

THE ORIGINS AND MEANINGS
OF
HANS MEMLING'S LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use and development of landscape settings in the religious works and portraits of Hans Memling (c.1440-94). It addresses how Memling's illusions blend the experimental with the traditional and considers how elements in their appearance could be said to resonate with spiritual and socio-economic features of context.

Memling's burgher patrons were a new, affluent group in late-medieval Bruges in search of a material culture that could promote and serve their aspirations. It was their commissions that drove artistic developments at this time and contributed to the transmission of visual ideas across borders, so a major focus is on understanding the part played by burgher identity and aspiration in the nature of the imagery that Memling created for them.

The first chapter provides an overview of scholarship on landscape imagery, with a view to setting the perspective of this study in its methodological context, and also to present significant examples of Memling's heritage in landscape representation.

Analyses of religious works follow and these show that Memling's juxtaposition of landscape with figures plays a significant role in the interpretation of how the sacred and profane realms of late-medieval existence were perceived to have related to each other. Compositional elements are found in these works that Memling adapts for use in his portraits-with-landscape.

Portraits of donors exist in many of Memling's religious paintings and there are features in the landscape that relate to their material success. Information on the real environment in which these donors and their contemporaries established their career, wealth and social status is presented in Chapter Three, and Chapter Four shows how Memling's portraits-with-landscape functioned as a visual record of a burgher aspiration to be seen as credit-worthy and in possession of the wealth and social esteem that comes with *vivre noblement*.

The emphasis in this study on spiritual and socio-economic elements of context is not meant to marginalise other perspectives that help broaden understanding of landscape imagery at a time only decades before the emergence of landscape as an independent genre in Western art. However, a redirection of approach away from a focus that associates landscape in art with a growing interest in the natural environment has proved fruitful in relation to Memling.

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Hans Memling, Detail of windows: *Virgin with the Christ Child on a Cushion*, Left wing, *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, 1487, Memlingmuseum, Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges (www.wga.hu).

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Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1475-80, The Robert Lehman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Borchert, 2005, Pl.16: 129).

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Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Madonna and Child*, c.1476-77, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.culture.gouv.fr)

Fig. 251

Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Young Man* (Tymotheos), 1432, National Gallery London (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 252

Dieric Bouts the Elder, *Portrait of a Man*, 1462, National Gallery, London (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 254

Hans Memling, *Portrait of an Elderly Couple*, c.1470-75, Old Man: Staatliche Museen, Berlin; Old Woman: Musée Louvre, Paris (Borchert, 2005, Pl.6a-b: 118-19).

Fig. 255

A.

Hans Memling

Detail: *Old Man*, Left wing, *Portrait of an Elderly Couple*, c.1470-75, Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Borchert, 2005, Pl.6a: 118).

A1

Hans Memling

Detail: *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, c.1490-91, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (De Vos, 1994, Cat. No. 89: 319).

A2

Hans Memling

Detail: *Altarpiece of Jacob Floreins*, c.1490, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

B.

Hans Memling

Detail: *Old Woman*, Right wing, *Portrait of an Elderly Couple*, c.1470-75, Musée du Louvre, Paris (Borchert, 2005, Pl.6b: 119).

B1

Hans Memling

Detail: *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, c.1490-91, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (De Vos, 1994, Cat. No. 89: 319).

B2

Hans Memling

Detail: *Altarpiece of Jacob Floreins*, c.1490, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 256

Hans Memling, Two wings with the *Portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch*, c.1480, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Borchert, 2005, Pl.19a-b: 132-33).

Fig. 257

Hans Memling, *Portrait of Willem Moreel*, Left wing, Two wings with the *Portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch*, c.1480, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Borchert, 2005, Pl.19a: 132).

Fig. 258

Hans Memling, *Portrait of Benedetto Portinari*, Right wing, *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari*, 1487, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005, Pl.30: 145).

Fig.259

Hans Memling, *Portrait of Willem Moreel*, Left wing, Two wings with the *Portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch*, with detail of landscape to left and right, c.1480, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Borchert, 2005, Pl.19a: 132).

Fig. 260

Hans Memling, Detail: *Willem Moreel with His Sons and St William of Maleval*, Left wing, *Moreel Triptych*, 1484, Groeningemuseum, Bruges (Borchert, 2005, Pl. 24: 138).

Fig. 261

Hans Memling, Detail: *Barbara van Vlaenderberch with Her Daughters and St Barbara*, Right wing, *Moreel Triptych*, 1484, Groeningemuseum, Bruges (Borchert, 2005, Pl. 24: 138).

Fig. 262

Rogier van der Weyden, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 263

Rogier van der Weyden, Detail: *Virgin Mary, Christ and St John the Evangelist*, Central panel, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 264

Rogier van der Weyden, *St John the Baptist*, Left wing and landscape detail: *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 265

Rogier van der Weyden, *St Mary Magdalene*, Right wing and landscape detail: *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 266

Jan van Eyck, Detail: *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin*, c.1435, Musée du Louvre, Paris (Harbison, 1991, Fig.61: 101).

Rogier van der Weyden, Detail: *Virgin Mary, Christ and St John the Evangelist*, Central panel, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 267

Rogier van der Weyden, *St John the Baptist and St Mary Magdalene*, Left and right wings, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 268

Jan van Eyck, *St Barbara*, c.1437, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 269

Piero della Francesca, *Portraits of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro*, (with reverse), c.1465-68, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 270

A.

Rogier van der Weyden

St Mary Magdalene, Right wing, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

B.

Rogier van der Weyden

Detail: *St John the Baptist*, Left wing, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.wga.hu).

C.

Hans Memling

Detail: *St Mary Magdalene*, Right inside wing, *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c.1480, Musée du Louvre, Paris (www.AllPosters.com).

D.

The Bayard Rock

Area: Wallonia, Ardenne, River Meuse valley, Locality, Dinant (www.gsi.ie/Education/European+Landscapes/Belgium.htm).

E.

The Rocks of Freyr

Area: Wallonia, Ardenne, River Meuse valley, Locality: Dinant [Anseremme] (www.gsi.ie/Education/European+Landscapes/Belgium.htm).

Fig. 271

A.

Hans Memling

Detail: *Beheading of St John the Baptist*, Left wing, *St John Altarpiece*, 1479, Memlingmuseum, Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges (www.wga.hu).

B.

Hans Memling

Detail: *St John the Baptist*, Interior left wing, *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c.1480, Musée du Louvre (www.AllPosters.com).

C.

Rogier van der Weyden

Detail: *St John the Baptist*, Left wing, *Braque Triptych*, c.1450, Musée du Louvre (www.wga.hu).

D.

Rogier van der Weyden

Detail: *St Catherine of Alexandria*, Right wing, *Virgin and St Catherine Diptych*, c.1440, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (De Vos, 1999, Cat. No.3: 181).

E.

Rogier van der Weyden

Detail: *The Three Magi*, Right wing, *Bladelin Triptych*, c.1445-50, Staatliche Museen, Berlin (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 272

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*, c.1473 or later, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (Borchert, 2005: Pl.11: 124).

Fig. 273

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Letter*, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005: Pl.12: 125).

Fig. 274

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* and landscape detail, c.1473 or later, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (Borchert, 2005: Pl.11: 124). *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* and landscape detail, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005: Pl.12: 125).

Fig. 275

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* and detail, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005: Pl.12: 125).

Fig. 276

Jan van Eyck, *Just Judges and Soldiers of Christ*, *Ghent Altarpiece*, c.1425-29, St Bavo Cathedral, Ghent (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 277

The Dunstable Swan Jewel, c.1400, British Museum, London (www.britishmuseum.org).

Fig. 278

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Gold Cord*, c.1475-80, The Royal Collection, H.M. Queen Elizabeth II (Borchert, 2005, Pl.13: 126).

Fig. 279

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow*, c.1475-80, National Gallery of Art, Washington (Borchert, 2005, Pl.14: 127).

Fig. 280

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Pink*, c.1480-85, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (Borchert, 2005, Pl.22: 136).

Fig. 281

Pietro Perugino, *Portrait of Francesco delle Opere*, 1494, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 282

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*, c.1473 or later, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (Borchert, 2005: Pl.11: 124).

Figs. 283 & 284

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Letter*, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005: Pl.12: 125).

Fig. 285

Pietro Perugino or Lorenzo di Credi, *Portrait of Perugino*, c.1504, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 286

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1475-80, The Robert Lehman Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Borchert, 2005, Pl.16: 129).

Fig. 287

Dieric Bouts the Elder, *Portrait of a Man*, 1462, National Gallery, London (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 288

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man*, c.1480-85, Kunsthhaus, Zurich (Borcher, 2005, Pl.21: 135).

Fig. 289

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar*, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005, Pl.9: 122).

Fig. 290

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man before a Landscape*, c.1470-75, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (Borchert, 2005, Pl.8: 121).

Fig. 291

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape*, c.1475-80, Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice (Borchert, 2005, Pl.17: 130).

Figs. 292 & 293

Hans Memling, *Diptych with the Allegory of True Love*, c.1485-90, Left wing: *Young Woman with a Pink*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Right wing: *Two Horses and a Monkey in a Landscape*, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 294

Hans Memling, Detail central panel: *Triptych of John Donne*, c.1480, National Gallery, London (www.nationalgallery.org.uk).

Fig. 295

Master of the Love Gardens, *Large Love Garden*, c.1440, Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Moxey, 1980, Fig.2: 126).

Fig. 296

Master E.S. *Love Garden with Chess Players*, c.1450-67, British Museum, London (Moxey, 1980, Fig.1: 126).

Fig. 297

Master of the Power of Women, *Allegory of the Power of Women*, c.1460, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (Moxey, 1980, Fig.18: 143).

Fig. 298

Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci with reverse*, c.1474-78, National Gallery of Art, Washington (www.wga.hu).

Figs. 299 & 302

Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci*, c.1474-78, National Gallery of Art, Washington (www.wga.hu).

Figs. 300 & 305

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*, c.1473 or later, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (Borchert, 2005: Pl.11: 124).

Fig. 301

Hans Memling, Detail: *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*, c.1473 or later, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (Borchert, 2005, Pl.11: 124). Leonardo da Vinci, Detail: *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci*, c.1474-78, National Gallery of Art, Washington (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 303

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape*, c.1475-80, Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice (Borchert, 2005, Pl.17: 130).

Fig. 304

Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar*, c.1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (Borchert, 2005, Pl.9: 122).

Fig. 306

Master of the Legend of St Ursula, *Portrait of Ludovico Portinari*, c.1470s, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 307

Master of the Legend of St Lucy, Central panel: *St Nicholas Altarpiece*, c.1486-93, Groeningemuseum, Bruges (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 308

Master of the Legend of St Ursula, Detail: *Portrait of Ludovico Portinari*, c.1470s, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (www.wga.hu).

Master of the Legend of St Lucy, Detail, central panel: *St Nicholas Altarpiece*, c.1486-93, Groeningemuseum, Bruges (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 309

Master of the Legend of St Ursula, Detail: *Portrait of Ludovico Portinari*, 1470s, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (www.wga.hu).

Fig. 310

Master of the Legend of St Ursula, Detail: *Virgin and Child with St Anne Presenting a Woman*, c.1479-83, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Martens, 1992(c), Fig.1, P.38).

Fig. 311

Master of the Legend of St Lucy, Detail, central panel: *St Nicholas Altarpiece*, c.1486-93, Groeningemuseum, Bruges (www.wga.hu).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to extend the art-historical dialogue on the form and function of the landscape imagery of Hans Memling (c.1440-94).¹ Landscape representation exists as an element in Memling's religious compositions and, most innovatively, in many of his portraits, and I suggest that interpretation needs not only formal analysis and an understanding of its spiritual and emotional response potential, but also knowledge of the political, economic and social contexts of the day, contexts in which landscape and its representation developed certain signifiers.

For over half a century before Memling, landscape imagery played the important role of grounding the action of figures in sacred narrative and for this reason I examine the landscape forms in Memling's religious works first. The aim is to give a plausible account of the role Memling's landscapes play in the presentation of Christian narrative, faith and doctrine. At the same time, I consider meanings that relate to the secular desires and aspirations of donors who are represented in these compositions. I study Memling's imagery in a comparative context, but explore only the imagery in religious works by Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and, to a lesser extent, the Master of Flémalle, because I consider the influence of these artists to be stronger than that of Hugo van der Goes, Petrus Christus and Dieric Bouts.

As Memling worked on his religious commissions, many of which included donor portraits, he was approached to paint secular portraits. In the 1470s, he began to paint

¹ Monographs on the life and works of Memling are De Vos, 1994, and Lane, 2009. See Borchert, 2005(b): 11-47 for an overview.

independent, non-profile portraits with landscape backgrounds, although he continued to paint portraits against plain backdrops just as the Master of Flémalle, Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden had done before him. Portraits juxtaposed with landscape signal a bold, innovative move on the part of Memling, with the only extant precedent being *Portrait of a Man* by Dieric Bouts painted in 1462 (Fig. 1). Bouts' sitter is in an interior with a view onto landscape from a window; this contrasts with the *Portrait of Edward Grimston* painted in 1446 by Petrus Christus (Fig. 2) in which there is no view from the interior's window. Memling's portraits juxtaposed with landscape were popular with both the Flemish burghers of Bruges and members of the Italian merchant community living there, and, furthermore, their format inspired portraitists both north and south of the Alps during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The close analysis of Memling's portraits-with-landscape in Chapter Four aims to provide plausible reasons for this popularity. Also, I consider which aspects of Memling's portraiture could be said to relate to his religious compositions, most especially those with a *sacra conversazione*-type format, and make reference to the fact that viewers' experiences and expectations of landscape representation had been honed in sacred art.

The key hypothesis behind the analysis of Memling's landscape representation in religious works is that the choice of landscape forms, and their organisation across the painted surface, plays a significant role in defining the relationship believed to have existed in late-medieval Christian minds between the sacred and profane spheres of existence. I shall argue that when Memling opened up the *sacra conversazione*-type format to include landscape views his adaptation introduced a perspective on this

relationship that was different from that presented in traditional sacred narrative. Furthermore, I aim to show that Memling adapted some of the techniques that he used to describe the nature of the juxtaposition between the divine and earthly realms of existence in these *sacra conversazione*-type compositions for use in his portraits-with-landscape, except that in the portraits the techniques are used to express the ‘spheres’ of outward, physical appearance and interiority in each sitter. I consider a sitter’s aspirations to be part of interiority, and present information in Chapter Three that I argue supports the view that a core aspiration of the Bruggelingen who commissioned portraits from Memling was the desire to be seen as having acquired a high social status with access to *vivre noblement*.

Over the past twenty years or so, scholarship that focuses on Memling’s art has grown steadily, although there has been little focus on the artist’s landscape imagery. In contrast, Memling’s art attracted a great deal of interest and esteem during the nineteenth century when, in the form of the *Moreel Triptych* (with its noteworthy landscape imagery), it played a significant role in the awakening of interest in early Netherlandish painting.

EARLY HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MEMLING’S ART

In this overview of the historiography of early Netherlandish painting in general, and Memling in particular, the focus is on Friedrich Schlegel’s response to the imagery of the *Moreel Triptych* (Fig. 3a-d);² it helps to highlight both the significance of Memling’s art in the awakening of interest in early Netherlandish painting, and the subsequent close

² De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.63. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.22. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.9.

association for over a century between Romanticism and scholarship in the field. Most importantly, in the context of this study, Schlegel responded to Memling's landscape imagery.³

Before Schlegel, only brief references to Memling and his art are extant. For example, in 1540 Jacob de Meyere wrote in his *Annales Flandriae* that Memling was an outstanding painter;⁴ in 1550, Giorgio Vasari recorded in his *Vite* that Memling was a pupil of Rogier of Bruges;⁵ in 1604 in his *Schilder-Boeck*, Carel van Mander praised Memling's skill in relation to the *Shrine of St Ursula*;⁶ and in 1769 in his *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant*, Jean-Baptiste Descamps considered Memling the equal of the van Eyck brothers.⁷ Descamps was the first scholar to ascribe the *Moreel Triptych* to Memling and was responsible for introducing the legend that Memling sought sanctuary at the Hospital of St John after being wounded in battle, and, as an expression of gratitude, painted several works for the friars. This tale played a significant role in fostering an interest in Memling's paintings amongst Romantics across Europe. Also, it is likely that early nineteenth-century officials at the Louvre used Descamps' scholarship to help with decisions on which artworks to confiscate from the North for display at their museum.

Schlegel's admiration of early German and Flemish painting was significant in stimulating subsequent interest, and his response to the *Moreel Triptych* is a rare

³ For early historiography see Borchert, 1997 & 2005(a); De Vos, 1994: 58-73; and Haskell, 1993, Ch. 15.

⁴ De Vos, 1994: 60.

⁵ De Vos, 1994: 62-63.

⁶ De Vos, 1994: 63.

⁷ De Vos, 1994:64-65.

example of a scholar addressing Memling's representation of landscape, although his religious beliefs, nationalistic aims and Romantic philosophy constrained his interpretation. The *Moreel Triptych* is a devotional triptych with life-size figures commissioned in 1484 by Willem Moreel and his wife, Barbara van Vlaenderberch, for a family altar in the parish Church of St James, Bruges. Schlegel was unlike the early Romantics Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck in that he did not equate art and religion, or think of the artist as one who follows inspiration from God, but he did argue that art should express the religiosity of the Church.⁸ Furthermore, by stating that the landscape of the *Moreel Triptych* was most suitable for saints (see later), Schlegel invested landscape with sanctity and gave to the Romantics that followed him a view of landscape that persists to this day. So entrenched is the Romantic view of nature in our culture, a view championed in England by the admirer of landscape in art, John Ruskin, and the poet, William Wordsworth, in the second half of the nineteenth century, that it is sometimes difficult to place it on one side and examine landscape imagery from other perspectives. Significant to the development of this perspective was Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. For example, Ruskin writes in Volume I that "painters should go to nature trustingly, rejecting nothing, and selecting nothing", and closes the volume with a poem by William Wordsworth that describes the love of nature as having the power to create within us a sense of serenity and beauty.⁹

Schlegel's concern with the religiosity of the *Moreel Triptych* as a whole meant he did not consider particular meanings attached to particular features in the landscape such as

⁸ Borchert, 1997: 137-38.

⁹ Ruskin, 1843, Vol. I: note 1, page 450. See also my MA thesis 2006: 22-31 on the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

the meticulously-detailed dwellings behind Willem and his wife. In a sense, Schlegel was thinking of the imagery in relation to contemporary context, but he considered only the religious context in which it was produced. To add to this one-sided view of context, Schlegel's understanding of the religious context at the time of Memling was grounded in a neo-Gothic, Romantic view of medieval Christianity.

After the Peace of Amiens in 1802, Schlegel visited the Louvre's picture gallery on several occasions.¹⁰ In 1793, the first year of the French Revolution, the Louvre was opened up to the public as an art gallery and in 1803 it was renamed the Musée Napoléon. By the time of Schlegel's stay in Paris, the Louvre's exhibits included works confiscated from outside France by its revolutionary forces. Notable early Netherlandish works taken to Paris were the central panels of the *Ghent Altarpiece* by the van Eyck brothers, Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Canon van der Paele*, Gerard David's *Justice of Cambyses* and Memling's *Moreel Triptych*.

Schlegel considered Netherlandish artists as German and greatly admired Hans Holbein, Albrecht Dürer, van Eyck and Memling;¹¹ he believed that their praiseworthy qualities related directly to their 'German' nationality. Schlegel's nationalistic perspective emerges at a time of revolution and war, when the countries of Europe were in search of a means to define their identity, so this attachment to the idea of specific national traits resulting in praiseworthy accomplishments is not surprising. The philosopher desired a renewal of the arts on the basis of a new faith and saw a return to the piety of medieval

¹⁰ See Millington, 1849: 1-148 for an English translation of Schlegel's comments on paintings that he saw in Paris and the Netherlands between 1802 and 1804.

¹¹ Millington, 1849: 123.

German culture, a piety embodied in its art, as providing a model for such a renewal.¹²

The following comments made by Schlegel reveal which features of the *Moreel Triptych* he believed could be explained by reference to traditional qualities in the German character: a sense of simplicity, wholeness and piety; an ability to represent and interpret tranquillity in nature; an appreciation of individuality expressed in facial features; and a belief in the parity of intellect, senses and emotions:

Die Landschaft ist in den Seitenstücken vom Mittelbilde aus fortgesetzt; sie ist so still und grün, naturgeföhlt, deutsch und röhrend...Der liebevoll redliche und freundliche Ausdruck im Gesichte des heiligen Christoph,...durchaus still und röhrend...einfacher und anmutsvoller...Hier in diesem vortrefflichen und verhältnismässig nicht so berühmten Maler öföhnet sich der Blick in eine noch unbekante Weltgegend der altdeutschen Kunstgeschichte...Es atmet durchaus in ihm ein röhrender Ausdruck der innigsten Andacht und Fröhmmigkeit.¹³

The landscape continues from the central scene to the side panels; it is so quiet and green, full of feeling for nature, German and touching...[He notes] the lovingly honest and friendly expression on the face of Saint Christopher. [Compared with Dürer, Schlegel finds Memling] thoroughly still and touching...simpler, and more charming...This excellent and relatively less famous painter opens one's gaze to a still unknown region of early German art history. [The painting] breathes a moving expression of the most heartfelt devotion and piety.¹⁴

Schlegel's comments on the paintings he saw at the Louvre were originally published in the journal *Europa* published between 1802 and 1804. De Vos turns to this journal for Schlegel's comments on the *Moreel Triptych*.¹⁵ Important in the context of this study is the final sentence of this extract:

Dieses Gemähldte könnte ein Vorbild sein, wie man landschaftliche und einsiedlerische Gegenstände der Heiligen Geschichte zu behandeln hat.

This work could serve as an exemplar of how to treat the landscape and

¹² Borchert, 1997: 138.

¹³ Note 17, Borchert, 2005(a): 416. Taken from Schlegel, F. *Ansichten und Ideen von der christlichen Kunst*, ed. H. Eichner (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, IV, 1). Munich etc., 1959, 44-45.

¹⁴ English translation, with additions, from Borchert, 2005(a): 180-81. See also Millington, 1849: 39-40.

¹⁵ De Vos, 1994: 66.

hermeticism of the Scriptures.

For Schlegel, then, a key function of the landscape in the *Moreel Triptych* was to convey the sanctity of nature and this attitude towards the natural environment is an integral part of Romantic philosophy. So, according to Schlegel's thinking, the imagery of the *Moreel Triptych* works to encourage the viewer to meditate upon a beautiful environment, one unmarked by mankind's materialism and greed and one in which saints can draw close to God. Schlegel's view of the natural environment as a source of untainted beauty and his desire for nature to be re-enchanted relates to what he saw as the negative impact of the hostilities of war and the increasing urbanisation of his day.¹⁶ His response to Memling's landscape imagery relates to this perspective; for him, it showed how members of late-medieval society were 'at one' with the beauty of the earth, a beauty that indicates the presence of its Creator.

Schlegel's enthusiasm for early Netherlandish painting was shared with Sulpiz and Melchior Boisserée, two brothers from a merchant family in Cologne. These two men became the first major collectors of early Netherlandish painting. Sulpiz kept a journal and each brother made notes that aimed to assess style and quality. Like Schlegel, they considered Flemish art to be German art and identified its qualities with German sensibilities. In 1836 the Boisserée collection arrived at the Pinakothek, Munich.

The art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen was familiar with the Boisserée collection; he was a friend of Charles Eastlake who was made keeper of London's National Gallery in 1843, and cousin to the Romantic writer and friend of the Schlegels, Ludwig Tieck.

¹⁶ Stone, 2005: 180.

Waagen became director of the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, in 1830 and many early Netherlandish paintings entered the gallery under his directorship including Rogier van der Weyden's *Miraflores Altarpiece* (discussed in Chapter Two). His book, *Ueber Hubert und Johann van Eyck* (1822), shows him to take the Romantic view that qualities in an artwork were related to an artist's character.¹⁷ However, Waagen was a scholar who looked carefully at the style of paintings. For example, he called attention to differences in style between painters of the Cologne School and Flemish painters and explored extant written sources.¹⁸ The thread of sensitivity to Romantic philosophy continues with Johan Passavant, a former painter in the Nazarene movement of painting which aimed to encapsulate medieval spirituality in its works. Passavant became inspector at the Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt, in 1840. In his *Kunstreise durch England und Belgien* (1833) he praises Memling's skill in relation to the *Shrine of St Ursula*, particularly his ability to give small figures expressive qualities, though he makes no reference to Memling's carefully-crafted illusion of the Cologne skyline (Fig. 4, B1 & 2).¹⁹

Romanticism, then, played a significant role in the development of interest in early Netherlandish painting during the nineteenth century. By the middle of the century, the city of Bruges, with its Hospital of St John proudly displaying key works by Memling, was a place of pilgrimage for Romantics like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelite and one-time friend of Ruskin. In 1839 the Hospital of St John was opened as a museum. Here there were works by Memling including the *St John Altarpiece*, the

¹⁷ Ridderbos et al, 2005: 221.

¹⁸ Haskell, 1993: 436.

¹⁹ De Vos, 1994: 69.

Shrine of St Ursula, the *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, the *Triptych of Adriaan Reins*, and the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* that were not taken to Paris (Fig. 4, A-E). The paintings that were returned to Bruges in 1816 following the end of the Napoleonic Wars were temporarily housed in the Town Hall; these included Memling's *Moreel Triptych*, van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with George van der Paele* and David's *Justice of Cambyses*. In 1855, the English archivist and Catholic convert James Weale settled in Bruges. He worked in the archives of the city and found documents relating to the lives of many artists and their patrons. Although Weale placed emphasis on the use of contemporary written documents to open up information on the realities of the past, his attitude towards Memling's imagery was not unlike that of Schlegel's. He saw the need to look back and take account of the context in which the artwork was produced, but he was concerned primarily with what he saw as the influence of medieval Christian religiosity on Memling's creativity. In his 1901 monograph on Memling, he wrote:

...even when painting earthly scenes, [Memling] kindles in us thoughts of heavenly things. It is easy to see by his paintings that he was indeed a man humble and pure of heart, who, when the arts were beginning to abdicate their position as handmaids of the Church in order to minister to the pleasures of men, preserved his love for Christian tradition and in earnest simplicity painted what he believed and venerated as he conceived and saw it in his mediations.²⁰

In 1867 Weale organised an exhibition in Bruges called 'Exposition de tableaux anciens, d'objets d'art et d'antiquités' and, along with others, helped Henri Kervyn de Lettenhove install paintings for the Bruges exhibition 'Exposition des Primitifs flamands et d'Art' in 1902. He also wrote the exhibition's catalogue, although it was not ready for its opening and appeared after Georges Hulin de Loo's *Catalogue*

²⁰ De Vos, 1994: 70.

critique.²¹ Paintings were lent to the exhibition from countries across Europe thanks to the formation of committees within these countries. Max Friedländer, a significant connoisseur of early Netherlandish painting, was on the committee for Germany. Friedländer describes Memling as “pure in heart and at peace with himself... [a] flower without thorns”, and he admits to the use of many negatives to describe his work.²² In this context, he writes of Memling’s landscapes thus:

Clean and orderly like his familiar humans, Memling’s cheerful countryside beckons from afar, parklike and summery, with winding paths, white horses, still waters, swans, comfortable and livable houses, round trees and blue hills along the horizon - an idyllic homeland where the weather is forever fair.²³

For Friedländer, then, his response to Memling’s landscapes was constrained by the artist’s repetitive use of certain motifs which showed, in his eyes, a lack of originality and resulted in landscapes that were not skilful reproductions of their counterpart in real life. For Schlegel, his response to Memling’s landscape in the *Moreel Triptych* was shaped by the view that landscape was invested with a sanctity which in turn had the potential to create within viewers a sense of God’s perfection and serene beauty. However, Memling’s landscapes were not the primary concern for either scholar. Friedländer’s rather negative attitude towards Memling’s art - and later Panofsky’s - contributed to a downturn of interest in Memling, although, as explained later, art-historical perspectives changed considerably during the second half of the twentieth century.

²¹ Ridderbos et al, 2005: 236. See also Boyens et al, 2002.

²² Friedländer, 1971, Vol. 6, Part 1: 35 & 34.

²³ Friedländer, 1971, Vol. 6, Part 1: 34, comments later reiterated by Panofsky, 1953: 348.

MEMLING STUDIES: RECENT EXHIBITIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP

The 500th anniversary of Memling's death brought with it a resurgence of interest in Memling, and subsequently, through a range of exhibitions and scholarship, understanding of Memling's imagery is developing. In the outline that follows, I highlight scholarship that references Memling's landscape imagery.

Dirk de Vos and Barbara Lane have both produced monographs on Memling, de Vos in 1994 and Lane in 2009.²⁴ De Vos's book was published to coincide with an exhibition at the Groeningemuseum, Bruges, entitled "Hans Memling: Five Centuries of Fact and Fiction" and which opened in November, 1994.²⁵ Papers delivered during the exhibition's concluding days are to be found reproduced in *Memling Studies* (1997) edited by H. Verougstraete, R. Van Schoute and M. Smeyers.²⁶ In a paper in this book, Catherine Reynolds looks at a selection of Memling's landscapes, none from portraits, focussing on changes in viewpoint and arguing for the influence of Hugo van der Goes on Memling's compositional format. Reynolds takes the view that Memling's landscapes were "determined by their function, that of serving the main subject matter", and she turns to the unresolved nature of landscape features in underdrawings of many early Netherlandish paintings in support of her viewpoint.²⁷ In 2005, Till-Holger Borchert edited a catalogue that accompanied the exhibition "Memling and the Art of

²⁴ De Vos, 1994 and Lane, 2009.

²⁵ Campbell, 1995.

²⁶ Verougstraete et al, 1997.

²⁷ Reynolds, 1997: 169.

Portraiture” that travelled to three venues: Madrid, Bruges and New York.²⁸ For the *Moreel Triptych*, Borchert writes:

From an art-historical viewpoint, the altarpiece’s greatest significance lies in its representation of landscape, where it takes its place alongside the works of Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Dieric Bouts and Hugo van der Goes. In this artistic chain, it provides a crucial link in the development of landscape as an independent genre, as first practised by Joachim Patinir in the early sixteenth century.²⁹

This insight is most relevant to the analyses of this study which focuses on the way Memling manipulates the form of juxtaposition between key figures and landscape. I suggest that experimentations by artists with the nature of this juxtaposition are significant to the process that saw landscapes emerging as an independent genre in the North.

In addition to the exhibitions and scholarship that have focussed on Memling, there have been those in which Memling’s work has been included within a much broader theme. Particularly significant in this regard is the work of scholars keen to address the cultural relationship between Italy and the North during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Findings from this type of scholarship have proved useful to this study because landscape imagery in fifteenth-century Flemish works was admired in this period by Italians in general, and emulated by Italian artists in particular, although Michelangelo was a significant exception in this trend.³⁰ In March, 1994, the findings of a symposium in Utrecht produced a range of papers in *Italy and the Low Countries* -

²⁸ Borchert, 2005(b).

²⁹ Borchert, 2005(b): 172.

³⁰ See pages 305-306.

Artistic Relations: The Fifteenth Century (1999) edited by V.M. Schmidt.³¹ In a paper in this volume, Michael Rohlmann notes that many painters in Florence emulated Northern compositions in a variety of ways, but that if there was exact copying it tended to be in relation to features in the landscape.³² The watermill in Memling's *Virgin and Child with Angels* (the *Pagagnotti Triptych*) was a popular feature and appears in Fra Bartolommeo's *Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist* (c.1490) and Lorenzo di Credi's *Virgin and Child with an Angel* (c.1480-90).³³ As to the organisation of landscape features in Northern works, Rohlmann refers to the influence of the 'plateau composition' as seen in a painting no longer extant by van Eyck, his *Women Bathing*, which was described in 1456 by Bartholomaeus Facius. The panoramic vista that Facius describes sounds not unlike the one found in van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin*: "In the same picture there is...a puppy lapping up water, and also horses, minute figures of men, mountains, groves, hamlets and castles carried out with such skill you would believe one was fifty miles distant from another".³⁴ Rohlmann references the plateau-type landscapes of Alessio Baldovinetti (c.1425-99) and Antonio del Pollaiuolo (c.1431-98) and also calls attention to the specific influence of Memling's *Pagagnotti Triptych*, with its Virgin and Child in an interior with landscape opening up behind them on both sides, on many Florentine painters: Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449-94), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Filippino Lippi (c.1457-1504), Lorenzo di Credi (c.1459-1537) and Fra Bartolommeo (1473-1517).³⁵ Luciano Bellosi's paper in the same volume begins with a reference to a treatise written in 1509 by Francesco

³¹ Schmidt, 1999.

³² Rohlmann, 1999: 51.

³³ Nuttall, 2004: 134-35.

³⁴ Baxendall, 1964: 102 (English translation of Facius). See also Meiss, 1976.

³⁵ Rohlmann, 1999: 50.

Lancilotti. Bellosi points to the usefulness of its contents in gauging perceptions of early Netherlandish painting in central Italy at this time and, in this regard, he singles out one statement which he translates into English thus: “In order to paint the landscape, both in the foreground and in the background, a certain aptitude and descriptive ability are needed, which are peculiar to Flemish, more than to Italian painters”.³⁶ In the context of a discussion of Flemish-type landscapes being adopted by Italian artists, Bellosi highlights how meanings can change across space and time:

the Flemish landscape takes on a value opposite the one it had in Van Eyck. For him, it was the display of a will of total fidelity to natural features. For the Italians, on the other hand, it becomes an ideal landscape, a dream landscape, which represents the nostalgia for the Garden of Eden. A beautiful, uncontaminated nature, needing no work by men, because it is naturally green.³⁷

Bellosi sees Memling as a mediator in this translation process with his landscapes:

no longer so severely naturalistic as Van Eyck’s, but lightened by a suspended atmosphere and a sentimental sweetness with which Perugino, better than anyone else, harmonized”.³⁸

In the catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition “Bruges and the Renaissance: Memling to Pourbus” held in 1998 at the Memlingmuseum, Bruges,³⁹ Hilde Lobelle-Caluwé refers briefly to Memling’s artistic reputation spreading beyond Bruges, but notes the difficulty in trying to assess the direction of influence between North and South.⁴⁰ Four years later, in 2002, an exhibition that celebrated the artistic exchanges between Flanders, Spain and Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was held in the Groeningmuseum, Bruges, entitled “Jan van Eyck, de Vlaamse Primitieven en het

³⁶ Bellosi, 1999: 97. *A'paesi dapresso e a'loniani / bisogna un certo ingiegno e descretione / che me l'hanno e fiandreschi che italiani.*

³⁷ Bellosi, 1999: 104.

³⁸ Bellosi, 1999: 104.

³⁹ Martens, 1998(a).

⁴⁰ Lobelle-Caluwé, 1998: 67.

Zuiden 1430-1530". In the exhibition catalogue,⁴¹ Manfred Sellink briefly examines landscape, though his focus is on van Eyck's imagery, not Memling's. He suggests that the growing interest in geography and cosmography during the fifteenth century may have been an important stimulus to the development of landscape representation as an independent genre in the sixteenth century, but that also significant to this process was the "ability to tie all the landscape elements into a visually convincing unit", an ability possessed by van Eyck and his immediate circle of artists.⁴² Sellink closes with a reminder that despite the praise of Flemish landscape imagery by Italians, landscape representation did not qualify for a high position in the theory of art being developed in Italy in the sixteenth century, a theory that was to dominate practice and scholarship in art for centuries to come.

A further scholar to have examined this issue of North-South artistic relations fairly recently is Paula Nuttall in her book of 2004 *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting, 1400-1500*. Her consideration of landscape representation begins with a focus on the appeal of the plateau-type composition and then the popularity amongst Florentine painters of Netherlandish features like:

Boutsian feathery trees, the neat round ones of Memling, turrets nestling in verdant foliage or silhouetted against limpid skies, winding paths and expanses of water dotted with the tiny forms of horsemen or swans...⁴³

In a later paper, written for the catalogue that accompanied the 2005 exhibition of Memling's portraits and entitled "Memling and the European Renaissance Portrait", she argues that:

⁴¹ Borchert, 2002.

⁴² Sellink, 2002: 213.

⁴³ Nuttall, 2004: 204-205.

Memling's chief contribution to portraiture...was in his use of the landscape background, sometimes viewed through a window..., but more typically seen extending behind the sitter, either under an open sky or through the arch of a loggia.⁴⁴

This review of Memling studies has shown that Memling's landscape imagery has received the most attention from scholars exploring the artistic relations between North and South during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This is understandable in light of the Italian admiration for art/painting *alla flamma* and the influence of Memling's portraits-with-landscape on Italian artists during the Renaissance. To date, no scholarship has focussed on Memling's landscape imagery, but there are in-depth studies of landscape representation by two Northern artists working in the years shortly after Memling's death: Joachim Patinir (c.1480-1524) and Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538).⁴⁵

PRESENT-DAY PERSPECTIVES IN ART HISTORY

For most art historians today, exploration of production context is a significant process in their research. In their efforts to unravel the role of late-medieval intention and response in the production of artworks, most of them emphasise acknowledgment of the fact that their own experiences and attitudes grounded in a different and remote century play a role in interpretation. Attention to this dynamic has been emphasised over the past sixty-five years. An overview of the scholarship on German and Netherlandish art during this period has been presented in two papers by Larry Silver and a brief reference to these helps explain the perspective of this present study.

⁴⁴ Nuttall, 2005: 74.

⁴⁵ See pages 65-68.

Silver's paper of 1986 begins by noting how Panofsky's *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (1943) and *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953) opened up access for the English-speaking world to the German art-historical tradition and to German and early Netherlandish paintings. The influence of Panofsky's notion of "hidden symbolism" was strong initially, but it gathered criticism slowly, as did his view that the integrity of an artwork was stable across time. Silver highlights Baxandall's *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (1980) as a key work that changed the direction of scholarship devoted to the study of what is now often called early modern, northern European art.⁴⁶ In his book, Baxandall works not unlike an anthropologist in that he addresses the nature and relevance of contemporary context in relation to artefact production. Silver embraces this approach, one that involves the recovery of the making and viewing context, with enthusiasm, and further suggests a focus on studying artworks closely, artworks drawn from a wide range of media. More specifically, he urges art historians to work to "recover more fully the historical worlds of an urban bourgeoisie and of a princely class not always separate from the culture of cities, as well as their complex relationship [and] to take note of the dominant character of religion, specifically in terms of its own historical changes".⁴⁷ The aims of this thesis come out of this line of thinking, as do the major trends in the study of early modern, northern European art over the past twenty years. As to the latter, Silver looks at research since 1986 in his 2006 paper and notes a development in methodological self-consciousness, an emphasis on interdisciplinary discourse, attention to a wide range of media and a move away from an "uncritical embrace of the celebrated Flemish naturalism as both

⁴⁶ Silver, 1986: 519-20.

⁴⁷ Silver, 1986: 522.

progressive and foundational for the verisimilitude in art of the following four centuries".⁴⁸

This art-historical approach requires specific knowledge of an artwork's historical context, evidence for which is often limited. Rarely are movable art objects from late medieval Europe still in the location for which they were produced - Memling's *Altarpiece of St John*,⁴⁹ for example, is a rare exception in the chapel of the Hospital of St John, Bruges. It is important to have knowledge of the viewing context; many altarpieces, for example, were *part* of a much larger commission that included the chapel in which the altarpiece was placed, and the liturgical items placed on the altar beneath it. In addition, it is unusual for paintings themselves to include details of authorship, although there are a few paintings from van Eyck and Memling that survive with signatures and dates. The apparent lack of contemporary concern to record authorship may not result from the collaborative production techniques that were usual in the workshops of painters of the day, but from the fact that few paintings survive in their original frames and, as Memling's *Triptych of Jan Floreins* shows, the frame was a place where artist, patron and commission date could be recorded.⁵⁰ Then there are problems to do with the fact that few contracts survive that refer to extant painted works - the contract of 1464 for Dieric Bouts' *Holy Sacrament Altarpiece* for St Peter's Church, Leuven, is an exception.⁵¹ Also, contemporary and near-contemporary details in inventories and letters (should they exist) are often difficult to match with extant

⁴⁸ Silver, 2006: 352.

⁴⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.31. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.10

⁵⁰ For scholarship on frames and supports see Verougstraete & van Schoute, 2000: 107-17. Also, Verougstraete & van Schoute, 1996: 89-90 for differences between small and large frames in the quality of the carving of their mouldings at the time of Campin.

⁵¹ Stechow, 1966: 10-11.

paintings. For example, Marcantonio Michiel's record (1520-30) of works belonging to Pietro Bembo refers to the right-hand panel of a diptych - now believed to be Memling's *Bembo Diptych* and which is also analysed in Chapter Two - as an image of the Virgin and Christ Child and not St Veronica.⁵² Additionally, there is a dearth of written contemporary references to *particular* Northern works or their artists; what there is tends to be brief. There are problems that arise, too, from an absence of writings by Northern intellectuals on the function of art in society, in the manner of the Italian humanist scholars, and of detailed records about attitudes towards the natural world. Finally, a problem that is particularly relevant to this study is that there are few extant documents with references to land owned by particular members of Bruges' fifteenth-century burgher elite. All these problems of evidence mean that it is necessary to look at collective surviving evidence and from this process develop sound inferences that can form the basis of interpretation.

THESIS OVERVIEW

Aims

The aims of this study are to examine the form and organisation of Memling's landscape features in a selection of his religious works with images of donors, and in secular portraits; to place Memling's landscape imagery within the artistic context of its day; to find evidence that can help illuminate the attitudes, experiences and aspirations of the artist and his patrons, most particularly those related to land and its ownership; and to reflect on the way these details of context could be said to resonate with the form that Memling's imagery assumes.

⁵² De Vos, 1994: 205.

Hypotheses

There are two key hypotheses that drive this thesis. The first is that in Memling's religious works, the visual expression of the relationship between sacred figures and landscape can be considered a metaphor that aims to describe, for people of the late middle ages, the nature of the relationship between the sacred and profane spheres of existence. The second is that a significant aspiration of Memling's patrons was to achieve high social status and that their painted commissions were viewed partly as a vehicle to convey such an aspiration to contemporaries and descendants. These two hypotheses come together slowly as I present evidence to suggest that Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions and his portraits-with-landscape share some symbolic qualities. In late-medieval *sacra conversazione* works an enthroned or standing Virgin with Child is placed in a church-like architectural form with a group of conversing saints, each recognisable by their attributes. Unlike Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions, the architectural forms did not traditionally provide views onto landscape.⁵³ This is not to suggest that the choice and organisation of landscape forms in Memling's non-*sacra conversazione*-type compositions have no bearing on his portraits-with-landscape. For one thing, experiences and expectations of landscape representation of Memling and his contemporaries were grounded in sacred narrative. From the outset, the format of the imagery in *all* Memling's religious works is considered of relevance to that of his portraiture, not least because both *oeuvres* address duality: the sacred and profane realms of existence in one, the outward and inner being of sitters in the other. However, I aim to show that the aspiration of burghers to be seen

⁵³ See pages 119-20.

as part of an exclusive social set resonates most particularly with Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type format.

Chapter outline

Chapter One presents an analysis of how a selection of scholars has approached the study of landscape imagery. Emphasis is placed on a range of case studies where the aim was to link the form and content of the artwork's imagery with particular features of contemporary context. These studies provide models for the methodological approach of this study and, at the same time, present significant examples from Memling's heritage *vis-à-vis* landscape representation.

Chapter Two describes and analyses Memling's landscape imagery in a selection of his religious works. Memling's skills in landscape representation, and his patrons' expectations of its function, are grounded in religious works, so it is necessary to examine the choice and organisation of his landscape forms in his religious works first. I begin by suggesting that the development in landscape representation by the founding generation of Netherlandish artists emerged during a process of experimentation aimed at finding ways to visually describe the sacred-profane dynamic of their religious compositions at a time when there was an interest in, and a demand for, skilful illusions of the real world. The problem was that such illusions carried the potential to destroy the attention that sacred art had traditionally paid to hierarchy, to the visual presentation of God's realm as perfect and distinctly supreme.

Memling's religious *oeuvre* is large so I divide the works into two compositional groups depending on whether or not key sacred figures and their company are enclosed in a large architectural form that, to some degree, separates them from the surrounding landscape. This proves a useful procedure as it reveals immediately that in the first group the emphasis is on sacred narrative, whilst in the second there is a focus on Church doctrine and imagery with the potential to aid spiritual meditation. In the works of sacred narrative, the figures are shown taking part in events that occurred during their lives on earth, events recorded in the Bible and other holy texts. Figures are not presented as separated from landscape within an architectural form placed to the fore of the picture plane. Sometimes figures are placed in buildings, but such buildings, often with a section of their exterior walls missing, are spaced across the picture plane contributing to an integrated landscape that sets the scene in which the action of the story takes place. This *within* landscape scenario for figures contrasts with that in Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type; most compositions in the second group of Memling's religious *oeuvre* are of this latter type. Here the Virgin and Child, together with saints and/or angels, pose motionless within a church-like architectural form. Behind them are openings offering panoramic views of landscape.

I show how Memling used landscape features in a traditional manner in works of sacred narrative, to ground action in the lives of saints and in Biblical events and suggest that the placement of Christ and/or saints *within* a worldly environment works to enhance the belief that this world and the next are closely interwoven, that everyday life can be filled with spirituality. In contrast, Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type works convey a

sense that the sacred and worldly exist contemporaneously, but that the sacred is distinctly superior and ‘cordoned off’ from the profane world. Divine presence still exists in the earthly surroundings beyond the architectural form, but there is a slight shift in emphasis. Here, the earthly landscape is not about how everyday life could be filled with spirituality, but about how it relates to the divine life being played out in the tableau. In other words, the focus in this life should be preparing for life in the next one at God’s side; the emphasis has shifted to the divine dimension of Christ’s sacrifice and his gift of everlasting life with God and saints in paradise. As to the forms in these landscapes that carry references to the donors, I suggest these are statements of material success set in the context of a commitment to religious devotion and a concern about life after death.

Chapter Three focuses on what can be deduced about the heritage and life experiences of Bruges’ fifteenth-century burgher elite in order to provide a foundation from which to draw inferences on the real and aspirational identities of Memling and his patrons. Specific attention is paid to understanding what meanings this social group attached to land and its ownership. I present evidence that suggests a general aspiration amongst these citizens to acquire noble status or to be *perceived* as having access to *vivre noblement*, although such an aspiration was modified to take into account principles and values associated with entrepreneurial success.⁵⁴ Land ownership was important to the burgher elite because it could not only imply a credit-worthy status, but it could also, in some cases, offer power by way of noble titles and juridical rights. However, this

⁵⁴ See Wilson, 1998: Ch. 2 on the artistic commissions, especially painting, of Bruges’ burgher elite and *vivre noblement*.

aspiration did not have to detract from the primacy of urban loyalties. Additionally in this chapter Memling's artistic status is considered, together with its influence on his popularity amongst the burghers of Bruges. Also discussed are the places of worship attended by Memling and his contemporaries.

The final chapter addresses the form, organisation and function of the landscape features in Memling's portraits-with-landscape. This innovative form of portraiture was popular amongst many traders and merchant bankers of Bruges. It seems that members of the burgher elite judged its form appropriate and effective for recording their existence and aspirations. Hence, the basic aim in this chapter is to find reasons why this form appealed to this particular group of citizens. The analyses of portraits are carried out with the evidence from Chapter Three held in mind, evidence that supports the view that many burghers had aspirations to achieve high social status, but it also draws on elements from Chapter Two, most especially from Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions. By presenting the Virgin and others in regal-looking clothes within a secluded architectural form with panoramic views across landscape (through openings often circumscribed by rich, marble columns), Memling conveyed the group as distinctly aloof and superior. So, by adapting this format for use in his portraits-with-landscape, he was able to project for his sitters an aura of high social status. Also explored is the resonance that exists between the presentation of van der Weyden's portraits in the *Braque Triptych* and those portraits in which Memling reduced the architectural form to a ledge for sitters' hands. Memling may have seen the *Braque Triptych*, or perhaps his presentation of sitters juxtaposed directly with landscape

(together with his opening out of the *sacra conversazione* format) emerges as a response, also, to the enthusiasm at the time for the presentation of landscape in panoramic mode and which appeared in the North in van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin* (c.1435).

Although Memling used in his portraits-with-landscape those compositional elements from his *sacra conversazione* works that had the potential to imply a sense of separation between key figures and landscape, at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, he applied formal techniques that brought foreground and background *together*. Memling's harmonising rhythms of line, colour and texture, across the surface of his portraits connected sitter with landscape and thus a sense of symbolic interweaving between sitter and landscape was promoted, with landscape features able to function as descriptors of interiority and material success. In those portraits where he reduced the architectural form to a ledge for the hands of sitters this connection appears even stronger.

In the analysis of a small group of Memling's portraits-with-landscape, those with no people or buildings in the landscape, I introduce a more speculative tone suggesting the form may signify a redirection of emphasis by Memling and his clients away from a primary desire to project high social status and material success, to one more concerned with indicating the condition of the sitter's interiority, most especially the possession of 'inner nobility'. Here, I consider the notion that Memling's portraits-with-landscape may have attracted the attention of the young Leonardo da Vinci.

A brief afterthought alludes to the fact that Memling never included the representation of prominent buildings in Bruges like the Belfry, or the Church of Our Lady, in the manner of the Master of the Legend of St Ursula or the Master of the Legend of St Lucy. This fact can be used to support the notion that many members of Bruges' commercial elite believed that the primary function of their portraits was to help convey their high social status, and that because ownership of land was judged a potent signifier of wealth and power at that time, it was this, and not the significant buildings of the city in which they made their money, that they wished Memling to include in their images alongside their fine clothes, rings and, possibly, intimations of their 'noble' souls.

CONTRIBUTION TO ART-HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Landscape representation is a record of humanity's experience of, and relationship with, the world of which it is a part, and this study aims to understand exactly what the landscape representation in Memling's art records about the relationship of the burgher elite of Bruges to their immediate, exterior environment. The dialogue that it opens up is significant not only because a detailed investigation of Memling's landscape imagery has never been carried out before, but, with its emphasis on socio-economic factors alongside the Christian belief system, it moves away from an hypothesis that associates development of landscape representation primarily with a growing interest in the natural environment. This is not to imply a rejection of the latter, only that other possibilities are taken into consideration. Furthermore, Memling's landscapes may warrant a label 'landscapes of serenity', but I consider it is time to move beyond this generalisation to an exploration of detail, to investigations like this one designed to extend debate on the

role of landscape representation in late-medieval Christian art and on why Memling's portraits-with-landscape appealed to the fifteenth-century businessmen of Bruges.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY OF LANDSCAPE: PERSPECTIVES AND MODELS

INTRODUCTION

The core aim of this chapter is to present an analysis of how a selection of scholars has approached the study of landscape imagery. I begin with a brief reference to some developmental studies of landscape in Western art and a short discussion of two studies each of which addresses the landscape imagery of a particular artist. But the heart of the chapter is a group of case studies in which scholars search for a resonance between form of imagery and context of production, and because the focus of each scholar is different, together they provide exemplification of the multivalent interpretative possibilities present in visual imagery. This exploration of scholarship introduced potential models for analysing Memling's imagery and I consider that the insight it provided helped make this interpretation of Memling's landscape imagery more nuanced.

In each case study I explore information that contributes to an understanding of the development in landscape imagery from the fourteenth century to Memling's time. The aim is to present Memling's heritage *vis-à-vis* landscape representation in developmental terms in preparation for the discussion of the landscape skills of Memling, the Master of Flémalle, van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden in Chapter Two. I discuss research by scholars on sources, style and function of motifs and this inevitably contributes to an understanding of the development of landscape imagery, with some scholars exploring context in search of reasons to account for changes in style, especially the compositional arrangement of visual motifs. Furthermore, the

methodology of looking at what artists take from tradition and examining the differences, most especially the effects on interpretation of such differences, is significant in art history, and one that is adopted in this present study of Memling.

DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES OF LANDSCAPE IMAGERY

Developmental studies of landscape representation in Western art focus on the ways in which the imagery of particular artists contributes to the development of landscape as an independent genre.

In *Landscape into Art* first published in 1949, Kenneth Clark examines representation of landscape thematically, through modes of vision: symbolic e.g. medieval illuminators; factual e.g. Durer; fantastical e.g. Altdorfer; idealistic e.g. Claude Lorrain; naturalistic e.g. Constable; and Impressionistic e.g. Monet. These modes are not mutually exclusive, but Clark applied them with a model of progression in mind. For him, the “rise and development [of landscape painting] since the middle ages [was] part of a cycle in which the human spirit attempted once more to create a harmony with its environment”.¹

Clark focuses on a ‘feeling for nature’ at all stages of landscape representation. I suggest this focus needs to take into account that such a feeling may not be the same from one generation to another. Pearsall and Salter address this issue in *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* where they examine the representation of landscapes

¹ Clark, 1976: 1.

and seasons in both medieval painting and literature.² Their scholarship makes it clear that the medieval view of nature was nothing like that of nineteenth-century Romantic poets and scholars. Their discussion of both texts and paintings is an example of an interdisciplinary approach designed to broaden understanding of the contemporary meanings attached to the natural world. However, in this regard, also, I urge caution because it cannot be assumed that there is a straightforward correspondence between meanings attached to features in the real world and those of their represented form. Furthermore, meanings related to the natural world might not be the same across written and visual media.

The application of ideas from one field of study to another is taken up by Roskill in *The Languages of Landscape* where he promotes the usefulness of intertextuality in the study of painted landscapes.³ In literary theory, intertextuality refers to “a relationship between different texts of the same period, in which one is read in light of, or in terms established by the other”,⁴ and it is an idea used in this study when the imagery in Memling’s work is studied in comparison with that of the Master of Flémalle, van Eyck and van der Weyden. Like Clark, Roskill presents a thematic approach to the study of landscape art with examples of painting set out broadly in chronological order. He is concerned with “the different kinds of ‘language’ that are entailed in the creation and

² Pearsall & Salter, 1973.

³ Roskill, 1997.

⁴ Roskill, 1997: 22.

apprehension of [landscape art]”,⁵ arguing that “landscape art is to be understood as a means of transmitting a certain view or awareness of the natural world”.⁶

An issue that can arise when examining landscape imagery from a developmental perspective is that when the landscape under discussion is *an element within* another genre it may be explored only from the standpoint of how far it is independent of figures. However, in *Landscape and Western Art*, Andrews does reference secondary landscapes in their own right when he talks about all landscape being mediated land, whether the embodiment of a principle thematic motif (the Argument) or the accessory element (the *parergon*).⁷ I suggest he could have pressed this point further and considered the possibility that social and cultural factors also influence the *degree* to which landscape is secondary. As discussed earlier, I consider this concept most important in Memling’s work, with the nature of the juxtaposition between figure and landscape able to carry meaning derived from notions of dualism that existed in society at that time.

From his overview position, Andrews argues that changes across time with regard to humankind’s view of their place in nature lie behind changes in landscape representation. He sees artists like Turner with an interest in depicting the processes of nature, as exemplifying a move from picture to process, a shift from notions of landscape to those of environment.⁸ In other words, we see ourselves today as

⁵ Roskill, 1997: 8.

⁶ Roskill, 1997: 232.

⁷ Andrews, 199: 7.

⁸ Andrews, 1999: 193.

organisms functioning within our world, sharing and experiencing all the processes of nature first-hand and not as spectators glimpsing part of it from a specific location outside 'the frame'. I suggest this polarity drawn by Andrews appears too strong, but the question of humankind's attitude to the natural environment and how this could be said to 'play out' in painted representation remains. The focus in this present study on socio-economic features of Memling's environment is not meant to invalidate the importance of this issue.

In this brief discussion of developmental studies of landscape, reference was made to a few elements that are relevant to this study, but because the primary concern in this research is not to assess the part that Memling's landscapes played in the development of landscape as an independent genre, such studies do not provide an appropriate model of scholarship. However, the detailed exploration that I carried out of Memling's imagery has led me to conclude that Memling's manipulations of the juxtaposition between key figures and landscape features are significant in the development of the artistic processes that contributed to the appearance of independent landscapes as first practised by Joachim Patinir in the Netherlands and Albrecht Altdorfer in Germany in the early sixteenth century.

IN-DEPTH STUDIES OF LANDSCAPE IMAGERY **Joachim Patinir and Albrecht Altdorfer**

More focussed studies of landscape in art are better models for a study of Memling's imagery. There is no detailed study on Memling's landscapes, but they exist for Patinir (c.1480-1524) and Altdorfer (1480-1538). These two artists, from the generation after

Memling, are perceived in art-historical scholarship as artists standing at the forefront of the development of landscape towards independent genre status in Western art.

