

AN OPEN AND SHUT CASE?

AN INVESTIGATION INTO JAN DE BEER'S *JOSEPH AND
THE SUITORS* AND THE *NATIVITY AT NIGHT*

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Abstract

The reason for this dissertation is to highlight the Barber Institute of Arts exceptional double-faced panel, *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night*, by Jan de Beer. This essay investigates the substance, purpose and original destination of the paintings to firmly establish their great significance amongst the art of the Northern Renaissance. Furthermore this work aims to help re-establish de Beer's reputation. In the sixteenth century he was one of the best and best known painters in Antwerp, when it was the most cosmopolitan city in Europe and yet outside of a small circle he is hardly appreciated today.

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Abbreviations

The Barber Institute of Fine Art	-	The Barber
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum	-	The Thyssen-Bornemisza
<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i>	-	<i>Suitors</i>
<i>Nativity at Night</i>	-	<i>Nativity</i>

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(c.1520, oil on a double-faced oak panel, 138.4 cm x 138.4 cm, Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Art).

INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of this thesis is to highlight the quality and importance of the Barber Institute's double-faced panel, *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night* (figs 1, 2).¹ To accomplish this, the paintings and their subjects will be considered through four relevant strands: depiction and meaning, attribution, purpose and, finally, location.

Firstly what exactly the paintings depict and their meaning will be questions used to investigate the theological narratives underpinning the paintings. It will be argued that the paintings have an undercurrent of morality and of condemning human vices which makes them pertinent to contemporary life. In *Joseph and the Suitors*, in particular, this is accompanied by genre highlights and with barely disguised humour, almost certainly discernible to contemporary viewers. In the discussion relating to attribution, the second area, this thesis will show that there is still much to add regarding the painting's attribution, and, in particular, this thesis will challenge the view that the only master involved in the work was Jan de Beer (1475-1528), who was active in Antwerp, when it was the effectively the economic capital of Europe. Indeed, it will be proposed that de Beer worked with a landscape specialist to produce the *Nativity at Night*, a proposal that has some bearing on the date of the Barber panel. The third subject to investigate is the panel's original purpose, and this will focus on a point previously discussed by other scholars regarding the ecclesiastical fitment that the

¹ The sequence of the front and the reverse of the panel will be made clear in the section relating to the reconstruction of the panel in Chapter 3 when it will be demonstrated that the front face of the panel is *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night* is the reverse.

panel originally belonged to. Evidence will be presented to show that other de Beer panels, now in Madrid, were originally associated with the Birmingham paintings and this will enable a reconstruction of the works' probable original composition.² The final theme relates to the panel's original destination, and will conclude that is likely to have been near Antwerp.

There are very few recorded facts, and no known contemporary documents which directly relate to the paintings. However they are painted on either side of a panel which is formed of oak planks.³ In 1915 Max Friedländer attributed the paintings to Jan de Beer, they had previously been given to Henri met de Bles by William Weale.⁴ Friedländer's amended attribution was based on the discovery in 1902 by Hulin de Loo⁵ of a drawing of nine male heads in the British Museum that bears the signature of de Beer and also the name of Joachim Patinir, who was a landscape painter.⁶ In 1938, Friedländer included de Beer in his volume on Antwerp Mannerists, in which he published the painter's entire oeuvre.⁷ In 1978 Dan Ewing wrote his PhD thesis entitled the *Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer* in which he adjusted the oeuvre, as well as discussing the *Nativity* but less so *Joseph and the Suitors*, and Ewing also suggested that the Barber paintings could be linked to ones in Madrid,⁸ but this was dismissed in 2005 by Peter van den Brink.⁹ More recently Ewing and van den Brink have written several articles about Jan de Beer, his work and his circle, including ones in *Extravagant*,¹⁰ a catalogue of sixteenth-century Antwerp paintings and drawings between 1500 and 1530.

² Peter Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, the Betrothal of the Virgin', Kristin Lohse Belkin and Nico van Hout, eds, *Extravagant, A Forgotten Chapter of Antwerp Painting 1500-1530*, exhibition catalogue, Koninklijk Museum Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, 2005, 104. Dan Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, PhD Thesis, Michigan, 1978, 255.

³ Barber curatorial file and the author's examination of the panel during restoration, July 2011, viewed without its current frame (the restorer did not allow photography).

⁴ Max J. Friedländer, 'Die Antwerpener Manieristen von 1520', *Jahrbuch der könig-lich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 1915, 11. Barber curatorial file, July 2011. Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 339.

⁵ Friedländer, *Die Antwerpener Manieristen von 1520*, 36, 65-91. Herbert Cook; Maurice Brockwell, 'A Catalogue of the Pictures of Doughty House, Richmond and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook', Baronet, ed., vol. III, 'English, French, Early Flemish, German and Spanish Schools and Addenda', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 30, No.168, March, 1917, 117.

⁶ A.E Popham, *Catalogue of Drawings by Dutch and Flemish Artists Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, vol.5, *Dutch and Flemish Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, London, 1932, 4. Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, Study of Nine Male Heads,' *Extravagant*, 95.

⁷ Max J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Paintings, the Antwerp Mannerists, Adriaen Ysenbrant*, trans. Heinz Norden, vol.11, New York and Washington, 1974, 14-21(the original was printed between 1924 and 1937 in Berlin and Leyden).

⁸ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 252-253.

⁹ Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, Study of Nine Male Heads', *Extravagant*, 95-96.

¹⁰ Ewing, 'Pseudo-Bles, The Adoration of the Magi', 'Pseudo-Bles, The Beading of St John the Baptist', 'Jan de Beer, Triptych with the Adoration of the Shepherds', 'Jan de Beer The Crucifixion', 'Jan de Beer and workshop

The approach of this dissertation is partly iconographical and partly formalist and it will comment on some of the essential elements involved in understanding early sixteenth-century Netherlandish paintings, such as their setting and accoutrements for mass and prayer. Furthermore it will place the paintings in their economic and socio-political context which was especially important in the panel's place of production, in the multi-cultural¹¹ commercial and trading city of Antwerp, as well as describing how the iconography would have been perceived by the 'period eye', the particular visual experience, taste and conditioning of the time.¹²

The structure of this thesis will follow the aims previously indicated. In Chapter One, it will consider the panel's subject matter, particularly *Joseph and the Suitors*, which will be followed, in Chapter Two, by an examination of the panel's authorship. In Chapter Three the work's original function will be investigated and, in the light of the knowledge now gained, a reconstruction of the work, in its original form, will be attempted. In Chapter Four its production and location will be examined in order to explore the potential status of the commission.

(Master of Amiens?), Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi', 'Jan de Beer', The Adoration of the Magi', 'Jan de Beer and workshop (Aert de Beer?), The Lamentation', 'Jan de Beer, The Crucifixion', 'Master of the Errera Sketchbook, Imaginary view of Jerusalem with a circular temple', 'Anonymous, Imaginary view of Jerusalem with a circular temple', 'Master of Amiens, Au juste pois véritable balance', 'Master of Amiens, Death of the Virgin', 'Northern French Painter (?), Altarpiece wing with The Ascension and Saints Martha and Lazarus', 'Jan de Beer, Birth of the Virgin', Kristin Lohse Belkin and Nico van Hout, eds, *Extravagant*, 2005, 54-94, 102. Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, Study of Nine Male Heads', Jan de Beer, Saint Luke painting the Virgin and Child', 'Jan de Beer, Saint Luke recording the Annunciation to Zacharias', 'Jan de Beer, the Betrothal of the Virgin', 'Jan de Beer, The Tree of Jesse', 'Jan de Beer, Christ at Emmaus', 'Copy after Jan de Beer, Christ at Emmaus', 'Attributed to Jan de Beer, The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew', 'Jan de Beer, Christ taking leave of his mother and Christ's entry into Jerusalem', 'After Jan de Beer, Ecce Homo', 'After Jan de Beer, The Deposition', 'Jan de Beer, The Penitent St Jerome', Kristin Lohse Belkin and Nico van Hout, eds, *Extravagant*, 2005, 90-117.

¹¹ Susie Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, Oxford, 2008, 4, 5, 71. 'These centres and regions [Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, Tournai, and Antwerp] were, at varying points, the most commercially and culturally successful, and the areas of greatest industrialization. Their importance is vividly conveyed in the travel account of Pero Tafur (c.1410-c.1484), a nobleman from Castile, who in the 1430's undertook an extensive journey across Europe. "Here, in Northern Europe, were the most cosmopolitan cities he had seen anywhere..." Antwerp, Bruges' rival as the commercial centre of Europe, left him lost for words: "I do not know how to describe so great a fair as this. I have seen others at Geneva in Savoy, at Frankfurt in Germany and at Medina in Castile, but all these together are not to be compared with Antwerp". Antwerp had a great market-place and port which attracted merchants and sailors of many countries including, 'England, Scotland, the Baltic, Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

¹² Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, Oxford and New York, 1988, 29-103, 36, 40. Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven and London, 2008, 143-153.

CHAPTER ONE

VIEWING THE PANEL

This chapter will analyse the panel's two paintings and explain what they depict and what they mean, which will ultimately help us understand its use. It will identify and comment on contemporary texts on which the paintings are likely based and it will also make reference to comparable works of art, including examples from the Antwerp Mannerists, a group in which Friedländer placed de Beer. The subjects depicted in each panel will be discussed in detail, and it will be suggested that this work is not simply a product of the Antwerp Mannerists' flamboyant style of painting, the group described by Friedländer as having a turbulent penchant for novelty,¹³ but a very deliberate and successful attempt by the painter to deliver a theologically appropriate, pedagogic, and in the case of *Joseph and the Suitors*, an entirely modern image. The two sides of the panel will initially be considered separately and later in the chapter discussed jointly.

JOSEPH AND THE SUITORS

This painting will be discussed according to several main themes that I have connected with its iconography. One is the lineage from the old order to the new order, linked with Joseph's ancestry; a second is betrothal and family; a third subject concerns prophecies of sacrifice; and a fourth concerns character types and nationalities. It will be demonstrated that underpinning all these themes is the overarching concept of God sacrificing his Son to redeem man's sins.

The subject depicted in *Joseph and the Suitors*, also known as the *Flowering of Joseph's Rod*, depicts Joseph with the suitors at the moment when a bearded, meek and relatively simply dressed Joseph has been chosen to be the Virgin's husband, indicated by the flowering of his rod, and the painting clearly shows the disappointments of the contemporarily dressed failed suitors (fig. 1). The story is not strictly based on a biblical text, although it recalls the Old Testament story in which

¹³ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 14-21.

Aaron's rod suddenly flowered without any human intervention.¹⁴ The subject also derives from apocryphal and other devotional texts. For example a version of the flowering of Joseph's rod is briefly recounted in the *Golden Legend* as follows:

Each unmarried but marriageable man of the House of David is to bring a branch the altar. One of these branches will bloom and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove will perch upon its tip, according to the prophecy of Isaiah. The man to whom this branch belongs is, beyond all doubt, the one who is to be the virgin's spouse.¹⁵

The same story is also told in the Protoevangelium of James¹⁶ and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew¹⁷ and in the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary¹⁸, although, in the last of these, the episode varies slightly in that each of Mary's suitors brought a rod to the High Priest in the Temple and, as a sign that Joseph had been chosen to become her husband, his rod flowered, as is depicted in the Barber panel.¹⁹ The betrothal itself is included in the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke.²⁰ Since the story of the flowering of Joseph's rod is prefigured by Aaron's similar story in the Old Testament, it is reasonable to consider that the painted subject was intended as a reminder to viewers of the old order before Christ, as well as the new order to come.

It is suggested here, in addition, that the change from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from Judaism to Christianity, is traditionally signified by the High

¹⁴ Num.17:1-11. Moses 5:10:11:12. James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Boulder, 2008, 1. Aaron was the elder brother of Moses. Aaron was the priest of the Israelites when they were in the wilderness, and so was the prototype of the ancient Jewish priesthood, which was traditionally descended from his sons. Specifically to settle the leadership issue between all the tribes of Israel, the head of each tribe brought a staff to the temple, next day it was found that Aaron's staff had flowered and produced almonds. Therefore Aaron became the leader. Jerome's account of the choosing of Joseph from the other suitors for the Virgin is an adaptation from Aaron's story.

¹⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans., William Granger Ryan, vol.1, New Jersey and Chichester, 1993, 37-38.

¹⁶ Protoevangelium of James 9.

¹⁷ Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew 8.

¹⁸ Gospel of the nativity of Mary 9.

¹⁹ Harris Cowper, *The Apocryphal Gospels and Other Documents Relating to the History of Christ*, London, 1867, 42. Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 252.

²⁰ Matthew 1:18. Luke 1:26-27. Matthews Gospel is the first Gospel of the New Testament and its narrative of the events leading up to Christ's birth tends to be written from the male point of view, or from Joseph's perspective and establishes Joseph's royal genealogy from the Old Testament and creates Joseph's credentials and importance as the step- father of Christ This birth narrative begins by stating Joseph's fiancé is pregnant and that Joseph knows he can not be the father and that an Angel informed him of Mary having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and so marries Mary. The narrative of the flowering of the rod is not in St Luke's Gospel, which includes the Birth narrative. St Luke's Gospel tends to tell the story of Christ's birth from the female perspective, from Mary's, when an angel came, not to Joseph in a dream, but to Mary and tells her she will bear a son and that she has been impregnated by the Holy Ghost

Priest, who is dressed as a Jew; he has a full beard, indicative of his faith. He is pulling at Joseph to show that he is the chosen suitor, which also indicates that Joseph has been chosen to help facilitate the change from the old Jewish world to the new Christian one by being Christ's step-father. The suitor on the far left is also depicted as a Jew because the figure wears a red beard, and red beards and hair were a pejorative indicator up to 1600 of the Jewish race.²¹ The sash around this suitor is also made up of linked gold rings and though this is a sign of wealth, a single yellow ring was a negative badge of Jews at the time;²² also he wears a traditional Jewish tallit with points and tassels (figs 3, 4). He is separated from the other suitors just as Jews were often separated in the community.²³ Yet the depiction of this separated 'other' in the Birmingham panel is, by contrast with contemporary standards, mild and inoffensive.²⁴ Given the painting's likely position inside a church, rather than attempting to be offensive to Jews, which was often the case, the depiction of Jews in *Joseph and the Suitors* could be considered theologically sound and inclusive.²⁵ This is because any theologically true representations of the suitors should include a Jew because the suitors were each descended from the tribes of Israel, and, simplistically, the tribe of Israel from Judea became Jews.

However, the likely Jewish suitor, evidently rich, appears to hold prayer beads. Jews do not use prayer beads and instead, if necessary, they count the knots on their tallit. The beads which the Jewish suitor holds are similar to the beads on the back shelf in

²¹ Andrew Colin Gow, *The Red Jew: Anti-Semitism in the Apocalyptic Age, 1200-1600*, Leiden, 1995, 69. Mitchell Merback, ed., *Beyond The Yellow Badge, Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 2007, Leiden and Boston, 1.

²² Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, Oxford, 2010, 106, 107. Merback, *Beyond the Yellow Badge*, ed., 2. 'For just as the implementation of the badge after Fourth Lateran allowed for a more precise social labelling and tracking of Jews within a society already organized hierarchically, the special recognition given by art historians to those forms of *pictorial* labelling that first emerged in the High Middle Ages— not only the **circular badge**, but the conical hat, the hooked nose and bulbous eyes, pseudo-Hebrew letters, Mosaic tablets and so on—offered an earlier generation of scholars the promise of being able to track Jews.'

²³ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 83. Baxandall refers to images that were occasionally used to depict a group which was offensive to the greater community, particularly Jews by the majority Christian group. He notes this is particularly so on a high altar where the altarpiece was the offering of the community rather than an individual donor. Furthermore he cites a particularly racist example of Jewish persecution in Regensburg cathedral of a carved *judensau*, which demonstrates pornographic acts of a pig and a Jew and shows the hatred, fear and resentment felt by the majority Christian community to the Jews.

²⁴ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Germany*, 83.

²⁵ Robert C. Davis and Beth Lindsmith, *Renaissance People, Lives that Shaped the Modern Age*, London, 2011, 136, 138. The ambiguity towards immigrant Jews (a result of the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492), in Antwerp inspired both violence and assimilation and so some Jews did convert to Catholicism. Furthermore Jews were often money lenders in sixteenth-century Europe as the professions were barred to them and also because Catholics had religious issues about the sin of usury, and so avoided money lending. Therefore Jews were critical to the economy and to Catholic merchants and nobility and plausibly gained greater business if they at least 'looked both ways', that is had a show of converting their faith and yet did little in practice, as suggested, also plausibly alluded to in Metsys *Money Lender and his Wife*.

Metsys' *Money Lender and His Wife*, (1514; Paris, Louvre) (fig. 5). The beads in the *Money Lender and his Wife* are described as a rosary although they are only five beads on a small hoop, as are the beads in *Joseph and the Suitors*.²⁶ It is suggested here that the suitor's rosary also represents the change from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the old Jewish way and the new Christian way and hence the reason to depict him as Jewish but now with the Christian symbolism of the rosary.

Linked to the old order and the change to the new order is the theme of lineage. This author suggests the painting establishes the importance of the purity of the ancestors of Joseph and in particular that Joseph descends from Abraham via King David and the prophets.²⁷ This may be indicated by the bronze panel on the far left of the painting above the altar, depicting Joseph's ancestors Abraham and his son Isaac. Furthermore, the altar boy is depicted under the bronze panel, he is alone on the left and arguably alludes to King David, sometimes shown as a boy because he defeated Goliath when he was a shepherd boy.²⁸ In addition the painting also shows ten suitors and it is probable that the suitors each represent the lost tribes of Israel (often referred to as twelve tribes, but also as ten tribes) who descended from Isaac's son Jacob, who was renamed Israel, and so also descended from King David.²⁹ Thus de Beer has stressed the purity of Joseph's genealogy in a chronological left to right sequence.

The piety of Christ's earthly family was a recurring theme in art of this period, but Marian examples are much more common than Joseph subjects. However an example of Joseph's lineage showing him being the chosen suitor can be found on the interior (first left shutter) of the Brussels-produced *Infancy* Altarpiece of Saluzzo (c.1500; Brussels, Maison de Roi) (figs 6, 7, 8).³⁰ When closed the Saluzzo altarpiece represents the *Tree of Jesse* and it opens to reveal several scenes from Joseph's life

²⁶ Gray Henry and Susanah Marriott, *Beads of Faith*, London, 2002, 22-25, references different forms of rosary beads. Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages*, Pennsylvania, 1997. www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/moneylender-and-his-wife, accessed September 4th 2013.

²⁷ Matthew 1:1-16.

²⁸ Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Boulder, 2008, 95.

²⁹ Luke: 3:23-38.

³⁰ www.brussels.be/artdet, accessed June 22nd 2013. The Saluzzo altarpiece includes the following episodes from Joseph's life, birth of Joseph, the benevolence of Joseph, Joseph training to be a carpenter, the suitors, the betrothal (highlighted on figure 8), the census in Bethlehem, life in Nazareth, the flight to Egypt, Jesus with the scribes and the death and burial of Joseph. This altarpiece (c.1500-1510) is attributed to the studio of Jan Borman, the carver, and the painted shutters to the van Orley family, possibly Bernard or his father, Valentino.

including both the *Testing the Suitors* and the *Betrothal*.³¹ The shutters of this painted Joseph cycle in turn open again to reveal a wooden sculptured Marian cycle, which again includes the Betrothal scene, which means that the Betrothal scene is shown twice, once painted and once carved and both parents' lineages are depicted (figs 6, 7, 8). A similarly carved and painted altarpiece (c.1540; Belgium, Enghien, St Nicholas' Church), but with only one set of shutters depicts *Joseph and the Suitors*, on its inside, left shutter, and this is believed to come from Antwerp (figs 9, 10, 11).³² When the Enghien altarpiece is closed the scene depicted is from Mary's mother's family, St Anne, but when open a *Joseph and the Suitors* painted scene is adjacent to a wooden carved betrothal scene in the centre of the altarpiece, thus once again, indicating both Christ's parents' lineages and their coming together at their betrothal. Scenes of Joseph with the Suitors are rare and ones without the Virgin more so.

