

JEAN GOSSART  
*THE ADORATION  
OF THE KINGS*

LORNE  
CAMPBELL

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Sixteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings  
with French Paintings before 1600*

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## SIGNATURES AND INSCRIPTIONS

### Jan Gossaert (Jean Gossart)

NG2790

### The Adoration of the Kings

Oil on oak panel, 179.8 x 163.2 cm, painted surface approximately 177.2 x 161.8 cm

### Signatures

NG2790 is signed in two places: once on the collar of the black king's black attendant, IENNIN GOSS... ; a second time on the black king's hat, IENNI/ GOSSART: DEMABV... (the A in GOSSART is unlike the other A; the reason is not obvious).

### Inscriptions

On the black king's hat: BALTAZAR.

Near the hem of the scarf held by the black king: SALV[E]/ REGINA/ MIS[ERICORDIAE]/ V:IT[A DULCEDO ET SPES NOSTRA] (Hail, Queen of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope).

On the scroll held by the second angel from the left: Gloria:in:excelcis:deo: (Glory to God in the highest).

On the object at the Virgin's feet, which is the lid of the chalice presented by the eldest king: [L]E ROII IASPAR (the king Caspar).

## PROVENANCE

No reference to NG2790 has been found before 1600, when it was in a chapel dedicated to the Virgin in the church of the Benedictine Abbey of Geraardsbergen (Grammont) in East Flanders, south of Ghent and west of Brussels. In August 1600 Albert and Isabella, the rulers of the Spanish Netherlands, returning from Oudenaarde to Brussels, visited the abbey, saw the painting and asked to have it.<sup>1</sup> On 5 April 1601 Albert authorised a payment of £2,100 to the abbot for its purchase<sup>2</sup> and on 18 May 1601 it was recorded that the painter Gijsbrecht van Veen, residing in Brussels, had been sent to Geraardsbergen to buy from the Abbey of St Andrew the painting in oil on panel of the 'Adoration of the Three Kings or Magi', 2 ¾ ells high by 2 ells wide, with its plain frame. It was to be placed on the high altar of the chapel of the palace in Brussels.<sup>3</sup> The picture was reframed and installed in the chapel in 1603.<sup>4</sup> It was mentioned in several sources of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

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1. van Waesberghe 1627, p. 178 (the Abbot Jérôme de Monceaux 'Epiphaniam sacelli Deiparae Virginis, "Ioannis Malbodij" egregij pictoris opus cessit Alberto Austriaco Belgarum Principi Aldenarda hac Bruxellas cum coniuge serenissima Isabella transeunti, & magno opere roganti'); Ruteau 1637, pp. 228–9 ('Soubs le mesme Abbé l'Archiduc Albert avec Isabella Infante d'Espagne, venant d'Audenarde à Grardmont, & visitant l'Eglise de S. Adrien, il impetra de l'Abbé & Conuent la peinture de la Chapelle de nostre Dame, pour la mettre en la sienne Royale, comme elle est encore presentement, & offrit au Monastere en recompense deux mille florins: c'estoit vn oeuvre de Iean de Maubeuge excellent peintre ...'). Steppe 1965, pp. 39–46, cited manuscript sources of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They are later than the books by van Waesberghe and Ruteau and do not seem to add significantly to what is printed there.
  2. 'pour l'achapt qu'avons faict de luy d'une pièce de paincture représentant les Trois Roys ...' (de Maeyer 1955, p. 269). For the payment itself, see Finot 1888, p. 5.
  3. 'Digo yo, Joachim Denzenhear, guarda ropa y joyas del Ser<sup>mo</sup> Sor Archiduque Alberto, que la pintura sobre tabla, al olio, de la Adoracion de los Tres Reyes Magos, de dos años y tres quartas de alto y dos y media de ancho, con su marco llano, que Su Al<sup>a</sup> mando comprar por mano del pintor Grisbeque Benio, beçino de Brusselas, del abadia de Sant Andres, que esta en camara de Gramont, en ocho mill y quatrocientos reales pagados por finanças, por mano del recividor general Christobal Godin en el mes de abril de mill y seiscientos y un años, que la dicha pintura hea de poner en la capilla real del palacio de Brusselas en el altar mayor de la dicha capilla. La qual dicha pintura queda en mi poder. En cuya berdad di esta firmada de mi nombre. Al dicho Christobal Godin en Brusselas, a 18 de mayo año de 1601 años. Joachim Dencenhear' (de Maeyer 1955, p. 270).
  4. The previous retable, made by Jean Mone in 1538–41 and installed in 1554, was removed and restored; it is now in the cathedral of Brussels. See Duverger et al. 1953, pp. 23, 89–90. For the history of the chapel and palace, see Smolar-Meynart et al. 1991.
  5. *Inter alia* Miraeus 1622, pp. 97–9: '... Ioanni Malbodio (cujus opus eximium, grandi aere à Gerardimontano Abbate redemptum, in sacello palatij Bruxellensis collocauit)'; notes by Peeter Stevens (1590–1668) in his copy of van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck*, which he acquired in 1625: 'Ditto Mabuse heeft oock gemaect een schoon stuck dat staet tot Brussel inde Capelle oft Hoff. Het subiect is van de drij Coninghen. Heeft synen naem daer in gestelt, staet alsoo omden hals van een figuer geschreven: Jannyn Goussaert de Mabuse' (published by Briels 1980, p. 213); du Molinet 1682 (Gachard 1839, p. 56): 'L'autel, qui est de marbre, a un tableau des plus beaux, de la manière d'Albert Durer'; *L'Histoire de l'archiduc Albert gouverneur general et puis prince souverain de la Belgique*, Cologne 1693, p. 359: 'Il acheta à grand prix de l'Abbé de Grandmont une pièce de Jean de Maubeuge qu'on void encore dans la Chapelle de la Cour à Brusselle'; Brussels, September 1693 (Gessler 1933): 'in de Capel van 't Hoff, daer op den autaar een seer fraey stuck van Maubeuge staet. Is de Offerhande van Wijsen aen onse Heer'; H.F. van

Three descriptions are particularly informative: that by François-Nicolas Baudot, sieur du Buisson et d'Aubenay (c.1590–1652), commonly called Dubuisson-Aubenay, a Frenchman who visited the Low Countries several times between 1623 and 1627;<sup>6</sup> that by Chifflet (1650);<sup>7</sup> and that by Losano, who was employed in the palace chapel between 1692 and 1712.<sup>8</sup> The framing elements were of gilded wood. There were two fluted columns with a 'frontispiece' above, surmounted by a cross and, at a lower level, by two angels. On a raised oval on the tympanum was the dedicatory inscription: Deo Opt. Max. D.D. MDCIII (Given and dedicated to the best and greatest God, 1603) and on an architrave above the picture was a polygonal plaque bearing a Latin inscription in gold letters on a blue ground: Aurum, Myrrham, Thus regique hominique deoque dona ferunt (They bring as gifts to the king and the man and the God gold, myrrh and frankincense). During Lent and Advent the painting was replaced or covered by another, in grisaille, of the Crucifixion.

The *Adoration* remained on the altar until the fire of February 1731 which destroyed the

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Heussen, trans. H. Van Ryn, 1722, part I, p. 81: 'De gemelde *Jan van Maubeuge* mengde zijne kleuren met water/ zoo als zijne andere schilderyen uytwijzen: te weeten die deftige kruyshechting in de kerck van Tongerlo; en de aanbidding der drie koninkgen/ dwelke op 't outaer der Hof-kapelle te Brussel staat.' It is possibly the picture vaguely described in an inventory of 1659: 'En la capilla ... una pintura de Nuestra Señora, San Joseph y Nuestro Señor, de seis pies de alto y quatro y medio de ancho' (de Maeyer 1955, p. 446).

6. 'En la chapelle de la Cour, au maître-autel, il y a une contre-table faite en forme de portail, tout de bois, deux colonnes cannelées à vuide par le haut et dorées, le frontispice au dessus où il y a au sommet une croix, aux deux costés plus bas deux anges et au tympan dans une ovale élevée cecy: *Deo Opt. Max. D.D. Anno MDCIII*. Entre les colonnes et le frontispice est tendu le tableau, de hauteur comme de 4 pieds, de largeur ou longueur parallèle à l'autel 3 pieds. C'est une Adoration des Roys (Epiphanie) avec plusieurs personnages représentés à leur suite et une perspective de la crèche. Il a esté apporté de Gêramont, estimé 20.000 francs. L'architrave qui borne ce tableau par en haut a en son milieu une place plus large que le reste et faite en forme de plaque à plusieurs angles avec cecy en lettres d'or: *Aurum, Myrrham, Thus regique hominique deoque dona ferunt*' (Halkin 1946, p. 60).

7. 'Arae tabella peruetus, Epiphania est, Ioannis Malbodij, pictorum aevi sui principis, penicillo expressa, quam ab Hieronymo Monçaeo, Gerardi montis in Flandriâ Coenobiarchâ, impetrarunt Serenissimi Albertus & Isabella, cùm fortè per Monasterium euis iter haberent circa annum M.DC. oblati pretij loco duobus florenorum millibus. Limbus haud alius quàm è ligno deaurato, & supra appositè haec Iuueni sacri Poëtae verba: *Aurum, Thus, Myrrham, Regique, Hominique, Deoque Dona ferunt*. At verò per totum Dominici Aduentus & verni Ieiunij cursum altera ei tabella Christi crucifixi sussicitur, quae subnigris coloribus destinato ab Ecclesiâ lacrymis & poenitentiae tempori mirè conuenit' (Chifflet 1650, pp. 9-10).

8. A.G.R., Manuscrits divers 821, fols 4v-5: 'La Chapelle royale de la Cour de Bruxelles ... La Table d'autel est tres magnifique. Le Tablau [*sic*] represente l'adoration de trois Roys au petit Jesus née [*sic*] dans le Bethelém; il est paint par Jean Malbody pintre de ses sermes. Princes. Tout la structure du dit Autel est doré et au dessus du Tablau il y at escrit ansi en lettre d'or sur un font bleu[:] *Aurum, Thus, Myrrhan [*sic*], Regique, Hominique, Deoque dona ferunt[,]* et deplus durant l'Aduent, et le Quaresme, l'on expose un aultre tablau, ou il y at pint, le bon dieu pendant a la Croix, pint en obscure, et sans aultre couleur que du pinseau noir, ce qu'il conuient pour représenter le temps de petence [*sic*].' For Losano, see A.G.R., Manuscrits divers 822.

palace but spared the chapel.<sup>9</sup> It was subsequently put back in the chapel<sup>10</sup> and remained there for some time. The building was demolished in the 1770s but the picture had been removed by Charles of Lorraine (1712–1780), Governor of the Austrian Netherlands from 1744. In the inventory taken after his death it was listed as ‘A picture representing “The Adoration of the Magi”, painted by Halbert Dur [i.e. Albrecht Dürer], on panel, 5½ by 5 feet’.<sup>11</sup> It was included in the sale of Charles’s effects in Brussels on 21 May – 27 June 1781. According to undated notes made by François Mols (1722–1791),<sup>12</sup> it passed into the possession of ‘Mr. Le Cock, Conseiller-Pensionnaire-Adjoint des Etats de Brabant’: Emmanuel-Marie de Cock (1742–1796), who was from 1776 Pensionary of Brussels and Greffier-Pensionary of the Estates of Brabant.<sup>13</sup> He died in exile at Brno; meanwhile NG2790 was said to have been owned by M. van Fulens at The Hague, about whom nothing has been discovered.

