
Alart du Hameel and Jheronimus Bosch – Artistic Relations and Chronologies

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Jheronimus Bosch's most impressive and largest triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, is a major challenge for art historians. Not only does the enigmatic content create problems; another contentious issue is the dating of the work. The dates suggested so far extend over three decades. The catalogue of the recent Prado exhibition (2016) reduces this timespan to 1490-1500.¹ Even the *Catalogue Raisonné* by the Dutch Bosch Research and Conservation Project (BRCP) gives a rather broad dating of c. 1495-1505.² The BRCP has based the *terminus post quem* of this proposal on the first edition of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* from 1493, which contains two woodcuts that seem to have inspired Bosch. In the triptych as well as in the chronicle, the *Creator Mundi* is shown with the written quote of Psalm 33 (32), 9 ("Ipse dixit et facta sunt, Ipse mandavit et creata sunt"), and in both media the depiction of the Garden of Eden contains both a dragon-tree and a date palm.³ Although these African trees can be found already in Martin Schongauer's engraving *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* from c. 1470,⁴ the combination of God and the Psalm seems to be more than just a coincidence. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that Bosch and the German woodcut designer used the same source.

At the same time I believe there are serious reasons to date the painting no later than the early 1490s. Firstly, there is no stylistic or technical evidence to date the triptych later than the Frankfurt *Ecce Homo*, which has been dated c. 1475-85 by the BRCP⁵, and c. 1485-95 by Jochen Sander.⁶ No other work, besides the Metropolitan Museum's Bosch triptych *The Adoration of the Magi*, which has been dated in the 1470s,⁷ looks earlier in style. The chronological relation appears the other way round when one compares *The Garden of Earthly Delights* with another Prado triptych: *The Adoration of the Magi*. This triptych is convincingly dated c. 1495 on the basis of the patrons,⁸ but it looks less gothic in figure style.

This same date should be taken, in my view, as a *terminus ante quem* for *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, also for a motific reason. The *Garden*-triptych presumably served as a prerequisite for the *Adoration*-triptych, since the fruit on the African servant's head does not fall within any iconographical tradition in the holy context of the Epiphany, but it does make sense as an illusion to the exotic origin of the three magi from the east, the very location of the earthly paradise. Bosch was the first and only artist who depicted this paradise as an exotic world turned upside down. In the centre panel of his largest triptych he painted numerous naked people, including black Africans, balancing birds or exotic fruits on their heads.⁹

Another reason why I am not convinced by later datings is the evidence provided by a group of Boschian engravings made by the architect and engraver Alart du Hameel (c. 1450-c. 1506). *The Besieged War Elephant* is the most famous example (Fig. 1).¹⁰ Unfortunately, as in the case of Bosch's oeuvre, none of those engravings is dated. For this reason, most scholars have situated Hameel's Boschian engravings very roughly around 1500. Nevertheless, their style looks much older. The BRCP seems to take account of this fact by dating Hameel's Boschian engravings around 1490 (respectively before 1494).¹¹ One should be aware that this is earlier than the dating assigned to *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.



Figure 1

Alart du Hameel, *The Besieged War Elephant*, c. 1490, engraving, 203 × 336 mm. London, The British Museum (Source: The British Museum, Collection online)

As far as I know, Jos Koldeweij and Paul Vandenbroeck were the first to date Hameel's engravings, in particular *The Besieged War Elephant*, earlier than 1494.¹² They did so for a simple reason: Hameel signed not only with his name, but also with "bosche" for the city of 's-Hertogenbosch, where he worked no later than 1494. This reasonable dating of Hameel's engravings, however, has never been used for dating Bosch, even though Bosch is generally accepted at least as an important source of Hameel – especially with regard to *The Besieged War Elephant*, which was copied more than once as an invention attributed to Bosch.¹³ The similarity between Hameel's war elephant and Bosch's elephant in the paradise wing of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* is well known. However, this painted elephant, or the similar elephant in the Haarlem woodcut from 1485,¹⁴ could not have served as the model for the engraving: Hameel's war elephant resembles more closely a real African elephant, most of all in the shape of the forehead and the giant toenails, which are typical for an elephant, but completely missing in both the woodcut and Bosch's painting. This suggests that a highly naturalistic, but now lost prototype must have existed, probably of pre-Christian origin, as suggested by Carthaginian coins depicting mounted African elephants.¹⁵

