



Hieronymus Bosch
*Devil-Queen Seducing
Saint Anthony*
(detail of the right
interior panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

Next spread:
Fig. 1
Hieronymus Bosch
*Temptations of Saint
Anthony* triptych
ca. 1500
Lisbon,
Museu Nacional
de Arte Antiga

ERIC DE BRUYN

Hieronymus Bosch's Lisbon *Temptations of Saint Anthony* Triptych and Its Written Sources

Together with the *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, see the essay by Reindert L. Falkenburg in the present volume), the *Temptations of Saint Anthony* triptych (fig. 1) is one of the most difficult and least well-understood paintings by Hieronymus Bosch that have come down to us. But whereas art historians are still largely at a loss about the true meaning of the *Garden* triptych (in particular of its centre panel), the iconography of Bosch's Lisbon painting, dedicated to the Egyptian hermit and desert father Anthony the Great (251–356), can be clarified with the help of a number of written sources describing the life of the saint and containing additional legendary episodes. These texts were available to Bosch and his contemporaries around 1500, and fortunately they are still available to us today.

SAINT ANTHONY'S LIFE AND LEGENDS

The most basic information on Saint Anthony is provided by *Ho bíos tou makariou Antoníou tou megálon* (The Life of the Blessed Anthony the Great), a hagiography written in Greek by bishop Athanasius of Alexandria not long after Anthony's death

(in 356).¹ For the sake of convenience, this text is commonly referred to by its Latin title *Vita Antonii* (The Life of Anthony). In around 370, Bishop Evagrius of Antioch produced a Latin translation of the Greek *Vita Antonii*.² This translation closely follows the original text, but sometimes sentences are dropped or paraphrases are used. Of major importance is also the *Vita Sancti Pauli Primi Eremitae* (The Life of Saint Paul, the First Hermit), a Latin hagiography written by the Church Father Saint Jerome of Stridon between 373 and 378, in which he describes how Saint Anthony visited his fellow-hermit Saint Paul.³

The *Vita Antonii* and the *Vita Pauli* were both incorporated into the *Vitas Patrum* (or *Vitae Patrum*, The Lives of the Fathers), a highly variable corpus of stories about the old fathers and first monks living in the Middle East deserts during the early days of Christianity, which was translated from Greek into Latin between the fourth and seventh centuries.⁴ Later on, new texts (supplements to existing legends, stories about contemporary saints) were added. An interesting and recurring item of the *Vitas Patrum* manuscripts is the *Apophthegmata*



Patrum (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers), a corpus of short anecdotes about and sayings of the early desert hermits. It has come down to us in two standard versions, an alphabetical one (with a structure based on the names of the fathers) and a systematic one (with a structure based on various devotional themes).⁵ Finally, the very influential *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend), a Latin collection of saints' lives compiled by the Italian Dominican Jacobus de Voragine in around 1260, has two short chapters, one on Saint Paul and one on Saint Anthony, which summarize what can be read in the *Vita Antonii*, the *Vita Pauli*, and the *Vitas Patrum* tradition.⁶

All the texts mentioned above represent what could be called the "official" history of Saint Anthony's life. But in the course of the centuries some medieval authors added new, sometimes quite remarkable episodes of their own making to the saint's biography. The so-called *Patras Legend*, written in (very poor) Latin by an anonymous author around the year 1000, tells how Anthony became the abbot of a monastery in Patras (a fictitious city somewhere in the Middle East), how he led his monks into the Egyptian desert, and how a king sent them twelve camels with victuals.⁷ The *Inventio et Translatio Corporis Sancti Antonii Constantinopolim* (The Discovery and Translation to Constantinople of Saint Anthony's Body), a Latin text written by another anonymous author probably in the eleventh century, describes how Emperor Constantinus ordered bishop Theophilus to travel to Egypt in order to look for Saint Anthony's corpse and transport it to Constantinople.⁸ The mission was successful, and the emperor's daughter, who was possessed by devils, was cured. Finally, in or around 1341, the Spanish Dominican Alphonsus Bonihominis translated parts of an Arabic text, presented to him by Coptic monks in Famagusta, into Latin. This text, commonly referred to as *Legenda mirabilis* (Amazing Legend),⁹ introduces a number of episodes that are both entertaining and indeed ... amazing.

