanity that showed sometimes in the creation of God.

Other paintings

The Disputation of Saint Stephen

Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1455 – 1526). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen

Ludovico Cardi called Cigoli (1559-1613). Galleria Palatina of the Pitti Palace – Florence. 1597.

Saint Stephen preaching in Jerusalem

Vittore Carpaccio (ca. 1455 – 1526). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1514.

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Domenico Zampieri called Il Domenichino. Musée Condé. Chantilly.

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Jean Tassel (ca. 1608-1667). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. 1666.

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1754.

The Stoning of Saint Stephen

Benvenuto Tisi called Garofalo (1481-1559). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1540.

Saint Stephen between Saint James and Saint Peter

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Galleria dell' Accademia. Florence. 1493.

Saint Stephen

Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337). The Horne Collection. Florence. Ca. 1320.

Saint Stephen

Francesco Raibolini called Francesco Francia (ca. 1450-1517). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1475.

Saint Stephen anointed to Deacon

Vittore Carpaccio (1456/1457-1525/1526). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1511.

The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen

Lorenzo Lotto (ca; 1480-1556). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Stephen

Girolamo da Santacroce (died 1556). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

*James***Saint James the Great conquering the Moors**

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Szépművészeti Múzeum - Budapest. 1759.

Saint James the Great conquering the Moors

Juan Carreno de Miranda (1614-1685). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1660.

James

Saint James the Great was an apostle, son of Zebedee and brother of another apostle, John^{E5}. Their mother presented James and John to Jesus. She wanted her sons not only to follow Christ, she was ambitious for them in her admiration for the new message Jesus had been talking of. She offered her sons to sit the one to the left, the other to the right of Jesus. But Jesus told them that they did not understand the hardships they would be facing with their proposal. He then asked them whether they were really willing to drink with him the cup of suffering. When the answer was unwaveringly yes, the two new apostles followed Jesus.

Both were witnesses to the most important events in the life of Jesus, the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection. Only Peter, James and John were with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. John is frequently painted as one of the few bystanders next to the Crucifixion, often supporting the Blessed Virgin. Jesus on the cross gave Mary to John as his adopted mother. John was the apostle beloved of Christ. John also wrote the fourth Gospel. The lives of James and John are wrought with legends. A Samaritan town refused to welcome Christ. When James and John saw this, they urged Jesus to call down fire from the Heavens to destroy the Samaritans. So, Jesus called James and John Boanerges or ‘Sons of Thunder’, because they were impetuous and had a rash temper^{E5}. James and John were willing to drink Jesus’s cup of suffering and indeed James’ fate was an early martyrdom around 44 AD, the first apostle to be martyred, whereas John suffered Domitian’s persecution. John would survive those however, go to Patmos, write his Revelation, and continue his preaching.

James preached in Judea and Samaria. Then the ‘Golden Legend’ tells that he went to Spain but made no headway there, converted only very few to Christianity and soon returned to Judea. Saint James was the first apostle to be martyred. He was killed by the sword in Jerusalem under King Herod Agrippa, just before the same Herod imprisoned Peter. The body of Saint James with his severed head was supposed to be brought by boat from Palestine to Spain in the fourth century. The ‘Golden Legend’ says that the Christians put the body on a rudderless boat, giving the burial over to divine providence. The boat made port in Galicia of Spain, in the realm of Queen Lupa. Several miracles were performed before the burial, for Queen Lupa tried to prevent the burial on her grounds. But finally she believed the wondrous events and became a Christian herself^{G49}. The relics were kept at a village in Galicia, the northwest of Spain, later called Santiago for Saint James. This is the legend as it was written down in the thirteenth century. The first charter mentioning the tomb of Saint James in Spain dates from 829^{G14}.

A tomb of a martyr with a severed head brought in a boat is probably linked to indeed a historical figure. A Spanish preacher called Priscillus was decapitated around 386 in Trier of Germany. His decapitated body could have been returned to Spain and his cult continued in Galicia^{G14}. The legend of James and the historical fact of Priscillus could have been joined.

Spain

Spain was mostly Arab in the ninth century. Tariq-b-Ziyad had attacked the country from 710 on. He landed at Gibraltar – Djebel al Tariq - and rapidly conquered the greater part of Spain, helped by the fact that the original Spanish had had enough of Wisigoth reign. Early Spanish nobles preferred Moorish reign and supported the Arabs. The Arab armies were stopped however in their advance to the North in 732 when in a sudden campaign they wanted to conquer the basilica of Saint Martin of Tours in France. Charles Martel at the head of a Frankish army stopped them. In the eight century, the Arabs devastated Galicia and the North of Spain.

But already in 739 the situation started to change slowly. The Spanish nobles of the North took the initiative to reconquer the land. Alphonso I of the small Kingdom of Asturia retook Galicia and incorporated it in Asturia. His son, Alphonso II, made an alliance with Emperor Charlemagne to fight the Moors. Alphonso III, crowned in 850, took Leon in 856, Burgos in 883 and Zamora in 893.

So, Spain desperately needed a saint in the early ninth century. And not just any saint. Spain needed a very powerful one, a warrior-saint. Who better than James, who had with John been closest to Jesus and who had been a Boanerges at that? The tomb of Saint James may well have been a wishful finding, the culmination of the Spanish Christian energy dressed against the Moors, in order to galvanise once more Spanish war spirit to reconquer the land from the Moors.

James became the patron saint of Spain. A strong image of a fighter-saint was necessary; one who could perform miracles in the battlefield. Soon, ‘Saint James’ or ‘Santiago’ was shouted as the battle cry of Asturian soldiers winning back their land. For that, the tomb was a place to find new strength and support. The site of Saint James’ burial was a village that grew to a small town. Along with the success of the wars against the Moors the reputation of Saint James grew. The town of Santiago in Compostella thus became a famous pilgrimage place. The heyday of the pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostella was from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The cult was based on Saint James defending Christianity against the Moors, a faith so well rendered by Tiepolo in his painting. This was testified by many miracles, such as Saint James’ appearance in the middle of the battle of Clavijo against the Moors in 844. That battle occurred around 930, and was going badly for the Spanish against the Saracens. But Saint James according to a legend, promised King Ramirez of Castille victory in a dream. From there James received the name of ‘Matamores’ or Moor slayer and the saint is usually painted while his horse tramples the Saracen under its hooves.

Santiago de Compostella

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella was one of the most important if not the most important of medieval Europe. The first highborn pilgrim came to Santiago around 950: Godescal, bishop of Le Puy in France. The Franks would help, if not with weapons then at least with spiritual aid. More and more pilgrims took the roads for Compostella. Monasteries along the roads provided hospitality for them. Many roads led thus from all over Europe to Galicia. Pilgrims to the shrine of Compostella wore scallop shells, the symbols that traditionally guaranteed them shelter and food along the roads. The roads started in Sweden or England and Ireland. They started in Antwerp, Cologne, Metz, Basle and many other European towns. They continued in four well-known major trails over France. One trail went from Paris over Tours and Bordeaux, another one started in the abbey of Vézelay in Burgundy and went over Limoges. A third came from Basle in Switzerland over Le Puy and the famous abbey of Conques. A fourth came east from the Provence, from Arles over Toulouse. The pilgrims went to Compostella and if they did not perish on the route, returned with knowledge of major parts of Europe. The pilgrimages opened up Europe, they showed that covering the vast distances was quite possible and thus promoted trade over Europe still more than was already existing.

The churches and monasteries along the roads to Compostella where pilgrims could rest, spend the night or receive something to eat, all have enmasoned somewhere in their walls the Santiago sign: the scallop-shell or Saint James' shell, or 'compostela', so that pilgrims could recognise where they were welcome. These shell-signs remain. One can find them in the front wall of churches and abbeys still today, all over Europe.

Santiago de Compostella was destroyed and burned by the Moor Almansur in 997, during a period when the Muslims became more powerful again, but the tomb was untouched. The Kings of Castille opened the routes to Santiago again around 1030. Somewhat later, in 1064, the town of Coïmbra was taken by Ferdinand the Great. This was a new feat for Santiago since Ferdinand, the infante Sanches and Rodrigo de Bivar called El Cid had made a pilgrimage to Saint James before the battle, to implore his support. From then on, the Moors were truly losing ground in Spain. Around this time also, a formidable cathedral was built on the tomb of Saint James. Asturia-Leon and Castille were united around the same time under one monarch, giving rise to the more powerful Kingdom of Castille.

The war against the Moors continued until the fifteenth century. In 1492 Muley Boabdil handed over the keys of Granada and its citadel, the Alhambra, to the Christian Kings of Spain. This was of course the same date as the discovery of North America and the cry of Santiago continued during the conquest of the Americas, where many cities received the name of Santiago. This conquest was regarded as a crusade for Catholic faith and was led in Saint James' name. The last crusade was the uprising of the Spanish army supported by the right-wing Phalange in 1936 against the government of the Frente Popular. The Caudillo Franco's soldiers used the call 'Santiago y arriba Espana' to the victory of the Franquists in 1939. Franco himself was born about 100 kilometres north of Santiago.

The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela is an imposing monument to Christian faith. Pilgrimages took off again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; most of the Baroque monuments and churches date from those times. Famous now are the priests and monks of Santiago who sway an enormous censer, an incense burner of sixty kilograms called the botafumeiro, all through the middle aisle of the church during Mass. At least four men are necessary to start the censer slowly swinging, then the vessel goes faster and farther in one long arc, spreading the incense perfume all through the church.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela continues in our days. The James' shell still remains a sign of the roads; one can find the shell somewhere in almost all Belgian, French and Spanish towns and in towns of many other European countries. The tradition of pilgrimage on foot lives on. Pilgrims fly by aeroplane or take the train to the relatively recent pilgrimage site of Lourdes in France, but the Compostela pilgrimage has remained a journey on foot. Many Christian Europeans still take the roads and either go to Santiago in one track or make it a lifetime journey. They take off from their native town once or twice a year, go by car to a point they reached the last time and continue on foot for a couple of days to another place nearer to Santiago. It may take some of them ten years this way, but they reach their goal ultimately. The pilgrimage is particularly popular with Christian managers and intellectuals.

Rocamadour

Santiago de Compostela is not the only pilgrimage town of the Middle Ages. Another famous one is Rocamadour in the French Quercy region. This was also an early pilgrimage site, dating from the eleventh century. Rocamadour is a very small village, almost only one street, hanging against the rocks of a spectacular hilly landscape, the Causses. Roc Amator in the old Occitanian language means 'who loves the rock'.

The Rocamadour chapel held a black Madonna that was ardently revered. It really started off as a pilgrimage site when in 1166 a body was found close to the chapel. The body was probably of a hermit known to have lived at Rocamadour, called Amadour, but a later legend of the fifteenth century accepted by Pope Martin V in 1428 attributed the corpse to Zacheus, husband of the Saint Veronica who had wiped Jesus's face during his passion. Rocamadour became the most famous pilgrimage to the Holy Virgin of Europe and it lay on the roads to Compostela.

More than two hundred steps lead to the chapel of Rocamadour, high against the hill. The pilgrims ascended these steps on their knees. Kings and bishops went to Rocamadour: Henri II Plantagenet was one of the first to come, after having been cured miraculously by calling on the Virgin. Other illustrious pilgrims were Blanche of Castille, her son Saint Louis King of France, many other Kings of France up to Louis XI. Here is a connection with Santiago and Spain: Blanche of Castille brought with her the Spanish religious ardour from Santiago to Rocamadour and her son, King Louis of France, became known as Saint Louis. The flags of Rocamadour were used in the battles of the Spanish against the Moors.

The heydays of Rocamadour were during the thirteenth century, but tens of thousands flocked again in the town on the special Great Pardon days installed by Pope Martin

V in the year 1428. On these special days, full pardon was given for one's sins. During the Hundred Year War, in 1562, the Protestant captain Bessonies destroyed and burned the village. Rocamadour would only be restored as a pilgrimage place in the nineteenth century.

Rocamadour is a splendid site where the small river Alzou has cut almost a canyon out of the Causse hills. Its loneliness, purity, silence and piety continue to inspire receptive people. In 1936 the composer Francis Poulenc came to Rocamadour as a tourist. He was so impressed by the spirituality of the site that he converted to Christianity and composed on religious themes, from his 'Litanies à la Vierge Noire', or 'Litanies to the Black Madonna', to the 'Dialogue des Carmélites'. He died in 1963. The Museum of Sacred Art of Rocamadour bears his name.

Santiago de Compostela and Rocamadour. How did these pilgrimage sites originate? It seems that over the centuries energy piled up in Europe. The energy found its directions of relief in Catholic fervour and specific targets. First Santiago and the reconquista of Spain, later the conquest of the Americas. Another objective was the formidable eleven crusades to that first pilgrimage site of Christian faith: Jerusalem. Rocamadour supported the essence of the cult of the Holy Virgin, which allowed Saint Joan of Arc to win back France from the English. It was the Madonna that appeared to Joan and told her to take up the coat of arms for France. Joan could thus gather around her the nobles of France and from then on the French armies were almost invincible.

Europe was much a Christian citadel, although Arab, Moor, Turkish and other cultures have much added to its diversity and richness of culture. But it cannot be denied that European history is mostly Christian history. European history was many times driven by this religion and its energy to conquests outside Europe as well of course as by the internal strives within Christianity such as of the many sects that interlocked and the religious wars, Reformation and Counter Reformation.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

The painting of 'Saint James the Great conquering the Moors' by Tiepolo was painted in Venice. We have few paintings of Saint James made by native Spanish painters. So, it is a geographic surprise that the most impressive painting of Saint James comes from a Venetian painter. The commission of the Spanish ambassador in London of the painting explains the subject. Tiepolo, who was born in Venice in 1696, painted more and more for the court of Madrid and went to live there in 1761. He decorated the Throne Room and the Guard Room of the Spanish royal palace. He died in Madrid in 1770.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo was a pupil of the historic painter Gregorio Lazzarini. So he knew historic scenes and learned some of the theatrical expressions of his master. Tiepolo's style of dazzling effects in presentation and his soft, pastel colours he acquired however from another Venetian painter: Giovanni Battista Piazzetta. Piazzetta was thirteen years older than Tiepolo was, but both painters worked almost at the same time, decorating the Venetian palaces and villas. Piazzetta positioned figures against the sky, in very dramatic and epic representations, often without any

landscape. He introduced groups of many figures with each separate expressions, attitudes of passion, surprise. Little angels flew around in mists and clouds. Piazzetta led Baroque art in new directions, lighter, more confuse in presentation, into whirling scenes and soft colours. Tiepolo painted in the same style, but he could modulate his representations to a profound art. He was both a decorator and a painter of smaller works on canvas.

As a decorator especially Tiepolo would follow Piazzetta and evolve this master's style into heights of mannered scenes and fantasies that are called Rococo. He became so well known for decorating Venetian palaces that he was called upon to work all over Europe. He worked in Milan from 1730 to 1740. He was called to decorate the residence of the Prince-Bishop Schönborn in Würzburg, Germany. Here, two centuries before, the great Matthias Grünewald had worked. Tiepolo painted on the ceilings of the monumental staircase of the palace the 'Four Continents' and the 'Life of Emperor Barbarossa'. The architect Balthazar Neumann built the residence. The two geniuses turned the palace in one of the outstanding pieces of art of the century. Tiepolo continuously sought new means to apply light and soft colours, contrasts, figures in extravagant clothes, groupings of intertwined figures, to obtain new effects that made his pictures into something strange, abstract, of the realm of dreams. Tiepolo is all about extravagance, illusions and transitoriness. He is the last important genius painter of Venice. Painting in Venice thus ended in a last firework of the senses.

And yet, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo was sufficiently intelligent to be able to paint intense character pictures. He could do much more than decorate. The Saint James we present here is such a painting, where can be seen a powerful Tiepolo, master of his art and also of the expression of his feelings. This is not just one more of those shallow Rococo paintings, but one that can be compared to the best expressions of masters of any century.

James is a noble youth, looking ecstatically but serenely at the sky where his powers come from. He dedicates his deeds to God. He is an idealistic figure, a white knight, and not a rude soldier. This is shown in the white robes flowing around James and in the standard he holds. The giant flag flows like the robes, continues their movements to the right of the picture. James is not clad in rich armour, bears no jewels. James is not a worldly nobleman, but a sober young man, almost a monk and this represents the ideal of a noble knight. He rides a white horse, but the animal is not wild and prancing: it also is controlled, held in reigns. It looks compassionately at the conquered Moor. James does not seem to kill the black Moor, only subduing him by the touch of his long straight sword on the Moor's neck. The sword is unwavering. It cannot be torn from his hand; it spirals around his wrist.

The Moor has been vanquished already. His curved sword lies on the ground. He holds his head down to the earth. The Moor's clothes are dark also, and painted in shadows, thus contrast with the white rider. The white masses of James and his horse tower above the Moor. So, while the Moor seems to fall into the black earth, the white knight James holding his head to the skies shows all the splendour of victory and the promises of Christian support from the Heavens.

Of course, Tiepolo would not be Tiepolo if he had not added some style figures by which he was known. Two winged angel-heads hang over the clouds and in the lower background a confused battle scene is shown before a Spanish castle, with interlaced horses, flags and figures. Moors are lying on the ground where James' horse has passed. James has a head with full curls, repeated in the curls of the ample manes of his horse. This contrasts even more with the black head with very short cut hair of the Moor.

Tiepolo must have thought much about his scene. He has used firm lines to re-enforce the static monumentality of the picture. The movement of the sagging Moore, of the aristocratic horse and the victorious flag form two parallel lines. Perpendicular to these lines is another line going from James' sword over his outstretched hand to his head. Thus, the view is drawn automatically to the centre point of the picture: the gaze upwards of the saint. This is the essence of the picture: the victory of the heavens and of the Christian ideal.

Saint James Boanerges the impetuous was the Matamores or Moor Slaughterer. Yet the sword lies there gently on the Moor's neck. It is a gesture of pity over the vanquished, a gesture of consolation, maybe so that now the Moor may save his soul in Christian faith. It is a gesture of protection. The wide-open mantle reminds us of images of another Saint, of Saint Martin. The Saint Martin who with the same gesture of the robe and a drawn, long sword cuts his mantle in two, to give half to a beggar. There are many such paintings and sculptures in Western Europe of Saint Martin on a horse, cutting his mantle in two. The scene of Tiepolo with Saint James is a scene of dominance, of tenderness, of empathy with the loser, and of a static nobility that seemed to be necessary over the centuries to picture the ideals of knighthood. In this, Tiepolo's Saint James joins the other noblest expression of knighthood that can be found in not a painting but a sculpture: Donatello's Saint Georges, now in the Bargello Museum of Florence and with a copy still in a niche of OrsanMichele church. This Saint Georges is also a noble young man, quite decisive in his expression but otherwise in a static defensive posture. These saints are no oppressive figures, no torturers or killers but protective young knights devoted to the Christian ideals. Tiepolo has brought all these images together in a powerful picture, expressing a depth of vision and feelings that could be expected of a genius painter.

Saint James conquering the Moors is thus not a Tiepolo picture as we would expect. It is a serene and direct picture, which shows us the genius of a Tiepolo completely controlling his emotions. Tiepolo has not painted a whirling action scene with James in middle of a battle, interlaced figures and curls, delicate details. The battle remains in the background and merely the essence is shown. The composition remains static and monumental, as needed to express the meaning of the picture and of course: as a Spanish Ambassador might like. Tiepolo needed to make the scene static so that the picture would become everlasting, the image of a thought and of a vision. This was the vision and the strength that would lead the Spanish in the end to conquer the land from the Moors. More than any Spanish artist, Tiepolo had captured splendidly this Spanish vision of Saint James.

Tiepolo brought with pictures such like the one we show here more profound meaning than we would expect from Rococo. Rococo is considered nowadays as an unbridled art in which much more attention is given to sentimental, light, overlaid elements of

decoration and unchecked fantasies in representation. Rococo seems to have been more than that with artists like Tiepolo. Rococo could take also a serious devotional subject, painted by an artist in a powerful but relaxed way, conveying a profound meaning but to which was added a profusion of sentimental decorative elements. It is hard not to agree with the combination of seriousness and joyful elation of this art and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo was its greatest Italian master.

Juan Carreno de Miranda

Tiepolo had had an example. In 1660, almost hundred years before Tiepolo, the Spanish artist Juan Carreno de Miranda made also a painting of Saint James the Great conquering the Moors. We see immediately that Tiepolo must have known this picture. He might have seen it at the court of Spain, or copied drawings of it may have been presented to him. Carreno de Miranda's painting is untypical for Spanish art, in that it represents a very lively scene and not the usual static portraiture common in Spanish pictures. But it is of course a scene of the life of a saint, and in that aspect it meets again the general standards of traditional Spanish art of the seventeenth century.

Carreno de Miranda was a Spanish nobleman, born in Aviles in 1614. He was a Baroque painter, who worked for several monasteries before being introduced to the Spanish court by Velásquez. He painted large frescoes in Italian style for the royal palace of Madrid. He then worked mainly as the portraitist of the Court of Spain, became official Painter of the Court, until he died in Madrid in 1685.

The Saint James of Carreno de Miranda is a passionate warrior who shows no mercy at all. He flings his sword high above him to strike violently all enemies of Christianity. His white horse prances, ready to trample a Moor to death. This is probably how Spanish noblemen saw Saint James, their Santiago, at his best, how they liked him in the middle of their battlefields. This was the spirit of the Conquistadores who would wage violence without pity in the South Americas.

There are similarities and differences between the Tiepolo and the Carreno de Miranda pictures. Both paintings show Saint James fighting on a white horse, in the midst of action. Both riders triumphantly hold a flag that flows in the wind. But the Tiepolo Saint James is a noble youthful knight showing mercy, whereas Carreno de Miranda's Saint James is an avenging monk-soldier. Carreno de Miranda's painting is very dynamic, his horse prances high with lifted hooves. Tiepolo's painting is more in restraint; his horse is standing and quietly looking at the Moor. Tiepolo's knight is clad in white, the clothes of a nobleman. Carreno de Miranda's James is dressed in the dark, coarse cloth of a monk. His James is intent on the battle and his long untidy hair makes him much more a warrior than the mystic Saint James of Tiepolo. Both paintings inspire us very different emotions. They may have been typical for the character of the countries and the times they were made in. Carreno de Miranda's vision was one of raw conquest in the name of a religion without compassion. Tiepolo's Saint James is a picture of nobility and forgiveness. Tiepolo modulated his Spanish example.

The paintings of Carreno de Miranda and of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo are the pride of the National Gallery of Hungary. The collection of Spanish art in the Museum of Budapest is very important, with more than eighty paintings^{H1}. The Esterházy family acquired many of these paintings in the nineteenth century. The Esterházy collection became national Hungarian art treasure after 1870, but the Esterházy continued to add paintings to it. The Saint James of Carreno de Miranda was donated by Jenő Boross of New York in 1922; the painting came from the collection of the French king Louis-Philippe^{H1}. The Museum can present both pictures next to each other to show the differences in time and styles of a typical Spanish painter Carreno de Miranda of the seventeenth century and of the Venetian Tiepolo of the eighteenth.

Other paintings:

The Apostle Saint James

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1612-1613.

Saint James

Cosimo Tura (1431-1495). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. Ca. 1485-1490.

Saint James the Great

Jusepe de Ribera called Lo Spagnoletto (1591-1652). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London.

Saint James

Workshop of Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1485 or later.

Saint James interceding with the Virgin in Favour of the Souls

Michel-François Dandré-Bardon (1700-1778). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

Saint James fighting the Infidels

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1600-1665). Oratorio di San Giacomo della Marina. Genoa.

Saint James anoints the first Bishop of Braga

Orazio de Ferrari (1606-1657). Oratorio di San Giacomo della Marina. Genoa. Ca. 1647.

The Apostle James defeating the Infidels at the Battle of Clavijo

Pseudo Jacopino (14th century). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna. 1320's.

The Battle of Clavijo

Iacopino di Francesco (1360-1370 active, known). Chiesa di San Giacomo Maggiore. Bologna.

Saint James the Apostle (Triptych of Lepreno)

Francesco di Simone da Santacroce (ca. 1440-1508). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Saints

Introduction

The history of Christian religion had its heroes, martyrs and leaders in all centuries up to our time. These were officially recognised and named as Saints by the Roman Catholic Church in a process called canonisation. Many books exist on the lives of these men and women. For the history of paintings one of the most important sources was the 'Golden Legend'. The saints were venerated. Parts of their body or even of the clothes they had worn or parts of their instruments of passion were spread and sometimes buried in the altars of churches dedicated to their examples. These churches needed pictures that represented the lives of the saints. There are over fifteen hundred saints. Of most of these saints' lives exist pictures. It would be impossible in this book even to present one picture on the theme of each saint.

Surprisingly however, a few figures appealed more to the imagination of the greatest painters. Each painter made at least once a picture of Jerome, Sebastian or Francis. These pictures are particularly interesting for art history because they are good examples for comparative studies. With the pictures of Jerome and Sebastian we can follow the evolution in modes of representation, in styles and in colour, in expression and in spirituality.

*Saint Jerome***Saint Jerome Penitent**

Piero della Francesca (ca. 1410-1492). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1450.

Saint Jerome in his Study

Lorenzo Monaco (ca. 1370-1425). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. Around 1418.

Saint Jerome in the Desert, Jerome bringing the Lion to the Monastery, the Death of Jerome

Lazzaro Bastiani (1425-1512). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint Jerome

Cosimo Tura (1431-1495). The National Gallery - London.

Saint Jerome reading in a Landscape

Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1430/1431-1516). The Ashmolean Museum – Oxford.

Saint Jerome in his study

Colantonio (ca. 1440-1465 active). Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte – Naples. 1445.

Saint Jerome in his study

Antonella da Messina (1430-1479). The National Gallery – London. 1475-1476.

Saint Jerome

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Pinacoteca Vaticana – The Vatican. Around 1480.

Saint Jerome

Filippino Lippi (1457-1486). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. 1496.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Pietro Vanucci called Il Perugino (1448-1523). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. 1499-1502.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1506.

Saint Jerome

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Stedelijk Museum – Gent.

Saint Jerome in his Cell

Quentin Massys (1466-1530). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen.

The Saint Jerome Triptych

Adriaan Isenbrant (?-1555). Kunsthalle – Hamburg. 1510-1520.

Saint Jerome penitent

Giovanni Pedrini called Giampetrino. Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. Active from 1510 to 1540.

Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg as Saint Jerome

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), Hans Cranach (?). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota (Florida). 1526.

The Temptations of Saint Jerome

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1541.

Saint Jerome

Marinus Van Reymerswael (ca. 1493-1567). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Antwerp. 1541.

Saint Jerome

Henri Blès (1480-1550). Musée d'Art Ancien – Namur. 1535-1550.

Saint Jerome penitent

Master of the Grillhet Masterpiece of the Provence. Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. Around 1550.

Saint Jerome penitent

Tiziano Vecellio (1489/1490 – 1576). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint Jerome in the Wilderness

Paul Bril (1554-1626). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. 1595-1600.

Saint Jerome

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Museo Galleria Borghese – Rome. Around 1606.

Saint Jerome

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Museum of Saint John's – Valletta, Malta. 1607-1608.

The Last Communion of Saint Jerome

Domenico Zampieri called Il Domenichino (1581-1641). Pinacoteca Vaticana – The Vatican. 1614.

Saint Jerome

Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam. 1618.

Saint Jerome in his Study

Hendrick van Steenwyck the Younger (1580-1649). The Courtauld Institute and Art Galleries – London. 1624.

Saint Jerome

Jacques Blanchard (1600-1638). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1626.

Saint Jerome

Lubin Baugin (1612-1663). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen.

Saint Jerome sustained by Angels

Johann Liss (1595-1629). Church of San Nicolo dei Tolentini – Venice. Around 1627.

Saint Jerome

Artus Wollfort (1581-1641). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen. Around 1630.

Saint Jerome and the Angel

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Detroit Institute of Arts – Detroit. 1640-1642.

Saint Jerome

Antonio de Pereda. Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1643.

Saint Jerome

Juan Valdés Leal (1622-1690). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1656-1658.

The Death of Saint Jerome

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696 – 1770). Museo Poldi Pezzoli – Milan.

Saint Jerome has been one of the most frequent subjects of painters from the first days till ever. Most paintings however date from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries and we propose to look at Italian paintings from the fifteenth century made by Lorenzo Monaco, Antonello da Messina, Piero della Francesca, Giovanni Bellini, Leonardo da Vinci, Filippino Lippi and Cosimo Tura. A Dutch-Flemish Bosch painting dates from around the change of that century. From the sixteenth century, we propose Italian pictures by Giorgio Vasari, by Pietro Perugino and by Giampetrino. We also show Flemish-Dutch pictures by Quentin Massys and Marinus van Reymerswael, a French painting and a Flemish-Italian one made on the brink of the next century by Paul Bril. Of the seventeenth century we propose pictures by the specialists of Holy Lives, the Spanish artists, here Antonio de Pereda, and Juan

Valdés Leal. We will also present a picture by the Italian Guido Reni. Jerome was painted also in the Netherlands and France in that century: we show a painting respectively of Hendrick van Steenwyck and by the French painters Jacques Blanchard and Lubin Baugin.

Many other painters have taken on Saint Jerome as a subject. There is a 'Saint Jerome Penitent' of Jan Gossaert in the National Gallery of Art of Washington D.C. That same museum holds a Saint Jerome of El Greco, an especially daunting picture. There is Jan Van Eyck's 'Saint Jerome in his study' in the Detroit Institute of Arts. There is one by Albrecht Dürer, and so on. Almost every figurative painter has painted a Saint Jerome.

Life of Jerome

Saint Jerome's full name was Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius. Jerome or Hieronymus lived from 341 to 420^{E5}. He was born in Dalmatia. The 'Golden Legend' says he was born in the town of Stridon on the boundary between Dalmatia and Pannonia (Hungary). He studied extensively in Rome and was baptised around 366. He left for Palestine and arrived in Antioch in 374. He became very ill in Antioch and had a dream in which God condemned him for not being Christian enough and too much of a Roman rhetoric. He became a hermit in the desert rocks of Syria for five years. He left his rocks however, was ordained a priest in Antioch and studied further in Constantinople. There he made translations of Greek works in Latin. He returned to Rome where he became the secretary of Pope Damasus, during whose Pontificate Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity as the religion of the Roman State. Damasus was also a pope who was violently opposed to dissensions in the Christian church. He opposed the Donatists of North Africa and other schisms. Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome to revise the Latin version of the Bible into a single final volume. Jerome had learned Hebrew earlier already, while a hermit, so made it his life work to revisit the original Hebrew texts. This Latin Bible was later to be called the Vulgate, the reference version of the Bible in Roman Catholicism.

Jerome stayed in Rome for three years. He left for Bethlehem, together with a group of ladies who had lead a convent life in Rome. They made pilgrimages to Palestine and Egypt. Finally, the nuns Paula and her daughter Eustochium founded a convent in Bethlehem. Jerome founded a monastery there too. He remained the rest of his life in Bethlehem. He continued to study, to write, to comment on the lives of saints like Saint Paul the Hermit and Saint Malchus (who had been a hermit like Jerome in the Syrian desert of Chalcis). Jerome died in Bethlehem. He was buried under the Church of the Nativity, but later his body was brought to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

Saint Jerome was known for his difficult character. He was sarcastic, controversial, had a biting rhetoric and like Pope Damasus, refused compromise on all subjects of the Bible^{E5}. He was a priest but scarcely said a Mass. He was brilliant and a traditionalist, so, of course, he aroused jealousies. More than once he left a town surrounded by gossip and scandal. He left Rome because of gossip about his relations to Paula.

Jerome wanted as accurate a Bible as possible, soundly based on the oldest texts. He even wanted all monastic life to be directed to the study of the Bible texts, an idea, which he put into practice both in his simple monastery and in Paula's convent of Bethlehem.

The paintings of Saint Jerome can represent him in various ways. He may be shown as the penitent hermit in front of his rock cave of the Chalcis desert. He can be dishevelled and partly naked, kneeling before a crucifix in the desert. He sometimes holds a rock in his hand, a symbol of his penance. Jerome would also have beaten his chest with such a rock in order to hold back the temptations that disturbed him from his work. Jerome may be being whipped by angels for being accused by God to prefer Cicero to the bible. He may be depicted hearing the trumpets of the Last Judgement in the desert^{G41}.

Often also a lion is at Saint Jerome's feet. This may come from Saint Paul the Hermit, Paul of Thebes, of whom Jerome wrote about. This Paul is usually shown with two lions who according to legend (Jerome's writings) burrowed Paul's grave at the request of Saint Anthony of Egypt. Anthony had been a hermit also, subject to a series of temptations by which, like Jerome, he became a notable subject of paintings over the centuries. The lion may also come from another medieval legend according to which Jerome had removed a thorn from a lion's paw, after which the ferocious animal thankfully had remained a companion to Jerome. The lion is also a symbol of the power of the scholar over forces of nature and over worldly matters.

The 'Golden Legend' compiled various legends around Jerome, one of which was that while Jerome was in the monastery of Bethlehem a lion suddenly leaped into the courtyard. It showed its wounded foot. Jerome called the monks to wash the animal's feet and to clean the wounds carefully^{G49}. They then found the paw to have been scathed by thorns. The lion recovered and lived among the monks. Jerome even assigned a duty to the lion. The beast was to lead an ass that carried firewood from the forest to the monastery. The lion played the role of guardian, but nevertheless merchants came by and stole the donkey. The lion returned ashamed to the monastery. Jerome punished the beast by having it carry the loads of firewood itself. But one day the lion saw the merchants again, sprang upon them and drove the caravan of camels to the monastery. The merchants then offered half their oil for Jerome's blessing^{G49}.

Because of this legend, paintings of Jerome contain not just images of the lion but also often a caravan with camels and merchants travelling by in the landscape. Lazzaro Bastiani, a Venetian painter working mostly in the second half of the fifteenth century took several scenes of these legends and depicted them on the predella panels below a Saint Jerome altarpiece he made for the cathedral of Asolo. The first panel shows the lion in the courtyard of the monastery amongst all the frightened brothers. Saint Jerome looks at the paw of the animal. The second part of the predella shows a traditional representation of Jerome, with the saint in his cave beating his breast with a stone, knelt in front of a crucifix, amidst his books and with the lion at his side. These scenes are the small images of a painter whose only intent it was to show simple scenes of Jerome's life in a straightforward way. The pictures have more historical than artistic value. They show indeed how even in the late fifteenth century, in the main period of Italian Renaissance, the 'Golden Legend'

remained an important source on the lives of the saints for painters. The last panel shows the Funeral Mass of Jerome in his monastery.

Jerome beats his breast with a stone in various paintings. This also is a reference to a story from the 'Golden Legend'. Jerome read Cicero by day and Plato by night, because he disliked the coarse language of the Bible. He came down with a fever however, so sudden that preparations for his funeral were under way and he was hauled before the Judge's tribunal. Jerome said he was a Christian but the Judge told he was a Ciceronian and had him flogged for having lied. Jerome then would have pleaded for pardon and pledged that he would never again deny Christ by possessing worldly books. Whereupon he regained his strength^{G49}.

Jerome can also be shown in paintings as a man of learning, seated in his study with books all around him. Or he is painted as a Doctor of the Church, in full cardinal's ornate. He is then translating the Bible. Jerome never really was ordained a cardinal, but again the 'Golden Legend' wrote that he was ordained a cardinal-priest in the church of Rome at the age of twenty-nine.

Paintings of Piero della Francesca and Pietro Perugino

The Piero della Francesca picture of Florence is one of the oldest of our collection. When we look at a Piero della Francesca painting, the first thing we ask ourselves is: where is the geometry, where is the mathematics? We expect evident and subtle geometries in this painting, especially since his well-known 'Baptism of Christ' of the National Gallery of London dates from 1442, from well before his Saint Jerome. And that Baptism picture contains many strict geometric patterns. Piero was born around 1420, died in 1492, and seems to have stopped painting around 1470 to devote himself solely to perspective and mathematics. The geometries are subtler in the Saint Jerome. There are triangles in this picture: the crown of the trees forms two triangles of green and a triangle also is the whole corner where Jerome sits. The picture has a distinct lower and upper half, but the overall pattern is not so strict as in the Baptism. Perspective there is: the treetops of the right recline to a point where also the line of the left rocks is drawn to. But the main point of this painting seems to be nature and the face of the Saint.

Saint Jerome sits before his rock cave. His cloak is the colour of the rocks, which makes him almost part of the rocks. He is barefoot, scarcely clad. Saint Jerome wears a stone in one hand, the symbol of his penance, a rosary in the other. His books are on a table and in a niche of the rocks. On the ground lies the red cardinal hat, although Jerome never really was ordained a cardinal. The lion is also there, a symbol of the fighter of God. The lion lies in the continuity of the triangle made by Jerome's figure and the rocks. Our view is attracted by Jerome's face, and then glides down to the lion. From the lion we see the reflections of the trees in the small river. Then we go up again to the beautiful green of the leaves. Saint Jerome is not in a desert in Piero della Francesca's painting. He seems to live in a cave, but a forest and a small river in front of low hills form a bucolic landscape. The trees are light, airy, not entangled. Each tree is separately painted, by the orderly mind of Piero della Francesca. A mathematical mind likes well-defined pictures, not entangled bushes. The river flows

calmly, silvery and in the clear waters are reflected first the green tree crowns, then the tree trunks.

The face of Saint Jerome is remarkable. Piero has not really made an old man of Jerome, which is historically right since when Jerome lived as a hermit, he was still quite young. This is one of the most remarkable faces of Italian Renaissance. Jerome seems to be determined, ascetic and slim but with a strong will. He wants to learn out of his books, be left alone, but to a purpose and he does not regret it. We see an obsession here, but not an ascetic, mystic loss to the world. Not a man easy to talk to. He seems too intelligent for his time, too intelligent to remain in a cave. He looks up and the line of the rocks accentuates that line upwards.

Saint Jerome has been painted in the left corner as if to give more emphasis to his loneliness and separation from the world. Piero wants to say: this is not a man like all other men. Leave him alone with his books. He does not want to see you, spectator. More important is God's creation, you look at that. So, this seemingly strange, simple painting again is pervaded by the intelligence of the Tuscan mathematician. And the Jerome of della Francesca seems to be exactly how we would imagine the scholarly painter genius to be.

Pietro Vanucci called Il Perugino took this example of Piero della Francesca around 1500 for his own picture of 'Saint Jerome in the Desert'. Pietro Perugino may have been a student of Piero della Francesca. He became far more famous over the centuries than Piero della Francesca, for having made some of the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, and having defined a new way of representation for religious art. Perugino's picture should be a desert scene according to the title. Although Jerome is knelt in front of his rock cave, the landscape is all but barren. In fact, with its lake surrounded by green trees this country looks more like the peaceful paradise of Eden than like a desert. It is a serene landscape, an ideal place to live in, conform to the kind of ideal places Perugino liked to design. Jerome looks gently, naively and interrogatively at the cross. He holds the stone of his penitence, but the stone is also a symbol of his tenacity. Lion and cardinal's hat are near.

Perugino has painted a calmer picture than Piero della Francesca, more balanced and sweet. Perugino has reverted the scene of Jerome but it nevertheless resembles much Piero della Francesca's picture, up to the thin bearded face of Jerome. Piero's mathematics was subdued into Pietro's art of composition so that the symmetries disappear in a softer image. Pietro has added splendid colours, such as can be seen in the blue cloak of Jerome. He also added nice details such as small flowers beneath and golden hues on the foliage of the plants above.

Pietro Perugino has composed the scene around the tree of hope, which is situated exactly along the middle vertical axis of the frame. Jerome's view goes to the Jesus on the cross and this movement is aligned with a diagonal. The contours of the rocks follow the other diagonal. This strong composition underscores the stability and rest of Pietro Perugino's picture. He had learned the compositional lessons of Piero della Francesca, but he subordinated these to the individual art of his painting.

Piero della Francesca's and Pietro Perugino's paintings were early Renaissance pictures. We saw clear design, keen eye for nature and for harmonious composition

but emphasis on the human figure, and a desire to blend classical ideals of beauty – certainly in Perugino – with religious themes.

Jerome in his study

Lorenzo Monaco was a painter who lived over the change of the centuries, from 1372 to 1424. His painting of Jerome still feels very Gothic. Jerome is a static, long figure in black robes, shown in his cubicle. The lion at his feet lifts its paw so that Jerome can pick out the thorn. This is one of the oldest representations of the legend of Jerome and the lion. Perspective is applied in this picture, but it is not yet right: some lines run parallel to each other. Jerome looks a wary, old man surrounded by all his books. He does not seem the powerful scholar and adventurer that he has been. In that the picture of Lorenzo Monaco resembles the one of Piero della Francesca. The golden colour is lavishly applied as in the Gothic paintings of Siena.

Colantonio was a master of Naples, where he worked at the court of the first Aragon King of Naples, Alphonso. The painting we show here was made in 1445, just two years after the Aragon Kings arrived in Naples. It presents Jerome in his study. Books are lying all around him on the shelves; paper lies on the ground. Various objects are shown on his desk, such as an hourglass. This was the most popular image of a scholar. It is a striking example of a realistic picture. But also some of the inordinate that we usually associate with Naples is shown here. In the study, Jerome takes a thorn out of the lion's paw. The lion presents its open paw and Colantonio has given a sad face to the animal. Jerome is dressed as a monk, but his cardinal's hat lies near.

Another early picture is of Antonello da Messina, who was a pupil of Colantonio. This work is remarkable and interesting in that we see how cells of monks were built in abbeys. As can still be seen for instance in the San Marco abbey of Florence, the cubicles of monks were made of wood and inserted in the space of a large hall. Antonello da Messina has shown Jerome in such a cubicle, with his books around him but also with all kinds of utensils. It seems there is only one cubicle in the large hall, which underscores the loneliness of the scholar. Jerome is in cardinal's red and the lion and the owl are also there. The owl reminds of the cave where Jerome lived for a long time as a hermit. The owl was also a symbol of wisdom and is thus naturally associated with Saint Jerome.

The paintings of Lorenzo Monaco and Antonello da Messina are simply images of Jerome as a scholar, with the usual symbols that are associated with the saint. They do not prove anything else, do not express views of the painter. Neither Lorenzo nor Antonello have shown other feelings but reverence for the Saint.

From the shop of Lucas Cranach comes a painting on which maybe his son, Hans Cranach, worked. We are now a century later, in the sixteenth, but the study of Jerome is still in bright light and clear colours. Jerome is Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg, humanist, correspondent of Erasmus, and opposer of Martin Luther. But this cardinal did not wish a schism in the Holy Roman Church and tried to avoid the inevitable separation to the end. This cardinal also was a patron of the arts. He

commissioned many works to the painter Mathis Gotthard Niethart, called Matthias Grünewald.

The painting of Lucas Cranach is full of medieval symbols. Jerome's cardinal hat and his lion are in the picture, but also many other objects. Next to Jerome are his pens in a wooden box, and also his prayer books. The apple represents the original sin; the pear denotes Christ incarnate; the beaver is an emblem of industriousness; the pheasant represents immortality, the peacock redemption. The fowl family is a reference to Christ caring for his flock; the hourglass indicates the shortness of life, and so on. The room is a typical German study, with high windows that let the light through amply. For the evenings there is a chandelier made of antlers, in which there is the image of a woman. Such chandeliers and the images were called 'Leuchterweibchen' or chandelier girls in German. The scene is austere, but at the same time full of joy so that the Cardinal is not thought of as too strict a man, he is not lonely and isolated, he is a man who can easily grasp the full real meaning of life and enjoy himself in company. Just as Mathis Gotthard Niethart, Lucas Cranach left Cardinal Albrecht to follow Luther.

A Protestant hint comes with the Leuchterweibchen. It is a fact that in many Late Medieval houses of Germany and Switzerland such chandeliers were popular. Examples have been preserved and there is a beautiful one in the Suermondt Ludwig Museum of Aachen for instance. But such a secular chandelier above the head of a cardinal must bear more meaning. Albrecht von Brandenburg was the most important cardinal of Germany and thus had to oppose Martin Luther. He had a mistress, a baker's daughter called Magdalena Redinger. The image of a woman above the Cardinal's head like a sword of Damocles may refer to the Cardinal's mistress.

Quentin Massys, a Flemish-Brabant painter also made a picture of Jerome in his cell. Massys must have known the earlier examples, because his scene much resembles these. Massys however brought Jerome's face in full view and gave less attention to the study. Massys brought gentleness and intelligence to Jerome's face. We see here also a Jerome caressing a skull. Around Jerome again are all the attributes of a doctor of the church or of a humanist thinker. Massys' picture proves that images of Jerome stayed as popular in the North as in Italy.

Hendrick van Steenwyck, a seventeenth century painter born in Frankfurt, Germany but who later worked in London, also made a picture of Saint Jerome in his study. One can see the difference of the centuries. The bright colours and details of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have made way for more darkness and gloom. Life has become more difficult. So, Jerome is now depicted in a cloister as large as a church, but a Roman arch and the lack of light almost makes a crypt of the volumes. Jerome's bed is in an alcove; the lion is near the sleeping place. Jerome is dressed in red as a cardinal. He is studiously looking through his books, lost in thoughts. The scene is not unlike Antonello's. But Van Steenwyck has used dark red and brown colours; light does not bring some joy. The saint works in isolation, far from the light of the world. And of course between this painting and the previous ones came Caravaggio, his night scenes and the discovery of the contrasts between light and dark.

Leonardo da Vinci and the suffering Saint Jerome

Leonardo's Saint Jerome of the Vatican Museum is an unfinished picture. Jerome is imagined as a man abandoned in the desert, lonely and in despair. He is emaciated; the bones of his ribs show through his thin body. His head is inclined in unhappiness. He is imploring help and company, maybe only recognition of his work. The Vulgate bible could have been devised in this way: an enormous work of a lonely man far from the world. The real Jerome was not like that and his Bible was not conceived in the wilderness. The real Jerome was a man of the world. He was the renowned secretary of a cardinal and Pope, learned women admired him. He lived in the circles of aristocratic Rome. But we like to think of the translation of the Vulgate as the lonely work of genius, just as Leonardo has depicted it. The painting is unfinished. Yet, we can sense the dark and soft tones, the vagueness of the objects in the typical da Vinci 'sfumato'.

Giovanni Pedrini, called Giampetrino, was probably a pupil of Leonardo da Vinci in Milan. Giampetrino was active in that town from 1510 to 1540, but little is known of his life. He was certainly an accomplished painter as can be seen in his picture of Jerome. The passion of Leonardo is gone in Giampetrino's painting. Giampetrino shows a devote, fervent, gentle but powerful man in prayers before a cross. The cross is small, but the painter placed it before a far landscape so that the cross can also be perceived as huge in that landscape. This was a nice visual finding for an otherwise not so well known painter, who is not counted among the greatest. Giampetrino's 'Jerome' is a simple, but honest and quite expressive picture.

Cosimo Tura – Jerome as a Conjuror

The Cosimo Tura painting is equally forceful as the Piero della Francesca picture is. Tura was a Ferrara painter, with a style very different from the Tuscan painters, although Andrea Mantegna influenced him. Some of that influence can be seen in the winding landscape. Tura's Saint Jerome is unworldly, with his long pointed beard, which makes more a magician of him than a saint. He seems to conjure the world with the gesture of his outstretched right arm holding the stone. He is enveloped in the draperies of his cloak as if weird plants entangle him. Jerome is now indeed in a rocky desert, with a violent landscape of red sand mountains and canyons around. Winding paths run against the slopes of the canyon and some pilgrims are seen on those roads, which may lead to a high cathedral hidden on the right. The strangeness is emphasised by the petrified tree trunk against which the Saint is drawn. Jerome's other symbols are there also: the lion on the lower left, his books on the ground and his red cardinal hat. Added is an owl, a cave bird, symbol of his loneliness and strangeness: the bird is a night animal. What a contrast with the Piero della Francesca painting! Piero placed Saint Jerome in a nice, airy landscape. Cosimo Tura saw his Saint Jerome as a weird sorcerer, with a strong muscled body, a hallucinating figure in a magic, wild canyon.

Filippino Lippi – a Florentine image of Jerome

A much sweeter painter than Cosimo Tura was Filippino Lippi. Filippino was the son of Filippo Lippi. His father died when he was still young, so Botticelli raised him and also became his teacher. Filippino made sophisticated, complex paintings with usually very many figures or many architectural elements in one and the same picture. His portraits are simpler though, and his Saint Jerome is a combination of both. Filippino's picture resembles Cosimo Tura's in the overall colours and in the intricate folds of the draped cloak of the Saint. But the Saint Jerome is a much more accessible, nice man here. Jerome keeps his head inclined and there is much tenderness in his eyes. He seems to be an older, more mature and forgiving man. He is knelt before the crucifix, which is fixed on a dead tree. That dead tree is a symbol of the death of Christ. The usual symbols of Jerome are very subtly present, almost hidden. The lion is seen on the ground behind Jerome; in his cave on the middle left lie his books and red cardinal hat. Another lion roams, far and small, on the right. Filippino could not paint Jerome in a desert. So: admire the landscape, the hills and a large river on the right and the flowers and plants on the cave of the upper left.

Venetian paintings of Saint Jerome

Lorenzo Lotto was a Venetian painter, but although born there in 1480 he worked outside the town. He was a very individualistic painter, maybe because he had travelled much in Italy and worked away from his hometown in the solitude of its neighbourhood. In 1554 he became a religious in the Holy House of Loreto and he died there in 1556. Lotto could make very contrasting pictures, very different in themes and in mood. He made scenes of crowds, religious pictures and also interior scenes. His 'Jerome in the Desert' is set in a very wild landscape as was not common for the Venetian painters who were anchored in their town and who added more cosmic, imaginable landscapes. Lotto shows an unhappy, lonely, frail man whose only hope and only possession seems to be the cross he holds in one hand. Jerome keeps the stone to remind him of his vow in his other hand and the man seems to ponder these two, bewildered between his wish to continue the separation from the world and the image of Jesus who was so passionately merged with life. This Jerome seems to hear the words of Jesus on the cross 'Lord, let this chalice pass me by'. Jerome is further set against a barren rock with a dry tree trunk. This scenery gives way to a landscape of woods and a more free, open sky in the far.

Lotto has shown a sad Jerome and a sad picture. We sense the intimate feelings of a lonely, unhappy painter in this picture.

A contemporary painter of Lorenzo Lotto and one who was more famous in Venice was Giovanni Bellini. Bellini was member of a family of Venetian artists. His father Jacopo Bellini painted and so did his brother Gentile. Giovanni Bellini, more than his father, is considered the creator of the Venetian style. The picture 'Saint Jerome reading in a Landscape' of the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford is thought to be a work of Giovanni, though there is no certainty on this attribution. The picture is excellent though and indeed contains some of the style figures of Bellini. It is also a calm, intimate picture. Jerome reading in his cave occupies the left half on the frame. Jerome is a serene, quiet old man. There is a scarcity of detail here; we do not see books everywhere on the ground and only spare shrubs grow on the rocks. The lion is present in the painting, but the animal only peers quietly from around the cave.

Jerome wears what could be a white Roman toga, which adds to his dignity. His long beard is equally white and his body seems thin and without muscles. This is an idealised Jerome. Saint Jerome sits calmly reading a book on a tablet, obviously delecting in the marvellous blue sky and the landscape of the Veneto. Giovanni Bellini's style is sensed in the smooth round curves of the sand and roads around Jerome and in the rich, soft yellow and brown colours. This is a picture of meditation, of spirituality, of rest and of resplendent nature. Jerome has forsaken to live among men, but he certainly has found solace in the wonderful nature of the region of Venice around him. Bellini has shown what could be a paradise on earth. He showed a picture truly of the Renaissance: return to the values of direct observation of nature and to serious scholarship of the works of the Antiques.

Hieronymus Bosch – a Northern image

The Dutch-Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch had at least once in his life to paint his patron saint, Hieronymus stands for Jerome. Bosch's Jerome is of course the most hallucinating, as could be expected of the possessed Bosch.

Jerome is a younger man abjectly lying on the ground with outstretched arms holding and embracing the crucifix. His head is completely shaven as a penitent monk. Jerome has a thin, emaciated body and legs, scarcely covered by a white cloth. He lies in front of his cave; his arms are inside the cave. But the cave resembles a small wooden forest hut, rounded instead of rocky. Jerome's symbols are near, but spread all around him, you have to search for them. On the lower right are his cardinal's hat and one sole book. To the right is a phantom of a lion, turned into some pet dog. On the right also is a petrified tree trunk on which sits the owl. The rest that surrounds Jerome is hallucinatory, worthy of a 'Temptation of Saint Anthony'. The tree trunk on the right has a wide opening that seems to want to draw Jerome into hell. Above Jerome's hut is an assembly of stone slabs, over which creep animals and wild plants with thorns. A wooden cross lies amongst the slabs, under the thorns. A symbol of the crowning with thorns of Jesus. Amongst the slabs, maybe meaning heathen antiquity, is a plant that winds like a snake and a stone or wood piece in the shape of an open-snouted wild and dangerous animal. Under Saint Jerome is a small pond, a marsh. Strange fruits disappear in the mud. In the lowest left corner is a hedgehog, also an animal with thorns. On the upper left we see an exotic tree crowned with thistles. This whole landscape around Jerome is weird, ghostly, not of our real world, but out of a bad nightmare. The upper right of the painting then shows a pastoral landscape to heighten the contrast with Jerome's dreamworlds.

Fifteenth century paintings

We presented in the previous chapters mostly paintings of the fifteenth century, of the Renaissance period. So different by the characters of the painters, of how they saw Saint Jerome, and so different in the impression they wanted to give to viewers. Piero della Francesca showed an intelligent, determined scholar in an airy, structured landscape. Cosimo Tura gave us a sorcerer in the act of conjuring the world out of a desert canyon with steep slopes. Filippino Lippi draws a compassionate, tender, and devote man who seemed almost ashamed of his books and cardinal hat. Finally,

Hieronymus Bosch saw Jerome's nightmares and a monk abjectly stricken by the ugliness of his fears.

In this lies the magic of paintings: one subject is treated with such different visions, so clearly expressed by these genius painters of one century who lived in different cultures of South and North, with differing visions of the universe. Still they have much in common: their Saint Jeromes are all set in a landscape that they cannot forget, as if they are drawn again to the outside world, or they saw Jerome as a scholar in his study.

The contrast is always there, in equilibrium with the space occupied by the scene of the Saint. And that even with Cosimo Tura, who has presented the scene with human figures around the Saint, which was an exception since the pictures of Saint Jerome are mostly about loneliness and isolation from the world. All the pictures express isolation and spirituality and the earliest pictures indicate the scholar Jerome. These Jeromes were still symbols of ideas.

The Renaissance and Late Medieval paintings referred to the two main episodes of Jerome's life: his life as a hermit in the mountainous desert and his life as a scholar working on the Vulgate Bible. Here we remark the double nature of the Renaissance thought and feeling. Jerome the scholar studied ancient texts, admired them and commented upon them. He knew different languages and conversed with other scholars in the environment of the Papal court of Rome. He had travelled much and found out many things by himself so as to become a wise man. But he was punished 'for loving Cicero too much' and lived as a monk in the desert, utterly devoted in the most extreme way to the hardest form of Christianity. Jerome and the Renaissance men studied the classical authors and ancient sources of learning. This was a very secular way of living and it proved a craving for knowledge and wisdom, as were the reasons for the original sin of mankind according to the Book of Genesis. Those intentions contrasted with the dogma and the subjection to the rules of Christian religion. This duality of the Renaissance, which created a tension in its society and its art, is epitomised in the pictures of Saint Jerome.

Giorgio Vasari

Giorgio Vasari, born in 1511 in Arezzo, but who worked in Florence and died there in 1574, belongs to the late Renaissance of the sixteenth century. He was indeed what we still call a Renaissance man although he belonged to quite another period in art, a period we call Mannerism. He was not only a painter and decorator, but also an architect and biographer of the main Renaissance painters. He decorated the immense Salone di Cinquecento of the Signoria fortress of Florence for Cosimo de Medici. He was the architect of the Uffizi building and of the corridor that would protect the Medici when they went from the Signoria over the Uffizi and over the Arno river by the Old Bridge to their Pitti Palace. He was the founder of the Academy of Painters of Florence. He painted a 'Temptations of Saint Jerome', which hangs now in the Palatine Gallery of the Medici's Pitti Palace.

Vasari's Saint Jerome is an older man, with the usual symbols: the stone in his hand, a lion at his feet, looking at a crucifix, the red cloak for the important function he held in the Church, the books. A skull is added, a symbol more of his negation of life by going into penance as a hermit. But the temptations of Saint Anthony are here brought to Saint Jerome. Which is plausible: Jerome was a hermit just like Anthony, must have been subject to temptations to leave his rock cave just like Anthony.

Temptations are in the shape of a Cupid firing arrows of love to the saint, a woman with her baby tempting Jerome to sweet family life, and another angel in the lower left tempting him with science and the arts. No emaciated figures here, but the full flesh and blood figures that Michelangelo started. Saint Jerome is an old but still powerful man; the arm that clutches the stone is well muscled. His other arm embraces the crucifix. Jerome is looking intently at the crucifix, as if to look in the eyes of Christ. But we see not so much of his face. So this seems a less personal Jerome: the viewer is less implicated in the story, the painting is to be admired more than to be taken as a pious example.

The figures surround Jerome so that the frame is filled. The painting is structured in two triangles, the lower right one for Jerome, and the upper half for the surrounding figures. All figures are curved, in action, so the whole painting gives an impression of energy. The figures are in movement, a movement that seems to want to break out of the frame. Vasari had to paint nudes to the example of his illustrious master Michelangelo, so the theme of the temptation by a half-naked female, a mother holding her baby as the image of marriage, surrounded by the nude Cupids, was evident. This image of Saint Jerome is quite another painting than the previous ones we saw: more complex, more decorative, sentimental, nervous, and less close to the usual mind-image we have of Jerome. Art definitely seems to have changed in function with the years separating us from the previous century. This kind of painting, which Michelangelo started, is called Italian Mannerism.

Mannerism was to some extent answer to new tensions in European society. These tensions were the culmination of the duality of the discovery and admiration for Classicism versus the religious Christian zeal still present in the Renaissance and which might have had in fact helped to destroy the Roman culture. Remember how in many paintings Jesus Christ is depicted against Roman ruins, the old faith that Christendom had replaced. The tension between these two feelings was searching for a relief and Mannerism was the last spasms before the resolution of the stress in society and in art. Furthermore Mannerism was contemporary to the uncertainties induced by Martin Luther and Protestantism.

Van Reymerswael

Almost contemporary to Vasari's picture is the one of Marinus Van Reymerswael. Marinus was born in 1493 in the village of Reymerswael, worked in Antwerp and died around 1567 in Middelburg, the Netherlands. Van Reymerswael was a Mannerist too, but at the same time a Calvinist from the North Netherlands. He studied in Antwerp with Quinten Massys, but must have had some good laughs at the Catholic seriousness of Massys. His Saint Jerome is almost a caricature. We see a roguish

Jerome here, ready to retort with witticism. But not necessarily nice witticism. His beard is long and unkempt, low on his face, his head completely bald. He has small but peering eyes. This gives him the face of a person who likes to take things into derision. His long fingers seem like a spider, ready to envelop you and lose you in his rhetoric. The fingers draw our attention to the skull that is menacingly ugly, ready to jump at us with open teeth. Marinus' picture somewhat resembles the Jerome of Quentin Massys we already presented. Some of Jerome's symbols are of course present: his cardinal's hat, his red cardinal habit, the books, the skull, the high crucifix. No lion here: this is a sixteenth century study room in the middle of town.

The structure of the painting is clever. The two diagonals separate the painting in four planes. The right plane contains Jerome, the right one the large open book. The lower one contains the green desk of the table with the pencil and glasses, the upper one the shelf with the scrolls and books. The forms and colour areas that flow over them soften these diagonals, but they are nevertheless quite present in this painting. Van Reymerswael made one of the first and last Protestant pictures of Jerome. Protestantism would have few paintings of Saint Jerome, even though more than ever the Bible was venerated. But Martin Luther wrote another bible and that was not the Catholic Vulgate anymore. Van Reymerswael thus gave us a malignant Jerome.

We are now hundred years after the first painting of our series, yet we see that all these painters knew their saints, their lives and their iconography. They had scarcely books, any catalogues of paintings. Yet they knew which the symbols of a Saint Jerome were and how ancient artists had drawn and presented the saint. These painters travelled and learned a lot. They did not just study the technique of painting with their masters: they acquired also lots of knowledge about how to investigate a subject before starting to paint, to consult theologians, to think before putting the first colour on the canvas. To be a good painter, being able to draw well and to colour well was by far not enough. A painter had to be able to apply and show all his intellect to compose an image that could surprise and appeal to the buyers. Van Reymerswael certainly had that intellect.

Saint Jerome and Landscape Painting

Saint Jerome is a universal theme. You can roam the small museums of Europe and run into a Saint Jerome painted by lesser artists. There is one in the Museum of the Countess Hospice of Lille, made by Artus Wollfort in the seventeenth century. Truly Baroque, a praying Jerome with a sleeping lion, books and the crucifix. Another Jerome of this Flemish painter of Antwerp has found its way in the Museum of Fine Arts of Caen. Or take one in the Museum of Ancient Arts of Namur in Belgium by the painter Henri Blès who was born in the nearby town of Dinant, also on the Meuse River.

Very naïve, the painting of Henri Blès. His Saint Jerome picture is a landscape, made by a local craftsman of the Meuse region. But Blès worked in the renowned workshops of Antwerp and Ferrara and he may have been family to another renowned painter of the Namur-Dinant river axis: Joachim Patenier. Like in many Pateniers the important part of the picture is not the saint but the landscape. Blès has used a landscape that can be found back in many of his paintings, too: a central rock with

small roads leading to the top, a luxurious landscape around, far blue hills and a town scene. Blès' Saint Jerome has all the symbols associated with him: the lion, the cardinal's hat and cloak, the skull, and Jerome is praying to the crucifix. An owl can be seen somewhat further, but this is not necessarily a symbol of the caves, since Blès always hid an owl somewhere in his pictures. It was his signature. Jerome is drawn as if the painter were a child: delicately, lovely, naïve and simply, and so are the lion and other figures. The saint is small, almost forgotten in the marvellous landscape.

Henri Blès was born in a region of imposing views, of deep rivers, high valley slopes, and a region of steep hills and vast forests. He must have felt an almost mystic unity with that nature, more than most of the city painters of Flanders and Wallony. Man is indeed small in the tortuous rocks, streams, fields and mountains of his landscapes. Blès is thus primarily a landscape painter and he really excelled in the marvellous natural setting of these paintings, adding imaginary traits to nature to form cosmic views.

Landscape painting became important for Flemish artists. Not just the men who were born amidst forests and who thus were close to nature used it. The art in Bruges of the sixteenth century did not rise anymore to the splendour of its previous century. The wealth of Bruges had declined by then, but still famous painters kept workshops in the town.

Thus Adriaan Isenbrant. Isenbrant lived in Bruges during the reign of Emperor Charles V. He participated in the decorations of the Emperor's Joyous Entry in Bruges and he worked for the various guilds of Bruges. Isenbrant stands between the old Flemish Primitives and a new Renaissance, classicist tradition. Isenbrant made a 'Saint Jerome Triptych' in which the Saint is flanked by two female saints: Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine. Remarkable in this picture are the soft tones and the soft contours resembling the sfumato of Leonardo da Vinci. The elder Saint Jerome is beating his breast in penitence, a pose that is quite seldom represented. His usual symbols are in the picture: the cardinal's hat and robe, the lion. The landscape in the background is magnificent; it shows a Flemish town in front of wild mountains and rocks. It was still common in those days to paint various scenes of the Saint's life in one painting. So, a small scene between the saint and the town shows Jerome while taking a thorn out of the lion's paw. The rocky mountains remind of Jerome's life as a hermit. In this scene is also a camel, a symbol of Jerome's life in the Orient and of the caravan of the 'Golden Legend' tale.