Another motif which is close to Bosch is the bear lying on its back at the bottom left of Hameel's engraving. A bear of similar shape can be seen in the claws of the flying griffin in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, but Hameel's version is more detailed, depicting ears and mouth. There are two possible explanations: either both artists followed the same prototype, or Hameel used a more detailed version from another painting or drawing by Bosch. In any case, it seems unlikely that a small detail of the engraving was the painter's source, since the dependence was usually the other way round. This suggests the following conclusion: if the early dating of Hameel's print is correct, and if the triptych indeed predates Hameel's print, its terminus ante quem must be 1494. Hameel's localising signature in combination with his leaving 's-Hertogenbosch in 1494 is, however, not the only reason which suggests an early dating of his engravings. There are some good stylistic reasons as well. Before explaining these, I will first introduce the artist:

Alart du Hameel, who worked as Late Gothic architect, interior designer, sculptor, and engraver, was born in around 1450. His birthplace is unknown, but he started his career in 's-Hertogenbosch as an architect for the *Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady* and for the Sint-Janskerk (since 1559 Sint-Janskathedraal) in 1478. In the same year he became a member of that elite confraternity. Thus, he must have been a well-respected citizen. This is confirmed by his marriage to the daughter of the *hoogschout* of 's-Hertogenbosch, the highest executive official in the town. In 1494/95 he moved his workshop to Leuven, where he worked as "magister operis" for the Sint-Peterskerk. In 1502 he became a citizen of Antwerp. A few years later he died, at the latest in January 1507.¹⁶

It is quite unusual for a late medieval architect to publish prints. Hameel probably realised that the reproductive medium gave him the opportunity to sell more of his designs. As all of Hameel's engravings are signed – *The Besieged War Elephant* even on three places – he apparently



Figure 2
Alart du Hameel, *The Last Judgement*, c. 1490, engraving, 235 × 345 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum
(Source: Rijksstudio database)

engraved them himself. There is also some evidence indicating that Hameel started his career as a graphic artist by making designs for engravings in the 1480s: his *Monstrance* can be linked to an order for the Sint-Janskerk in 1484/85, and his *Ciborium* recalls the sacrament house he designed in about 1486 for the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, later the cathedral of Antwerp.¹⁷ Today we know a total of 12 engravings by Hameel. Most of them have been preserved in one or only a very few copies. He signed them primarily with a hallmark similar to that of an anonymous Netherlandish engraver active in the 1470s and 80s, called Master W with the Key, or Master of the Housemark.¹⁸ Hameel usually crowned his hallmark with an “A” for Alart. Only the *Monstrance* and the *Ciborium* show the hallmark without this “A” crowning. This is further evidence to suggest that the *Monstrance* and the *Ciborium* should be placed at the very beginning of a hypothetical Hameel chronology.

Another reason to do so is Hameel’s localising signature “bosche,” which he mostly wrote in a calligraphic style, similar to the localising signature “bochol” used by Israhel van Meckenem in the 1480s.¹⁹ Notably, Hameel’s localising signature is absent from all his early design engravings.²⁰ Only the *Monstrance* shows one, but very different, by using the complete city name “S’HERTOGHEN-BOSCHE”. Thus, we may assume that Hameel had not yet found his definitive signature in around the mid-1480s, but used it later in all of his Boschian engravings. We do not know when he became Boschian. In any case, he must have been familiar with Bosch by 1488 at the latest, when the painter joined the same elite brotherhood.

Hameel left four engravings which can be related to Bosch: *The Besieged War Elephant* (Fig. 1), *The Last Judgement* (Fig. 2), *Saint Christopher* (Fig. 3), and *The Lovers at the Fountain* (Fig. 4).²¹ The first two compositions are so close to the painter that they were even thought to have been invented by Bosch – last but not least because of the misinterpretation of the localising signature “bosche”. However, in *Saint Christopher* just a few crazy monsters remind us of Bosch – for example the anthropomorphic boat to the left of the saint. The engraving *The Lovers at the Fountain* also appears to be only partially influenced by Bosch: nothing but the disabled fool on the ground may be called Boschian, since Bosch drew a similar head in his Louvre sketches for a *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, probably drawn in the 1490s.²²

