

The Charterhouse near 's-Hertogenbosch and its connection with the studio of Jheronimus Bosch, 1466-1515

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A few kilometres from the city walls of 's-Hertogenbosch an imposing Carthusian monastery was built in the decades around 1500. Its construction coincided with the period when Jheronimus Bosch was a successful painter in that city. Documents proving that he worked for the monastery do not exist. However, there were several direct and indirect forms of contact between the monastery on the one hand and important institutions and persons in the city on the other hand. Do they justify the idea that influence and contacts also existed between the monastery and workshop of Bosch?

1 The origin of the monastery during the adolescence of Bosch

The duchy of Brabant flourished economically and culturally in the fifteenth century. The area was divided into administrative units that were geographically defined around the main cities. The city of 's-Hertogenbosch – the fourth city after Louvain, Brussels and Antwerp in the duchy – was the capital of the Bailiwick of 's-Hertogenbosch. From the city, this area stood under the control of the duke through his officers, such as the high bailiff and the steward-general.

The duke's influence was not limited only to his officers in 's-Hertogenbosch but also appointments of the aldermen, for example, needed his approval. The court of aldermen of 's-Hertogenbosch had both in the city and bailiwick extensive legal powers.¹ Also spiritually the duke exercised control. From 1412 he appointed, in turn within the chapter itself, persons who could fill the vacant places in the chapter as new canons.² Many prominent members of the secular and ecclesiastical powers in the town and bailiwick were connected with the Brotherhood of Our Lady, officially founded in 1318. Her members worshiped the Virgin in their own chapel in the church of St. John with prayers and songs.³

Around the middle of the fifteenth century in and around the town, several monasteries and religious communities were present. For the most part they were reformed in that time. They wanted to return to their original statutes and rules. If they lived without a recognized religious rule they had to choose one, including *the tria vota substantialia*. Personal property (*peculium*) and the freedom to go outside the monastery, disappeared or were severely curtailed. New monasteries, such as St. Gertrude's Monastery (1448), followed from the outset the *inclusura*, while others submitted to the new rules in the long run.⁴

The impetus for the religious reform was motivated by the new spiritual movement in the Church, which is commonly referred to as the *Devotio Moderna*, the Modern Devotion. The founder of it, the deacon Geert Grote (1340-1384), was highly critical of conditions in the church in his writings and sermons and pointed the way towards simplicity and internalization. For four years he lived in the Carthusian monastery Monnikhuizen near Arnhem, where he was influenced by the prior Hendrik van Coesveld. Grote sought a new form of religious life in order to approach the ideal of the *vita apostolica* as close as possible, not within closed monasteries, but in religious lay communities. In these houses Brethren of the Common Life lived undogmatically according to guidelines drawn up by themselves or statutes that were initially not recognized by the Church. This renewal movement, which

¹Jacobs 1986, 20-49.

²BHIC, 2006 Mechelse aanwinsten van het bisdom Den Bosch 1330-1719, inv.nr. 34 d.d. June 17 1412.

³Van Dijck 1973. For chant see Roelvink 2002.

⁴Sanders 2016 in preparation.

arose in the cities that are located in the IJssel River Valley in the eastern part of the Northern Netherlands, quickly attracted many followers. In 's-Hertogenbosch, this new way of living was introduced in 1410 when a female follower of the Modern Devotion came from Diepenheim and shaped the community of the priest Jan van Orthen in this way. Fifteen years later, the men followed: they founded the Fratershuis in the Hinthamerstraat. With these Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life, the ideas of this new movement emerged in 's-Hertogenbosch.⁵

In this city Jeroon or Joon, son of Anthonis van Aken, was born around 1450. His first name is derived from his Latin name Hieronymus and was in the spelling of those days written as Joen or Jeroen.⁶ Of his childhood little is known with certainty. It is not unlikely that he attended the Latin School, led by the chapter. There he learned the principles of Latin. Many students from out of town found shelter in the Fratershuis, the hostel building of the Brethren in the Hinthamerstraat. For Joon this would not have been necessary, as his childhood home was in the city.

During Joon's childhood, Ludolf van de Water (c. 1400-1475) conceived a plan to found a monastery in the bailiwick that embraced pure Christian ideals. From 1437 he was a canon of the Chapter of St. John in 's-Hertogenbosch. From the influence of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life, who had come to the city in his early years, he may have been inspired to bring new Christian ideas into practice through a monastic foundation. From around 1450, he expanded his possessions in the region between St. Oedenrode and Boxtel as much as possible in order to acquire initial capital as the basis for a new foundation. What he finally could offer, however, proved insufficient: he needed help from others.

Two individuals presented themselves for that task. One of them was his fellow canon Maarten van Someren (c. 1381-1467). He was strongly influenced by the Modern Devotion. He also witnessed the arrival of the Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life. In his last will he endowed the Brethren, as well as many other convents that lived in the spirit of the Modern Devotion. The monastery Mariënhage near Eindhoven, permeated by the Modern Devotion, saw him as a second founder because of his large donations. Maarten was in close contact with the Carthusian Order. Apparently he was important to them, perhaps in his functions as notary and city secretary. In 1424 he was admitted as a participant in the spiritual works of the Order as a reward for his services to the Hollandse Huis (*domus Hollandiae*), the Carthusian monastery near Geertruidenberg.⁷ In the years around 1400 the influential Hendrik van Coesveld, prior of that monastery, had propagated the spirit of the Modern Devotion. As a *professus* and prior of Monnikhuizen, he must have been in close contact with Geert Grote, who lived in that charterhouse during the years 1374-1378.⁸

Another assistant of Ludolf van de Water was Arnt Stamelaert († 1468). This councilor and former alderman of 's-Hertogenbosch had a son, Hendrik, who was a Crosier in Cologne. The Crosiers were in those days strongly influenced by the Modern Devotion and had their way of life already adjusted accordingly at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

⁵ Sanders 2016 in preparation.

