

## Book reviews

Maryan W. Ainsworth, with contributions by Maximiliaan P.J. Martens, *Petrus Christus: Renaissance master of Bruges*, New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art) 1994\*

"Far fewer authors have written about Petrus Christus and his art since 1937 than on the van Eycks. Bazin studied one aspect of his art. Schöne proposed a new catalogue of his works, in an appendix to his book on Dieric Bouts. Panofsky, especially, has written penetratingly on Petrus Christus. A definitive monograph on this painter remains to be written." These were Nicole Veronce-Verhaegen's concluding remarks in her "Editor's note" in the first volume of the reprint and updating of Friedländer's *Die Altniederländische Malerei* of 1924.<sup>1</sup> Quite a lot has happened since 1967. In the "Selected bibliography" of the work under review Ainsworth now mentions five dissertations on Petrus Christus, or with him in the leading role, two monographs and some 20 articles focusing entirely on one or more of his works or aspects of his artistry. This growing interest has also been paralleled by the greater emphasis placed on Petrus Christus in more general studies and surveys. An example of the latter is James Snyder's excellent *Northern Renaissance art*, which devotes seven pages to Christus.<sup>2</sup> Snyder discusses him among a small group of "northerners" and still seeks the origins of his art in the circles "closely related to [Dieric] Bouts and Ouwater in an intimate workshop situation in his early years." Here Snyder is evidently following Schöne and de Tolnay.<sup>3</sup> He assumes, as so many do, that Petrus Christus came from the Brabant village of Baerle, between Turnhout and Breda, and not from the Baerle near Ghent. However, Snyder then misuses this localization in order to suggest that Christus received a northern Netherlandish training: "This proximity with Haarlem and other Dutch centers in Holland adds credibility to the theory that Christus received his training and apprenticeship in circles dominated by the Haarlem school."<sup>4</sup> Lying south of Breda and the great rivers, Baerle in fact looked far more to the southern Netherlandish, Brabant and Flemish cities than to the north, or northwest rather, and the cities of Holland. As the crow flies, Baerle is about 50 kilometers from Ant-

werp, 70 from Brussels and around 100 from Haarlem. Maryan Ainsworth and Maximiliaan Martens evidently cannot agree on Christus's origins. Martens (p. 15) believes that the Brabant Baerle is the more likely contender (even the unusual surname is commoner there), while Ainsworth (p. 55) would prefer him to come from the Baerle near Ghent, and he would then step effortlessly into a "post-Eyckian workshop." What is perhaps more important than the true birthplace (even though it might provide new points of reference), and certainly more so than the pernicious attempts to classify the young Petrus Christus as either "Dutch" or "early Flemish," are the efforts to establish an independent position for this master, whose fortune and fate it was to be literally forced to work in the shadow of Jan van Eyck, the undisputed "founding father" of northern Renaissance painting. Ainsworth (pp. 25-26) sums up this critical history briefly and to the point in her introductory essay preceding the catalogue of 26 works (pp. 67-193). In this chapter, "The art of Petrus Christus" (pp. 25-65), she also describes "her" *oeuvre*, which was executed between ca. 1445 and ca. 1475. The springboard for this chapter is provided by Maximiliaan Martens, a Belgian historian of Flemish art and lecturer at Groningen University, who first gives a short sketch of the city of Bruges in Christus's day (pp. 3-13) and then provides a "Cultural biography" (pp. 15-23) that relies heavily on new research into local history. The book closes with two appendices: "Archival documents and literary sources" relating to Petrus Christus up to 1800, including previously unpublished material, meticulously gathered together by Martens (pp. 195-211), and "Dendrochronological analysis of panels attributed to Petrus Christus" (pp. 213-15), which is presented by Peter Klein of the University of Hamburg with his customary thoroughness.

The strength and great importance of this study lies in the fact that Maryan Ainsworth, Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Paintings Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, uses the findings of modern scientific examination to build on the connoisseurship of earlier scholars. This is made possible on the one hand by Christus's relatively small *oeuvre* of around 30 paintings (no fewer than nine of which are signed), five drawings and one miniature, and on the other hand by Ainsworth's extremely privileged position in a museum which not only carries out such research at the highest level but which also has more works by Petrus Christus than anyone else. The formidable core group consists of the six paintings in the Metropolitan Museum that are now accepted, probably defini-

\* Review translated from the Dutch by Michael Hoyle.