Hameel’s *The Last Judgement* engraving has a Boschian composition, resembling the centre panel of *The Last Judgement* triptych in the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. It was Bosch’s very own iconographic invention to give much more space to Hell than to the Judgement itself (or to the way to Heaven, which is nearly hidden in the upper left corner). Interestingly, not all of the hybrid demons are real Boschian monsters. Some are free copies, such as the anthropomorphic cephalopod at the bottom left; others are more likely Hameel’s own invention, such as the extremely long-fingered creatures. Based on Koldewei’s thesis that the Vienna *Last Judgement* could have been ordered by Hippolyte de Berthoz, the BRCP’s *Catalogue Raisonné* dates the triptych around 1503.²³ In the same catalogue we find the dating of the related *Last Judgement* engraving c. 1490, based on the convincing hypothesis that Alart du Hameel must have stopped using the localising signature “bosche” when he left ‘s-Hertogenbosch in 1494. To solve the problem of dating the engraving 10-15 years earlier than the Vienna triptych, the



Figure 3

Alart du Hameel, *Saint Christopher*, c. 1490, engraving, 200 × 335 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (Source: Rijksstudio database)

Figure 4

Alart du Hameel, *The Lovers at the Fountain*, c. 1490, engraving, 244 × 117 mm (Source: Silva Maroto 2016, see note 1, p. 181)



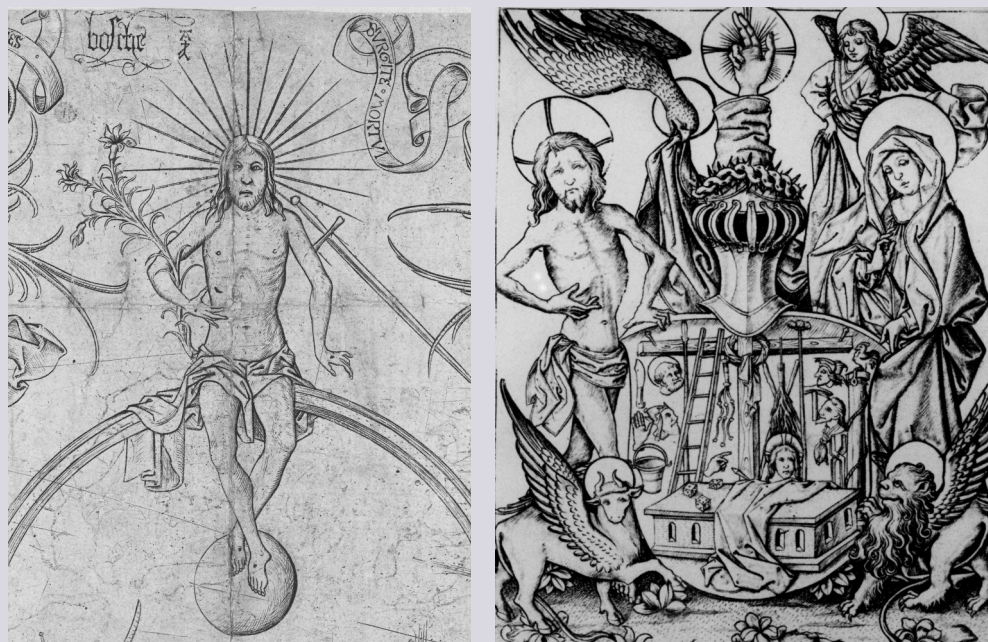


Figure 5

Left: detail from Alart du Hameel, *Last Judgement* (see fig. 2); right: Master E.S., *Coat of Arms of the Passion*, c. 1455-60, engraving, 144 x 102 mm (Source: Höfler 2007, see note 26)

BRCP's *Catalogue Raisonné* raises the hypothesis of a lost prototype by Bosch.²⁴ Although it is impossible to exclude any lost prototypes, either of *The Last Judgement* or of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, in my view there is no need for such a makeshift hypothesis, since both triptychs could be from c. 1490 as well.²⁵

Due to the absence of any dated work by Bosch we have no reference point for dating Hameel's Boschian engravings by comparison. Thus the search for stylistic and motific sources other than Bosch seems to be more promising. Interestingly, all non-Boschian sources date from no later than the 1480s. To date, this fact has received little attention, but fits quite well with Koldeweij's early dating of Hameel's engravings. Probably the most influential of these early sources was Master E.S., an anonymous German engraver active in the 1460s. Master E.S. inspired Hameel more than once. For instance, the facial features and arm positions of the figure of Christ in Hameel's *Last Judgement* resemble the depiction of Christ in the *Coat of Arms of the Passion* engraved by Master E.S. (Fig. 5).²⁶ This suggests that Hameel copied a similar figure by the German master and inserted it into his Boschian composition. Hameel's method of using figures invented by Master E.S. as a model can be seen even more clearly in other engravings by his hand. For example, the armoured dog in the foreground of *The Vision of the Emperor Constantine* resembles a barking dog from a playing card by Master E.S. (Fig. 6).²⁷ Its head and posture are the same; only the heavy armour is missing. Another example appears in the engraving of *Saint Christopher*: The model for the little monk with a lantern standing at the rocky shore on the far right can be found nearly mirrored in the letter "U" from the engraved series of a figurative alphabet by Master E.S. (Fig. 7).²⁸ Although the monk's facial features and his robes have slightly changed, the hand holding the lantern demonstrates that Hameel copied this figure.

