



# DIERIC BOUITS

CREATOR OF IMAGES

Edited by Peter Carpreau

HANNIBAL



## DIERIC BOUTS CREATOR OF IMAGES AND EXPANDER OF HORIZONS

In the handing down of even the most valuable expressions of our human culture, chance and circumstance often play a far greater role than we presume. The works of Johann Sebastian Bach might never have come to our ears had they not been rediscovered in the nineteenth century by Felix Mendelssohn. Similarly, the paintings of Dieric Bouts might never have reached us, or would have continued to be wrongly attributed to Hans Memling, had it not been for the groundbreaking work of Johann David Passavant. This German painter, researcher and curator was fascinated by the Old Masters and published the influential travel and art book *Kunstreise durch England und Belgien*, in which he did justice to Dieric Bouts by acknowledging his essential contribution to the history of the art of the Low Countries. For this, we wish to thank him and pay posthumous tribute.

As a society, we do not wish the transmission of our cultural capital to be dependent on accidental rediscoveries. For this reason, the Flemish Community, the City of Leuven and KU Leuven are jointly investing in a proactive heritage policy to counter the risk of cultural memory loss and promote historical awareness. Exactly 25 years after the last retrospective, *Dirk Bouts (ca. 1410–1475). Een Vlaams primitief te Leuven* (Dirk Bouts. A Flemish Primitive in Leuven), organised by Prof. Maurits Smeyers and held in St. Peter's Church in 1998, we urgently need a new way of marking the importance of Dieric Bouts's legacy in Leuven – and one that is tailored to the twenty-first century.

Under the leadership of Peter Carpreau, art historian, curator and Bouts expert, the M Leuven team has drawn on collections around the world to bring together the largest number of paintings attributed to Dieric Bouts and his workshop ever seen under one roof. Bouts is back in the city where his works took shape and acquired meaning in the middle of the fascinating fifteenth century. In a period of enormous social transition, when medieval feudal society was slowly but surely crumbling, new urban forces were emerging. City leaders, fraternities, and guilds were shaping what can now be considered a fledgling urban democracy. Most notably in Leuven, this historical process had an exceptionally powerful catalyst in the founding of the University in 1425. Leuven was fertile ground for the growth of an international stronghold of innovation.

All these developments were, of course, accompanied by a deeply human desire for distinction. Leuven was embarking on an ambitious building programme that led to the construction, among others, of the historic Town Hall and the collegiate St. Peter's Church. These new landmarks included new visual programmes and, consequently, a significant number of artistic commissions. In this enterprising cultural climate, Dieric Bouts emerged as the right image maker in the right place and at the right time. The spatiality of Jan van Eyck and the visual lines of Rogier van der Weyden came together in panels painted by Bouts in a perfect synthesis of the visual culture of the early Renaissance. Bouts used this potential to execute ambitious projects in which clients and advisors – themselves affiliated with the young University – had an important say in determining the iconographic programme that the artist would capture in paint. The historically documented commissions for his *Last Supper* (for the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament's chapel in St. Peter's Church) and *Justice of Emperor Otto III* reveal how Dieric Bouts translated themes that were rarely, if ever, explored into new kinds of images with a deep footprint that is still present in our own visual culture today.

M Leuven reflects this in putting together an exhibition that can be explored in two parallel ways. Across five adjoining museum galleries, the visitor is introduced to some 25 works by Dieric Bouts and his workshop, supplemented by about 40 pieces from their historical context. In conjunction with this, the makers of the exhibition in each gallery have connected Bouts's late Gothic images with those of our contemporary visual society. M Leuven invites us on a fascinating visual journey in which the image types that Dieric Bouts introduced or perfected continue to be in evidence today in striking visuals from advertising campaigns, sports reports, and science fiction films. For example, the models from the storyboards of *Star Wars*, housed in Los Angeles and on loan from the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, suddenly seem like an echo chamber of the fantastic landscapes in Bouts's *Fall of the Damned* in Lille (on loan from the Palais des Beaux-Arts). And a sublime sports photograph of Eddy Merckx exhausted after drawing on the last of his strength to win a race, visually merges with *Christ Crowned with Thorns* from the M Leuven collection. This wealth of tantalizing interfaces is the work of a multidisciplinary team of curators and scholars that connects art historical expertise with the professional visions of visual creatives.<sup>1,2</sup> With this sense of adventure, M Leuven presents to the world a trans-historical exhibition dedicated to visual mastery over the centuries.

The exhibition at M Leuven is the focal point of the *New Horizons | Dieric Bouts Festival*, which opens on 22 September 2023. The festival, with Dieric Bouts as its inspiration and New Horizons as the consistent thread, allows audiences to discover a host of new horizons over a period of four months through a broad cultural programme ranging from visual arts and music to theatre and lectures. The initiator is KU[N]ST Leuven, a partnership between the City of Leuven and KU Leuven. More than a hundred organizations are contributing to the programme, which will broaden our horizons, just as Dieric Bouts did so masterfully in the fifteenth century.

The *DIERIC BOUTS. Creator of Images* exhibition at M Leuven begins a month later, on 20 October 2023, and runs until 14 January 2024. A supplement will follow a few weeks later in the form of a smaller focus exhibition, *Atelier Bouts*. Running from 16 February to 28 April 2024, this exhibition takes a closer look at the material of four large altarpieces and two smaller works, considering in detail recent laboratory research and offering unique insights into the creation process and the extremely accurate form and image structure of Bouts's painting practice. There will be a particular focus on the launch of an ambitious new restoration project that the Museum is being supported by the Flemish Community to undertake. The focus is on *Triptych of the Descent from the Cross*. Since 1505, this literally and figuratively *majeure* work by Dieric Bouts has been preserved in the Capilla Real in Granada. It is leaving Spain for the first time to be restored to its former glory by a specialized team from Belgium's Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage following the exhibitions at M Leuven. This enables us to fulfill our responsibility to sustainably preserve the most valuable Flemish heritage in the world for generations to come.