NG2790 is thought to have been the ‘tableau unique’ which in May 1787 was exhibited in the house in Leicester Square, London, of the auctioneer John Greenwood (c.1729–1792). ‘A Foreign Gentleman has brought into England a picture that astonishes every person who has seen it ... It is to be viewed ... from ten in the morning till six in the evening, at one shilling per person.’<sup>14</sup> On 26 April 1788 it was auctioned by Greenwood, in his rooms in Leicester Square, with a ‘Select Collection of Cabinet Pictures, Just consigned from Abroad, the Property of M. VAN FULENS, late of the Hague’. Billed as ‘a superb picture by J. de Mabuse ... which merits a place in the first Cabinet in Europe’, it was the subject of a ‘description ... which lays on the table’.<sup>15</sup> This *Description* was a printed sheet which was perhaps prepared for the exhibition of 1787 and in which the history of the painting was set out, with much

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9. It is listed, as ‘L’adoration des Trois Roys de la chapelle Royale’, in the 1732 inventory of pictures saved from the fire (de Maeyer 1955., p. 463).

10. *Description de la ville de Bruxelles*, Brussels 1743, p. 12: ‘Le principal Autel est orné d’un tableau représentant l’adoration des Mages fait par le fameux Jean Malbodius.’

11. ‘N° 66. Un tableau représentant l’adoration des Mages, peint par *Halbert Dur*, sur bois, h. 5 pieds ½, l. 5 pieds’ (Jacquot 1896, p. 53).

12. B.R., II 11978, annotated copy of H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 2nd edn, Strawberry Hill 1765, vol. I i, facing p. 50: ‘... un beau Tableau de lui [Gossart] représentant l’Adoration des Mages lequel du Cabinet de feu S. Al. Le Duc Charles de Lorraine & de Bar, est passé dans Celui de Mr. Le Cock, Conseiller-Pensionnaire-Adjoint des Etats de Brabant ...’.

13. Ryckman de Betz & de Jonghe d’Ardoye, p. 1077; Claessens 1968; Claessens 1969.

14. Advertisement from an unspecified ‘journal’ reprinted in Whitley 1928, vol. II, p. 191. For John Greenwood, who had been a dealer in Holland before settling in England, see Redgrave 1874, p. 178.

15. Sale catalogue, p. 8 (111); photocopy at the NG. According to the *Morning Post* of 26 April 1788, ‘The Picture of Jean de Mabuse of the Wise Men’s Offering which will be sold this day at Greenwood’s, is supposed to be the most capital Antique Painting in the world, and merits a place in the first Cabinet in Europe, being in perfect preservation and extremely scarce’ (reprinted by Whitley 1928, vol. II, p. 192).

scholarly detail.<sup>16</sup> The buyer's name has not been discovered. By 1795 NG2790 was in the possession of the dealer and writer Michael Bryan (1757–1821). It was No. 180 in the 'superlatively capital assemblage of Valuable Pictures ... to be sold by private contract at Bryan's Gallery, Savile Row, 27 April 1795 (& subsequently)'.<sup>17</sup> On 16 March 1796 Bryan acknowledged having received from the Earl of Carlisle a picture by Poussin, valued at 200 guineas, 'in part payment for a Picture sold to his Lordship by John de Mabuse representing the Wiseman's offering, for the sum of Four Hundred Guineas'. On 28 June 1796, he issued a receipt for an additional 300 guineas for the same picture.<sup>18</sup> Farington reported in his diary on 20 March 1796 that, at Bryan's Gallery, 'Lord Carlisle has bought the large high finished picture by [Gossart]'.<sup>19</sup>

Lord Carlisle was the great collector Frederick Howard (1748–1825), 5th Earl of Carlisle. He took NG2790 to his country seat, Castle Howard in Yorkshire, where by August 1796 it was placed, with other sixteenth-century pictures, in a small room. 'The better to ensure its safe preservance, a covering of green silk fitted into a wooden frame, guards it from danger; - it is constantly locked-up, unless when opened for the inspection of visitors.'<sup>20</sup> No. 17 in the Castle Howard catalogues of 1805 and 1814,<sup>21</sup> it passed to the Earl's son George (1778–1848), 6th Earl of Carlisle, his son George William Frederick (1802–1864), 7th Earl, and his brother William George (1808–1889), 8th Earl. In 1884 it was being restored by (William) Morrill in London.<sup>22</sup> Moved in 1885 from Castle Howard to Naworth Castle in Cumberland,<sup>23</sup> it was inherited by the 8th Earl's nephew, George James Howard (1843–1911), 9th Earl of Carlisle. Shortly before his death, the 9th Earl, who was an amateur painter and who had been for more than 30 years an influential Trustee of the National Gallery, had agreed to offer the

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16. Horace Walpole acquired one of these printed *Descriptions* and preserved it in his own copy of his *Anecdotes*, now in The Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University and formerly in the library of the Earl of Derby. It was reprinted by Brockwell 1911, Appendix, pp. 7–9.

17. Transcript at the NG; see also Whitley 1928, vol. II, p. 193.

18. Castle Howard Archive, J 14/27/2, J 14/27/3: these receipts were discovered and transcribed by Nicholas Penny.

19. Garlick & MacIntyre 1978, p. 512. The price was 500 guineas (*An Account of the Paintings at Ince collected by H. B[lundell]*, s.l. 1803, p. cxc [CXC]).

20. Manners 1813, pp. 92–3 (referring to a visit on 13 August 1796).

21. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures at Castle-Howard*, Malton 1814, pp. 5–6.

22. Castle Howard Archive, J 22/78, letter of 21 August 1884 from Sir Frederick Burton to the future Earl of Carlisle (discovered and transcribed by Nicholas Penny): 'Morrill is getting on with your Gossaert. Perhaps I shall find it done today. It is a pity that you could not have seen the back of the panels (six in number), after the planing down. The nut brown oak, with its beautiful markings, is a picture in itself, not a wormhole in it, and the joining of the panels is so perfect that only the variation of the graining reveals it ...' William Morrill (1838–1910) ran a picture-lining business at 3 Duck Lane, off Wardour Street in Soho.

23. Davies 1968, p. 65.

*Adoration* to the Gallery at a price much below its market value. His widow, Rosalind Frances (née Stanley, 1845–1921), immediately put his wishes into effect by offering the picture for £40,000.<sup>24</sup> The Earl's will was proved on 14 June 1911; the Dowager Countess then sent the painting to the Gallery, where it remained on loan, though not on public exhibition, until the money was raised for its purchase.<sup>25</sup> Lady Carlisle's offer was accepted on 3 August<sup>26</sup> and, though the purchase was not completed until 8 January 1912, an official announcement of the acquisition was made on 1 September 1911, when the picture was placed on exhibition.<sup>27</sup> The government made a special grant of £15,000, plus the legacy and estate duties (£2,776) payable by Lady Carlisle in respect of the picture, on the understanding that the annual purchase grant of £5,000 should be suspended for the year 1912–13. (The Lords of the Treasury had attempted to suspend the purchase grant for four years but the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, wrote from Downing Street on 24 August 1911 to curb their parsimony.<sup>28</sup>) The Gallery raised £13,000: £10,020 from the Temple-West Fund; £2,380 from the Loan Exhibition Fund; and £600 from the Grant-in-Aid account. Alfred Charles de Rothschild (1848–1918) contributed £500; Edward Priaulx Tennant (1859–1920), first Baron Glenconner, gave £500; Edward Cecil Guinness (1847–1927), first Earl of Iveagh, donated £1,000. The remaining £10,000 came from the National Art Collections Fund and included subscriptions of £500 from George Nathaniel Curzon (1859–1925), Earl Curzon of Kedleston, and £50 from Messrs Sully.<sup>29</sup> The Chairman and Honorary Secretaries of the Fund wrote on 31 August 1911:

The satisfaction of the Committee of the National Art-Collections Fund in being able to give decisive help towards so notable an acquisition has been increased by their sense of the extremely favourable terms upon which the picture has been offered to the nation by the Dowager Countess of Carlisle, acting in accordance with the known wishes of her late husband, and without the intervention of agent or middle-man. There was no picture in England better worth preserving for the nation: none which should be a more splendid or more popular addition to the Gallery ...<sup>30</sup>

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24. Board Minutes of 9 May 1911, NG 8/57, p. 57.

25. Board Minutes of 9 May, 26 June, NG 8/57, pp. 57, 60–1.

26. Board Minutes of 14 November, NG 8/57, p. 69.

27. Board Minutes of 13 February 1912, NG 8/57, p. 79; *Morning Post*, 1 September 1911 (cutting in the NG dossier).

28. Correspondence in NG 7/395/1911.

29. Correspondence in NG 7/397/1911; *Report of the Director of the National Gallery, for the Year 1911, with Appendices*, London 1912, pp. 2–3, 8.

30. *Morning Post*, 1 September 1911 (cutting in the NG dossier). The Chairman was the Earl of Balcarres; the Secretaries were Isidore Spielmann and Robert C. Witt.

To celebrate the acquisition, a book was published: *The 'Adoration of the Magi' by Jan Mabuse Formerly in the Collection of the Earl of Carlisle*. The text was by Maurice W. Brockwell (1869–1958), who was employed between 1907 and 1911 by Sir Charles Holroyd, the Director of the Gallery, to revise the catalogues. Brockwell's book was privately printed by The Athenaeum Press. This seems to have been the first occasion on which the acquisition of an important painting for the Gallery was commemorated by the publication of a monographic study.