⁶ The oe-spelling was pronounced as oo in the time of Bosch. Proof of this are two items in the accounts of the so-called Table of the Holy Spirit in 's-Hertogenbosch of 1487-1488 where a payment appears to Bosch: "Jonen the maelder" (see for these two items Van Dijck 2001, 174 and 43-44). As a supplement, we want to point out the spelling of his name in November 1495 in a document prepared by the Park Abbey in Leuven for the benefit of the abbey and Bosch: Jheronimus de /van Akenen dictus de maeldert (Archive Abbey Park in Leuven, charters Oirschot). In the documents written after his death, the professional designation disappeared (Archive Abbey Park in Leuven, R IX f. 121 13-12-1517 'Hyeronimus de Aken'; f. 147v 17-12-1517 Jeronimus de Aken'; f. 150r 'Jeronimus van Aken).

⁷ Sanders 1990, 158-159.

⁸ Sanders 1990, 148 and 156-157.

The Order was in that century in a steady expansion in the Netherlands and neighboring German region.

As a result two religious orders were of interest as candidates for the planned monastery of Ludolf: Crosiers and Carthusians. Brethren and Sisters of the Common Life would not fit in the rural areas where Ludolf's possessions were concentrated. In 1460, contacts about the planned foundation were already taken up with the Carthusian Order. The Carthusians of Roermond were the Order's representatives for Ludolf. The Order hesitated because of the small size of the starting capital. The Crosiers, who were around the same time in contact with Ludolf, hesitated for the same reason. Until 1465 both orders proved to still be competitors.⁹ At that time Joon, son of Anthonis van Aken, had reached the age of about 15 years.

After the disappearance of the Crosiers as competitors, the Carthusians dared to take the step of proceeding. The bishop of Liege gave, in addition to his consent, a patron saint to the monastery. He chose St. Mary of Egypt, a recluse who was well known in the Order and in 's-Hertogenbosch. Joon could have known that his grandfather Jan van Aken had depicted her life around 1434. The painting hung in the chapel of the Brotherhood of St. Mary in St. John's church.¹⁰ The canons Ludolf van de Water and Maarten van Someren must have seen this painting often. The idea to make her patroness would have come from Maarten.¹¹

In 1466 the monk Dionysius van Ryckel or van Leeuwen, better known as Dionysius Cartusianus (Denis the Carthusian) (1403/1403–1471) was sent from Roermond to the bailiwick together with some monks and lay brothers. He was instructed to prepare the foundation of the new monastery.¹² He was 62 or 63 years old and a celebrity in the Western world. Many nobles, princes and dignitaries had asked his advice. In his writings he gave them guidance. His works are published by the Carthusian Order and comprise 42 parts in 44 volumes. His comments and treatises are characteristic not so much for their innovative nature as for the compiling of medieval theological doctrine. Both in manuscript and in print his works circulated widely in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The arrival of this famous person in a relatively empty part of the Bailiwick of 's-Hertogenbosch must have aroused enthusiasm among residents of the city and bailiwick. Also 16-year-old Joon van Aken will have noticed his arrival.

The small group of Carthusians, however, did not like the stay in Olland, part of St. Oedenrode where Ludolf had planned his foundation, and after just over a year they moved and settled with Ludolf's help on Eikendonk, a higher spot in the wetland between 's-Hertogenbosch and Den Dungen, just outside the city wall. Denis remained there for several years as rector to build up a real convent. In 1469, he received permission to return to the charterhouse in Roermond where in his youth he had professed solemn vows.¹³ Joon was then about 19 years old and would have at least assisted in the Van Aken family company as a painter.

From an ecclesiastical point of view all arrangements around the new Carthusian monastery had been made. The only missing element was the consent of the Duke of Brabant. This was given shortly after 1470. Presumably Arnold of Egmond, Duke of Guelders and benefactor of the Carthusians, functioned as an intermediary. In 1470, his son had him released from his imprisonment under pressure of Charles the Bold. With great ceremonies, the city of 's-Hertogenbosch welcomed him towards the end of December of that year on his

⁹ Sanders 2012, 30.

¹⁰ Van Dijck 2001, 144.

¹¹ Sanders 2012, 31; Hoekx et al. 2016, 32.

¹² Sanders 2012, 34.

¹³ Sanders 2012, 35; Gaens and Sanders 2016, 308.

way to the court of Charles.¹⁴ The duke gave from his residence in Abbeville permission for the foundation of the charterhouse. However, he wished to be considered as *primus fundator*. Hence he was bestowed the right to choose the saint who would serve as the patron of the monastery. The old patron St. Mary of Egypt had to give way to St. Sophia of Constantinople. With this patroness the charterhouse had not a saint, but a building for protection. The duke was referring by this name to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent desecration of the Hagia Sophia. The impending rise of Islam was extremely topical.¹⁵ At the time of the solemn entrance of Duke Arnold in 's-Hertogenbosch and the change of the monastery's name, Joon was about 20 years old and fully aware of the world around him.

Eikendonk proved to not be a suitable place for a monastery building either. The project was only accelerated when a rich and childless couple from Guelders stepped in. Arnt van Herlaar and Aleid Pieck decided to commit fully to this starting convent. Thanks to funds from Aleid, in December 1471, the Carthusians could buy monastic buildings in Vught immediately to be used by them for the time being as an appropriate monastery. In 1472, they moved to their new home.¹⁶ Joon van Aken was around 22 years old and probably painted in his or his family's studio in 's-Hertogenbosch.

2 Renovations of the building

2.1 Exterior

Now the Carthusians possessed a monastery. However, the complex was not built for Carthusians but for Sisters of the Common Life. A Carthusian monastery had strict architectural rules to ensure the separation from the world and each other. So, the building had to be adjusted. An open space had to be created before the church where the service buildings and buildings where the lay brothers could live could be established. The church could stay of course, but had to be divided into two by a rood screen. The choir monks had their place in the choir, while the lay brothers had the rear at their disposal. Aleid Pieck provided the funds to enable these structural changes.¹⁷ At the entrance of the monastery the coat of arms of Charles the Bold, carved in stone, was applied.¹⁸

Even more radical was the reconstruction that had to be made for lodging the choir monks. Each of them required a separate house, a cell, facing a cloister which gave access to the church. The prior and the procurator conventionally had their cells connected to a separate cloister because of their contacts with the outside world. For these units Aleid's spouse, Knight Arnt van Herlaar, donated money: he was the founder of eight cells.¹⁹ Moreover, Aleid herself moved to the convent after her husband died. Shortly after, her second husband Gerit, 'brother of Strijen', possibly lived there with her. She inhabited a separate house on the monastery grounds. Aleid took care of the quality of life of her second husband: after her death, he was allowed to move into a house outside the monastery walls, and he had his food and drink delivered from the monastery.²⁰ For all this construction activity, it would have been impossible to find enough qualified people in Vught. In addition, the whole monastery had to be upgraded, in accordance with the wishes of Aleid and Arnt. What was more obvious

¹⁴ Sanders 2010, 66.