1 M.J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish painting*, vol. 1: *The van Eycks - Petrus Christus*, Leiden & Brussels 1967, p. 106.

2 J. Snyder, *Northern Renaissance art: painting, sculpture, the graphic arts from 1350 to 1575*, New York 1985, pp. 150-56, 165.

3 W. Schöne, *Dieric Bouts und seine Schule*, Berlin & Leipzig 1938, p. 56; C. de Tolnay, "Flemish paintings in the National Gallery of Art," *Magazine of Art* 34 (1941), pp. 179-81.

4 Snyder, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 150.

5 *St Jerome's* critical fortunes have fluctuated widely. Elisabeth Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck*, New York 1980, pp. 370-71 fig. 232, represents one of the extremes by rejecting it as a "pastiche" on the evidence of laboratory research. See also, in passing, A. M. Koldewey, *Van de hoed en de rand*, (Clavis Kleine Kunsthistorische Monografieën, vol. 14; in press), note 15.

tively, as autograph, headed by the world-famous *St Eligius*. The next group undoubtedly comprised six paintings spread among other American collections which could be seen at the exhibition in New York from April to July 1994. The spectacular news was that seven works in European collections were flown over for the show, even the *Madonna enthroned with Sts Jerome and Francis*, which had not left Frankfurt since 1846. Two other small panels in the Metropolitan Museum play a crucial role in the study of Petrus Christus, but in a negative sense. They are the *Virgin and Child with Sts Barbara and Elizabeth and Jan Vos* by "Jan van Eyck and workshop" of ca. 1441-43, and *St Jerome in his study* from the "Workshop of Jan van Eyck" of 1442(?), Ainsworth's cat. nrs. 1 and 2, pp. 68-78. Both used to be regarded, by Panofsky among others, as works by Jan van Eyck that were completed by Petrus Christus, while the *St Jerome* has long been labeled, by Friedländer and others, as a copy by Christus after van Eyck.<sup>5</sup> Using stylistic analysis backed by investigation of the underdrawings Ainsworth argues persuasively that Christus had nothing whatever to do with these panels. His hand is different, and the putative close collaboration with Jan van Eyck can no longer serve as a point of departure for discussing his *oeuvre*. This is extremely important, of course, and sheds a new light on Petrus Christus as he steps forth from van Eyck's shadow. It is also significant in one particular detail, in that Christus also painted the donor Jan Vos, a Carthusian who left Bruges for Utrecht, around 1450 in the *Virgin and Child with St Barbara and Jan Vos*, better known as the *Exeter Madonna* (cat. nr. 7).<sup>6</sup>

On this point it is odd that Ainsworth says nothing at all about another small panel in the Metropolitan Museum which earlier authors have tossed back and forth between Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christus: the *Virgin in a niche*.<sup>7</sup> As with the rejection of the above two works, considerations affecting the attribution of this devotional painting could, by default, help build up the picture of the true Petrus Christus. Moreover, this *Virgin in a niche*, the *Virgin and Child* of which are faithful copies of their counterparts in van Eyck's Antwerp *Virgin at the fountain*, belongs to the group of devotional images discussed by Ainsworth in connection with cat. nr. 11, the Budapest *Virgin and Child in*

*an archway*. Friedländer considered this panel, which once belonged to King Willem II of Holland,<sup>8</sup> to rank "between Jan van Eyck and Petrus Christus."<sup>9</sup> Erik Larsen, in his catalogue of the Flemish Primitives in the Metropolitan Museum of 1947-48, leans towards Petrus Christus.<sup>10</sup> He even goes so far as to suggest that, like the *St Barbara* in Antwerp, the design remained behind in van Eyck's workshop and was completed by Christus.<sup>11</sup> Harbison included it in his recent book on Jan van Eyck as a mid-fifteenth century copy.<sup>12</sup> There is another problem associated with the Budapest *Virgin and Child in an archway*. Ainsworth arrives at a dating of ca. 1450-55 on stylistic grounds, which is confirmed by the dendrochronological dating carried out by Klein, who concludes that the oak panel was probably painted after ca. 1449. At the end of her description of the Budapest panel, Ainsworth states that two precise but inferior copies "attest to the popularity of the image." One of them, which was in fact slightly larger than the original, was in the Stroganoff Sherbatoff Collection in St Petersburg and vanished after the Second World War. The second was set aside and numbered for inclusion in Hitler's museum in Linz. It was handed over to the Dutch government in 1946, and was then classified, and repeatedly exhibited, as a fake.<sup>13</sup> After being "sold back" to Count Stroganoff in 1968, who was then living in the United States, it was returned to the Nederlandse Dienst voor 's Rijks Verspreide Kunstvoorwerpen after a lawsuit brought because it had been labeled a fake and was a different panel altogether. In 1994 it was placed on loan with the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, whereupon it was immediately published and categorized as "Petrus Christus (group)" in the catalogue of the museum's holdings of early Netherlandish art.<sup>14</sup> Ainsworth concludes that "it is probably a weak though contemporary copy" (p. 130, note 18). Van Asperen de Boer sees it in a more favorable light, giving as his opinion in the Rotterdam catalogue that "it is quite probable that the present picture was made in the Petrus Christus workshop." This is bolstered by the dendrochronological dating of the support, which was again done by Peter Klein. The panel was probably painted after 1444,<sup>15</sup> so the Rotterdam work may be just a little earlier than the one in Budapest. A tempting hy-