Our last picture of the sixteenth century is one by Paul Bril. Paul was a Flemish painter, born in 1554 in Antwerp. Paul and his brother Matthias went to Rome when Paul was just twenty. Matthias painted the frescoes of the Geographical Gallery in the Vatican and Paul painted many landscapes with the ruins of old Rome. Paul Bril was one of the favourite painters of Cardinal Federico Borromeo of Milan and the cardinal collected several of Paul Bril's pictures for his Pinacoteca. The Bril brothers died in Rome, Paul Bril in the year 1626. The brothers had a lively school with many pupils in Rome. Paul Bril is mainly a landscape painting, which one can see in the magnificent painting of the Ringling museum.

This is probably one of the Saint Jerome paintings one can like most. It is an impressive painting, very forcefully three-dimensional. But let's start with Saint

Jerome himself. This time the cave is really a wooden hut. Jerome is again knelt in front of a crucifix. His red cardinal's robe is open and he pulls the stone of his penance to his heart. He almost cries out his passion to the crucified Jesus. Does he vow to his faith or is this indeed a scene where Jerome in despair cries the hardships of a hermit? The passion of the older Jerome is mirrored in the wild whirling landscape behind the saint. The scenery is not a desert, but a forest scene with hills all flamboyantly overgrown with trees, shrubs, and plants. There is a gorge, maybe a small waterfall and a bridge with wooden railings over the river. High mountains are set farther in the landscape. It is a night scene, the moon looms above. This was a new way of presenting a Saint Jerome scene. The hill road looks somewhat menacing, but at the same time intimate, protected, as it is caved in by the hills. There are less of Jerome's symbols: his books, the bible at the foot of the high cross. The lion is barely visible on the bridge, but also present. No skull, cardinal's hat, no owl. In fact, but for the lion, Jerome is the only living soul in the landscape. It emphasises his loneliness and it is probably that problem he is dealing with so passionately looking at the cross. So, this is a vivid drama, quite a story, which must have well appealed to an Italian audience. And it is still another way of looking at Jerome.

In these paintings Saint Jerome is set in a landscape and the landscape seems more important than the saint. That was a different view in art, unknown to Italian Renaissance, as art always centred on man first. The Northern paintings already focused their tradition away from man, away from the proper religious subject and thus created in Europe the awareness for a kind of painting that would perform other purposes in society than religious exaltation and learning. The focus elsewhere than on man stood in conflict with Renaissance ideas. But this conflict was a basis for reflection on art, which would lead to an explosion in subjects as content for paintings in later periods, and already in Italy in the later Renaissance years. But Italian painters never became great landscape painters, primarily interested in nature barred a few exceptions such as Jacopo Bassano.

Titian

The great Tiziano Vecellio also painted Jerome and it is one of the most impressive pictures – of course. It is a powerful painting, full of tension and violence. Jerome is the powerful man who is almost fighting with the Crucifix, in the act of anger at trying to perceive its secrets. Books are strewn on the rocks and are neglected. All the wisdom that Jerome sought in books of far centuries is around, but is no avail. Jerome with one outstretched arm conjures the Crucifix, with the other holds the stone as if to want to hit the cross and not himself. One feels Jerome's desperate anger of not being given the final truth, whether Jesus Christ was God or not. Jerome has dedicated his life in the loneliness of nature and finally cries out his last hopes and last despair of the silence of Jesus's symbol. No answer will come. The death skull is near and the sand in the hourglass is running. Jerome will disappear in the silence of the wild forest. The 'Saint Jerome' of Titian is a late painting, painted in the dark brown and grey tones that Titian came to prefer. Titian painted a scene of fighting humanity, of the anger of man confronted with the ultimate doubts of Christendom: believe or not believe. It is a picture of temptation of the hermit and of seeking humanity.

Baroque paintings

For the seventeenth century, we turn to pious Flanders, to Italy and to zealous Spain. In Spain especially were the painters of saints' lives by excellence. Painters received many commissions from the rich monasteries.

The picture of Anthony van Dyck is an early painting. For van Dyck, born in Antwerp in 1599, was then only nineteen or twenty years old. It is entirely in the style of the Antwerp master of Baroque art per excellence, Pieter Paul Rubens, who then was in full fame in Antwerp, just forty years old. Jerome is in a cave or in a wooden hut, reading a long paper scroll that is entirely opened on his knees. His legs are crossed and over these are thrown the traditional red cloak. At his feet are on one side a sleeping lion, on the other Jerome's books and scrolls. An angel holds his pen and a cave owl is barely visible against the darkness of the cave. The angel symbol stresses the fact that Jerome's Vulgate also was a work of heavenly inspiration. For a painting of such a young artist, this is really impressive. Jerome is an older man, painted with quick brushes, muscles and veins appear clearly only when looked from at from a distance. Jerome is intensely reading and he looks like an older Michelangelo, a powerful genius lost in his scholarly work. The colours of this painting are magnificent, the red cloak draws our attention and a subtle blue hue of a shawl around the angel adds a touch of liveliness. The combination of old age contrasting with the young child that is assisting is also a lucky find of van Dyck.

Guido Reni was an Italian painter from Bologna, where he had learned to paint at the academy of the Carracci family. He founded himself a workshop in Bologna and so together with the Carraccis he was one of the principal masters of the fame of Bologna. In the painting we show, Guido Reni is a very Baroque master: his scene is very dynamic in the movements of Jerome and the angel. Jerome is an ageing but still powerful genius, helped by an inspiring angel.

Equally an old man is the Jerome shown by Il Domenichino. Domenico Zampieri was born in Bologna like Guido Reni and studied in the workshop of Lodovico Carracci. He worked also with Annibale Carracci there, but he spent most of his life in Rome. The 'Last Communion of Saint Jerome' was made for the San Pietro cathedral in Rome. Jerome is indeed in the last days of his life in this picture. We see an almost demented very old man, already open-mouthed receiving the host of the Eucharist. Jerome needs to be supported by a crowd, and he is almost nude, as is the traditional image of the saint. The red cloak merely hints at Jerome's status of a cardinal, and also the lion can only be seen partly in the left corner. Jerome is old but still venerated. People crowd around him to touch him, support him, or kiss his hand. The whole painting is in the finest Baroque style with much pathos and movement.

Jacques Blanchard was called the French Tiziano. Blanchard had been to Venice and he also knew the Baroque Flemish art. His image of Saint Jerome is also Baroque.

The picture reminds of the Guido Reni painting and of the van Dyck Jerome. Jerome is an older, but also still a powerful man with a long white beard. He has thrown off his cardinal's robe and he is staring intently with wrinkled forehead over a skull on his books, right at the cross. The austere, long cross underscores the force of the image. This Jerome is trying to understand Jesus himself, to better grasp the Saviour's life in the Bible and to transcribe it to the Vulgate. Or maybe he is asking Jesus for help at the daunting task. He may actually and sceptically reproach Jesus for not having made his message clearer.

Lubin Baugin who worked in Paris made another French picture. He lived from 1612 to 1663 and died in Paris. Baugin's picture is quite different from all pictures we present here. We see a kneeling and leaning Jerome, sitting on the ground. What strikes in this painting is the simplicity of the composition. There are only two books, and a square table that has the form of a piece of antique marble. The painter has made a very simple yet very gripping picture of a nude old man. Jerome is indeed almost completely naked with a powerful torso. He is bald and bearded. Jerome looks as if he has just found the skull on the ground next to an overturned table and he looks at it in amazement, pondering at the shortness and the vanity of life.

The French also had a long tradition of pictures of Jerome. We have a picture of the Master of the Grilhet altarpiece of the Provence area in southern France dating from the middle of the sixteenth century. This representation of Jerome contrasts with many pictures of the Saint, but it strangely makes us remind the image made by Piero della Francesca. Jerome is the hermit here, holding crucifix and stone. But he is thoroughly emaciated. Jerome is an obsessive, possessed man who knows only religious zeal. The Master of the Grilhet altarpiece has not shown a doctor of the church, but an extraordinarily lonely man looking intently at the crucifix as if desperately wanting the cross to explain him the mystery of the message, the meaning of its symbol.

Juan Valdés Leal came from Sevilla, born of a Portuguese family in 1622. He worked in Sevilla and Madrid, mainly on commissions of monasteries and died in 1690. The Valdés Leal Saint Jerome is one picture of a whole cycle of the life of the Saint the painter made for the cloister Buenavista near Sevilla. It shows Jerome as a cardinal, but well with his symbols: the crucifix, the books, pen and ink, a slab of stone on the small altar, the lion at his feet. It is a traditional Baroque painting, so the inevitable angels or putti are above. Jerome looks somewhat higher than the cross, and we feel that this is more a cardinal organiser of the Church than a scholar and an ascetic. Jerome is far from beautiful; the angels are outright ugly. This was a feature of Valdés Leal, for some reason he always painted his figures really ugly or at least not beautiful at all.

Antonio de Pereda was born in 1611 in Valladolid, but went to Madrid and worked there from 1635 on together with the best painters of his time like Velazquez, Zurbarán and Maino at the decorations of the royal castle of Buen Retiro. Pereda died in Madrid in 1676. His Saint Jerome is a very realist work. Jerome is an old man and all the wrinkles of his old body are meticulously shown. Jerome is dreaming with his eyes open, thinking with uplifted head about God. He seems to hear God's voice, trumpeted to his ears, and seems to hold his ear to these sounds. He holds a very crude wooden cross. His books are present, more shown to us than to Jerome because the

drawing is right for us but inverted for Jerome. His red cloak, pen and ink, his rock, a skull are his symbols. Just as with Van Reymerswael the skull looks fearsome. Antonio de Pereda has probably made the most realist and touching Jerome. He is an old man, with a white beard, intent on listening to the message of God. He still has power, but for how long? This is a Jerome of the earth, of here, not an elevated Saint. So of all the Saint Jeromes we saw, he is the most human and maybe the closest to us.

Tiepolo

Our overview of paintings on Saint Jerome should end with his death. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, one of the very last major painters of Venice, made a picture of that scene. It shows all the pathos of the Venetian Rococo style. Saint Jerome is dying, alone and emaciated in a cave. He is resting on the hard ground with just a cloth under him, already in the company of skulls and old bones. Books are still around, but his spirit has gone forever. The heavenly angels crown his head and are waiting to bring Jerome to the Jesus of whom he has written the story so many times. Jerome is expiring, but also longing with open mouth for the beauty above. Tiepolo coloured the scene in warm brown colours and a few yellows and reds, sober colours for a humble departing of a lonely man who invested more importance in his work than in any worldly matter. That world is shown through the cave opening, but the view is distant and dark.

Epilogue

This was quite a list of paintings, covering three hundred years. What have we learned? Principally the sheer inexhaustible possibilities that painters have to represent a simple theme such as Saint Jerome. We could have taken any theme of the hundreds of themes used again and again over the centuries, and analysed how the theme evolved and how each painter had a different, personal, individual feeling of the subject. Very few themes have been taken up by so many artists as images of Saint Jerome. Every painter made a different picture of Saint Jerome according to his own character and his culture.

For Piero della Francesca Jerome was a determined scholar intent on his books. Piero was himself much like that. Antonello da Messina and Lorenzo Monaco showed Jerome as a scholar-monk in his cell. For Cosimo Tura however, Jerome was a wild, mad sorcerer wielding magic. For Filippino Lippi Jerome was a tender man as probably Filippino was too. Hieronymus Bosch saw Jerome's nightmares; Vasari saw his temptations. For Blès he was almost unimportant and lost in nature's marvellous landscapes. Blès was born in such majestic landscapes and took these views with him to Flanders and into his pictures. Van Reymerswael who converted to Protestantism later in life saw in Jerome a dangerous spider-like creature. Paul Bril saw a passionately doubting man, Isenbrant a penitent, Van Dyck and Guido Reni a powerful scholar genius. For Juan Valdés Leal he was a cardinal and for Antonio de Pereda simply a very human but still energetic old man. This is the magic of the endless possible variations on a theme in the imagery of painting, which are in fact the inexhaustible vastness of our human visions and ideas.

Jerome was a much sought after theme. The saint was the symbol of the lonely scholar who created a work of genius with a breadth of vision that spanned centuries. Was this not a dream of all painters too? And maybe an ideal of lonely, epic creation made in spiritual isolation that all painters secretly sought. This creation of the mind, this spirituality had power over nature and world.

Other paintings:

Fourteenth century:

Saint Jerome

Master Theodoric. Kreuzkapelle, Burg Karlstein. Národní Galeri – Prague. Ca. 1360-1365.

Christ on the Cross, between the virgin, Saint John, Saint Gregory and Saint Jerome

Jacobello Albergua (died before 1397). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

Saints Jerome, Gilles and Augustine

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

Fifteenth century:

Saint Jerome translating the Bible

Nicolás Francés (ca. 1400-1468). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. Ca. 1430.

Saint Jerome

Bartolomeo Montagna (ca. 1450 – 1523). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint Jerome.

Giovanni Bellini (1420-1516). National Gallery. London.

Saint Jerome dreams that he is being flagellated by two Angels

Sano di Pietro. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1444.

Scenes from the Life of Jerome

Sano di Pietro. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1476.

The Penitence of Saint Jerome

Hans Memling (1433-1434). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1485-1490.

Saint Jerome

Justus van Gent (1460-1480 active) and Pedro Berruguete (ca. 1450-1503). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1476.

Saint Jerome and a Devotee

Piero della Francesca (1416/1417 - 1492). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

Madonna of the Orange Tree

Giambattista Cima da Conegliano (1459-1527). Galleria dell'Accademia - Venice.

Altarpiece of Saint Jerome

Antonio Vivarini (ca. 1415-1486). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1441.

Saint Jerome

Filippo Lippi. Staatliches Lindenau Museum. Altenburg. Ca. 1430-1435.

Saint Jerome

Master of Urgel (active ca. 1480-1510). Museo Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Barcelona. Ca. 1490.

Saint Jerome in his Study

Jan van Eyck and Collaborators. Detroit Institute of Art. Ca. 1440-1442.

Saint Jerome in his Study

Antonio da Fabriano. The Walkers Art Museum. Baltimore.

Scenes from the Life of Saint Jerome

Master of the Gesuati (active around 1450). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Jerome in his Study

Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-1494). Chiesa degli Ognissanti. Florence.

Saint Jerome and two Saints

Andrea del Castagno (1421-1457). Church of Santissima Annunziata. Florence. 1454.

Virgin and Child with Saint Jerome and a Holy Martyr

Cosimo Tura (ca. 1430-1495). Musée Fesch. Ajaccio. 1495.

Crucifixion with Saint Jerome and Saint Christopher

Bernardino di Betto called Pinturicchio (1454-1513). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1473.

Saint Jerome in a Landscape

Giovanni di Pietro called Spagna (ca. 1470-1528 active). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Saint Jerome

Ercole de'Roberti (ca. 1450/1456 – 1496). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. Ca. 1470.

Saint Jerome

Ercole de'Roberti (ca. 1450/1456 – 1496). Collection Cini. Venice. Ca. 1470.

The penitent Saint Jerome

Master of Saint Egidius. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Ca. 1500.

The penitent Saint Jerome

Fra Bartolomeo della Porta (1472-1517). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1498.

Saint Jerome

Vicino da Ferrara (active second half 15th century). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara. Ca. 1475-1480.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Matteo di Pietro di Giovanni called Matteo di Gualdo (active ca. 1462-1503). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Saint Jerome

Giovanni Martino Spanzotti (ca. 1455-1528). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

Saint Jerome in a Landscape

Zanetto Bugatto (2nd half of the 15th cy). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Penitent Saint Jerome

Fiorenzo di Lorenzo (ca. 1440-1525). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Vincenzo Foppa (1427-1516). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Penitent Saint Jerome

Giovanni Mansueti (1485-1527). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Bartolomeo Montagna (ca. 1450-1523). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Gregorio Chiulinovic called Lo Schiavone (1437-1505). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Alvise Vivarini (1446-1503). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Antonio Vivarini (ca. 1441-1484). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Marco Zoppo (1433-1478). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Sixteenth century:

Saint Jerome Penitent

Andrea Solario (?) (1470-1524) or follower of Leonardo da Vinci. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Early 16th century.

Saint Jerome in Ecstasy

Luca Signorelli (ca. 1445-1523). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1505.

Saint Jerome. Hans Schüfelein (1480/1485-1538/1540). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1504-1505.

Saint Jerome

Workshop of Ambrosius Benson (active 1519-1550). National Gallery in Prague. Prague.

Saint Jerome

Copy of Joos van Cleve by the Monnogrammist AH. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. 1541.

Landscape with Saint Jerome

Simon Bening. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1561.

The Penitent Saint Jerome

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1557). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1506.

Holy Family with Saints Jerome and John the Baptist

Ludovico Mazzolino (ca. 1480-1528). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1515.

Saint Jerome with Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Michelangelo Anselmi (ca. 1491-1556). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1532-1535.

The Penitent Saint Jerome

Marco Basaiti (active 1496-1530). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1488-1576). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1575.

The penitent Saint Jerome

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1588). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. 1575-1580.

Saint Jerome

Marco Basaiti (1471/1475-1530). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice.

Saint Jerome

Jacopo da Ponte called Bassano (1517-1592). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Around 1560.

Saint Jerome

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1518-1594). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1570-1575.

Saint Jerome

Lorenzo Lotto. Muzeul National de Artà al Romàniei. Bucharest. 1512-1513.

Saint Jerome and a Donor

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). Ca. 1563.

Saint Jerome in Penitence

Italian School (Emilian). 16th century. Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

Landscape with Saint Jerome

Frederick van Valckenborgh (ca. 1570-1623). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. 1590s.

Saint Jerome

Lombard Painter of the Beginning of the 16th Century. Galleria Borghese. Rome.

Saint Jerome in Prayer

Anonymous Roman Painter, maybe Giacommo Rocca, active late 16th century.

Galleria Borghese. Rome.

Saint Jerome

Federico Fiori called Federico Barocci (1528/1535-1612). Galleria Borghese. Rome. 1580-1600.

Saint Jerome in a Landscape

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1515.

Saint Jerome

Ambrogio da Fossano called Il Bergognone (1455-after 1522). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome in his Cell

Marinus van Reymerswael (1490-ca. 1567). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1545.

Saint Jerome in a Landscape

Gerolamo Muziano (ca. 1528-1592). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Copy of Joos van Cleve. National gallery in Prague. Prague. 1572.

The Communion of Saint Jerome

Agostino Carracci (1557-1602). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Saint Jerome Reading

Giovan Battista Moroni (ca 1523-1578). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome and the Martyrdom of Saint Stephen

Andrea Cordigliachi called Previtali (ca. 1470-1528). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Seventeenth century:

Saint Jerome

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1618-1624.

Saint Jerome

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Private Collection Rau. Germany. 1636.

Saint Jerome

Jean de Boullogne called Valentin Boullogne (1594-1632). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

Saint Jerome in Meditation

Jusepe de Ribera called Lo Spagnoletto (1591-1652). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Jerome

Bartolomeo Cavarozzi (1590-1652). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Jerome

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1635.

Saint Jerome

Simone Cantarini (1612-1648). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Saint Jerome

Bernardo Strozzi (1581/1582-1644). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. Ca. 1640.

Madonna with Child, Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine

Leonardo Boldrini. Museo Correr. Venice.

Saint Jerome meditating on the Skull

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice.

Saint Jerome

Antonio de Pereda (1611-1678). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

Saint Jerome

Monogrammist I.C. 17th century. Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

Saint Jerome

Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1571-1610). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1606.

Saint Jerome

Lionello Spada (1576-1622). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome.

Saint Jerome

Trophime Bigot (1579-1650). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. First half 17th century.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

Saint Jerome

Guido Reni (1575-1610). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. 1590-1610.

Saint Jerome doing Penance

Giovan Battista Crespi (1557-1633). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

Saint Jerome and the Angel

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). National Gallery of Art. Washington DC. 1620-1627.

Saint Jerome and the Trump of Doom

Jusepe de Ribera called Lo Spagnoletto (1591-1652). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. 1637.

Saint Jerome

Roman Follower of Caravaggio. Galleria Colonna. Rome. Around 1620.

Landscape with St Jerome

Gaspard Dughet (1613-1675). Museum of Fine Arts. Boston. 1639-1640.

The Vision of Saint Jerome

Pier Francesco Mola (1612-1666). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1655-1659.

Saint Jerome writing

Nicolas Régnier (Nicolò Renieri) (1591-1667). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1630-1635.

Eighteenth century:

Saint Jerome and the Lion

Donato Creti (1671-1749). Musée des beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1700.

Saint Jerome

Pierre Subleyras (1699 – 1749). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1739.

Saint Jerome in the Desert

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Palazzo Bianco. Genua. Ca. 1715-1720.

*Saint Sebastian***Saint Sebastian tended by Irene**

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1649.

Saint Sebastian

Antonello da Messina (1430-1479). Gemäldegalerie – Dresden. 1474-1475.

Saint Sebastian in a rocky Landscape

Marco Zoppo (1433-1478). Courtauld Institute Galleries – London. 1475 – 1478.

The Martyrdom of Sebastian

Hans Memling (active 1465-1499). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Antonio del Pollaiuolo (ca. 1431-1498) and Piero del Pollaiuolo (ca. 1443-1496). The National Gallery – London. Ca. 1480.

Saint Sebastian

Vicenzo Poppa (1427 – 1515). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam.

Saint Sebastian

Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). Galleria degli Uffizi – Florence. Ca. 1480.

The Virgin and Child with Saints

Luca Signorelli (1445-1523). The National Gallery – London. Ca. 1480.

Saint Sebastian

Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1435-1506). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1480.

Saint Sebastian

Pietro Perugino (1448-1523). Musée du Louvre. Ca. 1499.

The Feast of the Archers

The Frankfurt Master. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Antwerp. Ca. 1500.

Saint Sebastian

Louis Brea (1450-1522). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen.

Saint Sebastian

Liberale da Verona (ca. 1445 – 1529/1536). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Hans Holbein the Elder. Alte Pinakothek – München. 1516.

The Madonna and child with Saint Sebastian and Saint Roche

Bernardo Luini (1460-1532). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota. 1522.

Saint Sebastian

Giovanni Luteri called Dosso Dossi (ca. 1489 – 1542). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint Sebastian

Jan Van Scorel (1495-1562). Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen – Rotterdam. 1542.

Saint Sebastian

Tiziano Vecellio called Titian (ca. 1488-1578). The Hermitage State Museum – Saint Petersburg. 1575.

Saint Sebastian saved by the Angels

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. 1609.

Saint Sebastian

Jusepe Leonardo (1601-1653). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid.

Saint Sebastian

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie - Berlin. Around 1618.

Saint Sebastian

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Musée du Louvre – Paris.

Saint Sebastian

Nicolas Régnier (1591-1667). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1624.

Saint Sebastian attended by Saint Irene

Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629). Allen Memorial Art Museum – Oberlin (Ohio). 1625.

Saint Sebastian

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Musée Malraux – Le Havre. 1630.

Saint Sebastian

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. Around 1640.

Saint Sebastian tended by Saint Irene

Luca Giordano (1634-1705). The National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. Around 1650.

Saint Sebastian lying

Giacomo Farelli. Château de Villandry – Villandry, France.

Saint Sebastian and Saint Irene

Antonio Molinari. The Hermitage State Museum – Saint Petersburg. Ca. 1690-1700.

Saint Sebastian

Camille Corot (1796-1875). The Louvre – Paris. 1850-1855.

Saint Sebastian

Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Bordeaux. Ca. 1910.

The Archers of Saint Sebastian

Anto Carte. Le Musée de l'Art Wallon – Liège. 1920.

Saint Sebastian

Jean Schaack. Musée d'Histoire et d'Art – Luxembourg. 1926.

De La Tour's Sebastian

Would you expect Georges de La Tour's painting of 'Saint Sebastian tended by Irene' to be a painting of the seventeenth century? I wouldn't. It is so different from everything else of that century. It makes one think of a cubist's painting, or of one of the modern unconventional twentieth century pictures. But this painting really stems of the seventeenth, so we must have here in de La Tour one of the most original, individual, independent artists of that century. De La Tour was entirely his own man in art.

Sebastian is shown almost dead, pierced with one arrow straight through his lungs. It is night, darkness is everywhere. He seems to be lying next to the tree against which he was shot; the ropes with which the saint was bound still wind around the tree. Irene has come, holding a bright, straight torch. There is no wind; the flames burn high, perturbed only at the top. The light of the torch is very white and this white falls on Irene's cap, her face, her dress of weak pastel orange. This orange continues in the colour of flesh of Sebastian's naked, contorted body. The light also falls here, but not farther than Sebastian's upwardly curved legs. Away and behind Irene stand three other women. Their colours are dark blue to emphasise the night and the distance, shining square blue, and for grieve the same fleshy hue as Sebastian's body.

The painting has strong structure of composition, in two triangles. One triangle is formed by Sebastian's body as base, another side line going from his head to Irene's head and the third side line goes over Sebastian's curved leg to the arm and further again to Irene's cap. The three heads of the mourning women form another triangle. The triangles are quite distant, separate. So that we have one separate scene with Sebastian and Irene, that remains by its isolation intimate. Irene holds in a real link Sebastian's hand. Sebastian and Irene are the essence of compassion and love, of two people inextricably linked in time and space by feelings of empathy.

The painting would have lost dramatic expression without the three bystanders. One can only be alone and separate when the separation itself is shown, explicit. Yet, there is also a link –though weak- between Sebastian and Irene on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other. The connection is made by the woman in the long, dark blue dress resting her hand on Irene's shoulder. But this is not a hold, not a gesture of consolation. The woman simply poses her hand lightly on Irene; there is no act of possession, no real touching. The mere touch means understanding but nothing more. The distance is respected.

Georges de La Tour

Georges de La Tour could paint pictures and portraits to all detail of every wrinkle in a face. He has shown he could do that, in other paintings. Yet in this painting, the faces remain anonymous, almost blank. Sebastian's is hidden in the dark, Irene's is only partly lit and then still the part we cannot see. The face of the woman in dark blue is reduced to simple forms. The praying half-figure in shining blue has a face that is only suggested. The upper lady is weeping and thus hides her face. De La Tour suggests that the drama and passion of the scene is important, not the individuals. It emphasises the pain of Sebastian, the dying, the emotion and not any detail. The emotion becomes thus detached from the world, transcendental. The image is reduced to its essence.

This kind of feeling contrasts very much with the other French paintings of the seventeenth century. It contrasts with the Baroque paintings of Nicolas Régnier, of Claude Vignon, Valentin de Boulogne, Simon Vouet and even more with those of Nicolas Poussin, Claude Gellée le Lorrain, Eustache Le Sueur and others who took again to themes of Antiquity. Georges de La Tour went back to the basics, the foundation, and the essence of emotion and expression. His 'Saint Sebastian and Irene' is the painting in which he reached a pictography that is above his century.

Georges de La Tour arrived there through his studies of light and darkness. More than any even later painter, he was interested in the effects of light on subjects. He applied it in many of his paintings and went ever farther in using the results. De La Tour used a point source of light, the torch, to show his vision. It takes an extraordinary skill of knowledge, technique, memory of scenes, and painterly talent to depict the light falling thus from one point on the figures. De La Tour mastered these skills so that his

picture was a technical challenge that he resolved easily. When one continues to play with light and dark areas in scenes, ultimately one arrives at a kind of sublimation of the subject matter like in this Saint Sebastian. De La Tour was an experimenter who pursued his ideas as far as he could, individually, independent of any other art streams. He worked also as an independent, in the France of the seventeenth century, but isolated from Paris where the real action was.

La Lorraine

Georges de La Tour was born in Vic-sur-Seille near the Lorraine town of Metz in 1593. He worked and died however in Lunéville, the residence town of the Dukes of Lorraine. The Lorraine Duchy is in the Northeast of France, today only separated from Germany by the Alsace. Lorraine has a history that is of the most complex in Europe because this was border territory, trapped between France and Germany. It was the remnant of the Middle-Frankish Empire that was created when Charlemagne divided his lands in three parts in the ninth century. This Kingdom was further divided when Lotharius I also divided his land among his three sons. Lotharius II thus reigned over the territory between the Rhine, Meuse, Saône and Schelde. The country was called 'Lotharii Regnum' and from that received its name. After battles, around 925 the Roman Catholic German Emperor Henry I recognised his stepson Giselbert as Duke of Lorraine and so Lorraine became a part of the German Empire, not of the Kingdom of France. In 1048 Lorraine separated from the Netherlands and from then on, the name was associated only with the parts that are now in France, but the territory was somewhat larger than now and had as its main cities Trier, Metz, Verdun, Toul, Nancy. The title of Duke did over the centuries not bear much power, because the Lorraine counties of Voudémont, Bar and Salm as well as the bishoprics of Verdun, Metz and Toul were very independent. The bishoprics went to France in 1552, leaving only a very patchwork Lorraine Duchy.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century France was governed by Cardinal Richelieu, King Louis XIII and his mother Maria de Medici. The three hated, respected, fought each other more or less openly, but united against common enemies. They would die within one year of each other, Richelieu and Maria in 1642, the King in 1643. Richelieu wanted absolute power for the King and fought French nobles all the time, and naturally also the Lorraine Dukes who were as vassals of the German Emperor so close to core French land, a thorn in his eye.

From 1624 on, in the lifetime of Georges de La Tour, the Duke in Lunéville was wild Charles III. In 1631 Richelieu forced on this Charles III a treaty, signed in the town of Vic where Georges de La Tour was born, which subdued Lorraine to France although Lorraine was in feudal dependence of the German Emperor. By this treaty Charles had agreed to imprison French rebels and had to give free throughway to French armies who would fight the German Emperors over the Rhine. Charles kept supporting French nobles against Richelieu however, so Richelieu once again entered Lorraine with an army, forced a new peace at Liverdun. At each peace treaty Lorraine lost land: the County of Clermont, the fortresses of Marsal, Stenay, Jamez. Trier also was occupied by force. The fortifications of Nancy were to be destroyed. In 1633 Richelieu and Louis XIII found new reasons to attack Charles III. The Duke had to fight a Swedish army first and lost a battle at Hagenau, so he humbly invited King

Louis XIII into Nancy. A new treaty with France was concluded in Neuville. Charles' brother Cardinal François de Lorraine negotiated. Lorraine came definitely under French influence. Charles III left government to his brother and went to Austria to start a military career as a noted general for the German Emperor.

Cardinal François of Lorraine then started to call himself Duke and married. Richelieu qualified this marriage illegal and had his Marshal La Force imprison François in Lunéville. François escaped soon and would lead an adventurous life with his wife in Florence and Vienna, but Lorraine was now fully occupied by the French. The territory would remain totally governed by the French from 1634 to 1661, occupied for twenty-seven years. Lorraine was relatively peaceful after 1634, but wars waged in the Alsace region between France and the German Emperor, just to its eastern border. Wars waged also to the West. The painter Peeter Snayers thus made a picture of the battle for the town of Thionville.

In 1641 Charles III threw himself once more to the feet of King Louis XIII. Cardinal Richelieu, who wanted the Lorraine region by law and not just by force to belong to France, granted pardon. The wild Charles III however soon joined again Spanish and German forces. France occupied Lorraine once more. Charles III only received a further reduced Lorraine back after the Spanish-French wars, at the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1661.

His nephew, Charles IV, followed on Charles III of Lorraine. This Duke without a land was an excellent general, who would lead the German Empire armies in the wars against the Turks and even against the French. He defended Vienna with Johan Sobieski and took Buda castle in Hungary from the Turks in 1686. Gyula Benczur, a Hungarian painter of the nineteenth century painted him together with Eugene of Savoie recapturing Buda castle. The last half of the seventeenth century in France was first Mazarin's, then Louis XIV's. During their conquests in the North of France Louis XIV again occupied Lorraine in 1670. So Charles IV lost his Duchy completely, but his son regained it in 1697 at the Peace of Rijswijk. Lorraine would then become fully under French influence and in the nineteenth century be reduced to a province of France. But the House of Lorraine did not disappear. It reached its highest glory by obtaining the Duchy of Tuscany in 1737. Descendants of the now Habsburg-Lorraine would govern as Dukes of Tuscany from out of the Pitti Palace of Florence where once the Medicis had ruled but from which that illustrious family had finally disappeared without heirs.

Georges de La Tour worked in this Lorraine and its provincial residence Lunéville, far from Paris with all its sophisticated painters dedicated to the gallantries of the court of the Kings of France, far from the Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin. It may explain some of de La Tour's individualism. The people from Lorraine are headstrong, independent, proud but resigned. They will accept any rule but notwithstanding that rule keep their own culture and beliefs. We have only around forty paintings left of the very individual painter Georges de La Tour. He was also the only renowned painter of Lorraine, who could therefore impose his artistic visions on his environment. The painting of Saint Sebastian was commissioned by the town of Lunéville and offered in 1649 to the French Governor La Ferté. It is a late work, in which Georges de La Tour fully developed his style to the maturity of the essentials. He died in 1652.

Saint Sebastian

Saint Sebastian was a Roman martyr. He was a captain of the Praetorian guards of the Roman Emperor Diocletian around 290. Sebastian was a Christian^{E5}. He supported other martyrs while they were imprisoned. Such as the twin brothers Mark and Marcellian who had received some stay of execution and whose families and friends tried to withdraw them from the true faith. Sebastian on the contrary encouraged them in their Christian faith. Fabian, the prefect, persecuted the Christians and denounced Sebastian to Emperor Diocletian. Diocletian reproached Sebastian of ungratefulness and ordered him to death. He was tied to a stake. Mauritanian archers shot Sebastian. They pierced him according to the 'Golden Legend' with so many arrows that he looked like a porcupine^{G49}. He was left for dead. Sebastian was thrown in the gutters, but found by a Christian woman Irene and tended by her. Apparently none of his vital organs were touched. The widow Irene nursed him back to health. Therefore Irene is now the patron saint of nurses. Sebastian recovered, and confronted again the emperor with a renewed avowal of faith. He was then beaten to death with cudgels and finally thrown in the Cloaca Maxima of Rome, the main sewers, to prevent the Christians from honouring Sebastian as a saint. But Sebastian appeared to Saint Lucina, revealed where his body was and was duly buried by the Christians^{G49}. His early tomb was in the Saint Balbina catacomb of Rome. A church was built in his name. From before the Middle Ages, during Roman times, the Church of Saint Sebastian of the Catacombs was a much sought after pilgrimage site.

Saint Sebastian became of course the patron saint of archers. You can still visit for instance the house of the Sebastian Guild of Archers in Bruges, Flanders. One of the earliest paintings by a Flemish Primitive painter is a picture made by Hans Memling, who worked in Bruges. The picture was probably made for a guild of archers. Sebastian is a beautiful youth in this image, serene in front of the archers and oblivious, even stoical to the piercing arrows. The archers have long bows, which they tend and fire.

The archers' guilds had an important position in medieval towns, especially in the defence of the walls. They were the main defenders of the towns and thus stood as symbols of the autonomy of the cities. The Frankfurt Master was a painter who worked mostly in the port of Antwerp, not so far from Bruges. He painted in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. He made a picture testifying to the importance of the archers' guilds in the Middle Ages. The 'Archers' Feast' shows many different scenes of a gathering of the guild. The mayor of the town, or the best archer of the contest and thus the 'King', is seated in the middle of the scene on a throne under the town's key. Jesters have been invited to enjoy the feasters. People chat and discuss all around. Elegant young men pay their court to the ladies. Apples are picked, and brought to the children that are playing in the grass. The imposing castles and defences of the town are topped by long, flowing colours. All this shows us the socialising power of the archers' guilds in medieval towns.

Saint Sebastian was painted from very early times on. There are mosaics in Ravenna, representations in the church of Saint Peters' Chains of the late seventh century, frescoes in the Saint Saba church of the eighth century. He was much painted in the

fifteenth, sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Old frescoes from before the tenth century show Sebastian as a venerable grey-bearded officer. These frescoes however already started to depict Sebastian in the nude, with many arrows piercing him. Nude pictures of Sebastian and of a young man are very old too, dating from before the Middle Ages. Images of Sebastian with Irene only seem to appear in the seventeenth century.

Sebastian's martyrdom was a reference to the passion of Jesus. Jesus and Sebastian both died in almost the same position tied to a pole. Jesus suffered the flagellation tied to a column. Sebastian was shot with arrows against a tree but we will see that rapidly in the hagiography of Sebastian painters also placed him against a column. Sebastian was shot against a tree, but he did not die there so he suffered torture only by the arrows. Sebastian recovered from his torture; Jesus resurrected. Irene tended Sebastian. Mary Magdalene anointed Jesus. Images of the Pietà of Mary and Jesus find a similar duality in Sebastian compassionately helped by Irene. Saint Sebastian is always painted pierced with arrows against a pillar or tree, never in the scene where he is clubbed to death. Such a scene would annihilate the analogy with the passion of Christ.

Sebastian was also much venerated and prayed to as a figure that had suffered torture but had survived. His cult grew during the plague epidemics in Rome of 767 and even later during the general European plague years of the middle of the fourteenth century, around 1348. Sebastian had suffered but survived and that image was one of the rare example of hope for people caught in plague epidemics. Sebastian was also venerated as the saint who could divert and protect from the plague. He was one of the Plague Saints.

Italian Renaissance paintings

The interest in paintings of Saint Sebastian for art historians lies in the fact that they can follow with pictures of this theme the evolution of male nude painting. We know the interest of Italian artists in man, so their painters almost all painted at one moment or other of their career a Saint Sebastian.

Marco Zoppo, a Bolognese who painted much of his life in Venice, was one of the early painters of Saint Sebastian scenes. On his painting of the Courtauld Institutes, Sebastian is bound one arm up and another curved behind his back. This pose curves also the body and shows all the muscles of this soldier-picture. The picture is an example of the first male nudes in Italian painting which emphasise the anatomy of muscles of a man and which became common from that period on, also in pictures of Jesus. We also find here the soft colours of Venice.

Around the same time, around 1475, Antonello da Messina arrived in Venice. Antonello knew oil painting and brought this technique to the lagoon town. His Sebastian is in serene calm as confronted to pain. The nude figure of the saint is bathed in light, but shadows are applied so that the contrast between presence and absence of light creates the form of the body and lends it volume. It was very early for a painter to use this technique and it can be seen that Antonello da Messina mastered the technique already to perfection. Sebastian's body is young and soft. The scene is

set in an Italian Renaissance town as background. This landscape is hard and angular. It contrasts with the soft body of Sebastian, creating an effect of solitude, the effect of separation between Sebastian and the daily world that we find in many other painters, an effect that was certainly also the objective of Antonello. Antonello da Messina made very inspiring, idealistic and dignified paintings of Jesus and his Sebastian follows these examples.

Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo worked together on their Saint Sebastian of Renaissance Florence. Marvellous in this painting is the landscape of the Arno River around Florence. The scene has thus been brought from Rome where Sebastian was really martyred, to the environment of Florence. The painting was made for the Oratory of Saint Sebastian, which was attached to the church of the Saints Annunziata of Florence^{U1}. Sebastian is represented as a new Christ, bound high on a tree as if on a cross. Archers all around are either shooting arrows in his body or preparing their bows. The Pollaiuolo's made wonderful studies of the heavy muscled archers in effort. This is the real objective of the painting: the joy of the painter to depict these torsos as studies of nudes and men in action. Their Sebastian seems to suffer and thus holds his head inclined in pain, but his face is directed to the skies and remains serene. His body is still young and less muscled than those of the archers, so more elevated.

In the Luca Signorelli painting, Sebastian is standing pierced with arrows on one side next to the Virgin who has on the other side Saint Christina^{U1}. The saint seems oblivious of the arrows in his body, but has his hands still bound behind his back. Luca Signorelli used Sebastian – and the angels above - to show his art in painting a nude, just as the Pollaiuolo's had done.

Pietro Perugino was the early Renaissance painter who had the most idealised vision of religious themes. His Sebastian is traditional in composition. Sebastian is set against a column like a flagellated Jesus Christ. He has one arrow in an arm, another in his shoulder. His arms are bound behind his body. Perugino set this scene in a Roman palace with elaborately decorated square columns and a clear open landscape behind Sebastian. Sebastian's body is one of the most beautiful and perfect of the Renaissance. Perugino made the link with Christ's martyrdom very clear. The column was introduced gradually in Renaissance pictures of Sebastian. Remark how in Antonello da Messina's picture Sebastian is still situated against a tree but pieces of a Roman column appear at his feet. Perugino and Mantegna extended this vision and placed Sebastian's martyrdom against a column, thus making the parallel with Christ's martyrdom more immediate. Perugino made of Sebastian a very beautiful youth. His Sebastian is an image of a Roman Adonis sculpture and the Roman statues that became to be sought after in the Renaissance probably inspired Perugino. Yet Perugino's Sebastian is also one of the first examples of an effeminate youth, in which male stubbornness needs to be sought far. Sebastian is an Adonis aspiring to the spiritual death in which he will revive in an ethereal form, neither male nor female. These pictures epitomise the dual vision of the Renaissance. They blend a religious theme with a nostalgia and revival of the ideals of classical Greek beauty ideals of the human body.

Liberale da Verona was a painter of the Veneto and his 'Sebastian' is depicted in Venice. This picture also is a study of the human nude. A magnificent, very dignified Sebastian is serenely standing against a tree, hands bound in his back, oblivious of the

arrows that pierce his body. The scene of the martyrdom is set against a background of Venetian canals. A story of intrigue and death unfolds behind the saint. A fallen Roman column is the symbol of the new times announced by Jesus and the martyrs.

The androgynous Sebastian

Lorenzo Costa, a painter from Ferrara, showed Sebastian as a very young, effeminate male, likewise with his hands bound behind him. It is a lovely painting, but we feel that something else is showing here. Costa transgresses a border. He changes Sebastian to an attractive youth and thus may have been one of the firsts to start inspiring images of more ambiguous feelings. Bernardo Luini's later picture continues this representation of Sebastian as a beautiful youth. And yes, the martyrdom of Sebastian transpierced with arrows can have meanings of hard sexuality. Masochism is a sexual perversion, involving one's own pain or humiliation. Images of the martyrdom of Sebastian have been used to represent these emotions. The Japanese writer of the twentieth century Yukio Mishima trained his body until he was muscled as an experienced body-builder. Then he had photographs made of himself in poses of classic nude. He posed also as a Saint Sebastian, hands tied in the back. Pictures of Sebastian are thus a universal imagery, capable of inspiring respectful adoration of the martyrdom of one of the early church saints but on the other hand also of masochistic perversion. Later still, in our Post-Modern artistic trends, the photographers Pierre et Gilles made series of photographs of young boys in the midst of forests, posing as the nude Sebastian pierced with arrows.

The effeminate presentation of Saint Sebastian is most visible in the Vincenzo Poppa painting of the martyrdom in the ruins of the Campus Martius of Rome. The Sebastian is in a traditional pose, but his face could be of a girl and his hair falls long on his shoulders in golden curls. It is far from certain that in these representations should be found homosexual reminiscences. Costa and Poppa may have emphasised the youthful appearance of Jesus, his idealised sexless appearance. The 'Golden Legend' would have said of Jesus, as of John the Evangelist, that he had chosen to remain a virgin. The artists may have stressed the universality of his life and message, not just in male but also in female sense. They built upon a tradition of depicting Jesus in an androgynous way.

Another picture, entirely in this view of Sebastian, is Dosso Dossi's painting in the Pinacoteca di Brera of Milan. A very young Sebastian is posed like a dancer, in a waving, tortuous, alluring movement of the body, standing with upheaved hands, against a tree. A luxurious green cloak folds from his back around him as if nature were enveloping the body. The tree holds oranges, always a symbol of the original sin. Jerome arches in one movement, the tree in another and thus Sebastian and wild nature are almost in an intimate embrace. Dosso Dossi was a Ferrarese painter who glorified the plastic elements in the human body as can be seen in this 'Sebastian'.

Hans Holbein the Elder and German Sebastians

Hans Holbein the Elder painted a scene of Sebastian's martyrdom in 1516, at the time he withdrew in the cloister of Isenheim, the cloister in which Grünewald had just finished his famous altar-piece. Holbein died in Isenheim in 1524. So, this is a relatively late work. He painted it as a Sebastian altarpiece for the Saint Saviour church of Augsburg where he was born in 1465 and where he was also established as a painter. It was the middle piece of a triptych, with Saint Barbara on the left panel and Saint Elisabeth on the right. Holbein's painting resembles much the earlier work of the Pollaiuolo's. Sebastian is against a tree, bound but with one arm upwards, the other hangs down. Archers are all around. Just as in the Pollaiuolo scene an archer to the left is taking aim, another archer is charging his crossbow below, still other archers are tending their bows on the right. The archer in the lower left is in blue uniform, just as in the Pollaiuolo painting. The background is formed by a landscape; here a medieval fortified town. The Pollaiuolo landscape is definitely Renaissance; here we are still in the Gothic of the Middle Ages. The realism of the North is also clear: the faces of the archers are grim, very intense, and all different.

One senses something of the roughness and the cruelty of Holbein's times in the German states, in the meticulousness by which the crossbows, swords, daggers are painted. These must have taken an important place in Holbein's life. Sebastian is drawn amidst this cruelty as a serene young body, against a blood-red robe, but with a strange bearded head clearly in pain. Beard and hair are of the same brown as the tree, building a link between Sebastian and the tree. Sebastian resembles a faun. And the tree has strange horn-like structures, which make us think of representations of horned Satan, the devil. The horns surround Sebastian and protrude even between his arms, as if Sebastian was in the grip of the devil. Did Holbein want to warn the viewer of the potential dangers of the ambiguous image of Sebastian?

A French-Italian Sebastian: Louis Brea

A Sebastian of loneliness is Louis Brea's painting. Brea was born and worked in the Provence in southern France. He worked around Nice, but also in Tuscany in Italy. His Sebastian is standing on a pole high above a landscape of turreted castles. The pole rises out of the abysses. Sebastian is posed nonchalantly and he looks in the far, oblivious of the arrows in his body. Brea has painted Sebastian as a symbol, not as a suffering man. The painting dates from the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century and it looks primitive as compared to some of its Italian examples. But the vision is well depicted and the composition of the picture is individual.

Andrea Mantegna

The most impressive Saint Sebastian of the late fifteenth century is Andrea Mantegna's. Saint Sebastian is bound to a pillar and pierced with many arrows. Here also he seems oblivious of the pain, with a serene body. Mantegna inspires again a static impression to the viewer, his particular style in most of his paintings. The whole scene is deliberately artificial, intellectual, so different from the real world. It is a typical Mantegna exercise in theatrical static drama, by which the painter emphasises the difference between reality and artistic expression.

Most remarkable is Mantegna's head of Sebastian. Andrea Mantegna painted Sebastian as a mature man, in whose face one can see all the experience, worries, hardships of an older warrior. Sebastian is very sad, almost crying at the injustice. He sends his eyes to the skies, to new hope. The arrows that pierce him in all directions are long, unworldly. By drawing the antique pillar behind Sebastian to such prominence, creating a dream-like and unreal environment, Mantegna sets Sebastian out of time. This is the classic Sebastian painting that can defy the ages. The background is formed by an Italian landscape, in which the metallic curves of Mantegna's landscapes can be recognised. It is a typical Mantegna landscape with towns and fortresses on high hills.

Tiziano Vecellio

Tiziano's Saint Sebastian of the Saint Petersburg Hermitage is a very late work, made in the last years of his life around 1575. Tiziano's colour palette had darkened, although the saint is completely shown in light. Man and nature are one, in a turmoil that announces the end of the world or the end of a soul. This is more a Christ figure, in which the sufferings of ages are all brought together. It is a Sebastian in torment and the colours and forms announce a new vision of paintings: touches and patches in rapid brushes as the Impressionist painters would use, and a force of expression as would only be reached again in the twentieth century.

Procaccini

Giulio Procaccini painted mainly in Milan. He painted in the Mannerist way and took on the subject of Saint Sebastian more than once. His Saint Sebastian of the Brussels Museum is in that style. In this picture, movement is the main theme. Sebastian and the angels are embraced in one flowing movement of limbs and bodies. Sebastian still hangs with one hand on a tree, but the angels are liberating him. The angels are gently drawing the arrows from Sebastian's bodies, thus saving him from death. Sebastian's body is devoid of wounds, an occasion for Procaccini to show an unblemished male nude in all its splendour. Most important for Procaccini was the painting of the male nudes, not just in Sebastian but also in the young boys or angels.

Jan Van Scorel and Dutch Sebastians

Jan Van Scorel, a Dutch painter of Utrecht, born in 1495 and who died in 1562, painted a Sebastian as a study after Michelangelo. Van Scorel remained many years in Italy, Venice and Rome, when he was young and was very drawn to Italian Mannerism. But he was a late Renaissance man, an architect and waterworks engineer. His Sebastian is in a non-conformist pose with one leg uplifted and hands over the head as if covering for a near disaster. His 'Martyrdom of Sebastian' was painted after a figure of the 'Last Judgement' of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican. The figure is on the lower left of Michelangelo's painting, and indeed a figure waiting to be drawn into hell. Michelangelo's work dates from 1541, Van

Scorel of 1542, so his Sebastian is one of the first copies ever out of Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement'.

Dutch and Flemish Baroque paintings

Very different from former presentations of Saint Sebastian are the paintings of the seventeenth century. By looking at the Georges de La Tour painting, one could forget that his was the time of late Mannerism and of Baroque. Hendrick ter Brugghen was such a late Mannerist. He was a Dutch painter who worked mostly in Utrecht, but he had been to Rome and studied Caravaggio. One of his major works is the 'Saint Sebastian attended by Irene'. Ter Brugghen throws a very white, eerie light on Sebastian's side as the women lower him from the tree against which he was shot. Irene delicately draws out an arrow from his body. Ter Brugghen shows Sebastian as a man in silent suffering for his faith, but helped by the unselfish charity of Irene. The heads of Sebastian and Irene are so close to each other, that we find here a rare message of human solidarity and of human bondage.

The most famous painter of the Baroque period was Rubens. Pieter Paul Rubens' Sebastian is shown in full pathos. The head is contorted to depict the pain of martyrdom. Sebastian's body is full-fleshed, as in most Rubens paintings. It is again a study of the nude. Rubens painted Sebastian in the same attitude as Mantegna, but the saint's body is more curved and the setting is in a scene of nature. Sebastian is bound against a tree. The background is a landscape of nature. An arrow holder and arch are on the ground in a still life, which was a popular genre in northern paintings. Rubens also uses light and darkness, brings Sebastian in full light and nature behind him in shadows. In that way the shapes of the body could be emphasised to all the pathos that is characteristic of Rubens' pictures.

Rubens' most promising pupil was Anthony van Dyck. Van Dyck soon established his own workshop in Antwerp and travelled to Italy, in the example of his master. Van Dyck's composition shows a Sebastian in a slanting position, in the line of a diagonal of the frame. Van Dyck had learned well Rubens' lessons of using slanting lines to renovate views. Two angels are in the left triangle and one of them delicately pulls an arrow out of the Saint's chest, thereby saving him. Van Dyck was one of few painters showing the moment when divine intervention saves Sebastian a first time and that can come as something of a surprise because the whole main religious meaning of the legend lies in this fact. Van Dyck stressed the empathy of the heavens for Sebastian. He also showed the suffering of the tortured human Sebastian in a very tender way.

Spanish and Neapolitan Sebastians of the Baroque

Jose de Ribera painted Sebastian like Rubens against a tree in a picture of the Madrilene Prado Museum. Sebastian's arms are not bound in the back anymore, but tied above the head, more suggesting Jesus. Ribera likewise makes Sebastian in this picture a powerfully muscled man. The position of the head remains classic uplifted.

Much more powerful is Ribera's painting of the Malraux Museum of Le Havre. Ribera was born in Jativa in Spain in 1591 but he worked for the largest part of his career in Naples, Italy, and where he also died in 1562. He arrived in Naples in 1616 and he painted in a rare mixture of Neapolitan Baroque, used the contrasts between dark and light in the best Caravaggio style and with the passion and gloom of a true Spaniard. Ribera made a very striking, a surprising Saint Sebastian thus once more showing his force and individualism. Ribera uses fully the style of Caravaggio in order to make the paleness of the nude body of Sebastian to contrast in the painting. Caravaggio had stayed in Naples in 1616-1617 as well as in 1619 and he had shown his style there to be learnt by Ribera. Ribera gave Sebastian a dramatic pose with outstretched, imploring arms. This pose reminds strongly of the crucifixion of Jesus. And since Sebastian is all gleaming with intense light, sure to come back to life, the picture also reminds of Jesus's resurrection. Sebastian is a young man in this image so that Ribera could detect in his young body, which is not yet so muscular as the body of a Roman soldier and without hair on breasts and shoulders. The lines of the ropes around the body can accentuate the earthly bonds of a body that could otherwise have belonged to an angel. Ribera accentuated thus other lines like the arrow, the rope of the loincloth.

The composition and visual effect on the viewer of this Sebastian is very strong. Ribera has put Sebastian all along the diagonal of the frame, where we recognise Caravaggio's influence in a very unconventional pose. The colours are few; the whole scene is in soft browns. The landscape is frugal, simple, restrained, as if Ribera had wanted to paint a picture of classical antiquity. As on other classical pictures we have a feeling of loneliness, of cold, of placement out of any space and time. This makes the picture all the more remarkable. Jusepe de Ribera has shown with this painting all the intensity of his own feelings.

Jusepe Leonardo, a Spanish painter who worked mainly in Saragossa in the seventeenth century, has shown the preparation of the torture of Sebastian. The saint is being bound at arms and feet. Leonardo uses Sebastian to paint a male nude. Through the binding Sebastian's torso is pushed somewhat forward in the full light, his head is held backwards. This image is a fine example of Sebastian used to depict the male nude; the body is kept young and athletic. It is not so much the body of a soldier as the body of a young man without blemish as one could expect of a saint.

Luca Giordano of Naples' representation of Sebastian joins Georges de La Tour's. Sebastian is away from the pillar, found by Irene. Light and shadow are here also applied in the new seventeenth century way. The symbolism of Jesus is deliberately stressed here, as one could expect of a painter who was once a pupil to the Spanish Jose de Ribera: Sebastian's arms form a cross. Irene as a Mary Magdalene tends to his wounds. The body is a poor body here, older, thinner, with longer stretched and more worn-out muscles. The emotions of helplessness are explicitly shown, just as one would expect of a Christ figure.

The Roman painter Giacomo Farelli was a competitor of Luca Giordano. His Saint Sebastian is reduced to a torso coming out of the night. It is a pain-distorted torso suddenly shown to us out of the dark of times and we expect it to disappear again. The drama is reduced to its essentials.

In Venice's painting art of the seventeenth century, Sebastian is also present, as shows Antonio Molinari's picture. Sebastian's body is turned against a tree, one hand bound above his head, the other on his back so that the full light can fall on his athletic body. This is again an exercise in painting of a nude male body. But Irene who has come with balms for Sebastian's wounds makes the picture complete. A second Roman woman is untying Sebastian. Saint Sebastian's body is completely lit, whereas his head is in darkness. The painting is in the soft colours of Venice, the flesh tones contrast nicely with the red cloak thrown on the ground and the soft red gown of the Roman woman. The structure of the scene is in an Andrew's cross: one line goes from the bottom left of the armour to the red cloak, then over the body to the red dress of the Roman woman. The second crossing line goes from the head of Irene to Sebastian's head and the high hand in the top left corner. It is thus a painting in a strong composition and soft colours, announcing the later famous Venetians Pittoni and Tiepolo.

A French Sebastian

Sebastian was a theme taken up by painters of all countries: Italy, Flanders, Spain, and also by French painters. Nicolas Régnier was born in 1591 in Maubeuge of northern France but he first had an apprenticeship in Flanders and then left for Rome. He died in Venice in 1667. The major French painter who revived French classical art, Simon Vouet, influenced him, and he studied with other painters of Rome. Nicolas Régnier made a Sebastian in contrasts of light and darkness and using a Sebastian theme not unlike Georges de la Tour's although Nicolas Régnier's picture dates from almost three decades earlier. Sebastian is lying on the ground; the full light is thrown on his body. Régnier has not shown a body transpierced with arrows. He only suggests the death by arrows by showing some of the arrows next to the body. The body's pose is unconventional since it is reversed so that the head is closest to the viewer and the body recedes from the lower border of the frame. Sebastian is lying peacefully as if sleeping, while Irene and another woman are tending him. The faces and necks of these women are equally lighted intensely as is the body of Sebastian. These patches of lighted flesh gleam out of the picture, underscoring the human drama. The women are quite present amongst them; they are talking and referring to each other. The sleeping Sebastian is in another place, separate. We have seen these emotions and this distance in Georges de la Tour's painting. Régnier had a French tradition in the making. Régnier's picture can have inspired also other painters. Like a 'Venus weeping over Adonis', to be found in the museum of Caen, made by Nicolas Poussin in 1625. Who copied whom?

Sebastian in later centuries

The theme of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian continued to interest painters to our days. As an example we present first the expressionist picture of Jean Schaack, a local Luxemburg painter. Sebastian is shown against a haunting landscape of barren mountains and at night. He already wears the saintly halo. The killing soldiers are still riding past on their horses. The image is one of mystic death confronted with a dangerous world.

Camille Corot, the French Realist painter occasionally made pictures of religious themes, mostly portraits of monks. His Saint Sebastian remains an exceptional painting for this artist. Corot painted Sebastian with hands held above the head against a tree as in the first images of old. He painted Sebastian's nude body in dirty yellow with grey patches and the whole picture is in grey tones, denoting correctly the sadness of the scene.

The French Symbolist painters Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) and Odilon Redon (1840-1916) made several paintings of Sebastian. Moreau followed the tradition of a Sebastian depicted as a youth with an almost female body.

Odilon Redon was all colours, all dreams and all mind-images. His Sebastians express the solitude of the artist. The pastel drawing of Bordeaux shows a Sebastian entirely alone in a wide, cool landscape. A sole leafless tree grows forcefully out of rocks and Sebastian is bound to this only living part of nature that is standing there as if for Sebastian only. Sebastian is shown in full, with long arrows in his sides but the most remarkable are the flowers under his feet that are as so many eyes watching the agony of the saint. For Redon, Sebastian may have been an image of his anxious mind. Redon marvellously put in colours the vague view we all keep in our head of Sebastian: a naked body against a tree, with very little other detail.

Anto Carte was a Walloon (Belgian) painter who deserves to be better known. With two painter-friends he founded the group 'Nervia' in 1928. The painters aimed at reaffirming the Walloon presence in art and to support young artists. The group was very diverse. Anto Carte was much influenced by cubism, but also by expressionism and the naïveté of Pieter Bruegel. Carte painted the people of his region, the workers of the Walloon coal mining and heavy steel industry. The tradition of archery continued since the Middle Ages in this region. Carte's 'Archers of Saint Sebastian' show the tired workers with their new, modern bows perpetrate the martyrdom of Sebastian in the twentieth century. The image and spiritual value of Sebastian lived on.

Sebastian, a universal theme

Saint Sebastian was a universal theme in painting. There was a definite need in Western Europe for a patron saint of soldiers, of warriors. Soldiers, especially mercenaries of medieval times, were daily confronted with their death and with the waiting for death. Death was always present, but always to be denied. Saint Sebastian represented this idea: at the same time violent suffering, but a death that was ignored, in which epic heroism could be found, and at least the distant, elusive hope that death could be survived. This image brought the soldiers closer to the epic of the resurrection of Jesus. This primary feeling appealed to all. Sebastian had resurrected from death, so he was called upon for assistance in cases of illnesses where death was almost certain, for the plague. He became one of the Plague Saints. He was the icon of a tortured nude man, from whom everything had been taken away but who had survived by divine powers.

The greatest European painters made it their honour to show their art in painting at least once a Sebastian. They must have considered it an exercise in professionalism by

which they could compare themselves over the ages. Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, Lorenzo Costa, Luca Signorelli, Andrea Mantegna, Hans Holbein the Elder and Bernardo Luini were fifteenth century or early sixteenth century painters of Sebastian. In the seventeenth century Georges De La Tour, Peter Paul Rubens, Jose de Ribera, Luca Giordano, Giacomo Farelli and Antonio Molinari followed them. These were powerful painters from very different countries and centuries in Europe, who did not hesitate in their art.

Sebastian's martyrdom was not a delicate scene. It was a scene for real men and for powerful painters. We admire the sophistication of the Pollaiuolo painting, the fineness of Lorenzo Costa's. Rubens and Luca Giordano made probably the most accomplished realistic paintings that show in the most direct, forceful way the passion of Sebastian. Andrea Mantegna's Sebastian stands alone in a complex, unworldly picture. His Sebastian is the essence of what the martyrdom is about: an image of transcendence, an image of eternally suffering man in an impassible nature. Rubens, Mantegna, and the Pollaiuolo's had very different expressions at the extreme of the same theme.

We saw themes like Saint Jerome and this Saint Sebastian, which stress the differences as well as the similarities in European art and thinking. The themes are the same in Germany, Flanders, France, Italy or Spain. But each painter lived in his own culture and time and represented the theme differently.

There are all those painters of Sebastian over the centuries and the geographies. And then there is Georges de La Tour. De La Tour was of no century, even less of his century than Mantegna, and of all centuries. De La Tour showed a very different Sebastian, a scene that was not classic: no Sebastian standing right, but one found in the gutters and in the dark of night. An expression reduced to the essentials. De La Tour painted areas in light and dark, with soft colours, entirely in gloom. His painting is a mature masterpiece of an artist almost at the end of his life, who must have reached the final way how he wanted to show what was in the depth of his mind. De La Tour did not find it necessary to show his art in comparison with so many other painters. He wanted to show a new Sebastian, one that was his own only. He showed us an abandoned, suffering, tortured man coming out of the darkness to find compassion and love, and a man being cared for a last time by another human. Sebastian and Irene are together isolated in that touching of souls, a theme more universal even than the Saint Sebastian. A theme within a theme. A theme that was universal in that it joined other images of compassion as of Saint Martin and the parable of the Good Samaritan. De La Tour delivered a painting also that is very expressionist, very close to modern European man.

Other paintings:

Fifteenth century:

The Polyptych of the Misericordia

Piero della Francesca (ca. 1410-1492). Museo Civico – Sansepolcro. Ca. 1446.

Saint Sebastian

Benozzo Gozzoli (ca. 1420-1497). Fresco in the Duomo of San Gimignano. Ca. 1464.

Saint Sebastian

Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). Casa d'Oro. The Giorgio Franchetti Gallery. Venice.

Saint Sebastian

Andrea Mantegna (1430/1431 – 1506). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. Ca. 1457-1459.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Hans Memling (ca. 1435-1494). Triptych of the Resurrection. Musée du Louvre-Paris. Ca. 1490.

Saint Sebastian

Carlo Crivelli (1457-1500). Museo Poldi Pezzoli – Milan.

Saint Sebastian

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1474.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Anonymous Master of Germany. Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln. Around 1475.

Madonna enthroned with Child. The San Giobbe Altarpiece.

Giovanni Bellini (1434/1439-1516). Galleria dell'Accademia - Venice.

Saint Sebastian

Andrea da Murano (active ca. 1463-1504). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice.

Saint Sebastian

Hans Fries (ca. 1465-1518). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

Saint Sebastian

Pietro Vannucci called Il Perugino (ca. 1448-1523). 1493.

Saint Sebastian

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). The Dresden Altarpiece. Gemäldegalerie – Dresden. Ca. 1496.

Pilgrims at the Tomb of Saint Sebastian

Josse Lieferinxe (1493-1508). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1497.

Saint Sebastian

Fiorenzo di Lorenzo (ca. 1440-1522). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Circle of Vincenzo Foppa (1427-1616). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

Saint Sebastian

Vincenzo Foppa (1430-1616). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

Saint Sebastian

Jacometto Veneziano (ca. 1472-1494). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Sebastian between Saint Dominic and Saint Anthony Abbot

Francesco di gentile (second half 15th century). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Sebastian (Polyptych of Scanzo)

Bartolomeo Vivarini (ca. 1432-after 1491). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Sixteenth century:**Saint Sebastian**

Raffaello Sanzio called Raphael (1483-1520). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Sebastian

Sebastiano Luciani called del Piombo (1485-1547). Galleria dell'Accademia - Venice. Ca. 1507-1513.

Saint Sebastian

Giovanni Battista Benvenuti called Ortolano (ca. 1487 – 1527). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori – Rome.

Saint Sebastian

Pietro de Saliba (last quarter 15th century). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Sebastian Diptych

Master of the Sebastian Diptych (active ca. 1510 in the environment of Hans Baldung Grien). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1510.

Saint Sebastian

Marco Basaiti. Casa Rezzonico. Egidio Martini Collection. Venice. Ca. 1520.