In one of them, Anthony meets a bathing devil-queen and her handmaids near a river. This devil-queen succeeds in taking Anthony to one of her cities, where she tries to seduce him, but just in time Anthony realizes that he is dealing with the devil. Another episode relates how Anthony was invited to travel to Barcelona in order to cure the local king's wife and children, who were possessed by devils.

Because Hieronymus Bosch's native tongue was Middle Dutch, it is important to point out that information about Saint Anthony was also available to him in his own language. In or around 1358 Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* was translated into Middle Dutch, probably by Petrus Naghel, a Carthusian monk living near Brussels.¹⁰ In the manuscripts the text is called *Gulden legende* (Golden Legend) or *Passionael*. Between 1478 and 1516 the Middle Dutch *Passionael* was printed twelve times, for the first time by Gheraert Leeu in Gouda in 1478.¹¹ The chapter about Saint Anthony in these incunabula (printed editions) is much longer than the corresponding chapter in the manuscripts and deviates from it to such an extent that it can safely be concluded that the incunabula offer a new, independent draft of the text. Unlike the manuscript version, the printed editions are not based on the *Legenda aurea* but on the *Vita Antonii* by Athanasius/Evagrius, and they also incorporate the *Patras Legend* and the *Inventio et Translatio Corporis Sancti Antonii Constantinopolim*.

From the thirteenth century on, several vernacular versions of the *Vitas Patrum* corpus arose all over Europe, resulting in a complex hand-written and – from the late fifteenth century on – printed tradition. The *Vitas Patrum* was translated into Middle Dutch twice (a first time not long after 1361, a second time in the early fifteenth century), but as was also the case with the *Passionael* text the printed editions offer a new, independent draft. In 1490, Peter van Os published *Dat vader boeck* (The Book

of Fathers) in Zwolle, and in 1498 Henrick Eckert van Homberg published the text again in Delft, apparently basing himself on the 1490 edition.¹² According to recent research, this version is based on, or – to put it more carefully – is closely related to the Middle German translation of the *Vitas Patrum* (the so-called *Alemannische Vitas Patrum* tradition), which was produced in the Upper Rhine area around 1320–1330 and was printed for the first time in Strasbourg before 1482. Virtually everything that *Dat vader boeck* tells us about Saint Anthony can be traced back to the *Vita Antonii*, but it also recaptures some items from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and quite faithfully incorporates the story about the devil-queen from the *Legenda mirabilis*.

THE LISBON TRIPTYCH'S PRINCIPAL SCENES

In the interior panels of Bosch's Lisbon triptych Saint Anthony is represented four times. Since Dirk Bax published his groundbreaking monograph on this painting in 1948, it has become clear that the four scenes showing Anthony were inspired by the medieval written sources dealing with the saint and in particular by the *Passionael* and *Vader boeck* incunabula.¹³ In the upper region of the left interior panel, Anthony is lifted up in the air and beaten by a gang of monstrous devils, whereas in the lower region of the panel two monks and a layman carry Anthony (apparently unconscious after he has been thrown down to earth again) to his hermitage (fig. 2). These scenes do not agree with what we read in the *Vita Antonii*, where it is told (in chapters 8–9) that when Anthony was thirty-five, he moved to a tomb near his village. There he was attacked by the devil and his minions, after which a friend carried the half-dead saint back to the village. The following night Anthony asked to be brought back to the tomb, where he was beaten up a second time by devils in the shape of monstrous animals. But there is no mention of Anthony being lifted up in the air.