## EXHIBITIONS, COPIES AND VERSIONS

### Exhibitions

Possibly London 1787 (at Greenwood's, Leicester Square: see above); London BI 1851 (1); Manchester 1857 (provisional catalogue 517; definitive catalogue 436); London RA 1885 (230); NG 1945–6 (9); NG 2000 (31); NG 2011 (8).

### Copies

Many copies are known, all of which appear to be seventeenth century or later.

1. Sir Charles Turner (deceased) sale, Berlin (Lepke), 17 November 1908 (30), painted on copper, 80 x 74 cm.
2. Private collection, Belgium (photographs at the NG).
3. Formerly in the church of Our Lady of the Zavel, Brussels: seen there in the 1620s by Dubuisson-Aubenay.<sup>31</sup>
4. Formerly in the Cremer collection, Dortmund, on canvas, 217 x 165 cm.<sup>32</sup>
5. Formerly at Geraardsbergen, abbey church of St Adrian, a copy, replacing the original, was

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31. 'Dans le chœur de Notre-Dame du Sablon, il y en a un tout semblable pour l'histoire, mais la moitié moindre en grandeur, estimé 3000 francs; il est en la paroy du chœur au coing de l'Evangile de l'autel': Halkin 1946, p. 60.

32. *Collection Geh. Kommerzienrat Cremer Dortmund*, Dortmund 1914, text, p. 28; plates, part I, plate 13.



still there at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

6. Mexico City, Museo de San Carlos, panel, 80 x 73 cm.<sup>34</sup>

7. Wittelsbacher Ausgleichfonds, Munich, WAF 163, on panel, 119 x 87 cm, stated to be dated 1601.<sup>35</sup>

8. Parish church of St John the Baptist, Nethen (south of Leuven, north-east of Wavre), 154 x 150 cm.<sup>36</sup>

9. National Gallery, Prague (O 10488), on canvas, 100 x 73.5 cm, monogrammed IF (? for Joseph Führich, 1800–1876), acquired in 1949 from the National Restoration Fund, Prague.<sup>37</sup>

10. Tula Art Museum, Tula (south of Moscow), panel, 131.5 x 98 cm, stated to be dated 1601.<sup>38</sup>

George Scharf's copies, made at the exhibitions of 1857 and 1885, are in his sketchbooks at the National Portrait Gallery: SSB 47, pp. 41–2; SSB 111, fols 9v–14. The picture was photographed in 1857: see *Photographs of "Gems of the Art Treasures Exhibition", Manchester 1857* by Signori Caldesi and Montecchi, London and Manchester 1858, *Ancient Series*, No. 12.

## Version

*An Adoration of the Kings*, formerly in the Ashburnham collection and now in the Maternuskapelle of Cologne Cathedral (painted on oak, 125 x 225 cm), may be classified as a free version.<sup>39</sup>

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33. Van Bockstaele 2002, p. 98 and notes 181, 182.

34. Exh. cat. Mexico City 1964, p. 13 (33), reproduced.

35. *Katalog der im Germanischen Museum befindlichen Gemälde*, 3rd edn, Nuremberg 1893, p. 14 (46), from the Boisserée collection.

36. Destrée 1930; reproduced in colour by Van Bockstaele 2002, p. 96. The two dogs are omitted; a monkey is included in the centre of the foreground; some of the colours differ. In the early seventeenth century, Nethen belonged to Edouard Scheyfve, whose father Jean Scheyfve (c.1515–1581) had been Chancellor of Brabant (Galesloot 1870–84, vol. I, p. 338).

37. Kotková 1999, p. 76.

38. Yamschikov 1973, not paginated, entry by I. E. Lomize, with colour plates.

39. Weale 1905; exh. cat. Cologne 1982–3, pp. 203–4 (83).

## TECHNICAL NOTES

In the 1780s, François Mols noted that NG2790, though it had at times suffered from neglect, was remarkably well preserved: 'it is still as fresh as when it came from the artist's brush.'<sup>40</sup> The author of the *Description* of 1788 stated that the panel 'is as firm, as if just taken from the Hands of the Joiner'.<sup>41</sup> At the sale of 1788, the picture was reported to be 'in perfect preservation'.<sup>42</sup> Even the most hostile critics, for example Louis Simond in 1811, conceded that it was 'in a wonderful state of preservation'.<sup>43</sup> In 1884, William Morrill thinned the panel<sup>44</sup> and then, presumably, applied the cradle, which, however, does not bear a stamp. In 1918, 1939, 1940–1 and 1957, minor repairs were carried out. In 1974–5 a split in the panel was mended and the painted surface was cleaned. Both the panel and the paint are in excellent condition. There are one or two small damages in the architecture and the sky above the Virgin's head and in the drapery of the flying angel fifth from the left; there are other small losses along some of the joins in the panel and along the lower edge. In some areas the paint has become slightly transparent and the underdrawing is visible. Some of the yellow- and red-lake pigments have probably faded.<sup>45</sup>

The panel, which measures 179.8 x 163.2 cm, is made up of six oak boards, laid vertically, vertical in grain and radially cut. The butt joints were reinforced with dowels. The widths of the boards are: at the top edge, 30.25, 28.15, 25.7, 32.3, 25.1 and 21.7 cm; and at the lower edge, 29.2, 28.5, 27.9, 30.2, 25.5 and 21.2 cm. The back has been planed and the thickness varies between 7 and 8 mm; a cradle has been applied which consists of 20 vertical and 16 horizontal members. When the panel was thinned, the dowels were exposed and removed. Only six dowel-holes are now visible but many more must be concealed under the cradle. The panel has a slight convex warp and there is a little woodworm damage at the right edge. There are no labels, inscriptions or other marks on the reverse. No dendrochronological

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40. 'Malgré le peu de soin qu'on en avoit pris avant ce tems [its entry into the collection of Charles of Lorraine] - exposé dans un endroit ouvert a toutes les inclemences de l'eur [sic], ce Tableau a peu Souffert, & il est encore aussi frais comme sortant du Pinceau de l'artiste. Effet de la methode que Jean de Maubeuse a suivie' (Mols, cited in note 12 above).

41. Brockwell, Appendix B, p. 9.

42. *Morning Post*, 26 April 1788, quoted by Whitley 1928, vol. II, p. 192.

43. '... an adoration of the wise men of the East, by Mabenge, a Flemish painter, whose name I never heard of before, nor wish to hear again. It is decidedly a bad picture, curious, perhaps, on account of its freshness, smoothness, and wonderful state of preservation, although 300 years old; just like (in that respect only) Leonardo de Vinci's pictures' (!): Simond 1815, vol. II, p. 74 (Castle Howard, 11 March 1811).

44. See the letter cited in note 22.

45. On the condition, materials and technique, see also Billinge, Spring et al. 1997, pp. 89–97.

investigation has been attempted.

The painted surface measures approximately 177.2 x 161.8 cm and there are unpainted edges on all four sides. As they vary in width from about 1 cm at the top to about 1 mm at the lower left, they have obviously been trimmed. Along the unpainted edges at the top and bottom are irregularly-spaced holes, countersunk on the obverse (16 along the top edge, 17 along the lower edge); in some places small areas of paint and ground have been lost because of the countersinking. These holes were presumably drilled in order to secure the panel into a frame. The unpainted edges imply that the ground was applied when a framing structure was in place. In some areas there are *barbes*, indicating that ground and paint were applied while the panel was framed, but in other areas, for example the head of the attendant on the extreme right, original paint extends beyond the ground onto the bare wood of the unpainted edges.

The ground is chalk in animal glue and is covered by a thin priming layer of lead white mixed with a little lead-tin yellow. Infrared reflectograms<sup>46</sup> reveal considerable amounts of underdrawing, which appears to be in a liquid medium and which is applied on top of the priming, and a great many changes (see below) made at all stages of the drawing and painting processes.<sup>47</sup> The main lines of the architecture are ruled but the rest of the drawing is freehand. There are no indications that any mechanical methods of transfer have been used. The drawing is detailed, with areas of diagonal hatching to indicate shadowed areas in the draperies and with curving lines as well as diagonal hatching to suggest shadows in flesh areas. Often, for example in Caspar's nose, the artist has drawn several lines in his search for the definitive contour. Details such as knuckles and fingernails are drawn: the knuckles of the youth on the extreme left, for example, are indicated in a summary way by a series of rapidly underdrawn arcs; wrinkles in the hose of Melchior and his attendants are underdrawn; and decorative elements such as the pattern on Balthasar's robe have underdrawn outlines. Many adjustments have been made to the contours during painting: for example in the foremost three angels and their wings; and the dog in the lower-right corner.

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46. New infrared reflectograms, made in November 2008, supersede those discussed in Campbell, Foister & Roy 1997, pp. 89–92. Infrared reflectography was carried out using the digital infrared scanning camera OSIRIS which contains an indium gallium arsenide (InGaAs) sensor. For further details about the camera see [www.opusinstruments.com/index.php](http://www.opusinstruments.com/index.php). The new images will be discussed in much greater detail and depth by Rachel Billinge in a forthcoming study. What follows is a short summary report, written in collaboration with Rachel Billinge.

47. These will be studied in detail in the forthcoming publication by Rachel Billinge cited in note 46.

The Virgin once wore a chemise with a higher neck, which was painted, but, in a complex series of alterations, Gossart has changed it for the front-opening chemise that is now visible.<sup>48</sup> The Child's head was at first underdrawn, inclined towards Caspar's gift. It was then redrawn and a reserve left to the right of its present position, which is the result of a final adjustment in paint of its place and scale. At first, the Child did not hold a coin but touched the edge of Caspar's goblet; the goblet itself, with the Virgin's left hand and mantle, has been altered more than once. The fall of the Virgin's draperies across the broken floor has also been changed as painting progressed and probably after Gossart decided to include Caspar's sceptre. The attendant on Melchior's right is underdrawn with half-closed eyes but painted with wide-open eyes. The group of attendants behind Melchior is much altered. The head of the attendant immediately behind Balthasar is painted on top of an underdrawing and a reserve for a different head in a different position: a man with a very broad nose facing towards our right. The top parts of the turban of Balthasar's black attendant and of Balthasar's crown have been painted over the largely-finished walls of the building behind them; and the inscribed ends of Balthasar's scarf with its fringes have been added at a late stage in the course of painting.

Almost all the architectural elements were altered after the painting was nearly finished. Both the central arches were painted as broken; they were made entire only at a fairly late stage. Certain figures, animals and objects are neither underdrawn nor reserved but have been added at a late stage and are painted directly on top of whatever is behind them. These include: the two figures at the window on our left; the two shepherds behind the ass and the two shepherds in the distance, immediately on our right of them; the ox; the ass; Joseph's stick; the sash of the angel in the upper-left corner; Caspar's sceptre; the lid of his goblet and the stone supporting it. The broken tiles of the floor and the plants in the foreground were all added after the grid of the floor, itself laid out only after the main figures had been blocked in.