Saint Sebastian

Venetian Upper Italy. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1520.

Saint Sebastian

Giovanni Antonio Bazzi called Sodoma (1477-1549). Palazzo Pitti – Florence. 1525.

Saint Sebastian

Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1525-1528.

Saint Sebastian

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1531.

Portrait of a young Man as Saint Sebastian

Anthonis Mor van Dashorst (ca. 1517/1520-1576/1577). Alte Pinakothek. Munich.

Saint Sebastian

Italian School. 16th century. Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

Saint Sebastian

Jan van Scorel (1496-1562). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam. 1542.

Holy Family with Saint Sebastian, Saint Jerome and Mary Magdalene

Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Saint Sebastian

Roman Painter of around 1550, School of Jacopo dal Ponte (1510-1598). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Saint Sebastian

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Cathedral of Palencia – Palencia. Ca. 1579.

Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625). Castello Sforzesco – Milan.

Saint Sebastian

A painter of the Veneto Region. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Middle 16th century.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Jacopo da Ponte called Bassano (ca. 1510/1515-1592). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. 1574.

Saint Sebastian

Jacopo Robusti called Tintoretto (1519-1594). Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice. Ca. 1578-1581.

Saint Sebastian

David de Haen (1595-1622). Musée des Beaux-Arts – La Rochelle.

Saint Sebastian cured by Irene

Master of the Candle light (16th century). Collezioni Communale d'Arte. Bologna.

Saint Sebastian's Martyrdom

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1570-1625). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

Seventeenth century:**Saint Sebastian**

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Galleria Corsini. Rome. 1601-1606.

Saint Sebastian and the Angel

Carlo Bononi (1569-1632). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg.

Saint Sebastian attended by Saint Irene and her Maid

Dirk Jaspersz. Van Baburen (ca. 1595-1624). The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. Ca. 1615.

Saint Sebastian

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. 1615.

Saint Sebastian tended by Irene

Antonio Bellucci (1654-1726). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1716-1718.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Horace Le Blanc (Ca. 1580-1627). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rouen. 1624.

Saint Sebastian tended by Irene

Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). The Ermitage – Saint Petersburg. 1628.

Saint Sebastian

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). Ca. 1630-1635.

Saint Sebastian tended by Irene

Francesco Cairo (1607-1665). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. Ca. 1635.

Saint Sebastian attended by Irene

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Saint Sebastian healed by the Holy Women

Giovanni Domenico Cerrini (1609-1681). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1652.

Saint Sebastian healed by the Holy Women

Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655). Musée des Beaux Arts. Tours. Ca. 1654.

Saint Sebastian healed by Irene

The Master of the Candle. Musée des Beaux-Arts – Bordeaux.

The Battle for Thionville

Peeter Snayers. Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. 1639.

Saint Sebastian

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1618.

Saint Sebastian healed by Irene

Gian Francesco Barbieri called Guercino (1591-1666). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Eighteenth century:

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian

Attributed to Nicolas-Bernard Lépicié (1735-1784). Musée Magnin. Dijon.

The Glorification of Saint Sebastian

Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1764). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Palais Rohan. Strasbourg. Ca. 1725.

Nineteenth century:

Saint Sebastian

Friedrich Overbeck (1809-1869). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1813-1816.

Saint Sebastian

Léopold Burthe. Musée de la Ville de Poitiers – Poitiers. 1852.

Saint Sebastian

Gustave Moreau (1826 – 1898). Musée Gustave Moreau – Paris. Ca. 1876.

Twentieth century:

Saint Sebastian

Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg.

Saint Sebastian

Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1910.

Saint Sebastian

Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Museum of Modern Art – Gumma, Takasaki. 1913.

John the Baptist

The Saint John Altar

Rogier Van der Weyden (1399-1464). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin.

The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1515-1569). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1566.

Luke presents a quite detailed story about the birth of John the Baptist, about his preaching and his relations to Jesus. He tells little of John's death however. He merely mentions a few words when he talks of Herod's puzzlement because the tetrarch thought that John had reappeared: 'John? I beheaded him. So, who is this I hear such reports about'? More accounts of the death of John the Baptist are given in Marc and Matthew.

We can follow the story of the Gospels with the altarpiece on John the Baptist made by Rogier van der Weyden. This altarpiece contains three panels. Looking at the altarpiece, the left panel tells about the birth of John. The middle panel shows the baptism of Jesus and the left panel depicts John's gruesome death.

Zechariah, John's father, was a priest who served in the temple. He was married to Elisabeth. The couple was childless and both Elisabeth and Zechariah were advanced in years. Zechariah was burning incense in the sanctuary, when the angel Gabriel appeared to announce him the birth of a son: 'your wife Elisabeth is to bear you a son and you shall name him John'. This son 'would prepare for the Lord a people fit for him'^{G38}. Zechariah did not believe these words, so Gabriel told Zechariah that he would be silenced and lose his power of speech until John's birth. And indeed, Elisabeth became pregnant and gave birth to a son some months before Mary. It happened that eight days after his birth they came to circumcise the child. They wanted to call the child after his father, as was the custom in the family. But Elisabeth told them to call the child John. This was a serious matter. Zechariah was still dumb, but he took a writing tablet and indeed also wrote 'His name is John'.

Rogier Van Der Weyden chose one of these moments for the left panel of the altarpiece. Elisabeth is still in her bed, which is made up by a servant because lady visitors are coming in. The circumcision seems to be over however, because the baby wears a white band low on his belly. Mary, who earlier already visited Elisabeth, holds the baby John. Zechariah is writing John's name on a tablet.

The middle panel of the John the Baptist altar that is shown is the baptism of Jesus in the waters of the river Jordan. Luke writes that while Jesus was at prayer, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in a physical form, like a dove. A voice came from heaven saying: 'You are my Son; today have I fathered you'. Rogier the painter has combined both events: the baptism and the apparition of the Holy Spirit. Also the famous words of God are written around the dove, coming out of God's mouth: 'Hic est filius meus dilectus in quo michi bene complacui ipsum audite' or 'this is my beloved Son in whom I take delight, listen to him'.

The right panel shows the death of John. Herod the tetrarch had married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. John had told Herod that it was forbidden by the law of the Jews to have one's brother's wife. Herodias was furious with John for this and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man. However, later on Herodias gave a banquet for Herod's birthday and let her daughter Salome dance for the tetrarch. Salome delighted Herod so much, that he swore an oath to Salome: 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it to you'. Salome went to her mother who urged her to ask the head of John the Baptist. The King was distressed, but dared not to break his word. He sent for a guard and had John beheaded in prison. The head was presented to Herodias.

In Rogier's right panel the guard holds John's head. John's body is lying on the stairs leading to the cellar prison. A richly clad Salome receives the head. Salome and the guard avert their eyes of such a treacherous act, making the emotions quite clear to the viewers. The big, ugly sword and the blood flowing amply and dramatically out of John's neck underscore this. In the background one can see the banquet for Herod. Herodias can finally take revenge. She is really a very evil woman; although John is dead and Salome brings her the plate, Herodias needs to pick at the head with a knife.

All these scenes are depicted with the smallest details so typical for Flemish Gothic painting of the fifteenth century. The figures are dignified, expressionless, unreal, and unworldly as expected of northern religious art. But admire the grace in the figures, the wonderful colours and the realism of the scenes. Van der Weyden displays a splendid skill in the play of shadows on the draperies and on the cloaks of the figures. Red dominates in the scenes, as Van der Weyden was maybe fascinated by the red horror of John the Baptist's death.

The representation of spirituality prevailed in this art. Thus, saints could not be shown in human emotion. Saints were figures that were transcended. Rogier Van Der Weyden was a master of detail, as we can see in the medieval bedroom in the left panel, the landscape in the middle behind Jesus or the town scene in the left panel. Rogier became a storyteller in this altarpiece and varied the backgrounds and the stories.

This aspect is strengthened by the many sculptures and half reliefs carved in the stone arches above the main figures. The twelve apostles are thus shown, two by two from left to right: James the Lesser and Philip, Thomas and Matthew, Peter and Andreas, the brothers James and John, Paul and Bartholomew, Thaddeus and Matthias. Each arch bears six half reliefs. The left arch tells first about the annunciation of Gabriel to Zechariah, how Zechariah leaves the temple unable to speak, further the engagement of Joseph and Maria, the annunciation to Mary, the visitation of Mary to Elisabeth and the birth of Christ. In the first scene of the middle arch, Zechariah predicts the future of John, John is shown preaching in the desert, and John baptises Pharisees and Sadducees. Three scenes of the temptations of Christ in the desert follow these. In the right arch then, priests and Levites are questioning John. In the next half-reliefs John indicates Jesus as being the Messiah, John scolds Herod for his unlawful marriage, John is thrown in prison, John is visited by young men while in prison and finally, Salome dances at the table of Herod. Between the first painted sculpture and the last, John's life unfolds.

John the Baptist was a figure that much appealed to the masses of the church, almost as much as Jesus. John's life was adventurous and filled with legends of old. Medieval stories abounded and many relics filled the churches of Western Europe, most of them probably falsifications. For a figure like the Baptist, most important were these very many stories so that Van der Weyden was obliged to show as many as he possibly could. He solved the issue by relegating many images to the grisaille sculptures in the arches of the three panels. Van der Weyden's panels bear the various scenes so that the wonderfully painted altarpiece could not only be admired but also used to explain the life of the Baptist. The altarpiece thus also had educational value and Van der Weyden combined the three pain scenes in bright colours and intricate detail with the smaller grisaille drawings. This is a great example of Late Medieval storytelling in a church tradition that was in line with earlier Romanesque habits.

Pieter Bruegel

The most important acts of John are the baptism of Christ, but also his many preachings. Especially Luke underscores the preachings of John and John's naming Jesus Christ as the Messiah: 'Someone is coming who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals'. Pieter Bruegel the Elder has made a picture of the preachings of John the Baptist. The result is stunningly different from Rogier's panels. But one still senses the powerful drive to tell stories of the northern painters. Rogier Van Der Weyden was born in the Walloon town of Tournai, but he painted in the tradition of the early Flemish Primitives. Bruegel was born in Limburg close to Holland, but like Rogier he came to the Duchy of Brabant and worked in Brussels.

Everybody has come to listen to what interesting John has to say. This is not just hearing a religious speech; the scene is one of entertainment, as if we were on a Flemish kermis in the country. You have just as in real life really to search for John, since so many people are around him. The people are young and old, female and men, rich and poor. Soldiers are there and peasant women, children and travellers. Even truth Sayers use the occasion to earn a dime so they read hands of the credulous. Look at the variety of dresses and the variety of the faces. Bruegel also knew how to paint landscapes: one unfolds to the right.

There are so many people in this picture of Bruegel, that the message of the preaching is lost in the crowd. This was a very strange and new message then, contrary to the true meaning of the church. Bruegel had brought religious painting one step further in the evolution. His painting is an example of a religious theme that has been reduced to an excuse for a landscape and genre painting. The religious theme disappears in the figures as if Bruegel wanted to say that this particular event of the Gospels was not that important after all. Far more imposing was the movement of the crowds, the people that have assembled. We know of these gatherings of people also in our own times. People spontaneously came to the streets in the old Soviet countries to announce the demise of Communist dictatorship. The global curiosity and the silent gathering of the people are forces that are impossible to stop. The curiosity is menacing. Crowds always create feelings of oppression and latent danger. This feeling also radiates from Bruegel's picture.

Saint John the Baptist is a strange figure in the New Testament. Various authors have presented this Saint as some of a theological issue. The New Testament sees no issue since it explains how John's coming before Jesus was all ordained from long before by God. John was to prepare the ways of Jesus. But John was the first to preach the new teaching. He had a following, which modern investigators have proven to be of a sect of the Essenes. The Essenes were one of the priestly castes of Israel, new to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The New Testament talks often in denigrating terms of these latter groups, but never mentions the Essenes. What happened? Did John found a new Essene movement that Jesus only took over later and brought to its logical extreme thus founding Christendom? Scholars who do not believe in the divine design of the events of Jesus's life certainly see John the Baptist not just as a precursor but as the real founder of the new movement of Judaism that would lead to Christendom. Then John would maybe have been greater than Jesus. Modern writers have exploited that controversy. They claim that sects and secret societies existed that may have proven more devotion to John than to Jesus.

The stories of these sects are often linked to the Hospitaller Knights Order of Saint John the Baptist. This Order was really founded in 1099 by the overseer of the Christian hospital of Jerusalem. Comparable orders may have been in existence since the sixth century, but the order was then newly established. The Order had as its first goal to tend to the sick pilgrims and to manage and protect the hospital of Jerusalem, but it soon also became an order that fought for Christendom in the Near Orient. When Sultan Saladin took Jerusalem in 1187 the Knights of Saint John first settled in 1191 in Acca, which they called Saint John of Acre. Then when also this town fell to the Muslims, the headquarters of the order was transferred to Lemisso on the island of Cyprus. That happened in 1291. In 1309 the Hospitaller Knights conquered Rhodos and established their headquarters there. Much of the wealth of the forbidden Templar Order came to the Hospitaller Order, and maybe with that treasure came some of the mysteries connected with the Templars since these last performed rites on secret relics. In 1522 the Order of Saint John was once again obliged to abandon to leave their headquarters. They went to Crete, then to Sicily and finally obtained in 1530 the Island of Malta from Emperor Charles V. Malta's capital was named after the Grand Master of the order, La Valletta. Caravaggio painted another Grand Master there, Alof de Wignacourt, in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Napoleon Bonaparte attacked the Knights of Malta and Grand Master Hompesh capitulated to the French armies in 1798. But that was not the end of the order. The Hospitaller Knights moved to Saint Petersburg for the Russian Tsar Paul had become its Grand Master in 1798 too. From Russia the seat of the Hospitallers moved to Catania in 1821, to Ferrara in 1825 and remains now since 1834 in Rome. An order that has been almost a thousand years in existence has known wealth and power, and that still claims John the Baptist as its patron saint cannot but have been the subject of mysterious tales.

Pieter Bruegel did not doubt the New Testament. It is difficult to ascertain however whether Bruegel wanted to indicate with the feelings of oppression and danger of the crowds support for John and thus for Jesus, or refusal of him. One would opt for support, but John has disappeared in the crowd and does not throne nor guide the people. The ambiguity remains. But this is the ambiguity of everyday life in which the message of Jesus and John the Baptist are not in the minds of the crowds. John and Jesus do not interfere in this. Who does not search for them will not find them. Thus a simple picture bears a universal, fundamental lesson of Christian religion.

Alexandre Cabanel

Saint John the Baptist preaching in the Desert

Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889). Musée Fabre. Montpellier. 1850.

Alexandre Cabanel started studying drawing already in 1834, merely eleven years old, at the Academy of Fine Arts of Montpellier. In 1839 he won a price in his town and that allowed him to go to Paris, where he continued to study painting from 1840 on. He tried several times to win the 'Prix de Rome' of the French Académie, which would have allowed him to stay for five years in Rome. He succeeded only the third time, in 1845, although he came in only second after Léon Bénouville, but being anyway allowed to travel to Rome and work at the French Academy's school in the Villa Medici.

Alexandre Cabanel's painting 'Saint John the Baptist preaching in the Desert' dates from 1850, the year that Pope Pius X could return to Rome. The year before, the army of the self-proclaimed Roman Republic occupied Rome and the Villa Medici, which was the palace of the French Academy in Rome. This French Academy was one of the many such schools operated in Rome by European countries, all more or less assembled not so far from the villa Borghese. The British, Rumanian and Belgians had eventually academies in Rome on the French example and sent promising young painters to study Italian art and to learn from the splendid light of Rome. Alexandre Cabanel was in the Villa Medici in 1850. When the villa was occupied in 1849 by the Roman army, the artists had to go to Florence for a while, so for two to three months the students had also been immersed in the wealth of Tuscan art amassed in Florence. Cabanel was much impressed by the power of Michelangelo's David. He would not stay in Rome after 1850. He returned to Paris in 1851 and met success somewhat later in France's capital; Napoleon II, the new French emperor, supported him until the debacle of 1870 when during the French-German war the emperor was defeated, and imprisoned by the German army. Napoleon III had to abdicate. Cabanel then travelled to Italy, to Florence and to Venice. In 1878 he was appointed a professor at the Roman Academy of Fine Arts.

Alexandre Cabanel's painting of John the Baptist was sent to the Salon, the official exhibition of Paris in 1850. It was bought rapidly by the town of Montpellier, where Cabanel was born in 1823. Alexandre Cabanel was still a student of the Academy when he made his 'The Preaching of John the Baptist in the Desert' in Rome; he was only twenty-seven years old, but his picture was already remarkable.

A great power shows in Cabanel's picture. This is not a narrative picture; the viewer is overpowered by the force of John the Baptist. The man is formidable and he fills the frame. He is still a young man but he has strong, mature muscles. He has a

hairless, well-sculptured breast, long elegant but wiry legs with the muscles of an athlete runner and arms like of a stone-breaker. He is a wild man, with unkempt hair of an obsessed, as of an animal. He is clad only in animal skins and he lived in the desert. But he has only a small beard and the thin moustaches of the intellectual. He is intelligent but possessed, with devouring black eyes and he cries out his message with fervour, his mouth open and desperate. We hear him call out loud, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. This is the John of Matthew, the man that called Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of vipers. John spoke of precursors only as powerful as himself, of Abraham. He was the voice that cried in the desert. He preached of repentance through baptism, against extortion and intimidation, for charity and sharing.

The desert is devoid of everything human, of everything living. There are but the sand and rocks and the sky in the desert. So Alexandre Cabanel did not show the landscape: it stops low behind under John, so that the conjuring figure all the more commands the scene as he is set against the blue sky. John sits before the heavens in an epic way, so that he stands before the vastness of the cosmos. He sits on imposing rocks and he cannot but entirely dominate his audience. Cabanel therefore makes the man on the right incline his elderly, grey head to the ground, in acceptance of the Baptist's grandeur and of his menacing message. The artist showed John the Baptist entirely, but he merely suggests the bystanders. None of the people around John are shown in full inside the frame.

To the left, Cabanel placed a young boy in white robes and as here we see a long, thin cross carrying the scroll with the words 'Ecce Agnus Dei', we cannot but suppose that Cabanel showed the young Jesus here, in trance and admiration for the one that truly started the Christian religion even though now and in the Bible the Baptist is considered merely as being the precursor of Christ. It was John the Baptist who first said the words, 'Behold the Lamb of God'. John was not a lamb, he was a lion of the desert and thus Cabanel depicted him. It could be something of a sacrilege for Christian theologians to see how formidable John began to preach, before Jesus, the new religion, while Jesus was still so young. But this was the vision of Cabanel, the artist.

Alexandre Cabanel's painting is of course a marvellous, imposing image. It is not only a painting that is meticulously drawn with enormous and brilliant talent, painted with exquisite mastery of fine, harmonious colours and excellent lines. It is also an intelligent and forceful picture made by a man – still young – filled with strong and new emotions, dedicated to epic grandeur, to the cult of man. This grandeur of man was of course very much a Florentine idea but was most of all also the inspiration of the French neo-classical trend of painting that had come into its own with Jacques-Louis David and his pupil Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Ingres would be the director of the villa Medici from 1835 to 1841. Alexandre Cabanel's John the Baptist is an eminently neo-classic picture, late of trend but of the trend anyway. It has the frugality of decoration of classicism, as well as its depiction of but one important personage in the main theme. It has the epic, overt expression of emotions in a way that promises a maximum impact on the viewer. 'John the Baptist Preaching in the Desert' really hits the viewer in a most Romantic way. It is very realistically painted and all details are masterly rendered. It nevertheless manipulates the natural and the imitation of reality; it subjugates nature and employs it to the aims of the emotions of

epic and force. John the Baptist preaches, conjures, orders, calls for the power of a revengeful God. He points to the heaven with his right hand and commands to grasp God's Law with the gesture of his right hand. Alexandre Cabanel made of John the formidable, fanatic, obsessed man of the bible, a man that could only come to a dramatic end.

Other paintings:

Saint John the Baptist

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Around 1513-1515.

John the Baptist in the Desert

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin.

Saint John the Baptist

Gian Giacomo Caprotti called Salaino (1480-1524). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist

Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1600.

The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist

Joachim Patenier (1480-1524). Le Musée d'Art Ancien – Brussels. Around 1520.

Saint John the Baptist

Francesco del Cossa (ca. 1436 – ca. 1478). Pinacoteca di Brera – Milan.

Saint John the Baptist in a Cave

Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1660-1665.

Saint John the Baptist Preaching in a Landscape

Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist

Giovanni-Battista Gaulli called Baciccio (1639-1709). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1690.

The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist in the Desert

Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889). Musée Fabre. Montpellier. 1850.

The Sermon of Saint John the Baptists in a Landscape

Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavalier d'Arpino (1602-1660). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

Saint John being interrogated by the Jews

Francisco Herrera the Elder (1585-1682). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen. 1635-1640.

Saint John the Baptist

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Galleria Doria Pamphili – Rome.

Saint John the Baptist

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art – Kansas City. Around 1600.

Saint John the Baptist

Tiziano Vecellio (1489/1490 – 1576). Galleria dell'Accademia – Venice. Around 1511.

Saint John the Baptist

Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. 1607.

Saint John the Baptist

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530) – Palatine Gallery in the Pitti Palace – Florence. Ca. 1525.

The Life of John the Baptist

Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337). Frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel of the church of Santa Croce – Florence. Around 1320-1330.

John the Baptist

Frey Carlos. Museo Nacional de Arte Antigua. Lissabon. Ca. 1520.

John the Baptist

Ercole de' Roberti (ca. 1450/1456-1496). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1480.

The Legend of the Relics of Saint John the Baptist

Geertgen tot Sint Jans (ca. 1460/1465 – 1490/1495). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. After 1484.

The Saint John Altarpiece

Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473-1531). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. 1518.

Zacharias writes down the name of the Baptist

Luciano Borzone (1590-1645). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness

Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

Saint John the Baptist

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Accademia Linguistica di Belle Arti. Genoa. 1615-1620.

The Infant Saint John the Baptist

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1620-1625.

Salome with the Head of John the Baptist

Salome with the Head of John the Baptist

Guido Reni (1575-1642). The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1639-1640.

Violence

The Decapitation of John the Baptist was a very frequently recurring theme in painting until the seventeenth century. This theme can be joined to other similar scenes of decapitation. David cut the head of Goliath and several of the greatest painters used this theme of the Old Testament for one of their pictures. In another story of the Bible, Judith slay Holophernes and decapitated him.

Michelangelo Merisi, called Il Caravaggio was probably the greatest master who seems to have had this theme turning around in his mind. He made paintings of all

three themes: the slaying of John the Baptist, of David carrying the head of Goliath, as well as a picture of Judith with the head of Holophernes. In addition, we owe him paintings of the 'Offer of Isaac', also a rather violent scene. Caravaggio went as far as to portray himself in the head of the slain Goliath that David carries. He was not the first painter for such a miserable self-portrait however. Michelangelo Buonarroti similarly painted his own sad, drooping face on the boneless skin that Saint Bartholomew holds in the 'Last Judgement' of the Sistine Chapel. Caravaggio lived an adventurous life in which violence was never far. He was accused of having participated in several fights in Rome, and he was even temporarily imprisoned. He became embroiled in a dispute over a game in 1606, after which a man was killed. He had to leave Rome on account of this. He first hid near Rome, then travelled to Naples and still later he went to the island of Malta. He had to flee from Valetta on Malta too, pursued by the wrath of a Knight of Malta. In many later pictures of Caravaggio one senses a violent tension and a brutal force of representation, which is in line with his scenes of beheaded figures.

Many painters pictured the slaying of Holophernes by Judith. The most forceful of these works is probably the one by Artemisia Gentileschi. This picture is all the more a rarity in the pictorial arts since it was made by one of the very first great woman painters. Thus, the psychological concept of a woman slaying a man and cutting off his head is an added poignant interest, and a theme that indeed was taken up by other artists. Artemisia Gentileschi was the daughter of Orazio Gentileschi. Father and daughter lived in the seventeenth century. Artemisia had an eventful life. She had become the lover of Agostino Tassi. Tassi was a Florentine renowned painter with whom her father worked together and who taught her the art of painting in addition to her father. Orazio Gentileschi accused Agostino Tassi of rape on Artemisia, who was still a minor then. Tassi was judged, condemned and imprisoned. Artemisia was tortured before Tassi so that the court could extort a confession from him. Tassi indeed confessed. It was the end of his career. The 'Judith and Holophernes' was one of the first paintings of Artemisia and it is also one of her few remaining works. It shows an accomplished, very powerful artist.

Guido Reni

The theme of the 'Beheading of John the Baptist' interested Guido Reni, an artist from Bologna. Reni also made a picture of David carrying the head of Goliath. Here then we find an artist who, like Caravaggio, took the theme of a beheading and repeated it in various scenes. Reni lived from 1575 to 1642 in Bologna. He studied painting in the famous Accademia degli Incamminati founded by the three Carracci artists in 1580. Guido Reni continued the fame of Bolognese art. Reni knew the works of Caravaggio but he preferred more restrained presentations in art. He had travelled extensively and he worked besides Bologna also in Rome, in Ravenna, and in the Papal States. He used the grace of the Carracci painters and especially in his later years joined the more tempered style of the greatest of the Carracci, Annibale.

Guido Reni's 'Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist' was painted around 1639 to 1640, so it is a very late work. Strangely as compared to the subject of the theme, Reni made a quiet, elegant and classic picture. Reni presents a marvellous Salome. She is a beautiful young woman, richly dressed. Salome is even shown as a

gentle lady, holding with one hand gracefully her magnificent red, wide robe, showing exquisite bare feet. With her other hand however she cruelly lifts the head of John by the hair. But even here grace continues in this act and the silver platter is held delicately by a page. The young beauty Salome looks at the head with an air of interest but with indifference and in the other figures too few emotions can be discerned. No blood drips from John's head. Some of this indifferent contempt at the sight of a slain man can also be found in Reni's picture of the 'Triumphant David' of the Louvre museum. Guido Reni seems to want to show that at courts and between their nobles, death and cruelty are commonplace.

There is no background in this painting, except two ladies in waiting and a young servant opening a drapery, but even this small scene is painted in darkness. Some areas such as Salome's red robe and the soft green costume of the page are painted in rapid brushstrokes so that all eyes remain on the exquisite face of Salome. The colours fade away from the centre, again emphasising Salome herself. The structure of the scene is the conventional pyramid, forced by the two arm movements and the broad robe of Salome.

Guido Reni worked in the Carracci style and he was the heir to Bolognese Classicism. He handled devotional subjects, but in the aristocratic, calm way of the Carraccis. Emotions are sublimated in this style so that what we have in Reni's painting is the cool culmination of a style that reacted against the ostentatious display of emotions of Baroque.

At such a picture it is always difficult to grasp the meaning of the image. Reni may have expressed a moral message in view of the indifferent cruelty of Salome. Maybe he had a memory of a refused love in mind, or he thought only of a simple beautiful portrait of a young lady with an added religious theme. Whatever the real aim of the picture, the result is striking.

The relics of John the Baptist

The beheading of John the Baptist ended a remarkably vivid and cruel story of the New Testament. The act was the beginning however of an even more wonderful and mysterious episode of religious history told in the 'Golden Legend' and in the annals of the cathedral of Amiens, a town in northern France^{G43}.

After the beheading, John's disciples took his body with them. Herod did not know what had happened with the body. He thought even at a later stage that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist.

The 'Golden Legend' tells that John's bones – but not the head – were burned on the day of his martyrdom and partly recovered by his followers. The burning of John's bones is a theme of which also various pictures exist. John's disciples buried his body at Sebaste, a city of Palestine. The pagans scattered the bones but they were collected, buried, pulverised and the ashes thrown in the winds. According to Bede, some of the bones were carried off and given to Philip, bishop of Jerusalem. Afterwards Philip

sent them to Anastasius, bishop of Alexandria. Still later, another bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus, enshrined the bones in the temple of Serapsis.

John's head was in fact hidden by disciples of Jesus in the palace of Herod. Monks found the head back in the fourth century, in the ruins of Jerusalem. The 'Golden Legend' then tells that in the times of Emperor Macian Saint John revealed the whereabouts of his head to two monks who had come to Jerusalem. They found the head rolled up in haircloth sacks such as John had worn. The monks went their way with the head. A potter joined them on the road. The potter was admonished by Saint John to leave the monks and to go back to Emissa with the head. He hid the head in a cave there and at his death entrusted the relic to his sister. Later, John revealed the place of burial to Saint Marcellus who lived in the very cave where the head had been hidden. Marcellus followed a star until he found the head. He gave it to the bishop of the city. Emperor Valens still later wanted to transfer the head to Constantinople but it wanted to be led no further than Chalcedon. Much later, Emperor Theodosius brought it finally to Constantinople. The 'Golden Legend' states that then in the Frankish king Pepin's reign the head was transferred to Poitiers in France. But the story of Amiens cathedral then is somewhat different, though its story also starts in Constantinople.

In 850, John's head was in Constantinople. In 1204 the Crusaders took Constantinople and sacked the ancient imperial town. They stole the treasures of centuries, to pay Venice for their transport to the Orient and of course they stole even more for their own greed.

The Crusaders were keen after the old relics of Constantinople. A Crusader canon coming from Picquigny in northern French Picardy, called Wallon de Sarton, discovered in the ruins of a palace of Constantinople a relic consisting of a silver plate with in its middle a half ball of transparent crystal. The crystal contained the skeleton of a human head, minus the lower jaw. The head had a small hole above the left eye. Greek letters engraved in the plate asserted that this were the remains of John the Baptist. A legend evoked by Saint Jerome had told that Herodias in her anger had stabbed with a thin dagger stylus in the head of John. Wallon de Sarton had to sell the silver plate to pay for his voyage back to France, but he kept the crystal ball. In 1206 he gave the relic to Richard de Gerberoy, the bishop of the town of Amiens in Picardy^{G43}. Since then the relic is shown in the cathedral of Amiens.

The cathedral of 1206 soon became too small to host the multitudes of pilgrims. A new cathedral was built in Amiens from 1220 on. The cathedral was built in the new Gothic style. It is currently one of the most remarkable monuments of Gothic Catholicism in France. Kings visited John the Baptist's head: Saint Louis, a Crusader himself, Charles VI and Charles VII. Sapphires, emeralds, amethysts, rubies, diamonds and precious pearls were added to the treasure of John the Baptist in Amiens cathedral. In December of 1790, a group of Commissars appointed by the revolutionary Directorate - the Directoire - of the district of Amiens, presented themselves at Amiens cathedral to make up the inventory of the treasure. The Mayor of the town, Louis-Alexandre Lescouve, received an order by the Representatives of the People to handle over the treasure of Amiens. He gave all the precious stones, the silver and gold, but kept the relic, which as he said had no value since it was only a skull, and should be buried in a nearby cemetery. He kept the relic in his house however, and then after two years gave it to a priest called Lejeune. In 1816 the Abbé

Lejeune gave the famous crystal ball back to the new bishop of Amiens, Monseigneur Villaret. Finally, in 1876 a new silver plate was added to the head as it can be seen today in a niche of Amiens cathedral^{G43}. Few pilgrims come to Amiens now and few tourists are amazed at the relic and its marvellous story. The relic is still there, almost forgotten now, a testimony of the past devotion of millions.

Other paintings:

The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

The Birth of John the Baptist, Elisabeth flees with her Son

The Master of the Saint John Altarpiece (active in Delft ca. 1500). Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Museum of Saint John's – Valletta, Malta. 1608.

The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist

Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640). The Borghese Gallery. Rome. Ca.1600-1610.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

Herod's Feast

Bartholomeus Strobel the Younger (1591-1665).

Salome

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). El Escorial – Madrid. Around 1606.

Salome

Robert Henry (1865-1929). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art – Sarasota (Florida). 1909.

Salome with the head of Saint John the Baptist

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1639.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Mattia Preti (1613-1699). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1650.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Daniele Ricciarelli called da Volterra (1509-1566). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Follower of Willem Key. Musée des Beaux-Arts – Rouen.

The Decapitation of Saint John the Baptist

Jacopo Bassano (1515-1592). Statens Museum for Kunst – Copenhagen. 1535.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Giovanni di Paolo. The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1450-1460.

The Beheading of John the Baptist

Niklaus Manuel called Deutsch (ca. 1484-1530). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1517.

Herodias' Revenge

Juan de Flandes (ca. 1465-1519). Mayer- Van Den Bergh Museum – Antwerp.

The Head of Saint John the Baptist

Andrea Solario (1470-1524). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Late 15th, early 16th century.

Herodias with the Head of Saint John the Baptist

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1614.

John the Baptist

Petrus Christus. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Bequest. Ca. 1445.

John the Baptist preaching

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1531). Fresco, Chiostro dello Scalzo – Florence. 1515.

The Baptist preaching

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588). The Borghese Gallery – Rome. Ca. 1565.

Saint John the Baptist

Jusepe de Ribera called Lo Spagnoletto (1591-1652). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London. 1650.

John the Baptist

Agnolo di Cosimo called Bronzino (1503 – 1572). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1545.

Landscape with a Sermon of Saint John the Baptist

Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi (1606-ca. 1680). Galleria Borghese. Rome.

The Sermon of John the Baptist

Paolo Caliari called Il Veronese (1528-1586). Galleria Borghese. Rome. Ca. 1562.

Salome with the Head of John the Baptist

Viktor Müller (1830-1871). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1870.

Salome with the Head of John the Baptist

Andrea Solario (1470-1520). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Herod with the Head of John the Baptist

Francesco Cairo (1607-1665). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1634.

Salome

Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644). Gemäldegalerie Staatliche Sammlungen, Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin.

The Head of Saint John the Baptist

Giovanni Francesco Maineri (active in Parma 1489-1540). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara. Ca. 1500.

The severed Head of John the Baptist

Giovanni Francesco Maineri (active in Parma 1489-1540). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1502.

The severed Head of John the Baptist

Marco Palmezzano (1459-1539). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1490's.

The Martyrdom of John the Baptist

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1568-1632). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

The Beheading of John the Baptist. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898).

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Rotterdam. 1856.

The Martyrdom of John the Baptist

Pier Francesco Mazzuchelli called Il Morazzone (1573-1626). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

Saint John the Baptist Preaching

Joseph Parrocel (1646-1704). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Arras. 1693.

Saint John the Baptist in the Desert

Giuliano Bugiardini (1476-1555). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

Herodias with the Head of John the Baptist

Francesco Cairo (1607-1665). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1633.

Saint John the Baptist

Alessandro Bonvicino called Il Moretto (1498-1554). The Sforza Castle Museums. Milan.

The Intercession of Saint John the Baptist

Pellegrino Tibaldi called Pellegrino Pellegrini (1527-1597). Chiesa San Giacomo Maggiore. Bologna. Ca. 1554.

Polyptych of John the Baptist

Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). Ponteranica, the Saints Vincenzo and Alessandro parish Church. Bergamo. 1527.

Saint John the Baptist

Martino Piazza (active until 1527). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

John the Baptist

Donato de' Bardi (active 1426-1451). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1445-1451.

Saint John the Baptist

Giovanni di Nicolò Luteri called Dosso Dossi (1473-1542). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint John the Baptist (Triptych of Lepreno)

Francesco di Simone da Santacroce (ca. 1440-1508). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint John the Baptist (Polyptych of Scanzo)

Bartolomeo Vivarini (ca. 1432-after 1491). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene

Jan Van Scorel (1495-1562). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam. 1528.

Mary Magdalene

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1897.

Mary Magdalene is one of the major figures of the Gospels. The Evangelist writers mention a Mary in various instances. These figures have been brought together by tradition into one. A Mary anointed Jesus's feet in Simon the Pharisee's house. Luke does not give this woman a name, but John does and calls her Mary of Bethany. This Mary apparently is the same as the woman listening intently to Jesus in the house of Martha and Mary. Luke calls Mary a lady out of whom he exorcised seven devils. Mary of Magdala then is one of the followers of Jesus and she is also present at the Crucifixion, the Entombment. She is the first person to whom Jesus shows himself after the Resurrection. But there is a strange message in this Resurrection scene. Jesus asks Mary not to cling to him for he has not yet ascended to God. Was this plea only for Mary in particular or directed to just any human being capable to retain Jesus on earth?

Luke 7:36. One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, suddenly a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment. ^{G38}

John 11:1. There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. ^{G38}

Luke 8:1. Now it happened that after this Jesus made his way through the towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna and many others who provided for them out of their own resources. ^{G38}

Luke 10:38. In the course of their journey Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Martha scolds her sister for not lending a helping hand. But Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her." ^{G38}

John 19:25. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. ^{G38}

John 20:1. It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. ^{G38}

John 20:11. Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet. They said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there. ^{G38}

John 20:16. Jesus said, “Mary!” She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbuni” – which means Master. Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my father and your Father, my God and your God.” ^{G38}

Mary Magdalene was considered a courtesan, in any case a sinner. She is sometimes co-identified with another Mary, Mary of Egypt. This Mary was in the fifth century a harlot of Alexandria who travelled to Jerusalem and had a vision there of Christ. She converted to Christianity and lived as a hermit beyond the Jordan region. This story may have led to another story told in the ‘Golden Legend’ according to which Mary Magdalene lived as a hermit in the Provence region of Southern France.

Mary’s cognomen ‘Magdalene’ would have come from Magdalum, the name of one of her ancestral properties according to the ‘Golden Legend’. She was wellborn. Her father’s name was Syrus; her mother was called Eucharua. The ‘Golden Legend’ says she was of royal stock and her family owned several towns of which Magdalum was given to Mary. She was renowned for her beauty but also for the way she gave her body to pleasure. After the Resurrection of Jesus Peter had given Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus, Martha’s maid Martilla and Cedonius the blind who had been cured by Jesus as well as many other Christians in the custody of Maximin.

Unbelievers send off Maximin, Lazarus, Martha and Mary and the others in a boat without oars, sail or rudder. The travel was fraught with miracles. When the boat set off, Sarah the black servant of the two Maries had been retained on the shore and she despaired to get into the boat. Mary, mother of James and John would have thrown her cloak in the sea, which served as a raft for Sarah to reach the other companions.

An angel guided the boat miraculously to a site that is now the small town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the delta of the Rhône River. But according to the ‘Golden Legend’ the boat coasted directly at the old port of Marseilles. Mary and her companions Christianised the Provence from there. Martha left for Tarascon; Lazarus became the apostle of Marseilles. Maximin and Cedonius evangelised Aix-en-Provence, where Maximin became the first bishop of Aix. Mary Magdalene’s place was the village of Sainte Baume, called after Magdalene’s balms, which is currently still her pilgrimage site. The village is now called Saint-Maximin-de-la-Sainte-Baume and the cave of Mary is the pilgrimage site. Mary’s cave is in a dramatic landscape where a high plateau descends abruptly to lower country. Magdalene’s pilgrimage site

is still visited yearly by more than two hundred thousand people. It was a pilgrimage site where France's kings came to pray and a road there is still called the 'Road of the Kings'.

The two other Marias and Sarah stayed in the Camargue, the estuary of the Rhône river and when they died their relics remained in Saintes-Maries. This site became the most famous pilgrimage of the Gypsies of Europe. Their patron saint is the black Sarah. The Gypsies wear the relics and the boat of the Marias in procession every year.

Mary Magdalene stayed near Sainte Baume. She was found by a priest who had built himself a cell near the place without a stream or comfort of grass or trees where Mary lived. When her last hour came, Mary asked the priest to go to Maximin and to tell him that at Resurrection day she would descend the mountains and be in the church of Aix, waited upon by angels. So happened. Mary Magdalene received the last sacraments of Saint Maximin, bishop of Aix. Then she lay down full length before the steps of the altar and expired.

While Mary Magdalene lived alone in her cave, seven times a day angels came down to elevate her to the heavens and show her the joy of living near Jesus and the saints. She heard the glorious chants of the celestial hosts. This site is close to the village of Saint-Maximin, high on a promontory above her supposed cave in the rocks, and a column has been dressed in remembrance so that the place is now called Saint-Pilon. A road goes from Mary's cave to Saint-Pilon. In the eleventh century rumours ran that the relics of Mary Magdalene would have been brought to the famous abbey of Vézelay so that the pilgrimages to Saint Mary Magdalene continued there. But in 1279, Charles of Anjou found back the relics in the nearby village of Saint-Maximin so that the pilgrimages to Mary's cave of Sainte Baume returned. Sainte Baume was one of the great pilgrimage sites of Europe and of the Provence, a place that attracted the Provence kings, the Avignon Popes and also of course Saint Louis King of France.

One of the first compelling images of Mary Magdalene is Donatello's statue. In that famous sculpture, now in the Opera del Duomo of Florence, Mary is nude but covered entirely by long floating hair. This long hair has become since Donatello a symbol of the sensuality of Mary Magdalene. She is the ultimate penitent. Mary is a symbol of hope and forgiveness, a recurring theme in the Gospels. She is a message of Jesus to all adulterous women, and to prostitutes. There are many such examples whereby Jesus drew to himself sinners and small people. The early church thus appealed to vast masses of people and founded its religion on some of the most powerful emotions, which lived in humans, the emotions of love.

Jan van Scorel

Jan van Scorel painted a magnificent portrait of Mary Magdalene for which he certainly used a Dutch girl as model. Van Scorel was one of the first Dutch painters in want of an own style, different from the overpowering influences of Southern Netherlands painters. He had travelled to Italy and had brought back memories of Italian Renaissance pictures. 'Mary Magdalene' is shown as an early Renaissance

picture. It was a pictorial success for van Scorel who proved his considerable skills of portraiture.

Mary Magdalene is dressed in a magnificently detailed robe. She carries with her the jar of ointments, her symbol from the story in the house of Simon. She has the conventional long hair and a décolleté that in this painting is covered prudently by a transparent veil. Van Scorel has well-proportioned Mary Magdalene. He has given her a normal, not an alluring pose in half profile. He gave her the face of a virtuous girl. Yet, she looks defiantly directly at the viewer. Van Scorel particularly took care in the depiction of her hands. Behind Mary is on the one side a rocky landscape with her cave. Shown also is the legend of her daily elevations to heaven. To the left we find the symbols of Jesus's Redemption: a dead tree trunk representing the old Law and a tree with luxurious foliage, which indicates the joyful life in Christ. Thus, a subtle reference to Jesus accompanies the portrait.

However finely drawn, the picture of Jan van Scorel does not radiate spirituality. It is an exquisite portrait that could have been made to prove without doubt the considerable skills of the painter to van Scorel's commissioners. Van Scorel's professionalism is evident and the portrait indeed can take its place among the finest of its age.

Puvis de Chavannes

A picture that is entirely different and does radiate spirituality is Puvis de Chavannes' 'Mary Magdalene'. Puvis' Mary Magdalene is sitting in the desert. Her back is supported by the rocky landscape in which she lived in solitude. She is almost nude; there is no brocaded robe here. She wears long straw-yellow hair. Mary Magdalene is shown while in meditation, turned inside, with eyes that look expressionless into the far. She may have been caught at her morning toilet in the Provence. That region's warm, bright light pervades the whole picture so as to whiten all colours. There are almost no shadows in the diffuse light, except the minimum that is necessary on Mary Magdalene to make the volume of the figure credible. This light is everywhere, on Mary and on the canyon. The colours are so light and diffuse because Puvis de Chavannes used the tones of frescoes, which were always paler than those of oil paintings. These are the colours of transcendence, so they match well with the concept of a saint and hermit who lived in the Provence where that wonderful light is indeed remarkable. And of course, Mary lived halfway heaven.

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes was born in Lyon in 1824 and died in Paris in 1898. He is counted to a movement in painting called Symbolism. Symbolism was a late outcome of the Romantic Movement whereby its artists sought inward spirituality. Art and the artists could create independently of appraisal and independently of any admiration of viewers. The Symbolists were Gods in their own thoughts, as they themselves proclaimed in their literature and poetry. The centre of their inspiration for themes was the personal mind. The Symbolist movement was created in the 1880's in France from an intellectual reaction to the realism and obsession with the direct awareness of nature of the Impressionist painters.

Puvis de Chavannes however, more than belonging to this Symbolist movement, invented his own style of representation and his own feeling of colours. He dedicated himself to the career of an artist. He first went to Florence, but returned to France in 1847. He entered the studio of Henri Scheffer, the brother of the more famous Dordrecht Dutch painter Ari Scheffer. He soon went back to Italy. He became impregnated with Italian classicism and with a certain aristocratic spirit for art detached from everyday reality, which shows in his subsequent works. He studied under Eugène Delacroix and Thomas Couture, and the great Chassériau also influenced him. Chassériau's mistress was the Princess Mary Cantacuzène, born of Rumanian nobility and married to the Prince Alexander Cantacuzène. She had left her husband and had come to Paris around 1850. Puvis de Chavannes met her in the workshop of Chassériau around 1856. She remained with him and he would marry her very late in life, around 1897. He made not only a marvellous portrait of her, now in the Museum of Lyon, but Mary Cantacuzène was also a frequent model for various female figures in Puvis de Chavannes' pictures.

Puvis de Chavannes positioned himself as a decorator who made large murals, but more on large canvases than in fresco. He had success and painted scenes for the Parisian Pantheon as well as many murals for official buildings in France. His light colours resemble the tones of old Italian frescoes. The adjective mostly used for these Puvis colours is 'chalky'. Puvis de Chavannes' figures are mostly static, and aristocratic in stature, as figures in an idealised world draped in a haze. Puvis de Chavannes is the painter of stillness, of awkward melancholic and sad, inward quietness. His 'Mary Magdalene' is an example of this particular style.

Mary Magdalene is shown nude, but her nudity is not provocative. Her simple, white robe has fallen to her knees. She is alone in the mountains. A few bushes of yellow flowers grow around her, in the same colour as her hair and body. The atmosphere has taken the hues of the figure. Nature and person only make one, have become blended in contours and colours. The figure forms as much space as the vastness behind her. This is a very unusual Mary Magdalene. She is not dressed in beautiful gowns as she was depicted in previous centuries and her symbols like the ointment jar are not present in the picture. She is not shown as a courtesan, but just as a lady who has decided to live with bare means in a mountainous desert. Even her long hair is mostly hidden behind her shoulders. Her gown has fallen off, in a classic pose that Puvis de Chavannes used again and again in his images.

Puvis de Chavannes has pictured Mary Magdalene as a figure of spirituality, as a mystic figure that combined past sensuality and profound transcendence. Thus, the painter has shown Mary Magdalene as a symbol of purification of a human being. The bright diffuse light and the pale colours enhance the impression of a vision coming out of a dream, suddenly revealed to the artist.

Lefebvre and de La Tour

Two other, completely different visions of Mary Magdalene were given by two French artists that were at the antipodes of art: Jules-Joseph Lefebvre and Georges de La Tour. We present paintings by these artists.

Mary Magdalene

Jules-Joseph Lefebvre (1836-1912). The State Hermitage Museum. St Petersburg. 1876.

Among the many themes from the life and legends of Mary Magdalene there is one that is at the least surprising. Several stories from the Bible have been used by painters to depict the female nude: Bathsheba in her Bath, Susanna and the Elders, Potiphar's Wife and Joseph the Egyptian, and a few others. Most of these scenes are from the Old Testament. Mary Magdalene repenting in the wilderness or in a cave has been taken up by artists also to test their talent on the nude. The painters that painted Mary Magdalene in the nude were mostly French neo-Classic, academic artists, who sought the splendour of the female and an excuse for the depiction in a Bible theme. But they went back to a theme that was very ancient and from the fifteenth century already one can find pictures of the Magdalene nude, such as of the school of Bernardino Luini or at the end of that century to Giulio Cesare Procaccini's pictures of the nude Magdalene. One of the Neo-Classicist painters of nudes who used thus Mary Magdalene as an excuse for a picture of the female nude was Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, and he was not a minor artist out for sensation.

Lefebvre was born in 1836. From 1852 on he studied in Paris with Léon Cogniet (1794-18880) and he attended the 'Ecole des Beaux Arts' of Paris. He won the 'Prix de Rome' in 1861, which allowed him to stay for five years in Rome on a governmental stipend and study in the Villa Medici of Rome, where the French Academy of Rome was housed. Lefebvre painted scenes from classical antiquity then, about also his first nudes. He returned to Paris in 1866 but met little success until he made a truly striking picture, called 'Truth', of a female nude standing high holding a round mirror that represented Justice. The woman stood in long, a long slim nude and splendidly shaped body, and she held the symbol as high as she could so that the viewer had to pass over her body lines, in a caress of the eyes, to discover the symbol. It was one of the most finely and also provocative erotic nudes ever made and the Parisians of the end of the century relished it. Lefebvre from then on painted almost no other pictures but of nude women, but also fine portraits. In the 1870's, at the height of his fame, he became a professor at the 'Académie Julien' in Paris and many students received his teachings of very realistic and very academic depiction. His fame grew, so that he was promoted to the French 'Légion d'Honneur' in 1898 and he was appointed a member of the 'Académie de France'. Jules-Joseph Lefebvre was now the very greatest painter of the female nude of the century and the one most accepted by the French establishment.

Lefebvre made a painting of Mary Magdalene in 1876, in the period when he was already famous. He showed Mary Magdalene glorifying her magnificent young body in the sun of Southern France, outside the cave in which she had preferred to live like a recluse. Lefebvre shows her reclining against hard stone and with her arms around her face. She only barely looks through her arms, head turned to the viewer, but the viewer has the impression that he or she is alone to admire the ivory body and that this gaze is yet not unknown to Mary Magdalene. The Magdalene repents in her cave in loneliness, but she has remained for Lefebvre the temptress of the New Testament. She repents, but has forced herself into isolation because the desire to seduce has not

left her. Under arms and head Lefebvre painted Mary's long, brown-red hair, which forms a crown and background of colour for her white arms. Lefebvre let the light of the sun truly sculpt Mary's body with delicate chiaroscuro and the light thus builds a Greek statue of the greatest elegance. The woman has perfect features. She is slim and long and yet full enough for every viewer to want to caress her with his or her eyes. She crosses her legs, and bends her left leg also in full view of the eyes of the onlooker. Lefebvre always drew and painted his models in all realism, but he sought also original poses that could surprise, even if always only of the female nude. His paintings thus presented a lyrical ode to female beauty in its utterly unblemished, most perfect form. The nude Mary Magdalene of Jules-Joseph Lefebvre is not a real woman anymore. She is an ideal view of the mind created by an almost divine light, to which the nude Mary presents her body eagerly.

Jules-Joseph Lefebvre kept the colours around Mary Magdalene delicate and soft. He positioned his nude along the left diagonal and as the eyes of the viewer pass along the long legs to her upheaved small breasts and then to her eyes, the viewer is taken in by an elevating movement that the painter of spiritual, religious pictures would have been very jealous of, as that painter would have sought to depict the elevation of the mind. By such compositions Lefebvre could assign to his nudes a dignity so that they could be easily accepted, even if very erotic depictions, as subliminal images and thus be openly admired in the French Salons. Lefebvre painted the white body of Mary Magdalene against the dark grey, hard, cold and massive stones to evoke more feelings of coldness in the viewer, and thus of pity for the woman. Instead of showing a luxurious landscape of the sun-burnt Provence, he painted yet only a hint of the hills and of a lake or river in pastel, soft and rather cold hues. Thus the body of the woman contrast with her warmth against the hard environment. Lefebvre thus banned emotions from his picture. His picture remains cold and without empathy and this contrast with the Magdalene's calculated charm brings a tension that the viewer cannot avoid, and which should heighten the effect of interest in the painting. He could paint green nature under Mary Magdalene's feet, as if a miracle had made grow lush, green grass where she moved. This area of colour also contrasts with the rest of the picture, only to enhance still the extraordinary whiteness of Mary. Such a delicate whiteness can only be divine, tells Lefebvre, and Mary Magdalene has regained her purity. In the grass grow only white flowers, which are of the colour of innocence and purity, and no otherwise coloured plants. The flowers grow in the wild, low, and they seem to curve over Mary Magdalene and also to caress her, as if they were part of her. The Magdalene repented for her sins. The flowers of purity tell her that she is forgiven now, and will be received in heaven.

Jules-Joseph Lefebvre used Mary Magdalene's image of the repentant female sinner as an alibi for one more painting of the female nude. Other French Classicist, academic painters would follow his example, such as Emmanuel Benner. The title is unnecessary however. Lefebvre made a splendid picture of a nude and further references are superfluous. Lefebvre was probably the painter who made the most and best Classicist nudes, together with the great master Ingres.

The Magdalene with the smoking Flame

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Los Angeles. Ca. 1636-1638.

The 'Magdalene with the Smoking Flame' is a stunning picture of Georges de La Tour, a French painter of the first half of the seventeenth century. De La Tour was born in 1593 in the town of Vic-sur-Seille, in the Lorraine region, near Nancy, in what is today North-eastern France. In the beginning of the seventeenth century the Lorraine was a duchy squeezed between the expanding Kingdom of France and the vast but still feudal Holy Roman German Empire. Lorraine was the feeble remnant of one of the three powerful lands into which Charlemagne had divided his empire in the ninth century among his sons and successors. The Lorraine was doomed to disappear as an independent duchy, but in the beginning of the seventeenth century people lived at peace there.

Georges de La Tour was the son of a baker, Jean de La Tour, and his wife, Sybille Molian. He was the second child in a family of seven children. Little is known about his life before 1620. He may have studied at Nancy, maybe even at Paris. He may have travelled to the Northern Netherlands and to Rome, but all this could be pure speculation. We do not know which painters he met, which education he received, who his teachers in the art of painting were, and we do not actually know which painters may have influenced his vision. He must have been a young man of substance however, quite recognised in his early twenties for his talents in business and in painting, for he could marry in 1617 a young lady of noble descent, Diane Le Nerf, whose family lived in another Lorraine town, in Lunéville. Diane le Nerf was the daughter of Jean le Nerf, a treasurer of the Duke of Lorraine, so de La Tour had added access to the administrators and nobles of the Duchy, but he may have met his future wife, probably, due to his access to the court. He must have been known as a very promising painter already at that young age. In 1620 Georges de La Tour moved to Lunéville with his family and he started a fine career there, a double career even, as a trader and as a painter. A few years later he would take in students in his workshop. He sold paintings to the Duke of Lorraine in this period, a sign of his status in the region.

The Lorraine region had been relatively peaceful in the first quarter of the seventeenth century but at the beginning of the 1630's the Catholic Duke of Lorraine, Charles IV, drew his duchy into the Thirty-year War. This was a particularly savage war between Catholic and Protestant factions in Germany. The war was mainly fought on German territory. Also the Swedish and Protestant King Gustav Adolph played a major role in that war with his excellent army for a couple of years. In 1631 the Catholic, mercenary armies of the German Emperor laid siege to, captured and destroyed the town of Magdeburg. More than twenty thousand citizens of Magdeburg were killed in the pillage of the town. The war moved to the West. In the autumn of 1638, also Lunéville was burnt and sacked by the French governor Pédamont. De La Tour's workshop was destroyed. Georges de La Tour must have seen the events coming, for he had sought refuge first at Nancy, then at Paris. He had fled from Lunéville before the armies destroyed it.

It seems that Georges de La Tour had as much success in Paris as he had had in Lunéville, despite the fact that the French capital seethed with ambitious and very good painters. He obtained even the title of 'Painter of the King', which included lodgings in the Louvre Palace. He may have met Cardinal Richelieu and King Louis XIII. He travelled to and fro between Nancy, where in all probability his family had remained, and Paris.

Georges de La Tour lived in Lunéville and Nancy because that was where his region was, his family, and his business. He had a large family; he would have ten children with Diane le Nerf. He did not need to live off his art. He did not have to live in a city of great wealth to find the necessary commissioners to sell his paintings to because he had other means of subsistence. This has always been a puzzle for scholars because painters live where the money is, and the money was in Paris. How could a great painter like de La Tour have lived for so long in the Lorraine, when fame was to be had only in Paris. That mystery has added to his fame. But de La Tour was not the lonely genius of a forgotten land, the man who worked in all intimacy of a small town far from where the true action was. He was not cut off from the artistic currents of his age for he had many contacts as a merchant and gentleman. We know from scarce documents that he had an estate, owned lands, held cows, and dealt in grains. He knew what was going on in Paris and in the world. He may have travelled occasionally to the capital for his business. But he only went to live in Paris when life became too dangerous in Lunéville.

Georges de La Tour eventually returned to Lunéville, in the beginning of the 1640's, to a Lorraine that was now French territory. He continued to receive commissions for paintings from the Henri de La Ferté-Senneterre, the French governor of the Lorraine in Nancy. He left the Parisian court where the money was on which he would be able to live off his art because he did not really need that kind of money, and his family preferred Lunéville. Still, he was first and foremost known as a painter in the Lorraine. De La Tour continued to work in Lunéville until his death in 1652. He died from an epidemic illness that slew many people in Lunéville, including his wife and his servant.

The 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame' is a nocturnal picture. Mary Magdalene sits before a lamp light and that lamp is the only source of light in a scene that is much hulled in darkness beyond a short distance from the flame. We are of course puzzled by the style of Georges de La Tour in such scenes, when painting in Paris was of grand religious or mythological themes that certainly better represented the growing splendour and importance of what was Europe's wealthiest and best organised royal court. How and why did Georges de La Tour start to depict such night scenes, even before his arrival time in Paris from about 1635 on? Various hypotheses have been proposed.

De La Tour may have travelled to the Netherlands, maybe for business with the Low Countries, and seen there pictures made by the first Dutch Caravaggist (who had been to Rome and seen some of Caravaggio's pictures) Hendrick Terbrugghen. He may even have seen nocturnal pictures made by the Dutch artist Gerrit van Honthorst, who was approximately of the same age as Georges de La Tour, but who had painted nocturnal scenes already in the 1620's. He may have seen the nocturnals of the Genovese artist Luca Cambiaso, who painted such scenes in the period of 1570 to

1575. He may have been in Rome and seen Caravaggio's work there, or the work of Caravaggio's first followers. We very much doubt however that de La Tour studied these painters.

De La Tour's style is very different from Caravaggio's work and de La Tour's very intimate work is very far from the powerful images that Caravaggio produced. Had De La Tour seen paintings by Caravaggio, he would have been otherwise influenced to very different scenes from the work we know of him. De La Tour worked still very much in the traditional modes of representation, not with the brutish power of the belly-gripping images of Caravaggio. He produced paintings in which we see figures only, no landscapes. De La Tour was only interested in people, much like Caravaggio, and also much like Terbrugghen and Van Honthorst. His mode of representation is very different from the art brought by all these painters however, though in subjects he was not far from Terbrugghen and van Honthorst. De La Tour was the painter by excellence of silence, of quiet and reserved images. He painted first pictures in bright and pure colours, in clear lines, with light backgrounds. He used chiaroscuro only to show the volumes of his figures, and not more than was necessary for the realism of the pictures. But then, around 1635, de la Tour discovered night scenes. How did he come to these?

It does not take much for an artist to adopt an idea. De La Tour may well never have been to the Netherlands and never to Rome. He may have seen, even briefly, just the time to pass by a picture in a corridor, maybe even in the Louvre or in one of the many other palaces and hotels of Paris, a Dutch painting or an Italian painting of a scene lit by a candle. After all, fifty years or so before de La Tour was in Paris, Jacopo da Ponte called Bassano and Francesco Bassano already painted nocturnals, and even Antonio Allegri called il Correggio had painted such scenes a hundred years earlier! Luca Cambiaso of Genoa had made such pictures about fifty years earlier. Correggio had even painted nocturnals, for instance with Judith and her servant, merely lit by the flame of a long torch, and Nativity scenes in which bright light emanated in the night from the baby Jesus. De La Tour might have pondered over the scene for just a moment. He may have wondered at the technical difficulty of rendering the shadows. Chiaroscuro was as old a technique as the art of painting itself of course. It was used often, since antiquity, to render the volumes of the human body as shown by the contours on robes and cloaks. The details of chiaroscuro on cloth were always a precise subject of admiration for spectators. But the rendering of shadows in a night scene was a daunting task. It was also a surprising task, for the art of painting was the art of working with colour. In nocturnal pictures one made colour disappear in darkness. The art of painting was also the art of lines and of composition however, and lines were emphasised in the dark. De La Tour knew darkness well.

De La Tour was a wealthy gentleman of the Lorraine. We do not know in how many items he traded, whether he merely exploited his estate, but he did trade in cereals. It was hard to make much money in the Lorraine region and de La Tour's times were hard; resources were few. One could not be too honest, not too scrupulous. It has been suggested that de La Tour manipulated the price of grain in his town. One had to have cunning, be ambitious and be hard driving in one's business. De La Tour had grown rather wealthy not only from his profession as a painter, but also from his business. He was an ambitious man, a man that had to put himself and his actions constantly into question. He had knowledge of the world more than other men and he had

confidence in his abilities. As a painter, he must have been challenged by the nocturnal scenes, understood the tests of such paintings and the possibilities they offered to prove his superiority. Moreover, as a business man, a gentleman-trader, he knew the importance of being the first in specific trades, to be the only importer and the only trader for goods in a town. When you had found a good that nobody traded in and that could appeal to buyers, you could ask high prices. Every businessman knew that. Georges de La Tour had found in nocturnal paintings something no other French painter did. He had found his niche.

Nocturnal scenes are extremely difficult to paint. One needs to paint the play of light and shadows right, and know how to show the hues as they appear not in daylight but in semi-darkness. Hues of colour are not the same in daylight and at evenings. It is fairly easy to imagine the effects of light and shadows on objects, but de La Tour had to depict the play of light on surfaces of different textures. Light is reflected from an object of a dark colour - such as a wooden box - very differently than from a young face, a nude shoulder, a bare knee, very differently from a heavy velvet robe than from a flimsy silk shirt. Light from a candle or from a small oil lamp is very special light. It is very bright close to the wick, and then fades rapidly. Such light reduces volumes to surfaces more than diffuse light from a broad source does. A candle in the night is a single point source of light. The lines of light go in straight lines out of the point of light so that it might be not too difficult to determine the intersection of those lines with square objects. It was a lot trickier however to determine the shadow lines on round surfaces such as of the human body. It was difficult then to draw the borders between light and shadow. There was on such contours not a clear delineation of shadows. Light faded out over round volumes. Of course, because a candle is a point source it throws shadows that were clearer than those of diffuse light, and it tends to emphasize surfaces rather than volumes, but viewers would be more attentive at scenes of candlelight to check whether the shadows were right. De La Tour had better have his shadows exact, as in natural scenes. Yet, there were several advantages to such light too for a master painter like Georges de La Tour. The effect of a point source is more dramatic and hence astonishes, appeals to the attention of the viewer. That was an interesting effect, for spectators would remain longer before such a painting, and interest meant money and fame.

It was an arduous task for Georges de La Tour, and for any painter of nocturnals, to determine just how the contours ran of the brilliant, lighted and less lighted surfaces. He had to seek out the gradations in the transitions from very bright, directly lit spots, to the darker areas on volumes. The chiaroscuro was particularly difficult on round forms and textures of cloth and flesh had to be rendered still in a credible way for the viewer. De La Tour could not just paint scenes in black and white. The surfaces are coloured, and light is not always just reflected in pure white. Brightly lit surfaces take on pure white or lighter hues of the colour of the surface. How did the hues change from white to the original colour of the area, then to darker hues, as could be seen in the shadowy parts? The shadows are coloured too. But which hue had to be used? What did the shadows of objects do on a coloured background? Do the darker surfaces retain their colour, but in sombre hues, or do they turn black or brown? Many colours disappear in dark light, to leave only brown and deep-orange hues dominant. How could one make a picture that did not look dull only in these hues? It was a notoriously hard task to present candle-lit scenes in an exact way. How could De La Tour accomplish such a task?

It has been suggested that Georges de La Tour used artificial source of light to simulate his scenes and to draw the lines of shadows on the canvas. He would have placed his canvas on a low table, used a harsh light to project shadows, and copied the lines. That seems hardly possible however, for the light in the canvas had to come from within the canvas, from a source inside the picture, since that is where the candle is positioned, and not from a source outside. Georges de La Tour had to bring an image that was a true imitation of nature. He had to render an as exact view as possible. That was a main element of the skills he had to master. It was by far not the only talent he had to possess, for he had to master also composition, the art of design of lines and forms in his picture, and he had to be intelligent enough to guide the view of the spectator over the picture and present a view that was interesting for his commissioners. But he could not be credible as a painter if he could not imitate the reality of the shadows to near perfection. He had to possess a formidable talent of observation and the abilities to retain all the details of a natural scene, and then be able to remember all the details in his mind and bring the details over to the canvas. Observation was key also for the colours, because in candlelight a blue shirt does not stay blue but becomes deeper blue, to dark grey. Red turns rapidly to black. Green disappears too. One could not follow one's mind but had to remember the effect of the scarce light on the colours.