Fig. 2
Hieronymus Bosch
*Saint Anthony Carried Aloft
by Demons to his Hermitage*
(detail of the left interior panel of the
Temptations of Saint Anthony triptych, fig. 1)



Fig. 3
Hieronymus Bosch
*Devils around
a Table with
Christ Appearing
to Saint Anthony*
(detail of the
central panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

As Bax pointed out, what Bosch painted corresponds more closely with the 1478 *Passionael* version, where we read (translated into English): “And the devils came back and tore him with their teeth and bashed him with their horns and beat him with their claws. They lifted him up in the air, they threw him down again almost killing him.” The *Passionael* incunabula are the only written sources which add the last sentence.¹⁴

In the 1478 *Passionael* – but also in the *Vita Antonii*, in the *Legenda aurea*, and in the 1490 *Vader boeck* – the episode with the second beating is immediately followed by a passage in which Christ appears in a ray of light in order to comfort Anthony. Bosch painted this in the exact centre of his centre panel, where Anthony is kneeling, and his right hand is pointing toward Christ standing next to an altar with a crucifix (fig. 3). Even the divine ray of light, explicitly mentioned by all texts, is present. The central

position of this scene explains why the exterior panels of the Lisbon triptych (fig. 4) represent the Arrest of Christ (left) and the Carrying of the Cross (right). Apparently, Bosch wanted the spectator to understand that Anthony imitates Christ’s attitude towards suffering during his Passion and that the wiles of the evil can be overcome by humble, passive endurance supported by a strong belief in Christ’s role as the Saviour of mankind. That message should come as no surprise: in the legends about Anthony, in particular also in the *Vita Antonii*, Christ is omnipresent.

The scene with the bathing naked female who is trying to seduce Anthony in the right interior panel (see p. 61) cannot be explained by a passage in the *Vita Antonii* or in the *Passionael* incunabula. As was pointed out once again by Bax, Bosch seems to have been inspired here by the *Vader boeck* texts, where we read how the devil took on the shape of

a beautiful queen who was bathing in a river with her handmaids and later tried to make Anthony sin with her in one of her cities. Although some authors do not see Bosch’s naked woman as the devil-queen from the legend, two arguments can be given in favour of Bax’s interpretation. If the bathing woman is *not* the devil-queen, it is impossible to explain why Bosch painted a diabolical city in the upper region of the right interior panel (fig. 5). Furthermore, the scene next to Anthony in the centre panel with devils around a table (fig. 3) who are distribut-

ing food and drink among mendicant minstrels and beggars can also be related to the devil-queen legend. According to the *Vader boeck*, the devil-queen tried to convince Anthony of her good intentions by showing some poor and sick people to him. She then claimed that she always shares her food and drink with the poor, cures the sick, and looks after everybody who is destitute. The richly dressed she-devil who is kneeling next to Anthony in the Lisbon centre panel (fig. 3): who else could she be but the devil-queen?



Fig. 4
Hieronymus Bosch
Arrest of Christ (left)
and *Carrying
of the Cross* (right)
(exterior panels
of the *Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)



Fig. 5
Hieronymus Bosch
Diabolical City
(detail of the right
interior panel
of the *Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

THE LISBON TRIPTYCH'S SECONDARY SCENES

Spectators who are more or less familiar with Anthony's biography and legends will not have too many problems to reach a correct understanding of the Lisbon triptych's basic message and of the essential iconography of its four principal scenes (i.e., those showing the figure of Saint Anthony). But the interior panels also have some twenty-one "secondary scenes", which are far more enigmatic and belong to the most difficult parts of Bosch's oeuvre, together with the visual riddles in the centre panel of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych. Recently, the expert literature on Bosch has shown a modest tendency to look for the iconographic key to some of these scenes within the same medieval tradition that inspired Bosch when he painted the four principal scenes. This research was done by Stefan Fischer (in 2009 and 2013) and by the Bosch Research and

Conservation Project (BRCP) team (in 2016).¹⁵ They related a number of the Lisbon triptych's secondary scenes to particular passages in the written sources dealing with Saint Anthony's life and legends. This new approach seems to be based on a sound premise: if some details of the Lisbon triptych remain enigmatic to our modern eyes, this is probably because we do not look at the painting with the cultural knowledge and religious background of Bosch and his contemporaries.