We sincerely thank everyone involved in putting on the exhibitions and designing the festival programme.

Bert Cornillie  
Alderman for Culture, city of Leuven  
Chairman, M Leuven, Co-chair, KU[N]ST Leuven

Mohamed Ridouani  
Mayor, city of Leuven

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Advisor to the Rector for Culture, Art and Heritage, KU Leuven  
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1 Inigo Bocken (KU Leuven/Radboud University), Till-Holger Borchert (Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum), Peter Carpreau (War Heritage Institute), Marjan Debaene (M Leuven), Valentine Henderiks (Université Libre de Bruxelles/Périer-D'Ieteren Foundation), Stephan Kemperdick (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), Gust Van den Berghe.

2 Charlotte Abramow, Amira Daoudi, Tom Eerebout, Laela French, Jasper Jacobs, Lectrr (Steven Degryse), Ryan Linkof, Luc Shih, Adalberto Simeone, Sebastian Steveniers, Gust Van den Berghe.







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# BOUTS AND THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY



# Modern Times

## The Influence of Devotio Moderna in Leuven

The influence of Devotio Moderna on the new visual language developed by painters from the Netherlands in the fifteenth century is beyond dispute. Devotio Moderna, or 'Modern Devotion', is understood to refer to a renewal movement within late medieval Christianity that began in the important and relatively large cities along the River IJssel, in particular Deventer and Zwolle. The driving force behind the movement was Geert Grote (1340–84) of Deventer. At its heart lay a desire for a sincere Christian life, humble and modest, according to the teachings of the gospel, freed from the daily longings and burdens of the world, and in line with the model set by the (supposedly) idealized conditions in the earliest days of Christianity. In all of this, and by contrast with mainstream popular devotion, the figure of Christ himself was central. The movement encouraged wealthier citizens to live a more spiritual life. It had an obvious effect on their consumption of culture, and the influence of Devotio Moderna was evident in the images and texts with which well-to-do lay people surrounded themselves.

Perhaps the most famous product of Devotio Moderna is a small book that is considered the most widely distributed book in the West after the Bible. It is *Imitatio Christi*, or *The Imitation of Christ*, attributed to Thomas a Kempis (1380–1471), who lived in the Agnietenberg monastery near Zwolle. Numerous manuscript and printed editions of this book exist, and both the Royal Library of Belgium (KBR) in Brussels and the Maurits Sabbe Library of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Leuven claim to have the world's largest collection of copies. To quibble would be against the spirit of the booklet, but both libraries have dozens, if not hundreds, of copies. What is beyond dispute is that the KBR has an autographed manuscript of *Imitatio Christi* copied and signed by Thomas a Kempis himself (ms. 5855–61). It is a small book, 10.1 x 6.2 cm in size, whose dimensions are perfectly suited for daily consultation and that users could carry around with them.

Various organisational structures evolved around the Devotio Moderna movement, including the Agnietenberg monastery, the Brethren of the Common Life, and the Congregation of Windesheim. This last was a group of Augustinian canons who joined together in 1394–95 and would form one of the most important branches of the

Devotio Moderna movement. Windesheim, where there was also a monastery and after which the congregation was named, is a village in the province of Overijssel, close to Zwolle.

The movement quickly gained a wider following, and from its core in the IJssel valley, it spread to Utrecht and south to Liège and especially the Brabant region. Unlike 's-Hertogenbosch or Brussels, where the Brethren of the Common Life established branches, Leuven was never home to an establishment directly representing the movement. This may be at least partly related to Devotio Moderna's aversion to professional scholastic theology as it was practiced at universities of the time, including at Leuven. It therefore goes almost without saying that the Brethren did not maintain a study house for poor students in Leuven. However, Devotio Moderna was not an anti-intellectual movement: schools run by the Brethren of the Common Life were located in Liège and Utrecht, while the Brethren in 's-Hertogenbosch offered accommodation to the pupils of the Latin school there and had printing houses in both 's-Hertogenbosch and Brussels for a number of years. Other monasteries, such as Mariënhage in Eindhoven or the Priory of Korsendonk in Oud-Turnhout, were also influenced in their spirituality by Devotio Moderna, as were the two monasteries in or around Leuven. As early as 1412, the Priory of Bethlehem in Herent joined what came to be called the Congregation of Windesheim. The Monastery of Sint-Maartensdal in Leuven itself, founded in 1447, also joined in 1461.

It is therefore unsurprising that, as Prior of the Bethlehem Priory in 1450–56 and 1459–73, Henricus de Merica (Van der Heyden, died 1473), born in the town of Oirschot, capital of the Kempenland quarter of the Meierij of 's-Hertogenbosch, twice addressed the Windesheim Chapter, although the texts of these speeches seem to have been lost. De Merica was moreover involved in the reform of Park Abbey but refused an invitation to become its Abbot. Diederik van Thulden (died 1494) was elected, a man who would make a significant and early humanist contribution to the Abbey library. Henricus de Merica himself wrote an account of the horrific sack of Liège in 1468 by Charles the Bold (1433–77) (manuscripts in Brussels, KBR, mss. 11968–70 and II 3748) (Fig. 11).