The second subject area in the panel to consider is the Betrothal; *Joseph and the Suitors* is particularly unusual because it does not include an image of the Virgin.³³ The subject of the choosing of the suitors in art of this period was generally accompanied by the wedding of Mary and Joseph because this indicated the bonding of both ancestral lines and the portent of the Christ child to come (as Mary was considered the Holy Mother of God).³⁴ Therefore few such examples of the subject without Mary exist, but there is a version of the *Flowering of St Joseph's Rod* (location unknown³⁵) by the so-called Master of the Antwerp Adoration who was active, c.1505-1530 (fig. 12). Ewing considers this panel a derivative of the Birmingham painting and the present author endorses his view. Although it is altogether a smaller, plainer, less competent painting than the Birmingham panel, it nonetheless shows several compositional and facial similarities. More usually scenes of Joseph with the suitors are placed next to, or integrated with the betrothal scene (figs 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19). An earlier example by Robert Campin is his *Betrothal of the Virgin* (c.1425; Madrid, Museo del Museo del Prado), which shows the suitors

³¹ The tree of Jesse is a traditional depiction of Christ's ancestry; Jesse was David's father.

³² Hans Nieuwdorp, ed. *Antwerp Altarpieces*, exhibition catalogue, Antwerp Cathedral, 1993, 98.

³³ Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and The Altarpiece, Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Paintings*, New York, 1984, 13. Lane states the Virgin appears more frequently in Netherlandish paintings than any other subject and figures 13-19 show how rare are scenes without the Virgin, either in the same painting or paired with another as in Padua.

³⁴ The marriage of Joachim and Anna, the Virgin's parents, is depicted in several carvings and altarpieces including the Antwerp altarpiece in St Mary Church in Lübeck and the woodcuts of the story of *Joachim and Anna* by Albrecht Dürer, which signifies the purity of the Virgin's and her birth.

³⁵ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 1974, 72.

on the left side of a dual scene which has the Betrothal on the right (fig. 13). This panel also aligns the choosing of the suitors with the Old Testament represented by the Jewish temple, and the betrothal with the New Testament in a Christian church. An example from the late fifteenth-century in Antwerp Cathedral, and attributed to a follower of Roger van de Weyden (1400-1464), also combines the flowering of the rod with the betrothal (fig. 14).

Italian scenes of the suitors without Mary include Giotto's fourteenth-century *Life of the Virgin* fresco (1305; Padua, Scrovegni Chapel), and again this scene is then followed by an image of the Betrothal (fig 15, 16). Other Italian versions also show the suitors but are again combined with their marriage; for example, the *Betrothal of the Virgin* (c. 1501; Caen, Musée des Beaux Arts) by Pietro Perugino, and the derivative of this by Raphael (1504: Milan Pinacoteca di Brera), which both show the suitors and the betrothal together (figs 17, 18). No Italian examples of *Joseph and the Suitors* without Mary are known. A French fifteenth-century manuscript, the *Marriage of the Virgin* painted by Jean Fouquet also shows the suitors and the Betrothal (Chantilly, Musée Conde) (fig. 19).³⁶ The above suggests that accompanying the *Suitors* originally would have been a *Betrothal* because, as discussed, existing panels depicting Joseph and the suitors together with the Betrothal are relatively rare and, without the Betrothal, even rarer.

The subject of matrimony and family was promulgated, especially by secular patrons, because for the increasingly affluent, powerful and confident middle class, marriage often developed primarily into an effective economic unit. Therefore, it is not surprising perhaps that Christ's parents and grandparents, particularly St Anne and

³⁶ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 29-31. Italian (and French) fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth-century painting examples are sometimes relevant to the painters of the North because of the cross fertilisation of ideas. For example 'the Neapolitan humanist Pietro Summonte remarked in 1524, 'works from Flanders were the only ones reputed fashionable'. However as Nash point out, 'the view from Italy can also affect the way we interpret the function of works of art made in the North.'

Akira Kofuku, 'Landscape with Virgin and Child or Rest on the Flight to Egypt-Patinir and Early Flemish Painting', *Bruegel and Netherlandish Painting, from the National Gallery Prague*, Tokyo, 1990, 38, 'the desire to imbibe the spirit and forms of Italian Renaissance was a common basis of action for Netherlandish painters of the sixteenth century...'. Also 'these turn-of-the-century developments coincided with the dawn of Italianism in the fifteenth century, Flemish painters were in a position of producing nourishment to Italian painters, but this relationship was reversed in the sixteenth century'.

Stephanie Schrader, 'Gossart's (Gossaert) "Sojourn in Rome", Man, Myth and Sensual Pleasures', *Jan Gossart's Renaissance*, New York and London, 2002, 45 (though Jan de Beer is not known to have travelled to Italy), his fellow Antwerp citizen, Jan Gossaert who was active from 1503 and who died in 1532, was known to have travelled to Italy with his patron, Philip of Burgundy in 1508. nationalgallery.org.uk, accessed June 10th, 2013.

depictions of the Holy Family, were popular as exemplars of family life in commercial areas particularly in and around Flanders. Numerous representations exist, such as the Master of the Antwerp Adoration's *Holy Family* (c.1505-1530; destroyed; previously in Nuremberg) (fig. 20). In addition humanist and Reformation authors also helped encourage the value of marriage,³⁷ as promulgated by Rotterdam-based Desiderius Erasmus in his *Encomium matrimonii* (1520) and his *De Institutio Christiani matrimonii* (1526) and also by Martin Luther in his *Vom Ehelichen Leben* (1522).³⁸

It is argued here that besides the particular association of marriage and family, a third theme of prophesying sacrifice is also emphasized, partly because the bronze panel on the altar shows Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac and this depicts the customary prefiguration of Christ's death.³⁹ There are further indicators of sacrifice in that most of the carved male figures that can be identified are prophets (top and centre back of the painting, figs 1, 21, 22). The image of a prophet, who told of the coming of Christ, is also a sign that God had kept his promise of sacrificing his son to save mankind.⁴⁰ The prophets can also be related to the Eucharist, which is the sacrament instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, during which Christ designated the bread and wine as his body and blood. Specifically the larger bronze figure on the column at the top of the panel appears to be a representation of Moses (fig. 21). The figure, possibly with horns and a book also holds a staff which represents the miracle of the rock, in which Moses strikes the rock with his staff and water gushes from a spring.⁴¹ This event was seen by the contemporary Church as an omen of the water and blood that flowed from Christ's side and thus this bronze statue is a reference to Christ's ultimate Crucifixion and sacrifice.⁴² However, the figure is painted small and so it is possible that this bronze figure is Aaron, his attributes are the rod and a censer (fig.21).⁴³ Aaron's inclusion in the panel may recall the story of both Aaron and Joseph's flowering rod and show the cycle between the Old and New testaments. The mid-size stone statue

³⁷ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformation*, 2010, Chichester, 95.

³⁸ Arie Wallert, Gwen Tauber and Lisa Murphy, *The Holy Kinship*, Amsterdam, 2001, 10.

³⁹ The bronze compares with earlier work, such as Jan van Eyck's, *Madonna and Canon van der Paele* which also contains, amongst others, a scene of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, painted to appear as if carved. The polychromed altarpiece in the *Holy Kinship* in Rotterdam attributed to Geertgen tot Sint Jans, is another earlier but similar example.

⁴⁰ Rosie Giorgi, ed., Stefano Zuffi, *Saints in Art*, California, 2003, 141.

⁴¹ Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13.

⁴² Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols of Art*, Philadelphia, 2008, 222.

⁴³ Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols of Art*, 62. A censer is a device for burning incense.

(second from the right on the panel, appearing as on an un-shown plinth) is Moses with the list of commandments or perhaps as his staff turns into a serpent, as described in the Bible in Numbers (figs 1, 22).⁴⁴ In addition a possible example of Christ's sacrifice is the straw hat clutched by Joseph, perhaps referencing the Eucharist because the straw represents wheat and thus the bread of Christ's body. This is arguably also the case in many contemporary altarpieces, for example Adriaen Ysenbrant's *Altarpiece of the Nativity*, (c.1521; New York, Metropolitan Museum Of Art) which depicts the Christ child lying in a basket, a reference perhaps to a bread basket and so again potentially referencing Christ's body and the Eucharist (fig. 23). Furthermore as well as the organist in the organ loft at the top of the painting, there are thirteen figures in the panel, possibly representative of the Last Supper and this again prefigures Christ's ultimate sacrifice. Finally the theme of sacrifice and lineage may be combined in the figure of the boy David because, not only was he a direct ancestor of Christ, but he was the son of Jesse who was often depicted contemporarily as the root or father of the Church (fig 6). The similarity between Christ as the son of God and David as the son of the father of the Church resulted in David being seen as a prefiguration of Christ.⁴⁵

A fourth theme embodied in the painting is the moralizing and didactic tone highlighted by the contrast between Joseph and the other suitors, and I propose that de Beer is making a clear distinction between the devout, virtuous, Joseph, and the mercantile rich, failed suitors. Joseph is depicted traditionally bearded, although not necessarily older than the other suitors, and with lowered eyes, evidently surprised by being chosen as the Virgin's suitor. This is because the Priest is shown having to tug at Joseph's clothing to tell him this. Joseph is relatively soberly dressed and the only suitor wearing pattens, which are wooden platforms on shoes and I suggest they indicate that he is a lowly tradesman (a carpenter), because he needed to walk the bad street surfaces and so needed to raise his shoes from the mud and grime. In contrast all the other suitors wear flat leather pumps or fine light coloured boots, indicating they are gentlemen and able to afford to ride over or avoid the dirtier parts of the town. The message seems clear that the humble and poor are rich in God's eyes and that monetary wealth is not relevant to God.

⁴⁴ Numbers 21:4-9.

⁴⁵ Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 95.

I also proposes that the pattens could also be linked to the writings of St Birgitta of Sweden, which were published in the Low Countries in the early sixteenth century (and with which the *Nativity at Night* has similarities). She writes of Mary's clothing and in particular that shoes can connote intentions, one represented amendments for past sins and another represented future good intentions, and so Joseph's left patten, noticeably pointing forward could be a metaphor for the good Joseph is about to do.⁴⁶ This author suggests that another even more subtle reason for the dominant pattens is perhaps that the old Medieval Latin for the plate at the Eucharist, which carried the bread, representing Christ, was called a paten.⁴⁷ Thus I propose it is plausible that the artist was inferring that just as Joseph was to become the carrier or supporter of Christ, just as the paten was the supporter of the bread representing Christ. This pun is perhaps depicted more literally in Petrus Christus' *Nativity* (c.1450; Washington D.C., National Gallery), where the Christ child is shown lying on a paten to represent the bread, the host of the mass representing the Christ child, and also prefiguring Christ's ultimate death⁴⁸ (fig. 24).

A notion that obsessed contemporary Europe in relation to theological paintings in churches was the contradiction between the appreciation of great art and the consequential distraction from devotion. Conversely plainer images perhaps allowed greater contemplation with less distraction.⁴⁹ Therefore de Beer may have made the relative contrast between the plain Joseph and the decoratively dressed failed suitors for this reason, but also with a message that the meek shall inherit the earth. This point is further epitomized by Joseph's traditional modesty, a hatless figure with his eyes cast down and his blossomed rod lowered and almost hidden.⁵⁰ Joseph, despite his meek and humble appearance, is of course the suitor who succeeds, and then (as now) symbolic acts of deference were seen as courtly good manners.⁵¹ De Beer, however, has indicated the importance of Joseph's character and his role through his central position within the painting and his dominant size. To expand upon this moral

⁴⁶Bridget Morris, ed., *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Dennis Searby, vol. 1, Oxford, 2008, 7: 1.

⁴⁷ Robert A. Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1968, 7.

⁴⁸ Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1968, 4 - 7. De Loo reported that patinir is the Walloon form and means a maker of pattens, the type of wooden shoe that Joseph is shown wearing in *Joseph and the Suitors*.

⁴⁹ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 93.

⁵⁰ Matthew 1:1-21. Matthew explains that Joseph considered himself unsuitable choice for his young bride and de Beer has managed to make Joseph both one of a crowd and yet separate.

⁵¹ Rublack, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 7.

aspect of the picture's iconography, it is worth noting that in contrast to Joseph's meekness the failed suitors seem raw from surprise, jealousy, anger and disappointment. Of this group of eight suitors, only seven can be properly seen and stand quite separately from the suitor on the left.

I suggest that the group of seven failed suitors that cluster around Joseph could have an association with the seven deadly sins. The most prominent failed suitor, in the right foreground, is ostentatiously dressed in a contemporary manner, with notably pointed shoes, fancy headgear and tunic, loose cut elaborate sleeves as well as a jeweled sword, which is suggestive of the figure of vain pride, as exemplified in the margin of a manuscript of *Piers Plowman* (c.1350-87) (figs 25, 26).⁵² It is also plausible that the figure representing Pride is specifically depicted as an Italian (fig. 26i).⁵³ Several different nationalities populated the great trading city of Antwerp, particularly the states that made up the Italian peninsula and Erasmus described the image of Italians as having, a rather flamboyant way of standing with one leg carrying the weight, the other elegantly bent, 'like a stork', which aptly describes the golden figure at the forefront of *Joseph and the Suitors*. Citing Erasmus's *De civitate murom puerilium*, Michael Baxandall explains the comic profile of Italians in the North was one ranging from syphilis carriers, to the exotic and included this type of stork like pose and so this pose was well understood (and the stork was appropriate because its wings spread so wide that they covered other peoples' space). Furthermore there was a growing distrust of Italians in the North: an anonymous book of 1513 deplores the growth in Italianate luxury and display and implores its readers to 'distrust the south wind'.⁵⁴ It is also plausible the Italian suitor also represented a comment about the Church of Rome, since St Birgitta's *Revelations* states that 'toads and vipers' dwell in

⁵² C. Warren Hollister and Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe, A Short History*, New York, 2002, 373. Citing a manuscript of William Langland, England, c.1350-87.

⁵³ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 133, 136. Though the Italian states sought their own identity, other nationalities, in particular, had a notion of Italian style. Baxandall quotes from Antonio de Beatis from 1517, '*appartimenti a la italiana bellissima et assai bene intese*'. Rublack, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 125, 'everyone in the Renaissance was increasingly confronted with questions of the national style of his or her dress, Castiglione for one chided Italian courtiers in 1528'.

⁵⁴ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 136-139. In 1520, Ulrich von Hutten wrote a paper called the *Thieves* in which Italians were also derided as businessmen with pretensions trying to buy the Church. Baxandall evidences a general distrust between the German and Italianate peoples, even though Italy constituted individual states in the sixteenth-century.

Rome,⁵⁵ which may have been particularly appropriate in 1520's Northern Europe, previous to the reformation.⁵⁶

Turning to the other suitors, the figure in the red tights and green cloak's most ostentatious feature is his bottom and his feet are in a most unusual splayed position allowing his legs to be apart, so he probably represents lust (fig. 26ii). Particularly so as the figure has similarities to Hieronymous Bosch's painting of *Lust* painted on the *Table of the Seven Deadly Sins* (c.1480; Madrid, Museo del Prado) (fig. 26iib), as the male figure also has red tights and a splayed leg. Indeed all the unsuccessful suitors betray a striking caricaturist humour.⁵⁷ Sloth could be represented by the chubby faced man with the brown hat and shown only from his neck upwards (fig. 26iii). Covetousness may be represented by the figure shown in black, perhaps as a contrast to the more colourful candidates, and interestingly the painter seems to have managed to show him envying Joseph for his marrying Mary but also coveting the golden suited suitor figure for his finery (fig. 26iv).

The suitor in black might be assessing the suitor dressed in gold for his wealth, since his black clothes may identify him as a tax-collector, banker or money lender and he does indeed have similarities with Marinus van Reymerswale's financial type in the *City Treasurer* (c.1540; Antwerp, Koninkijk Museum voor schone Kunstan) (fig. 27). This suitor also has similarities to certain works of Metsys such as the *Money Lender and his Wife* (1514; Paris, Louvre) (fig. 5), which is an example of a profane subject that nevertheless has serious religious and moral significance too.⁵⁸ Metsys and other contemporaries of de Beer generally used physiognomic types to connect outward appearance with inner character, for example his *Ugly Duchess* (c.1513; London, National Gallery) (fig. 28). For this Metsys was probably influenced by Erasmus, whom he knew and whose portrait he painted. Erasmus also drew connections

⁵⁵ Morris, ed., *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden*, vol.2, trans., Denis Searby, Oxford, 2008, 35. St Bridget is the name usually used in English but her full name is St Birgitta of Sweden. Rublank, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 144.

⁵⁶ C. Warren Hollister and Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, New York, 2002, 343.

⁵⁷ Rublank, *Dressing Up, Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 86. Rublank generally refers to the contemporary habit of satirizing appearances.'

⁵⁸ *The Money Lender and his Wife*, the painting has both a religious and a moralistic undertone and originally had a verse from Leviticus 19:35 in its frame, 'you shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure'.

between physical appearance and character. It is possible that de Beer also knew Erasmus and was attracted to peoples' looks and their inner character too.⁵⁹

Yet other sins could also be depicted. Anger would be represented by the cross looking suitor in the yellow hat and gluttony represented by the figure in the blue turban, who is barely seen but he has a rotund face and a chin too many (figs 26v, 26vi). The final sin of greed may relate to the last suitor but too little of him is visible to confirm this (fig. 26vii). Yet de Beer also used flawed and obviously contemporarily dressed men to invite comparison with the pious Joseph. The modern dress depicted has a spectrum from black to bright yellow and vibrant colours perhaps indicative of the cloth traders based in Antwerp and of the range of wools and silks particularly available in the city, which may particularly relate to local viewers (see Chapter Four).

Besides Metsys, other contemporaries of de Beer used caricatured poses and expressions and this type of representation is reminiscent of the work of Hieronymus Bosch particularly *Christ Carrying the Cross* (1515-1516; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches, Museum) (fig. 29). In this painting, Bosch contrasts a serene-looking Veronica and Christ with an aggressive, unattractive crowd perhaps challenging the sixteenth-century audience to rise to the Saint's examples, just as Erasmus in his *De civilitate* expounded the opinion that outwardly honest people should also mirror the virtuous condition of the soul.⁶⁰ Bosch used this technique regularly, such as in *The Crowning of Thorns* (1490-1500, London, National Gallery) and also in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1500-1505; Museo del Prado, Madrid) (figs 30, 31, 32).⁶¹ Indeed, as Anna Bryson points out, the body was a 'text' in which good and bad character could be read.⁶² Albrecht Dürer who visited Antwerp in 1520 also may have influenced these figure types because his treatise *Vier Bücher von Menschlicher Proportion* suggested six postures (bent, curved, turned, wound, stretched/squashed and thrust) that he

⁵⁹ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 19. Ewing explains that de Beer and Quintin Metsys were both alderman in the guild and that they appraised a painting together. Larry Silver, *The Paintings of Quinten Massys* (Metsys), Oxford, 1984, 105. Silver discusses the portrait Metsys painted of Erasmus, thus it is plausible that as Metsys knew both de Beer and Erasmus, that de Beer knew Erasmus.