Anthony is not represented in any of the interior panels' secondary scenes. Yet, it is obvious that all these scenes should be understood as temptations of the saint concocted by the devils. When Anthony delivers a long sermon to his followers in the *Vita Antonii*, he spends many words in describing the characteristics of the devils and the tricks they use, saying literally (in chapter 28): "The evil spirits can do nothing, they only play some kind of

theatre, using changes of shape, and terrifying the children by appearing as a troupe, and by means of their disguises. But that makes them all the more despicable, because it is a sign of their weakness. ... He who cannot do anything, like the demons, tries to cause anxiety by means of illusions, if necessary." Apparently, this is what the devils are also doing in the Lisbon secondary scenes: creating illusions, playing some kind of theatre. But when Bosch designed his triptych, he seems to have approached the principal and the secondary scenes in a crucially different way. In the four main scenes showing Anthony the saint is tempted *physically*: he is attacked and beaten up, and he is confronted with carnal lust.

In the secondary scenes, though, the devils are creating diabolical illusions to disturb the saint *mentally* by enacting blasphemous and disparaging parodies of things, persons, and ideas that are precious to him. Obviously, these parodies can only make sense to a spectator who *knows* about the things, persons, and ideas that were precious to Anthony by having heard about them (oral communication, sermons ...) or by having read about them (written sources).

In some cases the devils' offending harassments are fairly easy to recognize. The left upper region of the centre panel depicts an army on its way to a village with a nearby monastery in flames attacked by devils (fig. 6). At first sight, this detail does not



Fig. 6
Hieronymus Bosch
*An Army on Its Way
to a Village with
a Nearby Monastery
in Flames
Attacked by Devils*
(detail of the
central panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)



Fig. 7
Hieronymus Bosch
A Net Dragging Fish out of the Water
(detail of the central panel of the *Temptations of Saint Anthony* triptych, fig. 1)

seem to have a direct connection with the story of the triptych's protagonist until we realize that in the *Vita Antonii* Anthony points out more than once that the devils sometimes appear to him in the shape of troops of soldiers (chapter 23). In chapter 39 the saint says: "How many times did they threaten me like armed soldiers!". The same is also mentioned in the *Vader boeck* incunabula. Noteworthy: the church tower of the burning monastery is crowned by a Tau. The Greek letter Tau was the insignia (today we would say "logo") of the Antonites, a religious order established around 1100 that treated patients suffering from ergotism (Saint Anthony's fire). Three of the four Saint Anthony figures in the interior panels wear the letter Tau on their shoulder (see for example p. 58). Of course, it has to be highly unpleasant for Anthony that one of "his" monasteries is being assaulted.

In other cases the link between the diabolical parodies and Anthony's life and legends is somewhat less obvious. For reasons of space, I will limit myself here to three examples. Spread all across the interior panels we can see fish that find themselves outside their natural element, above the water, on land, or in the air. In the lower right corner of the

centre panel a net is dragging a whole bunch of fish out of the water (fig. 7). Apparently, by using the illusion of fish out of water, the devils are making a cynical comment on one of Anthony's well-known sayings, namely that monks who abandon their life of loneliness and return to "the world" soon lose all their virtues and good habits, just as fish soon die when they leave the water. This saying can be found in chapter 85 of the *Vita Antonii*; but also in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, in the *Legenda aurea*, in the *Passionael* incunabula, and in the *Vader boeck* incunabula. In the 1490 *Vader boeck* the saying is rendered as follows: "Just as fish that end up on land from the water, and soon die when they are out of the water for a short time and are not thrown back, so too fares the monk who stays around worldly persons too long, for he loses his virtues and his good habits. For if the worldly words enter the ears too much, they expel the spiritual thoughts. And just as a fish desires to get back into the water in order to regain its strength, so too a monk will always try to break his contact with worldly people." To the right of the "stage" in the centre panel, three devils are reading (or singing) from an open book