More important for the city of Leuven itself was the Sint-Maartensdal Monastery, which was located on the site of the current residential area of the same name. Nothing remains of the historic buildings, but elements of the library have survived. At the time of writing, 156 manuscripts are in existence, of which 101 are in the Royal Library (KBR) in Brussels, and 16 incunables, of which nine are in the KBR.<sup>1</sup> These manuscripts were comprehensively described and analysed by Willem Lourdaux and Marcel Haverals in their extensive study, *Bibliotheca Vallis Sancti Martini in Lovanio. Bijdrage tot de studie van het geestesleven in de Nederlanden (15de–18de eeuw)* (two volumes; Leuven 1978–82).

The Sint-Maartensdal library served not only the monastic community, but also – and herein lay its exceptional importance – the University. It is often noted in historiographies of the University of Leuven that until 1636, there was no central university library, prompting its somewhat unfavourable comparison with Leiden, but the situation was more complex. Because of the presence of larger or smaller libraries in the colleges themselves, in the Faculty of Arts and most especially in the monasteries of Park, Bethlehem in Herent, and Sint-Maartensdal, the University did indeed have access to enough books to meet the needs of late medieval students and professors. A central library was simply not (yet) needed.

The library of Sint-Maartensdal was remarkable for another reason. A great number of books came into the collection because their owners donated them on joining the monastery. This was particularly true for Adam Jordaens (died 1494) and Henricus Vrancx (died 1504), although they were not the only ones. Some 14 manuscripts are known to have been owned by Henricus Vrancx, the majority of which are the work of the church fathers Augustine (Brussels, KBR, ms. 148: *De ciuitate Dei*) (Fig. 12) and Hieronymus (Brussels, KBR, ms. 66–76: *Epistulae*). That fitted perfectly with the profile of a monastery that had connections with *Devotio Moderna*. This is also evident in an exceptional series of three volumes of Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Brussels, KBR, mss. 136, 140 and 227) (Fig. 13), which was copied in 1465 by another member of the *Devotio Moderna* movement, Petrus of Utrecht, from the *Domus Florentii* in Deventer.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that copies were made for brothers and sisters from other convents. The handwriting, moreover, confirms the connection between Leuven and Deventer, the heart of the *Devotio Moderna* movement.

In this movement, books were the central preoccupation. Initially, this mainly meant individuals copying texts and later also editing them. The emphasis was on the Bible (whole or parts) and the church fathers. The process

of transcription meant these texts could be thoroughly considered, 'ruminated' according to the accepted term, and therefore become the inner possession of the copyist. In this sense, a copyist actually copied a text twice: once materially and once in his own head. Being preoccupied with books was consequently its own form of piety. Moreover, there was a clear preference for the sources of Christian life, such as the church fathers. The *ad fontes* ('to the sources') movement, which would also characterise Humanism (albeit with an emphasis on profane, classic literature), had a clear Christian counterpart in *Devotio Moderna*.

Given the importance of the book in this reform movement, and in Sint-Maartensdal in particular, it is perhaps remarkable that there is no copy of the *Imitatio Christi* in the collection if we exclude a later copy made in 1524–25 (Brussels, KBR, ms. 11160–68). In terms of its inventory, the Sint-Maartensdal library looks indeed like a normal monastery library, although the church fathers perhaps occupied a slightly more prominent place there than elsewhere. Texts by classical authors are limited in number, as are texts of university scholasticism. However, the collection does include, for example, Heymericus de Campo (1395–1460), professor of theology at the University and as such one of the first great names in Leuven.

The absence of the *Imitatio* is perhaps less strange than it might initially seem. It served mainly for the personal reading and consideration of the members of the community, in Sint-Maartensdal as well as elsewhere. That, however, means that in practice, this booklet was either part of an individual's property or was specially made available to him or her. The book was, therefore, not necessarily held in the communal monastery library where members of the community came to study. The *Imitatio Christi* belonged in the monastery cell, not in the library. This is why there are so many owner's marks to be found and also why the book was produced in such a small format. This is characteristic of books that were privately owned, while the books in the monastery library during this period were about 30 cm in height. The same can be seen in books of hours, which also tend to be on the small side.

Fifteenth century copies of the *Imitatio Christi* from Bethlehem have been preserved: Brussels, KBR, ms. 4592–95 (just under 14 cm high) (Fig. 14); Nijmegen, University library, ms. 204 (dated 1497; 14 cm high); Paris, Sainte-Geneviève, ms. 3463 (12 cm high); and Straatsburg, University library, ms. 344 (17.5 cm high).<sup>3</sup> This last manuscript was copied in 1431 by Ioannes Cornelii, a Bethlehem monk. Also from Bethlehem is an example of the statutes of the Congregation of Windesheim (Brussels, KBR, ms. 11224; latter half of the fifteenth century).