Georges de La Tour therefore could only have one of two things.

De La Tour might have brought the figures and objects of his scene together in a real setting. He may have used a model, a young woman representing the Magdalene, maybe a servant, maybe his wife, in a dark room, and lit her by a candle or an oil lamp. He may have taken in the scene and noted in his mind all the details of the glory of light. He must have led his eyes get used to the paucity of light, have noticed the magic of how eyes took in more and more details when they adapted to less light. He might also have noticed how different the effects were from a feeble point source as compared to from a wide source, such as sunlight coming through a window. Then he might have started on his painting, using his memory alone. The advantage of such a process was that he needed not many artefacts, just a room in the darkness, and a girl. He could repeat the scene easily, even in a small room in Paris. He could reproduce the setting at will, whenever he had doubts about how the shadows fell or which hues they took. This is the most probable process Georges de La Tour might have used to paint his nocturnes, in which only few personages are figured in. It is interesting to note how he started with relatively frugal pictures such as the 'Magdalene at the smoking Flame' to evolve to pictures with more than one point source of light and pictures with ever more personages.

Georges de La Tour may however also have done nothing of the sort and painted purely from memory, making mind-images of how the shadows could form. There was no electric light in the seventeenth century. De La Tour was not a poor man in Lunéville. He must have been occupied with his business, with the management of his estate, and with his large family, for many hours during the day. He may have worked late, at times of falling light, but he had the money to buy candles and oil lamps. He would have used candles often, especially in winter, to illuminate the canvases he worked on. How many times had he painted at times of scarce light, alone in his room, looking intently at a feebly lit painting? He must have known darkness a lot

better than we do. He must have seen the effects of little light thousands of times, before he painted his first picture of a night scene. With a memory tuned to details, tuned to the attention of his art, he must have known the effects of candlelight by heart. He may well have imagined his figures and objects in his mind, from what he knew so well, and then painted by instinct and by memory.

Georges de La Tour may have used a combination of the two described processes, setting up a model, drawing contours of light and shadow, memorising the hues of the surfaces with a mind tuned to volumes, lines, forms and colours. Then he would have started to paint. He had an advantage on any viewer: no spectator could imagine a scene as real and exact as an artist like de La Tour. He could be sure of that. Some errors against reality might go unnoticed. And de La Tour could set up his models over and over again, to come as close to reality as necessary. He would not need this process more than a couple of times. To people that study his paintings in intricate detail, his skills in rendering reality is truly astonishing, for there is hardly an error to discover. Computer simulations have been made to reproduce the effects of light, and de La Tour has been proven to be exact.

In most of de La Tour's nocturnal paintings there is only one source of light. The advance of his art would have been to use more than one point source, to depict the effects of the crossing of the cones of light, and to figure in several figures. The summit of his art would have been to bring scenes that were powerful in emotions. Georges de La Tour reached that summit of art too, but it would take time. In the 'Magdalene of the Night Light' in the Louvre of Paris', dating from about 1635, there is a single source of light, a glass lamp like in the 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame'. In the Magdalene of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, made equally around 1635, the flame is single and hidden by a skull, which meant another challenge. In the 'Repentant Magdalene' of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, made in the period of 1638 to 1643, there is a double light source because the candle flame stands before a mirror. Both sources project light and bring shadows. The 'Magdalene of the smoking Flame' must have been made a long time before this last picture. In his 'Saint Sebastian helped by Irene' there are many figures and in this painting Georges de la Tour may have had to handle the volumes as if they had more angular forms, to make his task of imagining the shadows easier, or he reached a degree of representation that was abstract and truly astonishing for a painter of his age. 'Job jeered by his Wife' was his last nocturnal painting, even probably his last work overall, and his most touching picture. In this painting at last, de La Tour was not the caring gentleman anymore, but the truly feeling artist. The 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame' is one of the first pictures in an ascending line of art.

There is only one source of point light in the 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame': the light of a burning wick fuelled by the transparent wax or oil in a glass. The lamp is simple, the device of a poor house. The light illuminates Mary Magdalene. She sits on a chair but that object is completely hidden in darkness and indeed, the detail is totally un-essential for the picture. The structure of the painting is simple and very strong. The brighter areas of the Magdalene are all situated along the right diagonal of the frame, so that the picture is very Baroque, even though the oblique diagonal is not used as an element of movement in de La Tour's picture, for the figure of the Magdalene is at rest, very static, without gestures, and does not directly seek to involve the viewer. The Magdalene sits, turned into her own thoughts, and she does

not look at the viewer. She does not interrogate the viewer, conveys no feeling to the viewer, she does not look outside the painting. This aspect of course strengthens the intimate character of the scene. The Magdalene therefore has her own life that the viewer watches, becomes a voyeur to, but takes no part in. The viewer remains a viewer, is no actor. The viewer indeed looks at a picture. The Magdalene's intimacy is not disturbed, for she does not notice the viewer. The left triangle of the frame, the space to the left of the right diagonal, is other wise hulled in darkness but since the right triangle is equally in darkness - though less so -, the structure is quite balanced around the bright diagonal. A table starts in the middle of the right triangle and objects are placed on the thick, brown table top. We see the glass with the long yellow flame, books, a heavy wooden crucifix, a rope that hangs low in two lines that go down below to two beams and are attached there. The light of the flame illuminates brightly the forms along the right diagonal, the Magdalene. She holds a skull with her right hand, in her lap. The flame lightens her white flesh in the most dramatic way. De La Tour showed Mary Magdalene with bare shoulders and bare left arm. The light plays in harsh shadows on her. Her bare flesh indicates maybe that she had been a sinner before and certainly adds a touch of daring and sensuality that viewers would expect in a picture of the Magdalene. The light fades on the skull and on her knees. Georges de La Tour applied all hues of brown, orange, ochre and many shades of white in a fine harmony of warm colours. He used no green, red or blue, no pure hues anywhere, which might have disturbed this harmony. One should admire the variety of hues and shades, the skill in rendering the transitions from light to dark, the chiaroscuro on cloth, the means of indicating the differences in texture of for instance the white shirt and the thick orange robe of Mary Magdalene.

The subject of the painting is the repentance of the Magdalene. She has been a sinner and reflects on her past, wicked life. She was the woman taken in adultery, the vain sister of Martha, the sister of Lazarus, the woman of sin that wept while she anointed Jesus' feet at the house of Simon. All these women of the Bible may have been different personages, but this Mary is all of them together. Therefore she turns her head away in shame, away from the passing viewer. This Mary is the Magdalene that Jesus refused to be touched by after his Resurrection, the woman to which he had to say 'Noli me Tangere'. This Mary reflects on the shortness of life and on the vanity of humans.

The flame gives off black smoke, as if it will soon die out, be extinguished, like the end of life. The book may represent the Bible with the words of God, but it may also indicate the vanity of knowledge. The wooden cross is the symbol of the Magdalene's repentance and love for Jesus. Around and over the cross hang the ropes that can be used to seek physical penitence. These may even be the ropes of a hanging or of torture. Such a rope holds also the robe of Mary, a sign of the penitence emphasised by the ropes on the table. The rope around the Magdalene suggests poverty. The ropes of the table end on heavy wooden beams, which she may have drawn a while ago, another sign of her penitence. The skull is the ultimate symbol of vanity, the sign of life that passes by quickly. The same symbol is the flame. These objects are all placed near each other, in one connected triangle of space. They are not dispersed but keep the attention of the viewer confined to a limited area, to the area of light. The Magdalene looks at these objects. She is melancholy impersonalised. She holds her head in her hand and caresses the skull in her lap. Yet, no other emotions but this interior gloom radiate from the picture.

The Magdalene sits and supports her head with her arm and her hand. She ponders over her past and future life. She holds a skull in her other hand and gently caresses the round form in her lap. Why does she not hold there a baby child, like the Virgin Mary? The skull is the symbol of her sin. She holds death in her lap. Why does she not hold life, like the Virgin Mary? Why has God brought her to sin and why has he brought Mary to life? Just how much of her life has been her own choice, how much God's choice? Has God ordained her to be the sinner in Jesus' life, because a woman sinner was necessary for the message, just as he ordained Mary to engender his life?

Death is everywhere around the Magdalene. Death is in the skull and in the flame that will soon peter out, for its smoke becomes blacker, longer and thicker. The smoke of the flame is life that disappears into nothing. Will the Magdalene's life then stop? Will she be joined with the one person she truly loved, Jesus? Jesus however did not even want to touch her after his Resurrection. 'Noli me tangere', he said, do not touch me. Was that a sign of love or a sign of the distance between humans and God, the distance between depravity and purity? Will she be condemned to hell in the hereafter? Why did Jesus deliver a message of forgiveness when forgiveness cannot be hers now? If it was a sign of distance, then the Magdalene will die alone and disappear in the void like black smoke in the air. Her smoke will also be black, not white.

Jesus said no one would die for himself or herself alone, but the Magdalene will surely die alone. She is in solitude here, sitting in the dark. No one will accompany her. No one will stand by her on her journey into the darkness; no one will hold her hand when the flame goes out. She will die for herself alone. That will be the most terrible aspect of her death: the loneliness in the darkness of the night. But it was also the choice she made when she went to live in solitude. She renounced the world. She renounced discourse with other people. She renounced the laughter of children and the heat of the sun on her face, for she lived in the darkness of a cave.

The Magdalene does not fear death. She doubts she will suffer much in death. She does not fear death, but she fears suffering at the moment of death. And she will be alone. Is that not so of every human in the moment of death? No, Jesus said no one dies for himself or herself alone. He once praised her, at her and Martha's house, for hanging to his lips, hearing him out, listening eagerly to his words and taking in his words into her heart. She has read the Book in remembrance of those times and she has done penitence. So, maybe she will not die alone and still see Jesus in the after-life.

The Magdalene is an eminently Catholic theme. Protestant painters have rarely taken it up in their religious scenes. The Magdalene was of course a symbol of sin, and hence not very acceptable for reformed, austere painters and commissioners. There was also always an element of sensuality in the Magdalene, an element from which de La Tour did not shy away from. In the 'Magdalene of the smoking Flame' he drew the Magdalene's shirt low over her shoulder, bared her knees, to indicate very clearly who she was and what she was. Still, he treated the subject with much delicacy. He was indeed the painter of the silence of the night.

Georges de La Tour may have applied structure elements of the Baroque, such as his use of the diagonal and the dominance of the tenebrism, but his painting is absolutely not Baroque in this treatment, in this confinement of emotions to the very private sphere. The expression of the scene is not Baroque. It could be rather Classicist, as the court of Paris might have better appreciated, yet that court welcomed splendour and not this reserved intimacy. In representation also, de La Tour was original. Georges de La Tour showed his own, very individual vision.

Why was de La Tour so original, so different from the many excellent painters that worked at and around the court of Paris? Could he not have been more successful imitating their style and using their themes?

Georges de La Tour was an ambitious man. We have documents that mention he refused to pay certain taxes and that state he had to compensate for having beaten a man on his land. He had to be hard if he wanted to succeed in business, and we know he was quite wealthy in Lunéville. He must have been an ambitious man also in his art of painting. He was a hard-working man, managing his estate and be a painter. He had a large family. Nocturnals were a tough challenge. He had painted many pictures in fine colours and he could learn nothing anymore from these. Why would he have painted if it was not to take up a challenge? Nocturnals were a new style that summoned him, defied his skills and his intellect. His skills were ample for scenes in normal light and de La Tour may have sought to surpass himself in nocturnals.

Georges de La Tour had come to Paris. There were very many fine painters in the capital of France in those times, attracted by a wealthy court. Simon Vouet, Nicolas Régnier, Valentin de Boulogne, Claude Vignon, Gérard Douffet, François Perrier, Jean Lemaire, Philippe de Champaigne, Jacques Blanchard, the Le Nain family painters, Jacques Stella, Laurent de La Hyre, Michel Corneille, Jacques Patel Père, and other, younger artists, would have vied for commissioners. Competition was tough in Paris. This was the golden era for the economy of France and for the royal court, but it was also a golden era for the painters that flocked to Paris and increased competition. La Tour had to compete with many established painters and no one awaited a provincial artist, however fine, who came from far, without good connections nurtured over many years, and who arrived in the town as a refugee. Of course, his fame had reached Paris even during the time he worked in Lunéville. A document states that the King paid him for travelling to Paris from Nancy. The other painters knew much better the Parisian commissioners for churches and hotels, for abbeys and the court. De La Tour came to Paris with a provincial fame only, so he had to find a way to distinguish himself among the other artists. His ambitions did not allow him to be one among the flock. He was special. What could be easier than to distinguish himself by proposing a subject, a style of representation that was entirely different from anything that the other Parisian painters showed? The nocturnals were a niche, and de La Tour knew the value of a niche in business.

With nocturnals, de La Tour could astonish Paris and his colleagues. He was therefore not a competitor to the other artists and might therefore also appeal to their benevolence. He was different. He appealed to commissioners with other views. The King was pleased with his pictures. We know the King placed one of his paintings in his bedroom, and displaced for that another painting. The Cardinal Richelieu owned paintings by de La Tour. The 'Magdalene at the smoking Flame' was one of the first

of his nocturnals. We can follow how he perfected his style, to astonish ever more his contemporaries and master the challenge of more complex rendering of light and shadow.

The 'Magdalene at the smoking Flame' is a great painting. It is however a painting of which I would hesitate to count it among the very greatest of the century. The 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame' is, despite its magnificence and technical feat, a painting that does not represent the power of feelings I would expect from a very grand picture. It is an intimate picture, a mild picture of interior serene emotions, and hence to be admired for the way in which it shows this modesty, but it reflects few ardent feelings onto the viewer. De La Tour was a rather wealthy man, a landowner, relatively rich in Paris, truly rich in Lunéville. He was nicely married to a noble woman and the family of his wife's father was connected to the Dukes. He was a successful gentleman. He would not be ennobled, but his son, Etienne, also a painter, was ennobled after Georges de La Tour's death. Georges left Lunéville before his family suffered from the violence of the Thirty-Year war. He had the means to come to Paris and leave his business of the Lorraine region. He returned only to Lunéville when the disturbances had subsided, when his house had been rebuilt in Lunéville and when the Lorraine region was firmly and securely in the protection of the French King and of Cardinal Richelieu. He had not suffered much. There is no suffering in his paintings of that time and for a truly great painting there has to be not only talent and intelligence but also – at least, to my taste - the emotions of suffering in the picture.

Let us compare Georges de La Tour with the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi, called the Caravaggio. Caravaggio may have killed a man. He was pursued by the guards of the Pope. Caravaggio was a man who had suffered from his violent character and from his deeds. How different was Caravaggio from de La Tour! Georges de La Tour had the character of a gentleman and of a decent housefather. He was not a wild adventurer. He could not be. The 'Magdalene with the smoking Flame' is a picture of a dining room, a picture composed with a cool head and with little passion. The objects placed before the Magdalene seems artificially gathered, gathered with a purpose that serves the picture. We are used now to see such assemblies of objects, since we have seen so many Dutch vanitas still life painters show these objects and we do not forget that this Dutch still life art epitomised a country in which lived the finest and also most ruthless, well-organised merchants of Europe, a country that had created the first worldly art directed to their immediate reality instead of to the transcendence of God in religious motives. Georges de La Tour was a Northerner, not a Roman, and not even a Frenchman from the South or from Paris. De La Tour resembled in character the leading men of the Dutch Republic. He was not a hot-charactered Mediterranean. He was the well-to-do, respected citizen of a prosperous town in a not so rich region. He must have loved his family dearly. He lived a quiet life. He had a sense of the details of the night. His paintings show he appreciated intimacy, quietness, silence, introspection and modesty. In that, he was of the same character of that greatest of Northern painters, who would come later in the same century, Johannes Vermeer of Delft.

Georges de La Tour coolly diversified his images in Paris, so that the paintings could bring him in more money, more success, more recognition, fame and admiration. He was not a man who had suffered. He came from an industrious region of France, the Lorraine, where it was not easy to live but where fortunes could be made only through

hard and long work. De La Tour's art was not as exuberant or as powerful as the art of the other greatest masters of his times.

A little more to the north, in Antwerp, Pieter Paul Rubens delivered in the metropolis of Antwerp grand, exuberant pictures. Rubens was wealthy, and wealth came easy in the largest port of Europe, a port that traded for large amounts of gold with the entire world. The greatest fortunes gathered at Antwerp. Rubens was a diplomat for his town and kings and queens ordered paintings from his workshop. His pictures were of religious and mythological scenes and he painted portraits in the finest, bright colours. Rubens burst of energy and happiness. He personalised the boastfulness of Brabant.

To the South, in Milan, Rome and Naples and in Malta, worked the genius Caravaggio. Caravaggio had suffered much, lived among thieves, murderers and prostitutes, as well as among rich cardinals and knights. He had a wild and violent character. He had been born a genius and his art did not need to evolve. He was the painter that for all periods of the art of painting delivered the most powerful, terrible views, views of death and assassination that gripped the viewers with admiration and abhorrence.

Georges de La Tour had a place between Rubens and Caravaggio. It was a place of hard work in two professions, in a world in which he had to calculate and scrape small earnings together to ensure his ample family lived well. He was a good housefather. He defended his possessions. His character shows in his paintings. He was an intelligent artist who used his considerable skills, skills nearly as great as those of Rubens and Caravaggio. Rubens made paintings to please and to overwhelm with delight. In a few paintings Rubens also showed that he could be serious and imposing and quiet. Caravaggio painted from his guts but with enough knowledge of the style elements of the art of painting to make perfectly composed pictures. Caravaggio was wild, but he knew very well that great paintings needed strong structure. He succeeded in making his pictures extremely powerful, as powerful as his first idea, yet he had enough intelligence to keep his feelings in check once he started to work. Georges de La Tour was an artist in between, but no less an artist.

Georges de La Tour brought quiet, intimate paintings of a modest studio. He was interested in people lost in thoughts, at rest, in contemplation, pondering over the woes of the world. In his nocturnals he painted people that were turned into themselves, not - like Rubens did - people that opened to the world, and not -like Caravaggio did - people that suffered violently. De La Tour thought he had to paint night scenes to be able to distinguish himself among the French painters that preferred Rubens' style to Caravaggio's. Indeed, Rubens brought many and mighty scenes lauding Maria de Medicis to Paris. De La tour was not like that. Because of this need to differentiate, we have some of the strangest but finest pictures of the seventeenth century of this painter, and Georges de La Tour is still considered an artist that was very different from any other artist that worked in that century.

Next to the Classicist pictures made by the painters of the great seventeenth century of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, of the Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, we have from de La Tour pictures that are art at its purest and most intimate. To taste and understand this art, you have to travel through France. You will have to taste the outrageous Paris as well as the quiet province towns such as Nancy. In provincial France, you will find

many people who live in apartments that look drab on the outside but that are filled inside with pieces of art. Here live the people that admire painter like Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin and Georges de La Tour, the French painters of meditation and silence.

Many of Caravaggio's paintings are about death. Yet, they are about the terrible things that people can do to each other. Caravaggio's paintings are about the violence at the moment of death, about the brutality of that act when men forget they are humans and become thoughtless butchers. Caravaggio's paintings are about revolt against this abasement of humanity and they are about the horror of vile murder. Caravaggio taught his viewers to loathe murder. He showed what assassination of a human is really like.

Georges de La Tour also reflected on death in his many paintings on the theme of Mary Magdalene, and maybe even in all his night scenes. He did not show the horror of the moment of death however. If the viewer takes some time at his pictures, he or she will reflect about how people die, about loneliness and about the darkness that may come after life. The visions of Caravaggio and of de La Tour are thus complementary. Caravaggio was the painter of the horror of the moment. De La Tour was the painter of the silence of the night and of solitude, when reflection and dark fear of the unknown conquers the mind. He was no lesser artist.

Other paintings:

The Temptation of Mary Magdalene

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). The National Gallery – London. 1618-1620.

Mary Magdalene with Balms

Segna di Buonaventura (active between 1398 and 1327). Alte Pinakothek – Munich. Around 1310.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Szépművészeti Múzeum – Budapest. 1578-1580.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Pasquale Chiezza. 17th century. Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Jacob Van Loo (1614-1670). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome.

The Repentant Mary Magdalene

Domenico Fetti (1588/1589-1623). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. Ca. 1615-1621.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1657.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Musée des Beaux-Arts. Rennes. 1657.

Saints Mary Magdalene, Catherine and Margaret

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

Mary Magdalene

Jan van Scorel (1495-1562). Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam.

Mary Magdalene

Michelangelo Merisi called Caravaggio (1571-1610). Galleria Doria Pamphilj. Rome. 1595-1597.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1490-1576). The Palatine Gallery in the Pitti Palace – Florence. 1530-1535.

The Penitent May Magdalene

Tiziano Vecellio (ca. 1490-1576). The Hermitage – St Petersburg. Ca. 1560-1570.

Mary Magdalene

Francesco Ubertini called Bachiacca (1494-1557). Galleria Pallatina, Palazzo Pitti – Florence.

Penitent Mary Magdalene

Giuseppe Cesari called Il Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568-1640). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Tournai.

Penitent Mary Magdalene

Johan Moreelse. (1603-1634). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Caen.

Penitent Mary Magdalene

Carlo Cignani (1628-1719). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1685 – 1690.

Saint Mary Magdalene in Penitence

David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London). 1634.

Mary Magdalene

Quinten Metsys (1466-1530). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Antwerp. Around 1500.

Christ and Saint Mary Magdalene at the Tomb

Harmensz. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). The Royal Collections – London. 1638.

Mary Magdalene

Michelangelo Merisi called Il Caravaggio (1570-1610). Galleria Doria Pamphili – Rome. Around 1595.

Mary Magdalene

Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1608 – 1662). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1650.

Mary Magdalene

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574 – 1625). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan.

The Holy Mary Magdalene

Lucas Cranach the Elder (ca. 1472-1553). Wallraf-Richartz Museum – Köln. 1525.

Mary Magdalene

Francisco Hayez (1791 – 1882). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana – Milan. Ca. 1830.

Christ as a Gardener appearing to Mary Magdalene

Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1561.

Saint Mary Magdalene and her Stories

Maestro della Maddalena. Galleria dell'Accademia. Florence. Ca. 1280-1285.

Saint Mary Magdalene

Piero di Cosimo (1462-1521). National Gallery of Art, Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1500-1505.

Saint Mary Magdalene

Simon Vouet (1590-1649). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. 1623-1627.

Saint Mary Magdalene in Penitence

Giovanni Gioseffo dal Sole (155-1619). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome.

The Magdalene in Glory

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582-1647). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1620.

Mary Magdalene in the Desert

Emmanuel Benner (1836-1896). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1886.

Mary Magdalene

Bernardo Strozzi (1581/1582-1644). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa. Ca. 1620.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Georges de La Tour (1593-1652). Musée du Louvre. Paris. Ca. 1642-1644.

The Magdalene

Giovanni Gioseffo dal Sole (1654-1719). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Bologna.

The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Felice Giani (1758-1823). Collezioni Communale d'Arte. Bologna.

Mary Magdalene

Mariotto Albertinelli (1474-1515). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Mary Magdalene in Adoration

Leandro da Ponte called Bassano (1557-1622). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Magdalene in a Landscape

School of Bernardino Luini (ca; 1480-1532). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Assumption of the Magdalene

Marco d'Oggiono (1475-1524) and a Follower. Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Mary Magdalene

Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1574-1625). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

*Saint Francis***Saint Francis**

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon. 1650-1660.

Saint Francis of Assisi

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Museo Nacional d'Arte – Barcelona. 1650-1660.

Saint Francis in Meditation

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). The National Gallery – London. 1635-1640.

Saint Francis Standing with a Skull

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). The Saint Louis Art Museum – Saint Louis. 1634.

Saint Francis Kneeling with a Skull

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Stadtmuseum Suermondt-Ludwig – Aachen - Germany. 1635-1640.

Saint Francis in Ecstasy

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Bayerische Staatssammlungen – Munich - Germany. 1660.

Saint Francis

Cimabue (ca. 1240-1302). Basilica of Assisi – Assisi.

Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1295-1300.

Exhibition of the Corpse of Saint Bonaventure

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1629.

The Stigmatisation of Saint Francis

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). The Courtauld Institute Galleries – London. 1767.

Saint Dominic and Saint Francis saving the World from God's Wrath

Pieter-Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Lyon. 1618-1620.

A monk is standing. He wears simple beggar monk clothes: a long coarse brown cloak and a cape. The cape hides his features, which are anyhow not important to God. The monk lifts his head and finds ecstasy. He has an extraordinary vision of the beauty and love of God. This vision is so sudden and wonderful that the monk's mouth opens in surprise. The monk is a simple man, probably not very intelligent, a country boy who has come to live in a cloister. It is as if he has grown out of the earth. He is clad in the colour of earth. The monk is standing alone in a dark crypt. The vision is his alone. Light falls just so that we have a small, short glimpse of the sudden mysticism of the moment.

This is the Saint Francis in the mystical view of a Spanish painter. The Saint is shown in a crypt, his tomb. According to legend, Francis had thus been seen standing in his tomb in Assisi by the pious visitors Popes Nicolas V and Sixtus IV^{F5}. Almost the same picture of Zurbarán is exhibited in the museums of Lyon and of Barcelona.

Saint Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis was born of a wealthy cloth merchant, Pietro Bernardone, in the town of Assisi. His mother was French; he spoke French well, so that his name Giovanni was changed into Francesco or the Frenchman. He was a wealthy young man, who brawled with his friends in the streets of Assisi, went to the war between Assisi and Perugia in 1201, was imprisoned for a year and so was very much in esteem in his home town.

Yet, he was not as other young men of his times. He disliked war, once turned his back in a battle and faced cowardice. He fell ill after his imprisonment. It entirely changed the way he thought about life. He turned to the poor. In 1205, when he was 23 years old, he heard voices in the church of San Damiano of Assisi, which seemed to implore him to repair this church that was crumbling. Francis sold his possessions to start the task, but in the act also gave away some of his father's bales of cloth. He fell into a conflict with his father over this. Francis renounced his inheritance and gave everything back, even his clothes, so that he stood naked in front of his community. The Bishop of Assisi however liked Francis, recognised a spark of divine madness, hid his nakedness, gave him a cloak and further supported him.

Francis went into extreme poverty, nursed lepers, and continued to rebuild San Damiano with money begged. At first he lived alone, but then disciples assembled around him, vowing to the same poverty as Francis. They adhered strictly to Catholicism, to obedience and reverence for the Pope. Soon they became preachers of poverty and simple life. They formed a monastery at the Portiuncula of Assisi where they lived in prayer and labour. They continued to beg to live. In 1210 Francis and his disciples wrote their Rules in 25 chapters and went to Rome to receive acceptance of these rules of strict poverty from Pope Innocentius III. They refused all property for themselves as individuals and also for their Order. The Pope accepted orally the founding of a new order of monks, the Franciscans.

While his order grew, Francis himself was driven by a desire to convert the heathens to Christianity. He left Italy a first time in 1212, but his ship was thrown to the Dalmatian coast. He tried again in 1214 and went over Spain to Morocco, but became ill and had to return once more to Italy. Finally, in 1219, he set off for Acra in the Holy Land where the fifth crusade had begun two years before under Leopold of Austria and Jean de Brienne, King of Jerusalem. The Crusaders attacked Damietta, the sea capital of the eastern Nile in Egypt. Francis was soon disillusioned by the Crusaders that lived in these countries, as well as by the Papal legate Pelagius. He found the austere Sultan Malik Al Kamil more to his taste. He talked to the Sultan but could not convert him. He returned to Assisi and to his little church, a disappointed man.

In the meantime, the monastery he had founded had become a real Order of several thousand people. Cardinal Ugolino, the later Pope Gregory IX, wanted to use the fervour of Francis and his Order of Franciscans for a new religious élan, especially since they pledged to complete orthodoxy in Catholicism. But Francis of Assisi was not the organiser such a new Order needed. Francis realised this and resigned as Minister-General in 1220. He retired to Mount La Verna in Tuscany. Yet, he continued to devise simple Rules for his Franciscan Order: renunciation, return to the conditions of the first followers of Jesus, devotion to the humble child of the Nativity. Pope Honorius III accepted the order now formally in 1223.

In 1224 Francis wrote the famous 'Canticle of the Sun'. He wrote this poem while visiting Sister Clare of Assisi who had followed him. She had become a nun, lived close to the Franciscans in the Portiuncula of Assisi and had founded the Poor Clares sister monastery. Saint Francis also wrote the 'Fioretti', little flower poems and texts. That same year 1224, according to legends, he received while in ecstasy on mount La Verna the impression on his own body of the Stigmata, the wounds of the Crucifixion of Christ. The panel of Giotto of around 1300 shows this event. A winged seraph God sends the Stigmata to Francis who is already wearing the brown coarse cloak of the Franciscans friars.

After that experience Francis fell ill, became blind and died in 1226 at the Portiuncula chapel. He was buried in the church of San Giorgio of Assisi and canonised in 1228 by Pope Gregory IX, the Cardinal Ugolino that had always supported him.

The Franciscan Order spread over Europe. They sent missionaries to the Greek Orthodox countries and to the Mohameddan Africa and Asia. The Ordo Fratrum Minorum became a huge success, to probably the largest Catholic order. In 1300 already the order had 30.000 to 40.000 followers. In later centuries, internal discussions over just how much the rules of Saint Francis had to be followed led to a separation in 1517 of first two, then three orders. The Observationists held to the original rules of Francis, the Monasterials followed softer rules. Out of the Observationists came in 1525 the Capucines. The complete order grew to over 100.000 monks, then fell back again heavily after the French revolution. The Franciscans wear a long brown gown with a white long-hanging rope and a cape. They are either barefoot or wear simple sandals.

Two years after Francis' death started the building of the Saint Francis Basilica of Assisi. This was constructed to a large cathedral with frescoes of Giotto di Bondone, Cimabue and Pietro Cavallini. We have a picture there of Francis made by Cimabue. Cimabue was born in 1240, so the fresco of Francis dates from more than forty years after Francis' death, but Cimabue may have held other pictures of him. It shows a small, lined and gentle face. Truly the face of a man who was the 'Husband of Lady Poverty'.

Saint Francis epitomised aspects of Catholic faith that appealed particularly to the poor masses: the emphasis on individual and common poverty, gentleness, compassion, simple love of nature, love for all creatures through love of God. He did so in a heroic way, far greater and more extreme than any other church authority. The simple message that Good always wins from Evil drew forward to heroism the simple qualities of most poor country and urban people. Francis instated a new Order that became very popular by these qualities so that it attracted large numbers of followers. He was one of those elements that brought more humanity, joy and love to Christianity, not unlike the premises and goals of the cult of the Holy Virgin. The Christian Church was in dire need of a renovation based on gentleness, tolerance, mutual understanding and poverty at the moment. The Franciscan Order influenced European civilisation at least somewhat in the better sense. It was one of the major reactions in the Catholic Church that wanted to join again the original message of love and simplicity of Jesus.

Francis was not just a happy dreamer who talked to the birds and was followed in church by a lamb, but also a man who knew the reality of organisation and the necessity for rules to a community. He vowed always to strict orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism. He was one of the symbols of Christian Faith that shaped civilisation, as there were other symbols. Saint James the Great led to the reconquista of Spain and then Europe from Mohammedanism, Saint Sebastian taught heroism of suffering for the true faith and promised rebirth. Saint Jerome taught scholarship, teaching and learning of the Bible. There are two kinds of men: hunters and farmers. The Catholic Church had in Saint James the hunter and warrior, the one who could appear in the heat of battle with flying colours to charge forward. The Church needed a farmer of souls. Saint Francis was just that. And of course, Francis brought a change in monastic life as Dominic, Bernard, Benedict and still later Ignatius had done or would do.

The Rubens painting of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis shows these founders of beggar monk orders as men that were saving the world from the wrath of God. God holds his three lightning bolts, ready to destroy the world. The Holy Virgin intercedes, but only Dominic and Francis by vowing to chastity, poverty and obedience, can avert God's destruction. Around the saints, Rubens painted the sins that Dominic and Francis abjured: luxury, pride, and avarice. Dominic and Francis wear the monk's habits of their order, for Francis that is the brown cloth tied in the middle by a rope. Remark the flamboyancy of this Baroque painting, the bright colours and the dynamism of the scene; all characters are engaged in action.

Saint Francis is a frequent subject of paintings throughout history. Cimabue, Giotto and Sassetta were painters who lived close to Francis' age, the thirteenth century. But also later Italians in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries continued taking him as a subject, such as Giovanni da Milano. Still later the tradition more or less stopped, but Italian painters regularly took up the subject again. For instance: Giovanni Battista Tiepolo painted the stigmatisation of Francis.

Francisco de Zurbarán

Francisco de Zurbarán was born in 1598 in Fuente de Cantos near Badajoz in Spain. He was raised in Sevilla, was a pupil of the painter Pacheco and met there Diego de Velázquez with whom he became friends. He at first remained at the town of Llerena, but returned to Sevilla after 1629 where he obtained many commissions. In 1634 Velázquez invited him to come to Madrid, where he worked at the decoration of the new Buen Retiro royal palace. King Philips IV appointed him to court painter. But he returned to Sevilla. After 1645 his fame declined. He painted large series of saints, and of the Holy Virgin, many of which were exported to the Americas. He was back in Madrid in 1658, gave testimony for Velázquez when his friend entered the Order of Santiago. He lived as a very poor in Madrid until his death in 1664.

Francisco de Zurbarán was named after Saint Francis. He may have been particularly inspired by his patron saint, wanting in his religious ardour special favours for his afterlife. Zurbarán also lived at the end of his life in dire poverty, never had an easy life and he was naturally attracted to the same ideals as Francis and his way to render

poverty heroic. Zurbarán also painted for the Franciscan Saint Bonaventure College of Sevilla. He painted an 'Exhibition of the Corpse of Saint Bonaventure', part of a series of Bonaventure lives, now in the Louvre Museum, for that College. Saint Bonaventure was elected Minister-General of the Franciscan Friars in 1257, right after Francis. He staunchly defended the original rules of Francis, but insisted on the need for learning so that he became one of the more moderate Franciscans. So, Zurbarán knew very well the story of the life of Francis.

And Catholic Faith had become obsessive in Spain through the works of the Orders, but also through the support of the Kings of Spain. Saint James the Great and Christianity gave the necessary fanatic energy to Spain, both nobles and common folk, to reconquer the territory occupied by the Moors. Thereafter, the Spanish remained zealous. The conquest of the Americas led to the naming of many new cities by the name of saints, such as Santiago de Chili for Saint James and San Francisco for Saint Francis. The Inquisition in which the Dominican Order was very present played of course a prominent role in keeping Catholic Faith pure and obsessional. Spanish life and culture was impregnated by religion and no other Spanish painter but Zurbarán pictured so many monks and Saints. Zurbarán not only painted for the Franciscan College, he also made many paintings for the Dominican Cloister of San Pablo el Real and for the Hospital de la Sangre of Sevilla. So, many religious institutions commissioned his works, tens of paintings of saints and Holy Lives. His paintings impersonate to perfection the religious ardour of the Counter Reformation.

Zurbarán was a true Spaniard, the prisoner also in his art of Spanish society. Yet, the seventeenth century was the golden century of Spanish art. After the great Emperor Charles V had abdicated, Spain and the German Empire went into different hands. Ferdinand of Austria, brother of Charles V, received the German Empire. Philip II, son of Charles V, became King of Spain. Philip died in 1598, and was followed by three weak Kings who ruled through their First Ministers. Under the reign of Philip III ruled the Duke of Lerma. This Duke together with his brother the Great Inquisitioner Cardinal Don Bernardo de Sandoval, chased more than half a million descendants of the Moors out of the country, although they had converted to Christendom. These were the industrialists and merchants of old time. They were banished in the name of Christian faith, but it left Spain bloodless and completely in grip of religious fanaticism.

Spain slowly declined. Philip III died in 1621. His son Philip IV gave power to another Minister, the Duke of Olivarez. In 1641 both Portugal and Catalonia were lost, Catalonia to the French King. In that same year at the Peace of Munster, the Northern Netherlands definitely were recognised as an independent country. Later in the 1640s started unrest and rebellions in Sicily and Naples, that could only be finished by the able General Don Juan of Austria. This was the period of Richelieu, Mazarin, and Louis XIV. Around 1650 new French-Spanish wars ensued, with first victories for Spain's Don Juan, but subsequently a disastrous battle at Dunkirk. The wars ended in the Peace of the Pyrenees. Although Catalonia came back to Spain so that the border between Spain and France was once and for all established by the mountain chain, large territories that Spain had above the Pyrenees and in Northern France were lost.

This seventeenth century was the golden century of Spanish art, both in paintings and literature, but it was at the same time a period of slow decline. All the riches acquired by the empire of the sixteenth century disappeared. Yet, no other century of Spain has delivered so many masters in paintings. But even the greatest masters like Diego Velazquez, Alonso Cano, Francesco Ribalta, Juan Valdez Leal, so many others and Zurbarán, were limited to commissions from monks and the royal nobility. There was no rich middle class of merchants and industrialists anymore in Spain; most of them had been driven out of the country by the religious laws against the Moor and Jewish descendants. The many wars diminished the wealth of the country; money was constantly devalued. Since most painters depended upon the monasteries and the royal court, they had to conform to strict religious principles and a strict life, which showed in their pictures. They could not just paint any picture lest they lose their commissions from monasteries and court.

Spanish art of the seventeenth century has produced very many works of genius, but most represent lives of saints, scenes of the Holy Family, or portraits of the royal court, diplomats and the Spanish noblemen. Some paintings represent strange phenomena that were looked at as curiosities by the court: Juan Carreno de Miranda made a painting of a very fat girl while Jose de Ribera made one of Maddalena Ventura, a married woman and mother who had suddenly grown a beard. So, a strange twist for the bizarre and the extreme, possibly a reaction against too much religious strictness, remained in Spanish culture. Zurbarán, although a very gifted painter, was also caught in these themes. His genius lies in having given us, notwithstanding the restrictions, magnificent paintings in which the Spanish zealous soul is depicted.

The two best Zurbarán Saint Francis are the 'Francis Standing' of Lyon and Barcelona, and the 'Francis in Ecstasy' of Munich. In the Munich painting, Francis also looks upward, with open mouth, at a vision. But here the Francis is less earthy, gentler. Yet the skull is present, reminding how a monk has forfeited pleasures of life and how close he is to a death he can but desire, to be near God.

Zurbarán's Saint Francis are utterly Spanish. The colours are Spanish. The browns, greys, sombre tones that are the tones of the beggar Orders, are preponderant. Dark and light are used to emphasise mysticism, surprise, and loneliness. Zurbarán painted Saint Francis particularly in the Lyon/Barcelona pictures in a mystical miracle scene, and in the dark of Francis' crypt-tomb. The religious fervour is Spanish. The simplicity and the subjects are Spanish. These are no Italian monks full of joy and life. The Spanish Zurbarán Saint Francis are monks who live in abject poverty, have abandoned all possessions, live in holes and caves like hermits, with always death close. Zurbarán has represented Saint Francis as a simple, innocent peasant boy. Zurbarán himself was born out of a farmer' family, so he must have seen closely these uncomplicated peasant boys that were made into monks.

Many of Zurbarán's paintings of Saint Francis depict him with a skull, as if Francis was linked directly to death. The real Francis of course was much more lively, full of joy. He liked to laugh and was constantly surprised at the wonders of life and nature. But these Saint Francis of Zurbarán are never painted in an environment of nature: never a pasture, a tree, a plant, a bird. They were painted in the dark interiors of

Spanish monasteries. Compare the paintings to the bright, clear tones of Fra Angelico. Compare Zurbarán's paintings and colours to his contemporary Rubens.

The seventeenth century was Spain's Golden Age for paintings, but it was also the Golden Age of the Netherlands and of France, and all these ages were golden for Italian art. There is an enormous difference in gaiety of life between the Baroque paintings of Rubens, the classic intellectual paintings of Nicolas Poussin, the marine scenes of the Dutch commercial painters, the Bolognese Guido Reni, and the ecstasy of the Spanish Zurbarán. Yet Zurbarán is a genius by his own right, his 'Saint Francis Standing' represents the art of his country. The picture represents a part of the European character and as such belongs with Zurbarán to our spiritual heritage with the same importance as Pieter Paul Rubens, Nicolas Poussin or Guido Reni.

Other paintings:

The Life of Saint Francis

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Bardi Chapel in the church of Santa Croce – Florence. Around-after 1320.

The mystical Marriage of Saint Francis

Sassetta (1392-1450). Musée Condé – Chantilly. 1437-1444.

Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata

Giotto di Bondone (ca. 1267-1337). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1295-1300.

Saint Francis

Giovanni da Milano. Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1360.

Saint Francis

Francisco Zurbarán (1598-1664). Suermondt Ludwig Museum – Aachen.

Saint Francis

Annibale Carracci (1565-1609). Galleria dell'Accademia. Venice. 1585-1586.

The mystic Marriage of Saint Francis

Stefano di Giovanni. Musée Condé. Chantilly. 1444.

Saint Francis receives the Stigmata

Jan van Eyck. Galleria Sabauda. Turin. Ca. 1435-1440.

Saint Francis receives the Stigmata

Pedro Fernández called Pedro Ispana (active 1510-1521). Galleria Sabauda. Turin.

Saint Francis receives the Stigmata

Master of Hoogstraten. Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid.

Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). Apsley House. The Wellington Collection. London.

Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata

Ubaldo Gandolfi (1728-1781).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1822.

Saint Francis of Assisi

Raffaello Santi called Raphael (1483-1520). Dulwich Picture Gallery. Dulwich (London).

Scenes from the life of Saint Francis

Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337). Frescoes of the Church of Santa Croce. Ca. 1325.

Saint Francis in Adoration before the Cross

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo di Conservatori. Rome. Ca. 1585.

Saint Francis marrying Poverty

Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661). The National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. Ca. 1630-1635.

Saint Francis in Prayers with two Angels

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Galleria Colonna. Rome. Ca. 1631.

Saint Francis

Bernardo Strozzi (1581/1582-1644). Galleria di Palazzo Bianco. Genoa.

The Ecstasy of Saint Francis

Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1650). Collezioni d'Arte di Banca Carige. Genua. 1634-1636.

Saint Francis and the Angel

Giovanni Maria Arduino (1580-1647). Parrocchiale di Santa Lucia. Conzano. Ca. 1637.

Saint Francis in Ecstasy

Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli called Morazzone (1573-1626). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1608-1609.

Saint Francis in Ecstasy

Giovanni Battista Crespi called Il Cerano (ca. 1575-1632). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. 1620's.

Saint Francis in Meditation

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

Saint Bartholomew

The Golden Legend tells that Bartholomew went to India after the death and Resurrection of Jesus. He delivered the daughter of King Polemius there from a demon so that Bartholomew could baptise the King, his family and his people. Bartholomew drew out the demon from an idol in the temple and the demon, while being cast off, destroyed all the other idols of the temple. The priests of the temples of India, on hearing this, went to king Astyages, the brother of king Polemius to complain. They told that Bartholomew had tricked Polemius by magic. Astyages then sent a thousand men to capture Bartholomew. Bartholomew destroyed the king's god Baldach, so the king was furious and tore his purple robe. He ordered the Apostle to be flayed alive and be beaten with clubs.

Even the Golden legend tells that there are various versions of the death of Bartholomew. He may have been crucified and died in Albana, a city of greater Armenia. He may have been beheaded. Jacobus de Voragine put it all together in the 'Golden Legend', giving credence to all the stories. He wrote that Bartholomew must have been crucified and before he died on the cross been taken down, flayed alive, and finally beheaded. According to legend, the Armenians put Bartholomew's corpse in a lead coffin and tossed that into the sea. The coffin drifted and ended at the island of Ligara. Bartholomew's relics were later transported to Beneventum and then to Rome, to the church that still bears his name.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew

Giovanni Lanfranco (1582 - 1647). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1610-1620.

Giovanni Lanfranco was born in Parma in 1581. It seemed he was a young page in the service of the Count Scotti in Piacenza and this count sent him to Agostino Carracci in Bologna to study painting. When Agostino Carracci died, around 1612, Lanfranco joined Annibale Carracci in Rome and he worked with him, as his assistant, in the Farnese Palace of Rome. Giovanni Lanfranco learned from Annibale Carracci to paint ceilings and that became his great speciality also later on. He acquired fame by painting the cupola of the church of Sant' Andrea della Valle in Rome, with an Assumption of the Virgin. He then worked for the Pope, in the Pope's Palazzo del Quirinale. From 1633 to 1646 he was in Naples, and there he painted the interior of church domes with imposing scenes, such as in the San Gennaro chapel of Naples' cathedral. He returned to Rome and spent the rest of his life working for the pope. Urban VIII conferred even a knighthood upon him so that he must also be called Cavaliere Giovanni di Stefano. He died in Rome in 1647. Lanfranco's life was marked by his competition with Domenichino. Lanfranco won the commission for the dome of Sant' Andrea della Valle by scheming against Domenichino. The latter is said to have weakened the scaffold on which Lanfranco worked in the church, hoping his rival would break his neck. Domenichino was also Lanfranco's rival in Naples.

Lanfranco's 'Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew' is a relatively small canvas compared to the surfaces he worked upon during his life as a professional painter. His picture is Baroque and Caravaggesque. It may have been made in the years 1610 to 1620. We see Saint Bartholomew in agony, being flayed alive. A torturer holds the flaying knife and opens Bartholomew's arm. Soon the man will take all the skin off Bartholomew's body. A soldier in full armour pulls at the saint's ropes to tighten them. Although more powerful pictures exist of this theme, such as Mattia Preti's (1613-1699) Neapolitan picture of the martyrdom in the same Corsini Gallery, Lanfranco's handling of the scene is not without merit.

Lanfranco showed the moment at which the flaying begins, but Bartholomew endures already such pain that he is already past the physical experience of agony. The pain is so intense and so present, now and in the picture, that Bartholomew has abandoned himself in apathy to the torture. The saint lifts his eyes to the heavens, given over to the next life, to the purely spiritual life in which one cannot sense pain. Such force of expression shown by Lanfranco in the inclination of Bartholomew's head, Bartholomew's pleading look to the skies and the open mouth of abandonment of all the energy of the saint, is very successful in evoking emotions of pity and admiration in the viewer. Lanfranco thus very well knew how to express the martyrdom and the feelings of the saint at the long moment of his death.

The scene is Caravaggesque. Lanfranco painted the figures very realistically. Bartholomew has not the idealistic face of a youthful or wise person. He has the wrinkles of old age and hard work and the unkempt, wild hair of the solitary and poor man, the fine and strong chest and muscles of a trained handworker, and also the torso of a common, old man. The soldier has the rough face of a seasoned guard and warrior. The man who holds the flaying knife has the strong hands of a butcher. Lanfranco painted no decoration in the background, a style element that was typical also of Caravaggio. The painter used much contrast between light and shadows, which allowed him to show Bartholomew in the centre of attention, but these shadows are softer than what one might expect from Caravaggio. Soldier and executioner look at the saint, strengthening the focus of all attention on Bartholomew. Lanfranco placed the saint somewhat to the right, so that the light areas of colour could balance the dark menace of the soldier.

Bartholomew has abandoned himself to the torture; he does not withdraw his arm violently to escape the torture but he leaves his arm to the torturer. After all, this was what God had wanted, in Bartholomew's fate. Lanfranco thus linked in one area of light torturer and victim. The picture thus is of great emotional intensity, and since the figures are shown only in half, they are very close to the viewer so that the viewer must participate intimately in the torture scene. Still, Lanfranco painted the horror to the side, allowing the viewer also to perceive first the fineness of his art without making it compelling for the eyes of the viewer to always return to the place of pain in the picture. The lines and the colours bring the viewer always back to Bartholomew's serene face.

By the time that Giovanni Lanfranco made the 'Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew', he had entirely mastered the art of painting and the style of Baroque. He had seen

Caravaggio's Roman paintings and made his the new style. All these style elements allowed him to induce strongly in his viewers the emotional power of the moment.

Other paintings:

Saint Bartholomew and Saint Thomas – Epitaph of Jan of Jereň

Anonymous. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. 1395.

Saints James the Younger, Bartholomew and Philip

Master of the Trebon Altarpiece. National Gallery in Prague. Prague. Ca. 1380.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew

Mattia Preti (1613-1699). Galleria Corsini. Rome. Ca. 1655.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew

After Charles Le Brun (1619-1690). Musée Magnin. Dijon..

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew

Gioacchino Assereto (1600-1656). Accademia Linguistica di Belle Arti. Genua. 1636-1639.

Saint Bartholomew

Konrad Witz (ca. 1400-1444/1446). Kunstmuseum. Basel. Ca. 1435.

Saint Bartholomew

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669). The J. Paul Getty Museum. Los Angeles. 1661.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew

Circle of Isidoro Bianchi (1581-1662). Galleria Sabauda. Turin. 1630's.

Spiritual Themes

Introduction

In the following chapters we present a few spiritual themes taken up by painters in the past centuries. The themes do not represent scenes of the lives of Jesus, the apostles or saints, even though these holy figures may be shown in the images. The scenes of spiritual themes are symbols. They represent ideas and concepts of the mind in a visual way through the medium of painting, as static images on a flat frame of limited dimensions. This is a difficult challenge and we will see how the painters coped with a difficult task. A picture of the concept of suffering humanity may show the tortured, sad, abandoned Jesus and thus be a religious theme too, but primarily that picture represents a mind-concept. There are of course many such themes illustrated by painters. We can show just a few.

The artists translate the spiritual themes into images and bring their personal view of the concepts in the pictures. The scenes are not narrative, nor decorative, but the direct expressions of the thoughts, feelings, reflections, experiences and states of mind that occupied the artist at the particular moment that the pictures were made. Therefore a more thorough understanding of the motives that drove the painters to make the works of art of this kind are far more important for these scenes than for narrative depictions or portraits. In order to understand the paintings we must understand the painters. We must understand the mood of the artist, the motives and situations or events that led to the work of art. For paintings of spiritual themes thus more than for other visual works the viewer needs to widen his knowledge of the artist and the artist's work. The viewer needs to know the painter's life in order to be able to understand fully the meaning, interest and beauty of the painting. By the depth and scope of their artistic communication, paintings of spiritual themes are thus among the most interesting but also most demanding works of art since the process of communication includes far more needed elements than the usual work of art.

Let us illustrate this with an example. A lesser-known painter from Lyon in France, Louis Janmot, made a series of paintings called 'The Poem of the Soul'. Janmot painted a eulogy on the concept of the soul. Each picture of the series is well painted. One can analyse the painting and admire its structure, lines, forms and colour. But the epic grandeur of each picture and thus its interest for the viewer lies in other elements. It lies in each picture being part of a larger series that narrates the states that a human soul traverses. The series tries to engage the viewer to believe in the existence of such a concept by the aesthetics of the art of Janmot. The series take on a further dimension and interest when the viewer learns that Janmot used the paintings and drawings to illustrate a long poem. In his whole life Janmot made only this one series, this one long poem, and he reacted to a society that had become hostile to his religious beliefs. The interest of the viewer ultimately lies more in elements of the work of art that cannot be seen at all on the canvases themselves.

We will show paintings on themes like the soul, suffering humanity, the Apocalypse, vanity, the exaltations inspired by a Gothic cathedral, tolerance, love and remorse. We will end – of course – by the Last Judgement. While showing these paintings we will be interested in the reasons, the emotions or events that led artists to visualise such scenes. These spiritual works of art are among the most interesting art because so rich in communication of the way the artists understood and reacted to their society. But

we will also explain why the paintings are of the greatest aesthetic of the past centuries.

Christianisation

The Introduction of Christianity in the German Forests

Joseph von Führich (1800-1876). Schack Galerie – Munich. 1864.

Joseph von Führich was born in 1800, at the turn of the century, in Kratzau in Czechia and he became a student at the Prague academy in 1816. In 1826 he travelled to Rome and added works to the series of frescoes of the Nazarenes. This group of German-speaking painters had been founded in Austria in 1809, when six students from the Viennese academy had assembled in the 'Lukasbund' or Brotherhood of Saint Luke, and established in Rome. They lived in an abandoned monastery of San Isidoro in Rome and they were soon called 'The Nazarenes' by the Romans in gentle mockery of their style of clothing and wearing of their hair. The Nazarenes were romantics and they were very catholic. They sought inspiration in religious, spiritual themes and in the style of painting of the early Italian renaissance. They favoured fresco painting over oil paintings. Joseph von Führich joined this group of idealists, but only a few years later already, in 1831, he was back in Prague and married. He conformed well to the establishment of the Austrian empire. In 1834 he was called to Vienna by the powerful Count Metternich, to preside over the famous collection of art works of Count Lamberg. In 1841 he was appointed professor of composition at the academy of painting of Vienna. Von Führich had to flee from Vienna during the revolution of March 1848 but he returned from Czechia in 1851 and taught once more at the academy there. He had many students at the academy of Vienna and he was made a knight by Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1851 so that his name should be Joseph Ritter von Führich. He went on a pension in 1872 and died in 1876. Von Führich painted vast series of monumental scenes from 1854 to 1861 and his 'Christianisation in the German Forests' shows the same epic breadth of those paintings.

In his painting, von Führich shows a scene of the adoration of the Virgin, but it is as if this adoration is not of a sculpture of Mary and her child but of the real throning Madonna and child, appearing in the German forests. Von Führich shows how the Christian missionaries convert the German pagan tribes. The warrior-knight, the priest and the monks are at work. One should read the story from left to right. Deep in the German forests the tribe hunters live from killing forest animals such as stags and boars. They hunt fowl, and dwell inside the forests. They live in the wild, prepare their meals in small spaces amongst the trees. The women cook and the men spend their time hunting and sleeping. They also like to hear heroic stories. They are interested in what a Christian knight is doing, for warriors interest them. This knight, a von Führich version of Saint Georges, prays to a statue of the Virgin that has been erected at the end of the forest by priests. The priests use the natural curiosity of the tribesmen, and especially of the children, to teach about Jesus Christ who died on a cross for the redemption from sin of mankind. The priest reads from the bible and teaches the word of God to the children. Monks in the meantime, on the right in the painting, change the habits of the Germans. They save babies that have been abandoned to the waters of a river from certain death. They clear the forests and introduce agriculture to the hunters. On the far right, in the upper part of the picture, we see the end of the process of introducing Christendom: a settled village of

Germans, and a church whose bell tower dominates the landscape. Not only do the monks till the land; they also gain land on the forest. We see monks sawing down the trees and pushing back the forest.

Von Führich's structure and story moves in the form of a crescent from left to right over the whole frame. The structure of the composition is an 'Open V', with the praying knight at the lowest angle of the V. The knight occupies the central position of the structure. In this way, a large panorama evolves for the viewer. In an 'Open V' structure one finds often a deep open space and far view of a landscape. Joseph von Führich placed the Madonna in this space, against the background of the threatening German forest. The statue blends with the trees and seems protected by the massive but broken trees that surround it. Such views of nature, of dark and mysterious forests with open spaces among the trees, were of course a main characteristic of German romantic painting. Von Führich strengthened the structure of his picture around the Madonna, for he drew a very strong, heavy pyramid on the throning Madonna. The lines of the pyramid are formed by –on the left – the German warriors, and on the right by the group of the priest and the children.

There are a few sought-out details in von Führich's picture. The German tribesman on the Virgin's right (left for the viewer) might be a druid. The man wears a staff and a long, white beard. He also wears a cap or a helmet with horns, and so could represent the devil, the evil that still haunts the forests. The knight below the Virgin is praying and so he has deposed his helmet. That helmet is not of a traditional European design but of oriental faction. Von Führich may have reminded here of the crusaders. Indeed, it took a crusade to convert to Christianity the last of the heathen tribes to Catholicism.

In fact, the Christianisation of Germany started with the conversion of Clovis, the king of the Franks, in what is now a place in France. The headquarters of Clovis were north of Paris and thus closer to Germany than the current capital of France, and the territories controlled by the Franks went deep into Germany. The ranks occupied vast territories in the large area north of the Alps and they conquered gradually more land under their successive kings, among which the greatest finally was Charlemagne. Under the influence of the Frankish kings the tribes of Germany were converted to Christendom. Conversion to Christendom proceeded not only from the West however. Christendom also advanced from the East, from the Eastern Roman Empire, centred on Constantinople, and among the Goths. It was Ulfilas, the apostle of the Goths, consecrated bishop in 348 at Constantinople, who invented the Gothic script and alphabet that was in use in Germany until at least the first half of the twentieth century. Ulfilas translated the Bible into Gothic also. But he was an Arian and Aryanism spread among the Goths, the Burgundians and the Vandals. The conversion of the Franks to Catholicism led to the abandonment of Aryanism among the German tribes in the sixth century. The last Arians in Western Europe were the Lombards of Northern Italy and these were definitely subdued by Charlemagne. German paganism continued in the most northern territories around the Baltic Sea. The Scandinavian territories and the Baltic areas were only converted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Around the turning of the twelfth into the thirteenth century, the Teutonic Order was established in the example of the Hospitaller knights of Saint John to convert the north-eastern tribes, such as the Wends, to Christendom. The Teutonic Knights conquered vast areas and they also ruled over these lands. The praying knight

in von Führich's picture might hint at this crusader order. From out of the lands of the Teutonic Knights would emerge Prussia, whose capital was Berlin. Thus, von Führich also seems to remind the viewer of the history of Germany and especially of the history of the eastern territories, the lands that were closer to Vienna than to Paris.

The 'Christianisation of Germany' by von Führich was painted for Count Schack. Adolph Friedrich Count von Schack, born in 1815, possessed vast lands in Mecklenburg Schwerin and he was at first a diplomat. Already in 1850 however, he left the state service to travel, to study, to write, and to collect art. Von Führich showed Count Schack drawings of several designs but Schack let von Führich choose two pictures to be painted in oil, among which this 'Christianisation', made in 1864. Von Führich was also sixty-four years old by then. We wonder how a man like the old, acclaimed, famous, established and rather conformist artist von Führich, so much linked to Habsburg power and pomp, would imagine a religious theme and develop on it, that went back to the origins of Christendom. The painting must have reminded Count Schack of the wild and pagan origins of Germany. The uncorrupted wild was an eminently romantic theme, of course, but societies do not always like to be reminded of their pagan origins. However, von Führich was a Bohemian, a Czech, not a German, and he worked in Austria. He worked for an empire that was in constant strife with Prussia. There is something of a political pamphlet undertone in the painting, made by a very civilized Austrian courtier. Von Führich told in his picture how civilisation was brought to Germany, and may have hinted that that process was not necessarily finished, even if only he told that in an unintentional and subconscious mood. Count Schack was of German descent, but not Prussian, and when von Führich painted his 'Christianisation', Schack had been living for about ten years in Munich, in Bavaria, and he intended to stay in Munich. Schack had bought a large house in Munich and installed his collection as a gallery in it. He collected a great number of works of romantic art, which was contemporary art for him. The Schack gallery received a new home by Emperor Wilhelm II in 1908. Did Wilhelm II see von Führich's painting then and did he wonder what that painting was about?

Von Führich's painting exposes all the characteristics of a Nazarene and romantic work. Its colours are hard and pure, and the colour surfaces are well separated in contiguous, contrasting areas. Von Führich separated the areas of colours as if he had been working on a fresco, the preferred medium of the early Nazarenes. The theme is eminently romantic, historical and religious. The structure of the picture is very strong, as it should be for a work of a professor in composition at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. Von Führich was too old however for dreamy and languid atmospheres of foggy scenes of woods and ravines and wild rivers. There is no fog in his landscape to hide parts of the scene, no emerging mountains, no churchyards, and no vastness that imposes on man. Von Führich was a great storyteller in his historical scenes and he loved grand, epic views. Some of these preferences show in his 'Introduction of Christianity'. Von Führich's structure, lines and colours show complete mastery of the art of painting. He certainly was a great painter, though not one that could remain in the favour of modern viewers. His representation of scenes is disciplined and formal. We can guess from these features of his art the character of the artist, who stayed faithful to the style of his youth. This style influenced Austrian and even more Czech painting way into the first decades of the twentieth century.

Other paintings:

The Chapel in the Forest

Moritz von Schwind (1804-1871). Schack Galerie. Munich. Ca. 1850-1855.

Pfemysl Otakar II bringing Christianity to pagan Prussians.

Antonin Lhota (1812-1905). The National Gallery in Prague, Trade Fair Palace. Prague.

Christ the Redeemer and the Light of the World

Christ as the suffering Redeemer

Andrea Mantegna (1435-1506). Statens Museum for Kunst – Copenhagen. 1495-1500.

The Light of the World

William Holman Hunt (1827-1919). The Wardens and Fellows of Keble College – Oxford. 1853.

Luke tells how after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles. He gave his last instructions.

Jesus opened the mind of the apostles to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “So it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.”^{G38}

Jesus was referring to a prophecy of Isaiah, who gave a prediction of salvation in the ‘Fourth song of the servant’.

Look, my servant will prosper, will grow great, will rise to great heights.
As many people were aghast at him – he was so inhumanly disfigured that he no longer looked like a man – so many nations will be astonished and kings will stay tight-lipped before him, seeing what had never been told them, learning what they had not heard before.

Who has given credence to what we have heard?

And who has seen in it a revelation of Yahweh’s arm?

Like a sapling he grew up before him, like a rose in arid ground.

He had neither form nor charm to attract us, no beauty to win our hearts.

He was despised, the lowest of men, **a man of sorrows**, familiar with suffering, one from whom, as it were, we averted our gaze, despised, for whom we had no regard.

Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying, while we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God;

whereas he was being wounded for our rebellion, crushed because of our guilt; the punishment reconciling us fell on him, and we have been healed by his bruises.^{G38}

In these lyrical phrases stand the words ‘a man of sorrows’. This theme was a subject of many pictures of Jesus.

Andrea Mantegna

Andrea Mantegna made a picture of ‘Christ as the Suffering Redeemer’ or the Man of Sorrows around 1495-1500. His picture refers to the above texts. Mantegna painted

Jesus as a classic statue, stylised as an antique chiselled sculpture, white and cool as Carrara marble.

Jesus is sitting on a grey porphyry sarcophagus. The tomb is opened and the lid lies somewhat further to the left on the ground. The sarcophagus is open because this is a scene of after the Resurrection of Jesus. The scene is one of Ascension, and Jesus also shows the wounds of his martyrdom so as to take the viewers witness like the incredulous Thomas. Jesus shows the viewer his sufferings. The sarcophagus is at the same time a tomb and an altar on which Jesus proves his sacrifice. It is also a throne for Jesus.

Jesus has an expression of deep sorrow on his face. His suffering shows clearly; he keeps his head inclined as if he were asking us for pity and sympathy. Jesus seems to want to talk. He opens his mouth as if to appeal to the viewer and wanting to communicate with him. The painting thus involves the viewer directly. The kneeling angels that are holding Jesus strengthen this involvement. The angels claim Jesus and they support him. They are weeping at the pain of Jesus. One angel is dressed in red and has red wings; the other one is in blue. These are the colours of fire and of the skies, of the cherub and the seraph, of old the guardians of God. The angels' wings form with the open arms of Jesus a character X, the Christogram of ancient Greek language.

Andrea Mantegna painted two landscapes on either side of Jesus. On the right of the picture is a quarry in which stone cutters are sculpting antique sculptures. These represent the old Gods and the pagan world that the Christ has come to abolish. Above this scene is Golgotha with the three empty crosses pointing ominously to heaven. On the left Mantegna pictured in the Mount Zion with the city of Jerusalem at its foot. Somewhat lower still are green fields and the Holy Women are approaching the tomb. The first light of dawn creeps over the horizon. Grey clouds hang in the skies, which grow gradually blue in the faint sunlight.