¹⁵ Sanders 2012, 36.

¹⁶ Sanders 2012, 36-40.

¹⁷ Sanders 2012, 57; Hoekx et al. 2016, 93.

¹⁸ Sanders 2012, 58; Hoekx et al. 2016, 60.

¹⁹ Sanders 2012, 61; Hoekx et al. 2016, 93.

²⁰ Sanders 2012, 46.

than to go to the city and hire experts for these works? There were plenty of good craftsmen available working for instance at St. John's church.

Once the first monastic buildings and cells were finished, one could think of expansion. And the monastery grew, cell by cell. Eventually the number of cells would be doubled to 15 or 16 by benefactors who in addition to the construction of the cell also donated revenues for the maintenance of a monk on their behalf. One of them was Herman van Brakel. From 1455, he was provost of the Chapter of Cleves and previously secretary of the Duke of Cleves. Until his death in 1485, he was the chancellor. The duke, Johan, was well-disposed towards the Carthusian Order. Along with Duke Arnold of Guelders, he had sought the permission of Charles the Bold around 1470 for the establishment of the Carthusian monastery near 's-Hertogenbosch. Herman maintained as chancellor undoubtedly intensive contacts with the Carthusians of Wesel, who had been founded shortly before 1420 by Duke Adolph of Cleves. On that basis, he must also have known the prior of Wesel who, in 1471, attended on behalf of the general chapter to the purchase of the Sisters' monastery by the Carthusians. Moreover, the then rector of the young monastery had professed in Wesel where he held the function of prior. Herman van Brakel also was a friend of the Carthusians: in 1478 he founded five cells in the young convent Vogelsang near Jülich.

Herman also founded a cell in the new monastery in Vught. At that time, the extension of St. John's church in 's-Hertogenbosch was on schedule. The Brotherhood of Our Lady had advanced plans to demolish their old chapel in the church and replace it with a new one (the current Sacrament Chapel). The supply of stones from the German area had to take place by water and was expensive because of the many tolls on the Rhine. In 1479, the provosts of the confraternity prepared the construction of a new chapel in St. John's. At the annual swan meal in early January of that year, Lord Frederik van Egmond and 'den raet van Cleve' (the councilor of Cleves) were present for that purpose. As a result of this hospitality, the councilor made a commitment to allow the necessary construction stones to be transported through the river Rhine in the duchy without paying tolls. In appreciation, eight officers of the tolls in Dusseldorf, Orsoy and Grieth received membership in the brotherhood for free.²¹ This councilor of Cleves had to be of sufficient weight to provide such an important allowance in 's-Hertogenbosch. Presumably this was Herman van Brakel or his agent.²² It is obvious that during this visit similar arrangements were made with the Vught Carthusians in favor of the renovation of the monastery, at least for the construction of a cell, financed by Herman. All founders of cells in the monastery were offered an anniversary as a benefactor. Only Herman is listed as founder of a cell on four different days in the *kalendarium*, the calendar memorial register of the charterhouse.²³ So he meant a lot more to the monastery than just the founder of a cell.

Not only the officers of the tolls received a free membership to the brotherhood. At the same time Alart du Hamel, his sister Nicolaa and his servant Jan Heyns received this honor because of certain services they had granted to the brotherhood. Alart was master pilot of St. John's church and also assumed that function for the new fraternity chapel. After the death of his first two wives, Margriet van Auweninge and Wilmken, he married Goossen Heym, the natural daughter of high bailiff Jan Heym.²⁴ Jan inhabited Maurick castle in Vught, close to

²¹ BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 121, f. 31v-32r and f. 12r-v.

²² Herman was not a total stranger to the brotherhood. In the account of 1458/1459 he was registered as an external member ('Item dominus Hermannus de Braclis prepositus ecclesie Clivensis'). His death fee is written in the account of 1486/1487 ('heer Herman van Braklis proest tot Cleve'), together with some other deceased persons from Cleves (BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 119, f. 127r and inv.nr. 122, f. 17v).

²³ Gaens et al. 2016, 217, 244, 264 and 290.

²⁴ <http://www.grafzkerkintjan.nl/grafzerken/207/margriete-van-auweninge-1484.aspx#Bijzonderheden> [consulted 07-03-2016]. The money for the membership of the brotherhood is recorded in the account of

the monastery of the Carthusians. The Heym family and the Carthusians had close relations. One of John's sons, Frederik, was a professed monk of the charterhouse; another son, Simon, was a benefactor of the Carthusians and chose the monastery for his final resting place.²⁵ The marriage bond between Alart and the Heym family could have given the monastery the possibility to carry out his services for the charterhouse. By the mid-eighties, Alart had already left the daily work regarding the construction of St. John's church and the chapel of the brotherhood to his assistant Jan Heyns, who had in the meantime become his brother-in-law by marriage to Nicolaa. In 1494, he also formally transferred his duties in 's-Hertogenbosch to him. Perhaps also Jan Heyns had been involved in the Carthusian monastery.

In the last two decades of the fifteenth century, the monastery's buildings were extended with three cells: the foundations of Walravina Pieck (†1482), canon Klaas van der Poorten (†1483) and Lambert Millinck (in 1497). The construction of the monastery was related to the building activities of the fraternity and St. John's church. The acquisition of the building lodge ('bouwloods') of the Brotherhood of Our Lady is the first indication of that idea. Carthusian Dirk van Dinther bought it in 1495 or 1496 from the provosts, when the construction of the chapel was finished.²⁶ The initial capital for a new cell in the monastery in 1520 is another interesting indicator of mutual contact. Geertruid, daughter of Dirk van der Straten, resident of 's-Hertogenbosch, was the benefactor. She was the widow of William of Zittart.²⁷ For Geertruid and William, two separate anniversaries were celebrated in the charterhouse.²⁸ In 1478, William was one of the heads of the building lodge of St. John's church.²⁹ From the construction halls of Saint John's church and also likely the chapel of the brotherhood, craftsmen were probably transferred to the monastery. A donation by the widow of a building superintendent provides significant support for this reconstruction.