⁶⁰ Davis and Lindsmith, *Renaissance People, Lives that Shaped the Modern Age*, 154, Erasmus was the bestselling author by the time he died in 1536, and was published from 1510.

⁶¹ Lynn F. Jacobs, 'the Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch', *the Sixteenth-Century Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, Winter, Arkansas, 2000, 1009.

⁶² Anna Bryson, 'The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanour and the Image of the Gentleman in Sixteenth-and Seventeenth-Century England,' *Renaissance Bodies*, eds, Lucy Grant and Nigel Llewellyn, London, 1990, 145.

considered were connected to temperament.⁶³ Therefore it is plausible that the link between the form of the body in the Birmingham panel is didactic, geared towards guiding the viewers' moral conduct and therefore was part of the new way of representation and thus of seeing expounded by Erasmus, who was Europe's best-selling contemporary author.⁶⁴ Michael Baxandall has also observed that to imply types of behaviour in the form of a human figure is both 'strong and deep' in older European art and he considers the devotional image a particularly acute case because, as an exemplar of spiritual excellence, the viewers enter into a testing type of encounter and one that directly invites comparison with themselves.⁶⁵

Thus, not only does *Joseph and the Suitors* encourage a direct relationship between the depicted St Joseph and the implicitly sinning viewer, but arguably he invites viewers to consider themselves against the range of sinning types that are depicted. Particularly relevant for the failed suitors is a phrase from *In the Praise of Folly*, where Erasmus ridiculed old men as 'nasty, crumpled, miserable shriveled, bald, toothless and wanting their baubles and who are so pleased with themselves and life that they propose to young women without dowries'.⁶⁶ Therefore if viewers were under any misapprehension that they were more allied to Joseph, the presence of the range of flawed suitors reminds them otherwise. Reindert L. Falkenburg also discusses the theme of worshippers being 'blind with one eye open' and the need for the worshipper to search for the redemption figures as a guide from sin to redemption. Therefore perhaps *Joseph and the Suitors* is a prompt to remind worshippers rather to 'look themselves full in the face'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Church was a major educator through the use of altarpieces, rood screens, woodcut sculptures, stained glass and

⁶³ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 155-157. He explains the four temperaments of character connected to appearance which Dürer referenced as sanguine (well proportioned), choleric (slim and sallow), melancholic (gaunt and dark skinned) and phlegmatic (plump, pale and lethargic).

⁶⁴ Footnote 59.

⁶⁵ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 50, 67, 155-157.

⁶⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly and Letter to Maarten van Dorp*, 1515, ed. A.H.T. Levi, trans. Betty Radice, London, 1993, 48. This verse also has resonance to Quinten Metsys' (attributed), *The Marriage Contract*, c.1520 (Musea de Sao Paulo, Brazil). Also it is the adjacent paragraph in *The Praise of Folly* that Metsys is reputed to have based the depiction of the *Ugly Duchess*.

⁶⁷ Norman E. Muller, Betsy J. Rosasco, James H. Marrow, eds, *Henri Met de Bles, Studies and Exploration of the World of Landscape Tradition*, Princeton, New Jersey and Turnhout, Belgium, 1998, 104.

mystery and morality plays⁶⁸ and so types of sins communicated in a humorous way may achieve more results than some sermons.

It is proposed here that the panel's overall theme of differentiating between the new order - God's purpose - or the devil's influence, is also indicated by the way *Joseph and the Suitors* includes three seemingly innocuous and ambivalent animals, a white cat, a brown dog and a hound (figs 33, 34). Their ambivalence perhaps suggests that it is only animals who are not interested in the Church. In the biblical world dogs were mostly regarded as low life and on the outskirts of society perhaps metaphorically challenging the world of Christ.⁶⁹ However it is plausible the animals may also have been included for other significant reasons because all these animals fit into the theological and moral theme of those touched by God and those touched by the devil. Arnold of Liège writing in the early fourteenth century compared a cat toying with a mouse to the devil playing with a human soul.⁷⁰ This is repeated in a mid-fourteenth century work, *The Prick of Conscience*, which tells a popular proverb of how the cat who eats mice represents the Devil who tempts the weak to disobey the Church's teaching and then devours them and throws them into hell.⁷¹ Yet the cat can also refer to the catcher of the devil, the cat being in this case a trap or bait for the devil. This idea may have been inferred in Robert Campin's mousetrap on the window sill in his *Merode Altarpiece* (1427-1432; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). The mousetrap was potentially set as a trap for the devil and so may allude to St Augustine's suggestion that the Holy cross was a mousetrap set by the devil (figs 35, 36).⁷² A cat can also connote sexual promiscuity and the suitor representing lust's rod points towards the cat.⁷³ Finally the small brown dog of course can be a subtle and homely reminder of the faithful, leading the viewer to perhaps understand God embraces the whole flock.

⁶⁸ Hollister and Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 31, 35, 394, refers to literature written in Latin and only used by the educated and Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 2, refers to the importance of the painted altarpiece to convey church rituals to all.

⁶⁹ James Marrow, 'Circumdedere me canes multi: Christ's Tormentors in Northern European Art of the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance', *The Art Bulletin*, LIX, June, 1977. Lorne Campbell, *National Gallery Catalogues, The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, London, 1998, 189, 190.

⁷⁰ Katherine Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Cats*, London, 2010, 74.

⁷¹ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Cats*, London, 2010, 74, 77.

⁷² Jacques Duchesne-Guillemain, 'On the Cityscape of the Merode Altarpiece' (Liège University), www.metmuseum.org/pubs/journals, 1512690, 1959, 1. Kathryn Walker Meikle, *the Medieval Cat*, London, 2010, 80.

⁷³ Penny Howell Jolly, 'Antonello Da Messina's St Jerome in his Study', *The Art Bulletin*, vol.65, no.2, June 1983, 241.

The hound has generally been the preserve of the aristocracy thus a hound is often the donor's dog and, in this case the hound's collar does contain a red and a white jewel,⁷⁴ the colours perhaps representing the red and white of the House of Burgundy as red (normally set with white) became the principal colour of Burgundy.⁷⁵ A hound also may represent speed which can also indicate both the speedy nature and far-reaching extent of God's mission on earth, an allusion to the amount of work that Christ as the redeemer will need to complete.⁷⁶ Furthermore, a hound, when guarding, was believed to represent the priest and guard against the devil.⁷⁷ Thus depiction of animals in this panel could have been a piece of naturalism used as part of a communication strategy too, gradually, latently taking the onlooker from the known and often mundane to the unknown world, as a linking device for the eye and the mind.⁷⁸

Other subjects indicated in the panel are possibly linked to contemporary micro-historical events. For example, St Bernardino of Siena promoted the cult of Joseph as a reaction against the medieval mystery plays, in which he was often made to look ridiculous. Joseph had been lampooned in mystery plays (which represented vice and virtue allegorically) as downtrodden and a cuckold and hence the didactic message to enable a correctness of this caricature.⁷⁹ The skill of de Beer's composition conveys an impression of a stage with the altar's raised plinth and the curtains around it and with the cast of actors upon it.⁸⁰ This would not be lost on any congregational

⁷⁴ Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, 148, 150, 154. Reference to the hound in Gerard David's *The Virgin and Child with Saints and Donor*. Often aristocratic hounds are shown wearing the colours and coat of arms of their owners and the hound in the Birmingham panel wears a jeweled dog colour embellished with a red jewel, possibly a ruby and by its side a white jewel, possibly a diamond. Similar hounds and donors can be noted in Jan Gossaert's *Siziliano Diptych*, c 1508, with Antonio Siziliano and his hound on the right wing, now in Rome. Also in Jan de Beer's *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and Ewing notes a hound is often a flourish of de Beer's. Roger van der Weyden's frontispiece to the *Chroniques de Hainaut* and Pseudo Bles, *Beheading of John the Baptist* show hounds. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 82

⁷⁵ D'Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton, 'The Order of the Golden Fleece', D'Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton and Jan R. Veenstra, eds, *The Ideology of Burgundy, The Promotion of National Consciousness, 1364-1565*, Leiden and Boston, 2006, 70.

⁷⁶ Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, Nottingham, 2012, 33,

⁷⁷ Ann Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, London, 1990, 50. Yona Pinson, 'Connotations of Sin and Heresy in the Figure of the Black King in Some Northern Renaissance Adorations', *Artibus et Historiae*, vol.17, no.34 (1996), 162.

⁷⁸ Boda and McConville, eds., *Dictionary of Old Testament Prophets*, 2012, 30, 31, 32-34. They state that most of the animals and their allegoric message were known to viewers in a familiar and meaningful way.

⁷⁹ Guido Latr, 'Religious Education and the Bible: Lessons from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', *Westminster Studies in Education* [0140-6728] London, 1996, vol., 19, 1, 51. www.brussels.be/artdet, accessed 22nd June 2013.

⁸⁰ Lane, *The Altar and Altarpieces*, 25.

audience and there were strong attempts by the Church to counteract this contemporary negative Joseph culture.⁸¹

Overall, therefore, this work promotes modesty, manners, simplicity, and honesty and condemns the vices and implores viewers to embrace the opportunity of Christ's coming for their redemption and encourages this by endorsing the purity of lineages of the Holy Family and so to God. Furthermore it is likely the painting was actually on an altar also because the Birmingham painting depicts an altar, and in the sixteenth century the green curtains, depicted either side of the altar in *Joseph and the Suitors*, could have been drawn around the altar.⁸²

THE NATIVITY AT NIGHT

The other side of the panel shows a nocturnal Nativity⁸³ featuring the Madonna, part standing, part kneeling and surrounded by angels dramatically lit by the Christ child and by Joseph's lantern (fig. 2).⁸⁴ Indeed a Nativity scene should be painted at night because it was night when the angel of the Lord came to tell the shepherds of Christ's birth 'and glory shone around them.'⁸⁵ In a similar way to *Joseph and the Suitors* this painting will be discussed with reference to the main themes with which it deals, and these themes are similar in both panels. The first theme to be discussed is the change from the old order to the new one, once again linked to lineage, but in this case also the purity of Mary's family. The prophecy of sacrifice, directly linked to the Eucharist will also be discussed and it will be argued that the most appropriate original setting for the panel was as an altarpiece. Once again this analysis will use literature as well as key examples from previous painting traditions by which the artist is likely to have been influenced.

⁸¹ www.brussels.be/artdet, accessed 22nd June 2013.

⁸² Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 25, '...altar curtains were drawn around altars during the Transubstantiation, to hide the miracle from view and thereby enhance its mystery.' Kim Woods, 'The Netherlandish Carved Altarpiece,' eds Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, Cambridge, 1990, 78. The celebration of the Eucharist takes place at the altar and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is repeated by the ceremony of the consecration, when the wafer is transformed into Christ's body, known as the transubstantiation. Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 229.

⁸³ Night Nativity scenes such as figs 37, 38, 39 and 40 often show the Virgin kneeling over a new born Christ child surrounded by angels, as depicted in the Barber's *Nativity at Night*.

⁸⁴ Barber curatorial file and the authors examination of the panel during restoration, July 2011, viewed without its current frame (the restorer did not allow photography and the author had no more access to the panel). De Voragine, 1993, 197.

⁸⁵ Luke 2:1-20. Matthew 2:1-12. Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 226.

The Nativity story can be found in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. Matthew's Gospel tends to be recounted from Joseph's point of view and features the Magi, and refers to when 'they [the Magi] were to come in to the house, they saw the young child'. However Luke's Gospel simply features Mary and Joseph's travel to Bethlehem and the visit of the shepherds. Luke's Gospels refer to the Christ child being born in a manger, 'the Virgin laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them at the inn.'⁸⁶ The setting of this *Nativity at Night*, however, is in an above ground grotto not a stable or an underground cave and this is probably because in the *Revelations*, St Birgitta wrote that the Holy Family was in a grotto.⁸⁷ St Birgitta had visited Bethlehem in 1370 and had written her *Revelations* after her vision of the Virgin. Her book was published in the Low Countries in 1489 and 1515, at the start of the printing expansion.⁸⁸ The Birmingham *Nativity at Night* seems to be a close representation of the following passage from the *Revelations*:

When her time came she took off her shoes and her white cloak and undid her veil, letting her golden hair fall on her shoulders. Then she made ready the swaddling clothes which she put down besides her.

When all was ready she bent her knees and began to pray While she was thus praying with hands raised the child was suddenly born, surrounded by a light so bright that it completely eclipsed Joseph's feeble candle.⁸⁹

The *Nativity at Night* relies on a previous painting tradition of *Nativity* scenes, and even night nativities are more ubiquitous than scenes of *Joseph and the Suitors*. Hugo van der Goes', Monforte Altarpiece (c.1470; Berlin, Staatliche Museen) is thought to be the first Netherlandish triptych to contain a Night Nativity wing, now lost, but known through several copies; the National Gallery in London has a possible copy of 1520-30, as does the Museo de Evora in Evora (Portugal) and there is another in Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Art Antica, both c.1520-30 (figs 37, 38, 39). A de Beer

⁸⁶ Matthew 1. Luke 1:26-38.

⁸⁷ Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist*, New Jersey, 1995, 97. Harbison discusses other painters using St Birgitta's book as a source for inspiration including Matthias Grünewald.

⁸⁸ Marguerite Tjader Harris, *Birgitta of Sweden*, New York, 1990, 3. Wilhelm Waetzoldt, *Dürer and his Times*, London, 1995, 90, Dürer's prints were circulating illustrating the Virgin's life.

⁸⁹ Morris, ed., *The Revelations of St Birgitta*, trans., Denis Searby, Oxford, 2008, Chapter 7, verses 775-785.

Nativity, the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1510s; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum) has similarities to the Barber painting and another key de Beer work is the *Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi* (c.1518; Milan, Brera), which has a *Night Nativity* on its left shutter (figs 40, 41, 42, 43). Painting traditions often took precedence over literary sources. For example, neither St Luke nor St Birgitta stated that the Magi were present at the birth of Christ at the same time as the shepherds, and yet they are a common presence together in many contemporary *Nativities*. This is not however the case in the theologically correct Birmingham *Nativity*, nor, for example, in van der Goes' Portinari Altarpiece (c.1476-1479; Florence, Uffizi) (fig. 44). This might indicate that de Beer was especially faithful to the text provided by Birgitta as well as suggesting that originally accompanying the Birmingham *Nativity* would have been another panel, showing an *Adoration of the Magi*.

Other night-time *Nativities* can also be compared to the Birmingham panel, including an earlier Geertgen tot Sint Jans (c.1490; London, National Gallery) and an example by a follower of Gerard David, the *Nativity* (c.1500; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) (figs 45, 46). There is also an example of a *Night Nativity* by van der Goes which is framed by curtains (1480; Berlin, Gemaldegaleri) (fig. 47). Another important one is by a follower of Jan Joest of Kalkar (c.1515; New York Metropolitan Museum of Art) (fig. 48). Ewing considers there are a further five, early sixteenth-century, *Night Nativity* scenes which he suggests are by artists belonging to the so-called Antwerp Mannerists. One of these is particularly pertinent because it is painted by the Master of Amiens, who was a pupil of de Beer's. (c.1515-1519; San Francisco, M. H. Young Memorial Museum) (fig. 49).⁹⁰ There was also a *Night Nativity*, by Adriaen Ysenbrant (c.1518; Lübeck, St Mary's), now destroyed.

Returning to the Barber's *Nativity at Night*, the first major theme concerns, just as in *Joseph and the Suitors*, the old world compared to the new one. This theme is alluded to in the section above the shepherds where a tiny figure is portrayed running from the burning fires which suggests that those not embracing Christ will burn in hell. This motif further indicates the destruction of the pre-Christian era, as buildings in ruination featuring in *Nativities* usually do, for example, Jan Gossaert's *Adoration of*

⁹⁰ Dan Ewing, 'Jan de Beer and workshop (Master of Amiens?)', *Extravagant*, 64-66.

the Kings (c.1515; London, National Gallery) (fig. 50). In addition in the far background, at the top of Birmingham's *Nativity at Night* and in the centre of de Beer's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Cologne are similar motifs with works by Bosch. This is demonstrated, for example, in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* which also depicts burning fires and ruined buildings (figs 51, 31, 32). This again is the traditional method artists used to show the end of the old world outside indicating the world before Christ and the start of the new, now that God had sent Christ to redeem man's sins. Further indications of the Old and New Testaments are an ox shown endearingly peering over the Christ child out of the gloom and the ass raising its head to the straw of its manger. These animals are traditionally included in nativities because Isaiah said 'the ox knows its owner and the ass its master's stall; but Israel, my own people, has no knowledge, no discernment,'⁹¹ and this was seen as a prophecy that the Jews would refuse to recognize Christ as the Messiah.

The other de Beer *Night Nativity* panel in Milan does not have the same theological undercurrents of the grander Barber panel, nor the destructive fire (only a small fire in the background, for the shepherds to warm themselves), nor the ox and the ass. This implies that it was important to the patron that the new Christian way (which was not being embraced by Jews) was communicated in the panel, particularly given the similar themes on the reverse, on *Joseph and the Suitors*. Besides the depiction of the destruction of the old, dark, world, is the light of the new one, and the shepherds are arriving on the cave's threshold because they literally, and metaphorically, saw the light and they cross from the old sinful world to the new saviour's realm.⁹²

The panel is dominated by light from the centre of the grotto and particularly the scene around the crib and follows the text in the *Revelations*, which states that 'the divine radiance emanating from the Christ child totally annihilated the material light of the candle'.⁹³ In this central scene the Christ child is emitting the brightest light and so light is being used to signify the new way and also indicates a theological

⁹¹ Isaiah 1:3. Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew references the ox and the ass at the Nativity.

⁹² Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols of Art*, 207, 224, 330. Similarly to the meek Joseph in *the Suitors*, the shepherds represent those choosing Christ's way and possibly their carrying of instruments further endorses that they come in peace, possibly because musical instruments can be contrasted with carrying arms. Hall believes this is derived from Homer's *Odyssey* (8:266-365) where love and war in the form of Venus and Mars, associate Venus with musical instruments and Mars with weapons of war.

⁹³ Harris Cornel, *The Iconography of Christ*, Uppsala, 1924, 9-13. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Art: Its Origins and Character*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1953, vol. I, 46, 125-126.

hierarchy.⁹⁴ The Virgin's face is bathed in the radiance and the aura from the Christ child. Early Christian thinkers, such as pseudo-Dionysius, considered light to be both a symbol of divine light and fittingly an instrument of creation, appropriate for the birth of Christ.⁹⁵ This alludes to Mary's status as most pure and to her unblemished lineage. As God's messengers the angels are included in the sacred light and emit light from the tips of their wings. Indeed light symbolism continues with the grotto which is lit by two circles of light open to the sky, as written in the Apocryphal Book of St James which refers to light and to also Saint Birgitta wrote: 'The cloud withdrew itself ... A great light appeared... So that our eyes could not endure it ... And little by little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared'.⁹⁶ In contrast Joseph, depicted in the shadows by the curtain of the panel, is holding a candle, which is a common Netherlandish motif and it indicates him as being a mere mortal, although a Christian one, with a mortal's light.