Hameel was not only an inventor but a compiler, who did not hesitate to enrich his compositions by copying. Moreover, the engraving *The Lovers at the Fountain* seems at least to be inspired by Master E.S., who more than once engraved couples in combination with the moralising figure of the fool.²⁹ The idea of the little boy peeing on top of the fountain, however, is more likely of Italian origin, probably inspired by a *Fountain of Love* as shown in Ferrarese engravings from the 1470s.³⁰ However, the sitting posture of this naked boy, repeated by the fool on the ground, resembles a naked young woman integrated in an ornament engraving by Master E.S.³¹

If Hameel had made his Boschian engravings as late as around 1500, one may wonder why he would have been highly influenced by Master E.S. or his copyists, like the early Israhel van Meckenem, without being influenced by the mature Meckenem or other engravers later than 1490. Hameel did not renounce the subtle thin parallel hatchings that we know from the earliest German and Netherlandish engravings, although he partly modelled his figures with consistent crosshatchings. Notably, not all of the strong cross hatchings in Hameel's engravings are original; some of them were added later, when the old copper plates were reworked for new editions. This can be demonstrated by comparing the only two impressions



Figure 6

Left: detail from Alart du Hameel, *The Vision of the Emperor Constantine*, c. 1485-90, engraving, 244 × 195 mm (Source: Lehrs 490, see note 18); right: detail from Master E.S., *Playing Card: The Three of Dogs*, c. 1460-65, engraving, 133 × 89 mm (Source: Höfler 2007, see note 27)



Figure 7

Left: detail from Alart du Hameel, *Saint Christopher* (see fig. 3); right: detail from Master E.S., *Letter U of the Fantastic Alphabet*, c. 1465-67, engraving, 140 × 133 mm (Source: Höfler 2007, see note 28)

of *The Besieged War Elephant*, which have been preserved in the British Museum in London and the Vienna Albertina. A closer look at the elephant's skin or shadowed areas at the ground clearly reveals two different states: the thin parallel hatchings in the London print have been replaced by strong cross hatchings.³²

Certainly, not all of the strong and dark cross hatchings result from a later reworking of the plate. The engraving of *St. Christopher* (Fig. 3) suggests that Hameel used both kinds of hatchings at the same time in the same picture: the legs of the giant saint still contain the old fashioned fine parallel hatchings, as used for example nearly half a century earlier by the Master of the Berlin Passion, while the rest of the engraving is dominated by heavy regular cross hatchings. Comparing the hatchings inside and outside an amusing Boschian figure (with open mouth and raised finger walking to the right), which Hameel used twice in *The Last Judgement* (appearing bottom right behind a mound of earth) and *St. Christopher* (right of the big lobster), we notice the increasing darkness of stronger hatchings, which can be interpreted partly as the artist's intention and partly as a result of refreshing the copper plate in areas other than the saint's legs.

As stated above, Hameel's style resembles Master E.S. as well as the early Israhel van Meckenem. Meckenem's later stylistic development in the 1490s, however, reveals an increase of contrast, plasticity, and spatial depth. Hameel's engravings completely lack such qualities. This seems to confirm Koldewey's dating of the engravings at the latest in 1494, when Hameel left 's-Hertogenbosch. As a consequence of this early dating we may also reconsider the late datings of Hameel's Boschian sources like *The Garden of Earthly Delights* and the Vienna *Last Judgement*.