Even more important in underlining the relationship between the Carthusians and the brotherhood is the foundation of a cell in the first years of the sixteenth century by Lord Frederik van Egmond (1440-1521), completed by his son Floris (1470-1539), both sworn members of the confraternity. The reason for this generous gesture was the bastard son of Floris, Frederik van IJsselstein. When this young man was ordained a priest in 1512, he had already professed as a Carthusian. Grandfather Frederik and father Floris had arranged adequate shelter for him: a new cell at the Carthusians in Vught. They were therefore commemorated as benefactors of the Carthusians.³⁰ Frederik van Egmond had joined the brotherhood in 1478/1479, together with his father William IV van Egmond as external members.³¹ They were respectively nephew and brother of Duke Arnold of Guelders, Carthusian friend par excellence. In 1479 Frederik held on behalf of the brotherhood negotiations with the councilor of Cleves on toll freedom for stones for the new chapel. So he served a more important role in the brotherhood than just an ordinary external member. In 1499 or 1500 he became a sworn brother, which was celebrated with a sumptuous meal.³² He lived in an imposing house in the Orthenstraat, where he loved to live according to the

1494/1495, but was already paid earlier: 'Gosuina meesters Alarts du Hamel uxor' (BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 122, f. 291v).

²⁵ Sanders 2012, 170-171.

²⁶ BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 123, f. 6v.

²⁷ SAH, archief Sint-Jan, inv.nr. 1817 (1216).

²⁸ Sanders 2012, 64 en 76; Gaens et al. 2016, 268 en 282.

²⁹ Hezenmans 1866, 63.

³⁰ Sanders 2012, 62-63; Gaens and Sanders 2016, 311.

³¹ BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 120, f. 292r-v and f. 297r.

³² BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 123, f. 258r-258v. Frederik was not a *clericus* and yet he could become a sworn member. Was that also possible for Bosch in 1488? If so, that means that he was not necessarily a clergyman.

chronicler Molius.³³ During and between the meals at the brotherhood, he must have looked for people in the city who were able to construct and decorate an appropriate cell for his grandson.

Was the basis for the negotiations between the brotherhood and Cleves already established earlier? Towards the end of December 1477 Maria, along with her husband Maximilian, made her Joyeuse Entrée in 's-Hertogenbosch.³⁴ The dukes of Cleves and Jülich were present with their sons.³⁵ In December 1496 it was the turn of the young Philip the Fair to be inaugurated in 's-Hertogenbosch as the new Duke of Brabant. We do not know if his new wife, Joanna of Castile, and other people of the Iberian Peninsula accompanied him. Cornelis van Glymes van Bergen, nephew of Gerijt van Strijen through his wife Maria van Zevenbergen, was in any case present.³⁶ In 1478, Cornelis (20 years old) was appointed commander of the troops that marched from 's-Hertogenbosch to Grave. After the conquest of that city, Maximilian appointed him in 1485 as governor of that region. He was Maximilian's councilor and chamberlain. In 1489 and 1490, the duke placed him on the committee for the selection of the aldermen of 's-Hertogenbosch. In the latter year, he also became admiral of the Netherlands.³⁷ He inherited from his father in law a house in 's-Hertogenbosch, that he converted, in 1500, into a palace and named it after his wife: Hof van Zevenbergen (Court of Zevenbergen). In the winter of 1504-1505 the Duke, recently also King of Castile, stayed for a long time in the city. The dukes Willem van Gulik and Jan van Kleef, both Carthusian friends, kept him company. Emperor Maximilian and his wife, Blanca Maria Sforza, daughter of the Duke of Milan, had contact with him. Cornelis van Bergen and his son in law Floris van Egmond were appointed as commanders. These warlords, both members of the Golden Fleece, moved in the highest court circles, where they also met Spaniards and Italians.³⁸ The Carthusians would also have received benefits from that relationship. In addition, Charles the Bold as founder of the monastery was a perfect key to the Court.

Hubert van Loon also was an important figure in the history of the monastery. Professed in the Charterhouse of Scheut near Brussels in 1498, as a member of an 's-Hertogenbosch grain buyer family he already had from the very start of his life as a Carthusian the intention to be transferred to the monastery near his hometown. This in fact happened shortly after his profession. In 1502 he was appointed prior of the monastery in Vught. He arrived at the monastery in good circumstances. The cell of Frederik van IJsselstein was under construction. Already in the first years of his priorship, between 1503 and 1508, he was able to buy six farms for the monastery.³⁹ A chronicle of 's-Hertogenbosch, dating from 1608, still referred with emphasis to this prior as the man who brought the *opera et structura* of the monastery to a climax.⁴⁰ The only image we have of the monastery dates back to the thirties of the seventeenth century.⁴¹ There we see a ruin of the monastery which apparently, like St. John's church and the brotherhood's chapel, was made of sandstone from the area of Münster and tuff from the Eifel.

³³ Hoekx et al. 2003, 190-191.

³⁴ Van Lith-Droogleever Fortuijn et al. 1997, 233.

³⁵ Van Bavel et al. 2001, 51.

³⁶ Van Lith-Doogleever Fortuijn et al. 1997, 284; Hoekx et al. 2003, 187, 189; Sanders 2012, 119.

³⁷ Schuttelaars 1998, 212-213.

³⁸ Van Lith-Droogleever Fortuijn et al. 1997, 297-298 and 301; Hoekx et al. 2003, 193, 195; Sanders 2012, 46.

³⁹ Sanders 2012, 74-76 and 139.

⁴⁰ BHIC, 108 Handschriftenverzameling, inv.nr. 14, f. 17r.

⁴¹ Sanders 2012, 114.