Fig. 8
Hieronymus Bosch
Devils Reading (Singing?) from an Open Book
(detail of the central panel of the *Temptations of Saint Anthony* triptych, fig. 1)



containing mysterious illegible signs (fig. 8). One of these devils is dressed as a priest, and the other two seem to be dressed as monks. When Anthony speaks about the deceitful snares of the devil in chapter 25 of the *Vita Antonii*, he says: "Often the demons sing the psalms while remaining invisible, shocking as it is to tell. In addition, they recite the sacred words of the Scripture with a foul mouth, for often when we are reading, they repeat the last words like an echo. They also awaken to prayer those who are asleep, so as to deprive them of sleep for the whole night. They disguise themselves as genuine monks and put pressure on many of the monks."

In chapter 39, Anthony describes one of his own experiences with these kinds of temptations: "A few months later, when they were singing in front of me and quoting to each other from the Scriptures, I pretended I was deaf and did not listen." Similar passages can be found in the 1490 *Vader boeck*. A remarkable detail of the scene painted by Bosch is the nest with an egg in it on the head of one of the monk-devils (fig. 8). In chapter 24 of the *Vita Antonii* (the chapter immediately preceding chapter 25!), Anthony says that the devil often boasts

about himself. One day, the devil said: "I will pursue and overtake and I will hold the whole world in my hand like a nest and I shall take them away like eggs that have been abandoned." If this passage (which can only be found in the *Vita Antonii*) can indeed explain the nest with an egg in the Lisbon scene, this connection shows that Bosch was not only inspired by the Middle Dutch incunabula but that he consulted Latin written sources as well.

A third and final example is the scene in the centre region of the left interior panel, where four diabolical "pilgrims" are on their way to what seems to be a brothel (fig. 9). One of the "pilgrims" is dressed as a bishop, another is dressed as a cardinal, and a third is dressed as a monk. This scene can be unmasked as an insulting parody of one of Anthony's characteristics. In chapter 67 of the *Vita Antonii*, we read: "Never was he [Anthony] provoked to impatience by sudden anger nor did he allow his humility to become puffed up into pride. For he urged all the clerics right down to the lowest rank to pray before he did and he also bent his head for the bishops and priests to give him their blessing, as if he were their disciple in humility."

A very similar passage can be read in the 1490 *Vader boeck*: "He also respected all priests and in particular bishops. He knelt on the ground for them and asked them for their blessing." In the scene that Bosch painted, the devils are viciously mocking a particular trait of Anthony, namely his deep respect for representatives of the church, by staging an illusion in which representatives of the church are going to visit a brothel.

THE LISBON TRIPTYCH AND THE *MALLEUS MALEFICARUM*

A Latin text which is not directly related to Saint Anthony but also qualifies as a possible source of inspiration for the Lisbon triptych is the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Witches' Hammer), written by the Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger



Fig. 9
Hieronymus Bosch
*Diabolical "Pilgrims"
on Their Way
to a Brothel*
(detail of the left
interior panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

and published for the first time in 1487, when Bosch was approximately thirty-seven years old.¹⁶ If there is one late medieval painter who might be suspected of displaying a more than average interest in demonism and witchcraft, that would be the *faiseur de dyables* (creator of devils) from 's-Hertogenbosch. Witchcraft definitely plays a role in the Lisbon triptych, as is clearly illustrated by the couple (apparently a devil and a witch) riding an airborne fish in the upper right interior panel (fig. 10). The *Malleus* is not the only fifteenth-century text to mention the flight of witches, but another scene in the Lisbon interior panels does seem to be directly inspired by Kramer and Sprenger's book.

