

Plate 1 Follower of Quinten Massys, *Saint Luke painting the Virgin and Child* (NG 3902), c.1525. Oak, 113.7 x 34.9 cm.



National Gallery Technical Bulletin

Volume 18, 1997

National Gallery Publications,
London

Distributed by Yale University Press

Series Editor: Ashok Roy

© National Gallery Publications Limited 1997

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

First published in Great Britain in 1997 by National Gallery Publications Limited
5/6 Pall Mall East, London SW1Y 5BA

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this journal is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 85709 178 7
ISSN 0140 7430

Edited by Diana Davies and Jan Green
Designed by Jan Green

Origination by The Burlington Press
Printed in Great Britain by The Burlington Press
(Cambridge) Ltd

Front cover: Jan Gossaert, *The Adoration of the Kings*
(detail of Plate 65)



Plate 79 Wolf Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* (NG 6550), c.1519. Fir, 95.5 cm maximum × 68.2 cm maximum (including modern additions). After treatment.

Wolf Huber's *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*

Wolf Huber (1480/5–1553) is, along with his slightly older contemporary Albrecht Altdorfer, the most important artist to have worked in the Danube Valley in the early sixteenth century, and his career as a court artist to successive rulers in Passau is well documented.¹ Yet, although many drawings by him survive, his painted works are relatively few in number; most of those that are dated were made between 1517 and the early 1520s.² Painted works which can be securely assigned to the remainder of his career are lacking, although Huber is known to have executed wall-paintings as well as altarpieces which no longer survive.³

The National Gallery's recent acquisition of a fragment of a panel painting (Plate 79) which can be attributed to Huber on the basis of comparisons with other surviving painted works and drawings thus forms an important addition to his oeuvre. It also provides a particularly rewarding opportunity for comparison with another work in the Gallery's collection, Altdorfer's *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* (Fig. 30), for both pictures show the same subject, a popular one in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Northern Europe.⁴ In common with Altdorfer's picture, Huber's composition includes a highly dramatic group of women supporting the fainting Virgin Mary. In conventional representations of the subject by artists such as Dürer, the Virgin kneels and pleads with Christ not to leave for Jerusalem and certain death. In the compositions by Huber and Altdorfer the Virgin's distress foreshadows her grief at the Crucifixion, and the pose in which she is shown is similar to that used in paintings of the figures surrounding the crucified Christ.⁵ The right-hand side of Huber's picture has been lost, so that only the hands of Christ remain, along with some drapery and two toes of his left foot. The upper part of the picture has also been cut, but much remains of a landscape viewed through a screen of fir trees. A Gothic arched gatehouse is visible at the end of a wooden bridge; standing on the bridge is a small figure,

possibly an apostle, whose garments are blown about by the wind.

Although the fragment had evidently undergone a fairly recent cleaning and restoration before it came to the Gallery, its condition and appearance were disconcerting, not least because of the mutilated state of the raised hand belonging to the lost figure of Christ (Fig. 19). Examination of the back (Fig. 20) and edges confirmed that the panel now comprises five vertical planks, identified as fir (*Abies* sp.). Dendrochronological analysis was carried out on two of the planks, establishing that the earliest possible felling date for the tree from which they were cut was 1508.⁶ The generally accepted seasoning time of about ten years between felling and

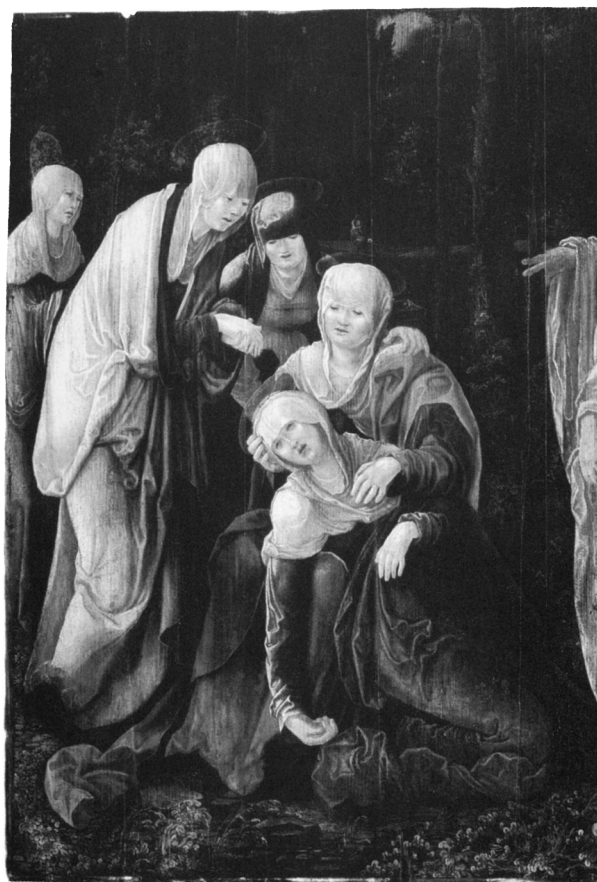
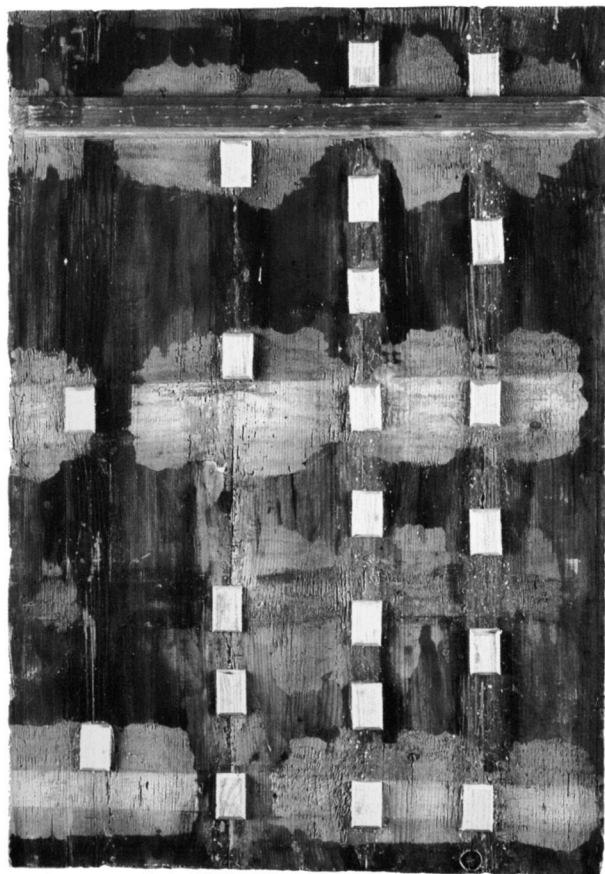


