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The Iconography of Hieronymus Bosch's  
*St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* (Rotterdam)

## SUMMARY

Begun in 1568, the revolt of the Netherlands against the Spanish stimulated every Dutch province to strive to attain the greatest possible autonomy and independence from the dominant province of Holland. One of the arguments forwarded for pursuing this independent course was how ancient a region was (*laudatio ex vetustate*). Incidentally, it was Holland with its Batavian myth that had a strong suit in hand in this matter. To counter this, historiographers were appointed to confirm their region's age. In this capacity, the States of Friesland designated Suffridus Petrus (1527-1597), Bernardus Furmerius (1542-1616) and Pierius Winsemius (1586-1644) consecutively. Relying on traditional accounts, which they believed were ancient, Petrus and Furmerius established a line of legendary Frisian monarchs, beginning with Friso – banished from India – who was said to be a descendant of Noah's son Sem. The results of their scholarly research were published in small-scale, unillustrated books in Latin.

Not officially commissioned as a historiographer, around 1597 Martinus Hamconius (c. 1550-1620), wrote an acrostic on the name of Suffridus Petrus, which comprised an ekphrasis with an animated description of the legendary Frisians. In 1606 he also devised a table (fig. 1) in which all the characters who played a

role in the illustrious history of Friesland are described in Latin. This cast of characters was published again in 1617, this time in Dutch (fig. 2). A lost copy of this edition featured illustrations (fig. 3), which were reused in an edition of Hamconius' *Frisia* (1620) (figs. 17, 20, 21). The tableau of 1617 includes several old Frisian traditional costumes (fig. 10). All the prints were made by Pieter Feddes of Harlingen.

A second set of illustrations of the Frisian princes was etched by Simon Wynhoutsz. Frisius around 1617. These prints, known only from Pierius Winsemius' *Chronique* of 1622 (figs. 15, 18, 19), originally constituted a consecutive series (fig. 13), doubtless intended to illustrate Hamconius' treatise and probably made for his publisher Jan Lamrinck, who (according to the author's hypothesis) could not use it and thus cut down the plates and included them in Winsemius' *Chronique*, which he also published. A third, incomplete series of illustrations (fig. 14), again by Pieter Feddes, was likewise made to illustrate Hamconius' series, but may have been rejected and likewise used in the *Chronique*.

Some details in four of the figures in both series (figs. 15-23) seem to point to the iconographic tradition of the free Frisian countryman.

I.  
Hieronymus Bosch,  
*St. Christopher carrying the Christ  
Child*, c. 1496, oil on panel,  
113 x 71,5 cm. Rotterdam,  
Museum Boijmans  
Van Beuningen.  
Photo: museum.



## The Iconography of Hieronymus Bosch's *St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* (Rotterdam)

Inventory number St. 26 of the Rotterdam *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen* is a panel by Hieronymus Bosch depicting St. Christopher who is carrying the Christ Child on his shoulders (fig. 1). Roger-Henri Marijnissen and Gerd Unverfehrt have pointed out in earlier publications that the central theme of this panel is closely related to the traditional fifteenth-century iconography of *St. Christopher* and to the *vita* of the saint in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*.<sup>1</sup> In this influential thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives and legends, which was also translated into Middle Dutch<sup>2</sup>, we can read that Christopher was a Canaanite giant who wanted to serve the most powerful man on earth. He becomes the servant of a king but when he notices that this king is afraid of the devil, he succeeds in becoming the devil's valet. Somewhat later Christopher finds out that the devil is afraid of Christ and his cross, and again the giant leaves his master. He then meets a hermit who advises him to settle on the bank of a dangerous river and to carry travellers across the water. One night a little child asks to be taken to the other side but during the crossing the child suddenly weighs so heavily, that Christopher almost stumbles under this burden. After he has reached the other bank, the child reveals itself as the Saviour.<sup>3</sup>

It is not difficult to determine that what Bosch painted in the centre of his panel is referring to the moment when Christopher almost succumbs to his divine burden. However, as is not unusual in the works of Bosch, the painting also contains a number of striking and even fantastic details which are more difficult to explain. The tree-trunk that Christopher uses as a staff begins to sprout at the top and at the bottom and also carries a bleeding fish halfway up. To Christopher's left we see a naked man fleeing from a dragon, a bear that is being hung up in a tree by an archer (fig. 2), and a flying fish. To the right of the saint Bosch painted a highly remarkable withered tree and a number of weird objects, such as a broken pitcher, a dovecot and a little manikin climbing towards a beehive.