6 Back in 1938, H. J. J. Scholtens "Jan van Eyck's 'H. Maagd met den Kar-tuizer' en de Exeter-madonna te Berlijn," *Oud-Holland* 55 (1938), pp. 49-62, convincingly proved that the donor in the *Exeter Madonna* was the same Carthusian as the one in the panel attributed to Jan van Eyck. He is Jan Vos, prior of the Genadedal charterhouse near Brugge from 1441 to 1450, and prior of the Nieuwlicht charterhouse near Utrecht from 1450 to 1458.

7 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Marquand Collection, gift of Henry G. Marquand, inv. nr. 89.15.24.

8 See E. Hinterding and F. Horsch, "'A small but choice collection': the art gallery of King Willem II of the Netherlands (1792-1849)," *Simiolus* 19 (1989), pp. 4-138, esp. p. 56, cat. nr. 3 (ill.).

9 Friedländer, op. cit. (note 1), p. 92.

10 E. Larsen, *Les primitifs flamands au Musée Métropolitain de New York, Utrecht & Antwerp 1960* (ed. princ. 1948), pp. 38-39, 10-110, fig. 1V.

11 Ibid., pp. 39, 109.

12 C. Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: the play of realism*, London 1991, p. 163, fig. 106. Dhanens, op. cit. (note 5), p. 365, fig. 230, reproduces it, without comment or dating, as an imitation.

13 See exhib. cat. *Vals of echt?*, Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum), 1952, nr. 96; exhib. cat., *Falsch oder echt?*, Basel (Kunstmuseum) 1953, nr. 38; *Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst: old master paintings, an illustrated summary catalogue*, Zwolle & The Hague 1992, p. 67, nr. 431.

14 See J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, in F. Lammertsc (ed.), *Van Eyck to Bruegel, 1400-1550: Dutch and Flemish painting in the collection of the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen*, Rotterdam 1994, pp. 40-43, cat. nr. 3.

15 Ibid., p. 43; P. Klein in the same catalogue, p. 23.

pothesis is that both of these workshop or (partly) autograph copies stem from a painting by Petrus Christus himself. The missing Stroganoff panel is either another copy or the original. If the date 1441 that it bore is its true date, or that of the prototype,<sup>16</sup> it would be Christus's very first work, easily predating the earliest mention of him in the archives (his purchase of Bruges citizenship in 1444). Maryan Ainsworth would surely be unable to accept this on stylistic grounds.

The Stroganoff panel had a signature as well as a date. According to van Asperen de Boer's notes, which are based on earlier information, the inscription read in full: "I.P.C. A<sup>o</sup> 1441 [Invenit Petrus Christus?]." In view of the comparative material discussed by Ainsworth on pp. 27-33, this must either be spurious and unreliable, or a corrupt transcription. The latter is not unlikely,<sup>17</sup> and the "I.P.C." should certainly be read as "XPI", Christus's own abbreviation of his surname.