The Christ child lies in the painting's centre foreground and the light emitting from Him illuminates the scene, with the Virgin to the left. The Christ child may be centrally positioned to represent the central belief of Catholicism which is that Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist. This is relevant because Catholics believe that during the mass ceremony the priest changes consecrated bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, called the Holy Eucharist and the Christ child appears to lie on a bed of wheat, representing the bread of the Holy Eucharist. In addition, as Erwin Panofsky pointed out, the name Bethlehem (which means House of Bread) was connected with the words 'I am the bread that came down from heaven' from John 6: 41 and, therefore, linked not only with the Eucharist but also Christ's incarnation.⁹⁷ Indeed, as Maurice McNamee suggests, the general symbolism of the naked Christ child repeated by de Beer in this panel was used to emphasis the flesh of the incarnation as

⁹⁴ Morris, ed., *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden*, trans., Denis Searby, Oxford, 2008, 7: 782. Harris, ed. *Birgitta of Sweden, Life and Selected Revelations*, 203. The message given from the light is from a popular written text based upon St Birgitta's vision of the Christ child at night.

⁹⁵ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Altarpieces 1380-1550, Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing*, Cambridge, 1998, 90, Pseudo-Dionysius was a 6th century theologian who considered God as three, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century had grown in popularity in the sixteenth-century, repeatedly quoted Pseudo- Dionysius, and Thomas's works are used by the Council of Trent as reference. Alan Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture, From the Early Church to the Middle Ages*, Burlington, USA, 2009, 172. Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting, its Origins and Character*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1953, 126.

⁹⁶ Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Paintings*, 254. Hall, *Dictionary of the Subjects and Symbols of Art*, 226.

⁹⁷ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Art*, 333-334.

well as the Eucharist and thus concurs with Panofsky's suggestion.⁹⁸ Around the crib, the two angels and the flying angel are all dressed in pastel colours of pale pink, blue and blue/grey. However the fourth angel on the right is dressed in more colourful patterned and dark green clothing and has wings of peacock feathers.⁹⁹ The peacock feathers may represent the ancient belief that the peacock's flesh never decayed and so the peacock became a Christian symbol of immortality and in turn of Christ's resurrection. Consequently the peacock feathers may imply that the new born child is immortal, and although He will sacrifice his life to redeem man's sin, He will rise again and this is why a peacock is often featured in Nativity scenes, such as in Father Angelico's fifteenth-century *Adoration* (Washington, National Gallery).

The angel, with peacock wings and in green, appears to be dressed in priest's vestments and by tracing the use of the vested angel in Flemish painting McNamee has concluded they always symbolise the mass, as also seen in van der Goes' Portinari altarpiece in the Uffizi, and also in other works attributed to de Beer, including the Milan *Nativity*.¹⁰⁰ Given this, one could hypothesize that a priest dressed in vestments actually conducting the mass would have visual associations with the similarly dressed angel in the picture, and so effected an indirect link between him and the Christ child.

Yet another suggestion of future sacrifice is made by the manger, which, according to Ewing, is depicted as an altar and perhaps as a tomb from which the Christ child will ultimately lie in and rise from.¹⁰¹ This is reminiscent of Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1483-85; Florence, Santa Trinità) (fig. 52), where the ox's water trough looks like an altar and a tomb. There is a similar feature in the early sixteenth-century *Adoration* Altarpiece (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Brussels) by the Master of the Antwerp Adoration's, in which the manger is depicted either as tomb or a broken pillar, or both and so, similarly to the broken pillar in the Barber's *Nativity at Night*, represents the pillar the Virgin leant against before giving birth. It is suggested

⁹⁸ M.B. McNamee, 'Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece', *The Art Bulletin*, vol.45, 1963, 143. M.B. McNamee, 'The Origin of the Vested Angel as a Eucharistic Symbol in Flemish Painting', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 54, 1972, 263-78.

⁹⁹ Hall, *Dictionary of the Subjects and Symbols of Art*, 246.

¹⁰⁰ McNamee, 'The Origin of the Vested Angel as a Eucharistic Symbol in Flemish Painting', 263-278. Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 126-127.

¹⁰¹ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 127-128.

the broken pillar in the *Nativity at Night* is a metaphor for the broken old Jewish church and so the new life of Christ but also His future sacrifice, the half pillar possibly connoting His shortened life (fig. 53).¹⁰² Once again this suggests the mass. A similar conspicuous broken pillar can be noted in an early sixteenth century *Adoration*, attributed to the circle of Jan Gossaert (1515; London, National Gallery) (fig. 54).

Both Gospels' Nativity stories are often merged in Renaissance works, but this is not the case in the Birmingham *Nativity*, which depicts St Luke's story, with the shepherds alone, without the Magi.¹⁰³ This may suggest the panel centres around Luke's Gospel, yet it more likely indicates that the Magi adoration was in a separate but associated panel, because surviving complete altarpieces by de Beer show both shepherds and Magi and because this maintains the strict theology and chronology established in the Gospels. De Beer has also created a convincing space which gives a sense of the viewer able to occupy the same space as the suitors, or, as Ewing suggests the fourth side of the worship of the Christ child in the *Nativity*.¹⁰⁴ On one hand the iconography of the *Nativity* is a composite of customary motifs used by van der Goes, by Geertgen, and by Bosch for example, and because of the many motifs, such as the altar used as a manger, the painting appears to have a particular significance to the mass.

In summary of Chapter One, Friedländer and others disparagingly, although not necessarily accurately, called the Birmingham paintings style Antwerp Mannerism due to the exaggerated body poses and extravagant gestures used by painters in the early sixteenth century in and around the Southern Netherlands.¹⁰⁵ The accuracy of this 'ism' is debatable and I would argue particularly so in relation to this double sided panel because the characters and motifs from the *Nativity at Night* are not particularly mannered and nor, indeed, are they in the panel of *Joseph and the Suitors*. The suitors are representatives of types intended for the edification of the viewer and in particular possibly represented sinful behaviour in a way that would be understood

¹⁰² Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols of Art*, 205.

¹⁰³ St Matthew 2:1-13, discusses the visitation of the Magi and St Luke, 2:8-22, discusses the visitation of the shepherds.

¹⁰⁴ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 1978, 124.

¹⁰⁵ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 12, 13, 14.

by a congregation. This point has a bearing on the whole basis of the term Antwerp Mannerists, known for their exaggerated poses because these poses may actually have painted with reasons to depict a type. For example, the early sixteenth-century *Beheading of St John the Baptist* (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen) attributed to the so-called Pseudo Bles shows the executioner resembling the figure of lust in *Joseph and the Suitors*, so Bles could simply be depicting the executioner as lust, and in this case a lust for blood (fig.53a). Therefore instead of the Antwerp Mannerist representing ‘a fad adopted in one way or another by a host of mediocre painters’, as described by Friedländer,¹⁰⁶ they are, I suggest, painted purposefully for learning, for humour and to establish a representative type.

The *Nativity at Night* communicates similar themes to *Joseph and the Suitors*; the old order to the new one, the purity of lineage and Christ’s future sacrifice and also conveys the need to learn from the Holy Family. However rather than through caricature, as depicted in the *Suitors*, in the *Nativity’s* case, the message is conveyed by motifs such as ethereal light, and the size of Joseph. He is shown as large amongst men in the *Suitors* and yet very small amongst the Christ child and the Virgin in the *Nativity at Night*. Joseph has literally been moved to the background in the *Nativity* and the disparity consolidates the Virgin’s higher status. Therefore the need to learn from and aspire to the Holy Family by the use of differences of human type is clearly shown in *Joseph and the Suitors*, yet also the contrast between mortals and saints is depicted in the *Nativity*. The two paintings are rich with mass iconography which probably suggests the panel was an altarpiece.

¹⁰⁶ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 21.

CHAPTER TWO

ATTRIBUTION

This chapter will firstly examine Jan de Beer's life and conclude that he was one of the most esteemed painters in Antwerp in the early 1500s. This will be followed by a resumé of his oeuvre, covering variations of quality and style and also discussing the interventions of his workshop.¹⁰⁷ The third section will look at the so-called Master of 1518 in relation to de Beer and specifically propose that work attributed to the master should instead be attributed to Jan de Beer and his workshop. In the final section I will argue in favour of a possible intervention of Joachim Patinir in the execution of the *Nativity at Night*, which also has implications for the dating of the Barber's panel.

THE HISTORICAL JAN DE BEER

Few details of de Beer's life are known. He was the son of Claus de Beer and was born in or near Antwerp probably around 1475.¹⁰⁸ After completing his apprenticeship with Gillis van Everen, who had a large studio in Antwerp and was actively involved in the St Luke's Guild, de Beer himself enrolled in the guild in 1504. Therefore he had probably worked as a journeyman for several years previously, which was normal practice.¹⁰⁹ Five years later both the older and more established painter Metsys and de Beer served as aldermen at the guild, which strongly indicates that de Beer had achieved a great reputation at a relatively young age, and places him in a circle of the elite of Antwerp painters. Indeed in 1509, de Beer and Metsys were both asked to judge in a dispute over the quality of a painted and carved altarpiece commissioned for the town of Dunkirk.¹¹⁰ In addition there is some further evidence that de Beer, Patinir and Metsys were all closely connected: de Beer to Metsys as fellow guild aldermen and de Beer to Patinir via the British Museum drawing of the *Nine Heads* paper because the *Nine Heads* drawing has both de Beer's and Patinir's names and marks upon it. (fig. 55). Furthermore, when Patinir died (by October 1524) he left two young children under the guardianship of his friend and colleague, Metsys, thus

¹⁰⁷ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 125.

¹⁰⁸ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 1974, 19, 14-30.

¹⁰⁹ Dan Ewing, 'Jan de Beer', *Extravagant*, 223.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Goddard, 'Hendrik van Wueluwe', *Extravagant*, 222. Ewing, 'Jan de Beer', *Extravagant*, 223.

showing a triad of association.¹¹¹ De Beer can also be associated with Dürer through Patinir, because we know from Dürer's diary that Dürer invited Patinir to dinner in August 1520, and Dürer drew Patinir's portrait. In addition Dürer went to Patinir's second wedding, whilst he was in Antwerp.¹¹² De Beer was included in Ludovico Guicciardini's account of the Low Countries, which included famous Netherlandish artists, and was published (at Antwerp) in 1567,¹¹³ and was placed in the select company of Metsys and Patinir.¹¹⁴ This means that de Beer was placed alongside the best artists in Antwerp by his contemporaries at a time when Antwerp was at the centre of European commerce and art, despite this fact de Beer remained relatively un-researched.¹¹⁵

CONSTRUCTING A DE BEER OEUVRE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BARBER PAINTINGS

In 1915 Friedländer attributed the Barber panel to Jan de Beer, rather than to Henri met de Bles as previously given by William Weale, and this has not been disputed since.¹¹⁶ Friedländer's attribution of the Birmingham panel was made possible by the discovery in 1902, by Georges Hulin de Loo, of the signature of Jan de Beer on a study of nine male heads, drawn on purple-brown prepared paper with black chalk and the point of a brush and heightened with white chalk, which is in the British Museum (fig.55). This has relevance to the Birmingham panel because Friedländer, followed by Ewing and others, believed one of the nine heads to be the model for Joseph in the Birmingham *Joseph and the Suitors*.¹¹⁷ The British Museum drawing is

¹¹¹ Lars Hendrikman, 'Quinten Metsys', *Extravagant*, 223.

¹¹² Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, Princeton, 1968, 3.

¹¹³ Lodovico Guicciardini, *The description of the Low Countries and of the provinces thereof, gathered into an epitombe out of the historie of Lodovico Guicciardini*, trans., Thomas Danett, London, 1567, 98.

¹¹⁴ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer', *Extravagant*, 222, 223.

¹¹⁵ Karel Van Mander, *Het Schilder boeck, The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, Harlem, 1603, trans., Hessel Miedema, Netherlands, 1994. De Beer's reputation had potentially been harmed by his exclusion by Karel van Mander in the *Schilder-boeck* published in 1608 in Haarlem. This may be because de Beer's son Aert de Beer was mentioned in the *Schilder-boeck* and he was a renowned glass maker and his reputation had perhaps for a moment in time eclipsed his father's.

¹¹⁶ Footnote 4.

¹¹⁷ Van den Brink, 'Study of Nine Male Heads,' *Extravagant*, 95. Norman E. Muller, Betsy J. Rosasco and James H. Marrow, eds, *Henri Met de Bles, Studies and Explorations of the World Landscape Tradition*, Princeton, New Jersey and Turnhout, Belgium, 1998, 109, 110, where it is noted that during the 1520's in the Netherlands many drawings were on coloured ground.

dated, and as Ewing and others have explained the date can only be read as 1520.¹¹⁸ The heads in the British Museum do indeed have strong resemblance with the attributed work of de Beer, and have become the touchstone for the construction of his oeuvre.

Friedländer suggested that the *Nine Heads* drawing could provide a thin thread on which to hang de Beer's oeuvre; and on this basis he identified the triptych of the *Adoration of the Magi* (c.1518; Milan, Brera) as a de Beer painting, which includes a *Night Nativity* on its left shutter (fig.43). This attribution was also made because the central head in the *Nine Heads* drawing and the head of Joseph in the Milan painting are so similar. Friedländer then identified several characteristics of de Beer's style such as Gothic architecture, draped curtains, billowing figures and robes that spread out to the ground or end in points, which are depicted in the *Milan Adoration* and are all apparent in *Joseph and the Suitors* (figs 1, 43).¹¹⁹

It is from the *Nine Heads* sheet and the Milan *Adoration* that the rest of de Beer's oeuvre stems (figs 43, 55).¹²⁰ Friedländer then connected the Milan *Adoration* with the Cologne *Adoration of the Shepherds* triptych which has a *Night Nativity* to the Paris *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1518-1525; Paris, Cluny Museum) (figs 41, 42, 43, 56).¹²¹ He also included the Barber paintings in de Beer's oeuvre, as well as two other large panels showing the *Annunciation* and the *Birth of Mary*, (c.1520; Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza) (figs 57, 58). In total he identified thirty-five paintings and drawings as works by de Beer. In 1978, however, Ewing reconsidered Friedländer's attributions and reduced de Beer's opus. He included the key pieces discussed, but he removed the Thyssen-Bornemisza panels to a secondary category of works, a de Beer

¹¹⁸ Ewing, *Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 255. Van den Brink, 'Study of Nine Male Heads', *Extravagant*, 95, 96. The two points that are still visible of the mainly missing third digit could only be a two, given that de Beer had died by 1528.

¹¹⁹ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 20.

¹²⁰ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer and Workshop, Triptych with the Adoration of the Magi', *Extravagant*, 64-66. Ewing states the Milan Adoration was the centre of Friedländer's attribution and held a 'privileged position' in his oeuvre, but Ewing now contests that this triptych is an autograph de Beer.

¹²¹ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 14-21. Friedländer includes a poor example, the Altarpiece of the *Virgin and Child* now in the National Gallery, London, as a de Beer. The shutters of this triptych are superior to the centre piece, yet other than a figure of Joseph with some rudimentary similarities to the Birmingham panel, it is difficult to understand Friedländer's attribution. Ewing, *The Painting and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 158. Van den Brink, 'Study of Nine Male Heads', *Extravagant*, 95-97. He suggests the '*Nine Heads*' was only used in later de Beer works including 'Joseph and the Suitors' and Jesse in a de Beer cartoon in Vienna. Van den Brink believes the central head in the *Nine Heads* drawing was from a model drawing and this author endorses this view as it can be seen in Metsys' work too, for example as a mirror in the *Adoration of the Magi*, c.1526 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and in the 'Mass of St Gregory'. The Birmingham panel has much of the quality, originality and style of some of Metsys and indeed Ewing mentions this too.

workshop list. He also proposed, however, that they were part of a de Beer altarpiece, which included the Birmingham panel,¹²² although in 2005, Peter van den Brink dismissed Ewing's earlier suggestion that the Birmingham panels were originally with the Madrid panels.¹²³ Ewing in 2005 redesignated the cornerstone of the de Beer oeuvre, the Milan *Adoration*, as a joint workshop piece, possibly with the Master of Amiens, who, as discussed, was de Beer's pupil before he left for France.¹²⁴

Other works attributed to de Beer by both Friedländer and Ewing which have a potential connection to the Barber paintings are two drawings. The first of these is the *Betrothal of the Virgin* (c.1515-1520; Vienna, Albertina) (fig.59), which is a preparatory drawing for a lost altarpiece. Van den Brink, unlike this author, does not consider the Vienna drawing to be connected with the Birmingham panel, although the priest is very similar to the priest in *Joseph and the Suitors*.¹²⁵ The other de Beer drawing shows the *Birth of the Virgin* (1518-1520s; Frankfurt, Stadel Art Museum) (fig. 60). This drawing is very similar in style to the painted version in Madrid and was once considered by Ewing to be a preparatory drawing for it, although Ewing has since reconsidered this, and in 2005 suggested it could be a preparatory drawing for a missing *Birth of Mary* painting.¹²⁶ This author endorses this view because the drawing has a similar structure to the Madrid painting, but the details are too dissimilar to support a conclusion that the *Birth of the Virgin* drawing was a preparatory drawing for the Madrid panel. Although this drawing is a fragment, the length remains intact and is 279mm long, which is a scale of 2mm to 1cm in relation to the Barber panel, and thus this author suggests potentially it was a preparatory drawing for a companion panel in an altarpiece with the Barber panel, made to scale. For a different reason, Ewing speculates that it could be a preparatory drawing for a companion panel to the Barber painting because of that the inclusion of Moses as a decorative carving, above the doors.¹²⁷ However, scenes depicting the birth of the Virgin are relatively ubiquitous and even its subject is debatable, as the torn drawing lacks much

¹²² Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 338-341.

¹²³ Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, The Betrothal of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 104.

¹²⁴ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer and workshop (Master of Amiens?)', *Triptych with The Adoration of the Magi*, *Extravagant*, 64-66.

¹²⁵ Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, The Betrothal of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 104.

¹²⁶ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer, The Birth of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 102.

¹²⁷ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer, The Birth of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 102. The change in title was argued by Ewing in 1978 because of the link to the *Birth of the Virgin* in Madrid, a link he now considers unlikely.

important detail, and was understandably called the *Death of St Anne* for many years.

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The quality of the paintings attributed to de Beer varies. The pinnacle in any assessment is *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night*, less good are the *Annunciation* and the *Birth of the Virgin* in Madrid, and even less good again is the Altarpiece of *the Virgin and Child* (c.1515-20; London, National Gallery). This might suggest that de Beer worked alone on the very best pieces, such as *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night*, and that the next tier down involved good journeymen such as the younger Master of Amiens, with just some input from de Beer.¹²⁹ The third category could have involved more general studio hands with even less input from de Beer. It is known that the Master of Amiens worked for de Beer before leaving for France in 1519 and so the attributions between de Beer, the Master of Amiens and de Beer's workshop generally have been muddy.¹³⁰ It was perfectly normal for a painter of de Beer's status to have a large workshop, since as Lorne Campbell has said, 'Profit came only when the master sold under his own name work which might have been executed mainly by apprentices'.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer, The Birth of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 102.

¹²⁹ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 179, '...the employment of assistants was a routine, essential practice'.

¹³⁰ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer, The Birth of the Virgin', *Extravagant*, 102.

¹³¹ Lorne Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 118, No.877, Apr., 1976, 191.