In my doctoral dissertation<sup>4</sup> I have tried to show that Bosch did not paint some sort of personal secret language, but that quite on the contrary many of his themes and allegorical motifs can also be found in contemporary iconographical and literary sources. Especially the Middle Dutch moralizing and devotional texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the late medieval literature of the so-called *rederijkers* [rhetoricians] contain a wealth of material that may contribute to a better understanding of Bosch's pictorial language. Many of the metaphors and symbolical ideas that were used by Bosch, also appear elsewhere and can thus be regarded as commonplaces or *topoi* which more than probably were fairly easy to interpret for a late medieval person with an average intellectual training. In my dissertation I concentrated mainly on the *Haywain* triptych (Madrid, Prado/Esorial) and on the *Pedlar* tondo (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van

2.  
Hieronymus Bosch,  
*St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* (detail), oil on panel,  
113 x 71,5 cm. Rotterdam,  
Museum Boijmans Van  
Beuningen. Photo: RKD,  
The Hague.



Beuningen). In this article I will try to explain the allegorical motifs of Bosch's *St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* by using the same methodological approach.

Let us first take a closer look at the staff of St. Christopher, which shows green foliage at the bottom and at the top. According to the *Legenda aurea*, the Christ Child told St. Christopher to plant his staff in the ground. The next morning the staff had leaves like a palm-tree and bore dates, thus proving that the little child had spoken the truth.<sup>5</sup> However, what Bosch painted, agrees more closely with the fourteenth-century Middle High German poem *Sanct Christophorus*<sup>6</sup> which was already signalled in connection with Bosch's Rotterdam painting by Dirk Bax in his doctoral dissertation of 1948<sup>7</sup>. According to this *vita* the saint's staff

begins to blossom while he is still crossing the dangerous river and this is done by Christ to show *daz er gelauben solt daz, / daz er der ware got was* [so that he (Christopher) would believe that he (Christ) was the true God].<sup>8</sup>

The fact that a bleeding fish is attached to Christopher's staff cannot be explained by the *Legenda aurea* nor by the German *vita* and seems to be a novel addition to the traditional iconography of St. Christopher. The allegorical meaning of this fish becomes obvious, though, as soon as we have noticed how heavily St. Christopher is leaning on the staff. The key for a correct interpretation can be found in the Middle Dutch translation of the *Legenda aurea* in which the staff is called a *stock* [stick] several times.<sup>9</sup> Referring to the sticks being carried by the pedlars on the closed wings of the *Haywain* triptych and on the Rotterdam *Pedlar* tondo, I have signalled in my doctoral dissertation that the term *stock* can be encountered dozens of times in Middle Dutch literature around 1500 as a symbol of Christ and of his death on the cross whereas 'leaning on a stick' means that believing in Christ is a strong support for sinful man and a reliable protection against the wiles of the devil.<sup>10</sup> With this knowledge in mind it is by no means far-fetched to interpret the (bleeding!) fish as another allegorical reference to Christ and to his death on the cross.<sup>11</sup> In the Middle Ages the fish was a well-known symbol of Christ. In the former chapel of the Guild of the Fishmongers in the cathedral of 's-Hertogenbosch a fifteenth-century mural painting with apostles, three family weapons, some fish and a number of inscriptions can still be seen. One of these inscriptions reads: *Jhs die van vysken gebecken spyse naemt / Jhs gekruist oock vys is genaemt* [Jesus who turned fried fish into food (?) / Jesus on the cross is also called fish].<sup>12</sup> Jan Mandyn, a painter strongly influenced by Bosch and active in the middle of the sixteenth century, depicted a *St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek) in which St. Christopher is holding a fish in his right hand, whereas his left hand is leaning on a staff.<sup>13</sup>

The bleeding fish must also be contrasted with the flying fish that Bosch painted at lower left. This creature flies in the saint's direction and seems to be threatening or challenging him. A flying fish can also be seen in the foreground of the left panel of Bosch's *Garden of Delights* triptych (Madrid, Prado) in a context which refers to the impending Fall of Man, and at the top of the central panel of the same triptych in a context of sinfulness and unchastity. A third specimen features among a group of airborne devils in the upper left of the central panel of the *Temptations of St. Anthony* triptych (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga). Flying fish appear frequently in a diabolical environment on paintings of sixteenth-century Bosch imitators. A good example of this is the *Temptation of St. Anthony* which has been preserved in two versions (Amsterdam/Madrid)<sup>14</sup>, on which a devilish monk is travelling through the air on a flying fish.

All this goes to show that the flying fish had a negative connotation for Bosch, as has already been observed by Paul Vandebroek.<sup>15</sup> In the medieval bestiaries – and also in some zoological Middle Dutch texts – the Latin name of the flying fish is *serra*.<sup>16</sup> According to these texts the *serra* is a sea monster with huge wings that tends to race against ships. When it becomes tired, it lowers its wings and is carried back to its original location in the depths of the ocean. Time and again this is interpreted in the same allegorical way: the sea is the world and the crews of the ships are the righteous people. The flying fish is a symbol of those who have started out with the intention of becoming good Christians, but after a while they abandon this intention and they revert to sin, which means that they will end up in hell (the depths of the ocean).<sup>17</sup> On Bosch's Rotterdam panel this symbolical meaning of the flying fish can only be applied to St. Christopher in an inverted and indirect way. The *serra* here signals what *did not* happen to the saint and at the same time what *could* have happened to him, considering his past (when he

was a servant of the devil): as opposed to the bad Christians who relapse into sin St. Christopher never gave up his search for Christ and was rewarded for this by meeting Christ in person and being baptised by him.