Ainsworth explains this abbreviation incorrectly, saying that Christus signed "his name in Latin and Greek letters (usually Petrus and X̄pi for XPICTOC, or 'Christos') and the rest of the inscription in Latin" (p. 28). She is right that the letters are Greek and Latin, but the decipherment of the contraction XPI can never lead to the suggested Greek for "the anointed," the Messiah in other words. This is in fact an incorrect inflected form of the contraction XPC. The *nomina sacra* were contracted in the very earliest Christian manuscripts out of respect for Christendom's holiest words, such as the Latin DS for Deus and SPS for Spiritus, the Greek IH or IHC as an abbreviation for the Greek form of the name Jesus, which was soon turned into IHS, partly due to the medieval spelling of the name as Ihesus. XPC therefore stood for Christus, as did the popular chi-rho monogram, the "chrismon," the X and P being the first letters of Christ's name. Then Greek fell out of use and bastardized forms like XPISTUS were introduced.<sup>18</sup> The contractions were also inflected, with the result that the second person singular, Christi, was abbreviated to XPI.<sup>19</sup>

Expanding Petrus Christus's signature as Ainsworth consistently does is therefore basically incorrect.<sup>20</sup> The archival documents meticulously published by Martens in Appendix 1 (pp. 195-211) contain several variant forms. The artist evidently called himself both "Pieter Christus," like his father, and "Pieter Christi." What is remarkable is that the latter form appears as a signature in more formal documents like the list of

members of the Bruges Confraternity of Our Lady of the Dry Tree (p. 197, doc. 8: "pieter cristi") and in a contract between its representatives and the Franciscans of Bruges (p. 202, doc. 16: "Pieter Christi"). Without wishing to insinuate that Petrus Christus was a pious man, one cannot avoid the conclusion that there was a duality here, both for himself and for his contemporaries: Pieter, the son of Pieter Christus, and at the same time Pieter "the man of Christ." The abbreviation "x̄pi" for the Latin "Christi" was used very frequently and was obviously, indeed demonstrably, known to Petrus Christus. Against the dark wall in the background of his *Portrait of a young man* in the National Gallery in London, Christus painted a framed miniature of the *vera icon* with the associated hymn. In the last line of the first column of text he used the abbreviation "x̄pi" for "Christi" in a form identical to that he used for his signature. This was noted by previous authors, among them Martin Davies, who published an exact transcription of Christus's text of this hymn, which was extremely popular in the fifteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Maryan Ainsworth goes way too far when she suggests, in a rhetorical question (pp. 59-60), that Christus's allusion to his own name in this painted devotional miniature is also the sign of an association with book illuminators.

The interpretation of the mark that Petrus Christus placed after his elegant and entirely original signature and date on the *St Eligius* in New York (cat. nr. 6) as a miniaturists' mark (pp. 30, 59) does not seem very convincing to me. It is true that from 1 April 1426 the Bruges miniaturists were obliged to choose a mark, register it with the dean of the guild of image-makers and to sign their works with it. However, it is known from practice, from surviving artefacts and above all from the renewal of this ordinance on 27 June 1457 that it had not been observed at all.<sup>22</sup> What cannot be completely ruled out is that this was Petrus Christus's own mark. Why, though, would he add it to the prominent and perfectly clear mention of his name, and why did he use that mark here and nowhere else?<sup>23</sup> Ainsworth (p. 30) refers not only to miniaturists' marks but also to those used by goldsmiths. This is an interesting suggestion, but it is not pursued. Bruges had quite a long tradition of marking gold and silver. In the case of the town mark it went back to the late thirteenth century—to 1298, to be precise.<sup>24</sup> In the guild statute of 1441 it was stipulated that all gold and silversmiths were to stamp their personal *teekin*, or master's mark, on every article

16 Van Asperen de Boer, op. cit. (note 14), p. 43.

17 Ainsworth gives an extreme example of an incorrect reading of the inscription by Petrus Christus on pp. 99-100. It relates to *St Eligius*, which is signed and dated 1449, but which was nevertheless sold as a van Eyck of 1441 at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

18 J.L. van der Gouw, *Oud schrift in Nederland*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1978, pp. 61-62; J.J.M. Timmers, *Christelijke symboliek en iconografie*, Bussum 1978, nrs. 26-28.

19 See also A. Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature Latine ed Italiane*, Milan 1973, p. 515.

20 The correct reading had already been given in M. Davies, *National Gal-*

*lery Catalogues: the early Netherlandish School*, London 1968 (reprint 1987), p. 32: "...signatures... in semi-Greek lettering...; they imply a name Christi."

21 Ibid., p. 33.

22 A. Vandewalle, "Het librariërs-gilde te Brugge in zijn vroege periode," in exhib. cat. *Vlaamse kunst op perkament: handschriften en miniaturen te Brugge van de 12de tot de 16de eeuw*, Bruges (Gruuthusemuseum) 1981, pp. 40-41.