Fig. 19 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Before treatment.



execution of the painting would fit with the approximate date proposed for the work (see below). With the exception of the one on the far right, the planks each measure between 13 and 14 cm in width. The panel seems to have retained its original thickness of about 1.4 cm and slight chamfers along the left (as seen from the front) and at the bottom indicate that these edges have suffered little or no cutting. Furthermore, a strip of undecoloured green glaze on the draperies of the Holy Woman on the far left must always have been covered by the frame.

All but one of the joints had evidently separated on at least one occasion and been reglued, that between the first and second planks being particularly badly stepped and uneven (Fig. 21). Others were partly open and in a precarious state. On the reverse (Fig. 20), small blocks of wood had been glued across the joints, possibly quite recently. Across the top was a single batten, shaped to fit the reduced dimensions of the panel and therefore not original. The lighter marks across the middle and lower parts show that two more such battens were once present. Although there are several small holes in the panel, some filled with what may be original plugs of wood, they are not organised in rows or patterns that might indicate positions of original battens. Softwood panels used by Huber and other German painters seem not to have been reinforced with cross-battens, even when of quite considerable size.⁷

Further proof that the batten marks must be associated with the panel in its fragmentary state comes from the straightness of their edges. Had the batten marks been the original ones, their outlines would be discontinuous at the joints, since the image on the front revealed that not only had the second and third joints slipped out of register during re-glueing but also that slivers of original wood and paint had been lost, presumably through the planing of the edges to neaten them and to provide a clean surface for bonding. The fourth joint (on the right) has remained tight, but a curved split along the length of the next plank had also slipped while

Fig. 20 (above left) Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Reverse, before treatment.

Fig. 21 (left) Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Photographed in raking light, before treatment.

being glued, the most obvious consequence being the kink in Christ's fingers. To the right of the split, a wide strip of this plank had been cut out, resulting in the deformation of the hand and disrupting the sweeping curve of the contour of the Virgin's mantle. Why it should have been removed is inexplicable. The plank has suffered more woodworm damage than the others, but hardly sufficient to account for the cutting out of a section. Equally puzzling is the fact that such a narrow piece should then have been re-attached at the right edge, unless, that is, the fragment was cut down to its present format only after the planks had been disarranged. On the other hand, if the panel was rejoined after it had been cut down then any stepped edges must have been straightened by trimming (including the otherwise intact lower edge).

The other main problem of condition probably has its origins in the unusual preparation of the panel. Although the grain of the fir is generally regular and straight, the planks have several knots and flaws. These were covered with a paste of red lead in heat-bodied linseed oil (Plate 80).⁸ Its bright orange colour was visible in many areas of damage, while its opacity to X-rays means that it registers strongly in radiographs (Fig. 22). Then, instead of the normal smooth white chalk ground,⁹ the panel was coated with a mixture of what appears to be red lead, lead white and calcium carbonate¹⁰ applied over the thinnest of layers of calcium carbonate bound with an animal-skin glue. This first layer may lie only in the depressions of the wood grain. Both layers are so thin that their presence is not evident except in cross-sections (Plate 81). From a surface examination, the painting might be assumed to have no ground at all. The grain of the panel is exceptionally prominent (Fig. 21), even by the standards of other works on soft-wood supports. While the texture of the wood may have become more pronounced with time, the picture surface can never have been smooth.

Unfortunately, the adhesion of these thin preparatory layers has been poor, especially over the red lead putty and along the ridges of the wood grain, and some areas of the painting have suffered from extensive flaking. Worst affected are the blue-grey draperies of the Holy Woman on the left of the main group, the blue mantle of the Virgin, and the landscape and draperies on

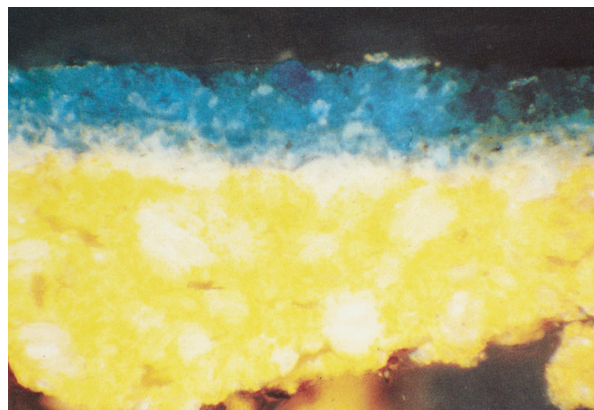


Plate 80 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Cross-section from the Virgin's blue mantle showing a thick layer of mineral azurite over a thin greyish under-modelling. At this point no ground is present. The paint layers lie directly over the bright orange filler of red lead (lead tetroxide), applied to knots and flaws in the panel. Original magnification 250×; actual magnification 230×.