The underdrawing and all the changes appear to be the work of one artist, Jean Gossart; there are no obvious interventions by assistants.

Natural ultramarine occurs in the Virgin's robes; different grades of azurite and red lakes that differ in hue have been used; the haloes of the Virgin and Child are painted in shell-gold. Lead-tin yellow and yellow earth have been mixed into the flesh paint of the heads of the man

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48. These changes have been misinterpreted by Ainsworth 2010, pp. 148-9, who finds in them indications of a supposed collaboration between Gossart and Gerard David. See further below, pp. 15.

on the extreme right and the angel in green in the upper-left corner – and probably also the heads of the Virgin, the foremost shepherd and other protagonists. The medium is linseed oil; some resin, probably pine-resin, has been detected in a sample from the red glaze on the crimson edge of an angel's wing. There is no evidence that the oil has been heat-bodied.<sup>49</sup>

In order to extend his range of colour and tone, Gossart has mixed and layered his pigments in unusually complex ways.<sup>50</sup> Some of his blues, greens and reds are undermodelled in different tones of grey (lead white and black). The Virgin's dress, for example, is undermodelled in grey beneath the blue, whereas her mantle, of a different, more intense blue, is not over grey. The green robe of the angel second from our left is undermodelled in grey. The green layer on top, which is mainly of verdigris, is thicker in the shadows, while in the lighter areas the verdigris is mixed with small amounts of lead-tin yellow and lead white. This contrasts with the green drapery of the small angel behind the ox, where the grey undermodelling lies under a thinner, more translucent layer of verdigris and the modelling is all in the grey underpaint. Caspar's robe is underpainted in a uniform, very dark grey, over which is a modelling layer of mixtures of red lake and lead white. The darker red pattern is rendered in red lake and the whole mantle has received a final glaze of the same red lake. The dyestuff from which this red lake is derived is probably from a scale insect source, perhaps the kermes insect. Different mixtures of red and blue are used to create various shades of purple: from the pale mauve of Balthasar's sash (red lake, azurite and lead white) to the deeper purple of the Virgin's underdress (ultramarine and red lake).

The hair and beards are often rendered using *sgraffito*, for example the beards of Balthasar and the horseman on the right and the hair of the attendant on the extreme right. In certain places, for instance the green areas of the doublet of the attendant on the left, the glazes are spotted, because they have been blotted with cloths. A fingerprint in the green glaze on the robe of the angel behind the ox spreads onto the bricks on our right and shows that Gossart has blotted the glaze with his finger. In the head of the attendant directly behind Balthasar, the parts painted over the reserve for a different head are rather thin, whereas the parts painted over the architecture are thicker and contain much more lead white. The transitions are not at all obtrusive. On occasion, the paint is impasted to cast real shadows that play some part in creating illusions of form. Frequently the paint is worked wet-in-wet, for example in the eye of the dog in the lower right corner; the wet paint is often dragged or feathered, for

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49. See also Mills & White 1977, p. 59.

50. See Campbell, Foister & Roy 1997, pp. 92–5, for a more detailed discussion of the pigments and layer structures.

example in Melchior's ermine and in the fur of the shepherd holding the pipe.

Especially in the foreground, there are virtuoso passages of detail: for instance the hairs sprouting from the wart on Caspar's cheek, the decoration of Caspar's hat and the fringes on Balthasar's stole. From each of the pearls on Melchior's hat protrudes a tiny yellow spot to indicate the golden pin that holds it in place. By contrast, some extraordinary details are rendered with surprising economy of effort. The pearls edging Melchior's doublet are strips of grey, worked over quickly with white highlights, pale blue secondary lights and dark grey shadows that define the shapes of the pearls. The pearls on Caspar's hat, however, which are more readily visible, are more carefully executed. They are roundels of grey, painted on top of the red of the hat and thin enough to reveal the red in some places, as if it were reflected in the pearls. On the shadow sides are black crescents and bright orange reflected lights, while on the lit sides are tall dashes of azurite and white and, on top of that, dots of pure white.

## DESCRIPTION

The Adoration of the Kings is mentioned in Saint Matthew's Gospel, 2:11.

The palatial buildings are in ruins. The stones and bricks are chipped and broken and are overgrown with creepers, small trees and other plants. It seems impossible to make much sense of the architecture but the round arches and the marble columns are in the Roman style. The frieze above the Virgin bears a relief of naked dancing babies. Four capitals are decorated with naked babies: at the top left, above the head of the first angel; at the top right, above the head of the angel in pink; on the left, between the scroll and the left wing of the angel in green; and on the right, between the angel in white and the praying hands of the angel in pink. On the capital above the eldest king is a relief of the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22: 9–13). Abraham seems to be nude, which is very unusual; the angel stays his right hand; Isaac, who is kneeling, is dressed in a long robe; the ram, which should be behind Abraham, appears in front of Isaac. The floor is made up of slabs of coloured stone arranged in geometrical patterns but again chipped and broken. Weeds and wild flowers have sprung up between the stones: plants of the hawkweed genus, thistles and, in the centre, white dead-nettles. The two dogs have been adapted from prints. The dog on the left is taken, in reverse, from Schongauer's *Adoration of the Kings* (B. 6); the dog on the right is from Dürer's *Saint Eustace* (B. 57).

The Virgin and Child have blue eyes and gilded haloes. The eldest king, Caspar, who has greenish-grey eyes and a wart on his left cheek, has offered his gift of gold coins in a golden goblet. The Child takes one of the coins in his left hand. The cover of the goblet, inscribed with the king's name, [L]E ROII IASPAR, lies at the feet of the Virgin; the goblet itself is ornamented with columns, lions and roundels of men's heads. In front of Caspar are his hat (the fleurs-de-lis around the crown look black but are in fact azurite) and his sceptre, which incorporates two naked babies holding looped ropes and a figure of Moses holding the Tables of the Law. The second king, Melchior, who has brown eyes, stands behind Caspar and wears a doublet of green patterned in silver beneath a coat of cloth of gold patterned in azurite and lined with ermine. He carries his frankincense in an elaborate golden vessel ornamented with figures of (?) prophets. Behind him are four attendants, the second of whom carries a sword and mantle and the fourth of whom, on the extreme right, is wearing sandals in the Roman fashion. The third king, Balthasar, approaches from our left. His elaborate hat, which incorporates a crown, is inscribed with his name, BALTAZAR, and with the artist's signature. Balthasar's mantle is lined with striped and spotted lynx fur and his boots are made of leather so thin that his toes and toenails can be distinguished. Around his neck he wears a fringed stole inscribed with the opening words of the *Salve regina misericordiae*, a prayer or hymn to the Virgin. His gift of myrrh is contained in an elaborate golden vessel ornamented at the top with three figures of naked babies. Behind him are three attendants: the foremost, dressed in rich textiles paneled together, seems to have red pimples on his chin; the second, who is black, wears a silver collar inscribed with the painter's name. Through the window on our left are seen two men in exotic clothes, evidently attendants of the kings. On the far right, the horseman wearing a turban and holding a heavy ornamented hammer is another of their retinue; other mounted attendants appear in the distance.

Between Balthasar and the Virgin, Saint Joseph leans on his staff. Behind him, the head of the ox appears through a doorway in which stands an angel, his right hand on his breast. His robe is green, his wing light yellow and pinkish-red. The ass, between the Virgin and Caspar, is eating weeds. Directly behind Caspar are two shepherds. The one on our left carries a musical instrument similar to a recorder; the other holds a straw hat and an *houlette*, a trowel-like implement used in herding sheep. Hanging from his neck on a twisted cord is a small horn. The four men between the shepherd with the *houlette* and the Virgin are evidently also shepherds, and behind them other shepherds are receiving the news of Christ's birth in fields outside a town where there are many large buildings in exotic styles.

Above, nine angels are hovering or flying. The two on the left, but not the others, wear jewelled headbands and the second holds a scroll inscribed: *Gloria in excelcis [sic] deo* (Luke 2:14). The foremost angels on the left and right wear robes made of shot fabrics: yellow shot with blue and pink shot with yellow.<sup>51</sup> At the top edge of the picture blazes the star that guided the kings. Below the star hovers the dove, representing the Holy Ghost.

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51. On shot fabrics, see Monnas 2008, pp. 230–1, who cited an inventory of 1501–2 of the possessions of the Confraternity of the Purification and Saint Zenobius in Florence. Among the stage props were complete outfits for four angels, including four albs of *taffettà cangiante*, shot taffeta (taffeta being tabby-weave silk).



## ATTRIBUTION

NG2790 is signed by Gossart in two places. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, those who did not notice the signatures associated the picture with Dürer. In 1682 Claude du Molinet thought that it was ‘in the style of Dürer’; in the inventory of the collection of Charles of Lorraine, taken after his death in 1780, it was attributed to Dürer.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent authorities have noticed Gossart’s signatures and all except Ainsworth (see below) have concluded that the painting is by Gossart. Those who have examined it closely have agreed that it is very consistent in style and technique and have been unable to discern any significant interventions by assistants.

### The theory of a ‘prestige collaboration’ between Gossart and Gerard David

In 2010, Ainsworth suggested that the London *Adoration* was the product of a ‘prestige collaboration’ between David and Gossart. She argued that the Virgin and Child, though underdrawn and perhaps laid in by Gossart, were in fact by Gerard David.<sup>53</sup> She felt that the ‘oval-faced Virgin with typically downcast eyes and prominent dimpled chin; the widely spaced placement of her legs, like two columns, supporting the erect Christ Child on her lap; the neatly arranged, cascading draperies, spilling out onto the floor in tightly composed, angular folds – these are all characteristic of David’s paintings of the Virgin and Child.’<sup>54</sup> The same description could be applied to the Virgin of the Monforte altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes – though there the Child is not sitting up ‘erect’ – as well as to other compositions by Gossart’s predecessors; and Gossart based the composition of NG2790 on the Monforte altarpiece. Ainsworth, however, implied that Gossart was taking ideas from David’s *Adoration of the Kings*, also in the National Gallery (NG1079); whereas the present writer believes that David’s *Adoration*, very different in composition from other paintings of the same subject that are assigned to David, is in fact a response by David to the novelty of Gossart’s reinterpretation of Hugo’s creation.<sup>55</sup>

Ainsworth observed that ‘the Virgin and Child types in Gossart’s *Adoration* are distinctly

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52. See notes 5 and 11 above.

53. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 13–15, 148–9.

54. Ibid., p. 148.

55. Campbell 1998, p. 54.

different from those in the Prague *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin* of about 1515'.<sup>56</sup> The Prague picture is signed, on Saint Luke's belt, GOSSAR.... It is true that the types are different; but it is less evident that the heads differ 'stylistically as well as in terms of painting technique'.<sup>57</sup> In fact, reproductions of details from the two pictures show very remarkable similarities in style and technique.<sup>58</sup>

In the Prague picture, Gossart is aiming at historical accuracy by portraying the Virgin as a beauty of Roman antiquity: which is in keeping with the palace in which she sits, built in a classical style and decorated with sculpture representing antique as well as biblical subjects. The Virgin is in type a sister of Gossart's Amphitrite in his *Neptune and Amphitrite* of 1516, his Deianira in his *Hercules and Deianira* of 1517, his Venus in his *Venus and Cupid* of 1521, his undated *Venus* (Rovigo) and his *Danaë* of 1527.<sup>59</sup> The Virgin in the London *Adoration*, on the other hand, is Gossart's variation on the ideally beautiful Virgin of van der Goes's Monforte altarpiece; and Gossart continues to develop this ideal of beauty in his half-length compositions of the *Virgin and Child* such as those in a private collection (at present on loan to the National Gallery; L650), in Berlin, in the Prado and in Cleveland.<sup>60</sup> Gossart of course selects appropriate figure types, just as he chooses different architectural settings. In the London and Prague paintings, he is making very deliberate decisions to envisage the Virgin in very distinctive ways. The resemblances in treatment, however, are many and striking. The hair and mouths correspond closely, as do the high upper eyelids and the slender lower eyelids, emphasised by narrow dark shadows below lit areas representing the linings as well as the surfaces of the lower lids. The noses are broad and long, though they terminate in neat points, and are stressed by wide highlights. There are bright lights on the ends of the noses, on the channels in the upper lips and at the far sides of the lower lips, where deep shadows accent the far corners of the mouths. The reflected lights on the chins and the incipient and slight double chins are very similar indeed.

Ainsworth thought the Prague Virgin and Child types 'rather homely' and contrasted 'David's hallmark sweet Virgin and Child models'.<sup>61</sup> The Virgin in NG2790, she observed, 'shows ... David's characteristic smooth modeling of the face and refined drawing of the features in

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56. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 148.

57. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 14.

58. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 12–13, figs 7–8.

59. Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 217–21, 221–4, 226–9, 229–32, 232–5.

60. Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 164–6, 168–70, 170–3, 184–6.

61. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 139.

paint'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, if we compare the Virgin's face in NG2790 with the Virgin's head in *The Virgin and Child with Saints and a Donor* (NG1432), attributed to David,<sup>63</sup> we find similarities in the painting of the eyes, nose, mouth and chin, but David's tonal contrasts are more sudden, less controlled and less delicate; the reflected lights and the highlights on the hair and the eyelids are less sensitively modulated. Ainsworth perceived in the male heads of the NG2790 'somewhat rougher brushwork and more densely applied paint'. But the heads of the three kings, those of their attendants, even those of the foremost shepherds are just as beautifully painted as the Virgin's head, with passages of virtuoso detail that match the extraordinary precision and subtlety in the rendering of the textiles and metalwork. Even the dogs, though copied from German prints, and the ass are extraordinarily sympathetic studies of animals. There is nothing in Gerard David to equal Gossart's sensitivity to detail and the accomplished economy of his technique, which allowed him to record all his observations with astonishing skill.

Although Ainsworth admired Gossart's 'very sophisticated understanding of light' in his early paintings, she saw as typical of his technique during his early period a 'rather thick application of paint in discrete, unblended brushstrokes' and a 'less than subtle modeling of forms'.<sup>64</sup> 'Not yet adept at depicting the human body', Gossart is 'somewhat maladroit' in 'anatomical description, for example in the awkward foreshortening of arms'.<sup>65</sup> She found confirmation of her attribution to David of the Virgin's head in the London *Adoration* in her observations that his brushwork ended 'abruptly at the altered neckline of the dress, even though the light underpainting is visible beyond it. There is also a gap between the reserve left for the head and the painted layers at the right contours. This suggests that someone else executed the head of the Virgin and did not bother to blend it fully into the existing form.'<sup>66</sup> In fact, Ainsworth may have misinterpreted the complex changes in this area, where Gossart was altering the necklines of the Virgin's chemise and dress.

In the Child's head, Ainsworth discovered 'David's more opaque treatment of flesh tones (rather than the slightly eerie opalescence of Gossart's), as well as David's emphasis of the Child's almond-shaped eyes with a continuous stroke of white paint on the lower lid.'<sup>67</sup>

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62. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 148.

63. Campbell 1998, pp. 146–57.

64. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 82.

65. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 82, 137.

66. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, pp. 148–9.

67. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 149.

Though Ainsworth did not define further Gossart's 'slightly eerie opalescence' she may have been thinking of the faces underpainted in grey in later pictures in the style of Gossart, such as the Mauritshuis *Virgin and Child* and the Antwerp *Portrait of a Man*.<sup>68</sup> Alternatively, she could have been referring to Gossart's own *Children of Christian II of Denmark*, probably painted in 1526, where the red lakes in the flesh have faded and where some (charcoal?) black is mixed into even the palest areas of the faces. Neither grey underpainting nor such admixtures of black can be found in any of the heads of the London *Adoration* (though grey undermodelling is found beneath several of the textiles). In this, as in many other respects, the Virgin's head, the Child's face and the heads of the other male figures are completely consistent in treatment.

Ainsworth considered that 'David may also have reworked the [Virgin's] draperies, and in particular his typically angular folds at the base of the cloak, which differ in configuration from the broader, looser ones planned in the underdrawing and the first paint stages'.<sup>69</sup> The changes seem to respond to Gossart's addition of Caspar's sceptre, which is painted, apparently without underdrawing and certainly without a reserve, on top of the paint of the altered mantle.

Ainsworth's suggestion that Gossart, returning from Rome in 1509, left his regular employment with Philip of Burgundy to spend some time in Bruges before returning around 1515–16 to Philip's service also seems unlikely.<sup>70</sup> Geldenhouwer's near-contemporary account made it clear that Gossart remained with Philip; during the period between 1509 and 1516, he produced the *Adoration* for one of Philip's closest associates, Daniel van Boechout.<sup>71</sup> As will be demonstrated below,<sup>72</sup> the complexity and ingenuity of its composition, as well as the extreme sophistication of its technique, are without parallels in David's work.

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68. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 86, and p. 157 note 4.

69. Ainsworth in Ainsworth et al. 2010, p. 149.

70. The idea of the 'prestige collaboration' between David and Gossart is also considered above, pp. 15.

71. Campbell 2010 and see below, pp. 23.

72. See under 'Imitation and Invention', pp. 20.

## THE GENESIS OF THE COMPOSITION

Gossart's most important source is the Monforte altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes (Berlin). It is not known where this very influential painting, which is now cut at the top, was in Gossart's time. The original composition can be partially reconstructed from reversed versions attributed to the Master of Frankfurt.<sup>73</sup> Many very obvious parallels may be made between NG2790 and the reconstructed Monforte *Adoration*, with its magnificently-attired kings and attendants, the bystanders in the middle ground, the broken architecture and the flying angels. Gossart has adapted his figures of the Virgin and Child from Hugo's panel, while his Balthasar and his Melchior were inspired by Hugo's Balthasar. Fascinated by Hugo's views through ruined buildings to distant landscapes, Gossart extended the vista and, more daring even than Hugo, opened up at the centre of his painting a vast recession towards mountains seen across an enormous distance.

There is one obvious borrowing from Dürer: the dog on the right in NG2790 is taken from Dürer's engraving of *Saint Eustace*. The other dog comes, in reverse, from Schongauer's engraving of the *Adoration of the Kings*; and it seems that Caspar's hat and the men behind Melchior are inspired by the same print. In NG2790, the young man at the right carrying the sword and mantle, the man laying his left hand on the left shoulder of the former, the horseman wearing a turban and the rocky landscape behind them find their counterparts in the print. There are, moreover, points of resemblance between the two Virgins and the two Children. In the engraving, the attendant on the right appears to be carrying the youngest king's cloak; whereas the mantle carried by Gossart's young man does not seem to belong to Melchior. Gossart's underdrawn horseman is more like Schongauer's than his painted figure. There are probably further borrowings from another Schongauer print in the same series, the *Nativity* (B.5), where the figures of Saint Joseph, the shepherds and the angels holding the scroll are not dissimilar, and where the broken stones in the foreground, the plants growing among them and the creepers climbing over the ruined arch may very well have influenced Gossart's ideas. Gossart's Child is not unlike the Child in Schongauer's engraving of the *Virgin with the Parrot* (B.29).

The steep perspective in which the ruined buildings are seen and parts of the ruins themselves are reminiscent of Dürer's engraving of the *Nativity*, dated 1504 (B.2). The angels are all to some extent similar to Dürer's angels and may be compared with those in the

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73. Formerly Vienna: Friedländer, vol. VII, no. 124; and Varese, Museo Baroffio: Collobi Ragghianti 1990, p. 103 (184 bis).

woodcuts of his *Apocalypse* and *Life of the Virgin* series. The pose of the second angel from the left may have been inspired by Dürer. He recalls the woman on the right in Dürer's engraving of *Four Witches* (B.75), dated 1497. The many figures of babies, on the capitals, on the frieze, on Balthasar's gift and on Caspar's sceptre, are influenced by classical precedent and may be based on antique sources, on Italian prints or, more probably, on designs by Dürer (compare his engraving of the *Three Putti*, B.66).

Although making use of van der Goes, Schongauer, Dürer and very likely other sources, Gossart has created a composition that is entirely his own and completely characteristic. Even if some of the heads of the subsidiary figures are hastily painted, there are no fundamental differences in technique between them and the other heads and there is no reason to believe that Gossart delegated any significant part of the painting to assistants. The story that he laboured on NG2790 for seven or eight years seems to have been invented at the end of the eighteenth century but he must have expended a great deal of time and effort on this picture.<sup>74</sup>

## INVENTION AND IMITATION

The dog in the lower-right corner is accurately copied from Dürer's engraving of *Saint Eustace*. Only the tail has been altered, to keep it within the panel. Gossart's dog, however, has an almost quivering alertness that is not taken from Dürer. Gossart's unsurpassed command of the oil technique, and his attendant mastery of light, allowed him to make the dog's eye appear to sparkle and its nose and whiskers seem to twitch. Even when Gossart is copying literally, he transforms the models that he imitates.