Walter Gibson regards Patinir as the artist “who first freed landscape from its traditional subordination to the human figure, thereby creating a type of picture whose chief content was not narrative but natural scenery imagery”.⁹ His analysis of a selection of Patinir’s paintings addresses the detail in compositional form; for example, he notes how Patinir tended to mix viewpoints - horizontal surfaces viewed from above, but mountains, trees and buildings from straight on (Figs. 5-7). In contrast, Reindert Falkenburg argues for a symbolic emphasis in the artist’s landscapes in *Joachim Patinir: Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life* (1988). Falkenburg states in his introduction that he:

seeks to show that Patinir’s landscapes are not only deeply rooted in the moral and religious thought of his day, but are directly connected to late medieval devotional art [and that] since we know so little about the social and cultural environment in which these paintings originated the study is necessarily restricted to the actual images and their relationship to visual traditions and to the range of associated ideas expressed in the broader context of contemporary literature, and devotional writings in particular.¹⁰

However, in his review of Falkenburg’s book, Buijsen argues that a significant weakness lies in Falkenburg’s efforts to provide a symbolic interpretation for every detail in each painting. He suggests, further, that multivalent possibilities can occur in the sense of what a viewer takes from a painting in terms of meaning; for example, the scenes within Patinir’s landscapes may work to help with spiritual meditations, but their

⁹ Gibson, 1989: 3.

¹⁰ Falkenburg, 1988: 8-9.

detailing may attract the viewer because of an interest in nature.¹¹ I focus on symbolism in Memling's imagery, but aim to give due weight to the existence of multivalent interpretative possibilities, including the formal requirements of each composition.

In *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, Christopher Wood examines Altdorfer's early independent landscapes (Figs. 9 & 10), those pictures "entirely empty of living creatures, human and animal alike... [that] tell no stories",¹² and looks beyond the view that they resonate with a growing interest in nature. Wood argues that the moment of isolation when Altdorfer "prised landscape out of a merely supplementary relationship to subject-matter" is one that "tends to get obscured when it is assumed that it was nature that furnished the principle of isolation".¹³ In place of nature, Wood suggests that Altdorfer's focus on trees (e.g. Fig. 10) enables him to establish authorial presence by way of the style of his brush stroke:

Altdorfer resisted texts... but [he] was not a descriptive artist either. He did not seek meaning in the surfaces and textures of objects around him. Like many German painters he had another ambition: self-manifestation in the picture, through idiosyncratic line and generally through sharp-edged disregard of the criteria of optical verisimilitude.¹⁴

Wood is referring here to the context-specific notion that Baxandall presented in his *Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, that schooling methods for merchants produced a sensibility in the German culture of the day to a 'florid' line style.¹⁵

¹¹ Buijsen: 1989: 213.

¹² Wood, 1993: 9.

¹³ Wood, 1993: 23.

¹⁴ Wood, 1993: 27-29.

¹⁵ Baxandall, 1980: 143-52.

The scholarship of Falkenburg on Patinir, and Wood on Altdorfer, is important to this study not least because it attends to the significant role, in terms of meaning, played by the *form* of the juxtaposition between figure and landscape in a composition. In my analyses of Memling's paintings, I shall show that Memling manipulated the nature of this juxtaposition, but that his manipulations never resulted in one element totally dominant over, or subordinate to, the other. Patinir and Altdorfer, on the other hand, took the step of upturning the traditional dominance of figures, and in many cases banished them entirely from their compositions.

CASE STUDIES

Models of scholarship and significant works of landscape representation before Memling

In contrast to the scholarship of Falkenburg and Wood that examined independent landscapes, the research discussed here is concerned with landscape representation which, in the manner of Memling, is presented with figures. Works with a secular emphasis are discussed first.

1. Secular examples

a. Landscape imagery in the painted showpiece of a fourteenth-century, Italian republic:

***Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside (1337-40)*
by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c.1295-1348)**

The *Sala dei Nove* on the second floor of Siena's town hall, the Palazzo Pubblico, was the meeting place of the chief citizens' council of government (Fig. 11). This council, known as the Nine Governors and Defenders of the Commune and the People of Siena, ruled the republic from 1287-1355 and commissioned Lorenzetti to paint a fresco cycle

on the walls of its meeting place; records of payment indicate that the work was carried out between 1337 and 1340.¹⁶ Council members were elected every two months, mostly bankers and international merchants, with members of many of Siena's noble houses excluded and no evidence that a judge, notary or physician ever held office.¹⁷ Most members owned agricultural land (farms, vineyards and orchards) within the *contado*, but their holdings did not compare with those of the richest nobles who owned palaces, houses, shops and squares in the city and castles, farms and small communities in the *contado*.¹⁸

Entrance into the *Sala dei Nove* was either through a small door in the south-east corner of the room¹⁹ or a larger one on the western side of the north wall.²⁰ If council members used the larger door, the image to their left, on the east wall, would have been *The Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside* (Figs. 12, 14, 15, 17 & 18); to their right, on the west wall, its contrast the *Allegory of Bad Government and its Effects* (Fig. 16); and on the wall behind them the *Allegory of Good Government* (Fig. 13) with the Personification of Peace reclining, centre stage, gazing towards the *Effects of Good Government on the City and the Countryside*, an image of the condition of Siena and its *contado* were it to be under her dominance.²¹ The text of the scroll held

¹⁶ Starn & Partridge, 1992: 14.

¹⁷ Bowsky, 1962.

¹⁸ Bowsky, 1962: 376-77.

¹⁹ Starn & Partridge, 1992: 18.

²⁰ Polzer, 2002: 70.

²¹ Greenstein, 1988: 497.

by *Securitas* in the left-hand corner of the image reinforces the message of the fruits of peace.²²

Baxandall begins his discussion of the representation of Siena and its *contado* during peace with a list of ‘pictorial peculiarities’ that he suggests need addressing. Included in the list are: the painting’s “extraordinary and precocious maturity... specifically the success with which such a vast affair is articulated into one whole”, its hills that “have broken right away from the more usual spiky mountain formulas of the time” and “the assertiveness and emphasis with which the two halves of the picture are balanced”.²³

As noted earlier,²⁴ Baxandall was interested especially in the nature of the relationship between form and context of production, and his paper on the imagery in *The Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside* focuses on the awareness that an art historian should bring to any visual analysis that includes reference to social matters. On the one hand, the art historian should not look at “Lorenzetti’s picture for an unstructured collection of represented objects [as this] would be to ignore the kinds of organization that make it art and the special kinds of information art carries”, whilst on the other, s/he “can deploy... materials plucked out of the materials of social history... not society”.²⁵ Amongst factors of context that relate particularly to artistic skills and tradition he notes, for example, that the city wall holds a place within the artistic tradition of displays of foreshortening, and that the agricultural activities resonate with

²² Translated from the Latin: Let every man go about without fear, and let every man sow, while this lady rules the land, for she has taken the power from all the guilty. (Feldges-Henning, 1972:147)

²³ Baxandall, 1985: 33.

²⁴ See page 50.

²⁵ Baxandall, 1985: 42.

the labours of the months from book illuminations, although he prefers an emphasis on the influence of municipal imagery in this regard; he further notes that these traditions help only with particulars within the representation, not with their organisation across the picture plane.²⁶ As to the social facts of the day, Baxandall cites the mercantile and banking backgrounds of the IX and their economic dependence on the good will of Siena's workers; the strife between social classes and across city clans; and the difficulties with its rural territory, specifically peasant unrest and disruption to trade routes. For the city to thrive (and individual merchants to prosper) there was a need for social cohesion and peace within city, within countryside and across both; thus it fell to the IX to promote and ensure peace and prosperity. With this in mind, I consider that Lorenzetti's combination of texts, personifications and (what-seems-like) everyday scenes can be interpreted as the IX's 'mission statement'. In *The Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside*, Lorenzetti used his artistic skills to help produce what is really a record of aspiration of Siena's IX.

Polzer notes how Lorenzetti's image of the peaceful city and countryside of rolling hills includes enough of the particular to imply that they referenced Siena and its *contado*: in the city, the bell tower and dome of the cathedral and to the right of the countryside the port of Telamon identified by its name.²⁷ Norman supports Hans Belting in his view that Lorenzetti painted an ideal city though he included particulars like the city's position above rolling countryside and the reddish colour of its buildings to identify the

²⁶ For an overview of the representations of the labours of the months see Alexander, 1990: 437-38. From the twelfth century they became widespread: carved on the exterior of cathedrals and churches and painted in the calendars of Psalters and Books of Hours.

²⁷ Polzer, 2002: 70; Norman, 1997: 312 notes that the cathedral belongs to the part of the fresco that was repeated some twenty years later.

ideal with Siena.²⁸ Reference to a particular detail might also be the equality of space between city and countryside because activities in both commanded equal attention from the IX. Links are forged between these two equal spaces, between city and *contado*, by way of content and form. For example, sheep on the hillside appear in the town herded to market (Fig. 12), and light emerging from within the city spreads out and illuminates the countryside. What is important is that Lorenzetti's aerial perspective (despite its imperfections) and illusion of depth worked to provide the IX with a picture of the *whole* territory over which they had control. Upon this unifying panorama Lorenzetti then arranged detail from model books, detail chosen to project the IX's aspirations for Siena. For example, in the countryside, the rich enjoy hunting; travellers journey without fear of attack by brigands; and farmers sow, hoe, reap, thresh and plough in safety, thus a plentiful supply of food is promised (Figs. 12, 14 & 15). Greenstein suggests the influence of cosmological thought on the portrayal of activities (there are medallions above the picture with Venus, Mercury, the Moon and the seasons of spring and summer),²⁹ and Starn points to images in contemporary manuscripts as source material and to scenes showing the cycle of the seasons and crafts in reliefs on public buildings. Starn also shows how closely the scenes reflect aspects of the IX's responsibilities as recorded by their commissioners looking into the state of the city's fortifications and roads, for example, or into cases of travellers trying to avoid the payment of licences to transport goods.³⁰ He (with Partridge) presses the link between form and context of production a little further when he suggests that:

the great panorama... incorporates very different perspectives just as it integrates

²⁸ Norman, 1997: 313.

²⁹ Greenstein, 1988: 498-506.

³⁰ Starn, 1987: 23 & 26.

distinct social groups and activities. Here, if anywhere, we have a model of, and for, the genial accommodation of diversity envisaged by republican ideology.³¹

But there is no hint that contemporary viewers visualised such symbolism in the imagery. Early accounts support the view that the imagery is a visual record of the IX's aspiration to deliver peace. Around 1350 a Sienese chronicler called *Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside* on the east wall *la Pace (Peace)* and its counterpart on the west wall, *la Ghuerra (War)*.³² Later, in 1427, Saint Bernardino used the same titles in a sermon and so also Lorenzo Ghiberti writing between 1447 and 1455.³³ Saint Bernardino describes the frescos in detail in 1425; he says of the peace fresco:

Voltandomi a la pace, vego le mercanzie andare atorno; vego balli, vego racconciare le case; vego lavorare vigne e terre, seminare, andare a' bagni, a cavallo, vego andare le fanciulle a marito, vego le grege de le pecore etc. E vego impicato l'uomo per mantenere la santa giustizia. E per queste cose, ognuno sta in santa pace e concordia.³⁴

When I turn to peace, I see commercial activity, I see dances, I see houses being repaired; I see vineyards and fields being cultivated and sown, I see people going to the baths, on horses, I see girls going to marry, I see flocks of the sheep, etc. And I see a man being hanged in order to maintain holy justice. And for this [reason] everyone lives in holy peace and concord.³⁵

Ghiberti wrote:

Nel palagio di Siena è dipinto di sua mano la pace e lla guerra; ev vi quello [che] s'appartiene alla pace et come le mercatanzie vanno sicure con grandissime sicurtà e come le lasciano ne' boschi et come e' tornato per esse. E le storsioni [che] si fanno nella guerra stanno perfettamente.³⁶

³¹ Starn & Partridge, 1992: 50.

³² See Southard, 1980: 361 for the chronicler's report.

³³ Southard, 1980: 362.

³⁴ Debby, 2001: 275

³⁵ Debby, 2001: 276.

³⁶ Debby, 2001: 282 from Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I Commentarii*, ed. J. von Schlosser (Berlin, 1912).

In the palace of Siena are painted by his [Lorenzetti's] hand peace and war; and that which pertains to peace, how merchant caravans travel... in utmost safety, how they leave their goods in the woods, and how they return for them. Also the extortions made during war are perfectly indicated.³⁷

It is interesting that Ghiberti, the sculptor, makes no reference to the innovative presentation of landscape - Baxandall's "extraordinary and precocious maturity" - but both he and Saint Bernardino made use of it to construct narratives around the figures and their actions.

From this discussion of a selection of studies on Lorenzetti's *Effects of Good Government on the City and Countryside* it is clear that knowledge of the political, economical, social and cultural factors that moulded life in fourteenth-century Siena enriches the understanding of Lorenzetti's imagery. However, whilst it is relatively straightforward for scholars to find the models upon which Lorenzetti based his labourers, and documentation to support the view that Siena's leaders aspired to peace, it is not so easy to interpret exactly how context and imagery resonate with each other. This problem of the interpretation of visual metaphor exists for all artworks, not least in this study of Memling's imagery. I suggest, however, that in the case of the scholarship on Lorenzetti's imagery discussed above that the insightful view of Starn and Partridge - one developed out of social and political knowledge - that Lorenzetti's panorama presents "the genial accommodation of diversity envisaged by republican ideology",³⁸ is not invalid because contemporary comment tends to focus on the narrative elements of the work. What is crucial, therefore, to enhancing the plausibility of interpretations of

³⁷ Greenstein, 1988: 492.

³⁸ See note 31.

imagery, is awareness of their multivalent and inferential nature combined with detailed knowledge of the context of production.

b. Landscape imagery in early, illustrated versions of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* from late fourteenth-century, northern Italy

The research outlined here aims to understand the realistically-looking landscapes that appear in these manuscripts. As a consequence, discussion focuses on the development of landscape representation and, for this reason I include here other examples of life-like landscapes in manuscripts from the same period. For the *Tacuina*, the scholarship of Hoeniger is highlighted because she searches for an explanation of the imagery's form in the *combination* of function, patron desire and artistic skills. It is this combination that I explore in Memling's imagery.

Starn and Partridge see Lorenzetti's panorama of 'genre scenes' as a *Tacuinum Sanitatis* "painted large... a pictorial anthology, part description and part prescription, conducive to the health of the individual and the community".³⁹ Origins of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* lie in an eleventh-century Arabic treatise that aimed to give information on how to achieve good health. Content included the gathering and preparing of healthy foods, exercise, human emotions, seasons of the year, the four ages of life, geography and weather. Sixty years ago, Pächt drew attention to three illustrated versions of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* that survive from Northern Italy in which the presentations of plants, animals, working peasants and members of the nobility engaged in a variety of tasks like dancing, horse riding and picking roses in a garden amount to examples of early

³⁹ Starn & Partridge, 1992: 54.

landscape representation (Figs. 19a-f & 20a-f).⁴⁰ These versions are held in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Nouv. Acq. Lat. 1673), Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Series Nova 2644) and Rome (Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 4182). All three appear to be the first “Tables of Health” to be illuminated, and the illuminations dominate the text; most are scenes of human activity, including scenes set in exterior place.

The *Tacuinum* is not an illustrated herbal. Usually, botanicals are presented in herbals as individual portraits, but there are exceptions. For example, in a *Tractatus de herbis* type of herbal held at the British Library (Egerton MS 747) there are some scenes with figures in a ‘landscape’. Collins describes one such scene shown at the top of folio 9 in which a mineral used in the production of yellow dye is extracted from the earth; the figures appear in a landscape with trees that comprise oak leaves almost the size of the figures (Fig. 21). Illustrations like these had been copied and elaborated over a period of 200 years.⁴¹ Plants in a *Tacuinum Sanitatis* are shown most often in their natural environment, being grown, cultivated or harvested. Thus, in many scenes peasants may be represented taking part in their seasonal labours. Additionally, courtly figures may be shown engaged in a variety of activities thought to promote healthy living. All the illustrations, therefore, help “to present health information for the elite, by localizing each topic within an idealized version of court society, by toning down the medical content, and by spicing up, here and there, the secular flavour of the text”.⁴²

⁴⁰ Pächt, 1950: 35-37.

⁴¹ Collins, 2000: 252.

⁴² Hoeniger, 2006: 51.

The three *Tacuina* under discussion were commissioned probably by Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351-1402), Count of Milan, or by members of the nobility associated with his court, and made in the workshop of Giovannino dei Grassi. Hoeniger argues that the works were not commissioned as works of medical science (there were numerous examples of these in the Count's library), but as works of art to be enjoyed by the Count and his friends.⁴³ A feature that may have appealed to members of this elite group was the representation of spaces and activities with which they were familiar on their estates. Hoeniger suggests further that the skills of the artists, Visconti's desire to own and/or give as presents opulent manuscripts and the fact that the *Tacuinum* itself had never before been illustrated were the elements that combined to create the context in which a new type of pictorial genre was able to emerge (but one already writ large almost 200 miles away on the walls of the *Sala dei Nove*, Siena).⁴⁴ The artists had only text to work with, so where the adaptation of available models was not an option, they had to create new visual models. As to the application and/or adaption of the traditional, they were schooled in dei Grassi's naturalistic portrayal of animals and fashionable courtly figures, and the labours of the months were useful to them in portraying, for example, the harvesting of wheat - by changing one labourer to several and placing them in a field, the picture was transformed to a scene on a noble estate. Biblical sources would have been used, too, with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden providing inspiration for the garden imagery.⁴⁵ A herbal of the type *Tractatus de herbis* may have been a source for some imagery, as a copy was held in Visconti's library, and so also the treatise *Historia plantarum* which was being produced in the workshop at the same time and

⁴³ Hoeniger, 2006: 57.

⁴⁴ Hoeniger, 2006: 65.

⁴⁵ Withoft, 1978: 52.

contained over 600 illustrations of plants and animals; the cherry and pine trees and the squash, melons, marjoram and turnips in the Paris and Rome versions of the *Tacuinum* are similar to those found in these two works. These sources seem to be responsible for the least natural representations; for example, with the pine representation its needles and cones are disproportionate to the size of the tree. Where the figures in *Tacuina* scenes are of a courtly disposition, it is likely that the source of inspiration came from pictures from courtly love stories, for example, the illuminations in which noble men and women are shown picking roses in a garden and musicians playing instruments outside (Figs. 20a-c).

In addition to the imagery from courtly love stories, hunting manifestos may have provided models for certain life-like, individual features, but not for ideas on how to set the action of figures within an appropriate environment. Starn and Partridge note, for example, how the mounted falconer in Lorenzetti's peaceful countryside is very similar to an image on folio 103r of Frederick II's *De arte venandi cum avibus*.⁴⁶ Pächt suggested that the life-like representations of the birds (the quarry) in Frederick's manuscript came out of practical necessity with "the rest, figures, buildings, rocks, water, etc [being] the same abbreviated, schematic formulas as can be found in any other contemporary painting". Perhaps reasons of practical necessity could be applied, also, to the form of some of the features in the illuminations in Gaston Phoebus' handbook on hunting: *Livre de chasse* (1387-89). For example, one illumination shows the hunters examining the faeces of a deer (Fig. 22), a necessary action for animal trackers, and another one depicts the hunting dogs very large in comparison with their handlers (Fig.

⁴⁶ Starn & Partridge, 1992: 55, 76 & 77.

23); knowing which type of dog to use, and when, were skills hunters had to learn. In both these illuminations, attention has been given to placing particular detail within landscape, but not to matching scale of figures to scale of landscape features. This contrasts with Lorenzetti's imagery and in most of the illuminations of the Count of Milan's *Tacuina*.

c. Landscape imagery on the walls of a prince-bishop's residence: the frescos of the *Torre dell'Aquila, Castello del Buonconsiglio, Trento (1391-1407)*

An inventory (1410) of the property stolen from George of Liechtenstein, prince-bishop of Trent, shows that the copy of the illustrated *Tacuinum Sanitatis* now held in Vienna was once owned by this prince bishop.⁴⁷ This is a significant fact because the frescos on the walls of the second floor of the *Torre dell'Aquila* depict the labours of the months in the genre-type manner of the *Tacuinum Sanitatis* (Figs. 24a-f). Booton describes the paintings as grand and innovative, as the combination of two pictorial traditions (the labours of the month and nobles engaged in leisure activities), but with the expansive landscapes and naturalistic detail making them rare for the period. In comparison with other painted mural decoration in castles of the region at that time, Booton suggests that "none compare with the compositional invention, the rich, evocative settings, and the lively details of courtly refinement and agrarian implements".⁴⁸ I suggest that the innovative and grand appearance of these painted frescos indicates that the imagery played a part in fulfilling George's desire to convey his supremacy in the region.

⁴⁷ Booton, 1995: 244-45.

⁴⁸ Booton, 1995: 255.

Before being expelled from Trento after a citizens' uprising in 1407, George of Liechtenstein took measures to enhance the prince-bishopric status of the Principality of Trento.⁴⁹ In addition to territorial annexations, he embarked on a building programme in Trento, with the jewel of this programme being the transformation of the *Torre dell'Aquila* into elegant living quarters. The tower, set in the curtain wall above the gate in the western part of the city, was a little distance from the reception rooms of the castle itself, but George had a covered passageway built which led visitors from the castle to the tower;⁵⁰ this supports the view that George was keen to show off his painted walls. The images on the walls of the tower (the structure which in itself was a thrusting manifestation of the prince's power in the principality)⁵¹ were part of a display mechanism designed to enhance the religious and temporal power of their owner. As with the viewers of the Count of Milan's *Tacuinum* manuscripts, the audience of the frescos would have been from the noble and ecclesiastical elite in society so they are likely to have related well to the scenes they saw. It is interesting to note that the peasant labours traditionally associated with the months of the year are not the focus in every narrative scene. For example, in the January scene courtly figures are seen playing snowball outside an imposing castle whilst peasants exercise dogs on leads (Fig. 24a); for July a young nobleman proposes to his love in the foreground of a scene which includes peasants raking in hay (Fig. 24d); and for September a noble party sets off to hunt falcons whilst peasants with oxen plough fields in the distance (Fig. 24f).

⁴⁹ For details see Booton, 1995: 243.

⁵⁰ Plesch, 2002: note 7, page 190.

⁵¹ The tower had once belonged to the town and was confiscated by George (Booton, 1995: 255).

An emphasis on various noble activities across the year can also be found in medieval poetry. Folgore da San Geminiano (1220-1332) dedicated twelve sonnets on the seasons of the year to a group of Sienese noblemen and in each month the detailed description refers to the activities they enjoy and the food they eat. It can be seen from the translated excerpts below that it is the social activities of the nobility that give form to the representation of interior and exterior spaces.

For January I give you vests of skins,
And mighty fires in hall, and torches lit...
Ye'll fling soft handfuls of fair white snow
Among the damsels standing round, in play...

In February I give you gallant sport
Of harts and hinds and great wild boars...

I give you meadow-lands in April, fair
With over-growth of beautiful green grass;
There among fountains the glad hours shall pass,
And pleasant ladies bring you solace there...

In June I give you a close-wooded fell,
With crowns of thicket coil'd about its head,
With thirty villas twelve times turreted,
All girdling round a little citadel;
And in the midst a springhead and fair well
With thousand conduits branch'd and shining speed,
Wounding the garden and the tender mead,
Yet to the freshen'd grass acceptable.
And lemons, citrons, dates, and oranges,
And all the fruits, whose savour is most rare,
Shall shine without the shadow of your trees;
And every one shall be a lover there;
Until you life, so fill'd with courtesies,
Throughout the world be counted debonair.⁵²

Pächt suggests that scenes like these of noble activity during particular seasons - and as presented visually on leaves of the illustrated *Tacuina* and walls of the *Torre dell'Aquila*

⁵² Rosetti, 1861: 102-15.

- give landscape a 'self-centredness' because of emphasis on environment during a particular season.⁵³ But it is debateable that this 'self-centredness' emerged directly as a result of a noble elite being interested in landscape *per se*. I suggest - and I shall suggest this for Memling also - it is more likely that the imagery's commissioners were interested in such scenes because they presented narratives of their lives at a particular time in a particular place.

d. Gardens as a landscape form

Folgore's sonnets show that ideas of courtly romance played a part in some noble activities. Such ideas appear in the visual arts at this time, also, for example the painted murals (1340-1360) at the top of the central tower of the Castle of Sabbionara, d'Avio which create the 'Chamber of Love'. The theme of courtly love⁵⁴ makes use of garden imagery and for this reason it plays a significant role in the development of representations of landscape, with the imagery from gardens of the elite, the *Hortus Conclusus* and the Garden of Paradise being closely related.⁵⁵

The English word 'Paradise' derives from the Old Persian word *pairidaeza* which was used to refer to a walled garden; such tracts of cultivated land were found often in the midst of arid soils and included groves of trees and a variety of water features like canals, waterfalls and fountains, with water being "the central and most essential

⁵³ Pächt, 1950: 37-38.

⁵⁴ Bumke, 1991: 360-77. Also Weigert, 2008, note 26, for references on the courtly love tradition.

⁵⁵ See A. Winston-Allen, 1997: Ch. 4, for brief discussion of secular love gardens and Marian iconography.

element in the Persian garden".⁵⁶ This style of enclosed garden was adopted by the Church Fathers for the *Hortus Conclusus* of Mary, a symbol of her purity and beauty and, as the new Eve, this garden was her Paradise.⁵⁷ *Garden of Paradise*, c.1410, by the Master of the Paradise Garden (Fig. 25) and *Virgin and Child in a Garden*, c.1410, by an unknown German Master (Fig. 26), are early examples of this theme painted on panel. In the former, the realistic-looking flowers are organised with grasses, leaves and trees to create a garden environment, but as it is unlikely each flowered at the same time, decisions to include them in the landscape must relate to Christian symbolism attached to them.⁵⁸ The large red rose to Mary's right in the second may be a reference to the Christ Child's future martyrdom; if it had been white, it would more likely have been viewed as a symbol of Mary's purity.⁵⁹

Having briefly referenced how garden imagery played an important role in the development of landscape imagery, I consider here its presentation in tapestries, most especially the imagery in six tapestries that depict noble life and studied by Weigert.⁶⁰ Weigert's emphasis is on understanding contemporary reception, most especially in terms of the architectural function of the tapestries. In my analysis of Memling's landscapes, the viewing context in terms of their physical display space is left unconsidered, but I take into account the significant fact that the responses of the contemporary viewers of Memling's landscapes were honed, in part, by viewers' experiences and expectations of landscape representation.

⁵⁶ Moynihan, 1980: 1 & 5.

⁵⁷ See note 30, Chapter Two.

⁵⁸ See also note 65, Chapter Two.

⁵⁹ Hall, 1974: 268.

⁶⁰ Weigert, 2008.

Representations of flowers, trees and leaves appear in tapestries from before the reign of Charles V of France (1364-80) and persisted until the early sixteenth century.⁶¹ Often, heraldic motifs were included with the thick flora. However, during the time of Charles V and his brothers, sets of large wall hangings with figures became popular amongst members of the aristocracy, rich nobles and ecclesiastics. Each tapestry in a set would form part of a narrative cycle, with Biblical stories and ancient myths being popular themes. Scenes of courtly life, especially those referring to courtly love, and set in environments abounding with flora and fauna, were popular for several decades. For example, *Promenade d'amoureux* (Fig. 27) and *Le concert* (Fig. 28), are fragments from an early cycle made in Arras at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and the six tapestries from *The Lady and the Unicorn* cycle (Figs. 29 & 30), and the six from *Seigniorial Life* (Figs. 31 & 32), are examples of early sixteenth-century works.

Weigert studied the six tapestries of *Seigniorial Life*,⁶² rare survivors of a late thick flora (*millefleurs*) set. She argues that previous scholarship had focussed on the subject matter of the tapestries, although not how “the Cluny series was designed to inspire in the viewer a historically specific experience of love” and had ignored the role played by their materiality and potential for mobility.⁶³ Weigert’s emphasis is on understanding contemporary reception. Building on Warburg’s scholarship about the architectural function of a set of tapestries, Weigert begins by noting how some contemporary documents describe *chambres*⁶⁴ by the theme of their wall hangings, and that “rather

⁶¹ Delmarcel, 1999: 25.

⁶² Weigert, 2008: 321, a title *Scenes from Noble Life* was given to the tapestries in 1914.

⁶³ Weigert, 2008: 323.

⁶⁴ Rooms to which the nobility retreated for relaxation, not banqueting halls.

than just decorating an existing space, tapestries were seen as creating new ones... [with] the owner of the tapestry set [able to] create an intimate, personalised space in different locations or at different times".⁶⁵ Weigert suggests viewers would have seen the gardens in this set as "an environment extending beyond the textured walls",⁶⁶ and at the same time would have felt enclosed within such an environment because on every wall hung a tapestry. Weigert further suggests that it is not simply that amorous activities took place in these enclosed gardens, but that "being surrounded by the garden represents the very state of love that manifests itself through the soul's encounter with the sensual world".⁶⁷ I suggest the *millefleurs* design works well in stimulating a range of senses. Interestingly, Weigert notes how the visual focus on surface pattern tends to prevent the viewer's entry into the garden (in his/her imagination) and she suggests that this in turn prompts awareness of the materiality of the fabric. She sees this experience of the viewers, many of whom were likely to be rich merchants and bankers at this time, as providing a visual metaphor for the changes within the social-class structure of the day. Members of the trading elite were able to buy noble status and imitate the buying choices that the aristocracy and most powerful of nobles once made, but the world to which they aspired, the noble life of the past, no longer existed: "he or she was free to wander before the garden but not to enter or inhabit it".⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Weigert, 2008: 326.

⁶⁶ Weigert, 2008: 326

⁶⁷ Weigert, 2008: 330.

⁶⁸ Weigert, 2008: 334.

Weigert's scholarship is important to this study, not only because of a concern with exploration of landscape imagery, but because it is a reminder that there are meanings to be found associated with the contemporary reception of an image.

2. Religious examples

The link noted above between the imagery of secular gardens and the *hortus conclusus* of Mary highlights the fact that it is unwise to separate the secular from the religious in a consideration of the imagery in medieval works. However, Buettner refers to a growing disconnection between the two. In her paper on manuscripts in late-medieval courtly society, she suggests a situation in which many images by the late Middle Ages became “disconnected from a religious framework and recast, at least partially, into autonomous visual territories”, with the range of subject matter in manuscripts playing a significant role in the process.⁶⁹ I suggest that also to be considered is the fact that within religious works there is always likely to be imagery that relates to the non-religious experiences of a viewer's world.

a. Landscape imagery in the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean, Duke of Berry (left unfinished in 1416)

Weigert suggests that “the garden expanse in the Cluny series recalls an earlier time when its viewers mastered the land and its workers”.⁷⁰ Such a time is reflected in the imagery of the calendar pages of the *Très Riches Heures* (MS 65, Musée Condé, Chantilly), which offers glimpses into the world of aristocratic luxury of Jean, Duke of Berry (1340-1416), the third son of Jean le Bon, King of France, or perhaps more

⁶⁹ Buettner, 1992: 90.

⁷⁰ Weigert, 2008: 334.

accurately into the world as the Duke preferred it to be seen (Figs. 33a-l).⁷¹ Jean, the commissioner of the manuscript was an aristocrat who made heavy taxation demands,⁷² was a builder of châteaux and a collector of luxurious works. In 1881 Léopold Delisle identified the three eldest Limbourg brothers as illuminators of the *Très Riches Heures*,⁷³ but the brothers died in 1416, the same year as Jean, and between 1482 and 1489 the illuminations were completed by Jean Colombe for Duke Charles of Savoy.⁷⁴

Alexander's scholarship addresses the illuminations of the calendar pages in the *Très Riches Heures*. Three images - January, April and May (Figs. 33a-c) - present narratives from courtly life; for example, in the illumination for April, fashionably dressed nobles watch the betrothal of a couple. In the hunting scenes for August and December, the noble life-style continues, but peasant activity is included: for August nobles are shown in the foreground on horseback, carrying falcons, whilst in the background there are peasants working in the fields and swimming (Fig. 33d), and for December servants are shown dealing with the kill of a boar hunt, an aristocratic pastime (Fig. 33e).⁷⁵ The March, June, July, September and October (Figs. 33f-j) illuminations, focus on peasant labour; here, workers are engaged in the seasonal occupations of the land, land adjacent to one of the Duke's châteaux. The illumination for February shows some peasants working, but there is no château and they appear to

⁷¹ See Husband, 2008: 11-31 for an overview of the life and patronage of the Duke of Berry.

⁷² Alexander, 1990: 440.

⁷³ Camille, 1990: 81.

⁷⁴ A most important selection of recent scholarship on the Limbourgs is presented in Dücker and Roelofs, 2009, papers from a conference convened in conjunction with the exhibition *The Limbourg Brothers, Nijmegen, Masters at the French Court 1400-1416*. See Husband, 2008: 33-45 for an overview and Schmidt, 1999: 28-35 for the Limbourgs' work in relation to examples of Italian art. Meiss, 1974: 66-101, includes detail of records of the Limbourgs.

⁷⁵ See Perkinson, 2009, on the issue of identifying *particular* figures and events in the Duke's life as represented in the *Très Riches Heures*.

be in their own village (Fig. 33k), and that for November, the only calendar illumination painted by Colombe, shows a peasant with pigs during the acorn harvest (Fig. 33L).

Alexander's focus is on the "ways in which the Limbourgs alter the normal cycle [of the labours of the month], since these alterations will be suggestive signs of their own and the patron's ideology" and argues that the "scenes are constructs... not to be seen, for all their "realism", as neutral".⁷⁶ His focus is not on the landscape *per se*, but on the social status of the people within the landscape, and he begins with noting how the representations of the Duke's châteaux function to convey both his wealth and his military power.⁷⁷ Perkinson moves beyond this viewpoint on the châteaux.⁷⁸ He builds on Buettner's scholarship on the tradition of gift-giving at the Valois Court where she refers to the quality of *estrangeté* in objects - "an object's visual and conceptual dexterity, its ability to flatter the recipient's wit".⁷⁹ Perkinson shows first that naturalism in portraits - and by extension 'architectural portraits' - was not necessarily preferred over symbolic forms of representation at this time, and that much depended on the taste of the *giver*. Gifts were a demonstration of loyalty to the recipient and what was important was finding ways to demonstrate loyalty through the type and nature of the gift. The quality of *estrangeté* would have been of particular importance when the giver was of a lower social order and lacking in wealth. The closely-observed detail of the Duke of Berry's residences could therefore be interpreted as the Limbourg brothers'

⁷⁶ Alexander, 1990: 438.

⁷⁷ Alexander, 1990: 440-41. March, Château de Lusignan; April, Château de Dourdan (or Pierrefonds); May/June, Palais de la Cité, Paris; July, Château du Clain, Poitiers; August, Château d'Étampes; September, Château de Saumer; October, the Louvre, Paris (view from Hôtel de Nesle; and December, Château de Vincennes.

⁷⁸ Perkinson, 2009.

⁷⁹ Buettner, 2001: 606.

desire to be seen as having a close and loyal relationship with their patron: they were so close to Jean that they knew he held his châteaux dear, and, consequently, it was likely that an accurate, painted replica would please him greatly, as would the application of their superb creative skills to the task of making such a replica. The fact that the Limbourgs were keen to demonstrate their loyalty and provide the Duke with gifts that possessed *estrangeté* is shown in the choice of their New Year's gift in 1411; this was a counterfeit book made of wood block covered by white velvet with a clasp with the Duke's arms.⁸⁰

The Duke of Berry certainly paid great attention to the ownership of châteaux which is understandable in light of his so-often itinerant lifestyle during decades of infighting between members of the French aristocracy. At one point he was forced to leave Paris from April 1410 to November 1412 and during this time his Hôtel de Nesle was looted and another of his residences in Paris, Bicêtre, was destroyed by fire.⁸¹ According to the court historian, Jean Froissart, one of the Duke's favourite châteaux was that at Mehun-sur-Yèvre,⁸² which is accurately and meticulously detailed on folio 161v of the *Très Riches Heures* the image illustrating the text for the first Sunday in Lent, the *Temptation of Christ*. (Fig. 34).⁸³ In this illumination, two temptations are clearly presented: the Devil tempting Jesus to turn stones into bread, and his promise to give Jesus, after leading him up a mountain, all the kingdoms of the world if he bowed down before him. Meiss suggests that the remaining temptation, in which the Devil tells Jesus

⁸⁰ Camille, 1990: 107.

⁸¹ Andrews, 2002: 31.

⁸² Husband, 2008: 17.

⁸³ Meiss, 1974: 161-62.

to prove he is the Son of God by throwing himself off the Temple's pinnacle, is inferred by the position of Christ close to the highest tower of the château.⁸⁴ A most striking aspect of the illumination is the dominance of the château in relation to the figures of Christ and the Devil. An initial reaction to this compositional feature is that the Duke's identity - which is reinforced by the presence of his arms and his emblems of the swan and lion - takes precedence over the detail of events in Christ's life. Meiss, however, suggests an alternative interpretation and one that seems appropriate in the context of Ash Wednesday, the day when the late-medieval devotee was required to fast, repent and confess sins. By 1414 the Duke had given the château at Mehun to the dauphin, so perhaps this image alluded to the renunciation of a material possession that the Duke had held most dear.

An innovative factor that adds to the impact of the grand images of the Duke's châteaux and accompanying estate lands in the calendar pages of the *Très Riches Heures* is their full-page presentation. This contrasts with the labours of the months in *Les Belles Heures*, an earlier work by the Limbourg brothers.⁸⁵ On the calendar pages of *Les Belles Heures*, the signs of the zodiac are shown at the bottom of the page and the labours of the month (with usually one worker) at the top, all set within small, quatrefoil-shaped frames (Figs. 35a-b). Although there are elements of landscape representation within the occupation scenes of *Les Belles Heures* (in the July scene, for example, two peasants stand in a field binding sheaves of wheat together), the Hours' illuminations do not possess the same innovative qualities as those in the calendar of the

⁸⁴ Meiss, 1974: 162. See Matthew 4: 1-10 and Luke 4: 1-13, Douay-Rheims Bible, for the temptations.

⁸⁵ See Husband, 2008, for *Les Belles Heures*.

Très Riches Heures. In the latter there are three distinctly new features: their full size, their presentation of a whole range of people within the landscape and their inclusion of features within that landscape that unambiguously relate to the owner of the manuscript. I suggest these “true-to-life” images of external environment come out of a creative process working to satisfy an aristocrat likely to have been keen on finding ways - including images in manuscripts used for religious devotions - to project his power over place and community. Mindful of Perkinson’s interpretation that their form resonates with the aspirations of the Limbourg brothers, they convey also “the concept of peaceful, well ordered land-use, involving a rational division of labour... secured by a central authority that governs the whole”.⁸⁶ Like Giangaleazzo Visconti, Jean, Duke of Berry would have shown his manuscript to close friends and associates. Not only does it present the Duke as a religious man and the owner of an innovative and luxurious commodity, but also the ‘accurate’ detail of each château would have carried the signifiers attached to the real-life counterpart. Furthermore, the imagery functioned not only to project the Duke’s power, authority and wealth in his own time, but also to record it for posterity.

Following on from the analyses of Lorenzetti’s imagery, and that of the *Tacuina*, this exploration of the Limbourgs reinforces the view - and one which I adopt in this investigation of Memling - that the appearance of imagery comes out of the artistic skill to adapt and innovate in order to please and accommodate the specific wishes of their patrons, and to take account of experiences and expectations of the wider contemporary community. An aim of these particular patrons appears to be one of gaining possession

⁸⁶ Warnke, 1994: 44.

of visual images that provide a record of the relationship they had - or wished to have - with the land and communities over which they had control. In Chapter Four, I argue that the sitters in Memling's portraits-with-landscape have a similar aim.

b. Sacred themes and the use of local, familiar landscape forms

In this section, I discuss religious images from both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries where landscape forms betray an influence of cultural norms, including the expectation that scenery in Biblical narrative will look familiar. This part does not include detailed interpretation of the images by scholars, but it is a necessary precursor to the final item in which I address the distinctive case of the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444), where the mimetic accuracy of landscape forms moves the imagery of Biblical narrative beyond the use of generic, familiar forms so as to appropriate those with the potential to allude to Church politics of the day.

I suggest that the Biblical event of the flight into Egypt is significant in the development of landscape representation, with the journeying theme providing artists with the opportunity to experiment with the choice and organisation of landscape features. In Italy, Gentile da Fabriano reproduced in his *Flight into Egypt* (Fig. 36) a northern Italian countryside through which the holy trio travelled. *Flight into Egypt* is the central scene of the *predella* to the *Adoration of the Magi Altarpiece*, 1423 (Fig. 37). In the scene, the dark side of barren hills seems to envelop the figures as they follow a stony track to the safety of a countryside lit up by the rays of the sun. Gentile carefully reproduces the effects of light to create mood, with lightness associated with hope, and darkness with danger. In contrast, the illuminator of the *Brussels Hours* (c.1400), possibly by

Jacquemart de Hesdin, chooses the wintry scenery of a northern land to convey a sense of the harsh realities that Mary and Joseph faced as they left their homeland to escape Herod's command. Mary holds Jesus closely to the warmth of her body as she travels through a land where trees are bare of leaves and fields are covered with frost (Fig. 38). Each painting shows how the physical location of its artist and audience has influenced the choice and organisation of landscape features; and with different physical locations (and at different times in history) come different cultural experiences and expectations. For example, in Italian paintings that present the life-style of hermits who have rejected the luxuries of civilisation to focus on a personal relationship with God, the scenery is extremely bleak. Penitential landscapes, like that in *Thebaid* (c.1410) by Gherardo di Jacopo Starnina (Fig. 39), do not appear in Northern art.⁸⁷ Inspiration for this type of scenery is likely to be rooted in ideas about the early Church Fathers who travelled into the bleak areas of northern Africa to meditate upon the Scriptures far away from the distractions of the material world. The *Legends of the Anchorites*, painted after 1350 (Fig. 40) and one of the frescos at Campo Santo, Pisa, is very similar to Starnina's composition. Both works contrast with *St John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (Fig. 41) painted by Geertgen tot Sin Jans in the North many years later between 1490 and 1495. In this image, St John is shown alone, contemplating the sacrifice of the Lamb of God in the most idyllic of surroundings: rolling, green hummocks of land, a gently rippling stream, trees in full leaf, ferns and flowers, birds and animals. Decker argues that this image functioned as an aid to spiritual meditation at a time when the idea was prevalent that the soul was an 'inner space', an inner space that could be likened metaphorically to a garden that needed tending, except that it was devotions that tended a soul and not

⁸⁷ See Lillie, 2007: note 86, page 40, for scholarship on paintings with the Thebaid theme.

digging and raking.⁸⁸ He suggests “the lush grounds... offered viewers an image of the saint’s inner wilderness transformed into paradise through spiritual exercises...”⁸⁹ Decker’s interpretation of form in terms of symbolism is a pertinent reminder that there needs to be caution on placing too much emphasis on the notion that geographical location and/or cultural expectations determine difference. As Lillie concludes in her examination of Fiesole, “far from being mutually exclusive terms, the *locus amoenus* and the penitential landscape are interdependent... both were contemplative modes that entailed a retreat from the city to engage in virtuous forms of leisure in order to reach a higher intellectual and/or spiritual level of existence”.⁹⁰ For Memling, the admiration of Flemish landscapes is likely to have played a part in the enthusiasm for his portraits-with-landscapes amongst Italian patrons and artists, but as I will show, such an admiration, borne out of the appeal of unfamiliarity and difference, is unlikely to have been as significant as other factors.

c. The *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444) by Konrad Witz

Decker’s approach to the landscape imagery of *St John the Baptist in the Wilderness* is similar to that adopted by Smith in her analysis of the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* in the sense that both scholars aim to unravel meanings in the relationship between landscape appearance and key ‘happenings’ in the sphere of religion.⁹¹ For Decker, the concern was the practices of spiritual devotion, for Smith it was the politics of the Church at its highest level.

⁸⁸ See also Falkenburg, 2001, in which he discusses vernacular texts that helped devotees give shape and form to their inner being. Both house and garden metaphors were popular.

⁸⁹ Decker, 2007: 310.

⁹⁰ Lillie, 2007: 44.

⁹¹ Smith, 1970.

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes (Figs. 42 & 43a) was painted about twenty years after Gentile's *Flight into Egypt* and, like Gentile, Witz depicted a Biblical event in a location far away from that in which it originally took place. Witz, however, took a further step and reproduced in paint a real-world location so accurately that it is possible to work out the spot on Lake Geneva on which he stood, five centuries ago, when he designed the setting for the composition. *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, with its completion date (1444) and the artist's name (*conradus sapientis*) on its lower frame, is an exterior panel of an altarpiece made for the Cathedral of St Peter, Geneva, the cathedral from which all the altarpieces, statues and paintings were removed/destroyed less than a century later, and in which John Calvin would preach. The central panel of Witz's altarpiece is not extant.⁹²

The Biblical scene that Witz represents in the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* is made up of two events in the lives of Christ and Peter. The first refers to the event recorded in Matthew 14: 21-33 where, following a storm, Peter walks on the waters of Galilee from his boat to Jesus standing on the shore. The second event is the moment recorded in John 21: 1-14 where the resurrected Christ appeared to Peter and five disciples.⁹³ The men had been fishing all night, had caught no fish, and Christ told them to cast their net on the right-hand side of the boat. When they did, they netted 153 fish without any damage to the net. In the painting, a large figure of Christ stands directly in line with the Môle Pointu, the top of which is blanketed by a cloud; this may be a reference to the

⁹² See Deuchler, 1985: 7 for documents on biography of Witz; 8-9 for history of the altarpiece; and 10 for description of the scenery in *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*.

⁹³ Smith, 1970: 150-51 & Deuchler, 1985: 10-11.

location where Christ ascended into heaven following his Resurrection.⁹⁴ These events in which Christ's relationship with Peter is highlighted take place by Lake Geneva (Lake Léman), in the region where the new pope, Felix V, was elected. To the right is the Petit Salève and in the distance the snow-clad Mont Blanc. The countryside looks well-cared for and peaceful, one across which riders bearing the papal colours of Felix V can travel safely.⁹⁵

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes was completed by Witz, a contemporary of van Eyck, during a tumultuous time in the history of the Church. An Ecumenical Council of the Church convened at Basel in the spring of 1431 became dominated by a dispute over who was the supreme church authority: the Pope or the Council.⁹⁶ The Pope in Rome at the time, Pope Eugenius, saw himself as the direct successor to St Peter and based his authority on the words of Christ: "And I say unto thee: That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church..."⁹⁷ whereas many Council members, including Nicholas de Cusa, argued that Peter was no more important than other disciples.⁹⁸ The upshot of the disagreement was that Pope Eugenius moved the Council to Ferrara and later Florence, but not many Council members supported him, and in 1439 they elected a new pope. The antipope Felix V was the former first Duke of Savoy, Amadeus VIII.

Amadeus had been a popular and successful ruler of Savoy, a territory that stretched from the Jura to the shores of the Mediterranean, but after his wife's death he handed the

⁹⁴ Hagen & Hagen, 2002: 43.

⁹⁵ For description and identification of landscape features see Haagen & Haagen, 2002, and Deuchler, 1985: 10-12.

⁹⁶ Smith, 1970: 152 and Deuchler, 1985: 8.

⁹⁷ Matthew 16: 18, Douay-Rheims Bible.

⁹⁸ Smith, 1970: 152 gives a translation of a treatise written by de Cusa in 1433.

day-to-day running of the country over to his son and retired to live a life of contemplation at Ripaille on the shores of Lake of Geneva.⁹⁹ Geneva and its environs at this time were controlled by a governor appointed by the Duke of Savoy, and part of his fortress can be seen to the right of Witz's picture. Amadeus was not antipope for long - he resigned in 1449. He had tried to maintain his authority by appointing numerous cardinals, but he received little international support.

One of the bishops that Amadeus made cardinal was the Bishop of St Peter's Cathedral, Geneva, François de Mies (Cardinal of St Marcel). It may be that de Mies was a commissioner of Witz's altarpiece and that he is represented in the picture on the right interior panel (Fig. 33d).¹⁰⁰ De Meis is documented as trying to improve the educational standards of pastors in his diocese,¹⁰¹ so it is likely that his intellect and knowledge of doctrinal treatises played their part in the iconography of the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* together with his loyalty to the antipope Felix and the political circumstances of the time.¹⁰² Deuchler proposes multiple commissioners: Amadeus as the chief commissioner, with support from de Meis and one Bartolomeo Vitelleschi. Vitelleschi had fled to Savoy for safety (his uncle had been charged with treason against the pope in Rome and murdered) and Amadeus appointed him assistant to Cardinal de Meis, later making him a cardinal. Deuchler builds on Smith's scholarship and argues that in the panel that depicts St Peter presenting the patron to the Virgin, it is plausible to interpret the scene as a visual expression of St Peter supporting his successor and rightful

⁹⁹ www.newadvent.org.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, 1970: 152.

¹⁰¹ Tentler, 1977: 353.

¹⁰² Smith, 1970: 154. A cathedral account dated February 20th, 1444, which authorises payment to masters for painting a work for the Cardinal of St Marcel, may refer to the *Altarpiece of St Peter*.

claimant of the papal tiara i.e. Amadeus (although he is not shown to possess it already).¹⁰³

In her analysis of Witz's imagery, Smith argues that the artist's mimetic detail carries with it symbolic meanings that relate directly to the Church politics being played out in Geneva at the time. In other words, the composition offers meanings specific to events in both the Bible and the contemporary world. In relation to the former, the placement of the Biblical event on the shores of Lake Geneva conveys the universality of the Christian message. In relation to the latter, a conclusion that can be drawn is that this land, for so long in the capable hands of Amadeus before he was elected pope (and therefore peaceful and productive), is the place that Christ chose to appear to his disciples and where he told Peter to feed his sheep (John 21: 17). In other words, Felix V was the rightful pope, he followed in the footsteps of Peter, the disciple chosen by Christ to carry on his work on earth. Further doctrinal points are embedded in the imagery. For example, Smith notes how some of the symbolic language expressed visually is to be found also in verbal form in the communications between Council members and Rome, and cites the fact that the Archbishop of Palermo, writing in support of Eugenius, likens the process of avoiding a schism to that of sailing safely into port in the boat of St Peter.¹⁰⁴ So, if the boat is taken as a reference to the Church, and the space in this boat is shared between Peter and five disciples, then the image would seem to refer to the Council's view that no one person in the Church is more important than anyone else.

¹⁰³ Deuchler, 1985: 9-10 & 12.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, 1970: 153.

Witz is highly skilled in representing naturalistic effects in paint, particularly as shown in his attention to the effects of refraction and reflection of light in water, but it would seem that the most significant factor in the creation of such a life-like picture - life-like in terms of copying individual features in the real world and placing them in their real-world locations - comes out of Felix's supporters wishing to promote the rightfulness of his papal appointment. Not only does the peacefulness of the countryside with its riders holding Amadeus' colours support this view, but so also the contrasting style of the other paintings from the wing panels (Figs. 43b-d).¹⁰⁵ This contrast lends weight to the notion that there is significant meaning to be found in the very realism of the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes*.

In these reflections on meaning, it is important to remember that the altarpiece, with its emphasis on the life of St Peter, was made for a cathedral dedicated to St Peter-in-Chains.¹⁰⁶ The fact that the imagery in one or more panels includes references to a moment of crisis in the Church does not exclude the commissioners' desire to honour the patron saint of the cathedral through the portrayal of events in his life.

THE CASE STUDIES: Review and implications

These case studies of scholarship have shown how exploration of contemporary context has the potential to enrich understanding of the forms of imagery chosen by artists and their patrons. At the same time they have highlighted an issue that accompanies this

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 1970: 150 contrasts the individualised depiction of the landscape with the generalised nature of the landscapes in Witz's *St Christopher* at Basel and his *Crucifixion* in Berlin.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, 1970: 151. Parts of St Peter's chains formed the Cathedral's most prized relic (Deuchler, 1985: note 48, 16).

type of art-historical perspective: the multivalent possibilities that are inherent in the context of production and reception of all artworks open up a diverse number of perspectives and interpretations for scholars. This is not a weakness because there needs to be exploration of each possibility, but it is wise to acknowledge this issue from the outset. In addition, the presentation of scholarship that addresses resonances between changes in traditional forms of representation and various elements in the context of production has provided insight into the development of landscape imagery before Memling, most especially in terms of the evolution of life-like, painterly illusions of real world features.

In general terms, the scholarship lends support to the view that the appearance of imagery comes out of an artistic skill to adapt and innovate in order to accommodate the specific wishes of patrons, with the experiences and expectations of the wider contemporary community also taken into account. With regard to more specific terms, perhaps the one of most relevance to a study of Memling is the notion that specific landscape forms have the potential to convey aspirations of power, wealth and high social status. This concept is important to Memling's religious works with donors, and to his portraits-with-landscape.

I consider Smith's scholarship on Witz's *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* particularly helpful to my analysis of the imagery in Memling's religious works. I view these religious compositions by Memling as the visual expressions, for late-medieval Christians, about life on earth, life after death and how these two parts of existence were

understood to relate to each other. Like Smith, I am concerned with how an artist portrays the sacred, doctrinal and secular all together in one image. Also, I wish to understand the role played by features that are life-like, and how artists convey a sacred world using visually-descriptive terms that, through their carefully-crafted, life-like nature are distinctly 'worldly'. I make reference continually to meaning that can be found in the "choice and organisation" of landscape forms. For an understanding of choice, I look at a combination of artistic heritage, one that includes the artist's training and patron expectation of landscape in art, and the demands of subject matter on the one hand, and, on the other, I examine the sacred, doctrinal and secular symbolism associated with them. In terms of the organisation of features, I acknowledge that rhythms of colour, line and shape relate to formal considerations, but argue that within these aspects there are layers of meaning to unravel in addition to their potential to promote particular emotions in viewers. I refer most particularly to the meanings that can be said to resonate with the juxtaposition of main figures with landscape, and, as noted earlier, I argue that the nature of the juxtaposition provides a visual metaphor of the relationship between the mortal and heavenly forms of existence accepted by Christians living in medieval Europe. I am trying to respond not simply to the fact that, in the eyes of late-medieval people, existence spanned this world and the next, with the earthly and sacred realms not seen as separate entities, but, also, I hope to contribute to an understanding of *how* this relationship was envisaged. The fact of this dualism in medieval existence, and my aim to explore its ramifications, are best explained in the words of John van Engen taken from a paper for scholars of medieval Church history:

This world of nature, marriage, sexuality, the body, honors, customary practices, and all the rest was self-evidently there, as self-evident as the world of christening, as real as churches and sacraments and saints and prayers. What we need is better language and frameworks for teasing out the shifting interactions, how people defined and negotiated distinct sacred and profane spheres, how certain aspects of human life, or of culture, or of social power, or of the interior life, moved from one to another or back again, sometimes comfortably, sometimes dialectically”¹⁰⁷.

I take the view that Memling was one of many artists in the fifteenth century who tried, in his imagery, to define the relationship between the sacred and profane spheres. The content of the next chapter aims, therefore, to show how Memling and other significant Netherlandish painters worked to accomplish this endeavour at a time when there was an interest in, and a demand for, well-crafted illusions of the real world.

¹⁰⁷ Van Engen, 2002: 512.

CHAPTER TWO

LANDSCAPE IN MEMLING'S RELIGIOUS WORKS

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the last chapter I referred to the scholarship of John van Engen and his wish that more attention be paid to exploring how medieval people “defined and negotiated distinct sacred and profane spheres,” to how aspects of their lives “moved from one to another”.¹ Hypothesising that in the imagery of his religious paintings Memling may have worked, in part, to define the relationship between these two spheres, the content of this chapter looks for visual evidence to support such a notion and explores the contribution of landscape imagery to this aim. I view the relationship as multi-faceted, one with ever-shifting parameters because it could be envisaged in different ways by different people at different times. So, as I explore how Memling built on his artistic heritage to portray sacred narrative and Christian doctrine in painted imagery with these themes sometimes combined in one image, and sometimes including references to the secular identities and aspirations of commissioners, I consider how he was able to convey the superior and mystical qualities of a sacred world using representations that were painted so skilfully that they rivalled their worldly counterparts. Additionally, I reflect on what aspects of these religious compositions relate, in adapted form, to Memling's portraits-with-landscape.

¹ Van Engen, 2002: 512.

The belief system that Western sacred art served

It is necessary, first, to present an overview of the belief system and religious practices of late-medieval Christians, to understand exactly what it was that Memling's imagery served and also my use of the term 'real-spiritual dynamic'. Chapter Three discusses some of the churches and confraternities that circumscribed the religious practices of Memling and his patrons in Bruges, but here the detail focuses on the belief system of medieval Christians in the West, and its translation into the sacramental practices of the Holy Roman Church.²

The Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist in medieval Christianity are two significant examples of the belief that there were real and sacred realms that coexisted across space and time.³ Together with the belief in the power of the relics of saints, these Sacraments point to situations when elements from one could 'meet with' elements from another, and I use the term 'real-spiritual dynamic' to refer to this interface of the two realms of existence. The relics of a saint were thought to bear witness to the fact that the saint in question 'existed' on earth and in heaven at the same time, and therefore could function as a channel between the two realms. The Sacraments, as outward signs of Grace, also worked to bring the two spheres together. For late-medieval Christians, life on earth was only part of one's existence, with death being the point at which the soul crossed over to Paradise, after a period in Purgatory.

