Éva Bárdits

A PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

IN THE CHRISTIAN MUSEUM OF ESZTERGOM

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2019

A PORTRAIT OF CHRIST IN THE CHRISTIAN MUSEUM OF ESZTERGOM

by

Éva Bárdits

(Hungary)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique,
Medieval, and Renaissance Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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I, the undersigned, **Éva Bárdits**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 16 May 2019

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Signature

Abstract

This thesis centers around a small-scale devotional painting depicting Christ with a crown of thorns in the Christian Museum of Esztergom, aiming to better define this particular work's art historical position as it has not been extensively researched before. Iconographic analysis, stylistic analysis and the evaluation of technical data are all applied to reach this aim.

The findings of a restoration that was carried out in 2018 (and that gave momentum to this project in the first place) are recorded and examined. The exact iconographic type of the image is defined as Christ Crowned with Thorns (or Salvator Coronatus). Questioning previous attributions and dating, the time and place of the painting's creation is investigated through stylistic and iconographic analogies, concluding that the painting is either of German or Netherlandish origin, and was most probably created between 1475 and 1525.

Concerning the possible meaning and function the painting is investigated within the context of fifteenth-century devotional attitudes, interpreting it as an Andachtsbild. A multilayered meaning is revealed in the interplay of various iconographic types that is understood within the framework of affective piety and thus connected to emotive and mnemonic aspects of private devotion. The embellishment of Christ's portrait with the signs and tools of corporeal suffering is established to be the core of this meaning.

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Introduction

The subject of this thesis is a painting of the Christian Museum of Esztergom (see "Illustrations", *fig. 1*).[1] It is a truly small-scale work: it is painted with oil on a wooden panel that is 21 cm high, 16 cm wide, and a mere 4 mm thick. It depicts the face, or to define the composition more accurately, the bust of Christ in a hieratic frontality, representing him as wearing a crown of thorns, raising his right hand, stretching two of his fingers and turning the palm towards the viewer; his left hand rests at the bottom edge of the panel, the palm turned towards himself and somewhat upward.

Moving beyond the descriptive details nothing has truly been said about the work as no extensive research has been published on it so far, though it has been listed in catalogues.[2] Before the Christian Museum, the painting was the in Nagyvárad, in the collection of Arnold Ipolyi, but as no documentation has been found about his acquisition of the painting, the provenance could not have been traced back any further. Conclusively, the description in the most up-to-date online inventory of the Christian Museum of Esztergom – stating that the painting was created around 1480 in Swabia – has neither been confirmed nor questioned.[3]

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[1] Inventory number: 55.348.

[2] Boskovits, Miklós Boskovits et al., *Az esztergomi Keresztény Múzeum képtára* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964), 166; Tibor Gerevich and István Genthon, eds., *Magyarország műemléki topográfiája I. Esztergom. 1. rész: Esztergom műemlékei* (Budapest: Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága, 1948), 107.

[3] Described on the Christian Museum's website as "Áldó Krisztus félalakja. Diptychon részlete? Sváb festő (Ulm?). 1480 körül." [Half-length Christ Blessing. Part of a diptych? Swabian painter (Ulm?)] http://www.keresztenymuzeum.hu/collections.php?mode=work&wid=400&page=1&vt=.

In general, the aim of the thesis is to mine out as much information as possible about this specific artwork and better define its art historical position. What gives momentum to such an endeavor is, first, a recent restoration at the Hungarian University of Fine Arts by a student, Alíz Pintea. This restoration has been thoroughly documented and disclosed crucially relevant technical data concerning the painting's physical condition, restoration history, the materials used, and its underdrawing. Second, Ágota Varga, a doctorate candidate at Pázmány Péter University is researching the Ipolyi-collection, that could also reveal some valuable information concerning the provenance (and thus the origin) of this painting in the coming years. And third, it seems that there is a renewed interest in late-medieval devotional images that represent bodily suffering. Just to give three examples of the relating scholarship from the last couple of years, in 2013 a publication was dedicated to the iconographic type of the Man of Sorrows, discussing it within various frameworks; a collection of essays of late-medieval to early modern representations of the body's desecration was published 2015; and finally, in 2016 an exhibition was dedicated to this portrays of the suffering Christ crowned with thorns, along with depictions of the so-called Johannisschüssel (the cut head John the Baptist) in and around Dirk and Albrecht Bouts' workshop.[4]

This latter exhibition is all the more related to this research as the particular variation of the iconographic theme represented by the Esztergom painting has been most notably produced and developed in the workshop of Dirk Bouts, and later under the leading of his son,

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[4] Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham, eds., *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 2013); John R. Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, eds., *Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300–1650*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Valentine Henderiks et al.*, Blut und Tränen: Albrecht Bouts und das Antlitz der Passion,* edited by Peter van den Brink, Dagmar Preising and Michel Polfer (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2016).

Albrecht Bouts, creating a large number of half-length portraits of Christ Crowned with Thorns, that are memorable for their naturalistic expression of the details of suffering. In the first chapter, after describing the present condition of the painting, I will define the iconographic type of the Esztergom Christ that will be greatly aided by the scholarship surrounding the Bouts-workshop and this renewed interest in themes representing corporeal torment. Eventually, I propose that the type is most unambiguously named a "Christ Crowned with Thorns", as more specific labels could derail later interpretation. This definition is relevant as I will argue that a main quality of the Esztergom image is the way it incorporates various types to construct a multi-layered meaning with an emphasis on, but not only relating to bodily suffering.

This recent arousal of scholarly interest in the broader subject somewhat justifies my choice of topic, but in a way, it is also a disadvantage in the sense that this particularly obscure work might not contribute much to the grand discussion. To provide any kind of historical contribution the main question of this thesis should be about the painting's date and place of creation, but it has to be noted beforehand that an absolutely firm answer will not be given to this issue. I will look into the validity of the assumed Swabian origin and juxtapose this hypothesis with other possible solutions. Parallelly, the occurrence and dispersal of this specific variation of the iconographic type in the Low Countries and German-speaking regions will be touched upon, within the relevant time frame, i.e. roughly from the second half of the fifteenth century to the first half of the sixteenth centuries. But mostly the discussion will center around the predicaments one faces when trying to define the dating and attribution of such an image: I will argue that on a merely stylistic and iconographic base deciding between the two plausible solutions to its place of origin, namely a Netherlandish and a German, does not seem possible. However, technical aspects of the work, first and foremost the material of its panel, implies a German origin.

The small size and the theme of the painting suggests it could have been on object of private devotion, that would align to fifteenth-century devotional practices, thus it could be defined as an Andachtsbild. It is generally believed that devotional art in the North[5] in the period can be explained by a new, more personal kind of religiosity that centers around the details ot Christ's humanity, evoked and defined by mystical theology, medicant orders, and the Devotio Moderna – to put it bluntly, the default view is these paintings aid the individual emotional reception of works, supporting the devotee in meditation, religious contemplation, and emotional identification. However, the terms "private devotion" and "Andachtsbild" already imply meanings and suggest practices that need to be reflected upon, contextualized and concretized.

Hence in the third chapter I will very briefly summarize the vast scholarship on the role of devotional images in fifteenth-century piety to the extent that it appears to be relevant regarding our painting in question and the overall methodology and theoretical background of this thesis. This is necessary to be able to comment on the possible function and usage, that is deeply connected to questions of iconography and, finally, the meaning of the painting. In order to answer those questions meaningfully, referring to the broad social context of the late fifteenth century and the role of the images of Christ in it will be paramount, along with some

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[5] I use the term "North" to refer to basically anything non-Italian in Europe. This peculiar terminology is standard in art history-writing, even though it can be somewhat misleading as on the one hand, it obscures the vivid connections between Netherlandish and Italian centers (and falsely implying that these are homogenous units in themeselves), and on the other hand, it suggests a geographical orientation that is not less false, as „Northern art" usually incorporates areas „as far south as Spain" or „as far east as Krakow"- See Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4. I am sticking to this terminology due to its commonness.

preliminary remarks on theoretical issues. Eventually, I will argue that a multilayered meaning can be read in the interplay of various iconographic types (most relevantly the Man of Sorrows and the Salvator Mundi). This meaning is unfolded within the framework of affective piety that creates the grounds for connecting this image to emotive and mnemonic aspects of private devotion. The embellishment of Christ's portrait with the signs and tools of corporeal suffering is established to be the core of its meaning, being simultaneously a source of emotional identification and a tool for recalling the painful details of Jesus's passion.

Chapter 1 – Naming What We See

The painting depicts the bust of Christ in front of a plain gold background. Christ is represented bleeding and weeping, wearing a grey tunic (toned with brownish shades) and a crown of thorns that's thick, dark, warm green tendrils and spikes pierce into his skin, striping his forehead and the right side of his face with little streams of blood flowing from the wounds. The light falls in to the figure from the right side, casting deep shadows on the left. His face is roundish, or heart-shaped with quite wide cheekbones and forehead with a pointed chin, characterized by an elegantly long nose. His brown hair is falling on his shoulders in neat waves and he has a short beard that's folded apart in two at the bottom of the chin. He is shown in a hieratic frontality, his suggestive and tortured gaze directed at the viewer. His right hand is raised and turned towards the spectator, showing a wound; he tentatively stretches his middle and index finger, bending his little and ring fingers slightly, but not in an obvious, traditional form of a blessing gesture. His other palm is turned towards his own chest, very close to the downer edge of the painting; this gesture is not immediately understandable either: it's not clear if the palm is resting on his chest or if it's hovering in mid-air.

Facing a work that has not been researched so far, how does one move beyond mere description? Before interpreting the painting's function or meaning, it needs to be located in time and space; but in order to do so, first, a meticulous scrutiny of the current condition of the object and its recent restoration is necessary to understand what we see on the panel, and meaningfully interpret some of the findings of the technical examinations within the framework of conservation later. And second, a preliminary look into the iconographic typology of the portraits of Christ is crucial so that the picture can even be named in a way that does not cumber, but facilitates later interpretation of the meaning we can attest to its type.

The Present Condition of the Painting

What gave momentum to this whole project is a restoration carried out in 2017 by Alíz Pintea, a student of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts' Conservation Department, and her supervisors, Kornélia Forrai and Anna Vihart. As the restoration has been thoroughly documented together with the various technical examinations that were carried out (e.g. analysis of the material of the panel, the pigments and binders) there was an anticipation that not only new information would be revealed this way, but the disclosed data would help better define the painting's time and place of origin. But interpreting such data and using them to reinforce a historical narrative is never a straightforward process: data acquired through technical examinations typically do not offer instant solutions but require analysis and are open to different interpretations. In this section, I will summarize the restoration process and its discoveries in detail, partly because I will rely on these findings later, but also because making this information accessible could be useful for, or hopefully even inspire, further research.[6]

Before this recent conservation the panel had been retouched several times. Among these most notable are thick, dark outlines that were especially prominent in the hands, that thus gave a very peculiar impression (see *fig. 3* for the pre-restoration condition). Some of the overpainting was executed above the layer of glaze so these are known to have been added after 1964; besides these, the image was retouched in three different ways under unknown circumstances. All of these additions were distinguishable by the use of different paints, detectable under UV-luminescent examination and under stereomicroscope. Thus the

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6 The restoration is recorded in two unpublished documents by Alíz Pintea; as both texts are without page numbers, the numbers I will use refer to the page count.

conservator first removed the thick, somewhat darkened glaze, as well as the identified overpaintings.[7]

Following this procedure, the object required serious intervention, given that a vertical fracture had developed through its whole length, which was visible in the front to the naked eye even before the process of restoration started. At some point in the painting's history, a small horizontal board was attached to its upper edge, probably to prevent the panel from breaking along the vertical crack. The restorers separated this supplement since the pressure induced by the board caused the two parts of the panel (split by the fracture) to slightly curve, and the bending would have worsened without this intervention. After the removal of this addition, it was revealed that the original edges of the painting are clearly visible both at the bottom and at the top, which means that there is no sign that the panel was ever cropped. Following this process, the panel was taken apart, its two parts were separated along the existing crack. The traces of adhesive used in previous restorations were removed and the two pieces of the panel were aligned, fitted and glued together again.

Infrared reflectography (IRR, see *fig. 2*), UV and X-ray photographs were taken of the image and the pigments and materials of the layers of paint were analyzed.[8] What is more, most

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[7] Alíz Pintea, Restaurálási dokumentáció: Németalföldi festő, Áldó Krisztus mellképe [Restoration documentation: Netherlandish painter: Bust of Christ Blessing] (Unpublished, 2018), 8-9.