Likewise some other details on the Rotterdam panel appear to contain references to the past of the saint. Although neither the *Legenda aurea* nor the Middle High German *vita* make any mention of a dragon or of a bear being hung up in a tree by an archer<sup>18</sup>, the meaning of these motifs can be understood by consulting medieval bestiaries and Middle Dutch literature in which both the dragon and the bear occur as allegorical topoi referring to the devil.<sup>19</sup> At the same time Bosch seems to be telling a story to the attentive spectator by positioning the details of the dragon and the bear on the opposing banks of a river flowing through the landscape in the background of the panel.

On the left bank a naked man, who apparently wanted to take a swim in the river, is put to flight by a dragon that shows up from behind the wall of a ruin (fig. 2). The swimmer leaves behind a white shirt (a motif we will meet elsewhere on the panel, see below) and somewhat more to the right we see three wading birds, two of which are drinking from the river. Probably the details with the swimmer and the wading-birds are intended to bring to the spectator's mind the topoi 'river' and 'streaming water' which in late medieval literature are often used as allegorical references to the sinfulness of this world and the transitory character of all earthly vanities.<sup>20</sup> The whole detail with the dragon would then refer to the power of the devil who is always on the lurk to tempt mankind to sin.<sup>21</sup>

The detail with the captured bear has a contrary meaning: here it is the devil who has been defeated by a faithful person (the archer). By painting these two motifs one immediately above the other but at the same time clearly separated on opposite banks of a river, Bosch wanted to indicate that there has been an evolution from sinfulness to conversion, which perfectly matches St. Christopher's biography: after having served the devil, he has (literally and figuratively speaking) overcome the tempting waters of earthly vanities and now he has become a follower of Christ. That this is indeed what Bosch wanted to communicate, is proven by the fact that the tree on which the bear is being hung, is a dead tree starting to blossom again. In Middle Dutch literature we meet this motif several times as an image of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection and as a symbol of the sinner who – due to Christ's sacrifice – can always count on forgiveness and a happy life in the hereafter.<sup>22</sup> It is more than likely that the withered tree-stump with a blossoming twig in the lower right of the painting has the same allegorical meaning.

The most eye-catching fragment of the Rotterdam panel is definitely the withered, bare tree with thorny branches to St. Christopher's right. From one of these branches a huge broken pitcher is dangling and right above it we see a shed that has the shape of the upper part of a horse's skull. A ladder leads to the place where the pitcher has been broken and inside the pitcher a fire is burning. In the neck of the pitcher sits a bearded man: he is holding a rope to which a lantern is attached. Under the shed we notice a drying white shirt and a spit with a roasted chicken. Above the shed Bosch painted a dovecot and still higher a weird, naked creature is climbing towards a beehive. This enigmatic, typically boschian construction is apparently intended to represent the tree-cabin of St. Christopher, because in the Middle Dutch version of the *Legenda aurea* we can read about the moment after which the future saint has met the hermit: *Aldus ghinck hi tot die riviere ende maecte daer ene woninghe to synre behoef* [thus he went to the river and there built himself a dwelling].<sup>23</sup> In 1948 Bax wrote that the tree-cabin (which can possibly also belong to the hermit, or to St. Christopher and the hermit) has been diabolized: to tempt the saint the devil has turned it into a brothel.<sup>24</sup>

In my opinion Bax was right: the withered tree (itself an allegorical topos in Middle Dutch literature referring to sinfulness<sup>25</sup>) contains a number of allegorical references to unchastity and prostitution, as I will try to demonstrate below.

In Middle Dutch the words *duyfhuys* [dovecot] and *duve* [dove] could mean 'brothel' and 'prostitute'.<sup>26</sup> Bosch also painted a dovecot as the symbol of a brothel under the roof of a tavern on the Rotterdam *Pedlar* tondo and on the central panel of the *Adoration of the Magi* triptych (Madrid, Prado). That this symbolism was still clearly understood by the sixteenth-century Bosch imitators is proven by the *Temptation of St. Anthony* mentioned above, which has been preserved in two versions<sup>27</sup>: on these panels St. Anthony is being tempted by a naked woman standing in the doorway of a house, the upper part of which consists of the head of an old woman (apparently a procuress) carrying a dovecot. Moreover in Middle Dutch the expression *een tijtken speten* [to spit a chicken] could refer to sexual intercourse, the chicken being a metaphor for a licentious girl or a whorish woman.<sup>28</sup> On the central panel of his *Temptations of St. Anthony* triptych (Lisbon) Bosch painted a monk who is sitting at a table with a prostitute and in the immediate neighbourhood of this scene we see a dovecot and a spit with a roasted chicken. Likewise Peter Bruegel the Elder placed a dovecot and a spit with a roasted chicken near a diabolized love-scene in his *Luxuria* drawing.<sup>29</sup>