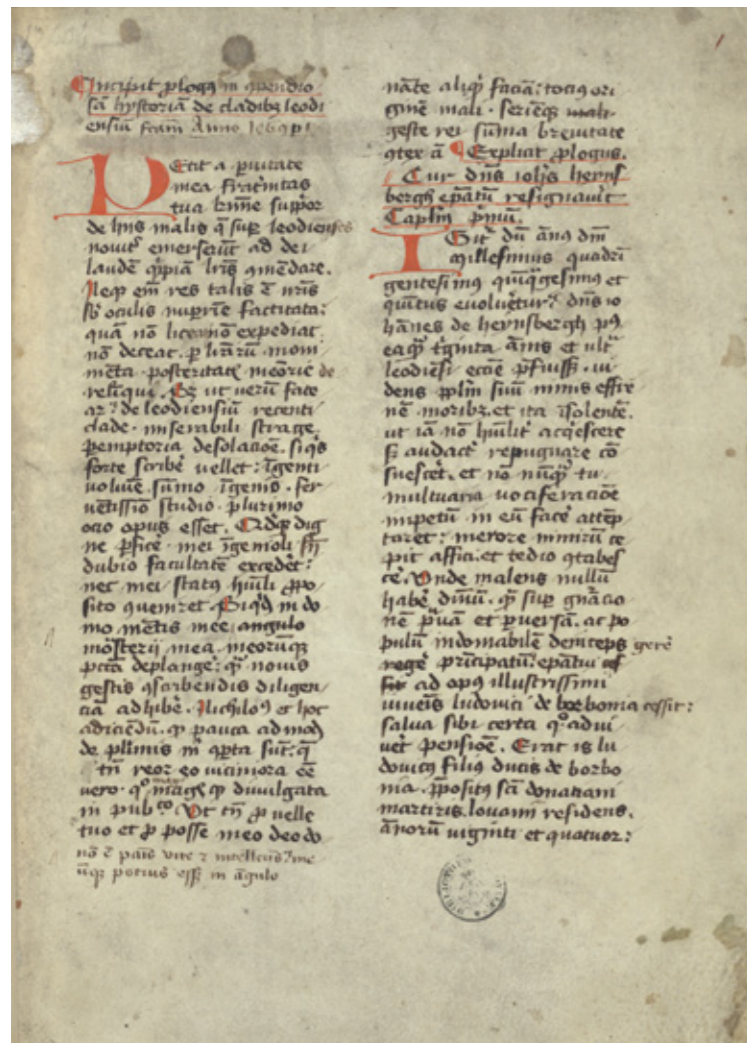


Fig. 11 Ms. 11968–70, f. 1r: Henricus de Merica, *De cladiibus Leodiensium* (Bethlehem, Herent), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.



Fig. 12 Ms. 148, f. 9r: Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* (Henricus Vrancx, thereafter Sint-Maartensdal, Leuven), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.



Fig. 13 Ms. 136, f. 1r: Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Part I (Sint-Maartensdal, Leuven), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.

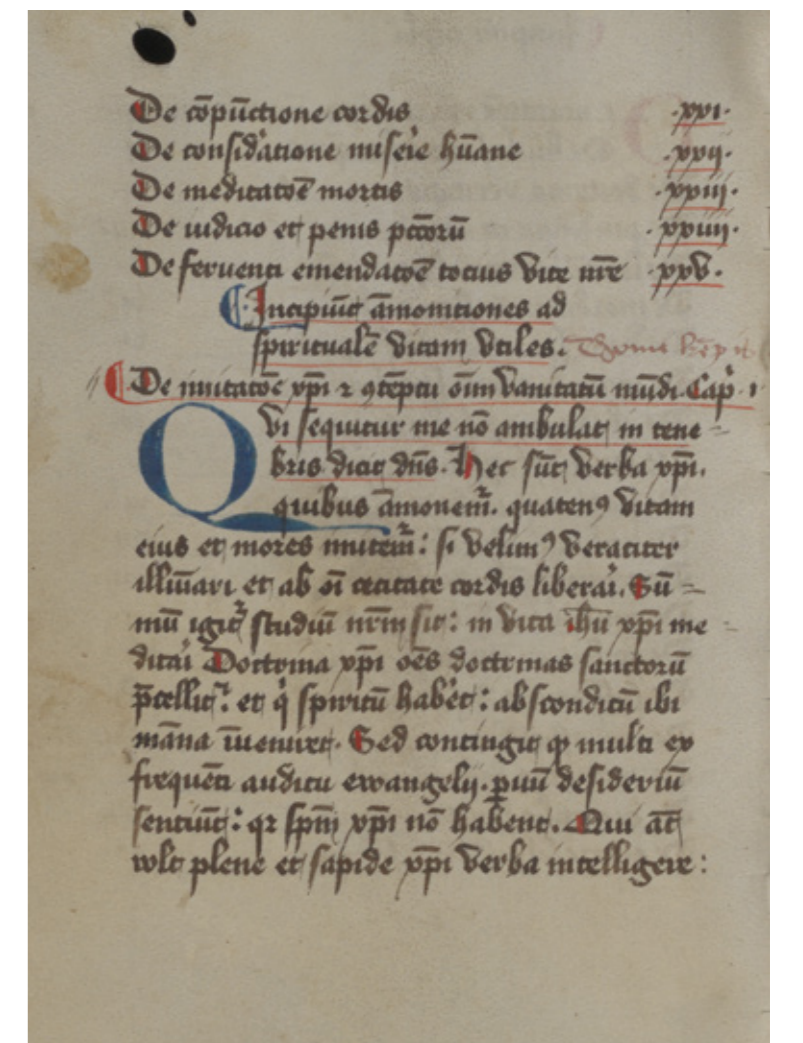


Fig. 14 Ms. 4592–95, f. 135v: Thomas a Kempis, *Imitatio Christi* (Bethlehem, Herent), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.

authors (Seneca, Boethius, and Macrobius, along with Cicero's *De inventione* – most often referred to as *Rhetorica* – and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*). Most other classical texts are rare and are therefore interesting as a measure of the penetration of Humanism in the fifteenth century. Exceptions from this pattern are the tragedies by Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE), in which interest gradually increased from the thirteenth century onwards.