2.2 Interior

About the interior of the monastery in the early years, we are even worse informed than the building. There is a notice about the presence of sculptures and paintings in the church in the time of the dedication around 1472. We must immediately note that this data is delivered to us by Eligius, chronicler of the monastery around 1625.⁴² Although this weakens the reliability, we know also that he had archival sources at his disposal that are now gone.

Sculptures and paintings in Carthusian monasteries, however sober the Order may have seemed, were not unusual in the Netherlands.⁴³ Their task was to arouse and strengthen devotion. A good example is the crucifixion of Christ in the Charterhouse of Scheut near Brussels. This painting dates from about 1460 and was painted for this monastery by Rogier van der Weijden (1399/1400-1464). Shortly before, he had given a painting of St. Catherine to the charterhouse of Herne, where in 1449 his son had entered. With these works the devotion for the depicted scene was increased. The Brotherhood of St. Mary knew painter Rogier van der Weijden. In 1456–1457, she had him design a draft for an image of Mary.⁴⁴ Another example forms a scene of hell in the brothers' chapel of the Charterhouse of Roermond. This mural painting dates about half a century later. It shows hideous devils dragging the souls of the deceased into the fiery mouth of hell. This painting was intended to remind the brothers of the Last Judgment everyone was expecting.⁴⁵

Ludolf van de Water died in 1475. He was buried in the choir of the Carthusian church. He came from a family whose members loved to be portrayed. Ludolf's father Everard(?) is depicted as a founder on a very damaged mural in St. John's church.⁴⁶ Another relative of Ludolf, Everard van de Water, in the period 1523–1548 often alderman of 's-Hertogenbosch, was together with his wife portrayed in the choir of the Blessed Sacrament in the Preachers monastery above the high altar in the vault, seated on fur in a red coat with leopard lining, with on the one side the coat of arms of Van de Water and on the other that of the Coenen family. The middle part of the vault was again adorned with the coat of arms of Van de Water. It was displayed in the fashion of those days. It stood between two climbing lions, half gilded with an open, partly gilded helmet with a high golden crown on top. Above it stood a white head with two horns. In another part of the vault other people with their coat of arms could be seen, such as Cardinal van Enckevoort, Herman van Deventer, Knight of Jerusalem, George Sampson and Coenraad Kempen. Lastly, there is a portrait of Canon Peter van de Water (deceased in 1597), kneeling before the cross with St. John's church in the background.⁴⁷ So it is not inconceivable that such a painting could also be seen in the immediate vicinity of the final resting place of Ludolf van de Water. Also, of subsequent founders who were buried in the monastery, like the couple Aleid Pieck and Arnold van Herlaar, we can assume that images at their tomb in the choir of the church kept alive their memory.

The same is true for the founders of cells and other important benefactors. They also attempted with help of memorial pieces to save their souls by turning to Carthusian prayers. In and around the cells they created, their own memorial pieces could be found. We cite two examples. One comes from the Charterhouse of Nieuwlicht near Utrecht: the triptych of the Last Supper (about 1521) showing three kneeling Carthusians, Jacobus Pauw, Vincentius

⁴² Hoekx et al. 2016, 105.

⁴³ See Zuidema 2010.

⁴⁴ Van Dijck 2001, 54.

⁴⁵ Le Blanc 1990, 31-34.

⁴⁶ Peeters 1985, 308-309 and 322.

⁴⁷ Oil paint on panel. Privately owned. Published in: Ach Lieve Tijd, 800 jaar Den Bosch, part 7 ('s-Hertogenbosch 1983), 156.

Pauw and Petrus Sas; the other comes from the Charterhouse of Delft: the triptych of the family Van Beesd (ca. 1509-ca 1514). It is almost inconceivable that the family of the Vught Carthusians Frederik van IJsselstein or Frederik Heym did not have such paintings close to their cells. From 1499 onwards, the grandfather of the Carthusian Frederik van Egmond met painter Joon regularly during the fraternal meals of the brotherhood. Cornelis van Bergen and his wife Maria van Zevenbergen would have enriched the interior of the charterhouse to keep their memory alive. Mary was called *generosa benefactrix* by the Carthusians in their calendar, and both of them were honored in the Carthusian Order as benefactors.⁴⁸

Priors of the Carthusians also allowed themselves to be portrayed. The monastery near Geertruidenberg had two examples in this period, namely Hendrik van Haarlem (1490-1499) and Willem Bibau (1509-1521). Possibly Hendrik van Haarlem praying to Mary had immortalized his merits because of the construction of a gatehouse at the monastery.⁴⁹ A prior like Hubert van Loon (1502-1530) can also be qualified for such a picture in Vught. In Scheut, where he made his solemn vows, he often passed the painting of Rogier van der Weijden and surely he would want to have paintings like that Vught, in that monastery with plenty of building activities during his priorship. He loved art: the Carthusians of Vught and Frederik van Egmond each gave a stained glass window for the cloister of the monastery in Scheut.⁵⁰ In 1566 the monastery in Vught fell victim to the Iconoclasts. The monastery was very battered. It was no longer suitable to live in and was abandoned. It is not known if any paintings have survived.

3 Relationships between the Carthusians and the studio of Bosch

Soon the monastery had become a worthy place. Apparently the building was by 1494 sufficiently representative for the Brotherhood of Our Lady to celebrate the Friar Minor Jan van Hollant because of his dedication to the recruitment of members for the confraternity.⁵¹ For that event the brotherhood would surely have chosen a place of allure. According to the chronicler of the monastery, the charterhouse of Vught was one of the most beautiful charterhouses in the Netherlands. In his time (1625), buildings of three floors could still be seen in the damaged monastery.⁵² It is in any case clear that in the time of Bosch there was a Carthusian monastery under construction near the city, which had sufficient resources and which, like other monasteries in the region, would have purchased religious pieces for deepening devotion and accepted memorial pieces to commemorate generous donors, such as the families Van Egmond, Bergen-Zevenbergen, Heym and others. Where could these objects be bought more easily than in 's-Hertogenbosch? That brings us to the question of whether in the works of Bosch and his studio connections can be found with the Carthusians of Vught.