Another intriguing detail is the white shirt, which hangs between the branches of the withered tree, next to the spit with the roasted chicken. A white shirt is also the only garment that is left behind by the naked swimmer on the left bank of the river. Because St. Christopher is wearing a white shirt beneath his red upper garment, on a superficial, literal level we probably have to understand that this shirt got soaked during one of his previous crossings and now it has been hung up in the tree-cabin to dry. But at the same time this shirt has a deeper, allegorical meaning. The motif of the white shirt can also be seen on the Rotterdam *Pedlar* tondo, where it is hanging in the window of a brothel, and on the central panel of the *Temptations of St. Anthony* triptych (Lisbon), where it belongs to a naked man who – in the immediate neighbourhood of a brothel scene – is ready to dive from a bridge into the water. In both these cases and on the Rotterdam *St. Christopher* it is clear that the motif of the white shirt appears in a negative erotic context which refers to prostitution. That the white shirt has to be associated with voluptuousness and earthly vanities can further be derived from fifteenth-century *ars moriendi* woodcuts in which a shirt hanging on a crossbar and a sack filled with coins show up as meaningful details clarifying the central scene: a dying man who on the brink of the grave is being tempted by devils by means of his earthly possessions which he doesn't want to abandon.<sup>30</sup>

One of the clearest references to prostitution in the diabolized tree is the gigantic broken pitcher. As Bax has already pointed out<sup>31</sup> it is highly probable that Bosch borrowed the 'broken pitcher' motif from the medieval legends about St. Christopher. In the Middle High German *vita* for example we can read how the hermit, on the occasion of his first meeting with St. Christopher, is going to fetch water but when he sees the giant, he is so terrified that he drops his pitcher:

Do sach er den einsidel sten,  
der het muot nach wazzer ze gen.  
Do der einsidel in ersach,  
er hueb sich mit grozzen gach  
in sein chlausen er do chart,  
sein chruweg im zebrochen wart;  
er slug vast den rigel fur,  
er want der tiefel wer vor der tur.<sup>32</sup>



[There he (Christopher) saw the hermit standing, who wanted to go to the water. When the hermit noticed him, he stood up with great speed and hastily he ran to his hermitage, thereby breaking his pitcher. He firmly drew the bolt, because he thought the devil was standing in front of his door.]

If Bosch was indeed inspired by passages like this one, it goes to show that he adapted a traditional element to his own needs and insights (as he did elsewhere in his paintings). On the Rotterdam panel the hermit who is going to fetch water with a pitcher, is clearly portrayed (together with a little white dog), but a second hermit and a second (broken) pitcher have become part of a devilish frame up that is meant to upset the saint, in vain of course. The figure who is sitting in the neck of the giant broken pitcher holding a rope with a lantern attached to it, is in the first place a diabolized version of the well-known iconographical motif of the hermit who uses a lantern to give St. Christopher some light while he is carrying the Christ Child across the river in the middle of the night.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, though, the lantern is more than probably meant to be the sign of a brothel, since lanterns had this symbolical meaning assigned to them in earlier centuries.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the huge broken pitcher has to be interpreted as a diabolized *spreeuwpot* [starling-pot], as was suggested by Marijnissen.<sup>35</sup> In a sixteenth-century engraving after the Bosch imitator Jan Wellens de Cock, representing a *Landscape with St. Christopher*<sup>36</sup>, the tree-cabin, this time apparently belonging to the hermit, is pictured in a normal way. At the left side of the cabin a white shirt has been hung up to dry (a detail showing influence from Bosch's Rotterdam panel) and at the right we see two starling-pots, again of normal size. In my opinion however, Bosch's pitcher hanging from a branch is far more reminiscent of the jugs and pitchers attached to a stick which we frequently meet in late medieval iconography as signs of taverns and brothels.<sup>37</sup> But why exactly did Bosch paint a *broken* pitcher? This question can only be answered in a satisfactory way if we consult late medieval Middle Dutch literature.

In texts from about 1500, an earthen pitcher (in Middle Dutch: *cruyck* or *pot*) which is easily broken, is sometimes used as a metaphor for man's sinfulness and transitoriness. More often, though, the motif of the broken pitcher appears in a context referring to negative, reprehensible sexuality. In these instances the expression *een cruycke / pot breken* [to break a pitcher] has the meaning of 'having sexual intercourse'. Even more relevant is the expression *een ghebroken potken* [a broken small pitcher] which could refer to an unmarried girl who has lost her virginity, or to a prostitute.<sup>38</sup> That the expression *broken pitcher* could refer to a prostitute is also confirmed by a *Temptation of St. Anthony* of a sixteenth-century Bosch imitator (Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie).<sup>39</sup> In the centre of this panel we see a man with a large bundle on his back who has just committed a theft, as can be deduced from the figure in nightdress on the road behind him who is calling for help. The man with the bundle is walking in the direction of a huge, erect pitcher with a large hole in it. In the hole of the broken pitcher a prostitute is waiting for the man with open arms. Apparently the anonymous painter wanted to suggest that the thief is going to squander his loot in a brothel.