THE MASTER OF 1518 AND THE BARBER PANEL

This section will examine potential links between the so-called Master of 1518 and de Beer. The two painters have not previously been connected although Friedländer placed them both in the woolly group known as Antwerp Mannerists. The Master of 1518 is named after the date that appears carved on an altarpiece in St Mary's Lübeck although it was donated to the church in 1523 by Johann Boenne who was a Lübeck merchant who travelled to Antwerp.¹³² A possible identification of the Master of 1518, by Georges Marlier, to Jan Mertens van Dornicke is inconclusive and has no bearing at all on the attribution of the Lübeck altarpiece.¹³³ The Lübeck work was commissioned in Antwerp and its main components are complete and each of the main, lower level, inside panels is very large and a very similar size to the Barber panel.¹³⁴ The Lübeck altarpiece is 286 x 254 cm when closed and each wing (naturally) is approximately half the size of the closed piece. When the first set of shutters are opened, which are painted on both sides, they reveal another set of painted shutters, and so show a series of completed painted scenes (fig. 61, 62). Once the second set of painted shutters are open they reveal a carved work in the centre, and this second set of painted shutters have wood sculpture on the backs, so when fully opened this altarpiece shows only sculpted figures, just as the first opening the altarpiece shows only painted figures (fig. 63).

The present author suggests that Friedländer was unusually haphazard in his categorization of the Master of 1518's oeuvre. Indeed Friedländer describes him as a 'master of extraordinary productivity' and his oeuvre is not only large but also very varied.¹³⁵ For example, he attributed a small, very fine *Birth of the Virgin* (c.1515-1525; Madrid, Binasco Collection) to the Master of 1518, which differs in quality and style from the Master of 1518's *Adoration of the Magi* in Los Angeles (c.1515-1525; County Museum) and this is different again from the *Betrothal of the Virgin* in St

¹³² Rolf Salzwedel, ed. *St Mary's, Lübeck*, guide book, Lübeck, 2002, 30.

¹³³ Van den Brink, 'Master of 1518, The Martyrdom of Four Saints (or one saint in four stages of martyrdom)', *Extravagant*, 136, 137. Annick Born, 'Jan Mertens van Dornicke', *Extravagant*, 225. M.W. Ainsworth and M. Faries: 'Northern Renaissance Paintings: The Discovery of Invention', *Bull. St Louis Art Museum*, xvii, 1986, 31-37. Born, 'Jan Mertens van Dornicke', *Extravagant*, 223.

¹³⁴ Salzwedel, ed., *St Mary's Lübeck*, Lübeck 2002, 30.

¹³⁵ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 29.

Louis (c.1515-1525; St Louis Art Museum), although they are all attributed to the Master of 1518 (figs 64, 65, 66). The latter two examples are very different in style and quality to each other and also different to the Lübeck paintings, particularly by facial type and figure shape. However, the small Madrid, *Birth of the Virgin* has similarities to the de Beer drawing of the *Birth of the Virgin* and to the large *Birth of the Virgin* in the Thyssen-Bornemisza and to the Lübeck panels (figs 64, 60, 58). This is apparent in the compositions of the busy domestic scenes, the facial types and the billowing skirts and drapes. This all suggests the oeuvre of the Master of 1518 contains some works of an extraordinary quality and some with strong resemblance to the work of Jan de Beer and yet the Master of 1518 oeuvre has a wide range of styles, suggesting perhaps some wrongful attribution.

In particular the Lübeck panels and the Barber's panel are strikingly similar. For example, the panels' colours, their style of flowing robes and their similar facial features and also their detail and composition (figs 61, 62, 63, diagram 2, 8a). Therefore this author argues that the painter of the Lübeck altarpiece was Jan de Beer and his workshop. The similarities in the work between the Lübeck paintings and the Barber's include the colour palette, both rich in oranges and blue, gothic arches, gowns that spread on the ground and billowing figures, just as Friedländer himself described de Beer's works. In particular the figure of Mary in the circumcision scene in Lübeck has a very similar elegance and bearing to her depiction in the Barber panel. The male facial types and the fine detail are very similar in both panels and particularly apparent is the similarity between the horizontal head at the base of the *Nine Heads* drawing, to the head of the kneeling Magi in the *Adoration* scene in Lübeck. The hound and the dog in the market scene in the Lübeck panel are similar to those in *Joseph and the Suitors*. The further significance of this connection will be discussed in Chapter Three.

PATINIR, DE BEER AND THE *NATIVITY AT NIGHT*

In this section I will propose that a previously unacknowledged working relationship existed between de Beer and Patinir, which will explain the mystery, commented upon by many academic writers, of why Patinir's name is written on the reverse of

the de Beer *Nine Heads* drawing.¹³⁶ Specifically, I am arguing that the *Nativity at Night* was painted by de Beer in collaboration with the landscape specialist Patinir. This is not only because they are both associated by the *Nine Heads* drawing but also because of stylistic evidence in the *Nativity at Night*, and also the circumstantial evidence discussed which shows that the painters were probably well known to each other and were both highly regarded. Other works have been jointly attributed to Patinir with other masters, precisely because their talents were complementary, one example is attributed to Metsys and Patinir, the *Temptation of St Anthony* (1515-1524; Madrid, Museo del Prado) and another to Joos van Cleve with Patinir, the *Landscape with St Jerome*, (1516-1517; Madrid, Museo del Prado) (figs 67, 68).¹³⁷ Joachim Patinir spelt his name in two ways, Patinir and Patinier. De Loo reported that the version spelt Patinir is the Walloon form from Belgium and means a maker of patters, the type of wooden shoe, that Joseph is shown wearing in *Joseph and the Suitors*, and translates into Flemish as de Patinier,¹³⁸ this is possibly another reason why the patters were featured prominently.

Van den Brink has pointed out that Ewing took a suggestion originally made by A.E. Popham very seriously, which was that de Beer had given the *Nine Heads* sheet to Patinir as a gift whilst working on a joint commission.¹³⁹ This author endorses this view because Patinir was renowned as a miniaturist and an expert landscape painter; indeed Dürer describes Patinir in his diary as ‘that good landscape painter’ and so he complemented de Beer, who in the *Nativity at Night*, included landscape and miniature work (figs 51, 61, 68, 69, 70, 71).¹⁴⁰ It is thus very possible that the two masters collaborated. Patinir was enrolled in St Luke’s Guild in Antwerp after 1515, when de Beer was an alderman of the guild.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ A.E Popham, *Catalogue of Drawings by Flemish Artists*, 4, 7.

¹³⁷ Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, 3, 7. Karel van Mander seemingly confuses Joachim Patinir with Henry de Patinir (also known as Henri de Bles) 36.

¹³⁸ Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, 4, 7.

¹³⁹ Popham, *Catalogue of Drawings by Flemish Artists*, 4. Popham states ‘Patinir’s name on the back of the drawing would be most natural by assuming that it explained that it belonged to him.’ Van den Brink, ‘Jan de Beer, a Study of Nine Male Heads’, *Extravagant*, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Akira Kofuku, ‘Landscape with Virgin and Child or Rest on the Flight into Egypt-Patinir and Early Flemish Painting’, *Bruegel and Netherlandish Painting*, Tokyo, 1990, 38.

¹⁴¹ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 45.

Ewing suggested that de Beer and Patinir landscapes were similar and that this was because their work uses many of the same iconographical motifs (figs 51, 69, 70).¹⁴² However, I believe that Patinir had an actual involvement in painting the Birmingham panel. Some specific evidence in the *Nativity at Night* of a contribution by Patinir is that he was an admirer of Bosch and he often copied and used his motifs.¹⁴³ Such motifs included burning fires and ruined buildings which appear in the background in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, de Beer's *Adoration* and the *Nativity at Night* in Cologne and in Patinir's *Charon Crossing the River Styx* (1520-1524; Madrid, Museo del Prado) (figs 32, 51, 69, 70).¹⁴⁴ In addition Patinir painted a small *Night Nativity* roundel above his *Assumption of the Virgin* (c.1515-20; Philadelphia, Museum of Art), similar to the Barber's *Nativity at Night*, perhaps borrowed from de Beer (fig. 71).

There are other instances where both painters seem to have joined forces. Friedländer, without making any claims of joint authorship, suggested the landscape in the *St Ursula* shutter in de Beer's Triptych with the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in Cologne is partly derived from Patinir's style.¹⁴⁵ However, Ewing points to a reliance by de Beer on Patinir for the landscape in the *Adoration of the Magi* in Milan where the conical shaped mountain was used by Patinir, such as in the 1515-1514 work such as his *Flight into Egypt* (1514-1515: Antwerp, Koninkrijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten).¹⁴⁶ The proposed revised attribution of the Barber panel to de Beer with some input from Patinir has some bearing on its dating, which is usually given to c.1515-20.¹⁴⁷ Taking the date on the British Museum drawing as 1520 together with the fact that Patinir died in 1524, means that we should consider a date for the execution of the Barber's panel of between 1520 and 1524. These dates generally conform to Patinir's other known corroborations with Metsys (1515-1524) and van Cleve (1516-1517) (figs 67, 68).

¹⁴² Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 59, 60.

¹⁴³ Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ Koch, *Joachim Patinir*, 3, 37.

¹⁴⁵ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ewing, 'Jan de Beer and Workshop (Master of Amiens?)', *Extravagant*, 66.

¹⁴⁷ Richard Verdi, *The Barber Institute of Fine Arts*, Catalogue, London, 2005, 36.

CHAPTER THREE

FUNCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

This chapter will establish that the original function of the Barber panel was part of an oak carved and painted altarpiece. The second section will propose a reconstruction of the original altarpiece, that includes the Barber paintings, the two Thyssen-Bornemisza paintings and also argue that the de Beer *Birth of the Virgin* drawing in Frankfurt was the preparatory drawing for an arched sculpture in the centre of the wooden case.

POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS

The size and the subject matter of the Birmingham panel lends itself to being originally housed in a large space such as a chapel or a church and there are three main liturgical fixtures that require a double-sided panel with a narrative on each side and these will now be examined in turn. The first is the door of an organ cover, which is a suggestion made in 1932 by Maurice Brockwell, a joint curator of the Cook collection to which the Barber panel previously belonged, examples of the type of doors Brockwell referred to are in the Fugger Chapel (fig. 72).¹⁴⁸ However, this suggestion is unlikely because of the shape of the panel, since organ covers need to be taller than wide, and the square Barber panel has not been cut (fig. 72).¹⁴⁹

Another, more likely option is that the Barber panel belonged to a church partition. The most common use of a partition was as a choir screen to separate the laity from the sanctified space of the clergy. Both sides of the partition would ideally show appropriate yet obviously different scenes and so these screens were often constructed

¹⁴⁸ Brockwell, *Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond, and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook, Baronet.*, vol.III, *English, French, Early Flemish, German and Spanish Schools, and Addenda*, Abridged Catalogue, ed. Herbert Cook, London, 1932, 18. *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 29-30, 1968, 503.

¹⁴⁹ Barber curatorial file, accessed June 6th, 2013.

for double-sided viewing.¹⁵⁰ However, painted scenes within stone or wooden frameworks often show figures of saints. Narrative scenes do exist, such as those of the fourteenth-century choir screen in Cologne Cathedral which shows the story of the Magi, and another sixteenth-century example in Piedmont (Varello, Madonna Delle Grazie), which is a double-sided wall screen with scenes from the *Life of Christ* by Gaudenzio Ferrari that hangs from the barrel ceiling (figs 73, 74).¹⁵¹ These types of double-sided narrative scene screens are very rare and generally restricted geographically to Italy and modern-day Switzerland.¹⁵² It is impossible to state the Barber panel is not from a partition, but there are few examples that help to recommend this. In any case because the iconography of the panel, discussed in Chapter One, suggests it was painted for an altarpiece, this seems much more likely and will now also be explored in more detail.

An image-bearing object, placed upon the altar, was commonplace in the North from 1215, the mass was celebrated by a priest with his back to the congregation and before the 1560s this could have been done behind a screen or curtains.¹⁵³ Whilst the priest faced the altar, the congregation could look at the altarpiece which displayed a story in a direct manner, particularly for the uneducated¹⁵⁴. The identification of the functions of the altarpiece generally attributed to the time of Thomas Aquinas is as follows:

‘the first is for those that cannot read and write and yet can read an image on a wall, the second is on account of the sluggishness of our emotions, not easily moved to devotion and yet moved by things seen and on account of forgetfulness, because we forget what we hear but remember what we see’.¹⁵⁵

The altarpiece had no specific liturgical function, although it had also to cater for the prescribed rule that the altar had to be dedicated to a saint, which had been laid down

¹⁵⁰ Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, New York, 2013, 25, William Durandus, wrote in 1286 in ‘*Rationale divinatorum officiorum*’, making this point, ‘a veil or wall is suspended or interposed between the clergy and the laity, that they may not be able to behold each other.’

¹⁵¹ Jung, *The Gothic Screen*, 25.

¹⁵² Jung, *the Gothic Screen*, 25.

¹⁵³ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 264-265. Evelyn Welch, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, 1997, 135. Lynne F. Jacobs, *Opening Doors, The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted*, Pennsylvania, 2012, 9, 10. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 64.

¹⁵⁴ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 53.

¹⁵⁵ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 53.

by the Synod of Trier in 1310. However, the altarpiece had relative flexibility, on shape, size and narrative.¹⁵⁶

Little has been written about the Birmingham panel's original function, although the double-sided nature of the Birmingham panel suggests it was a shutter of an altarpiece, so both sides could be seen when it was either open or closed. Friedländer and Ewing state the Barber panels are from a shutter from an altarpiece, but do not pursue this suggestion further.¹⁵⁷

During the sixteenth century, images of the Virgin appeared on countless altarpieces, and often actually depicted her at an altar, as perhaps she is subtly shown in the *Nativity at Night*, as discussed (figs 2, 52). The following extract from the fourteenth-century *Speculum humanae salvationis* unites the Virgin to the altar table and to her sacrifice of her son, and so it is appropriate that the *Nativity at Night* was at an altar:

*Mary is well prefigured by the table of the sun,
Because through her celestial food has been served to us;
For she gave birth, for us, to the son of God, Jesus Christ,
Who has revived us with his body and blood.
Blessed be this most beautiful altar,
Through whom food so healthful and so abundant has been served to us!*¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, as discussed briefly in Chapter One, Ewing did suggest that the manger in the nativity was an altar and that the three angels worshipping around it allow a fourth worshipper to look in on the vacant open side.¹⁵⁹ Falkenburg more generally commented that the liturgical space of the mass and the physical space in which the viewer is situated together with the pictorial space of a painting in front of him, and the mental space of Eucharistic devotion become intertwined,¹⁶⁰ and that these create a sense of interconnection that extends far beyond the visible boundaries of the

¹⁵⁶ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 64.

¹⁵⁷ Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Friedländer simply states in the caption under the illustrations of the panels in his epic *Early Netherlandish Art*, 'J. de Beer. Shutter: *Nativity*, with Reverse, *Joseph with the Flowering Staff*, Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.' Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 130, though Ewing notes the Birmingham panel is slightly smaller than the latest measurement of the panel.

¹⁵⁸ Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 22, 24, citing the *Vita Christi*, c.1325, an abbreviated form of the *Speculum*.

¹⁵⁹ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 126.

¹⁶⁰ Reindert L. Falkenburg, 'Hans Memling's Van Nieuwenhove Diptych, the Place of Prayer in Early Devotional Painting', John Hands and Ron Spronk, eds, *Essays in Context, Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych*, New Jersey and London, 2007, 105.

devotional image. All of this, together with candle light and perhaps music, would begin to change the status of the worshipper from viewer to participant, and this suggests the panel was part of an altarpiece and one that particularly engaged the congregation.

Particularly relevant in this connection is that the altar depicted in *Joseph and the Suitors* is under the base of the pulpit, and this might have been intended to indicate the status of the altar, actual and painted, since, in the picture, Christ's stepfather was being chosen directly in front of it. Both the Birmingham compositions, as demonstrated in Chapter One, have a notable theological resonance, which encourages a lively engagement with God. In addition the altarpiece would have had an important function of decoration, of instruction, veneration and remembrance.¹⁶¹

Having made the case that the Barber panel was once part of an altarpiece, this section now explores the types of altarpieces that could once have accommodated it. In the sixteenth century, altarpieces were produced prolifically and with many different configurations although triptychs and polyptychs were the most common. Brockwell also entertained the idea that it could have been the central panel of a triptych. Although there are indeed examples of triptychs whose central panel is of comparable dimensions to the Barber work these are only painted on one side.¹⁶² One such similar-sized panel which measures 136 x 136 cm and which depicts the *Adoration of the Magi* (c.1518; Genoa, San Donato) is attributed to Joos van Cleve. However, although of large dimensions, it is unlikely that the Birmingham panel would once have been a central panel of a triptych since one of its richly painted sides would have permanently faced a wall and thus rarely or never seen.¹⁶³ Although it could conceivably have belonged to a triptych with a back panel that could be viewed, from the rear, there are no examples of this type with the shape and size of the Birmingham panel or with a full narrative.

The panel's size generally also militates against it having been a shutter of a painted triptych. This is because the centre panel would need to have been at least 274 cm

¹⁶¹ Eugene Honee, 'Images and Imagination in the Medieval Culture of Prayer: A Historical Perspective', ed. Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, trans., Michael Hoyle, Princeton, 157, 1994.

¹⁶² Brockwell, *Abridged Catalogue of the Pictures at Doughty House*, 18.

¹⁶³ Lynn F. Jacobs, 'The Triptych's of Hieronymus Bosch', *Sixteenth-Century Journals*, XXX1/4, 2000, 1.

wide, since the Birmingham panel is 138.4 cm wide. A wing of this width and proportion, with narrative paintings on both sides is unheard of and if it did exist would have rivaled even the large painted triptych, the Portinari Altarpiece which is 253 x 304 cm when closed and 253 x 586 cm when open and so each wing is 141 cm wide. This is a similar size to the Birmingham panel, but it does not have a double sided narrative only grisaille saints on its closed shutters. Therefore, since painted altarpiece wings seldom had narrative paintings on each side, and certainly no altarpiece survives that has shutters with narrative paintings on each side that are of comparable dimensions and have the same square shape to the Barber panels, it is unlikely that the Barber panel was a wing to a painted triptych.¹⁶⁴

An altarpiece could of course be more complex than a simple triptych and include many more panels. Such an altarpiece is known as a double-opening altarpiece, having an extra set of shutters and thus two sets of openings and three potential views (closed, first opening and second opening). Precisely because the shutters move, and they could be seen both open and closed, then the backs of the movable shutters could be painted with full narrative, rather than just with full length figures, such an example is Hans Memling's *Passion Altarpiece* commissioned for Lübeck Cathedral (fig. 75).¹⁶⁵ However to the author's knowledge there are no known examples of fully painted panels in this type of painted altarpiece of similar dimensions to the Birmingham panel.

Another type of altarpiece had a mixture of wood sculpture and painting, an example of this type is the Antwerp example *The Infancy and Passion Altarpiece* (1532; Philadelphia, Museum of Art), originally from Pagny near Dijon (figs 76, 77). It shows six painted panels when closed (one main narrative and two smaller ones per shutter), and when the shutters are open, the inside painted shutters reveal ten narratives. This altarpiece has eight double sided panels with sixteen painted scenes (plus three on the predella), and a wooden carving in the centre. This piece also has a double faced painted panel with one length approximately the same as the

¹⁶⁴ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 133. Ewing, endorses this and points out that no wholly painted altarpiece of this size has the same size painted panels on both sides, as the Birmingham panel does.

¹⁶⁵ The Memling altarpiece has two openings, closed it shows an 'Annunciation' in grisaille, the first opening shows the four saints to whom the altar was dedicated and the third opening shows scenes from the Passion. It was commissioned for the two Grenarde Brothers, who, respectively, were the Master of Lübeck Cathedral and the Lübeck representative of the Hanseatic League in Bruges, where he probably became aware of Memling's work.