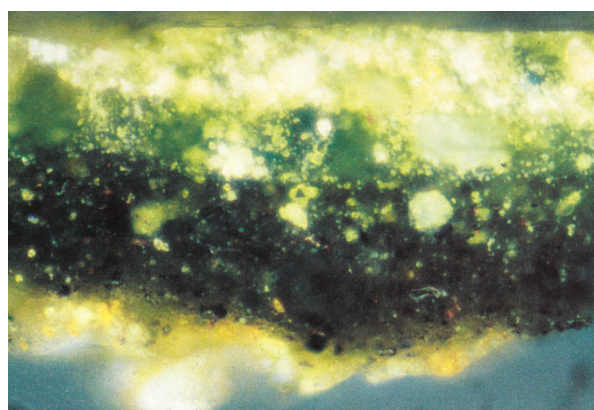


Plate 81 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Cross-section from the yellow-green highlight on the foreground foliage, lower right. The paint layers contain principally verdigris, lead-tin yellow and lead white. Here a trace of calcium carbonate ground can be seen and over this a very thin priming composed of red lead, lead white and calcium carbonate. Original magnification 400×; actual magnification 365×.

the strip attached to the right edge. The extent of the flake losses was evident in X-radiographs but also on the surface of the painting as no attempt had been made to fill them. The old restoration was generally rather perfunctory and a certain amount of overpainting of undamaged original had been carried out in order to disguise the trimmed and out-of-register joins. In the cleaning, uneven residues of a very dark and opaque old varnish had been left in the depres-



Fig. 22 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Detail from X-radiograph.



Fig. 23 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Detail, after cleaning, before panel treatment.

sions of the wood grain, particularly on the Virgin's mantle and the landscape in the upper right corner where it may have been intended to obscure the consequences of the lost strip of wood. Finally, in an attempt to reduce the visibility of the surface deformations, a matt varnish, very obviously sprayed, had been applied. The overall effect was to make the work seem uncharacteristically coarse in execution.

Removal of this restoration produced an immediate improvement. Both varnish and retouchings were readily soluble in xylene, an indication that they had almost certainly been applied within the last forty years or so. Xylene was also the most effective solvent for the coloured wax fillings used to plug the many holes, knots and gaps across the joins. In the case of the lower part of the join on the left, a depressed wedge-shaped section with surviving original paint had been completely covered with this wax filler. Along this join there were also the remains of an older, much harder restoration. The uneven residues of an earlier varnish were reduced, but a slight yellow-brown staining, particularly in the depressions of the wood grain, remains. The greatest gain was in the landscape in the upper right corner where distant blue and tree-covered hills emerged from beneath the brown varnish. The presence of a crusty accumulation of this very discoloured old varnish along the cut upper and right borders, as well as along the uncut edges, suggests that the dismemberment of the panel occurred some time ago and quite possibly before the nineteenth century.

After cleaning, the consequences of the planing of the edges of the planks were very apparent, even on those which had lost only small amounts. Ellipses of haloes were discontinuous and contours of draperies no longer aligned. Along the second join there was no space for the Holy Woman's missing eye, or for the correct number of clasped fingers (Fig. 23). In Huber's paintings the hands may not be anatomically very convincing but their arrangement and gestures play an important expressive and narrative role. The loss of a section of Christ's hand (Fig. 24) made the subject of the fragment especially difficult to comprehend.

Since treatment of the loose and open joins was inevitable, it was decided to explore the possibilities of dismantling the panel and replacing

the missing sections of wood. A tracing of the painting was cut along the lines of the joins and the pieces manipulated until all the contours were correctly aligned. Sufficient evidence had survived to propose a plausible reconstruction of Christ's raised hand. Once the register of the split is corrected, the outstretched first and second fingers can be seen to be almost intact. To the right of the lost piece and below the main part of the hand is the tip of a curled finger, complete with fingernail. If this is taken to be the end of the little finger, then the minute crescent of flesh-coloured paint on the left side of the loss must be the edge of the knuckle of the third or ring finger. The position of the thumb is more conjectural since it has to be contained within the missing section.¹¹ When sufficient space is inserted to accommodate this reconstruction of the hand, the planks of the bridge behind can be linked and the previously stepped contour of the Virgin's mantle forms a smooth curve. In addition, the proposed insertion brought the width of the whole plank to just over 13 cm, the same as the other four surviving planks. As a check on the accuracy of the exercise, the image of the painting was captured digitally using a prototype of the MARC camera and divided into its constituent planks.¹² The sections were then manoeuvred on screen to determine the optimum relative positions. By these means it was possible to establish that between the second and third planks an insert of 0.4 cm was needed, with the third plank shifted up by 0.1 cm, and between the third and fourth planks a piece 0.2 cm wide but with no vertical displacement. The split running through Christ's fingers had slipped by 0.2 cm and the large insert had to be 2.1 cm wide, with the fragment on the right displaced upwards by 0.4 cm.