Taking all these allegorical references into consideration, there can hardly be any doubt that Bosch wanted the spectator to understand that the devil has turned St. Christopher's tree-cabin into a brothel, an interpretation which is confirmed by a number of *St. Christopher carrying the Christ Child* panels painted by sixteenth-century Bosch imitators in which the tree-cabin has been turned into a *real* (and not an allegorical) brothel.<sup>40</sup> Of course St. Christopher – being a saint – is in no way influenced by all this and the devil's works are of no avail, as can be understood from the lower part of the tree. On the ground, to the left of the

tree-trunk, we see a dunghill and right above it a little chapel. In the immediate neighbourhood two cocks are looking in opposite directions. At the other side of the tree-trunk a ladder is lying on the ground and right above it hangs a dead fox: its hind legs are tied to the trunk and its throat is bleeding.

Apparently the lower part of the withered tree has to be interpreted in a positive way, as opposed to the diabolized upper part. This is pointed out most clearly by the little chapel. Moreover the ladder which is lying on the soil, signals in a subtle way that for the time being St. Christopher is not going to enter his tree-cabin which means (in an allegorical sense) that the devil cannot get a hold on him. In this connection it does not seem far-fetched to see the dead fox as a symbol of the victory over the devil and as an allegorical parallel with the bear that is being hung up in a tree by an archer. In medieval literature and iconography time and again the fox was seen as an image of the devil.<sup>41</sup> The dunghill undoubtedly alludes to sinfulness, but at the same time the little chapel hanging somewhat higher signals how sinfulness and the devil can be beaten: by placing one's hope on Christ. Which is exactly what St. Christopher has done.

Two cocks are standing to the left of (and very clearly not *on*) the dunghill. They find themselves close to the dunghill but are manifestly looking *away* from it. That the cocks ignore the dunghill means that they despise the sinfulness of all earthly vanities whereas the fact that Bosch painted *two* (positive) cocks can be associated with the two main figures of the panel: St. Christopher and Christ.<sup>42</sup> Because the two birds are turned in different directions they seem to be keeping a sharp lookout, thus allegorically referring to watchfulness against sinful behaviour, a positive connotation of the cock which occurs several times in Middle Dutch literature.<sup>43</sup>

The iconographical and textual evidence that I have collected above confirms that in 1948 Bax was right when he stated that the diabolized tree on the Rotterdam panel was intended by Bosch as an allegorical reference to prostitution.<sup>44</sup> An important question however, which has neither been asked nor answered yet in the literature about Bosch, is: *why* did Bosch paint the tree-cabin as a diabolized brothel? In other words: is there a link between St. Christopher and prostitution, or was it only Bosch's intention to give a general warning against sinfulness and unchastity? The answer can be found in the *Legenda aurea* and in the Middle High German *vita*. In the former text we read that St. Christopher preached Christianity in his later life and for this reason he was tortured by a heathen king. This king locked the saint up in a dungeon with two prostitutes who had to seduce him and make him fornicate with them. Of course St. Christopher remained untouched by their attempts and he even succeeded in converting the two women (after which they were killed by the king).<sup>45</sup> The Middle High German poem is even more relevant: here the devil transforms himself into a beautiful woman and attempts to seduce St. Christopher. It goes without saying that this diabolical prostitute, too is rebuffed by the holy man.

Although many of Bosch's paintings may seem weird and puzzling at first sight and bear witness to a rich and impressive imagination by adapting and combining traditional elements and motifs, I have tried to show in this article that a good deal of this painter's allegorical language can be understood in a better way when we consult contemporary iconographical and textual sources in general, and Middle Dutch literature in particular. Especially the diabolized tree on the Rotterdam panel provides strong proof for the thesis that many motifs in the works of Bosch are also to be found elsewhere in late medieval iconography and texts. Because of their more explicit character these latter (textual) sources are indispensable for a correct understanding of Bosch's forgotten imagery. By applying this methodological approach to the Rotterdam *St. Christopher carrying*

the *Christ Child* we are able to gain more insight into the final message Bosch wanted to convey to his spectators. Like St. Christopher every Christian has to choose between good and evil, but by ignoring the wiles of the devil and by turning to Christ, the saint set an example to follow. Those who act like St. Christopher will be eternally rewarded in heaven, the others will pine away in hell.<sup>46</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> R.H. Marijnissen and Peter Ruylfaelaere, *Hieronymus Bosch. Het volledig oeuvre*, Antwerp 1987, p. 402. Gerd Unverfehrt, *Hieronymus Bosch. Die Rezeption seiner Kunst im frühen 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1980, p. 189. More information about this panel is also given in Friso Lammertse (ed.), *Van Eyck to Bruegel 1400-1550. Dutch and Flemish painting in the collection of the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen*, Rotterdam 1994, pp. 84-89 (with extensive bibliography).