Mantegna lived from around 1430 to 1506. This picture dates from somewhat before 1500. Mantegna was seventy then. One might expect a work in rough, nervous brushstrokes, maybe hesitatingly brought on the canvas. But this painting is ascetic, as if unhesitatingly chiselled by the best craftsman out of hard marble. The lines are unwavering, the draped shroud or toga of Christ is a marvel of exact drawing skill. The 'Christ as the Suffering Redeemer' may be something of a testament of Mantegna. It is a picture of refined and elevated aesthetics in which the transcendence of the man Jesus is the central theme. Mantegna did not yield to the impatience of an old man. He took his time to represent his personal image of Christ without compromising the least of his aesthetic concepts of art. Florentine line and drawing reigns in this picture. The quiet appeal of Christ could be the final appeal of Mantegna to his audience and to his God.

Andrea Mantegna remained eminently religious even through the Renaissance opened so many doors to classical antiquity. In Mantegna's picture the Roman icons are merely a sign of the world that ended with Christ. Mantegna communicated his own message of the ultimate values of society and for him these were religious values.

William Holman Hunt

There are various references to the image of Jesus as the 'Light of the World'.

The most direct one is in John's Gospel. When Jesus spoke to the people, he said: "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life."^{G38}

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, in the 'Second song of the servant', we read the following lines.

'I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the earth. Thus says Yahweh, the redeemer, the Holy One of Israel'.^{G38}

In Matthew's Gospel is told how Jesus, after the arrest of John the Baptist, withdrew from Galilee and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, beside the lake, on the border of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew said that this was to fulfil what the prophet Isaiah spoke:

'Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali!

Way of the sea beyond Jordan. Galilee of the nations!

The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light;

On those who lived in a country of shadow dark as death a light has dawned'.^{G38}

In the Revelation of John, in its preliminary vision, John sees God in a vision surrounded by seven lamp stands. God is holding seven stars in his right hand. These refer to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. God judges the seven communities and for Laodicea he said:

'Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in and share a meal at that person's side.'^{G38}

William Holman Hunt, a Pre-Raphaelite painter of the second half of England's nineteenth century, the Victorian age, painted a scene of 'The Light of the World' that refers to these various lines of the scriptures. Jesus stands in the darkness and he knocks at a door as written in the Revelation of John. He holds a lamp of light so that the title of the picture is justified. God is depicted as Jesus, wearing a crown, a halo and the cloak of a king. William Holman Hunt was a very religious man. He was very poor; he had to work from his twelfth year on as a clerk. But he had a great determination and a forceful character. He made many religious and moralising pictures. Hunt travelled twice to Palestine and started some of his most elaborate paintings there. He wanted to know and see for himself the landscapes and settings of Biblical scenes.

'The Light of the World' is a haunting picture even though God has a gentle and expecting face. God, the King, has come in the night to a solitary house in the woods. Wild weeds and flowers, ivy and brambles have grown to the door for this house was neglected without God. The handle is large and rusty, but God nevertheless visits the lonely modest door. A wizard's lamp throws its eerie light on God's green robe and on his red-bearded face. God has come with bare feet through the dark forest where roots and trees intertwine around a marsh or lake.

This image is one of the most famous of Pre-Raphaelite religious pictures. It is a technical marvel. Hunt has well succeeded in rendering the strange light falling on God and the plants before the door. The picture is one of the night scenes lit by a point source, here the lantern that Christ holds. Such pictures are always very difficult to imagine and then to paint and the skills needed from the painter are considerable. The colours in William Holman Hunt's painting are harmonious and not as harsh as in many other paintings of his hand. Another Pre-Raphaelite painter, John Everett Millais wrote that Hunt indeed made the picture at night by the light of a lantern.

The picture was an expression of Hunt's religious zeal and of his moralising sense. The idea of the picture is to show that even in places where the message of Jesus has been forgotten, where the door to Jesus is overgrown with weeds, God may enter any moment. He will enter at an unexpected moment to bring light in the darkness of the souls.

The Trinity and the Adoration of the Name of Jesus

The Holy Trinity

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). Museo Nacional del Prado – Madrid. 1577-1579.

The Adoration of the Name of Jesus

Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco (1541-1614). National Gallery – London. Around 1578.

With the death of Jesus began the long work of conversion to Christianity. The Christian message rapidly spread over Europe and the Mediterranean countries. The church needed devotional pictures and especially the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century stressed the educational character of art. Among the paintings and frescoes of scenes of the life of Jesus and of the lives of the saints, an important attention can be given to images of the glory of Mary and Jesus. Paintings of the Ascension of Mary and of Jesus, where these figures ascended to heaven in an aura of light and magnificence were always spectacular so that they remained long in the memory of the people. Among these pictures also have to be taken into account scenes of the Holy Trinity, picturing God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity was an attempt of the early Christians to reconcile the concept of monotheism with the tangible experience of Jesus the human together with the perception of an all-encompassing force of wisdom and knowledge that pervaded the universe.

Domenikos Theotokópoulos, called El Greco, made a painting of the Holy Trinity around 1577-1579. El Greco was born on Crete in 1540 or 1541, but he worked in Spain and died in Toledo in 1614. He is one of the artists who established the fame of Spanish pictorial arts of the late sixteenth century and especially the Spanish seventeenth century. El Greco made several such pictures like Jesus's Passion, of the Resurrection of Christ and of the Holy Trinity. This painting was commissioned for the church of Santo Domingo El Antiguo of Toledo and it was the first picture that El Greco made when he arrived in Toledo in 1577^{P1}. The composition was based on an engraving by Dürer and the body of Jesus was probably drawn after the Pietà that Michelangelo made for Vittoria Colonna^{P1}. El Greco was still young and this may have been one of his first great paintings, so it is understandable that he went back to famous examples.

El Greco painted the tortured body of Jesus supported by God the Father as in a Pietà. Jesus is shown as if he were lowered from the cross. He is lifeless and his contorted body and hands show the wounds of Golgotha. Jesus's head hangs powerless on the shoulder of the Father, who looks sternly at Jesus's face. There is not much pity in the white-bearded face of the patriarch God. This God ordained Jesus's death. He brings his son back to heaven, but what has been accomplished needed to be done. The Holy Spirit hovers above God the Father in the form of a pigeon. Thus the three forms of God are present.

The whole scene is painted as a glory of the heavens. Various angels are positioned in a 'V' form around Jesus and the Father. This form both enhances the movement in the

picture by its oblique lines and it brings the view always back to the pale body of Jesus. Small angel heads support Jesus's feet and all figures are standing on grey clouds in the sky. Above the Holy Spirit shines a brilliant sun that sends its radiations over the scene. The illumination that pervades through the picture comes from the sun that breaks through the clouds, but the light also seems to be generated by the Holy Spirit. God the Father is depicted as a bishop of the church with a high mitre and cloaks in blue and gold. There are no ornaments in the cloaks and robes. They are not painted in all detail of the folds even though the white robe of God the Father shows folds, which are indicated by shadows of grey colour more than by line. El Greco painted in a style that was rough and direct. It is as if he had not much patience to show intricate detail. He was interested in the subject and gave a visually striking effect.

El Greco's colours are harsh and cold and only a few colours are used in this painting, and then always with entire, broad patches in one and the same colour. El Greco did not have patience for intertwining shades of colours; when he started a surface in a certain colour he used that colour alone plus its various shades in order to create volume and depth. Then he put another colour to another surface such as in the fresco way of painting. The colours are unusual; no red but rose, some blue but also much purple and these two colours contrasted by yellow that simulates golden shines. The result was an image that could easily be read visually.

El Greco's composition was important and conveyed the message directly; his colours supported the composition. The message of grand emotion for the Ascension of Jesus and the Trinity was thus immediately conveyed to the viewer and the viewer's mind could be impregnated with a vision of glory. This was the kind of images of pathos that the clergy liked and could use for their proliferation and stabilisation of Christian faith. El Greco's picture is a scene of exaltation. Religion is about the glorification and exaltation of God and this painting epitomises that concept.

IHS

El Greco made many religious pictures for pious Spain. The letters IHS were the first three letters of the Greek name of Jesus IHSOYS, which stood for Yahweh. They could also be the abbreviation of 'Jesus Hominum Salvator', Jesus the Saviour of Mankind. The use of these letters as symbols of Christ may have originated with Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) who made a plaque in Volterra with these letters inscribed, surrounded by rays of light^{U11}. El Greco's painting of the 'Adoration of the name of Jesus's' was one of his first Spanish pictures since he arrived in Spain in 1577. The picture shows Philip II, King of Spain together with the Pope and the Doge of Venice in adoration of the trigram. The picture may commemorate the battle of Lepanto of 1571 in which a combined papal, Spanish and Venetian naval army led by Don Juan of Austria defeated the Turks, thus securing the Mediterranean for Western trade once more. The trigram contains the three letters of Jesus's name and three monarchs joined forces to defeat the Turks, the infidels, against which so many crusades had been led already in Christ's name.

El Greco painted the trigram in fiery flames on top of the painting. The letters also bear the cross. Angels above adore the name. On the earth are the King of Spain, the

Pope and the Venetian Doge, on their knees and looking upwards at the sign. The multitudes of the round earth surround them, in awe and expectation. Some of them, in red robes, conjure the apparition with high-lifted open arms. To the right a terrifying whale opens its large mouth and shows hell with the doomed creatures inside. Thus the three main parts of the universe, heaven, earth and hell are all directed to the trigram. In the middle, people pass through a gate maybe to the Kingdom of the heavens.

El Greco's painting resembles a primitive, primeval rough drawing. The painter was still new in Spain; his art needed fulfilment and sophistication. It shows the rapid, expressionist character of El Greco. As usual we find few bright colours. Only red is used in a few patches and in a symmetric way: two areas above in angels and two in cloaks of humans. The black dress of Philip II is central to the picture, close to the black whale and hell. In the rest of the painting the yellows and greys dominate. The fiery letters in very bright light are situated on top of the Spanish King, thus emphasising an ominous message. The piety of Philip II would slowly become obsessive and suffocate Spain.

In 1521, about fifty years before El Greco set foot on Spain, Spanish and French soldiers clashed in Navarra. The French army held a siege to the town of Pamplona. Among the defenders was a young Basque officer who had been at the court of Madrid. He had been a page of a noble at the court and he had fallen desperately in love with a very lively French girl called Germaine. He had bad luck for the girl had married Ferdinand the Catholic after this King had been widowed of Isabella of Castille. The knight, Don Inigo, became a soldier and fought at Pamplona. He was a fierce soldier, spurring his comrades to hold the town until death. But his leg was shot by a canon ball so the valiant defender fell and so did Pamplona. While he was being operated upon and slowly recovered from his wounds he read a book on the life of Jesus. His leg didn't cure well so he remained lame. The knight could not be a soldier again so he decided to become a soldier of Christ. His love, the Queen, was unattainable so he devoted love to the Virgin Mary. Don Inigo de Loyola started to study Latin and went to universities in Spain and in Paris.

In 1539 he went to a little church in Montmartre, then still the countryside outside Paris, and vowed with six friends to become a monk, to travel to Jerusalem and to fight Jesus's spiritual battles. Going to Jerusalem was difficult because there was a war again between Venice and the Turks, the war that would end at the battle of Lepanto. But Rome was within reach. Don Inigo wanted to found a new order. The mission of the order was to deepen religious life in the Catholic Church, to promote Catholicism and in a true Spanish zeal to fight heresy. The order was not accepted immediately. Don Inigo's zeal was first thought to be misdirected. He was once even imprisoned by the Inquisition. But his ideas gained support. In 1540 the 'Societas Jesus's' was founded. Their cult was to the name of Jesus and they would be called Jesuits.

Ignatius of Loyola had been a soldier. He knew the importance of exercise and of drill to soldiers. He installed a soldier's exercise on the members of his order. The order had a military character from the beginning. Loyola was called the General of the order. Provinces were organised as well as a hierarchy of colleges, residencies and noviciates. Loyola chose only intelligent and able men, contrary to the other monk

orders that were open to everyone. He wrote a treaty for the leaders of the religious drill. The spiritual exercises that every Jesuit had to pass lasted four weeks, was repeated and then recurred in the form of a week's seminar every year of the Jesuit's life. It took thirteen years to become a full Jesuit priest. The result was an order of very intelligent men, inspired by the energy of fighters and with the pride of an order of elite men. The highest virtue of these men was obedience to the Pope and to their General. The first general, Ignatius of Loyola, died in 1556 in Rome where he had stayed for over fifteen years. He was buried in the Baroque church of 'Il Gesu' in Rome and sanctified for his services to Catholicism.

The Jesuits really conquered the world. They sent missionaries to India, China, Japan, South America and Canada. Everywhere they came they were feared and everywhere they were the leaders for they were the most intelligent and the most unwavering in their faith. One of the foremost names in this spiritual conquest of the Orient was Franciscus Xaverius who went in 1549 from India to Japan. Through Franciscus, a Christian community in Japan developed. The Christian community grew until the Jesuits went too far, and started to destroy statues of local Gods. The Christians were confined to a region on the coast, then in 1638 completely banned, an edict that would only be retracted in 1873. The most wonderful successes of the Jesuits were won in Paraguay, where they instituted almost an Indian Jesuit state isolated from the other Christians. But the Jesuits became too powerful in Europe and when the order came under attack in the second half of the eighteenth century, their Paradise in Paraguay was closed. The Jesuits were driven out of the country in 1767; the Indians were once more the prey of adventurers.

The Jesuits organised schools in Europe. They opened not just seminars but also schools for all intelligent young children. Many colleges in Europe are still the property of the Jesuit Order and are organised by the Jesuits, including various universities. The order played a tremendous role in the spiritual teaching of the elite of Europe.

The end of the Jesuits came in the eighteenth century, in the age of Enlightenment. The French King Louis XV had appointed as First Minister the anticlerical Duke of Choiseul. The Duke envied the grip of the Jesuits on intellectual France. He was an able administrator who reorganised France's army and he was sympathetic to the Philosophers of the Enlightenment. The Duke of Choiseul was strengthened in his conviction against the power of the Jesuits when the Marquis of Pombal banned them from Portugal. Choiseul directed the anger of the Parliament against the order and brought Parliament to confiscate all the possessions of the Jesuits in France in 1764. This was only the sign for all the Bourbon kings to do the same. The Jesuits were thrown out of Spain, Naples and Sicily, then Mexico, Argentine and Peru. Finally in 1773, under pressure of the Bourbon kings of France and Spain, the Pope abolished the Jesuit order.

The Papal bull was not read everywhere however, and for instance in Russia and parts of Germany the Jesuits continued their work. In 1814 the Pope reinstated the order, but the old battle of influence also continued. The Jesuits were forbidden in Germany in 1872, readmitted in 1917. In France the work of the order was made impossible after 1901, then the Jesuits could return after World War I. In Spain the Jesuits were banned from 1932 to 1936, then reintroduced when Franco had reconquered the

country. The history of the Jesuit order thus epitomises the difficult relations between worldly and religious power, especially in education of the young elite of the European countries.

Other paintings:

The Holy Trinity

Masaccio (ca. 1401-1428). Santa Maria Novella – Florence. Around 1420.

The Trinity

Andreï Roublev (Ca. 1370-1430). The Tretyakov Gallery. Moscow.

The Two Trinities

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). The National Gallery – London.

The Adoration of the Trinity

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). Kunsthistorisches Museum. Vienna. 1511.

The Holy Trinity

Tommaso Guidi called Masaccio (1401-1428). Church of Santa Maria Novella. Florence. 1425/1426.

The Triumph of the Name Jesus

Giovan Battista Gaulli called Baciccia (1639-1709). The Gallery at Palazzo Spada. Rome. 1679.

The Holy Ghost worshipped by a Family

Domenico Robusti called Tintoretto (1560-1635). Galleria Colonna. Rome.

The Holy Trinity

Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Antwerp. Ca. 1620.

The Trinity crowns the Virgin Mary

Cristoforo Agosta (ca. 1570-after 1597). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Trinity

Giovanni Paolo Lolmo (ca. 1550-1593). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

Saint Louis and Saint Francis holding the Monogram of Christ

Francesco Bonsignori (ca. 1560-1519). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan.

The Trinity (Polyptych of Scanzo)

Bartolomeo Vivarini (ca. 1432-after 1491). Accademia Carrara. Bergamo.

The Adoration of the Lamb

The Adoration of the Lamb

Hubert and Jan Van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441). Church of Saint Bavo. Gent.

Apocalypse

The 'Revelation to John' is a vision of the catastrophic end of the world as enacted by God, the ending called the Apocalypse. You should read the following text and look at the same time at the opened altarpiece of the 'Adoration of the Lamb'.

The Revelation starts with a scene of the Son of Man dressed in a long robe tied at the waist with a belt of gold. The Son of Man had white head and hair, eyes like a burning flame and feet like burnished bronze, a voice like the sound of the ocean. His face was shining like the sun; he was holding seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword. Around him stood seven lamp stands. The Son of Man asked John to give seven messages to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

After the messages were delivered and explained, a door opened and John saw the second vision of his ecstasy. He saw a throne standing in heaven and the One who was sitting on the throne looked like a diamond and a ruby. A rainbow looking like an emerald encircled the throne. Round the throne were twenty-four other thrones on which sat the Elders, dressed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads. In front of the throne there were seven flaming lamps burning, the seven Spirits of God. In the middle of the throne and around it were four living creatures all studded with eyes in front and behind. The first living creature was like a lion, the second like a bull, the third had a human face and the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each had six wings.

In the right hand of the One sitting on the throne there was a scroll that was written in back and front and was sealed with seven seals. A powerful angel called with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to pen the scroll and break the seals?" Nobody could be found to open it, so John wept. But one of the Elders consoled him and said, "Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed and so he will open the scrolls and its seven seals."

Then John saw in the middle of the throne a Lamb standing that seemed to have been sacrificed. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits that God had sent out over the whole world. Then, an immense number of angels gathered around the throne and they chanted:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was sacrificed

to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing."

All angels, Elders and the four living creatures prostrated themselves in worship.

Then the Lamb broke the seven seals.

The first four seals brought forward four horse riders who the one after the other went from victory to victory, had the power to take away peace from the earth and set people killing each other, had the power to wage war and were death itself.

When the fifth seal was broken, all the souls of the righteous who had been killed on account of the word of God were seen under the throne, each dressed in a white robe.

When the Lamb broke the sixth seal there was an earthquake and the sun went black. Then all the kings of the earth, the governors and commanders, the rich people and the men of influence, the whole population, slaves and citizens, all fled because the end of the world was at hand.

John saw four angels, standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the world. And another angel rose, carrying the seal of the living God. The four angels were to devastate the land and the sea, but a voice told to wait until a seal was put on the foreheads of the servants of God, who numbered a hundred and forty-four thousand, that is twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then a huge number of people from every nation, race, tribe, and language stood in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hand. They shouted in a loud voice, "Salvation to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." An Elder told John that all the people had been through the great trial; they had washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb. He said the Lamb would be their shepherd and would guide them to the springs of living water, and God would wipe away all the tears from their eyes.

The Lamb then broke the seventh seal.

Seven angels were being given seven trumpets. Another angel came to the altar with a golden censer and a huge quantity of incense. This angel went to the golden altar that stood in front of the throne and from the angel's hand the smoke of the incense went up in the presence of God and with it the prayers of the saints. The angel filled the censer with fire from the altar, which he hurled down onto the earth. Immediately there were peals of thunder and flashes of lightning and the earth shook. The seven angels with the trumpets now sounded their instruments and all disasters fell to the earth.

Above is an abbreviated version of the first part of the 'Revelation to John'. It is a terrible story, even though told in a lyrical and epic style of images. The breadth of its vision covers the entire universe and no subsequent text could be grander. Since it tells the end of the world and the coming of the glory of God, not just in pity and love but also in vengeance, its Greek name of the 'Apocalypse', which only means 'revelation', has been a synonym for the destruction of the world as we know it.

Yet, the Biblical School of Jerusalem gives another definition of the word apocalypse: 'a form of literature promising, normally in coded imagery, release from present misery and a glorious future for God's people'. The prophet Ezekiel first described this longing for the spiritual kingdom that would replace the material world. The vision was popular in Judaism from 200 BC onwards, and occurs in the New Testament in Mark and the Revelation to John.^{7G38} This softer definition is quite

different from the way in which we commonly understand the word. It defines the word in the spiritual realm and diminishes the terrible pictures of John's Revelation that inspire us such fear.

It is this last view of the apocalypse that Hubert and Jan Van Eyck have rendered in their altarpiece of the 'Adoration of the Lamb'. But as it will be clear when reading the Revelation and looking simultaneously at the central panel of the altarpiece, the inspiration of the Van Eycks came from the grand mind-images of John's Revelation.

The Adoration of the Lamb

Let us first go briefly over the various pictures of the 'Adoration of the Lamb'.

The panels were made in the fifteenth century in the Flemish town of Gent. They have been preserved in this town and in the church and chapel for which they were commissioned. The Gent altarpiece shows in its closed form twelve panels. The four panels below contain the two donors, Judocus Vijd and Isabella Borluut who were a married couple of wealthy burghers of Gent. The middle lower panels show John the Baptist in his haircloth dress and carrying the Lamb, and John the Evangelist pictured in the traditional way with the cup of poison he was proposed to drink.

The upper panels represent the Annunciation. To the left is the archangel Gabriel. He carries the white lilies that were a symbol of the purity of the Virgin Mary. To the right is Mary herself, also depicted traditionally before her book of wisdom. She is shown in a state of ecstasy with the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering above her head. These scenes are set in a low-ceilinged house of Gent. Through the Gothic windows medieval Gent unfolds. Above the panels of the Annunciation are lunettes, small panels filled with the prophet Zacharias and Michal. These were added to fill the panels that needed to cover the majestic inner altarpiece.

The opened altarpiece shows twelve panels. In the upper row at the extreme left and right are Adam and Eve, with next to them two panels of angels making music. On the left panel angels are singing in front of a Gothic stand on which lie their papers. On the stand is a woodcarving of Saint Georges slaying the dragon. Higher up we can denote two woodcarvings of prophets. On the right panel is the heavenly orchestra. The central instrument is a small organ, but angels also play on violins and harps. All the angels are pictured in marvellous robes, painted in complete detail of the golden brocade patterns. The various expressions of the angels can be admired, yet all angels also resemble each other in faces and in headdress. All the angels wear crowns, again rendered by Van Eyck in elegant detail.

The upper middle panels carry the real glory of the altarpiece. God the Father is seated on a throne flanked by Mary and John the Baptist. The splendour of detail and the glory of these figures are almost unbelievable. God especially wears robes bordered with gold. He has the tiara of the Popes on his head, or the crown of the Kingdom of the Heavens, whereas the crown of the Kingdom of the Earth is at his feet. The Virgin Mary is shown also enthroned in all her majesty, adorned with

magnificent jewels. John the Baptist is clad more modestly and he points to the real power, to God.

On the lower level are six panels. On the left are the 'Just Judges' and the 'Knights of God'. To the right are the 'Hermits' and the 'Pilgrims'. The vast bottom middle panel shows the 'Adoration of the Lamb'.

As in the Revelation God - 'the One' as called by John - sits on his throne above the central panel. Other thrones flanked him in John's story of the Apocalypse but Van Eyck only painted Mary and John the Baptist. Above the altar but still in the bottom panel is the dove of the Holy Spirit so that the picture shows the Holy Trinity: God the Father on his throne, the Spirit, and the Lamb representing the resurrected but sacrificed Jesus. Beneath the throne stands an altar on which stands the Lamb. The Lamb is the sacrificial living creature representing the passion of Jesus; therefore blood rushes from its hearth into the chalice of the Eucharist on the golden altar. Angels surround the altar, all as told in the Revelation. The Revelation tells that an angel came with a censer to the altar and so in the picture also we find two angels in front of the altar sending smoke of incense upwards to God. Still more in the foreground is the fountain of life. The spring of water and flowing water is emphasised several times in John's apocalypse.

We will look at these wonderful pictures into more detail.

Hubert and Jan Van Eyck

Four lines in Latin are written on the lower frames, which freely translated mean something like: 'Painter Hubert van Eyck, a greater was never found, started the work and his brother Jan, the second in art, finished the work as asked by Judocus Vijd. With this verse he places this accomplishment for you to see.' In the last phrase capitals are used in unexpected places, in the middle of the Latin words. These capitals refer to Roman numerals, which give the date of May, 6 1432. Jan Van Eyck knew not only how to use symbols, he also frequently added texts to his pictures and he hid numbers inside the text.

The verse explains that Judocus Vijd commissioned the work. Vijd was a lord of Paemele and a rich banker of Gent. He was a member of the Town Council of Gent, may even have been its mayor^{G58}. Vijd was married to Isabella Borluut who also was from a well-known family of Gent. The altarpiece was made for a chapel that Judocus Vijd had installed in the Saint John's cathedral of Gent; a cathedral now called of Saint Bavo.

Hubert van Eyck must have been over sixty or even over seventy years of age in 1432. So it seems unlikely that he did more than design the composition of the paintings. His much younger brother Jan must have done most of the work but just what part of the altarpiece is difficult to determine. Whether Hubert and Jan were real brothers is uncertain. The only testimony to that is the text of the 'Adoration of the Lamb'. The painters may have been family without being brothers in blood. They may have been spiritual brothers or had bonds of teacher and pupil of the same village Eyck in Limburg. Jan Van Eyck could not have worked for long years at the

altarpiece for he was employed by the Duke of Burgundy. He must have asked a special permission to leave the court for maybe two years to work at the panels.

The altarpiece

The altarpiece had a memorable history of several restorations and of moves. It remained in the Vijd chapel until the end of the eighteenth century. After the French Revolution, when the French armies occupied Flanders, the panels were moved to Paris but brought back after the French defeat of Waterloo. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the clergy of Gent sold several panels and these pictures landed in Berlin. The Peace Treaty after the First World War stipulated however that the panels would have to return to Gent, and this indeed happened so that the altarpiece was complete again.

In April of 1934 two panels were stolen, namely the panels of John the Baptist and the 'Just Judges'. The thieves returned the painting of John the Baptist. The main thief Arsène Goedertier had confessed the theft only while dying and his accomplices Achille De Zwaaf and Joos Lievens died before so that a mystery remains as to the whereabouts of the second panel. The 'Just Judges' panel was never found and is now replaced by a copy. Arsène Goedertier left a letter in which he wrote that the panel would be found in a place where only the bishop of Gent could withdraw it without being seen. Many think that Goedertier hid the panel in Saint Bavo cathedral. Since then, a treasure hunt has gone on for the lost panel but it was never found. The quest for the 'Just Judges' remains one of the main mysteries of Flemish folklore.

Just before the Second World War the altarpiece was brought to safety in a castle of the town of Pau in the Pyrenees. But the Germans who occupied Belgium confiscated it, gained possession of the altarpiece by the exchange of thousands of prisoners and hid it first in the famous Bavarian castle of Neuschwanstein, later in a salt mine of Austria^{G58}. The Germans also sought after the lost panel and a strange hypothesis was recently formulated by a young Flemish writer, Patrick Bernauw, that the Nazi's art historians were looking for possible clues of the hidden Grail in the symbols of the 'Adoration'. The central panel of the altarpiece shows the Grail in which flows the blood of the Lamb.

After the Second World War the panels returned once again to Gent. Today they are shown under bulletproof glass in the de Villa chapel of Saint Bavo cathedral. The 'Adoration' was restored in 1952 and at that occasion a few lines were engraved in the Vijd chapel, 'Pious hands saved this masterpiece from terrible iconoclasts. Three times it returned to Gent during wars; a fire could not destroy it and the centuries respected it, because the renovated splendour of this altarpiece sings God's love'.

The panels

In the central panel many references are made to the 'Revelation to John' or the Apocalypse of the Gospels. The Lamb is standing on an altar as told in the Revelation and blood flows from its hearth into a chalice. The Lamb has been offered, like Jesus,

but it is standing like the resurrected Christ. Blood ripples down on the altar, consecrating the table on which the Eucharist is served. The altar or throne is inscribed with golden signs. Angels behind the altar hold the symbols of the last passion of Jesus. The angels on the left side hold the cross and the lance, the crown of thorns and the nails. To the right they hold the column of the flagellation and the lance with the sponge drenched in vinegar, plus the whips of the flagellation.

A group of four angels flank both sides of the altar, a number that can be remarked in numerous Flemish and Italian paintings. Two angels burn incense in front, as told in the Revelation, even though van Eyck has pictured two angels instead of one to satisfy his sense of harmony and symmetry. Symmetry of colours, sometimes reversed as in the angles holding the passion instruments, can be discerned already in this scene. Golden rays emanate from the Lamb that is looking straight at the viewer, thus interpellating the viewer directly. The same golden rays shine from the dove above the Lamb. The dove represents the Trinity and thus the two most mystic elements of Christianity were brought together closely in the same image.

The central panel is about the Apocalypse, but no horrors can be found in its distinct images. How different is this for instance from the gruesome pictures of hell, torture and pain inflicted by monsters to humans in for instance the frescoes of Hell and Last Judgement of the Campo Santo of Pisa. There are all the iniquities, humiliations, horrors, tearing of bodies and souls amidst ugly creatures shown to scare humans out of sin. Van Eyck only showed veneration, exaltation, lifting of the spirit. The panels of the 'Adoration of the Lamb' are the image of a noble mind directed towards beauty and dignity. Van Eyck's mind was one of peace, of delicacy, of admiration of nature and of elevation of man. Van Eyck had confidence in the power and love of God. He glorified the Spoken Word as an offered Lamb. Although Van Eyck was still very much an artist of the northern Gothic, still linked to medieval tradition, he had a mind of Renaissance without doubt.

In front of the altar stands the fountain of life out of which pours the water of life. The water is gathered around the fountain and becomes a small river. This scene refers to various images of the Bible, not just to the Revelation but also to the Song of Songs and the psalms. A bronze angel with open, protective wings guards the fountain. This picture of the fountain was the example of numerous copies made by subsequent Flemish Primitives.

Adam and Eve

The panels of the top of the altarpiece contain Adam and Eve. Van Eyck was doubly courageous to place these figures in the altarpiece. Firstly, Adam and Eve were the original sinners whereas the altarpiece was a song of veneration. Secondly, both figures are as nude as they can be but for the fig leaves they hold over their private parts. Van Eyck must have used models to draw these figures and the clergy must have apprehended that. Van Eyck was revolutionising and his figures were painted so much to nature may have shocked the clergy. The artist had a good argument though. Adam and Eve were born in the bliss of God and unaware of their nakedness until the original sin. Van Eyck painted Adam and Eve in this state, perfectly at ease in their nudity and unaware of shame. This already was a whole new program that broke with

old conceptions. The exaltation of mankind was thus not a monopoly of Italian Renaissance artists even though such northern images in religious art were rare. Van Eyck arrived early at the same view of the prominent place and pride of humanity as the artists of the Florentine Renaissance. Adam and Eve's nakedness certainly did shock later so that in the nineteenth century the panels were even replaced with Adam and Eve dressed up with robes and skins.

Eve holds an eastern citrus fruit, which could be a symbol more according to the real Jewish tradition than to Christian tradition^{G58}. Van Eyck points to the original sin with his Adam and Eve panels. He wrote for Adam on the frame, 'Adam draws us into Death' and for Eve, 'Eve brought damage by killing'. For medieval scholastic thought sin was equal to death in Christ.

Above Adam we find the offers of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam. Above Eve is a small panel of the slaying of Abel by his brother Cain. These were the first victims of the sins of Adam and Eve.

Look at the immediate naturalism and vividness of Van Eyck's pictorial representation. Adam's foot literally steps out of the frame, calling a rare and strange sensation of surprise in any viewer who remarks it. In Adam and Eve Van Eyck continues his vision of dignity however. His figures are quiet, serene, calmly standing in a natural poise, untortured and with such dignity that they remain in harmony with the rest of the panels. Van Eyck had no need to express painful feelings of sin and shame nor a heavily muscled Adam. Eve may be shown as pregnant of following generations, thus of humanity.

Heavenly Music

The panels next to Adam and Eve are the angels singing and making music. Here all the skills of the genius artist show clearly, as well as the patience and love whereby van Eyck relentlessly handled the smallest detail. The brocaded cloaks of the angels are masterpieces of observation and composition. One finds complete images, icons, miniature paintings and entire scenes mirrored in the gemstones of the jewels that for instance clasp on the cloak of the front angel of the choir. Pictures of the Madonna and images of Jesus can be seen on the rich dresses of the angels. Each angel wears a crown, but the jewels of various colours are perceived from a distance as flower crowns. The colours of the scenes are warm and harmonious with the brilliance of the new paints of translucent oils and fine suspended pigments that Van Eyck used so that the colours remained as fresh as ever.

The angels all look alike. They are impassive and uncommitted. They are lost in the concentration on their songs and music. All are alike, with hair of the same colour, shape and texture, the same crowns and long, slender hands.

The choir consists of eight angels like the octave of the western system of music and in the orchestra old instruments have been reproduced in detail. The music instruments, such as the organ for instance, are decorated with woodcarvings and so is the bookstand of the choir. Each small detail is meticulously rendered, such as the placeholder in the book of songs or the wood carving of Saint Georges slaying the

dragon on the music stand. In the 'Revelation to John' also a dragon appears and Van Eyck seemingly loved such ornaments since we find them back in several of his pictures.

Van Eyck used a static composition in the choir of angels, underscored by the long vertical green triangle formed by the open cloak. This is an angular element that corresponds to the straight oblique lines of the organ on the other panel. More than anything else we grasp in these details of composition the subtle sensibility to harmony of the artist. In the musicians' panel the composition is more nervous with the prominent oblique lines that intersect each other, so an angular element was needed between the softer curves of the choir panel. Even the chair under the organist angel is composed of oblique lines that fit with the rest of that panel. There might here also be a subtle play on the calm Adam and the supposedly more fickle mood of Eve. Remark the almost obsessive eye for detail in the tiles on the floor. We find here various symbols such as the Lamb, the letters IHS that were the very name of Jesus.

The sense of detail in the 'Holy Lamb' altarpiece is a culmination of the thought of the Middle Ages. The whole world, all things created, was the result of the will of God. Therefore all things were to some extent permeated with the soul of God. The creation was not perfect, sin had corrupted humankind, and the benevolent presence of God was withdrawn from earth, but the divine soul still rested in all living and non-living elements. Therefore these were worthy of being painted in every detail as everyone should admire and respect the creation of God. Only by painting the most intricate detail could the creation of God be lauded. This idea could have inspired the Van Eycks and the Flemish Primitive painters to show such level of detail in their work.

God, Mary and John the Baptist

The three central panels of the top row represent the Virgin Mary, God the Father or Jesus and John the Baptist. The figure of God above the Apocalypse scene of the Lamb is in line with the Revelation to John, in which is told that God's throne stood above the altar. God is depicted as a young man, with a countenance as traditionally attributed to Jesus. The figure is not the old wise man but the serene youth that Jesus was. Van Eyck has left a double meaning and referred to the double nature of Jesus as God.

In the three panels the splendour of the jewels and crowns, of the tiara, sceptre, borders of cloaks, and brocades is staggering. This dexterity and consistence in brilliant detail was present in art before Van Eyck but never with such obsession. It was rarely equalled especially on such a scale, after this artist.

Van Eyck applied also many inscriptions on the circles around the three figures. The arches serve partially as grand haloes. Van Eyck combined pictures and words, a combination that was aimed at even better explaining the meaning of the scenes. This was not so rare in Van Eyck's times, but it was rare that an artist used such lines within the surface of his painting instead of on the frame. We have to wait surrealist

artists of the twentieth century like Magritte to rediscover combinations of the written word and the image.

Rays of gold emanate from the three figures. The thrones are richly decorated. In the brocades behind Jesus a pelican is tearing at its breast to feed its young. This was a traditional symbol of the offer of Jesus. Jesus wears the tiara, the symbol of the Popes and a simpler crown lies at Jesus's feet. This symbolises the pre-eminence of the spiritual world over the material world. This concept is also underscored by Mary and John who read from books, thus placing them in the sphere of the learned and the spiritual. God's throne is situated in the composition of the panels above the dove so that the image of the Trinity as represented by God the Father, Holy Spirit and Son is enforced. Around God is written, 'This is God Almighty because of his godly majesty.' To Mary, 'She is more beautiful than sin'. Mary's crown is adorned with roses and lilies whereas the small white flowers that are strung on delicate stems are among the first to bloom in spring in Western Europe. They bloom around April, the usual time of Easter. They are called 'Easter Bells' in Flanders and are thus both references to the white purity of the Immaculate Mary and to the passion of Christ at Easter. The roses and lilies are Mary's traditional symbols. Here also, as in the old Italian pictures of the Maestà we find star motives and there are twelve stars, as told in a phrase of the Revelation, over the head of Mary. Mary's hair is very similar to the hair of the angels, a detail that places her in the realm of the heavens.

On Mary's crown are very many pearls. We know that these were often associated with Mary in medieval times. The Virgin had given birth to Jesus in an Immaculate Conception. Her son was Jesus, the ultimate jewel of the creation. Pearls were likewise created in an unpolluted way inside the shells and from the dew of the skies.

John the Baptist wears a robe of hair but a splendid green cloak hangs over his shoulders. John prepared the way of Jesus and so he points to Jesus with his right hand. All attention of these panels returns to the God-Jesus figure. God holds his right hand in a gesture of judgement. Remark the striking similarity in features of the faces of God and Adam. The Bible wrote that Adam was made to the image of God and Van Eyck was one of the rare painters to take these words so literally. This idea of representation was new and daring in the Gothic era and heralded the new times of proud confidence in man. Details such as these indicate the mature, profound reflection that must have accompanied the designs of the compositions of the Van Eycks.

In all the upper panels the figures are painted serenely. They are inwardly turned. Not one figure looks straight at the viewer except Jesus. Thus is emphasised the pre-eminence of God over all other figures, just as told in the Revelation. All figures support Jesus and are subordinated to him. Mary, John, Adam, Eve and the angels seem to have no power but to intercede between humanity and God. They are painted here as if they had turned away from humanity in humble obedience to God. The figures around God seem to live for themselves; the only figure that can condemn and forgive is God. In the Revelation God's majesty and power is indeed the major epic feeling. Van Eyck has remained true to these texts of the Revelation.

The majesty of the altarpiece is undeniably built on the splendour of the jewellery of the main figures. Gems and pearls in all shapes and forms are lavishly used to a

wealth that could not but have deeply impressed the faithful that came to pray in the Vijd chapel. Gent was rich, but the very wealthy were few. There could be no fuller expression of the grandeur of the heavenly kingdom than through the display of this wealth of jewels. Add to this the solemn dignity of Jesus, the sweetness and serene beauty of Mary and the wisdom expressed in John the Baptist and we have here indeed the most majestic images that were ever expressed in the visual arts. These elevated feelings of the power of spirituality and of transcendence were the main source of inspiration of the high Gothic cathedrals of northern France, Flanders and Wallony. They are expressed in Van Eyck's panels with an unequalled vision.

The Lamb

In the central panel below, the Holy Lamb thrones. It draws the attention of the viewers as its altar is encircled by angels and from the four corners of the earth the human race centres on it. The human race has come to honour the Lamb with its adoration.

From the northeast come the virgins and the female saints, wearing the long palm branches as told in the Revelation. The saints of the front row wear the symbols of their martyrdom. Agnes has the Lamb, Barbara her tower and Dorothy the basket with the fruit of paradise. In the middle is a saint without specific signs but with the wonderful white and green gown of a princess. This might be Ursula who led her companion virgins, but a figure somewhat behind holds an arrow and that is a usual sign of Ursula who was shot by arrows. The rich gown may indicate Catherine of Alexandria who was considered to be a bride of Christ and the patron of young girls. Catherine thus also could be claimed as the leader of the virgins. To the right of this group grow high lilies, signs of the purity of the virgins.

From the northwest come the bishops and cardinals and these also hold the branches of palm trees as were used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem. Next to this group grow wild roses, maybe a sign of the ardour in faith of the group and a reference of course to Jesus's passion.

From the southwest come the representatives of the Old Testament. The prophets are knelt in the front row. Behind the prophets come the Jewish leaders of the Bible and some of their kings. Most of these are elder and bearded men, referring to the great age from which they have come to venerate the Lamb.

From the southeast come the representatives of the New Testament and of Christianity, led by the twelve apostles. They are fourteen. Probably the most important missionaries of the 'Acts of the Apostles' were added, that is Paul and Barnabas. The Popes and the Deacons of the church follow them. The first Deacon, Stephen, can be easily recognised for he holds in his lap the stones with which he was martyred. Several priors of abbeys have also come with this group.

The golden rays of the dove of the Holy Spirit permeate all these figures.

The procession of humans that have come to adore the Lamb is continued in the side panels.

The wealth of the figures and of the whole central panel has been admired for centuries. Here we see all the splendour of the rich Flemish cities displayed. Van Eyck's art was not an art rooted in the common people. We find here no image of the farmers working in small huts in the country and no artisans of the towns. The image needed to be an image of the heavenly kingdom but for Jan Van Eyck this elevated kind of image was very natural. He lived and worked for the court of the Dukes of Burgundy, the most splendid court of Western Europe. The King of France, the Dukes of Orléans, of Berry and of Burgundy were of the same royal French descent. Their courts, however cruel, were dedicated to the admiration of beauty. The display of wonderful dresses, the ostentatious display of wealth was formidable at the courts where one needed to be remarked so much that the courtiers wore gold pieces and bells on their dresses. The courts challenged each other in external show of wealth. Robes and cloaks were the richest of Europe, as could be easily manufactured in the cloth industries of Flanders and Artois. Van Eyck's art is the art of a courtier entirely, of a courtier living in a splendid illusionary world of extravagant outward poising. Van Eyck had the genius to represent this wealth that Flanders could well afford, as dedicated to religion and devotion so that the wealth does not shock nor became vulgar but was directed to a higher purpose.

The Judges and Knights

To the left are the 'Just Judges' and the 'Knights of Christ'. The Christian knights advance proudly and defiantly in full gleaming armour wearing their banners and shields with the signs of the resurrected Christ. The French historians of the beginning of the fifteenth century wrote often about the splendour of the gleaming armour of the knights on white horses entering in victory cities, aware of their power and status.

From the right come the pilgrims led by the giant Saint Christopher, patron saint of travellers. Behind Christopher one of the pilgrims wears the scallop-shell of Saint James of Compostela on his hat. Next to this panel are the hermits, led by Saint Anthony^{G58} and followed by Mary Magdalene who also ended her life as a hermit. Mary Magdalene is recognisable by the pot of balms with which she is traditionally associated. Whereas various types of trees and in particular a palm tree indicate the direction of the pilgrims, that is to the warm south, the rocks allude to the caves of the hermits.

The most striking in the lower panels is the extremely rich lush-green nature in which Van Eyck situated the scenes. All the figures advance in a paradise. All kinds of trees, bushes, low grass, and shrubs grow between the procession of men. In the meadows around the Lamb grow all sorts of flowers, some with ancient Christian meanings of plants that divert malice. The landscape is not flat but small green hills have been painted, as for instance behind the group of virgins. The horizon is if formed by far views of towns with their medieval Gothic slender towers and churches that proudly rise to the skies. Birds hover in the skies of the side panels over the pilgrims, since birds also do migrate. More secular buildings, castles and bell-towers are painted on the panels of the Judges and Knights.

We turn our attention to the back panels.

The back panels

On the back panels of the altarpiece other figures are painted. The altarpiece remained closed most of the time, only to be opened during High Mass in the Vijd chapel. Often, the panels on the backside of similar altarpieces were only painted in grisaille as if the figures were sculptures. Van Eyck continued this habit. Thus the artist created a sensation of space since the painted sculptures stand as if in niches, emphasising the three-dimensionality of these panels. These would have blended well with the colours of the light grey stones of the chapel. Two figures are painted in full colour however: Judocus Vijd and his wife Isabella Borluut, the two donators. They stand around John the Baptist, who wears the Lamb, and John the Evangelist who conjures the snakes that crawl out of his poisoned cup.

The panels in the middle row show colour and these represent the Annunciation. The angel Gabriel is drawn on the left, holding the lilies of the Immaculate Conception. The Virgin Mary is shown on the right, under the dove of the Holy Spirit and in a representation that feels very medieval. The Virgin was reading from her book of wisdom and slightly turns in surprise towards the viewer. Gabriel makes a calling movement with a finger, asking Mary to join her destiny. The small middle panels are a view of a street of Gent that scholars have recognised, and a washing stand, which again refers to the purity of Mary.

The four panels of this middle row are small masterpieces of observation. The gowns of Mary and of the angel flow naturally to the floor in many folds and each of these folds has been rendered completely by the shadows of the light that does not anymore pervades the whole scene but definitely comes from a particular side. Van Eyck's altarpiece stood on an altar of the Vijd chapel and the windows of the chapel were to the right of the panel, light came indeed from that side. Marvellous here also is how the painter has continued the lines of the windows over the four panels from left to right, linking all the panels as if they were truly one action in the same room. Van Eyck also has continued the lines of the beams of the roof over the four panels, enhancing the effect of space he had started to create with the sculptures in the lower row.

Above the middle row we find smaller panels of the prophet Zacharias on the left, the Erythreian and Cumaean Sibyl in the middle and the prophet Michal on the right. These figures testify of the old prophecies on the coming of Jesus and thus these panels occupy a logical place above the Annunciation. The texts in the panels also refer to these prophecies. Van Eyck has used the Sibyls as later Michelangelo would do in the Sistine Chapel, in the roles of ancient secular prophets of the heathen world and thus accepted them in the Christian themes.

Van Eyck has not depicted Vijd and Borluut in the inner central panel, as was tradition. But by placing them on the outer panels the two donators were seen most of the time, since the altarpiece remained closed during the week. Van Eyck gave a position of humility on the outer panels to which Vijd and Borluut could hardly protest. But he spared them the humiliation of having to show them on the main panel in smaller dimensions than the saints, as was the custom. He gave the donators

predominance on the outer panels because they are in the only panels there painted in full colours and he painted them as tall as the other figures. The donators are calm, severe and humble. One discerns intelligence and some cunning in Vijd and determination in Borluut. In this couple, the wife was probably the harder driver.

Epilogue

The 'Adoration of the Lamb' is an exceptional work of art.

We know of wonderful miniatures of before the times of the Van Eycks, but the extraordinary patience and endurance with which Jan pictured every detail is unequalled. We have no evolution of various paintings that led gradually to this sense of detail and of completeness. The 'Adoration of the Lamb' is a bright, sudden star in the history of northern art.

The 'Adoration' showed the grandest of images of Christian thought. In order to express the transcendence of Christian thought, Van Eyck did not paint the Resurrection of Christ or any other scene that might hold some direct link to the tangible life of the figures of the Bible. Van Eyck looked to the mystic visions of the ecstasy of John. Like John, he radically placed his pictures in the realm of the spiritual and made his pictures subservient to ideas of the mind. In this, Jan or Hubert proved a reflection that was new, rare and splendid. The brothers could have shown the Apocalypse in all its horrors but instead they brought a work that is only exaltation and elevation of the spirits. They were aesthetes. Their example was an extraordinary pledge to the confidence and hope for better times. They showed to the monarchs of their times that not destruction and raw power were the first values, but the spiritual values of the Redeemer as symbolised by the Lamb. The Lamb testified to forgiveness and altruism contrary to the urges that drove the powerful to wars.

The Van Eycks pictured a spiritual realm. Yet they reached their grandiose effect on viewers by showing the most direct splendours of real life. These splendours of life Jan Van Eyck knew well. He lived amidst the wealthiest court of Europe and he held a position of prestige there. He could not but be tempted to show to the people of Gent what that splendour could amount to. The Van Eycks observed nature and showed all detail of lawns, hills, trees, skies, birds and flowers. They used models of real people and drew Adam and Eve from nature. They did not scare away from this most palpating of all views of the nakedness of man and woman. They combined the splendour of nudity with the splendour of the inorganic world, the profusion of jewels and gemstones. They definitely sought to create space to paint the vastness of the natural world of meadows, towns, forests, rocks and mountains. They painted their altarpiece in the brightest light, a metaphysical light that was of God's creation.

Very many paintings have lost their lustre and their colour over time. The Van Eycks used oils and pigments that by almost a miracle have guaranteed for almost six centuries now brilliant colours. The panels have been cleaned several times, but the brightness of the views must be as fabulous as when the Van Eycks painted them. The variety of colour also is splendid. And the artists added symmetry and harmony with a skill and feeling for beauty that is astonishingly perfect.

The 'Adoration of the Lamb' came as a comet in the skies of northern art. The brightest star was the complete, definite work of art. No subsequent painting could ever surpass either its visual magnificence or its depth of thought. The greatest miracle is probably that this rare piece of art was saved during all the centuries since it was conceived, in such a good state that we can still admire its beauty in its original environment.

The Soul

The Poem of the Soul

Louis Janmot (1814-1892). Musée des Beaux- Arts - Lyon. 1835-1881.

Louis Janmot is a less-known painter from Lyon in France, born in 1814 when France had its first emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Janmot made few paintings, most of which can be seen in Lyon only. He lived all his life in Lyon, the second town of France, till 1891. He spent a short time in Rome in 1835. He was a pupil of the great Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. So we find in Louis Janmot the crisp design and the dry colours of French Neo-Classicism and of the Ingres portraits.

The paintings of Janmot have much in common with Pre-Raphaelite paintings in subject, colours, design, and emphasis on flowers and nature. Yet Janmot had no contact with that group and the first better-known Pre-Raphaelite paintings date from about five to ten years later. Janmot blended the same ingredients as the Pre-Raphaelites did. A touch of romanticism, melancholy, love of nature, the grace of flowers amply used. He applied a design of well delineated contours, simple and dry colours, and a realism in presentation that remind of Italian fresco painting. Janmot reached a new purity in style to present other scenes than classic ones. Purity of feelings inspired by religion, search for higher life were the ingredients also used by Janmot, just as by the Pre-Raphaelites. All were looking for a new spirituality, new ideals and since no such ideals could be found in their present world, the search could only be in the imagination, in mystical unions, in the soul.

Janmot has made an extraordinary accomplishment that has remained unique in Western European painting. He dedicated all his life to a series of thirty-four paintings called 'The poem of the soul'. Eighteen of these paintings, which date from 1836 to 1855, are painted in colour. The seventeen drawings, which he made after 1855, are in black and white. The paintings are accompanied by a long poem on the same subject. Paintings and poem document and explain each other.

The poem is about the birth and life of a boy, a new soul on earth^{F6}. God and the angels decide on life (Génération divine), a guardian angel brings life to earth (Le passage des âmes) and the boy finds a loving mother (L'ange et la mère). The boy is joined by a companion girl (Le printemps). They play together in an ideal and untouched paradise. Both their souls retain images of their previous life in the heavens (Souvenir du ciel). The children remain together from childhood to adolescence. They leave their family (Le toit paternel), face the dangers of a secularised university (Le mauvais sentier), the wrong path for them, which will lose their souls (Le cauchemar). But they encounter a wise man who teaches them religious education (Le grain de blé) and shows them the path of Catholic faith (Première communion). The children grow up to adolescents (Virginitas) and start to love each other with a pure platonic love (L'échelle d'or). Time goes by (Rayons de soleil). They climb the hills of life (Sur la montagne), live a simple life in the midst of nature (Un soir). Their souls join (Le vol de l'âme) and fly to the heavens (L'idéal). But the boy cannot follow and is thrown back to earth where he mourns on the tomb of his beloved (Réalité).

The black and white drawings take over from that point. The boy still lingers in the solitude of a forest (Solitude), yet he finds new energy at the beaches, a new touch of infinity to his soul (L'infini). He dreams and receives the revelation of carnal beauty (Rêve de feu). The lovers are joined (Amour), but in a true sensual, earthly love now. Only for a short time: the dream ends (Adieu), the lady has to leave again. In solitude, the young man falls in despair and doubt (Le doute). This is a moment the devil has awaited (L'esprit du mal). He tempts the boy to an orgy (L'orgie), so the youth loses his soul and his God (Sans Dieu). The black hooded phantom now accompanies the man (Le fantôme), his fall continues to a total ending (Chute fatale). In a macabre scene, the man is bound to the corpse of his beloved (Supplice de Mézence), tearing it with him across mountains, and all the generations of Evil are visited by him (La génération du mal). His soul however longs again for purity. He prays and his mother intercedes on his behalf to God (Intercession maternelle). Finally, faith triumphs over evil (La délivrance) and the soul is elevated to the Heavens (Sursum corda).

Janmot has been thoroughly inspired for his poem and series of pictures by Catholic faith. He was one of the representatives of a struggling generation. Since the end of the eighteenth century France and Europe had entered a struggle for the education of the young. For Janmot this was a struggle for the soul of man.

The French Revolution of 1789 had secularised French society. The clergy had originally sided with the masses. Representatives of the second state, the Clergy, had even joined at first the third state, the Commons, in the National Convention. The Bishop of Autun, Talleyrand and the Abbé Sieyès were convinced revolutionaries. They played important roles in the different stages of the revolution. But religion was soon to be repudiated by the revolutionaries. The possessions of the Church were increasingly confiscated.

Unscrupulous merchants bought the convents, abbeys, cloisters and churches to turn them into staple houses or to use them as quarries for other buildings. The Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon, for instance, was once a cloister for nuns: the Saint-Pierre convent. The nuns had to leave at the French Revolution and the convent was to become the Palais Saint-Pierre, one of the National Museums of France. The churches and monasteries were pillaged for their works of art, not only in France but also in all the occupied territories, including the Vatican. The works of art were sent to the French National Museums, both in Paris and in the country, such as the Lyon Museum. One of the Catholic monuments that were sold during the Revolution, bought by merchants and turned into quarries was the Saint Donatian cathedral of Bruges. The same fate fell to the cathedral of Liège. These splendours of medieval art did not survive the Revolution.

Soon, Priests had to swear allegiance to the Revolution and to the French State. Many priests refused, especially in the countryside. People in Brittany and Flanders supported their priests and revolted. The monarchists generally defended Catholic faith. The Vendée uprising by the Chouans was definitely both aristocratic and Christian inspired. At the same time, philosophers and writers defended their Christianity.

The nineteenth century was really the century of the battles of ideas. Monarchists versus republicans, religious versus anti-clerical tendencies, liberal bourgeois classes versus socialist and upcoming communist ideas, conservative versus the new scientific thought. These conflicts which started in the eighteenth century in the France of the Enlightenment but which then remained intellectual exercises until the French Revolution of 1789, tore Europe at all intellectual seams. Some form of equilibrium was found in the beginning of the twentieth century, and then only after World War I.

The philosophical currents that affected Janmot most were republican and secular versus monarchist and Catholic. Many of these struggles were centred on education. In 1824, the Dean of the Universities of France, Freyssinet, decided to give responsibility for primary education to the Catholic clergy. In 1833 another Minister of Education revoked this again. In 1834, the Abbé Félicité de Lamennais published his 'Paroles d'un croyant' in which he supported the democratic movements versus the political and religious authorities. Emperor Louis-Napoleon alternated between resolutions in favour of the Church and against it, according to prevailing tendencies, once supporting the Pope and then forcing upon him measures to reform his Papal States.

In 1877 the French president Mac Mahon was opposed to the government of Jules Simon. Mac Mahon supported the French Catholics and the Pope. But a Member of Parliament, Gambetta, launched a ferocious campaign against the president, crying the now famous words, 'Le Catholicisme, voilà l'ennemi' or 'Catholicism, there is the real enemy'. This led to a crisis in French government and the Republicans as opposed to the Christian Conservatives won the new elections. Later, in 1879 under president Jules Grévy and his government France engaged in deliberate politics secularised the French State again. Projects of law were proposed to stop the educational religious orders. The law was voted in 1880. It forbade religious congregations, among which the Jesuits, to continue to teach and forbade the clergy to hold functions in university education. The French Republicans wanted a French State free of the influence of the Catholic orders and thus of Rome. They felt that the State was all-important and that society had to be directed by the Assemblée instead of by religion. Most of the Republicans refused to call their actions directed against Catholicism, for their rules applied equally to Protestant and Jewish associations.

Janmot had foresight of these developments. His painting 'Le mauvais sentier', the wrong path, is a hallucinating representation of Janmot's feeling about secular education in France. At each step of the children along their road of knowledge, science and literature professors grow out of the wall and lead, tempt them further into what Janmot considered to be the wrong, entirely secularised path. This kind of education corrupted the soul.

In 1880, the Republican former Minister of Education, Jules Ferry, who had become Président du Conseil, published various further laws against the unauthorised congregations, such as the Jesuits, dissolving them effectively. Jules Ferry wanted these laws to become more popular so he decreed that primary education would be entirely secular but also entirely free of charges. Jules Ferry left government in 1882 for the even more anti-clerical Gambetta. French education was secularised; the

Catholics had lost the official battle for the soul. French society was definitely to be de-christianised.

But as late as 1900 the struggle was not finished. In France, a new law on associations was then once more directed against Catholic congregations. The Minister of Cults, Waldeck-Rousseau sent a letter to the bishops of France reminding them of the interdiction for monks to preach. And in 1901 the Assemblée adopted a law inspired by the now President of the Council, Waldeck-Rousseau, to forbid congregations to form without permission of the State and the Préfets of France had to control the revenues of the orders annually. The Catholic congregations resisted and new severe anti-clerical politics started that would lead ultimately to the final separation of Church and State. It was during these times that the monks of the abbey of Solesmes for instance, who were dedicated to the study of Gregorian music, had to leave their monastery in France and immigrated to England. Eventually, of course, they would return. You can still hear in Solesmes today the most elevated, dignified Gregorian religious music as a proof of the indestructibility of religious feelings in Europe.

In 1902 and in 1904 France again adopted anti-clerical laws, now by Emile Combes who had succeeded to Waldeck-Rousseau. Combes had to resign when the Minister of War Louis André was forced to admit that in order to guard the right morale of the army the Republican convictions of officers had been inscribed on cards, and that Catholic officers were blocked from promotion. Louis André had written this in private letters to the Freemasons, which became published. But anti-clericalism continued in France. As late as in 1905, under the government of Aristide Briant, further laws were voted that guaranteed freedom of conscience. But no cult would be supported nor given salaries to. All the possessions of the Church would be given to cultural associations. This law was the highest point of secular influence in France.

These struggles between Republican and Catholic convictions happened not only in France, but also in other countries.

In Belgium, liberal and Catholic governments alternately came to power, Catholic and anti-Catholic street revolts succeeded each other. In 1854 the parliament signed the Convention of Antwerp restoring the influence of the clergy on education of children from 12 to 18. But later, in 1879, the Belgian then liberal government adopted a contrary law to organise primary school secular education by the State, whereupon the Church responded by organising its own schools funded by the parents. This was the foundation for a dual system of education in Belgium that has survived until this day.

Comparable adverse tendencies can be found in the history of Italy, where the Pope would lose his Papal States to the newly found young state of Italy that grew out of northern Piedmont. The Piedmont armies beat the Pope's army led by General Lamoricière in 1860. In 1864, the Pope published the bull 'Quanta Cura' in which liberal and socialist philosophies as well as the religious neutrality of nations were refuted. Italian royal armies finally entered Rome in 1870. The Pope excommunicated King Victor-Emmanuel. But the Popes were henceforth confined to the Vatican.

In Germany, the Iron Chancellor Bismarck met hostility from the Catholic Centre Party to his politics of liberalism. In 1872 Bismarck forced a law to be adopted by the Reichstag that withdrew from the Church all power in education and in cultural

matters. All schools were put under the control of the State. That same year Bismarck obtained the interdiction of the Jesuit order. With these laws the Chancellor inaugurated a cultural battle that has since been called the 'Kulturkampf'. But the Catholic Centre Party was fortified even by these reforms and won the elections of 1874. Fifteen Alsatian members of the Reichstag openly protested against the anti-clerical school laws. Chancellor Bismarck at that dramatic moment in Bad Kissingen, where he spent a holiday, was the victim of an attempt on his life by a young Catholic who was hostile to the campaigns of the Kulturkampf. The laws were not withdrawn. In 1875 Pope Pius IX joined Germany's political conflict. In his Papal bull 'Quod Numquam' he condemned the German laws of 1874. Bismarck reacted by having the Reichstag vote a new law directed once more against the German religious orders and congregations, confiscating their possessions and he demoted from his Episcopal functions the Count-Bishop of Breslau, Heinrich Förster. Only in 1878 the new Pope Leon XIII proposed to the German Chancellor to negotiate the end of the Kulturkampf. A new adversary had stood up to Bismarck by this time, the Social Democrats and Bismarck needed the Conservatives. In 1880, the German Chancellor had the Reichstag vote the first laws softening the earlier edicts, thus ending the Kulturkampf.

In Switzerland, closer to the Lyon of Janmot than Paris, and during his lifetime, a civil war even ensued when the liberal government voted laws against Christian influence. This started in 1834 when a law was voted in Basel to permit secular control over religious affairs. Five years later, with its pastor Bernhard Zitsel, Zürich rose against the liberal government of the canton. In 1843 the Swiss parliament closed the monasteries of Argovia. This provoked a Christian reaction. The Catholic cantons formed a separate federation and called for the help of friendly Catholic nations. France, Austria and Prussia intermediated, but could not avoid armed skirmishes between the two parts. The Catholic town of Luzern was attacked by the liberals, but could hold. The cantons closest to France such as Fribourg, Valais, but also Schwyz, Uri and Unterwalden formed the 'Sonderbund' or 'Special Union' with Luzern to protect themselves together. Geneva however was more liberal and democratic. It would take until 1848 for Switzerland to find harmony again in a new Constitution and the dissolution of the Sonderbund. But a new uprising failed in 1853 in Fribourg. In the histories of Austria, Prussia, Poland, England, Ireland and Scotland similar struggles can be found.

Janmot was a witness to this and as a convinced Catholic, dedicated to more religious values than mere human morals, he entered the struggle as the artist he was, with his 'Poem of the Soul' and his paintings. He was also a friend of Pierre-Simon Ballanche, who like himself was from Lyon, born there in 1776. Ballanche tried to reconcile Christian faith with the progressive democratic ideas of the French revolutions. He was a mysticist, writer, poet also and philosopher. Ballanche was a friend of François-René de Chateaubriand, another proponent of Christianity in Romanticism, and frequented the Parisian salon of Madame Récamier – who was also born in Lyon.

The Romantic Chateaubriand converted to Christianity and wrote already in 1802 his 'Génie du Christianisme'. Chateaubriand feared the coming destruction of nature and thus was one of the first Romantics. The return to nature is a returning theme also in Janmot's 'Poem of the Soul'. Janmot uses Classicist techniques for presenting profoundly Romantic and religious ideas. He applied themes from antiquity however

as symbols of the republic and past revolutions: the 'Orgy' is in a Greek temple and 'Chute fatale' or 'Fatal Fall' uses forms that could come out of an Ingres or a David painting. Janmot deliberately wanted to break with Neo-Classical French style and clearly favoured the purity of untouched nature.

The paintings of Janmot are magnificent, large and important works of art that illustrate one of the great tendencies of the battle of ideas that were the essence of the nineteenth century. The Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon shows them in all their glory next to each other. The paintings are to be admired as the dedication of a great artist to his ideas. Janmot of course was a great Romantic artist. He devoted his life and his creativity to one idea only, a eulogy in the defence of the soul. Here was an artist not gifted with the power of a genius, devoting all his creative energy to an idea that most people of his times and almost all of ours would mock. We may find Janmot very naive and we may regret his futile effort. Yet, his series on the soul represents the cravings of many persons of Western Europe of the nineteenth century. Many Romantics sought the ideals of medieval and Renaissance Christianity and even though Europe was de-christened in the end, the values and messages of Christianity did not die out. In this way many images of the English Pre-Raphaelites also re-connected with Christianity as did the art of the German and Austrian Nazarenes movement. Artist like Louis Janmot helped and vowed stubbornly to religion. These convictions must be respected, even if we do not share them anymore. Moreover, Janmot made interesting and good paintings.

Janmot dedicated his life to one idea, an obsession to create a great breath of Christian thought and art. The soul was the noblest possession of mankind and for Janmot it was inspired by God in man. The soul was linked to Jesus and had to be preserved. Did Janmot think to create the ultimate artistic work that would convince the world of his ideas? We will never know, but we have to recognise the work of a genius, tormented by the struggle for ideas in his times, the struggle for the soul, but unwavering in his conviction of the prevalence and higher value of Christian spirituality.

Other paintings:

The Holy Soul

Guido Reni (1575-1642). Pinacoteca Capitolina, Palazzo dei Conservatori. Rome. 1640-1642.

Procession

Nicolas de Staël (1914-1955). Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. Dijon. 1950.