3.1 Way of thinking

In the eyes of Bosch, the world was in a bad way: everywhere around him were temptations and sin, which meant for most people a sure way to hell. Only a small number of persons could resist the earthly temptations. In the beginning of the fifteenth century Modern

⁴⁸ Sanders 2012, 119 and 303 n. 500. Gaens et al. 2016, 230. On December 23 the houses of the Order celebrated Cornelis' anniversary. The folium of the Vught calendar which would have contained his name, is sadly lacking. The death of Cornelis on December 23 1508 (instead of 1509) is confirmed by Hoekx et al. 2003, 310. He died in Grave. The day of the death of Philip the Fair (September 25) is also missing in the calendar.

⁴⁹ Sanders 1990, 49-50.

⁵⁰ Sanders 2012, 60.

⁵¹ BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 122, f. 298v.

⁵² Hoekx et al. 2016, 93.

Devotion had already penetrated 's-Hertogenbosch. The Sisters of Orthen had from 1410 onwards a branch inside the walls (with sisters and a short time later brethren) and from about 1430 a branch in Vught (the convent they sold in 1471 to the Carthusians). Around 1425 came the Brethren of St. Jerome or St. Gregory who moved into a building in the city at the invitation of the city council. The writings of the Modern Devouts point the way to internalization and a pure lifestyle.

During the adolescence of Bosch, the Sisters and Brethren of Orthen and the Brethren of St. Jerome were already during some decades present in the city. New, however, were the Carthusians. They commanded awe and respect because of their rigid choice for the hermit life. Unlike most other orders they were never in great moral decline.⁵³ The inhabitants of 's-Hertogenbosch, including Bosch himself, would have closely monitored their development near the city.

The great initiator of this monastery was Denis the Carthusian. His arrival at Eikendonk, just outside the city walls, cannot have taken place unnoticed, nor were his numerous writings. In them he repeatedly refers to the sinfulness of men, the poor compliance with the monastic rules and the need for personal conversion of laity and clergy, and reform of the ecclesiastical and secular leaders. Personal downfall and the disappearance of Christian civilization would certainly result in case of neglect of Christian doctrine. He goes beyond the Modern Devouts by describing concretely a vivid picture of hell and damnation. Thomas à Kempis for example admits that a life without sin is very hard to live, but he gives hope to his readers and indicates the way to a better life. He warns mankind and calls for conversion. He is looking for strength in the sinner and his possibilities to let him change his life. He does not give a close description of hell, monstrous devils or punishments. He tells about the relation between the committed sin and the punishment in hell and gives some examples.⁵⁴

The writings of Denis were also known in the city. The library of the Carthusian monastery itself of course contained many works of Denis⁵⁵, but also in other monasteries his writings were present. Proof can be found in a still existing manuscript from the second half of the fifteenth century in the library of the Brethren of St. Jerome.⁵⁶ Moreover, Denis wrote between 1465 and 1467 a treatise at the request of the founders of the Carthusian monastery, Ludolf van de Water and Maarten van Someren.⁵⁷ Also works written by his friend and kindred spirit, the Liege Carthusian prior Jacob van Gruitrode, could be found in 's-Hertogenbosch.⁵⁸ He was co-founder of the library of the Vught charterhouse through the many books he gave to the new monastery.⁵⁹ His works are steeped in the passion spirituality, practiced within the Carthusian Order of those days. He wrote several works in the vernacular and translated some of his Latin writings into 'Diets'.⁶⁰

'Dionysius Cartusianus' is often called author of the *Cordiale de Quatuor novissimis*. However, this work was originally written by Gerardus van Vliederhoven and was in the

⁵³ When Erasmus wrote in 1511 his *Praise of Folly*, in which he told how everyone shifted the practicing of piety to others, he finally ended at the Carthusians as the only ones who have buried piety deep inside (Bange 2007, 122). In his *Dialogue on the Shipwreck* some sailors in distress promised even to become Carthusian when they were saved (Trapman 2004, 73).

⁵⁴ In hell every sinner will suffer his own pain. For example: the lazy one will be impelled with hot stings, the glutton will suffer tremendous thirst and hunger, the haughty one will be ashamed and the miser will be extremely poor (Thomas a Kempis, *De imitatione Christi*, book I, chapter 24, paragraph 3 and 4).

⁵⁵ See Verschueren 1935-1936. In 1510 the Vught Carthusians ordered to print a treatise of Denis at their own cost (Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek Uithof).

⁵⁶ Heeswijk, Abbey of Berne, Manuscripts, nr. 20.

⁵⁷ *Sonus epulantis*.

⁵⁸ A copy of Van Gruitrode's *Meditations* was bound circa 1500 by the Brethren of 's-Hertogenbosch for the monastery of St. Elizabeth-Bloemkamp (Tilburg University, Brabantcollectie, nr. KHS 9).

⁵⁹ Sanders 2012, 34, 68; Gaens et al. 2016, 230.

⁶⁰ Van Aelst 2011, 156-158 and 161-172.

fifteenth century widely spread, also under the name of Denis. But Denis had nothing to do with it.⁶¹ At the description of the third ‘last thing’ (hell) the author refers to Athanasius who wrote down the testimony of Anthony the Hermit about this thing. Then he speaks about hell and the reasons for its diverse designations, the hideous creatures that live there and the variety and severity of the punishments. In addition, he describes how the hell dogs pounce on sinners and devour the intestines of the fornicators. Every level of society, both lay and clergy, is dealt with, from high to low.

Denis, on the contrary, wrote two works regarding the four last things. The least influential was his *Cordiale sive Praecordiale*.⁶² Much more famous was his *De quatuor hominis novissimis* in which he gives an even more vivid picture of hell than can be found in the *Cordiale de Quatuor Novissimis*. This work was for the first time printed in Delft in 1486 and reprinted in 1487.⁶³ The Carthusians of Cologne were in the decades around 1530 very active in publishing and republishing the texts of Denis. The dedication of the publication of *De quatuor hominis novissimis* is a letter, written in 1535 by the prior of the charterhouse of Cologne, Peter Blommevenne of Leyden, to Martinus Grevius, secretary of 's-Hertogenbosch. Martinus had close contacts with the Carthusians of Cologne and Jülich and knew Bosch personally, being himself a sworn member of the Brotherhood of Our Lady. He lived in Vught.⁶⁴ He was also a good friend of the Vught Carthusians.⁶⁵ In 1521/1522 the husband of his niece, Gielis vanden Bossche, was commissioned in the house of Grevius to paint two side panels for the altarpiece of Adriaen van Wesel.⁶⁶

Denis writes about 10 characteristics of the punishments, including the eternity, the intensity (heat and cold), the diversity and the intrusiveness, and he describes this with concrete examples. He distinguishes a great series of punishments: fire; cold; worms; smell of sulphur; sight of demons and the bodies maltreated by these demons, worms, snakes and toads; fantasy monsters; hunger; thirst; to be chained; darkness; disgusting smell; and at last the knowledge never to see God.