<sup>2</sup> This Middle Dutch version, known as *Passionael*, was made by the so-called *Bijbelvertaler van 1360* and was printed thirteen times from 1478 on. More information about these printed versions in Koen Goudriaan, 'Het Passionael op de drukpers', in: Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Marijke Carasso-Kok (eds.), *Gouden Legenden. Heiligenlevens en heiligenverering in de Nederlanden*, Hilversum 1997, pp. 73-88. I consulted the legend of St. Christopher in a *Passionael* which was printed in Zwolle in 1490. A modern edition of this last passage in A.J. Schneiders, *De legende van Christoffel*, The Hague 1941, pp. 21-33.

<sup>3</sup> William Granger Ryan (transl.), *Jacobus de Voragine. The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, 2 volumes, Princeton (N.J.) 1993, vol. II, pp. 10-14.

<sup>4</sup> It was published as Eric de Bruyn, *De vergeten beeldentaal van Jheronimus Bosch. De symboliek van de Hooiwagen-triptiek en de Rotterdamse Marskramer-tondo verklaard vanuit Middelnederlandse teksten. Proefschrifteditie*, 's-Hertogenbosch 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Schneiders 1941 (note 2), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> This poem consists of 1.630 lines and has survived in three manuscripts, two of them dat-

ing from the fourteenth century and one dating from around 1400. I quote from the edition in Anton Schönbach, 'Sanct Christophorus', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum*, 17 (1874), pp. 85-141. Cf. also H.-F. Rosenfeld, *Der hl. Christophorus. Seine Verehrung und seine Legende*, Leipzig 1937, pp. 481 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Dirk Bax, *Ontcijfering van Jeroen Bosch*, The Hague 1948, pp. 231-235. English translation: Dirk Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch. His picture-writing deciphered*, Rotterdam, 1979, pp. 305-310.

<sup>8</sup> Schönbach 1874 (note 6), p. 120, vs. 1.116-1.122 (the quoted verses are: 1.121-1.122).

<sup>9</sup> Schneiders 1941 (note 2), pp. 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 268-272.

<sup>11</sup> This also explains why the Christ Child is holding a little cross next to the staff, where – according to the traditional *St. Christopher* iconography – we would rather expect a globe.

<sup>12</sup> The mural painting has been damaged in the past but the fish and the inscriptions were faithfully restored. Cf. C.-F.-Xavier Smits, *De Kathedraal van 's-Hertogenbosch*, Brussels-Amsterdam 1907, pp. 200-201.

<sup>13</sup> Unverfehrt 1980 (note 1), p. 280 (cat. nr. 124, ill. 174).

<sup>14</sup> Unverfehrt 1980 (note 1), p. 275 (cat. nrs. 101/102, ill. 151).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Vandenbroeck, 'Jheronimus Bosch' zogenaamde *Tuin der Lusten*. I, *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1989, pp. 172-173.

<sup>16</sup> Compare for the correctness of this observation Wilma George

and Brunson Yapp, *The naming of the beasts. Natural history in the medieval bestiary*, London 1991, p. 205.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for this bestiary topos Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French bestiaries*, Chapel Hill 1962, pp. 163-165 and Nikolaus Henkel, *Studien zum Physiologus im Mittelalter*, Tübingen 1976, pp. 180-181. In the bestiary of Philippe de Thaon (c. 1125) the *serra* symbolizes the devil who holds back holy inspiration from man and captures him just as the *serra* draws away the wind and devours fish: cf. McCulloch 1962 (this note), p. 163. The *serra* is also mentioned in Jacob van Maerlant's *Der naturen bloeme* (c. 1270) and in the Antwerp Jan van Doesborch edition *Der dieren palleyes* (1520). In this latter source no allegorical interpretation is given, whereas Van Maerlant interprets the *serra* as a symbol of people who live above their social position until they have lost all their money and goods. Cf. Eelco Verwijs, *Jacob van Maerlant's Naturen Bloeme*, s.l. 1980, Part 1, p. 334 (Book IV, vs. 831-854). As for *Der dieren palleyes*: I consulted the copy in Brussels, Royal Library, II 38.891 (Book III, chapter 82, Ff4v-Ggr).

<sup>18</sup> As Bax noted, the German *vita* tells us that before meeting the devil, Christopher encountered some hunters who had killed two deer, a swine and a bear and that the giant carried the game to the castle of their lords [cf. Bax 1979 (note 7), p. 307]. In my opinion this passage bears too restricted relationship to the Rotterdam panel to explain Bosch's intentions.