- 1 P. Silva Maroto (ed.), *Bosch. The 5th Centenary Exhibition*. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2016, p. 330.
- 2 BRCP (ed.), *Hieronymus Bosch, Painter and Draughtsman – Catalogue Raisonné*. 's-Hertogenbosch / Brussels 2016, p. 356.
- 3 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), pp. 356-357, 362, 377.
- 4 L. Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch*. München 2006, p. 40, fig. 29.
- 5 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), p. 224.
- 6 Silva Maroto 2016 (as in note 1 above), p. 222.
- 7 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), p. 216.
- 8 Silva Maroto 2016 (as in note 1 above), p. 195-196 (c. 1494); Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), p. 212 (c. 1495).
- 9 Balancing food or a bird on one's head derives from medieval personifications of virtues and vices, mounted and armoured like knights. They bear their symbols in the manner of coats of arms on helmets and shields. The relation becomes clear in the centre panel of Bosch's *Last Judgement Triptych* in Vienna. One of some demonic riders bears a fox and fish on his helmet like the personification of gluttony on helmet and shield in an illustrated *Etymachia* treatise from c. 1420-30 (Wellcome *Apocalypse* MS. 49, Folio 53 verso, Wellcome Library, London).

- 10 Silva Maroto 2016 (as in note 1 above), p. 178.
- 11 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), pp. 26-27, 182.
- 12 J. Koldeweij, P. Vandenbroeck, B. Vermet, *Hieronymus Bosch. The Complete Paintings and Drawings*. Rotterdam / Gent / Amsterdam 2001, p. 116.
- 13 G. Unverfehrt, *Hieronymus Bosch: Die Rezeption seiner Kunst im frühen 16. Jahrhundert*. Berlin 1980, pp. 241-242.
- 14 Silver 2006 (as in note 4 above), p. 52, fig. 41.
- 15 See the Hispano-Carthaginian coin from c. 237-209 in the British Museum, inv.no. 1911,0702.1.
- 16 M. Bass, E. Wyckoff, *Beyond Bosch. The Afterlife of a Renaissance Master in Print*. Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis 2015, pp. 20-21.
- 17 Bass / Wyckoff 2015 (as in note 16 above), pp. 22-23.
- 18 M. Lehrs, *Geschichte und kritischer Katalog des deutschen, niederländischen und französischen Kupferstichs im XV. Jahrhundert*, 9 volumes, Vienna 1908-34, vol. 7.
- 19 See for example Israhel van Meckenem's copy of the *Coat of Arms with Tumbling Boy* by the Master of the Housebook, c. 1485. Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 9, no. 521.
- 20 This also applies to Hameel's engraving of a statue of Saint Pieter which is partly a design engraving according to the different foliage ornaments in the left and the right half of the console under the saint's feet. See Koldeweij 2001 (as in note 12 above), p. 45, fig. 38.
- 21 Bass / Wyckoff 2015 (as in note 16 above), cat.no. 5, 12, 15. – Silva Maroto 2016 (as in note 1 above), cat.no. 3-5.
- 22 Silva Maroto 2016 (as in note 1 above), pp. 248, 250. – The dating c. 1495-1505 is based on stylistic relations with *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.
- 23 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), pp. 290-305.
- 24 Catalogue Raisonné 2016 (as in note 2 above), p. 26.
- 25 Concerning the Vienna triptych, the underdrawing of a single patron kneeling at the bottom left of the centre panel contradicts the assumptions that Philip the Fair or Hippolyte de Barthoz could have been the original customers in the early 16th century, because they would have been accompanied by their sons. However, we cannot exclude that the triptych remained unfinished in Bosch's workshops and was adapted later.
- 26 Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 2, no. 188; J. Höfler, *Der Meister E.S: Ein Kapitel europäischer Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Regensburg 2007, no./ fig. 188.
- 27 Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 2, no. 253 ("Hunde-Drei"); Höfler 2007 (as in note 26 above), no./ fig. 253.
- 28 Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 2, no. 302; Höfler 2007 (as in note 26 above), no./ fig. 302.
- 29 Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 2, no. 207, 214, 215; Höfler 2007 (as in note 26 above), no./ fig. 207, 214, 215.
- 30 See the unique impression in the British Museum London, inv.no. 1845,0825.491 (Hind E.III.20).
- 31 Lehrs (as in note 18 above), vol. 2, no. 308; Höfler 2007 (as in note 26 above), no./ fig. 308.
- 32 Nevertheless, hitherto both impressions have been regarded as first state, because Max Lehrs denied any difference between them. – M. Lehrs, "Verzeichnis der Kupferstiche des Alart du Hameel", in: *Oud-Holland*, 1894, p. 22 ("Der Druck ist leicht ungleich, rührt aber meines Erachtens nicht, wie Hr. Bartsch anzunehmen geneigt ist, von der später überarbeiteten Platte her").