In paragraph 41 he shows how God punishes the sinners in those parts and senses of the body that had given them the most pleasure in their life on earth: the lechers (*luxoriosi*) in their genitals, the gluttons and twaddlers in their bellies and tongues. People who are uncontrollably wandering around, running away, jumping, singing, chatting, driving around and rushing towards vices: they will be punished extra severely for those activities. People who are looking at women, spectacles, choirs and more of these will be punished in their eyes; who listen to songs, music, vain words and gossip will suffer in their ears; who are concerned with pleasant touch and good taste will endure grease and gluttony. The sinners *contra naturam* (sodomists, homosexuals) will be tortured by snakes, toads and dragons.⁶⁷

Of course Denis used the prevailing views of his time about hell but he also refers to revelations of, what he calls, worthy authors. He starts with a book of an anonymous English author who described a vision in purgatory. This person saw sinners being tortured by the fire and frozen in a casserole. Others were punished by pitch, sulphur and melted metals.

⁶¹ This confusion can still be seen in Ilsink et al. 2016, 472.

⁶² The *Cordiale* (sive *Praecordiale*) was printed in Cologne in 1530 and maybe even earlier. It is published in DCOO, vol. XL, 445-465. Denis wrote about purgatory and hell also *Colloquium sive dialogus de particulari iudicio animarum post mortem* or *De particulari iudicio in obitu singulorum Dialogus* (DCOO, vol. XLI, 419-488).

⁶³ Cockx-Indestege 1984, 205. The text is published in DCOO, vol. XLI, 489-594.

⁶⁴ Van Dijck 1980, 67-77.

⁶⁵ Sanders 2012, 119.

⁶⁶ BHIC, 1232 ILVB, inv.nr. 127, f. 159r; Ilsink et al. 2016, 429 and 430 footnote 5. For Grevius see also Van Dijck 2012, 334.

⁶⁷ DCOO, vol. XLI, 551-553. *Contra naturam* means according to Kiliaen: *buggherije* (paederastia, aversa venus, libido contra naturam, peccatum sodomiticum). See also R.-M. Marijnissen 1972, 73.

Monstrous worms were chewing with poisonous teeth on their victims. In purgatory was a very deep valley with a river in it, surrounded by a mist with an incredible smell. A big fire reached the sky. On the other side there was a terrible cold. Sodomists were heavily tortured. Men who had eaten unlimitedly fruit and vegetables now had burning coals in their mouth. There were leaders of monasteries, bishops and kings; and only a few priests, because hardly any of them had real repentance. Therefore, most of them stayed in hell.⁶⁸

He continues with the vision of St. Patrick's purgatory. From that story, he takes only what he had not yet addressed. The knight Egneius saw in purgatory a field full of naked people with their face down lying on the earth, nailed to the ground. Demons were whipping them. In another field people lay with their faces up. They were covered by snakes. Toads were placed on their breasts and trying to tear out their hearts with their mouths. In the third field the people were totally pierced to the earth with nails. In the next field, people hung on iron hooks from their hair, arms, feet, eyes, ears, breasts or genitals. Others were cooked in cooking pots or placed in pots with melted metals. The story of the devils who use a wheel with knives on it for torturing sinners is not told by Denis. He does describe the bath house with baths filled with hot liquid metals. He ends with the ice cold bridge over the river. Underneath lies hell. By repeatedly invoking Jesus, Egneius could leave this terrible place without any harm.⁶⁹

From the vision of Tondalus (Tnugdäl), Denis only presents some highlights. He talks about the burning lid with souls on it. The sinners were almost completely burned when they were filtered and thrown down to be renewed, capable of being subject to the same torture again and again. Then Tondalus and his angel reached the mountain of fire and ice, where the souls swung back and forth from one element to the other. In the meantime, they were tortured by the demons with their tridents. After the deep valley with an awful smell he encountered the great monster Acheiron. Souls were dragged by devils into the mouth of that creature (see the Roermond mural) and suffered pain from dogs, bears, lions, snakes and innumerable unknown hideous animals. More extensively, Denis continues on to the story of the wild cow that Tondalus had to transfer over a narrow bridge, as punishment for the theft of it from his godfather. Denis does not tell, like in the original story, that sharp nails stuck out of the bridge. In the middle of the bridge Tondalus encountered a soul coming from the other direction and carrying sheaves of grain, and in a mysterious way he reached the other side.⁷⁰ Then the angels took him to other punishments but Denis did not relay them any more. The 'Boeck van Tondalus vysioen' was already in print in Antwerp in 1482 and in 's-Hertogenbosch in 1484.⁷¹

Denis continued, also partly, with the life of Christina Mirabilis in Sint-Truiden, the Revelation of St. Bridget and the book of St. Jerome's death. Only from St. Bridget did he give some vivid scenes of tortured souls in hell. From Denis' treatise on the Four Last Things and his description of purgatory and hell, we find many elements in the paintings of Bosch, especially in the *Garden of Earthly Delights* and the *Last Judgement*.

The permanent threat of an imminent Last Judgment, the depravity of man and the punishments that await him in hell, we find both in Denis and in Bosch. In this context, it is of interest to note that the writings of Denis also enjoyed wide publicity in Spain from the last quarter of the fifteenth century. At least three incunabula of *De quatuor hominis novissimis* were printed in Spain.⁷² The Spaniards who stayed in 's-Hertogenbosch as the retinue of

⁶⁸ DCOO, vol. XLI, 558-561.

⁶⁹ DCOO, vol. XLI, 561-563.