² www.fordham.edu Excerpt from *Profession of Faith of Michael Paleologus*, II Council of Trent, 1274, the first important document which listed the seven sacraments of the Holy Roman Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony.

³ But see Van Engen, 1986: 533 and 537. He notes that few historians speak confidently of a common ideal within medieval people and that, perhaps, most were far less caught up in Christian culture than has been assumed.

The Sacrament of Baptism was the rite that gave entry into Christendom, an entry that conferred on the soul both earthly obligations and the opportunity to partake of everlasting life:

Being dipped into a font, waist high or more, together with christening's liturgical blessing and anointing, bestowed a name and a guardian angel, fit each child into a network of spiritual kin, joined them to the "Christian people" at large and in a parish, welcomed them into life-long rights and obligations as their "law", and opened the gates of heaven to an everlasting future.⁴

When Christ took responsibility for the sins of humanity at the moment of his death, he made possible this everlasting future, but its attainment depended on both faith and practice. During the Last Supper, Christ talked with his disciples of his impending death and its meaning and, also, how his friends could retain a connection with him. He broke bread, drank wine, shared each with them and said "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me...this is the chalice, the new testament in my blood, which shall be shed for you".⁵ This moment in Christ's life is behind the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and it is perhaps the most potent signifier of the belief that elements of "the beyond" are present in "the here and now".⁶

Sacred art and fifteenth-century Northern artists

Because the realm from which God ruled the earth was considered supreme and perfect, sacred art traditionally paid attention to hierarchy. However, the consummate skills of fifteenth-century Northern artists able to produce illusions of depth, and to translate into

⁴ Van Engen, 2002: 508.

⁵ Douay-Rheims Bible, St Luke 22: 19-20.

⁶ See Rubin, 1999: 14-35 for discussion of the Eucharist Sacrament.

paint the closely observed effects of light on real-world surfaces, had the power to destroy intimations of a parallel and/or interwoven spiritual existence. I suggest, therefore, that these ‘virtual reality’ artists⁷ were likely to have directed some of their creative energy towards finding new ways to visually describe the godliness and humanity of Christ contemporaneously, to convey the universal and everlasting truth of Christ’s life and sacrifice in compositions bound by earthly time and space and to pictorially confirm the intercessory power of saints. I aim to demonstrate that landscape plays a significant role in the process.

A traditional way of promoting understanding of the universal and everlasting nature of Christianity’s message was the representation of Biblical events in contemporary and familiar settings. It is necessary, now, to examine extensions and adaptations to this tradition, to explore, through the imagery of Memling and his immediate predecessors, landscape representation in sacred art against the backdrop of a growing demand for life-like images in art. My hypothesis is that as artists like Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling wrestled with the real-spiritual dynamic of their religious compositions, landscape representation got caught up in the ‘slip stream’ of the process. I suggest landscape imagery was designed and manipulated by them in the service of symbolism, both religious and secular, with significant manipulation being directed towards visually describing the type of juxtaposition between the key holy figures and the landscape. If, as I hypothesise, this juxtaposition functioned as a visual metaphor of

⁷ I consider this term appropriate for artists like van Eyck, van der Weyden and Memling. In the manner of present-day software experts, they were able to create artificial environments in such a way that viewers were able to suspend the knowledge that they were looking at a representation of an environment (and/or a person) on a 2-D surface, and accept the panorama as real.

the nature of the coexistence between things earthly and things spiritual then, by manipulating the detail of the juxtaposition, artists could convey different perspectives as to how the sacred and profane spheres of existence interfaced.

The possibility that the evolution in landscape representation by Northern artists of the fifteenth century may relate to a search for the visual means, in religious works, to describe the location of the sacred in relation to the earthly does not displace the resonance of other variables in such a process, or interactions between each of them. For example, when Jan van Eyck opened up a room in Chancellor Rolin's luxurious residence in *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin*, not only was he able to organise landscape features to visually describe the juxtaposition of the sacred-earthly dynamic together with aspects of the Chancellor's personal fortune, but he also demonstrated access to the light source that illuminated the surfaces of the interior. In other words, it cannot be said that van Eyck only had an interest in landscape *per se*, or that he recognised how useful it could be in visually describing elements of Christian doctrine, meditative demands or patron identity. There is a complex interaction of variables at work here determining the appearance and nature of his landscape. The interest in light sources is a significant variable and it relates to a desire in most fifteenth-century Northern artists to create realistic illusions of form and texture in paint.

Two important factors influencing landscape evolution at this time are the changes in patterns of religious devotion in the middle classes, and the growing interest of this section of society in portraiture, an art form once monopolised by aristocrats. With

regard to the first, artists were commissioned to provide small, devotional works for use in the home, the subject matter of which had to provide prompts for meditation that could be understood without guidance from clergy. This broadening out of requests in relation to religious works led inevitably to a broadening out of themes. For example, where devotees were concerned to have in their homes a model for good behaviour, they might choose the exemplar of a saint's life (with biographical events depicted in landscape), rather than imagery directly related to the celebration of the Mass.

The broadening out of themes in order to meet the demands of personal devotion was accompanied by a desire in devotees to have their portraits included in the imagery. It probably helped in the actual process of devotion to see oneself at prayer. Additionally, a portrait in a devotional work could function as a surrogate, a surrogate that could forever pray for its soul before the Virgin and Christ Child.⁸ But it is also likely that commissioners of such works were keen to proclaim more than their religious nature to the rest of the community; this is especially true of works made for public spaces like churches. As nobles had demonstrated in former times, portraits could be effective in projecting high social status, power and wealth; the representation of lordly estates and fortified houses was as important as fine clothes and jewellery in this regard. So, landscape features employed to set a scene in sacred narrative, and/or aspects of Church doctrine, and/or help convey the nature of the real world's relationship with sacred phenomena could include, also, particularised detail designed to convey both religious and secular information about patron identity and aspiration.

⁸ Gelfand & Gibson, 2002.

Chapter outline

The main thrust of this chapter, then, is to examine the ways Memling's imagery responds to the needs of Christian narrative, doctrine and practice, most especially the contribution made by landscape representation. In understanding Memling's choice of landscape features it is necessary to investigate artistic heritage; in this regard I focus on the influence of van der Weyden on Memling. I analyse works by van der Weyden in my exploration of Memling's arrangement of features across the picture plane, too, taking the view that the organisation of features is determined greatly by formal considerations, but that it is able, also, to convey levels of meaning associated with emotional response and the late-medieval concept of how and where the spiritual and earthly interfaced. A wish to understand the latter accounts for my focus on the way Memling and his close predecessors organised their landscape features *in relation to* key figures.

It is important to hold in mind from the outset that there are issues surrounding a methodology that relies on the comparison of works by different artists, especially when that comparison depends on visual analyses that have no support from contemporary written record. One caution relates to the fact that some of the artists of this chapter - and their patrons - are located in different places and decades of the fifteenth century. But perhaps the most serious issue arises from disagreements between scholars as to who painted what; very few works bear an artist's signature.⁹

⁹ See Sander, 2008: 75-93 & Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: 149-59 for details of the ongoing controversy surrounding the identities/works of the Master of Flémalle, Robert Campin and Rogier van der Weyden.

With this caution in mind, the chapter opens with an overview of Memling's religious works. It includes a discussion of Memling's devotional works without landscape, and a short account of the mainly Italian tradition of the *sacra conversazione* format in devotional art. The overview begins with organising Memling's religious *oeuvre* into two compositional groups depending on whether or not key sacred figures and their company are enclosed in a large architectural form that to some degree separates them from the surrounding landscape.¹⁰ However, there are some significant works for which this grouping is inappropriate, and I analyse these in detail because they are particularly helpful in opening up the potential meanings of Memling's landscape imagery. The detailed exploration of compositions from both groups draws out meanings that relate especially to the organisation of architectural features and landscape in relation to figures.

OVERVIEW OF MEMLING'S RELIGIOUS *OEUVRE*

Two groups: sacred figures presented within landscape and sacred figures set apart from it

Group I contains compositions that portray events from the lives of saints and/or holy figures from the New Testament played out in an exterior environment comprised of forms that, for the most part, would have been familiar to audiences from late-medieval Northern Europe. Memling addresses all the key episodes in Christ's life, with the notable exception of the Visitation, and in some works, praying donors are represented either in the main scene or in the wings. The landscapes pictorially describe the earthly locations in which the events took place, with the holy figures placed *within* landscape.

¹⁰ See Appendix A.

In accordance with tradition, Memling uses familiar and recognisable earthly surroundings thereby conveying the notion that the relevance of the narrative and its consequences apply across time and space. Also, I suggest that the realistic portrayal of the earthly events in Christ's life held the potential to reinforce in the minds of the viewers the fact that Christ lived his life on earth as a man, with his death on the Cross dramatically confirming his human nature. This in turn prompts the hypothesis that the choice and organisation of landscape features in these religious works relate, at least in part, to the idea that it was possible to access the divine within an earthly environment and, also, that living an earthly life in accordance with Christian ideals was not *only* about its necessity in terms of earning eternal life after death; living with God on earth was both necessary and possible.¹¹

Group II is slightly larger, with most works concerning devotion to Mary and her role in the Incarnation. The Virgin and Christ Child are usually represented within an architectural form that looks out onto landscape. This kind of presentation of the holy pair is reminiscent of *sacra conversazione* compositions, but, with the exception of the *Triptych of John Donne* and the *Altarpiece of St John*, it is angels and not saints who attend/converse with the Christ Child and Mary. Memling opened up this traditional format to broad landscape views, and one aim in this chapter is to address the impact on meaning of this innovative move.

¹¹See Ladner (1983): 242-43 for a brief reference to Augustine's term "signum" in his *de doctrina Christiana* (Book I).

In contrast to the compositions of the first group where I suggest that the imagery supports the view that divine presence can be felt within the environment of everyday life, in Memling's tableaux-with-architecture, I argue that a different perspective of the real-spiritual dynamic is presented. Here, the sacred figures gather in a secluded place somewhat cordoned-off from the landscape. The architectural form is the significant determinant of a sense of separation between the location of the divine and all that exists in the profane world beyond. I propose that with the exception of the forms that reference the material success of the donors, the landscape imagery here is not about how everyday life could be filled with spirituality, but about how it relates to the divine life being played out in the tableau. The focus is on life with God and saints after death and how the divine dimension to Christ's sacrifice made such a life possible. At the heart of Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions is Church doctrine. There are two interrelated doctrines to consider. The first relates to Mary's Immaculate Conception and her perpetual purity, and I suggest that Mary's 'enshrinement' in an architectural form visually expresses this purity, her separation from the carnal drives of humanity. The second concerns the celebration of the Eucharist (and the role played by Mary in Christ's Incarnation). For a late medieval worshipper, the purpose of gazing at the naked Christ Child on the Virgin's lap - with him sometimes reaching for the apple of Original Sin - was to embrace the truth of Christ's Incarnation and acknowledge that he sacrificed himself for humanity's redemption. Furthermore, I suggest that as worshippers looked intently at this Eucharistic imagery, it was but a short step to imagining that it offered a glimpse of life in eternity: through the sacrifice of Jesus, believers could live forever in a place of serene, regal splendour that was set apart from

the real world, and habited by the Mother of God, his Son, angels and saints.¹² It was a place that offered only glimpses out onto the world, a world able to carry motifs that related back to the scene within the church-like architectural form which was in itself a visual reminder of the Church's role in the celebration of the Eucharist.

In both groups Memling painted landscapes that were familiar to fifteenth-century, northern-European eyes. Contemporary landscapes were important in terms of conveying the ever-relevant nature and universality of the Christian doctrine, but their instantly recognisable appearance had another important function: it gave patrons the means to project aspects of personal identity and status within a devotional context. For example, a watermill in a country estate behind a kneeling donor by the Virgin and Christ Child could have Eucharistic overtones, but, at the same time, it could refer to the donor's high social status in the sense that he owned the mill rights on a *heerlijkheid*.¹³

Works without landscape: devotion to the adult Christ

In Group II, there is a small number of works without landscape imagery and dedicated to the devotion of the adult Christ. In these there is a neutral background, a format that seems to enhance the feeling of being close to Christ and, in some, promote the personal contemplation of, and empathy with, Christ's Passion.¹⁴ At the outset, the use of plain backdrops seems a logical choice for non-narrative religious works because there is no

¹² Harbison, 1985: 100-101 does not dismiss this idea, that images like the *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* can be interpreted as anticipating the future, but prefers to place emphasis on a donor meditating in the present in order to produce visualisations that can guide piety in everyday reality. See also Goffen, 1979: 201 who suggests a dual function.

¹³ See pages 194-97 for features of a *heerlijkheid*.

¹⁴ Nash, 2008: 279 where, in her discussion of *Ecce Homo* by the Master of Moulins, she suggests the limitation of detail aids participation in and contemplation of Christ's body at a precise narrative moment.

obvious setting for such subjects, but the answer is likely to be more complex, with the theme of devotion and, in the case of golden backdrops particularly, the weight of artistic tradition being significant factors. This exploration of some of Memling's works with no landscape, together with works by the Master of Flémalle and van der Weyden, is important in the sense that an understanding of absence can help with an understanding of presence.

Memling's images of *Christ Giving His Blessing* (Figs. 45 and 52)¹⁵ and the *Man of Sorrows* (Figs. 46 and 47)¹⁶ have plain backgrounds; in the *Virgin Showing the Man of Sorrows* (Fig. 44)¹⁷ there is a gold relief background with the *Arma Christi*; in *Christ at the Column* (Fig. 48)¹⁸ there is a tiled floor beneath Christ's feet and behind the column there was once a moulded stone arch; and in *Christ as Salvator Mundi* (Fig. 49)¹⁹ Christ, flanked by angels, has a gold surface behind edged with dark clouds. In the two paintings of Christ giving his blessing, Christ is represented as *Salvator Mundi*, but without the attributes of his power, a crossed orb and a crown: he appears as a human being with his hands resting on a window ledge.²⁰ Aside from the frontal position, this bust-sized format of the figure is reminiscent of many of Memling's portraits. De Vos notes that the presentation has a precursor in the Master of Flémalle's Christ in *Christ*

¹⁵ De Vos, 1994: Cat.Nos.27 and 61. Lane, 2009: Cat.Nos.62 and 8.

¹⁶ De Vos, 1994: Cat.Nos.58 and 88. Lane, 2009: Cat.Nos.30a and B3 (Lane categorises the latter as a disputed work).

¹⁷ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.24. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B7 (A disputed work for Lane).

¹⁸ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.65. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B1 (A disputed work for Lane). Ringbom, 1984: 23-30 cites the *Vera Icon*, *Man of Sorrows* and *Arma Christi* as being amongst the most popular images associated with indulgences.

¹⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.81. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.1.

²⁰ De Vos, 1994:142.

and the Virgin (Fig. 50)²¹ and also in van der Weyden's Christ in the *Braque Triptych* (Fig. 51).²² However, van der Weyden included the orb surmounted with a small cross, but replaced a crown with a halo set against a rising sun. Also, and most significantly, van der Weyden presented a panoramic landscape behind Christ and his accompanying saints. For van der Weyden then, the title 'Saviour of the World' gained a greater sense of credibility when that world - including its sun, the source of light and God's first creation - could be experienced by the viewer in relation to its saviour. It was an immediate and instantly recognisable world over which Christ loomed at a great height. Memling's plain, window-framed equivalents present a more personal Christ accessible on *terra firma*. The same can be said of the *Man of Sorrows* at Esztergom (Fig. 47) in which Christ emerges from a sculptured niche to show the devotee his wounds. It may have seemed inappropriate to place gold behind such images because so often gold was associated with a heavenly location.

The gold of heaven is shown in *Christ as Salvator Mundi*; here clouds support the notion that this is a heavenly location. Van der Weyden also uses this most superior of minerals for the heaven of his *Last Judgment* (Fig. 53). This heaven of gold dominates the composition, and its splendour may have worked to bring comfort to the residents of the hospital at Beaune. In contrast, Memling uses less gold in his *Last Judgment* (Fig. 54) and, consequently, the events that will take place on earth on that fateful day tend to gain in prominence. Two other works where Van der Weyden uses gold to represent

²¹ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: Cat.No.7. Sander notes that the practice of combining bust-format icons of Christ and the Madonna in a diptych has its roots in Byzantine tradition. Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: Cat.No.5.

²² De Vos, 1994:142.

heaven are the *Virgin with the Child and Four Saints [The Medici Madonna]* (Fig. 55) and the *Portrait Diptych of Philippe de Croÿ* (Fig. 56). The former is the only *sacra conversazione* composition by van der Weyden extant and its lack of landscape views is compatible with Italian tradition. For the diptych, the gold behind the Virgin and Child - which on a material level was likely to have given Philippe pleasure in owning such an exquisite work of art - may have prompted him in his meditations to envisage the holy pair in heaven.

The golden surface behind the figures of van der Weyden's *Deposition* (Fig. 57) cannot, however, be understood in terms of placing the event and figures in heaven: despite the placement of landscape beneath the figures' feet, the gold denies the event a fixed location in earthly time and place. The death of Christ was most certainly an earthly event, but van der Weyden has enshrined it, he has placed the narrative of this most significant event in a gilded shrine, where it can be a channel of communication and an everlasting focus of devotion. The roots of this format may lie in the influence of the Master of Flémalle. Pächt argues that van der Weyden's master drew inspiration from two sources: Italian trecento painting and Gothic sculpture. He further suggests that the imagery of the central panel of the *Seilern Triptych* (Fig. 58) is a painted *Saint-Sépulchre* niche, with further influences re the interaction between figures coming from mystery plays.²³ These suggestions seem particularly relevant to an explanation of the form of imagery in van der Weyden's *Deposition*: it represents a scene from sacred history that was regularly played out by medieval actors and which van der Weyden enshrined in the manner of Gothic sculpture. The scene thus became a scene of meditation forever, in

²³ Pächt, 1999: 41-47.

this case *compassio* with Mary. The Master of Flémalle's own painting of the Deposition - known from a copy (Fig. 59b) - appears also to have had a gold backdrop.²⁴ It can be seen from what is left of the original (Fig. 59a) that like van der Weyden's *Deposition*, gold is not used for the earth.²⁵ Suggestions by Sander on the format of the representation of the bad thief are similar to those outlined here in relation to van der Weyden's *Deposition*: he sees the presentation of the crucifixion of the bad thief in a 3-D landscape as bringing authenticity to the narrative, whilst the tactile materiality of the gold backdrop indicates the rear wall of a shrine; for him, the gold backdrop did not indicate a transcendent space.²⁶ However, I suggest that the copying of a shrine with its sculptured holy figures does not have to preclude the idea that such figures can then exist in a transcendent space: the whole idea of shrines is that they capture the non-earthly within their framework. Furthermore, the sky is where heaven was thought to be located; hence gold for the Master of Flémalle's sky is quite understandable. A golden sky for the *Seilern Triptych* may have been considered particularly appropriate because of the Resurrection panel. Perhaps, understanding the miracle of Christ's resurrection is promoted by meditation upon the non-earthly juxtaposed with the earthly. In contrast, understanding the importance of Christ's Incarnation is likely to be facilitated by a focus on the detail of the earthly reality at his birth. In *Nativity* (Fig. 60), the Master of Flémalle acknowledges the virgin birth by alluding to the miracle of Salome's hand, but the emphasis is on the presentation of an instantly familiar world including a realistically-portrayed newborn baby. In other words, the themes of the

²⁴ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: 223.

²⁵ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: Cat.No.8. Also, in his *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Musical Angels*, Memling presents a golden sky adjacent to landscape in the same manner as the Master of Flémalle. However, Lane categorises this as a disputed work (Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B5).

²⁶ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: 222.

Seilern Triptych and the *Nativity* have contributed to how the landscape-plus-sky is presented: in the former, the domination of heaven in its traditional, gold format for Christ's victory over death, and, in the latter, the domination of earthly reality to persuade the viewer of the humanity of Christ.

So, gold traditionally represented a transcendent space, but the growth in the popularity of images related to Christ's Incarnation - which in turn was directly related to a growth in the Cult of the Virgin Mary - was accompanied by a need for motifs to support that earthly event. However, such an evolution, then, necessitated finding ways to imbue that earthly event with holy qualities. So, I suggest that it was not only a case of artists searching for the means to convey a sense of hierarchy in their religious works that drove experimentation with landscape, but also a shift in the nature of religious devotions. Furthermore, it was not just a growing devotion to Christ's Incarnation that occurred. The followers of *Devotio Moderna*, for example, placed emphasis on identifying with the events of Christ's Passion as well as a proper approach to Holy Communion.²⁷ I contend that a new artistic emphasis on real-world illusion was appropriate to both subject matters because an understanding amongst meditators of the magnitude of God's gift turned most significantly on Christ's humanity, on his experience of earthly birth, life and death.

²⁷ See pages 255-56.

Memling and the popular tradition of the *sacra conversazione* format in Italian sacred art²⁸

The composition of most of Memling's devotional works follows a *sacra conversazione* format. In fifteenth-century Italian *sacra conversazione* works, an enthroned or standing Virgin and Child were placed in the centre of a group of conversing saints recognisable by their attributes. The holy figures were represented in a background of forms drawn from church architecture, but these forms, unlike those used by Memling, did not traditionally provide views onto landscape.²⁹ Fra Filippo Lippi's *Barbadori Altarpiece* (Fig. 61) commissioned in 1437 is an early example of a *sacra conversazione* composition. Fra Angelico used this format too: in his *San Marco Altarpiece* of 1438-40 (Fig. 62), his *Annalena Altarpiece* c.1445, his *Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece* c.1450 and his *Madonna of the Shadows* c.1450 (Fig. 63). The *San Marco Altarpiece* is an Italian *sacra conversazione* composition that does offer an exterior view. In Domenico Veneziano's *Madonna and Child with Saints* c.1445 (Fig. 66) for the church of Santa Lucia dei Magnoli, Florence, Mary's throne is set in a loggia, a compositional idea taken up by Memling; Veneziano also represents the crowns of trees above the top rim of the loggia. Much later, a very young Botticelli painted *Madonna and Child with Six Saints* c.1470 (Fig. 67) for the convent of Sant'Ambrogio, Florence. The key point is that most of Memling's compositions from the second group are anchored in this tradition (a tradition with which his Italian patrons would have been

²⁸ Van Eyck used this compositional type, too, in the *Virgin and Child with George van der Paele* (1434-36) and Stefan Lochner enclosed Mary and Jesus with standing saints in the *Altarpiece of the Patron Saints of Cologne* (c.1440). Kostner, 2002:79-80 notes the tendency to forget van Eyck's composition in surveys of *sacra conversazione* works.

²⁹ For an overview of devotional themes in relation to the Virgin, see Hall, 1984: 324-335. See also Goffen, 1979, for a discussion of the term *sacra conversazione* and her distinction between the *Maestà* (e.g. Figs. 64 and 65) and *sacra conversazione* formats.

most familiar), but that he made significant changes. In addition to the fact that he favoured angels over saints in the central tableaux of figures with the Virgin and Child, Memling opened up the architectural form and introduced landscape views. I aim to show that the landscape of these views did not function in exactly the same way as the landscape of works in Group I where the *primary* function of the landscape was to visually describe the environment in which sacred figures carried out actions whilst on earth, a function that promotes the notion that things divine and earthly are interwoven. In contrast, the *primary* function of the landscape in the *sacra conversazione*-type compositions was to provide symbolic references that related back to the foreground theme and the figures enclosed by the architectural form. Where these references refer to the devotional theme and sacred figures, they have the potential to reinforce notions of the distinctive and unworldly nature of the sacred, and where they refer to donors they could embrace both religious and secular aspirations. This type of juxtaposition, then, between landscape and tableau-within-architectural-form presents a hierarchical model of divinity, with the key quality of sacredness being interpreted as a superiority over, and a distinction from, things earthly. However, whilst Memling's format retains this hierarchical perspective, at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, it presents a new perspective on the Church's traditional role as mediator between the sacred and profane realms of existence. By opening up the church-like architectural form I suggest that Memling introduces the notion of a Church less dominant in such matters.

It is interesting to speculate upon the reasons that prompted Memling to open up the *sacra conversazione* format to landscape. Firstly, as noted in the General Introduction

in reference to the comments of Facius, there was enthusiasm at this time for panoramic vistas of landscape, but I suggest that in these works that focussed on devotion to Mary with the Christ Child, Memling's introduction of landscape views may have been inspired by images of Mary enclosed in her *hortus conclusus*,³⁰ although in art there can often be a conflation between the representations of the Garden of Eden, the *Hortus Conclusus* and heavenly paradise (Figs. 68-76); these are all significant spaces where sin is excluded.³¹ Memling and his contemporaries were accustomed to the imagery of an enclosed garden referencing the purity inherent in Mary, so landscape juxtaposed with Mary would not have seemed unusual to them (and, by extension, they would have understood the potential of landscape features to reference qualities in other figures).

Unhappy bedfellows: works that rest uneasily in their allotted group

There are some paintings that do not rest easily in their allotted group and later I focus on two of them; this process adds to understanding Memling's compositional formats and the metaphors implied by them. Appendix A shows that paintings in Group I tend to display green colour coding; this colour indicates characters of sacred history engaged in narrative action *within* landscape. The significant exceptions, the ones *without* green coding, are the *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* (Figs. 77 & 80),³² the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* (Figs. 78 & 81),³³ and *The Annunciation* (Figs. 82 & 95).³⁴ There is

³⁰ The metaphorical link of the Virgin with an enclosed garden comes from her role as the Bride of Christ. Solomon's song to his bride was considered an allegory of the love and union between Christ and the Church i.e. His bride, personified in Mary. See Douay-Rheims Bible, Solomon's Canticle of Canticles 4:12: "My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up". It was Rupert of Deutz, a Benedictine theologian, who gave the entire text of the Song of Songs a Marian interpretation.

³¹ Griffiths, 2007: 136-38 discusses the temporal relationship between these three in the sense they reference humankind's past present and future.

³² De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.13. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.42.

³³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.32. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.11.

little green colour coding in Group II. Here sacred figures do not appear *within* landscape and the green coding appears only where Mary, Jesus and saints are painted in the garden setting of the *Hortus Conclusus*.

In the *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* and the *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, Memling sets the stable where Christ was born within landscape, yet the views onto landscape from the stable suggest an affinity with the arrangement of landscape views in Group II. In other words, the sense of narrative *within* landscape is not strong. There is a close analysis of these two paintings later in the chapter in which they are compared with van der Weyden's *St Columba Altarpiece* (Fig. 79). Suggestions are made there as to why the sense of narrative-within-landscape seems stronger in van der Weyden's work.

Perhaps Memling's *Annunciation* is better placed in Group II alongside other works without landscape, but as it completes the table of events in Christ's life it is placed in Group I.³⁵ The enclosed scenario ultimately relates to the Biblical text: "And the angel being come in, said to her..." (St Luke, Chapter 1: 28, Douay-Rheims), and later to a desire to represent Mary in an environment that provided a metaphor of her purity. Robb discusses three scenarios for the visual representations of the Annunciation: within a portico (mainly Italian - Figs. 83-87), within an ecclesiastical structure (begun in French illuminations - Figs. 88-90) and within a Flemish burgher interior (Figs. 91-

³⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.84. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.48.

³⁵ See Blum, 1992, for an analysis of Memling's *Annunciation*. In a discussion of the dogma of the Virgin's perpetual virginity, Blum notes (pages 52-53) that the Virgin's body itself was likened to a range of enclosed architectural forms including a temple, tent, church and castle.

95).³⁶ In other words, to set the Annunciation within landscape was not traditional; to do so would be to ignore both the Biblical text and metaphorical allusions to Mary's purity.

GROUP I: WORKS WITH KEY SACRED FIGURES PLACED WITHIN LANDSCAPE

In both groups of Memling's religious works I focus on understanding the form of his imagery in relation to both the religious context of the day and the artistic tradition that had evolved to respond to that ever-changing context. In sacred art, Memling worked in a tradition of landscape motifs that looked back to the beginning of the fifteenth century, one that was shared between many workshops in the North, but I compare Memling's imagery at various points only with works by the Master of Flémalle, van Eyck and van der Weyden, and consider the effect on meaning of any differences.

I consider that in all the works of this group Memling's imagery supports the idea that sacred presence is detectable in things earthly and not something to be found only in a realm that is distinctly superior and 'cordoned off'. I have subdivided the works into those that address the lives of saints and those that represent key events in Christ's life. I begin with an exploration of landscape imagery in works of saints' lives: firstly, a comparison between the images of St John the Baptist and St Veronica on the external panels of the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* and the interior panels of the *Bembo Diptych*.³⁷ I show that within the general notion that the depiction of saints within an earthly environment is important in terms of a presentation of both their intercessor and

³⁶ Robb, 1936.

³⁷ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.50. Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: Cat.No. 25. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.44.

exemplar roles, Memling responds, also, to demands that arise from differences in function and meaning *vis-à-vis* whether the saints are on the interior or the external panels; secondly, I compare Memling's presentation of *Saint Jerome*³⁸ with van Eyck's *Stigmatisation of St Francis* in order to explore the ways in which manipulations between landscape and figures in the hands of different artists can influence meaning; and finally in this section, I analyse the imagery in two works by Memling where a group of standing saints is represented within landscape: the *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*³⁹ and the *Moreel Triptych*.⁴⁰ In the first composition, there are no patrons and Memling uses the landscape in a traditional manner to provide the background to narrative events in each saint's life. In the second, Memling uses landscape features to provide information on both saints and patrons.

Saints John and Veronica

It may be that Jan Floreins commissioned both the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* (Figs. 96 & 98) and the *Bembo Diptych* (Figs. 97 & 99).⁴¹ However, there is documentation extant that associates ownership of the *Bembo Diptych* with Bernardo Bembo.⁴² A letter to one of Bembo's sons in 1502 from Isabella d'Este includes a possible reference to the

³⁸ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.66. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.4. The attribution to Memling of a second painting of St Jerome (De Vos, 1994: Cat. No.67) is rejected by Lane, 2009: 336.

³⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.41. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.58.

⁴⁰ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.63. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.22. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.9.

⁴¹ De Vos, 1994: 205, but see Campbell, 1995: 254 who disagrees.

⁴² Campbell, 1981: 471. See also, Lane, 2009: 202, who agrees with Campbell and suggests that Bembo commissioned the work between 1471 and 1474 when he was Venetian ambassador to the Burgundian court (see, also, Fletcher, 1989: 816). Lane 2009: 290 argues that as Floreins was a member of the Brethren of the Hospital of St John he could own no property; therefore, even if he commissioned the diptych he could not have sold it to Bembo. Accepting Lane's hypothesis requires a rejection of a completion date of 1480-83 proposed by de Vos. However, as Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: 175 note, the presence of John the Baptist on the interior and John the Evangelist's chancel on the exterior indicates a link with the Hospital of St John, Bruges, as these saints were its patron saints; this in turn lends support to the notion of a Floreins connection.

Bembo Diptych, as does a note by Marcantonio Michiel, in the 1520s, that referred to a diptych by Memling that he saw in Padua at the home of another son; it is assumed that Michiel wrongly described one of the panels as a Virgin and Child when it is in fact a St Veronica. In both works, St John and St Veronica are placed within landscape, but in the Floreins triptych each saint is framed by the representation of a late-Gothic arch promoting the feeling that each saint-with-landscape is located within an architectural form associated with a church: a portal, or window or niche.⁴³ As it is likely that Jan commissioned the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* for the chapel at the Hospital of St John, the use of a church-like framing device on the exterior seems most appropriate since the viewer would be standing quite literally in a church.⁴⁴

If Floreins commissioned both works, then the choice of St John in both is understandable as the saint is Jan's name-saint. The choice of St Veronica is understandable, also, because Jan was master of the Hospital of St John from 1488-97.⁴⁵ St Veronica's role as protector of those who die suddenly without benefit of the last rites makes her a logical choice for an image displayed in a hospital environment and for a man whose identity was partly defined by such an environment.⁴⁶

⁴³Birkmeyer, June, 1961: 111. In his generally negative appraisal of Memling's work, Birkmeyer argues that the viewer's location directly in front of the centre of the closed panels of the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* was absurd. I prefer to see the location as one carefully contrived by Memling to encourage the viewer to open up the panels and gaze upon the hopeful message of humanity's redemption through Christ's presence on earth.

⁴⁴The exterior wings of the *Triptych of Adriaan Reins* also present saints within Gothic arches and with views onto landscape. Reins was also a Brother at the Hospital of St John.

⁴⁵See page 226.

⁴⁶Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: 170 state that the Holy Face of Veronica was probably the first indulgenced image and that in later years it had the power to reduce time in Purgatory and provide remission from sin.

Memling presents the St John of the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* in a manner not totally unlike the St John in the *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*.⁴⁷ The saint is seated as he gestures towards the Lamb and behind him is a tiny scene of Christ's baptism in the River Jordan, a potent reminder of the close relationship that John had on earth with Christ (Figs. 100-102). There are no tiny scenes behind St Veronica that help extend knowledge of her life, although the small ship depicted may be a reference to the Church, the organisation to which Floreins had dedicated his life (Figs. 103 & 104). The Church was thought of as the ship that sheltered its members on their pilgrimage through life en route to heaven, and St Veronica played a significant role in helping many take that final step.⁴⁸ A narrative element continues in the fictive sculpture of the arches: in the St John panel are Adam and Eve before the Fall, and in the St Veronica wing they are shown being expelled from Paradise; it is precisely this narrative that led to the need for mankind's Redemption through the actions of Christ on earth. I suggest, therefore, that a plausible interpretation of the imagery's function on the exterior panels of the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* was to introduce the viewer (via St John) to the coming of Christ (the representation of the interior) and the ultimate purpose of Christ's Incarnation (via St Veronica's presence at the Crucifixion). There is a shift in emphasis in the *Bembo Diptych* with the focus redirected to what the representation of these two saints could convey about life after death and how the viewer could best live life on earth in preparation for the afterlife.

⁴⁷ This representation in the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* was once considered to be a self-portrait of Memling. See Lobelle-Caluwé, 1997: 43-52 for a summary of the images that have been proposed as self-portraits.

⁴⁸ But see Lane, 2009: 265 who suggests the ship may refer to that which, according to legend, carried Veronica from the Holy Land to Rome. Veronica was called by Emperor Tiberius who was cured of some illness when he touched the image. The relic was translated to St Peter's, Rome in 1297 where it remains to this day (www.catholic.org).

On the exterior panels of the *Bembo Diptych* there is a skull with the inscription 'MORIERIS' on one and the chalice-with-serpent of St John the Evangelist on the other (Fig. 105). So if the owner of the diptych began his devotions by holding the diptych in the manner of a closed book, he would have engaged, firstly, in the contemplation of death. This state of mind would have altered as he opened the diptych: from a meditation that concentrated on a state of being outside life, he would then gaze upon a vision of what awaits the soul after death: communion with saints in a landscape engendering thoughts of Paradise. At the same time, I suggest the images could function as a stimulus to meditation on how one should live life on earth: the saints lived life on earth, too, and through the quality of their earthly lives were granted eternal life. Instead of a tiny baptism scene behind John in the *Bembo Diptych*, there are large, barren rocks that help prompt the viewer to contemplate the saint's time in the wilderness, and behind St Veronica there is a city - most likely a reference to Jerusalem - and a path to her left, perhaps an allusion to the place where she wiped the face of Christ. There seems to be a meditative emphasis on St John's personal suffering as he worked to prepare the world for Christ, and in relation to St Veronica, on the place, and moment, where she met with Christ on his journey to Calvary.

Lane offers an alternative perspective on the function of the saintly images in the *Bembo Diptych*, arguing for a focus on the priestly role in salvation.⁴⁹ This perspective accords with Jan's profession and serves as a reminder that no one interpretation is certain and that the imagery could carry multiple levels of meaning. Also, she cites the scholarship of Verougstraete where it is suggested that the position of the light in the niches of the

⁴⁹ Lane, 2009: 250.

external panels provides clues as to how the diptych should have been handled.⁵⁰ Rather than looking at the images of the interior immediately after the skull, and then rounding off personal meditation with a feeling of comfort provided by the image of the chalice with its implication of eternal life, she argues for turning the closed diptych over to view the chalice first. Then, because opening will be from left to right, St John will be viewed before St Veronica. This view gains some plausibility if the work was commissioned by Jan because his personal identity (Jan) was perhaps more pertinent in personal devotions than his social/friar identity (master of the Hospital of St John). But what is significant in the context of this study is that subtle changes in the figure-landscape relationship can be detected and this in turn highlights the potential that exists within this dynamic for influencing meaning.

St Jerome and St Francis

The life of St Jerome was a popular theme in devotional works both north and south of the Alps: there were five images of St Jerome cited in the 1492 Medici inventory and one of these was attributed to van Eyck.⁵¹ In one (out of two) of his paintings of *Saint Jerome* (Figs. 106 & 112), Memling combines rock outcrops and a variety of plants to create the desert location of St Jerome. Large rock boulders encircle the saint as he strikes his chest with a large stone before a miniscule Christ on the Cross. This tiny image may be inspired by the small six-winged angel/Christ in van Eyck's *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* (Figs. 107 & 111 and for detail Figs. 110 & 113), although the image appears much earlier in Italian art; the six-winged form in Duccio's depiction of

⁵⁰ Verougstraete, 2006.

⁵¹ Lillie, 2007: 23-24. Also, Nuttall, 2006: 107. See Rohlmann, 1999: 45-48 for a summary of early Netherlandish painting in Florence in the fifteenth century.

the scene, for example, is very similar (Fig. 108 & Fig. 109). The visualisation by St Jerome of the suffering Christ is necessary in order for him to reach an understanding of the magnitude of Christ's love for humanity; also it provides an example of the kind of suffering that he should aim to emulate. The boulders in the *St Jerome*, which also provide a cave for shelter, contrast sharply with the gently undulating landscape that lies beyond with its lush trees and a distant tower in a settlement. This small representation of a pleasant topography serves to accentuate the conditions under which St Jerome carried out his penance. I suggest that because the boulders look totally out of place, there is the sense that the saint found a place beyond the 'normal' in which he exiled himself from worldly temptation.

It is helpful to consider Memling's interpretation of St Jerome's bid to imitate the sufferings of Christ alongside that of van Eyck's interpretation of the mystical experience of St Francis on the slopes of La Verna in 1224.⁵² Both compositions address a belief that union with God was possible through meditation, prayer and a regime of ascetic discipline. In his painting, Memling organised elements from various events in St Jerome's life and located them in a single exterior environment. St Jerome's pet lion is shown resting before the cave, his four years as a hermit in the Syrian desert are suggested by the rocks and the dark brown robes of a penitent, and his appointment as secretary to Pope Damasus I in Rome is conveyed by the cast-off robes and hat of a cardinal (despite the fact that the office of cardinal did not exist in the time of St Jerome). Memling presents a saint in exemplar mode; he employs landscape to

⁵² There are two almost identical versions, except for size, of van Eyck's painting of St Francis. A very small one (12.4 x 14.6cm) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (see Philadelphia, 1997) and another (29.2 x 33.4cm) in the Galleria Sabauda, Turin. See Geirnaert, 2000, for a discussion of Anselm Adornes' will of 1470 with its reference to two paintings of St Francis.

'gather together' the kinds of earthly endeavours required to earn a 'one-to-one' with God. In contrast, van Eyck presents a single mystical experience - that of St Francis sharing with Christ the piercing of hands and feet - and his landscape, including its juxtaposition to the figures, carries symbolism that is integral to describing the saint's mystical experience.⁵³ A discussion of Snyder's scholarship helps with an explanation of this notion.⁵⁴

Snyder briefly refers to the influence of Scholastic thought in van Eyck's imagery in the sense that the artist applies, in visual terms, the notion that features in the real world could carry numerous layers of meaning, and then, in a discussion of the passivity of van Eyck's represented devotees, he comments - in relation to van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Nicholas Rolin* - that the artist "presents us with Rolin's mystical vision of the Madonna and Child as the manifestation of his devotion in very concrete, Nominalistic terms... further [elaborating] the world of the donor and that of the Virgin in the eye-catching details of the backgrounds behind them, emphatically splitting the symbolic world in two, the more mundane behind the earthly patron, the more ecclesiastical behind the Virgin and Child".⁵⁵ In other words, duality persists at several levels, and the same can be said of *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*.

Firstly, there is topographical accuracy of the rocks in the region where St Francis' experience is said to have taken place: La Verna overlooking the valley of the Casentino in Tuscany. There are geologically-accurate limestone boulders immediately behind

⁵³ See www.newadvent.com for biography of St Francis.

⁵⁴ Snyder, 1997: 75-87.

⁵⁵ Snyder, 1997: 82.

Brother Leo, slate-sandstone sedimentary outcrops behind these and an igneous formation similar to those in the hermit and pilgrim panels of the *Ghent Altarpiece* behind St Francis.⁵⁶ Secondly, there is symbolic meaning to be found in the way the landscape features are organised. Snyder suggests that the placement of St Francis' stigmatised hands at the centre of the composition draws attention to the differences in landscape on either side of the composition.⁵⁷ The sleeping Brother Leo is placed before the barren rocks where he is unaware of the meanings that St Francis is unravelling about the purposes of his vision, meanings about the richness of life that comes with the knowledge of (and for St Francis, personal experience of) Christ's suffering and His role in salvation. The richness of life is expressed visually in the luxuriant undergrowth represented on St Francis' half of the painting, and there is a river between the two halves in the manner of the *Virgin and Child with Nicholas Rolin*, except that instead of a bridge linking the two 'realms', there is a boat making its way from one bank of the river to another. The river can be interpreted as both the Arno and the River of Life. Similarly, the distant city, significantly placed between St Francis' hands and the six-winged angel/Christ in a V-shaped space between the two halves of the composition, can be interpreted as a reference to both Assisi and heavenly Jerusalem (Fig. 113). To this end, the city's forms are reminiscent of those of heavenly Jerusalem in the *Adoration of the Lamb* panel of the *Ghent Altarpiece* (Fig. 114) and the *Virgin and Child with Nicholas Rolin* (Fig. 115).

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of the geological aspects of van Eyck's Philadelphia *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* see Bé, 1997.

⁵⁷ Snyder, 1997: 83.

This comparison of the landscape manipulations of Memling and van Eyck has highlighted their interpretive potential in the hands of two different artists with different aims. For Memling, the way he organised landscape features related to his aim of presenting St Jerome in exemplar mode; his concern was to bring together a range of the saint's biographical details, and convey to viewers the fact that, in the manner of St Jerome, achievement of a close identification with Christ meant a commitment to ascetic and devotional practices that spread across a lifetime. In contrast, Van Eyck used choice and organisation of landscape features to help him visually describe the personal experience of St Francis receiving the stigmata, and thereby help viewers reach a deeper understanding for themselves of Christ's suffering and its implications for humanity.

**Sts Stephen, Christopher, John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene
with the Virgin and Christ Child
in Memling's *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*
and
Sts William of Maleval, Maurus, Christopher, Giles and Barbara
with the Christ Child
in Memling's *Moreel Triptych***

In these works of saints, the landscape imagery in each painting accompanies standing saints, except that in the *Moreel Triptych* it also provides information on the identity and aspirations of patrons.

The small size of Memling's *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* indicates that it is unlikely that it was displayed in a public space (Fig. 116). Its content addresses the circumstances of Christ's arrival on earth particularly his birth through Mary and the threat from Herod, and provides viewers with images of saints who, with the exception

of Stephen, were in direct contact with Christ when he lived on earth. Each panel presents a multitude of mini-locations to convey biographical events that occurred in different times and places.

The holy figures represented in the panels are the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child, St John the Baptist, St Mary Magdalene, St Stephen and St Christopher. In the central panel, Mary stands with the baby Jesus in her arms resting for a while on her journey to Egypt. To the left of her is the episode of the Massacre of the Innocents and to the right a legend not recorded in the Gospels: the Miracle of the Cornfield. Joseph gathers dates from a nearby palm tree and both the ox and ass stand close to him. A pair of monkeys, a magpie and a bird of prey perch on the rocks behind Mary and there are two lions to the far left.⁵⁸ The winding track edged with bushy trees is a common feature in Memling's landscapes, so are the tall, feathery-type trees that appear here on the horizon. The rock formation behind Mary appears in other works by Memling (Figs. 117-119).⁵⁹ This rocky topography is continued across into the St John panel, together with the waters of the River Jordan.⁶⁰ St John gestures towards Jesus (*Ecce Agnus Dei*) and behind him are tiny scenes portraying the Baptism of Christ, the Feast of Herod and his own execution. The last two scenes take place in buildings where the interiors are open to view: these architectural features serve to separate narrative events that occur in different places and on different occasions in real time. This style of continuous

⁵⁸ De Vos, 1994: 189 notes that these animals have a symbolic purpose (e.g. the sinful monkey) as well as suggesting an exotic location.

⁵⁹ For example, similarities in *The Advent and Triumph of Christ* and almost identical forms in the *Diptych with the Virgin and Child and Four Musical Angels* and the *Bembo Diptych*.

⁶⁰ A continuity in landscape features occurs across the St Stephen and St Christopher panels also, so that when the triptych is closed the saints appear to share the same landscape space.

narrative is repeated in the other panels of the altarpiece - in the St Stephen and Mary Magdalene panels - and it is a device that Memling employs to great effect in *Scenes from the Passion of Christ* (Fig. 120),⁶¹ in the *Advent and Triumph of Christ* (Fig. 121)⁶² and to a lesser degree in the *Greverade Triptych* (Fig. 122).⁶³ Use of this device in the St Christopher panel of the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt Triptych* leads to the inclusion of more detail about St Christopher's life than is to be found in Memling's *Moreel Triptych*. The hermit that lights up the river crossing is similar in both paintings and so, too, the rock formation in which he stands. However, Memling has rotated the formation to suit the demands of each composition.

The dense vegetation in the foreground of each panel is a feature that is found in many of Memling's works including the *Moreel Triptych*. Memling follows in the footsteps of the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden - the Tournai School - in his portrayal of carefully observed plant life in the foreground of painted scenes.⁶⁴ However, whilst the realistic reproduction of plant life certainly adds to a sense of 'truth' in this work, it was a tradition in religious art at this time to include some plants for their symbolic value; for example, in the *Portinari Triptych* by Hugo van der Goes, the foreground flowers in the central panel are likely to allude to the virtues and sorrows of the Virgin.⁶⁵ This realistic reproduction of plant life continues in the *Moreel*

⁶¹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.11. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.68.

⁶² De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.38. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.45.

⁶³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.90. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.40.

⁶⁴ De Vos, 1999: 318.

⁶⁵ Ridderbos, 2005: 109. See also Hall, 1984: 162 & 192: the white lilies/irises may allude to Mary's purity and the blue to her Immaculate Conception, and Murray, 1996: 197: the columbine blooms may be a reference to her Seven Sorrows, with the red/orange colour of some of the lilies alluding, perhaps, to Christ's future death.

Triptych, where it supports the feet of saints that are shown to have a close and personal connection with the patrons of the altarpiece.

In the *Moreel Triptych*, the Christ Child, with St Christopher, forms the object of devotion, and Willem Moreel, his wife Barbara and most of their children are portrayed praying *within* landscape (Fig. 123). There is no architectural form in the manner of a *sacra conversazione* composition separating figures from the landscape. Instead, and in innovative manner, Memling uses landscape features themselves to suggest a distinction between the key holy figures and things worldly. However, the same features that separate the sacred from the worldly also work to connect the two. This sense of ambiguity, so important in conveying interwoven realms, extends to the manner of the representation of Moreel himself: his commitment to religious devotion - he prays within landscape and not in a church-like space - is part of the imagery that also conveys his high noble status.⁶⁶ A close visual analysis of the painting provides evidence to support these statements.

The *Moreel Triptych* presents three saints - St Christopher, St Maurus and St Giles - within landscape in its central panel, but in contrast to the *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* and the *St John Altarpiece*, there is no multitude of tiny scenes set within the landscape providing the narrative detail of each of their lives. From the St Christopher legend, the hermit of the river bank is present in his cave and St Christopher fords a river with the Christ Child on his shoulders; he holds the traditional flowering

⁶⁶ For biographical details of Willem see pages 218-19.

staff in his hands.⁶⁷ As for St Maurus and St Giles, their attributes are depicted in the manner of the saints in the central panel of the *St John Altarpiece*: the monk St Maurus has a crook and open book, St Giles touches his pet hind and there is an arrow in his arm.⁶⁸ Crucially, in contrast to compositions of standing saints in Italian compositions, where features of architecture tend to separate saints, Memling uses rocky, river bluffs to screen one saint from another. Some sort of screening device may have been judged necessary by Memling because in the first place St Maurus and St Giles played no part in the legend of St Christopher, and in the second, their status in the composition is not equal to that of St Christopher who with the Christ Child is the object of devotion. St Maurus and St Giles stand close to, but not within, the sacred narrative event *in the place of* Willem Moreel and his wife Barbara; they are two of the couple's name saints.⁶⁹ This notion is formally supported by the continuation of the luxuriant foliage beneath their feet into the wings containing Willem, Barbara and their children. In addition, the dark clouds that swirl behind the haloed head of Jesus function to focus attention on the Holy Child on St Christopher's shoulders in the space between the river bluffs. This feature of storm clouds linked with Christ's halo works at a metaphorical level, too, in that it conveys the hope (the light of Christ's halo) that the Incarnation brought to a humanity consumed with sin (the darkness of the clouds). With hands clasped in prayer, Willem and Barbara kneel in the real world they share with St Maurus and St Giles and contemplate the afterlife made possible through Christ. At the same time, they invoke St Christopher to avoid dying suddenly without the benefit of the last

⁶⁷ For the legend of St Christopher, see Catholic Encyclopedia Online and Hall, 1984: 68.

⁶⁸ For the legend of St Maurus, see Catholic Encyclopedia Online and Hall, 1984: 45. For St Giles, Catholic Encyclopedia Online and Hall, 1984: 138.

⁶⁹ De Vos, 1994: 241. 'Maurus' and 'Moreel' share the same etymology: Maurus/Moor and 'hert' (hind) can be linked with van Hertsvelde, Barbara's family name.

sacraments.⁷⁰ Behind them stand two more name saints, St William of Maleval with Willem and his sons, and St Barbara with Barbara and her daughters.⁷¹ Through the intercessory powers of five saints, one of which protects against sudden death, Willem and Barbara are trying to ensure a life everlasting in Paradise made possible through the Incarnation of God, the fact of which is conveyed by the image of the naked Christ Child.

This dominant presence of four saints in landscape, in addition to St Christopher, focuses attention on the belief that saints exist in the world and paradise contemporaneously. In other words, the key figures of the altarpiece project from the very start an emphasis on the interweaving of the real and the spiritual and Memling works to extend this with his choice and organisation of landscape features. The river bluffs screen off St Christopher and the Christ Child, but *at the same time* they merge with landscape features that support St Maurus and St Giles. These features in turn continue across into the wings where magnificent fortified dwellings are also represented, one in each wing (Figs. 124 & 125). Like the residence at Mâle,⁷² each one has a tower - most notably the one behind the two Barbaras⁷³ - and for each one there is access across a drawbridge, crenellated balconies and narrow windows (Figs. 126 & 127). Adjacent to the large residence behind Willem is a church and rural

⁷⁰ De Vos, 1994: 242. He refers to Blum's suggestion that St Christopher and St James (patron of Moreel's parish church and the location of the altarpiece) were both venerated on the 25th July.

⁷¹ For the legend of St William of Maleval, also known as St William the Great, see Catholic Encyclopedia Online. See note 143 for St Barbara.

⁷² See page 194 and Fig. 205A.

⁷³ Because St Barbara holds her attribute of the tower close to the tower of the fortified house, this symbol gains in strength. Not only were towers a symbol of a lord's power, but because of their association with the legend of St Barbara they also carried implications of chastity, a most significant notion in the wing that carried representations of Barbara and her daughters.

buildings that continue into the central panel. The largest one could be a mill.⁷⁴ These details suggest Willem had a large estate that included a village, church and mill rights. The fortified dwelling behind Barbara indicates that she brought considerable wealth and status of her own to the marriage. Just as the hermit in the river bluff supplies detail of St Christopher's life, so the settlements behind Willem and his wife convey the high status detail of their lives. Unfortunately, there is no extant documentation that describes or makes reference to the exact appearance of Willem's lordly estate at East Cleyhem⁷⁵ or of his wife's, but it is likely that the contemporary church-goers at St James recognised the fortified houses in the landscape as those associated with the finest of the city. But this imagery related to Moreel's secular identity interweaves with that designed to convey the religious nature of himself and his family: the couple kneel in prayer with a church behind Willem, and a daughter who is a nun next to Barbara, but at the same time they are portrayed in fine clothes and adjacent to buildings that suggest their status is noble. The presence of so many of their children also has a dual function: it conveys a key noble sentiment, that of lineage preservation, but it also displays the expectation of Willem and Barbara that their children will pray for the souls of their parents and thereby reduce their time in Purgatory.

The *Moreel Triptych*, then, is a composition in which much imagery is dedicated to describing Moreel's secular identity, yet at the same time it conveys an inseparable juxtaposition of the sacred and earthly. The dominance of saints, with their intercessory abilities, has much to do with this, but I suggest that also significant is the experience

⁷⁴ Compare, for example, the mill structure in his *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence.

⁷⁵ See page 195.

that Memling gained from his experimentation with the *sacra conversazione* format which I discuss later in this chapter. The landscape views that he introduced to this traditional format gave him a surface upon which he could make symbolic references that linked back to the foreground tableaux, tableaux that increasingly included portraits of donors. It was in this arena, one distinctly religious, where Memling must have realised the potential of landscape features to convey high-status information about donors. I sense that it was not something that either he or his burgher clients were likely to ignore, especially when it came to secular portraiture.

Memling and van der Weyden

In this part of the exploration of Memling's religious works, I focus on Memling's presentations of one-off key events in sacred history and how his imagery and meanings compare with those of van der Weyden. The aim is to place Memling's imagery within the artistic context of its day and explore further the influence on meaning of landscape manipulation.

Although there is no documentary evidence that Memling worked with van der Weyden before he was granted citizenship of Bruges in January, 1465, close similarities in style, motifs and technique suggest Memling had access to van der Weyden's workshop, patterns and compositions.⁷⁶ Especially relevant to this hypothesis is Memling's style of underdrawing in his earliest works: the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*, the *Kansas City Virgin* and the *Last Judgment*. In these works, like van der Weyden Memling used a

⁷⁶ De Vos, 1994: 361-64 & Lane, 2009: Ch.1. But see Lane, Ch.3 where she proposes that Memling may have spent time in Bouts' workshop in Leuven, and Ch.4 where she highlights Memling's likely familiarity with works by van Eyck and Christus in Bruges.

fine paint brush with bone black ink to draw outlines and drapery folds; his strokes were long and ended with a hook shape; and for areas of shadow he used a parallel hatching technique.⁷⁷ However, he did not use this very detailed method of underdrawing for long and soon changed to a more sketchy method using black chalk or charcoal.⁷⁸ The compositions of van der Weyden were to have a strong influence on many painters that came after him, especially in the North. However, the underdrawing link supports the view that for Memling his relationship with van der Weyden was a most personal one: it is likely that he worked at one time in van der Weyden's workshop, perhaps as a journeyman, and before setting up on his own in Bruges.

A work commissioned early in Memling's Bruges-based career was the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* (Figs. 128 & 129).⁷⁹ Crabbe, a Cistercian, was the twenty-sixth abbot of Ter Duinen Abbey in Koksijde and he may have commissioned, also, the *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi*.⁸⁰ In the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*, there are many features that display van der Weyden's influence on Memling, especially features from the *Triptych of the Crucifixion* and the *Abegg Triptych* (Figs. 130-132):⁸¹ like his master, Memling uses landscape to link subject matter across panels, and between these works of the two

⁷⁷ Van Asperen de Boer et al, 1992.

⁷⁸ For an overview of Memling's technique see de Vos, 1994: 377-85.

⁷⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.5. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.54. Lane, 2009: 299 does not agree with de Vos on a date of c.1467-70. Geirnat, 1997: 25-30 agreed to accept de Vos's dating, but maintained his earlier decision (1989) that Crabbe commissioned the work for the chapel altar of the Bruges refuge of Ter Duinen Abbey on Snaggaardstraat which was consecrated in 1479.

⁸⁰ De Vos, 1994: 114.

⁸¹ De Vos, 1999:212. Since Panofsky cast doubt on the *Abegg Triptych* as an autograph work of van der Weyden, many scholars have followed his lead. De Vos, however, disagrees. See 210-16 for de Vos's scholarship on the *Abegg Triptych* and 234-37 for the *Triptych of the Crucifixion*. Also, Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: Cat.No.31; Kemperdick regards this as a workshop composition.

artists there are similarities in natural and architectural landscape features and figural arrangements.