Gossart divides his painting into two horizontal registers: the celestial zone of the star, the dove and the angels; and the terrestrial zone of the Virgin and Child, the kings and their attendants, and the shepherds. Admittedly, one angel is present in the terrestrial region, hidden in the doorway above the ox. The reasons for his presence there are obscure. Otherwise, the celestial and terrestrial beings stay within the boundaries of their two registers. They never overlap but meet where the top of Balthasar's hat touches the lower

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74. In the 1795 sale catalogue it is stated that the painting 'was the work of upwards of seven years'. The Duke of Rutland, seeing the picture in 1796, wrote that 'Eight years of unceasing labour are said to have been dedicated to the completion of this work' and a similar statement was made in the Castle Howard catalogue of 1814 (see notes 20 and 21 above).

contour of the angel on our left. In the terrestrial zone, the poor – the Virgin and Child and Saint Joseph, the shepherds and the ox – are isolated from the rich kings and their attendants. The Virgin's mantle, however, interlocks with Caspar's; and his sceptre and the lid of his chalice intrude slightly across her draperies, while the contour of his head intersects three of the shepherds.

The celestial and terrestrial zones are united by the strong verticals of the architecture, stressed by rather sudden contrasts of light and shade. No structural sense can be made of the buildings, which have been created as a decorative foil as well as a narrative context for the figures. The verticals are frequently aligned with verticals in the figures of the lower zone: Balthasar's gift and the ends of his fringed scarf line up with a section of wall behind; the folds of Joseph's skirts and his stick echo and continue verticals of the architecture; as does the strongly-lit fold hanging from the Virgin's right knee. Melchior's gift and the stripes and contours of his clothes again accord with some of the verticals in the buildings behind him. There are also echoes or visual rhymes between celestial and terrestrial figures: Caspar's pose is not unlike that of the angel in pink in the top right corner; while his and the angel's shapes are echoed in the dog in the lower-right corner. The solemn Child has counterparts in the boisterous dancing children on the frieze far above his head and in the playing, perhaps even fighting, children whose legs can just be seen on the two capitals at the upper edge.

In the Monforte altarpiece, van der Goes placed his principal figures in a relatively shallow frieze against a rapidly-receding landscape. Gossart groups his figures in a very much deeper space and their positions can be plotted in relation to the squares of the floor. The foremost figure is Balthasar, whose feet are on the fifth and sixth tiles from the lower edge. Joseph's foot is on the twenty-third tile; the Virgin's foot is on the ninth; Caspar is in the same area; while Melchior's feet are on the twelfth and thirteenth rows of tiles. The strong diagonal recession between the figures of Balthasar and Melchior is emphasised by the facts that the pose of one reflects and reverses the pose of the other; and that the colours of their vestments are in some sort of counterpoint. Another receding diagonal leads from the dog in the lower-right corner to Caspar, the Virgin and Joseph. In the celestial zone, the angels on the right fly on diagonal courses from the top-right corner towards the Virgin and Child.

The composition is closed on the left and at the lower edge, while the top and right edges interrupt angels's wings and the figures of attendants. There is a greater sense of movement here, though the predominant impression is of a stately and slow progress towards the Virgin and Child. The ceremonious motion takes its rhythm from the long vertical lines in the figures

and the architecture. The Virgin's shoulders, hair and veil make protective arches over the Child; and these arches are echoed many times in the buildings behind her. The soaring verticals, moreover, give a sense of exaltation.

The mathematical centre of the composition is in the Virgin's face, near the line of her jaw; the vanishing points of the perspectival systems are to the right of the Virgin's head, near the shepherd who stands directly behind the ass. His hat was at first a brilliant red; Gossart covered the red with a dull green-brown, presumably to make the hat, the figure and the vanishing area less obtrusive. It may not be accidental that Gossart has placed a shepherd at this focal point; and it cannot be coincidental that he wrote his signatures on the two Africans, Balthasar and his black attendant. Whatever his reasons were, they are now elusive. The acne on the face of Balthasar's principal attendant and the hairy wart on Caspar's face may be reminders that imperfections can afflict even the most prosperous. The ease with which Balthasar, the Virgin and Melchior hold the undoubtedly exceedingly heavy gifts may merely indicate that these people are not ordinary mortals. The kings's clothes, furs and jewellery and Balthasar's boots, of the thinnest and softest leather, are all marks of unimaginable riches; but the intense blues and scarlets of the Virgin's and Joseph's clothes allow them to maintain their dignity and presence among all the splendour of cloths of gold, velvets, jewels, pearls and ermine. The Child, of course, is naked: the Word made flesh.

Gossart has asserted the divisions between celestial and terrestrial, between rich and poor, but has also with consummate skill integrated them in a ceremonious representation of the Incarnation. Developing upon Hugo's Monforte altarpiece, Gossart has used successions of long verticals to imply solemn, stately movements. His skill in manipulating space, more ambitious than Hugo's, allows him to deploy and order his composition along receding diagonals and to distribute his figures with extraordinary intelligence. A surface pattern radiates from a vanishing area slightly above and right of centre and imposes a wheel-like discipline, in which the grid of the floor, because it is broken and overgrown and because its colours are not violently contrasted, cannot command too much attention. The same circle that describes the wheel and its spokes also encloses a sphere, the radii of which mark some of the main stresses of the composition in depth: the flights of angels; the processions of Balthasar, Melchior and their attendants. Gossart uses geometrical pattern in both two and three dimensions with immense discretion to enhance the narrative and to induce apposite emotional responses.



## THE PATRON

NG2790 was by 1600 in the abbey church of St Adrian at Geraardsbergen and it is usually assumed that it was painted for the abbey.<sup>75</sup> François Mols, however, writing in the 1780s, claimed that it had come from ‘the effects of David of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht, in whose service Jean de Mabuse worked for a long time’, and the author of the *Description* of 1788 stated that it had been ‘carried to Holland, and during the Troubles in the Low Countries, it escaped the Iconoclastes’.<sup>76</sup> David of Burgundy was Bishop of Utrecht from 1456 until his death in 1496. It was his half-brother, Philip of Burgundy, bishop between 1517 and 1524, who employed Gossart. These confused reports are clearly unreliable. In 2010, the present writer argued that the *Adoration* was commissioned by Philip’s close associate Daniel van Boechout, Lord of Boelare.<sup>77</sup>

Little is known about the history of the abbey of St Adrian. The buildings were sold in 1797 and afterwards most of them were demolished; the archives have been dispersed or destroyed. The choir and towers of the church seem to have been knocked down in 1799.<sup>78</sup> According to Ruteau, writing in 1637, other paintings by Gossart were in the abbey in his time: a *Last Judgement*, in the chapel of Saint Natalia (Saint Adrian’s wife); a *Crucifixion*, on the ‘autel privilégié’; and other, unspecified paintings.<sup>79</sup> *The Last Judgement* was mentioned in an inventory taken in 1791, when it was still on the same altar.<sup>80</sup> If these paintings were in truth by Gossart, then it would appear that he was employed at the abbey. It seems very likely that he painted NG2790 for the abbey and that he may have executed other commissions for Geraardsbergen at much the same time.

According to van Waesberghe (1627) and Ruteau (1637), NG2790 came from the ‘chapel of the Virgin’ at St Adrian’s.<sup>81</sup> According to Ruteau, Jan de Broedere, abbot from 1504 until

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75. See in particular Steppe 1965<sup>2</sup>.

76. ‘Ce Rare Morceau avoit été Achetté de feues L.A.R. Les Archiducs Albert & Isabelle - de L’Abbaye de Grammont (ou Mons S.<sup>ti</sup> Gerardi) en flandre - en 1605 - pour Deux Mille florins - Mais Le tableau Même vennoit des Depouilles De David Batard de Bourgoigne Eveque d’Utrecht, au Service duquel Jean de Maubeuse avoit été longtems’ (Mols, cited in note 12).

77. Campbell 2010.

78. Van Bockstaele 1977, pp. 53–128; Van Bockstaele 2000, pp. 50–1.

79. ‘... Jean de Maubeuge excellent peintre, duquel ils ont encore des rares pieces, comme celle du iugement en la Chapelle de S. Natalie, celle de la Crucifixion à l’autel priuilegé & autres’ (Ruteau 1637, p. 229).

80. Steppe 1965<sup>2</sup>, p. 43.

81. See note 1 above.

1526, 'restored the crypt behind the choir and built there a fine chapel dedicated to the Virgin'.<sup>82</sup> Historians have taken this statement rather literally and have concluded that de Broedere paid for the building. The chapel, visible in some views and plans of the abbey,<sup>83</sup> seems to have been about 13 metres long. The crypt had been the burial place of several abbots, many monks and some noblemen of the district, whose tombs appear to have remained after the crypt was reconstructed as a chapel.<sup>84</sup> Jan de Broedere himself was buried there under a plain 'blue' stone.<sup>85</sup> In the will dated 12 April 1518 of Daniel van Boechout, lord of Boelare near Geraardsbergen, it was recorded that the abbot Jan de Broedere had agreed that Daniel and his wife should be buried in the chapel of the Virgin behind the choir.<sup>86</sup> Their tomb was indeed erected there.<sup>87</sup> When their daughter died in 1563, she was buried in the abbey church 'in her father's chapel'.<sup>88</sup> It seems clear that Daniel van Boechout may have contributed towards the cost of the chapel of the Virgin and that it was for a time known as his chapel.

Gossart would appear to have painted the *Adoration* between about 1510 and about 1515.<sup>89</sup> By 1508 and until 1524, he was in the service of Philip of Burgundy. Though the exact terms on which Philip employed Gossart are not known, it seems unlikely that Gossart could have worked for other patrons without Philip's consent. It therefore appears logical to look for connections between Philip and the possible patrons of NG2790, Jan de Broedere and Daniel van Boechout.

Very little is known about Jan de Broedere, alias van Coppenhole, also called Johannes de Cruce.<sup>90</sup> He was consecrated at Valenciennes on 25 November 1506. His abbacy was a period of great prosperity and he died in 1526. A missal, sold at Christie's in 2002, is decorated with

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82. 'L'Abbé Coppenolle fit bastir le quartier Abbatiale, puis la Censse ou bastimens au bas de la cour, ou est presentement le college: il releua aussi la grotte derriere le choeur, & y bastit vne belle Chapelle dediée à la Vierge' (Ruteau 1637, p. 219).