The panel proved to be easy to disassemble (Plate 82).¹³ The paint on each plank or section was protected by strips of facing tissue adhered with Paraloid B-67. The pieces of facing were individually shaped to leave access to the splits and joins and as much filling and glue as possible was picked out from them on the front face of the picture. Once the batten and the blocks of wood had been removed from the back, several of the joins virtually fell apart. In spite of the planing, the worm-eaten edges had provided inadequate bonding surfaces for the glue to be

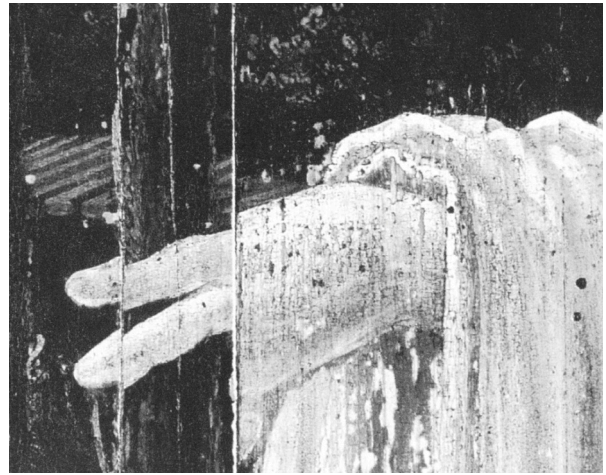


Fig. 24 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Detail, after cleaning, before panel treatment.



Plate 82 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. The disassembled panel. The paint surface is protected by a facing.

effective and when the panel came to be re-built it was often necessary to add rye flour to the adhesive¹⁴ to fill the many worm channels and cavities.

The panel clamping table¹⁵ proved to be invaluable, both in securing and improving the level of the many small splits and the uneven and stepped join on the left, and, more importantly, in the systematic assembly of the planks with the inserts. These were made from a carefully select-



Fig. 25 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. After panel treatment, before restoration.

ed piece of pine, since it was felt that a related timber would be a more sympathetic choice and react in a similar way to the original to any possible change in environment. The new wood was well-seasoned (it was, in fact, an old shelf) and notably straight-grained. The cut pieces were left for several weeks to ensure that they would not twist or warp and in so doing introduce new stresses into the panel. It is also noteworthy that even the narrowest separated fragment of the original panel showed no sign of dimensional instability in the stable environment of the Conservation Department workshop.

The other advantage of using pine was that for the wide insert through Christ's hand, the grain of the wood could be exploited to duplicate the texture of Huber's original panel.¹⁶ This texture is such a dominant feature of the painting that the insertion of a smooth flat band would have been visually very disruptive, regardless of the method of restoration eventually selected. An

important factor in deciding how to restore this inserted area was the need to unite, in a visual as well as a physical sense, the narrow strip of surviving original on its right with the rest of the fragment (Fig. 25). This, and the requirement to clarify the important gesture of Christ, led to the decision to restore the area imitatively, matching the level of finish and tonal depth of the original paint on either side. However, because of the need to move up by 0.4 cm the piece to the right of the insert, it was possible to incline the upper and lower edges of the new section, making the restoration readily identifiable. The same approach was taken with the much narrower insert between the second and third planks. The whole fragment is displayed mounted within a frame so that its edges remain visible.

The inserted strips were by no means the only difficulties encountered in the restoration. In the areas which have suffered flaking sometimes little more than an occasional island of original paint survives. Nevertheless, it was possible to fill in the basic forms, but some detailed internal modelling of drapery folds has almost certainly been lost, especially in the lower part of the Holy Woman standing on the left in the main group. The regular verticality of the accumulations of residual varnish along the wood grain was a useful aid to the integration of the retouchings. Her blue-grey mantle must have changed colour as well because it was found to have been painted with a mixture of azurite, red lake and lead white (Plate 83). In common with so many examples of this pigment combination,¹⁷ the lake has faded and the azurite become dulled so that there is now little difference between this area and the true greys of the headdresses of the Holy Women.

The azurite of the Virgin's mantle has probably become rather more green with time and the shadows of the folds are no longer clearly defined. Cross-sections show that a thin blue-grey undermodelling consisting of azurite, lead white and a little black is present.¹⁸ The unusual greyish pink of the Holy Woman who stands at the back of the main group has the appearance of a faded lake, although this area was not sampled. On the other hand, the deep brown tinge of many of the other areas of red lake, including the Holy Woman's mantle and the Virgin's

sleeve, seems to have been intentional since a certain amount of black pigment was added to the lake. The hot red-brown glaze in the shadows of the dress of the Mary who supports the Virgin now looks similar but this drapery is probably the most radically altered colour area in the painting. The glaze is also much damaged by abrasion, with the pattern of damage suggesting that a corrosive cleaning material may have been employed. The drapery seems to have been depicted as a shot fabric, underpainted in the mid-tones and highlights with yellow and red earths and a little black, and modulating through to azurite in the shadows. The highlights were then picked out with a pale pink (vermilion and white) and the rest glazed with a transparent green consisting of verdigris in linseed oil with a small amount of pine resin.¹⁹ This green has now become completely brown. Other 'copper-resinate' glazes have also discoloured, notably on the draperies of the Holy Woman on the far left, but because they have a substantial underpainting of verdigris and lead-tin yellow (Plate 81) they remain recognisably green.

Other alterations can be attributed to a general optical shift caused by the poor reflective properties of the orange ground. It can never have had the luminosity of a conventional chalk ground, but a layer as thin as this is likely to have darkened considerably, becoming significantly translucent with age and from the absorption of varnish, glue and oil. Optically the paint film behaves as though applied over a warm red-brown preparation and the picture seems to have changed in similar ways to works on dark-coloured grounds. Therefore the flesh tones of the Holy Women are now cool and tending to grey – although a degree of pallor was evidently meant to indicate their distress since the surviving areas of Christ's hands are noticeably warmer in tint. Contrasts between highlights and shadows have almost certainly become exaggerated but, again, dramatic lighting effects such as the bold white highlighting of the Virgin's expressively drooping arm are clearly intentional.