[8] The material of the base layer consists of calcium-carbonate and calcium-sulfate that was mixed with animal glue; above this base of "chalk", a thick layer of red colored with iron oxide pigments was found; the visible paint-layer was defined as oil and various pigments were found: lead white, minimum in the color of skin and the gown, lead yellow, azurit blue, cinnabar red, a green containing copper, and organic red and black pigments. Alíz Pintea, Restaurálási dokumentáció: Németalföldi festő, Áldó Krisztus mellképe:

importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, the examination of the panel's wood established that it is spruce.[9] This fact is utterly relevant because in the Netherlands the use of spruce is highly atypical, while in German territories it is common, most characteristically appearing in Bavaria and the Upper Rhine-valley in the Middle Ages.[10]

Despite the many overpaints, the damage caused by the fracture of the panel, and by previous attempts of conservation, the painting is quite well preserved: there are no signs of infestation by insects in the wood, and the paint-layer, though somewhat weathered, is not really damaged. It safe to say that now, in its restored condition the image should be closer to its authentic state than it was before the conservation. For example, an iconographically meaningful detail, the wound on Christ's left hand, was hidden but became clearly visible again (compare *fig. 1* and *fig 3*).

An overall characteristic of the style is that the surface of the paint is relatively flat and smooth, and that toning is created by very thin layers of paint. But most strikingly, there is an apparent discrepancy between the execution of the general area of the head (face and hair) and the other parts of the figure (neck, hands, and gown). Most notably, compared to the size of the head the hands are disproportionately small, which could have been a conscious choice, a distinctive figure-style. Such a figure-style is not unprecedented, for example one frequently meets with surprisingly small hands in the oeuvre of Dirk and Albrecht Bouts (e.g. *fig. 6*). But,

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Természettudományos vizsgálatok [Restoration documentation: Netherlandish painter: Bust of Christ Blessing: Scientific examinations] (Unpublished, 2018), 6.

[9]The exact type is *Picea abies*. Pintea, "Scientific examinations", 4.

[10] Wadum, Jørgen. "Historical Overview of Panel-Making Techniques in the Northern Countries" In *The Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings: Proceedings of a Symposium at the J. Paul Getty Museum, 24-28 April 1995,* ed. Kathleen Dardes and Andrea Rothe (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1998), 150.

in addition to size, the hands and the neck in this image lack the chromatic richness, the delicate layering of varying shades of the face. The hands are especially rough, anatomically unconvincing, and schematic (as if they had no bones and muscles), and the shading is restricted to bold greyish tones. The overall quality of the execution of the hands makes an uncertain impression, which, in turn, makes the gestures hard to interpret. In contrast, the face is executed very skillfully and elegantly: the cheeks are nearly rosy with vivid, warm red and brown tones intermingling with cold greyish and bluish shades.[11]

The execution of blood and tears is also worth noting. The remainders of realistic teardrops are still somewhat visible, and they seem to have been painted in an extremely delicate manner – even though they are abraded, the subtle white highlights are still visible under the left eye of the figure (i.e. on the right half of the work, see *fig. 5*). In contrast, blood is depicted completely differently, in a more "expressionist" manner: instead of "trompe l'oeil drops," it looks like paint was poured and dripped; the red paint looks like red paint, without trying to create the illusion of actual blood-drops. However, these streams of blood might not always have looked like this: the erosion of an upper layer of highlights may have resulted in this effect.

A Christ Crowned with Thorns

Iconographic taxonomies are not one of the hot topics of contemporary art historical discourse, and regarding the iconography of Christ's Passion it seems to be the case doubly

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[11] It should be noted that the discrepancy was much more glaring before the restoration. As the thick black outlines and other additions were removed, the anatomy of the hands has somewhat improved.

so.[12] The research of the Northern Renaissance, on the one hand, has recently been mostly preoccupied by the vast field of opportunities opened by technical examinations that typically facilitate the clarification of dating and attribution or provide insights into the actual practices of workshop production; on the other hand, even though utilizing or referring to Panofskian iconology is something of a default setting of art history: it has become engrained in the discourse, but it is used not as an end in itself, but rather as a tool in varying frameworks – e.g. such a framework is the discourse centering around "the body" that has been thriving in the last couple of decades, or reception-oriented discussions focusing on the pragmatics of images.

Having said that, for the purposes of this thesis, specifying the iconographic type appears to be a precondition of any later interpretation, as it is indispensable for even referring to the work unambiguously. In this subchapter, iconographic typology will be restricted to formal and compositional characteristics as much as possible, without trying to establish the painting's meaning or to connect it to different functions prematurely– keeping in mind that mapping the iconographic tradition that the image belongs to will be paramount for later interpretation nonetheless.[13] In order to do so, in the beginning I will explore some of the most immediately relevant iconographical analogies of the painting, that are found most prominently in the production of the Bouts workshop. Thus, I will outline how and on what basis similar compositions are usually defined, highlighting incoherence in the usage of certain terms and indicating problematic issues that are connected to the taxonomy of this iconographical theme.

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[12] E.g. concerning the Man of Sorrows, Mitchell Merback remarks that iconographical approaches have grown hollow: Mitchell B. Merback, "The Man of Sorrows in Northern Europe: Ritual Metaphor and Therapeutic Exchange." In *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, ed. Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 77-78.

[13] Dealing with the possible function and usage of such images in their social embeddednes, and thus discovering its possible meanings is the subject of the third chapter.

Then, I will clarify the ambiguous terms and offer a solution for the conflict between the different approaches to labeling this type. Finally, after pinpointing and explaining the iconographic traditions that the painting can be connected to, all this analysis will contribute to a proposition concerning the type of this painting, namely to define it as a Christ Crowned with Thorns.

Looking at the Esztergom Christ it is somewhat surprising that it is referred to in catalogues as "Half-length figure of Christ Blessing".[14] As apparent from the description above, both descriptive elements of this title are somewhat misleading. First of all, the figure of Christ in the painting is not truly half-length, as the composition cuts him only a bit under the shoulders, resulting in a bust-like composition rather than representing the whole upper body as the label suggests; but even if one accepts a more inclusive, broad use of the term "half-length," it obscures the fact that the painting leaves the impression of being a portrait with a definite emphasis on and compositional dominance of the face itself. [15] In a recent exhibition this word in the title has been changed to "bust", which is definitely a more accurate description of the composition.[16]

However, the "blessing" component persisted in the description of the painting, even though the hand-gesture of the figure is anything but obvious. Indeed, the idea that the gesture is a blessing is not at all unconvincing: the position of the ring and the little finger create the impression that they might be halfway through bending with the tentative stretching of the middle and ring fingers. But the gesture could just as well be interpreted as showing the wound

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[14] Christian Museum of Esztergom, "Áldó Krisztus félalakja", see footnote nr. 1 on page 1.

[15] In this text I simply use the word "portrait" as an image that represents a likeness with an apparent *hic et nunc* presence, without engaging deeply with the problematic theoretical issues about what defines a portrait.

[16] Megmentett műkincsek 2018 [Preserved art treasures 2018], Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 06/22/2018-09/23/2018.

to the viewer. This could be eschewed as an uncertainty explained by the artist's lack of skill, but it is more plausible and fruitful to observe it as a purposeful ambiguity that can have some kind of meaning – and in this latter sense, referring to the gesture as blessing does not do justice to the painting, as it can be interpreted as presenting the wound too. Also, labeling the painting in this way involves the risk of suggesting that it represents a narrative or an activity actually performed. This, again, obscures an essential quality of this image that is the hic et nunc presence of Christ's figure that is rendered into the structure of a cult image that defies an inner temporality, that represents timelessness and eternity. To express it in another way, the interplay of the iconic and the narrative is fundamental aspects of Andachtsbild that contribute to their meaning.

The largest group of paintings that provide the most immediate analogies to the iconography of our subject can be found in the Bouts workshop. Dirk Bouts was a prominent figure of fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting working in Louvain. After his death in 1475, his son, Albrecht Bouts, inherited his workshop and carried on producing paintings (probably along with his brother, also of the name Dirk, of whom barely anything is known).[17] Lively debates are going on concerning the attributions of certain paintings in the group: when it comes to these barely documented devotional images produced in large numbers (probably intended to an open market) it is often problematic to distinguish between autograph works by Dirk and Albrecht, and also to separate those from the production of the workshop, the works of later copyists, and tell apart those paintings that were immediately copied from those that

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[17] Cyriel Stroo et al., *The Flemish Primitives Vol. 3: The Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Bouts, Gerard David, Colijn de Coter and Goossen van der Weyden Groups* (Brussels-Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 131. For a more recent summary of the presence and succession of Dirk Bouts' workshop in Leuven see Henderiks et al., *Blut und Tränen,* 13-25.

are distantly inspired by the Bouts workshop. Here it would be completely futile to even address those questions, especially since these debates are more or less irrelevant concerning the iconography of our painting in question. This is why I prefer addressing this group of works as the production of "the Bouts workshop" or as "Boutsian" in a generalizing manner, loosely referring to basically everything that is connected to the workshop, i.e. not only including autograph works, but the whole of the alleged production of the workshop including obscure works of "lower quality" on which there is but scanty information available.[18]

What is relevant to our present enquiry is that within this group there are many variations of the portrait-like representations of Christ wearing a crown of thorns. The variations are intermingled to the extent that sorting them in an all-encompassing and airtight taxonomy is impossible, but some constants and variables can be identified with relative safety. Christ is always depicted in a portrait-like manner, bleeding and crying, wearing a crown of thorns heavily piercing his forehead, and generally leaving the impression of extreme bodily suffering and torment. The direction of the gaze, the turning of the head, the color and type of the dress, the color of the background, the presence of other instruments of the Passion's narrative, the gesture of the hands, and even the occurence of the wounds vary.

Anne Dubois and Roel Slachmuylders divide the Bouts-group into three main categories: according to them, the first group comprises those works which depict Christ as an Ecce Homo, Christ before his crucifixion as presented to the people by Pilate; works of the second category show him as a Man of Sorrows, i.e. showing Christ with his wounds; and a

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[18] A comprehensive catalogue of such works, both the workshop-production and more distant followers is included in Valentine Henderiks, *Albrecht Bouts* (Brussels: IRPA-KIK, 2011), see especially 373-406 in the catalogue for Christs crowned with thorns.

third group is that of the paintings which depict him as neither. The authors refer to this last category as the Salvator Coronatus or Christ Crowned with Thorns.[19]

Examining the validity of this taxonomy, we are immediately faced with the task of clarifying the difference between the Man of Sorrows (generally used synonymously with Imago Pietatis and Vir Dolorum) and the Ecce Homo. Fundamentally this distinction lies in the dead or alive state of Christ. This differentiation can most easily be made on the basis of the presence of the wounds of the Crucifxion: the Ecce Homo can be straightforwardly connected to a narrative scene in the Bible, namely when the tortured and humiliated Christ is presented to the people by Pilate whereas the Man of Sorrows depicts Christ after the crucifixion, having had received his wounds.[20] The types are obviously connected by the depiction of Christ's suffering and separating them is not always possible since they are frequently intermingled and confused.[21] Thus, the suggestion that the two are conflated in the case of the Bouts-works is more than justified, and it might be telling of the fundamental characteristics of these works.

One of the types in this group of paintings are the busts of Christ holding up both his hands, with the palms turned towards the viewer with all fingers stretched, showing his wounds, which is clearly characteristic of the Man of Sorrows (e.g. *fig. 9*). Another type, very similar to the previous one, is when the hands are nearly the same, but Christ only stretches two fingers on his right hand, suggesting an act of blessing (*fig. 16*); I would argue that this gesture is already somewhat uncharacteristic of the Man of Sorrows, as images of that type traditionally

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[19] Stroo et al., *The Flemish Primitives,* 233.

[20] Colum Hourihane, "Defining Terms: Ecce Homo, Christ of Pity, Christ Mocked, and the Man of Sorrows." In New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows, edited by Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 23-24.

[21] Hourihane, "Defining Terms", 19.

emphasize the postmortem state of Jesus, with emphasis on the signs of suffering in gestures (e.g. Christ pointing at and thus demonstrating his own wounds). Rather it seems to be the case that the gesture is that of a blessing, that is reminiscent of the type of the Salvator Mundi, the triumphant portraits of Christ as the savior. A slightly different variation of this can be seen in pictures which show Christ's right hand as described above, but the other hand is depicted with the palm turned downward, as if resting at the bottom of the image. Virtually all three types of images of the Bouts-workshop mentioned here show Christ's head in three-quarter profile or at least slightly turned, but—with the exception of some later copies—never in such a hieratical frontality as the Esztergom painting.