23 On the back of the *Portrait of Edward Grymeston* on loan to the National Gallery in London the signature and date are accompanied by a similar but not identical mark. It is a later addition to an inscription that is itself not original, and Ainsworth (p. 30) rightly regards it as completely spurious.

they produced, which also had to bear the town mark and the date letter. In fact, this was probably standard practice already.<sup>25</sup> Not much is known, however, about the fifteenth and early sixteenth-century marks used by Bruges masters.<sup>26</sup> The oldest extant copper tablets on which the marks were registered only go back to 1567, and no hallmarked gold and silver objects at all have survived from the fifteenth century. It is known from other cities and from later makers' marks that the dies almost always bore canting, that is to say figurative scenes, or symbols resembling house marks, and this is confirmed by other sources.<sup>27</sup> Taking her lead from an article published by Peter Schabacker in 1972, Ainsworth (pp. 96-98) considers it likely that *St Eligius* was painted for the Bruges goldsmiths' guild.<sup>28</sup> The coincidence of the date 1449 on the painting with the reconsecration of the goldsmiths' chapel is certainly a strong argument for this. However, I would like to put forward another explanation for the mark that is so demonstratively placed after the signature and date. Might it not be the master's mark of the goldsmith who commissioned the panel from Petrus Christus for the reconsecrated chapel? A parallel is provided by Hieronymus Bosch's *Crowning with thorns* in the Prado. Going by the evidence of the meticulously painted silver hallmarks on that panel I suggested that it was painted in 1510/11 for a silversmith of 's-Hertogenbosch (whose name is not known but some of whose hallmarked works survive) for the guild altar in the city's Church of St John.<sup>29</sup>

A few comments are in order on Ainsworth's description of the metalsmiths' products displayed behind St Eligius and the exotic raw materials, some of which have been worked. Speaking of a vertical crystal cylinder with a gold, or more probably silver-gilt mount, Ainsworth says that it "was probably meant for storing Eucharistic wafers." She bases this on the eucharistic symbol of the pelican perched on top of the lid feeding its three young with its blood. As it happens, transparent pyxes are extremely rare, and all the few known examples should probably be regarded as forerunners of eucharistic monstrances. The one in *St Eligius*, however, is more likely to be a reliquary, with the relic being visible through the polished crys-

tal.<sup>30</sup> The best-known and most venerated relic in Bruges was the Holy Blood, and that would have been the prime association evoked by the pelican offering up its own blood on top of the blood-red stone set in the mount.

Ainsworth says of the large pitchers in the display cabinet behind the saint: "The cast pewter vessels... are *presentkannen*, or donation pitchers, which the city's aldermen offered to distinguished guests on official occasions. They were sometimes partially gilt and embellished with dedicatory inscriptions, as they are here." These, though, are quite definitely not pewter but silver vessels. Not only are they manifestly more costly and ceremonial, but there would have been no question of a silversmith wanting or even being allowed to display or sell pewter objects. The pewterers had their own corporation, and the lines demarcating the different crafts were clearly defined. Secondly, pewter *presentkannen* were not dispensed as gifts by the city authorities but were used to pour "presentation wine" for honored guests.<sup>31</sup> However, there is no reason to identify those pitchers as such. Large silver pitchers and ceremonial beakers were standard items for presentation as occasional gifts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as were bowls and cups. There is documentation on scores of orders for costly vessels of this kind placed with Bruges silver and goldsmiths by rulers, the counts and dukes, and by civic authorities.<sup>32</sup>

The monograph on Petrus Christus by Maryan Ainsworth and Maximiliaan Martens, which also served as the exhibition catalogue, contains many other points of departure for further discussion of detailed or wider issues. A more general problem with this kind of monographic study with a newly formulated *oeuvre* is what is to be done with attributions which are no longer acceptable—the "rejects." Ainsworth has chosen to leave them out altogether and to concentrate instead on the positive side of her story. This, though, leaves the reader with a number of unanswered questions. The problem of the Metropolitan Museum's *Virgin in a niche* has already been mentioned. The triptych wing, *Isabella of Portugal with St Elizabeth* (Bruges, Groeningemuseum, acquired in 1965, which Ainsworth refers to as *St Elizabeth and a donor*) is only mentioned in connection

24 The first mention of "den ambochte van de Zelfersmede" (the silversmiths' guild) in Bruges is in 1302 and not, as Ainsworth states (p. 96), 1328; see F. van Molle, "Vijf eeuwen wel en wee van de Brugse goud- en zilversmeden," in D. Marechal (ed.), exhib. cat. *Meestermerken van de Brugse edelsmeedkunst*, Bruges (Memlingmuseum and Brangwynmuseum) 1993, p. 12.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-54.