The dark colours, especially in the background, have become lowered in tone or 'sunk', rendering much of the detail invisible under all but the brightest lighting conditions: for example, it is difficult to see that, above Christ's

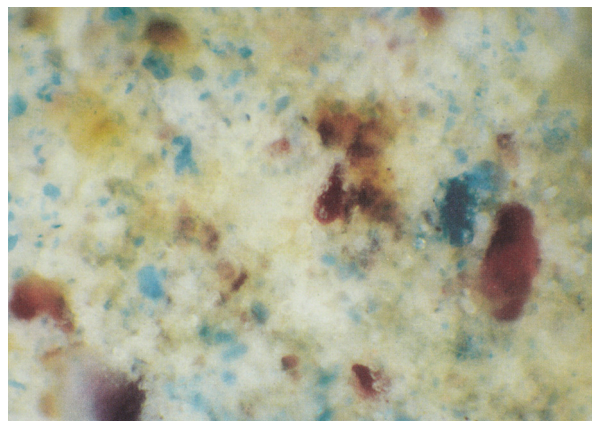


Plate 83 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Top surface of a sample from the discoloured blue-grey of the Holy Woman second from the left showing a mixture of lead white, azurite and red lake. There is some discoloration and fading of the pigments. Original magnification 250×; actual magnification 230×.

raised arm, a bridge, a squat crenellated tower and a couple of pollarded willows have been picked out with minute points and dashes of colour. Little of the architectural detail of the gatehouse and walled town can be distinguished and their structure can now only be appreciated in infra-red photographs and reflectograms (Fig. 26). The legibility of the background architecture has not been helped by the tendency of the dark brown colours to develop a broken and shrivelled craquelure. This is perhaps partly the result of the breaking through of the prominent wood grain, but poor drying of the paint may also be to blame. Passages of transparent brown paint on the shutters and centre panel of Huber's Feldkirch *Saint Anne Altarpiece* and also of his *Lamentation* of 1524 in Paris are affected by drying defects, in some areas so severe as to suggest the use of a bituminous pigment. A sample from the National Gallery panel, taken at the junction between the gatehouse and the trees to the right of it, found only black and red lake. However, both pigments are slow to dry in oil and a thick, medium-rich application of paint might develop drying problems, even though the medium used by Huber seems to have been heat-bodied linseed oil in all colours analysed, with the exception of areas of green.²⁰

The handling of the paint in the National Gallery's fragment is bold, giving the impression that it was rapidly and confidently executed. As the cross-sections show, some of the colours



Fig. 26 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*. Composite infra-red reflectogram.

were built up in a sequence of layers, but other areas, especially in the lighter colours, appear to have been painted with a more direct technique. The depiction of foliage with an assortment of dots, dashes, loops and flourishes may to some extent be echoed in the work of other early sixteenth-century German artists such as Dürer and Cranach, but in Huber's hands these abbreviations become highly distinctive and can be easily recognised both in his paintings and his drawings. For instance, the manner of painting foliage in the National Gallery fragment finds close parallels in paintings such as the predella to the *Saint Anne Altarpiece* and the Louvre *Lamentation*, as well as in studies on coloured paper such as two in Budapest dated 1517 and 1519 (Fig. 27).²¹ These studies in particular exhibit the manner of working with strong highlights against a darker background which is also seen in the Gallery's painting, as well as exemplifying Huber's idiosyncratic way of representing leaves and foreground foliage. He indicates only the exposed branches with gnarled and wavering lines, and the radiating arrangements of leaves terminate in a ruffle of dense rounded forms, drawn and painted with extraordinary vigour.

The underdrawing on the Gallery fragment revealed by infra-red methods of examination (Fig. 26) can be related both to underdrawings visible on his paintings and to sketches and studies on paper. Its purpose seems to have been the approximate placing of the figures on the panel. The drawn lines are seldom followed faithfully in the execution of the painting, and there is little sense of the composition being worked out at the underdrawing and painting stages. The few pentimenti made during painting amount to no more than adjustments of contours such as the enlargement of the headdress of the Virgin. It is probable that some form of compositional drawing on paper was made – perhaps similar to those which survive for episodes depicted on the shutters of the *Saint Anne Altarpiece*. The graphic style of the underdrawing is close to that of his drawings on paper in its boldness and fluidity and in details such as the rapid scribbles to indicate landscape and trees, the curlicues which stand for bunched drapery folds (for example in the mantle of the Holy Woman on the left of the main group), and the tendency to sketch in limbs

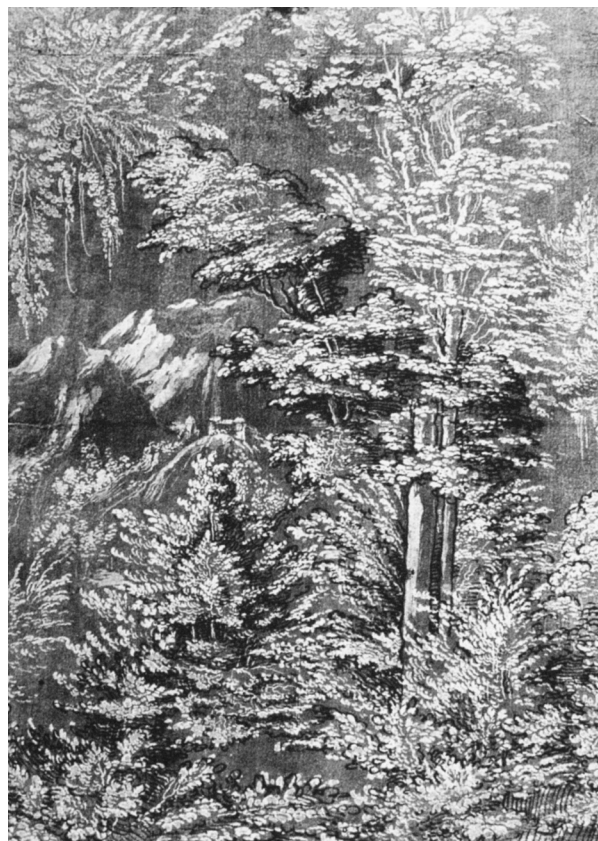


Fig. 27 Huber, *Study of trees with a mountain*, 1519. Pen and black ink with white heightening on brown prepared paper, 22 × 16.2 cm. Budapest, National Museum of Fine Art.

which are later to be covered with draperies.