Another, probably the largest and most homogenous, group of Christ's busts in the Bouts workshop is that of those which do represent Christ frontally, with his hands folded and "resting" at the bottom of the panel *(fig. 13)*. What Dubois and Slachmuylders suggest concerning this category can be confirmed here: similarly to those that show Christ's bust without depicting his hands, these images fit neither the category of the Ecce Homo nor the Man of Sorrows.

The images that show Christ without hands, and can not be defined as Ecce Homo or Man of Sorrows for this reason, are either three-quarter or slightly turned portraits and busts *(fig. 7).* or completely frontal images, occasionally in the form of a tondo *(fig. 11 and 12)*. This last variety is clearly reminiscent of the Sudarium or Vera Icon (Jesus's likeness depicted as appearing on the veil of Veronica) and is occasionally explicitly represented as such—on a white background, depicting only Christ's "levitating" face without even a neck *(fig. 11).*

What is important to note here is the fluidity of these categories: all of these types seem to be intermingled with each other, therefore all kinds of permutations occur. An eloquent example of this mutability and flexibility is a painting of Christ, now in the Rijksmuseum, that shows the blessing-like gesture similarly but not the wounds *(fig. 6).* In this image, the hands

are disproportionately small compared to the head and are squeezed into the composition at the bottom of the panel which makes it difficult to judge if there are wounds, but I definitely see no blood on the palms. The exact same pattern of Christ's face appears in both "handless" and "handwounded" versions *(figs. 7 and 8)*. Moreover, some "*Ecce Homo*-type" busts (the least numerous group) where Christ is unquestionably depicted in the moment of presentation to the people by Pilate—hands tied by rope, without wounds, holding a stick in his hand—show the same facial expression, presence and atmosphere of suffering, ripped out of time, as the images in the other two categories of Dubois and Slachmuylders. The exact same pattern of the face can appear as a "clear" Man of Sorrows and as a "clear" Ecce Homo, with only slight modification of the crucial details *(fig. 9 and 10)*

This apparent fluidity between the Man of Sorrows, the Ecce Homo, and other connected iconographical types representing the suffering of Christ is not specific to the Bouts-group alone, but a widespread phenomenon from the late medieval period. Hourihane even argues that "artists themselves […] sometimes seem to have been oblivious to the general compositional elements for this subject and how the theme should be represented."[22] This statement suggests that the confusion does not only lie in the "misinterpretation" of art historians, but its immanent in the artworks themselves. Having said that, I would strictly refrain from blaming the artists for ignorance of the iconographical categories that art historians have later constructed to explain their work. Instead, I propose that these categories, at least in the case of Boutsian works, might not be sufficient to grasp the characteristics of the paintings themselves. I would not imply that this categorization is completely useless, but I would put an emphasis on the fluidity and apparent interchangeability in the case of this type in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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[22] Hourihane, "Defining Terms", 24.

What can be said merely on the basis of Bouts-works is that these portrait of Christ do not aim to present a moment of the Bible's narrative, which, in a sense, explains their flexibility: they entail a variety of meanings that frequently transgress the strict borders of clear-cut iconographic types. As a tentative solution to this issue I propose to avoid the specific labels unless they appear to be absolutely fitting. In this vein, the term "Christ Crowned with Thorns" could be used in a more generous and broad sense to involve all the images mentioned in the previous categorizations. Hourihane argues that art historians frequently mislabel paintings, and uses a work of Dirk Bouts in the National Gallery as an example *(fig.14)* for a mislabeled Christ Crowned with Thorns that is actually a Man of Sorrows.[23] But in truth, as Henderiks remarks, this image just as much recalls the type of Salvator Mundi, through its triumphant character and the blessing gesture.[24] I would argue that even in this case Christ Crowned with Thorns is a valid label as it encompasses the inherent ambiguity of the image more accurately: Christ being dead and triumphant simultaneously, victorious in redeeming mankind in this most defeated, humiliating act of being tortured and death. And in the case of portraits this effect can be seen as even more exaggerated: being a conglomerate of various types and inherently ambiguous, it is more fitting and meaningful to these call images Christ Crowned with Thorns or Salvator Coronatus than labeling them as Man of sorrows or Ecce Homo, as these latter types only capture a fraction of its far-reaching and diverse iconographic kinship.

Even though Bouts's workshop appears to be nearly monopolistic in the development and popularization of this iconographic type, it is definitely not the only source of images that

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[23] Hourihane, "Defining Terms", 19, 46 (footnote nr.3).

[24] Henderiks et al., *Blut und Tränen*, 84; Catheline Périer-d'Ieteren, *Dirk Bouts: The Complete Works* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2006), 269.

are of similar iconography. Among others, Oliver Hand, for example, investigating a Head of Christ by Petrus Christus, states that it is most probably the earliest known Netherlandish portrait of Christ in which he is depicted wearing a crown of thorns.[25] The author argues that the roots of this type can be found in the traditions of the Sudarium and the Holy Face. While he believes that the image is closely influenced by the Eyckian Holy Face, he suggests that there was a demand for augmenting these images with allusions to the narrative of Christ's passion, and thus a further source of origin is the Man of Sorrows. To sum up, he suggests seeing this iconography as a conglomerate of the Man of Sorrows, the Holy Face and the Sudarium. Furthermore, this proposition is supported by his recognition that by the late fifteenth century the variations of the portraits of Christ were extremely mixed and one should not expect clear-cut types and automatically attribute specific functions and meanings to them.[26]

Different variants of the type exist outside Northern developements too. Éva Eszláry points out a marble relief of Italian origin, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, which represents Christ's bust with a crown of thorns pearcing his forehead, and very prominent tears dropping from his eyes (*fig. 18*). Even though the composition does not involve Christ's hands, and it shows him slightly turned (as opposed to the frontality of the Esztergom image), it is a valid analogy to the extent of the similarities of the general iconographic theme. Eszláry defines this type as Salvator Incoronatus and asserts that it has its origins in Netherlandish painting, with a tentative remark suggesting that it was probably conceived in the workshop of Dirk

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[25] John O. Hand, "Salve sancta facies: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the 'Head of Christ' by Petrus Christus." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27 (1992), 7.

[26] Hand, "Salve sancta facies", 16.

Bouts. She describes the type as a combination of the "authentic" portraits of Christ and the images of the Suffering Christ (probably referring to the Vir Dolorum or Imago Pietatis).[27] Discussing the same relief, Urbach agrees with this label and describes the iconographic type as an "abbreviated" form of the Ecce Homo.[28] Reflecting on the origin of the source of Eszláry's naming of the type she also cites two mentions of an image in the wills of two citizens of Leuven: in 1504, it is mentioned as a Facies Salvatoris, and in 1554 as a Salvator Coronatus, providing an early, sixteenth-century precedent for using the label.[29]

Finally, returning to the Esztergom image, after all this, it seems that the broad iconographical kinship of its type is basically twofold but incorporates a variety of categories: on the one hand, it may be interpreted as "subtraction", connected with the type of the Imago Pietatis (or Man of Sorrows, Vir Dolorum) and the Ecce Homo (the Suffering Christ); on the under hand, as an "augmented" form of the Holy Face (Vera Icon or Vera Effigies) or the Sudarium, and the Salvator Mundi. In a way, it follows the Man of Sorrows as much as it clearly shows Christ having already suffered the crucifixion, having had received his two wounds on the palms. But the frontality of the face and the allusion to the gesture of blessing are reminiscent of a Salvator Mundi. All things considered, I believe the Salvator Coronatus or Christ Crowned with Thorns are the most fitting descriptions of the Esztergom Christ's type, that captures its manyfold iconography and the multilayered meaning connected to it as it is discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

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[27] Éva Eszláry, "Über "Salvator Incoronatus" Reliefs aus dem toskanischen Kunstkreis.", *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 100 (2004), 178.

[28] Zsuzsa Urbach, "Ein flämischer ikonographischer Bildtypus im italienischen Quattrocento: Bemerkungen zur Studie von Éva Eszláry", *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 100 (2004), 186.

[29] Urbach, "Ein flämischer ikonographischer Bildtypus", 187.

Chapter 2 – Placing the Painting

A primary goal of this thesis is to disclose new information about the Esztergom Christ and better define its art historical position. Situating the image in space and time would ideally be a key step in this, upon which further interpretation and evaluation can be based. However, the further I got in research, the clearer it had become that a firm dating and attribution in this case can hardly be expected, and even an approximation or a vaguely convincing hypothesis proves to be extremely challenging. Hence this chapter will mostly reveal the difficulties that make this object so resilient to definition.

In order to clearly explain the predicament of determining the painting's origin, I will reflect on the methodologies I apply quite extensively: this might seem unusual, and for an art historian probably more or less evident or even redundant. Still, I believe this part is necessary as I am aiming to highlight that traditional methodologies of dating and attribution are, in a way, constructed to favor a certain type of artifacts and to overlook others; specifically, neglecting objects such as the painting I am dealing with. The aim of this section is certainly not discarding or questioning style critics itself as a method, but merely to highlight the difficulties one faces when applying it to a painting such as the one in question.

Bearing this in mind, in the second part of this chapter I will nonetheless briefly examine the validity of the very few previous attempts at defining the image, namely the nineteenth-century attribution to Martin Schaffner, and the most recent cataloging that suggests a Swabian origin, then assess the plausibility of German and Netherlandish origin in general. While I agree that the object is undoubtedly a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Northern painting, I aim to demonstrate that neither the attribution to Schaffner, nor the more general localization to Swabia are well-founded. Finally, after pointing out some possible connections, I will suggest to maintain an inclusive attribution and keep the possibility of both a

Netherlandish and a German origin; even though I ultimately lean towards a German origin, is should be noted that, due to the ambiguities described in the first subchapter in the following, I will refrain from elevating this idea even to a level of an actual hypothesis.

Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I will examine if the Esztergom Christ's possible format, namely a possible diptych-format through the discussed analogies and the scarce information on its provenance. This aspect is important to clarify as a different format would naturally require a different approach when dealing with the painting's function and meaning in the final chapter of the thesis.

Notes on Methodology

In his classic *On Art and Connoisseurship*, Friedländer defined the "objective criteria" to determine a work's authorship: first, authentic inscriptions and signatures on the painting itself; second, documentation that survives concerning the artwork such as contracts, letters, catalogues, legal documentation, and other early references, notably the accounts of Vasari for Italian and Karel van Mander for Northern artists; and third, the analysis of style following the Morellian method, that is the meticulous observation of various marginal details and the recognition of their patterns or similarities.[30] All this culminates in the "intuitive verdict" of the connoisseur; Friedländer, describing this process as rather mystical and undefinable, states that after all the painstaking inspection of details the final judgment of the connoisseur must depend on the general impression induced by the work as a whole, as an overall unit to link it to already existing attributions.[31]

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[30] Max J. Friedländer, *On Art and Connoisseurship* (Beacon Press, 1960 [1942]), 163 ff.

[31] Friedländer, *On Art and Connoiseurship*, 171, 173-4.

How does the Friedländerian approach affect the attribution of this particular painting? The Esztergom Christ was not signed and there are no authentic inscriptions on it—it was probably not meant to advertise the fame of its creator. This is more than understandable since the concept of the artist as an individual celebrity genius has not reached its zenith in the fifteenth century – the period marks the transition between the "history of images" and the "era of art".

As for documentation, the earliest accounts we have about it come from the late nineteenth century. Ephemeral documents like records of commissions are not often preserved, but the dearth of such evidence is also explained by the fact that by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the focus of workshop practice shifted more and more towards the emerging and growing open market. In this changing economic environment workshops tended to recreate the same type of image in a series, repeating the exact same composition or its variations over and over again; [32] this process is exemplified by the Boutsian type of Christs crowned with thorns that were truly reproduced in large numbers. thus, in a vast proportion of cases, such documentation did not even exist in the first place. In addition, an image depicting a theme that is not special or distinguishable in any sense is not likely to be identified in inventories even in the unlikely event of being noted. Lacking documents, thus, all we are left with as a tool for attribution is the analysis of style.