83. Van Bockstaele 2002, pp. 69, 72, for reproductions of a late eighteenth-century painting of the abbey (by the local artist Petrus Canivé, born in 1738: fig. 3) and a late-eighteenth century plan (both in De Abdij, Geraardsbergen).

84. 'In d'abdie van Sint Adriaens, achter de choor, in Onse Vrouwe capelle licht, int' harnas, met zijn wapen zeer triomphant, daer staet: Cij gist noble homme monsieur Rogier de Gavre d'Escornaij, ch[eva][ll]ie[r], s<sup>r</sup> de Hoornebeke, obiit 1456, le 21 d'octobre' (Béthune 1897–1900, p. 111). Rogier was a younger son of Arnold VI van Gavere, Baron of Schorisse (Escornaix), and was himself lord of Horebeke, east of Oudenaarde. See also de Béthune 1897–1900, pp. 104–6.

85. Van Bockstaele 2002, p. 160, citing a manuscript of 1699.

86. Van Bockstaele 2002, p. 166.

87. De Béthune 1897–1900, pp. 104–5, 111–12.

88. De Béthune 1897–1900, p. 104.

89. See below, pp. 30.

90. Van Bockstaele 1977, pp. 101–3.

his coat of arms and was presumably commissioned by him.<sup>91</sup> The miniatures, which are of indifferent quality, hardly substantiate the idea that de Broedere was a discerning patron. There is at least one indication that he had connections with the court of Margaret of Austria. On 9 April 1511 Margaret summoned to Ghent both Jan de Broedere and Jan Clercx, Abbot of Ninove; they were to celebrate divine service on the eve of Palm Sunday (12 April), on Palm Sunday itself, and on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that, at Margaret's court, de Broedere might have made the acquaintance of Gossart's patron Philip of Burgundy.

Daniel van Boechout, on the other hand, is relatively well-documented and was closely associated with Philip of Burgundy. Daniel inherited through his father the lordship of Boelare near Geraardsbergen;<sup>93</sup> and from his mother the lordship of Beverweerd, about seven miles south-east of Utrecht.<sup>94</sup> On 27 July 1487, David of Burgundy certified that, in his presence, Daniel's widowed mother had made over to Daniel all her landed property.<sup>95</sup> At the time of David's death in 1496, Daniel was his castellan at Ter Horst near Rhenen.<sup>96</sup> At an unspecified date, Daniel was one of the chamberlains at the court of Philip the Handsome.<sup>97</sup> By 1517, when Philip of Burgundy became Bishop of Utrecht, Daniel was well-established in his favour. When Philip made his ceremonial entry into Utrecht in May 1517, Daniel took a prominent place in his entourage and the town of Utrecht made him generous gifts of wine.<sup>98</sup> Philip appointed him to his council; during Philip's absences from the *Nedersticht* (the area around Utrecht), Daniel was his *stadhouder* or representative there; and he was castellan of Philip's principal residence at Duurstede.<sup>99</sup> Philip died in 1524. Daniel was one of the four executors of his will.<sup>100</sup>

Daniel may have got to know Philip of Burgundy when both were involved in the civil strife that afflicted Flanders in the early 1490s,<sup>101</sup> or afterwards when they were at the court of

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91. Sold at Christie's, London, 13 June 2002, No. 3. The coat of arms corresponds with that on the abbot's seal (Van Bocksatele 2000, pp. 139, 153), though the quarterings are reversed and the combinations of colours in the first and fourth quarters, *azure a cross gules*, infringe the rules of heraldry.

92. Bruchet & Lancien 1934, p. 86.

93. Van Trimont 2001, pp. 155–63.

94. G[alesloot] 1880, pp. 265–96, 413–38; Maris 1956, pp. 52 (56), 73 (81), 414–15 (447); van Ginkel-Meester & Hermans 1995.

95. Drossaers 1955, vol. III, p. 90 No. 1289.

96. Van Asch van Wijck 1850–3, vol. I, p. 25; for the castle, now destroyed, see Renaud 1995, pp. 259–60.

97. Butkens 1724–6, vol. III, p. 46, 'Chambellans ... Le Seigneur de Boulers'.

98. Matthaeus 1738, vol. I, p. 177; van Campen 1933, p. 95; van Kalveen 1974, p. 320; Sterk 1980, p. 34.

99. Sterk 1980, pp. 36–7.

100. Sterk 1980, pp. 86–8.

101. Doutrepont & Jodogne 1935–7, vol. II, p. 241; van Trimont 2001, pp. 160–1.

Philip the Handsome. They must certainly have met when both were in the service of David of Burgundy. Daniel was his castellan at Ter Horst while Philip was his castellan at Duurstede; Philip was asked to protect Ter Horst when it was under threat.<sup>102</sup> Gossart was in Philip's service by the winter of 1508–9, when he accompanied Philip on his embassy to Rome, and, as Gossart seems to have had lodgings in Philip's residences,<sup>103</sup> it is more than likely that Daniel van Boechout had met Gossart in or before 1508 and that the two men knew each other well.

Daniel van Boechout, Philip of Burgundy and Gossart appear to have shared a taste for erotic images. Among the items which Daniel had from the estate of Philip of Burgundy were 'two precious little panels of fornication (*de boelschap*), well done, with a cover or case (*custodie*) for one of them'.<sup>104</sup> These were two paintings of explicitly erotic subjects; they may very well have been by Gossart. Daniel and his wife, who predeceased him, were buried in 'a beautiful ... tomb in the Italian style':<sup>105</sup> if it was made in Daniel's lifetime, the tomb gives another indication of his aesthetic tastes. Daniel van Boechout provides the obvious link between Gossart and the abbey at Geraardsbergen and it was probably Daniel who secured the permission of Gossart's employer Philip of Burgundy to commission him to paint not only the great *Adoration* but also his other paintings which once adorned the abbey church.

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102. Kalveen 1974, p. 11; and Sterk 1980, p. 16.

103. Prinsen 1901, p. 235.

104. Sterk 1980, p. 264: 'Twee costelicke taffereelkens van de boelschap wel gedaen mit een custodie daer d'een in hoirt', with the marginal note 'Dese taefferelen heft die here van Boeler'. They came from Philip's small town house. The other items appropriated by Daniel included a length of blue velvet, two precious gold rings, one with a cameo, and a great bed (Sterk 1980, pp. 90, 227, 248).

105. 'een schoone triomphante hooghe verheven tombe op d'italiaensche maniere ...' (de Béthune 1897–1900, p. 112). His wife was dead by 6 October 1523, when he laid down how his property was to be divided between his two daughters. This document, mentioned by Campen 1930, p. 69, belonged to Campen and cannot now be found; I am grateful to Geert Van Bockstaele for sending a photocopy of a typed transcript where there is a reference to 'vrouwe Marie van Luxembourg zaelieger memorie zyne wettelicke gheselnede was'.

## DANIEL VAN BOECHOUT

Daniel van Boechout was a very well-connected nobleman. His mother, Johanna van Vianen, and his father's brother, Daniel van Boechout, Viscount and castellan of Brussels, were the leading members of a noble company that went in 1440–1 to the Town Hall of Brussels to inspect 'the town's painting', evidently one or more of the *Scenes of Justice* painted by Rogier van der Weyden for the 'Golden Chamber' there.<sup>106</sup> The van Boechouts were closely related to many of the great families of Brabant and Liège; and the van Vianens to the van Borselens and many of the other great families of the northern provinces.

Perhaps born in about 1455,<sup>107</sup> Daniel was probably brought up on his mother's estates near Utrecht. He may have been the 'Daniel de Bouchoute of the diocese of Utrecht' who matriculated in 1476 at the University of Leuven.<sup>108</sup> Only in about 1480 did the van Boechout family come into their Flemish inheritance.<sup>109</sup> When Daniel's elder brother Jan decided to enter the Church,<sup>110</sup> Daniel became his parents's heir and seems to have divided his time between his estates in the northern provinces and his lands in Flanders. In 1487, Daniel married Marie de Luxembourg, daughter of Jacques de Luxembourg (died 1487), Lord of Fiennes, a Knight of the Golden Fleece,<sup>111</sup> and sister of Philippe de Luxembourg (died 1519), Bishop of Le Mans (1476) and Cardinal (1498). It was Philippe who commissioned the great *jubé* in the cathedral of Le Mans, now known from a large and elaborate preliminary drawing.<sup>112</sup> Daniel's elder daughter and heir, Marie van Boechout, married in 1512 as her first husband Hugues de Lannoy, Lord of Rollencourt, who died in 1528; their granddaughter and

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106. Galesloot 1867, pp. 487–8.

107. His parents married in 1440 or 1441: see Galesloot 1870–84, vol. I, pp. 134–5; according to De Raadt 1898–1903, vol. I, p. 307, Johan van Boechout was already calling himself lord of Beverweerd in 1440 and must therefore have been married to Johanna, the heiress; she was described as his wife on 19 August 1441 (Drossaers 1955, II, p. 224 No. 859). Daniel was the younger of their two sons (van Trimpont 2001, pp. 158–9). His sister Katharina, aged five on 26 September 1461 (Galesloot 1870–84, vol. I, p. 176), was born in 1455–6.

108. 'Ex lilio ... Daniel de Bouchoute, Traj. Dioc.': see Wils 1946, p. 349.

109. De Portemont 1870, vol. II, pp. 426–8; van Caenegem 1966–77, vol. II, pp. 547–9; de Potter & Broeckaert 1900, 'Over Boelare', pp. 14, 19; De Smidt & Strubbe Brussels 1966, p. 119; Verschaeren 1974, pp. 260–1.

110. The 'heer Johan van Bouchout' who, in February 1476–7, witnessed a deed of David of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht (van Asch van Wijck 1850–3, vol. I, p. 78) may have been Daniel's father or alternatively his elder brother, who was a Canon of Utrecht Cathedral by 1476–7 and who died in or around 1507 (Butkens 1724–6, vol. II, pp. 270–1; Tenhaeff 1946, pp. 533, 550, 562; Drossaers 1955, vol. III, p. 90; Maris 1956, p. 52; Alberts, Rutgers & Roebroek 1969, p. 765; van den Hoven van Genderen 1997, p. 418; van Trimpont 2001, pp. 158–9).

111. Campen 1930, pp. 66–7 and van Trimpont 2001, pp. 159–60, resume the terms of the marriage contract, dated 24 August 1487.