Like other German artists in this period, Huber appears to have made a number of different types of drawing which might be used at different stages of working up a painted composition, in addition to landscape drawings which were probably finished works in themselves. As well as the fairly elaborate ink sketches of whole compositions, a number of chalk drawings survive of heads, hands, or drapery alone.²² These may well have been kept to be used in a series of painted works, and although no precise parallels can be made with surviving drawings, the National Gallery's painting shows similarities to such studies, and in particular to a drawing in Karlsruhe (Staatliche Kunsthalle) of a lamenting female head. This in turn is similar to female heads in such paintings as the *Visitation* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), the *Lamentations* in Feldkirch and Paris, and the *Circumcision* in Bregenz, as well as the National Gallery fragment. Such variation on a theme is characteristic of Huber's work, and it is surely no accident that



Fig. 28 Huber, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother*, 1519. Lime, 36.7 × 26.8 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

the two female figures on the left of the National Gallery picture reveal close similarities to the figure of the Virgin showing distress at the Circumcision of the infant Christ in the painting at Bregenz, as well as to the grieving female figures in both *Lamentations* and the small version of *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* of 1519 in Vienna (Fig. 28). Moreover, not only is the tiered arrangement of the Virgin and Holy Women found in the two *Lamentations* and the National Gallery fragment, but also the composition of our picture, in which the Virgin sinks back, her arm drooping, is closely paralleled by the composition of the Feldkirch *Lamentation*, albeit in reverse, where it is the body of Christ which sinks back, his hand in a very similar position to that of the Virgin in the National Gallery picture.

Although many of Huber's landscape drawings are likely to have been sold to collectors, some may have been retained in order to re-use various motifs in both drawings and paintings:

bridges, castles and gatehouses constantly recur, as well as pollarded willows, tall pines and riverside and lakeside views. The Gothic arched gatehouse and wooden footbridge in the National Gallery's painting can be paralleled in a number of drawings by Huber,²³ and were clearly favourite motifs, as were the pollarded willows which appear on a very small scale in the woods on the far right. Another favourite device of Huber's is the inclusion in the background of one or more small figures like that on the footbridge in the National Gallery picture. Such figures, with their details strongly highlighted in white or a light colour, feature in the backgrounds of the shutters of the *Saint Anne Altarpiece*, and in the Louvre *Lamentation* a small figure of a man with his dog appears in the middle distance, picked out with white highlights which have now become semi-transparent.

Any discussion of the origins and date of the National Gallery fragment is best preceded by some consideration as to the possible size, shape and design of the painting when it was still intact. The position and scale of the surviving parts of Christ indicate that he was standing closer to the front of the picture plane than the group of Holy Women, and with his left foot forward. The relative positions of his hands – with the left hand rather oddly posed, apparently grasping the trailing fabric of the wide sleeve of his white robe – seem awkward unless the figure is imagined as standing with his left shoulder raised and his back turned slightly away from the viewer (Fig. 29), a bold invention but one also seen in Altdorfer's woodcut of the same subject. Furthermore, the compositional device of a foreground figure turned away from the viewer is common in Huber's paintings. Also common are figures with their weight distributed mainly on the forward, straightened leg. If the curve of the outline of the existing lower part of Christ's red mantle is extended, it sweeps down to the ground and it seems probable that it terminated in a typical writhing – almost as if animated – bundle of surplus drapery.

To make room for this conjectural pose, it is necessary to add three more planks of the same width as the five which constitute the surviving fragment. This gives a width of about 110 cm, almost exactly that of Altdorfer's painting of



Fig. 29 Proposed reconstruction of the painting of which the National Gallery panel is a fragment.



Fig. 30 Albrecht Altdorfer, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* (NG 6463), probably 1520. Lime, 141 × 111 cm.

Christ taking Leave of his Mother (Fig. 30) and, for the purposes of this reconstruction, Huber's panel is taken to have had a similar format, although it may well have been slightly taller, or have had a curved top like that of the centre panel of the *Saint Anne Altarpiece*. Saint Peter and Saint John were not necessarily present but they appear in Altdorfer's version and there would be space for them as observers behind and to the right of Christ.²⁴ The upper left corner was probably filled in by the top of the gatehouse and the buildings rising beyond it.

The short curved spikes of broken branches projecting from the surviving tree-trunks indicate that they were coniferous; and a fringe of discoloured 'copper resinate' (which might have been interpreted as residual varnish)²⁵ over the sky at the upper edge of the fragment may be the end of one of the trailing fronds which so often hang from the branches of Huber's fir trees. To balance these trees and the buildings, there is likely to have been another group of trees on the right, perhaps leaving Christ's head set against an open space with a distant view beyond. The

framing of the principal figure by groups of trees appears in other designs by Huber,²⁶ and the highly finished landscape drawing of 1519 in Budapest (Fig. 27) shows the artist studying distant hills seen through a screen of trees. Such an effect is hinted at in the remaining area of landscape in the National Gallery fragment, and it is not impossible that the Budapest drawing was in some way connected with the painting.