Amongst the Park Abbey manuscripts with classical texts worthy of our attention is Brussels, KBR, ms. 14492, with works by Cicero (Fig. 15). Traditionally, this volume was attributed to the fourteenth century, but it seems to me to be more likely to date from the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Its origins have been suggested to be Cologne or the Rhineland, although the decoration could also have been added at Park: it shows a strong affinity with other manuscripts associated with the Park library in the second half of the fifteenth century, including the Caesar codex (discussed below) (Brussels, KBR, ms. 17937). This manuscript contains a number of Cicero's speeches, including *Pro Caelio*, the *Catalinarians*, and the *Philippics*, and has been associated with Cambridge University Library, ms. Dd.13.2, which is dated 1444 and was probably copied in Cologne by Theodoricus Nycolai Werken de Abbenbroeck (Province of South Holland). This copyist also worked on other codices and was active in Ferrara, among other places. He was therefore a student from the Southern Low Countries and an early Humanist. Because we do not know exactly when ms. 14492 arrived at Park, and the date remains too vague to permit conclusions to be drawn, it is difficult to know exactly what role this volume played in the Abbey library.



Fig. 15 Ms. 14492: Cicero, *Orationes*, first half 15th century (?) (Park Abbey, Heverlee), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.

#### ABBOT DIEDERIK VAN THULDEN AND HIS ACQUISITIONS

Until the mid-fifteenth century, there was little evidence of the influence of Humanism, but that changed with Abbot Diederik van Thulden (died 1494) from the North Brabant town of Hilvarenbeek, who was elected Abbot in 1462 after the prior of Bethlehem Henricus de Merica (van der Heyden, died 1473) from Oirschot – also in North Brabant – had refused nomination. At the time of his election, Diederik van Thulden was procurator for his order in Rome. He would return to the eternal city in 1474–75. He personally knew Popes Pius II (papacy 1458–64) and Sixtus IV (papacy 1471–84). It is hardly surprising that someone who mixed in the highest circles of one of the centres of Italian Humanism had contact with this new cultural phenomenon: indeed, it would be remarkable if he had not.

Diederik van Thulden would emerge as someone who not only added various special manuscripts to the Park library but also, as a reader, made his own marginal annotations from time to time. These are mainly lemmata or proper names and can also be found in many incunables owned by Italians or in Italian manuscripts of the time: this was apparently common behaviour among Humanist readers in Italy in the second half of the fifteenth century. Brussels, KBR, ms. 18716–19 (*De uiris illustribus* by Hieronymus, Gennadius, and Sigebert of Gembloux; fifteenth century) also includes marginal notes in the same hand.<sup>1</sup>

Among the most remarkable manuscripts with a Humanist connection are, of course, Brussels, KBR, mss. 11485 (Fig. 16) and II 1416, both including works by the Humanist Flavio Biondo (1392–1463), *De declinatione*

*Romani imperii* and *Roma triumphans* respectively.<sup>2</sup> The dating of these two volumes (they were copied between 1460 and 1480) and the subject matter, as well as the fact that Italian paper is used, point in the direction of Abbot Diederik. These manuscripts show a curious mixture of Italian and transalpine features. The script type is a Gothic *hybrida* with some slight influences of the Humanist minuscule but was at least of north-western European origin. The decoration with pen-work is also typical of north-west Europe. On the other hand, the text (highlighted in yellow) was written in long lines in one wide column, while the watermark of the paper betrays an Italian origin. Most late medieval manuscripts from transalpine Europe were written in two columns. The exceptions were works of fiction, such as Burgundian chivalric novels in prose, very small-format manuscripts, and manuscripts of classical texts from the Italian *quattrocento*.