Procession

Religious Procession in the Region of Kursk

Ilya Repin (1844-1930). The Tretyakov Museum. Moscow. 1880-1883.

Ilya Yefimovich Repin was born in 1844 near Kharkov in a region of Imperial Russia that is now in the Ukraine. His father was a Russian military, but Ilya was destined to become a painter. His father recognised his talent and sent him to a local painter from whom the boy learned to paint early on. In 1866 Ilya Repin travelled to Saint Petersburg. He was admitted to the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. He won a first prize at the Academy with a religious painting. He learned the style elements of the art of painting in the best Classicist ways from the professors at the Academy.

In the period of from 1873 to 1876, Repin visited Paris and Rome on an allowance granted by the Academy. At his return in 1876 he lived for several years in Moscow and he met the artists that had gathered at Abramtsevo in the houses of the Russian maecenas Savva Mamontov. This buoyant group of artists discussed about art and the meaning of art. Innovation and evolution in the arts bursted out of Abramtsevo. In 1878 Repin joined a group of artists who wanted to reform Russian painting and who strove to change the archaic views of the Saint Petersburg Academy. This 'Association of Peredvizhniki Artists' pursued a more realistic and indigenous style. The group also aimed to address wider layers of Russian society than the Saint Petersburg establishment and its Academy, which had been instituted to provide works of art for the Petersburg nobility mainly. Repin painted many portraits of Russian notables however. The movement he adhered to, the 'Wanderers' or 'Itinerants' was not so much considered as a political and socialist contestant group that had to be suppressed. It was justly regarded as a group that merely wanted to innovate art, but not necessarily society, and that was thus relatively innocent. Repin in the end even became a professor at the same Academy he had wanted to reform. From 1892 on he was a professor at the Academy. From 1882 he thus lived in Saint Petersburg. He nevertheless made paintings that were socialist in inspiration, pictures of the people living in the countryside of the Ukraine and of Russia.

Ilya Repin made his painting of the 'Religious Procession in the Province of Kursk' over a number of years, from 1880 to 1883. The painting dates from the time when Repin was still relatively young but already at the height of his art. Repin had many friends in the world of the Russian arts and sciences. Among these were Leon Tolstoy, Dimitri Mendeleev and the composer Modest Mussorgsky. He was well accepted by the whole of Russian society, also by the nobility and the wealthy industrialists and rich merchants. Despite his socialist inclinations he was commissioned to paint a large canvas of a session of the State Council of the Russian Government. Repin had seen the Impressionist style of painting in France, during his stay in Paris. Though he would later give due attention to the play of light in his paintings, and although he always used a very bright palette, he remained a realist in his depiction of Russian life. He painted portraits and scenes of historical themes, many of which were also socialist inspired. His paintings show profound sympathy with the life of the poorer people outside the large cities such as Saint Petersburg. His

work must have contributed to draw the wider attention in Saint Petersburg on the masses of the Russian poor.

Ilya Repin continued to travel to Western Europe until he met in 1900 Natalia Nordman. He went to live with her on a domain she possessed on the Gulf of Finland, not so far from Saint Petersburg, called Penaty, at Kuokkala. These lands passed to Finland after the October Revolution of 1917 but Repin refused to return to Russia. He did not like the Bolsheviks too much. He only set foot again on Russian territory in 1926. He died in 1930 at Kuokkala of Finland. The house called Penaty still exists; is a museum today, dedicated to Repin's works. Repin is considered one of Russia's main artists of the nineteenth century.

The painting we use as an example of a painting on the theme of the religious procession is named 'Krestny Khod in Kursk Gubernia'. 'Gubernia' means province and 'Krestny Khod' of course religious procession. Repin stayed in the country for a long time to sketch scenes, before he started on his painting. So, what he painted existed really. He had seen such processions and he must have been deeply impressed with this typical expression of Russian devotion of the masses. With his 'Procession' he showed what the different classes of the Russian society of the countryside were composed of. Repin did not have much sympathy with the clergy or with the underlying control of that society by the Tsarist regime. He did not openly contest the Tsarist government, but it is obvious that the thought that reforms were necessary, reforms that had to come from within the circles of the elite to which he in fact entirely belonged to.

The Kursk region is in Russia, near the Ukraine. It lies to the south-west of Moscow and the territory is rather hilly, as is shown in the painting. There are many streams and rivers in this land, but the rivers can hardly be used as waterways, so that the territory remained agricultural mainly in Repin's times. Kursk province is a region of large villages and small towns, of which Kursk was the main city. It is ancient land. Kursk existed in the eleventh century. The city was destroyed by the Mongols in the thirteenth and possessed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century a strong citadel so that it was a centre of resistance to anything that was not Russian. The Kursk region was the heart of Russia. One of the greatest tank battles of World War II took place between the German and Russian armies in 1943 in this region.

With a procession, a community pledges its allegiance to religion. The relics of saints, usually of the saints of the churches of the villages, the saints that are supposed to protect the community, are brought solemnly through the main streets of the villages and through the fields. The saints bless the countryside and this blessing had to guarantee fine crops, good weather to support the growth of the cereals and health to the livestock. The relics were carried through the fields to show that the saints knew the country. Their omni-presence was thereby consolidated in the land. The priests preceded the procession to inspire belief in the people. The processions were an expression of the public worship for God and the saints. They proved that the lands belonged to Christendom, to Jesus Christ. This belief held the community together. And this belief therefore had to be confirmed and supported by the local notables since it also consolidated order and traditional rule.

We should imagine – and can do so from Repin's work – a large crowd of people advancing slowly through the Russian countryside, through the small villages and the low, dusty hills. This crowd was the whole village and people might have come from several other villages too. The people advanced on earth roads, accompanied by hymns and the incantations of the priests. Incense burners would perfume the procession and all the associations would proudly carry banners to honour the saints. Christian processions continued of course ancient traditions of pagan processions, many of which were directed to the protectors of crops, be it the brute forces of nature or old, pagan gods of growth and harvest. There was always a strong element of ceremony in processions, so that processions were not only led by priests but also accompanied by the local notables. Representatives of the richer layers of society were still integrated part of the larger society, so they had their place in the processions. Such is also the case for the Russian procession in the province of Kursk, as painted by Ilya Repin.

The priests, all dressed in dirty, long, black robes, wear the relics of the saints. The relics are inside tower-like structures in wood, decorated by the zealots with flowers and ribbons. On each side of the reliquaries are placed white, wooden triangles, in which one found the eye of God that saw everything that happened in the world and that pierced the souls. The elder priests walk first. They have long, black beards. They wear poor sandals and their feet and legs are bound with white or grey cloth. Their beard and hair are unkempt. They are poor. The younger priests hold the bier poles, behind. One such youth, dressed in a shorter and brown cloak instead of a black one, probably still a novice, looks with awe at the flowered reliquary with its golden cupola. Behind him, two women bear other relics, pieces of bones of a saint in a smaller box. Further on, other priests swing incense burners and the perfumes envelop the procession. More icons are shown, hilly images of the saints and the Holy Family. In the distance we see the banners of the church associations and more relics are worn. The procession is large. It is an important procession, which takes place at Easter and thus celebrates the Resurrection of Christ, the event of the founding of Christian faith. Many popes, Orthodox priests, walk among the crowd.

The procession is accompanied by the imperial police. The police officer rides on a horse on the left side of the painting and we see how also his men are all mounted, and ride in long rows to the left and right of the people. The men are attentive, haughty, and one of the policemen hacks in on a man with his long riding whip. Repin shows the agents that have to keep the order in the procession not just as help and protection, but as a menace. It is as if the authorities have forced the people to march in the procession and drive them forward. The police seem to be present as much to enforce that command than to keep the order. They ensure that all the people participate. They force the crowd to advance. Priests also seem to order the people to march on. To the left for instance, Repin shows a priest pushing on handicapped children. The children walk with sticks and they obviously do not advance quickly enough, so a priest urges them on. Here, Repin showed overt poverty and misery of the people. Yet, he remained rather discreet in his messages. He could have represented more horrible examples of poverty and oppression still; he refrained from doing that. He remained the refined Saint Petersburgian artist, the future professor of the Imperial Academy. He showed poverty in a discreet way in his painting. There are also rich children in the painting. These walk not aside the procession, but right after the relics. We see such well-clad children aside the women dressed in bright colours,

the women that hold a box of relics. These women wear fine clothes and aprons, nice head shawls. Their children wear books. Only these children receive education. Repin showed the misery of poverty close to just a little wealth – for even the wealthy in the countryside were not that rich, and certainly not as rich as the inhabitants of the capital of Saint Petersburg. Repin depicted the oppression of the villagers by the military and the zeal of the local priests, which he represented as neglected old men. Ilya Repin thus proposed to the viewer a long, massive, dark band of people that advances slowly through the brightly lit dusty country. It is dry in these vast fields of central Russia, and the vastness of the crowd throws up dust that blurs the view in the rear. We see no end to the people.

Repin used the diagonals of the frame for his structure, but he lowered the lines of the diagonals so that he could present the scene as seen from a height, from above, from a hill. The line of the right diagonal, the line that goes from the lower right to the upper left, is the line of the people in the procession. Along this line, Repin placed the men and women and children, mostly clad in black, so that a wide, sombre ribbon is the crowd that flows forward in the painting. The other diagonal's line starts on the left, but much higher than the lower left corner, yet it moves to the upper right corner. This is the top line of the crest of a hill, a hill of which the trees and bushes have been cut down so that no green colours would alter the two main hues of the scene; the black of the people and the yellow-ochre of the sun-bleached, dusty earth of the Russian plains. The line of the hill terminates at the gilded cupola of the reliquary, thus also emphasising its structure and symbol of the procession. Repin guides the view back to the reliquary.

Repin's colours are the colours of Russia; ochre for the land, black of the people, but these colours for a harmony of contrast that must be admired in his art. There are yellow-golden robes on the priests, orange head-shawls, light-brown gowns, gold in the banners and on the reliquaries. The black colours also indicate the mood of the people. Nobody laughs and heads are bent to the ground. Black is also the colour of power, so we find those hues on the priests and on the military, and much also on the men's clothes.

Ilya Repin accomplished a very fine work to present to the viewer a realistic impression of an old Russian procession in the Russian society with its various levels and beliefs. It must have been an enormous work of composition to draw so many figures, so many faces, poises and expressions, so as to represent the mood and differences of the figures. Repin must have made hundreds of sketches and studied as many persons in the country. He not only represented the concrete, physical aspect of the people, but also the tensions among the mass of people, from the naïve devotion of the priests and of some of the women to the subjugation of the crowd by the police forces. It is not for nothing that Repin painted the policemen on horseback, so that their black, vertical lines prominently rise out of the crowd's horizontal, dark band. Repin used this style element of the vertical lines to indicate oppression, to stiffen the atmosphere and draw the attention of the police.

It is singularly striking how poverty-aware painters from diverse European countries, as Ilya Repin from Russia and Charles Degroux in Belgium to Gustave Courbet in France used religious processions to express issues in their society. See for instance also Charles Degroux' painting of the 'Pilgrimage at Anderlecht' and Courbet's

‘Burial at Ornans’. These pictures represent actual events, but by the choice of the subject and by subtle hints at the tensions these artists delivered clear messages to whom were receptive to them and wanted to read them. Their paintings were to large extent accusations, complaints of the poverty of the people, of exploitation and subjugation. We know what followed in Russia: communism came with the Bolsheviks. Ilya Repin seems not to have had much more sympathy for Lenin than he had for the clergy of former Russia. When Lenin asked him to return to Russia from Penaty in Finland, Repin refused. He must have believed that there were softer and more appropriate ways to alter Russian society than Lenin’s methods.

Paintings such as the ‘Procession in the Province of Kursk’ are masterpieces of Russian art and they must be cherished as images of Russia’s past that would never have existed without artists like Repin. Russia was much a closed country for art critics and for people that wrote on art during the periods of the Cold War after World War II. Russian paintings and also Polish, Czech, Hungarian and other art of Eastern-European countries were much ignored and of course very hard to access by the rest of the world. In most Western-European or North-American books on art, reproductions and discussion of these art forms lacked. It is only truly since the beginning of the twenty-first century that art writers could discover, absorb and then write on the works of these marvellous artists to full extent. Nevertheless, this art and these paintings are of the same quality as the art of their counter-parts of Western Europe and Northern America. The works of Repin and of many other Russian artists (and Hungarian, Czech, Polish and so on), are worthy of admiration as works of genius, and worthy and of publications to the same degree as western works.

Other paintings:

The Procession of Death

Gustav Adolph Spangenberg (1828-1891). Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. 1876.

Religious Procession

Illarion Priannichnikov (1840-1894). The Russian Museum. St Petersburg. 1893. Ca. 1625-1630.

The Guardian Angel

The Guardian Angel

Carlo Bononi (1569-1632). Pinacoteca Nazionale. Ferrara. Ca. 1625-1630.

There are many instances in the Bible in which angels are mentioned. They then appear in the earliest texts as emanations of God, parts of God that appear on earth and act. The angels are God. In later texts the angels are more described as entities that are independent of God, entities that are sent on earth by God, do God's will and represent God. The angels are then messengers of God, but spiritual creatures that seem to be able to act independently with free will. The Bible names two kinds of angels, called Seraphim and Cherubim. These are often depicted as red and blue angels. The belief in angels and guardian angels is common, but their existence remains unproven.

Guardian angels are spirits that protect a particular person in his or her spiritual life. The existence of guardian angels has not really been defined by Roman Catholicism, but belief in their existence is widespread. The belief in guardian angels is very close to the belief in a personal God, in a God that accompanies every person and that knows what he or she does at every moment, and that is therefore aware of every act of a person and can protect a person from spiritual deprivation. Belief in guardian angels as a personal agent of intercession with God is of course very attractive and a very consoling and powerful concept for lonely people. The guardian angel protects a person from temptation and evil and it is this idea that Carlo Bononi painted in the seventeenth century. The theme is relatively rare in religious painting.

Guardian angles are often associated with children or young people. Children are most in need of guidance, also of spiritual guidance, so that the task of the guardian angel is supposed to be to lead the children to the path of faith and of the right faith. There are various mentions of personal agents in the Bible too, the most obvious being the angel that leads Tobias on his journey in the Book of Tobit. The guardian angels would also lead the dead to heaven and it may also well be such an image that Carlo Bononi had in mind when he painted one of his masterpieces.

Little is known of the life and deeds of the Ferrarese painter Carlo Bononi, born in 1569 and who died around 1632. Ferrara was a town of Northern Italy, ruled from the middle of the fourteenth century until the end of the sixteenth century by members of the famous d'Este family. It had always been a buffer state between Venetian and Papal territories, but the Dukes of Ferrara had been able to guarantee their independence. The Duchy of Ferrara was incorporated in the Papal States after 1600 and lost much of its lustre afterwards, but for more than a century and a half the d'Este rulers governed reasonably well, exerted charitable rule, guarded, expanded and embellished their city. Ferrara's court attracted artists during this period and painters as important as Andrea Mantegna, Garofalo, Dosso Dossi, Ercole de Roberti, Cosimo Tura and many others, among which in Bononi's own years also Scarsellino and Guercino brought their art to Ferrara. These are all grand names, and more could be cited, so that from the Renaissance to the Baroque eras Ferrarese art was as interesting and resplendent as the art of Milan, Florence and Rome.

After 1600, Ferrara was deprived of much of its art works. Its sculptures and paintings were transferred to Rome by the cardinals that governed the city. The last Duke of Ferrara, Cesare d'Este, moved his modest court to Modena and ruled there over a much smaller territory than before. Pope Clement XVIII Aldobrandini sent his nephew, Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, to take possession of the Este treasures. The negotiations over the surrender of Ferrara were not held with Cesare d'Este but with Lucrezia d'Este, Duchess of Urbino. It was an error of Cesare to allow Lucrezia to speak for Ferrara, for Lucrezia's lover, Count Ercole Contrari, had been assassinated on the order of Cesare's father, Alfonso do Montecchio. Cesare may have forgotten that act, but not Lucrezia. Cesare d'Este was the son of another branch of the d'Este than Lucrezia. Alfonso d'Este, the previous Duke of Ferrara and brother of Lucrezia, had died without children. The passage of Ferrara from d'Este rule to the Papal States was signed in 1598 in what has been known to history as the Capitulation of Faenza^{B25}. The army of the Pope occupied the city in the beginning of 1599. The finest paintings of the d'Este court were transported to the Aldobrandini Villa at Frascati. The minor works were sent to Cesare, to Modena. Ferrara's art was dispersed and never recovered its former splendour.

Carlo Bononi saw the beginning of this change, and he saw the transition from d'Este rule to Papal rule. When Guercino understood from where most commissions would come and moved to Rome, Bononi was the foremost painter of a city that was merely one of many provincial towns in a state that centred power and art in Rome.

Carlo Bononi's 'Guardian Angel' was made on a commission of the Ferrarese noble Sigismondo Carpi to serve as an altarpiece for the church of Saint Andrew of Ferrara^{B25}. The picture may have been painted in 1620, when Bononi was just over fifty years of age and in a period when papal government must have been absorbed and well established.

The picture is of the Baroque style, but of the Classicist trend in that art. Classicism was all about order and clarity of representation, Baroque all about exuberance and emotions. There are few personages in Bononi's picture, as was common in Classicism. We see an angel, a young man and a devil. The main figure is the guardian angel, which shows to the youth the glory of the angels in heaven. The youth kneels beneath the guardian angel. A devil grasps the shoulders of the youth to draw him away from bliss to hell, but Bononi shows the youth in such a solid poise that the viewer notes immediately that the devil will not so easily push the youth down. The devil therefore merely touches the youth and does not seem to exert much power.

Bononi painted the angel and the youth in poises that prove their feelings, but the artist did not bring the figures to very dramatic or tragic expression in gestures. The figures are painted in a quite static poise. The angel stands, looking at the youth, touching the youth's front with his left hand, and he points with his right arm to the heavens. In those heavens we see a bright, golden light and the faces of many little angels. The guardian angel smiles reassuringly. Only his splendid wings could add drama to the scene, but Bononi did not paint them in exalting hues that contrast with the mood of the picture; he used the same hues almost as the in the rest of the picture. The youth is on his knees, looks in beatitude at the heaven, but otherwise shows no particular exuberant feeling. He holds his hands crossed over his chest in a gesture of

protection. The youth is more turned into himself. The devil crouches behind the youth and grasps the man, but the youth seems oblivious of that touch. After all, the angel touches the youth also, so the devil's grip has no power. Bononi painted the devil not as a terrible dragon or snake, but as an ordinary man. He painted the devil discreetly, only in part within the frame, and only two small goat's horns on the devil's head indicate evil. Bononi could hardly show a powerful, threatening devil in a painting that had to stand on an altar of a Ferrarese main church. So, it would be difficult to paint a devil more discreetly than he did in his 'Guardian Angel'. We can hear the deans of the church pray to Bononi, 'Do not scare our people away'.

The body of the guardian angel dominates the picture. One could imagine an artist of the Carracci family of nearby Bologna, or Guido Reni, to have shown an angel thus. These painters were the greatest masters of Classicist Northern-Italian seventeenth century art. Carlo Bononi was a great master of painting too, however, as testifies the marvellously sculptured nude body of the angel and – to no lesser extent – of the youth. The structure of Bononi's picture is also simple, as demanded by Classicist art.

Bononi used the pyramid as the main structure of his scene. The top of the pyramid is the angel's head. The two sides of the pyramid go down to the two lower corners of the frame. In that opened triangle, Carlo Bononi painted the knelt youth in light colours, on the right. To the left, Bononi merely painted a mass of very dark colours. The structure in colours thus supports the movement of the angel, for the outstretched arm of the guardian angel is situated along the right diagonal. This was the second main element of structure in the painting. Along this right diagonal Bononi not only placed the gleaming body of the angel, but also the body of the youth. The heavenly light shines from above over the angel's chest, along his splendid and nude body, onto the youth and continues then to the lower right corner. If Bononi had placed another figure to the left of the frame, or any other feature of prominence, and painted this in light hues, then that figure or element would have distracted the viewer from the main scene and broken the effect of the wonderful bodies. The structure of the 'Guardian Angel' is thus a proof of the skills in composition by lines and colouring of Carlo Bononi. The diagonals of Baroque always brought movement and elevation in a picture, whereas a pyramid structure guaranteed stability and rest. Bononi combined the two diligently, in the most simple way, providing a powerful image to the viewer combined with spiritual elevation (along the right diagonal), and an imposing view for the altarpiece.

The painting would have stood high on a massive altar of the church of Saint Andrew. It would inspire feelings of humility in any church-goer, since the viewer would recognise himself or even herself in the beautiful youth at the feet of the angel. The youth is almost naked, deprived of any possessions, merely a representation of the soul. The youth sits low, in a very humble position, with his eyes directed to the heavens. Such was also the fate of Ferrara after its capitulation to foreign rule. The people of Ferrara could use some support from the heavens since they had lost support of their banished Duke. Bononi thus reserved a lesson in humility for the pious people of Ferrara, who also must have made the link between the picture and the fate of their city.

Bononi supported the movement of the angel inconspicuously by a few details. A thin, long, high bush stands just to the left of the angel and bows in the air, yielding to

a wind that comes from the right. It bends in the same direction as the angel's outstretched right arm. A little further, to the left side of the frame, a tree trunk bends also to the left, again in the same direction, parallel to the right diagonal, and upwards, to the left. Such visual elements support the main view of the picture.

Bononi placed the landscape of trees and of a farmhouse low, so that the angel looks all the more imposing, larger than the world. The angel seems to ascend from earth. The guardian angel rises up, so that Bononi emphasised also much the purely vertical direction, the direction to the sky, to heaven. Bononi would not have been a great master had he not deviated a little from the too obvious slanting lines. So he made the angel bend a little to the right. The angel is therefore more in a vertical poise. He had to do that of course, for otherwise his structure would not have been stable for too slanting, and it would have seemed as if angel would plunge down to the left. The inclination of the angel's body to the right provides balance in the picture and it is a welcome diversion from the all too powerful right diagonal. There can be no fine artist without delicate intelligence. Such touches prove Carlo Bononi to have been a grand master of painting.

The Ferrarese artist showed that also in the colours he used for his painting. Bononi applied a fine harmony of hues and of tone, for he painted in nice, very subdued brown and orange hues overall. He brought the nude bodies of the angel and of the youth in bright golden light, in hues and tones which are again in fine harmony with the background colours. If he had done that for the entire painting, the work would have been boring. So he painted a patch of contrasting light pink almost in the middle of the frame, in the cloak of the angel. That allowed him to demonstrate his skills at chiaroscuro and at sculpting body volumes through cloth, but also to separate the bright parts of the bodies of the angel and of the youth. The pink area helps to bring balance in the painting, in the structure, and nice variety in the colours. Note a master at work!

Other paintings:

The Guardian Angel. Pietro Berettini called Pietro da Cortona (1597-1669). National Gallery of Art in the Palazzo Barberini. Rome. P135.

The Guardian Angel. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri called Il Guercino (1591-1666).

Prayer

Grace (Benedicite)

Charles Degroux (1825-1870). Musée d'Art Moderne - Brussels. 1860.

The tones are dark and ochre. Dark as the land. Gloomy as poverty. We see misery. These pictures are hard to look at. We prefer the splendours of colour of the Italian Renaissance. We prefer to look at the happiness of a Filippo Lippi picture. Why would a painter show images that do not please our mind? Paintings should be images of beauty, and thus present agreeable scenes: nice young ladies with flowing robes of colourful shades, muscular young men, bucolic landscapes, blue skies with cotton-white clouds. This painting of Charles Degroux is so different from what we feel that beauty should be. Our reaction is not different from the reaction of art critics when this and other pictures of Degroux were first shown. The critics told his paintings came out of the workshop of Gustave Courbet and were scandalous. They did grant some qualities to the paintings such as that they represented reality in a truthful way. But the critics of the times also preferred pictures that were aesthetically more pleasing.

Yet, the picture of Charles Degroux indeed pleases the eye of experts and it intrigues. The colour shades are harmonious in the low tones and there are contrasts of colour in the picture that have meaning. There is a patch of warm green on the left and a patch of nice orange on the right. There are bright flecks as the caps of the ladies or the sleeves of the youths. The father figure is surrounded by a kind of an aura, but even this hue is not shrill but subdued, and doesn't hurt the eye. Degroux used tones and hues as could be seen in old powerful masters like Titian.

There are no oblique lines crossing each other over the canvas that might induce nervousness and unrest in the viewer. There is symmetry in the painting: both to the left and to the right of the father there are five sitting figures. Only the father stands. The lines are horizontal, soothing, and give us an impression of rest and peace. The standing father figure forms the traditional pyramid structure of a triangle that goes from his head to the two lower corners of the frame, so Degroux linked to old structures of composition. There is order here. The horizontal directions are accentuated by the table and the bunk, by the wooden wall in the background, by the lines of the chimney. Even the textile that hangs from the chimney is horizontal. There are no curtains or other decorations indicating another direction. Life is flat; it is robust and close to the earth. It does not change. Immutability is expressed in the stiff horizontal and vertical lines.

All the figures of the painting show the same sorrow and grief, but they are individuals. Each figure tells another story; the painter has rendered each different character. Only two figures are with their backs to us. But they also have a story to tell in the family

The boy on the extreme left looks intelligent by his pose. His elbows rest on the table as if he were not praying but thinking. We can understand that he will become a teacher or an engineer. Next to him, half hidden, is an older brother in red cloak. This

is probably the eldest son; he sits closest to the mother. He looks already as the next owner of the farm, more sure of himself and solid, also taciturn. The mother has a shawl in what might be the most joyful colours of the picture, as if to show that she might have liked to be richer. She has dressed up for dinner. Her face shows that she is not resigned. She shows anger at her fate. Her hands are very formally held together, as if she may have been once of a better-to-do family. Her eyes are closed or directed down in intense spiritual concentration. She needs the prayer that brings hope and consolation. Next to the father, on his right, sits another boy deep in prayers and lost in thoughts. Is he thinking of all the poverty and the hard labour that awaits everybody of the family? He will probably not remain on this farm: one day he will cut himself loose and run away.

The boy may be kept back from leaving by his little sister next to him. She has only recently learned to pray and has not yet found out that she can get away with some slack. She is beautiful, with nice, long, black hair. She looks somewhat as a gypsy, as a black beauty to come. Her elder sister on the far right is already a future mother. She holds the youngest baby in tenderness and protection. Another sister next to her on the left, in front of the father, is pious. She really believes that praying has the power to change fates and lives. She may enter a cloister and become a nun. The dog likes her much; he seems to revere her, as she is probably the nicest to him, so the dog points to her as the certain spiritual future for the family. This is the chosen one. Further on the left is another girl in dark red dress. This one sits upright, confronts the mother and seems to have her strength. Next to her sits another brother in a dark green shirt. This boy is the farm worker. His shirt is the colour of the meadows. He helps his father on the farm and probably feels most for the land.

Degroux made two other pictures of his 'Benedicite'. One, an oil painting too, is in the Museum of Fine Arts of Gent in Belgium and the other, a drawing, is in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. In both these pictures Degroux introduced a person more, a servant-girl that brings food on the table. And the young girl in the orange shirt looks distractedly at her dog. More than in the picture we show here, these other pictures indicate that Degroux very much followed examples of traditional images of the Last Supper. Traditional paintings of this theme also used the horizontal lines of the table and a dog is often to be found also in these images as a symbol of loyalty. But Degroux' painting is extremely different from Paolo Veronese's or Leonardo da Vinci's inspiring images.

When you start looking at the painting, you are drawn from left to right and follow the lines of the figures, none of which really look at you. So you do not feel engaged as a viewer, you do not have to be embarrassed. Until you arrive at the father. And the father stands and looks straight at you. All figures show some form of grief. Most are not resigned. They do not seem to want to accept their fates, their poverty. The father too shows such a feeling of pride and of defiance. He seems to be saying, 'I control this family. We are poor, but these are mine. Compassion is mine only. Do not touch my people. We are poor, but we don't need you. We don't need your pity. We only need justice. We will get along and I can still feed my family.' The large kettle is shown quite clearly as if the father has told the children to sit somewhat aside, for the viewer to remark the pot of food. There is poverty, but there is food so there is some degree of independence. No help is wanted nor needed. This is dignity.

Dignity is what people fight for. Poverty they can stand. They can stand being occupied by foreign armies and even lose liberty to some degree. But they will not stand losing dignity or justice.

The year is 1860. The scene is Belgium in Western Europe. Belgium was a new country; it received its independence only in 1830. Belgium as a state is younger than the United States of America. Industrialism soared. In Europe of the late 1800s, the metallurgic industry in particular grew massively, mainly in the carbon belts of Europe, among which Belgium. This brought new concentrations of people to the existing cities of Wallony (the French-speaking southern part of Belgium), the old towns of Lorraine in France, Saxony, the Rhineland, Poland and Czechia. The cities became black by the coal dust pollution. No bright pictures could be painted.

Western Europe knew economic crises. In 1831 one such crisis bankrupted Charles Degroux' father so that his family of ten children had to move from the French part of Comines, a town on the border of France and Belgium, to Brussels where Charles' father got a job as a clerk. Degroux came from a family of ten children – one child died very young-, ten as in his painting of the Benedicite. Since the beginning of the 1840s, social critics were uttered frequently by economists, militant politicians and journalists such as Louis Blanc and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, against the appalling conditions of the working class. In 1846-1847 the economical situation in Western Europe became catastrophic. It was linked to insufficient agricultural production. Famines broke out, especially in Great Britain and Ireland. Tens of thousands immigrated to North America. Remember the 'Last of England' by Ford Madox Brown, painted in 1852.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels founded the Communist League in London in 1847. Its former name was the 'League of the Just', justice and dignity they claimed indeed. The Communist Manifesto dates from 1848. From 1848 on also, a wave of revolutions rolled over Europe: Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Venice and Milan. The French Republic was proclaimed, the president of France would be chosen by universal voting. In 1851 two workers, William Newton and William Allen, founded in Great Britain the 'Union of Engineers', one of the first workers' unions to claim higher wages in an organised way. In 1853, Prussia installed a new law on children's work: children workers had to be older than ten years and not work more than six hours because they had to be at least three hours at school – this either in public schools or at their working place. The Bessemer converter was invented in 1855; Friedrich Krupp of Essen in Germany applied it eagerly. Industrialism still expanded.

There were constant battles between the armies of the European countries during that time. The Crimea war started in 1854. In 1857 there was a new financial and economic crisis in the United States, Great Britain and France especially. Unemployment grew. New revolutions started. Giuseppe Garibaldi came, though by royal decree, at the head of an Italian army. He fought and defeated the Austrian army. The former French president now declared Emperor Napoleon III also declared war to Austria. Solferino, the very bloody battle at which the idea of the International Red Cross grew and was founded by Henri Dunant later in 1864, was fought in 1859. Karl Marx published 'Das Kapital' in 1867.

In 1848 in Belgium a small army of Belgian and French workers threatened to march against Brussels, but was defeated by the Belgian regular army. In 1849 the workers in the cotton manufactories of Gent went on a strike for two months. In 'Das Kapital' of 1867, Karl Marx called Belgium the paradise of continental liberalism. He noted that in the high furnace factories for every 1000 persons worked 149 women, with 98 boys and 85 girls younger than sixteen. He further told that between 1850 and 1863, Belgium had doubled its exports of carbon and iron^{G16}. Liberal Belgium was a powerhouse where enormous fortunes were made. Belgian centralisation of industry was an example for the world, not only because so much carbon and steel were exported, but also because of its output of machinery, locomotives, and railways. The countryside and the farmers did not participate in the wealth however; workers were exploited and lived in abject poverty.

Charles De Groux was born in 1825; he died in 1870 a mere 45 years old. His father had brought the family to Brussels and Degroux studied at the Brussels academy where one of his teachers was François-Joseph Navez. Charles Degroux did not have a good health. He had a weak hearth and would die suddenly in his workshop, leaving his wife and children without any means so that they had to sell all Degroux' paintings and drawings at an auction^{G73}. His friends, all artists, paid for his tomb. Charles Degroux was very pious and seemed to have found solace in his prayers. He lived off his painting. He was not poor but certainly also not rich. Degroux has not made a great many paintings, but he painted in the new realist way that suited the industrialism and the social struggles he saw around him. He painted religious scenes also, and historical scenes hoping to earn more money. He always showed the poverty in his religious scenes and always poor people were the first subjects of his paintings. He lived through these socially troubled years not without being deeply touched.

Belgium was very Catholic then. In 1854 Parliament adopted the Convention of Antwerp reinstating the influence of the Catholic Church on public schools. Yet, there was also quite some anti-Catholicism. A liberal anti-clerical party won the elections of 1857. In Italy, in 1860, the year in which Degroux painted his 'Grace', Garibaldi entered the Papal States and defeated its army. But Belgium would remain stubbornly Catholic, especially in the country, in Flanders and amongst the farmers.

Degroux shows the peasant family very naturally at the moment that they are saying grace before dinner. The father also has his fingers crossed for prayer. He is resigned and respectful and forces the same on his family. Poverty is indicated by the low colour tones of the painting. There is no decoration on the walls. This class has neither the money to buy pictures and trinkets, nor the education to aspire to beauty, nor the time to look for beauty. The father is the dark force of the picture and probably the austere man who has the responsibility to protect the family and to bring the food regularly on the table. But not all is harmony in this family. There is no joy at table. There is dissent. The mother is another focal point at the table. Degroux showed that in centring on the mother and in constructing a strong triangle of shapes. This triangle is formed by her figure in brighter tones and the boy and girl symmetrically in front of her. Here is a strong triangle that confronts the father. All other figures are closely bound neither to the father figure nor to the mother triangle; they form no block together. Therefore, structural solidity and also solidity of emotions is drawn to the strong triangle of the mother.

Pictorial art of the times since 1850 changed from Neo-Classicism to Realism. Its main proponent was the Frenchman Gustave Courbet who exhibited 'The stone breakers' at the Brussels painting salon of 1851. His paintings caused a stir in art, but when we now look at them in retrospect, they still seem very nice, sweet, still devoted to harmony, to restraining rules of art, and not very revolutionary. Yes, the subjects had evolved from Greek and Roman mythology to everyday life, and from portraying middle-class rich people to picturing common folk and workers. But the paintings still were addressed to middle-class buyers. Just as Degroux' picture they are not really intended to shock, only to show. They remain harmonious in lines and colours, story telling, and within the rules. Still, they were painters who did not deliberately by their subjects, their content, seek higher beauty and ideas. By showing common people the Realist painters drew the intellectualism and individualism of Classicist and even Impressionist painting back to harsh reality. Critics vehemently opposed these views. Real art was not supposed to show the hardness of life.

Some of the real horrors would be shown only much later by Belgian painters like Eugène Laermans, Constantin Meunier and Charles Hermans. The social-realism movement would lose momentum by 1880. Painters needed buyers; they frequented the middle class and were from the middle class themselves. Peasants and high-furnace workers do not usually spawn painters, and when they were, these painters quickly moved to middle-class circles, were provided for by the middle class or the very rich and moved in their circles.

Still, the painting 'Grace' of Charles Degroux is one of the first paintings to show the humiliation, the misery of peasants and workers. As such it is a picture that inspires respect. At the same time it is as good a masterpiece as former Romantic and Neo-Classical pictures. 'Grace' is still rooted in the desire to bring beauty to the eye, emotions to the mind and it is based on very strong pictorial structures that show the skill and intelligence of the artist.

Many decades later, this also would be thrown away by the Expressionists. Degroux' painting heralds that period. The Expressionists would use the same colours and the same robustness as used by Degroux, but harmony would be banned and the pictures would not be agreeable to the eye anymore. But we can still look long at the Degroux painting and have feelings of tenderness for the family, inspired by the warm colours and restful lines.

Degroux showed a picture of praying. Jesus emphasised many times in the New Testament the act of praying. He told to ask to the father and promised that God when asked would give. Jesus addressed the poor. He addressed the unclean, the sick and he cured lepers. Prayer was the only solace and hope of the poor. Only in prayers could one ask for a change in one's state of poverty and hope for being given, hope for better times. Hopes were humble in the 1860's. Hope was limited to ask for meagre daily food, for a job, in which one had to do very hard and dirty work ten hours or more all days of the week, and good health. Prayer was the only moment in life when contact with spirituality was made. This was the moment when the mind, also of the poor, lifted to the heavens and aspired for beauty and serenity. Degroux showed that moment, but of course dissent is in his picture and if the father still is in this single moment of concentration and symbiosis with God, silent accusation is in the scene. The accusation would grow. Degroux' painting is accusation. The bourgeois critics of

his time understood that very well and therefore could not give all true admiration for Degroux' work.

Other paintings:

Prayer. Fritz von Uhde (1848-1911). Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. 1885.

Inner light. Maurice Denis (1870-1943). Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain. Strasbourg. 1918.

*Asceticism and the Joy of Living***Asceticism and the Joy of Living (Abnegation)**

Frank Buchser (1829-1890). Kunstmuseum. Basel. 1865.

Franz Buchser's painting 'Asceticism and the Joy of Living' shows a scene from the countryside of Switzerland. The scene is set on a plateau but the Alps show in the background. It is high summer, the time to reap in the harvest and various people work in the fields, cutting the wheat and charring the dry stalks on wagons drawn by horses. There are no clouds in the sky. It must be in the hot afternoon, but in the early afternoon, for the shadows made by the sun on the people are little. A group of Franciscan monks advance. A couple of horse-riders, man and woman, slowly pass by on the earthen country road. Two girls, who may have worked in the fields, have put flowers in their hair and rest next to the road. One of the girls wears a hat with the summer flowers. She seems interested in a young monk who walks by. She may just be wondering how one can abnegate the joys of living thus, or she may have other interests in the boy. The young monk reads piously from his Bible, but he may only be hiding his eyes in the book from shyness or shame, because the stern abbot is not reading his own Bible at all and looks straight ahead, also at the young monk. The abbot crosses his arms across his breast in an act of determination and defiance. Between the abbot and the young monk stands an elder monk, a wise man with a white beard. This man looks at the abbot and seems to interrogate his leader. Two other monks follow on the right. That is about the description of what the viewer sees. The painter however evokes one or several stories in the viewer, personal interpretations of what is painted. We do not really know what Franz Buchser may have meant, but the story that unfolds may be as follows.

It is a very hot, heavy summer day. A young girl, maybe a peasant's girl, rests besides a road. She is a happy and nice girl and she seems to be interested in a young monk that passes by. This young monk has just been tonsured and he has left public life for a strict religious order dedicated to poverty. The abbot still watches the boy, who is not yet entirely a member of his community and needs to be kept on the road to religious ardour. Under the strong attention of the abbot, the boy cannot recognise the attention of the girl. So he averts his eyes and acts as if he were not interested at all in the girl, but in his Bible alone. The elder monk however, a stout man with a red face and an impressive belly, a sensual man, a man that has kept contact with the real world outside of the monastery and who enjoys living, does not really agree with the abbot. He understands the emotions that must go through the boy's mind. He interrogates the abbot with his eyes and that interrogation is already a silent blame. This man would let the young man return to public life, to the joys of life outside the monastery, to love, to harvests in summer, to easy living and to a happy life with moments of leisure. The young monk might marry, grow rich and go on horse-riding with his bride. But the old monk has also stayed too long in the monastery. He does not speak out, only interrogates. Behind the three monks that form this scene laden with austerity, reproach, regrets and tension, follow the other monks. They follow the father-abbot doggedly, without questions, oblivious of the world. They do not look around, do not ask questions, do not interrogate, and probably have few thoughts of themselves at all, except on following the abbot in silence and see to it that they not

stumble on this country road with small stones. In Franz Buchser's scene these monks also form the balance with the two horse-riders on the left. They seem to be in the scene for the sake of pictorial design, but their presence is also necessary for the sake of the narrative, the literary content of the painting. They may represent the fate of the young monk. Which fate will the monk choose: the joys of living or asceticism?

The girl looks at the young monk with interest. She seems to be attracted to him and there are two attractions at play. The boy is physically attractive and nice. But since he is a monk already, the girl might also be attracted by the adventure of subverting a monk. She may want to transgress the conventions of society and thereby show her freedom from and in society. Good manners forbid girls to be interested in young monks but the girl may want to overcome conventions and affirm her freedom in the act. The girl is bored in the hot summer day and attention from a young monk might well be exciting.

Franz or Frank Buchser made several paintings with heavy undertones, some of sexual content. He was born in Switzerland; studied painting a little in Rome, Paris and Antwerp, but was largely an autodidact in the arts. He travelled a lot, to England, Spain, the Netherlands, but also to far lands such as Africa (1857-1858 and in 1860 and 1880). He was in the United States and Canada between 1866 and 1871 and made paintings from which could be understood his concern about the status of the Negro population there, especially of female slave black girls. He painted such girls in the nude, unaware of their strong sexual appeal. His pictures have the soft realism of his era, stay in the genre depiction and seldom seem to outrightly accuse social situations. He usually painted genre scenes in lively but sweetly harmonising colour areas.

In 'Abnegation' Buchser questioned religious celibacy in monastic life. Celibacy for priests and monks had not really been ordered by Jesus in the texts of the New Testament. Although there was no direct demand or order for celibacy in the Holy Scriptures, that may as well be because celibacy was taken for granted in Jesus's Essene-like movement. Many women however belonged to Jesus's circle and accompanied him on his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus did not avoid women. Nowhere does Jesus seem isolated from women and he did not only address men. He conversed with women freely, even with women he met occasionally and that did not belong to his group of disciples or relatives. He had a long conversation for instance with a Samaritan lady he met at a well. At his Resurrection, the first person to which he showed himself was not an Apostle but to Mary Magdalene. Jesus thus did not ask celibacy from his disciples, and among the group that walked with him were both men and women. Jesus merely commended those who for the sake of the Heavens kept away from the married state, but he merely allowed those who had the force to accept this chaste state to accept it.

In the first centuries of the Catholic Church therefore, priests could marry. Celibacy as the renunciation of marriage for the better observance of chastity was not demanded by the Popes. During the early Middle Ages however this led to abuse and priests and monks lived unmarried with women openly outside marriage. Priests and bishops bought their offices and had mistresses even while they were married. At the Lenten Synod of 1074 Pope Gregory VII, the Pope called Hildebrand, ordered that all clerics who were guilty of incontinence should cease to exercise their sacred ministries. So it was only in the eleventh century that the Popes installed really the

command of celibacy, and it happened in view of the degradation of morals not only among monks and priests but in the whole of society. In Gregory VII times, the Catholic world was in a grave, deplorable condition. Since the edict of Gregory VII, celibacy of priests and monks are the rule in the Catholic Church. Protestant Churches abandoned celibacy rapidly however. Martin Luther married the former nun Katharina von Bora in 1525 and Luther had daughters and sons by her. Protestants argued that it was not 'normal' to lead a non-married life. It was only 'normal' for men to have sexual relations with women; continence and chastity was not normal for healthy men, but who wanted it could nevertheless also choose this way. The institution of marriage protected women and children and in any society such care had to be guarded and institutionalised, inheritance regulated. The institution was marriage, a solemn declaration not just for the fellow-humans but also before God. Marriage was and remains a sacrament in Catholic Church. The definition of 'normal' life varied widely from one century to the other, from one culture to the other. Homosexuality was tolerated easily in certain cultures, violently repressed in other. The Catholic Church and the Popes always looked at chaste monastic life as normal as married life.

Monastic life started when individuals and then small communities sought spirituality in isolation. In the Middle Ages and in Western Europe in particular, these communities grew from the tenth century on to strong and rich monasteries and convents. The abbeys were the agricultural and industrial powerhouses of their times, of which depended the economies and welfare of very many families. When celibacy was installed, the rule was strictly followed because of the Papal decree. Nuns could engage in a new kind of marriage, a marriage to Jesus, and find spiritual elevation and also full solace in this relation. Men had no such consolation to support them once they entered a monastery and gave the vow of chastity. Homosexuality and paedophilia have been among the side effects that racked the communities. Nothing but tradition and the idea that when priests married divorces and extra-marital relations might add to the issues of the clergy, withholds the Catholic Church from allowing priests and monks to be married once more. But almost a thousand years of tradition are hard to withdraw in the process. Monasteries are after all voluntary communities of men desiring to live together in dedication to works of charity and of spiritualism. Alternatives could only be communities of couple of man and woman. Experiments of such communities have existed but have also not been successful. Moreover, couples living in villages and towns investing in religious initiatives are very common so that closer relations in closed surroundings limiting freedom seem not necessary or desirable.

Franz Buchser painted in his picture another issue of celibacy: the constraint. As long as men entered monasticism of their own free will and in full knowledge of their engagement, this life was tolerable and welcomed. But men and women arrived at monastic life through all sorts of reasons and also by coercion. Families, friends, looking at the emphasis on ideals and having unrealistic views of the life in monasteries, could exert much mind-power over youth. In the Middle Ages one was well fed in monasteries and when one was intelligent but poor and not aristocratic, the abbeys were the only hope on power. Buchser also drew attention to that issue in his picture: the abbot exerts some form of power over the young monk, power that the wise old monk puts into question. What is really best for the young monk is impossible to know, but the elder man interrogates the coercion. He interrogates the abbot on the freedom of the actions and will of the young monk. The Catholic Church

also and always emphasised free will, but men are men and some use of will-power over younger, less mature and less strong young minds must have been no exception.

Franz Buchser was a painter of realism. He painted simple scenes with an easy talent but without a great and subtle power of expression. He used the medium of painting to express ideas and make controversial reflections. His art of painting was largely subjugated to the narrative, to the literary content of his pictures. In that sense his paintings are examples of the densest narrative content in pictures. With 'Asceticism and the Joys of Living' he made a painting on the theme of the dangers and issues of celibacy, on the exertion of power over young minds and also some on the attraction of things forbidden. We are at unease with so much narrative in a painting, but Buchser certainly reached his aims effectively in making viewers reflect on the more difficult problems of religious life.

Other Paintings:

The Triumph of Faith

Carlo Innocenzo Carloni (1683-1775).). Pinacoteca di Brera. Milan. Ca. 1766-1773.

Intolerance

The Excommunication of Robert the Pious

Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921). Le Musée d'Orsay - Paris. 1875.

Jean-Paul Laurens' painting dates from the Romantic period in which the depiction of historical scenes thrived. Yet we see no romantic entwining of bodies in 'The Excommunication of Robert the Pious', or chaos of emotions. The composition and general view of this painting is very cool, clear, and linear, apparently devoid of passion. Straight lines prevail in this classic scene that reminds us of Jacques-Louis David's paintings. Yet, this picture dates from 1875, more than fifty years after the great David's death.

The scene of Laurens' picture is impressive and overwhelming in menace and tension. The ceremony of the excommunication is over. The bishops of the Church are leaving through the massive Romanesque door of the mighty castle. King Robert II remains alone on his throne, abandoned by all courtiers. Only Berthe, his love, clings to him. The king's sceptre has fallen on the ground. Robert and Berthe look in horror at the overturned candle, the sign of the end of their spiritual life. They are alone and isolated, imprisoned in the lines that grow in the form a cross over them. The vertical beam of the cross is drawn by the floor pattern, over the vertical lines of the throne. The lines continue to the ceiling in a tapestry of the same straight lines. The horizontal lines of the throne and the side-couches suggest the arms of the cross. The king and the queen are caught in the cross. The throne stands on a slightly heightened dais, and the form of this is also a cross. The grey-blue pattern on the tiles of the floor lead directly to the king and his lover, and seems to assault them. Has Jesus, innocence, again be crucified? Or has a spell of intolerance been cast over the future life of Robert and Berthe, so that they will henceforth only experience disasters and unhappiness in their lives?

Jean-Paul Laurens has used colours and composition that match the theme wonderfully. Berthe is dressed in a white robe, but an orange band ties her waist, indicating a pregnancy. She wears the white of innocence and virginity, yet she clings to the king. Both fear what has happened to them. Destiny weighs on the royal couple. Robert wears the red cloak of his royalty, but this red can also be seen in the cloak of the bishop who leaves the hall. Above the throne hangs a tapestry with Romanesque designs, and above Robert hangs the image of the God Pantocrator, the all-powerful, vengeful God of the universe.

The 'Excommunication of Robert the Pious' is a terrible scene, turned into a remarkable painting claiming powerful ideas.

Jean-Paul Laurens wanted to show the intolerance of the Christian clergy and the evil that the clergy could bring on well-meaning people. He sought tolerance for French society and expressed his idea that tolerance could only be realised in a totally secularised state.

The painter, Jean-Paul Laurens, was born in 1838. He worked in Paris, but came only after 1870 to present heroic historical themes. He died in 1921. Laurens painted for famous halls of the political elite of his country. In the Palace of the Légion d'Honneur of Paris, he painted a large scene of the founding of this order. He was an atheist, a humanist who condemned the religious fanaticism of the Roman-Catholic Church.

In that he was the opposer of artists like Louis Janmot of Lyon, who vowed to spirituality, to the existence of the soul and who saw only in religion a possible saving from debauchery.

Laurens' vision of society was different. For him, only a society focused on humanity and on the individual rights of man could be the basis for the new and future French State. With these ideas he felt in line with how a large part of the French middle class of new wealth thought. This society had grown up with the ideas of Voltaire and Diderot and of the French Revolution of 1789. It was dedicated to the times of Illumination in France, and refused the return to Christianity proposed by certain Romantic writers and painters.

A bust of Laurens, made by the sculptor Rodin, is in the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts. One sees a long, somewhat narrow head with receding front, a long beard. Laurens looks like an ascetic, thoughtful man. Rodin showed a man who defended his ideas.

One of Laurens' paintings relates for instance the 'Liberation of Resistant of Carcassonne enmasoned by the Inquisition', a whole program of engaged art. This battle between Christian and atheist convictions waged all through France of the nineteenth century. It has delivered remarkably engaged paintings of both ideologies, such as the 'Excommunication of Robert the Pious' that we present here.

Another painting of Laurens is as macabre. It shows the popes 'Formose and Stephan'. In 896 Pope Stephan VI had the body of his predecessor, Pope Formose, dug up from his grave. The putrefied skeleton was put on the papal throne and Stephan led a simulacrum of a trial over Formose for having occupied the papal function. The picture of Laurens shows the putrefied corpse of Formose on the throne, and the judges of the trial condemning the past pope. Laurens showed clearly these past excesses of Christianity and found of course enthusiasm for his themes in the defenders of secular humanism.

Robert II was the son of Hugh Capet, the first Capet King. Robert succeeded on his father in 997. Gerbert, bishop of Reims, educated him. This bishop had been appointed by the king and by a French synod, clearly against the will of the pope of Rome. The popes therefore considered the royalty of France with unusual mistrust. Robert learned Latin, mathematics, mechanics, politics and Catholic piety. Soon, he became known as Robert the Pious.

Nevertheless, the pope of Rome continued to protest against the nomination of bishop Gerbert. King Robert gave in to wishes of the pope to reinstall Arnulf, and not his friend Gerbert, as bishop of Reims. This gave the Roman popes a power over France they would never lose.

The king was betrothed to Berthe, the widow of Count Odo of Champagne. Not only was he family of Berthe, but also the godfather of one of her sons. So there was a direct spiritual connection between Robert and Berthe.

The Church considered a marriage incestuous. Pope Gregorius V declared the marriage illegal in 998 and excommunicated the king of France. Robert II at first

ignored this, but both he and Berthe saw her next pregnancy turning into a miscarriage as a sign of the wrath of God. Around the year 1000, which was considered as a possible ending of all times, Robert divorced from Berthe to marry Constantia, the daughter of the Count of Aquitaine. Soon however, he lived again his now double marriage with Berthe, and he asked the Pope to be able to remarry Berthe. Robert died in 1025.

Jean-Paul Laurens has taken this romantic theme to defend his secular convictions. Robert was pious, a good king and a learned man. He loved honestly, yet was condemned by Roman popes asserting their power over France's kings and thus over France itself.

This image of Laurens must have been very powerful indeed to atheist and humanist France's politicians, so that one can understand that Laurens was commissioned paintings of historical themes that were signs of intolerance of the Christian Church.

Jean-Paul Laurens' painting belongs to a style called Historical Painting, a movement that was particularly in fashion in the second half of the nineteenth century. The subjects of historical painting were epic, showing important scenes of the national history of the countries of the artists. They were not idyllic, not of nature, of landscapes or seascapes. The scenes call all for grandeur, for energy, for deeds larger than man. They show proud men, conquerors, Emperors, Kings. The men were fighting, sometimes losing a battle, sometimes winning, but always fighting. This was the new virtue of the end of the nineteenth century: fight always, and even in losing, be always proud and always surpass yourself. Then you could achieve anything you wanted, conquer new territories, master new ideas, be independent, and be your own man. This kind of paintings inspired an enormous dash and spirit. The motto was, 'Dare and you'll succeed'.

Such was of course the spirit of the times. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of man really bringing nature's enormous hidden powers to massive use. Coal, oil, fire and water were used in formidable industries. Ores were smelted, poured in forms and beaten to huge beams that were turned into bridges and railroads. The power of steam was harnessed and put to good use. Huge locomotives could be made to run at more than fifty kilometres per hour. People started to fly in the air in machines of wood and iron. The old art of the alchemists, now called chemistry, yielded stupendous transforming results and new compounds like bakelite, the first plastic, were constructed. Adolf von Bayer and Ernest Solvay founded chemical factories and invented new chemical processes. The structure of matter was investigated, the effects of its inner forces applied. Werner von Siemens built the first electric tram in 1879.

The triumphs of industry and science were displayed in world exhibitions. The first one was held in 1851 in London, then followed almost every five years by Paris, London, Paris, Vienna, Philadelphia, Paris, Sydney, Brussels, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Barcelona, Paris, Chicago, and so on. Distances were conquered too, and formed less and less obstacles to ideas, inventions and financing. Industry, money, science became overpowering world phenomena for the first time. It had all been done before, of course, but never on such a scale, at such speeds, with so much power. Man began to apprehend that there were no limits to what he could do with these powers.

Isambard 'Kingdom' Brunel dug canals in England, canals of hundreds of kilometres long, and his bridges spanned over ever wider streams.

Alexandre Eiffel built a slender iron tower of more than 300 meters high for the world exhibition of Paris of 1889. He also worked a lot in Hungary: he built the bridge of Szegedin and the West Railway Station of Budapest, which is a masterpiece of iron and glass.

Authors like Jules Verne dreamed far out of what might be achieved by science: voyages in balloons around the world, to the interior of the earth, men living in the seas. 'Twenty miles under the Seas' dates from 1869.

Heroic times for Titans were to be matched by pictures of monumental dimensions. But the new industrialist men were simple, humble of character, and modest. They were no aristocrats, no dukes, earls, and kings. They did not yet think of having themselves painted leading their workmen. Some portraits were made, and certainly the first photographs taken, but no heroic paintings of themselves were produced in great quantities, except maybe for private use in the homes of these men. Examples of heroism and grandeur could still be found primarily in history. To match the times, the new industrial rich and the political powerful that supported the arts commissioned large works of painters who were naturally inclined to look to the themes of their own education. Which was history. Since the commissioners were mostly politicians wanting to decorate the new large public halls, parliaments, exhibition halls, the first theme to be thought of was national history.

With the power of industry grew, once more, the confidence in man and his accomplishments. Religion was not needed anymore. The antagonistic ideas of the newer, wealthier men directed against Christianity and against Christian influence over the State, soared. The politicians and industrialists of France too refused the predominance of Christian thought and of the Christian clergy in affairs of the state. They were in need for publicity and for polemics to represent their ideas. Jean-Paul Laurens was a magnificent painter for them. He seemed to adhere to the trend for total secularisation of the state. He did not hesitate in showing the intolerance of the Church.

Historical painters were many. In Belgium painted Louis Gallait. Gallait was born in 1810 in Tournai, the town of Rogier Van Der Weyden and Jacques Daret. He died in 1887. Gallait worked in Brussels and produced huge paintings, monumental historical scenes of Belgium's past. He went in the circles of industrial entrepreneurs of Tournai and Brussels. In 1863, he painted a series of full-length portraits of historical figures for the Brussels Senate Hall. Louis Gallait looked to historical themes of great power. The most powerful men that had ever reigned over the Belgian territories was Emperor Charles V of the sixteenth century, so naturally Gallait painted a scene of Charles' life, a scene in which all the important nobles of the imperial court were assembled. This was a painting of huge dimensions, 4.85 by 6.83 meter, on the 'Abdication of Charles V'.

Among the most known Hungarian historical painters are Bertalan Szekely and Gyula Benczur. Benczur made a painting called 'The Recapture of Buda Castle' in 1896. 'The Recapture of Buda Castle' dates from 1896, but Benczur started to paint it as early as 1885. It was completed for the Millennium Celebrations in Hungary^{H2}. These festivities celebrated the thousandth birthday of the Hungarian nation, since the first

Magyar King Arpad had then entered the land that was later to be called Hungary. From May to June 1896, the festivities amazed Hungarians and the world. In one regal procession the royal crown of Hungary was placed in a crystal carriage, escorted by military guards and by the Keepers of the Crown proudly wearing halberds and thus brought to the Matthias Church and to the Royal Palace of Buda.

In another, escorts of officials of the 89 municipalities and of the National Assembly, all riding on horse, rode in full regalia of panther skins, shakos, plumes, and swords, preceded by heralds holding silver trumpets. The procession saluted the king and the Queen in the Royal Palace. The noblemen lowered the colours, and then marched back to the Matthias Church to escort the crown back to Parliament. A National Exhibition was held in the City Park. The grand exhibition housed pavilions of Budapest history, ethnographic exhibitions, military displays, pavilions of commerce, and of monetary business. There was an agricultural exhibition and a pavilion of public education. Most astounding was the Hall of Industry, in which stood huge cast iron columns, leading to an iron-supported all-glass roof, and to wide glass windows. The capital's patronage of the arts was proven by Gyula Benczur's 'Recapture of Buda castle', displayed at the exhibition.

Hungary has fathered many excellent historical painters which are far too less known. One reason of course, is that their paintings are either frescoes, or too large pictures to travel much and far. So these painters are not represented in the major museums of the world. One has to visit the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest to discover them. Amongst these painters, Victor Madarasz is one of the best. He won a gold medal on the Paris exhibition or Salon of 1859 with a picture of the 'Mourning of Laszlo Hunyadi', a scene of 1457 telling of the killing of Hunyadi who fought the Turks. Other Hungarian painters of historic scenes are Sandor Liezen-Mayer, Mor Than and Bertalan Szekely. Bertalan Szekely for instance made a painting of the 'Discovery of the Body of King Louis II at the battle of Mohacs', of another heroic moment of Hungarian national fame.

The United Kingdom also knew many historical painters. Among these was an artist called Daniel Maclise.

Daniel Maclise was Irish: he was born in Cork of Southern Ireland in 1806, but he moved early to London in 1827 to further his career as a painter. He produced many historical paintings. He also illustrated books of Shakespeare's plays. He gained a good reputation in the historical genre, so that he was commissioned to paint two large frescoes for the Royal Gallery in the House of Lords in the Parliament of Westminster. These were based on grand themes and national heroes. Maclise lived at the period of the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite painters, but his artistic style was different. He had a gift for grand and large-scale compositions. He painted the scenes that were to the taste of his commissioners, who talked of the grand victories of the English. In contrast with the middle-class style of painting of Gallait and Benczur, we find much romantic poetry in his painting of the 'Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife'.

Historicism is a genre of painting that emerged in all its splendour out of Neo-Classicism and Romanticism in the nineteenth century. Famous battles had been painted long before. Paolo Uccello painted the San Romano battle, Albrecht Altdorfer a battle of Alexander the Great. Classical scenes of Roman and Greek antiquity were common since the beginning of the art of painting. Schools of historical painters existed in all the centuries before and historical scenes were quite popular already in

the eighteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century however emerged the painting of scenes of more recent history, of medieval times and later.

The motives behind the historical paintings were various. The Hungarian painter Bertalan Szekely used the historic motive of the death on the battlefield of King Louis the Second as a romantic theme: escape to earlier ages, loneliness, sadness, and expression of gloom.

Louis Gallait in Belgium and Gyula Benczur in Hungary were honoured painters. They worked for the powerful dignitaries and rich industrialists who commissioned their large epic canvases to glorify the deeds of the country. Thus, Louis Gallait painted for the Belgian Senate, Daniel Maclise for the English Parliament, Jean-Paul Laurens for the Légion d'Honneur hall, Gyula Benczur for the anniversary of the Hungarian State.

These painters were no flatterers. They did not directly paint to please alone. But what they did and how they did it indeed was acclaimed by the wealthy among whom they lived, and in whose circles they moved.

Daniel Maclise combined both: he painted for the eminent politic establishment, and yet applied romantic expression to the historical scenes. Jean-Paul Laurens could find in history examples to illustrate his anti-clericalism. The motives were different, the results also different in how they appeal to our senses: we can truly love Szekely's paintings, feel intimately involved in them without reserve. We can like Maclise's scenes and the skilled romantic expression of pathos. We can admire the skill and be impressed by Gallait's and Benczur's paintings.

We look in awe at the coldness by which such powerful emotions are expressed in Laurens' 'Robert the Pious'.

Historicism of the nineteenth century was an all-European phenomenon, not limited to one country. Historical paintings are found first and foremost in Hungary. These paintings are too less known in the other European countries and the New World. Szekely, Benczur, Than, Liesen-Mayor and Madarasz made wonderful paintings that are waiting to be more acclaimed.

The movement existed almost independently in Belgium, where it was most used by the Walloon, French speaking Belgians like Gallait but also Barthélémy Vieillevoye, Auguste Chauvin and others.

Pietro Benvenuti, Giuseppe Bezzuoli, Gaspero Martellini, Enrico Fanfani, Stefano Ussi and others very well represent Italian historicism. These Italian painters have also been somewhat forgotten by our times. They deserve better recognition.

Austria had Hans Makart.

France was first still in the ban of the imposing Neo-Classicists David and Ingres, but Delacroix in the more rash Romantic way and Laurens in a more neo-classical style especially applied the genre.

The nineteenth century remains too much the century of the French impressionists and of the now the - at least starting to be more admired English Victorian Pre-Raphaélite painters. We tend to forget that this century was rich in many styles.

The historical paintings are marvellous, although less to our taste of the moment. We ought to learn to love them more because they were the expression of powerful feelings of pride, magnificence, a recognition of heroic deeds of the fathers, and a new faith in man's accomplishments.

Other paintings:

The Recapture of Buda Castle in 1686

Gyula Benczur (1844-1920). The Hungarian National Gallery – Budapest. 1885-1896.

The Discovery of the Body of King Louis the Second

Bertalan Szekely (1835-1910). The Hungarian National Gallery – Budapest. 1860.

The Abdication of Charles V

Louis Gallait. The Museum of Fine Arts – Tournai. 1841.

Pope Formose and Pope Stephan VI

Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921). Musée des Beaux-Arts – Nantes. 1870.

The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife

Daniel Maclise (1806-1870). The National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1854.

Vanitas

Still life with Parrots

Jan Davidsz. De Heem (1606-1684). The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Sarasota, Florida USA. Late 1640s.

Many still lives are bleak pictures, without inspiration, closed and without joy. There are often only a few objects displayed, the pictures are exercises in style or the painter had no other meaning but to show his craftsmanship. Although colours may be bright, especially for seventeenth century Dutch paintings, the background is often brownish, quite vast and without interest. After all, although in most languages these pictures are indeed called 'still lives', they are called in French 'Nature Morte' or 'dead nature'.

We usually are at unease with these paintings. We have an impression of solitude such as we can feel when we wake up in an afternoon alone in a quiet house. We feel lost and aching, without aim in life and we have undefined fears. These were the feelings that the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre called 'La Nausée', the existential fear, and the one emotion that was so hated and utterly refused by Europeans. It was the loneliness and fate of the small human being confronted with vast eternity.

The painting 'Still Life with Parrots' also is supposed to be such a picture of things dead, of life that was, of lifeless objects, things drawn artfully together either to show the skill of the painter or to be an object of decoration. Yet this picture of Jan Davidsz De Heem is something quite different, isn't it?