The panels of the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* are now dispersed, but when placed together they display Memling's skill - in the manner of van der Weyden⁸² - in using features in the sky and landscape to bring unity to the subject matter of triptychs. Continuity features include the dark clouds covering the sun to the left and the moon to the right which spill over rhythmically into the side panels; the dominant track which leads the viewer's eye to the distant representation of Jerusalem as it wends its way from a fortified, rural dwelling in the left-hand panel across into the central one; and the rocky, grass-covered outcrops behind the male donor and his name-saint in the right-hand panel which dovetail with those behind St Bernard in the central panel. The downward thrust of the latter leads the eye to Christ's crucified feet and then on to the upward thrust of the adjoining land at the top of which stands Jerusalem, the buildings of which spread from the central into the left-hand panel.

In addition to the inspiration of landscape continuity, Memling copied van der Weyden in placing trees at the edges of tracks and interlocking spurs of rolling landscape so that they could function as recession tools. For example, in the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* Memling's bushy tree types are accompanied by others with short, thin trunks and they tend to edge tracks and/or interlocking spurs of land (Fig. 133). Taller trees of a different style - with the exception of one between St John's head and Christ's legs - are

⁸² De Vos, 1999:236 notes evidence to suggest that van der Weyden's *Triptych of the Crucifixion*, Vienna, was originally a single panel; hence, a continuous landscape is to be expected if true. But there are other examples e.g. the *Abegg Triptych*, the *Braque Triptych* and the *St Columba Altarpiece* (in part).

to be found on the horizon. Both the bushy-type trees and the 'feathery' variety are found in works by van der Weyden (Figs. 135 & 138).⁸³

The form and organisation of architectural features in the landscape in Memling's *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* also owe much to van der Weyden. In his representation of Jerusalem, Memling paints mostly Gothic-styled towers. The tallest one in the left-hand panel (Detail F, Fig. 139) is repeated in other paintings, for example: the *Virgin and Child*, Brussels (Detail D, Fig. 139) and the *Diptych with the Virgin and Child and Four Musical Angels* (Detail E, Fig. 139) and it is a feature that originates with Rogier van der Weyden; it can be found, for example, in van der Weyden's *Bladelin Altarpiece* (Detail B, Fig. 139) and *St Columba Altarpiece* (Detail C, Fig. 139). The onion-shaped dome on the centrally-planned structure above the Virgin Mary's head in Crabbe's triptych (Fig. 133) is also similar to van der Weyden's in his *Triptych of the Crucifixion*, Vienna (Detail A, Fig. 139), but there it has another smaller dome surmounting it. Notably, Memling does not use the exotic domes he created for his later panoramas of Jerusalem.⁸⁴ Another similarity of building (and location in the composition) between van der Weyden's *Triptych of the Crucifixion* and Memling's *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* is the fortified dwelling surrounded by a moat with swans situated behind Mary Magdalene in the left-hand panel of van der Weyden's work (Fig. 140) and behind St Anne in the left-hand panel of Memling's (Fig. 141). It is doubtful that Jan Crabbe, a

⁸³ De Vos, 1994: 363. He compares Memling's *Diptych with the Virgin and Child and Four Musical Angels* (Fig. 136) with van der Weyden's *Visitation*, Leipzig (Fig. 138) to show Memling's take up of both types of trees. Memling also references the water space of the *Visitation* in his *Virgin and Child*, Brussels (Fig. 137). He uses the form of bushy trees along the edges of interlocking spurs a great deal e.g. *Man with a Red Hat* (Fig. 134).

⁸⁴ *Scenes from the Passion of Christ* and *Scenes from the Advent and Triumph of Christ*.

Cistercian abbot, owned such a luxurious dwelling.⁸⁵ However, as the old lady and the young man portrayed in the wings are likely to be relatives of Jan (perhaps his mother and brother),⁸⁶ the dwelling could refer to the home he once shared with his family. The dwellings in the two crucifixion paintings are not similar, but their inclusion with donors of substance suggests attempts by van der Weyden and Memling to provide information about the personal circumstances of the donors of these religious works.

Jan Crabbe was not the first abbot to appear in a religious composition that included reference to a fortified settlement with a moat in the landscape. In the *St Vaast Altarpiece* by Jacques Daret (c.1404-1470) there appears in the Visitation panel (Figs. 143 & 144) Jean du Clercq, abbot of St Vaast in Arras, kneeling before a complex that may be St Vaast itself: a large church surrounded by a wall with towers and with an imposing gatehouse, a moat with swans and drawbridge and thatched houses close by, possibly for lay workers.⁸⁷ It is recorded that Daret and van der Weyden were both apprentices in the workshop of Robert Campin; the inclusion of high status residences in works that show donors is evidence of their shared training and also of a desire of donors long before Memling's time to have personal details portrayed in their religious commissions. The degree to which such buildings are particular rather than generic is difficult to assess, although the appearance of the same building in several paintings suggests an emphasis on the generic and symbolic.

⁸⁵ The entrance to the lowered drawbridge is the same as that for the residence behind Willem Moreel in the *Moreel Triptych* (Figs. 141 & 142).

⁸⁶ See de Vos' reference to the scholarship of Renders (de Vos, 1994: 90).

⁸⁷ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: Cat.No.13 - note 3, page 250, states that the Abbey of Saint-Vaast had no moat or residential complex with chapel.

As to similarity of figural disposition, there is a very close resemblance between Memling's portrayal of Christ on the Cross in the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* and that in both the *Vienna Crucifixion* and the *Abegg Triptych*: Christ's upper body with outstretched arms is silhouetted against the sky, and in the *Abegg Triptych* there is the same darkness covering the sun;⁸⁸ Memling's Mary Magdalene replaces the Virgin of van der Weyden's work at Vienna clinging to the foot of the Cross; and Memling adopts van der Weyden's innovative procedure of placing the donor(s) in the central panel close to holy figures. It may be that Van der Weyden's decision to represent donors in the same scale as the landscape features designed to provide the sacred narrative's setting results directly from an aim to locate spiritual experience in the here and now. Memling does this in only two narrative works, his *Triptych of Jan Crabbe* and his *Lamentation*, although he did paint narratives in which his donors were closely associated with their surroundings. In the *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, for example, Floreins is slightly separated from the main action by a low, crumbling wall. Most importantly, and in the manner of the *Moreel Triptych*, in the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*, Memling includes details that relate to religious and secular aspects of Jan's identity. Jan's meditations beneath Christ's crucified feet at Calvary, and his presentation by St Bernard, project his spiritual and monastic identity, whilst the presence of family members and the moated dwelling identify his secular origins.

The strong influence of van der Weyden continues in Memling's *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* at the Prado and in the *Triptych of Jan Floreins*: the compositions in the central and right-hand panels of these paintings and those in van der Weyden's *St*

⁸⁸ Douay-Rheims Bible, Luke 23: 45.

Columba Altarpiece are very close (Figs. 77-79).⁸⁹ These altarpieces are all concerned with the narrative of Christ's arrival on earth, hence the scenery helps to give the events plausibility, to show the viewer that it really is true that Christ was born of humankind, in humble surroundings and that the powerful from all corners of the world - both Jew and Gentile - were witnesses to these facts. I suggest that all of the compositions imply that the earthly viewer, in the here and now, is very much a part of the Biblical narrative. In the *St Columba Altarpiece* the 'piling up' of the figures close to the picture plane promotes this feeling, as does the framing technique in Memling's two works whereby he zooms in and cuts out much of the stable roof. It is only in van der Weyden's painting that there is a landscape-plus-sky sharing equal space with figural disposition together with an allusion - in the form of a tiny crucifix on the central column of the stable - to Christ's future death.

Before a detailed discussion of the central panel of the *St Columba Altarpiece* and its relationship with that in Memling's two works, it is necessary to take a brief look at the wings of all these triptychs and the central panel of the *Bladelin Altarpiece*. It can be seen that the Presentation at the Temple scenes in Memling's two works are inspired by van der Weyden's right-hand panel of his *St Columba Altarpiece* (Figs. 147-49). Memling's left-hand panels, however, relate to the central scene of van der Weyden's *Bladelin Altarpiece*⁹⁰ which in turn looks back to the *Nativity* of the Master of Flémalle (Figs. 150-154). What is relevant to this study is not so much the striking similarities in

⁸⁹ The *St Columba Altarpiece* is not a completely autograph work. See van Asperen de Boer et al, 1992: 29-30 & 36: the infrared reflectography revealed that the underdrawing was by another hand. He suggests Rogier made changes in the first paint layer after seeing Lochner's work (Fig. 146). See also De Vos, 1999: 276-83 for his analysis.

⁹⁰ See De Vos, 1999:242-48 for his analysis of the *Bladelin Altarpiece*.

figural disposition across these paintings of Jesus' birth in a stable, but the influence of the Master of Flémalle's choice and organisation of landscape features in his *Nativity*: all the key ingredients are there that surface in both van der Weyden's and Memling's landscapes across numerous works.⁹¹ Interestingly, some of these are the very features that Friedländer used as a basis of his displeasure in Memling's landscapes.⁹² The ingredients include the attention paid to reproducing the detail of a variety of Flemish buildings; a rutted, meandering path - in formal terms this brings depth to the composition, but it also denotes the vehicle of journeying - here it provides for the journey to Bethlehem and for the business of everyday life, but it could also take the devotees in other paintings to Jerusalem or other holy sites,⁹³ the feature of trees and wicker fencing edging the track - again, these help lead the eye to the horizon where hills are shrouded in mist; riders on either white or brown horses and pedestrians are shown making their way to/from a town with cathedral spires and fortifications; and a castle on the highest point of land is a reminder of social hierarchy - this overlooks a stretch of sea with a galleon and small boat, elements so pertinent to the life of a merchant-trader (Figs. 155 & 156). The holy stable's link with this countryside is implied by its angled position; van der Weyden retains this orientation in the *Bladelin*

⁹¹ See Pächt, 1997: 11-36 for the influence of the Master of Flémalle and van Eyck on van der Weyden, and note 9 above on the attribution complexities surrounding the Master of Flémalle. What is important to this study amidst all these issues is that van der Weyden's landscape features directly influenced Memling, but that ultimately Memling worked in a tradition of landscape imagery that looked back to the beginning of the century, one that was shared between many workshops in the North.

⁹² See page 43.

⁹³ See Acres, 1998: 434-39 for a discussion about the role that roads, paths, halls, stairs, doors and gates can play in conveying passage of time.

Altarpiece, but not the *St Columba Altarpiece*; by rotating it in the latter so that it is parallel to the picture plane I suggest an element of separation creeps in.⁹⁴

In contrast with van der Weyden's space that is dedicated to landscape in the central panel of the *St Columba Altarpiece*, Memling's is greatly reduced in his *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* (Figs. 157 & 158). To the left of the *St Columba* stable there is a close-up view of a street with all the bustle of contemporary, everyday life and through the stable's arches can be seen rolling green fields edged on the left by a track carrying a traveller on horseback and on the right by a row of trees indicating the route taken by the Magi; more settlement is depicted on a rising slope beyond this route (Figs. 159 & 160). It could be argued that the format of the composition conveys the sensation that the key figures are acting out the scene of a play on a shallow stage; this happens because they have been 'piled up' horizontally close to the picture plane.⁹⁵ One effect of this arrangement is to bring the viewer close to the action, but more importantly in the context of this study is the effect of suggesting that the landscape has been painted on a backdrop of panel or linen behind the stage of actors. If this view is accepted, it would be illogical to argue that van der Weyden set his stable *within* landscape. Certainly, the angled stable in the *Bladelin Altarpiece* draws the eye unquestionably into the landscape whereas the frontal disposition of *St Columba's* does not. But to counteract this, van der Weyden has dedicated half the picture space to features of landscape and sky and, most importantly, placed a small crucifix in a prominent position in relation to their organisation horizontally and vertically across the picture plane. The presence of the

⁹⁴ See Pächt, 1997: 52 for his comments on the angled stable in the *Bladelin Triptych* and pages 53-66 for his analysis of the *St Columba Altarpiece*.

⁹⁵ Ridderbos, 2005: 37 takes this view.

crucifix in the scene pays heed to the Church's belief, based on Old Testament scripture, that knowledge of Christ's death existed at his birth.⁹⁶ Its placement in relation to *both* foreground scene and landscape works like a fulcrum holding them in balance. Thus, I suggest, landscape plays both an integral part in setting the sacred event and also in visually describing a central belief of Christian doctrine.

The scholarship of Acres is concerned, too, with the ways in which landscape intertwines with foreground in the *St Columba Altarpiece*.⁹⁷ Acres argues that the form of van der Weyden's landscape is integral to bridging the temporal gap between donor and Magi. For him, the downhill, bustling street in the middle-ground left 'propels' the donor to his position for witnessing the holy scene, with the immediacy of the street contrasting with the distant path taken by the Magi. Both pathways serve the same holy pilgrimage, but each occurs in a different geographical location and century with the two 'united' by the crucifix. A rather speculative, but quite persuasive, notion from Acres is the possibility that the diagonal linking the star, the crucifix and the myrrh was employed to enhance the visual description of the closely interwoven nature, for van der Weyden, of the sacred and worldly realms of life.

As noted earlier, the crucifix is not represented in the two works by Memling (Figs. 157 & 161 & 162-164). In the Floreins work this absence of the crucifix on the stable's central pillar is particularly noticeable because Memling's double arch and central pillar

⁹⁶ E.g. Douay-Rheims Bible, Isaias 7:14 (the prophecy of a virgin conceiving a son who will be called Emmanuel), Isaias 53:3 (Man of Sorrows, rejected by humankind) and Isaias 53: 8 (His death).

⁹⁷ Acres, 1998.

are identical to those of the *St Columba Altarpiece*.⁹⁸ Also absent in Memling's representations are van der Weyden's very detailed passages of landscape that the crucifix unites to the left and right (Figs. 165-167), and the dramatic dark-light sky. These absences suggest that Memling's focus (or his patron's) did not include typology: the record of the Magi event is there, and for well-read Christians this would have prompted mediation upon Old Testament prophecies of Christ's birth and death together with their implications across all nations, but Memling's priority seems to have been to emphasise the straightforward narrative and to 'enshrine' it.

The walls of stables in both works by Memling provide a dominant barrier that allows only a glimpse of landscape beyond (Figs. 166 & 167): as devotees gaze upon the adoration scene, it seems they must forget the world and its distractions and concentrate on the fact that in the most humble of earthly surroundings was born the king of kings. Here was a sacredness that was defined by its seclusion from the world which in turn implies its superiority; it could exist in the world, but the world paled into insignificance at its side. In his *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi*, Memling paints a wide street with pedestrians and horseback riders making their way towards the stable. Because the street leads directly to the stable, the sense is created that the street's function is primarily to provide a route down which pilgrims can travel rather than to provide for the exigencies of everyday life. Also, between this street and the stable there is a double 'barrier': a long wall with just one entrance and a series of stable arches between fairly wide and solid side-walls. This arrangement of features implies that here was an everyday life that did not embrace God's Incarnation *within* its fabric. Furthermore,

⁹⁸ De Vos, 1994: 158.

this sense of aloofness of the tableau scene gains strength from the poise and organisation of the earthly kings within it: the large amount of space around the carefully-posed bodies of the kings pictorially presents the social distance between aristocrats and the rest of society; it is a visual format that contributes to the making of a sacred event very much aloof from the ordinary, everyday life-experiences of the majority.

Memling's *Triptych of Jan Floreins* is much smaller than his *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi*, but it shares the same theme and conveys the same attention to the secluded nature of the sacred realm. The major difference between the stables of van der Weyden and Memling is the way Memling zooms in and cuts out nearly all the roof, especially in the Floreins work. He uses this framing technique to great advantage in many of his secular portraits and it has the effect of drawing the viewer up close and magnifying the content that has been placed close to the picture plane. The viewer of the central panel of the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* is thus able to get close to the stilled action of the Magi pledging allegiance to Jesus. This time, the tableau figures are separated from a busy street by the sharp points of a wooden fence (Fig. 167).⁹⁹ I suggest, again, that the emphasis in terms of the function of the street is one of a route for pilgrims - following in the steps of the Magi - rather than as an enabler of town experiences, especially trade. The rider on a camel conveys the 'foreignness' of the scene and, at the same time, reinforces the view that it is a long journey to reach the very

⁹⁹ Lane, 2009: 25 refers to the scholarship of Dijkstra where it is noted that a pointed fence was in the underdrawing of the *St Columba Altarpiece*. Fletcher, 1997: 165 argues for a similarity between Memling's placement of this fence in relation to the road and that of van der Goes' pointed fence in his *Portinari Altarpiece*.

separate world of 'things sacred'. Like the donor of the *St Columbia Altarpiece*, Friar Jan Floreins is separated from the Biblical narrative by a low wall. But there is no busy street behind him; he is not firmly anchored in everyday life like van der Weyden's donor. Floreins holds an open book in his hands which rest on the top of the wall. Floreins was Master of the Hospital of St John 1488-98, but at the time of the painting's commission he was a young friar there; his noble connections suggest he was well-placed to provide the funds for artistic patronage.¹⁰⁰ The sense of hierarchical qualities in relation to 'things sacred' that is present in the *Triptych of Jan Floreins* is likely to have resonated with the perspectives of a young friar and nobleman.

In summary, the analysis of van der Weyden's *St Columba Altarpiece* alongside Memling's *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* and *Triptych of Jan Floreins* was carried out with the aim of demonstrating more than the significant influence of van der Weyden on Memling, or the debt they both owe to the Master of Flémalle in terms of landscape. The comparative examination has shown how landscape in these works fulfilled, on the one hand, its traditional role in sacred art, that of setting the scene for narrative action, whilst on the other it had not only the potential to convey symbolism relating to Christian doctrine, but, also, by way of its organisation in relation to figures and the architectural form in which these figures were placed, make allusions as to how the interface between sacred and earthly was envisaged. Although an argument could be made that van der Weyden's figures are shown like actors on a shallow stage, with the landscape painted on canvas behind them, I suggested an opposite point of view arguing that his format is one of figural tableau set *within* landscape, and this resonates

¹⁰⁰ See note 45.

with an aim to combine narrative with a symbolism referring to a key aspect of Christian doctrine. I further suggested that, in contrast, Memling's format with its absence of the crucifix, its zooming technique that reduces landscape views and its stilling of foreground action ends up presenting a work that emphasises narrative and a sacredness that is defined by its seclusion from the world. The idea that a significant defining characteristic of sacredness was its separation from the world is expressed in Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions, the subject matter of the next section.

**GROUP II:
WORKS WITH KEY SACRED FIGURES NOT PLACED WITHIN LANDSCAPE**

In most of Memling's works in this group the landscape is viewed from a church-like architectural form that encloses a holy tableau, and the aim of this section is to explore the effect on interpretation of placing an architectural form between landscape and figures. This form promotes a sense of the sacred being 'cordoned off' from the earthly. I suggest that this does not preclude references in the earthly reality (the landscape) to this enshrined sacredness (the tableau), but such references imply that the function of earthly features is to serve the vision of the holy interior. Where donors accompany the holy figures, symbolic references to the religious and secular identities and aspirations of these donors can be found in the landscape. Additionally, the very placement of these donors in the cordoned-off, sacred space indicates their separation from, and superiority over, others in society. I apply this notion later to Memling's portraits-with-landscape in Chapter Four arguing that looking out at landscape from a loggia implies a sense of distinction in society. In all of these paintings of tableaux-with-architectural-form, I consider the effect of the *combination* of architectural form and landscape on meaning,

as I did in van der Weyden's *St Columba Altarpiece* and Memling's *Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi* and *Triptych of Jan Floreins*. To this end, this section of the chapter begins with an exploration of van der Weyden's use of arches juxtaposed with landscape in his *Miraflores Altarpiece* (Fig. 168).¹⁰¹ I show, again, that van der Weyden created a view of the real-spiritual dynamic that is different in emphasis from Memling's. He presents holy figures within spaces framed by an architectural form, yet sacredness appears closely interwoven into the fabric of the world.

An exploration of the way van der Weyden juxtaposes architectural form with landscape in the *Miraflores Altarpiece* is useful to an understanding of Memling's juxtapositions in all his *sacra conversazione*-type works. However, the focus here is on three works by Memling that include a *Miraflores*-type arch within an architectural form. These are contrasted with the *Triptych of John Donne*, a *sacra conversazione*-type work without this extra architectural feature. Resonances between Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type works and van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin* are also examined.

The *Miraflores Altarpiece* (c.1440-44)¹⁰²

The *Miraflores Altarpiece* is a fixed triptych that presents three traceried arches framing the pivotal events in the Virgin's life.¹⁰³ There are no donors represented and the central image shows Jesus' rigid body held lovingly in the arms of Mary. The arches, with sculptural groups skilfully represented with shadow effects, merge into rectangular

¹⁰¹The painting at the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, is the original. See De Vos, 1999: 230-31.

¹⁰² See De Vos, 1999: 226-33 for his analysis. Also, Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: Cat.No.29.

¹⁰³ De Vos, 1999: 227. King Juan II of Castille donated the altarpiece to the Carthusian convent of Miraflores near Burgos which was founded in 1441-42 as a mausoleum for himself and his wife. It was not until 1453 that the convent was dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

frames which in turn unite with the picture frame.¹⁰⁴ The arches convey the idea that theirs is a threshold-type function, with their fictive sculptures of Biblical events implying the sort of threshold that the Church offers i.e. access on earth to the spiritual realm.¹⁰⁵

For de Vos, the rounded, traceried archways in the *Miraflores* suggest the entrance to a church.¹⁰⁶ I lean towards this viewpoint and interpret the landscape beyond the archways as the worldly environment in which the Church (i.e. heaven on earth) is set. However, in terms of reality, I acknowledge that it is doubtful such panoramic views would have been available from inside a medieval church. Kemperdick discusses the ambivalence of van der Weyden's arch form: the sculptures imply church doorways, but the "wooden" effect behind them, together with the tracery, is reminiscent of retable shrines. Additionally, the triple format brings to mind the architectural form of many charterhouse rood screens.¹⁰⁷ This latter suggestion is particularly interesting in light of a choir screen's function due to its location between choir and nave: it is a divider of space and social groups, but also a uniter of spaces and groups, through the ritual of the

¹⁰⁴ A work that may have inspired van der Weyden to set a holy scene beneath a Gothic portal may have been *The Betrothal of the Virgin* probably painted by the Master of Flémalle (Fig. 169).

¹⁰⁵ See Birkmeyer, March, 1961: 2-5 for a detailed description of the arches in the *Miraflores Altarpiece* and his view that they functioned as portals into a sacred realm. Also, Panofsky, 1953: 259-64 for an analysis of the painting as a whole. For him the arches functioned to "cut out ... a field of vision from the context of reality" (page 260).

¹⁰⁶ De Vos, 1999: 226. Also see Birkmeyer, March 1961: 12 for his view that the portals of the Chartreuse at Champmol - the Carthusian Monastery founded by Philip the Bold and used for the tombs of Burgundian dukes - provides the prototype of van der Weyden's symbolism: "The entrance of the church is the dividing line between the world of the living and the tombs of the dead...the threshold between the profane and sacred realms". See also Low, 2003: 470 here discussing the main portal of the monastic cathedral at Vézelay and the notion of crossing a threshold. For Low, a significant aspect of the porch's sculptures was they brought a sacred space into being i.e. it was only by passing through the arch that the church came into existence for lay visitors.

¹⁰⁷ Kemperdick & Sander, 2008: 318.

Mass.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, its doors indicate a site of passage, a threshold across which there is a new territory.¹⁰⁹ But whatever the exact architectural form, there is a sense of the presence of Holy Mother Church, through which the viewer (i.e. humanity) is given 'access' to the Incarnation; the death of Christ and the grief suffered by Mary; and the appearance of the resurrected Christ to his mother. Although there is an emphasis on Mary's relationship with Christ, and the role she plays in his life, there is a strong sense that Christ's birth, death and resurrection are the focus of devotion, with the viewer meant to 'experience' these events through the eyes and heart of Mary.¹¹⁰ These events from sacred history are represented close up to the picture plane in the same space as the arches: from the left-hand side of the altarpiece to the right, a zigzag rhythm (present in body outlines) functions to enhance verticality and this in turn reinforces a sense of frontality. In addition, the bold colours, especially the red, bring dominance to the figures at the front edge of the picture plane where the arches are located. The placement of the holy figures beneath/close to these arches implies their presence in the sacred sphere of heaven-on-earth. A sense of the everlasting nature of this sacred sphere is conveyed by the portrayal of further New Testament events in sculptural relief in the fictive stone.

In the central panel of the *Miraflores Altarpiece*, the lowered step and the projection of Christ's feet into the viewer's space bring not only sacred and human together, but also

¹⁰⁸ Jung, 2000: 630.

¹⁰⁹ Jung, 2000:631. Her scholarship on choir screens in Gothic churches makes use of the notions of van Gennep, Turner and Leach re boundary markers/thresholds and for Turner 'liminality'. It is an attractive idea when applied to the arches of the *Miraflores Altarpiece*: a screen already in a holy place and separated from the outside world marking the crossing from one territory to another.

¹¹⁰ For a comparison of the *Miraflores* with the *Saint John Triptych* see Lane, 1978; she argues that both refer to the liturgy of Easter.

past and present. Also, this representation of a dead Christ dramatically projects Christ's human rather than his God-like nature, as does the rooting of the Cross in an earthly landscape. But the location of the Cross is not straightforward: it is firmly anchored to both Golgotha and the church-like architecture. In addition, there are no doors at the back edge of the floor space (as in the right-hand panel) functioning as a barrier between sacred and real locations: there is no clear view of where floor space ends and landscape begins. Van der Weyden has created a sense of ambiguity in this central panel, and ambiguity is important for conveying an interwoven relationship between the sacred and profane realms. Furthermore, there are subtle pictorial 'reflections' that reinforce the notion that the realms are inseparable. At the foot of the Cross there is an X shape formed by the two diagonals defining the central action (one formed by St John's head, his right arm and Christ's left arm and the other by Joseph of Arimathaea's head, Mary's face and Christ's feet). This arrangement has the effect of focussing the viewer's gaze on St John's hands which clasp Mary's anguished body. The white at either end of Christ's upper body encloses the red of Mary's gown and helps to concentrate the viewer's attention on the faces of Mary and Christ and the colour of the blood he shed for humanity. This so important X, designed to focus the devotee's mind on the agony endured at Golgotha, is echoed in the landscape behind the Cross as rows of trees follow the outline of interlocking spurs of land (Fig.170). This device joins with other devices to create a sense of depth, but its reflection of the foreground X rhythm not only leads to a sense of merging worlds, but also to an enhancement of the emotional content of the sacred narrative.

The relationship between the main figural action and landscape in the right-hand panel is not quite the same as that in the central panel. Both panels do show van der Weyden engaging in continuous narrative, with landscape functioning to give those events that occurred before the main action a physical location: in the right-hand scene, Christ is represented as he steps out of a sarcophagus and before him lies a meandering path down which he will walk to greet his mother;¹¹¹ and in the central panel, the empty Cross indicates that he has been taken down prior to the Lamentation/Pieta of the foreground action. However, there are some major differences in the way landscape and main action have been defined and brought together. This in turn suggests an ever-shifting quality to the nature of the juxtaposition between sacred and worldly. In the Resurrection panel there is a large expanse of tiled floor that has to be crossed before reaching doors that open out onto the landscape; they are open but they still indicate a barrier (Fig. 171). The emptiness of the space in which Jesus reveals himself to his mother reinforces an important fact in the story recorded in the *Meditationes vitae Christi* that Mary was alone at the time, but, perhaps more importantly, it gives emphasis to an event most decidedly unworldly - the ability to conquer death. This emphasis on Christ's godliness in both the foreground and the background of the Resurrection panel contrasts with the humanity of Christ conveyed in both foreground and background of the central panel. It appears that nothing is 'fixed' for van der Weyden: Christ is present on earth and in heaven as both God and man; there is no

¹¹¹ For a brief account of the literary and iconographic history of this episode before van der Weyden see Breckenridge (1957). He refers to the importance of the thirteenth-century narrative of Pseudo-Bonaventura, but also the scene's high profile in Spain and thought to be derived from Coptic and Syrian sources. In light of the *Miraflores* being a Spanish commission, this fact is significant.

separation in his nature. Consequently, the sacred and the worldly are not confined to heaven and earth respectively.

The imagery of the left-hand panel, with its absence of landscape views, presents a sharp contrast to that in the central and right-hand panels. Here, the naked Christ Child lies in a central position on the altar of Mary's lap, both in the company of sleeping Joseph; a cloth of honour hangs behind the group and the bull's eye glass panes of the windows adds to the sense of seclusion that haunts the scene. It is likely that the metaphor of enclosure is a reference to the virginity of Mary at Christ's birth.

In summary, I suggest that van der Weyden used the church-like arch form to convey the threshold function of the Church between things earthly and spiritual, and, then, by varying the nature of the contents of the space behind the arch and its relationship to the choice and organisation of landscape features beyond, he was able to set up a sense of ambiguity that implied an interweaving of the sacred and the earthly. This sense was reinforced by the humanity of Christ being present in the sacred realm in the central panel and his godliness being on earth in the right hand panel. The aim now is to consider Memling's application of the *Miraflores*-type arch within an architectural form that encloses a tableau of figures and which has views onto landscape.

Memling and the use of arches in *sacra conversazione*-type compositions

The three compositions discussed here, and which display a strong affinity with the *Miraflores Altarpiece*, also betray the influence of two works by van Eyck: his *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* and his *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin* with its

panoramic views onto landscape.¹¹² The three works by Memling are the *Triptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned* at Vienna (Figs. 172 & 178),¹¹³ the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels* at Washington (Figs. 173 & 179)¹¹⁴ and the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels* in Florence (Figs. 174 & 180).¹¹⁵ In each of these paintings, the seated Virgin, the Christ Child and two angels (a donor replaces one angel in the work at Vienna) are located beneath/slightly in front of a highly decorated Gothic arch supported by marble columns.¹¹⁶ There is an oriental carpet at Mary's feet and in two of them it runs over a step. Together with the carpet, the robes of the angels (and in one case the donor) reach across the arch towards the space inhabited by the viewer. The cloth of honour behind Mary links the arms of her throne with the canopy above her head and screens out the central part of the landscape view; it also accentuates the height of Mary within the pyramidal organisation of the figures beneath the arch. The canopy seems to be touching the arch, and this works to suggest that the arch with its rich columns and elaborate decoration is very much a part of the holy scene.

The sacred scene in each painting does not represent a narrative event in the manner of the *Miraflores*. The primary function of the scenes is doctrinal and concerned with Mary's role in the Incarnation and devotion to the Eucharist. The flesh of Christ sits on the altar of Mary's lap, a lap covered with red robes that allude to Christ's future death.

¹¹² The *Triptych with the Resurrection* also has a decorative arch, but it is direct onto a landscape.

¹¹³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.53. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.70.

¹¹⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.77. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.71.

¹¹⁵ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.89 (Cat.No.52 for wings). Lane, 2009: Cat.No.35.

¹¹⁶ In contrast to the argument being made here of a van der Weyden/van Eyck resonance in these three works, Lane, 2009: 63-64 suggests a consideration of Bouts' *Enthroned Madonna with Angels, Capilla Real* and Christus' *Virgin and Child Enthroned on a Porch*, Madrid. However, whilst it is the case that in these two works the holy pair is placed in a loggia space with columns and arches, there is no predominant *Miraflores*-type arch to the fore.

Christ's small hand reaches for the apple which indicates he is the second Adam and willing to assume the sins of the world. This symbolism of sacrifice continues in the sculptural representation decorating the arches; there are, for example, representations of vine leaves and bunches of grapes in the arches of all three paintings. This amplification of meanings related to the main scene through the sculpture of the arches comes directly from van der Weyden.

In the *Triptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned*, Vienna, there are arch sculptures representing the Sacrifice of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter; the first prefigures Christ's sacrifice and the second refers to the virginity of Mary.¹¹⁷ In the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence, there is the Killing of Abel and Samson Killing the Lion; these are Old Testament precursors to Christ as victim and then as conqueror. However, the sculptures represented in the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Washington, do not have references to Christ's death: one is of King David, ancestor to the Messiah, the other is of Isaiah the prophet who foretold Mary's birth.¹¹⁸ The presence of plump cherubim and *putti* together with festoons in the Vienna and Florence versions suggest an Italian influence, although there is the possibility that the one now in Vienna was commissioned by the Flemish, Cistercian abbot Jan Crabbe.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Douay-Rheims Bible, Book of Judges 11: 30-40 for Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter. The girl spent two months in the wilderness beforehand where she lamented the fact that she would die a virgin. Lane, 2009:318 highlights the sacrifice element in the story: like Abraham, Jephthah was prepared to sacrifice his child in order to please God and this act prefigures Mary's role in the sacrifice of Christ.

¹¹⁸ Questioned as an autograph work (De Vos, 1994: 276)

¹¹⁹ De Vos, 1994: 216.

The Eucharistic symbolism present in the figural action and (in two) the decoration of the arches leads to the expectation of features in the landscape echoing such symbolism. But before examining Memling's landscape features from this perspective, it is necessary first to consider the very significant influence of van Eyck's *sacra conversazione*-type composition, his *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* (Fig. 184), on Memling. Many features used in the three works under discussion relate to this composition.¹²⁰ Canon van der Paele was a canon at St Donatian's in Bruges and the painting was one of many gifts given to the church.¹²¹ There is a strong possibility, therefore, that Memling and his patrons saw the painting *in situ*, although there is no extant documentation that gives information about its original location in the church; Martens argues that it was an epitaph and that it hung in the chapel where van der Paele's tomb was placed.¹²² As to the similar forms between Memling and van Eyck, there is the Virgin, dressed in red, with the naked Christ Child on her lap, sitting on a throne located in a church-like interior with an adjacent ambulatory reached through rich, marble columns; there are carvings of events that prefigure Christ's sacrifice (and Adam and Eve) that van Eyck places on the arms of the Virgin's throne and which Memling puts on the architectural features associated with the arches,¹²³ van Eyck's canopy above Mary's head touches the central arch of his composition just like Memling's and there is a step covered by an oriental carpet at Mary's feet¹²⁴ together with an elaborately tiled floor. However, in Van Eyck's painting - and in accordance

¹²⁰ Nash, 2008: 122-24 suggests that the strong influence of van der Weyden on Memling has drawn attention away from that of van Eyck and the Bruges tradition of painting.

¹²¹ See Martens, 2005: 366-77 for the canon's biography and endowments.

¹²² Martens, 2005: 372 & 374.

¹²³ Adam and Eve are placed in niches on the exterior wings of the Vienna composition.

¹²⁴ There is no step in the Washington painting.

with Italian tradition - the holy space is *totally* secluded from worldly landscapes: behind Mary's canopied throne the windows of the ambulatory have dense, bull's eye panes of glass. The imagery of the figural scene could be describing Canon van der Paele's vision of Mary visiting his church of St Donatian in Bruges to impart/reinforce knowledge of the Incarnation and the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian faith, or alternatively a glimpse of himself in the presence of the holy pair in his future life after death. Either way, I suggest there is a sense that worldly reminders - like those that could take shape from exposure to views of the world outside the church - are banished from the canon's thoughts; for him, the world outside heaven on earth has nothing to do with contemplation of the sacred.

In contrast to Canon van der Paele, the rich and powerful Chancellor Rolin is portrayed in prayer before his vision of the Virgin and Child in the *Virgin and Child with Nicholas Rolin* (Fig. 185 & 186) with all his worldly distractions in clear view. It is clear that Rolin did not envisage the holy pair whilst in a church, but the *prie-dieu* and the three church-like arches that provide the view indicate this might be in a holy space in his residence. The impressive view with landscape features that broaden out information about the patron and, at the same time, embrace religious symbolism that links back to the main figural disposition is a notion that Memling was to embrace.¹²⁵ What appears

¹²⁵ For a discussion on the imagery revealing Rolin's personal history, his impulse toward confession and devotion to the Doctrine of Mary and the Body of Christ see Harbison, 1995(b): 100-18. See also Gelfand & Gibson, 2002, for the argument that the image of Rolin functioned as a 'surrogate of self', one that could pray *ad infinitum* on behalf of his soul.

to have been significant for him, also, was for landscape to be viewed from on high through the columns and arches of a luxurious dwelling.¹²⁶

Van Eyck's format of a rich-looking architectural form with landscape views containing references to the foreground figures may have contributed to Memling's inspiration to open out the *sacra conversazione* format. Whether true or not, Memling found a form that could extend information about the foreground figures (including donors) whilst retaining those elements of a traditional visual metaphor that resonate with a sense of enclosure, sacredness and the Church. Additionally, landscape juxtaposed with Mary had the potential to fulfil expectations borne out of the traditional association between Mary and the *hortus conclusus*. For me, Memling's architecture itself functions as a symbolic screening device between the two realms of existence with two key notions implicit in its form: it was the embodiment of the Church, as enabler of the Real Presence, and it enshrined the qualities of Mary that made her superior to, and separate from, the world - her Immaculate Conception, her perpetual virginity and her role as mother of God. The landscape views thus work with the architectural form to visually describe the nature of the coexistence of the spiritual and earthly. The coexistence could not be one of intricate interweaving in these *sacra conversazione*-type images by Memling because of this focus on the Virgin and a desire to symbolically express her purity. The argument that there was a stress in the *sacra conversazione*-type works upon the qualities in Mary that set her apart from the world gains support from the fact

¹²⁶ There is no document extant that refers to Memling ever seeing the *Virgin and Child with Nicholas Rolin*. Two eighteenth-century documents record that the painting came from the parish church at Notre-Dame, Autun (Teasdale Smith, 1981: 274), the church in which Rolin was baptised and buried. It is apparent from the format of van der Weyden's *St Luke Drawing the Virgin* that he was familiar with the work, so it may be that van der Weyden was Memling's source of information.

that Memling usually places her - in the manner of van Eyck - in the upper storey of the architectural form; hence no doors giving easy access to the landscape. This imagery does not eliminate her Mediatrix role; it reduces its emphasis only, for she is still located on the boundary between the two spaces that define the dual aspect of medieval existence.

As a *sacra conversazione* composition, van Eyck's *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* is relevant to all Memling's *sacra-conversazione*-type works, but in the Vienna, Washington and Florence panels under discussion this influence is combined with van der Weyden's arch form in the *Miraflores Altarpiece*. In all three of Memling's compositions there is a decorated arch to the fore and he uses it like van der Weyden: to embrace Biblical narrative, to associate the figural scene with heaven on earth and to connect with an ambulatory-type space that connects interior with exterior. The robes of Mary's company, and the oriental carpet at her feet, project beyond the arch into the viewer's space, a visual 'reaching out' of the holy to the worldly, yet there is not the same degree of fluidity between the holy scene and landscape that van der Weyden achieves.¹²⁷ In each work, the outside edge of the ambulatory comprises a low wall that supports columns, and the whole architectural space exists in an upper storey location. This sense of a barrier is made stronger by the dominance of both the Virgin's cloth of honour with canopy and the highly decorated *Miraflores*-type arch; these work together to prioritise the sacred tableau. Memling's organisation of features in this way conveys the notion that to experience God's gift of everlasting life, it is necessary to leave the

¹²⁷ I consider the landscape as the visual expression of the earthly sphere of existence with the church-like architectural form, like a church, representing heaven on earth (or at least the place that can access the heavenly sphere).

world behind and enter the distinctly separate location that represents heaven on earth i.e. the Church. However, as I shall argue next, this notion of a distinct location for the sacred does not prevent the embodiment in earthly landscapes of a whole host of signs that give information about what exists in the sacred realm.

In the *Triptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned*, Vienna, the image of the donor is not original; De Vos suggests that this was originally a portrait of Abbot Jan Crabbe of Ter Duinen Abbey.¹²⁸ However, the church in the right-hand landscape view of the central panel bears little resemblance to any of the buildings of Ter Duinen Abbey shown in Pieter Pourbus' early sixteenth-century plan. The presence of the two Johns in the wings does support a reference to the abbot's name, but it is more likely that they are there because of the Eucharistic theme of the altarpiece. To the left of the central panel a traveller on a white horse, obviously a man of high status, leaves the gatehouse of a town, with the tower of a fine residence behind it (Figs. 175 & 181). To the right is a winding path from a church which leads to a small bridge over a stream. The path continues on the other side of the bridge then out of sight behind Mary's cloth of honour; it appears again near the town. A pedestrian, clothed in the manner of van Eyck's tiny landscape viewer in *The Virgin of Chancellor Rolin*, stands on the bridge looking in the direction of the church and two travellers are shown walking along the track towards the church. It seems the to-ings and fro-ings from town to church continue in total ignorance of the sacred image that protrudes into the space of the viewer. But the organisation of the landscape features with the emphasis on the journey

¹²⁸ See De Vos, 1994: 215-16 for his reasons. Martens 1998(a): Cat.No.115 for image of Pourbus' plan of the abbey.

from town to church supports the idea that it is only by engaging in such a journey and entering church that it is possible to learn about and share in the sacrifice made by Christ. It is interesting to note, but mere speculation, that Memling includes a bridge over a river in his route to 'heaven on earth'; the imagery of access across water dovetails nicely with the idea of access to Christianity through the Church's rite of baptism, the rite in which all past transgressions are erased.

The Washington and Florence compositions are likely to have had wings with standing saints like the Vienna triptych. Rohlmann has made a strong case that the wings in the National Gallery, London, that depict Sts John the Baptist and Laurence,¹²⁹ belong with the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence (Figs.187-189).¹³⁰ These saints appear before Gothic arches that open onto church-like ambulatories with landscape views in the manner of the Vienna work. Rohlmann points to the compatibility in size of the panels and to the fact that Fra Bartolommeo copied Memling's mill from the central panel and the upper part of St Laurence's landscape and placed them together in his *Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist* (Fig. 190). If Rohlmann's arguments are accepted there are implications for this study because his research enabled him to suggest the name of the patron of the panel at Florence: Benedetto Pagagnotti, the Dominican bishop, humanist and astrologist. Rohlmann's contention rests on the position in which Memling placed the Pagagnotti coat-of-arms above one of nine cranes on the exterior of the London panels (Fig. 191). The crane in question holds a stone in its claw and is a reference to a particular member of the rich,

¹²⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.52. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.35.

¹³⁰ Rohlmann, 1995.

well-connected Pagagnotti family of Florence: Benedetto, who like the crane in the painting watches over his flock.¹³¹ Rohlmann further suggests that although Sts John and Laurence are not his name saints they are an apt choice: St John as the patron of Florence and St Laurence in honour of his close ties with two Lorenzos of the Medici family.

There is no information at present as to the whereabouts of wings for the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Washington, and there is no donor shown with the angels; hence any statements about elements in the landscape referring to aspects of secular identity can only be generalised. Like the central panel of the Vienna triptych, there is, to the left, a gatehouse to a town which in turn is adjacent to the tall tower of a residence (Figs. 176 & 182); this is accessed by a drawbridge over an expanse of water. There is a traveller on a white horse going across the drawbridge towards the house and a man faces him at a short distance; this man could be welcoming the traveller, and/or guarding the house, and or leaving the house. A lady is walking on the river bank opposite. In the right-hand landscape view, there is a small church with a pointed spire on the horizon. Two men in a small boat are journeying by river in the direction of the church. There is one pedestrian on the riverbank track that leads to the church. Like the Vienna work, then, there is a pattern of everyday life played out 'behind' a Eucharist reference, with church imagery to the right, a splendid residence to the left and pathways between the two. Memling's representation of contemporary activity in the landscape, especially that of people journeying, is reminiscent of the Master of Flémalle's *Nativity*, but it contrasts with van der Weyden's *Miraflores Altarpiece* where only events of

¹³¹ Rohlmann, 1995: 442-44.

sacred narrative are represented in the landscape. However, and as the analysis of the *St Columba Altarpiece* exemplified, van der Weyden usually depicted contemporary life in his religious paintings.

In the left-hand landscape view in the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence, there is once more a magnificent residence with adjacent tall tower standing behind a gatehouse with drawbridge (Figs. 177 & 183). Interestingly it includes a tower similar to that in the left wing of the *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*. Also, it is a little reminiscent of the moated complex in Daret's Visitation panel, but as noted this had no similarity with St Vaast. It seems such images are generic and used to convey the splendid living of those with high social status. As Rohlmann points out, Benedetto's splendid apartments at S. Maria Novella were in stark contrast to the expectations of his one-time fellow resident of S. Marco, Savonarola. However, Memling gives prominence to a lady rider on a white horse that saunters across the drawbridge; this seems strange in the context of a bishop's life. Ahead of the lady is a male rider on a brown horse. There is no church in the right-hand landscape view; instead there is a watermill with miller and packhorse. I suggested earlier that the mill representation was likely to have two functions: as part of the Eucharistic symbolism of the whole composition,¹³² and a reference, in Flemish style, to high social status, one that came with a lordly estate that contained a mill and grinding rights. Neither of these functions rules out the possibility of Benedetto wishing to own his own glimpse of Flemish landscape painted by the

¹³² De Vos, 1994: 318 outlines all the Eucharistic symbols in the painting, including the grain ground in the watermill that is Christ's flesh.

renowned Memling of Bruges. Memling's mill image was certainly to attract the eyes of other Italians.¹³³

In summary, the landscapes of these three *sacra conversazione*-type compositions by Memling have the potential to convey information about the figures of the tableau, most especially references to the doctrinal theme of the Eucharist, and the architectural form enclosing the figures presents a hierarchical vision of the relationship between the sacred and earthly realms of existence. The extra *Miraflores*-type arch enhanced this hierarchical perspective, and in the analysis of the imagery in the *Triptych of John Donne* that follows I consider how its absence influences interpretation. Features in the landscape of Sir John's commission relate to the Eucharist theme of the altarpiece, and to both the secular and religious identities and aspirations of Sir John and his wife. This contrasts with the landscape in the *Miraflores Altarpiece* which, as noted above, grounds events of sacred narrative only.

The *Triptych of John Donne* (c.1480)

I suggest that the absence of a *Miraflores*-type arch in the *Triptych of John Donne* (Figs. 192, 193 & 198)¹³⁴ has two major effects on meaning. Firstly, it brings the sacred tableau closer to the viewer's space, and, secondly, the architectural emphasis then becomes placed on the columns through which the vistas are viewed. I further suggest

¹³³ Lane, 2009: 209-11 refers to Rohlmann's scholarship on the fact of Italian painters of the day (especially Florentine) being attracted to the detail of Memling's landscapes. See, also, Nuttall, 2006: 132-35 for references to a watermill in Fra Bartolommeo's *The Virgin and Child with the Infant Baptist* and Lorenzo di Credi's *Virgin and Child with an Angel*.

¹³⁴ Campbell, 1998: 22 suggests the triptych may have been displayed in his mansion at Horsenden, Bucks., but as there seems to have been no private chapel there it would not have complemented an altar.

that the way these columns open up to landscape is significant: a variation in the number and size of landscape sections between these columns and the height at which the loggia is set contributes to meanings *vis-à-vis* the nature of the sacred-worldly juxtaposition. Equality between spheres is implied in this work with the view of four sections of landscape reducing the dominance of the interior. The flow between the two spheres is improved by lowering the loggia close to ground level; even the step used to raise Mary's throne above donors, saints and angels has gone. On the capital of the column behind Sir John of Kidwelly (and in the window beside John the Evangelist in the left-hand wing) are shields that display his coat-of-arms; on the capital behind his wife, Elizabeth Hastings, is a shield with those of the Hastings family.¹³⁵ The presence of 'things worldly' in features of the architecture circumscribing 'things sacred' is complemented by sacred symbolism in the 'worldly' landscape.

In the wings, the close interaction continues: the two Johns are presented with their attributes, in ambulatory-type spaces that open out onto landscapes set at the same level. The close presence of an onlooker in the panel of St John the Baptist adds to the sense of the ordinary, everyday being in touch with the spiritual. In the central panel, Memling once more presents a watermill complete with river, miller, bag of grain and packhorse. Its location immediately above the apple of Original Sin may refer to its principle function as a symbol of the Incarnation,¹³⁶ but it may also relate to St Catherine's wheel and/or the land-owning status of Sir John. All these possibilities can function to convey a close association between the sacred and earthly spheres, as does the tower of St

¹³⁵ For the life of Sir John Donne and his family see McFarlane, 1971: 1-12 and 52-55 (Appendix 3).

Also, Campbell, 1997: 73-76.

¹³⁶ De Vos, 1994: 183.

Barbara which rests in both the saint's hand and in the landscape. However, despite the fact of an improvement in flow between the two realms there is still a sense of hierarchy, with the holy figures and the donors screened off in a splendid architectural space with red marble columns, a tiled floor and oriental carpet. In other words, in the *Triptych of John Donne*, Memling conveys two worlds that are in communication with each other, but they remain distinct with the figures of the holy tableau (including the donors) existing in a space that conveys a sense of superiority.

In addition to religious symbolism present in the landscape of this triptych, there are also elements that convey the social superiority and some moral qualities of Sir John and his wife; the former are not specific as in the manner of the coats-of-arms in the holy architectural space. The scenery behind Sir John includes a tower to a residence accessed by a stone bridge, in addition to the watermill on the river with two swans. The vista behind his wife, Elizabeth, and their first daughter contains a male rider on a white horse, a grazing cow and, ostensibly, the tower of St Barbara. De Vos notes Memling's identification of a fortress (steadfastness) with the male and a farm (fertility) with the female in other paintings,¹³⁷ most notably the *Altarpiece of Jacob Floreins* (Figs. 194 & 195)¹³⁸ and the *Portrait of an Elderly Couple* [Berlin and Paris] (Fig. 196).¹³⁹ But in Sir John's commission there is also a cross-over with a male on a white horse on Elizabeth's side and the rural watermill on John's side.¹⁴⁰ This religious and generic secular symbolism present in the landscape goes against the notion of particular

¹³⁷ De Vos, 1994: 310-11.

¹³⁸ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.86. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.57.

¹³⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.14. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.5. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.7.

¹⁴⁰ Compare this cross-over idea with that of the coats-of-arms on the reverse of the Moreel wing-portraits.

details to project identity, especially those aspects associated with power and high status. A reason may be that the couple's clothing and coats-of-arms represented in the tableau space were deemed sufficient to project noble status; most significant in this regard are their House of York chains clearly visible around their necks. It seems, therefore, that the most important function of the landscape in this private work was to reinforce its Eucharist theme, whilst at the same time projecting an emphasis not on possessions and social status, but on the spiritual/moral qualities of each donor.

This exploration of the imagery in the *Triptych of John Donne*, in comparison with works with a *Miraflores*-type arch, has demonstrated the impact on meaning that variations in the juxtaposition between figures-with-architectural-form and landscape can imply. A brief comparison next between the *St John Altarpiece* and Sir John's commission further shows the significant interpretive potential that these juxtapositions can hold. There is a close similarity between the imagery of the *Triptych of John Donne* and the *St John Altarpiece* which suggests Sir John was inspired by it and wanted something similar for his private devotions.¹⁴¹ Therefore, a comparison between the two works serves to demonstrate how the organisation of landscape and architectural form *in relation to* figures can respond to aspects of function, with Memling adapting the imagery of a high altar to suit the requirements of a much smaller work used in private devotion.

¹⁴¹ See page 227.

The *St John Altarpiece* (1474-79)¹⁴²

The *St John Altarpiece* (Fig. 199) is a major work in Memling's religious oeuvre and in the context of this study is interesting from the point of view that it presents a *fusion* of elements from Groups I and II: landscape is used to ground sacred narrative action, but in the central panel this is viewed from an architectural space that provides the location for a tableau of holy figures and Eucharist symbolism. I suggest that this fusion underlines the prerogative of the Church in matters of Christian narrative, doctrine and practice. In the central panel, the Virgin, Christ Child, saints and wingless angels are secluded in a church-like interior with a tiled floor and oriental carpet, and between the columns that circumscribe this sacred space are views onto landscape. St John the Baptist is standing to the left gesturing towards Christ and the Lamb of God is behind him; St Catherine is in front of him, together with a musical angel - Catherine kneels before Christ and raises her marriage finger towards him. To the right is St John the Evangelist with his attribute of the chalice; St Barbara sits before him, reading, and next to her is a kneeling angel who holds a book (the Book of Wisdom?) for the Virgin to read - behind St Barbara can be glimpsed the Host in the tower that is her attribute. The legends relating to Sts Catherine and Barbara are not from Biblical history.¹⁴³ Within the landscape (and 'sculpted' in the capitals above each St John) are scenes taken from events in the lives of the two Johns (Figs. 200 & 201, left). One scene, however, shows the Bruges square in which the crane for measuring wine operated; this refers to the

¹⁴² Although the inscription on the frame of 'Opus Iohannis Memling 1479' is not original (hence de Vos' caution of 1474-79) there is perhaps little reason to doubt that this lettering followed the original.

¹⁴³ De Vos, 1994: 155 suggests that St Catherine as the Bride of Christ had meaning for the nuns at St John's, and as St Barbara was often invoked in cases of sudden death her representation was suitable for the location. There is also the association of St Catherine with the active life and St Barbara with the contemplative. See also Catholic Encyclopedia Online (www.newadvent.org) and Hall, 1984: 58-60 for St Catherine's legend and Catholic Encyclopedia Online and Hall, 1984: 40-41 for St Barbara's.

wine tariff rights that the Hospital owned (Fig. 201, right). This reference to wine reinforces the function of the altarpiece which is devotion to the sacrifice of Christ which is repeated in the Mass. At the same time, however, the wine-gauging scene provides an eye-catching reference to the notable role that the Hospital played in Bruges' wine trade.

The impact on contemporary viewers of the imagery of this monumental altarpiece would have been great because of its originality, and for Sir John Donne it would have had further appeal because it included his name saints. However, Sir John's private devotional requirements were unlikely to have been exactly the same as those of St John's high altar; thus Memling had to adjust the imagery accordingly. In the *St John Altarpiece*, it is significant that the architectural form is bounded by two semi-circles of columns, six of reddish marble and then some grey ones. These two tiers not only add seclusion to the holy tableau, but also bring a sense of dominance to the church-like form. This has the effect of reinforcing the role of the Church as dispenser of the Host during Mass together with purveyor of information about saints and sacred history. Sir John is likely to have wanted the imagery of his devotional work to provide for a more direct relationship with the experience of God's gift of salvation. Furthermore, the absence of events in the lives of the two saints releases space for there to be visual references in the landscape to Sir John's status.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter described and analysed the landscape imagery in a selection of religious works by Memling. This was in a comparative context arguing that the process of unravelling the influence of the Master of Flémalle, van Eyck and van der Weyden on Memling helped place Memling's imagery in its artistic context and could provide clues to the meanings that Memling attached to landscape. I suggested that the landscape imagery in the religious works of all these artists emerged from ongoing experimentation with modes of visual description that could retain the sanctity, universality and everlasting nature of Christian narrative, faith and doctrine within a form of imagery dominated by an urge to represent everything realistically. I further suggested that the landscape imagery of their compositions was designed and manipulated for symbolic as well as formal reasons and that a layer of symbolic meaning could be found in the way figures were organised *in relation to* landscape. I interpreted the visual description of this juxtaposition as a metaphor that helped convey how the sacred and earthly realms of existence interfaced with each other.

In broad terms, I argued that setting sacred figures *within* landscape implied an emphasis on sacredness being present in earthly surroundings, that it was as relevant to this life as the next. I showed how van der Weyden retained this intertwining concept of the sacred and profane spheres in his *St Columba Altarpiece*, but that Memling's treatment of the same theme - the Adoration of the Magi within an architectural form with views onto landscape - resulted in a different view of the sacred-profane relationship. The handling of architectural form *in relation to* landscape became a most significant

variable. This significance was demonstrated in the second half of the chapter beginning with van der Weyden's triple arch in the *Miraflores Altarpiece*, followed by Memling's use of an arch in combination with a *sacra conversazione*-type format in three compositions that had views onto landscape.

My analysis of Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions prompted the conclusion that although Memling opened up the format to landscape views, this did not promote the sense that, in the manner of van der Weyden, the spiritual was deeply interwoven in the earthly. With the exception of his references to secular identity and aspiration, the visual description of his earthly panorama was not about how everyday life could be filled with spirituality, but about how it related to the divine life being played out in the tableau: the landscape features were manipulated in the service of the doctrinal, Christian symbolism of the central panel and their primary function was not to provide the setting for Biblical narrative. As to the secular imagery in that landscape, this did emphasise earthly life with its statements of material success and commitment to religious devotion, but again it was to some degree also about what came after death: a desire to provide a stimulus to prayer so as to reduce years spent in purgatory, and/or to leave behind a record of time spent on earth be it in terms of material achievement or the heritage of children.

The key factor behind Memling's choice and arrangement of forms that ended up conveying two distinct realms was shown to be Memling's subject matter of devotion to Mary: the type of interaction between elements from each sphere was circumscribed by

a desire to emphasise the non-human qualities of Mary. This emphasis in turn reflected a religious perspective that focussed on the divine dimension to Christ's sacrifice, on the everlasting life with God and the Holy in Paradise, rather than on the earthly dimension which embraced redemption from sin and living an earthly life threaded through with spirituality. When Mary was not the object of devotion as in *The Moreel Triptych*, I argued that Memling did not totally abandon the idea that sacredness was defined by its segregation from the earthly realm of existence, but his imagery in this altarpiece came far closer to van der Weyden's vision of intertwined worlds.