<sup>19</sup> For Middle Dutch texts in which the devil is compared to a bear (a topos which can be traced back to 1 Samuel 17: 31-37), cf. De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), p. 419. In early christian texts the bear

was already a symbol of the devil, as is demonstrated in G.J.M. Bartelink, 'Diermetaforen en -symbolen voor de duivel en de demonen in oudchristelijke teksten', *Kleio*, 20/1-2 (October 1990-March 1991), p. 11. The topos 'dragon = devil' abounds in Middle Dutch literature. For this latter topos in medieval bestiaries, cf. Ann Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, London 1990, pp. 82-83.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of these topoi in Middle Dutch literature, cf. De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 510-511. The white wading-bird immediately above the flying fish probably has the same meaning.

<sup>21</sup> The fire in the landscape behind the ruin with the dragon stresses the negative connotation of the left bank of the river. As Bax wrote in 1948, it reminds us of the fires of hell. Cf. Bax 1979 (note 7), p. 308.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of this topos in Middle Dutch literature, cf. De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), p. 243.

<sup>23</sup> Schneiders 1941 (note 2), p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Bax 1979 (note 7), p. 309.

<sup>25</sup> For textual examples of this, cf. De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 437-438.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bax 1979 (note 7), pp. 124/309 and De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 366-370.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. note 14.

<sup>28</sup> Evidence for this can be found in L. Debaene, *Mariëken van Nieuwmeghen*, The Hague 1980 (5), p. 57 (v. 353); Frederik Lyna and Willem van Eeghem, *Jan van Stijvoorts Refererenbundel. Anno MDXXIV. Naar het Berlijnsch handschrift integraal en diplomatisch uitgegeven*, two volumes, Antwerp 1929-1930, vol. I, p. 238 (nr. 118, v. 4); G.A. Brands, *Tspel van de Cristenkercke*, Utrecht 1921, p. 18 (vs. 411-413).

<sup>29</sup> Remarkably, Bax also signalled the erotic connotation of *een tijtken spesen* (though only referring to the passage in *Mariëken van Nieuwmeghen*) in connection with the Lisbon triptych and the Bruegel drawing, but on the Rotterdam *Sz. Christopher* he interprets the spit with the roasted chicken as a symbol of gluttony. Cf. Bax 1979 (note 7), pp. 125 and 309.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. for the data in this paragraph De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), p. 372.

<sup>31</sup> Bax 1979 (note 7), p. 309.

<sup>32</sup> Schönbach 1874 (note 6), p. 107 (vs. 697-704). Somewhat later in this text it is explicitly mentioned that Christopher lies waiting for people to be taken across *under einem grozzen paum* [under a big tree]: a further argument to interpret the tree-cabin that Bosch painted, as the dwelling of St. Christopher, and not as that of the hermit. Cf. *ibidem*, p. 115 (vs. 948-953).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Louis Goosen, *Van Afra tot de Zevenslapers. Heiligen in religie en kunsten*, Nijmegen 1992, p. 96. This motif is also mentioned in the Middle High German *vita*: cf. Schönbach 1874 (note 6), p. 117 (vs. 1.014-1.018).

<sup>34</sup> A textual source from the seventeenth century confirming this, is quoted in Eric de Bruyn, 'De betekenis van de gebroken kruik op Jheronimus Bosch' Sint Christoffel-paneel te Rotterdam', *Desipientia. Zin & Waan*, 8/2 (September 2001), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Marijnissen and Ruyffelaere 1987 (note 1), p. 404. *Spreeuwopotten* were earthen pitchers with an opening in the belly which were hung up so that starlings could build a nest in them. In this way the eggs and/or the young birds could easily be taken out (and eaten).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Paul Huys Janssen (ed.), *Panorama op de wereld. Het landschap van Bosch tot Rubens*, 's-Hertogenbosch-Zwolle 2001, pp. 92-93 (cat. nr. 5).

<sup>37</sup> Examples of this are given in De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 87-89.

<sup>38</sup> Textual evidence for these metaphorical meanings is given in De Bruyn 2001 (note 34), pp. 6-7. The expression *een ghebroken porcken* is in fact a case of metonymy, because in the first place it refers to the deflowered lap / vagina and subsequently it is used as a *pars pro toto* for a deflowered woman.

<sup>39</sup> It was probably painted in Antwerp, around 1530. Cf. Unverfehrt 1980 (note 1), p. 275 (cat. nr. 100, ill. 139) and A.M. Koldewij, 'Nogmaals de "St. Antonius-kwelling" van de hand

van een navolger van Jeroen Bosch', *Anniek*, 22/8 (March 1988), pp. 443-448.

<sup>40</sup> Examples of this are reproduced in Unverfehrt 1980 (note 1), ill. 169, 171 and 172.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the survey in Paul Wackers, *De waarheid als leugen. Een interpretatie van Reynaerts historie*, Utrecht 1986, pp. 54-90. Cf. further Jozef Janssens and Rik van Daele, *Reinaerts s'reken. Van 2000 voor tot 2000 na Christus*, Leuven, 2001, pp. 16-21/87-95, and Jozef Janssens, 'Reinaerts felheid. Nog maar eens over de interpretatie van *Van den vos Reynaerde*', *Tiecelijn*, 14/3 (2001), pp. 128-132.