Life is crawling all over the place. The parrot is well alive though not flying; he proudly guards and shows the exhibition. There are shells of sea life with contorted forms, and dark green leaves reminiscent of a half-wild garden. There are apples and citrus fruit, luscious grapes and the menacingly long knives of a lobster. It is all a feast for the eye and one easily believes the whole to live a life of its own. These objects talk to us as they are together. They talk of joy, of far countries; they make us dream and wonder. We will enjoy a feast and while looking at them or eating them we will not be alone anymore. One object says, 'I grew in an untended and wild orchard in Holland'. Another, 'I stood with my sisters in a meadow in Spain'. Yet another, 'I was crawling under hundred fathoms of water'. Or, 'I am to be found on the beaches of the South Seas, I open my interiors to you – please come in to find a mystery, a pearl, and a dream'. 'And I, the nut, am so small, but I am the boss of it all, see: I climbed on a pedestal!' This is pure happiness in colours and forms.

The art of the painter is of course present; these objects are not just thrown together at random. There is mathematics and geometry here, as good as in the best Piero della Francesca. There is a hard line of sharp-angled objects going from down right to upper left. One of the seashells in the lower right points to the lobster and the parrot's beak. This line is drawn from sea-life very deep (the shells) over the earth-things (fruit) to air-life very high (the birds, the parrot) with the lobster as an animal in-between. The lobster is an odd-man-out here. It should have been at the lower part of the picture, not so high. And it peeks from behind the curtain. It has apparently escaped from the design of the artist. It has a life of its own, it was not quite dead, and it has crawled from where it should be, to another place. De Heems painting really is alive.

Another line is at a right angle to the former. This line starts left and goes to the right. This is the soft line of small round things: citrus fruit, apples, round oysters on a long oval plate that accentuates the direction. It goes from acid (citrus, oysters that just ask for lime) to sweeter fruits (the grapes). So we have to look twice: once from the big shells to the lobster and parrot, to the animal that hangs in the air biting a cut round object, and then we follow the other, lush, soft round flesh citrus-grapes line. Even the large golden vase is all made of round protruding rose buttons, eyes, or whatever your imagination dictates you instantly after following the other round things. It makes the vase also alive.

Most of the objects are open to you, not closed. They invite you to enter or to touch them. They cry out “you are not alone, we invite you amongst us. Touch us, feel us, plunge your hands in us, penetrate us and wallow in us”. The horn shells open their mouths, the citrus is half undone and shows its juicy interior, the oysters are all ready and moist, the melons show their red flesh inside until - following the first line always - we can rest and hide in the green foliage. One can easily surmise very sexual meanings in all this display of open flesh. The other line may then tell us of the angled thorny pains of sin that can follow.

The overall theme of de Heem's picture is abundance. There is profusion above the structure. The displayed fruit and objects have all been used in Dutch still lives for their symbolism. Thus, the white and red grapes with in between the peaches are a recurrent theme. The grapes generally are symbols of the union between Man and God. Grapes need much tending and long maturation. The grapes are symbols of the virtue of patience. The white grapes give white wine, which is drunk by the Catholic priest during the Holy Mass liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church. The red grapes pressed with their skins give a liquid as red as the blood of Christ. The half-filled glass next to the grapes, holding a wine, refers to the Eucharist. This idea is emphasised by the butterfly near the glass. The butterfly is ready to fly and so lightly that it was a symbol of the soul.

The peaches among the grapes were a symbol of truth in ancient iconography. A peach with one leaf represented hearth and tongue. Truth springs from the union of hearth and tongue^{G41}. Christ's good message was a true message. The grapes and peaches are on the left side next to a blue box on which stands another wineglass. Blue was always the colour of heaven, of piety and of divine essence. The pomegranates that are close also are a Christian symbol. They refer to the Resurrection of Christ. The many seeds contained in its case are a symbol of the unity of the many under one authority, the authority of the church's clergy. Vases are symbols of smell, one of the five senses. A golden vase such as in de Heem's picture can refer to abundance. Its position close to the grapes and wineglass can indicate a ciborium, used to contain the hosts of the Eucharist. All the elements in this part of the picture thus refer to Christ's sacrifice.

Symbolism continues in the tilted dish with the oysters. A tilted dish was used for special meaning in Dutch paintings. It was for instance the main theme of a Roelof Koets still life now in the Museum of Fine Arts of Orléans- France. De Heem used the theme in other of his pictures as for instance in a still life of the Louvre, Paris. The tilted dish was an additional means to show more fruit in the still life. The tilted dish

however meant instability, moral degeneration. In de Heem's picture the element is associated with open fruit showing their opulent flesh. The oranges near the oysters are symbols of sin. Oranges are often a replacement of the apples of original sin. The oysters themselves are a symbol of lust and sexual desire. Oysters are shown frequently by Dutch painters in genre scenes, for instance next to a man holding a woman's breasts. Spices were supposed to arouse sexually, a spice holder for pepper is near the oysters.

The dark, silver pitcher on the lower left is an attribute of Hebe who was the handmaiden of the Gods. Hebe personified temperance^{G41}. Thus, the pitcher can be understood as a symbol of temperance. It contains the water to put out the fires of lust. The pitcher symbolises sexual temperance. The citrus fruit down from the oysters are unwound, representing the passing of time. This feeling is strengthened by the empty seashells, which may indicate the emptiness of life. Finally, the red damask tablecloth is withdrawn from one corner of the table to show a dark mass of foliage. This may represent hell, a dark disorderly space into which an immoral life leads. Underneath we see a lamp. It is not lit, but Jesus referred to himself as the light in the darkness. This light is extinguished here.

The upper part of the painting represents the virtues of a life according to God's word. Here all objects are reminiscent of Jesus's life. The lower part represents lust and lechery, immorality.

The painting 'Still life with Parrots' of de Heem does not just show abundance of objects and forms. It contains dense symbolism. It seems to be almost an encyclopaedia of spiritual symbols used in Dutch still lives of the seventeenth century. De Heem puts all the symbols and meanings skilfully together in an ordered and yet natural manner. The painting is all order beneath the confusion. The picture looks so simple, yet it has several hidden meanings to what is a complex moral message. The five senses can be discerned in the images. The parrots can represent hearing, the oysters represent taste, and the protuberant forms of the golden vase can represent touch and all the luxuriant food and a symbol for sight. Wonderful smells are certainly in the air and the prominent golden vase was also an ancient attribute of smell^{G41}.

Dutch still lives most often were full of underlying moral meaning. They were then called 'Vanitas' still lives, which admonish the viewers to remember the transience of life and the worthlessness of earthly pleasures. 'Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas' is a phrase from the Ecclesiasticus book of the Bible, referring to temperance and the passing of time. In the painting of de Heem the magnificently coloured parrot looks with pity at a killed, dark parrot hanging head down and dead from the ceiling. Thus, life is immediately linked to death.

Finally, the whole movement of symbols leads to the nut on the pedestal, just on the border of the table. The outer, green case of nuts represented the flesh of Christ. The hard shell of the nut was the wood of the cross. The kernel of the nut represented Christ's divine nature. The nut stands in de Heem's painting between lust and death. The nut has also been used as a symbol of female virginity. The breaking of the nut was thought to represent the breaking of the hymn in marriage. The oysters also refer

to this image. In de Heem's painting the nut can either symbolise continued lust or the remembrance of Christ at the time of death and the last redemption.

De Heem was Dutch, born in the town of Leiden in 1606, so he would be prone to some moralising since he was brought up amidst the stern Protestant Holland environment. He moved to Antwerp in 1635 and spent most of his career as a painter there, until he died in 1684. Antwerp was then still an important port, but her golden days were over. The worse times of the religious wars seemed past but had broken the city. Alexander Farnese had conquered and taken the town in 1585 for the Catholic Spanish king. Most of the Protestant clergymen had to leave after that or convert, and had indeed left the town. With them of course went most of the wealth. Businessmen and merchants left the town for Amsterdam, which would have from then on, through the whole of the seventeenth century, a booming economy, and its Golden Age in arts.

So the town of Antwerp was to be Roman Catholic. The flamboyant counter-reformation kind of Catholicism prevailed. And while to the north of Antwerp the more austere Amsterdam flourished with its newly found wealth brought by the Protestants that had fled from Antwerp, the Brabant Antwerp was left between hope for better times and fear for worse. The hope and fear you can find in both lines of the painting of de Heem. Worse was to come.

But the first three decades of the 1600s were still benign to Antwerp and de Heem could find all the exotic (exotic to Flanders and Brabant) fruit, birds, animals and objects that are depicted here. De Heem could find here wealthy burghers to buy his paintings, as painters at all times looked for and worked where the money was. The new Catholic South Netherlands had both (still) the money, the tolerance and the joy of life that a painter like de Heem needed to thrive on. He was not just an artist, but also an excellent artisan, a skilled professional who knew all the tricks of his profession. Such as to build in delight of oysters and surprises like the lobster and the nut to discover.

De Heem was certainly not the only Antwerp artist in that period: the most famous Rubens lived there from 1577 to 1640, Anthony van Dyck from 1599 to 1641 and Jacob Jordaens from 1593 to 1678. There were many, many others. Look at the dates. David Teniers lived from 1610 to 1690, Adam van Noort from 1562 to 1641, Marten Pepijn from 1575 to 1643. Abraham Janssens lived from 1575 to 1632, Gerard Seghers from 1591 to 1651. Theodore Rombouts lived from 1597 to 1637, Cornelis Schut from 1597 to 1655, Erasmus Quellin from 1607 to 1678. Theodore van Dulden lived from 1600 to 1669, Jan Boeckhorst from 1605 to 1668, Thomas Bosschaert from 1613 to 1654, Abraham van Diepenbeeck from 1590 to 1675, Cornelis de Vos from 1585 to 1651 and so many more. Many still life painters lived there also, such as Frans Snijders, Daniel Seghers, Jacob van Es and others. Antwerp was a marvellous town for painters, with many rich citizens avid for visual delight in their houses, always ready to boast among each other and show off as true Brabanders with their acquisitions of luxurious paintings.

Antwerp, as Brussels, was in earlier centuries a part of the Duchy of Brabant. The last Duchess of Brabant had died childless in the fourteenth century and left her lands to the Duke of Burgundy. The last Duchess of Burgundy then, Mary of Burgundy, had married the Austrian prince Maximilian. This marriage would lead to an enormous

empire that would encompass in the seventeenth century the North and South Netherlands (with Flanders and Brabant), the Austrian lands as well as of course Spain with all its wealth in South America. The Protestant Antwerp revolted to the Catholic King of this empire and contrary to the Northern Netherlands, could not hold. But the Brabant joyful spirit continued to live. A Dutch writer, Gerbrand Bredero of Amsterdam, wrote in 1617 a novel called 'The Spanish Brabander Jerolimo', in which he brings mockingly on the scene a boisterous, cantankerous Brabander. The rich and poor shared the same joy; you can find it also represented in Pieter Bruegel's paintings of Brabant village feasts. Despite the war lost to the King of Spain, despite the loss of half of its population, humiliated and castigated, the Antwerp Brabanders did not lose their spirits and continued to show off as if they were the proudest and richest people of Europe.

Therefore this painting had to depict expensive fruit and rare animals. Citrus fruit certainly did not come cheap in the Antwerp of the seventeenth century and oysters were a luxury just as they are now in Paris, where they are still symbols of opulence and richness when you see them in the stalls of the restaurants along the fancy boulevards. Parisians would be quite surprised to find out that their favourite oysters were not one of their twentieth or at best nineteenth century's inventions, but were already on the plates of burghers of the seventeenth century. By the way, in Antwerp today you find no open stalls with oysters. The restaurants are full of mussels and French fries for the masses. And of course, our contemporary clothes have lost the buoyancy of colours and different textiles of the seventeenth century.

One can easily understand why John Ringling bought this painting in the 1920s. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is entirely dedicated to Baroque art. Ringling liked Italian art, but also the Rubens, Jordaens and van Dyck paintings, and those of other Antwerp masters. The museum gives these pictures the splendid vast rooms, which suit them so well. It is an enormous Italian Renaissance villa, with two long wings, lined with vaults and columns, around fountains in a wide patio garden. There even is a full-sized copy of Michelangelo's David in the courtyard. Ringling was a showman and collected some of the finest, most grandiose paintings in the world. Among which this de Heems 'Still Life with Parrots'.

The Baroque era appealed most to a person as of a character like John Ringling. He was a partner in the Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey circus, maybe the most fabulous circus the earth has ever seen and you can still find his circus museum next to his art museum in Sarasota, Florida. He built a Venetian villa for a house close to the museum, and Mable Ringling had a real Venetian gondola to make trips in Sarasota bay. The Ringlings came to Sarasota because the Barnum and Bailey circus held its winter quarter there. This tradition has been continued for four or five generations of circus people now. Sarasota is the winter quarter of most of the independent circus people of the United States of America. They remain in Sarasota for the three winter months with their caravans, elephants and tigers. In the evening they meet in their own tavern hall 'Showfolks' where the walls are lined with memories and photographs of the artists. There is even a circus school in Sarasota. The town has really remained the circus capital of the world.

European intellectuals can be scandalised by the incongruous and odd display of nouveau-riche fortune that John and Mable Ringling assembled in the Sarasota

museums. They may find this all 'kitsch' art. But we cannot but admire the joy and the self-confidence of the Ringlings, which would have appealed to the old Brabanders. The Ringlings were certainly encouraged by their artistic environment. All this display testifies to what circus people try to show: we can do many amazing things on this earth, wherever we want, whenever we want. Dream and your dream will come true. And dream also of higher learning and higher art. So, Ringling brought back to the Unites States some of the art that was as much his heritage as the heritage of contemporary intellectual Europeans.

We should be grateful to John Ringling and admire him for the wonderful museum built in the town of the winter quarters of his circus. As Robin Skynner and John Cleese remark in 'Life and how to survive it'^{G27}, 'a circus is a place of apparent madness where we can enjoy the excitement of seeing wild animals, but circus people do know how to handle them.' Baroque art and this 'Still Life with Parrots' are certainly like that.

De Heem knew how to keep order in his own circus ... well, except for the lobster.

Cathedral

Amorpha, Fugue in two Colours.

Frantisek Kupka (1871-1957). National Gallery – Prague. 1911-1912.

Amorpha, Warm Chromatics.

The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Meda Mladek Collection – Prague. 1911-1912.

Self-portrait among Roses.

The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Meda Mladek Collection – Prague. 1894-1895.

The Cathedral.

The Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Meda Mladek Collection – Prague. 1912-1913.

‘Amorpha, Fugue in two colours’ shows swirling arcs in white, red and blue. If we concentrate on the painting, and keep looking at it with concentration, we are taken up in the dancing movement of the lines. The curves interlace, turn and come back to points of origin, to be continued in other curves. There is no subject of any kind in this painting. The colours and strictly delineated areas suffice to painter and viewer. We are thinking of mathematics, of speed, of music that thrills us and makes our soul move. We are in a space quite separate of everyday life. We are in another world, a cool metaphysical world of pure thoughts and super-natural forms. Frantisek Kupka led us unto heights not experienced before and into this new strange world.

The picture was deduced from an image of a girl dancing with a ball^{Z1}, but nothing but the movement and the colours had remained of the image. These are also the images we perceive in our eyes, with eyelids closed, when we apply pressure to our eyes. Then we see the dancing yet well aligned curves that change constantly and that continue to be seen when the pressure stops.

‘Amorpha, warm Chromatics’ is an analogue painting and yet very different from the ‘Amorpha fugue’. Again, we need to lose ourselves in the image. This painting is the result of many studies of a woman picking flowers. Kupka said that two figures were represented, one coming from the left, the other from the right. Both figures merge in soft red and brown colours. What remains is the warm embrace, an image like two folded hands that point upwards. This is a prayer out of time and space, a presentation of the eeriness of an immaterial thought. And yet the warm colours go deep into us, instil emotions of sympathy; we feel good, satisfied and calm.

Kupka made many other studies of a woman picking flowers, in which the various stages of the act of picking are indicated in one picture. Each stage was only hinted at by vague variations in colours of each form, as the forms pass to an eye's iris. These forms were juxtaposed as in a photograph where successive movements are caught on a long-exposure plate.

Let us now look at ‘The Cathedral’. This painting has to be seen all alone in a wide oblong room, with bright light falling immediately on the picture. So you have to imagine yourself in a large, long hall with only the painting at one end with light falling on it directly. Then it is a marvel of colour and light. A viewer can easily

imagine himself in the middle of Chartres cathedral, all alone, amidst the mystic of centuries of devote praying, hopes, submission, pity and silent prayers of the millions that came here with their sufferings or their gratitude. The structure of the cathedral disappears then and in the eye remain only the bright colours of the high stained glass windows. This is the famous 'Chartres blue', the main and brightest colour of the Chartres stained glass panes. Kupka went several times to Chartres cathedral to immerse himself in its timeless medieval mystic. One gets dizzy, overwhelmed by the effect of the verticals. The blue and reds dominate. The dark black middle section of the painting creates the effect of space and perspective. This creates the mysterious abyss of death we will all enter one day.

'Cathedral' is only one of a whole series of studies that Kupka made on verticals. He showed how combinations of juxtaposed, coloured, vertical bars could inspire dancing, moving effects on viewers. 'Cathedral' was directly inspired from Chartres cathedral and Kupka's own feelings for this monument of religious art in which the fervent devotion of a society was expressed. Even today indeed we look with admiration at these realisations, which would be so expensive to copy now as to be virtually impossible. The Gothic cathedrals and their marvellous coloured windows had been the token of a society that had richness, but to which the whole community contributed. The drive, the energy and the will of our present society to install such monuments of art has waned and the nostalgia for these social undertakings sometimes overwhelm us. But then, of course, we have other 'cathedrals'.

What experience could lead a painter towards these feelings for what we can only experience with our mind, our hearth, eyes closed?

Frantisek Kupka is one of the foremost pioneers of abstract art. Pure abstract art does not contain a subject anymore, no tree, and no human. It is non-representational, has no meaningful content. In our short discussion of the early paintings of Kupka we saw that some of the subject matter had remained: 'Amorpha, Fugue in two colours' was derived of a dancing girl, 'Amorpha, warm Chromatics' still contains vaguely a reference to two meeting figures, 'Cathedral' refers to stained glass panes. These show the transition from traditional representational art to complete abstract art. Kupka started painting pictures as we were used to see in the previous centuries. And he definitely was a master painter and drawer, as proven by the painting 'Self-portrait among roses'.

The 'Self-portrait' is a figurative masterpiece. The roses are wonderfully drawn to full detail. Kupka was a master drawer and we would have been enchanted by his realistic paintings. 'Self-portrait' is a picture of happiness, of a person offering joy and liveliness to the viewer. It is a gift. And the painter is hiding beyond the flowers, offering the gift. He is a mysterious person; the flowers adorn him like a soft Christ giving a sacrifice to viewers. This was really Kupka: mysterious, a mystic, very religious, offering his life for an idea to viewers of art. Kupka was never rich, always poor, always in a world of thoughts and images that was not ours, showing us a way into inner depths outside and above meaning. His message was a spiritual message and in this he met the mystic medieval painters like a Matthias Grünewald. But Kupka liberated himself from subjects; he did not need a subject anymore to reach the heights sought by a Grünewald. Did he succeed in bringing us there? He tried and tried. All his life Kupka tried and tried again.

We have tens of drawings, studies of the same, limited number of Kupka themes over and over again, such as the studies of circles and lines, of verticals. There are tens of studies of 'Pistils and Stamens' because he would look deep into the inner flower to look for patterns. And then he would move and play with the patterns until they might have a sense to his mind or at the best bring a new emotion. Kupka was searching, trying to find new truths for us. He sought perfection as well as a Filippo Lippi. Did he succeed? Maybe he did, maybe not. Maybe all such trials and errors and studies are never adequate, can never reach the end, never attain the last truth. But then, this is life. We all search and seek, always look to reach a goal which should bring us to something ultimate that we think will make us immortal. The search always ends in vain, but as so many artists have told us: probably the search is more important than the end. Kupka certainly deserves respect for the trying and he can be honoured as one of the foremost artists and art pioneers of the twentieth century.

Frantisek Kupka was born in 1871 in a small town of Eastern Czechia, then still Bohemia and part of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire^{Z1}. Very young, before even becoming thirteen, he had to learn a profession. He was apprenticed to a saddle maker who as much as teaching him to work leather, initiated him to spiritism. Kupka would be an adept of spiritism for the rest of his life and at periods earn his living as a medium that could communicate with spirits from the after-life. At sixteen, he left home and travelled in South Bohemia where he saw the intricate patterns of folklore paintings on houses, which have some basis in Islamic tradition^{Z1}. At seventeen he first returned to the house of his father in Dobruska, where he painted sign-boards for shops, then entered the Academy of Historical and Religious Paintings of Prague. He studied under the Nazarene painter Sequens. The Nazarene movement of German painters, which formed a community in Rome, was strongly dedicated to religion, to spirituality and to a more decorative form of Romantic art.

Kupka would stay till 1892 in Prague, but then he left for the Academy of the capital of the empire, Vienna. Here also he studied under a Nazarene painter, Eisenmenger^{Z1}. He learned to know an older woman, Maria Bruhn, a Danish fashion designer. Maria Bruhn would support him. He himself continued to be very poor. Kupka struggled between traditional forms of painting and the new forms that started to grow in his mind. Finally, in 1896, twenty-five years old, he arrived in Paris.

Kupka had to earn his living. Maria Bruhn could support him in Paris for only two years; she died of cancer in Vienna^{Z1}. Kupka performed séances of spiritism, sold himself as a medium. He studied with the French artist Jean-Paul Laurens. In all these evolutions and events, spirituality had a prominent role in Kupka's life. He had an inclination for spiritism as a medium, Nazarene painters were his masters, he worked with the austere humanist Laurens who mainly used religious themes to represent his ideas, Kupka's poverty and the drama of Maria Bruhn's death, all these elements drew Kupka to introspection. Yet he earned his living also by making drawings of the Parisian life for newspapers, for which a keen eye of reality was necessary. He hated this work, though. He of course saw the Moulin Rouge and its frivolous annex world in Montmartre; he met the dancer called 'La Goulue' who has been made famous since by Toulouse Lautrec's pictures and posters.

In 1904 Kupka met Eugénie Straub, the wife of an Alsace officer. They fell in love and came to live together. Eugénie or Nini would remain with him the rest of his life^{Z1}. Kupka's paintings were gradually more exhibited. He became more known. He made study after study, most of which he tore up because inadequate to express what he sought. He was obsessively seeking more spirituality in art through the use of colour alone. He studied treatises on the value of colours.

Kupka married Eugénie in 1910 and around that time seemed to have found his final way and style of painting. He started the two paintings that are among the first truly abstract works of Europe, the two 'Amorpha' paintings. These two paintings were made almost at the same time. 'Warm Chromatics' may have been made somewhat earlier than 'Fugue', but the latter painting was exhibited first. Kupka had many contacts with a group of painters in the town of Puteaux near Paris^{Z1}. He met Robert Delaunay and his wife Sonia there, both pioneers of abstract art, as well as Duchamp-Villon, one of the two brothers of Marcel Duchamp. They had contacts with poets like Blaise Cendrars who was a friend of the Russian émigré Marc Chagall. Sonia Delaunay illustrated a book of poems of Cendrars. Kupka lived in the tight artistic world of Paris.

In 1912, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who also would designate the name 'Surrealists', gave the name 'Orphism' to the new tendency of cubism of the painters Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. In their paintings colour was more pervasive, after the poetry of the mythological Greek Orpheus. Kupka was considered to be one of those Orphists.

Kupka's art already had all the elements of subsequent styles and justifications of abstract art. He showed references to music (he was impressed by Johan Sebastian Bach's fugues, hence the name 'Fugue in two colours'), references to representations of speed (such as in 'A fair'), to mathematics (his many paintings and studies of 'Discs of Newton') and mechanics (such as 'Circles and lines'). Finally he experienced also with images of the effects of rays of light, as in 'Cathedral'. These elements would each separately serve as basic elements for directions in abstract art.

Thus, the early abstracts like Wassily Kandinsky and Robert Delaunay were fascinated by the immediate effect on our senses and soul of music. They wanted to reach the same immediacy of emotion as music by refusing subjects in paintings, so that a viewer's mind work was more or less switched off. The colours alone would impress emotions in the viewer, in the more direct way.

References to movement by the use of colours and forms like circles and discs, was exploited by Giacomo Balla also around 1912. References to light and light rays were exploited by the Russian painter Mikhail Larionov and his wife Natalia Gontcharova^{G29}. Mechanics, circles, wheels, and bars were used by Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia in France. The painter who was probably the very first abstract artist, the Russian Casimir Malevich, of course used the mathematical simple forms such as circles and rectangles. Malevich painted a black square on a white border. This 'Black Square' was probably the first totally abstract painting ever made, although many of the named painters worked to abstract ideas at the same time. Malevich called his style 'Suprematism'. Malevich worked the poetic figurative painter Chagall out of the latter's own-founded Academy of Vitebsk, Russia. Specific abstract style elements

were continued by the Dutch Piet Mondriaan and the Russian student of Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, led to a style called 'Constructivism' in which artistic forms were aimed to be used for utilitarian functions.

Frantisek Kupka had found alone almost all the elements of the various schools of abstract painting that would emerge from 1910 to the 1930s. He was not known as the father of these movements, but instinctively and painstakingly by continuous trial and error, through study after study he found all the elements that could be used for abstract non-representational art.

All the elements found, why continue? When one painter has applied a new style, then subsequent art is 'déjà vu' and much less interesting. This was indeed one of the problems with abstract art: the techniques of visual impression by these means were rapidly exploited and seemed to be exhausted. Some painters indeed reverted to traditional ways of representation. Malevich, for instance, painted a white square on a white border and called this the end to Suprematism. One could go no further. He returned to traditional painting. Delaunay also stopped abstract painting for some years, then started again to use abstract images^{G29}. Frantisek Kupka however understood that there was no end to the experiments. He never reverted, always continued to search for new colour combinations that would call images and emotions in his mind without the necessity of subjects. Abstract art became the greatest expression of the twentieth century.

It is amazing but probably quite natural to understand that the search for the power of colour and pure form was made by a man who believed in spiritism, a man who was a medium. Kupka must have had perceptions more finely tuned than ordinary people. He must have had a sensibility for the lines, circles and verticals, patches of juxtaposed pure colour areas that are extraordinary. Kupka had an intense spiritual life. A spiritual movement called 'Theosophism'^{Z1} also influenced him. More remarkable even, is the fact that the four great pioneers of abstract art: Kandinsky, Malevich, Kupka and Mondriaan were influenced to more or less extent by their search for more spirituality^{G29}.

Malevich, the first, seems to have been influenced by the hyperspace and Fourth Dimension theories of a Russian philosopher Peter Demianovich Ouspensky^{G29}. The philosopher Ouspensky was a disciple of George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, originally an Armenian Greek who had founded a quasi-religious movement before the Russian Revolution of 1917 in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, that later would move to France.

The Fourth Dimension was the spiritual world. There is a marvellous painting by Salvador Dali called 'Cube Hypercube' that illustrates the thought. A Christ is shown against a background of six cubes. When one unfolds a cube one has six two-dimensional surfaces. When one unfolds a four-dimensional cube, an object that a human mind cannot represent, one gets six three-dimensional cubes. In the same way, Christ is the unfolding representation of the four-dimensional concept of a God. Dali brought figurative Catholic thought and abstract spiritual influences together. There existed at the beginning of the twentieth century a whole literature on the theme of the Fourth Dimension, among which the book of Gaston de Pawlowski 'Voyage dans la Quatrième Dimension'.

Kandinsky, Kupka and Mondriaan knew the Theosophist theories and more or less were even actively engaged in the Theosophist community^{G29}. Although Theosophy is a very old religious philosophy that had many manifestations in various religions, it received much renown at the end of the nineteenth century by the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875 by the Russian émigré Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Helena Blavatsky, a Ukrainian of nobility, had travelled through Europe and applied occultism and spiritism before arriving in the United States where she founded the named society together with an American lawyer, Henry Steel Olcott. Blavatsky, like Kupka, seemed to have had extraordinary psychic powers. Blavatsky and Olcott moved to India, near Chennai, Madras, in 1878, to establish the headquarters of the society there. They edited a journal in India and remained there till their death. They left the American Society without the presence of a spiritual leader so that the movement there disappeared. A modified form of the sect continued to have followers in Germany, centred on the figure of Rudolf Steiner.

Sections and schools of Theosophy lived on in the main cities of Europe and India. The movement was later revived in the United States. Separate sections were founded by William Judge, an American mystic, then by Katherine Tingley. After the deaths of Blavatsky and Olcott an Englishwoman Annie Besant continued the society in India. The movement of these leaders exerted its influence until the 1930s. The Theosophical Society was emphasising universal concepts of God, nature and humanity and was dedicated to the comparative studies of religion, philosophy and science. The Theosophists claimed that unexplained laws of nature and potent powers were hidden in human beings, which could be reached by certain practices of meditation and spiritism. Knowledge of divine wisdom could thus open mysteries of the true spiritual human kind.

Theosophism with its search for spirituality without distinction of race or traditional religion struck a deep chord in Frantisek Kupka and in Piet Mondriaan, who both were one-time members of the society. The Theosophists also believed strongly in symbolism and in the mystical value of colour and form. Kupka and Mondriaan thought likewise that the higher spiritual realm could be reached through art. Mondriaan may have joined the Theosophical Society in 1909. Kandinsky had similar ideas and was influenced by Theosophist ideology.

The early abstract painters were all intelligent men who felt the need to explain their ideas. Kandinsky wrote a book in 1926 'Über das Geistige in der Kunst' or 'On the Spiritual in Art' in which he explained his feeling for inner harmony that sought expression in art. Mondriaan did the same in 1919 with 'Natural reality and Abstract reality'. Malevich, who like Blavatsky was an Ukrainian by birth (he was born in Kiev), wrote 'Der Gegenstandslose Welt' or 'The non-objective world' in 1926. Before that he had already written 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism' in 1916. Frantisek Kupka also wrote a book in French, earlier than these, around 1914, but that was only published around 1920, with the title 'La création dans les arts plastiques' or 'The Creation in plastic Arts'. So these painters absolutely had the need to justify their art, and they were all not just artists but also art ideologists.

Frantisek Kupka was one of the very first pioneers of abstract art. He was not a popular personality who sought glamour and fame. He was always considered a stranger in Paris, only partly understood and never brought to the front lights. In 1914

he volunteered in the French army together with a friend, the Czech sculptor Otto Gufreund^{Z1}. He fought in World War I on the Somme River with the poet Blaise Cendrars, though frail and sick. His wife Nini had to go to work in a factory during the war, since the family had no money. Kupka helped to found Czech regiments that fought on the side of the Allies^{Z1}. At the end of the war he returned as a captain to Paris. He continued to live in the town of Puteaux.

Kupka finally met a Czech industrialist, Jindrich Waldes, who would become his friend and who tried to support him with funds, by selling Kupka's paintings for him. In 1922 after visits to Prague, the Prague Academy accepted to pay Kupka as a visiting professor who could teach Czech students in Paris^{Z1}. His wife Nini organised an exhibition in 1924 in the Boétie Gallery that gave him some fame in Paris. In 1926 Kupka received the Cross of the French Légion d'Honneur^{Z1}. But Kupka, contrary to Chagall for instance, was not the character who could become admired in the cultural circles of Paris. When the Prague Academy stopped its payments in 1928, Kupka sank away in depressions. He had no steadfast income anymore. His wife Nini several times wanted to intern him in hospitals for the mentally ill. He left his wife several times; he suffered paranoia, but always returned to her. Waldes arranged for him twice to rest in Corsica, but the depressions continued and Kupka became more and more a recluse.

In 1935, recognition from out of the United States, especially the Museum of Modern Art of New York, gave him new courage. The director of that museum called Kupka the first European abstract painter^{Z1}. But from 1936 to 1945 Kupka passed several illnesses, remained some time in hospital and lived almost forgotten in Puteaux in France. After the war however, he participated in several major exhibitions in Paris, Prague, New York and he became more known again.

Kupka died in Puteaux in 1957 at the age of 86 years. Although frail and sick from around 1918, Kupka belonged to those giants of art who lived till a very old age.

Why was abstract art born in the beginning of the twentieth century? As we already noted, the major abstract painters were in search for a new spiritualism. That was probably because by that time the main spiritual force of Christianity had lost much of its power. Its substance and justification was brought into question by the new sciences and philosophies that emerged fully at that moment. Karl Marx, Johann Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein and many others had shattered previous beliefs or at the least destabilised basic religious beliefs. The hold of the religious orders on education and society had been broken. Yet, it seemed impossible for people to live without spirituality.

A person builds around him a cocoon of beliefs and certainties that are his view of the world. This cocoon is his or her protection from becoming mad, it is his or her stability in life. When such a cocoon is attacked, shattered, the person is in a state of panic, which can lead either to the formation of a new modified cocoon, or to ultimate depression and suicide. Something of this happened to Kupka. He was at some times totally uncertain of his capabilities; he had not found recognition.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals and artists had lost comfort in the cocoon of Christianity. They were in search for a new cocoon. Scientists and

philosophers did maybe not really need spiritual beliefs, but artists with their enhanced sensibility and frailty certainly did.

The artists sought a new cocoon, a new framework of beliefs. They found it or thought they could find it in all sorts of mystical theories. One artist frantically would adopt one theory, such as maybe a theory on the mystical signification of symbols, such as Mondriaan's thoughts of the mystical qualities of verticals and horizontals. Another artist would believe in a superhuman existence in the fourth dimension (in fact it should have been the fifth, time already is a fourth dimension as Einstein would show). Still another would become a member of the Theosophical sect. Each theory would be a possible explanation of the world, replacing the old Christian framework, and provide a new anchor for living and believing. Lounacharsky and the Russian Bolsheviks could support Suprematism because it was a replacement for the old Christian art.

This may all seem inadequate to us now, and all in vain, as explanations of the invisible, transcendental spirituality. But it provides a plausible explanation for the search for profound spirituality also in the pictorial arts. Art could reflect higher realities, lead to immediate glimpses of our soul, to some understanding of the processes of our mind, as also the Surrealists would try to find. This was what Frantisek Kupka also was searching over and over again and how abstract art was founded.

The awareness of the process can come as a shock to us. We believe abstract art to be a result of the cool decorative tendencies of our very materialistic world, epitomised by North American society. But on the contrary, abstract art was born out of pure search for spiritualism, interior emotions, mostly in the Eastern Europe that was after World War II a challenge to the Western world. Kandinsky, Malevich, Larionov, Gontcharova, Tatlin were Russians and so was Marc Chagall. Kupka and Mucha were Czech, Moholi-Nagy and Vasarely were Hungarians. Of course there were more names in France, Holland, Italy and later the United States. Especially the French couple Robert and Sonia Delaunay and Marcel Duchamp have to be cited, together with the Dutch Mondriaan and Van Doesburg. But the pioneers were Russians, Czechs, and Poles. Guillaume Apollinaire, who branded the names 'Surrealists' and 'Orphists', was of Polish descent.

With the spiritual foundation of abstract art the circle was closed again. Kupka, Malevich, Mondriaan, Kandinsky joined in their search the early spiritualists Giotto, Cimabue, Duccio, Fra Angelico, Van Eyck. Like the medieval painters they relied on the spiritual signification of symbols. They were trying to express emotions directly. They were sincere searchers for the human soul. They tried to probe the soul. Abstract art petered out and lost much of its original justification when there was no spiritual search anymore, when only decoration and rapid effect remained.

Other Paintings:

Vision of the Christian Church

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). Neue Pinakothek. Munich. Ca. 1820.

The Jesus of a Jew and Love

Me and the Village

Marc Chagall (1887-1950). Musée d'Art Moderne – Brussels. 1912.

The Walk

Marc Chagall (1887-1950). The Russian Museum – Saint Petersburg. 1917.

Double Portrait

Nagoya City Art Museum – Nagoya. 1924.

To my Wife

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou – Paris. 1933-1944.

The Triptych: Resistance, Resurrection, and Liberation

Musée National du Message Biblique Marc Chagall – Nice. 1937-1948.

White Crucifixion

The Art Institute of Chicago – Chicago. 1938.

The Village Madonna

The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection – Madrid. 1938-1942.

The Fall of Icarus

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou – Paris. 1974-1977.

Marc Chagall was born as Moïse Segal in 1907 in the Russian town of Vitebsk. Vitebsk was a small town in a province of the ancient Pale, the twenty-five Tsarist provinces where Russian Jews were granted permanent residence. Vitebsk had then about 48,000 inhabitants of which about half were Jews^{B7}. Chagall's family was poor. His father worked in a fish shop; his mother sold colonial goods. He was the oldest of nine children^{B7}. He spoke Yiddish at home, the language of the Ashkenazi Jews who had wandered over Germany to White Russia. Yiddish is a dialect of German, interspersed with Hebrew words. Segal followed the Jewish primary school, then the Russian secondary school where courses were given in Russian. In 1906 he learned to sketch and paint for a couple of months in the school of Jehuda Pen, a simple realist painter of genre pieces and portraits. But Chagall soon left for Saint Petersburg. He needed a permit for that, but a trader known by his father helped him to a certificate. Chagall worked for a while in a photographer's shop where he touched up and coloured photographs. The lawyer and maecenas Goldberg hired him as a servant, but let Chagall free to attend the school founded by the Imperial Society for Fine Arts, led by Nicolas Roerich. Thanks to Roerich, Chagall obtained his exemption from military service^{B7}.

Chagall had to leave this school in 1908 and continued to study for some months in the private school of the painter Saidenberg^{B7}. In Saint Petersburg he met a deputy of the Russian Douma, Vinaver. Through connections and recommendations of this friend he was presented to Leon Bakst, professor at the Sanseva School of Saint Petersburg.

Bakst had been a tailor, grown to some wealth by this trade during a previous war, before becoming a painter. He got expelled from the Academy of Art of Saint Petersburg for his new, revolutionary ideas in art, which seemed irreverent both to Russian Orthodox Christianity and Jewish religion. Bakst designed costumes for

dancers like Anna Pavlova and Nijinsky. The three met the producer Diaghilev and formed a dance company called the 'Ballets Russes' with which they toured in Europe at the time that Chagall was in Bakst's school. Bakst created the ballets, the sets and the costumes of the company. He was a powerful man, who dared to create a flamboyant new style of dancing by very sensuous young ladies, among which the Jewish Ida Rubinstein^{E10}. The 'Ballets Russes' were a furore in Europe. They scandalised by their free sensuality; they attracted the crowds to their performances. Bakst's paintings and costumes were as dashing as his ballets, decorative, very colourful, designed to astonish and to surprise. Chagall may have learned for the first time with Bakst to be entirely free in colours and imagination, a way of painting he would continue all his life.

When in 1910, Bakst left Saint Petersburg to go to Paris and dedicate himself completely to Diaghilev's ballets, Chagall wanted to follow Bakst. But Bakst did not want him as a decorator. Chagall received a small amount of money from Vinaver however, and left anyway for Paris, although he spoke only Yiddish and Russian. So, here was a very poor young Jew from a shtetl, a suburb of Vitebsk, feeling naively as if he could conquer the world, full of Bakst's stories of Paris, leaving his home, province and country filled with hope and fear, for a place thousands of miles away. Chagall already was a man without links, completely free in spirit.

Chagall stayed in Paris for four years. He met many painters in Paris' Montparnasse quarter around the Rue de la Grande Chaumière: Fernand Léger, Amedeo Modigliani, Robert Delaunay, Laurens, Archipenko, and Chaim Soutine. He worked a lot, was somewhat influenced by the cubist and fauvist French painters like Georges Braque.

From the Parisian period dates the painting 'Me and my village'. Some influence of the cubists can be seen in this picture: it contains sharply delineated areas of simple forms. Yet, already, this was a painting as Chagall would make all his life. The themes were not Parisian, but the themes of his Jewish Shtetl. The word shtetl is derived from the German Städtl or small town, village. Chagall painted the village houses on the top of the picture. The images of his town appear: a farmer with a scythe, a woman in traditional village dress, a fiddler or a rabbi, a cow is being milked, a sheep's head is drawn on the left, a bunch of flowers is shown in full colours. Chagall figured himself in on the right, wearing the Russian peasant's cap.

After one has discovered these memories of Chagall, maybe images of the apparent homesickness of the painter, one starts to astound. Because the images and the colours are weird. Let us begin again at the top of the picture. The fiddler or rabbi or clown is laughing all white in a village house that should be one of the most important buildings since it has a cupola, but that is far too small compared to the figure. And the houses are some standing right, some on their tops. The houses are painted in a dark but real blue. The farmer's woman also stands on her head. The cow is being milked in the sheep's head. The sheep has a blue ear, eats at the bright flowers. And the man's face on the left is all green – really the last colour in which one would paint a face.

But these are mind images, where realistic colours have no meaning. The colours of objects are interchanged. The fields are normally green, but they are red here. The face of the man on the right is green though, as were the fields of Vitebsk. The fields

are in the man. The village of Vitebsk is in the blue of memories, as volatile as the sky. And memories are so weightless, that a woman can easily be painted standing on her head. Besides, women are the opposite of men in all things.

In mind images as in dreams also, all kinds of symbols can mix. So a man can have a Russian cap on his head, be Jewish and wear a crucifix at his neck. The bouquet of flowers offered to the village shows the tenderness of Chagall for his village. But the sheep eats the bouquet. Is this a sign of the ever present Jewish irony? Chagall told over and over again that not too much profound meaning had been discovered in his paintings: he only had images and memories dancing in his mind and put these on canvas without any order. Thus watch the total freedom of colour, structure and image in Chagall's painting such as in this 'Me and the village'.

Marc Chagall painted objects, animals and human figures that he encountered in real life. But he painted them in no logical relation. The figure of a woman floats in the air; a goat may hold a bouquet of flowers, and so on. For Chagall the images he painted did not so much represent the objects or living things themselves, as their idea. It is true however that because Chagall used representations – if only illusions of the real objects – he eased the spectator's imagination to recognise the ideas. In a strange way, spectators of Chagall's pictures appreciate the fact that Chagall thus appealed to their imagination and this makes his work – and the work of other painters – more attractive. Spectators seem to like it that their imagination is stimulated and appealed to and not strictly represented as in 'trompe l'oeil' pictures that merely imitate slavishly real objects.

Chagall also became a friend of the poets Blaise Cendrars and Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire recommended Chagall to the Berlin art dealer Herwarth Walden who was the proprietor of the art gallery 'Der Sturm', in which most expressionist painters of the time, such as Oskar Kokoschka, exhibited their works. In 1914 Chagall left for Berlin with many of his paintings to have them exhibited also in 'Der Sturm'. A couple of months, after the opening of the exhibition, Chagall took the train for what he thought would be a short visit to Vitebsk. But while he was in Vitebsk, the First World War broke out and Chagall had to remain in his hometown^{B7}.

Chagall had met the daughter of a Vitebsk jeweller in 1909, Bella Rosenfeld. They married in 1915. During his stay in Vitebsk, Chagall continued to work and to exhibit in Saint Petersburg, and in Moscow. In 1917, the Russian October Revolution broke out. Chagall had met in Paris another Russian émigré, Lounacharsky. This Lounacharsky was an important Bolshevik politician. Lounacharsky became the Russian Minister for Culture and Arts and a protector of Chagall. He could found a school of pictorial arts in Vitebsk. Lounacharsky appointed Chagall People's Commissar of Arts for Vitebsk. Chagall wanted to make of his academy a centre for Russian fine arts. So, he called in many artists, painters like his old master Jehuda Pen, but also young revolutionary painters like Casimir Malevich and El Lissitzki.

Malevich was an adherent of abstract Suprematist art, the art in which forms are reduced to their most simple forms. Malevich disagreed more and more with the ideas of Chagall and succeeded in ejecting Chagall from his own academy^{B7}. The world of extreme non-figurative art was irreconcilable with the lyrical dreamworlds of Chagall.

In 1920, Chagall weary of the fights and knowing that he had lost his academy, left Vitebsk for good. He went first to Moscow; he decorated especially the walls of the Jewish theatre. But in 1922, Chagall helped by Lounacharsky, left also Moscow and Russia for Berlin where he tried to recuperate his paintings left in custody from before the war with Herwarth Walden. He would only get back some of his paintings many years later. Chagall obviously did not like Berlin too much, so accompanied by his wife and their child Ida, he returned to Paris in 1923. He was invited there by his friend the poet Blaise Cendrars, and by the art merchant Ambroise Vollard who commissioned him a series of book illustrations. Blaise Cendrars was a well-known figure in the artistic society of Paris. He was for instance also a friend of the abstract painter Frantisek Kupka, a Czech, who was experimenting in non-figurative images.

The years in Vitebsk were happy years, despite the revolution and the problems with Malevich. Chagall was happily married. He adored his wife, aided by the fact that she was a sophisticated person from a wealthy jeweller's family. The painting 'The Walk' of 1917 shows some of the elation of Chagall with his young wife Bella. Again, the painting contains the themes dear to the painter: his shtetl, the village of Vitebsk with the cupola synagogue. Cubist memories have remained in the drawing of the houses and the fields are still well-delineated areas. Chagall himself is a smiling slim young man in black. Bella is simply floating in the air, all curly and red colours. A bouquet of flowers is once more at Chagall's feet, transformed into crystals. This is a rare, beautiful painting of love and tenderness. Bella is shown as a lady who is so far from reality, who needs her Jewish joker of a man to keep her connected with the earth and reality. And Chagall, the poor fisher's boy is there to keep the high-flying Bella linked to earth. But their hands do not loosen.

In Paris, Chagall continued to paint. He had more and more success; his art was exhibited in Paris, Brussels, London, Prague, in Poland, in New York^{B7}. He became a French citizen in 1937, even though at the beginning the French authorities were reluctant to make French a former Russian communist People's Commissar. Chagall made travels in Europe, remained sometimes in the south of France where he met Pablo Picasso.

The painting 'Double Portrait' shows Chagall and Bella together. Chagall never left Bella. He took her with him on all his travels. They were inseparable. Bella is immaculate white, beautiful and intense. She always wore black gloves and these are painted on the white of her body. The flowers of hope and happiness are close by. Chagall is painting with his left hand; the palette is in his right hand. Chagall was indeed a left-handed painter. Both figures are floating together.

'To my wife' contains all the memories and most of the images of the Jew Chagall together in one painting. There are the wooden houses of the town of Vitebsk. When Chagall was born these houses burnt down; Chagall's parents had to flee with the baby in their arms. In some paintings Chagall recalls this event. There is the wedding of the dark Chagall and the white Bella under a linen roof, here painted red, as was Jewish custom. There is a fiddler on the roof; a violin comes out of a cloud. The fiddler is also a recurring theme of Chagall. There is a blue goat at the top of the picture, holding a candelabrum with three arms as used in some Jewish religious ceremonies. Candles burn in the chandelier. There are the bouquets of flowers, one large bunch in a vase painted soft in violet colours. The other flowers are at the

bottom in the very bright red and green colours as we found them already in various Chagall pictures. There is a sheep and a blood-red angel, a fish of hope with an umbrella. There is a goat playing the drum and a flying Jew blowing on the zofar, the traditional Jewish ram's horn. A pigeon is picking at fruit near a chair. Bella lies naked on a red bed. Of course the red of eroticism, but Bella is painted delicately. She is a symbol instead of an alluring woman. The fruit of sin is nearby. So is the fan Bella used frequently and so are the books valued by all Jews. But all is painted against a dark background because Bella by that time had died.

Where do all these images come from? Chagall was a learned Jew. Contrary to most poor Russian children, Jewish children were well educated at the Jewish heder or primary school in which they learned the religious books of the Jews. Those books were the Torah being the Pentateuch, the five books of Jewish history that contained the old alliance between God and the Jews, and the Talmud or law books. They learned the history of the Jewish people and received lessons in logic by reading and interpreting the Torah, the Jewish bible and the Jewish religious laws. But as all poor people, Chagall also must have heard tales told by his grandparents or old neighbours, coming in the evening to tell each other their finest stories. The stories were of magic and mystic events, of angels and evil spirits that haunted Jewish folklore.

The Kabbalah are a set of books of mystic Jewish authors of several centuries. The authors built on folklore and on traditions of esoterism of the Greek Gnostics who searched secret knowledge-systems^{E10}. The texts dealt in secret knowledge, miracles, angels and devils, in Satan and Belial, and in golems, dybbuks or spirits of all kinds. The Kabbalah contained especially also interpretation of holy numbers that could be found in all things and events, an obsession that can also be remarked in the 'Golden Legend'. Kabbalists saw God in everything, in events, animals and man, and in numbers. Pantheism of course was Judaic heresy, but the Kabbalah continued to thrive and had a special attraction to superstitious, simple-minded people who needed irrational reasons for all the bad things that happened to them. Their life was filled by dybbuks that drove them to crime and sin, that brought evil and suffering. The people could imagine themselves as to be no sinners, but inherently good souls. Their sins were driven by devils, as evil spirits threw people hence and forth.

The Kabbalah was put together in a coherent system by Isaac the Blind in the twelfth century, improved by Nahmanides in the thirteenth^{E10}. At the end of the thirteenth century then, the Spanish kabbalist Moses Ben Shem Tov wrote the final compilation called the Sefer-ha-Zohar, usually simple called the Zohar, which became the bible of the Kabbalists. The kabbalist beliefs left Spain with the Sephardi Jews who were expelled from Spain in the fifteenth century. Just as the Torah had its learned geniuses over the centuries, so had Kabbalism. In the fifteenth century Isaac Ben Solomon Luria was its greatest proponent. Luria thought that numbering letters and words of the Torah would directly lead to God. In the seventeenth century there was Gershom Solem, and so on. Chablis was also strongly messianic: the beliefs that God's reign would be realised on earth by a Messiah or Saviour.

The paintings of Chagall are reminiscent of his youth in which he must have been impregnated with kabbalist folklore. The symbols, devils, angels, dybbuks, goats, of Jewish primitive and mystic imagery are all found in Chagall's paintings. The zofar or ram's horn is drawn in many paintings, maybe a reference to the Kabbalistic Zohar

texts. But let us not look so far. Just as these images turned into the heads of the poor Jews of Vitebsk, so did they float in the dreams of Chagall. He simply continued the images of his first years. They never left him; he used them again and again in his paintings in various settings, forms and colours. We sense that Chagall must have been so happy with his wife Bella, that he was happy with all things and saw radiance in all things around him. This also is a pantheist feeling, prominent in the Kabbalah. Chagall assembled the images to poetry, to a lyrical expression that is very rare for the twentieth century and that particularly appealed to a certain European audience that was wary of the cruelty of Expressionist art.

The painting 'The Village Madonna' dates from 1938 to 1942. Chagall had now lived in Christian France for a long time. He had absorbed the Christian elements. The Madonna of the village carries a child as in the so many Madonna paintings of history. But the Jews also have their Madonna; at least Chagall had his. So this is again the white Bella with her child – a girl – Ida. Chagall is also there: he kisses from above the Madonna. The colour areas of this painting go from black beneath to blue and a joyful golden hue on top. The town, Vitebsk again, is completely in black. It is night and a single candle brings the light of the Madonna. The Madonna appears at night, the female saviour and hope of a tortured dark shtetl. Maybe Chagall saw in love of pure women like Bella the only hope for Jewish towns, which were now more and more persecuted by Germans, Poles and Russians. The heavens of the picture are full of angels announcing help and redemption. The themes of Chagall are present again: the cow or ox, here arriving to see what happens, the violin, the books, the bunch of flowers, the angel with the zofar. The result is very lyrical. This painting is a poem in colour.

In 1941, with Nazi Germans already occupying half of France and Chagall residing in the Provence region, he obtained an invitation of the Museum of Modern Art of New York to come to the United States. Chagall, who had hitherto refused to leave France although the Jews were starting to be picked up and sent to concentration camps, finally looked reality in the face. He escaped over Marseille, where he was briefly detained in prison after a search for Jews, to Madrid and the United States. Chagall stayed in New York, sometimes in town, sometimes in the countryside close by. His American days were sad. He abhorred the horrors of the World War. His paintings became grey and sad. Then, in 1944, Bella suddenly fell ill and died in a few days' time. Chagall stopped painting for almost a year.

Bella Chagall-Rosenfeld died in New York a day of 1944 at ten minutes past ten, as is indicated by the clock in the middle of the painting 'To my wife'. The clock is in the middle because everything floats around this hour: all the memories of a happy wedding, the village in Vitebsk and the love nights when ghosts and angels come to life.

Chagall remained a time in New York. His daughter Ida engaged a young English girl, Virginia Mc Neil, with whom over the years Chagall entered into a sentimental relationship^{B7}. He never married her though; few paintings have the figure of Virginia. In 1948 Chagall returned to France, a year later he bought a villa in Saint-Paul de Vence called 'La Colline', the hill. Virginia left him in 1951 with her children. Chagall returned to painting long biblical series. The painting 'King David' is one of the firsts of these.

After the departure of Virginia Mc Neil, Chagall remained alone. Soon however, he met the Russian Valentine Brodsky, Vava, and married her shortly after.

The triptych 'Resistance, Resurrection, Liberation' was painted in the period from just before the Second World War till just after it: from 1937 till 1953.

The painting to start with is 'Resistance'. On the bottom of the painting, the Jewish town is all in dark tones as if a giant fog has taken away all the colours. A dying man lies on the ground, helplessly, with a memory of a white lady fading in the distance. Is this Chagall, as he would imagine himself in a Russian town tortured by troops? Any troops would do, the Jews of Russia were constantly harassed by the pogroms of first the Tsarist Ministers, then of Stalin and finally by the German invasion. Vitebsk would not survive the holocaust. Almost all Jews of Vitebsk were killed, a community of more than twenty thousand souls disappeared. Chagall always refused to return to his hometown after the war. Even when a more tolerant Russian regime invited him back to Russia, to an exhibition of his art, he refused. He knew he would find nothing of the Vitebsk he loved, changed as it would have been by the German destruction and the soul-less rebuilding by the Stalinists.

The top of the painting 'Resistance' is all red. Like the red revolution that swept over Russia. Chagall had learned of the horrors of the civil war between White and Red Russians, then of the massacres of Stalin. Red is of course the colour of blood, so really the colour to use for a war scene. Death and destruction is red in Chagall's mind. War is also confusion, so the images whirl and are superposed. Fighting men are advancing with torches and guns. Peasants are fleeing with only a sack of meagre possessions on their shoulder. Mothers keep their babies warm in heavy cloth. But witches in blue hoods take away helpless babies. The picking bird shows its snout, looking to tear at corpses. There are no violins anymore, soldiers still think they have a violin bow, but their bows have turned into rifles. There is pain and outcrying. The eroticism of killed and violated naked women lying on the ground is also part of the horrors. Christ is crucified again; his body is contorted on the cross. And above all flies Satan as a billy-goat, bringing fire and destruction. In this painting the red colour is preponderant.

In 'Resurrection', red is diminished. When 'Resistance' hangs next to 'Resurrection', the borderlines between blue and red flows from one painting to the other. There is not only more blue in 'Resurrection', but the blue is brighter and completely at the bottom is the fish of hope. The fish is also the ancient icon of Christ, since fish in Greek was written *Ixos* or pronounced *Xos* for *Christos*. The fish icon can be found in the old Rome catacombs. The fish is at the feet of Jesus and the Christ is still a sufferer for humanity, but he has grown to fill the picture. It is the Jesus of a Jew, dressed in Jewish loincloth, as he should be. For Chagall real religious Judaism had made place for something much more fundamental. Since the Kabbalah was pantheist, God also had to be in Jesus even though the Jews did not recognise him as the final Messiah. For Chagall Jesus Christ was the sufferer, a symbol that was universal. Chagall, the multi-cultural traveller was saying with his images that Jesus was a Galilean Jew, a symbol that could be used both by Christians and by Jews.

Chagall's view is right. Judaism gave birth to the two most important religions in Europe and Near-East Asia: Christianity and Islam. Judaism is the source, the ancient traditional and conservative source, but the immutable basis of the monotheist religions of the Mediterranean regions. Chagall saw these beliefs as one. Maybe a time will come when indeed the priests and rabbis and mullahs will recognise and testify to one faith. They will maybe recognise that their differences of religion are merely differences of form and not of essence. On the bottom right of Chagall's picture a woman with red hair carrying a child looks at Jesus and the rabbi equally as possible saviours.

Certainly in 'Resurrection' there is still red, but not anymore of war. War has subsided, war is just finished. The last soldier wields a torch but the flame is white now. The soldier on horse has a ladder, he goes up somewhere: to the skies, to joy, redemption, at least he ascends to more hope. The red flags are triumphantly born by the masses. Chagall did have sympathies for the red communist revolution, as had the Jews Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky and so many other Jewish intellectuals who were at the basis of Communism. Jews were learned men. They had a tradition of ages of learning the Torah and the Talmud in their rabbinical schools. Jews discussed their holy books freely and by interpretation they could go to left and right ideals and ideology. The philosopher Baruch Spinoza went so far in rationalisation as to deny religion. The Jews excluded him out of their community. Jewish rationalism brought them also to Communism. So, 'Resurrection' to some extent is the victory of the poor people. The poor people's peace is finally a reality in view. Suffering however is not finished, but at least it has become apparent so that it can be helped. In the blue part, a rabbi could come out, still clutching the Torah scrolls. A cult lamp gives yellow light to the village. A figure is even reading and learning again: the Jews return to their tradition and again find time to spend on their books. The evil goat is still there however and the shtetl is on fire. This is a memory of the story that must have been told to Chagall in family circles. At the time of his birth Vitebsk, built of wood, especially the Jewish part of the town, burned down. Chagall's mother fled with her child in her arms, as is painted on top of the flaming houses. But dreams can come back and can become alive: a painter in blue is shown on the right of Jesus's legs, upside down flying in the airs.

'Liberation' is the last painting of the Triptych. The central element is a radiating sun that warms everybody. Warm also are the yellow, golden colours. The radiations are all pervasive. Joy is there as a fiddler who brings music and happy feelings. The red banners are still there at the top, but they are not important anymore, they have given way to the absolutely more universal emotions of people who simply want to be happy. There are violins and drums, clowns and jugglers and flutists. Women can show their babies to the feasting. Suffering in the symbol of Christ has almost completely faded to a shadow, only to be found a little in the top left corner, disappearing in the fog. The painter can paint in the open again and of course, next to him stands the ubiquitous Bella, in a beautiful blue dress. Blue is the colour of hope.

In 'Liberation', in the bottom part, we find the themes dear to Chagall: his wedding to a Bella in white wedding dress under the linen red roof. There is the bouquet of flowers in various colours, the house and a ladder pointing to the roof. There is a fiddler up there; is he the 'fiddler on the roof'? There are real people in the houses, one peers through the window and there can be again religious meetings in homes and

synagogues. The chandelier with the bright burning candles is held high. Humanity remains, with spiritual ideas and memories; religion has faded.

Chagall made other paintings on this theme, such as the 'White Crucifixion' of the Art Institute of Chicago. This painting is set in a snowy landscape. It contains again the image of the crucified Jesus, wearing the Jewish prayer shawl as a loincloth. The imagery is as explicit as in the Triptych. Jesus's halo is answered in the halo glow of the Jewish candelabra, the menorah. A synagogue goes up in flames, accentuating the persecution of the Jews. Boats of refugees are fleeing. Jews have to wear inscriptions on their breast. Chagall painted over some of the explicit symbols like swastika's on the flag and the inscriptions 'I am a Jew', probably fearing that the work would be destroyed during his flight from Germany and Europe^{S2}. All the horrors of German and European anti-Semitism are thus also expressed in this painting.

The Triptych was a rare show of faith in humanity and a declaration of joy at the end of the wars. Chagall had found peace and happiness back in the 1950s, so ended his vision of Europe with 'Liberation'. Some understanding of the universalism of Chagall's ideas emerged in Europe as a catharsis long after the wars. Chagall was invited in 1969 to design the stained glass for the Catholic cathedral of the French town of Metz, in 1974 he made the stained glass windows of the Notre-Dame cathedral of Reims. In 1969 the new Knesset parliament of Israel used Chagall mosaics. A year later he designed the stained glass panes of the Fraumünster church of Zurich, Switzerland. Later still he would decorate with stained glass catholic churches in Mainz, Germany and Chichester, England. The colours of Chagall lent themselves very easily to the art of stained glass in large volumes of churches and halls. Just as light breaks through the bright colours of the glass, so do the dream images come to the minds of men. It is not by chance that the stained glass images captured the attention of both the Chagall of dreamworlds and the painter Frantisek Kupka who was in search for pure emotions expressed in abstract art.

From his marriage with Vava Brodsky on, in a more peaceful though stressed Europe, till his death, Chagall went from triumph to triumph in a very filled life. He worked till close to his death in 1985, almost ninety-eight years old. He travelled to all countries of Europe, saw major exhibitions of his works in the United States and in Russia, all over Europe. In the last years his hands trembled, so he turned to a style of bringing patches of paint one next to the other on his canvases. But Chagall never was much of a drawer anyway: he never learned nor could draw finely as the masters Dürer, Botticelli or Van De Velde. His paintings were all colours and could remain so till his last days.

'The Fall of Icarus' is such a late painting, dating from 1974-1977. Chagall always painted at one picture over many years, adding visions as they came to a basic theme. This painting is all colours; form is reduced to the minimum. All strokes are bolder now. Icarus is in flames and falls down. He falls into the blood-red earth also, so he falls from one terror into another. He is the only one in trouble; all the bystanders are out of the red colour. In the blue, the entire Jewish village is present: masses of people and animals have come to look at the torture of one. Is Icarus the painter, who has travelled far to try to reach the sun, but who has went too far and has suffered? At least the people of the shtetl are not absent-minded or simply going on their daily

business as in the Pieter Bruegel picture. Here, all the Jews have come to cry at the misery, but also to open their arms compassionately to the falling artist.

The meaning of Chagall was as Icarus: someone who has went other paths to find impossible ideals, directions and worlds which most people think stupid and useless. Icarus was Jesus Christ who had elevated humanity, had dreams of love, then was nailed to a cross. Icarus was the symbol of the idealist and dreamer. Icarus was the simple man who loved so much that he had reached the skies and burned himself, then fell down. Chagall lived in dreams through all the horrors of the Russian pogroms and the holocaust that killed six million of the nine million Jews of Europe. The Russian Jews liked to live in Russia and no Germans were as patriotic as the German Jews of before the Second World War. The German Jews had liked their country: Germany was dedicated to learning, just as the Jews admired as a people. The Germany of before the Second World War had brought Von Bode and the Berlin Museum Island with the Kaiser Friedrich Museum and the Pergamom, Von Humboldt and Max Friedländer. It had brought Jewish scientists like Einstein and given them opportunities to work in the most intellectual environments.

All that Germany, together with Polish and Russian Jews, was destroyed in the wars. Chagall lived through it all.

Marc Chagall lived in the memories of his childhood, not unlike Isaac Bashevis Singer. Singer was a Polish writer who immigrated to the United States. His novels are like Chagall's paintings. Laughter is always there, as is the past. Singer told that he wrote in Yiddish because the more the language died, the livelier became the ghosts. Ghosts, spirits, dybbuks, billy-goats certainly were alive in the mind of Singer and in the mind and the eyes of Moishe Segall, the poor Jew of a shtetl near Vitebsk. For Chagall, these spirits drove people, just as Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote in his novels. Chagall kept his dream alive.

The strange thing that happened was that at first other poor people and then more and more the same poor people that had become richer, started to understand the dreams and the guarded message. Life can be beautiful in all colours and lyrical images, there can be fiddlers and cows and roosters and mothers with babies, and people can feel united with animals and small villages. In there only is the hope for a more humane future. Is it an illusion to believe that Chagall ever more attracted the masses to his paintings, that he received commissions such as to decorate the Parisian Opera because that message was finally recognised as the sole message of value? Chagall was the fiddler on the roof who continued to fiddle through the pain. He kept the laughter alive, the love, and the memories. His success in our years is the success of the true values of tolerance and unison of people's feelings and religions. And of course, these feelings are universal but also very Christian.

Marc Chagall lived over ninety years. So did Tiziano Vecellio, Oskar Kokoschka, Pablo Picasso and Michelangelo Buonarroti. These geniuses were such bundles of energy that they simply did not think of death. Maybe that is the secret of long life. They worked intensely till late in life, and then died suddenly like an oak tree that will not bend to the wind but is felled by an axe. Of all of these, the one that is the less dead, is Marc Chagall.

Christ's Presence

The Entry of Christ in Brussels

James Ensor (1860-1949). The J. Paul Getty Museum – Los Angeles. 1888.