Of the small number of surviving paintings by Huber, those which are dated are mostly concentrated into a short period in the middle of his career. The lack of dated and datable work covering the full half century of his activity as an artist presents problems for the dating of the present work. Moreover, its technique gives the painting a slightly different appearance to other surviving works.²⁷ Although there are evident similarities to works of the early 1520s, some stylistic features suggest that it might be dated slightly earlier, in the years just before 1520. In particular the somewhat elongated figures of the Virgin and Holy Women, compared with the squatter figures of some of the works of the



Fig. 31 Huber, *Study for an epitaph*, 1519. Pen and brown ink and grey wash on red-tinted paper, 21.7 × 20.6 cm. Munich, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung.

1520s, bring them close to a drawing dated 1519 (Fig. 31), a study for an epitaph.²⁸ In the drawing, which shows a family kneeling underneath a scene of the resurrection of Lazarus, the figures are significantly elongated: for example the saint presenting the family on the far left, and the figure of Lazarus, whose exceptionally long thighs correspond to those of the fainting Virgin in the National Gallery picture. The pose of the figure of Christ in the drawing has much in common with what can be deduced of the stance of the fragmentary Christ in our painting. Moreover, the figures in the small Vienna version of *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* (Fig. 28), also dated 1519, again resemble their larger counterparts in the National Gallery picture.

The relationship between Huber's rendering of this subject in the National Gallery fragment and Altdorfer's (Fig. 30) also raises questions of dating. Altdorfer's departure from the traditional iconography (which Huber himself followed in the version of 1519) is arguably more radical than Huber's. Huber's Virgin differs from that in his 1519 version, and from the woodcut by Dürer of the same subject designed in 1503–5, in the way in which her figure is more closely related to the Holy Women behind her, and especially in

the way in which she has ceased to plead with her Son, but lies back limply in distress. Altdorfer's Virgin is in a state of total collapse, which corresponds more fully to her pose in Crucifixion and Entombment compositions, and is probably in part inspired by the prints of Mantegna.²⁹ Altdorfer's painting can be dated to around 1515–20,³⁰ and the question arises as to whether Huber's composition is closely dependent on Altdorfer's and must therefore postdate it. Although the small picture in Vienna of 1519 shows a more traditional composition, it does not necessarily imply that Huber must have painted the National Gallery painting after this. And it cannot be assumed that Altdorfer's composition preceded that of Huber: the two artists may have developed their novel approach to the subject independently, with differing results in consequence, or they may each have responded differently to, for example, the stimulus of Italian prints.³¹ However, if Huber's composition did result from his knowledge of Altdorfer's painting, a date around 1518–20 would still be perfectly plausible.

Whether the painting of which the National Gallery picture is a fragment was originally an independent work or whether it was part of an ensemble is impossible to establish with certainty, although the large scale of the figures and the fact that the panel was not painted on the reverse are perhaps arguments in favour of its status as an independent picture. The subject does feature, however, on altarpieces as an episode in the Life of the Virgin as well as independently, and the possibility of its place in such an ensemble cannot be excluded entirely.³² No records appear to survive which would offer more information on this point,³³ and the fragmentary nature of the painting provides no further clues.

Nevertheless, the fragment is an important addition not only to Huber's oeuvre, if the proposed date of c.1519 is accepted, in that it sheds light on the earlier part of his career, but it is also a significant addition to the National Gallery's Collection. It remains, in spite of the vicissitudes it has suffered, a characteristic example of his work, both for the atmospheric beauty of the landscape setting – even in its sadly truncated state – and for the powerful and expressive grouping of the surviving figures.