I shall adapt the idea that the nature of the juxtaposition between figure and landscape functions as a visual metaphor of how sacred and real come together for use in the analysis of Memling's portraits-with-landscape, except that for portraiture the two spheres are the sitter's interiority and his/her physical appearance. Also relevant to Memling's portraits-with-landscape is the fact of viewer familiarity with the concept that landscape features can extend information associated with foreground figures. I shall argue, too, that Memling adapted the *sacra conversazione*-type format with its views onto landscape from an architectural form to promote the sensation of superiority and distinctiveness. The mention of such a sensation returns thoughts to the second key hypothesis of this thesis that a significant aspiration of Memling's patrons was to achieve high social status and be seen as having access to *vivre noblement*. In the next chapter, I present evidence to support such a hypothesis.

CHAPTER THREE

THE REAL LANDSCAPE EXPERIENCES OF MEMLING AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

INTRODUCTION

In the General Introduction, I noted that Schlegel's interpretation of the imagery in the *Moreel Triptych* was grounded in what he saw as its potential to convey the essence of medieval Christian piety. The meticulously-detailed residences in the landscape of the wing panels did not elicit comment from him, yet they are arguably as significant in terms of contemporary context as the Christian belief system. In my analysis of this altarpiece in the last chapter, I discussed their significance *vis-à-vis* conveying the wealth and high social status of Willem Moreel and his wife. This reference to material success accompanied their presentation as a pious couple, knelt in prayer, in the company of the Christ Child and an array of saints. From this format, the conclusion can be drawn that the aspiration to be seen as a couple of high social status is equal to that of being seen as pious. This conclusion leads in turn to re-stating the second key hypothesis of this study: that a core aspiration of Bruges' urban elite was the desire to be seen as having acquired a high social status with access to *vivre noblement*. Finding evidence to support this hypothesis is the aim that drives this chapter.

This chapter examines the traditions and structures in fifteenth-century Bruges and Flanders that shaped and inspired the lives of those who commissioned portraits from Memling and, most importantly, rooted and defined their identity, both real and aspirational. This investigation of context has as its backdrop a set

of key hypotheses: that Memling's patrons were simultaneously concerned to abide by the tenets of medieval Christianity and to achieve high status and power in their society; that their painted commissions were partly viewed as vehicles to convey such an aspiration to contemporaries and descendants; that the meanings they attached to land derived from the traditional association of land ownership with nobility; and that all these dynamics combined in a variety of ways with Memling's artistic skills, experiences and renown to effect the appearance of the landscape imagery of their commissions. I pay special attention to the conditions, perceptions and signifiers associated with the noble life, arguing that a burgher quest for high social esteem is demonstrated in the use of signifiers traditionally associated with nobility.

Chapter outline

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the urbanisation that developed in Flanders in the Middle Ages and concentrates on those elements that laid the foundations of burgher identity and patterns of living. Next, I consider the social and economic landscapes together, but under two headings: (a) Nobility, the Urban Elite and *Vivre Noblement* and (b) The City of Bruges. A detailed account of the history, rights, responsibilities and perceptions of Flemish nobility is given because I suggest that contemporary meanings attached to land are likely to be closely bound up with the noble way of life; traditionally speaking, it was aristocrats and nobles who owned land. Under the City of Bruges heading, the aim is to provide a flavour of urban life as it was lived by Memling and his contemporaries. In other words, I aim to address key elements from beyond and within the city walls of Bruges that helped mould burgher identity and aspiration.

TOWN AND COUNTRY IN LATE-MEDIEVAL FLANDERS

Present-day Belgium provides the core territory that was the County of Flanders in the fifteenth century, but lands now in the Netherlands and France were also included. Unfortunately, there are no maps of Flanders extant from before the sixteenth century although Erhard Etzlaub produced a map of central Europe in the last decade of the fifteenth century (Fig. 202A). The earliest maps of Flanders appear to be those by Jan de Hervy (1501), Pieter van der Beke (c.1538) and Gerard Mercator (Fig. 202B, 1559, reduced copy). Jan de Hervy's map (Fig. 202C) shows Bruges to its left and extends to Zeeland on its right; it includes the urban centres of Damme, Blankenberge, Sluis, and Aardemburgh and emphasises canals, locks, windmills and waterways of the region.¹ In 1501 the City of Bruges began a canal-building project to combat the silting up of the Zwin, and its accounts record a payment to de Hervy for "rendering in portraiture in oil colours the new canal and other things".² The 1571 map by Pieter Pourbus is similar in that it provides an image of coastal Flanders and includes symbols for windmills, fortifications, markets, churches and monasteries (Fig. 202D). Van der Beke's map was printed on four sheets of parchment and tinted with water colour (Fig. 202E). Van der Beke pays close attention to representing the exact number of churches in the towns together with their fortifications;³ such an emphasis conveys the notion that religious and military features (especially town walls) were considered key aspects of civic identity.

¹ Roberts, 1991: 82.

² Roberts, 1991: 83. Her translation from Fol.80v, *Stadreckening* (1501-02), Stadsarchief, Bruges.

³ Stabel, 1997: 13.

The Burgundian Netherlands, of which Flanders was a part, was one of the most urbanised regions in Western Europe. Less than two hundred years earlier, Flanders was described as a land:

plenteuous and ful of pasture... [with] the men... fayre of body and stronge... ryche of alle manere merchaundise... mylde of wille and faire of speche... trewe and trusty to straungers... [who with] precious wolle that thei haue oute of Inglonde... make noble clothes and senden by see and eke bi londe into many londes. And the londe is playne and bereth goode corne. In many places ther ben many trees but nought many wodes. There ben in some place marys and moores...⁴

It seems, then, that by the middle of the thirteenth century those elements integral to a vibrant, commercial county were already in evidence: here in this land of varied topography were, according to Anglicus, hard-working people, friendly to strangers, engaged in the manufacture of textiles and proficient in international trade. Later, in the opinion of the fourteenth-century chronicler Jean Froissart, the residents of the towns in Flanders were a sight to behold as they lived in great style.⁵

By the fifteenth century an urban hierarchy had developed in Flanders with three cities dominating the landscape: Ghent was the largest and it manufactured textiles made from English wool; Bruges was the second largest, with access to the sea at Sluis and the biggest trading hub north of the Alps; and Ypres (Ieper) was the third, a key centre of the medieval cloth trade.⁶ In 1438, the Castilian traveller Pero Tafur visited Bruges and was impressed by its range of commercial activities, its rich inhabitants and its large number of stone houses.⁷ In 1466, the scribes of Leo of Rozmital, a Bohemian baron, noted the large size and many

⁴ Seymour et al, Vol. II, 1975: 760.

⁵ Stabel, 1997: 3.

⁶ See Stabel, 1997: Chapter I for overview of fourteenth- sixteenth-century references to the Flemish urban system and early cartography of the region.

⁷ Borchert, 2006: 6.

mills of Ghent and the prime trading location of Bruges.⁸ The importance of Bruges as a commercial gateway was echoed in Italian merchant handbooks of the time, but merchants from Venice, Genoa, Lucca, Pisa, Rome and Florence were not the only foreigners in Bruges. There were, for example, merchants from Scotland, England, Portugal and Spain, many of whom were attracted by both the geographical location of Bruges and by privileges given them concerning toll and staple rights.⁹ Furthermore, each 'nation' had its own consulate in the city where goods could be stored and meetings held without council interference. The consular house of the Florentines, for example, was on the Place de la Bourse.¹⁰ It is not surprising that this vibrant trading centre of Bruges was also, like late-medieval London, an important centre of banking and insurance for northern Europe, with the Burgundians themselves using various bankers from Bruges.¹¹ By the middle of the century, Bruges had become so rich that its contribution of 15.7% to the tax bill for the County of Flanders was over 50% *per capita* higher than the contribution of Ghent.¹²

From the thirteenth century onwards the main cities of Flanders gradually established independence from their successive overlords who, in turn, were vassals of the French crown. But the independence of these cities did not include a growing power over their hinterlands. In the view of Nicholas, a Flemish type "city-state" failed because of the pre-occupation of the burgher elite with its urban interests.¹³ He drew this conclusion in part from a consideration of the

⁸ Stabel, 1997: 6.

⁹ Borchert, 2006: 4.

¹⁰ De Roover, 1948: 17.

¹¹ Murray, 1994: 147.

¹² Blockmans, 1996: 21.

¹³ Nicholas, 1968: 485.

facts surrounding burgher investment in countryside plots of land, sometimes whole estates, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I consider the scholarship of Nicholas, although forty years old, relevant to this study for a variety of reasons: it lays emphasis on the importance of high social esteem in the burgher psyche, it links social aspiration of its members with land acquisition and it provides thoughts on how an interest in land ownership does not have to detract from loyalty to an urban ethos. Furthermore, the patterns of living and working for burghers that developed in the pre-Burgundian period, and to which Nicholas refers, are extremely relevant in terms of the foundations of fifteenth-century Flemish society in general and burgher living in particular.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there was a gradual merging of members of the lesser nobility and burgher class living in towns and cities across Flanders.¹⁴ The dominance of the towns led some nobles to move away from their often-impoverished country estates and, contrary to the noble ethic of avoiding labour, began to engage in the business of commerce. Whilst many nobles came to acknowledge the superiority of the burgher elite economically, politically, and militarily, the burghers for their part tended to consider nobles superior in social terms. Burgher acknowledgment of this latter fact is demonstrated by their actions: efforts made to procure marriages with noble families, to acquire *heerlijkheden* (the Flemish equivalent to *seigneuries*) and to become knights.¹⁵ Nicholas sees the growth of burgher land ownership in the countryside as a form of both economic and social pressure on the nobility by the

¹⁴ See Dumolyn, 2006, especially 436-38 on the reasons for the gradual merging of the landed nobility and the urban patricians in late-medieval Flanders. Dumolyn refers, also, to Blockmans' scholarship on the increasing gap between the higher and lesser nobility, with the latter aligning itself increasingly with the urban elites (page 433).

¹⁵ Nicholas, 1968: 472.

burgher elite.¹⁶ The types of land bought were varied; usually these were small plots of land because it was not until the end of the fourteenth century that members of the burgher class were permitted in law to buy *heerlijkheden*.¹⁷ Sometimes, however, *heerlijkheden* were acquired for services rendered; Count Louis of Mâle, for example, engaged in the practice of granting fiefs, particularly to Bruggelingen, in return for support.¹⁸ The usual type of land purchased by the elite of towns and cities was arable, although there was also an interest in acquiring tolls and tithes.¹⁹

It is obvious that members of the burgher elite did not buy land for quick-profit reasons because agricultural depressions were particularly frequent in the fourteenth century. They appear instead to have been interested in the consolidation of their acquired plots and also in retaining possession of them from one generation to another. These are both patterns of behaviour reminiscent of *vivre noblement*: keeping a large estate intact and the associated matters of inheritance and lineage. However, members of the burgher elite did not acquire rights in law over tenants unless they bought a *heerlijkheid*; a chief aim seems to have been to establish themselves as permanent landlords, with most of them preferring to be absentee landlords.²⁰ In other words, living and working in the town took priority. Unfortunately, there is little documentation extant that can help illuminate this topic of land acquisition by burghers. A major reason for the absence in city archives is that property transactions had no

¹⁶ Nicholas, 1968: 473. Nicholas points to the lack of rural records in relation to this and later explains the absence of such records in urban archives also, with Ghent archives providing an exception.

¹⁷ Nicholas, 1968: 474.

¹⁸ Nicholas, 1968: 475.

¹⁹ Nicholas, 1968: 479.

²⁰ Nicholas, 1968: 480 and 477.

legal validity unless carried out before the people owning the land for sale.²¹ In Bruges, this was adhered to meticulously. Furthermore, the hinterland of Bruges - the *Brugse Vrije* or *Franc de Bruges* - was one of the Four Members (see the next section) and powerful enough to block any city interference, should it wish to do so.²² It seems, then, that burgher speculators in land had much autonomy when it came to acquiring land. However, not being bound by urban control may seem advantageous when it comes to free enterprise, but at the same time it does open up possibilities of exploitation, of a sense of 'I can do anything here because I don't belong'. Also, as already noted, being an absentee landlord suggests a greater loyalty to town than country. There is, in both of these elements, a sense of separation between town and country. Understanding the nature of this separation, and how it evolved, is important in a consideration of the make-up of the identity of Memling's burgher patrons.

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The big and little traditions of revolt

The three cities of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres along with the *Brugse Vrije* formed a fledgling parliamentary body called The Four Members. Although not democratic in the modern sense of the word, this was a representative institution and it had power to approve taxation. This powerful influence was to continue for a while under Burgundian rule with the Four Members initially providing a significant vehicle of communication between the prince and his Flemish subjects. Flanders had come under Burgundian rule as a result of the marriage in

²¹ Nicholas, 1968: 481.

²² Martens 1992(a): 151. "The territory of the Bruges Franc stretched around the city walls of Bruges, and was bordered by the North Sea, the river Yzer, and the Wester-Scheldt."

1369 between Philip the Bold²³ and Margaret, daughter of Louis of Mâle, Count of Flanders. Philip was Count of Flanders from 1384 until his death in 1404. His son, John the Fearless, Count of Flanders 1404-19, was not hostile to most demands made by the Four Members,²⁴ but Philip the Good, Count of Flanders 1419-67, was relentless in pursuing a policy of centralisation and proved particularly effective in reducing the privileges of Bruges and Ghent.²⁵ His son, Charles the Bold, was the last Burgundian duke to be Count of Flanders (1467-77) for through his grandson, Philip the Fair, Flanders became part of the Hapsburg Empire.

Before the rule of Philip the Good, Bruges was relatively independent of its count for, as has been recounted, it had a good deal of control over fiscal and economic structures. Amongst the numerous factors that interwove to produce this independence were the actions of some counts of Flanders in the fourteenth century who awarded Bruges, together with other cities in their region, certain rights and privileges in an attempt to preserve and/or strengthen the comital power base.²⁶ Bruges had not been a city always hostile to its pre-Burgundian overlord: for example, when Louis de Mâle faced war with Ghent, in the last years of his life, Bruges remained loyal.²⁷ This loyalty reflects, also, a long history of inter-urban rivalry between Bruges and Ghent.

Bruges' council members were drawn from patrician families - old lineages that had been resident in the city for generations but not necessarily noble - and guild

²³ King John II of France's fourth son and Duke of Burgundy from 1363.

²⁴ Nicholas, 1992: 323-24.

²⁵ Dumolyn, 2006: 432.

²⁶ Brown, 1997: 278-79.

²⁷ Murray, 1994: 139.

representatives. Each guild in the city did not have the same number of representatives: it was a hierarchical system with some guilds being more prestigious than others and many containing workers from a range of occupations.²⁸ But this state of affairs had never been a stable one, with jockeying for power by the various groups at different times. Even before Philip the Good's centralising policies, which included the formation of the Council of Flanders and the Chamber of Accounts,²⁹ there were divisions between council groups with power beginning to reside more and more with the wealthy, be they of patrician or merchant-oriented origins. By the fifteenth century, it was not unusual for masters of guilds to work no longer at their crafts: many had become wealthy entrepreneurs who organised the production and trade of the wares that they, or their forefathers, once crafted.³⁰ Gradually, these entrepreneurs merged with the patrician elite so that it was soon the case that the group in charge of decision-making for the city became quite narrow. It was entrepreneurs like these who followed in the footsteps of the land speculators discussed earlier. It was also from people like these that many of Memling's patrons were drawn, together with Italian merchant-bankers and members of some religious institutions at Bruges.

Bruges was to lose much of its autonomy after the failure of the Bruges Revolt, 1436-38, and the reprisals enacted by Philip the Good. The counts of Flanders had faced revolts for generations with their towns fighting for a greater say in

²⁸ The term 'guild' here refers to what Martens calls a 'corporation'. For him, "A corporation is a legally recognizable association of craftsmen with more or less the same specialization [and] a guild is a religious confraternity, often, but not always, affiliated with a corporation". (Martens, 1992a: 15).

²⁹ Dumolyn, 2006: 432.

³⁰ Nicholas, 1997: 186.

their administration, justice and taxation systems. Blockmans refers to such revolts as the 'Great Tradition' of revolts, a notion further refined by Boon and Prak to include struggles for power *within* groups of residents; these were called revolts of the 'Little Tradition'.³¹ Knowledge of such concepts is important in understanding the nature of civic identity that developed in late medieval Bruges. Usually the two traditions intermingled as in the case of the Bruges Revolt, 1436-38.³² Philip's decision to side with France against England in the 1435 Treaty of Arras meant not only disruption to supplies of English wool for weavers, but also increasing demands for troops and money from the city. Strained relations that already existed between town weavers and those in the countryside became worse, as did those between Bruges and its port of Sluis. These were not the circumstances - or those of its aftermath which included Philip exacting more money - under which commerce could thrive, especially when there was, at this time, a severe threat of piracy in the North Sea and the Baltic. What was important to the urban elite with its large numbers of entrepreneurs was a guaranteed peace in which a commercial ethos could thrive, one which allowed for a social mobility and with it greater individual power, social status and personal wealth. The events of 1436-38 showed that opposition to the might of Philip and his State machinery could not achieve this; far better to work with him. Gradually, therefore, the urban elite sided more and more with the policies of the Burgundian State. In other words, I suggest that this group's civic identity was not underpinned by an emphasis on the principle of autonomy from its

³¹ Blockmans, 1988; Boone & Prak, 1995.

³² Dumolyn, 2007, for detail of the revolt and references to contemporary commentary.

overlord.³³ But it would be unwise to interpret this process as one that resulted in loyalty to the city being relegated beneath loyalty to Burgundian rule and policy; rather it is more likely to do with the principle of ‘bending with the wind’ that carried with it the best opportunities for economic profit and social advancement.

THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

The nobility, urban elite and *vivre noblement*

As the narrow band of Bruges’ decision-makers became increasingly pro-Burgundian, the descendants of the architects of Bruges’ autonomy - the rank and file guild members - found their power eroded. Hence, by the middle of the fifteenth century, Bruges’ city council members were less reliant on their guild affiliation for their city privileges and office holding:³⁴ the route to power, wealth and high social status within Bruges’ community depended more on holding princely offices, acquiring land with titles and marrying into the nobility.

A key hypothesis of this study is that Memling’s entrepreneurial patrons were keen to embrace all forms of symbolism that had the potential to convey high social status - especially noble status - with high social status deemed essential to effect success in the commercial workplace. There were many members of the burgher class who aspired to *vivre noblement*. For example, there is William Hugonet, who was from Mâcon, of non-noble birth, knighted by Charles the Bold in 1471 and then made his Chancellor. Hugonet was a collector of manuscripts and tapestries, bought houses in Bruges, Brussels and Mechelen and

³³ See also Blockmans, 1988: 152-53. In his discussion of the series of Flemish revolts he points out that the opposition to monarchical centralisation did not insist on the banishment of the prince, only that he be “bound on all sides”.

³⁴ Dumolyn & Haemers, 2005: 380.

in 1476 bought the title deeds to the city of Middelburg, not long after Pieter Bladelin's death. These facts support the view that Hugonet believed the accumulation of symbolic capital was integral to the recognition of high social status, with symbolic capital defined as the acknowledgment, perception, or recognition of other types of capital beyond money and property: cultural (education, material goods etc.) and social (social relationships and network systems).³⁵ But in order to gain a clear understanding of this drive by members of the burgher elite to gain higher social esteem, it is necessary to examine the condition and perception of nobility in greater detail. This in turn can illuminate issues surrounding types of patronage and forms of artistic imagery taken up by the burgher elite of the fifteenth century.

There were no clear legal rules that defined the noble class of the Burgundian Netherlands: some nobles had lineage 'credentials' that went back for generations - 'credentials' include coats-of-arms, genealogical trees, witness statements that confirm the family has lived nobly for several generations, titles to seigneurial lands, participation in military expeditions and ownership of armour and horses;³⁶ some nobles were awarded noble status by the Duke of Burgundy himself; and some purchased patents of nobility. Also, some nobles had power and wealth, others had very little of either, and there were variations as to what constituted nobility from one province ruled by the Duke to another. However, De Win has formulated a most useful general description of the notion of nobility:

... a privileged group on the juridical level, to which one belonged essentially by birth or by elevation... which as an estate exercised political

³⁵ De Clerq et al, 2007: 4.

³⁶ De Win, 1986: 108.

power: it was a group in which one could and had to pursue a material way of life that allowed one to keep far away from manual labour and trade, to affirm one's position towards the outside world (through the possession of landed properties and lordships, castles, rich dress, servants, armour, horses, patronage) and to have enough free time to take part in the pleasures (hunting, tournaments, banquets) and the duties (feudal, military, administrative and others) of this estate.³⁷

It can be seen, then, that to live a noble life in the Burgundian Netherlands would have been impossible without possession of land. Land ownership not only provided a nobleman with his income, but it also endowed him with rights, those which allowed him the exercise of power. Military prowess and ownership of a fighting force were of key importance, too: it was still incumbent upon a fifteenth-century nobleman to provide his lord with a fighting force. To this end, it is striking how many noblemen were captured or died fighting with Charles the Bold on his campaigns.³⁸ The militia of towns and cities were increasingly mobilised by the Burgundian dukes, but it was the nobleman - perhaps knighted by the Duke on the battlefield - and the soldiers he trained who tended to lead the military campaigns. Consequently, the coat-of-arms of a knight and horse were potent signifiers of noble status despite the fact that not all nobles were knights.³⁹ In other words, the association between land and nobility was older than that between knighthood and nobility. That said, the title of lord (*heer*) did not automatically imply possession of a *heerlijkheid* (*seigneurie*), although it was extremely rare for a lord to be without land; in fact, many Flemish lords possessed multiple estates.⁴⁰ Very important is the fact that an

³⁷ De Win, 1986: 97.

³⁸ See De Win, 1986: 100 for the names of some Burgundian nobles who lost their lives or were taken prisoner.

³⁹ For a short discussion on the relationship between knighthood and nobility in the Netherlands see van Winter, 1986. Flanders and Hainault followed the French example.

⁴⁰ Gailliard, Vol. 1, 1857-64: 68. Louis of Gruuthuse, for example, was "seigneur de Gruuthuse, prince de Steenhuyse, seigneur de Avelghem, Hemstede, Oostcamp, Beveren, Thielt, ten Hove, Spiere, créé comte de Winchester 1471..."

estate owner was more than a landlord: he could hold “the dominant share of local political and judicial powers, and monopolized activities critical to the economy around him; everyone needed to use his mills and other resources”.⁴¹

Before continuing the discussion of *heerlijkheden* and their possible attendant rights and titles, the brief reference just made to the coats-of-arms of knights with their signifiers of noble breeding requires supplementing because the use of armorial bearings and the perceptions attached to these is not straightforward. I suggest it is plausible to maintain that with the development in knighthood, especially in France, and the increasing popularity of tournaments between knights, came a strong association between nobility and coats-of-arms, and that this association played a part in portraiture of the fifteenth century when non-noble clients asked for coats-of-arms to be painted on their commissions. However, it is hard to assess the strength of this association because in continental Europe individuals from other social classes and groups from various community organisations had, since the twelfth century, made use of elements found in the style of armorial bearings adopted by knights. This is evidenced, for example, by the content of *De Insigniis et Armis*, a tract by Bartolus of Sassoferrato (d.1357). Bartolus’ concern was with the legal issues surrounding the form and rights of use of arms and insignia. It becomes clear that as he discusses the method of bestowal, the use of heraldic-type emblems was not

⁴¹ Dewald, 1999: 66.

limited to the noble class.⁴² Reference to a small cross-section of coats-of-arms can illustrate this fact.

The rear of the *Portrait of Francesco d'Este* by Rogier van der Weyden (Fig. 203B) is an example of the armorial bearings of the illegitimate son of Leonello, Duke of Ferrara, who spent most of his life at the Burgundian Court.⁴³ These include the basic 'ingredients' found in coats-of-arms of nobles: shield with divisions and emblems, heraldic beasts as shield supporters, helmet with closed grill, crest (here a blind-folded lynx) and motto. With members of the aristocracy comes the added extra of a crown/coronet above the helmet; this is shown in the Flemish armorial window held at The Cloisters (Fig. 204) in the coats-of-arms of Philip the Fair, Charles V and Emperor Maximilian I.⁴⁴ Also, all the helmets of these rulers face forward and not placed at an angle like Francesco's. Another key signifier of the highest status within Burgundian/Hapsburg society is the collar-with-pendant of the Order of the Golden Fleece which circumscribes four shields in the window. The non-noble Maarten van Nieuwenhove of Bruges took much from these heraldic designs of the noble (Fig. 203E). Like Francesco, Maarten has a motto (though not at the top), shield with emblem, helmet and crest; instead of supporters of heraldic beasts, however, he has pictograms referring to his name.⁴⁵ His helmet is placed

⁴² For a translation of part of the tract and taken from *A Grammar of Signs: Bartolo da Sassoferrato's Tract on Insignia and Coats of Arms* edited by O. Cavallar et al (Berkeley, 1994) see www.heraldica.org. Bartolo refers to ownership of arms and insignia according to rank e.g. a king or prince; to nobles and non-nobles who receive such by grant from a ruler; and to people who adopt coats-of-arms for a variety of reasons e.g. for a tradesman's mark, for a decorative panel in a window or for the inscription on a tomb.

⁴³ See Kantorowicz, 1940.

⁴⁴ See Steinberg, 1939.

⁴⁵ Maarten's helmet and crest do not face the same way as Francesco's and Charles de Visen (Fig. 203C); it may have been deemed inappropriate to have helmet and crest turned away from the Virgin and Child.

at an angle, although not sloping in the same direction as those represented in the Hyghalmen Roll (Fig. 203A). In contrast, the coat-of-arms of Willem Moreel (who had a noble title) seems somewhat restrained: only a shield facing forward with '*arma*' inscribed above and his name below (Fig. 203D). A shield with emblems was the key element in 'burgher arms'. For example, a fifteenth-century armourer in Basel used a shield with a rooster facing left as his trademark and this was passed down for several generations.⁴⁶ In fact, many works by Memling show that his commissioners wanted only shields with emblems in the manner of Willem Moreel.⁴⁷ Coats-of-arms, then, have the potential to convey noble association, but I suggest that they are more ambiguous than signifiers able to reference ownership of land holdings.

There was a strict hierarchy in the types of *heerlijkheden*, with many of the larger ones including jurisdiction over several villages. Many examples of the most superior type were found in the *Brugse Vrije*. There was, for example, Mâle, the estate of the counts of Flanders from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries (Fig. 205A). Although only a small part of the medieval castle remains, it once had three massive towers lined by crenellated balconies and access was gained across a drawbridge; the windows were narrow, the walls thick and it was surrounded by deep trenches.⁴⁸ This association of fortification and nobility is important: in the fifteenth century, many burghers who bought land had buildings constructed upon it that resembled strongholds from their feudal past.⁴⁹ Further examples of estates fairly close to Bruges were Wijnendale, Koekelare and Oostcamp. The

⁴⁶ Terjanian, 2001.

⁴⁷ E.g. Tani and his wife, Gilles Joye, Jan Floreins, Bultinc and his wife, Pagagnotti.

⁴⁸ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 93-94.

⁴⁹ In conversation with J. Dumolyn, Ghent University, April 2008.

castle at Wijnendale (Fig. 205B), which was represented by Pieter Pourbus on his map of 1571, was once owned by John the Fearless, but by 1463 it was in the hands of the lord of Ravensteen (junior branch of the House of Cleves); it was during a hunting party here in 1482 that Mary of Burgundy fell from her horse and later died.⁵⁰ Koekelare is recorded as once belonging to Jan van Nieuwenhove (d.1505)⁵¹ who was created a knight in 1479 by the Archduke Maximilian and, like Maarten van Nieuwenhove (d.1500), Memling's patron, was descended from Jan van Nieuwenhove (b. 1381) and his wife Marguerite van der Scheure.⁵² Oostcamp was perhaps the most splendid of the three. It was owned by the Gruuthuse family and it was here where Edward IV of England stayed in 1470, and where Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian of Austria held their wedding reception on 10th September, 1477.⁵³ Exactly what Memling's patrons saw of these estates and their castles is unknown, but family connections in Bruges for two of the lords must have meant some detailed information about life on noble estates reaching the ears of the Bruges' burgher class. A little further afield, northwest of Bruges, were the estates of Cleyhem (East and West), Zuienkerke, once owned by Roland de Cleyhem. The father of Willem Moreel (commissioner of the *Moreel Triptych*) bought East Cleyhem from Roland in 1435 and Willem inherited it in 1448.⁵⁴ Some of the features existing at West Cleyhem in the fifteenth century are known because these were recorded in letters from March, 1482, stating that Archduke Maximilian annexed the fishery, bird enclosures, hunting grounds for swans and the windmill at

⁵⁰ Weightman, 1989: 93 and 139.

⁵¹ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 165.

⁵² See notes 139 and 140.

⁵³ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 207. For a profile of Louis de Gruuthuse, see Martens, 1992(b).

⁵⁴ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 314.

Meetkerke.⁵⁵ I suggest it was this type of living, one associated with a superior *heerlijkheid*, to which many burghers of Bruges aspired.

Superior *heerlijkheden* carried with them the right to appoint bailiffs and other law enforcement officers and to administer capital punishment. Those of a lesser status may have included only a castle and a few hectares of land, with no judicial rights and responsibilities.⁵⁶ Income from all estates, whether large or small, varied from place to place. There could be income from taxes and rents on property on the land, income from woodland, hunting and fishing and, most importantly, income from the use of flour mills, millstones and wine presses. Tolls could be charged for the use of roads and bridges, with the toll for a horse being greater than that of a cow, sheep or pig.⁵⁷ Also, most lords who owned land had the right to keep swans and build dovecotes.⁵⁸

Common features of most estates were water meadows, ponds and ditches fed by a nearby river. However, despite the small area that Flanders covers, there is quite a range of physical features and this fact needs to be taken into account when considering the possible appearance of noble estates of the fifteenth century. Generally speaking the land in the county is low-lying and flat, but the sand dunes and polders of the coastal region contrast with the well-watered, gently rolling topography further inland. Rackham suggests that in broad terms there was a similarity between medieval Belgium and medieval Essex and,

⁵⁵ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 312.

⁵⁶ See Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883, for details of all types of estates and their rights in Bruges' vicinity.

⁵⁷ Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 372.

⁵⁸ See Gilliodts-Van Severen, 1883: 406-408 on legends and rights related to swans and 412 on ownership of dovecotes.

further, that Simon Bening (1483-1561), the Ghent-Bruges illuminator, has provided posterity with a persuasive record of the 'true' landscape of his medieval homeland.⁵⁹

Field archaeology over the past twenty years concerned with the estates of nobles in England tends to support the view that landscapes surrounding some of the largest castles were manipulated with features like mills, dovecotes and fishponds carefully sited so as to provide pleasing views from various locations on the estate, particularly views from the castle itself. It provides evidence that questions the traditional idea that landscape design originated during the Renaissance.⁶⁰ I suggest this is an important notion to consider when examining the manipulated landscapes in Memling's work. It does not have to negate the idea that landscape features were chosen and manipulated across the painted surface to satisfy patron requirements, but it does introduce the possibility that Memling's imagery is closer to 'real life' than perhaps first imagined. However, there are numerous difficulties facing research into the idea that landscapes of medieval estates were 'designed' in accordance with an aesthetic idea or a set of social ideas or norms. Firstly, the appearance of such estates and their attributes have changed over the years and it is difficult to date what happened when, and, secondly, there is the danger of applying seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ideas on landscape design to the medieval world when meanings attached to land were completely different.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Rackham, 2002: 30.

⁶⁰ Liddiard, 2005: 98.

⁶¹ Liddiard, 2005: 121.

The process of imparking - which made a short comeback in England at the end of the fifteenth century when there was a fashion for pleasure parks⁶² - would have provided an impetus to design,⁶³ for not only had various enclosures, copses and grazing lands to be organised for deer, but also there had to be locations from which the hunt could be viewed. An example of a famous pleasure park in late medieval Flanders is the one that was attached to the Palace of Brussels, adjacent to the Forest of Soignies, and shown in the tapestries *The Hunts of Maximilian*. But whether manipulated or not, the fact remains that there were specific features on the estate of a lord that were the economic source of his noble life-style. The words of a fourteenth-century Welsh poem that describe the estate of Owain Glyn Dwr outline these succinctly:

...The famed hero's rabbit park...
And in another, even more
Vivid park, the deer pasture...
A fine mill on strong water,
A stone dovecote on a tower,
A fishpond, walled and private
Into which you cast your net
And (no question of it) bring
To land fine pike and whiting.
A lawn with birds for food on,
Peacocks and sprightly heron...
No hunger, disgrace or dearth,
Or ever thirst at Sycharth.⁶⁴

Over time such features did not lose their foundation in economic practicality, but they gained in terms of aesthetics and their potential to be signifiers of noble living.⁶⁵ To all these signifiers of a noble life, estate churches have to be added; these were important in conveying the piety and charity of their lord.

⁶² Stamper, 1988: 146.

⁶³ Cummings, 2002: 46.

⁶⁴ Liddiard, 2005: 116-17.

⁶⁵ Liddiard, 2005: 111-19 discusses the aesthetics of castle landscapes and quotes Gerald of Wales who as early as 1188 described Manorbier Castle, Pembrokeshire, as 'delightfully set about with orchards and ponds'.

Furthermore, the greater the scale of the castle, the land and its features, the more powerful the owner was seen to be. Scale of domain was perhaps the clearest indicator of status amongst the ranks of European nobility, a social group within which there was a wide variation in terms of definition, attainment and wealth.

In northern Europe, nobility from this period can be divided into two groups: the higher and the lesser, but trying to quantify the difference is hard; this is made even more difficult by the fact that the two groups were in constant flux. In general terms, the lesser nobility had a smaller number of titles, and the domain lands they owned were smaller in size and number. Before the Burgundians took control of so much territory in northern Europe, families of these lesser nobles were in a lamentable condition: their political power was weak, their finances at rock-bottom and their social status reduced. Reasons for this include the effects of loss of life in numerous wars and skirmishes, waves of plague and famine, the devaluation of currency, the downward spiral of estate rents and the policy of rulers turning to city burghers rather than to their Estate for help in the government of their provinces.⁶⁶ But during the time of Philip the Good's rule in particular, the lesser nobles who lived in Burgundian territories became invigorated. Philip's policy of recruiting many lesser nobles into ducal service contributed to this, but, as already discussed, it was also the case that many of them had been willing for some time to marry into the rich entrepreneurial families of the cities and/or engage in business activities. In this way, the burgher elite had a first-hand opportunity of rubbing shoulders with those of noble lineage. In fact, differences in style of living and aspiration became

⁶⁶ Prevenier & Blockmans, 1986: 131-32; De Win, 1986: 97-98.

minimal. For example, there were members in both groups who aspired to and attained positions in ducal service. However, there always remained an important difference: in law the nobleman was superior.⁶⁷

So it was, then, that great wealth and prestigious authority on a city's council were insufficient to deliver the ultimate prize: a position in society that reduced as far as possible the chance of being subject to the rule of others. Acquiring land, for long a behavioural pattern amongst burghers, had the potential to increase social esteem not least because of its association with juridical rights, but perhaps more importantly, to own land was *seen* as part of living nobly. In late medieval Flanders, society's perception was very much a part of the ennoblement process: "being noble equalled being considered as noble".⁶⁸ However, even if noble status was eventually acquired, it could take up to three generations before society's esteem was received.⁶⁹ I suggest that painted representations of persons in fine clothes and jewellery, juxtaposed with landed estates and coats-of-arms, were very likely part of this process of being *seen* to be noble. A persuasive hypothesis is that it was precisely those burgher patrons who did *not* own landed estates and titles in real life that were keen to be represented in the company of landscapes and coats-of-arms.

An issue that has to be addressed is whether or not the notions discussed thus far in relation to members of the Flemish burgher class are relevant to Memling's

⁶⁷ De Win, 1986: 105.

⁶⁸ Dumolyn, 2006: 433.

⁶⁹ De Win, 1986: 107-108.

Italian patrons, whether they, too, aspired to becoming noble and saw land ownership as integral to *vivre noblement*.⁷⁰

In the fifteenth century, Italy comprised a range of territories that were ruled in different ways. The Kingdom of Naples, for example, was a monarchy, Milan an autonomous duchy, the states surrounding Rome were semi-autonomous under papal control and Florence and Venice were republics, with the patricians in Venice calling themselves *nobeli* whether they were related to feudal nobility or not.⁷¹ The acquisition, role and power of nobility in these regions varied, but, in general terms, and from the fourteenth century onwards, nobles descending from families that once depended on land ownership for wealth and esteem begin to reside in the rich, commercial centres.⁷² However, this statement requires caution; different regions had different attitudes towards nobles engaging in trade, and towards noble-merchant intermarriage. A brief reference to a Poggio Bracciolini's *Dialogue De Nobilitate* (c.1440) is helpful here, although it has to be remembered that Poggio's interlocutors, Niccolò Niccoli and Lorenzo Medici, were Florentines, and that the subject of the debate was a consideration of the essence of true nobility. Through words spoken by Niccolò, Poggio states that Neapolitan nobles were contemptuous of trade and that:

so ridiculous [was] their pride, that though they should be reduced to the most abject state of poverty, they would rather starve than suffer any branch of their family to form a matrimonial alliance with the most opulent tradesman.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Grafton, 2002: 186 for his discussion of Alberti's attitude to the ownership of land in Florence, an attitude implied in *Il Libri Della Famiglia* through the character of Giannozzo who argues that ownership of land brings security because a family can sustain itself without using up cash savings.

⁷¹ Cowan, 1991: 132.

⁷² See Nicholas, 1997: 192-93 for a brief summary of Italian urban nobilities.

⁷³ Shepherd, 1837: 340.

The nobility of Rome were of a similar mind, but, in contrast, nobles from Genoa engaged in commerce and Venetian nobles formed “a kind of faction distinct from the body of the people, and are all engaged in merchandize”.⁷⁴ As to the nobles of Florence, “some of them engage in merchandize; others live upon the income of their property, and amuse themselves with rural diversions of hawking and hunting”.⁷⁵

It was common for the wealthy merchants of Italian towns and cities to own rural estates in addition to their city residences and, rather than being absentee landlords, to live on these estates for some months, usually the hottest, throughout the year. These estates were central to a family’s identity; unless misfortune struck, these were passed on from one generation to another. Where villas and estates were bought, rather than inherited, those that attracted the most attention were those with a significant provenance.⁷⁶ In other words, lineage was important to merchant and noble alike, with place - the villa and the land upon which it stood - being central to the projection of family identity and its continuance. In the case of Florentine estates, the land surrounding the villa was given over to agriculture and the estates carrying the highest status were those where the parcels of land were joined together encircling the villa.⁷⁷ There may have been provision for hunting on some estates, but supplying owners with farm produce was the main priority. It was the aristocracy who tended to give land over to hunting and, in addition, had hunting scenes recorded in their residences on walls in either fresco or tapestry form. For example, documents survive that

⁷⁴ Shepherd, 1837: 341.

⁷⁵ Shepherd, 1837: 342.

⁷⁶ Lillie, 2000: 206-208 relates the case of Palla di Nofri Strozzi who bought a villa close to where Petrarch lived and died.

⁷⁷ Lillie, 2004: 32.

describe plans made in 1471 by Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the Duke of Milan, for frescos on the walls of his castle of Porta Giovia; these were to depict him and members of his court hunting deer and falcon.⁷⁸

Of the Italian merchant-bankers working in Bruges during Memling's lifetime, some, like members of the Adornes family from Genoa, belonged to families that had long since put down roots in the city; some spent only a short time in a long career working in Bruges; and some, like Tommaso Portinari, spent most of their lives there. Although foreign residents tended to live in enclaves within the city, with the Florentine *nazione* being one of the largest, Flemish culture is likely to have impacted on them in a variety of ways as they engaged in business, worshipped in churches and took part in the city's ceremonial life.⁷⁹ There was a particularly close integration between the Florentine *nazione* and the society of Bruges, a closeness encouraged by Medici expectations of their factors in Bruges.⁸⁰ In terms of impact, I suggest that the aspects of Flemish culture likely to have had the greatest influence on Memling's Italian patrons from a trading/banking background would have been those seen to have potential for promoting financial success on earth and security in heaven after death. To succeed financially whilst a resident of Bruges, it would have been strategic to assume in life and art those signifiers of success that were recognisable to the 'locals'. At the same time, it would be unwise to ignore the influence of their heritage or their desire to record their contact with, and admiration of, landscape *alla flamminga*. As Nuttall notes, in addition to a cultural interest in landscape

⁷⁸ Welch, 1990: 163-84.

⁷⁹ Nuttall, 2006: 43.

⁸⁰ Lopez & Raymond, 1961: 210. A reference to Tani's 1455 contract with the Medici in which he promises to abide by the laws of Flanders.

by the educational elite in Italy via Pliny's descriptions of antique landscape painting, there had long been Italian admiration of the depiction of landscape in Netherlandish art.⁸¹

Whilst it seems to make sense that Memling's patrons requested representations of themselves in both secular and religious works juxtaposed with landscape to persuade viewers of their noble lifestyle, there needs to be a note of caution. As discussed earlier in the chapter, there had been several periods before Memling's time of burgher investment in the Flemish countryside, notably at the end of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁸² Crucially important, too, is the fact that in the earlier centuries when the burgher elite was acquiring plots of land, its members did not at the same time commission portraits; in those days it was a secular art form taken up only by the aristocracy. However, even in these earlier times the burgher class engaged in behavioural patterns resembling those of the nobility in relation to land, and by the fifteenth century, when Bruges had entered its cultural 'golden age', there was another important reason for its members to invest in land: it provided credit-worthiness, an increasingly relevant commodity in the late medieval European world of markets and money. In other words, at the time patrons approached Memling for portraits, not only were they interested in taking up an art form previously monopolised by the highest of nobles, but also there existed both traditional and new perspectives on land ownership making it a highly potent signifier of superiority in society.

⁸¹ See page 48 and Nuttall, 2006: 74-75.

⁸² See also Dumolyn, 2006: 436.

The city of Bruges

This part of the social landscape section is presented under several headings in order to focus on the different aspects of life in late-medieval Bruges which helped forge the identities and aspirations of Memling and his patrons.

Bruges: home to a duke and a renowned artist

Philip the Good died at his palace in Bruges, the Prinsenhof, in 1467, only 29 months after Memling became a citizen of the city. Bruges had long attracted artists, with Jan van Eyck being the most famous example before Memling, and on the 30th January, 1465, Memling, from Seligenstadt, Germany, was registered as a citizen of the city where he was to spend the rest of his life.⁸³ A legal document concerned with the trusteeship of his children implies that his wife died in Bruges sometime before September 1487 and that their children, Hannekin, Neelkin and Claykin, were under 25 years of age at this time.⁸⁴ This same document describes Memling's estate as comprising two adjacent houses in Sint-Jorissstraat with a piece of land and small house behind which opened out onto Jan Miraelstraat. Memling himself died on the 11th August 1494 and was buried in his parish church of St Giles; today, a memorial stone on the outside wall of the church records this fact.⁸⁵ Payment for four annual masses for Memling is recorded in the accounts of the church of Seligenstadt for 1534-51;

⁸³ De Vos, 1994: 407. Document 2 reproduces the text of fol. 72v, *Poorterboeken* (1454-78), Stadsarchief, Bruges. The *Poorterboeken* are the annual lists of newly accepted citizens.

⁸⁴ De Vos, 1994: 411-12. Document 26 reproduces the text of f. 199v, *Wezengoederen*, Sint-Niklaaszestendeel, 5 (1467-90), r. 208, Stadsarchief, Bruges.

⁸⁵ De Vos, 1994: 413. Document 32 presents an extract from a Latin copy of the section in Rombout de Doppere's chronicle that records Memling's death. Bibliothèque municipale de Saint-Omer, Ms. 730. De Doppere was chapter-clerk at St Donatian's.

here he is referred to as a citizen of Bruges.⁸⁶

The first reference to Memling living on Sint-Jorisstraat is found in a tax list made in 1466-67 by the churchwardens of St Donatian's.⁸⁷ The street was in an urban space only just outside the area that was enclosed by the first city walls built 1127-28 and one that housed painters and illuminators until the end of the sixteenth century. Memling's friend, the illuminator Willem Vrelant, lived only five houses away.⁸⁸ His house and workshop were not far from Hof Bladelin, the home of his Italian patron, Tommaso Portinari, or from St James' Church, the location of Willem Moreel's family chapel containing Memling's *Moreel Triptych*. Sint-Jorisstraat leads directly into Vlamingstraat, where in front of No. 35 (House Ter Beurze) local and foreign merchants conducted their business. Vlamingstraat in turn leads into the Grote Markt, the commercial heartland of medieval Bruges, with the Belfry Tower dominating the space (No. 7 of Fig. 206). Near this large market place is the Burg, a smaller square, which in Memling's time contained St Donatian's Church (No. 6 of Fig. 206), the Provost's Palace, the chapel of St Basil's with its relic of the Holy Blood, the Palais du Franc de Bruges, the Town Hall (No. 4 of Fig. 206 - completed in 1420) and the prison.

⁸⁶ De Vos, 1994: 414. Document 40 reproduces the text from K72/1, 1, fol.1-19 and K72/1, 2, fol.1-14, church accounts, Seligenstadt.

⁸⁷ De Vos, 1994: 407. Document 3 reproduces the text from A171, fol.2v, Bisschoppelikj archief, Bruges.

⁸⁸ De Vos, 1994: 21.

Bruges: workplace for artists

It is unknown whether or not Memling bought his citizenship in the manner of Petrus Christus:⁸⁹ after moving to Bruges, Christus paid three Flemish pounds in 1444 for citizenship of Bruges.⁹⁰ Only free citizens could join guilds so those wishing to work in the city had to have citizenship. Also, no documentation has been found that records Memling's application to join the painters' guild of St Luke (which also included sculptors, cloth-painters, glaziers, mirror-makers and saddlers),⁹¹ or his purchase of free master status.⁹² However, there is proof of membership of St Luke's in so far as his name appears in its Register of Deaths, 1494, after 11th August,⁹³ and the documentation referring to his registration of apprentices in 1480 and 1483⁹⁴ suggests he owned a workshop, one so successful that it made him a wealthy man.⁹⁵ There is no evidence to suggest Memling assumed any form of civic responsibility on behalf of St Luke's in contrast to Christus: for example, in 1469 Christus had represented the guild at a will hearing, and in 1472 in a lawsuit involving Pierre Coustain, the court painter.⁹⁶ There is no record, either, of Memling receiving commissions from Bruges' civic authorities. However, a large body of his work survives and out of 94 paintings attributed to Memling, patrons of 23 are known to some degree of certainty, and the national backgrounds of at least 44 of them: 17 of Italian origin, 8 of Spanish,

⁸⁹ Martens, 1990-91: 9. There were three ways of acquiring citizenship: to marry a Bruges' citizen, to live in the city for a year or to buy the right.

⁹⁰ Blockmans, 1996: 18.

⁹¹ Blockmans, 1996: 17.

⁹² De Vos, 1994: 22.

⁹³ De Vos, 1994: 413. Document 33: text from *Obituarium van de confrerie van de schilders 1450-1801*, 21, Stadsarchief, Bruges.

⁹⁴ De Vos, 1994: 410-411. Document 16 refers to Hannekin Verhanneman and Document 24 to Passchier vander Mersch (*Register A van het schildersambacht (1453-1578)*, fols. 37 and 45v respectively, Stadsarchief, Bruges.

⁹⁵ De Vos, 1994: 410. Document 19 reproduces text that shows only 140 citizens were taxed higher than Memling. *Stadsrekening (1480-81)*, fol.204v, Stadsarchief, Bruges.

⁹⁶ Martens, 1990-91: 6.

1 of English, 1 from Lubeck, 9 burghers from Bruges and 8 from religious institutions at Bruges.⁹⁷ In this prodigious amount of work it cannot be stated with certainty that no painting was produced for the open market.⁹⁸ What can be said is that a minimum of one half was commissioned from a combination of elite locals, foreign merchants and religious institutions, with no known commissions from the Burgundian aristocracy or city council.

A case can be made that Memling was regarded by members of his community, his patrons included, as one of the burgher elite. Certainly his wealth suggests he be considered so, together with his membership of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow which is discussed later. Memling's acquisition of an elite social status is likely to have furthered his popularity amongst the burgher elite because only the rich would have been able to afford his work. There follows a reflection on Memling's status as an artist within the general context of the making and selling of paintings in Bruges.

Firstly, the status of free master was essential to the social advancement of an artist, but even this status was graduated, with the artist-entrepreneur with several assistants holding the highest status.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, as assistants were not named in corporation membership lists, it is unknown how many worked in Memling's workshop. Working for a city council, or the court, and holding offices in the guild were all factors that enhanced status, but it seems that the lack of these did not detract from Memling's high social position which is confirmed

⁹⁷ Blockmans, 1996: 24. See also Martens, 1997: 35-42 for a statistical analysis of data concerning Memling's patrons.

⁹⁸ Martens, 1999: 403 estimates Memling painted 28,000cm² per year.

⁹⁹ Martens, 1999: 407 & 414.

by his tax record; belonging to a high tax bracket, as Memling did, was unusual for artists as they were mostly assigned to the lowest groups.¹⁰⁰ Burgher appreciation of his skills is likely to account for Memling's growing wealth and social mobility. Furthermore, when he first settled in Bruges he was commissioned by a wealthy Italian couple to paint an altarpiece and this significant work introduced Memling early in his career to members of the Italian community resident in Bruges. The couple were Angelo Tani and Caterina Tanagli and Memling painted the monumental *Last Judgment* for them sometime between 1467 and 1471. The personalised features of many of the figures entering Paradise suggest these figures may represent some of Tani's friends.¹⁰¹

It is likely that artists of Memling's artistic and social standing, who worked directly with local and foreign elites, would have been hardly affected by the rules and regulations of the Guild.¹⁰² Guild regulations monitored both craft standards and marketing procedures, but these included a little flexibility. For example, taking part in selling goods at market was restricted to guild members, but outsiders could take part on the payment of a tax.¹⁰³ Being able to operate outside the guild system must have allowed Memling a degree of freedom with regard to experimentation and innovation. However, the commissioning of paintings was in decline when Memling worked in Bruges, and an open market system of art production was in operation. Venues for selling paintings within this system were spaces set aside at the front of artists' workshops, stalls on market day and at seasonal fairs, and *pandern* where paintings were displayed

¹⁰⁰ Martens, 1999: 400.

¹⁰¹ De Vos, 1994: 85.

¹⁰² Stabel, 2006: 96.

¹⁰³ Stabel, 2006: 101-102.

alongside other luxury goods such as jewellery and furniture.¹⁰⁴ The last quarter of the fifteenth century was a time of increasing specialisation and collaboration amongst artists. Martens suggests that these changes were a consequence of the economic climate with a fall in the standard of living, a rise in food prices, but not wages, and an increase in the tax burden between 1472 and 1494.¹⁰⁵ So an artist and his patron able to function outside the regulations of the guild of painters and during an economic downturn are likely to induce in contemporary onlookers the perception that both players were members of the burgher elite of Bruges.

Bruges: residence for patrons of artworks

The lack of extant contract details and other correspondence between Memling and his patrons means that the wishes of patrons and their reasons for commissioning particular works has to be inferred from a combination of visual analysis and biographical detail. Therefore, the aim here is to consider information derived from contemporary documentation about some of Memling's patrons, to find facts that can help illuminate their religious motivation and secular aspiration and which in turn are likely to have influenced the appearance of Memling's imagery.

I begin with details in the life of the Florentine, Tommaso Portinari (1428-1501). In my analyses of Memling's paintings, I make only a brief reference to his portraits of Portinari and his wife, but I contend that even though Portinari appears to have been a somewhat exceptional member of the Bruges' elite, the

¹⁰⁴ Stabel, 2006: 91. *Pandern* were originally courtyards lined on all four sides by covered walkways.

¹⁰⁵ Martens, 1998(b): 22.

fairly rounded picture of his life and artistic patronage - thanks to extant documentation that is not available for other figures - helps illuminate the general picture of life and aspiration amongst Bruges' commercial elite. It is likely, too, that Portinari was a figure that many wished to emulate.

Tommaso lived and worked in Bruges from an early age: he was only twelve years old when he became an apprentice at the Medici bank there. He commissioned from Memling a devotional triptych, of which only the wings - with portraits of himself and his wife - are extant,¹⁰⁶ and a narrative painting *Scenes from the Passion of Christ* which includes full-length portraits of himself and his wife kneeling in prayer.¹⁰⁷ From Hugo van der Goes, he commissioned the *Portinari Altarpiece*.

For Portinari, it seems his patronage and his faith were not far apart, with music, architecture and church furniture all profiting from his generosity. Strohm recounts how, in 1467, Portinari paid for the singer Jean Cordier from the collegiate church of St Donatian to go to Florence to sing for several months in the Medici chapel.¹⁰⁸ Certain aspects of Portinari's personality, ambition and cultural experience can be inferred from this gesture. It may be that a primary motive was to ingratiate himself with his employer at that time, Piero de' Medici, but Portinari's actions in this instance show he had contact with, and influence amongst, the noble circles of St Donatian,¹⁰⁹ that he had an interest in the best

¹⁰⁶ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.9. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.50. For a brief overview of Portinari and his two commissions from Memling see De Vos, 1994: 30-33.

¹⁰⁷ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.11. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.68.

¹⁰⁸ Strohm, 1985: 37.

¹⁰⁹ Strohm, 1985: 11.

music of the day - the expertise of Cordier and St Donatian's polyphonic music - and that he was prepared to invest in its advancement.

It is useful, here, to consider how far the pattern of Portinari's artistic patronage could be said to resonate with that of members of the Burgundian aristocracy. Although court patronage embraced the commissioning of easily movable objects like tapestries, manuscripts, precious plate and jewellery, it also included significant architectural and sculptural projects like Philip the Bold's foundation at Champmol¹¹⁰ and his son's extensions to the Prinsenhof at Bruges.¹¹¹ There was also enthusiasm for patronage dedicated to church music: for example, Charles the Bold treated the Church of Our Lady at Bruges as his second court chapel, and his daughter, Mary, made an annual endowment to fund twelve solemn masses on high feast days.¹¹² Artists were appointed to the court, with the most renowned being Jan van Eyck to the court of Philip the Good, but paintings as commissions were usually related to portraiture, including devotional portrait diptychs. Rogier van der Weyden, though not a court artist, was commissioned to paint the portraits of Philip the Good, Charles the Bold and Anthony of Burgundy. The court also dedicated much of its wealth and attention to processions and other types of festivities. Display potential was an integral dynamic to most of Philip's commissions, and the artistic patronage of his son, Charles, was similar, with both dukes acquiring so many artefacts that they had to delegate their management to courtiers.¹¹³ Portinari may not have had the wealth to commission works of the same quantity and quality, but he did not

¹¹⁰ See note 106, Chapter Two.

¹¹¹ See Martens 1992(a): 50-79 on Burgundian patronage in relation to artists in Bruges c.1440-82.

¹¹² Strohm, 1985: 48-49.

¹¹³ Chipps Smith, 1998: 43.

confine his attention to painted works. It is worthy of note, however, that his most renowned painted commission, the *Portinari Altarpiece* (1476-79) made for the high altar of Sant'Egidio, Santa Maria Nuova, Florence, is one of the largest Netherlandish triptychs of its time. This factor adds support to the view that he, like his Burgundian masters, was concerned to convey an association with magnificence in the best way he could afford.¹¹⁴

When Portinari became manager of the Medici bank in Bruges in April, 1465, he became a junior partner with a quarter-share of the profits.¹¹⁵ For Portinari and the Medici, trade was as important as banking because it was trade that resourced their loans and not capital.¹¹⁶ However, Portinari was much more than a functionary of the Medici. He had been consul to the Florentine *nazione* in Bruges¹¹⁷ and advisor to Philip the Good before his appointment as councillor to Charles the Bold in 1467. In 1464 he was involved in the failed negotiations of marriage between the sister of the queen of France and Edward IV,¹¹⁸ and in 1468 he cut a striking figure leading twenty-one Florentine merchants, all dressed in red and black silk robes, in the wedding procession of Charles the Bold to Margaret of York.¹¹⁹ Portinari's support of the Burgundian dynasty appears to have been unflinching and viewed with suspicion by Cosimo de'

¹¹⁴ But see Wolfthal, 2007: 1-21 where she questions the view that Portinari was motivated by greed and ambition to ingratiate himself with either the Medici or the Burgundian elite. Importantly, she highlights the particular concern that merchant-bankers may have had about the condition of their souls because of the sin of usury. She argues this concern may have contributed to Portinari's support of the Franciscans, with their rule of poverty, and the focus on 'humble' imagery in the *Portinari Altarpiece*.

¹¹⁵ De Roover, 1946: 29 & 46. Also, de Roover, 1948, Chapter 3: 34-47 on Medici representation in Bruges.