James Ensor was born in Ostend as James Sidney Edward Ensor in 1860. His father was English, his mother Flemish. His parents kept a sea-coast souvenir shop in the most popular tourist resort of the Belgian North Sea coast. The shop was a curiosa shop in which sea-shells, toys and extravagant items were sold. James grew up in this world of marvel. Ensor's mother sold extraordinary articles and also masks for the carnival season. The tradition of celebrating Carnival was strong in Flanders and Carnival was an event that was much feasted in the town of Ostend. These may have so much influenced his young imagination that the masks became one of his major themes.

Ensor learned to draw while he was still a young boy and entered first the Academy of Ostend, then – in 1877 – the Academy of Brussels. He left the latter academy in 1880 and painted as a professional painter, exhibiting his canvases. In 1883 he was a member of a group of Symbolist artists founded in Brussels, called 'Les Vingt' or 'Les XX', the Twenty. Leader and secretary of this group was the Belgian lawyer and art amateur Octave Maus. In 1888 Ensor met a woman who served for a time in the shop of his mother, the daughter of a hotel keeper of Ostend. Ensor would never marry her, but Augusta Boogaerts would stay his friend their entire life. In that same year 1888 he painted the 'Entry of Jesus Christ in Brussels'. He was then twenty-eight years old, so that the picture is an early work in his career. At that age however Ensor had already found his main themes and later he would only re-iterate and develop further on these themes.

Ensor travelled to and visited Paris several times. He learned to know many painters, among which the Dutch artist Jan Toorop and the Belgian Walloon painter Félicien Rops. In 1893 the group 'Les XX' dissolved but Octave Maus immediately founded a new group, entitled 'la Libre Esthétique'. Ensor joined also this group. He continued to paint and gradually aversion for his work turned into recognition by the Belgian magistrates. Collectors such as the Lambotte family bought his paintings. From about 1905 on, Ensor lived back in Ostend. He painted, composed music and he wrote. His works were exhibited in known galleries. In 1929 King Albert II granted him the title of Baron and he also received the full naturalisation for Belgium. In 1930, a monument was erected in his home town in his honour and the former contestant was now integral part of the Belgian bourgeoisie. He died in November of 1949 at Ostend.

In his first period, James Ensor painted in a rather Expressionist way still lives and scenes of interiors, and also many portraits. His palette was dark, his subject gloomy. He used many shades of grey, dark brown colours on his canvases. His first masks date from about 1863, when he was only twenty-three years old. This theme would one of his major ideas as subject for his pictures. Gradually, he applied brighter and brighter colours, mainly from 1885 on, so that colour would become one of his main means of expression.

Ensor's interest in religious themes must be sought more in his sketches than in his oil paintings, but became important from 1886 on. He made drawings of the Pietà motif; he painted crucifixion scenes. By 1887 his sombre colours had almost entirely disappeared and he made works that might have joined the Impressionists if it were not for their strong expressive character. His first oil painting of the crucified Christ dates from 1888, the year of the 'Entry of Christ into Brussels' too. That same year he started to paint many pictures with figures and carnival masks. In around 1890 masks were his favourite subject. He painted a very Expressionist Ecce Homo scene in 1891 and one might wonder what place and to what extent religion influenced his state of mind at that time. In this remarkable painting, Ensor showed only the face of Jesus Christ, drawn completely in red and black, a face contorted with pain and horror, a face of blood with a terrible sneer on the mouth. In 1891 he made a painting of Jesus Christ appeasing the waves of the Sea during a storm. This would become a recurring theme for Ensor. He also painted 'Christ in Limbo', Christ descending to Hell, after his Resurrection, to deliver the souls of the pure from limbo. The period of 1888 to 1893 marked years during which carnival masks are dominant in his expression of humankind. Yet, he also painted many still lives, religious scenes, and occasionally also discrete pictures with the Virgin Mary. He painted masks until way in the 1930's.

Many of Ensor's painting suggest that he looked at himself as a lonely man in a strange and utterly non-understood outer world. He was a man surrounded by masks and skeletons. Ensor thus expressed the incomprehension of his universe, his impossibility to come to true communication with other human beings. Other men and women were mere hallucinations, phantoms and ghosts and clowns that walked in the streets with death and destruction on their faces. Ensor faced a profound alienation of his environment, of the cities he lived in. Yet, he had many friends and lived in Ostend snugly with members of his family in the same house. Ensor's oeuvre was entirely expressionist, hallucinatory, fantastic, outrageous and caricatural, delivered in irony and pessimism with extreme critic on his fellow-men.

There is a strong tradition of 'Joyous Entries' in Belgium, mostly in Flemish cities but not exclusively. It was usual for medieval rulers of Belgium to enter a city and take possession of the town in a formal way. In ancient times, the keys of the gates of the cities were presented to the rulers as a token of submission; and in return the princes, dukes and kings signed and confirmed the privileges of the town. In Brussels in particular, the entry of Emperor Charles V in the town, an event which happened in the sixteenth century, is re-enacted every year till this day in a festive procession called the 'Ommeganck'. The people that form the procession are mostly member of the noble families of Belgium, and so is the person who re-incarnates Charles V. James Ensor painted such an Ommeganck in garish colours, with a crowd of clowns and buffoons, puppets and carnival masks, skeletons and obese figures, which accompany Christ who rides a donkey.

The New Testament tells how Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem accompanied by a large crowd. Christ does not make his entry into Jerusalem in Ensor's painting, but in Brussels. The crowd is a grotesque wave of phantoms and ghostly figures that fill the boulevard. The crowd advances on the viewer and fills the canvas.

The structure of the painting is simple. James Ensor rarely sought a pre-devised scheme of lines. Here, he painted row after row of ghost figures to arrive at a level,

way behind, in which there is a layer in which Jesus is alone and rides calmly, blessing the crowd. The rows advance led by a bishop who is represented as a cheer leader, clad in the red colour which is the symbol not only of cardinals but also of the socialist movement of the Belgian society of the moment. It is a loathsome, gruesome circus of people that Ensor shows. There are masks of fleshless skulls, naïve Pierrot masks, black-hatted sorcerers, catlike masks, and medieval characters. All the people wear masks of carnival but their masks are their faces.

James Ensor was thus surrounded in his world not by live people but by caricatures instead of people, by horrible and repulsive alien hosts with which he could not communicate, and who defied communication, because they were so different from him and so one-sided. Ensor typified people in absurd categories and these only lived. Ensor thus showed a Belgian society of anxiety and hypocrisy. Jesus Christ is God, but the cheerleader though wearing the mitre of a bishop, is an overweight political, socialist leader. The crowd passes under a red banner on which is written 'Vive la Sociale'. A general precedes the musicians. He wears medals all over his breast so that the medals make a puppet soldier of him. The mayor, accompanied by clowns who must represent his assistants or 'échevins', as they are called in Belgium, all elected by the people, stand on a dais and acclaim the mob. The mayor is tall and thin and he wears a leader's staff. The throng of people brandish banners. A man grasps and lowers himself down a flag on which is written 'Les XX'. Painters thus climb on advancing artistic movements, probably only in order to gain some status from the group.

Jesus Christ greets the people, but he seems in particular to bless a skeleton. James Ensor may have shown himself a Jesus, addressing skeletons of creatures that do not understand his art and provide no substance of understanding to him. The same kinds of personages follow Jesus. A man holds high the queue of Jesus's donkey and another clown, wearing a hat coloured in Belgium's national colours of red, yellow and black, leads the second wave. The sinister, grotesque wave walks to the tunes of absurd music. The smirking faces laugh and the figures dance forward to no end.

James Ensor showed in 'The Entry of Christ in Brussels' about the most pessimistic view an artist can have of his fellow-men. James' Ensor contempt did not please his contemporaries, not even his fellow-artists of 'Les Vingt', and not the buyers of his work. The picture stayed in his home until 1929 and was only then exhibited for the first time. The painting said not so much about the Belgian society of the times, as about James Ensor and about how artists like him thought about the incomprehension of society about their art. Times were changing. Art, said Ensor, does not necessarily have to show pretty things. Art can show the absurd and the ugly and still be art. Artists before him had given this message of course. Caravaggio and Goya had done the same long before Ensor, but Ensor was one of the first to take this message as far as one could possibly do in representation. It is ironical that this same society acclaimed Ensor only a few years after he made this work and that Ensor easily indulged in the honour and acclaim he received from the Belgian society he represented in such a sinister way.

*Remorse***The Scream**

Edvard Munch (1863-1944). The National Gallery – Oslo. 1893.

The Artist's Sister Inger

The National Gallery – Oslo. 1884.

The Sick Child

The National Gallery – Oslo. 1885-1886.

Spring

The National Gallery – Oslo. 1889.

Evening Talk.

State Museum of Fine Arts – Copenhagen. 1889.

By the Roulette

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1892.

Melancholy

The National Gallery – Oslo. 1892.

The Artist's Sister Inger

The National Gallery – Oslo. 1892.

Dagny Juel Przybyszewska

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1893.

Death in the Sick Room

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1893.

Jealousy

The Rasmus Meyers Collection – Bergen. 1895.

Self-portrait in Hell

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1903.

Self-portrait with a Bottle of Wine

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1906.

The Death of Marat I

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1907.

Death Struggle

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1915.

The Artist and his Model

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1919-1921.

Sitting Model on a Couch

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1924.

The Ladies on the Bridge

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1935.

Under the Chestnut Tree

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1937.

Self-portrait. Between the Clock and the Bed

The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1940-1942.

The Scream

All texts on the painter Edvard Munch start with 'The Scream'. The picture is so unavoidable. No other image epitomises more the European twentieth century. It has been called the image of modern man, man in the grip of the horrors of the World Wars, man in the existential fear of the challenges of the new times. And indeed, the

change of the century brought upheavals in everything man had known in the previous times. His economy, his ways of living, his religious beliefs, his philosophies, his science, the very speed of change were dauntingly new. One and the same generation had to cope with the advent of radio, television, automobiles, planes, refrigerators, iron warships, plastics, and paved roads, distances that could be spanned in days instead of in months. But he also had to understand the structure of the atom, the limit formed by the speed of light, the big bang theory of the universe. And in a tentative understanding of his own primitive urges, man had to cope with his subconsciousness.

Confronted by so many challenges and changes, man had to scream to liberate his mind of the threats and to be able to absorb and digest the novelties. Only a scream could do that. Only the people who could scream would survive in this world, could assimilate it and adapt. Some people simply could not scream. Then the rapid times overwhelmed the personality. The challenges stayed and grew in the inner self and slowly but surely destroyed the person. The result would be depression, manic sickness. Tolerance and empathy could be forgotten and wars could and did ensue. Then it was the scream of war

‘The Scream’ is that kind of work. The picture is the visual expression of how the world can vibrate at a scream. All lines oscillate at the same frequency as the sound. All colours of the landscape start to move at the same rhythm as the sounds until the sounds of the scream and the vibrations of the colours become unbearable and are at the point of breaking the figure. No picture like this had been made before, although the French Impressionist painters had brought the transformation of reality very far. ‘The Scream’ was the first painting in which not the eye dominated however, but the very representation of an inner state.

Edvard Munch would continue to do exactly this during the whole of his life. Munch was the first painter of a new generation that led to the total and exclusive expression of subjectivity in art and he had the genius to bring immediately this method as far as it could be taken. The inner self was not just expressed, the new painters also tried to create images that inspired strange inner moods in viewers. This search would continue as it will probably continue forever. It quickly led in one direction to the annihilation of subject matter and to totally abstract painting.

This explanation of ‘The Scream’ is from inside out; the painting is the result of an inner state. There is another explanation however, that proceeds from the outside in. A person who knew Edvard Munch closely for many years has given this explanation: the financier and writer Rolf E. Stenersen. Stenersen handled Munch’s finances, was accepted as a friend and confidant. Munch would occasionally give pictures to Stenersen, which are now to be admired in the small but interesting Stenersen Museum of Oslo. Stenersen’s explanation is probably the right one and also the most plausible. Stenersen explains the painting as the agony of a hypersensitive artist at the threat of a landscape’s colours and lines^{G31}. The agony remains within, in an imprisoned mind, in an artist unable to scream out loud.

And indeed, Munch was a hypersensitive artist. He was very sensitive to colours. He saw sometimes objects in other colours than normal people and he had a view on balance and harmony of structure and line in paintings that was remarkable. This

sensitivity increased with age and Munch was only thirty years old when 'The Scream' was made. So we may expect also some deliberate search in this painting. 'The Scream' is not just the spontaneous expression in rapid lines that we find back in later works. 'The Scream' was also not painted after the periods that marked major disasters in Munch's life, although the death of his sister and mother had already marked him much. Munch can be considered an intuitive, spontaneous, impulsive painter. Yet he was also very intelligent and reflected much on his pictures, their subject and their structure. He may have taken on a subject in an impulsive way; the result was always very deliberate.

How could 'The Scream' be made? What kind of a man was this Edvard Munch who had arrived at this representation? How did the history of art and the evolution of painting work in this personality to arrive at such an image? As we will see, it was in the absence of tradition and the lack of academics in a man from Northern Europe, working outside the main streams of seven centuries of oil painting, that lay the reasons for the genesis of this new kind of images, which would mark our own century. One other man started to paint this way almost at the same time. This was Vincent Van Gogh, and he shot himself only a couple of years after having made his first pictures in the new style. It is remarkable how both painters arrived at a very bright colour palette in their best and last periods of artistic work.

Edvard Munch continued to work in this, now his only and own style. Our century has remained in the influence of Munch, whether consciously or unconsciously. Only another new wave of pictures and yet new thinking on the very basis of our societies can help us get out of Munch's nightmares.

Edvard Munch

Edvard Munch was born in Norway, in Loten in Hedmark at the end of 1863. Loten was only a village then, but Munch's father was an army doctor, a medical officer at the garrison of Loten. On his father's side, the Munchs were scientists, priests, and writers. Edvard Munch's uncle, the brother of his father, wrote a national history of Norway that became very popular and famous since Norway's nationalism grew at the end of the nineteenth century. On Munch's mother's side were farmers and merchants. His mother's father had been a sea captain and a timber merchant. He lost his fortune during the economic recession that shook Norway. The country had been loosened from Denmark at the 1814 Treaty of Kiel. Norway had been handed over to Sweden. The competition by new sources of timber had stopped the business of the Bjolstads. After the 1840s, Norway slowly started to grow again and the country buzzed with new energy in the 1860s. Munch's father was appointed to the Akershus fortress in Oslo in 1864. Akershus fort is still a military domain today and can be visited in Oslo. The town Oslo was in fact called Christiania until 1924.

Tuberculosis ran in Munch's mother's family. Laura Bjolstad died in 1868 when Edvard was only five years old. The younger sister Bjolstad, Edvard's aunt Karen, moved in to run the household. She was something of a painter; she made miniatures, collages of moss and leaves and sold these to contribute to the family finances⁰⁵. She inspired Edvard Munch to draw, encouraged him, so that at twelve he made sketches frequently. These were mostly of the indoors of the family flat, because he was often

sick with chronic asthmatic bronchitis and rheumatic fever^{G31} so that he had to stay inside for long periods in Winter.

The Sick Child

In 1877, when Munch was fourteen years old, his older sister Johanne Sophie died of tuberculosis. This had an everlasting impression on Munch. He made paintings of his sick sister at different periods of his life, six versions of the 'Sick Child' in all^{U2}.

'The Sick Child' has become famous as one of the first paintings made in an entirely new style, eight years before 'The Scream', in a subjective and forceful, expressive way. The painting treats the scene very respectfully. Death is near; the child's aunt bows her head to the inevitable end. Both child and aunt are linked by the nearing death. The colours of the figures are subdued but for the girl's hair. Everything around the girl seems to fade away, colours and lines disappear. The girl is still alive, and that is shown by the white of the cushion, which envelops her like an aura. The girl may soon become as white as this and her soul will take the appearance of a white angel. In this white, the girl will sink away. The painting is seen as through a veil, as if life disappears and is only a shadow. The veil of sorrow also, that wets the eye and blurs the vision. The world around is strange, unreal, leaving. There is great tenderness in this painting. The aunt is present and thereby lends courage and a small rest of force to the girl. The aunt bows her head in respect so that her looks might not frighten further nor embarrass the girl.

The death of his younger sister affected Edvard Munch very much. He painted the scene many times over at various periods of his life. He always kept the wicker-chair in which Johanne-Sophie had died. One of those paintings made in 1889 is 'Spring'. Other paintings on the theme are 'Death in the Sick Room' of 1893 and 'Death Struggle' of 1915. There are more than twenty-five years between these paintings but the memories; the frustration and obsession with this death remain the same.

In 'Death in the Sick Room', the image of the artist's other and most beloved sister Inger, facing the painter as the only one to do so, is also present. The other figures belong to the past and do not seem to have the same attention of Munch as had Inger. Johanne Sophie is treated with the same delicate, tender respect as in previous pictures. Sophie is in the wicker-chair; but then again she is not really in the picture. She is only hinted at by the presence of the mourning figures. Her chair is turned away from the viewer. Mourning is indicated by the averted, bowing heads. All figures are in dark clothes, contrasting with the two horizontal planes of green and orange colours of the room. There is structure in this painting due to these horizontal colour surfaces, but also in the two sets of people. There is the triangle Sophie, father, aunt Karen to the right and Inger with two other figures of which one is sitting in a chair just like Sophie. This structure reminds of that other very individual painting of 'Irene tending Sebastian' of Georges de La Tour, in which there are similarly two sets of separated persons. A figure is leaving the room – Edvard Munch? – indicating the departure to the world of the dead.

'The Death Struggle' is more hallucinating. It is a painting from Munch's later, very colourful period. Now, horrible death is immediately present. The departing soul and the pains are represented by the patches of red colour on the wallpaper behind the bed. These patches seem to form an ascending pattern and movement. The figures that are present however, are painted with bleak faces of which only remain masks. Munch repeatedly painted figures as hallucinating masks, as images of a nightmare, sometimes to underscore that these were images out of his memories, sometimes really to mean the danger that other people could represent.

Other Scandinavian painters took up images of sick children as themes after Krohg and Munch. So much so that Munch called this the 'Pillow Period'. Ejnar Nielsen made a 'Sick Girl' in 1896. Nielsen's picture is more realist, as cold as death itself, painted in the colours of oblivion. The girl has sunk into the bed, sunk into the deep and the iron bars retain her from life. The girl inexorably will sink into death. This is a picture of complete resignation, as Munch never accepted.

Inger

Maybe because of the loss of his sister Johanne Sophie was Edvard Munch so linked to his other sister, Inger. In 1884, one year before he painted the 'Sick Child', Munch made a portrait of Inger. Inger is still painted in a traditional style. She wears a black dress so that her body melts into the background. Emphasis is brought only to one hand and especially to the face. The picture proves how skilled a painter Munch already was at just twenty-one years old. Munch did not have to turn to rapid lines and colours because of lack of draftsmanship. He could draw and paint to natural detail as Rembrandt and he knew perfectly well the effects of light and dark. In 'Inger', the dark dress and dark background are used to bring the girl's face directly to us in dramatic effect. Inger is a striking, good-looking young lady already. Strict and gloomy, she has one of the finest faces ever brought to the canvas.

Edvard Munch made another picture of her in 1892. In this portrait, Inger stands in full. She is again clad in a dark dress, but now red patches enliven the dress a bit. Inger is high-collared. Again only her hands and face testify to her human body. The hands are held together, in a form of prayer. The whole image expresses purity, restraint, strictness, and austerity. The beautiful face is open, longing for tenderness and love. It is a very sensitive face, of a person who would be able to give a lot of love and tenderness, but who is probably so sensitive as to be hurt at the slightest remark. She looks very vulnerable. This is a woman who can be broken so easily by life, but she guards herself from being hurt. This is one of the finest portraits of a woman ever made. This is a woman men fight for, not to have, not to possess, but to protect. The men who venerate such women do not marry them for fear of hurting such an exquisite being. And she would not want to marry other men.

'Evening Talk' was made in 1889, when Inger was twenty-one. Munch had settled then in Asgaardstrand, on the western bank of the Oslo fjord. Inger was a young lady by then, but in this scene she deliberately draws her shawl over her as if to hide from the man and close herself to maybe a beginning idyll. The man is a theatre critic, Sigurd Botker. With his high bowler hat and long waistcoat, long black beard he seems a Bluebeard whose only interest is in dominating and profiting from Inger. The

landscape is marvellous, luxurious green. It is in contrast with the figures and the house. The meadows and flowers promise happiness and fertility, the two figures only radiate loneliness and separateness. The sharp distinction between the two parts of this picture creates the division of content^{K1}. But Inger is beautiful as ever.

Munch's first paintings, first love

Edvard Munch had attended a technical college in Oslo, but only for one year. Technical studies were definitely not for him. The next year, in 1880, he entered the Royal School of Design in Christiania and started to paint. He worked a little with the Norwegian painter Christian Krohg.

Remarkably, Christian Krohg had painted a 'Sick Child', now in the National Gallery of Oslo, in 1880. In that painting a girl is lying in a white chair, enveloped in white linen. She holds a pink rose. Krohg made another painting on the same theme, 'Mother and Child' in 1883 in which a mother has fallen asleep on a bed next to the cradle in which lies her (sick?) baby. And Krohg made other similar paintings: 'Mother at her Child's bed' in 1884 and 'Tired' in 1885. In 'Tired' a woman sits in a chair, almost asleep behind a sewing machine. Munch may have seen these paintings and have been inspired by them or by their theme, for his own famous 'Sick Child' painted in 1885-1886 when he was still so very young.

In 1885, Edvard Munch exhibited one of his paintings at the World Fair of Antwerp and he travelled to Antwerp and Paris. In Oslo, Munch made friends with a group of artists called the 'Oslo Bohemians'. The most prominent figure of this group was Hans Jaeger, a writer. Munch made his portrait but years after would still be worried whether that was a good painting or not^{G31}.

Munch was also acquainted to the painter Frits Thaulow. He met the painter's sister-in-law, Milly Thaulow. Milly and Edvard had an affair. Munch then was a striking, aristocratic young man, tall and slender with the poetic looks of a romantic artist. Munch would later say that he would always meet this kind of salon-women with the same features, over and over again^{G31}. When these ladies tried to build ties, Munch escaped them, sometimes abruptly and by any means he could think of. These ladies were not in love with him, he said, but merely with the image of the artist. The affair with Milly did not last long. It lasted the time for her to find a new lover.

In 1889, Edvard Munch arranged his own exhibition in Oslo, the first exhibition to be held in Norway by one man alone^{O5}. He bought a small, modest house in Asgaardstrand. This house and the surroundings of Asgaardstrand were to be his real home for the next twenty years^{O5}. He would always come back to here and long for nature as it was around the fjord. He made many pictures of the environment of Asgaardstrand. To understand a little how bucolic and peaceful this particular place was, one can look at the picture that Hans Heyerdahl made of this fjord in 1887, a picture now also in the National Gallery of Oslo.

Major exhibitions, fame

Munch travelled to Paris on a state scholarship in 1889. He painted a little with the French painter Leon Bonnat. He rented a room in Saint Cloud. And he painted scenes of this apartment, of the models that sometimes came with him. During that period in Paris, his father died. Munch could not attend the funeral in time. But he went back to Norway, then yet again returned to France in 1890. He visited Nice, the South of France, received some money of his aunt Karen. He played roulette in Monte Carlo hoping to win money on a scheme thought out by some of his friends^{G31}.

Munch made a painting of his casino life in 1892, called 'By the Roulette'. It is a daunting picture of the obsessed, eager men, all well dressed, with long bearded heads, all looking at the main player. In that, the player on the left, Munch, is isolated. It looks as if the whole table is spying at Munch. As if they have all come there only for one purpose: to encroach on him, to profit from him.

Munch also started a picture cycle that he called 'The Frieze of Life', to which he would add paintings almost to the end of his life.

Munch had received three scholarships to remain in France. A Norwegian writer, Bjornstjerne Bjornson, asked publicly in the press whether the State should subsidise vacations in the South of France for artists like Munch. So it was time for Munch to show what he had accomplished. He arranged a new exhibition in Oslo. A Norwegian painter living in Berlin, paying a visit to this exhibition, proposed him to present also his work at the Artist's Union premises in Berlin^{O5}.

The Berlin exhibition of Edvard Munch opened in November 1892. The exhibition caused a general uproar. Munch's way of painting was considered a scandal in Germany. Not his subjects, but this style was in cause. The exhibition was closed after one week. But Munch was famous. Further exhibitions were arranged in Köln and Düsseldorf, which were then the former centres of Romantic art in Germany.

Munch lived in Berlin for four years. He returned only to Oslo late in 1897, after a new exhibition in this town, which was more positive to him. When he had returned to Oslo however, his finances were very low. He lived in a very small studio together with another painter, Alfred Hauge^{O5}.

Jealousy

While in Berlin, Edvard Munch fell in love or was impressed to infatuation by a girl he had known since childhood, Dagny Juel. Munch had introduced Dagny to his friends in Berlin in 1893 and all fell in love with her. Dagny Juel married that same year the Polish poet Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1868-1927) who was part of the group. Juel and Przybyszewski practised free love. The poet would bring her himself to her lovers. Stanislaw Przybyszewski well understood the art of Munch for he wrote, 'To depict psychological phenomena in terms of external events, to express 'états d'âme' in terms of 'états de choses', has always constituted until now the unbreakable law of

tradition which no artist has ever dared to violate. Munch has broken entirely with this tradition. He attempts to present psychological phenomena immediately through colour.' The Swedish writer August Strindberg, more or less a friend of Munch, had the same infatuation for Dagny Juel. After the affair with Milly Thaulow, which had shook Munch in that he was committing adultery with a married woman, this was a second traumatising relationship. His father had educated Munch in austere Christianity. His father read the Bible often to the family. The feelings of sin and aversion for his behaviour in his sentimental and sexual relations must have deeply touched Munch.

Munch made a painting called 'Jealousy' in 1895 over the triangle affair with Dagny Juel. Dagny is shown nude and red, clothed also in red, always a colour of violence and pain. Przybyszewski (or Munch?) is next to her as Adam and Eve. He offers her flowers, while she grasps the forbidden fruit. Munch would also later make several paintings of this theme of Adam and Eve under the tree in his 'Frieze of Life'. Was it part of his memories with Dagny Juel? Munch's (or Przybyszewski's) figure with livid face appears in the foreground right, as a sad devil or lecher with ashen looks. The face is remarkable; it appears against the darkness with sunken eyes as a death mask out of a nightmare.

There could be no better expression of sin and torment, of jealousy, of repulsion and attraction. The painting is well constructed with the left scene of Adam and Eve and the right dark figure with bleak face, contrasting with the scene. The painting shows the destructive power of love and jealousy. A flower to the left should represent art, for Munch the only way to forget and to exorcise his torments.

Jealousy was not a new theme for Munch. He had witnessed the passion of his friend Jappe Nielsen for Oda Krohg, the lovely and lively painter-wife of the painter Christian Krohg with whom Munch had worked in his early years. The painting 'Melancholy' of 1892 refers to this relation of Oda Krohg and Jappe Nielsen. Two people are far away on the pier of a beach, together and yet separated. The man left alone in the relationship, Jappe Nielsen, is in pain with the torments of love and hatred. The boulders on the beach seem to crush him as life itself.

Munch made different paintings of Dagny Juel, either directly of her, or paintings in which his feelings were expressed. Thus the portrait he made of her in 1893. But also 'Separation' of 1896, 'Vampire' of 1893-1894, 'The Kiss' of 1897, his 'Madonna' of 1894-1895, 'The Day after' of 1894-1895, 'Anxiety' of 1894, even 'Puberty' of 1894-1895 and 'Ashes' of 1894. All these paintings show guilt and hiding (The Kiss), the devastating effect and power of woman over man (Vampire, Jealousy, Separation), the mystery of love and its direct result of pain (The Day after, Madonna), the genesis of womanhood and her sexuality (Puberty) and the psychological problems Munch had in coping with his emotions (Anxiety).

Dagny Juel, the mysterious, promiscuous nymph of the Berlin nightlife was killed, shot by her last lover when she wanted to leave him. The lover committed suicide.

Tulla Larsen

In 1896, Munch returned to Paris. He exhibited and continued to play roulette ^{O5}. Then he returned home to Oslo in 1897. His problems were not over; they started only for real. Munch remained poor. Though known in Germany and Berlin, even in Oslo and Norway, the income from his paintings was insufficient.

Then Munch met the daughter of Oslo's largest wine merchant, Mathilda or Tulla Larsen. A passionate relationship evolved. Edvard Munch was now thirty-four, Tulla was thirty. Maybe she was desperate, saw this as one of her last chances to build a family. Munch was far from ready to enter such involvement. They spoke about marriage, but Munch twice lost the papers. Munch and Tulla Larsen went together on a tour to Italy, but he soon sent her back to Paris, unable to support her presence long. Tulla had all the money; she would have power over Munch. They continued to meet on and off until 1902. Tulla tried to commit suicide with morphine. Finally they met in Asgaardstrand for a reconciliation ^{G31}. Munch had a handgun in the house. Tulla must have threatened to kill herself. Munch must have wanted to divert the shot. But a shot there was. Munch's middle finger of his left hand was partly shot off.

This event also had a profound impact on Munch. He never wanted to see Tulla again, blamed her for the incident. He wore a glove on his left hand and a ring on the shot finger. He never painted hands in full view again ^{G31}. Tulla had new lovers, but continued to harass Munch, involving Munch's former friends like Christian Krohg. This deeply wounded Munch. He thought more and more that everybody persecuted him.

Munch threw himself into work, travels and drink. He got in the newspapers for having had a brawl in a bar and fought with another artist. He had an exhibition in Berlin at the Berliner Secession, two exhibitions in Paris (1903 and 1904), in Prague in 1905 ^{O5}. But his nerves were on end. He spent his summers of 1907 and 1908 at the German Baltic Sea coast; he rented a house at Warnemünde. Munch painted on the nudist beach of Warnemünde. His pictures of naked bathing men were called immoral in Norway. He had a nervous breakdown in Warnemünde in 1908. Munch travelled first to Copenhagen, then to Norway to the fashionable clinic of Doctor Jacobson ^{O5}. He remained there eight months. He liked the atmosphere, was thankful and made a picture of Jacobson. He came out of the clinic surprisingly sober and cured.

To understand in what state Edvard Munch was in the period from 1898 to 1908, one has to bear in mind all the episodes of his life: the death of his mother in 1868, the death of his sister Sophie in 1877, of his father in 1889 and he had been unable to attend his father's funeral. His sister Laura was admitted to a hospital for the mentally ill. He had an adultery relationship with Milly Thaulow in 1885, a strange and very unfulfilled relationship with Dagny Juel in 1893 to 1895. Dagny Juel was killed. His younger brother Andreas died in 1895 also. In 1896, manic hysteria was detected in his sister Laura. She was interned in a hospital for the mentally ill. Then came the tragic end of the relationship with Tulla Larsen in 1902 during which Munch was wounded. He had constantly financial problems of which some were due to his nerve-wrecking gambling at roulette tables. He drank, went to summer holidays on nudist beaches. He failed recognition until 1902-1903. A large part of Norwegian society rejected him. These were all really traumatising, wrecking experiences for a man of the artistic sensitivity of Munch.

The state of mind Munch was in can be seen in some of his paintings, as the continuance of earlier paintings like 'Jealousy', 'Ashes' or 'Anxiety'. Munch painted for instance 'Self-portrait in Hell' in 1903. Munch presented himself in this picture in the nude, something he would almost not do anymore thereafter, amidst flames of hell and before a threatening shadow that resembles a phallus. His body is very pale but his face red and sunburnt. Munch went through the world like this, surrounded by menaces of pain, blood, and death.

Edvard Munch went alone, a stranger lost in thoughts and melancholy, as shown in his 'Self-portrait with a Bottle of Wine' of 1906. In this picture, all other people remain at a respectable distance but as in 'Roulette' they seem to spy on him. Munch was resigned in his fate, in his loneliness, in his abnormality to be unable to hold and persevere in any normal way social relations.

The shooting scene with Tulla Larsen is brought to life in 'The Death of Marat I' of 1907. A naked man lies on a bed. His hand is in blood and blood is all over the place. Man's death, misery, comes from a woman. She keeps standing after the act, smeared in red blood, with red hair. Man is thrown down. Woman is victorious. This is a very cruel picture; no other picture in any century is so openly sexual, harsh and repulsive. Munch had to make these images as a kind of confession, catharsis, acceptance, and the scream to clear his mind. He could and would not talk much of his life to friends. His paintings were his way of telling, of expressing the pains and of asking forgiveness and maybe understanding. But it remained a monologue between him and the canvas, between Munch and himself.

Munch's later periods

When Munch was discharged from Doctor Jacobson's clinic in 1909, he had become an ascetic who knew and understood his problems clearly. He would never fall into the same traps. Of course, he would have other affairs with his models; he would go to brothels. But he avoided people; he avoided the same kind of relationships that he knew could only evolve into other dramas. He avoided drink. Out of fear of re-collapsing into these situations, he became more of a recluse. He returned to Oslo in 1909 with his friend Ludwig Ravensberg. Munch purchased various houses, first in Kragero, later in Hvtitsten.

Finally, in 1916, Munch bought a larger property at Ekely, which he subsequently enlarged for more studio space to work in and in which he would remain for the last twenty-seven years of his life. Munch continued here to work in peace, a peace he guarded ferociously, like the whims of an eccentric old man. He lived more and more as a hermit did, having good contacts only with a handful of picked people on whom he preferred to call himself when he wanted to see them. He hated being called upon unexpectedly.

Major exhibitions of Munch's works were organised, among which the Sonderbund exhibitions of Cologne in 1912, during which Munch's works were shown together with Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne paintings⁰⁵. Munch had a whole room to himself at that exhibition.

Munch continued to live in Ekely until his death in 1944, at the advanced age of eighty. All photographs he made of himself show him like the portrait of his sister Inger: very formal, always in full costume with tie, always in a formal pose, never relaxed, no view of his intimacy.

Munch lived as a recluse at Ekely. He rarely had visitors. He lived only with a female householder, which he changed frequently because he did not want anybody to take any possession of him, to have any degree of ascendancy however small over him. He neglected his house and garden, lived like a Spartan though he would grow immensely rich. He became so wealthy that he did not need to sell his pictures anymore, so he guarded these too ever more jealously. The paintings accumulated in his vast studios. He had few real friends and then always preferred to call on them than be disturbed by them coming to his house unexpectedly and uninvited. The older he was, the more difficult, whimsical, recluse he became.

The way of life of Munch is reflected in his paintings. The only subjects Munch had were himself, his house and garden at Ekely with the dogs and horses he neglected, but painted avidly, with the occasional workers on his house when he needed transformations, with images from local gossips or events. Munch developed his rapid style in bright colours. He made very many self-portraits

‘The artist and his model’ (1919-1921) and ‘Sitting model on a couch’ (1924) are references to Munch’s models and women that he used. In the first painting, Munch and the model are standing as before a mirror. The bed is unmade; a rug has all the heavy colours referring to the spent passion. Munch is standing completely clad, tie included, as the victor and voyeur. The model is undone in this painting, long hair and robes loosened on her body. She seems tired and has a blurred face. We can imagine Munch interrogating himself on the relationship and its meaning. But here Munch has the upper hand. It seems women are no longer victorious, Munch is.

‘The model sitting on a couch’ of 1924 is a portrait of one of Munch’s favourite models, Birgit Prestoe⁰⁵. This is a fine portrait, in harmonious light, in happy colours. Munch painted in his ‘fauvist’ style of using hard, contrasting colours. Thus, ‘Under the Chestnut tree’ of 1937 is another painting of one of his favourite models, Hanna Brieschke. It is again a marvellous picture. Hanna is standing under a tree with full, long, white flowers that seem to grow out of the woman. Only the lower red colours behind Hanna could refer to more pessimistic undertones.

In the 1930s Munch became more fascinated with colours and the effect they could have on him and on an audience. Also in that respect, he was a very atypical painter. The older painters become, the more dark generally their palette grows and the more rapid their brushstrokes. Munch always had a rapid brushstroke since after 1910, but his palette grew brighter and livelier. He had reached more peace, though at the cost of loneliness. But the peace was real.

So for instance ‘The Ladies on the Bridge’. This picture refers somewhat to images of piers and bridges, as Munch always seemed to have in mind. Were these images of a search, a direction into other kinds of relationships with people, other relationships he yearned for but could never get himself to pursue? In this painting and in others of that period, the colours are so bright and joyful as almost to shriek. Munch was

clearly experimenting in how far he could go in using light and contrasting bright pure colours. He could only go as far as to use full white and this is almost the colour of the ladies on the bridge. They give the impression of youth, of angels living near Munch.

Munch's aunt Karen died in 1931. She was ninety-one years old. Munch had rarely visited her the last years. Edvard and Inger were at the funeral. Edvard also rarely saw Inger, though they corresponded with letters.

Edvard Munch neared death in 1940. Nazi Germany had already condemned his art as degenerate, together with the work of many other painters like Chagall and Beckmann. Munch refused to have anything to do whatsoever with the German occupation in Norway, although he had much due to Germany. After all, this was the country that had made him famous. He had no sympathy for the German Nazis. He said so openly. He was afraid that the Germans would take away his paintings. He refused to see the occupiers as he refused to see any other person he did not well know and considered unnecessary intruders.

Not long before his death in 1944, in the period from 1940 to 1942, Munch painted one of his last masterpieces 'Self-portrait between the Clock and the Bed'. It is a picture without self-pity. Munch has become an old man and he knew this in all clarity. His life now was now only a struggle against time. Death would come soon, as indicated by the clock. Until that moment there is only waiting. And on the other side below is a bed, but on the opposite of the clock is the figure of a naked woman. This was always the obsession and the difficulty of Edvard Munch. He was the playball of his times and of his sexual urges. He always longed for love, but had to experience that he could only get sex out of women. Women wanted to take some form of possession over him, which was intolerable to his character.

When Munch died in Ekely, eighty years old, he left eleven thousand paintings and eighteen thousand prints in his house. These were his children.

Epilogue

Edvard Munch had understood his inclinations during his stay in Jacobson's clinic in 1908. It was a turning point in his life. He obviously wanted no more of his former life and its dangers. He wanted no more to inflict pain, no more to receive pain. The only alternative, protection, was to live alone. He was fortunate in that he had the means to do so. In loneliness, quite understandably, he became an eccentric old man, mainly pre-occupied with himself alone. This is a trait we see in many elder people who live alone. Yet, Edvard Munch needs our respect for his life after 1908. He made amends.

How should we treat Munch's life in texts? Exhibitions and books on his art, also in Norway, pass rapidly in silence over some episodes of the times before 1908. Dagny Juel is then not mentioned, Tulla scarcely. Munch's life is not detailed; the episodes that could be considered immoral are left out. Munch also did not want people to pry into his life and he communicated in a monologue with his paintings only. He not

necessarily wanted to communicate with other people on the darkest episodes of his life. Yet, he showed his pictures in exhibitions and clearly sought recognition. To understand his pictures, we need the story of his life.

From the nineteenth century on, we can only understand fully pictures as of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Blake, Eugène Delacroix, Vincent Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, by knowing the life of the painters. This is as clear with no other painter as with Munch. It is even more so than with van Gogh for instance, who had a very short period of splendour. Munch painted hundreds of paintings that need to be looked at with particular interest. The painters are very often, due to the loneliness of Munch's character, the direct expression of Munch's moods and views. Munch's paintings can only be understood by studying his life. But once the painting is understood, our gratitude and satisfaction at the great art in colours, lines and expression of Munch's works remain unsurpassed in the twentieth century.

Other paintings:

The Sick Girl

Ejnar Nielsen. State Museum of fine Arts – Copenhagen. 1896.

The Kiss

Edvard Munch. The National Gallery – Oslo. 1892.

Vampire

Edvard Munch. The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1893-1894.

Anxiety

Edvard Munch. The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1894.

Madonna

Edvard Munch. The National Gallery – Oslo. 1894-1895.

Ashes

Edvard Munch. The National Gallery – Oslo. 1894.

Puberty

Edvard Munch. The National Gallery – Oslo. 1894-1895.

The Day after

Edvard Munch. The National Gallery – Oslo. 1894-1895.

The Separation

Edvard Munch. The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1896.

Self-portrait. The Night Wanderer

Edvard Munch. The Munch Museum – Oslo. 1923-1924.

Sin

Sin

Franz von Stuck (1863-1928). Neue Pinakothek – Munich. 1893.

Franz von Stuck was born in 1863 in a small town of lower Bavaria in Germany. He sought to become a painter and artist already when he was very young, only fourteen years of age. He worked through a period of early learning in the arts in a lesser-known arts-and-crafts- school of Munich, and entered the Munich Academy of painting in 1881. He painted and sculpted. He worked for the magazine 'Jugend', and he embraced fully the Jugendstil, a symbolist movement in Germany. He was in 1892 one of the founders of the 'Münchner Sezession', a group of artists that wanted to innovate German art and break with the traditions of the then well established painters. The 'Munich Secession' was the first movement of progressive artists who led the art of painting into new styles of representation. The Munich Secession dates from 1892; it was followed in 1897 by the Secession of Vienna in Austria and in 1899 by the Secession of Berlin. From 1895 on he was a professor at the same Academy of Munich for which he had been a few years before a contestant. Around 1897 to 1898 he built his 'Stuck-Villa' in Munich and decorated the building, developing his ideas of total symbolist art. His favourite themes were mythological scenes and allegories. His best-known picture is 'Sin', of which he made many versions in the period of from 1891 to 1912. This painting had an enormous success in Germany. He died in Munich in 1928.

Franz von Stuck's 'Sin' is a painting that is simple in structure. It receives its striking image not from its structure of lines, though the lines are very vertical. The main effect of the painting is engendered by the contrasts in the colours and by the concept of the picture.

'Sin' shows a woman who denudes her breast and belly, but who otherwise remains in the darkness of an alcove. A snake lies on her right shoulder and that snake curves around the back of the woman's neck, along her left shoulder. Von Stuck brought all the brightness of light on the nude parts of the woman's body. The massive gilded frame of the painting adds to the contrast that is already in the picture, the contrast between the subject of the woman that exposes her body to the viewer and the richness of the surrounding. Such heavy frames were common in Jugendstil. The symbolist artists designed elaborate frames for their pictures. The golden colour emphasises the strange atmosphere that emanates from the picture. How it does that need further analysis.

Complex and diverse feelings come onto the viewer when he or she stands in front of Von Stuck's painting. The picture is called 'Sin' and not 'Temptation', yet the first emotion of the viewer could be the fascination of the woman on the passing-by spectator. The woman could be a prostitute waiting in a dark alley of Munich for a willing client. She tempts the viewer to follow her by opening her gown and showing in the light of a lantern the whiteness of her flesh. In scant light contrasts of brightness are enhanced, as von Stuck showed in his picture. The woman's flesh so exposed in

the light might tempt a man seeking relieve of sexual desires and women in quest of sensations. Prostitution must remain anonymous in order to be easier consumed without remorse, so the woman's face stays in the darkness of the night. Prostitution then can remain an act in which there is no involvement in the persons that will indulge in the desire and the sexual act. The viewer is a voyeur first, but the woman can retain her personality outside the exposure and outside the sexual act.

Von Stuck shows however also the face of the woman in the painting, though hidden in sombre tones. The woman's eye is vivid and the snake unfolds near her face. The viewer remarks the symbol of the original sin in the snake. It was a snake that tempted Eve to eat first the fruit from the tree of knowledge, and Eve tempted Adam. Temptation will lead to embroil the viewer soon in an act that is sin, the transgression of religious and community laws. The viewer knows that the sin of Adam – and Eve – led to death, to mankind becoming mortal creatures, to decadence and expulsion from Paradise. Adam and Eve repudiated God's command so that they were condemned to suffering. A man or woman that will lay with the naked body of von Stuck's painting may well be chased from Paradise too, from their cosy paradise. They will meet trouble and punishment. God may doom the viewer's soul forever and the Munich police may apprehend the transgressor and make it know to Bavarian society that this man or woman pursues prostitutes. In the Bavaria of the end of the nineteenth century, that public knowledge would have meant exclusion from public society of the better-to-do, the magistrates, the notables and the military of the country.

The woman is not a woman but woman. She represents evil. Von Stuck made that clear by having the woman accompanied by a snake. The snake indicates danger. The woman has control in the dark alley, not the viewer. Will the woman be able to control the snake forever? The viewer can pass by or get involved. Getting involved means to seek danger. One may lose one's own world in there, with the woman and the snake.

We believe that as long as there is temptation only, there is no sin. The sin is only in the act after the viewer has yielded to the temptation. Is that truly so? Is that so for all religions? According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ told that there is already sin in the desire, in the looking. 'Thou shalt not covet'. Envy is a capital sin. So, sin is immediate. Von Stuck presented a picture that is sin for every spectator that has come to see his work in an exhibition. The painting is sin. Von Stuck's title is right. The woman represents sin as much as temptation and the picture in itself is sin. Sin is not what is represented, the painting is sin. Von Stuck made sin.

In real world, it takes courage for a passer-by to accept to the temptation, for the snake is dangerous and the woman in the darkness is a predator. The woman is the snake. The woman hides her face, but she is master of the situation and the snake that she is may bite, may kill.

When the viewer joins the woman in the darkness, the brilliance of the white flesh will disappear and the viewer will enter a world that is not his or her world, but the world of the woman and of the snake. The viewer will pass a borderline. He or she will voluntarily enter a world that must be a realm of decadence, of moral evil, and then sin will really take hold in its most complete and fulfilled form. The frame of the painting is thus a door to another world. Yet, will that knowledge keep viewers from

stepping into the darkness? The other world tempts with its mystic, the mystic of the unknown. The viewer is curious and may be longing for adventure and submit to the attraction of the unknown. Are not people constantly in quest of sensations? Sensations make one feel one is alive. Why pursue a life of good, live a boring life, when adventure looms a step beyond the frame?

There is a concept in Christianity that is called atonement. God will forgive one's sins and erase the stain of sin on one's soul when one shows true atonement. It suffices in Roman Catholicism to go to a priest, confess the sin, atone, and be cleaned from the sin. Priests can forgive in God's name. If one can get away from the punishment of society, from the society that knows no atonement and little forgiveness, then one can get away from the condemnation by God. But does not the soul always die a little, until no atonement and no forgiveness can be sought? Not all religions say that God can deliver pardon through priests. Sin deprives always - to some extent and forever - of moral good. The stain on one's soul will stay. Does the penance really remove the stain? Is confession and penance the reason why in history Catholicism has been such a successful religion?

These and other emotions and thoughts must pass in the mind of the viewer of von Stuck's painting 'Sin'. It is a picture that by its subject and concept only, appeals strongly to the viewer. Paintings of nude women were made before von Stuck and these may have led viewers to envy and desire, but none showed temptation, evil and sin so clearly. None of these paintings claimed to be sin, as did Franz von Stuck's. Many citizens of Munich and Berlin came to the exhibition halls in which von Stuck's work hung, to walk by this picture and experience the forbidden attraction. Coming there was sin. Von Stuck's work was sin, and defiance to God's laws and yet to be seen by everyone. No wonder the reactions of the bourgeoisie and the clergy to this painting was strong and controversial. It was also a very moral work, as it pointed to the dangers of sin, so it had its defenders.

'Sin' is a very powerful picture, and hence this painting will remain one of the main icons of the art of painting of religious themes. Franz von Stuck showed the fascination of men for sexual desire. In view of the main religious tendencies of his time and country, his picture meant much more than just an image.

The object of desire was the white flesh of the woman. Jugendstil, also called 'Art Nouveau' in other countries of Europe, was fascinated by the attraction of and for women. For 'Art Nouveau' artists, women - and more often than not - the alluring, nude, attractive, dangerous, light and accessible women, the women of theatres and cabarets, became one of the main themes of the representation of that art. Mostly however, the subject was taken up with respect and pure admiration and without thoughts or references to moral evil. Von Stuck's 'Sin' was a picture of that Jugendstil art at the extreme. It showed the dangers of such art. Many other artists represented the attraction and temptation of the dangers. With von Stuck's pictures like 'Sin', Jugendstil and 'Art Nouveau' were called decadent art. The style of Jugendstil is still much considered such today. It was the art style that marked a society of Europe that led the continent straight into the horrors of World War I, with the punishment after sin terrible in death and destruction. It will always be a controversy whether artists like von Stuck created that society or were merely the expressions of it.

Other paintings:

Sin. Franz von Stuck (1863-1928). Nationalgalerie. Berlin. Ca. 1912.

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The Last Judgement

The Last Judgement

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). Palazzo Vaticano. The Sistine Chapel – Rome.

There are various references also to the Last Judgement in the Gospels and of course, John's Apocalypse or Revelation is entirely dedicated to the coming of God to judge humans.

Matthew tells:

The coming of the Son of man will be like lightning striking in the east and flashing far into the west. Wherever the corpse is, that is where the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven; then, too, all the peoples of the earth will beat their breasts; and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ^{G38}

Matthew somewhat further talks again on the Last Judgement, in the same fearful words:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. ^{G38}

Luke, though always the most rational of the Evangelists describes the coming of God in terrible words:

There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves, men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your head high, because your liberation is near at hand. ^{G38}

Finally, John wrote in his Revelation on the Last Judgement:

Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. In his presence, earth and sky vanished, leaving no trace. I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing in front of his throne while the books lay open. And another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged from what was written in the books, as their deeds deserved. The sea gave up all the dead who were in it; Death and Hades were emptied of the dead that were in them; and every one was judged as his deeds deserved. The Death and Hades were hurled into the burning lake. This burning lake is the second death; and anybody whose name could not be found written in the book of life was hurled into the burning lake. ^{G38}

On October, 11 of 1534 the College of Cardinals elected Alessandro Farnese to be the new Pope of the Catholic Church. The Pope took the name of Paul III. Very soon, he asked the sculptor and painter Michelangelo Buonarroti to continue to paint the Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel. There was a whole wall to be filled behind the main altar, a surface of 226 square meter.

Michelangelo had a problem. He had to finish the never-ending tomb of the late Rovere Pope Julius II and the Herculean work took all his time. The Pope promised to arrange an agreement with the Duke of Urbino who had demanded of Michelangelo to finish the tomb as originally planned. The Roveres had succeeded the Montefeltros at the court of Urbino through adoption. They wanted to enforce their status. The Pope's agents indeed negotiated a new contract so that Michelangelo had only to deliver the Moses and two other statues of Captives that he had already finished. He later added a sculpture of Leah, the daughter of Laban, representing active life and one of her sister Rachel, representing contemplative life, which he sculpted in less than a year. Michelangelo had himself to pay for the three other statues and for having the tomb erected, for which he all deposited money in the Strozzi bank^{G46}. Tommaso Boscoli, Raffaello da Montelupo and Scherano da Settignano, made the other statues to Michelangelo's designs.

The worries over the tomb finally terminated, Michelangelo could not but resolve to enter the service of Pope Paul. Michelangelo prepared the wall from 1535 on. Two windows were filled with bricks. Frescoes of Pietro Perugino were destroyed as well as two smaller frescoes Michelangelo himself had painted in his earlier work on the ceiling. The whole wall was covered with new bricks, slightly inclined downwards so that dust would not gather on them and then the wall was plastered. A first plaster laid by Sebastiano del Piombo was torn down because it was a plaster for oil painting and Michelangelo was a fresco painter.^{G28} His faithful servant Urbino put on a new, fresco plaster. Michelangelo worked on his cartons in the meantime and he adapted his grand designs. In the spring of 1536 he began to lay the first paint on the first patches of fresco intonaco. He worked alone.

Vasari told in his 'Lives of the Artists' that Pope Paul and Michelangelo appreciated each other. The Pope admired the artist's work and he had much reverence and respect for Michelangelo. Michelangelo appreciated the dignity of the Pope who contrary to Julius II had no army of substance anymore. Paul III loved the arts as well as Julius the Rovere Pope. He lived a far more frugal life than Alexander the Borgia Pope and yet brought the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation, Charles V to accept him as the ecclesiastical authority. Furthermore Pope Paul had given Michelangelo the artist a lifetime stipend, half of which came out of the Papal treasury and the other half from the benefice of a ferry over the river Po at Piacenza^{G28}. Michelangelo worked at the 'Last Judgement' for about five years and 450 working days, until 1541. It was inaugurated and consecrated by Pope Paul on All Saints' Eve of 1541 and opened to the public on Christmas of that same year.

Michelangelo painted the whole wall blue as the skies. This would create the eternal space that could make one forget there was a wall behind the altar. Against this sky each figure could be clearly delineated as if standing out of the cosmos itself. In the middle of the fresco stood the all-terrifying God-Christ. God holds one leg bent, his arms in two different gestures. One arm held high to reject the condemned souls on

the right of the fresco - God' left, as told in the scriptures of Matthew -, the other arm held levelled to draw to him in an act of appeasement and protection the righteous on his other side. God thus was shown in the act of judgement and in an awesome state of tension between good and right. Thus, Michelangelo had recalled Luke's words that 'they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'. God is entirely nude, but for a wisp of loincloth. He is a formidable sculpture as Michelangelo had chiselled his David and could have made a Hercules, Zeus or any other terrible, revengeful God of antiquity such as Jupiter striking the humans with his lightning. Michelangelo must have imagined himself in that position conjuring the myriad of figures that surrounded God.

Huddled to God, almost at his feet, is the Virgin Mary. Mary was dressed but with only a blue thin veil over her legs that showed also her shapes. Mary was drawn in pity for the lost souls, full of sadness for all the mothers whose sons and daughters were thrown back into hell. She holds her hands in a prayer to God, asking for pity, but God's right arm shows a definite refusal to listen to her.

Around God Michelangelo painted an inner circle of apostles and saints. They were painted, some with their respective symbols, standing respectfully around God. Saint Peter on the right holds the keys of the kingdom. Saint Andrew keeps to his saltire cross on the other side. Adam is there also, dressed in animal skins barely hiding his nudity. Adam and Peter face each other; one is the first man and the other the first Pope. These two were painted somewhat larger than the surrounding figures, indicating they were greater than humanity. Both were painted as strong muscular, mature men. Yet they are not here just gathered with God. They also seem afraid of the divine wrath.

Below God on a cloud and to the left sits Saint John Climacus holding a ladder. This abbot of Mount Sinai wrote a treatise called the 'Ladder to Paradise' on monastic spirituality. Michelangelo gave Climacus, which anyhow means 'ladder' his symbol, emphasising the concept of spiritual life as a ladder that people have to mount. It was a proper symbol for the left side of the wall, where the righteous humans were depicted. On the right side Michelangelo faced Climacus with the apostle Bartholomew. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Bartholomew thus holds a flaying knife in one hand and a long boneless skin in his other hand. In a mood of desperation and probably also of humility, Michelangelo once painted his own distorted portrait in this sad fleece.

Above the circle of apostles and saints Michelangelo painted two scenes of the passion of Christ. On the left side of the wall the cross is pushed upright and angels are bringing his crown. On the right side is the column of the Flagellation, equally being dressed. Angels bring the instruments of the passion. Cross and column form a direction that points upwards, further higher into the heavens, like the point of a pyramid.

The figure of God-Christ has split humanity in two. On God's left are the condemned souls and the hell creatures, on his right are the saved people that are drawn out of death to stand at his right side, as the scriptures tell. John Climacus with his ladder to paradise was thus painted on the right side of Christ, whereas Bartholomew and the flayed skin that could point to the punishment that was awaiting the doomed are at

Christ's left side. Thus, God split the universe between good and bad. On one side the movement of the figures is upwards, out of Hades more closer to God. On the other side the movement is downwards towards the new and last hell.

Under the figure of God, under Climacus and Bartholomew, a cloud of seven angels sound the trumpets, as Michelangelo had read in the Apocalypse Revelation of Saint John. Other angels on that cloud open two books. As in the Revelation of Saint John was narrated, one book was the book of the dead and the other the book of the living. All men and women were inscribed in these books. The final countdown had begun. This was the moment of decision.

On the lower left part of the fresco, the righteous people are drawn out of the oceans of death, out of Hades and its dark caves, again as told in the Revelation of John. The figures are helped out of the oceans and ascend into the glory of God. They are pulled up or fly on their own, to stand crowded together at God's right hand.

In the lower right part of the wall, Michelangelo painted the river Acheron and the rowboat of Charon as mentioned in Dante's 'Inferno'. The doomed souls are here thrown back off the boat into the Acheron and thus in hell. Charon wields his oar to whip the doomed away, from his bark. When the fresco was completed for about two-thirds, Michelangelo opened the painting. Pope Paul was delighted with the work. The Master of Ceremonies however, one Biagio da Cesena, who had accompanied the Pope had expressed his dislike at the painting. Biagio answered to a question of the Pope that it was inappropriate to have all these nudes in a chapel and that the scene belonged better in a public tavern. Michelangelo decided to have his revenge and made a caricature of Biagio as Milos in hell – as Vasari calls the figure – or as a devil judge of hell. One can see Biagio at the extreme lower right where everybody could well recognise him. Biagio was shown with ass-ears and a great serpent started from his genitals and curled around his body. Biagio was surrounded by a heap of devils. Biagio pleaded to the Pope and to Michelangelo to have this image removed, but neither the Pope nor Michelangelo accepted to paint over Milos. The Farnese Pope also had a good sense of humour. And Biagio da Cesena at least gained 'fame' whereas his name otherwise would have been forgotten since long.

Above the scene of hell, angels throw back the condemned people in Charon's boat and into the river Acheron of hell. Here Michelangelo made a picture of a grieving woman, hiding her nakedness and weeping in despair. She looks with one eye at the terrible sight of hell, but straight at the viewer. This image has become a famous icon or symbol of grieving humanity. Devils curl around her legs and will pull her downwards also.

In the middle of the right scene, Michelangelo showed figures with various instruments of torture. There is the saw that cut the apostle Simon the Zealot in half. There is the torture wheel of Saint Catherine and the arrows of Saint Sebastian. Saint Blaise holds the wool combs that tore him to death and Saint Laurence, a deacon and Roman martyr, wears his cross. Torture and terrible pain await the souls that are falling on this side towards their damnation. Each soul would be measured. Once measured and found guilty, the people were judged and condemned. So that could be shown as was written in John's Revelation that 'every one was judged as his deeds deserved'. Still above that scene and level with God, are the people that are to be

judged. People wait here, shake hands for the last times, even embrace before being measured, judged and maybe separated forever. Here are however also still the righteous, like on the far right the Good Thief still carrying on his back the huge cross on which he was nailed at Golgotha and to whom Jesus before his death promised paradise.

There are about three hundred figures in the Last Judgement. Michelangelo painted all in the same brownish and fleshy hues that stand out against the blue space. As in so many paintings of the great artist, there was no landscape but the eternal space. The painting was dedicated to the glory of the human body, to man saved and man doomed. All figures are studies of nudes, of human bodies in all possible and all different positions. Even God is a dynamic Christ in the midst of his terrible Apocalypse. Michelangelo's life was dedicated to the glorification of man and the human body. The 'Last Judgement', though not the last fresco of Michelangelo, was and has remained the most formidable image of man.

With pictures like the 'Last Judgement' Michelangelo was one of the few artists who created a new style during the Renaissance. The style of paintings like the 'Last Judgement' was the beginning of what is now called Mannerism. Mannerism has various forms and major artists like Jacopo Pontormo and Domenikos Theotokópoulos called El Greco differ very much from Michelangelo's line of Mannerism, to which you also add Rosso Fiorentino, Giulio Romano and partly Bronzino. Michelangelo's mannerism was generated by the artist's formidable personality and by his inner force. In the 'Last Judgement' we see very many intertwined naked bodies, struggling over the frame, filling the frame and wanting to push out of it. Michelangelo's painting was an image of great tension because no figure was at ease, all figures were in stress and colours and lines contrasted and intersected everywhere.

Erwin Panofsky saw in mannerism a reflection of the strained duality of the Renaissance in which finally Christian and Classical images clashed. Tension also occupied the Christian church in the sixteenth century. Michelangelo's painting dates from just before 1540. That was two decades already, almost, after Martin Luther's declarations of protest at the ways of living of the Popes. And it was before the Council of Trent, which opened in 1545. The objective of the Council of Trent as asked by Emperor Charles V had been to reconcile the Popes' and the Lutherans' visions. But the Lutherans did not even participate at the Council. The Council of Trent did have an influence of dissolving doubts over religious matters. It re-affirmed clearly the dogma of Roman Catholicism. The split with Protestantism was now fulfilled and Roman Catholic dogmas confirmed. When the Council of Trent ended, in 1563, it took time for the tensions to ease. Mannerism then could evolve into Baroque, an art form that was in the show of full passion of scenes less filled with tension than Mannerism.

Any international society consisting of many independent countries with peoples of different origins, religions and interests knows tension. The century of the Baroque, the seventeenth century, also was a period of terrible wars like the Thirty-Year War that devastated large parts of Germany, or like the wars of Louis XIV. Maybe more rare is how a very great genius such as Michelangelo was able to bring the conflicts to the surface in art, for other artists to pursue.

The 'Last Judgement' has been called Michelangelo's pessimistic view of a corrupt world that needed to be doomed. This pessimistic concept does not really hold up however to the situation. Michelangelo lived maybe the most rewarding moments of his life. Yes, he was sixty when he started the work and had complained to the Pope that he was tired. But he was surrounded by a large number of artists of great talent who venerated him and stood by him. He had the confidence and admiration of the Pope. He loved Tommaso de' Cavalieri, the heir of a Roman patrician family and he loved Vittoria Colonna, the Marchesa de Pescara and one of the best scholars of Italy. Michelangelo's worries over the tomb of Julius were over. For Rome and Florence it was a period of peace, even though Florence did not appreciate the dictatorship of yet another Medici. Michelangelo grew old, but he could be satisfied and the work in the Sistine was artistically gratifying. Soon, he would paint further frescoes in the Pauline Chapel of the Vatican, another commission of Pope Paul, and he would be appointed the master architect of Saint Peter Cathedral. More than a rejection of a corrupt world, Michelangelo must have wanted to paint God's glory in full power.

The 'Last Judgement' is the end of the spiritual seeking of humanity. The uncertainty, the hopes and fears of the ultimate judgement end here. Michelangelo probably saw indeed this fresco as the final painting to be made, the one that would give all answers. It adorns the wall of the private chapel of the Popes, the Sistine Chapel. Here the Popes stood and still stand regularly in front of Michelangelo's pictures. The highest authority of the Catholic Church, the symbolic head of the church installed by Jesus and endowed with his power in the person of Peter, dressed in his majestic cope of a Prince of the Church, thus faces the last scene of glory and of despair in which all humanity is intertwined. Spirituality was shown in the depiction of naked humans and Pope Paul appreciated this. Spirituality ended in man as it was engendered by and in man. The evolution of spirituality was completed here and in this picture.

Other paintings:

The Last Judgement

Crispiaan Van den Broeck (1524 – 1590). Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Antwerp. 1571.

The Last Judgement

Gustave Doré (1832-1883). Musée des Beaux-Arts – La Rochelle.

The Great Day of His Wrath

John Martin (1789-1854). Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemäldegalerie – Berlin. 1851-1853.

The Opening of the Sixth Seal (Revelations 6 :12)

Francis Danby (1793-1861). National Gallery of Ireland – Dublin. 1828.

The Last Judgement

Rogier Van Der Weyden (ca. 1399-1464). Hotel Dieu – Beaune.

The Last Judgement

Jean Cousin Fils (1522-1594). Musée du Louvre – Paris. Ca. 1585.

The Last Judgement

Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678). Musée du Louvre – Paris. 1654.

The Last Judgement

Frans Floris (ca. 1517-1570). Kunsthistorisches Museum – Vienna. 1565.

Polyptych of the Last Judgement

Rogier Van Der Weyden. Musée de l'Hôtel-Dieu. Beaune.

Triptych of the Last Judgement

Hans Memling. Muzeum Narodowe. Gdansk, Poland.

The Last Judgement

Frans Francken the Younger workshop (1581-1642). Museum im Schottenstift.

Vienna. 1608.

The Last Judgement

Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). Alte Pinakothek. Munich. Beginning 16th century.

The Last Judgement

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and Frederico Zuccari. Cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore. Florence. 1572/1574 and 1576/1579.

The Last Judgement

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1524.

The Last Judgement

Jean Bellegambe (ca. 1468/1470 – after 1534). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1520-1525.

The Last Judgement

Fra Angelico (ca. 1395-1455). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin. Ca. 1447.