Notes and references

1. F. Winzinger, *Wolf Huber, Das Gesamtwerk*, Munich and Zürich 1979, 2 vols, Vol. I, pp. 19–26 and 203–8.
2. The dated works (excluding portraits) are the fragment from the *Epitaph of Jakob Endl* (Kremsmünster, Benedictine Abbey) of 1517, *Christ taking Leave of his Mother* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) of 1519, the *Lamentation* (Feldkirch, Church of St Nicholas), centre panel of the *Saint Anne Altarpiece*, dated 1521, and the *Lamentation* (Paris, Louvre) of 1524.
3. Winzinger, I, p. 65, II, plates 322 and 323.
4. See examples listed in L. Campbell, *The Early Flemish Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, Cambridge 1985, p. 80, and also R. Billinge and S. Foister, 'The Underdrawing of Altdorfer's "Christ taking Leave of his Mother"', *Burlington Magazine*, October 1993, pp. 687–91.
5. Billinge and Foister, cited in note 4, p. 691.
6. The identification of the wood species and the dendrochronological analysis were carried out by Dr Peter Klein. Only the third and fourth planks could be measured and dated. Their growth rings were formed in 1458–1504 and 1456–1508 respectively. As the youngest heartwood ring was that formed in 1508, this is the earliest possible felling date. Allowing for a minimum storage time of two years, the panel cannot have been made before 1510 and a date rather later in the decade is more probable.
7. Of other paintings by Huber, the Paris *Lamentation* and one of the portraits are described by Winzinger as being on fir; and the fragment from the *Epitaph of Jakob Endl*, the *Lamentation* and the predella from the Feldkirch *Saint Anne Altarpiece*, the *Raising of the Cross* and the *Allegory of the Crucifixion* (both Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) are all listed as spruce (see Winzinger, cited in note 1, I, pp. 171–84). It is not recorded how these identifications were made, but these panels are certainly some form of softwood. For photographs of the reverses of the main panel and predella of the Feldkirch altarpiece see Winzinger, II, appendix, A 22 and A 24.
8. The red lead was identified by SEM–EDX analysis. A few particles of lead white can also be seen. The linseed oil binder was identified by GC–MS. Examination of the sample by FTIR did not reveal any protein. See also pp. 53–5 of this *Bulletin*.
9. Hans Baldung Grien's *The Trinity and Mystic Pietà* (NG 1427), for example, is also painted on a fir panel but it has a calcium carbonate ground of sufficient thickness to have reduced, if not completely filled in, the undulations of the wood grain. Judging by a surface examination, the centre panel of Huber's *Saint Anne Altarpiece* and also his *Lamentation* in the Louvre (both on softwood panels – see note 7) would appear to have reasonably substantial grounds.
10. The use of a strongly tinted ground or priming was becoming increasingly common in North Italian painting by the second decade of the sixteenth century. Although there are later examples among German panels at the National Gallery (notably paintings of the 1530s by Holbein), other German paintings of the first quarter of the century in the Collection all have white preparations.
11. The shape of the reconstructed thumb was found by reversing a sheet of studies by Huber – almost certainly of his own left hand – in Dresden (illustrated in Winzinger, cited in note 1, II, plate 152).
12. This was executed as an assignment by Viviana Giovannozzi from Università La Sapienza, Rome, while on attachment to the VASARI/MARC electronic imaging project at the National Gallery in 1995. This project will be published in greater detail in due course.
13. The work on the support was carried out by David Thomas of the Conservation Department.
14. A urea formaldehyde adhesive ('Cascamite') was employed.
15. For a description of this equipment see A.M. Reeve, 'A new multi-purpose clamping table for the treatment of paintings on wood', *Studies in Conservation*, 35, 1990, pp. 160–2.
16. The depressions in the grain of the new piece of wood were emphasised by working over it with a wire brush to compress the softer fibres of each growth ring. To ensure that the texture matched that of the original painting, the strip was thinly coated with gesso (as a base for the restoration) before it was glued in place. Other fillings (with gesso and with 'Fine Surface Polyfilla') were carried out in the normal way after completion of work on the panel. Retouching was carried out with watercolour (used to underpaint some of the inserted strips) and with pigments in 'Paraloid B-72'. For a few final glazes Ketone–N (Larapol) was employed as a medium. Preliminary and final varnishes were of Ketone–N.
17. The drapery may once have been closer in colour to the pale blue mantle worn by Joseph of Arimathea in the Feldkirch *Lamentation*.
18. For the use by Gossaert of a grey underpainting for the blue mantle of the Virgin in *The Adoration of the Kings* see p. 92 of this *Bulletin*.
19. FTIR examination of a sample from the sleeve of the standing Holy Woman on the left of the main group showed the glaze to consist of verdigris in an oil/resin medium. The resin (identified by GC–MS as pine resin) appears to be incorporated in the medium with the oil (linseed oil) and therefore this is not a true 'copper resinat' of the type where verdigris is dissolved in resin, dried, pow-

- dered and then ground in oil. See also pp. 53–5 of this *Bulletin*.
20. Samples examined were from the blue-grey mantle of the Holy Woman on the left of the main group, the green of her sleeve, the red lake of the Virgin's sleeve, the pale blue sky and the dark brown of the gate tower at the upper edge. See also pp. 53–5 of this *Bulletin*.
 21. Illustrated in Winzinger, cited in note 1, II, plates 45 and 63.
 22. Winzinger, cited in note 1, nos. 76, 152, 154–7, I, p. 104 and 134.
 23. Winzinger, cited in note 1, nos. 22–5, 37, 41, 42, 45, 46, 48, 63, 68, 69, 89, I, pp. 82–4, 87–8, 96, 98–9, 90–1.
 24. For the purposes of this graphic reconstruction the figures of Saints Peter and John have been adapted from the same apostles in a drawing of *Christ and the Adulteress* formerly in Rotterdam (illustrated in Winzinger, II, plate 55).
 25. That this was discoloured paint was confirmed by the identification of copper from the verdigris.
 26. For example, drawings of *Saint Hubert*, formerly in Rotterdam, and a *Crucifixion* in Berlin (illustrated in Winzinger, II, plates 37 and 47).
 27. With the possible exception of the Kremsmünster fragment referred to in note 2 (not seen by the authors) none of the other paintings on softwood panels has such a dominant wood texture. The comparison is even more difficult with those works on lime.
 28. Winzinger, cited in note 1, no. 147, I, p. 132.
 29. Billinge and Foister, cited in note 4, p. 691.
 30. The evidence for a date of 1520 is doubtful. It was proposed in A. Smith and M. Wyld, 'Altdorfer's "Christ taking Leave of his Mother"', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 7, 1983, p. 51; but for a discussion of the problem see Billinge and Foister, cited in note 4, p. 691, n. 11.
 31. H. Mielke, *Albrecht Altdorfer. Zeichnungen, Deckenfarbenmalerei, Druchgraphick*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin and Regensburg 1988, pp. 315, 322, argues that the two artists exhibit parallel development; for another account of possible relationships between the two, see C.S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, London 1993, pp. 219–24, also pp. 161–6, 261ff.
 32. For example a painting of this subject by Martin Schaffner was part of a wing of the Wettenhausen altarpiece dated 1523–4: see G. Goldberg, *Altdeutsche Malerei Alte Pinakothek München Katalog II*, Munich 1963, pp. 184–6.
 33. The painting descended in the family of Edigna, Freifrau von Godin, and is believed to have been in the family since the nineteenth century; a suggested connection with the Bishops of Regensburg has not been substantiated, and no connection with any church is known.