26 The copper tablets with the marks of the Bruges gold and silversmiths from 1484 to 1795 survived until 1817, but vanished after their public sale that year; see A. Schouteet, "De Brugse goud- en zilversmeden onder het ancien régime, hun archief, hun merken," *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis Société d'Emulation* 96 (1959), p. 227.

27 These categories are represented by two published wax seals of Bruges silversmiths attached to a deed of 1328. They show a squirrel as the canting hall-mark of Gilles li Corenbitere and a house-mark of Jehan li Rike; see van Molle,

op. cit. (note 24), p. 13. The earliest surviving copper tablet with masters' marks in Ghent covers the period 1454-81; see E. Dhanens, "iv. Edelsmeedkunst," in exhib. cat. *Gent duizend jaar kunst en cultuur*, 3 vols., Ghent (Bijloekemuseum) 1975, vol. 2, pp. 251, 312-13, cat. nr. 547 (1).

28 P.H. Schabacker, "Petrus Christus' Saint Eloy: problems of provenance, sources and meaning," *The Art Quarterly* 35 (1972), pp. 103-20; likewise J.M. Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa*, Munich 1982, pp. 44, 61, 326, fig. 1.

29 See Koldewey, op. cit. (note 5).

30 Cf. H.R. Hahnloser and S. Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der Hartsteinschliffe des 12.-15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1985.

31 A. van den Kerckhove, "v. Tin," in exhib. cat. *Gent duizend jaar*, cit. (note 27), vol. 3, pp. 399-401.

32 Van Molle, op. cit. (note 24), pp. 26-33.

with "attribution questions" (p. 62, note 17), but nothing is said about it.<sup>33</sup> In Bruges it is presented without any hesitation as a Petrus Christus, ca. 1457-60.<sup>34</sup> Several works in private hands are also passed over, even though they have been included in various exhibitions.<sup>35</sup> The question, of course, is the extent to which works that were formerly associated with a painter but are now considered less germane or totally irrelevant should continue to be brought into the discussion. That being said, clarity is extremely important in this particular case.

The painter Petrus Christus has to be situated between Jan van Eyck, who died a few years before Christus acquired his citizenship of Bruges, and Hans Memling, who arrived in the city ten years before Christus's death. In hindsight, a crucial factor in Christus's development as an artist is that he was the first painter in the Low Countries and northern Europe to apply the rational, geometrically constructed one-point perspective. Ainsworth (p. 43) states that he employed a method developed by Filippo Brunelleschi. The earliest work to display central perspective to the full, she says, was the *Madonna enthroned with Sts Jerome and Francis* of 1457 in Frankfurt (cat. nr. 13). Here she refers to Jochen Sander, who published the panel in 1993.<sup>36</sup> Sander, though, is not so dogmatic, stating that the *Annunciation* of 1452 in the Groeningemuseum in Bruges is probably the earliest painting with a consistent one-point perspective.<sup>37</sup> He goes on to say that the Bruges panel must first be subjected to a thorough examination before it can be given its rightful place within Christus's *oeuvre*. The reasons for this are the possible restorations and overpaints, the vague provenance and the not unambiguous signature and date. Ainsworth (p. 32) is very cautious in her assessment of this and the other Bruges panels, which she examined in 1991, but appears to support the date of 1452. Leaving aside the question of which picture deserves the primacy, one must never forget that these are judgments in hindsight. It is a search for the evolution in painting technique towards the central, one-point perspective. To

33 The same applies to the *Portrait of a donor* (Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesgalerie) and to the *Portrait of Philip the Good* (Beloeil, Prince de Ligne Collection).

34 See D. de Vos, *Catalogus schilderijen 15de en 16de eeuw Stedelijke Musea Brugge*, Bruges 1979, pp. 96-98 (with detailed bibliography). Recently it was again published as such in V. Vermeersch (ed.), *Bruges and Europe*, Antwerp 1992, p. 160.