In the centre panel, to the right of the three devils reading from a book, an old woman, whose

upper body is hidden inside a hollow tree, holds a baby in her branch-like arms and rides sidesaddle on a giant rat. She is surrounded by four diabolical figures, one of whom is wearing a blue hat (fig. 11). Some authors have interpreted this scene – in my opinion correctly – as a parody of the Flight into Egypt.¹⁷ It cannot be denied that the combination of a woman with a baby, riding sidesaddle, and an old man (the figure with the blue hat) reminds the spectator of Mary and the Christ Child on a donkey, who are accompanied by Joseph on the Flight into Egypt. More than likely, this is another illusion staged by the devils in order to make fun of Christ and his mother. In this context, it can hardly be a coincidence that the head of the devil-hunter to the left of the fake Mary and Joseph is an Our-Lady's-



Fig. 10
Hieronymus Bosch
*Devil and a Witch
Riding an Airborne Fish*
(detail of the right
interior panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

thistle (*carduus marianus*, *Onser Vrouwen distel* in Middle Dutch). But what interests us here is the peculiar form of the saddle on which the fake Mary is sitting.

In fact, what we see is the visual combination of a saddle and a *bakermat*. This Dutch word refers to an elongated basket or mat with raised sides which in former times was placed in front of the fire and in which the midwife could sit when she was taking care of the baby, thus being protected from draughts and from the fire's heat. In the first place, Bosch may have been inspired here by an apocryphal story about the birth of Christ from Pseudo-Bonaventura's *Meditationes vitae Christi* (ca. 1300), which in Nicholas Love's Middle English adaptation of the Latin text, published in Westminster in 1494, reads: "Joseph also honoured and worshipped the child, both God and man. He took the saddle from the donkey and turned it into a cushion for Mary to sit on and into a support to lean on."¹⁸ But by turning the saddle into a *bakermat* and Mary into an old hag holding a baby in her arms, Bosch made sure that the spectator would associate the female figure on the rat with a midwife.

The *Malleus* dedicates a complete chapter (Pars II, quaestio 1, cap. 13) to midwives who are witches in the devil's service. It begins with the sentence: "We must not omit to mention the injuries done to children by witch midwives, first by killing them, and secondly by blasphemously offering them to devils."

According to Kramer and Sprenger, midwife-witches are the most dangerous and harmful of all witches. The midwife-witch idea seems to have been an original concept of the authors of the *Malleus*, for in Pars I, quaestio 11 they write: "We must add that witches that are midwives, cause the greatest harm, as penitent witches have often told us and others, saying: 'No one does more harm to the Catholic faith than midwives'." Kramer and Sprenger do not quote a textual source here, as they always do elsewhere, but they only refer to their own (direct and indirect) experience. If the belief in midwife-witches is indeed an original concept of the *Malleus*, the scene around the rat in the Lisbon centre panel would be a clear example of the influence of the *Malleus* on Bosch. But even if the midwife-witch concept was more common, there is still a striking similarity between what Bosch painted and what Kramer and Sprenger wrote.



Fig. 11
Hieronymus Bosch
*Witch-Midwife
Riding a Rat*
(detail of the
central panel of the
*Temptations
of Saint Anthony*
triptych, fig. 1)

THE ANTWERP COPY OF THE LISBON CENTRE PANEL

The early influence of Bosch's *Temptations of Saint Anthony* triptych is quite impressive. In the sixteenth century it seems to have been a pictorial "best-seller", which is proved by an estimated forty-one copies that are still traceable today (one full copy of the exterior and interior panels, four full copies of the interior panels, twelve full copies of the centre panel, twenty reduced copies of the centre panel, and four copies of only the left and right interior panels). The odds are that more copies,

currently hidden in private collections or even in the stored collections of art museums, will surface in future. Moreover, scholarly research on the larger part of these copies is scarcely out of the egg. One of the desiderata for future Bosch scholarship is to subject all these copies to a dendrochronological, technical, stylistic, and iconographic examination in order to gather more information about their dating, authorship, mutual dependence, and aesthetic qualities. Of course, the question of whether some of these copies are modern falsifications cannot be ignored.