Birmingham panel, *Christ Healing the Blind* is 144 cm long, in its frame. The altarpiece measures 294 x 228 cm when closed and 294 x 426cm when open, but unlike the Barber paintings, the narrative on both sides of each shutter do not match each other by exact size. Although the Brussels carved and painted Saluzzo altarpiece discussed in Chapter One is a different shape to the Barber panel, its painted panels have matching sized paintings on both sides of its painting panels. However, an altarpiece that has panels that are closest in size to the Barber panel is the painted and wooden altarpiece in St Mary's, Lübeck, which was previously attributed to the Master of 1518 and now I suggest is linked to Jan de Beer. The Lübeck altarpiece shares similar dimensions, style, place of origin, colours and tones and also its overarching theme with the Birmingham panel. Therefore it is most likely that the Barber panel originally belonged to a complex type of wood and painted altarpiece, similar to the size and structure of Lübeck's.

Yet the Barber panel and the panels in the Lübeck altarpiece do differ because the Lübeck altarpiece does not have matching painted square shaped narrative on its shutters, only on one side. This is because the closed aspect of these types of altarpieces always shows a full length scene, normally of saints. Accordingly if the paintings on the back of the full length scenes are square scenes, with two scenes vertically, one on top of the other, then the front and backs will not match. This is the case of the panels in the Lübeck altarpiece.

However some altarpieces of this type, such as Lübeck's, had two sets of shutters, and so the Barber double-faced square panel most likely belonged to the second opening of a carved and painted altarpiece. These types of altarpieces are rare, possibly because the form of square narrative was attractive to dealers to break down and sell, but also because they were exceptional pieces and probably few were made. Ewing too points out that the Birmingham panel had to be part of an altarpiece which had equal horizontally and vertically split narrative scenes and that these type of double shutter painted altarpieces attached to a case are rare.¹⁶⁶ However one type is seen in Cologne Cathedral, the St Agilulfus Altarpiece which was made in Antwerp around 1520, it is a polyptych, it is not complete but originally it had two pairs of painted

¹⁶⁶ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 133.

wings and its theme is Christ's Passion and St Agilulfus and St Anno (figs 78-82).¹⁶⁷ Ewing points to his own example, suggesting the *Passion of Christ Altarpiece* for the Church of St Nicholas in Kalkar by Jan Joest (fig. 83).¹⁶⁸ Lübeck, although otherwise similar to the Barber panel, as discussed in Chapter Two, does not have paintings on both sides of its second set of shutters.

Given that the only panels that have dimensions of comparable size to the Birmingham panel are part of carved and painted altarpieces, and that ones with equal size narrative on both sides are part of carved and painted altarpieces with two sets of painted shutters, it seems reasonable to propose that the panel was indeed originally part of such a double-opening altarpiece. Therefore in style and size the Birmingham panel may be similar to the complete examples in Cologne and Kalkar, and Lübeck (other than its extra sculpture). Its iconography can also be loosely compared to the *Life of the Virgin* altarpiece in Enghien and of *Joseph and the Suitors* with the Marian themed Saluzzo altarpiece.¹⁶⁹

RECONSTRUCTION

As with these surviving sculpted and painted altarpieces examples, the painted shutter, to which *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night* belonged, would have been hinged to a case. Another set of shutters would have closed over them, so three states of the altarpiece were probable, including the completely closed one. This type of altarpiece generally had four main parts, the carved centre case,¹⁷⁰ plus the painted

¹⁶⁷ Arnold Wolff, trans., Margret Maranuk-Rohmeder, *Cologne Cathedral*, Koln, 1990, 30. www.koelner-dom.de, accessed January 2013. The Cologne altarpiece was obviously a commission because of its particular iconography; at the centre of the lower structure is an opening for the shrine of St Agilulfus who is one of the patron saints of the Cologne. When closed the wings show a large depiction of the *Annunciation* flanked by images of four Bishops (higher layer) and four scenes from Christ's Passion (lower layer). The first opening focused entirely on the life story of the two Bishops, St Anno and St Agilulfus, both, as mentioned, the patron saints of Cologne (the altarpiece is not complete). Also German sculpted altarpieces with painted shutters have horizontally split closed shutters and also divided panels on the backs, such as Michael Pacher's altarpiece in St Wolfgang Austria/German border, which has two painted openings and a carved case. However the commission was for Cologne but not originally for the Cathedral. It was probably made for the collegiate church of St Mary at the Stairs, situated to the east of the Cathedral and only later moved to the Cathedral.

¹⁶⁸ Ewing, the *Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 133.

¹⁶⁹ Verdi, *Barber Institute of Fine Arts*, Catalogue, 36. Verdi briefly suggested the panel is from this type of carved and painted composite altarpiece, and this can now be firmly established. Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 133.

¹⁷⁰ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 96-100.

shutters, the predella and a crowning structure called the corpus.¹⁷¹ The most important elements may have been considered to be the corpus and case, which was polychromed and gilded over the sculpted wood. All other parts were subsidiary to it and, as Lynn F. Jacobs points out, the more sacred painted scenes were on the inside of the altarpiece, only seen when it was open.¹⁷²

These types of carved and painted altarpieces tended to be wider than their painted counterparts and, as Jacobs comments, the case sizes of sculpted altarpieces with painted shutters did have some level of size standardization, the closed width generally ranging from 260cm to 270cm. A little over two hundred survive, all produced in Antwerp and have been estimated at just around one per cent of the likely production in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century.¹⁷³ Notable examples produced in Antwerp include altarpieces in Enghien (Belgium), Vitoria (Spain), Hulshout (Belgium), Västerås (Sweden), Bocholt (Belgium), Kalkar (Germany, near the Netherlandish border), Oppiter-Bree (Belgium), Warsaw (Poland), as well as the Lübeck altarpiece in Northern Germany and the Pagny triptych now in Philadelphia (figs 84-93). Other works attributed to the Antwerp carver Jan Genoots include altarpieces in Västerlovsta, Botkyrka and Skarkind, all in Sweden and which all have heights between 250cm to 288cm and closed widths between 290cm, 320cm and 370cm and so the Barber panel is within this size range.

A shutter needing to cover half this width would require painted panels of between 125cm and 144cm high and between 145cm and 185 cm wide. The structure of each wing in the Birmingham example is likely to have been two panels high, as in the Lübeck example. Thus a square panel of 138.4 x 138.4 cm such as the Barber's would be entirely appropriate as a shutter attached to a carved case of this type of arrangement, the shutters each being one panel width wide and two panel lengths high. The stability of the otherwise unwieldy panel was gained by stacking two panels one above another and has added support from the relative solidity of the carved central panel case (figs 94, 95).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 67.

¹⁷² Jacobs, *Opening Doors, the Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted*, 5. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 67.

¹⁷³ Tony Money, *The Radley Altarpiece*, Radley School, Radley, 2008, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 97.

These types of carved and painted altarpieces normally show complete narrative cycles and so the new original use could be described as part of early multi-media communication with multiple panels able to open and close for appropriate religious events and festivals for easy absorption by the congregation.¹⁷⁵ The fully-closed state was the normal view and they were opened for church occasions and events, such as marriages and festivals.¹⁷⁶

Thus, for all the reasons discussed, the double-sided panel is very likely to be part of an altar shutter from a painted and sculpted altarpiece produced in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century. The altarpiece would have been a similar size to the Antwerp carved and painted altarpiece previously attributed to the Master of 1518 (but now attributed to de Beer) and his workshop, in St Mary's Lübeck, and that is approximately 2.74 m wide (without the predella and without the frame) and 3.35 m high (without predella). The painted configuration of the hypothetical Birmingham panel when fully closed is two full length painted figures and when first open, eight square panels (similar to Lübeck's), one of which would have been the Barber's panel. The other side of the Barber panel would have been visible when the second set of painted shutters were open, to show, on its third view, painted shutters on the sides and a carved case in the centre. The Barber panel can only have been on the lower layer, as the upper layer of paintings are all shaped.

The next section first explains the pitfalls in attempting to reconstruct the type of altarpieces that have been discussed after their constituent panels have been dispersed. However, in spite of this, the second section proposes a reconstruction of a double opening carved and painted altarpiece, with both sets of shutters painted on both sides produced between 1520 and 1524. The hypothetical altarpiece considers the inclusion of *Joseph and the Suitors*, the *Nativity at Night*, and de Beer's *Annunciation and Birth of Mary* in Madrid, and also considers the preparatory *Betrothal* drawing in Vienna.

¹⁷⁵ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 96.

¹⁷⁶ Lynne F. Jacobs, *Opening Doors, The Early Netherlandish Triptych Interpreted*, Pennsylvania, 2011, 8. Jacobs explains that '... the instruction to the sexton of the Old Kirk at Delft (1538), provide lists of festivals when the high altarpiece should be opened and half-opened as do instructions for sextons of churches in Nuremberg, Lübeck, Terernsee and Freisung.'

An attempted reconstruction of the painted and carved altarpiece of which the Birmingham panel was originally part has four particular difficulties. Firstly, as Jacobs describes, little attempt was made to marry a style between the carved and painted elements of the altarpieces of these sixteenth-century Antwerp productions. Time lags could be huge between shutters being attached to carved cases and also shutters could be sent to other cities, such as Brussels, to be attached to cases and the other way around.¹⁷⁷ Secondly, associations between separated paintings, such as the Birmingham panel, and complete surviving altarpieces by style or theme may not be directly helpful because though the subjects of altarpieces normally correspond they were not always coherent. For example, the *Virgin Mary* Altarpiece in Västerås, Sweden, has a Marian themed carved case yet the shutters relate to Christ's ministry. Moreover in St Mary's, Lübeck, the altarpiece depicts three separate stories on the shutters, *Joachim and Anna* and the *Birth of Christ* and a Marian cycle on the sculpture.

The third potential pitfall in attempting a reconstruction of a composite altarpiece is that both shutters and case scenes can be in an irregular story order. For example, Ethan Kavalier has suggested that a superior artist from Brussels, who produced the Lombeek altarpiece case in 1525, purposefully gave the case irregular compartments and disconnected scenes, although still with some sort of sequence. Kavalier proposes this was done on purpose to hold the viewer's attention.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, it is suggested that the chronological sequence of the painted and carved scenes could vary significantly for each altarpiece, which results in making any reconstruction difficult. For example the Enghien altarpiece (which is the only painted and carved Antwerp altarpiece to survive that contains a painted scene of *Joseph with the Suitors*), has shutters that have a relatively simple vertically-ordered-chronology, yet the case scenes are ordered horizontally (diagram 1). The Enghien altarpiece is ordered differently from that of the order of the Marian altarpiece in Lübeck. Chronologically, Lübeck has two stories, one on the sides and one in the centre and these have a different chronology sequence from each other (diagram 2). Another example is the Opitter Passion altarpiece which was originally from Antwerp and now is in Belgium

¹⁷⁷ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 80-113, 192-210.

¹⁷⁸ Ethan Matt Kavalier, *Renaissance Gothic*, 2012, 66-67.

in St Trudo's Church. The Opitter altarpiece chronological sequence is vertical, but different from the Enghien example (diagram 3).

Besides style mismatch, theme mixture and sequence changes, the fourth difficulty posed by the task of reconstructing altarpieces is that surviving cases were mainly produced as a type *en masse*, yet they could also be remarkably individualized as a result of specific commissions, and in these instances the painted shutters could be used to enable even greater differentiation from the case and to provide an entirely bespoke product. The result was cases with notably limited overall subjects yet with bespoke shutter scenes creating individualized altarpieces. When these panels and cases become separated they have potential for mistaken reconstruction centuries later. This is because many different shutter subjects could have originally belonged to the few repeatedly themed cases, such as Christ's Passion and Marian cycles which were the two most popular.

However, some consistency in order and subject can often be identified from surviving altarpieces. Generally a sequence that can be read from left to right is normal and frequently starts from the top left and finishes at the bottom right for each arrangement. Furthermore, saints had an order of importance, lower ranked saints were generally on lower panels and higher status saints were nearer the inside case, and possibly on a higher layer. This is noticeable on the Saluzzo altarpiece which depicts scenes from Joseph's life on the first opening and scenes from Mary's life on the second opening.

Ewing suggested that the Birmingham panel is part of a Marian cycle and also that it was part of the same Marian altarpiece as two large panels now in Madrid.¹⁷⁹ Ewing does not state in detail why this is so or indeed how the Birmingham panel and the Spanish panels were positioned in the hypothetical altarpiece. However this theory is, I believe, correct for several reasons, first the Spanish panels, the *Birth of the Virgin* and the *Annunciation* which are very fine, have obviously been cut from the *Annunciation* because the top of angel's arm and wing are missing at the top left. Furthermore the top right of the *Birth of Mary* also seems to have been cut because the top of the bed is missing (diagram 4 and Appendix 2). The manner of the cut of

¹⁷⁹ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 130, 134.

the Spanish panels suggests that they were originally shaped higher on one side. Therefore formerly they were probably the shape of an altarpiece shutter, possibly similar in shutter shape as the example referred to throughout in Lübeck. Furthermore the panels have been split and the cut piece matches on both sides of the Spanish panels which suggest that originally they were back to back with each other, though it is possible they were split from the backs of other paintings or from sculptures (they have now been cradled and have three bars across the back, for support).¹⁸⁰ Importantly the Spanish panels have been cut all around every edge and the holes, normally about one centimeter from the edge that would have attached the panel to an inner frame (as on the Birmingham panel) are missing, they have in effect been cut off, and tightly ‘framed’ in a dark wood, attached to the panel, not normally seen in its usual gilded frame.¹⁸¹ Thus the Spanish panels are now 111.5 x 131 cm and are consistent with having been split between each other, the top cut off and all sides trimmed of the framing holes (as can be noted in Appendix 2), with the presumed purpose to maximize sale room profit when wall paintings were most sought after. My examination with Thyssen-Bornemisza noted this for the first time (the Barber panels are uncut and slightly larger, they measure 138.4 x 138.4 cm).¹⁸²

Another reason the Madrid and Birmingham panels were possibly together is that the four paintings’ subjects do fit well together. For example they are similar to a painted group in the Marian altarpiece in Västerås, Sweden (fig. 83). Furthermore because of the shape of the Spanish panels they could only have been on the upper layer of an altarpiece (diagrams 5 and 6). The Birmingham panel, because of its square shape, could only have been on the bottom layer. However, the configuration in diagram 5, which shows the *Annunciation* on the right, is very improbable because the *Annunciation* scene is almost always on the left.¹⁸³ Therefore it is more likely that the *Annunciation* is on the left (diagram 6). Assuming that *Annunciation* is on the left and the Madrid panels were originally double-faced, with each other, as discussed, then the result is that the *Birth of Mary*, on its reverse, is on the top right of the first opening (diagram 6). Furthermore if the Madrid and Birmingham panels are part of

¹⁸⁰ Author’s examination, Madrid, February, 2012.

¹⁸¹ This was discovered at the Thyssen- Bornemisza, when the staff took the panel out of its frame.

¹⁸² Author’s examination, Madrid, February, 2012.

¹⁸³ Julia Hastings, *Annunciation*, London and New York, 2000. Of the seventy *Annunciations* depicted up to the 1520s, all but six, have the Virgin on the left.

the same altarpiece it is most plausible they were part of the same shutter (diagram 7). In this configuration the *Annunciation* would be above *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Birth of the Virgin* above the *Nativity at Night*, so the theme of a betrothal announcement would have been linked together and, when the shutter was opened, the theme of birth would have been linked together. If this were so the panels would fall into the chronology and hierarchy pattern noted in some other altarpieces, such as Enghien which has the birth and marriage episodes on its inside left shutter.

However, the panels in this arrangement do not look as if they sit comfortably together. The colours and tones are quite different on adjoining panels, which is not the case in the Lübeck example, and so it is possible that the Barber panel could have been the other way around, with *Joseph and the Suitors* under the *Birth of Mary* and the *Nativity at Night* under the *Annunciation* (diagram 8a). This arrangement looks much better and has the advantage that the Marian themes are on the most inner area, the most sacred place, next to the sculpted case. Equally this sequence places the Holy Family and Joseph on the first opening, further away from the sacred case, as in the Lübeck altarpiece and the Saluzzo altarpiece. The theme of the Holy Family and St Anne could thus have been on the top layer on the front and Joseph on the lower one, as befitting his lower rank. If this hypothesis is correct it is conceivable that the drawing from Frankfurt should be the *Death of St. Anne* and not the *Birth of Mary*, and given that this author has shown the scale of the drawing corresponds to the Birmingham panels, it is possible this drawing would have corresponded to the Madrid panels too, before they were cut. Therefore the Frankfurt drawing too could be a preparatory drawing for a panel for the Birmingham and Madrid altarpiece. The hypothetical altarpiece is likely to have also contained a painting of the *Adoration of the Magi*, and also a scene of the *Betrothal* as discussed. The *Betrothal* scene could have been painted on an adjoining shutter, similarly to its place in the Saluzzo altarpiece, and could have been carved as it also is in the Saluzzo example (fig.8). Its appearance has been reconstructed using a carved *Betrothal* scene from a Brussels altarpiece case (diagram 8b).

Ewing also suggested that a drawing attributed to de Beer of the *Betrothal of the Virgin*, now in the Albertina in Vienna, was the model for a painted altarpiece shutter partly because the Birmingham priest and the priest in the *Betrothal* drawing are so

very similar.¹⁸⁴ Ewing proposed this altarpiece would have also included the Madrid split panels and the Birmingham panel. However van den Brink disagreed with Ewing and considered that the Spanish and Birmingham panels were from completely different painted altarpieces and that the Vienna drawing had no connection with the Birmingham panel but did with those in Madrid. In addition K.G. Boon has also observed that the Vienna drawing is not by de Beer because it is too carefully worked out and not spontaneous enough, and believes it instead to be a copy.¹⁸⁵ However other drawings that scholars believe are models for sculptors are closely comparable to the style of the Vienna drawing. Therefore it is possible that the Vienna drawing was being made very deliberately, not as a copy, but to be copied by the carvers and polychromers of the altarpiece, as Van den Brink suggests for a similar contemporary drawing.¹⁸⁶ Indeed the detail would have needed to have been carefully drawn by de Beer for the carvers and the polychromers to be able to replicate. Furthermore around 1515 onwards, arch shaped tops became more and more in vogue, for the centre of carved and painted altarpieces and the *Betrothal* drawing is arched (fig. 59).¹⁸⁷ Therefore a reasonable hypothesis may well be that the Vienna drawing served as a model for the sculptors for the carved case that the Birmingham panels belonged to (diagram 9).¹⁸⁸ In summary of this section, I would suggest it is more likely than not the Birmingham and Madrid panels were part of the same shutter and thus altarpiece.¹⁸⁹ The Spanish panels, after close examination by the author are shown to

¹⁸⁴ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 134-135.

¹⁸⁵ K.G.Boon, 'Notities bij een houtsnede naar en een voorbeeldenblad van Jan de Beer', in: *Rubens and his World*. Bijdragen, opgedragen aan Prof. Dr. Ir. R.A. D'Hulst naar aanleiding van het vijftiengigjarig bestaan van het National Centrum voor de Plastische Kunsten van de 16de en 17de eeuw, Antwerp, 1985, 9-16.

¹⁸⁶ Van den Brink, 'Anonymous Group Pseudo-Bles, the Tree of Jesse', *Extravagant*, 124. 125. This drawing was previously attributed to Jan de Beer and van den Brink suggests 'the sheet may also have served as a model for a carving'. The drawings of the *Betrothal of the Virgin* and the *Tree of Jesse* are comparable in detail and size.