112. Exhibited Paris 2010–11, no. 2.

heir was Anne of Egmont (1533–1558), the first wife of William the Silent, Prince of Orange. Daniel's second daughter Françoise married in 1527 Richard de Merode, Lord of Frentzen.<sup>113</sup>

The prolonged lawsuits (1482–1517) over the family estates in Brabant<sup>114</sup> would have been expensive and Daniel's Flemish estates were ravaged during the civil wars. Between 1517 and 1524, Daniel probably lived mainly at Duurstede, which was Philip of Burgundy's principal residence and where Daniel was his castellan. He had stabling there for his horses and a room in the great tower, which, in 1533, was still known as 'the lord of Boelare's chamber'.<sup>115</sup> In his will of 1518, however, Daniel expressed his desire to be buried at Geraardsbergen; on 6 May 1518 he was present there;<sup>116</sup> and on 6 October 1523 he was in Aalst to arrange the division of his property between his two daughters.<sup>117</sup> Philip of Burgundy died on 7 April 1524. On 13 May, Daniel – one of Philip's executors – and some colleagues were diligently compiling inventories of Philip's goods at Duurstede.<sup>118</sup> Daniel was still there on 13 November 1524 but died between 26 September 1525 and 23 July 1527.<sup>119</sup> He was buried in the Chapel of the Virgin in the abbey church of St Adrian at Geraardsbergen.

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113. See for these family connections Galesloot 1880, cited in n. 68; Drossaers 1955, *ad indices*; Schwennicke, vols VIII, 1980; XVIII, 1998; van Trimpont 2001, pp. 162–73.

114. G[alesloot] 1880, pp. 277–85.

115. Matthaeus 1738, vol. I, pp. 224, 226, 227; Sterk 1980, p. 243; Enno van Gelder 1972–3, vol. I, p. 110.

116. D'Hoop 1880, No. 309.

117. Campen 1930, p. 69.

118. Van Asch van Wijck 1850–3, vol. III, pp. 119.

119. Van Asch van Wijck 1850–3, vol. III, p. 145; Drossaers 1955, vol. III, p. 171, No. 1584; Maris 1956, pp. 414–15; van Ongevalle 1987, p. 61.

## ICONOGRAPHY

On 2 October 1519, the Abbot Jan de Broedere wrote a description of the relics then in the abbey church at Geraardsbergen. The fourteenth item in a list of 33 was ‘a piece of the clothing of one of the Three Kings’.<sup>120</sup> In NG2790 the unusual emphasis on the splendour of the kings’s robes may have some connection with the veneration of this relic.

On the capital above Caspar’s head is a representation of the Sacrifice of Isaac, which prefigures the Crucifixion;<sup>121</sup> it is perhaps contrasted with the frieze of dancing *putti*, who probably represent the pleasures of innocence. Though there are nine angels in the upper half of the painting, nothing suggests that they represent the Nine Orders of angels. No specific reason has been found for the inclusion of a tenth angel, in the doorway behind the ox. He has been identified as a self-portrait by Gossart<sup>122</sup> but it is most unlikely that Gossart would have represented himself as an angel. Many of the heads are so strongly individualised that there have been frequent attempts to find portraits. The author of the *Description* of 1788 claimed to have discovered likenesses of Dürer, Lucas van Leyden and Gossart; the author of the sale catalogue of 1795 found in addition a portrait of ‘John Duke of Brabant’. There is no reason to think that any individual was intended to be recognised, though Gossart may well have worked from models. The theory that the young man directly behind Melchior is Saint Adrian is, again, without any foundation.<sup>123</sup>

The star has been thought to symbolise God;<sup>124</sup> but, according to the *Golden Legend*, the star might represent the Holy Ghost, or the angel that appeared to the shepherds, or a newly-created body which ‘returned to the underlying matter after its mission was accomplished’.<sup>125</sup> Because in NG2790 the shepherds in the distance appear to be looking towards the star rather than at any of the angels, Gossart seems to favour the idea that the star is the angel, especially as the dove is also present, as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost appeared at the Baptism which, again according to the *Golden Legend*, took place on the

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120. ‘Item, een stic van een cleet van eenen der dry Coninghen’: see de Portemont 1870, vol. II, p. 192.

121. In the *Biblia Pauperum*, the Sacrifice of Isaac is associated with the Crucifixion; in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, with the Carrying of the Cross.

122. Davies 1968, p. 64. Waagen had wondered whether the ‘small head with hat and feathers, at a window, may perhaps be the portrait of Mabuse’ (Waagen 1838, vol. III, p. 203).

123. Brockwell pp. 8–9, basing his theory on the fact that the horseman behind carries a hammer, which might suggest a link with Saint Adrian’s emblem, the anvil.

124. Davies 1968, p. 63.

125. *Golden Legend*, vol. I, p. 81.

same day, 6 January, as the Adoration of the Kings (and the Marriage at Cana and the Feeding of the Five Thousand).<sup>126</sup> The presence of the dove in NG2790 is not necessarily surprising. The dove appears above the Virgin and Child in the triptych of the *Holy Family* (Lisbon), once believed to be an early work by Gossart, and in several other Antwerp pictures of the early sixteenth century. In all these instances, however, God is also included.<sup>127</sup>

The gifts of the kings may be interpreted in various ways. Saint Bernard suggested that the gold was to relieve the Virgin's poverty; the frankincense was to dispel the unpleasant smell of the stable; and the myrrh was to strengthen the Child's limbs and to drive out harmful worms. Alternatively, gold was for tribute, frankincense for sacrifice and myrrh for burying the dead, and the three gifts denoted Christ's powers as king, God and man.<sup>128</sup> The last interpretation gives the sense of the inscription placed on the frame of NG2790 at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>129</sup>

## DATE

Brockwell, misinterpreting the inscription on Balthasar's scarf as: MDVII, proposed that NG2790 was dated 1507.<sup>130</sup> In fact the letters form part of a longer inscription from the *Salve Regina* and the picture is not dated. It is presumed to have been painted for the Chapel of the Virgin in the abbey church of Saint Adrian's at Geraardsbergen: the chapel is said to have been built when Jan de Broedere was abbot, therefore between 1506 and 1526. By 1516, Gossart was signing: MALBODIVS and seems thereafter always to have used that form of his name when he signed his paintings, though he continued to sign documents with his full name, Jean Gossart. As NG2790 is signed GOSSART, it may be dated before 1516. The latest of the visual sources used by Gossart in his *Adoration* are Dürer's *Saint Eustace*, of about 1500, and – possibly – his *Nativity* engraving of 1504. The earliest derivative composition is

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<sup>126</sup>. Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>127</sup>. For the Lisbon triptych, see Friedländer, vol. VIII, no. 1; for the Antwerp pictures, ibid., vol. VII, nos 26, 120, 129–30, 153, etc.

<sup>128</sup>. *Golden Legend*, vol. I, p. 83.

<sup>129</sup>. See note 6 above. A similar inscription was added to an *Adoration of the Kings* attributed to the Master of Hoogstraten (Enschedé: Friedländer, vol. VII, no. Supp. 187).

<sup>130</sup>. Brockwell 1911, pp. 4, 12.



perhaps the *Adoration* now in Cologne Cathedral, by an unidentified follower of Gossart.<sup>131</sup> It was in 1646 on an altar in the church of the Franciscan convent at Mézières<sup>132</sup> and it was probably painted for the convent, founded in 1489 by Philip of Burgundy, Bastard of Nevers. The donors are his wife Marie de Roye, whom he married in 1480 and who died in 1484 or 1488, their daughter Françoise and Philip himself, who became a Franciscan after his wife's death and survived until 1525.<sup>133</sup> The portrait of Marie is certainly posthumous. Françoise appears to be about ten (her age in the mid-1490s) and unmarried but the costume of both women is in the fashion of about 1515, the likely date of the painting.<sup>134</sup> On all these grounds, NG2790 may be dated between 1506 and 1516.

Such a dating is also plausible for stylistic reasons but the precise chronology of Gossart's early paintings is problematic. Waagen found in NG2790 'a most splendid confirmation of my conjecture that this artist, before he went to Italy [in 1508–9], must have executed important works in the pure Flemish style of the school of Van Eyck';<sup>135</sup> and many have agreed that in NG2790 there is little indication that Gossart had seen works of art in the classical and contemporary Roman styles. Others, including Friedländer, have argued that it was painted after 1509.<sup>136</sup> Friedländer thought that it was very similar to the *Malvagna triptych* (Palermo)<sup>137</sup> and wondered whether Gossart would have been 'able to paint a picture with so many figures and with such perfect illusion of space before he went to Italy'. In fact the rules of perspective are not consistently applied and Gossart must have decided against having a single vanishing point. Presumably he flouted the laws of mathematical perspective because he considered that here they would have produced aesthetically displeasing and disruptive effects.

The Virgin and Child in NG2790 are very similar indeed to the Virgin and Child in the much smaller *Malvagna triptych*, where the figures of Adam and Eve on the exterior are adapted, in reverse, from Dürer's *Temptation* (B. 17), probably of 1510, from his *Small Woodcut Passion*, first issued in 1511. The triptych must have been painted in or after 1511. NG2790 was probably also painted at the beginning of the 1510s, before the *Saint Luke drawing the Virgin*

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131. See note 39 above.

132. Joly 1670, pp. 14–15.

133. Ubald d'Alençon 1907, pp. 68–96.

134. Compare the portraits from the workshop of van Orley of Isabella of Austria, probably of 1515, and Eleanora of Austria, probably of 1516, both at Hampton Court: Campbell 1985, pp. 107–8, plates 82–3.

135. Waagen 1838, vol. III, p. 201.

136. Friedländer, vol. VIII, pp. 16–18. Smith 1985, p. 62, thought that it was painted between 1506 and 1508.

137. Friedländer, vol. VIII, no. 2.

(Prague), which it resembles in many ways but where Gossart affects a more self-conscious desire to evoke antiquity.

Gossart's signed drawing of the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* (Copenhagen) is reckoned to precede another signed drawing of *Augustus and the Sibyl* (Berlin), which, inscribed ANWER, is thought to have been done in Antwerp, before his journey to Rome.<sup>138</sup> Both drawings include *putti* in the antique style, very similar to the babies who swarm across parts of NG2790 and to the cherubs of the Malvagna triptych. Both drawings seem a little less disciplined in technique than the four drawings associated with the Roman journey; but this is scarcely surprising, since the Roman drawings are copies and Gossart had been taken to Rome in order to reproduce the monuments of antiquity. It is difficult to make constructive comparisons between drawings and a painting on the scale of NG2790.

There is no necessity to believe that Gossart's stay in Rome would have affected very profoundly the development of his style. He was interested in contrasts of tone and colour, in dramatic effects of recession, in distortions of perspective and in exotic ornament. He had more in common with Dürer than with his Roman contemporaries.

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<sup>138</sup>. Ibid., plates 66, 70.