The problem is that connoisseurship as conceived by Friedländer inevitably favors artefacts that were extraordinarily appreciated for some reason—ones that were meant to advertise their own fame in their own time, or those produced by workshops that sought to

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[32] Maryan W. Ainsworth ed., *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 116.

create a recognizable brand or a distinguishable style, or those that circulated in a sphere where they were used as a means of representation. In this regard connoisseurship, deeming them substandard or mediocre, inherently relegates vast amounts of "irrelevant" works to obscurity.[33]

To be more specific, the problem with the Esztergom Christ is that it was obviously not created in one of the most prominent workshops of the period, as it is suggested by the uncertainties of its execution and the somewhat archaic adaptation of the theme. When compared to Dirk or Albrecht Bouts's autograph Christs crowned with thorns, it appears less skilled, less detailed, less dynamic, "convincing", or "illusionistic". Furthermore, the type itself does not facilitate the establishment of a firm attribution as the theme as such is subordinated to certain conventions of representing Christ: a painter or workshop might have a characteristic figure-style that might not reveal itself in portrait of Christ as it might follow archetypes, possibly even in details.

Another problem is that because of its size and theme there are very few details and motives that can be examined. Evidence should be found in particular aspects such as techniques of execution, the appearance of brushstrokes, or the usage of colors, etc. These factors are far more efficiently and reliably observable in original works than in reproductions: the comparison of such a small-scale work with reproductions of incomparably larger works is

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[33] This is made explicit in his urging of the connoisseurs to not dissipate themselves, but seek "worthy material" for their work to follow the true tenets of connoisseurship as described by himself: "Many experts act inversely, to their own detriment: they waste time and strength in examining dubious and insignificant pictures, and run the risk of confusing their taste and distorting their standards." Friedländer, *On Art and Connoiseurship*, 174. This is the kind of remark that a present-day art historian would not say or follow. However, the mere fact that our painting is obviously one that falls in the category of "dubious and insignificant" pictures that need to be interpreted from the viewpoint that they were deemed hierarchically substandard in former scholarship.

laden with the danger of drawing false conclusions. As we have barely any clues to define a starting point of exploring works in the first place, finding convincing analogies of style is next to impossible without a vast knowledge and familiarity, and first-hand experience with a large number of works. For these reasons, my point of departure to stylistic analysis will be quite unattractive, namely that I will mostly be able to point out apparent stylistic differences and somewhat superficial analogies, while I will not be able to present convincing analogies on a well-established basis – these could only be discovered in subtle nuances that, at the present stage of research, exceed the capacities of this thesis.

Even though something of a paradigm shift in dating and attribution took place in the second half of the twentieth century, and the work of Friedländer might be seen as outdated, placing an image is space and time is, in a way, still inseparable from connoisseurship.[34] Technical examinations have flourished and vastly transformed the field of art history, especially when it comes to the art history of the Low Countries. Dendrochronology can determine the terminus post quem of a painting's creation, and the continuously evolving methods of infrared photography and reflectography have revealed the hidden world of underdrawings. These methods have truly brought about something of a revolution within the field as they legitimately debunked previously canonical attributions. However, one needs to be aware of the limitations of these advances. On the one hand, there are some practical limitations inherent to the nature of the examinations. On the other hand, the paradigm of connoisseurship has not changed fundamentally, its limitations and primary interests are still deeply ingrained in the process.

As for the practical limitations, dendrochronology only works if a huge, consistent sample of trees exists, like in the case of Baltic oak that most of early Netherlandish works

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[34]Ainsworth., *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 71-72, 106, 116.

were painted upon. It can not be used when the tree-population that gave the wood of the panel in question is obscure or has not been—and can never be—investigated by experts. This raises another problem, namely that, when it comes to the Northern Renaissance, every application of dendrochronological examination in the art history of Netherlandish Painting, from the beginnings to this very day, necessitates the personal contribution of Peter Klein, an expert on tree-ring dating in the field appearing basically in all publications on Early Netherlandish painting that require dendrochronological analysis.[35] This speaks of the fact that the field is so specialized that the access to the necessary technology is extremely limited in reality: it requires a huge database of a known type of tree and experts who can interpret the ring-patterns.

This is not the case with infrared reflectography (IRR), which is widely accessible: publishing IRR.shots have become customary parts of art historical studies. However, IRR imaging is not easy to meaningfully interpret, especially since it is much affected by the materials used, for example, it appears to be outright unfeasible when it comes to Italian painting.[36] Making sense of IRR is a whole new area of special expertise, and more importantly, even with the ability to meaningfully decipher the images IRR produces, their interpretation eventually follows the "traditional" method of connoisseurship and the critique

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[35] His own website provides a very usfeul basic introduction to how the method can be utilized in the art histroy of early Netherlandish painting: Peter Klein, "Dendrochronology- Art objects", http://www.dendroandart.de/?lang=en. Of course the application of the method is restricted to this area, what I aim to highlight here is that within the realm of art history this seem to be the most prominent and typical way of applying this kind of examination. Regarding this question concering our painting in question see footnote nr. 57.

[36] As most Italian works use different materials for underdrawings that behave differently to Netherlandish works under infrared light. Ainsworth, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 73-74. In this light the fact that the underdrawing on out painting is visible in IRR (*fig.2*) supports is Northern origin too.

of style, aiming at linking the images to existing firm attributions, examining the details and character of the underdrawing's execution.[37]

As for other material aspects of artworks that could be examined I have not recognized any peculiar pattern in the usage of pigments that could point to a specific origin and I do not know of any comprehensive qualitative research on pigments (used in fifteenth-century oil paintings) that could maybe orient attribution on technical basis. Of course, just as the criticism of style, quantification could only help establish probabilities, and not recreate "historical facts" concerning attribution and dating. However, what we can point out is that the usage of oil paint and chalk as a base are more immediately graspable technical facts that characteristic of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Northern artworks.[38]

Netherlandish Connections

As I already discussed in the previous chapter, the closest analogies of the iconography of the image direct towards Early Netherlandish Painting. To repeat the point: the first occurrence of the iconographic type is a work by Petrus Christus and it flourished in the workshop of Albrecht Bouts in the last quarter of the fifteenth, and the first decades of the sixteenth century, with copies dated as late as 1600 (*fig. 7*). Most artworks of the type created in the Netherlands are attributed to the workshop or loosely associated with Albrecht Bouts, even if only through careful credits such as "a follower of Albrecht Bouts" or "after Albrecht Bouts", relating images to his prototype even in cases when the work is question is extremely distant in style, e.g. it is a different face-type and execution (*figs. 20, 21*). In spite of this practice I would point out that it is clear that it was not only Bouts and his followers who produced such

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[37] Ainsworth, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 116.

[38] Ainsworth, *Early Netherlandish Painting,* 115.

works in the Netherlands, e.g. Hans Memiling has also created his own version of this iconographic type, to say the least (*fig. 23*); I have the impression that numerous obscure, but distinguishable schools and workshops could be established of works that distantly follow this prototype, judging by their varying styles.[39]

The figure-type and style of the Esztergom image has barely anything in common with the Boutsian representations of Christ.[40] Our painting depicts the savior with a more roundish, (maybe even slightly heart-shaped) face, with relatively wide cheekbones and an even wider forehead. What is more, in spite of his tortured state, he generally looks less grim, less wretched than the Boutsian Christs, with his lively red cheekbones and a gaze that is sad and tortured, but determined and intense at the same time, as opposed to the gaze of the Boutsian Christs that are hopeless, pitiful and laden with mourning.

There is a triumphant aura surrounding the Esztergom Christ that derives not only from the relative liveliness and dignified beauty of the face, but also from the completely hieratic frontality and straight gaze along woth the quasi-blessing gesture itself. On the one hand, the face-type is more reminiscent of the Holy Faces as developed by Jan van Eyck, appearing in numerous copies throughout the century (*fig. 19*).

What is more, as I already suggested in the previous chapter, the frontality of the figure accompanied by this gesture recalls another type, namely of the Blessing Christ. To give just one example, there is a preciously tiny painting of the Blessing Christ by Gerard David (*fig.

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[39] I have this impression on the base of searches in the databases of KIK-IRPA (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage of Belgium) and RKD (Netherlands Institute for Art History), but it is also palpable when looking in the catalogue of Henderiks, *Albrecht Bouts* (Brussels: IRPA-KIK, 2011), 373-406.

22).[41] This type is very much connected to the Salvator Mundi type because of its similar gesture and the emphasis on the victoriousness of Christ, even without the presence of an orb.

So, after all, what can be confidently said is that the panting's iconography clearly originates and feeds from Early Netherlandish works. But about analogies in style, for the reasons mentioned in the subchapter on methodology, not much more can be declared than resignedly admitting that it is does not seem to fit into any late fifteenth-century Netherlandish workshops that I know of. Additionally, it is important to reinforce here that the choice of wood for the Esztergom Christ's panel is uncharacteristic of Netherlandish workshops in general as those overwhelmingly use oak, which supports the idea of looking at other places to find the painting's origin.[42]

German Connections

As I mentioned in the introduction, the most recent catalogue of the museum suggests a tentative, yet surprisingly specific attribution: "Swabian painter (Ulm?)."[43] As there is next to nothing written down concerning the ideas behind this description, one can only assume that the specificity was inspired by the inscriptions on the frame and early, nineteenth-century

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[41] Interestingly, there is a very characteristic fold in the middle, under the neck of Christ's robe that has a very similar outline to that of the Esztergom Christ – this not very meaningful motive appears again and again in portraits of Christ. It would be far-fetched to deduce anything from this mere fact, but the sheer persistence of the motive might be worthy of investigation for future research.

[42] Naturally, there are exceptions to this rule. E.g. the only known Shouthern Netherlandish work painted on a maplewood panel is an utterly fascinating Christ Crowned with Thorns with a skull painted on its back. Stroo et. al, *Flemish Primitives*, 231, 237 (footnote nr. 1).

[43] Christian Museum of Esztergom, "Áldó Krisztus félalakja", see footnote nr. 1 on page 1.

catalogues and inventories. Here, I will examine the possibility of a Swabian, and more generally, a German origin on a technical, stylistic, and iconographical basis.

Martin Schaffner

On the back of the painting' s frame, the name Martin Schaffner is written twice with an elegantly calligraphic handwriting ("Martin Schaffner in Ulm / 1499-1564" in blue towards the bottom, "Martin Schaffner" in grey pencil toward the top), and once on a label on the back of the panel itself (see *fig. 4*). The frame did not belong to the work originally, it is a later construction, and the inscription is believed to be from the nineteenth century, probably written by Béla Czobor, who managed the Ipolyi-collection and was responsible for it after Ipolyi's death.[44] This attribution has not been validated in the very few subsequent mentions of the painting, but it should be addressed nonetheless as it is the only specific hint concerning the authorship of the work.

On the basis of the most recent monograph we can say that Schaffner's oeuvre mostly contains altarpieces created for churches and various portraits, rather than individual devotional paintings.[45] Even though there are remote thematic analogies to the Esztergom Christ, e. g. depictions of the Man of Sorrows (*fig. 24*) and the Sudarium (*fig. 28*), or the figure of Christ in various scenes (usually bigger narrative compositions) of the Passion, in all the instances when the face of Christ occurs, it is highly different to the Esztergom image, both in character and

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[44] For the inventories of the Ipolyi-collections with references to the painting see Attila Lakatos-Balla, *Ipolyi Arnold püspök hagyatéka Nagyváradon* (Nagyvárad: Varadinum Script Kiadó, 2012) as cited in the subchapter "A Missing Mary?" in their entirety in footnote nr. 54.

[45] Judging by the oeuvre as reconstructed by Manuel Teget-Welz, *Martin Schaffner: Leben und Werk eines Ulmer Malers zwischen Spätmittelalter und Renaissance* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

style: Schaffner's Christs are rougher, more austere, and anatomically more detailed. Generally, Schaffner's oeuvre does not contain face types comparable to the Esztergom image; also, the crown of thorns consists of thick, brown, dry-looking branches on all of Schaffner's versions, as opposed to the Esztergom image where the crown is greenish, wavy, and more like a tendril. Moreover, Schaffner basically never uses a plain gold background like that of the Esztergom Christ.[46] And the differences do not stop here: the hands of Schaffner's figures tend to have wider palms and shorter fingers, with a confident and visible anatomy (e.g. *fig. 25*), which is very different to the Esztergom Christ's hands. The overall brush-technique and modelling does not seem to be connected to the Esztergom image in any way: deep contrasts and very pronounced modelling is more characteristic of most of his works. Of course, reproductions can be absolutely misleading in this respect, especially when comparing a huge altarpiece with a painting that is basically the size of one's palm. However, thematic elements and face-types can be juxtaposed more securely even on the basis of photographs.

It is not impossible that whoever came up with the attribution may have been very determined to link the image to a name, and decided upon Schaffner among late-fifteenth century German artists based either on the fact that he depicted the tortured head of Christ quite often, or maybe because of the somewhat similar chromatic solutions he uses, rich with deep, warm reds and browns (*fig. 24*).[47] In the light of all this I believe that the attribution to Schaffner is not well-founded, which is probably why it is not maintained anywhere after nineteenth-century inventories.