35 They include the *Nativity* with Genoa as the earliest provenance in exhib. cat. *Flemish and Belgian art, 1300-1900*, London (Burlington House 1927), nr. 17, and exhib. cat. *De eeuw der Vlaamse Primitieven*, Bruges (Groeningemuseum) 1960, nr. 7; and *St Catharine of Alexandria*, exhib. cat. Bruges 1960, nr. 8; and exhib. cat. *Flanders in the fifteenth century: art and civilization*, Detroit (The Detroit Institute of Arts) 1960, nr. 16.

36 J. Sander, *Niederländische Gemälde im Städel 1400-1550*, Mainz 1993 (*Kataloge der Gemälde im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main*, vol. 2), pp. 163-71.

37 Dirk de Vos of the Groeningemuseum in Bruges is also firmly convinced of this; see D. de Vos, "Bruges and the Flemish Primitives in Europe," in Vermeersch, op. cit. (note 34), p. 320.

my mind it is going too far to assume that Petrus Christus never abandoned one-point perspective once he had mastered it, and that his entire *oeuvre* can be ranged around that one criterion.

One aspect of Petrus Christus that Ainsworth and Martens barely touch on is the question of his reception in Spain, which other authors have raised both in connection with paintings that were once in Spain,<sup>38</sup> and because Christus's grandson, Petrus Christus II, settled in Granada, where he may have capitalized on his grandfather's fame.<sup>39</sup> What is particularly interesting is that Dirk de Vos of the Groeningemuseum in Bruges has almost parenthetically added a major work to the *oeuvre* of Petrus Christus now in Spain. It is *The fountain of life* of ca. 1455-59 from the monastery of St Jerome of Santa Maria del Parral, which is now in the Prado.<sup>40</sup>

Before bringing this review to a close there are a few other points I came across while reading the book. It is suggested in connection with the *Virgin and Child in an archway* (cat. nr. 11, p. 126) that Marian devotion was particularly strong in Bruges. In fact, Bruges was not at all exceptional in this respect, but was representative for the Low Countries as a whole.<sup>41</sup>

In the discussion of the Washington *Nativity* of ca. 1470 (cat. nr. 17, p. 158) the step to the Eucharist is made too smoothly by interpreting the clothing of the kneeling angels as "Eucharistic vestments" and the gold oval on which the Christ Child is lying (which is a later addition anyway) as a paten.

The reading of the Kansas City *Holy Family in a domestic interior* and the attempts to identify the patron are simply too speculative (cat. nr. 20, pp. 170-76). The writings of Jean Gerson, dean of St Donation's in Bruges from 1397, are of course all very well for examining the role of Joseph. In the painting, though, he remains a bent old man with a walking-stick in one hand and a rosary in the other who is glimpsed slipping into the house in the background, apparently without any involvement in the main subject—almost like a stranger, in fact. Is this the visualization of Joseph as "an industrious provider for his fam-

38 De Vos, op. cit. (note 37), p. 347, lists five panels which are also discussed or reproduced by Ainsworth.

39 See de Vos, op. cit. (note 37), pp. 320, 324-25. The only work that has been attributed to Petrus Christus II on reasonable evidence has been exhibited twice in Belgium; see exhib. cat. *L'art flamand dans les collections espagnoles / Vlaamse kunst uit Spaans bezit*, Bruges (Groeningemuseum) 1958, pp. 68-69, nr. 35, and exhib. cat. *Luister van Spanje en de Belgische steden 1500-1700*, Brussels (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten) 1985, pp. 467, 469, nr. c6 (reproduction reversed).

40 De Vos, op. cit. (note 37), p. 347 (ill.). This *Fountain of life* and two copies of it are discussed, without any mention of Petrus Christus, in a little-known article by J. K. Steppe, "De echo van het 'Lam Gods' van de gebroeders van Eyck in Spanje," *Het Lam Gods: een recent onderzoek met verrassende resultaten (RAM - Rapport, nr. 4)*, Maaseik 1990, pp. 11-27.