¹⁸⁷ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*, 1380-1550, 138. Van den Brink, 'Jan de Beer, Christ taking leave of his mother, Christ's entry into Jerusalem', *Extravagant*, 112. Van den Brink suggests these drawings had many possibilities depending on the clients' wishes.

¹⁸⁸ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 134. Ewing discussed the probability that the Birmingham panels may have been part of a painted and carved altarpiece; he did not propose the Vienna drawing was the model for the carved centre case of the Birmingham altarpiece.

¹⁸⁹ Museum Thyssen-Bornemisza curatorial file, examined February 2012. Barber Institute curatorial file, examined January 2012. The provenance of the Birmingham panel and the Madrid panel do not seem to coincide, yet documentation only survives for the very late nineteenth and twentieth century. The Birmingham panel can be shown as being sold by the Cook family and the Madrid panels were not in the same auction catalogue, nor known to be in the Cook collection. Herbert Cook was a collector and connoisseur. Herbert Cook bought the panel from the Frederick family, this author has traced that they originally came from Hainault in the late sixteenth-century, possibly as religious refugees; they were wealthy and distant relations to Elizabeth I. It is plausible the panel was brought with them. The provenance of the Madrid panels have been traced back to a sale in Christie's, London in 1932 and then sold in 1954 in Lucerne and incorporated into the Thyssen-Bornemisza, Lugarno in 1956 and moved to Madrid with this collection in 1993.

be exceptionally finely painted, but without the invention evident in *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night* and so were potentially de Beer's workshop output.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRODUCTION AND LOCATION

This chapter will briefly discuss the method of production of *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night* so as to confirm that the panel was made in Antwerp in around 1520. It will then discuss the altarpiece's original destination, and suggest that it was most likely a church or cathedral in Antwerp or very close by.

PRODUCTION

The Birmingham panel has not been subject to dendrochronological testing, yet the evidence now indicates a production time of around 1520 and 1523. The panel is not in its original frame and so hinge marks cannot be examined, but it does have a series of peg marks about a centimeter from the panel edge, originally used to attach it to an inner frame which was then placed in the shutter and then hinged against the case. To meet the high demand for the carved and painted altarpieces, sculptors and painters gradually developed procedures to enable rapid construction to such an extent that specialization developed into an early form of the production line and included specialized transport as the finished cases and altarpieces were often exported.¹⁹⁰

The production system of sculptured cases depended upon the cost of the commission and the importance of the patron. However the result was some commonality between altarpiece cases and typically the bare case was assembled using dovetail joints and mortis and tenons.¹⁹¹ The vertical planks forming the back of the case had a horizontal plank attached to them, which the framing structure, including the shutters, were attached to later (figs 94, 95). The bare case was then separated into compartments,

¹⁹⁰ Myriam Serck-Dewaide, trans. Jack Soutanian, 'Support and Polychromy of Altarpieces from Brussels, Mechelen, and Antwerp', Valerie Dorge and F. Corey Howlet, eds, *Painted Wood, History and Conservation*, Part Two, *Historical Perspectives*, 1998, 82. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Altarpieces 1380-1550*, 217. The altarpieces cases were normally collaborations, often ad hoc between the local crafts of wood sculptors and painters but also polychromers who polychromed over wooden parts. In addition gilders and joiners were required as the altarpieces were large and commonly exported specialist workshops with many hands working on one sculpted case. For example different types of carvers may be used such as antique carvers, figure carvers, tracery carvers and this division of labour was increasingly necessary as the altarpieces became more and more popular. The trades were not necessary all employed constantly but often hired on an ad-hoc, sub-contractor basis.

¹⁹¹ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 18-22.

often six and tiered and the arch shaped case became popular after 1500.¹⁹² The carved figures and the architectural elements were placed in position and adjusted as necessary and then removed to be gilded or polychromed and placed back in position and fixed with forged nails, and the painters and gilders finished the case by covering the nail heads. The altarpiece was then generally placed on a painted or sculpted predella. The painted shutters were produced in the normal way; the prepared oak panel treated with gesso, bole (where gilding was required) and painted using oil before being attached to the case.

These altarpieces were produced on such a large scale that from 1470 the city guilds introduced a system of quality marks to try to ensure that the standard of these luxury items was maintained, as they were in effect mass-produced luxury goods. In Antwerp the sculpture quality mark of a hand or castle was stamped on the carvings and each altarpiece had to be marked as passed by the guild before it could be sold.¹⁹³ The vast majority of large carved and painted altarpieces were made in the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Mechelen, each of which had its own mark.¹⁹⁴ The Birmingham paintings are not marked by a city quality mark, but this was normal as the system of guild marks only applied to the sculpture, the carved case and only occasionally did the side of the shutter frame have the city sculpture quality mark carved upon it (the Birmingham panel outer frame is not original).¹⁹⁵ The Antwerp mark, however, can be seen on most of the two hundred and five other Antwerp-carved and painted altarpieces that survive,¹⁹⁶ such as those in Lübeck,¹⁹⁷ Cologne, Philadelphia and

¹⁹² Serck-Dewaide, trans., Jack Soutanian, 'Support and Polychromy of Altarpieces from Brussels, Mechelen and Antwerp', 88.

¹⁹³ Kim Woods, *Imported Images, Netherlandish Late Gothic Sculpture in England, c.1400- c.1550*, Lincolnshire, 2007, 34. Serck-Dewaide, trans. Jack Soutanian, 'Support and Polychromy of Altarpieces from Brussels, Mechelen and Antwerp', 90.

¹⁹⁴ *Jacobs, Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 101,197. However a note of caution when considering a place of production is that collaboration between cities also occurred and so an assumption that the case or *caisse* was carved in a city does not necessarily mean the entire altarpiece was manufactured in one place. For example Perier-d'Ieteren suggests Antwerp sculpture was paired with wings from the more established painting shops of Brussels' wings, for example the Warsaw and Havero altarpieces both with Antwerp stamps. Of course with a painted shutter with sculpture on its reverse, such as the Lübeck example, it much more likely the collaboration between sculptor and painter was in the same place and at the same time.

¹⁹⁵ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 91. The carved elements were stamped and also the painted polychrome of the carved elements, but not the painted shutters. The Lübeck altarpiece quite separately from these guild marks has the date, 1518, carved into its frame, as discussed in the essay.

¹⁹⁶ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 193-195.

¹⁹⁷ Although the Lübeck altarpiece, additionally has carved on its case the date of 1518, this is separate from the more normal hand marks of Antwerp carved between the legs and above the heads of the figures on the wooden carving *caisse* (which it has), indicating it has passed the guild regulations for Antwerp .However this mark is only for the sculpted element (the polychroming is marked separately). Indeed the altarpieces, previously mentioned,

Enghien. As has now been discussed, the Birmingham panel's size,¹⁹⁸ subject matter, wood type and style, all indicate it was a shutter to a sculpted oak case produced in Antwerp. The place of production of the Birmingham panel appears specifically to be Antwerp. It was a city not only with conditions for plentiful demand from a local market, but one which was also a major exporter, in the centre of European trade and a great European port. Ludovico Guicciardini, the Venetian Envoy, stated that: 'hundreds of ships would pass a day, and 2000 carts entered the city each week.'¹⁹⁹ It has been estimated the port of Antwerp was earning the Spanish Crown seven times more revenue than the Americas.²⁰⁰

Cosmopolitan potential buyers of large carved and painted altarpieces could view goods at a market unique to Antwerp, called the Pand. The Pand was essentially a free trading market where normal strict local guild rules relating to selling rights by members of the Antwerp guild were relaxed or abandoned and so products could be sold without any tariffs which usually protected local members' privileges of sale in the city. The market was normally bi-annual lasting six weeks each time but developed over time to be near-continuous. The tariff- free range of products in the Pand attracted even more traders to this bustling city and in turn encouraged artists to come to Antwerp to sell.²⁰¹ In October 1524, according to Pero Tafur the abbey at Averbode 'bought an Altarpiece of eight feet, which was in Antwerp in the Our Lady Pand'.²⁰² The altarpiece Tafur refers to, although large, does seem to have been bought ready-made from the open market. Campbell and later Jacobs have suggested that the existence of the great Antwerp bi-annual open market helped to encourage standardized forms of the carved and painted retable that would appeal to a wide

originally in Pagny and also the one in Cologne, according to their markings, were both sculpted in Antwerp and polychromed in Antwerp.

¹⁹⁸ Rachel Billinge, Lorne Campbell, Jill Dunkerton, Susan Foister, Jo Kirby, Jennie Pilc, Ashok Roy, Marika Spring and Raymond White, *Methods and Materials of Northern European Painting in the National Gallery, 1400-1550*, *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, vol. 18, 1997. The panel measures four Antwerp feet ten Antwerp inches and this may have become a standard measurement for altarpieces because guild rules about altarpieces were very detailed, and over each size boundary, wood depths and ratios were prescribed and increased. This bulletin explains the difference between the guild rules for over seven Antwerp feet and over eight Antwerp feet in respect of their wood types. This author suggests that to avoid higher guild stipulation in wood depths, it is plausible that painters and sculptures produced items just under the next higher level, which would have cost more to produce. This is possibly why this piece may be 4 Antwerp feet and 10 Antwerp inches high, rather than five Antwerp feet (an Antwerp foot is 28.5cm).

¹⁹⁹ Guicciardini, *The description of the Low Countries and of the provinces thereof, gathered into an epitombe out of the historie of Lodovico Guicciardini*, trans., Thomas Danett, 1567, 97.

²⁰⁰ Luc-Normand Teller, *Urban World History, an Expansive and Geographical Perspective*, 2009, 308.

²⁰¹ Lorne Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 118, No. 877, Apr., 1976, 192.

²⁰² Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 150.

range of speculative buyers.²⁰³ Susie Nash has proposed that model altarpieces would be displayed at the market and altarpieces then produced for a specific order, possibly with agreed amendments from the displayed model.²⁰⁴ Despite all of this, however, the Birmingham panel is doubtless part of an individual commission, because of the unusual scene of *Joseph and the Suitors* and the very fine quality of the work. Mechelen was also connected to the sales and distribution of Antwerp paintings because Mechelen dealers, located near the Franciscan Monastery and St Rombout's cathedral, on the road between Mechelen and Antwerp, often acted as sales agents for Antwerp commissions.²⁰⁵ This was in part because the Burgundian court was based in Mechelen. Antwerp too was also well placed to distribute directly to Europe through its large river port.

LOCATION

Sources to help identify the original destination of the altarpiece that the Birmingham shutter belonged to are scarce.²⁰⁶ Previously only St Leurs in 1953 has suggested the cathedral in Mechelen as an original destination of the Barber's panel because of architectural similarities between *Joseph and the Suitors* and St. Rombout's Cathedral in Mechelen²⁰⁷. This was discounted by Ewing, in 1978,²⁰⁸ who could see no similarities and it has not been considered since and this author endorses Ewing's view, though the principal Netherlandish employer of painters was the Burgundian court, based in Mechelen (fig.96).²⁰⁹ However Antwerp attracted a range of races and potential buyers and the so Birmingham panel's potential destination could have been almost any European city. Moreover churches had a wide range of interior styles and included all types from Swedish wooden ones to complex gothic ones.²¹⁰ There was no particular style of church in which Netherlandish carved altarpieces were placed. However, trading conditions were particularly favourable between Hanseatic League

²⁰³ Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, 194-196.

²⁰⁴ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 85.

²⁰⁵ Neil de March and Hans J. van Miegroet, 'The Antwerp-Mechelen Production Complex', Amy Golahny, Mia Mochizuki and Lisa Vergaras, *In His Milieu*, Amsterdam, 2006, 139.

²⁰⁶ Kim Woods, *Imported Images, Netherlandish Late Gothic Sculpture in England c. 1400-c.1550*, 307, 458, 479.

²⁰⁷ St Leurs, 'Het verdwenen XVI eeuwse retabel der Sint-Romboutskerck te Mechelen'. In *Annales du 35e congres de la fédération historique et archéologique de Belgique*, fasc.5, Courtrai, 1953, 557-60. St Leurs was discussing St Rombout's in Mechelen, but neither Ewing in his 1978 thesis, page 256, nor the present author, could identify any similarity between Mechelen cathedral and *Joseph and the Suitors*.

²⁰⁸ Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 256.

²⁰⁹ Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century', *Burlington Magazine*, 188.

²¹⁰ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 126.

members, the economic trading area covering most of current day North Germany, some of Scandinavia and Poland and the Low Countries including Antwerp and parts of Britain, and the majority of carved and painted Antwerp altarpieces were transported to the Northern Hanseatic region and predominantly to the Rhine Lands where they remain today.²¹¹ Thus although Spain, Portugal or Italy cannot be ruled out, Northern countries of Europe are favoured for the panel's original destination. Moreover the breaking up of Netherlandish altarpieces was more common where they were created. During the iconoclasm altarpieces were commonly broken up and destroyed,²¹² and of course this was a Northern European phenomenon. The most likely destination of the Barber panel would be a prominent ecclesiastical building because generally the higher the status of the ecclesiastical building that an altarpiece furnished, the higher the incidence of the breakup of altarpieces, because higher profile buildings attracted higher degrees of violence during times of religious intolerance. For example, the Cologne cathedral altarpiece was originally in the east choir of the Church of Maria and Gradus in Cologne and only moved to Cologne Cathedral in the twentieth century,²¹³ and the Lübeck altarpiece may have survived because it is in the Church of St Mary and not in Lübeck's cathedral.

Another reason for supposing the destination was in the North was that carved and painted altarpieces placed in Northern areas needed to be made of oak rather than the more ubiquitous lime wood of southern Germany. This was because lime wood would not have had the endurance to withstand the damper conditions of the North. For example, in Lübeck the sculptors' guild specified the use of oak for all religious carving, and in nearby Northern Hamburg and Luneburg, oak, walnut or pear woods were demanded. Of course oak altarpieces could and did go south, but they were made particularly to be able to withstand the Northern European climate.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Money, *The Radley Altarpiece*, Radley School, Radley, 2008, 11. Furthermore the author has identified five Antwerp altarpieces of this era to Great Britain. The first is in Oxburgh (miss-spelt in Antwerp altarpiece catalogue) Hall in Norfolk, which is Passion carved centre, passion inner shutters and four full length saints on the outer shutters. The second is in Radley School, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, and is also a passion scene without shutters, the school bought it from a dealer in London in the nineteenth-century. The third is in St Wilfred's chapel Carlisle Cathedral and is also has its shutters missing and the *caisse* is again a passion sequence. The fourth is in Burnley in Townsley Hall and was installed there in the nineteenth-century, it too has had its shutters removed and is also of the passion. A fifth, perhaps in Bath Easton, has not been able to be traced by the author. Therefore it is very unlikely the Barber paintings are from known surviving altarpieces in Britain.

²¹² Woods, *Imported Images, Netherlandish Late Gothic Sculpture in England c.1400-c.1550*, 3.

²¹³ www.koelner-dom.de, accessed 20 November 2012.

²¹⁴ Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, 2008, 27.

The general area of the North as the Birmingham panels' potential destination and possibly Flanders is vague, although one scholar, St Leurs, in 1953 proposed that the interior of the depicted church in *Joseph and the Suitors* was based on St Rombout's cathedral in Mechelen, Belgium (fig.96).²¹⁵ In favour of this as, previously noted, Mechelen was the seat of the Burgundian court and between 1506 and 1530 was home to the court of Margaret of Austria where she ruled and brought up her nephew, the future Emperor Charles V. The court commissioned the majority of the art in the Lowlands,²¹⁶ even though Margaret of Austria and the court generally commissioned work from Mechelen and Brussels, the links, particularly artistic ones, between Mechelen and Antwerp were strong. For example between 1517 and 1530 Rombout II Keldermans worked for Margaret of Austria and Antwerp cathedral concurrently, and Mechelen dealers traded in Antwerp paintings, as discussed, and so exchanges of suppliers between the two cities were established.²¹⁷

Ewing saw no comparison between the *Joseph and the Suitors* panel to the present day Mechelen cathedral but the church depicted in the panel may well be fictitious and serving to help show the genealogy of Joseph through its details and embellishments. Thus a hypothesis for Mechelen being the Birmingham panel's original destination is plausible but no more, but perhaps somewhere else in the Netherlands region was the original destination of the Birmingham panel.

One hypothesis which shall be considered is that the altarpiece stayed in Antwerp, not least because the panel depicts a gothic church from the period of around 1520. The tower of the Church to Our Lady in Antwerp was completed in 1521 and it is the largest Gothic church in the Low Countries. In 1559 it became the cathedral in Antwerp, previously being Antwerp's parish church.²¹⁸ In 1521 Emperor Charles V visited Antwerp, particularly to see the great tower of the just completed Church of Our Lady. He was inspired to make a speech in its honour, which began 'Beloved City of the arts, favoured above countless others'.²¹⁹ Therefore, given that Jan de Beer

²¹⁵ St Leurs, *Het verdwenen XVI eeuwse retabel der sint. Romboutskerk te, Mechelen*, 557-60. Ewing, *The Paintings and Drawings of Jan de Beer*, 256.

²¹⁶ Campbell, 'The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century,' *Burlington Magazine*, vol.118, no.877, Apr.1976, 188.

²¹⁷ Jan Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, Antwerp, 1994, 24-40.

²¹⁸ Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, Antwerp, 1994, 15.

²¹⁹ Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, Antwerp, 1994, 15-16.

was an alderman of the guild of St Luke in Antwerp, and given the completion of the church and the visit of the Emperor, it is very possible the Birmingham shutter was part of an altarpiece for this building.

Indeed although Quentin Metsys had been commissioned by the joiners' guild in 1508 to paint a triptych depicting their patron saints of their guild John the Baptist and John the Evangelist for this building, (now in the Royal Museum of Fine Art in Antwerp), most commissioned altarpieces in the Antwerp church were the types of carved and painted altarpieces which were so popular at the time.²²⁰ A floor plan of the position of the altars included the following patron guilds; bakers and millers, market gardeners, furriers, brewers and corn merchants, surgeons and barbers, woodcutters, tailors, hosiers, coopers, linen-weavers, haberdashers, stonemasons, dealers in old clothes, painters, shoe makers, schoolmasters, joiners, smiths, carpenters, fishmongers and mariners, innkeepers, and soap-boilers. Indeed Dürer, as mentioned, journeyed to the Netherlands between 1520-21²²¹ and confirmed the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp was very large and with many altars, he wrote in his diary on 5 of August 1520:

The Church of our Lady in Antwerp is so very large that many masses can be sung in it at one time, without interfering with each other. The altars have wealthy endowments and the best musicians are employed that can be had. I have also been into the rich Abbey of St Michael. There are, in the choir there, splendid stalls of sculpted stone-work. But at Antwerp, they spare no cost on such things, for there is money enough.²²²

Given the quantity of the altars and the existence of one paid for by the shoe makers guild and also the prominence of the pattens (the type of shoe discussed in Chapter One, worn by Joseph in *Joseph and the Suitors*), it is plausible the altarpiece was linked to the shoe makers' guild.

As well as these altarpieces, a new altar bay contained the altarpiece of the Guild of Our Lady of Praise and one of the guild's duties was every evening to perform an evening service of praise to the Virgin Mary. To enable this to be performed the guild had its own rood loft with an organ and a platform for singers in the chapel (and one

²²⁰ Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, 33.

²²¹ Linda Murrey, *The High Renaissance and Mannerism*, London, 1995, 218.