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[46] There is a fragmented Andachtbild-like painting in Schaffner's oeuvre depicting a Madonna (*fig. 25),* but it is a fragment of a larger compoition, see Teget-Welz, *Martin Schaffner*, 463. Stylistically this painting looks somewhat closer to the Esztergom Christ than most works of Schaffner with her relatively long-fingered but puffy hands; still, it leaves a highly different impression in the execution of details and face-types as well,

[47] E,g, see Teget-Welz, *Martin Schaffner*, figs. 44-45.

Analogies and Other Connections

It is quite challenging to point out stylistic connections within the vast and heterogenous category of German-speaking territories, where artists and workshops are not as defined as in the case of the Low Countries. Returning to the our only existing attribution (i.e. seeing the painting as a work of a Swabian painter, maybe of Ulm), within the late fifteenth-century schools of Ulm, the work of Jörg Stocker seems to be closer to the Esztergom image than Schaffner's. Being his master, Stocker is believed to have worked together with Schaffner in the same workshop for a time. When compared to Schaffner's individual work, the face-types are very different (especially Christ's), softer and more roundish; the hands of the figures seem to have a somewhat uncertain anatomy: they resemble inflated rubber gloves (see figs. *26* and *27*). The execution of these hands is somewhat reminiscent of the Esztergom Christ's, which too appear uncertain in their anatomy, but they are thin and have a certain elegance with their relatively long fingers. Other aspects of the style, such as brushwork are impossible to judge on the basis of reproductions, it is especially next to pointless when comparing a tiny photo of a large-scale altarpiece to a small Andachtsbild.

For this latter reason I would not imply any close stylistic connection, as there are many images that could be connected to the Esztergom Christ on this vague basis. To give just a couple of examples, there are analogies just as close in the late fifteenth-century production of Cologne. In a Lactating Mary with Saint Bernard attributed to the Master of the Life of the Virgin we see roundish faces and hands with elegantly long fingers in front of a plain gold background (*fig. 29*). The Rhinelands had vivid connections with Early Netherlandish painting,

taking over both image-types and pictorial solutions or painting technique.[48] In the meantime, taking a look at Bamberg, to the workshop of Wolfgang Katzheimer, we find works that are just as close, or distant: in a Deposition of Christ by this workhop we can find some roundish faces that superficially resonate with the Esztergom Christ's face-type (*fig. 30*), a similar simple application of a plain gold background, and the execution of blood (as not truly trompe l'oeil droplets, but a thin layer of paint) also seems somewhat similar.[49] But again, these are generalities and presumptions that can not even be elevated to the level of a hypothesis, especially in the lack of seeing the original works.

What can be safely said is that the iconographic type was far from being as popular in German-speaking territories as in the Netherlands, but nevertheless, it occurs from time to time in highly varying solutions. From the Salvator Mundi of Master E.S. through Schongauer's copy of the Braque-tryptich's blessing Christ (*fig. 33*) to Dürer's many depictions of the Vera Icon the presence of images that speak of the dispersal of portraits of the suffering Christ is undeniable.[50]

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[48] To give an example to the transfer of image-types between Leuven and Cologne painting: we find a creative adaptation of Dirk Bouts's compositions in the work of the Master of the Lyversberg Passion. *Painting and Patronage in Cologne*, 1300-1500 (Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2000), 195-197.

[49] I mostly base this statement on the works collected in a fairly recent publication dealing with franconian painting, especially the workshops of Hans Pleydenwurf and Wolgang Katzheimer, namely Robert Suckale, *Die Erneuerung der Malkunst vor Dürer* (Michael Imhof Verlag, 2009).

[50] Schongauer's print (*fig.33*) is a perfect example to the way image-types can travel long distances thanks to newly found technologies of reproduction in the fifteenth century. In the meantime it is worth noting here that the dispersal of the Salvator Mundi might not have only happened through the popularization of the Rogerian image, but through a lost eyckian prototype as argued by Imre Kovács, "A korai németalföldi festészet félalakos Salvator Mundi-ábrázolásainak ikonográfiájához: egy elveszett Jan van Eyck-táblakép nyomában."

A Missing Mary?

Portraits of Christs crowned with thorns of the Boutsian type are very frequently accompanied by another panel that depicts the Virgin turned in a three-quarter view, her hands clutched together in prayer and weeping (*fig. 15*). Accordingly, it is tempting to entertain the idea that the Esztergom Christ could have been a part of a diptych.[51] The extremely small size of the object supports the idea that it could have been used in one's own hand, being carried around. Most Boutsian Christs crowned with thorns are actually pendants and not foldable diptychs or triptychs, even though there are occasional exceptions to this rule, just as there are examples of foldable diptychs of the type in German territories (*fig 31*).[52] I had an instinctive presumption that the marbling was painted on the back of the painting to be at least occasionally looked at, but this a false preconception: on the one hand, it is a quite common practice that can be considered customary and possibly passed on only as a visual trend; on the other hand,

["Notes on the Iconography of Early Netherlandish Salvator Mundi in half-length: tracing a lost panel painting by Jan van Eyck"] *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 50, 1–2 (2001). This study also argues that the Salvator Mundi can be described as a "variant" of the Vera Icon as the two types seem to have been used interchangeably and that the workshop of Dirk Bouts adapted an Eyckian type of the Salvator Mundi.

[51] Even though the composition itself, the hieratic frontality of Christ's figure rather suggests that it was individual panel. Within the Bouts-group there is always some kind of compositional connection between the two panels in the posture of the figures - e.g. even if Christ is depicted frontally, he glances over towards Mary on the other panel.

[52] John Oliver Hand et al., *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (Washington, D.C. – Antwerp – Cambridge: National Gallery of Art – Koninklij Museum voor Schone Kunsten – Harvard University Art Museums, 2006), 4 (Boutsian Christs paired with Marys were pendants). See a South-German type of Christ crowned with thorns as Ecce Homo in a foldable triptych format in Hans Georg Gmelin, *Spätgotische Tafelmalerei in Niedersachsen und Bremen* (München: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1974), cat. nrs. 14 and 18.

it can be seen as a means of rendering the painting similar to a reliquary, as described by Hamburger, to justify the status of a painting in veneration against theological suspicion.[53]

Regardless of its exact original format, if there ever was a pair of the Esztergom Christ, it has not yet emerged. As the original frame of the painting was not preserved, we can only rely the earliest written accounts to reveal some information in this respect. I could identify four mentions of the painting before it arrived at the Christian Museum, in the inventiories of Ipolyi's collection (as assembled by Lakatos-Balla) and a peculiar pattern can be observed throughout the four accounts: our painting is always directly or closely followed in the catalogue order or numbering by a Mater Dolorosa or a Mary.[54] Neither of these accounts

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[53] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion." In *Imagination und Wirklichkeit: zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Klaus Krüger and Alessandro Nova (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 53.

[54] First, in the inventory of Arnold Ipolyi's collection from the turn of 1886 and 1867 by Béla Czobor: "180. Olajfestmeny fára, Krisztus (mellkép) / 8 /Martin Schaffner,Ulm 1495-1564" [Oil on wood. Christ (bust); the number 8 marks the estimated worth of the image] and "181. Mária (olasz) / 5" [Mary (Italian)], Lakatos Balla, *Ipolyi Arnold*, 58.

Second, in the inventory of the Ipolyi collection when handed to the association of archeologists: "Olajfestmény fára. Ecce homo 180" [Oil on wood. (…)] and "Olajfestmény fára. Mater dolorosa 181" [Oil on wood (…)], Lakatos Balla, *Ipolyi Arnold*, 204, 209.

Third, in the inventory of archeological association's museum when packing the images in 1916: "231. Krisztus mellképe aranyalapon. Deszka. Hátára írva kék irónnal: Martin Schaffner von Ulm." [Bust of Christ with golden background. Panel. Writing on its back with blue ink: Martin Schaffner von Ulm] and "229. Szent nő feje. Olajfestmény, deszkán; régit utánzó modern kép. (Lehet, hogy alatta van régi is.)" [Head of a holy woman. Oil on panel, a modern image imitating to be old. (Perhaps there is an old one underneath it.)], Lakatos Balla, *Ipolyi Arnold*, 279, 284.

record the size of the works they mention which makes identifying images extremely difficult. In the collection of the Christian Museum of Esztergom I have not found any late-medieval-looking paintings that could be described as Mater Dolorosa, even though the inventories suggest that the painting should be there, as it still arrived in Budapest in 1919. There are three Andachtsbild-like Marys in the collection, and one of them is sometimes even attributed to Schaffner (*fig. 35*), but neither of them seem to be related to our Christ in size, style, execution, technique or iconography (*figs. 34-36*).[55] What is more, the Mary mentioned in the catalogues could have been lost; also, the inventories do not suggest in any way that it had any connection to our Christ – it is priced differently and a stylistic difference is indicated – and of course, it is possible that the inventories themselves confused works, or used a non-accurate, arbitrary iconographical label.

Conclusion

In the light of all the methodological predicaments, no definite answer can be given to the origin of the painting, neither its time nor its place of creation: as I attempted to demonstrate, this painting is very resistant to definition on a stylistic basis, and there are no objective criteria at hand that could clarifly the situation. What can be said is that neither the attribution to Martin Schaffner, nor the assumed Schwabian can be considered firm. The only thing that could move this issue forward would be the emergence of new details concerning

And for the fourth time, in the inventory of the works that were taken to Budapest in 1919. "j. 229 Mater dolorosa" and right under it "j. 231 Krisztus (mellkép)" [Christ (bust)], Lakatos Balla, *Ipolyi Arnold*, 309.

[55] Teget-Welz did not list them among them the autograph works of Schaffner. Teget-Welz, *Martin Schaffner*, 633.

the painting's provenance, or if someone with a more trained eye than I would find some unquestionably close analogies – even though discovering a convincing one is not very likely to happen for the reasons I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter.[56]

Until then, I would settle for modest probabilities. The overall technique, execution, theme and character of the painting hints it is a product of Northern Renaissance. As the somewhat uncertain character of the work's execution suggests that it was not created in one of the most progressive, central workshops, we can deduce that it was probably inspired in a way by Netherlandish developments, i.e. was not created earlier than the Christs of the Bouts-workshop. On the other hand, the archaic gold background, the strict frontality suggests that it was not conceived later than the first quarter of the sixteenth century, all the more because such images, as I will discuss in the following chapter, are embedded in fifteenth-century models of piety that were not yet affected by the radically different attitude of religious imagery that came with Reformation. In conclusion, it seems plausible to suggest that the painting was most probably created sometime between 1475 and 1525 in a not-too-distant familiarity with Netherlandish developments, the Boutsian and the Eyckian types of devotional paintings that depict the likeness of Christ. However, I would not attempt to judge this distance: dispersal of Netherlandish themes and styles through the Rhinelands to Germany, and to other, even far away territories through economic connections has to be taken into account before establishing any kind of hypothesis.

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[56] It also should be noted that all my presumptions are based on the impression that this painting looks like a Northern Renaissance, I haven't even mentioned many possibilities that seem highly unlikely, but can not be absolutely ruled in the lack of certain data, e.g. more provincial or obscure territories, the possibility that the image is connected to Iberian developments, or it is a highly atypical Italian work, or even that it is a forgery.

Technical information points to a German origin, namely that the material of the painting's panel is spruce, a fact that was disclosed by the latest technical examinations that I have already mentioned in the first chapter.[57] In the lack of other concrete evidence I suggest that this should considered crucially relevant and in itself more convincing than a shaky hypothesis established on loose stylistic and iconographic connections.

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[57] One unpleasant consequence of this fact is that dendrochronology would be challenging to do as spruce is a diffuse-porous tree that does not produce a tree-ring as regularly as certain other species (e.g. oak). The research of Early Netherlandish painting has benefited enormously from the fact that most panels are of oak that can be dated with great accuracy. However, dating spruce is not at all impossible in itself as described by Hoadly, R. Bruce. "Identification of Wood in Painting Panels" In *The Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings: Proceedings of a Symposium at the J. Paul Getty Museum, 24-28 April 1995*, ed. Kathleen Dardes and Andrea Rothe (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute) 1998, 49-50. The problem is rather the accessibility of the technique as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, and the availability of such tables that "translate" the scientific findings to art historical choronologies. Nevertheless, the results of the wood's examination are now available, thus there is a chance to further put these findings in context in the future.