¹¹⁶ Lopez & Raymond, 1961: 404: "Our foundation rests upon trade, because, as you see, we have a large part of our capital invested [in it]". Taken from the translation of a letter written in May, 1464, by Tommaso Portinari to Cosimo *il vecchio*.

¹¹⁷ De Roover, 1948: 20.

¹¹⁸ Edler, 1933: 93.

¹¹⁹ De Vos, 1994: 30.

Medici, no doubt because of the expenses such a loyalty incurred, together with the time out from banking business. On the other hand, Cosimo did not dismiss him: as Cosimo was the controller of government in Florence, Portinari's aristocratic connections must have been advantageous to him in political terms. After Cosimo's death, Portinari was made manager of the Medici bank at Bruges and a little later he persuaded his employers to purchase Hof Bladelin, the former grand home of the founder of Middelburg.¹²⁰ By this time, the severe restrictions under which the manager before him (Angelo Tani) had worked had been reduced,¹²¹ and a new contract in 1471 granted permission for Portinari to lend up to £6,000 groat to Charles the Bold.¹²² It was also agreed at this point that Portinari could operate the three galleys built for Philip the Good in 1464.¹²³ However, in the last contract that Piero de' Medici signed before his death in 1469 there were instructions that required Portinari to sell these galleys, be circumspect about his investments in the alum trade and cease lending money to the Burgundian court.¹²⁴ Despite this, Portinari still engaged in affairs that took him away from banking. For example, in 1473 he joined Charles the Bold for several months in Trier for Charles' discussions with Frederick III.

So it was that Portinari was at the height of his power when he commissioned paintings from Memling and van der Goes. He also married in 1470 a Florentine lady, Maria Bandini-Baroncelli, and by the middle of the decade had two sons and a daughter. His world of power and wealth came crashing to a halt when

¹²⁰ De Vos, 1994: 50.

¹²¹ Lopez & Raymond, 1961: 206-11.

¹²² De Roover, 1946: 41.

¹²³ It was one of these that was captured by pirates in 1473 and which had on board Memling's *Last Judgment*.

¹²⁴ De Vos, 1994: 33.

Charles the Bold was killed in battle in 1477 leaving his debts to Portinari unpaid. The following year Lorenzo de' Medici began negotiations to close down the bank at Bruges and he made it clear as to whom he thought responsible for the state of affairs at Bruges: "in order to court the Duke's favour and make himself important [Portinari] did not care whether it was at our expense".¹²⁵ Portinari was left with little working capital, but nevertheless he tried to continue in the banking business in Bruges, with his nephews Benedetto and Folco working as his agents. Portinari returned to Florence in 1497, two years after his wife's death. When he died in 1501 he was no longer wealthy, but he left behind a range of works that testify to his great urge to promote himself and the status he achieved.¹²⁶

Portinari did not limit his religious affiliations to St Donatian's. He was a member of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Dry Tree, a religious organisation popular amongst the Florentines and supported by the Franciscans and Carmelites.¹²⁷ Many of its members in Bruges had aristocratic and/or merchant backgrounds: for example, Philip the Good, his wife and son were members together with Louis de Gruuthuse and members of the van Nieuwenhove family.¹²⁸ Between 1465 and 1495 at least ten percent of the 414 members were foreigners, especially Italian.¹²⁹ This wealthy confraternity could afford to pay for musical specialists to sing in its chapel at the Franciscan

¹²⁵ De Roover, 1963: 348.

¹²⁶ But see Kostner, 2003, for details of Portinari's will and evidence to support the view that he was not destitute when he died.

¹²⁷ Strohm, 1985: 71.

¹²⁸ Artists were also members. Martens 1992(a): 309 names the painters Petrus Christus, Arnoud de Mol and Gerard David and suggests that their membership might be indicative of the high social position they had attained.

¹²⁹ Brown, 1999: 579.

convent (Friars Minor).¹³⁰ Between 1466 and 1468, Portinari supported Isabella of Portugal and Margaret of York when they became interested in the Friars Observant, a reformed branch of the Franciscans: he donated land he owned outside the Ezelpoort for a new convent and church.¹³¹ Again, inferences about his character and aspirations can be made from this action: that devotion to the Virgin Mary and concern for his soul were central to his life;¹³² that support of members of the Burgundian aristocracy was important to him; that land was a key material possession¹³³ with the potential to bolster his standing in society; and that in the manner of several members of the Burgundian aristocracy, he did not wish to confine his worship and patronage to one church. This last fact is confirmed by his patronage of his parish church of St James. He presented this church with a canopy for the Sacrament, although he did so on behalf of the city of Florence: it was decorated with his own arms and devices, those of Florence and the Medici.¹³⁴ More importantly, and in company with Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, Portinari donated monies in support of a building project (1457-73) that included an extension of the number of aisles from one to three.¹³⁵ When the new choir was completed, the old one was converted into Portinari's private family chapel.¹³⁶ However, in October 1474, the chapel was transferred

¹³⁰ Strohm, 1985: 72. Portinari's name appears as one of sixteen signatories in a contract of 1462 for hiring singers. Petrus Christus was also a signatory and so, too, Portinari's friend, Anselm Adornes.

¹³¹ Strohm, 1985: 72. Nuttall, 2006: 46. Wolfthal, 2007: 11-14 outlines the rise of the Observants in Bruges and provides transcriptions of the documents that give information about Portinari and Cosimo de' Medici as benefactors of this group.

¹³² His commission of *Scenes from the Passion of Christ* indicates also his devotion (or his wish to be seen to be devoted) to the suffering of Christ and also his support of pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

¹³³ Nuttall, 2006: 271, note 56. He owned three houses close to Hof Bladelin. So land ownership and city property were both of importance to Portinari.

¹³⁴ Nuttall, 2006: 48.

¹³⁵ Martens, 1992(a): 262. Rombauts, 1986: 10-12 for building history, but Martens, 1992(a): note 385, page 262, states he could find no evidence in the church archives to support Rombaut's claim that Charles the Bold gave financial support towards the remodelling of 1457-70.

¹³⁶ Martens 1992(a): 263.

to the Corporation of Furriers, but it was agreed that Portinari's coat-of-arms would be retained together with ornaments he had donated, and that masses would be sung for him and his wife in their absence and at their death.¹³⁷ This ongoing link with the chapel supports the view that he intended, at least at this point in his life, to be buried with his wife in St James.¹³⁸

The founding of family chapels and the provision of endowments for masses was popular with the rich and powerful of Bruges. For example, at the Church of Our Lady, there was a family sepulchre, now lost, in which six members of the politically prominent van Nieuwenhove family were buried;¹³⁹ it was located in their chapel which was the fourth chapel from the west in the south aisle. There is no documentation extant that relates to the original foundation of this chapel or to the sepulchre concession, but in the nineteenth century the chapel was still known as 'the Nieuwenhove chapel'. A memorial stone, with the family's coat-of-arms and which may have referred to the chapel's foundation, was set in the chapel's south wall.¹⁴⁰ The sepulchre contained Maarten (1463-1500) who commissioned Memling in 1487 to paint a devotional portrait diptych, the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* and which is analysed in detail in Chapter Four,¹⁴¹ his wife Margaretha Haultains (d. 1522) who was the great-granddaughter of Maarten's uncle, Nicholas Jansz van Nieuwenhove; his brother,

¹³⁷ Martens 1992(a): 532-36.

¹³⁸ Rombauts, 1986: 126, No. 535. Even at a very practical level e.g. he is recorded as paying for the chapel's lighting in 1477. See also Martens 1992(a): 536 for the transfer deed where Portinari stipulates that his sepulchre for two bodies is maintained by the furriers, with no-one else being buried there without the permission of himself, or his wife, or his heirs.

¹³⁹ For genealogical details of the Nieuwenhove family see Gailliard, Vol. IV, 1857-64: 93 and Martens, 1992(c): 42, notes 18-23 for details of the six members buried at the Church of Our Lady.

¹⁴⁰ Martens 1992(a): 220-21 and 1992(c): 39 for details of the Nieuwenhove chapel and sepulchre.

¹⁴¹ De Vos, 1994: 279: Maarten (1463-1500) served as city councillor in 1492 and 1494, captain of the civic guard in 1495 and 1498, and burgomaster in 1497.

Jan, executed in 1488¹⁴² and his wife Anna de Blasere who died in 1479 possibly during childbirth; and his father and mother, Michiel van Nieuwenhove¹⁴³ and Catherina van Belle. Maarten's own son, Jan, and his wife Louise de Mouscron were also buried in the chapel.¹⁴⁴ This magnificent monument, in a church favoured by some members of the Burgundian aristocracy and the noble Gruuthuse family, signified more than a concern for the immortal souls of its members; it was an edifice of pride in a family which had for decades held political power in their community, and an architectural reminder of the high social status attached to the Nieuwenhove name. It seems, however, that despite its grandeur, in Maarten's eyes there was more that could be done to convey the magnitude of his family's stature in the community. To this end, he founded another chapel in the collegiate church of St Donatian, that "sacred bastion of the nobility, where the arms of the Van Nieuwenhove family were included in the stained-glass window of Martin's chapel".¹⁴⁵

Like Portinari and Maarten van Nieuwenhove, Willem Moreel also founded a chapel and, like them, did not confine his allegiance to one church: he is recorded as having donated a sacramental vessel to the parish altar at St Donatian's for use during the Feast of Corpus Christi, and he was also a member of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow. Moreel is an example of a wealthy Bruges entrepreneur of the fifteenth century. He belonged to the Guild of

¹⁴² Martens, 1992(c): 42, note 20. Jan held various civic posts including burgomaster in 1466 and *watergrave* of Flanders. He was councillor to Archduke Maximilian and in 1485 provost of the Noble Confraternity of the Holy Blood.

¹⁴³ Martens, 1992(c): 42, note 18. Although never burgomaster, Michiel held a range of civic posts throughout his life. In 1460 he, too, was provost of the Noble Confraternity of the Holy Blood.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson, 1998: 83.

¹⁴⁵ Wilson, 1998: 83. Also, the arms can be seen in a window of the church of St Jerusalem, Bruges, because the window commemorates the son of Portinari's friend, Anselm Adornes, who married Agnes van Nieuwenhove in 1476.

Merchant Grocers and assumed several positions of public office in his lifetime.¹⁴⁶ In addition, he inherited a noble status from a father who had acquired in his lifetime a *heerlijkheid* with title.¹⁴⁷ Weale was the first to reconstruct the biography of Moreel (d.1501) and his wife Barbara van Vlaenderberch (d.1499).¹⁴⁸ Moreel served as an alderman of Bruges in 1472 and 1475, as burgomaster in 1478 and 1483, as bailiff in 1488 and treasurer in 1489. By 1490 he had become one of the forty wealthiest men in the city despite the fact that from October 1481 to March 1482 he was imprisoned for his opposition to the Archduke Maximilian.¹⁴⁹ He may have lived at one time on Moerstraat as it is recorded that he rented out property that he owned in this street.¹⁵⁰ St James Church stands at the end of Moerstraat and, in March 1485, Moreel and his wife were given written permission for a chapel and burial place against the church's southern wall, although the space of 34 feet by 9 feet was not closed off.¹⁵¹ The couple was to provide for the altar's candles, together with its cloths and ornaments, and ensure it was appropriately decorated on feast days.¹⁵² The chapel was dedicated to St Maurus and St Giles and the *Moreel Triptych* was the altar's retable. However, Willem and Barbara were not buried in their chapel at their deaths, Willem in 1501, Barbara in 1499; it was only after one of their sons, Jan, endowed two masses in 1504 that their bodies were transferred from outside the church.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ Martens, 1992(a): 278.

¹⁴⁷ See page 195.

¹⁴⁸ Weale, 1864-65: 179-96.

¹⁴⁹ Martens, 2005: 356.

¹⁵⁰ *Fonds van de ambachten oorkonden*, nr. 589, 23rd February and 7th March, 1499, Stadsarchief, Bruges.

¹⁵¹ Martens, 1992(a): 279.

¹⁵² De Vos, 1994: 48. This responsibility was later transferred to the Corporation of Furriers (Rombauts, 1986: 27).

¹⁵³ Martens, 2005: 358.

Bruges: context for a new type in urban society

Commissioning of architectural works was once limited to aristocrats. Whilst it is true that men like Tommaso Portinari, Maarten van Nieuwenhove and Willem Moreel commissioned only small chapels and not, for example, whole monasteries in the manner of Philip the Bold's Chartreuse de Champmol at Dijon, the style of their artistic patronage indicates in part a wish to model their behaviour on the most prestigious in society. Although they were wealthy, these men, and others like them, did not have access to the same funds as the Burgundian courtly circle and, at the same time, their aspirations were grounded in different life experiences. They were members of the burgher elite of Bruges, and in this section I refer to the scholarship of Herman Pleij to support the view that there was amongst members of this elite a sense of being part of a new urban 'strain', one that had a set of aspirations and values all of its own and which was borne out of a synthesis of old and new.¹⁵⁴

Pleij closely examines this notion of synthesis within the context of a range of contemporary texts. He refers to "two highly divergent strategies [that] defined the literary imagination and discursive practices of the urban *literati*".¹⁵⁵ One makes use of classical and Biblical heroes or the chivalric themes of aristocratic culture, whilst the other caricatures rural life, especially the lifestyle of farmers. For example, a popular text in the last quarter of the fifteenth century about Hercules is adapted to embrace the merchant ethos of reward for work, and an early sixteenth-century version of the thirteenth-century verse romance *Heinric en Margriete van Limborch* had additions made to the hero's knightly virtues:

¹⁵⁴ Pleij, 2002.

¹⁵⁵ Pleij, 2002: 690.

under all circumstances he should be credit-worthy.¹⁵⁶ Noble virtues are aspired to, but they are adapted to suit a new city elite. As to caricaturing rural life, this has its roots in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve being cast out of Paradise into the wilderness, with the wilderness then becoming the paradigm that opposed civilisation, usually in the guise of city life. Also, farmers were close to animalistic passions, thereby often uncontrollable in terms of wasting money and drinking.¹⁵⁷ The behaviour of these fools was the very opposite of that of the hard-working burghers whose personal ambition was to live well off profits of labour. Additionally, Pleij argues that the notion of supporting oneself economically has its roots in urban society and cites in support the thoughts of Jan van Boendale (c.1330) from Antwerp on privacy. Boendale suggested that the privacy of close friends should be respected;¹⁵⁸ this was an unusual view, as it was out of step with the emphasis on community that existed in urban centres at this time and in Christian thought.

The 'new wisdom' concerning individual responsibility was not to be confused with a cunning that was solely concerned with amassing fortunes. Pleij acknowledges that this burgher ethos that developed was rooted in classical antiquity, in monastic ideals of hard work, discipline and self-sufficiency and in aspects of medieval chivalry, but maintains that it was the way all of these were synthesised that was unique, with members of the burgher elite taking only what they needed to promote their interests and ambitions.¹⁵⁹ Pleij's notion of a synthesis fabricated from elements of the past, but with the nature of their

¹⁵⁶ Pleij, 2002: 693.

¹⁵⁷ Pleij, 2002: 695.

¹⁵⁸ Pleij, 2002: 697.

¹⁵⁹ Pleij, 2002: 704.

selection and unification determined by the present, echo the thoughts of this study on burgher identity and aspiration: adherence of the burgher elite to the view that urban living was both necessary and superior, that this was the basis of a new 'strain' in the social stratification system and that old traditions, visual signifiers and virtues, particularly those associated with nobility, could not be abandoned in totality.

Bruges: place of worship, healing and pilgrimage

Although, as I have argued, the burgher elite of Bruges was conscious of its status as a new type in society, a process which in itself must have imbued a sense of distinction from others, at the same time it shared in the communal life experiences orchestrated by the Church. I referred above to some of the churches in Bruges,¹⁶⁰ and at the beginning of Chapter Two I presented an overview of the belief system and religious practices of late-medieval Christianity. Here, I provide a glimpse of civic religious life in Bruges and discuss the city's Confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow, which Brown considers "a guild which, if not strictly a microcosm of the whole town, was at least far more so than other urban guilds".¹⁶¹ Also in this section, I discuss the Hospital of St John, not because the services of care it offered were likely to have been taken up by Memling's wealthy patrons, but because it was significant in the community for a variety of reasons - not least because the Hospital owned property in the city and the municipal privilege of gauging imported wine - and because Memling was commissioned by various brothers and sisters at the Hospital to paint works including the *Altarpiece of St John* for its chapel and the *Shrine of St Ursula*.

¹⁶⁰ See Martens 1992(a): 305-71 for the religious institutions in fifteenth-century Bruges.

¹⁶¹ Brown, 1999: 584.

Both Christus and Memling were members of the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow; Christus joined sometime before 1467-68¹⁶² and Memling in 1473-74.¹⁶³ From 1450, the confraternity had an altar in the collegiate and parish Church of Our Lady (*Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk*) and after 1470 a chapel in its choir.¹⁶⁴ Its records of members show that it was a religious organisation that appealed to a wider range of Bruges' citizens - including women - than Our Lady of the Dry Tree. It was less expensive to join, and whilst it did not include as many foreign merchants, it did have aristocratic, noble and ecclesiastic members; amongst the craft members identified most were rank-and-file, not governors and by the year 1468-69 there were 1,157 members.¹⁶⁵ Membership included Charles the Bold, his mother, the Bishop of Tournai, several members of the noble Gruuthuse family and workers from both the socially-prestigious crafts, e.g. mercers and goldsmiths, and those less so, e.g. carpenters and tilers. In addition to its feast day celebrations each year on the 5th August, the confraternity was sufficiently wealthy to provide for a range of other services and masses throughout the year. In this way, it was able to serve well the "contemporary concern with suffrages to ensure a swift passage of the soul through purgatory",¹⁶⁶ and at the same time facilitate the development of a range of network systems crucial to the success of a trading community. For Charles the Bold it provided a context of encounter with the citizens of Bruges.¹⁶⁷ Brown adds a cautionary note to the notion that the organisation brought its members together on a regular basis: for its managers, perhaps, but not so for its

¹⁶² Martens, 1990-91: 7.

¹⁶³ De Vos, 1994: 408, document 8. Refers to fol. 129, *Broederschap Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-ter-Sneeuw, rekeningen 1473-74*, *Archief Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, Rijksarchief, Bruges*.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, 1999: 581.

¹⁶⁵ Brown, 1999: 582.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, 1999: 580.

¹⁶⁷ Brown, 1999: 576.

rank and file members as it was not compulsory to attend its services or its annual dinner.¹⁶⁸ There is nothing that provides information on exactly why Memling joined the Confraternity of Our Lady of the Snow, although it is plausible to assume that membership served his spiritual and social aspirations and, at the same time, provided a network of contacts that helped promote his business interests. The popularity of the confraternity may also be explained in part by the popularity of devotions to the Virgin Mary at this time,¹⁶⁹ and the influence of the belief that the cure of a paralysed Bruges widow was related to the appearance of a vision of Our Lady of the Snow at the confraternity's altar.¹⁷⁰ What the enthusiasm for membership of any religious confraternity from this period does signal, however, is the core position of Christian belief in people's lives and the desire to belong to an institution that provided not only the means to prepare for life after death, but also help during the difficult times of earthly life.¹⁷¹

The Church's calendar provided the rhythm of urban life; not only the peal of the church bells at certain intervals throughout the day, but also the festivals throughout the year associated with Christ's life and those of the saints.¹⁷² Care of the soul - its nurturing on earth so as to be fit for eternal life at God's side - was a priority, with illness and disease being viewed as punishment for wrongdoing. Inevitably, therefore, matters of the soul took priority in medieval hospitals like the Hospital of St John at Bruges.

¹⁶⁸ Brown, 1999: 585.

¹⁶⁹ Ainsworth, 1998: 258-59 notes evidence of a cult following in Bruges: statues of the Virgin on the façades of Les Halles, the Hôtel de Ville, the Belfry, the City Gates, in street corner niches and residences of the elite. Also, there were relics of the Virgin's hair and milk at St Donatian's.

¹⁷⁰ Brown, 1999: 573 & 584.

¹⁷¹ E.g. Our Lady of the Snow provided extra masses during times of pestilence (Brown, 1999: 580).

¹⁷² Strohm, 1985: 3.

The first ward of the Hospital of St John, whose entrance on Mariastraat faces the Church of Our Lady, was founded in about 1150 and administered by the municipal authorities and by a community of lay brothers and sisters who provided the destitute with shelter, food and attention to injuries. The hospital did not, however, treat those with contagious diseases.¹⁷³ In the fourteenth century, the Chapel of St Cornelius was added to the main chapel of the hospital.¹⁷⁴ A major source of income came from renting out farms, meadows, houses and mills, but profits from these sources became reduced during the first half of the fifteenth century.¹⁷⁵ In 1459, only a few years before Memling's arrival in Bruges and under the orders of the Bishop of Tournai, Jean Chevrot, the community transformed into a monastic order subject to the Rule of St Augustine.¹⁷⁶ This change was due partly to attempts to alleviate financial difficulties¹⁷⁷ and partly to ongoing Burgundian policy to reduce municipal powers.¹⁷⁸ In 1463 it was finally agreed that supervision of the hospital be shared once more, this time between the city council and the Tournai diocese. It would continue to receive many municipal privileges including the measurement of wine unloaded by the city crane.

The chapel at the hospital formed part of its wards: daily worship, veneration of the saints, prayer, communion and last rites were all necessary in the battle to cure the soul and by extension the body.¹⁷⁹ In 1473-74 an apse for the chapel was constructed and Memling was commissioned by four members of the

¹⁷³ Smets, 2001: 22. See also Lane, 2009: 175-79 for an overview of the hospital context at this time.

¹⁷⁴ The chapel in which Memling's *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* can be seen today.

¹⁷⁵ Martens 1992(a): 354-55.

¹⁷⁶ De Vos, 1994: 37.

¹⁷⁷ Nuechterlein, 2005: 60.

¹⁷⁸ De Vos, 1994: 37.

¹⁷⁹ Smets, 2001: 22.

hospital's religious community to paint the *St John Altarpiece* for its altar.¹⁸⁰ In the same year, another friar at the hospital employed Memling to paint a small triptych for his private devotions: the *Triptych of Jan Floreins*.¹⁸¹ Jan Floreins is known to have had noble connections;¹⁸² Weale claimed he was the older brother of one Jacob Floreins, spice-trader, for whom Memling painted the so-called *Altarpiece of Jacob Floreins*.¹⁸³ Jan was master of the hospital from 1488-97 when he was forced to retire without a pension; he had been so concerned about the discipline of some new friars that he wrote at length to the Bishop of Tournai in 1496. The letter reveals that in 1492 he became the sole surviving friar after plague swept through Bruges.¹⁸⁴ Friar Adriaan Reins was to copy Jan in commissioning from Memling a small devotional triptych in 1480, the *Triptych of Adriaan Reins*. Little is known about this friar except that he became a brother at St John's in 1479 and died in 1490, a victim of the plague.¹⁸⁵ But perhaps the most exquisite of all commissions that Memling made for St John's was the *Shrine of St Ursula* made for the community's prized relics, the bones of virgins from the St Ursula legend, and transferred from their old reliquary in 1489.

Taken together, then, all these works by Memling provide examples of patronage by members of a significant religious community in Bruges.¹⁸⁶ It may be that these brothers and sisters at St John's did not mix a great deal with Bruges' society at large, but it is likely that Memling's monumental *St John*

¹⁸⁰ See pages 173-74

¹⁸¹ See pages 124-26 & 150-51.

¹⁸² De Vos, 1994: 160. Jan Floreins was connected to the Lords of Rijst in Brabant who bore the Silly arms and to Henri de Berghes, appointed Bishop of Cambrai in 1480. See also Weale, 1901: 32-33.

¹⁸³ De Vos, 1994: 310.

¹⁸⁴ De Vos, 1994: 40.

¹⁸⁵ Martens 1992(a): 362.

¹⁸⁶ See Fig. 2(A-E) for a selection of Memling's works at the Hospital of St John.

Altarpiece and exquisite *Shrine of St Ursula* in the chapel of the hospital attracted many visitors, including Sir John Donne whose own commission from Memling bears a close resemblance to the former.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps the desire to see Memling's altarpiece outweighed what could have been a rather disquieting experience, for a knight of the English realm, of attending Mass in a chapel that opened out onto wards full of the sick and destitute. From 1470 Donne was serving in Calais under Lord Hastings,¹⁸⁸ so Bruges was not too far away for him, plus his many Yorkist links would have drawn him to the city. He may even have been drawn to the chapel by the presence of the *Shrine of St Ursula* there; not the one created by Memling, but its predecessor at St John's. On the Feast Day of St Ursula, October 21st, Donne could have joined in a pilgrimage to the Shrine, experienced the grandeur of the retable on the high altar and wanted something similar for his own devotions at home, especially as his name saints were both represented.¹⁸⁹

Pilgrimage was an integral part of medieval sanctity and this is clearly demonstrated in examples taken from Memling's oeuvre. Nuechterlein suggested that the *Shrine of St Ursula* is an object of veneration that at the same time presents imagery that explores the theme of pilgrimage; for her, a function of the imagery is to encourage viewers not to focus on the reliquary itself, but to imagine their location away from the shrine, journeying in the kind of landscape

¹⁸⁷ See pages 169-72.

¹⁸⁸ MacFarlane, 1971: 9.

¹⁸⁹ But see Campbell, 1997: 80 where he suggests Donne may have seen the *St John Altarpiece* in progress in Memling's workshop and prior to its completion in 1479. Campbell bases his hypothesis on an engraving he found of the heads of Donne and his wife taken from a copy of the *Donne Triptych*. As it is likely that the date on the engraving of 1478 was copied from the *Donne Triptych*'s original frame, it would appear that the *Donne Triptych* and the *St John Altarpiece* were painted close together with the former begun after the latter, but completed first.

that Memling represented in the scenes of the shrine.¹⁹⁰ The idea is one of spiritual pilgrimage, a concept employed in Tommaso Portinari's commission *Scenes from the Passion of Christ* and Pieter Bultinc's *Scenes from the Advent and Triumph of Christ*, although in neither of these can be found the kind of landscape 'truth' that Memling supplies in his Cologne panel of the *Shrine of St Ursula*. It is possible to adapt this idea to Memling's use of landscape imagery in portraits (in both devotional and secular works): it helps viewers to look beyond the physical features of the sitter to reflect on the kind of landscape in which the sitter poses and to share in (and thereby understand) the life experiences that particular features in the landscape suggest.

Bruges: space for processions

The streets of Bruges, like the streets of other cities in late-medieval Flanders, were used for both religious and secular processions, and in this section I consider features in these processions that offer insight into burgher identity and aspiration. The most significant fact is that whether a procession was associated with a ducal marriage or an annual saint's day, attention was always paid to status; this is shown clearly in the hierarchical arrangements of the social groups taking part.

The wedding of Charles the Bold to Margaret of York in July 1468 provided the inhabitants of Bruges with a spectacular exhibition of pomp and ritual.¹⁹¹ After a private ceremony at Damme, Margaret entered the city in a golden carriage wearing a white gown trimmed in ermine and a cloak of crimson; lords from

¹⁹⁰ Nuechterlein, 2005: 53 and 65.

¹⁹¹ Brown, 1997: 277 notes that John Paston of Norfolk likened the ducal court to the court of King Arthur.

England, knights of the Golden Fleece, heralds and archers accompanied her. The entourage was greeted by four processions: firstly, by the officials of the city dressed in black; secondly by representatives of the Church; next by a procession of merchants with Portinari leading the Florentines all dressed in red and green;¹⁹² and finally, by a delegation of the ducal household.¹⁹³ It is puzzling that Hans Memling and Petrus Christus are not mentioned in the ducal accounts amongst the names of masters from other urban centres. Their names do not appear in the municipal accounts either, despite the numerous festivities in the town between April and July, 1468.¹⁹⁴

Processions in Bruges were organised with growing frequency under Charles the Bold, a factor that could be interpreted as a measure of ducal insecurity rather than of control.¹⁹⁵ But Charles, in the tradition of his Burgundian predecessors, engaged in many festivities at Bruges that had a long, civic history. Just as the Big and Little Traditions of revolt were interwoven, so it is difficult to disentangle the civic from the comital in the origins of a range of processions, be they before or during the Burgundian period. For example, the Procession of the Holy Blood, for so long *the* expression of Bruges' civic identity, was linked with Count Thierry d'Alsace who allegedly brought the Holy Blood relic back from the Holy Land after the Second Crusade;¹⁹⁶ expenses for the procession were paid out of civic funds.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, jousting events were supported by civic funds, but attracted the participation of noblemen - in fact the jousting fraternity

¹⁹² Strohm, 1985: 123.

¹⁹³ Sources describing the wedding include Weightman, 1989: 52-59 and Martens 1992(a): 72-85.

¹⁹⁴ Martens, 1992(a): 85.

¹⁹⁵ Brown, 1997: 299.

¹⁹⁶ Brown, 1997: 292.

¹⁹⁷ Martens 1992(a): 101.

of the White Bear was reinvigorated by the support of the Bruges noble and pro-Burgundian family of Gruuthuse throughout the fifteenth century; and, as has been recounted, by the middle of the fifteenth century, the Bruges elite tended to support Burgundian policy, but not totally out of blind loyalty to the State. Arnade has argued, in the context of the Burgundian Netherlands as a whole, that the Dukes of Burgundy made use of traditional civic rituals to project important statements of their own, especially statements about their superiority and power. In other words, the Burgundians did not totally eradicate the civic agenda of their towns.¹⁹⁸ If this argument is accepted it reinforces the point that members of the burgher elite of Bruges were not 'blind' followers of the Burgundians, or at least that they, like the Burgundian State machinery, manipulated aspects of Bruges' traditional heritage to suit the demands of personal ambition. What can be said with a fair degree of certainty is that the hierarchical nature of these processions, and the chivalric connotations of tournaments, indicate that both city and count looked to *vivre noblement* as a worthy paradigm to follow.

The processions associated with the liturgical calendar were bound by a strict adherence to hierarchy, too, and competition between sections was not uncommon. Some could be rowdy as in a procession associated with the Feast of the Pope of the Asses. In 1483, Willem Moreel complained to the dean of St Donatian that the behaviour of the clerks and choirboys in the procession was "unseemly in the presence of so many 'nobles and magnates', and apt to induce the population to similar petulant behaviour".¹⁹⁹ Making inferences about his personality and aspiration from this statement is difficult, but it might be that he

¹⁹⁸ Arnade, 1997: 316.

¹⁹⁹ Strohm, 1985: 34.

saw himself as a man between two classes responding to and protecting what he saw as the expectations and/or needs of both nobleman and plebeian. Above all, he expresses a concern for public order, an understandable aspiration for both a burgomaster and a tradesman. But his response also indicates his noble heritage together with a desire to be seen as one who lived in accordance with noble ideals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter examined information on the heritage and life experiences of the burgher elite of Bruges in order to provide a foundation from which to draw inferences on the real and aspiration identities of Memling and his patrons. As far as extant sources allowed, I particularised contextual information on patrons pertinent to this study. Also, I presented evidence that supports the view that Flemish and Italian members of the burgher elite aspired to high social status, and that land acquisition was considered a significant element in achieving this aspiration. This linking of high social status with land ownership ultimately derived from the traditional association of land ownership with juridical and economic power for members of the aristocracy and nobility. I argued that in contrast to coats-of-arms, land ownership was a less ambiguous signifier of access to *vivre noblement*. But it could be more than a traditional signifier of power and wealth: for the entrepreneurs commissioning portraits from Memling, possession of land is likely to have enhanced their credit-worthy status in the trade markets. I showed how buying land by the urban elite was not confined to the fifteenth century and suggested that lack of urban control over these investments, and the fact that investors tended to be absentee landlords, provided

the burgher elite with a heritage that saw land as something that could be exploited for financial gain and improvement in social status. Thus, burgher attitudes towards land and its ownership came out of a complex mix of investment heritage, a wish to be credit-worthy and the traditional association of land with noble power and wealth. Memling's entrepreneurial clients may have looked back to traditions and signifiers long associated with noble living, but they formed a new stratum in urban society with values and aspirations of their own borne out of a synthesis of old and new.

The task in the next chapter is to examine Memling's portraits-with-landscape and consider how the aspiration of burghers to achieve high social status, together with their attitudes towards land, its ownership and representation, find expression in the imagery of their portrait commissions.

CHAPTER FOUR

LANDSCAPE IN MEMLING'S PORTRAITS

INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I examine the form, organisation and function of the landscape features in a selection of Memling's portraits-with-landscape.¹ This innovative form of portraiture was popular with many traders and merchant bankers resident in late-medieval Bruges, and my aim is to broaden understanding as to why this social group judged this form appropriate and effective for recording their existence and aspirations.

In my interpretations of imagery, I make use of the notion, formulated from evidence presented in the last chapter, that many members of Bruges' burgher elite had aspirations to acquire, or be perceived as having acquired, a style of living traditionally associated with nobility, but with the values and principles of such a style modified in accordance with those deemed integral to entrepreneurial success. I draw, too, on the analysis of Memling's religious works in Chapter Two where I showed that landscape imagery was used to define locations for the life experiences of foreground figures; that recognisable, contemporary features were powerful in implying 'truth'; that the realistic portrayal of such features had the power to carry the signifiers that were attached to their real-world equivalents; and that landscape played more than a background role because of its potential to forge both a formal and symbolic relationship with foreground figures, events and thematic content. Most especially, I turn to Memling's *sacra conversazione*-

¹Borchert, 2005(b) for catalogue of Memling's portraits. See pages 49-67 for Campbell's summary on Memling's portrait types, and 69-91 for Nuttall's examination of Memling's portraits in the context of European renaissance portraiture. For a useful overview of early Flemish portraits held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, see Bauman, 1986.

type compositions and show how Memling adapted the format for use in his portraits-with-landscape in order to promote a sense of exclusivity and social superiority for his sitters. At the same time, however, and somewhat paradoxically, I show that in these portraits there is a formal and symbolic *connection* between sitter and landscape, and suggest that this connectedness supports the view that Memling recognised the potential of landscape features to function as descriptors of a sitter's identity and aspiration. But perhaps paradox is to be expected in an examination of signifiers relating to burgher identity because embracing the advantages of land ownership, whilst at the same time prioritising urban living and loyalties, was very much a part of the burgher psyche.

Memling's harmonising of rhythms of line, colour and texture across each composition is the process that promotes a sense of symbolic interweaving between sitter and the landscape. This formal technique is likely to have contributed to Memling's popularity, especially amongst Italians: Memling's portraits are likely to have held novelty value by offering something not provided by the Italian portrait tradition of the day, especially as they introduced a distant land of lush meadows and unfamiliar forms of architecture, but equally important is the fact that Memling's connecting rhythms across figure and landscape brought a sense of harmony to each composition, and for many people, past and present, this is a significant quality in the production of an aesthetically pleasing artwork. A brief comparison between Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* - discussed in more detail later - and Francesco del Cossa's *Portrait of a Man with a Ring* (Figs. 207 & 208) helps explain these notions.

In *Portrait of a Man with a Ring*, Cossa paints a rocky landscape, typical of the Ferrarese school,² one that is likely to have been of personal significance to the unknown sitter and/or to the lady to whom he offers a ring. However, he lacks the sharing of rhythms across figure and landscape features found in Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Letter*, for instance in the curving track that mirrors the direction of the sitter's shoulder-line before leading the eye into the distance to the very crucial (in terms of 'entwining' figure with landscape) horizontal row of bushy trees. This row of trees does more than focus the viewer's attention on the sitter's mouth; it not only brings sitter and landscape together, but the form and texture of the individual trees reflect those related to the sitter's hair, as do the billowy clouds in the sky. In Cossa's scenery, in contrast, nothing promotes a sense of linkage between face and background. The much higher horizon line in Cossa's portrait gives more space to landscape (and necessitates the large expanse of smooth water), but this does not result in a closer identification of the sitter with the landforms. The high horizon blurs the focus so that landscape *competes* with sitter for the viewer's attention. Perhaps it could be argued that the rock formations echo the controlled, carefully-groomed hair of the sitter - especially that on the viewer's left - but the sensation is greater that the form and texture of the rocks *contrast* with the living, breathing sitter. The general impression in Cossa's work, then, is that a sitter was placed before a fully-formed landscape with its individual features existing in their own right and unrelated (except in the sense of reflecting local topography) to the life and aspirations of the sitter. It contrasts with Memling's composition where a strong sense of connectedness between sitter and landscape urges the viewer to examine the landscape and understand it *in relation to* the sitter, to see

² Nuttall, 2005: 81.

what it can offer in terms of extending information about the sitter's social identity and aspirations.

Chapter outline

The chapter starts with a consideration of data on fifteenth-century attitudes towards the function of portraiture and an overview of Memling's portraits together with some general observations on the format that he uses. I discuss next the tradition of upper-body portraits of the godly in order to highlight the meanings that Memling's patrons were likely to have internalised in relation to this format, and van der Weyden's application of the format to his devotional diptychs. Then I explore the imagery of Memling's *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* and his *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari*, and my analysis of Memling's presentation of Benedetto in an upstairs loggia with views across landscape leads to a discussion of his secular portraits where sitters are represented within an architectural form. Memling's format in these portraits resonates closely with that in his *sacra conversazione*-type works and it introduces a hierarchical dimension to the interpretation of the portrait. This hierarchy continues, but with less emphasis, in the portraits where Memling reduces the architectural form to a ledge on which sitters rest their hands. For these portraits with only a ledge I consider, too, the influence of van der Weyden's presentation of sacred figures in his *Braque Triptych*.

The chapter ends with an investigation of portraits which seem to cast doubt on the hypothesis that Memling's burgher sitters wished to be portrayed with landscape

features associated with noble living. These are the portraits - the only ones - where there are no riders on white horses in the landscape, no towers of castles, no clusters of estate buildings and no stretches of water with swans, and as I examine them I reflect on which elements may have inspired the young Leonardo da Vinci. The absence of activity in the landscape of these portraits may not be a matter of patrons wishing simply to reduce costs; rather that Memling concentrated on connecting rhythms of shape outline, texture and colour in an attempt to address the interiority of the sitter and convey the possession of a noble soul. This does not mean that I take the view that these are the *only* portraits by Memling that project nobility of soul, only that in these portraits the projection is at its strongest.

THE PORTRAITURE GENRE: definitions and expectations

Research by two scholars of portraiture, Marcia Pointon and Richard Brilliant, epitomises two contrary emphases that can occur in the study of the genre.³ I identify more closely with Pointon's perspective because it emphasises historical context and the role of portraiture in both recording and constructing identity. As the analyses in this chapter will show, Memling's choice and organisation of particular features suggest that his burgher commissioners placed emphasis on how they were perceived *within the community*. A key element in this is likely to derive from a significant function of portraits in religious works to attract as many people as possible to pray for his/her soul after death, arising from the contemporary belief that time spent in Purgatory could be reduced by prayer. Furthermore, it seems to have mattered to these devotees that they were viewed by their contemporaries, and remembered by their descendants, not just as

³ Pointon, 1993; Brilliant, 1991.

pious people, but as members of society's elite. Figures painted in luxurious surroundings, dressed in fine clothing and exquisite jewels projected people of high social status, and the concepts likely to have accompanied such status, like power, moral worth and leadership, are the very concepts that were needed to mobilise a large following of supporters both in life and death.

Pointon's notion that a person is primarily a social construct is not one emphasised by Brilliant. This does not mean he ignores the influence of social dynamics; he contends, for example, that portraiture is a "calculating art of (mis)representation [and] that no beholder can be completely innocent";⁴ for Brilliant, 'likeness' is a mental construct "varying as each perception of another may vary, but only the portrait artist can render such a transient image visible and fixed".⁵ He stresses the individuality of a sitter, the existence of a private, inner self that lies beyond the mask of social identity and which can be revealed to viewers by the skills of the artist. However, Brilliant does not attach much significance to the role of historical context and for this reason his perspective is inappropriate for this study.

Like Pointon, I take the view that knowing what commissioners and viewers expected of portraiture is important in understanding the form of imagery chosen. However, most surviving records of contemporary theories of portraiture are Italian. Alberti (1404-72), for example, said that painting could "make the absent present, but also [represent] the

⁴ Brilliant, 1991: 35.

⁵ Brilliant, 1987: 172.

dead to the living many centuries later”.⁶ Before secular portraiture was taken up by the entrepreneurs of Bruges in Memling’s time, it was an art form embraced by the aristocratic and noble in society. It is likely that these aristocrats, aware of the ancient art of profiling rulers on coinage, saw portraiture as a key vehicle to convey power and authority in the absence of their physical presence.⁷ Signifiers related to the basis of their authority - genealogy and the ownership of titles and land - could be added to their portraits in the form of coats-of-arms and inscriptions, although the right to bear arms and the use of coats-of-arms was not necessarily a noble privilege throughout continental Europe at this time.⁸ Many of Memling’s entrepreneurial patrons adopted this portraiture tradition and had inscriptions and coats-of-arms added to their commissions.

Perkinson, in his study of printed effigy books of the sixteenth century, cautioned against applying modern definitions of portraiture to fifteenth-century works.⁹ Using viewpoints expressed in some of the few contemporary texts extant, he tries to establish what people of the day (i.e. members of society’s elite) expected of portraiture and, most particularly, how important they considered the notion of ‘likeness’.¹⁰ In his conclusion he summarises two representational paradigms that existed for effigies for much of the sixteenth century: one for an audience of scholars and courtiers who wanted images to look like their subject, and one for “a much less lofty audience [that] sought only

⁶ Alberti, *On Painting*, tr. C. Grayson, 1991: 60.

⁷ For scholarship on the profile format in Florentine portraiture see especially Lipman, 1936, and Hatfield, 1965. See also Simons, 1988, who highlights the fact that most extant profile portraits from this period in Italy are those of women.

⁸ See pages 192-94.

⁹ Perkinson, 2002: 723.

¹⁰ See also page 88.

appropriate effigies to commemorate historical figures”.¹¹ The notion of aristocratic portrait commissioners wanting portraits to look realistic gains support from the recorded comments of Margaret of Austria (1480-1530) when in 1530 she required that her court artist provide her with portraits of her relatives that were ‘close to life’.¹²

Sherman looks at an earlier period and considers the ways in which the portraits of Charles V of France could be said to demonstrate a growing urge across the fourteenth century, and amongst the upper-echelons of Northern society, to record specific likeness.¹³ She examines representations executed between 1360 and 1380 of Charles V and, like Perkinson, argues that the gradual appearance of ‘naturalness’ in portraits in no way followed a linear path. She shows that in the works she analysed, the greatest degree of naturalism occurred in the dedication portraits and in family representations in manuscripts. For Sherman, Jean Bondol’s miniature of Charles V being presented with his *Bible historiale* (f.2r, MS10B23, *Bible historiale*, Museum Meermann-Westreenianum, The Hague) is the most masterful in terms of naturalness.¹⁴ In the images where Charles is shown engaged in official duties, she argues that his physical appearance tends to be less individualised, and in devotional works, where he is of necessity the subordinate figure, that his image is more limited to type i.e. simplified and with more stylised features.¹⁵ However, Sherman emphasises that it is necessary to consider the influence of size, medium and artistic skill in addition to social and

¹¹ Perkinson, 2002: 723.

¹² Eichberger & Beaven, 1995: 227-28 for Margaret of Austria’s portrait collection. See also Pearson, 2001-02 for her analysis of four devotional portrait diptychs that Margaret commissioned.

¹³ Sherman, 1969.

¹⁴ Sherman, 1969: 25-28

¹⁵ Sherman, 1969: 4.

iconographical factors. For this reason, then, the generalisations above should be treated with caution. For example, the portraits of Charles and his wife on the altar hanging *Paremont de Narbonne* are most impressively naturalistic, although this is a work where the royal couple are presented as devotees.¹⁶

An interesting observation made by Sherman is that the steady improvement in facial likeness tends to precede that of body likeness and of background elements in illuminations. This may be related to the fact that portraits are about social communication, a process in which the face plays a most significant role: the more 'believable' the face, the more attentive the response of the viewer. Also important is Sherman's conclusion that by the time of van Eyck's portraits in the North, the portraiture tradition embraced "the co-existence of conservative formal and individualized portrait elements".¹⁷ I suggest an extension to this conclusion: within this duality, the desire to record physical likeness relates to those situations where the sitter (in this case Charles V) is primarily concerned to project his non-spiritual, personal attributes. In the dedication works, Sherman suggests that Charles projects his success in leading and maintaining a culturally-sophisticated court, whereas in the family representations his commitment to his children's happiness and education is emphasised.¹⁸

The scholarship of both Perkinson and Sherman highlights the fact that portraiture of this time came out of aristocratic requirements, with some works demonstrating a

¹⁶ Sherman, 1969: 50-51.

¹⁷ Sherman, 1969: 82.

¹⁸ Sherman, 1969: 63-64.

particular aristocrat's Christian devotion, and that meanings attached to the function of portraiture are very much embedded in historical context. Also, as this present study is concerned with the noble aspirations of Memling's patrons, their findings are useful in providing information on the expectations re portraiture of the aristocratic elite. Furthermore, their analyses add nuance to a general awareness of the growing trend to be represented 'close to life'. The exact appearance of Memling's portrait sitters is unknown, so it cannot be stated unreservedly that physical likeness was a high priority for Memling's sitters and their audiences. However, in the manner of the argument that I made for the realism of the Duke of Berry's residences,¹⁹ I contend that the PR function of Memling's portraits influenced the emphasis placed on likeness of physical features: the more persuasive the illusion of real-world objects, the greater the power to retain the objects' real-world signifiers. It mattered to Memling's subjects that there was 'truth' in appearance; this could help persuade viewers of 'the truth' of other features depicted.

It is important to place this growing urge to be represented 'truthfully' in a much broader context than that of the portraiture genre in art. To begin with, the Renaissance view that the function of art was to mirror nature has its roots in antiquity. Parshall refers to this fact in his paper on the use of inscriptions with sixteenth-century prints, and the way these were used to bear witness to the 'truth' of the image.²⁰ His aim was to trace "late Renaissance thinking about the imitation of nature: the idea of the image as

¹⁹ See page 91.

²⁰ Parshall, 1993.

a statement of fact rather than as a display of invention”,²¹ and his scholarship highlights the fact that the complexity surrounding representation of likeness is not confined to portraiture. It forms part of a much broader context, that of natural philosophy and art theory with their “tension between invention and documentation [and] between peculiarity and typicality”.²² Interestingly, in his introduction to the term *contrafactum*, Parshall notes how during most of the sixteenth century it was used in relation to portraiture, landscape representation and images of reported events, natural objects and preternatural phenomena. Perhaps the application of the term to landscapes at this time is borne out of long-held expectations of landscape representation, because, as I discussed in Chapter Two, in religious art the tradition was to present sacred narrative in recognisable, contemporary landscapes.

Despite the complexities surrounding the development of likeness in art, it is clear that by Memling’s time clients desired life-like images of themselves. This is not to deny that many sitters expected a degree of idealisation in their portraits.²³ It is possible to understand the idealisation of appearance in terms of perceived function. If, for example, a portrait of a ruler was being sent to a foreign court, the most important attributes to be conveyed were his power, authority and inscrutability. At the same time, expectations related to the sitter’s perception of his/her identity had to be satisfied. For example, in her discussion of Pisanello’s portrait of Leonello d’Este, Woods-

²¹ Parshall, 1993: 555.

²² Parshall, 1993: 555.

²³ Woods-Marsden, 1987: 209. See also Simons, 1995: 263-311 where she suggests portraits of women were not about the projection of individualism, rather these were objects of cultural display designed to project the possession of wealth and power by male members of society associated with the sitter’s family. She also points to the flip side of the idealisation process in portraits i.e. the process itself could highlight aspects of cultural anxiety, a factor that lends support to the notion that portraiture can play its part in *constructing* identity.

Marsden reflects on the influence of humanist ideals concerning 'the truth' of nature and which were expressed in poetry popular in court circles. Pisanello's portrait could be interpreted as resonating with Leonello's view of himself as intellectual, poet and ruler. Mantegna was not as sensitive as Pisanello to the idealisation expectation of his patrons: displeasure in his portraits was recorded in 1475 by Galeazzo Maria Sforza and in 1493 by Isabella d'Este.²⁴

Later, I discuss the influence of humanist notions on portraiture when I analyse Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci*. I refer to the humanist viewpoint that physical beauty was an indication of the harmonious condition of the soul,²⁵ and also to the conceptual link made at the time between physical beauty, nobility of the soul and the upper-class way of life.²⁶ I suggest that there are some portraits by Memling - particularly those with undisturbed landscape - that may have influenced Italian artists concerned to express visually the harmony between a sitter's external and internal being; such notions tend not to be applied to fifteenth-century portraiture by Northern artists.²⁷ I analyse Leonardo's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* in an attempt to demonstrate the possibility that Leonardo was familiar with, and inspired by, Memling's portraits-with-landscape and suggest that, like Memling, Leonardo used landscape to give information about the figure represented, but with the primary aim of conveying the innermost

²⁴ Woods-Marsden, 1987: 210.

²⁵ See pages 300-301. Also, Leonardo himself records in his *Notebooks* that a disordered and confused appearance indicates the presence of similar qualities in the soul (Richter, 1880: 886, *Philosophical Maxim* 1143).

²⁶ See page 295. (Also, 292-94 for humanist debates on the essence of true nobility).

²⁷ The earliest surviving text on painting is from Italy by the painter Cennino Cennini. Ames-Lewis, 2000: 5 sees this text as a guide to the practice of Giottesque painting.

nobility of the sitter.²⁸ For women of Leonardo's day their most noble attribute was considered to be their purity, so often conceptualised by humanist poets as they (the women) wandered through secluded, beautiful gardens. However, a secluded garden was also associated with the purity of Mary (the *hortus conclusus*), so this humanist visualisation of women and their beauty/perfection can be seen as an extension of this notion.²⁹

There are few paintings by Memling extant of women, and for most of his male sitters his primary concern seems not to have been the projection of inner harmony. In most of his portraits-with-landscape the emphasis is placed on using features in the landscape (and the nature of the juxtaposition between figure and landscape) to convey high social status and material wealth. Furthermore, his manipulation of certain face/head features seems more related to the projection of dominance in the sitter-viewer relationship than to a concern for idealising the physical features of a sitter. However, as noted above, there is a small number of portraits-with-landscape in which a harmonious relationship between sitter and landscape is emphasised. The notion that beauty of the whole was related to harmony/symmetry of its parts is classical in origin and was co-opted by Christian and humanist thinkers. For example, in the seventh book of his *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St Victor saw the order of the world created by God (the supreme artist) as testament to his wisdom; a spin-off to this notion was that the forms of nature in all their

²⁸ But see Hills, 1980, who warns against supposing Leonardo gained all his experience of Flemish art from direct contact with Flemish works. Leonardo would have been familiar with paintings by Filippo Lippi, Botticelli and his own master Verrocchio, many of whom demonstrate knowledge of Flemish forms.

²⁹ See Cole, 1998: 28 who notes that most responses to landscape at this time came in the form of humanist writings, usually poetry, with little written by painters about attitudes towards nature.

various colours and shapes, and the way they were organised on the earth's surface, provided viewers with an insight into the wisdom of God.³⁰ However, I acknowledge from the outset that there is no way of knowing for certain that Memling consciously redirected his emphasis, in his portraits with undisturbed landscape, to focus on the inner nobility of the sitters. What can be said is that, in terms of *response* to the imagery of these works, its appearance conveys an overall sense of harmony, which could lead viewers to perceive harmony both within and without the sitter. Therefore, it may be that if, as I argue later, Leonardo was inspired by Memling's visual expression of identity, it was he, and not Memling, who recognised in its form a resonance with certain humanist ideals.

MEMLING'S PORTRAITS: general considerations

It can be seen from Appendix B that Memling painted upper-body portraits in both religious and secular contexts. In the former, portraits were painted on the wings of devotional diptychs and triptychs, some with neutral backgrounds, some with landscape views. In the latter, there are panels with (a) neutral backgrounds in the manner of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, with (b) sitters placed in rich-looking architectural forms with views onto landscape and with (c) subjects juxtaposed with landscape - not exactly *within* it - and placed behind a ledge situated to the fore of the picture plane. Memling never abandoned portraits with neutral backgrounds when he introduced portraits-with-landscape. In contrast, all van der Weyden's extant portraits, including those in devotional diptychs, have neutral backgrounds. There is one triptych, however, where van der Weyden juxtaposed upper-body figures with panoramic

³⁰ Summers, 1990: 312.

landscape views, but these were representations of sacred characters only; this is the *Braque Triptych*, and its influence on Memling is discussed later.

In all Memling's upper-body portraits the sitters are presented at a seven-eighths to three-quarters angle; in the latter, the tear duct of the far eye is close to the contour of the nose and its opposite corner close to the contour of the face (e.g. *Portrait of a Man before a Landscape* Fig. 246).³¹ Either one or two hands are included in each image and rest on a ledge and/or the picture frame. Unfortunately, not many original frames remain, although where they do, they play a significant role in defining the nature of the relationship between sitter and viewer.³² The nature of the interaction between picture plane, painted ledge and frame contributes to a sense of contact between sitter and viewer by it promoting an experience of shared space. The ambiguity of this space - how far real versus how far an illusion - is a feature that was not lost on Memling and his sitters because it could become part of the mechanics for visually describing aspiration: it had the power to blur the distinctions between real and imagined.

Campbell suggests that Memling idealises physical features by reducing the cranium in order to emphasise the features of the face, features that are painted in minute detail.³³ He maintains that the eyes should be placed centrally between the chin and the top of the head, but because Memling pays close attention to hairstyle and hats such scale issues do not tend to disturb the viewer. He also notes how Memling usually enlarges the near

³¹ Campbell, 2005(a): 56.

³² *Portrait of a Woman* retains its original frame and is inscribed with the date 1480. De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.36. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.17.

³³ Campbell, 2005(a): 57, but see Nuechterlein, 2006: 418-19 where she suggests that the absolute nature of Campbell's statement that eyes are set midway between chin and top of head is untenable.

eye and increases the space between eyes as this technique has the potential to convey a sense of recession. Memling's 'distortions' were designed to give emphasis to those features so vital in social interaction; it seems that his patrons liked images with the potential to demand a viewer's attention. Techniques designed to enhance the particulars of the face and hand place emphasis on the process of visual and tactile communication, the life-blood of social interaction. In addition, the close-up format achieved by placing part of a figure at the edge of the picture plane brings sitter and viewer within hearing and touching distance of each other. In other words, the close-up format simulates the conditions in life that are conducive to intimate social interaction. It is a format grounded both in antique and in sacred Byzantine imagery.

Sacred, upper-body representations

As Ringbom notes, the Byzantine upper-body and frontal image of Christ as Judge (*Pantocrator*) was inspired by early imperial images,³⁴ although images of emperors on antique coinage were usually *en buste* with heads in profile, not frontal. As to the upper-body format for the Virgin and Child, this, too, has ancient origins: it was found in the catacombs at Rome³⁵ and in its Byzantine form reached the North in 1440 (the *Cambrai Icon*).³⁶ As Queen of Heaven, the use of this format seems most appropriate in terms of its association with the elite. From the outset, then, the upper-body image is imbued with notions of power and authority related to rulers, both earthly and heavenly. Also relevant is the way the format contains the potential to convey mystery due to the

³⁴ See Ringbom, 1984: 39-71 for his scholarship on the origins of the upper-body holy portrait and the types of devotional images.

³⁵ Goffen, 1975: 496.

³⁶ Harbison, 1995(b):159.

fact that only parts of the figure are shown. Not only can the lack of knowledge about a person translate into the belief that such a person lies beyond the usual circles of life, but in accordance with the mantra “knowledge is power”, the withholding of aspects of visual description can be a potent element in the control of information about identity. A sense of the socially-beyond-reach can be further enhanced when the upper-body figure is represented behind a stone ledge or parapet and/or through a window.³⁷ Memling made use of the ‘ledge effect’ in many of his portraits and it separates the viewer’s space from the sitter’s thereby maintaining an air of social distance and mystique. However, this sensation is by no means clear-cut because a ledge can work to create a sense of spatial definition also.³⁸ It may be that the popularity of upper-body form is related also to the fact that upper-body portraits were less expensive to produce than ones in full-length.³⁹ One significant fact to note is that the frontal pose used in sacred portraits of the Virgin with the Christ Child tends to be avoided by van der Weyden and Memling in their secular portraits.

Memling’s full-length portraits

All Memling’s full-length portrait figures appear in kneeling pose in devotional works, sometimes placed in the central part of a triptych (e.g. Jan Crabbe in Fig. 209), sometimes in a triptych’s wing (e.g. Adriaan Reins in Fig. 210⁴⁰), and sometimes (in contrast to the imagery of van der Weyden’s diptychs) in the right-hand panel of

³⁷ See Ringbom, 1984: 43-44 for his discussion on the use of a parapet and the viewing of the Virgin and Child through a window-like opening. He notes the window aspect was recognised as a symbol of majesty in European painting of the fifteenth century and also the identification of Mary with a *fenestra coeli*. See also Goffen, 1975: 499-501.

³⁸ In conversation with J. Nuechterlein.