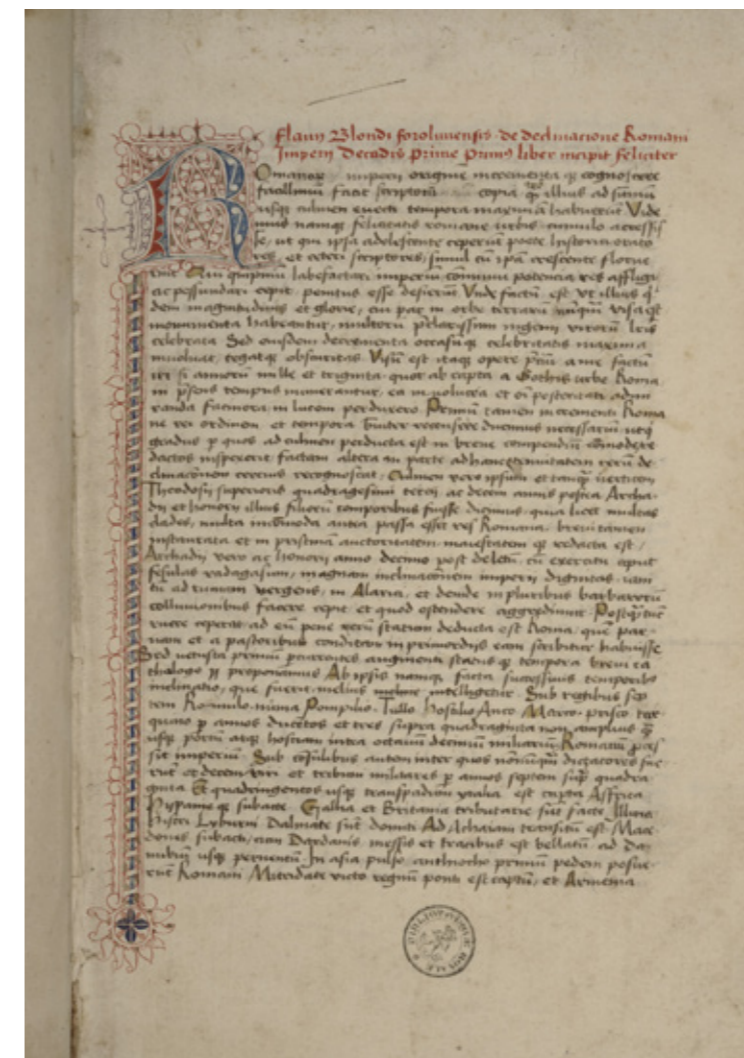


Fig. 16 Ms. 11485: Flavio Biondo, *De declinatione Romani imperii*, Rome, 1460–80 (copied for Diederik van Thulden; Park Abbey, Heverlee), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.

The Italian watermark suggests that both works (which were not yet to be found in Brabant at the time in any case) were copied in Italy, in all likelihood in Rome itself. In his work, the copyist followed the page numbering and layout of his model manuscript. He was probably someone from Brabant, one of the monks at Park who accompanied the abbot on his journey in 1474–75. This explains both the un-Italian script type and the un-Italian decoration of the initials.

There would be further examples. Housed at Diederik's Abbey was also Brussels, KBR, ms. II 2219 (Fig. 17) of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*.<sup>3</sup> Simply put, this text was not read during the Middle Ages but was much loved by the Humanists. One other manuscript with this text survives from the southern Low Countries: Brussels, KBR, ms. 9767, which was copied in Liège for Anthoine Estournel (died 1483), canon of St. Lambert's in that city. A colleague of Estournel's,

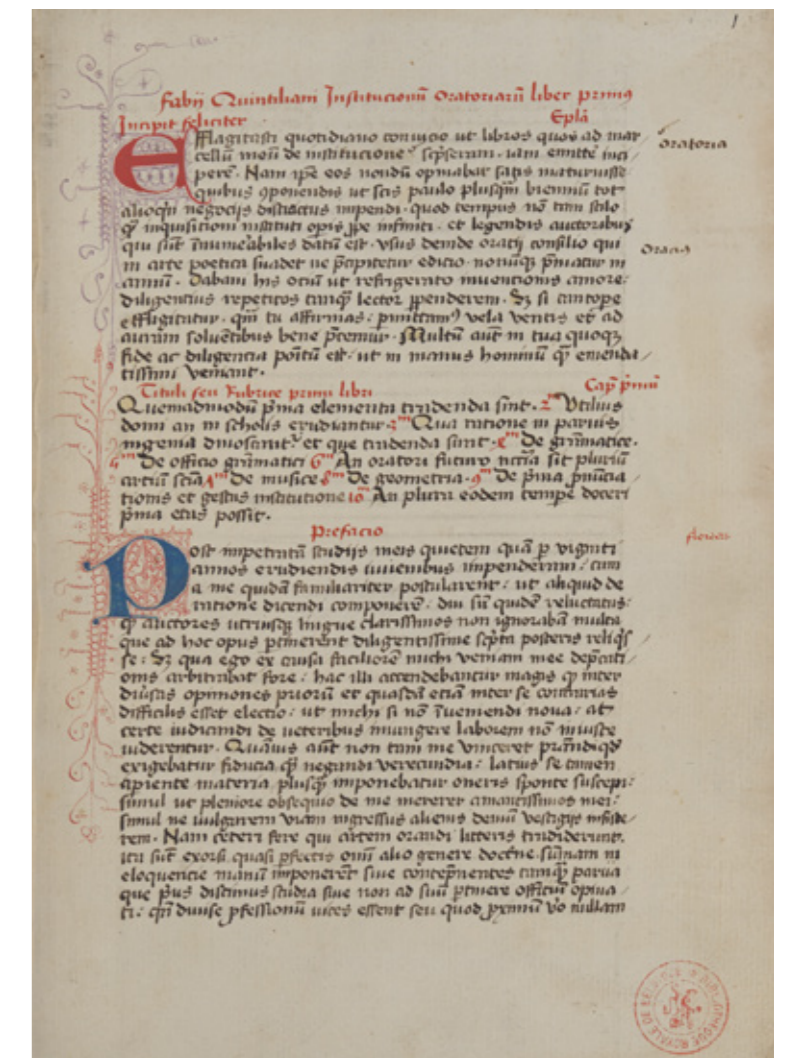


Fig. 17 Ms. II 2219: Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, Southern Netherlands (Park Abbey?), 1460–80 (copied for Diederik van Thulden; Park Abbey, Heverlee), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium.





Fig. 19 Albert van Ouwater, *Raising of Lazarus*, 1465–70, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Kat. Nr. 532A.