Chapter 3 – Meaning and Function

In this last chapter I aim to elaborate on the meaning of the Esztergom Christ. Generally, this chapter aims to extremely briefly summarize the vast and manyfold discourse on late-medieval piety and the role of devotional imagery within it. The field is large and diversified even within the realm of art history but is further embellished by more interdisciplinary approaches of cultural history. Within the limited scope of this thesis I can only offer brief glimpses into this vast discourse, and only to extent that it appears, in a way, relevant to the understanding of our subject, the Esztergom Christ.

I will very shortly outlinine the fundamental framework of fifteenth-century piety that is ubiquitously accepted in the relating secondary literature. As my approach has mostly been iconographical, I will more extensively reflect on the notion of Andachtsbild as established by Erwin Panofsky and interpreted by Sixten Ringbom and consider certain theoretical and terminological issues the notion invites; this way I implicitly reflect on the methodology of this thesis. Then, to more deeply understand the possible function, usage, reception and pragmatics of such and image, I will rely on three recent studies by James Elkins, Mitzi Kirkland-Ives and Herman Roodenburg to outline the basic conceptual framework of affective piety and discuss the emotive and mnemonic aspects of pious practices. This will hopefully shed light on the means by which the augmentation of a portrait of Christ with details of his suffering enhance its function in the context of devotion's pragmatics.

Notes on Theory

The is a general consensus in scholarship that the fifteenth century marked a transformation of devotional practices and religious attitudes, and that this shift reveals itself

in artworks. Especially exemplified by Netherlandish painting, the popularity of the writings of mystics like Saint Bridget, the "Pseudo-Bonaventurian" Meditationes Vitae Christi, the works of Ludolph of Saxony and Thomas à Kempis, along with the growing influence of religious orders (Cistercians, Carthusians, and Franciscans) and confraternities, all contributed to a new kind of piety that emphasized and centered around the personal identification with the human life and suffering of Christ.[58] Devotional practices paralleled this transformation: by the fifteenth century, collective forms of piety were more and more replaced by private ones, such as individual contemplation and meditation on paintings. This latter process is believed to be manifested in the emergence and spreading of the so-called Andachtsbilder, i.e. images that do not aim to capture an actual moment of the Bible's narrative, but are iconic compositions, displaced from time, and that could be used as aids to prayer, as tools for and subjects of private contemplation and meditation.

This paradigmatic term of Panofsky, Andachtsbild, is a default, deeply engrained notion in art historical scholarship. It has been mediated to non-German speaking literature by Sixten Ringbom's *Icon to Narrative*, a latter work becoming a perpetual point of reference. Peculiarly, Ringbom restricts the meaning of Andachtsbild to qualify paintings only in terms of visual representational strategies, excluding connotations with the practical usage of the work. In return, he uses"devotional image" to qualify paintings in terms of function, referring to them as objects of private devotion.[59] In his formulation: "'Devotional image' is thus a functional

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[58] This can be considered a default scholarly view, summarized by e.g. Eugène Honée,, "Image and Imagination in the Medieval Culture of Prayer: A Historical Perspective" In: *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe*: 1300–1500, ed. Henrik van Os. (London: Merrel Holberton, 1994), 157-174, or even more concisely in Hand et al., *Prayers and Portraits,* 3.

[59] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 52-57.

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term, while the 'Andachtsbild' (…) should be defined by formal and iconographical criteria alone."[60]

There is a difficulty in this separation: the intermingling of the two terms is apparent in the fact that the German "Andachtsbild" has been sometimes even translated to English as "devotional image".[61] I think that the underlying issue here is that defining Andachtsbilder without any implicit reference to function is not truly possible as they have always been understood in relation to devotional practices, even by Ringbom: he attempts to outline an evolution of the "half-length narrative" as a pictorial form, originating it from icons, and argues that the "dramatic close-up" could have been created by augmentative techniques, i.e. the addition of figures to cult images that originally depicted only one person (and not only through the subtraction of multifigured narrative scenes), in order to enhance the static icon with a narrative dimension, to serve the demands of private devotion more effectively.[62]

This difficulty of separation might be seen as a part of a larger issue, namely the overall structure of Panofskian iconology itself. According to Panofsky's method, interpretation of images occurs on three levels: first, the recognition of the forms themselves (the definition of the primary subject-matter itself), second, the definition of the iconographic theme (the identification of the depicted theme or "conventional subject matter"); and third, iconological interpretation, i.e. the actual understanding of the intrinsic meaning of the image within its particular historical, social and cultural context.

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[60] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 57.

[61] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 53.

[62] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 71.

First of all, what needs to be mentioned is that the three layers of interpretation can not be strictly separated, they are practically always intermingled and interdependent.[63] To put in another way, when applying the Panofskian method, we are constantly faced with a hermeneutic circle: we might scrutinize the culture and mentality of an era through its specific usage of iconographic themes, however, when deciphering the iconographical content of an image, we highly rely on our preexisting information on the mentality of the era or culture itself, thus presupposing the intrinsic meaning to guess the iconographical theme or even to define the primary subject matter.[64]

Iconographical interpretation in the case of an Andachtsbild relies very much on texts that could be sources of ideas that defined piety. But he relation of texts and images lies in their mutual socio-historical embeddedness; thus texts can not be regarded as recipes or prescriptions for certain types images. To just give one example of a possible predicament, the

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[63] Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art" in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993 [1955]): 67: "(...) in actual work, the methods of approach which here appear as three unrelated operations of research merge with each other into one organic and indivisible process."

[64] This process of interpretation could be further problematized considering that the status and perception of images is not constant in space and time, it differs in every culture or interpretive community, resulting in the fact that even the first layer of interpretation, which is basically the mere recognition of the forms represented, is, in a sense, determined by our relation to visuality, our own cultural embeddedness. According to Panofsky, on the level deciphering the intrinsic meaning of a work, we need to rely on our intuition to an extent; but this intuition can not be fully based on our own unreflected perception, but needs to adapt the perception of the culture in question. This is all very much known and not new, and Panofsky reflected on the possible misuse of his method, as quoted by W. J. T. Mitchell, "What is an Image?", *New Literary History* 15.3 (1984), 506: "[iconology threatens to behave] not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrography."

so-called Letter of Lentulus (the text was traditionally attributed to Publius Lentulus, procurator of Judea, hence the name) is an oft-cited source when discussing the origin of the Holy Face, or generally, any portraits of Christ.[65] This practice is quite understandable since textual sources that describe the likeness of Jesus Christ are extremely rare, and the characteristics listed in the letter more or less aligns to the various depictions of the head of Christ in the late Middle Ages. However, the description barely includes specific details and it is not plausible to imagine that painters followed this description; more or less every portrait-like depiction of Christ of the period is in line with the quite general and enigmatic description, and figure-types were more plausibly passed on through pictorial examples, so we have no reason to believe that painters created their Christs according to this text. Rather, one should conclude that the popularity of the text in the fifteenth century can be understood as a sign of an interest for a corporeal, personal, approachable physical image of Christ, as this same interest is traceable in many sources from prayers to Passion narratives.[66]

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[65] It describes Christ as "having a reverend countenance which they that look upon may love and fear; having hair of the hue of an unripe hazel- nut and smooth almost down to his ears ... waving over his shoulders; having a parting at the middle of the head according to the fashion of the Nazareans; a brow smooth and very calm, with a face without wrinkle or any blemish...; having a full beard of the colour of his hair, not long, but a little forked at the chin." Hand, "Salve sancta facies", 10.

[66] Imre Kovács "Szó és kép (kép és szó) a későközépkori magándevócióban. Egy esettanulmány: Krisztus Szent Arca." In *Szó és kép. A művészi kifejezés szemiotikája és ikonográfiája*, ["Word and image (image and word) in late-medieval private devotion.", Word and image: The semiotics and iconography of artistic expression] edited by Attila Kiss and György Endre Szőnyi (Szeged: JATEPress Kiadó, 2003), 127-8.

A Christ Crowned with Thorns in Fifteenth-century Devotion

In the chapter defining the Esztergom Christ's iconographical type I have discussed that it can be seen as an augmented form of portraits of Christ as the Holy Face (only presenting Christ's likeness without any direct allusions to his Passion), the Vera Icon and Sudarium (as appearing on the veil of Veronica) or the Salvator Mundi (Christ as Saviour), and on the other hand, as a subtracted form of the representations of the suffering or dead Christ. The Esztergom Christ is a quite unique conglomerate of these various types. Thus, it simultaneously evokes the story of the Passion, the sacrifice of Christ, but beyond the mere tragedy it is presented with the message of Salvation as a triumph. The image represents the most fundamental, defining characteristic of an Andachtsbild, namely that it is narratively impossible: Christ is simultaneously humiliated and victorious, tortured and serene, dead and resurrected.[67]

But how could such a message have been actually conveyed and received? As summarized at the beginning of this chapter, devotional paintings of the period are believed to evoke an emotional response through meditation and identification, as aids to evoking mental images through private contemplation, to deeply immerse in and feel the represented Christ's pain. Discussing a Mater Dolorosa that is a pair of Christ attributed Bouts in Chicago,[68] James

[67] From this point of view ambiguous character of the gesture can be considered meaningful, even if the artist did not intend to do so: his right palm raised in its peculiar manner simultaneously shows Christ presenting his wound, while alluding to the blessing gesture as it appears on depictions of the Salvator Mundi; meanwhile, his left palm can be imagined to be holding an invisible orb or indicating his heart. I think this latter suggestion is not completely out of line as in the IRR there is a dense hatching under and above the hands (*fig. 37*) that might speak of the fact that at some point in the process of the painting's execution of there was something planned there to be.

[68] For a Mater Dolorosa similar to this one see *fig. 15*.

Elkins approaches the image through the emotional response it induces. He suggests that only by looking carefully, by immersing in the details deeply enough, one can actually feel Mary's and the medieval devotee's pain.[69] In a way, this is very much accordance with the default scholarly view that these images were primarily aids of private devotion that spoke to the viewer on an emotional level, as invitation to identification with the figure of the Virgin; however, Elkins criticizes the dry and distant rhetoric of scholarly discourse as he does not consider it adequate for discussing such deeply human issues.[70] But in doing so he claims to be able to disclose an "authentic" emotional response to such an image by examining the details, by identifying with the emotions he believes the Virgin represents, and the problem is that this response can not be considered universal, but it is culturally determined (as even differing reactions of present-day viewers would demonstrate); it is merely a reconstruction that, no less than any other, stands on hypothetical legs. Nothing exemplifies this better than the beginning of Elkins's mental exploration by setting the image up as a portable diptych, folded in front of himself,[71] even though it is very probable that Chicago Mater Dolorosa was a pendant, suggesting that nobody ever interacted with this particular objects through such a direct, intimate physical contact.[72] Even though Elkins provides a convincing case for "compunctive

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[69] James Elkins, "Weeping, watching the Madonna weep" In *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 130: "(…) we didn't need to know about empathy because we simply felt the Madonna's emotions".

[70] Elkins,"Weeping", 133-4.

[71] Elkins, "Weeping", 127.

[72] Interestingly, a slightly different type of the type with a Sorrowing Mary and an Ecce Homo preserved in Aachen was built in a foldable construction at some point in its history. See Appendix, nr. 3. Hand et al., *Prayers and Portraits*, cat. nr. 3.

devotion" and for crying as an ever-present form of piety, it is not a straightforward task to reconstruct how these images were exactly felt about, looked at, what people actually did with them, and how they behaved in front them, as direct evidence supporting all the general assumptions is scarce and indirect.[73] However, I do not mean to discard or eschew Elkins's approach for centering around emotions as there is truly something immediately powerful in images representing this degree of bodily and mental suffering such as the Boutsian Mater Dolorosas and Christs crowned with thorns, or the Esztergom Christ: this emotive effect is the core of affective piety.

On a sidenote, the hic et nunc presence of the figures, showing them in a realistic manner, can be in itself validly considered to be relevant in aiding direct, personal identification of the devotee with the object of veneration. Realism or illusionism can be seen as an effective means of persuasion in this regard as it enhances the evoking of an immediate effect, merely through perception. The direct eye-contact of the Esztergom Christ with the viewer further creates a powerful connection that could facilitate emotional and mental immersion in the image.[74]

This direct presence and immediacy can be further elaborated on against the background of conscious efforts to constructing a religious experience, i.e. methods of affective

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[73] Elkins, "Weeping", 125; Hand et al., *Prayers and Portraits*, 4.