³⁹ Ringbom, 1984: 48.

⁴⁰ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.37. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.12.

diptychs (e.g. the donor of the *Diptych with the Virgin and Child and Four Musical Angels*, Fig. 211,⁴¹ and Jean du Cellier in Fig. 212⁴²).

The fifteenth century devotional diptych: van der Weyden and Memling

There are two portraits by van der Weyden of members of the Burgundian elite that are very likely the right-hand panels of diptychs that depict the Virgin and Child in the adjoining panel,⁴³ and three portraits by Memling that resonate strongly with these compositions and which, too, may have been the right-hand panels of diptychs with the Virgin and Child (Figs. 217-19). Van der Weyden's portraits are Jean de Gros (Fig. 213)⁴⁴ and Philippe de Croÿ (Fig. 214).⁴⁵ The portrait of Jean de Froimont (Fig. 215)⁴⁶ is a workshop production because dendrochronology places the felling for the panel at around 1469 and van der Weyden died in 1464. The quality of the Virgin and Child panels that accompany these portraits indicates they were painted by workshop hands. This seems plausible from a practical point of view in the sense that the master reserved his talents for the portrait of his distinguished client. However, the sacred quality of the

⁴¹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.87. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B9.

⁴² De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.62. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.61.

⁴³ See Hulin de Loo, 1923 and 1924, for the first suggestions of a connection between four possible portraits by van der Weyden and disparate panels of the Virgin and Child (he includes a portrait of John, Duke of Cleves). See also Gelfand, 1994: 78-91 on van der Weyden's diptychs and her paper of 2000 which centres on a *Madonna and Child* (Fig. 216) from Memling's workshop.

⁴⁴ De Gros died in 1484. He was made First Secretary to Charles the Bold in 1467, Treasurer of the Golden Fleece in 1478, he was the builder of the house in Ezelstraat, Bruges, where Archduke Maximilian was imprisoned in 1488, and was a benefactor of St James Church, Bruges. See Martens, 2006: 84-91 in which he considers de Gros' diptych a prototype for Memling's *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*. He provides biographical detail for both Jean and Maarten and suggests that if Jean's diptych had been placed in the de Gros chapel, Maarten may have seen it there.

⁴⁵ De Croÿ (1434-84) was appointed Chamberlain to Philip the Good in 1458, was Seigneur de Sempy (1452-1461), Knight of the Golden Fleece (1473,) loyal fighter for Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, but taken prisoner at Nancy, and holder of high rank at the court of Archduke Maximilian and Mary.

⁴⁶ See Campbell, 2005(b), for evidence supporting the view that de Froimont and de Croÿ were close friends. Jean de Froimont was a clerk at the court at Mons from 1450 and was named *conseiller* there by Charles the Bold in 1468.

Virgin and Child panel suggests this panel may have been considered at the time to be the more important of the two. Additionally, any painter of the holy pair would have been seen as the worthy follower of St Luke, the disciple of Christ believed to have painted the first portrait of the Virgin and Child. But despite the apparent differences in quality between left- and right-hand panels, it is clear in the case of the panels of the *Diptych of Jean de Gros* that the two belong together; on the back of the Virgin and Child is a motto associated with the de Gros family (*Graces à Dieu*) and on the portrait there is Jean's emblem. All these Burgundian functionaries who approached van der Weyden for devotional diptychs are likely to have been modelling their behaviour on Philip the Good who is known to have used a diptych to aid his religious devotions.⁴⁷ However, such diptychs could be more than an aid to personal devotion: after death they could be placed on tombs and become not only a focal point for the prayers of priests, relatives and friends, but also a record of social prominence, especially if they appeared in foundation chapels.⁴⁸ Some diptychs were hung on a wall with a chain attached to each wing, others displayed on a table or house altar and some placed in pouches after use.⁴⁹ However, these works of private devotion are likely to have carried meanings that applied to public life, also.⁵⁰ This is an important fact in the context of this study. If the landscape imagery in Memling's portraits is part of a PR

⁴⁷ See Ringbom, 1984:32 for his reference to the miniature, *Traité sur l'Oraison Dominicale* showing Philip praying in church before a diptych. Also Pearson, 2000: 106 who argues that even if this image does not represent fact, it reveals how Philip wished to be seen. See Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006:5 on the illumination on Folio 1v of the prayer book, Codex 1800, Vienna, which provides further reference to Philip's devotional habits.

⁴⁸ See Campbell, 2006: 41.

⁴⁹ Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: 4.

⁵⁰ Schmidt, 2006: 14-31, suggests an overlap between public and private spheres because devotional diptychs were commissioned almost exclusively by men i.e. public/official function was likely to be significant in the commissioning of this form. For a focus on the gender aspect of diptych commissioning see Pearson, 2000. She argues that the diptych form provided men with the means to pull personal piety into the public sphere (pages 120-21).

machinery to convey the power, wealth and authority of its sitter, then portraits in diptychs, triptychs and secular works had to be available at some point to the community at large. The value of the painted diptychs for van der Weyden's clients was unlikely to have lain in their material qualities because such men prized more highly artefacts of gold, silver, ivory and gems together with tapestries.⁵¹ This is not to deny the possibility that they admired van der Weyden's skill in representing fabrics, metals and jewels in paint. This ability that van der Weyden possessed, together with van Eyck and Memling, enabled the production of luxury in surrogate form,⁵² a significant quality not lost on the burgher elite of Bruges.

There are two diptychs by Memling extant that show the Virgin and Child in the left-hand panel and a praying male devotee in the right-hand: the *Diptych with a Young Man Kneeling before the Virgin and Child* (Fig. 220)⁵³ and the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* (Fig. 221).⁵⁴ In both of these diptychs, Memling departs from van der Weyden's model: he makes each panel proportionally wider so as to introduce details of an interior, one encircled by windows that reveal a landscape-plus-sky beyond.⁵⁵ I suggest that the adaptation of the diptych form to include environmental details was a significant factor in attracting the interest of the burgher elite: Memling retained the diptych format with its traditional association with devotions of the noble, but

⁵¹ It is not only a question of expense; gold and gems had religious significance, too. E.g. Douay-Rheims Bible, The Apocalypse of St John, Ch.21: 18-21 where Jerusalem is described as being of pure gold with the wall foundations and gates displaying a variety of gems.

⁵² Belozerskaya, 2006: 60-71 outlines what artefacts were valued at this time in order to show how painted diptychs could function as 'surrogate luxuries'.

⁵³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.55. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.20.

⁵⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.78. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.23. Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: Cat.No.26. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.14. Ridderbos, 2005: 144-47.

⁵⁵ Lane, 2009: 65-68 points to similarities between Memling's *Virgin and Child* and Bouts' *Madonna and Child* (Fig. 222).

introduced new imagery for adoption by a new social group wishing to make a distinctive mark in society. This helps to explain how the diptych format retained its popularity for many decades after van der Weyden.⁵⁶ In addition, it is possible that Memling and his two young patrons wanted particular details of place that could aid their imaginations in spiritual meditations and communication with God.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the young men may have been appreciative of the fact that Memling's linking of detail across the two panels of their diptychs had the effect of reinforcing a sense of closeness between the sacred figures on one panel and themselves on the other. This is not to say that a sense of closeness is absent in van der Weyden's diptychs, rather that his portraits pre-date the use of interior elements. Van der Weyden's patrons were from an earlier period in history and from a different class in society; the weight of tradition appears to have been felt strongly. In the Jean de Gros panels, for example, the Virgin with Child is represented in traditional manner against a plain background with golden rays around the sacred heads, and de Gros is shown against a neutral background in the manner of the portraits that van der Weyden painted of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold (Figs. 223 & 224). In fact, the imagery of this diptych provides strong support for the view that van der Weyden was able to capture in his portraits the "courtly vogue for the flatteringly abstract".⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See also Gelfand, 1994, who considers reasons for the popularity of the diptych format in the fifteenth century. She argues for a broad context that includes more than the influence of a growing interest in devotional practices associated with the spirituality of *Devotio Moderna*.

⁵⁷ But see Nuechterlein, 2006: 417-18 for her view that the placing of a sitter in a setting changes his/her image from one of essential being to one that can function as a memento of time and place.

⁵⁸ Eisler, 2005: 68.

It may be that diptychs with plain backgrounds in the manner of van der Weyden and his workshop influenced Tommaso Portinari when he commissioned Memling to paint a devotional triptych for himself and his wife (Figs. 225 & 226).⁵⁹ I showed in the last chapter that Portinari's land ownership earned him kudos within aristocratic circles,⁶⁰ but in this commission there are no landscape features to aid perception of him as one who lives his life in noble style. It seems Portinari is patterning his commissioning behaviour here on the devotional panels bought by significant Burgundian functionaries like the above-mentioned de Gros who, like him, had property in Bruges. In other words, the style of the portrait panels in this triptych from Memling indicates a wish to be seen as more closely associated with the Burgundian court than with the burgher elite of Bruges.

MEMLING'S UPPER-BODY PORTRAITS

Sitters represented in devotional works with imagery that includes views onto landscape with people and buildings⁶¹

The exploration of Memling's upper-body portraits begins with the portraits of two young men in devotional works, the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* and the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari*.⁶² These works are analysed in this chapter because the upper-body format of the sitters is repeated in Memling's secular portraits. Importantly, Memling's visual metaphors in these works address both the duality of the

⁵⁹ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.9. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.50. See Waldman, 2001, on the inventory of goods made on Tommaso's death. Included is a description of a triptych likely to be this one, and of which only the portrait wings remain.

⁶⁰ See page 216.

⁶¹ See Group 1B, Appendix B.

⁶² De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.79. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.23.

real-sacred spheres of existence and that concerned with the external-internal make-up of each sitter.

Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove (1487)

It is impossible to know exactly why Memling opted for the style of imagery that appears in the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* (Fig. 227), and the lack of documentation relating to the work's commission has inevitably led to a variety of scholarly perspectives. Falkenburg, for example, argues that the image is a visual prayer and bases his opinion on close visual analysis in the context of contemporary religious belief and practice.⁶³ In contrast, Pearson concentrates on the influence of gender and suggests that the form of masculinity projected in the work is one that focuses on bodily constraint rather than on standards associated with marriage and fatherhood.⁶⁴ Bearing in mind my suggestion above that the inclusion of environmental features in the imagery of diptych panels was of significance to burghers because it provided them with something distinctly new within a traditional format, I contend, also, that the imagery of the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* contains within its form the potential to guide Maarten in contemplation of both his inner being and the significance of Christ's birth and death, a contemplative process at the heart of *Devotio Moderna*.

In his book on the history and spirituality of *Devotio Moderna*, van Engen discusses Master Geert Grote (d.1384), the founder of the 'new devotion', and also the influence of *The Imitation of Christ* - completed in 1427 and which may have been written by Thomas à Kempis - with its four basic rubrics: contempt for the world's vanities; a call

⁶³ Falkenburg, 2006: 92-109.

⁶⁴ Pearson, 2006: 101-17.

to inner life; a resultant inner consolation; and a proper approach to Holy Communion.⁶⁵ Most importantly van Engen supports the view that *Devotio Moderna* was late medieval and orthodox, with the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life living within the community and attending Mass at their parish church, although some followers were in religious orders, most notably the Windesheim Congregation of Canons Regular. For all followers of the Movement, devotion to Christ was central. Focus was on affective identification with particular moments in Christ's life, especially His Passion, but devotion to Mary was not repudiated; the Virgin and saints remained intercessors and models of behaviour. Elements of this approach to spirituality and devotion became popular in the fifteenth century spreading out from Germany, especially amongst burghers in urban centres, but they were elements not confined to *Devotio Moderna*.⁶⁶ I suggest that Memling's focus on interiority in the imagery of the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* models the focus Maarten hopes to apply in his spiritual devotions.⁶⁷

The Flemish domestic interior that Memling depicts in the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* is circumscribed by windows. It is unlikely that a real-world, Flemish interior would have had so many windows (two shown on the wall behind Mary, two behind Maarten and one that is implied for use by the viewer), so it seems plausible to suggest that the form of their representation is driven by symbolic overtones. The reflection in the mirror (Fig. 228) placed on the wall behind the Virgin conveys the fact

⁶⁵ Van Engen, 1988.

⁶⁶ Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: 3 note similar elements found in the devotional practices of the Cistercians. Also in books like Pseudo-Bonaventura's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, Ludolphus of Saxony's *Life of Christ* and Voragine's *The Golden Legend*.

⁶⁷ See also Falkenburg, 2001, especially pages 6-8 where he discusses a fifteenth-century meditation manual that likens the 'upkeep' of the soul to that for rooms in a house.

that the viewer is in an open-air space outside the windows through which s/he watches Maarten in his devotions; initially the viewer would of course have been Maarten himself. As Maarten knelt in prayer each day, he would have looked at a representation of himself, with lips apart, reciting a text from his Book of Hours; he is beseeching the Virgin to intercede with God on his behalf.⁶⁸ His meditative expression indicates that he is pondering the state of his interior being, a process which as noted above lay at the very heart of *Devotio Moderna*. He implores Mary to help prepare his soul for the Hereafter and to guide him as he tries to comprehend the nature of Christ's sacrifice for humanity. I suggest that Memling expresses this interiority in terms of a room with numerous windows. The windows can be understood as 'windows of the soul' and as such are placed on the dividing line between physical and spiritual being with the capacity, therefore, to look both ways at the same time: they make it possible for one to stand in the world and view the unknowable, or to stand in the unknowable and see how it is for oneself in the world. Each day, as Maarten knelt before the diptych, he would have been conscious of his physical frame in the real world (i.e. the space implied by the mirror's reflection and one complemented by the landscape space shown through the opposite and right-hand-windows), but able to view the spiritual condition of his being which was evidenced by his direct link with Mary and Christ's Passion, a link visually described by the joint-occupation of the same interior space and by the placement of Maarten's Book of Hours on Mary's red robe. The hypothesis that the windows had a threshold function allows a useful adjunct: any imagery inscribed in their panes has the

⁶⁸ See Gelfand, 1994: 16-37 for a discussion of Books of Hours. She notes that by the beginning of the fifteenth century, a common location for a portrait of the devotee was at the beginning of Matins (the start of the Hours of the Virgin) which begins "O Lord open thou my lips". See also Falkenburg, 2006: note 63 above.

potential to convey information from both realms of human existence. Firstly, there is Maarten's motto and coat-of-arms, together with the garden imagery (Fig. 229) that visually describes the Nieuwenhove name, which are displayed behind the image of Christ as He accepts the apple of Original Sin; this arrangement permanently links the new Garden of Paradise with the Nieuwenhove name.⁶⁹ Secondly, his name is reflected in the image of St Martin who, like St George and St Christopher also depicted, conveys the ability to bring the spiritual and earthly worlds together (Fig. 230).

Although the imagery of the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* suggests a focus on religious motives, this does not preclude an element of high-status posturing on Maarten's part. The motto and the coat-of-arms are part of this,⁷⁰ together with the detail of his fine, but understated, clothing, his Book of Hours with the clasp also bearing his coat-of-arms, and his intimate contact with the richly-attired and bejewelled Queen of Heaven. Some of the architectural forms represented in the view from the window behind Maarten may refer to the Minnewater; they are similar to those in the *Virgin and Child with St Anne Presenting a Woman* by the Master of the Legend of St Ursula (Figs. 231-233) - the woman being presented is Anna van Nieuwenhove, the wife of Maarten's brother, Jan. It is understandable why Maarten may have requested aspects of the Bruges' skyline: it was the city in which so many members of his family held prominent civic posts and no doubt it was anticipated that Maarten would follow

⁶⁹ The imagery of planting seeds also resonates with the notion prevalent at the time that one's soul was like a garden in that it needed planting and taming at regular intervals. See also pages 93-94 for discussion of Decker's scholarship on the landscape imagery of Geertgen tot Sint Jans' *St John the Baptist in the Wilderness*.

⁷⁰ See pages 193-94.

this tradition.⁷¹ However, it is a puzzle to explain why, from all the key buildings of Bruges, the Minnewater, with its footbridge and two towers, was chosen. ‘Minne’ (Middle High German origin) relates to courtly love, thus a view of the ‘Lake of Love’ is appropriate for this image of Maarten’s devotion to Mary.⁷² As to the towers, perhaps they are represented because they form part of the fortifications of the city and as such allude to the qualities of strength and fortitude that were expected of men at that time. If Maarten had aspirations to assume a leadership role in Bruges, it was imperative that he convey such qualities. It may be significant that the Minnewater representation is immediately beneath the image of Maarten’s name saint, St Martin, who is shown sharing his cloak with a beggar; not only was this saint once a soldier and leader, but he was charitable towards the poor. In other words, here is an image of Maarten juxtaposed with intimations of strength, leadership and charity which in turn are juxtaposed with a reference to part of Bruges’ fortification system.

If it is the case that Maarten’s house is represented within the city, with a location almost side-on to the towers and footbridge of the Minnewater, then it is possible that the countryside seen from the rear-window represents the landscape beyond Bruges’ city walls (Fig. 234).⁷³ However, if the notion is accepted that the realism in early Netherlandish painting consists of fragments of ‘real life’ reorganised to create a whole with symbolic overtones, then it does not follow that the view from the rear-wall

⁷¹ See pages 217-18 for details of the Nieuwenhove family sepulchre. Also, Martens, 2006: 88-90 for a useful overview of the Nieuwenhove family members.

⁷² In conversation with J. Nuechterlein.

⁷³ For a further reference to this land close by the city walls see the *Virgin and Child with St Anne Presenting a Woman* by the Master of the Legend of St Ursula (Figs. 232 & 233).

window has to correspond in terms of real life with the view behind Maarten. Although the mirror indicates that Maarten and the Virgin share the same interior space - and, therefore, the windows circumscribing that space - the physical division of the diptych creates the sensation that the landscape features seen from this rear-wall window are more closely associated with the Virgin than with Maarten, just as the landscape seen from the window behind Maarten's left shoulder is associated more closely with him. In other words, Maarten shares in the experience viewed from this window, but the nature of the experience is directed by what is displayed in the Mary and Jesus panel of the diptych. I suggest that in the manner of the notion suggested in Chapter Two, that the primary function of landscape features in non-narrative sacred works is to embody signifiers that relate to the doctrinal theme of the foreground tableau (and to secular aspirations of donors if present in the tableau), so this can be applied to an analysis of the landscape of the Nieuwenhove panels.

In the landscape seen through the rear-wall window in the Virgin and Child's panel a rider on a white horse leaves a track to cross meadowland that is edged in the distance by trees; these in turn enclose a space with a church and, walking on the track towards Maarten's interior, there is a walker in red and blue clothes reminiscent of van Eyck's onlooker in his *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin*. The imagery encapsulates what looks like a generic scene of everyday life. It is a scene that focuses on journeys to and from church, except that in real life city-dwellers would have attended parish churches within the city walls. What is important is the scene's placement close to that in which Jesus Incarnate, placed on an altar-type sill, accepts the apple of Original Sin from

Mary, the second Eve. This juxtaposition of the two scenes highlights the connection between, on the one hand, the gift of salvation through Christ's death and, on the other, the Church's role in the re-enactment of that gift through the Eucharist. I proposed such a connection between travellers to/from Church in the landscape and Mary and Jesus in the foreground in my analyses of the *Triptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned*, Vienna and the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Washington.⁷⁴ In the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence, there is a watermill (with its Eucharistic implications), but no church; in all three there is also a high-status dwelling. In the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, there is no high-status dwelling represented in the landscape; instead this is present in the foreground in the form of Maarten's interior.

The rear wall of Maarten's room has a second window. Reference has been made already to the emblematic nature of its uppermost panes, but it is necessary to reflect on possible meanings related to the almost-closed shutter beneath. Perhaps this particular 'window of the soul' is mostly shuttered to indicate to Maarten that despite his daily efforts, there are still dark corners within his interior: ever present is the fact of Original Sin and ever present is Christ's sacrifice that makes possible a new Garden of Paradise for humanity. The very slight opening certainly allows the exit (or entrance) of rays in Christ's halo (Fig. 228). Interestingly, rays from the top of Christ's head travel to the mirror's surface where there is imagery to remind Maarten of his position 'on the outside' looking in. This sensation for the viewer of being outside looking in is strongly reinforced by the reflection in the mirror. When the wings of the diptych are set flat (as

⁷⁴ See pages 165-67.

in most photographs of the diptych) the position of the mirror invokes a somewhat confrontational relationship with the viewer i.e. there is the sense that the information conveyed through the mirror imagery (knowledge that Maarten and Mary are situated close together in the same room) is there primarily for the viewer outside the frame. However, this is a little misleading: if the diptych was set on a table or domestic altar in the manner of its present-day display-mode at St John's Hospital, the mirror's relationship with the viewer and devotee would appear angled, more like that in the *Diptych with a Young Man Kneeling before the Virgin and Child* (Fig. 220). There is still the opportunity for the outside-looking-in experience, but it feels less dominant. In other words, the viewer outside the frame is made to feel less of an interloper in the sacred scene before his/her eyes; this in turn would have helped Maarten (the original outside-the-frame viewer) to focus in his interiority. From a formal standpoint, the mirror in both diptychs carries out the same function as that in van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait*: it is a device to help reduce the limitations that a two-dimensional surface places on representations of reality; its inclusion helps the art of painting compete with that of sculpture in that it enables representations 'in the round'. However, this explanation does little to promote understanding of why the mirror is placed near the Virgin, or in the case of the *Diptych with a Young Man Kneeling before the Virgin and Child* why its reflection indicates the presence of two small children behind the Mary and Jesus. Held was among the first to note that it is unusual for the children of devotees to be represented in diptychs.⁷⁵ Perhaps from the very start this devotional diptych included an epitaph-type function in relation to the devotee's children: as the young man knelt in prayer each day as part of a cleansing ritual for his

⁷⁵ Held, 1936: 179.

soul, he would say prayers for his children, already dead, to help reduce their time in Purgatory.⁷⁶ Mirrors in art bring with them much symbolism. For these two diptychs, there are two references that seem particularly appropriate: the first alludes to a mirror symbolising the purity of Mary - the *speculum sine macula* - and the second foregrounds a mirror's power to stand witness to the truth of the reality that it gathers up in its glass surface.⁷⁷

In summary, in the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, Memling provided its twenty-three year-old commissioner with a series of visual prompts, all grounded in the physicality of the real world, which enabled him to examine the condition of his soul, the presentation of his exterior being and the way such elements were juxtaposed during his life on earth. The diptych also provided a record of a man most worthy of prayers by others after his death. Whilst there was a focus on visually describing the condition of Maarten's interior *vis-à-vis* its condition in terms of Christian sanctity, his secular aspirations and status were also conveyed. Although Memling uses an architectural form in the Nieuwenhove panels that is different from the church-like form of his *sacra conversazione*-type compositions, nevertheless he juxtaposes landscape and architectural-form-plus-figures in a particular way to convey the nature of the interface between earthly and spiritual. The emphasis on interior detail and the absence of panoramic views of landscape reduces the feeling that the location, with its occupants, maintains a dominant position in relation to that landscape. However, Maarten's high

⁷⁶ The suggestion that the children are dead is highly speculative. It is based on them being tucked away in the corner of the devotee's envisioned soul, in that very part where the Virgin and Jesus demonstrate the process by which the Afterlife is made possible. Also, the mirror makes it possible for the devotee to see his children both from 'within' and 'without'.

⁷⁷ Hall, 1984: 210-11.

social status is conveyed by his placement close to the Virgin and Christ Child together with his attire and the representation of his coat-of-arms. For the representation of another young man with a high social status praying before the Virgin and Child, Memling changes the location of the event to an upstairs loggia with views across landscape; for Benedetto Portinari, he draws on the *sacra conversazione* compositional format. The imagery of the Benedetto's commission is examined next to understand how a change in compositional format influences interpretation, especially in terms of the nature of the juxtaposition between the earthly and spiritual realms of existence.

Triptych of Benedetto Portinari (1487)

Benedetto Portinari commissioned the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* from Memling in 1487, the same year that Maarten commissioned his diptych (Figs. 235-237).⁷⁸ Religious motives predominate, but I suggest that the triptych's imagery does not resonate with the type of personal devotion associated with 'housekeeping-of-the-soul' notions in the manner just described for Maarten van Nieuwenhove. It is true Benedetto was Italian, so an image of himself inside a Flemish interior would not have carried quite the same resonance as it did for Maarten, but the expansive views onto landscape in each panel of the triptych tend to move the imagination away from meditations upon interior sanctity to ones more closely aligned with those discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type compositions, to contemplations of the Virgin's seclusion and purity together with the Christ Child's gift of salvation and the nature of the juxtaposition of these sacred elements with life in the real world. Also

⁷⁸ De Vos, 1994: 284-86 for evidence identifying Benedetto as commissioner. Benedetto was a nephew of Tommaso Portinari and the younger brother of Ludovico and Folco; he worked with Folco as Tommaso's agent in Bruges after 1496.

significant are intimations of the sitter's grandeur not only from his representation in rich attire close to the Virgin and Child in rich attire, but from his location in a splendid upper-storey loggia with views across landscape.

Campbell notes similarities in the landscape behind Benedetto and that in a *Virgin and Child* by a pupil of Perugino in the National Gallery, London (Figs. 238 & 239); this, he suggests, indicates that Benedetto sent his triptych to Florence fairly soon after it was completed.⁷⁹ If this is true, then the argument that the imagery was not designed for daily devotions (at home) in accordance with the spirituality of *Devotio Moderna* gains strength. The two wings of the triptych arrived at the Uffizi from the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova founded by Folco Portinari in 1288, so it is likely that Benedetto wanted his triptych to stand in his homeland alongside other commissions made by members of the Portinari clan, the most significant of which was the *Portinari Altarpiece*.⁸⁰

The image of the Virgin and Christ Child in the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* is similar to that in the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, although the colours of Mary's cloak and dress are reversed and the neckline of her dress is no longer V-shaped or studded with precious jewels. In the central panel, the Virgin is alone with Jesus and both have halos of fine rays about their heads. With her left hand, Mary offers her Son the apple of Original Sin and with her right she supports him as he sits on a cushion with a transparent veil across his genitals. The cushion, in turn, rests on an oriental mat placed over a ledge which forms part of the inner frame of an upper-storey loggia. The

⁷⁹ Campbell, 2005(a): 52.

⁸⁰ See page 213.

left- and right-hand wings have been separated from the central panel, but the dimensions and the detail of the landscape and the columns suggest the panels belong together. Benedetto's name saint, St Benedict, is portrayed in the left-hand wing with his pastoral staff and mitre. St Benedict's staff has images of St John the Evangelist blessing the chalice of the Eucharist and Sampson killing the lion. Behind the saint, on the wall, is the leaf of a manuscript with an illumination of Christ on the Cross attended by the Virgin and John the Evangelist. All these images reinforce the Eucharist symbolism of the central panel.

The choice and organisation of landscape features in the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* bear some resemblance, once more, to those of the *Triptych with the Virgin and Child Enthroned*, Vienna, the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Washington and the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence. As noted above in my discussion of the landscape imagery in the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, I suggested that the journeys to church depicted in the landscape may have been a reference to the Church's role in the re-enactment of Christ's gift of salvation through the celebration of the Eucharist. However, in the landscape behind Benedetto there is no clear image of a church tower (there are only faint spires beyond the trees), but in the central panel an image of a fortified dwelling - a tower complex - is dominant. To place this image directly behind Mary, and with Mary and the Church traditionally considered one and the same,⁸¹ I suggest this architectural form (and towards which people journey) may be a reference to the Church.

⁸¹ As the anti-type of Eve, Mary was the spiritual mother of men, hence her role as Mother of the Church.

Like the riders-on-horseback setting off on a journey (to the mill?) in the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Florence, so in the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* a rider travels towards the tower complex represented in the triptych's central panel (Fig. 240). The towers appear to have very little accommodation attached to them, although this could be behind the trees (Fig. 241A). This somewhat unrealistic representation lends support to the suggestion made above that symbolism takes priority. In addition to the possibility that the towers are a reference to the Church, they may also allude to the purity of Mary, but, also, as the thrusting centrepiece of a lord's dwelling they have the potential to convey his power and strength in society.⁸² Figs. 241B-G gives examples of towers/fortified dwellings that would have existed in Benedetto's lifetime. In the selection chosen, those from the North are built of brick - interestingly like most buildings in Bruges at the time - whereas the ones from Tuscany are square-shaped and stone. Because the towers are placed behind Mary, they are likely to be, first, a reference to her, but this does preclude them from being a signifier of Benedetto's fortitude and high social status. This notion gains support from placement of the towers between Mary and Benedetto. The tower complex plays a significant role in the panel-linking, clockwise motion that is conveyed across the landscape by means of the paths and their travellers: when looking at the background, the viewer's eyes alight, after the towers, on the widest part of the path, then they 'travel' towards Benedetto's praying hands before following the path behind Mary towards St Benedict; the direction line conveyed by the saint's open book then prompts the viewer's gaze towards the horizon, to the horse-rider's path that leads through a copse of trees back to the towers. A formal

⁸² See also note 73, Chapter Two.

function to the placement of features combined with a symbolic one is a significant element in Memling's imagery.

Another example of a link between the formal and symbolic qualities of the imagery is provided by the arrangement of trees behind the Virgin. The trees form a horizontal band level with the Virgin's neck which continues into the left-hand panel where it is level with St Benedict's neck also. This technique of placing a row of trees level with a sitter's neck is used by Memling repeatedly and it works to focus the viewer's gaze on the sitter's face. In this work, the row of trees behind the Virgin also blocks views into the distance thus bringing emphasis to the foreground features and accentuating the thrust of the towers. Additionally, it works to unite the sacred figures because it does not continue into Benedetto's panel; in fact, it is formally cut-off from Benedetto by the wide part of the path to the left of Benedetto's right shoulder. Benedetto is further differentiated from the sacred figures by a slightly lower placement on the panel.

In his fur-lined robes, Benedetto stares ahead envisioning his presence in the same space as the Virgin, Jesus and St Benedict. However, in contrast to the Virgin, his three-quarter pose does not 'isolate' him from the landscape view behind him and the vertical direction of the path behind him reinforces this effect. St Benedict, too, is more closely connected with the landscape than the Virgin, although the path that leads from his left shoulder is at a less severe angle. The marble of the columns of the loggia, together with their decorated capitals, suggest a residence that is most splendid. This architectural form, with its panoramic landscape views and reminiscent of the *sacra*

conversazione-type composition, encapsulates notions of a country estate and, together with the features of fine clothes, jewellery and prayer book - not forgetting the Burgundian-styled emblem on the exterior – presents Benedetto as a lordly individual.⁸³

In summary, the landscape in both the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* and the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* is juxtaposed with architecture-plus-figure, and the high social status of each sitter is partly conveyed by rich-looking attire and closeness to the Virgin and Child. The diptych format of Maarten's commission, the interior setting and the absence of a name saint project an atmosphere that is more intimate than Benedetto's commission, and one suited to the contemplation of the soul's condition during daily prayers to the Virgin; with the help of the Virgin and daily prayer, Maarten's soul can embrace sacredness. In contrast, Memling's use of a *sacra conversazione*-type format for Benedetto's commission conveys a sacredness that is somewhat aloof from the world. Benedetto still prays to the Virgin, but the focus of his prayer is the purity of Mary, God's gift of salvation and his life after death in Paradise.

**Sitters represented in non-devotional works
with imagery that includes views onto landscape⁸⁴**

There are no secular portraits extant by Memling that are reminiscent of a Maarten-type interior, although, as noted earlier, one exists from his close-contemporary Bouts who painted a man in an interior with a view onto landscape in 1462 (Fig. 242) and one from Christus, much earlier in 1446, although the window in this composition had no view (Fig. 243). However, Memling repeated his Benedetto-type presentation in several of

⁸³ See Borchert, 2005(b): 174 for a brief reference to Warburg's scholarship on Benedetto's emblem and motto. There is a banderol, with the motto DE BONO IN MELIUS, wrapped around a sprouting oak.

⁸⁴ Group II, B & C(i) & (ii), Appendix B.

his secular portraits-with-landscape. These are the portraits of Group IIB (Appendix B) and I discuss these first, before portraits with views onto landscape where the architectural form in which sitters pose is reduced to a ledge for the placement of hands. Memling's Benedetto-type presentation - including Memling's sitters framed by a stone-edged window aperture - echoes most clearly the manner of the hierarchical presentation of the Virgin and Christ Child of his *sacra conversazione*-type compositions. I consider that this hierarchy continues, but with less emphasis, in those compositions where only a ledge is represented, with each sitter still presented as an overseer of estate lands that bring with them political, economic and social power.

In the analysis of all Memling's portraits-with-landscape I focus on the way formal rhythms bring landscape and sitter together because, as I outlined in detail earlier, I consider the harmonising of rhythms of line, colour and shape across figure and landscape enables features in the landscape to function as descriptors of a sitter's identity and aspirations. In all but the final group of portraits I relate features in the landscape with an aspiration to be perceived as living a noble life, with visual statements of material success signifying that lifestyle. In the final group of portraits where the landscape is undisturbed by tiny scenes of activity, I argue for a redirection of emphasis - maybe in design, but certainly in perception - from nobility of lifestyle to nobility of soul. However, this does not mean that nobility of soul can be perceived *only* in these portraits, only that in these works it is primary. Thus I discuss nobility of soul only in the final section.

(i) Sitters represented within an architectural form with aerial views onto landscape⁸⁵

Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat (c.1465-70)

and

Portrait of a Man [Frick Collection] (c.1470-75)

The *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat* is an early portrait by Memling in which an unknown Flemish man is represented beyond a stone, window-type frame that gives an aerial view onto landscape (Figs. 244 & 245).⁸⁶ During the painting process Memling made the stone frame narrower and broadened the sitter's cap. This procedure, together with the clipping of the sitter's shoulders, arms and hat, brings a sense of monumentality to the figure, which is enhanced by the illusion that he shares the viewer's space. The viewer is given the impression of a man dominating both the space he shares with the viewer and the landscape behind him. Whilst it is true that Memling's positioning of the sitter before the window frame conveys a sense of separation between figure and landscape, at the same time his numerous 'entwining' features draw these two elements together. These features include a white band of sky painted adjacent to the sitter's face that draws attention to eyes, nose and mouth; a row of bushy trees that echo the line of the sitter's shoulders and another leading the viewer's eye to the rich, fur-edged neckline of his tunic; an upward 'pull' of a group of towers to the viewer's left, and trees to the right, that further concentrate attention on the white band of sky; and the positioning of the towers so that they complement the sitter's two hands thereby bringing attention to the space across which he gazes - the tallest tower is in line with the lower hand and the shortest ones with the higher hand. In contrast, the small man bending down and accompanied by two animals, possibly dogs, together with the roof structure to the

⁸⁵ Group IIB, Appendix B.

⁸⁶ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.7. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.1. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.28.

viewer's right, are so small they are imperceptible at first glance; such tiny detail reinforces the sense of priority given to the left-hand side of the composition. So this sitter has a close link with land but, like a lord, the relationship is about overseeing an estate from a position 'on high'. As to the landscape features themselves, the wooded topography associates the sitter with the kind of estate that was highly prized at the time as it provided a good source of income, and the church, placed in a prominent position - and in the usual position of the focus of prayer in a devotional diptych - reminds viewers that here was a godly man.

The composition of the *Portrait of a Man* in the Frick Collection, New York, is similarly executed, but this time presents an unknown Italian patron (Figs. 246 & 247).⁸⁷ Memling once again reduces the fictive stone frame in favour of the landscape and places the whole of the sitter's face against a sky with a band of mist at the horizon. A row of trees hugs only the sitter's right shoulder; this tends to draw attention to the strap of his headdress held over his shoulder which in turn highlights the firm clench of his fist. A distant church tower is visible to the viewer's left beyond a stretch of water, and to the right, dominating the space set aside for landscape, there is the tower of a residence; the latter is carefully set at the top of a diagonal that connects with the sitter's hands and matches the angle of the viewer's gaze.

I consider that the inclusion of a tower, the focal point of a lord's fief, adds to the implication that a lordly estate may be represented behind the sitter. If so, the track with a walker indicates the potential of toll monies, and the stretch of water access to

⁸⁷ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.12. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.2. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.46.

freshwater fish and the charging for fishing rights. Interestingly, there is no difference in presentation or landscape detail between the Flemish patron and the Italian. Also, in both paintings nothing is shown of the interior space; instead emphasis is placed on the sitter's monumentality, his clothing and a dominant placement over a landscape panorama.

It is useful at this point to return to the inferences drawn from the content of Chapter Three and reflect on why wealth without land ownership was insufficient to provide the burgher elite of Bruges with the sort of status to which they aspired. Wealth was crucial - and it could buy patents of nobility - but the greatest power in society of the day came with noble rank; this in turn was given definition primarily through land ownership for with it came juridical powers, titles and income. In other words, splendid residences with costly furnishings, fine clothes, expensive jewellery and heraldic devices were all signifiers of *vivre noblement*, but land ownership was the most potent and unambiguous. In addition, a significant motive for being perceived as land-owning was the need to be considered credit-worthy, a most relevant attribute in the late medieval European world of markets and money. So at the time patrons approached Memling to paint their portraits, both traditional and new perspectives on land ownership existed, making it a highly potent signifier of superiority in society. Thus, representations of sitters juxtaposed with land can be seen as part of the businessman's PR machinery: they functioned to project superiority and success whether fact or aspiration. These portraits are likely to have been hung in a room in the family home where guests were allowed and where social and business transactions took place. In

addition, if or when they assumed the role of epitaph above a grave and/or in a family chapel, they could function to project the high status of the sitter and his family in perpetuity.

Portrait of a Young Man [Lehman Collection, New York] (c.1475-80)

In *Portrait of a Young Man*,⁸⁸ Memling's representation of a loggia with columns similar to that in the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* may be related to the fact that the sitter is Italian. Campbell suggests that the columns and landscape in the *Madonna and Child* by a follower of Verrocchio (now attributed to Ghirlandaio) were copied directly from Memling's *Portrait of a Young Man* (Figs. 248-250).⁸⁹ Such a quotation lends support to the argument that this portrait was seen by many painters in Verrocchio's circle in Florence from around 1475. Perhaps the classical association of columns with power and authority was strong in the Italian psyche of the day. However, there are similarities with Bouts' *Portrait of a Man*. In both portraits, the sitters' hands lie on top of each other on a fictive ledge, a characteristic that recalls van Eyck's in his *Leal Souvenir* of 1432, where the sitter's right hand (which holds a rolled parchment) hovers slightly above a stone ledge (Figs. 251-253). I suggest that the connection with landscape appears more pronounced in Memling's work than in Bouts. This sensation is achieved by several compositional features: firstly, the right shoulder of Bouts' sitter is placed below window level - this contrasts with the neck and shoulder line of Memling's sitter linking rhythmically (as does the direction of his upper hand) with a horizontal band of trees in the landscape; next, the hair of Memling's young man continues into the space occupied by the white band of sky adjacent to the horizon, and

⁸⁸ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.48. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.15. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.52.

⁸⁹ Campbell, 1983: 675-76.

the circular base of the column that is touched by the man's doublet is echoed in the direction that the path takes through the landscape; and, finally, the bull's-eye glass shutter in Bouts' work, with its potential to screen out the landscape, aids the sensation that landscape and figure are not intricately interwoven. It may be that Bouts' focus was on portraying the vehicle through which light could pass into the interior space thereby enabling him to model his sitter's features in a specific manner. Also, his landscape view brings a sense of depth to the composition. Memling has added to this focus. He, too, is concerned with representing the effects of light and the illusion of depth, but by introducing compositional rhythms that chime across figure and landscape the implication is conveyed that there is a strong link between the two, with the landscape features and their juxtaposition able to function as attributes of the sitter.

Portrait of an Elderly Couple (c.1470-75)

and

Two Wings with the Portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch (c.1480)⁹⁰

The location of the sitters in *Portrait of an Elderly Couple* is clearly one of an elevated loggia (Fig. 254), and, like the Lehmann portrait, the presence of a porphyry column behind both the man and woman gives the space a rich, aristocratic air. It can be seen that the landscape features have much in common with those of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels* at the Uffizi and the *Altarpiece of Jacob Floreins* (Fig. 255). De Vos suggests that the fortified building behind the male represents his steadfastness and the rural dwelling behind the female refers to her fertility.⁹¹ This may be true, but the elevated and column-bound location for these two richly-attired sitters

⁹⁰De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.22. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.18. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.18.

⁹¹De Vos, 1994: 311.

also conveys the notion that this couple could have owned an estate with a fortified dwelling and buildings appropriate for tenant farmers. The white horse with rider behind the old man contributes further to a perception of noble living.⁹²

Although these two portraits of the elderly man and his female companion are now separated, they originally formed part of a continuous double portrait.⁹³ This format contrasts with the portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch which were once the wings of a devotional triptych (Fig. 256). The Moreels are in an upstairs loggia like that of Benedetto Portinari, and like the landscape features in Benedetto's triptych the equivalent in the Moreel panels is likely to have referred back to the sacred imagery of the central panel as well as the identities of the devotees. The fact of the missing central panel urges caution with regard to reflections on meaning. However, it is of interest to note the similar path direction above the praying hands of Benedetto and Willem (Figs. 257 & 258), but the difference in the sense of enclosure; the latter is achieved by placing Willem's chin level with the sill of the loggia in contrast to Benedetto whose chest is represented above the parapet. This much more open view from Benedetto's loggia may be related, to some degree, to an Italian sensibility cultivated in warmer climes than Flanders. Fairly prominent on the horizon behind Willem in the portrait wing is the representation of two luxurious residences (Fig. 259), not exactly like those painstakingly reproduced in the *Moreel Triptych* (Figs. 260 & 261), but not completely dissimilar; the viewer once more is provided with signifiers that lend support to the idea that Willem is of high social status. Also, his image seems

⁹² See page 284.

⁹³ De Vos, 1994: 115. Campbell, 1977: 187.

to be more dominant than that of his wife. This is because Barbara's mouth (and not chin) is level with the inside edge of the loggia's sill and, like the *Moreel Triptych*, her praying hands are shown lower than Willem's. This lower position of Barbara may simply relate to formal considerations - she is wearing a tall head-dress and Memling had a limited space in which to work - nevertheless, it may result from adherence to contemporary views on the subservience of women. Pearson has suggested, for example, that the *Moreel Triptych* is a statement of a masculinity grounded in marriage and procreation and that the elevated placement of Willem's hands indicates that the role of husband and father was considered, at the time, to be above that of wife and mother.⁹⁴

In summary, the analyses of Memling's portraits of sitters within an architectural form with aerial views onto landscape focussed on the formal rhythms that linked sitter with landscape because I considered such rhythms were able to promote a symbolic connection between the two. I detailed signifiers of *vivre noblement* in the landscape, and showed that the harmonising rhythms functioned within a compositional model that paradoxically presented sitters 'cordoned off' from the landscape; this format enhanced the projection of a socially superior identity for each sitter and conveyed a relationship with land that had been monopolised in the past by members of the nobility. In the works that follow, Memling retains this sense of aloofness for his sitters, even though he reduces the architectural features to ledges upon which sitters rest their hands.

⁹⁴ Pearson, 2006: 99-100.

(ii) Representations of sitters juxtaposed directly with landscape and behind a ledge which is situated beyond the pictorial plane⁹⁵

The analysis of these works can be divided into two sections depending on whether or not their landscape representation includes people and buildings. The compositional format of all these portraits resonates closely with that used by van der Weyden for his ‘portraits’ of five sacred figures in the *Braque Triptych*, and for this reason I begin with an examination of the imagery of this small devotional triptych.⁹⁶

Rogier van der Weyden’s *Braque Triptych* (c.1450)

The *Braque Triptych* (Figs. 262-265) is a portable devotional work probably commissioned by Catherine de Brabant in memory of her husband Jean Braque of Tournai who died in 1452. In it, van der Weyden presents five upper-body ‘portraits’ of sacred figures juxtaposed directly with a panoramic landscape.⁹⁷ There are no architectural forms enclosing these figures, although the picture frame acts as a ledge on which St John the Baptist rests the Bible and Christ his orb with cross.

⁹⁵ Group IIC, (i) & (ii), Appendix B.

⁹⁶ Attribution to van der Weyden of the *Braque Triptych* is not secure. See, for example, Asperen de Boer et al, 1992: 298 where it is stated that the underdrawing revealed in the reflectograms does not relate to that found in other works examined in the van der Weyden group. De Vos, 1999: 272 takes issue with Frinta’s suggestion that the triptych is a composite work with the Master of Flémalle responsible for the Mary Magdalene panel. Vaes (2008) gives details of Catherine de Brabant’s will of 1497 in which a “tableau à cinq ymaiges” was bequeathed to her grandson and provides useful information to support a connection between the Braque, Brabant and van der Weyden families in Tournai.

⁹⁷ See Lane, 1980, where she notes that because the figure to Christ’s immediate left is John the Evangelist, and not John the Baptist, this is not a Deesis. She references Byzantine mosaics in Sicily and thirteenth-century Tuscan dossals where a Christ is represented in the company of saints, none full-length. In the latter, the saints are smaller and/or their heads lower than Christ’s in the manner of the *Braque Triptych*, but there are no landscape backgrounds.

Borchert is one of many scholars to suggest that the *Braque Triptych* may be significant in influencing Memling with regard to upper-body portraits juxtaposed with landscape.⁹⁸ There are some significant elements from this work that have been taken up by Memling. The most important of all is the placing of the horizon line level with the neck and/or lips of each sitter except for Christ whose head is set a little higher in order to meet the requirements of sacred hierarchy; this compositional feature appears in the portraits already discussed. The positioning of heads in this manner in relation to sky and landscape adds a sense of monumentality to the figures and implies a position of each figure high up overlooking a world beneath; allusions to the presumed location of heaven are strong. The space is certainly one that is not bound by physical laws; its lack of enclosure adds to the sensation that its inhabitants are not of this world. It is these two elements - a monumentality that works to focus a viewer's attention and an implication that the sitter is separated from the ordinary - that Memling successfully transfers to a secular context. There is also a resonance in Memling of the way van der Weyden uses landscape features to act as 'book-ends' to a composition: a tall tree at John the Baptist's right shoulder and a limestone escarpment at Mary Magdalene's left.

Van der Weyden's panoramic vista in the *Braque Triptych* is not unrelated to that in van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Nicolas Rolin* (Fig. 266). An important difference, in addition to the fact that van Eyck's foreground figures are full-length and placed within an architectural form, is that the landscape perspective experienced by the viewer is close to that of the two people looking out from the garden below Rolin's room; this adds to the sensation of connection between distant landscape and figures represented in

⁹⁸ Borchert, 2005(b): 42.

the interior. Van der Weyden's presentation of Sts John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene resonates, too, with van Eyck's *St Barbara*: in each composition the saint has a commanding location overlooking a landscape panorama (Figs. 267 & 268).

An important element in the development of panoramic vistas in painting at this time is the popularity of van Eyck's work in Italy. Gibson recounts sixteenth-century documentation that refers to admirers and collectors of Flemish landscapes after Joachim Patinir, but he also references earlier documentation.⁹⁹ In 1459, for example, Ciriaco d'Ancona wrote of his admiration of landscape representation by Northerners, and, as noted in the General Introduction, in 1456 Facius wrote in praise of the landscape in *Women Bathing*, a work no longer extant. Cocke refers to the possible influence of this landscape on Piero della Francesca's double portrait of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro (Fig. 269) and notes that according to Facius, *Women Bathing* was in the collection of Ottaviano della Carda whom Baxandall identified as nephew and principal councillor to Federico.¹⁰⁰ It seems, then, that Italians of Memling's generation, both artists and their rich clients alike, appreciated the skills of Northern painters with regard to panoramic vistas of landscape, most especially those of van Eyck, the innovator of such vistas on panel. Consequently, the view could be taken that when Memling included these with life-like portraits - and when he opened up the *sacra conversazione* to landscape views - he was making a well-considered commercial judgment as far as his Italian clients were concerned.

⁹⁹ Gibson, 1989: Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ Cocke, 1980: 631.

The type of landscape perspective juxtaposed with upper-body figures (and not enclosed in an architectural form) is the most important compositional feature that Memling may have taken from the *Braque Triptych* and its forerunners, but also worthy of reflection is the nature of the landscape forms that van der Weyden uses in the triptych. It can be seen that the topography echoes the limestone forms of the Dinant region of present-day Belgium (Figs. 270A, B, D & E). Although this region is not a great distance from where van der Weyden worked first in Tournai and later in Brussels, it is far enough away in terms of a medieval perspective to convey 'foreignness' or 'out-of-the-ordinary'. In addition, its peaks and valleys offer a dramatic contrast to West Flanders. These landscape forms were able to provide a most suitable setting in which to place a river from foreign parts for the Baptism of Christ and events in Mary Magdalene's life after the death of Christ. With regard to the latter, according to French tradition Mary Magdalene spent the last years of her life in penance in a cave in the massif of La Sainte-Baume, Provence; interestingly, this is also a limestone region, but there is no way of knowing if van der Weyden was familiar with the area. Memling, for his part, locates behind his Mary Magdalene of the *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* a limestone formation reminiscent of van der Weyden's in terms of structure and placement, although in contrast he inserts the entrance to her cave in the escarpment (Fig. 270C). As for the River Jordan scenes, Memling follows van der Weyden in including a tiny scene of St John preaching alongside the baptism scene in two of his paintings (Figs. 271A & B). Also, it can be seen that van der Weyden adapted his Baptism scene on the banks of the River Jordan (Fig. 271C) for the bathing of the Magi in the right-hand panel of his *Bladelin Triptych* (Fig. 271E) and for the setting behind

his *St Catherine of Alexandria* (Fig. 271D). With regard to his secular portraits, however, Memling's topography departs from the drama of these 'foreign' limestone forms and he reduces the panoramic sensation.

There is a subtle difference between the wings and the centre of the *Braque Triptych* in terms of how the landscape and figures relate to each other. At a practical level, it is true there is not much room for landscape detail in the central panel because three figures are competing for space, but there may also be functionally-related reasons behind the slight difference that occurs in the nature of the juxtaposition between landscape and figures. The presentation of the landscape of the wings could be judged traditional in the sense that it works to ground events that took place in the lives of Sts John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene whilst on earth; I am taking the landscape form behind Magdalene to be the location of her penitence - this idea gains support from the similarity with Memling's rock formation that does have a cave entrance.¹⁰¹ These two saints stand witness to the first and last events in Christ's life on earth: John forecasts the coming of the Saviour, and Mary, as the first witness to Christ's Resurrection, conveys the benefits to humankind of his Passion. This focus on earthly events does not continue across into the central panel. Here, there is a strong allusion to a space that exists outside earthly experience, that 'place' (out of this world) reserved for those worthy of Christ's sacrifice and where souls can rest for eternity. The images and words of the panel convey information as to how humans gain access to this space: there is Christ in his role as Saviour of the World - he holds the cross and orb and says "I am

¹⁰¹ Campbell, 2004: 25 states this is not a narrative picture and Blum, 1969: 36 accepts only one narrative scene in the triptych, that of Christ's Baptism.

the living bread that came down from heaven”; at his right side there is the Virgin with hands clasped in prayer interceding for mankind and speaking words that stress Christ’s role in the provision of everlasting life “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”;¹⁰² and at his left there is St John the Evangelist saying the words “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” and holding his chalice (minus serpent) - this works to remind viewer’s of the Church’s role in accessing Christ’s sacrifice in perpetuity. There is a strong sense that these central characters appear in an environment ‘beyond’ the real world. This is not to say that the imagery and the words of John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene do not partake in the ‘explanation’ of what Christ’s sacrifice enables; it is a difference in emphasis only. As to the influence on Memling, it is the format of the wings where the sense of separation between figure and background is reduced that Memling adapts for use in this group of portraits-with-landscape. Furthermore, Memling’s subjects tend to sit in three-quarters view like John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene.

Sitters juxtaposed directly with landscape that contains people and buildings¹⁰³

Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin (c.1473 or later)¹⁰⁴

and

Portrait of a Man with a Letter (c.1475)¹⁰⁵

The first portraits by Memling to be discussed here that resonate with the format of the wings of the *Braque Triptych* are the *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* (Figs. 272 & 274) and the *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* (Figs. 273, 274 & 275). In these portraits

¹⁰² All translations from the Latin after de Vos, 1999: 270.

¹⁰³ Group IIC(i), Appendix B.

¹⁰⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.42. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.10. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.2.

¹⁰⁵ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.44. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.11. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.27.

of Italian sitters the stone 'window' frames of the *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat* and the *Portrait of a Man*, Frick Collection, New York, have gone, leaving only a ledge on which hands rest. This ledge cannot be seen in the *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*, but it is implied by the positioning of the left hand and the laurel leaves at the painting's lower edge. The horizontal bands of trees are present once more and level with the neck of each sitter whose faces, from the lips upwards, are silhouetted against blue skies. Although the background detail is brought up quite close to the viewer, the dominance of the sitter is not reduced. In other words, sitter and setting command equal attention: the sense is conveyed that the riders on white horses, the lakes with swans and the hilltop residences are attributes equal in importance to the black attire of each sitter and the contents of his hands.

Before examining these two portraits in detail, it is necessary to discuss why the white horses and swans in these works and others have the potential to carry connotations of social grandeur. By Memling's time, horses had long been associated with knighthood and heraldry, with white horses carrying extra kudos because of the link between whiteness and purity, the references to white horses in the Bible and to the belief that St George rode a white horse. Van Eyck was following the words of scripture closely when he chose white horses to lead both his just judges and his soldiers of Christ (Fig. 276).¹⁰⁶ In addition, horses must have played a key role in commercial enterprise of the day. As to swans, the largest of all waterfowl, these were thought to be the most superior of birds and ancient myths and chivalric tales embraced them. For example,

¹⁰⁶ Douay-Rheims Bible, The Apocalypse of St John, 19:11 "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true, and with justice doth he judge and fight" and 19: 14 "And the armies that are in heaven followed him on white horses".

Zeus took a swan's form to seduce Leda and the early medieval tale *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne* from the *Cycle de la Croisade* relates how the Swan Knight, Elias, arrived on the noble Bouillon estate in a boat drawn by a swan to save its lady heiress from being dispossessed. The Swan Knight married the lady he rescued and their daughter, Ida, became the mother of Godfrey of Bouillon, a crusader who was the first ruler of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷ Hence the swan form was common in heraldry¹⁰⁸ and jewellery for nobles. The Dunstable Swan Jewel (Fig. 277), for example, is an exquisite livery badge held today at the British Museum. It may have been presented as a prize at a joust held by Philip the Good at Lille in 1453 for it is recorded that the winner was awarded a rich swan of gold with a gold and ruby chain. At this time it seems that many nobles across Europe were keen to demonstrate their descent via the House of Boulogne (or House of Ardennes-Bouillon) from the Swan Knight of courtly romance.¹⁰⁹ Or the jewel may have belonged to someone who proclaimed allegiance to Henry Lancaster, for he adopted the emblem of the swan when he married Mary de Bohun. It was usual for land-owning lords to have rights with regard to the keeping and rearing of swans on their estates,¹¹⁰ so it is unsurprising to find that swan meat was a delicacy served at medieval banquets for the noblest in the land. For example, Chiquart, master cook to the Duke of Savoy, records in his fifteenth-century treatise the

¹⁰⁷There are echoes of the Swan Knight legend in another medieval tale: at the end of his Grail story, *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach introduces the Knight Lohengrin (Parzival's son). Members of Lohengrin's knightly order were committed to protecting kingdoms that had lost their rightful lord and, right at the end of *Parzival*, Lohengrin was sent to rescue Elsa of Brabant; she was imprisoned in the castle of Cleves known to this day as The Schwarnenburg. In his rescue bid, Lohengrin travelled down the Rhine in a boat drawn by a swan. An unrelated legend is one that grew up around the song of a dying swan; because it was thought to relate to the joy of entering the Afterlife it became associated with the prediction of death. This may be applicable in Memling's imagery in the sense of reminding the sinner of his mortality.

¹⁰⁸ For example, a white swan formed part of the coat-of-arms of Pieter Lanchals, executed with Jan van Nieuwenhove in 1488 for his support of Maximilian.

¹⁰⁹ British Museum, *The Burlington Magazine*, 1968: 45.

¹¹⁰ See page 196.

making of an *entremet* called 'The Castle of Love'. This was so large it had to be carried into the dining hall by four men. One of the towers of the giant castle contained a swan cooked and redressed.¹¹¹ It is likely, then, that the representation of swans in Memling's portraits-with-landscape would have prompted thoughts of *vivre noblement* in the minds of many contemporary viewers. Today, swans on the Minnewater of Bruges are a tourist attraction, but whether or not swans were on the city's waters in such great numbers in Memling's time - and owned by the local nobles - is unknown. If they were a common sight for the city's residents, this may have been of significance to Memling's Italian patrons keen to preserve memories of their stay in Bruges.

Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* and *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* are his only secular portraits-with-landscape extant that show each sitter with a hand-held attribute.¹¹² Attributes appear in portraits with neutral backgrounds: the *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* (Fig. 279)¹¹³ and the *Portrait of a Man with a Pink* (Fig. 280)¹¹⁴ and in the *Portrait of a Man with a Gold Cord* (Fig. 278)¹¹⁵ two of the sitter's fingers touch the end of the gold cord which ties his doublet. Out of the twenty secular portraits named in Appendix B, only five sitters have hand-held attributes. To some degree, this fact strengthens the hypothesis that landscape features functioned as attributes of identity, with Memling (and most of his portrait commissioners)

¹¹¹ Scully, 2005: 108.

¹¹² The attribution to Memling of the *Portrait of a Young Man* (Montreal), in which the man holds a scroll, is not secure (Borchert, 2005(b): 169).

¹¹³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.29. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.13. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.72.

¹¹⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.26. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.20. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.55.

¹¹⁵ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.30. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.12. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.74.

considering it unnecessary to have items in the sitters' hands when such sitters were represented with landscape: landscape features alongside dress and jewellery were judged sufficient, especially when it came to conveying high social status, wealth and power. In contrast, portraits with neutral backgrounds were perhaps thought to be in need of 'something extra' whilst, at the same time, following in the tradition of aristocratic portraits where the sitter would often hold, like Christ, attributes of power. There is no way of knowing for sure why these two sitters wanted both; it is likely that they were concerned to include *specifics* of identity or aspiration alongside a general aura of high social status. The hand-held attribute echoes an aristocratic portrait tradition and also denotes particulars of identity. The notion that both of these sitters had a high opinion of themselves, and were keen to have descriptive detail in their portraits that singled them out from other high-status individuals, gains support from their rather confrontational gaze from a seven-eighths frontal pose. A rather different interpretation might be that these two portraits provide evidence of a growing recognition of, and confidence in, a sense of individuality.

The *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* must have been taken from Bruges to Italy, either Florence or Venice, shortly after its completion in 1475 as it was copied by an Italian painter. Nuttall suggests that this copied painting, now at Petworth House, was carried out either because the patron wanted a copy, or the painter was keen to demonstrate his skill in emulating the portraiture and landscape talents of Memling.¹¹⁶ A work by another Italian, Pietro Perugino, draws quite heavily on the compositions of both the

¹¹⁶ Nuttall, 2005: 77.

Portrait of a Man with a Letter and the *Portrait of a Man with a Coin*; this is his *Portrait of Francesco delle Opere* (Figs. 281-283).¹¹⁷ The composition includes a smooth body of water and a horizontal band of bushy trees level with the sitter's neck, a towered residence to the viewer's right and distant, mist-engulfed mountains. In addition, the rising rocky topography on either side of Francesco - the edging of which is the reverse of his shoulder lines - echoes the way Memling uses line rhythms in the *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar* (discussed in the next section). The tall trees to the viewer's left in Perugino's work also resonate with those of Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar*.¹¹⁸ In another Italian painting held at the Uffizi, the *Portrait of Perugino*, a work attributed to Perugino or Lorenzo di Credi,¹¹⁹ the artist combines compositional ideas from the *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* and the *Portrait of a Young Man* (Lehman Collection): the resting of hands-with-paper on a ledge from the first, and the placement of sitter with a view onto landscape beyond the sitter's right shoulder, together with the placement of one hand upon another on a ledge from the second. The positioning of the sitter below a window opening in the *Portrait of Perugino* has, in fact, more in common with Bouts' *Portrait of a Man*; gone are the marble columns of the Lehman painting and the interweaving of rhythms between landscape and sitter (Figs. 284-287). I suggest that these absences combine with the direct gaze and subdued clothing to encourage the viewer to think about the interior qualities of the sitter, rather than his material possessions and noble status, as discussed further in the final grouping of portraits. In addition, the rolled parchment resonates with notions of antique scrolls and learning, a resonance that contrasts with that of the

¹¹⁷ See Lane, 2009: 230-36 for an overview of Memling's influence on Perugino.

¹¹⁸ Nuttall, 2005: 77 notes the use of similar trees in Fra Bartolommeo's *Portrait of Matteo Sassetti*.

¹¹⁹ Campbell, 1983: 676. The Uffizi attributes the portrait to Lorenzo di Credi.

folded letter of Memling's sitter which may be a reference to the significant role that letters played in the life of successful businessmen.

The sitter of the *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* may be Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian humanist whose emblem consisted of a laurel and palm branch and who may have commissioned from Memling the diptych, examined in Chapter Two, with John the Baptist and Veronica.¹²⁰ The identification of the sitter as Bernardo gains support from the laurel sprig painted on the lower edge of the portrait and the rather incongruous presence, in a Flemish-styled landscape, of a palm tree to the viewer's right. The use of a specific motif *within* the landscape appears to be a one-off amongst Memling's portraits-with-landscape; its location almost directly above the intricately-detailed coin held by Bernardo suggests that both the tree and the coin were there to provide a clue to specific identity.¹²¹ Very close to the palm tree are the very popular features of the white horse-plus-rider and swans floating on a serene body of water. Although I consider that white horses and swans appear with regularity in Memling's landscapes because they are signifiers of noble living, this viewpoint is not meant to detract from the fact that they bring, also, an element of beauty to each composition; they are part of a rural idyll far removed from commerce, inter-city rivalries and hostilities with Burgundian overlords.

¹²⁰ See Fletcher, 1989, for the original identification of the emblem with Bernardo and his link with Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci*.

¹²¹ De Vos, 1994: 190 notes that pictograms were popular in Italian humanist circles. Borchert, 2005(b): 160 records that Bembo was in the humanist circle around the Venetian historiographer, Marcantonio Michiel and had a collection of antique coins as well as paintings.

Sitters juxtaposed directly with landscape that contains no people and buildings¹²²

Portrait of a Man before a Landscape [Brussels] ((c.1470-75),¹²³

Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar (c.1475)¹²⁴

and

Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape [Venice] (c.1475-80)¹²⁵

Whilst the sitters in these paintings are juxtaposed directly with landscape in the manner of the last two portraits discussed, there are significant differences, the effects of which need to be addressed.¹²⁶ These are the only portraits-with-landscape by Memling in which there are no buildings, tiny people, tracks, animals, swans and stretches of water. This has the effect of providing the sitter with an undisturbed landscape to which only he had access. The difference in composition may be related to costs, with an empty landscape being cheaper, but paradoxically the result (at least to the modern eye) conveys great exclusivity. It also enhances the introspective gaze of the sitters - which in turn reduces the sense of accessibility - because there is nothing in the landscape to distract the viewer's attention. In all these paintings, the sitter and pristine landscape have become one, with rhythms of line, shape and colour in figure and landscape working closely together. This is especially noticeable in the *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar* (Fig. 289): the horizontal bands in the landscape give depth, but more importantly the light brown band of earth at the centre forms the inverted base of a broad triangle the apex of which is formed by the sitter's dramatic, light-brown-with-spots collar. In addition, the green slopes to the foreground hillocks invert the lines of

¹²² Group IIC(ii), Appendix B.

¹²³ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.43. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.7. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.19.

¹²⁴ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.28. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.8. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.26.

¹²⁵ De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.49. Borchert, 2005(b): Cat.No.16. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.69.

¹²⁶ The *Portrait of a Young Man*, Zurich (Fig. 288) is included in this group, but extensive retouching allows only a hesitant attribution (De Vos, 1994: Cat.No.47. Borchert, 2005(b): Pl.21. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B14).

the sitter's shoulders, and the bushy trees on either side of his head echo the form of his hairstyle; the latter is further enhanced by the position and form of the tall, framing trees. This visually dramatic relationship between hairstyle and trees occurs in the Brussels portrait, too (Fig. 290); less so in *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape* at Venice (Fig. 291).¹²⁷ As to the position of the top half of the face silhouetted against the sky, this works not only to highlight the sitter's curls, but also draws the viewer's attention to the sitter's eyes and his introspective gaze. Such a placement contrasts with that in the Venice work and helps to give a 'regal' uplift to the stance, although this is mainly achieved by placing the sitter's chin on the straight baseline of the inverted triangle upon which the bushy trees also stand. In the Venice work, the landscape appears less directed by concerns of interweaving patterns, with the single colour of the meadowland, though dotted with tiny flowers, contributing to a sense of overall serenity and 'naturalness'. In this portrait, Memling has raised the line on which the bushy trees are rooted and consequently the bottom of the sitter's nose rather than his chin is level with it. The line in turn draws attention to the nose and because in reality the nose protrudes from the face, the sensation that the sitter is close to the viewer is enhanced. At the same time, but somewhat paradoxically, the sitter seems more in tune with his environment than the man with the spotted, fur collar. The shadows cast by the trees to the left of the composition add to this sense of a closer association, for they point in the direction of the lower half of the sitter's face. Interestingly, they respond to a light source unconnected with that which lights up the sitter's face (from the right) and which

¹²⁷ A note of caution re the Brussels portrait. See Borchert, 2005(b): 157: although the tree to the left and the bushes to the right were painted later, they remain consistent with Memling's approach.

is located within the viewer's space. There are no strong shadows like these to disrupt the more-obviously manipulated environment of the man with the spotted fur collar.

Despite the dominant presence of the sitter and the sense of exclusivity, Memling's compositions with undisturbed landscapes do not strongly project burgher aspirations *vis-à-vis* the trappings of a noble life-style. I consider it necessary to think beyond the variable of cost in determining the choice of this type of landscape by some of Memling's patrons. A possible hypothesis is that Memling and his patrons chose to redirect emphasis to, or think additionally about, ways to express the interiority of a sitter that addressed more than a strictly religious condition (as in the case of Maarten van Nieuwenhove) and was in contrast to 'exterior' manifestations of material success and aspiration. Such a perspective would result in a move away from the idea of landscape imagery functioning to project association with noble *living* to one associated with projection of a noble *soul*.

Extant texts from the fifteenth century indicate that humanists were concerned to debate the essence of true nobility, and members of the Burgundian court were interested in these debates.¹²⁸ The concern was to establish if hereditary rights, living a wealthy and stylish life, virtuous qualities of the interior being, or a combination of all these elements determined a noble status in society. Jean Miélot, secretary at the Burgundian court, translated Bonaccursius de Montemagno's *De Nobilitate* in 1449 and Philip the Good's copy included an illumination of its presentation to him by a courtier.¹²⁹ In *De*

¹²⁸ See Willard, 1967, for a discussion of some significant texts.

¹²⁹ Willard, 1967: 38.

Nobilitate two men stand before the Roman Senate competing for the hand of a lady, and she declares she will marry the nobler of the two.¹³⁰ The Senate's decision is not recorded, but one is an idle man of noble birth, the other a Roman citizen who works hard, but is of humble origin. Other texts accompanied Miélot's translation of Bonaccursius' treatise in Philip's presentation manuscript, one of which was another *Traité de Noblesse* written by the Spanish diplomat and courtier, Diego de Valera; this inclusion shows an interest in this topic across the courtly circles of Europe,¹³¹ but a wider audience was reached when Miélot's translation of *De Nobilitate* was printed in Bruges in about 1475 by Colard Mansion.¹³² The 'message' of the texts is likely to have been considered extremely relevant to the upwardly mobile burgher elite of Bruges: nobility - in theory at least - could be accessed by all who were virtuous, with accident of birth being no stumbling block to membership.¹³³ Of course, there had always been behavioural codes attached to the nobility, with rights and responsibilities of equal importance, but texts implying that a code of behaviour had the potential to obliterate the hierarchical divisions in society seem at first sight to be quite radical.

Another significant fifteenth-century text that debates the essence of nobility was Poggio Bracciolini's *Dialogue De Nobilitate* (c.1440). I referred to it briefly in Chapter Three during a discussion on whether Italian entrepreneurs shared with their Flemish equivalents the same aspiration to achieve the kind of power and lifestyle traditionally

¹³⁰ Willard, 1967: 37.

¹³¹ Willard, 1967: 38-39.

¹³² Willard, 1967: 34 & 35: It was also printed in English in 1481 by Mansion's later colleague in Bruges, William Caxton; John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, completed this translation and the English playwright, Henry Medwall, based his play *Fulgens and Lucrece* (1497) on Tiptoft's translation.

¹³³ Willard, 1967: 45 makes the point it was highly relevant to ambitious state officials, like Chancellor Rolin, too.

associated with nobility.¹³⁴ Poggio was a philosopher and humanist with a moral agenda and was concerned to revisit Plato and examine the notion that true nobility consisted in the possession of virtue.¹³⁵ He used two Florentine humanists, Lorenzo de' Medici and Niccolò Niccoli, to be his interlocutors. Niccolò, in his search to define what it is that makes a man noble, begins with a discussion of the differences amongst the nobility across Europe. Then he contends that nobility should be more than ownership of title, power and wealth, and by way of reply Lorenzo turns to Aristotle's view of nobility saying that noblemen need to be virtuous and descended from noble and virtuous ancestors, but at the same time they should be wealthy.¹³⁶ Niccolò will not accept this, and argues that a virtuous man does not lose his nobility when he loses his money.¹³⁷ The debate closes with Lorenzo agreeing with Niccolò, except that for him a nobleman should *look* noble, with his external appearance indicating his distinction.

It is plausible to assume that the growing interest in the notion that nobility was more to do with the condition of one's interior being, than with the possession of hereditary rights, is likely to have found expression in some of Memling's portraits. I consider that the imagery of his portraits with undisturbed landscape best encapsulates a concern with projecting the possession of inner nobility. In visual terms, rhythms of a pristine landscape could work to enhance the beauty of a sitter's physical features which, in turn, could echo the beauty/harmony/nobility of the soul, and the more seamless the blending,

¹³⁴ See pages 201-202.

¹³⁵ Bornstein, 1975: 60 notes the ancient origins of the notion that true nobility was grounded in performance of noble deeds and how medieval authors like Boethius, Dante, Boccaccio, Jean de Meun and Chaucer adopted such ideas.

¹³⁶ Shepherd 1837: 343-44.

¹³⁷ Shepherd, 1837: 344.

the more noble the state of the soul. This does not mean that the two perspectives, one of landscape imagery functioning to project an association with noble living, the other to help convey the nobility of a virtuous soul, have to be mutually exclusive. This is partly because of the conceptual link that existed at this time between physical beauty (with its origins in notions of harmony), 'internal' nobility and actual nobility. In her discussion of Christine de Pisan's *Epître d'Othea à Hector*, (c.1400), Bornstein notes how "an equation is drawn between morality and the upper-class way of life",¹³⁸ and how courtly terms are often used to describe spiritual and moral vices and virtues, with 'noble' "a favourite term of praise that is continually identified with virtue" and vice "associated with disruption and discord".¹³⁹ Memling's *Allegory of True Love* goes some way in demonstrating this linkage visually. In this work, the representation of a woman's perfection/harmonious beauty - her purity - is conveyed through the image of a woman clothed in the style of dress reserved for chaste young girls from aristocratic families in the confines of a carefully-groomed landscape.

The *Allegory of True Love* (c.1485-90)¹⁴⁰

Here, I explore the imagery in *Allegory of True Love* to demonstrate how an undisturbed, carefully-groomed landscape can bolster a sense of the aristocratic which in turn links with notions of 'internal' nobility. Although issues exist as to whether these

¹³⁸ Bornstein, 1975: 54.

¹³⁹ Bornstein, 1975: 56. See also Morrall, 1998: 81-82 on the social criteria behind visual expressions of ideal beauty in early Renaissance Germany. Included within the conventions of decorum and behaviour at Court was the notion that beautiful (i.e. courtly) people were inherently noble.

¹⁴⁰ De Vos, 1994, Cat.No.73. Brown, 2003, Cat.No.15. Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: Cat.No.27. Lane, 2009: Cat.No.B10.

two panels were originally part of diptych, their allegorical nature seems fairly secure.¹⁴¹ I suggest that the *Allegory of True Love* (Figs. 292 & 293) focuses on the nature of female virtue, so in the manner of the visual expression of qualities surrounding the Virgin, the Queen of Heaven, there is a 'requirement' for pristine/seclusion-type imagery.¹⁴² In addition, and mixed in with these associations, are those attached to Burgundian chivalric ideals of the day that relate to the ideal woman.

What is significant about the imagery of the *Allegory of True Love* in the context of this study is that the scenery complements a very young girl attired in the manner of the Burgundian court of the 1470s; a comparison of Figures 293 and 294 show the similarity of her dress with the daughter of Sir John Donne. It was the custom of the day for pre-pubescent girls to wear either a similar style of dress to their mother, or an adaptation of the kirtle: the kirtle of the allegorical figure and Sir John's daughter is very wide in the lacing at the neck-line; it is a style that adult women did not wear before 1500.¹⁴³ This style of dress, then, indicates sexual innocence in a girl from a family with connections to the Burgundian court. The girl of the allegory stands with a pink in her hand which was a symbol of commitment to marriage, and behind her is a background deemed appropriate for extending the visual description of the qualities that

¹⁴¹ McFarlane, 1971: 41, note 51, argues that the panels were part of a commission with four panels. He suggests a bridegroom facing the young woman on a separate panel and that the panel with the horses contains symbolic references to this bridegroom's character; the woman would have had references to her character on a fourth panel. Hand, Metzger & Spronk, 2006: 288, refer to the comparability in size with the wings of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels* (the "*Pagagnotti Triptych*") suggesting that the panels may have been part of a triptych and, because of their thinness, separated from the inner wings.

¹⁴² But see Campbell, 1995: 253-54 who accepts that the girl may be an allegorical figure, but argues that the quality of the drawing and painting is not up to Memling's standard. He is also critical of the landscape representation.

¹⁴³ Vibbert, Page 11: <http://cleftlands.cwru.edu/Burgundian/Costume>

an aristocratic girl was expected to bring to marriage. Memling does not present here a variation on the 'love garden' theme (Figs. 295 & 296), the iconography of which was found principally in works like frescos, tapestries and manuscripts that were commissioned by members of the nobility;¹⁴⁴ his landscape imagery is designed, instead, to support a description of beauty in women, and not to visually describe the notions of romance taken from chivalric tales.

The meaning behind the object of the girl's gesture - two horses and a monkey in the right-hand panel - is particularly obscure. Interestingly, the form of the white horse matches the donkey in the central panel of the *Triptych with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, the panel in which two monkeys climb the rocks behind Mary and the Christ Child.¹⁴⁵ Monkeys appear in other works by Memling;¹⁴⁶ their representation in medieval art refers to human lust and sin. Young, in his consideration of the popularity of monkey imagery at this time, and its connotations with ill-gotten gains, examines a Burgundian, silver cup with scenes of a pedlar robbed of his wares by monkeys.¹⁴⁷ This bringing together of merchant and monkey in a variety of artworks was not uncommon because merchants of the day were thought to share many of the same vices as monkeys. Hence, their presence in Memling's paintings could function as a particular reminder to his merchant-patrons that they should be honest in their dealings. An alternative to this viewpoint would be one that focussed on monkey imagery being a reference to human

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, pages 84-86 for Weigert's scholarship on love gardens represented in tapestry. See, also, Moxey, 1980: 147.

¹⁴⁵ De Vos 1994: 264.

¹⁴⁶ E.g. a monkey sits on the top of the broken-down wall in *Scenes from the Advent and Triumph of Christ* (Fig. 121) close to the coat-of-arms of Pieter Bultinc and on the white horse of the Pharisee in the *Greverade Triptych* (Fig. 122).

¹⁴⁷ Young, 1968.

passion, specifically sexual passion. Perhaps, then, the monkey sitting on the white horse of knightly connotations refers to the fact that in contrast to virtue being so much a part of the female being, it is not something that males are able to attain easily; thus they have to look to the females of the species (the brown horse?) for guidance in this area of human behaviour. A further interpretation, but one still associated with sexual passion, revolves around the notion, popular with the Church of its day, that women should be held responsible for the temptations of the flesh that faced men. In this interpretation of the monkey imagery in the *Allegory of True Love*, it is not the exalted status of women in chivalric romance that is presented, but rather women's role as sexual temptresses (Fig. 297).¹⁴⁸ I suggest, however, that the uncluttered and enclosed nature of the landscape has a part to play in resolving the issue. It can be seen as increasing the number of noble-living signifiers and in this way make a more convincing case that here was a woman of 'noble virtue'. At the same time, it engages with the viewer's familiarity of the Virgin Mary/*hortus conclusus*/purity dynamic: here, in the landscape of *Allegory of Love*, there are no couples engaged in amorous games, just a secluded and pristine environment where a virgin can wander freely, and where there are no worldly distractions.

But it is one thing for moral and spiritual values to be expressed in general terms in visual allegory and another to present the possession of such values by particular people in their particular portraits. The imagery in Memling's *Allegory of Love* is an example of how good qualities in human behaviour are conveyed using visual references associated with courtly living. Of particular importance is the portrayal of an

¹⁴⁸ See Moxey, 1980, on this theme.

environment that is secluded and quite separate from others. Memling retains this sense of seclusion in his portraits with undisturbed landscape, and with this seclusion comes a feeling of peace and harmony which in turn is enhanced by the interweaving of formal rhythms across foreground and background. In fact, the key to understanding these portraits may lie more in recognising that these interweaving rhythms of line, texture and colour are about the creation of harmony and its metaphysical implications than in knowing that particular features carry with them particular signification from the real world. The aim of a harmonious presentation of a male sitter would have been to project an interiority that embraced the qualities of honour, strength (physical and moral), courage and courtesy and for a female sitter the qualities of purity, modesty and obedience. It is impossible to know if such thoughts consciously drove Memling to create the imagery of these few portraits. What can be said is that Memling's portraits with undisturbed landscape project a rather different sensibility than those with landscapes containing buildings and people.

Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*
and

Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* (c.1474-78)¹⁴⁹

Memling's format of the undisturbed landscape portraits may be the feature that captured the attention of the young Leonardo when he was asked to paint the *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* (Fig. 298), although resonances are strong between the portrait of Ginevra and Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin*. In addition to

¹⁴⁹ Brown, 2003, Cat. No.16. The lower part of the panel has been cut down and may have included hands, with one holding a pink in the manner of Memling's young woman in *Allegory of True Love*.

compositional similarities, the evidence is persuasive that Bernardo Bembo commissioned both Memling's painting and the *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci*.¹⁵⁰

The *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* presents a young woman dressed in understated manner, with clothes of sombre hue and no jewellery.¹⁵¹ On the exterior, a grisaille wreath of laurel and palm encircles a single sprig of juniper all set against a simulated porphyry background (Fig. 298). The juniper (*ginepro* in Italian) refers to the sitter's Christian name and is also a symbol of chastity,¹⁵² and the laurel and palm, as noted earlier, is Bernardo Bembo's personal device. As Ginevra and Bernardo were both poets, the inclusion of laurel leaves seems particularly apt, and the palm is a favoured attribute of saintly virgins. The laurel and palm emblem suggests it may have been Bernardo who commissioned the portrait to commemorate the young woman with whom he had a platonic love affair.¹⁵³ Weaving in and out of the vegetation is a ribbon with the motto "*Virtutem Forma Decorat*" (Beauty Adorns Virtue),¹⁵⁴ words that encapsulate the humanist viewpoint that physical beauty is an indication of the 'good'

¹⁵⁰But see Fletcher, 1989: 813 who notes that the *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* was not recorded by Marcantonio Michiel when he catalogued the art collection of Bernardo's son, Pietro. See, also, Nuttall, 2006: 224-28 for her reference to Leonardo's apparent interest in Netherlandish portraiture and Lane, 2009: Ch.11 for her reflections on how closely four artists associated with the workshop of Verrocchio - Ghirlandaio, da Vinci, Perugino and Raphael - studied the paintings of Memling.

¹⁵¹Woods-Marsden, 2003: 72-73 suggests that although the brown of Ginevra's dress blends with the countryside behind her, and the lack of eye-catching jewellery aids this sense of harmony, it may be that Leonardo's form relates to Florentine sumptuary legislation: laws of 1471/72 forbade women under thirty from wearing in public jewellery (except for a brooch and three rings), red cloth and furs.

¹⁵²Brown, 2003: 145.

¹⁵³Fletcher, 1989: 814. When Bernardo arrived in Florence in 1475 on the first of his two missions to the city as Venetian ambassador, Leonardo was working in the studio of Verrocchio, an artist Bernardo is known to have admired. Campbell, 1983: 675, notes that a work attributed to a follower of Verrocchio in the Louvre shares compositional features with Memling's *Portrait of a Young Man* in the Lehman Collection, further evidence to support the view that Leonardo had access to work by Memling (or inspired by Memling).

¹⁵⁴Woods-Marsden, 2003: 64 states that virtue here refers to chastity above all, but also included are obedience, modesty and silence.

condition of the soul.¹⁵⁵ The simulated porphyry background supports the notion that Ginevra's virtue is everlasting together with Bernardo's devotion to her.¹⁵⁶

A comparison between Memling's *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* and Leonardo's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* reveals similarities in format (Figs. 299-301).¹⁵⁷ Firstly, there is the direction of the pose and the gaze outwards towards the viewer, together with the location of each sitter's mouth level with the horizon. Leonardo's use of the juniper bush behind Ginevra's head provides the element of enclosure so essential in the projection of female virtue and unnecessary for Memling's male sitter, Bernardo. Secondly, there is a stretch of calm water to the right of each composition. Leonardo's backwards extension of the water not only brings a strong sense of depth to the composition, but it reflects the porcelain skin of Ginevra's chest and elongated neck which in itself was considered an important feature of female beauty at the time. As noted beforehand, this technique of using landscape features to focus the viewer's gaze on the neck and thence upward to the face was a favourite with Memling. Focus on Ginevra's face is also enhanced by the prickly juniper bush behind her head: the form of the foliage contrasts with Ginevra's glacial skin texture, and the

¹⁵⁵ The humanist poets Cristoforo Landino and Alessandro Braccesi wrote poems on Ginevra who was regarded in her time as an ideal beauty. These poets followed in the tradition of Petrarch's *Laura*, a paragon of beauty who could inspire virtue, love and artistic achievement. For a translation of Landino's poem 'To Ginevra' see Chatfield, 2008: Poem No.26: 55-56. Also a translation of 'To Bernardo Bembo', Misc. Poem No. 3: 276-77 in which he refers to 'Bembo's chaste affairs', to the 'Lovely Bencia' and to 'Bembo...in awe of her beauty, Beauty that surpasses the goddesses in heaven'.

¹⁵⁶ Fletcher, 1989: 812. See also Brown, 2003: 145 where he notes Leonardo's experience of Verrocchio's Medici tomb at San Lorenzo: the red porphyry sarcophagus had banderols weaving through foliate wreaths.

¹⁵⁷ But Hills, 1980: 615 points to the similarity of the Ginevra portrait with *Portrait of a Young Girl* by Petrus Christus, especially the sitter's gaze. He notes that Christus' portrait could have been the portrait mentioned in the 1492 inventory of Lomzo de' Medici's collection in which case it would have been familiar to members of the humanist circle around Lorenzo, many of whom would have been known to Leonardo.

individual spiky twirls heighten the sense of softness that is inherent in the curls of her hair. Memling for his part relies on the swirl of the clouds and the rounded forms of the short, bushy trees to harmonise with Bernardo's curls. Gone from Leonardo's composition is the palm tree (Bernardo's emblem) together with the lordly signifiers of white horse with rider and swans, but two bushy trees are retained at the water's edge. In both works, distant buildings are located to the right of each sitter: church towers nestle between rolling hummocks of countryside for Ginevra, and the tower of a castle standing on the highest distant hill for Bernardo. But despite these striking similarities there is a significant difference between the two portraits: Ginevra appears at one with her environment, Bernardo does not. Leonardo has achieved this sense of continuity primarily by the enclosure form of the juniper foliage and the earthly colours of Ginevra's clothes. Memling does bring sitter and landscape much closer together in his *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape*, Venice, and *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar*, Florence, by lowering the eye level of each sitter. There are other similarities between these two works and Leonardo's (Figs. 302-304): the gently undulating, meadow-type topography of Memling's Venice work is echoed in Leonardo's land surface, and the technique of placing a tall tree to the side of a sitter's face so as to guide the viewer's gaze upwards from the sitter's chin to the top of the head (and mirror hair texture), occurs in both Memling's Florence work and Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra, but the most significant similarity across the three is this oneness of sitter and environment. Memling's portraits with undisturbed landscape share with Leonardo's *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* a focus on surface patterns designed to project a seamless blending of figure and countryside. This blending is achieved by a sharing

in, and/or a reflection of, rhythms across these two elements of the composition. The lack of activity in the landscape is crucial to this format: there is nothing to lead the viewer's eye beyond the surface, nothing to distract attention and disturb serenity. Therefore, the sitters in the *Portrait of Ginevra de'Benici*, the *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar* and the *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape*, Venice, do not appear as two lords and a lady gaining recognition and wealth in society as a result of their ownership and utilisation of land and its resources; rather they appear as individuals at peace with themselves not as a result, primarily, of social, economic and political achievement, but as a consequence of a 'noble' interiority partly cultivated by contemplations of the harmony with which God infused the whole of Creation.

It is most likely the case that Memling's interest in lyrical rhythms, a very Gothic interest and one his master van der Weyden applied so effectively to convey the whole gamut of human emotion, led him quite naturally down the path of experimentation to a format that involved abandoning all in the landscape *except for* rhythms that could blend seamlessly with those that visually described the sitter. It may be that the sense of exclusivity that Memling retained in his portraits with undisturbed landscape interested Leonardo as he worked to convey the purity/chastity of his female sitter;¹⁵⁸ Leonardo was likely attracted by the overall sense of harmony of Memling's technique. He experimented with ways to visually express his outlook on life, an outlook that embraced notions of continuity between humankind and other aspects of creation, and the belief that the outward appearance of a person mirrored interiority. The concept

¹⁵⁸ But see Woods-Marsden, 2003:72 who suggests that one reading of the Ginevra imagery is to see the representation of a fertile nature as an embodiment of Ginevra's fertility.

that “the body of the human being was a microcosm, mirroring in its whole and parts the macrocosm, or greater world” goes back to Ptolemy;¹⁵⁹ it was embraced by Plato, and later by Renaissance humanists and poets.¹⁶⁰ Leonardo refers to this concept in his *Notebooks*, reflecting on reasons why “man has been called the world in miniature”.¹⁶¹ He notes, for example, how the frame of a human being is supported by bones, whilst the earth is supported by rocks, and how the rise and fall of a person’s lungs during breathing, lungs located inside the person alongside their blood, is mirrored in the rise and fall of the tides of the sea. This mirroring between human features and landscape features is exactly what Memling aims to achieve in his portraits-with-landscape. These notions of Leonardo’s help to explain his insistence that a painter should be ‘universal’ in the sense of paying equal attention to all things of the world; in fact, in *Notebooks*, he criticises Botticelli for his condescending attitude towards landscape.¹⁶²

To summarise: the compositional format of Memling’s portraits where, except for a ledge, sitters are juxtaposed directly with landscape, owes much to the wings of van der Weyden’s *Braque Triptych*. However, not all the works in this group are identical in terms of meaning. In the *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* and the *Portrait of a Man with a Letter*, the sitters, in three-quarters pose, are juxtaposed with landscape, but there is no sense that the sitters inhabit such landscape: these are not workers in the

¹⁵⁹ Kemp, 2004: 132.

¹⁶⁰ For an investigation of the issue of how and why Leonardo may have wished to reference this concept in the portrait of a lady, see Smith, 1985, although this paper relates to the *Mona Lisa*, a portrait painted many years after Ginevra’s, and probably not finished until 1514. Smith sees the imagery of the *Mona Lisa* as including references to Leonardo’s concern to project the superiority of painting over poetry: the details of a beautiful woman and an environment can be presented simultaneously in a painting. For Leonardo’s comments on the superiority of painting, see *Notebooks*, translation by J.P. Richter, 1880: 446-47.

¹⁶¹ Richter, 1880: 737-38.

¹⁶² Richter, 1880: 31.

fields, but lords who manage their estate lands from a distance. In addition, these men are the only two commissioners of Memling's portraits-with-landscape that hold attributes of identity in their hands, a fact that lends support to the idea that most of Memling's sitters were content with a general impression of noble living rather than with specific references of identity; it appears that most were content to see castles and churches midst densely wooded countryside, white horses and swans floating on undisturbed waters. In contrast, the other portraits in this group have none of these individual features associated with noble living. In *Portrait of a Man before a Landscape*, Brussels, *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar* and *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape*, Venice, Memling focuses on rhythms of line, texture and colour across figure and landscape - with no distractions of activity within the landscape - so that there is a keen sense of an overall harmony across the composition. Although Leonardo da Vinci is likely to have been drawn to Memling's achievements in this regard, I acknowledge that there is no way of knowing if Memling intended that some of his portraits emphasised the nobility of the soul rather than the possession of noble lands and title. In fact, the difference may simply be one of expense and/or taste. A further alternative to be considered is that Leonardo may have wished to avoid the type of criticism that Flemish landscape had received from Michelangelo, that "[the Flemish] paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadows of trees...and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes...done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skilful choice or boldness...and, finally,

without substance or vigor”.¹⁶³

AFTERWORD

In none of Memling's individual portraits-with-landscape can be seen references to the skyline of Bruges. The absence of buildings of significance at Bruges is intriguing and contrasts with the skyline in the *Portrait of Ludovico Portinari* by the Master of the Legend of St Ursula (Figs. 306, 308 & 309).¹⁶⁴ Harbison presents the persuasive hypothesis that representations of key architectural features at Bruges, like the towers of the Belfry and the Church of Our Lady, operate as symbolic attributes of the city with, in this case, the first alluding to its secular ideals and the second its religious.¹⁶⁵ Harbison's hypothesis is embedded in a broader reflection on the nature of reality in early Netherlandish painting and one which I have embraced in this study. He proposes that realism in early Netherlandish painting is made up of fragments of identifiable reality which, when organised into a whole, are then able to assume emblematic and propagandist qualities; in other words fact, symbol and ideal are inseparable. As to the paintings with specific Bruges buildings, he points to the increasing popularity of such works after Maximilian I's order that banished foreign merchants from the city following his imprisonment there in 1488. He suggests a reason for this may be found in "artists and patrons...willfully overcompensating [because] at a time of great insecurity and economic unrest, the paintings presented a picture of the opposite -

¹⁶³From *Dialogues on Painting* (1548) by Francisco de Holland, excerpt/translation presented in Manca, 1995: 114. This alternative viewpoint was suggested by J. Nuechterlein in conversation.

¹⁶⁴Although not a portrait, there is the cityscape of Bruges in the central panel of the *St Nicholas Altarpiece* by the Master of the Legend of St Lucy (Figs. 307, 308 & 311). St Nicholas, as patron saint of sailors, merchants, archers and children, is likely, therefore, to have been a favourite amongst the merchants of Bruges. See also page 258 for reference to the Master of the Legend of St Ursula's *Virgin and Child with St Anne Presenting a Woman* and note 73.

¹⁶⁵Harbison, 1995(a): 26.

paradisial calm and prosperity”.¹⁶⁶ This notion is attractive and by 1488 Memling was approaching the end of his life (he died in 1494). However, as Harbison himself notes, there were paintings with recognisable Bruges buildings from the late 1470s. In his response to Harbison, Martens adds further insight. He considers that the representation of the skyline of Bruges in the *Epitaph of Anna van Nieuwenhove* indicates that artists reorganised fragments from model books or reality and he describes how Bruges is shown simultaneously from different angles in this representation. He also gives a specific example of a building being used in an artistic context for reasons of propaganda: the placement of a *tableau vivant* referencing the alliance between Flanders and England before Bruges’ emblem of civic pride - the Belfry - at the celebrations of Charles the Bold’s wedding in 1468.¹⁶⁷

But the question remains: why are there no key buildings of Bruges in any of Memling’s portraits? I contend that this absence lends support to the hypothesis that the main concern of Memling’s urban-based clients was to have projected a sense of their association with land outside the city walls and, preferably, in the form of a noble estate. Memling’s portraits would have been the most expensive to commission in Bruges, so it follows that only the very rich - those perhaps much richer than Ludovico - would have approached him. These are likely to have been the very patrons keen to be seen as the most superior i.e. noble. To succeed in their highly competitive commercial world, they needed to show there was more to their identity than their business, political or religious life in Bruges, or their wherewithal to buy fine clothes and expensive jewellery. This

¹⁶⁶ Harbison, 1995(a): 27.

¹⁶⁷ Martens, 1995: 44-47.

viewpoint does not have to preclude a change in emphasis occurring after 1488: when members of this rich stratum of society were faced with losing contact with the city that had secured their wealth and status, it makes sense in terms of nostalgia that images of Bruges would take precedence.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In my analysis of a range of Memling's portraits-with-landscape, I have shown how Memling used the creative skills that he developed in sacred art to manipulate landscape imagery in such a way as to provide his fifteenth-century burgher patrons with a visual metaphor that chimed with their view of high social status and aspiration, power and credit-worthiness at a time of growing interest in portraiture beyond the aristocratic and noble circles of Burgundian society.

For those works in which Memling presented sitters in the manner of the *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari*, the nature of the juxtaposition between figure-plus-architectural form and landscape promoted a sense of social exclusivity and the sort of relationship with land that nobles had traditionally monopolised. Memling retained this sensation, but with less emphasis, in works where the architectural form was reduced to a ledge. However, I demonstrated that the imagery in all Memling's portraits-with-landscape conveyed, also, a sense of connectedness between figure and landscape, because of their interweaving rhythms of line, shape and colour across these two elements, with this sense strengthening as the architectural form reduced in size and as landscape became devoid of human activity. If the landscape features were to function as descriptors of

identify and aspiration, most especially aspiration beyond the material, this close association between figure and landscape was essential. Finally, I suggested that Memling's portraits with undisturbed landscape held the greatest potential to project a sitter's inner nobility because, in visual terms, harmonising formal rhythms within landscape, and across figure and landscape, could work to enhance the beauty of a sitter's physical appearance which, in accordance with contemporary humanist thinking, could echo the beauty, harmony and nobility of the soul.

It seems that both Flemish and Italian merchants and bankers of Bruges found in Memling's portraits-with-landscape a format of portraiture that had never been used before. Yes, they desired the titles and power that came with being noble, but at the same time they must have been conscious of the fact that their contribution to society was one which was significantly changing the feudal essence to which they aspired. So, being actually able to commission portraits was something new for them - it had always been something the aristocratic and noble had done - and to have portraits totally different from the 'old guard' was an added bonus. This is not to say there were no merchants who wished for a portrait with a neutral background. But to be projected in a portrait adjacent to land would have conveyed a sense of financial security i.e. credit-worthiness, and access to a style of life traditionally associated with nobility. Viewers were accustomed to landscape forms providing the scenery for religious narrative, so it would have been no great leap for them to understand landscape in portraits as grounding the narrative of a sitter's life, with the nature of its juxtaposition with the sitter alluding to a quality of separation integral to notions of high social status.

Furthermore, one thing that must have always been present in the minds of Memling's patrons was how to present their power and wealth - factors so useful in the competitive world of business - without earning the condemnation of the Church. To present themselves as members of the noble class, and thus owners of noble spirits, may have been seen as part of the machinery to avoid this dilemma.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This exploration of Memling's landscapes has proved helpful in broadening understanding of the relationship between visual expression and context of production for early Netherlandish painting in general and Memling in particular. Landscape representation forms a significant element in Memling's religious compositions and, most innovatively, in his independent portraits, and I addressed both its formal and symbolic functions. This study focussed on how spiritual and socio-economic elements of context could be said to resonate with the appearance of Memling's imagery.

The particular character of landscape imagery within religious works by Memling and the founding members of early Netherlandish painting emerged from a desire to satisfy the demands of a traditionally-hierarchical but changing Holy Roman Church on the one hand, and demands for realistic illusions of the real world, on the other. Artists experimented with modes of visual description that could retain the sanctity, universality and everlasting nature of Christian narrative, faith and doctrine within a form of imagery dominated by an urge to represent everything realistically. Manipulation of landscape features played a key role in this process of experimentation, especially the way they were organised in relation to figures; a layer of symbolic meaning exists in the relationship between figures and landscape, and, most importantly, in the way architectural form is designed and juxtaposed *vis-à-vis* these two. We can interpret Memling's decisions of how to juxtapose landscape, architectural forms and key figures (whether sacred or secular) as indications of how he and his contemporaries conceived

the relationship between the sacred and profane spheres of late-medieval Christian existence.

The placement of sacred figures within landscape has the potential to convey the notion that sacredness is present in earthly surroundings, whereas the representation of these figures within a church-like architectural form with panoramic views across landscape suggests that the defining characteristic of holiness is its separation from the world. My analysis of this type of composition - Memling's *sacra conversazione*-type works - showed that the visual description of their worldly panoramas was not about how everyday life could be filled with spirituality, but with how it related to the divine life and Christian doctrine being played out within the architectural form at the centre of the composition. However, where donors were represented in the work, some features within the panoramas related to the material success of the donors' earthly lives. The theme of devotion to Mary was significant to this *sacra conversazione*-type format because it provided Memling with a form that helped convey Mary's non-human qualities, most specifically her purity and her role in Christ's birth and subsequent consequences for humanity. The format enhanced the elevated status of Mary and her company, and when Memling adapted it for use in his portraits-with-landscape he was able to transfer this sense of elevation to the social status of his sitters.

Memling's patrons were members of Bruges' burgher elite and the evidence presented in Chapter Three showed that they aspired to high social status, and that ownership of a superior *heerlijkheden* could help fulfil this aspiration. The linking of high social status

with land ownership derives from the traditional association of land ownership with juridical and economic power for members of the nobility. Unlike coats-of-arms, ownership of lordly estates was an unambiguous signifier of access to *vivre noblement*. Furthermore, possession of land enhanced credit-worthy status which was a crucial element to commercial success. Memling's portraits-with-landscape with their signifiers of noble living can be interpreted as visual records of the achievement of high social status, or, at the very least, part of a PR system designed to imply access to noble living.

Landscape in some of Memling's portraits was pristine, with no buildings, tiny people, tracks with riders on horseback, animals or swans floating on stretches of water. This type of imagery redirects emphasis from signifiers of noble living to noble qualities found within the sitter's interiority. Noble interiority of the sitter could be projected in all Memling's portraits-with-landscape, but the portraits with undisturbed landscape held the greatest potential to imply ownership of a noble soul. In visual terms, there is nothing to detract from the harmonising rhythms of colour, line and shape in these portraits as they work to enhance the beauty of a sitter's physical appearance, which in accordance with contemporary humanist thinking could echo the harmony of the soul. But whether landscape is undisturbed or not, Memling's use of landscape imagery in portraiture provided members of the burgher elite with a visual metaphor that encapsulated their social and material aspirations. Memling's new portraiture form was most appropriate for the new commercial elite of late-medieval Bruges.

It is not intended that these interpretations of Memling's imagery should marginalise other perspectives striving to understand landscape imagery at a time only decades before the emergence of landscape as an independent genre in Western art. There is more to the context of production than the spiritual and socio-economic elements explored in this study. For example, a significant fact to consider is that in the late Middle Ages travel and exploration began to expand. The increasing realisation that the world was immense is likely to have promoted ideas about humanity's insignificance by comparison, an insignificance portrayed so keenly in the art of Patinir. In addition, there are resonances to explore that relate to the approaching Reformation. Memling's emphasis on juxtaposition set a precedent for artists like Patinir and Altdorfer, but the disappearance and/or reduction of figures may also relate to the growing suspicion of iconic images of the sacred. These are but two elements of context that warrant further analysis alongside those which have formed the basis of this study of Memling's landscape imagery.

APPENDIX A

Categorising of Memling's Religious Works

GROUP 1

Sacred figures placed within landscape

Lives of Saints:

St Sebastian [23]¹ His martyrdom takes place on a hillside overlooking representation of Rome²

Sts John the Baptist and Veronica [50] (*Bembo Diptych*). Landscape unites diptych panels. Also exterior panels *Triptych of Jan Floreins* [32]. Saints located within landscape that links across the two panels. Framing traceried arch to the fore in each.

Sts Christopher, Maurus and Giles [63] (*Moreel Triptych*). All within landscape.

Exterior, Sts John the Baptist and George in grisaille. Donors, Willem Moreel and his wife, within landscape in wings with their children and Sts William of Maleval and Barbara. Landscape links the triptych panels

St Jerome [66], [67] Landscape provides setting for aspects of the saint's biography (In [67] the saint and lion are viewed through an arch)

St Ursula [83] - the *Shrine of St Ursula* - The notable accuracy of the Cologne skyline. Scenes framed by arches

Events in sacred history

(with some including the depiction of episodes in saints' lives)

Annunciation [84] Interior setting. No landscape view from the window set high in the wall. [17] Fragment

Nativity [15] Stable set within landscape (landscape glimpsed through stable's ruinous arch)

Adoration of the Magi [13], [32] Triptychs. Stable set within the landscape in each central panel (although the manner of the views onto landscape suggest affinity with Group II).

Left wings: **Nativity**: [13] - Museo del Prado - view from stable of street with city gate, [32] view of urban dwelling with street to its left. Right wings: **Presentation in the Temple**: in both, views through open door to street or square. In [13] a church-like building with tower. In [32] donor, Jan Floreins, in central panel.

¹ The bracketed numbers refer to the catalogue numbers in de Vos (1994).

² Colour coding key:

Green: characters of sacred history engage in narrative action *within* a predominantly countryside-type of landscape, although urban landscapes dominate in some key works like *Scenes from the Passion of Christ*, *Scenes from the Advent and Triumph of Christ* and the *Shrine of St Ursula*.

Blue: views onto landscape are seen through architectural features (arches, columns and windows). With the exception of the exterior panels, *Triptych of Jan Floreins*, no Biblical narrative is represented in these landscapes. Some landscape features may be signifiers of elements in Christian doctrine.

Red: portraits of donors

Flight into Egypt [41] Triptych. Centre: Mary, Christ Child and Joseph within landscape. Sts Stephen, Christopher, John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene within individual landscape settings that provide for aspects of their biographies

Christ's Passion [11], [90] In [11] - *Scenes of the Passion of Christ* - panoramic urban landscape with donor, **Tommaso Portinari and his wife** in left and right corners
 In [90] - the *Greverade Triptych* - 'rural' Golgotha adjacent to 'Jerusalem' - linking landscape. Donor (**Adolf Greverade?**). Standing saints in church interior in first opening, with no views onto landscape

Crucifixion [5] Triptych with linking landscape. Donor, **Jan Crabbe**, in central panel, his possible relatives in the wings

Deposition [92] Diptych with linking landscape

Lamentation [16], [25], [37] In [16] - *Kaufman Triptych* - St James (left wing) and St Christopher (right wing) stand within landscape. In [25] - Galleria Doria Pamphilj Rome - a distant city with donor near Christ on Golgotha
 In [37] donor, **Adriaan Reins**, in left wing. Landscape links the triptych panels. Closed triptych: Sts Wilgefortis and Mary of Egypt stand in ambulatory-like form with access to landscape; they stand close to traceried arch to the fore

Advent and Triumph of Christ [38] - *The Seven Joys of the Virgin* - Panoramic views onto landscape. Donors, **Pieter Bultinc and his wife**

Resurrection [74] Central scene set in landscape but viewed through an arch with columns. Narratives in wings - Sebastian, left, and Ascension of Christ, right - set in landscape

Last Judgment [4] Wide plain in central panel with distant mountains

GROUP II

Sacred figures not presented within landscape

Devotion to the adult Christ:

- [24] Virgin showing the Man of Sorrows. Upper body, gold background with *Arma Christi*
- [27], [61] Christ Blessing. Dark background behind each figure
- [58] Man of Sorrows. Left wing of diptych, upper body and dark background
- [65] Christ at the Column. Full-length. Tiled floor and once an arch
- [81] Christ as *Salvator Mundi*. Golden background and dark clouds (possibly the top register of a polyptych). Upper body
- [88] Christ as Man of Sorrows. Upper body emerging from niche

Devotion to the Virgin and Christ Child:

A. Virgin and Christ Child without angel(s) and/or saint(s)

Virgin not full-length

- [3] Tondo, image direct onto landscape though not within it
- [20] No architectural feature between holy pair and landscape
- [6], [70] A view onto landscape through an arch in each. In [70] Christ on cushion/ledge

([70] may be been part of a triptych or diptych)

[8] With cloth of honour, but no views onto landscape. Christ on cushion/ledge (may have been part of a triptych or diptych)

[82] Tondo with gold background

[55], [78] [Diptychs with views onto landscape through windows in each panel](#). [Praying donors](#) in right-hand panels, [with Maarten van Nieuwenhove in \[78\]](#). Christ on cushion/ledge

[72] [View onto landscape behind a young man at prayer in a loggia](#)

(may have been part of a diptych or triptych that also contained a seated Virgin and Child)

[80] Also presents a [young man at prayer](#), but here there are no views onto landscape. This is likely to be the right-hand panel of a diptych with the Virgin and Child in the left-hand panel

Virgin Full-length

[54] Seated on bench with cloth of honour. [View through columns onto landscape](#) (may have been the central panel of a triptych)

[91] Seated on throne with cloth of honour. [View through columns onto landscape](#)

[85] Fragments of standing Virgin and Child - two kneeling [donors](#) with landscape behind

[19] Standing Virgin and Child with [donor](#) presented by St Anthony. [Glimpses of landscape through window and doorway](#)

B. Virgin and Christ Child with angel(s) and/or saint(s)

Triptychs

[39] *Donne Triptych*. Cloth of honour. [Central panel: views through columns onto landscape, donors, Sir John Donne and his wife, with daughter](#) and standing female saints. Left wing: St John the Baptist, right wing: St John the Evangelist; both in ambulatory-type space with access onto landscape

[53] - Kunshistorisches Museum, Vienna. Cloth of honour. [Views through arch/columns in central panel onto landscape](#). [Donor \(Jan Crabbe?\)](#) in central panel with angel. St Johns in wings, each slightly before a pointed arch to the fore of an ambulatory [that has views through columns onto landscape](#)

[79] [Triptych with views through arches/columns onto landscape in each panel](#).

[Donor, Benedetto Portinari](#), in right-hand panel, St Benedict, left. Christ on cushion/ledge

Diptychs

[62] No throne. [With six female saints within garden](#). Three angels in sky. Distant landscape views. [Donor, Jean du Cellier](#), in right-hand panel and presented by John the Baptist. [John the Evangelist and St George within landscape in scenes from their lives](#)

[87] No throne. [With four angels within garden](#). Distant landscape views. [Donor](#) with St George in right-hand panel

Single panels

(some of these may once have been part of a triptych)

[1] With two angels. [View through arch/columns onto landscape; low drop to walled garden.](#) Golden sky

[35] [Throne/cloth of honour within garden.](#) Donor behind St Catherine. Two female saints and two angels

[51] With angel and cloth of honour. [View onto adjacent walled garden and distant landscape through arch/columns.](#) Donor presented by St George.

[59] No throne. [With two angels within garden.](#) Distant landscape view

[68] Throne with cloth of honour and one angel. [View through window onto landscape](#)

[75] Throne with cloth of honour and two angels. [View of rooftops through one window](#)

[77] - National Gallery of Art, Washington - Cloth of honour and two angels. [View through arch/columns onto landscape](#)

[86] Throne with cloth of honour. [Views onto landscape through arches.](#) Donors (Jacob Floreins and his wife?) with their children by Mary's throne and presented by male saints

[89] - Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence - Cloth of honour and two angels. [View through arch/columns onto landscape.](#) Wings are almost certainly the panels held at the National Gallery, London, depicting St John the Baptist and St Laurence [52]. Each saint stands before a traceried arch that opens onto ambulatory-like form with [views onto landscape through columns.](#)

The [portraits of the Portinari and his wife](#) [9] and [Moreel and his wife](#) [22] are likely to be the wings of triptychs that had a central panel with the Virgin and Child

[9] plain background. [22] [Each panel, views onto landscape from loggia with marble columns](#)

A COMPOSITION THAT LINKS THE TWO GROUPS

St John Altarpiece [31] Wings: landscapes that ground key narrative events in the lives of the two St Johns. Central panel: Cloth of honour behind Virgin and Child, four saints and two angels. [Views through columns onto landscape,](#) but this landscape provides the location for more events in the lives of the two Johns + a representation of the square in Bruges where wine was measured. Donors: [Jacob de Ceuninc, Antheunis Seghers, Agnes Casembrood and Clara van Hulsen,](#) on exterior wings

APPENDIX B

Categorising of Memling's Upper-Body Portraits

GROUP 1

Portraits likely to be part of a devotional work

A. Sitters represented with neutral backgrounds

[9]¹ *Portraits of Tommaso Portinari and Maria Baroncelli* – these may be the wings of a triptych that had a central panel with the Virgin and Child

[18] *Portrait of Gilles Joye* – this portrait may have functioned as an effigy for a tomb rather than it being the right-hand panel of a devotional diptych

[45] *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer* (London) – in a loggia with columns, but no landscape views. This may have been the left-hand panel of a triptych

[80] *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer* (Banbury) – this tiny panel may have been the right-hand panel of a devotional diptych

[93] *Portrait of Jacob Obrecht* – hinge marks on the right-hand side of the frame denote that this panel was once attached to another. However, Obrecht does not pray to his right which was the usual stance taken up in diptychs that included the Virgin and Child. Attribution to Memling is most uncertain and so also the identity of the sitter

B. Sitters represented with views onto landscape that contains people and buildings

[22] *Portraits of Willem Moreel and Barbara van Vlaenderberch* – these may be the wings of a triptych that had a central panel with the Virgin and Child. Sitters pray in an upstairs loggia with columns with views onto landscape

[40] *Portrait of a Man at Prayer before a Landscape* (Charles de Visen?) – this portrait may be the right-hand panel of a devotional diptych

[55] *Diptych with a Young Man Kneeling before the Virgin and Child* (Chicago) – the figures share an interior that has views onto landscape through a window

[69] *Portrait of a Man with a Rosary* – this may be the right-hand panel of a devotional diptych

[72] *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer* (Madrid) – because of his position i.e. praying towards his left, this could be the left-hand panel of a triptych devoted to a holy figure with his wife represented in the right-hand panel. His arms appear to rest on a ledge

[78] *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* – the figures share an interior that has views onto landscape through windows

[79] *Triptych of Benedetto Portinari* (Central panel: Berlin, Wings: Florence) – the figures are in an upstairs loggia with columns and views onto landscape

¹ The bracketed numbers refer to the catalogue numbers in de Vos (1994).

GROUP II

Non-devotional portraits

A. Sitters represented with neutral backgrounds

- [10] *Portrait of a Man* – fragment sawn into an oval shape, possibly from an original rectangular portrait
- [21] *Portrait of a Young Woman*
- [26] *Portrait of a Man with a Pink* – his right hand holding a folded piece of paper appears to rest on a ledge. This portrait may have been the left-hand panel of a double portrait
- [29] *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* – his right hand holding the arrow rests on a ledge
- [30] *Portrait of a Man with a Gold Cord*
- [36] *Portrait of a Young Woman* – Cartouche with name *Sibylla Sambetha* added much later. Her hands rest on a ledge with the fingertips of her right hand painted on the frame
- [56] *Portrait of Folco Portinari* (?) – his hands appear to rest on a ledge. Probably a pendant to the lost *Portrait of Benedetto Portinari*
- [57] *Portrait of Benedetto Portinari* (?) – his hands appear to rest on a ledge. Lost since 1944 and probably a pendant to the *Portrait of Folco Portinari*
- [60] *Portraits of an Elderly Couple* (Man: New York, Woman: Houston) – man appears to rest his hand on a ledge, woman's hand overpainted at a later date

B. Sitters represented within an architectural form with aerial views onto landscape that contains people and buildings

- [7] *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat* – he is shown before a stone, window-like frame with his hands resting on a ledge
- [12] *Portrait of a Man before a Landscape* (Frick Collection, N.Y.) – he is shown before a stone, window-like frame. His right clenched hand appears to rest on a ledge
- [14] *Portrait of an Elderly Couple* (Man: Berlin, Woman: Paris) – in the shared space of an upstairs loggia with views onto landscape. Hands appear to rest on a ledge
- [48] *Portrait of a Young Man* (Lehman Collection, N.Y. – he is shown resting his hands on a ledge in an upstairs loggia with columns

C. Representations of sitters juxtaposed directly with landscape and behind a ledge which is situated beyond the pictorial plane (Sometimes the edge of the picture functions as such a ledge)

(i) Landscape with people and buildings

- [42] *Portrait of a Man with a Roman Coin* – his left hand holding the coin rests on a ledge
- [44] *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* – his left hand holding the letter rests on a ledge

(ii) Landscape *without* people and buildings*

[28] *Portrait of a Man with a Spotted Fur Collar* – the fingers and thumb of his right hand rest on a ledge

[43] *Portrait of a Man before a Landscape* (Brussels) – his right hand appears to rest on a ledge

[46] *Portrait of a Young Man with a Scroll* (Montreal) – his left hand holding the scroll appears to rest on a ledge

[47] *Portrait of a Young Man* (Zurich) – no ledge with hands (this may indicate that the panel has been cut down)

[49] *Portrait of a Young Man before a Landscape* (Venice) – the fingers and thumb of his right hand appear to rest on a ledge

*N.B. This is the only group of portraits-with-landscape where the landscape is without people or buildings.

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