41 This is made abundantly clear in a work that Ainsworth herself cites: J.A.F. Kronenburg, *Maria's heerlijkheid in Nederland*, 9 vols., Amsterdam [1904-31], which is still the most complete survey of Marian devotion in the Low Countries.

ily and a paradigm of perfection," and "an equal member of and participant in the Holy Family and integral to God's plan for man's salvation"? The interpretation of one of the figures at the head of the bed is intended to confirm Joseph's central role. The figure beside the open doorway through which Joseph can be seen appears to be a man clad in a toga holding two keys. Citing two ingeniously discovered sermons of Pope Innocent III (ca. 1160-1216) and Bernardino da Feltre (1439-94) these are interpreted as "Joseph's two keys to Paradise," in other words the Virgin and the Christ Child. This would produce a unique iconographic image: Joseph with two keys. Would not Petrus Christus have been more likely to paint his name saint as a minuscule detail? In search of hidden allusions that would identify the patron, the colors red and blue of the garments of the Virgin and Joseph and of the twisted cords from which the chandelier hangs are interpreted heraldically. These colors are combined with the conventional decorative motif of the fleur-de-lis at the top of the headboard of the bed and the "golden lion" on the chandelier to make up the component parts of the coat of arms of Charles the Bold. A bronze lion, however, was a very common decorative element topping a Gothic chandelier of this type. Turning it into a heraldic lion is definitely a case of overinterpretation. The identification of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, who are known to have been interested in Gerson's writings, as the patrons who commissioned this *Holy*

*Family* is untenable. This removes the main argument for the dating of the picture, the marriage of Charles and Margaret on 3 July 1468 as a *terminus post quem*, "making it his [Christus's] latest known panel painting."

Despite these criticisms, the book by Maryan Ainsworth and Maximiliaan Martens is an important and exemplary demonstration of the modern approach to art history. It couples traditional art-historical study—stylistic and iconographic analysis—with the results of the scientific examination of underdrawings (using infrared reflectography and X-radiography), the paint structure and pigments, and dendrochronological dating of the panels—and the most exacting research in the archival sources on a painter who is also placed in his historical context. This yields a new but still incomplete picture of Petrus Christus. In the case of Petrus Christus this demythologizing approach even leads to the withdrawal of haloes. The still anonymous Carthusian and St Eligius, both in New York, have been desanctified (pp. vii, 93, 95, note 5, 96, 101, note 9), and the Virgin's halo and the bright golden oval shape under the Christ Child in the Washington *Nativity* are also overdue for removal (p. 161, note 8).

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**Catherine Levesque, *Journey through landscape in seventeenth-century Holland: the Haarlem print series and Dutch identity*, Pennsylvania (The Pennsylvania State University Press) 1994\***

"We are face to face with 'a' Dutch landscape, specifically, the surroundings of Spaerwou but, far beyond this, with a synthesis of nature, buildings, people and animals which transcends all that is merely topographical."<sup>1</sup> Thus Wolfgang Stechow on the evocative power of a well-known etching by Esaias van de Velde. There is no such thing as a "merely topographical" landscape in seventeenth-century art, if at all, but the "topographical" elements found in many Dutch landscapes were clearly not Stechow's prime concern. For the purposes of his formal and aesthetic analyses it made little difference in principle whether the Haarlem village shown in the print was Spaarnwoude or some other Dutch hamlet chosen at random. One wonders, though, whether that view would have been shared

by a seventeenth-century inhabitant of Haarlem—Esaias van de Velde in this case. Do the early depictions of Dutch landscapes have a significance beyond the merely aesthetic? Catherine Levesque's study of "Haarlem" landscape prints is a comprehensive attempt to come up with an answer to this question. It can also be regarded as the complete opposite of Stechow's approach.

Her research was previously presented in her dissertation.<sup>2</sup> Although the present book considers landscape prints from the same underlying viewpoint of the "journey framework," the differences between the two publications are striking. The point of departure in the dissertation was Zacharias Heyns's *Weg-wyser ter salicheyt* (Amsterdam 1629), an ethical work giving the reader directions for following the proper path through life with the aid of an imaginary map. In the dissertation, that source was the key to predominantly moralistic and ethical interpretations of landscape prints. The fact that Heyns's pilgrimage of life plays no role at all in this new book is perhaps

\* Review translated from the Dutch by Michael Hoyle.

<sup>1</sup> W. Stechow, *Dutch landscape painting of the seventeenth century*, London 1966, p. 20; F.H.W. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts, ca. 1450-1700*, in progress, Amsterdam 1949-, vol. 32 (1988), pp.

258-59, nr. 20.

<sup>2</sup> C. Levesque, *Places of persuasion: the journey in Netherlandish landscape prints and print series* (diss. Columbia University 1987), Ann Arbor 1988.