## Rogier van der Weyden, Petrus Christus, or Albert van Ouwater? The Artistic Milieu of Dieric Bouts

Stephan Kemperdick

Little is known about the early decades of Dieric Bouts's life. We cannot say for sure where and under whom he was apprenticed, where he then learned his trade as a journeyman, or when he set up on his own as a fully fledged master. His name appears in documentary records for the Brabant city of Leuven, the earliest mention being in 1457,<sup>1</sup> but he was not a native of that city. It is very likely that he was born in Haarlem in the county of Holland; at least, this is what is suggested by an inscription on a triptych that includes 1462 as the year and Leuven as the place of origin (though this only became known through a later description). However, the inscription must have been posthumous, given that the wording also asks for the artist to be granted eternal rest.<sup>2</sup> Writers Ludovico Guicciardini (1521–89), Dominicus Lampsonius (1532–99), and Karel van Mander (1548–1606) also make reference to his Haarlem background.<sup>3</sup> Again, though, we cannot say for sure when exactly Bouts was born. In 1572, historian Johannes Molanus (1533–85) mentioned Dieric Bouts's epitaph at St. Peter's Church in Leuven. He also made mention of Bouts's sons – Dieric the Younger (ca. 1448–91) and Albrecht (ca. 1451/55–1549), both also painters – and states that their father had died on 6 May 1400 at the age of 75.<sup>4</sup> As this is clearly impossible, it is sometimes suggested that 1400 should be taken as the year of the painter's birth rather than of his death.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems very unlikely that an epitaph from the late Middle Ages would include the date on which a person was born but not the date on which they died. It is far more probable that Molanus misunderstood wording that stated that the artist died on 6 May 1475 but made no mention of his age. What we do know is that Dieric must have died between 17 April 1475, when he made his will, and 25 August of the same year, when his second wife was described as a widow.<sup>6</sup>

It is probable that Bouts's first marriage to Catharina van der Bruggen took place in the mid- to late 1440s. She came from a prosperous Leuven family and would go on to bear him four children.<sup>7</sup> She died before 1473, the year the painter embarked on his second marriage, this time to Elisabeth van Vossem, another member of the Leuven upper class. These family circumstances suggest that Bouts was born much later than 1400, although they do not completely rule out this early date. However, had he actually been born around that year, he would not only have married and sired children at an

unusually late time of life but also have produced his surviving works at a very advanced age for the time. His oldest dated painting, *Portrait of a Man (Jan van Winckele?)* in the National Gallery, London, is from 1462 (Fig. 28); in addition, the works that have been preserved in Leuven and verified by documents – *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament* (Cat. 7) and *Justice of Emperor Otto III* (Cat. 11) – would have been started when the artist was aged 64 and 70 respectively. Had Dieric Bouts been born in or shortly after 1400, this would make him a contemporary of Rogier van der Weyden (1399–1464) and even of Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390/1400–41), the groundbreaking pioneer of Early Netherlandish painting. As regards his education and training, if we accept the early date of birth, Dieric would have begun his apprenticeship in 1415, would have been a journeyman in the 1420s, and might already have been an independent master by the end of the decade. So what works might he have produced in the first 30 years of his career? Even if we place an early date on some of the surviving paintings in Bouts's style, this date is very unlikely to be before the mid-1440s, so the two preceding decades will be completely unaccounted for.

Most research therefore assumes that Dieric Bouts was born circa 1415–20, with the available information about his life suggesting that the latter end of this range is more plausible.<sup>8</sup> Had he been born around 1420, Bouts would have been an apprentice in the 1430s; at the end of that decade and in the early 1440s, he would have worked as a journeyman and then set up on his own in Leuven circa 1445–50. This would place him in the generation after Rogier van der Weyden and Jan van Eyck.

Dieric might also have served his apprenticeship in Haarlem, the town where he was probably born. In fact, this is often assumed, along with the likelihood that the painter worked in his home town for several years.<sup>9</sup> However, we know nothing about painters in Haarlem in the first half of the fifteenth century, not even whether there was a 'school' for panel painting there. Historiographer Karel van Mander associates just one surviving work and one artist's name with the town in the time before Geertgen tot Sint Jans (ca. 1465–95), i.e. before 1475 or so: *Raising of Lazarus* (Fig. 19), which is now in Berlin and, according to van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*, is the work of a certain Albert van Ouwater.<sup>10</sup> Van Mander declares that this enigmatic artist was a direct student of Jan



Fig. 23 Dieric Bouts, *Triptych of the Descent from the Cross* (detail: Mary Magdalene, left panel), ca. 1450–58, Granada, Cabildo de la Capilla Real de Granada.



Fig. 24 Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *Triptych of the Crucifixion* ('Abegg Triptych') (detail: Mary Magdalene, centre panel), ca. 1441–45, Riggisberg, Abegg-Stiftung, Inv. No. 14.2.63.



Fig. 25 Dieric Bouts, *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1465, London, The National Gallery, Salting Bequest, 1910, Inv. No. NG2595.





**Dieric Bouts**  
***Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee***

Ca. 1465–70

Oil on oak panel

41 × 61 cm (painted surface); 42.2 × 62.5 × 1.1 cm (panel)

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Kat. Nr. 533A.

Provenance: A seal on the back with a double-headed eagle and barred shield suggests that the panel was temporarily in the possession of the Austrian Habsburgs. In the nineteenth century, it was held in a private Italian collection. In 1902, it was part of the Adolph Thiem Collection, San Remo, from which it was subsequently acquired by the Berlin museums in 1904.

The painting depicts an event recounted in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 7:36–50): Jesus is invited to a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman who has lived a sinful life comes to the house and kneels before him, washing his feet with her tears, drying them with her hair, and finally anointing them with oil. Simon is appalled at the woman's immoral life. However, Jesus explains by way of a parable that she is showing him more love than Simon himself and forgives her her sins. In keeping with the medieval tradition, the sinful woman is here equated with Mary Magdalene. Jesus is accompanied by the disciple he loved, John, and by Peter. While Peter seems to share Simon's scepticism regarding Mary Magdalene, John turns to a monk kneeling in the doorway and points out to him what is happening. A table has been laid with fish, bread, and wine for Simon and his guests.