[74] In the meantime, realism and detailedness can also be seen as a means of self-justification for religious imagery itself, rather than just a tool that aids identification. Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing". Exploring the complex relations of devotion and artworks through the work of Jan van Eyck he argues that the skepticism towards images as objects of is reflected upon in the discussed paintings themselves; strategies of representation, notably "realism" or "illusionism" itself is understood as an expression of raising the question of the relation between image and veneration.

piety. Examining a Man of Sorrows by Hans Memling that very lavishly and directly "catalogues" the elements of Passion-narratives (from all the objects connected to them to various characters appearing in the gospels and Passion narratives), Kirkland-Ives establishes that it can be interpreted as a richly extended version of the arma christi (i.e. the instruments of Chtist's Passion) motive. She argues that the motive itself could have been flexibly used as a mnemonic tool in prayer to recall actual passages describing Christ's suffering and thus mentally relive and personally identify with those.[75]

In the Esztergom Christ we do not have a "full" arma christi, but maybe the crown of thorns, the wound, the tortured state of Christ could have been used as an aid to recall naturalistically detailed narratives of corporeal suffering in Passion narratives, to relive Chrits's agony through identification in its most painful details. To support this idea I would only cite here one prayer as quoted by Kirkland-Ives – cherry-picked from the study just to illustrate this pious attitude through a concrete example. This prayer appears in a printed book called *Ortulus anime in duytsche, met die getijden vander weken* (Gent: Universiteitsbibliotheek, 3743/4), printed in Antwerp around 1550, and intended to be a "devout exercise and praise of each separate instrument of our lord's Passion", as the beginning of its text states.[76] The prayer goes: "I greet you Lord Jesus Christ/ With the crown of thorns pressed into you head / that I a sinner of small person / to be sure very flawed; Your holy blood spurted outwards / from your head in seventy-two places / O Lord I have now seen you / Show

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[75] Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, "The Suffering Christ and Visual Mnemonics in Netherlandish Devotions." In *Death, Torture and the Broken Body in European Art, 1300–1650*, ed. John R. Decker and Mitzi Kirkland-Ives, (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 47.

[76] Kirkland-Ives, "The Suffering Christ", 47.

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me you mercy". [77] It appears that here compunction is paralleled by a deep emotional identification with Christ through the recital of the various physical motives and details of his suffering.

This aspect of devotional practices being both emotive and sensory is further elaborated by Roodenburg. Citing, among other sources, a rhetorical treaty (namely the anonymous Rhetorica ad Herennium) and a Passion narrative by the fifteenth-century Franciscan writer Johannes Brugman, he highlights the bodily aspects of memory-techniques and their role in "pathopoeia" - i.e. the construction of an emotional response in the observer - that mobilizes all the senses, manufacturing an experience that is both somatic and mental through rhetorical methods.[78] As he puts it, "preachers sought to craft the emotions of the faithful through a range of devotional practices, all oriented on the humanity of Christ, his physical agony in particular, and encompassing both the body and the senses."[79] He argues that images were not merely looked at, but induced multifaceted responses and were used performatively, i.e. to perform certain activities, such as ruminative viewing and reading, kneeling, meditative observation of images and recital of texts were among those.[80] He understands the interconnectedness of emotions, the body, and perception through all the senses through Bourdeiu's notion of an extended mind that situates the entirety of human cognition, including emotions, in its dependence on social structures.[81]

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[77] Kirkland-Ives, "The Suffering Christ", 49. The original dutch text is quoted in Krikland-Ives, "The Suffering Christ", 54 (footnote 36.).

[78] Herman Roodenburg, "Empathy in the Making: Crafting the Believer's Emotions in the Late Medieval Low Countries", *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 129/2 (2014), 42, 45.

[79] Roodenburg, "Empathy in the Making", 44.

[80] Roodenburg, "Empathy in the Making", 51.

[81] Roodenburg, "Empathy in the Making", 44.

I believe that these approaches of affective piety reveal a multilayered meaning and function of the Esztergom Christ, as within its context the interplay between the type of Man Sorrows and Salvator Mundi, the rendering of both into an intensely emotional and effective portrait composition with a focus on bodily suffering, gain an explanation. Still, it should be noted that by the late-fifteenth century, especially in the Netherlands and Italy, but generally in Europe, the demand for panel paintings have dramatically increased, not only for religious but secular themes as well (e.g. secular portraits). The sixteenth century marks the transition to the "era of art": on the one hand, this results in the fact that paintings are more and more appreciated through the filter of "aesthetics" rather than devotion, thus it is not unconceivable that people would occasionally even buy paintings without being deeply motivated by the desire to actually engage in pious activities.[82]

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[82] It should be further noted that the strikingly small size and thinness of the painting immediately supports the idea that it could have rather been an object that was meant to be carried around. This aspect could be further explored by juxtaposing technical aspects with different accounts and representations of interacting with such devotional images.

Final conclusions

The primary aim of my thesis was to generally better understand and define the Christ Crowned with Thorns in Esztergom. As no substantial research has been published on this particular work before except for catalogue entries, I believe that this aim was achieved at least in the sense of gathering relevant information together, including the process and findings of the recent restoration.

What is more, on the one hand, is that the scarce attempts at defining the painting were examined and argued to be questionable, thus the painting was defined more broadly as a German or Netherlandish work, created not earlier than the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and not later than the first quarter of the sixteenth century, i.e. between 1475 and 1525. It was established that the stylistic and iconographic analysis can not provide a more specific attribution in the present state of research. However, I tentatively suggested that the material of the painting's panel tips the scales in the favor of a German origin, as it is the only genuinely graspable evidence to rely on. A new document revealing details of its earlier provenance, a new interpretation of the technical data presented here (e.g. the pigments), or someone with the eyes of a true connoisseur who spots an unquestionable analogy, could all change this uncertain situation for the better. A more meticulous look at less-known German and Netherlandish workshops focusing on stylistic aspects could be one direction of further investigations.[83]

On the other hand, defining the exact iconographic type of the image as Christ Crowned with Thorns or Salvator Coronatus can be considered new information as it overwrites previous

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[83] What is more, different territories not mentioned in this thesis could also be taken into consideration, e.g. the Iberian peninsula.

definitions of the painting. Furthermore, seeing it as a conglomerate of various iconographic types presented a possible multilayered meaning within the context of affective piety.

The work was understood as an Andachtsbild within the context of late-medieval attitudes of devotion. One possible function and meaning was revealed in the interplay of various iconographic types: as a conglomerate of the Salvator Mundi and the Man of Sorrows it is a portrait of Christ that is augmented with the signs and tools of his corporeal suffering. The thorough exploration of and direct engaging with relevant textual primary sources has fallen outside the scope of this thesis, but it could be a promising point of departure for further research to better understand this iconographic type so popular in the North, and maybe more thoroughly interpret the subtle differences that characterize them. In this regard a deeper look into workshop practices and examining the production of this type of works to an emerging open market with regard to this particular type might be worth exploring in the future. Finally, further connecting technical data to plausible contexts of devotional practices (e.g. the small size of the painting as a sign of the work's portability) could reveal more of the work's original function.