Because the newly restored full copy of the Lisbon centre panel owned by the Antwerp Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten is part of the exhibition for which this catalogue was produced, I will spend some lines on it to round off this essay.¹⁹ The Antwerp copy (cat. 31/A) was bequeathed to the museum by Knight Florent Van Ertborn in 1841. From 1817 till 1828 Van Ertborn was the mayor of Antwerp, and from 1828 till 1830 he was the gover-

nor of the Utrecht province. After the Belgian Revolution (1830) he returned to Antwerp, and later he moved to The Hague, where he died in 1840. More than likely, Van Ertborn had purchased the painting from the collection of Maarten Bowier (1750–1830) in 1828 or earlier. Bowier was a prominent resident of the city of 's-Hertogenbosch: he was a 's-Hertogenbosch *pensionaris* (lawyer of the city), and he held the office of alderman several times. How Maarten



Fig. 12
Anonymous Artist
*Half-Egg Half-Lizard
Monster on the Stage
at the Right of the
Beggar with the Top Hat*
(detail of the copy after
Hieronymus Bosch's
*Temptations of
Saint Anthony* triptych)
after 1550
Antwerp, Koninklijk
Museum voor
Schone Kunsten



Fig. 13
Anonymous Artist
Witch-Midwife Riding a Rat
(detail of the copy after Hieronymus Bosch's
Temptations of Saint Anthony triptych)
after 1550
Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum
voor Schone Kunsten

been adapted. The most striking deviation from the original is the addition of a monster (half-egg, half-lizard) on the “stage” to the right of the beggar with the top hat (fig. 12). Other variants are subtractions. The soldiers near the burning monastery and on the bridge near the village have disappeared (the bridge is crossed by only one lonely rider). There is no bird with a twig-head on top of the harp in the scene around the giant red fruit. The woman presenting a plate with a toad and an egg is white instead of black. No monkey sits inside the basket on the back of the black monster sitting on the drake-boat, and the noble rider next to the woman on the giant rat does not carry an apple on his head (fig. 13). The Christ figure to whom Anthony is pointing has become almost invisible over time. During the restoration works of the panel in Budapest in 2021, however, macro photographs and infrared reflectography taken after the removal of the discoloured varnish layer have shown that the figure of Christ and the crucifix placed upon the altar were originally painted – even if with some gesture-like strokes of the brush – within the homogenous darkness of the chapel interior. Christ, the central figure of Saint Anthony’s life and of Hieronymus Bosch, thus reappeared on the panel.²⁰

Bowier or one of his ancestors acquired the painting is not known, but the link with ’s-Hertogenbosch (Hieronymus Bosch’s home town) is striking.

Father Clarenz Gerlach assigned the panel to the second half of the sixteenth century and argued that the painting was incorrectly attributed to Peter Huys. Marc Rudolf de Vrij, who considers the panel “one of the best of the extant replicas”, also rejected the attribution to Peter Huys. Gerd Unverfehrt concurred on the dating “after 1550” and considered the panel a late copy produced in Antwerp, in spite of its quality, which is “higher than that of most other copies of the Lisbon centre panel”.

The Antwerp panel (signed *Jheronimus bosch* in the lower right) is a quite faithful copy of the Lisbon centre panel. It has the principal scene and the eleven secondary scenes, but some details have