²²² Philippe Felix Rombouts and Theodore van Lerijs, *De Liggeren en andere historische archieven der Antwerpsche Sint Lucasgilde*, vol.1, Amsterdam, 1961, 75.

is depicted in *Joseph and the Suitors*). We know that they celebrated mass to the Virgin in Antwerp since 1124 daily and they did this at night with candles and music and a Night Nativity scene would be particularly apt and the depiction of the Virgin and a rood loft for its own organ in the Birmingham panel would be entirely appropriate for their purposes.²²³ Therefore given the motifs and iconography of the panel such as the rood loft, the figure of the Virgin, and the evocative Night Nativity, the Birmingham panel could plausibly have been a commission for the Guild of our Lady of Praise in the Church of Our Lady. Indeed Gillis Wraghe made a carved case for the Guild of our Lady of Praise in 1501²²⁴, and as discussed in Chapter three it would often be normal practice that a painter would be asked to paint the shutters later, when the guild could afford the investment.

This chapel still contains a statue of Our Lady, although not the original one which was destroyed when the Calvinists controlled Antwerp in the 1580s, which had followed a fire in the building in 1533, in which many works of art were burnt and attempted to be rescued and not shown in later depictions of the cathedral (figs 97, 98, 99).²²⁵ It is conjecture but the above evidence together with reference to de Beer's life, career and oeuvre may very well suppose that a leader of the hugely important guild of image makers would have been commissioned by one of the several guilds, particularly for the Guild of Our Lady of Praise, or even for the high altar, to produce an altarpiece housed in the church in readiness for its completion and visit of the Emperor. This is just a hypothesis but if it is correct the Birmingham panel would have had to have survived the great fire the Cathedral suffered in 1533. Two other works are known to have been saved and these are the previously mentioned Quentin Metsys' altarpiece commissioned by the joiners' guild and depicting John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, and one altarpiece by Bernard van Orley showing *Works of Charity* and *The Last Judgment*, both now in Antwerp. However it is completely plausible that a shutter was rescued. In summary, an Antwerp church most likely would have favoured one of the leading artists who was also from the city, particularly an alderman of the guild and in the circle of leading painters. Furthermore the church in Antwerp was specifically dedicated to the Virgin. Finally a work that

²²³ Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, 24.

²²⁴ Van Damme, *The Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp*, 133.

²²⁵ Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 3.

included, not only a range of sinning types but also different races as depicted in *Joseph and the Suitors*, would need to be in a city of viewers that understood and appreciated it such as Antwerp.

CONCLUSION

Michelangelo said: ‘In Flanders they paint with a view to external exactness such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill.’²²⁶ Michelangelo may well have tried to damn with faint praise the excellent work of the North, but he also spoke some truth. This is because on one hand, the Barber’s *Joseph and the Suitors* is just as Michelangelo described, it is a painting of external exactness of character types in Antwerp, which cheers the viewer. However, the painting is much more than just that. De Beer, by depicting external exactness of contemporary character types has matched them each with their inner temperament and so a range of sins is displayed. Therefore De Beer’s suitors show at one level the humour of a satirist, but on another, they contrast with the carefully depicted holy figures to offer the viewer their own life choices and paths.

Joseph and the Suitors and the *Nativity at Night* both convey the same theological themes of the change from the old order to the new, also Christ’s sacrifice, the purity of lineages of the Holy family and more generally both paintings implore the worshipper to embrace Christ. Yet as discussed the paintings each have different stories and different tones. For example *Joseph and the Suitors* offers theological messages yet does so in a contemporary and accessible way such as using fashionable clothing and perhaps some humour in its depiction of sinners. In contrast the *Nativity* conveys the most significant members of the Holy family, the Virgin and Christ, in a particularly divine, spiritual and somber way. This corresponds to their respective positions within the altarpiece, *Joseph and the Suitors* has a lower order of importance and is therefore depicted on the first opening and Mary and the Christ child are depicted at the last opening of the altarpiece. This exquisitely composed and rendered panel is not only an autograph de Beer it is amongst the best to have been produced in the Netherlands in the period and it places de Beer amongst the elite of sixteenth-century artists.

In the middle of the sixteenth century Marcus van Vaernewijck, in Ghent, wrote that ‘It would be impossible to enumerate all the works of sculpture, ornaments, statues

²²⁶ Francesco da Holanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans., A.F.G. Bell, Oxford and London, 1928, 15-16.

and others destroyed by the wars'.²²⁷ Indeed the Barber's and the Thyssen-Bornemisza's original companion paintings may have been destroyed, along with much of de Beer's oeuvre. Thus his oeuvre now needs to be re-examined with particular reference to works previously attributed to the so-called Master of 1518, to highlight de Beer's talent because from this investigation into *Joseph and the Suitors* and the *Nativity at Night*, it is now understandable why de Beer was held in such esteem by his contemporaries. It is less understandable why he has previously been comparatively little researched and thus less esteemed today.

During the course of this research, churches, museums and galleries which have works by de Beer and his contemporaries have proposed future joint exhibitions and the author suggests the Birmingham and Madrid panels are potentially re-united, perhaps with the Albertina and Frankfurt drawings. During the preparation for such an exhibition the paintings and drawings may be examined by infra-red and dendrochronological testing and then compared with each other and this may confirm one or two issues, so as to finally close the case.

²²⁷ Nash, *Northern Renaissance Art*, 11, citing, M. van Vaernewijck, *Den Spieghel der Nederlandscher Audtheyt* (Ghent 1568), published in French as M. De Smet de Naeyer (ed.), *Mémoires d'un patricien gantois du XVI siècle: Troubles religieux en Flandre et dans les Pays-Bas au XVI siècle*, 2 vols, Ghent, 1905-6, I, 126.

Illustrations

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
1.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i>
2.	Jan de Beer	<i>The Nativity</i>
3.	Unknown Artist	<i>A German Jew and Jewess from Worms</i>
4.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors, detail</i>
5.	Quentin Metsys	Money Lender and his Wife
6.	Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau	<i>Infancy Altarpiece of Saluzzo, closed, detail</i>
7.	<i>Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau</i>	<i>Infancy Altarpiece of Saluzzo, first opening</i>
8.	Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau	<i>Infancy Altarpiece of Saluzzo, second opening</i>
9.	Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau	<i>Virgin Mary Altarpiece, closed</i>
10.	Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau	<i>Virgin Mary Altarpiece, open</i>
11.	Attributed to the workshop of Robert Moreau	<i>Virgin Mary Altarpiece, Joseph & Suitors, detail</i>
12.	Master of the Antwerp Adoration	<i>Joseph with the Flowering Staff</i>
13.	Robert Campin	<i>Miracle of the Rod and the Marriage of the Virgin</i>
14.	Rogier van der Weyden	<i>The Flowering of Joseph's Rod and the Betrothal of the Virgin</i>
15.	Giotto	<i>The Virgin's Suitors Presenting their Rods at the Temple</i>
16.	Giotto	<i>The Marriage of the Virgin</i>
17.	Pietro Perugino	<i>The Marriage of the Virgin</i>
18.	Raphael	<i>The Marriage of the Virgin</i>
19.	Jean Fouquet	<i>The Marriage of the Virgin</i>

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
20.	Attributed to the Master of the Antwerp Adoration	<i>The Holy Family</i>
21.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
22.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
23.	Adrian Ysenbrant (also Isenbrant)	Altarpiece of <i>The Nativity</i>
24.	Petrus Christus	<i>Nativity</i>
25.	William Langland	Manuscript of <i>Piers Plowman</i>
26.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , diagram
26i.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
26ii.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
26ii(b).	Hieronymous Bosch	<i>The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things - Lust</i> , detail
26iii.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
26iv.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
27.	Marinus van Reymerswale	<i>City Treasurer</i>
28.	Quentin Metsys	<i>The Ugly Duchess</i>
26v.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
26vi.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
26vii.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
29.	Hieronymous Bosch	<i>Christ Carrying the Cross</i>
30.	Hieronymous Bosch	<i>The Crowning with Thorns</i>
31.	Hieronymous Bosch	<i>The Garden of Earthly Delights</i>
32.	Hieronymous Bosch	<i>The Garden of Earthly Delights</i> , detail, right panel
33.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
34.	Jan de Beer	<i>Joseph and the Suitors</i> , detail
35.	(Workshop of)? Robert Campin	<i>Annunciation Triptych</i> (Merode Altarpiece)
36.	(Workshop of)? Robert Campin	<i>Annunciation Triptych</i> (Merode Altarpiece), detail of right panel
37.	After Van Der Goes	<i>Night Nativity</i>
38.	Follower of Hugo van der Goes	<i>Nativity, with a Donor</i>
39.	Follower of Hugo van der Goes	<i>Nativity at Night</i>
40.	Jan de Beer	<i>Altarpiece of the Nativity</i> , open
41.	Jan de Beer	<i>Altarpiece of the Nativity</i> , closed
42.	Jan de Beer	<i>Adoration of the Shepherds</i> , detail
43.	Jan de Beer	<i>Adoration of the Magi</i>
44.	Hugo van der Goes	<i>Portinari Altarpiece</i>
45.	Geertgen tot Sint Jans	<i>Nativity at Night</i>
46.	Gerard David	<i>Night Nativity</i>
47.	Hugo van der Goes	<i>Nativity</i>
48.	Follower of Jan Joest of Kalkar	<i>Adoration of the Christ Child</i>
49.	Master of Amiens	<i>Nativity</i>
50.	Jan Gossaert	<i>Adoration of the Kings</i>
51.	Jan de Beer	<i>Adoration of the Shepherds</i> , detail
52.	Domenico Ghirlandaio	<i>Adoration of the Shepherd</i>
53.	Master of the Antwerp Adoration	<i>Altarpiece of the Adoration</i>
53a.	Pseudo Bles	<i>Beheading of St. John The Baptist</i>
54.	Circle of Jan Gossaert	<i>Adoration of the Kings</i>
55.	Jan de Beer	<i>Study of Nine Male Heads</i>

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
56.	Jan de Beer	<i>Adoration of the Magi</i>
57.	Jan de Beer	<i>Annunciation</i>
58.	Jan de Beer workshop	<i>Birth of the Virgin</i>
59.	Jan de Beer	<i>The Betrothal of the Virgin</i>
60.	Jan de Beer workshop	<i>Birth of the Virgin</i>
61.	Jan de Beer, formerly, Master of 1518	<i>St Mary's Altar</i> , closed view
62.	Jan de Beer, formerly, Master of 1518	<i>St Mary's Altar</i> , first open view
63.	Sculptor, possibly Jan Mertins	<i>St Mary's Altar</i> , second opening
64.	Master of 1518	<i>Birth of the Virgin</i>
65.	Master of 1518	<i>Betrothal of the Virgin</i>
66.	Master of 1518(?)	<i>Adoration of the Magi</i>
67.	Joachim Patinir and Quentin Metsys	<i>Temptation of St. Anthony</i>
68.	Joachim Patinir and Joos van Cleve	<i>Landscape with St. Jerome</i>
69.	Jan de Beer	<i>Nativity at Night</i> , detail
70.	Joachim Patinir	<i>Landscape with Charon's Boat</i>
71.	Joachim Patinir	<i>The Assumption of the Virgin, with the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Adoration of the Magi, the Ascension of Christ, St Mark and an Angel, and St Luke and an Ox</i>
72.	Photographer, unknown	The Fugger Chapel
73.	Unknown	<i>Journey of the Magi</i>
74.	Gaudenzio Ferrari	Wall screen with scenes from the <i>Life of Christ</i>
75.	Hans Memling	<i>Passion Altarpiece</i>

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
76.	Attributed to a follower of Pieter Coecke van Aelst	Altarpiece with <i>Scenes of the Passion</i>
77.	Attributed to a follower of Pieter Coecke van Alst	Altarpiece with <i>Scenes of the Passion</i>
78.	Attributed to an 'Antwerp Mannerist'	St. Agilulfus Altarpiece, second opening
79.	Attributed to an 'Antwerp Mannerist'	St. Agilulfus Altarpiece, central case
80-82	Attributed to an 'Antwerp Mannerist'	Panels and case openings from the Altarpiece of <i>St. Anno and Agilulfus</i>
83.	Jan Joest	High Altar, open
84.	'Antwerp Mannerist'	Shutters of a Carved Altarpiece of <i>Christ's Ministry</i> , first opening
85.	'Antwerp Mannerist'	Shutters of a Carved Altarpiece of <i>Christ's Ministry</i> , closed
86.	Unknown	<i>Virgin Mary</i> Altarpiece, closed
87.	Unknown	<i>Virgin Mary</i> Altarpiece, open
88.	Joos van Cleve	<i>Passion</i> Altarpiece, closed
89.	Joos van Cleve	<i>Passion</i> Altarpiece, open
90.	Joos van Cleve	<i>St John the Baptist</i> , left exterior wing, the <i>St Reinhold</i> altarpiece, closed
91.	Joos van Cleve	<i>St Reinhold</i> , right exterior wing, the <i>St Reinhold</i> altarpiece, closed
92.	Joos van Cleve and workshop	The <i>St Reinhold</i> altarpiece, open
93.	Antwerp Artist (Sculptor)	Sculpture from the <i>St Reinhold</i> altarpiece, second opening
94.		<i>Passion and Infancy</i> Altarpiece, back of case
95.		<i>Passion</i> Altarpiece of Herbais-sous-Piétrain, back of the caisse
96.	Photographer unknown	St. Rombout's Cathedral, north side of choir
97.	Gaspard Bouttats	<i>The destruction of the images, 1566</i>

No.	Artist	Name of Painting
98.	Hendrik I Van Steenwijk	<i>Cathedral interior</i>
99.	Pieter Neefs (the elder)	<i>Interior of Antwerp Cathedral</i>

DIAGRAMS

No.	Description
1.	Enghien Altarpiece
2.	Lübeck Altarpiece
3.	Opitter Altarpiece
4.	The Madrid Panels
5.	Position of Madrid Panels (Unlikely)
6.	Position of Madrid Panels (More likely)
7.	Position of both Madrid Panels together – plausible
8a.	Position of Madrid and Birmingham Panels together (Most likely)
8b.	Position of Madrid and Birmingham Panels with Vienna drawing and mock up

APPENDIX 1

MARIAN ALTARPIECES

The author for all the reasons discussed prefers Antwerp as the original destination for the altarpiece that contained the Barber panel. However, this dissertation drew up a list of known Marian altarpieces, whole or part, with the intention of discovering any link between the Birmingham panel and a case. Jacobs discusses many, though she does not list them, but she suggests there are about sixteen Marian Antwerp altarpiece cases that survive, from the period discussed. Woods also noted that transportation documentation in the last two centuries has been poor, so that it is difficult to trace most shutters provenance.²²⁸ The list of notes and the results are below:-

Lübeck, Germany; the altarpiece, and its links to the Birmingham panel has been discussed in the dissertation, it is particularly well documented and was commissioned by Johann Boenne and installed in 1523.²²⁹

Bocholt, Belgium; the altarpiece is complete, but is a reconstruction of the original and without any obvious connections with the Birmingham panel.²³⁰

Västerås II, Sweden; this is a Marian altarpiece with original shutters of Christ's Ministry but it is complete.²³¹

Enguien, Belgium; this altarpiece has a Virgin Mary altarpiece and it is complete, as discussed.²³²

Thenay, France; this altarpiece has an *Adoration* with a *Night Nativity* but with a full complement of shutters and it is smaller than the Birmingham panel.²³³

Ulkebøl, Denmark, this has a Virgin and Saints altarpiece with original shutters.²³⁴

Vitoria, Spain; this altarpiece has a *Death of the Virgin* scene, it is Marian and without shutters, but it is an unusually small case and so too small to be connected to the Birmingham shutter.²³⁵

²²⁸ Kim Woods *Imported Images, Netherlandish Late Sculpture in England c. 1400-1550, Lincolnshire, 2007*, 147. The trade art between the Low Countries and Britain was rife with 90 boats sailing between Ostend and England between 1809-1812, with as many as 18 containing works of art and this trade continued well into the nineteenth-century and most were undocumented, dated or attributed.

²²⁹ Salzwedel, *St Mary's Lübeck*, 30.

²³⁰ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 84-93.

²³¹ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 58-63.

²³² Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 98-106

²³³ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 140-141

²³⁴ Nieuwdorp, *Antwerp Altarpieces*, 44-47

Vadstena, Sweden; this altarpiece was painted before 1484 and has the lives of saints on its shutters.²³⁶

Valladolid, Spain, Valladolid was the capital of Castile and has a cathedral built in the so-called ‘mannerist’ style, its altarpiece case is 283 cm high x 248cm wide and 37 cm deep and scenes are the *Birth of the Virgins*, *the Annunciation*, *the Nativity*, *the Magi* and the central scenes are of the *Lamentation* and *Crucifixion*. The wings are missing but half of the width of the case is 124cm and so the Birmingham panel at 139cm is too wide for it to be a contender as a lost shutter.²³⁷

Bielefeld, Germany; this altarpiece has a carved and painted altarpiece which contains some Marian scenes but also the Passion.²³⁸

Grosskmehlen altarpiece is late fifteenth century but also has the theme of St George.²³⁹

Ternant, Belgium, this altarpiece, also has a Marian altarpiece but is complete with shutters.²⁴⁰

Tongeren, Belgium in the Church of Our Lady is an altarpiece that is possibly not complete, initial information suggests this is too small to be connected to the Birmingham panel. Furthermore, it does not have a narrative case.²⁴¹

Västerlovstá, Sweden, has an altarpiece which is complete with shutters.²⁴²

Kirchlinde, near Dortmund, Germany, Kirchlinde ‘s church of St Joseph, has a 1520 altarpiece from Antwerp, with missing shutters and no knowledge of their whereabouts, originally the altarpiece was dedicated to St Catherine and St Joseph and believed to have been in the Franciscan Monastery in the town, but this case is too small to have had shutters the size of the Birmingham panel(this altarpiece is separate from the passion altarpiece in St Peter’s, Kirchlinde).²⁴³

Xanten, Germany, has a Passion altarpiece but with several episodes from the Life of the Virgin, and it is complete with shutters in St Viktor’s Church.²⁴⁴

²³⁵ www.spainisculture.com., accessed May, 2012.

²³⁶ Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 113.

²³⁷ www.spainisculture.com/espana. Accessed May, 2012. The sculpture is in the National Sculpture Museum in Valladolid.

²³⁸ Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 84.

²³⁹ *Nieuwdorp, Antwerp Altarpieces*, 29.

²⁴⁰ Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 38-39.

²⁴¹ Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 44-45

²⁴² Jacobs, *Early Carved Netherlandish Altarpieces, 1380-1550*, 214.

²⁴³ www.historischer-verein-dortmund.de/archives.

²⁴⁴ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces 1380-1550*, 43.

Ontario, Canada, an Antwerp, sixteenth-century Marian carved altarpiece is now in Canada but the size is 223.4 cm x 195.6 cm and does not correspond to the Birmingham panel sizes and the Museum now debates if the piece is from Brussels or Antwerp.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Eugenio Felice, 'A Brabant Altarpiece', *Canadian Journal of Netherlandish Studies*, Ontario, 1993.

APPENDIX 2 – THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA MUSEUM, PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs taken at author's visit in February 2012, for this dissertation, courtesy of Thyssen Bornemisza Museum photographer.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Annunciation*, left side section of panel showing added attached 'frame'.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Annunciation*, right side section of panel showing added attached 'frame'.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Annunciation*, depth of panel including cradling and bars attached to back of panel.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Annunciation*, close up side view showing 'frame' inserted and support bar attached to back of panel.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Annunciation*, front side showing cut and later attached 'frame'.



Jan de Beer and workshop (?), *Birth of Mary*, back of panel showing cradling.

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