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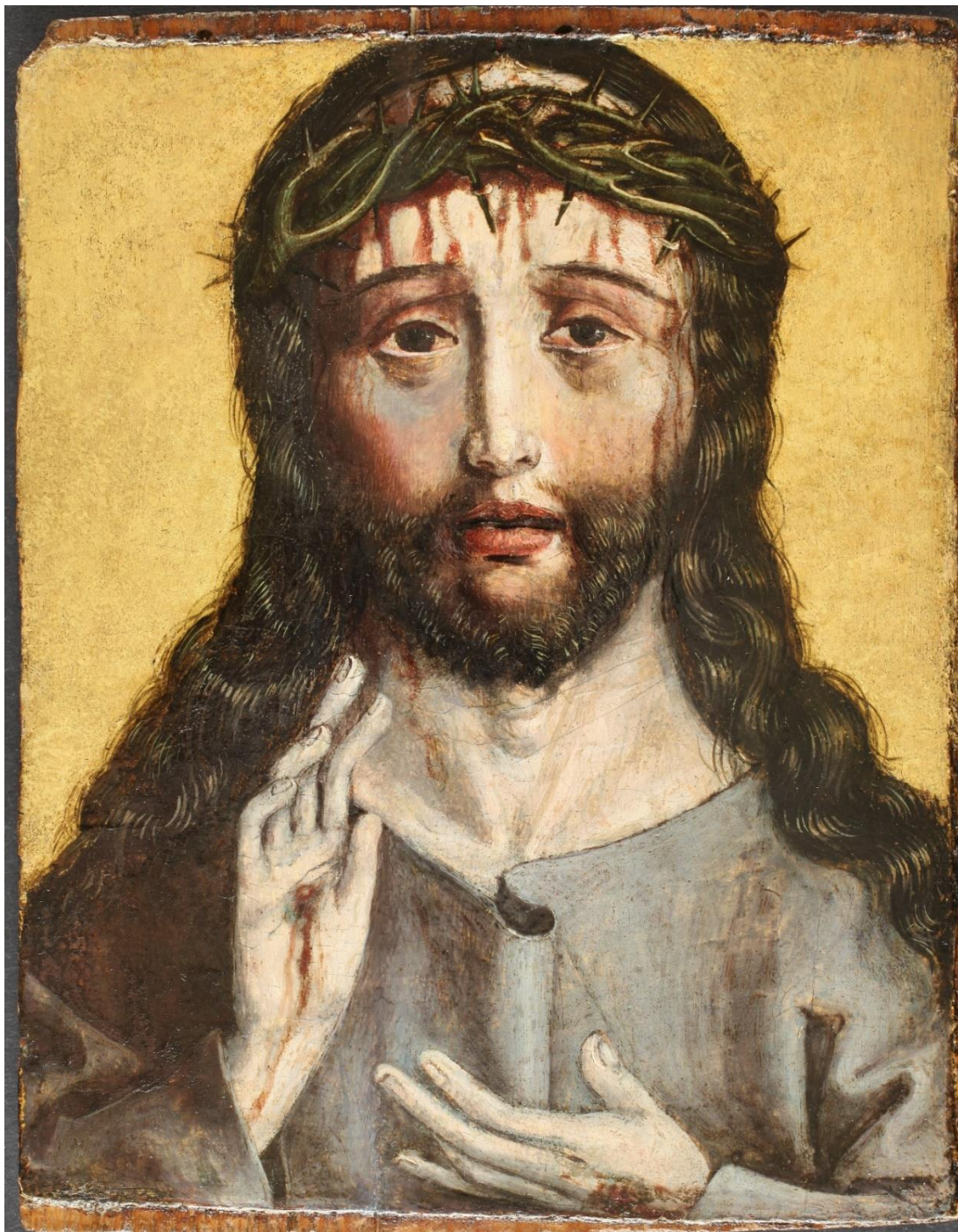
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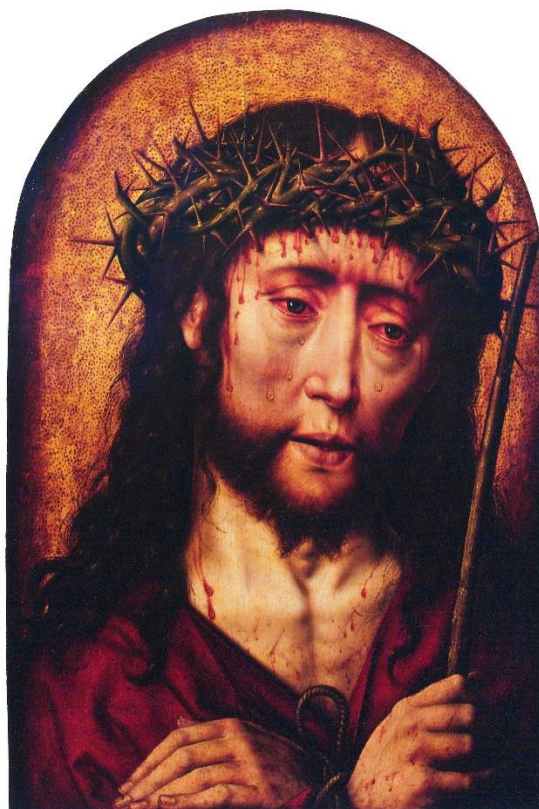
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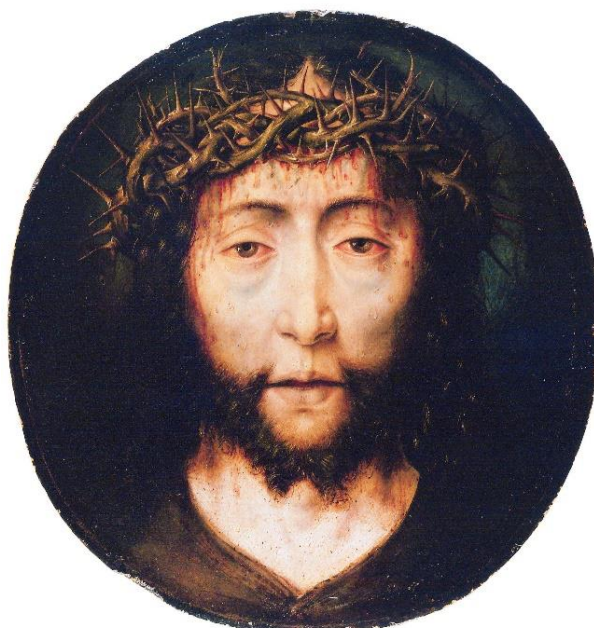
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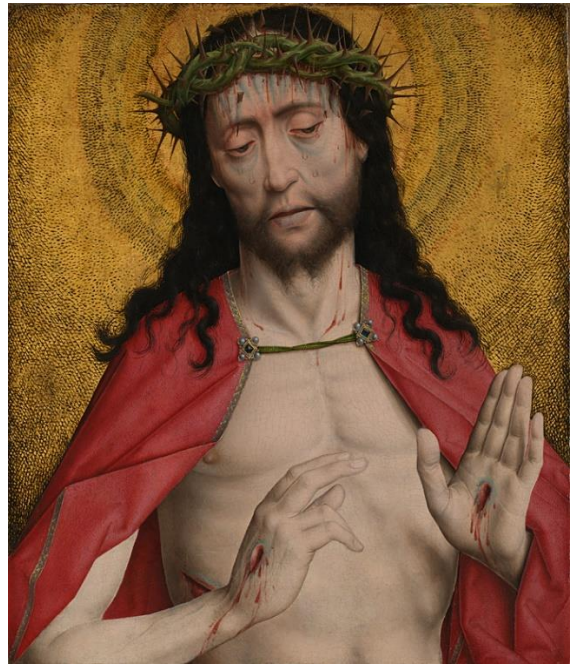
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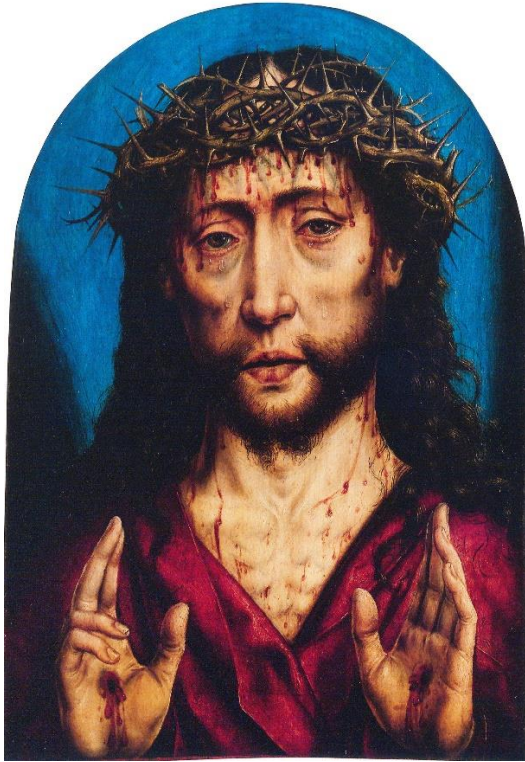
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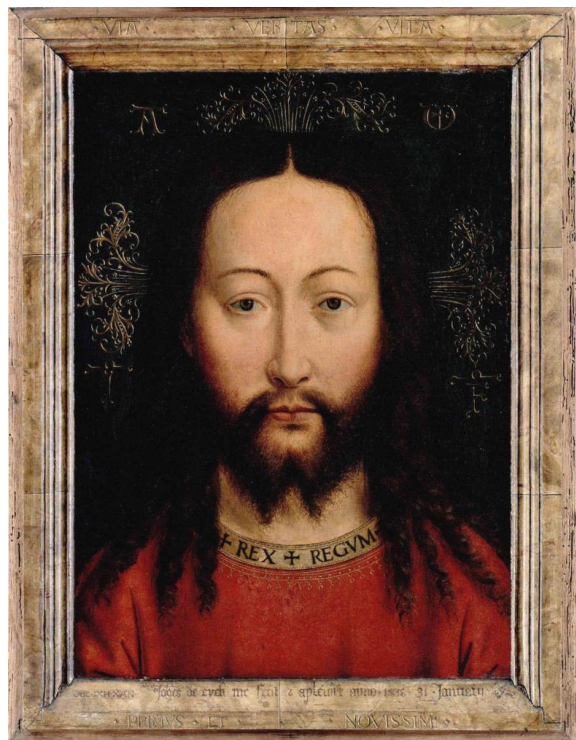
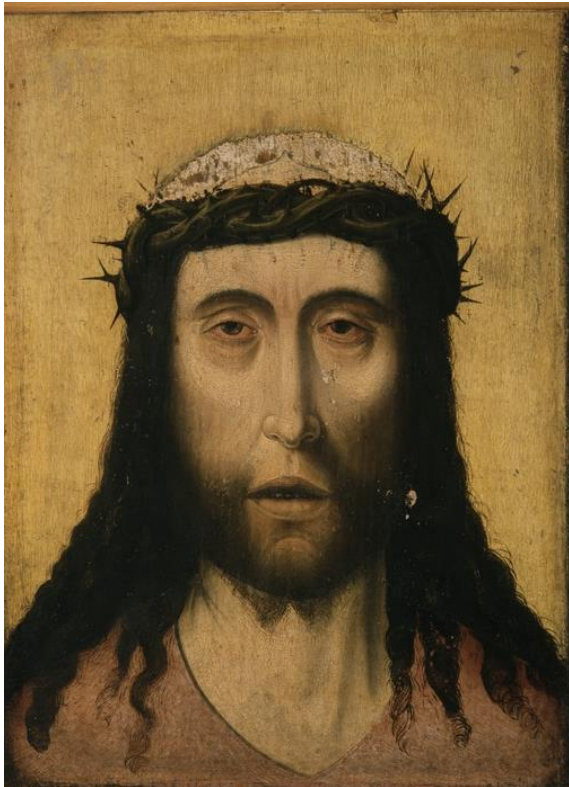*Figure 19. Follower of Jan van Eyck, Holy Face, after 1438. 44 × 32 cm.*

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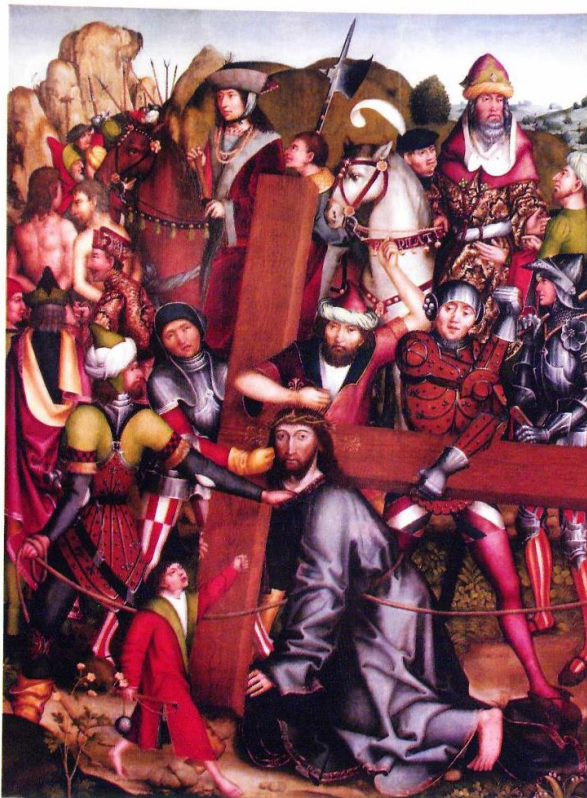
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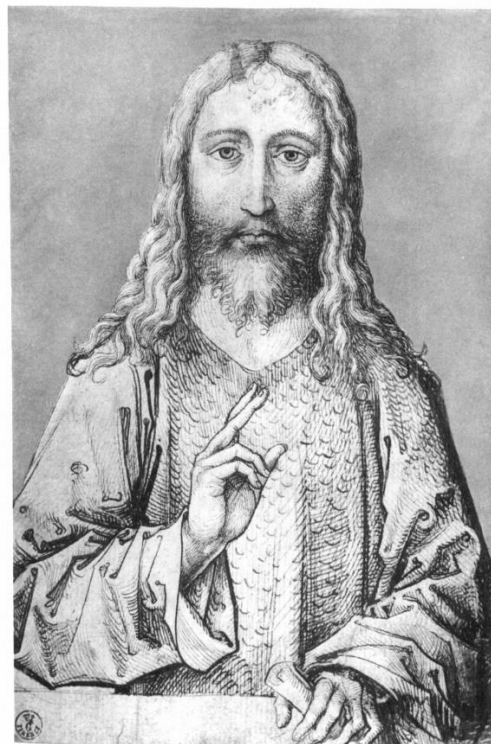*Figure 32. Bavarian (Mittich) painter, Christ Crowned with Thorns (Ecce Homo), 1498. 72 × 55 cm.*

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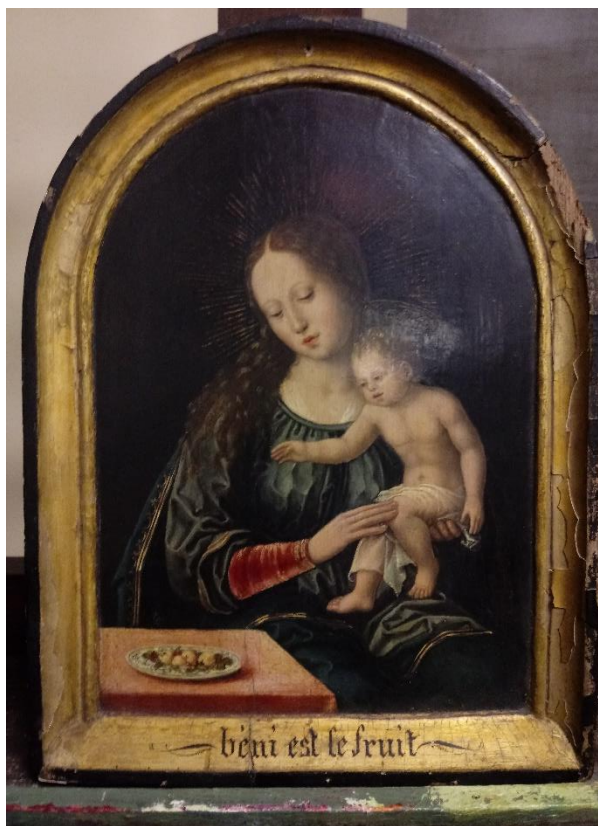
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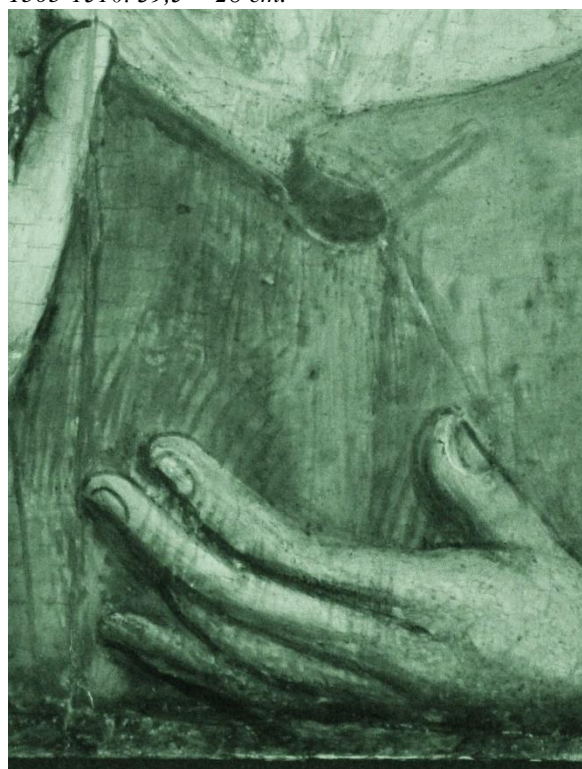*Figure 36. Pietro di Giovanni d'Ambrogio, Mary, 1440's. 47,5 × 29,9 cm.*

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