NOTES

- The standard modern edition is *Vita Antonii* [2020]. It has the original Greek text and a French translation.
- For a modern edition of the Latin text, see *Vita Antonii* [2005], 160–92. Accessible online: <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/7821/full.pdf> (last accessed: 13 November 2020). An English translation in White ed. 1998, 1–70.
- For a modern edition of the Latin text, see *Vita Pauli* [1943], 36–42. An English translation in White 1998, 71–84.
- The Latin corpus of the *Vitas Patrum* was published by the Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde in 1615. The second edition of 1628 (Heribert Rosweyde ed. *Vitae Patrum de Vita et Verbis Seniorum sive Historiae Eremiticae Libri X*. Ex Officina Plantiniana, Antwerp) was the starting-point for the nineteenth-century edition in Jacques-Paul Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* (*Patrologia Latina* 1841–1855, vols. 73–74, and vol. 21, 387–426). Although Rosweyde’s edition is not based on a critical study of the complete *Vitas Patrum* tradition, it is still considered the standard edition in modern research. For a critical approach of the Rosweyde edition, see *Vita Antonii* [2005], 90.
- Apophthegmata Patrum* [2013].
- A modern edition of the Latin text is *Legenda aurea* [2014]. An English translation is *Legenda aurea* [1993].
- A modern edition of the Latin text is *Paras Legend* [1943]. To my knowledge, no modern translations of this text are available.
- A modern edition of the Latin text is *Inventio et Translatio* [1883]. To my knowledge, no modern translations of this text are available.
- A modern edition of the Latin text is *Legenda mirabilis* [1942]. To my knowledge, no modern translations of this text are available.
- A modern edition of this Middle Dutch text is *Gulden legende* [2017].
- The Gouda incunabulum: *Passionael* 1478. No modern edition is available. I consulted the copy in the Ghent University Library, sig. BHSL.RES.0040. This copy is accessible online: <http://lib.ugent.be/catalog/rugor:001698686> (last accessed: November 14, 2020).
- The Zwolle incunabulum: *Dat vader boeck* 1490. No modern edition is available. I consulted the copy in The Hague, Royal Library, sig. 171 E 26. This copy is accessible online: <https://archive.org/details/ned-kbn-all-00002073-001> (last accessed: 14 November, 2020).
- Bax 1948. English translation: Bax 1979.
- The scene with Anthony being lifted up in the air and beaten by devils was also represented by other artists before and after Bosch, in particular in the Low Countries and in Germany. That this episode was also known in Germany, is proved by *Dat duytsche passionail*, a Middle Low German incunabulum published by Ludwig von Renchen in Cologne in 1485. This edition is closely related to the Middle Dutch *Passionael* incunabula and also adds the sentence about Anthony’s being lifted up in the air. I consulted the copy in Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, sign. Inc III 51. Some (in particular German) authors have related the scene with the airborne Anthony in Lisbon to chapter 65 of the *Vita Antonii*, where Anthony sees in a vision how he is lifted up into the sky by angels. Devils try to stop them and accuse Anthony of sins, but the angels rebuke the devils. As Bosch did not paint any angels in the upper region of the left interior panel, this interpretation has to be denied.
- Fischer 2009, 304–23; Fischer 2013, 62–72; Ilsink et al. 2016, 151–52.
- For an English translation of this book, see *Malleus Maleficarum* [1986].
- Bax 1948, 88; Bax 1979, 113; Cuttler 1957, 119; Wertheim Aymès 1961, 59; Tolnay 1966, 358; Marijnissen et al. 1972, 83; Goertz 1977, 106; Unverfehrt 1980, 80; Stroo et al. 2001, 108; Will 2001, 49; Silver 2006b, 230; Schwartz 2016, 145.
- Incipit Speculum* 1494, chapter 6 (*Of the natuyte of our lorde Jhesus*). “Joseph also honorynge & worshyppynge the childe god and man, tooke the sadel of the asse and made thereof a quyschyn our lady to syte on & a suppoyle to leene to.” The publisher of the text was Wynkyn de Worde. The text is accessible online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A16347.0001.001/1:4.6?r gn=div2;view=fulltext> (last accessed: 14 November, 2020).
- Oil on panel, 88 × 71 cm. See Cornette 1939, 21; Gerlach 1968; Friedländer 1969, 85, no. 90f; Unverfehrt 1980, 272–73, cat. 89a; Vandenbroeck ed. 1985, 54–56; *Hamburg* 2008, 106–9, cat. 13; De Vrij 2012, 477–78, cat. B.24.II.
- Everything in this essay is dealt with in more detail in my forthcoming book *All the Ingenuity of the Devil – Jheronimus Bosch’s St Anthony Triptych* (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga), due for publication by the Jheronimus Bosch Art Center (’s-Hertogenbosch) in 2022. I would like to thank Pascal Bertrand and Larry Silver for their help in writing this contribution.