The monk's white habit, girdled above the tunic, is that of the Premonstratensians, usually known in the Netherlands as Norbertines. However, there is no indication of his identity. It is possible that there were ties between Bouts and the Premonstratensian order, which had been established in Leuven as early as the twelfth century: a fragment of a panel from Bouts's inner circle<sup>1</sup> presents an elderly Premonstratensian as a donor. The theme of the Berlin painting – something of a rarity in the fifteenth century – may have been chosen by the patron as an admission of his own sinfulness but also in the hope of having his sins forgiven. The depiction of the patron in the painting also indicates that it had been conceived as an individual panel: later variants of the composition are also very much individual images.

The work was presented to the public for the first time at the famous *Exposition des primitifs flamands et d'Art ancien* in Bruges in 1902 and immediately attributed to Dieric Bouts.<sup>2</sup> However, opinions soon diverged. While Max J. Friedländer (1867–1958) confirmed the attribution,<sup>3</sup> other experts assumed it was the work of a follower of the Leuven master; one of these, Wolfgang Schöne (1910–89), thought it had been painted between 1470 and 1480 by the artist's

son Dieric Bouts the Younger (ca. 1448–91).<sup>4</sup> Friedländer and Ludwig Baldass (1887–1963) believed the panel to be a late work of Bouts the Elder and dated it to around the time of his *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament* (Cat. 7);<sup>5</sup> by contrast, Albert Châtelet and James Collier claim that it dates from Bouts the Elder's supposed early phase in Haarlem, putting it as early as 1445.<sup>6</sup> These disagreements continue in more recent research. In both the catalogue for the 1998 Bouts exhibition and Catheline Périer-D'Iteren's monograph, the painting is dated around 1445–50,<sup>7</sup> while Matthias Weniger believes that it was completed after the *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament* (1468) and also doubts that it was the work of Bouts the Elder.<sup>8</sup>

However, there is no validity to Collier's argument that the Berlin panel must have preceded the *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament* because it does not have a central perspective construction. The interior of the Passover feast depicted in the same Leuven triptych did not use single point perspective either. In composition and figure types, and with its dark, muted colours, there are certainly similarities between the panel with *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee* and the *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament*. The laden table in particular invites comparison. The beautifully painted pruned glasses are very similar but, as Weniger has demonstrated, were painted differently.<sup>9</sup>

There are also clear similarities with *Raising of Lazarus* in the Berlin Gemäldegalerie (Fig. 19), which is attributed to Albert van Ouwater, particularly with regard to the heads of Peter and Christ. This panel, which may have been produced in Haarlem, was sometimes seen as evidence that *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee* was also painted there. However, van Ouwater's painting dates not from the 1440s but from a time when Dieric Bouts had long been established in Leuven. These two panels share a very close dendro-chronology, with the earliest growth rings dating from 1435 (Bouts) and 1436 (van Ouwater). It can therefore be assumed that neither work was produced before the 1450s. As the youngest growth ring in the *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament*



Fig. 40 Dieric Bouts, *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, ca. 1465–70, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Kat. Nr. 533A.

(1464–68) also dates from 1436, there is little reason to believe that the panels with *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee* and *Raising of Lazarus* were painted much earlier than this. The similarities between the small Berlin panels and the *Triptych of the Holy Sacrament* support the dating put forward by Friedländer, Baldass and Weniger, i.e. roughly at the time of the Leuven triptych or even a little later. As Schöne and others have argued, the differences between the Berlin panel and Bouts's major work could also point to an assistant being involved in its creation.

Nevertheless, the composition has proved convincing: it subsequently became, so to speak, the standard for this relatively rarely depicted scene. Beginning with an early (ca. 1480) panel by Albrecht Bouts (ca. 1451/55–1549),<sup>10</sup> it was revisited by various Netherlandish painters in the sixteenth century. While this was frequently in the form of free variations, there were also examples including faithfully copied figures, such as in a panel in St. John's Hospital in Bruges from around 1520<sup>11</sup> or in a picture with rich Renaissance architecture dating from roughly 1530–40 in Marchmont House near Greenlaw, Scotland.<sup>12</sup>

- 1 Circle of Dieric Bouts, *Portrait of a Premonstratensian* (fragment), ca. 1475–1500, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Inv. No. 253.
- 2 BRUGES 1902, No. 39.
- 3 FRIEDLÄNDER 1925, pp. 45 and 108.
- 4 SCHÖNE 1938, pp. 43–49.
- 5 FRIEDLÄNDER 1925, pp. 45 and 108; BALDASS 1932, p. 114.
- 6 CHÂTELET 1980, p. 76; COLLIER 1984, p. 51.
- 7 LEUVEN 1998, p. 439f.; PÉRIER-D'ITEREN 2005, p. 237.
- 8 WENIGER 2001, pp. 235–38.
- 9 WENIGER 2001, p. 235.
- 10 Albrecht Bouts, *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, ca. 1480/90, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Inv. No. 2580.
- 11 Netherlandish Master, *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, ca. 1520, Bruges, Musea Brugge, St. John's Hospital, Inv. No. O.Sj0188.1.
- 12 Netherlandish Master, *Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, ca. 1530–40, Greenlaw, Marchmont House.