<sup>42</sup> On the Rotterdam *Pedlar* tondo Bosch painted a cock on a dunghill as a symbol of man's inclination towards sin: cf. De Bruyn 2001 (note 4), pp. 381-383. For the dunghill as a symbol of sinfulness and of earthly vanities in Middle Dutch texts, cf. *ibidem*, p. 382.

<sup>43</sup> An example of this is given in Eric de Bruyn, 'De vos als allegorisch motief in het geschilderde oeuvre van Jheronimus Bosch', *Tiecelijn*, 13/3 (2000), p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> For the time being I cannot explain the motif of the little naked imp that is climbing towards a beehive in the top of the tree. Bax interprets it as an allegorical representation of 'the sin of gluttony which leads to poverty' [Bax 1979 (note 7), p. 309], but his arguments are not strong enough to convince me. Neither do I have an explanation for the weird construction (a wrecked ship or a fish-trap?) in the lower left or for the strange white clouds at the top of the painting. Was the panel once shortened and could the spectator originally see God the Father here? According to Lammertse 1994 (note 1), p. 85, the arched shape has to be the original one because the *barbe* has been preserved.

<sup>45</sup> Granger Ryan 1993 (note 3), pp. 12-14. Cf. also the Middle Dutch version in Schneiders 1941 (note 2), pp. 30-31.

<sup>46</sup> In the Middle High German *vita*, at the end of the prologue, we read exactly the same message. Cf. Schönbach 1874 (note 6), p. 86 (vs. 36-46).

## Herman van Swanevelt als Radierer. Zur Chronologie der Entwürfe und der Drucke

Der Holländer Herman van Swanevelt (um 1603-1655) zählt zu den bedeutendsten und einflussreichsten unter den niederländischen Italianisten der ersten Generation.<sup>1</sup> Bis in den Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts wurde er als Maler, Zeichner und Radierer hoch geschätzt. Später verblasste sein Ruhm. Noch im Gespräch mit Eckermann äußerte Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, der selbst zwei Radierungsfolgen und einige dem Maler zugeschriebene Zeichnungen besaß, am 21. Dezember 1832: „Man findet bei ihm die Kunst als Neigung und die Neigung als Kunst, wie bei keinem anderen. Er besitzt eine innige Liebe zur Natur und einen göttlichen Frieden, der sich uns mitteilt, wenn wir seine Bilder betrachten...“. Goethe mag sich an Swanevelts Landschaft erinnert haben, die er 1768 in der Dresdener Galerie bewundert hatte.<sup>2</sup> Den neuartigen Typus der idyllischen Ideallandschaft mit milden Sonnenlichtstimmungen unterschiedlicher Tageszeiten im Gegenlicht, das, aus der in atmosphärischem Dunst verschwimmenden Ferne dringend, die Landschaft in weiches Licht taucht, hatte Swanevelt, gemeinsam mit dem gleichaltrigen Claude Lorrain, in den 1630er Jahren in Rom entwickelt und während seiner Pariser Jahre auch im Norden verbreitet. Allerdings waren es vor allem seine Radierungen, die einem breiten Publikum diese neue Landschaftskunst vermittelten.

Nach Qualität und Quantität war Swanevelt der profilierteste Radierer unter den frühen niederländischen Italianisten. Erste Radierungen hatte er bereits während seiner römischen Schaffensphase in den 1630er Jahren angefertigt. Vermutlich ließ er sich hierzu inspirieren durch den französischen Radierer Charles Audran, der in Rom zwischen 1632 und 1634 sein Hausgenosse war [vgl. IV], und durch Claude Lorrain, der in den 1630er Jahren 39 Radierungen fertigte, später nur noch 5 weitere.<sup>3</sup> Die weit überwiegende Zahl jedoch entstand in Swanevelts Pariser Zeit zwischen 1643-44 und seinem Tode 1655. A. Bartsch führte unter seinem Namen 116 Radierungen auf, sowie 2 als falsch zugeschrieben;<sup>4</sup> E. Dutuit 117, dazu, überwiegend ohne Nummerierung, insgesamt weitere 42 zugeschriebene, beziehungsweise solche, die nach seinen Vorzeichnungen gefertigt wurden;<sup>5</sup> im Hollstein-Band sind es 118, zudem 37 als nach Swanevelt angefertigte;<sup>6</sup> in Band 2 des *Illustrated Bartsch* erschienen 1978 nur die Abbildungen, während der Textteil fehlt.<sup>7</sup>

Es handelt sich bei seinen sicheren Radierungen, und nur die werden im Folgenden besprochen, um insgesamt 17 Folgen unterschiedlicher Blattzahl, von denen nur 2 späte 1653 und 1654 datiert sind, und um 5 Einzelblätter. Von den bei Bartsch und Hollstein aufgelisteten Radierungsserien bleibt eine außer Betracht, da sie laut Adresse von Israel Silvestre entworfen wurde, der Name Swanevelts jedoch nicht