⁷⁰ DCOO, vol. XLI, 563-564. See the interpretation of the bridge on the right panel of the Haywain in De Tolnay 1984, 25.

⁷¹ Van den Oord 1984, 28.

⁷² Reypens 1928, 109-110.

Philip the Fair and Maximilian in 1496 and 1504 completely understood the visual imagery of Bosch and showed an early interest in this painter.⁷³ There is therefore no need to search in the works of Upper Rhine scholastic early humanists for the origin of the pessimistic world view of Bosch and the desire to turn away from the world⁷⁴, because we can find these elements in the charterhouse just around the corner. The families of Egmond, Bergen, Zevenbergen and Heym could give assignments to the workshop of Bosch, and later, thanks to them, the ducal court could do so, including the Spaniards and Italians at court, because they were familiar with the scenes in the paintings.⁷⁵

Besides the Carthusians, the Crosiers had been suitable candidates for Ludolf van de Water to populate his foundation. Eventually, they abandoned Ludolf, but a few years later they managed in another way to establish the Order in the bailiwick. In 1468 they were invited by the Beghards of 's-Hertogenbosch (who had followed the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis (mendicants) for a long time), in order to transform their convent into a Crosier convent under stricter monastic discipline. This action ended in a big fight that was fought up to the highest ecclesiastical tribunals. The result was that the reformist Crosiers had to leave the building of the Beghards and start a new monastery elsewhere in the city in great poverty.⁷⁶ It proved not easy to reform a monastery. At the Dominicans, the reformists won the battle in 1483. This was only possible through the strong joint intervention of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities.⁷⁷ Bosch saw firsthand how difficult such reforms could be to implement.

The final name of the monastery, St. Sophia of Constantinople, reflects the fear of the future. Muslim danger threatened the Western World in the eyes of the Christians. The former capital of the Eastern Roman Empire had fallen into the hands of the devil. The quick advance of Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481) towards the west was unstoppable. The Ottoman armies added a whole series of areas to the empire: Serbia and the Peloponnese (1459), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1464), Euboea (1470) and parts of the Crimea (1475) and Albania (1479). Relying on Christ as the savior of mankind, as *Salvator Mundi*, was more necessary than ever. The name of the new Carthusian monastery was significant, just as significant as the seal the monastery used: Christ as king of the world. The seal shows a close resemblance to the illustration of Christ in the world history, entitled *Fasciculus temporum*. It can be derived directly from the illustration in this work, written by the Carthusian Werner Rolevinck and first published in Cologne in 1474. There Christ holds a globe with a cross on it in his left hand. On the seal, he holds it against his chest.⁷⁸ The date corresponds with the period of reconstructing the monastery in Vught. In the library of the monastery two copies of this work were kept.⁷⁹ This way of showing Christ as savior of the world is of course much older.

In the paintings of Bosch the danger of the Muslims was depicted with the flag of the Ottoman Empire, a crescent on a red background. The current Turkish flag is derived from it. No other painter of that time points so prominently to that flag. On the right panel of the *Triptych of St. Anthony*, this flag is placed on top of the sphere(?), which in his turn is placed on the back of a kneeling and bent person. The banner in the mast of the *Ship of Fools* also shows a crescent moon. On the *Ecce Homo* of Frankfurt am Main, the flag of the Ottoman

⁷³ Van Dijck 2001, 64-68 and the quoted further reading; *ibidem*, 91.

⁷⁴ Vandenbroeck 2001, 169-170.

⁷⁵ The relations between Bosch and the family Van Bergen or Van Glymes through Cornelis van Bergen is already noted in Withee 2014, 350-351.

⁷⁶ Hoekx et al. 2003, 127 en 129.

⁷⁷ Meijer 1897, 12-14 and 217-221.

⁷⁸ We only possess damaged seals of the charterhouse. Because of the vague image it has been interpreted previously as a Carthusian monk (Sanders 2012, 77). The globe is clearly visible on the seal in BHIC, 245 Klooster Sophiae Domus, inv.nr. 73.

⁷⁹ Verschueren 1935-1936, 28. The Louvain edition of 1475 shows Christ with a globe at his feet.

Empire is clearly displayed. Du Hamel has engraved a flag with crescent and star that flutters atop the structure on the back of the elephant. Also on the drawing of the *Tree Man* we see the flag.⁸⁰ On the right panel of the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, the flag with a crescent is placed on the helmet of a whistle blowing person. The veil of one of Christ's executioners in the *Christ Crowned with Thorns* of London is decorated with a crescent moon.⁸¹ Denis the Carthusian was imbued with the fear of the Muslims. After the fall of Constantinople he had visions of the impending danger. In his treatises he had called princes to war against the Muslim enemy. The spiritual way to defend society against them was a complete inner repentance and atonement at every level; if not, evil would be irrevocable. Theodoricus Loer a Stratis stressed this element in his *vita* of Denis in 1530.⁸² Bosch was strongly influenced by that fear and expressed it in his paintings.

3.2 Early Christian saints

Even more than the Modern Devouts, the Carthusians had a preference for saints from the early years of Christianity. Mainly those who sought out hermit life and embraced the solitude were popular. Their ideals corresponded more to the Carthusian way of living, which was concentrated on solitude and silence, than that of the Modern Devouts who did not withdraw from the world and seek out solitude.

In 1566 the charterhouse was heavenly damaged by the Iconoclasts. From then, the monks wandered around in the bailiwick. What remained of the buildings was set on fire in 1578 by order of the city.⁸³ From 1625 onwards the remaining Carthusians of Vught and some Carthusians of Lier founded a new charterhouse in Antwerp, which existed until 1783 when it was confiscated together with all its possessions by the State.⁸⁴ The inventories that were made up during the confiscation are too general to be well informed about the paintings that were in the monastery at that time. In order to protect their remaining farmsteads the Vught Carthusians kept until about 1660 a simple abode in Boxtel nearby their most important lands. We have an inventory of their last belongings there, that they sold to their former host. The paintings in Boxtel consisted of scenes from the life of Christ, namely a 'Bethleem met doirkens in stucken' (the birth of Christ with side panels, broken?); two paintings of Christ on the cross; a Descent of the cross; Christ in the tomb; images of Mary, namely a circular painting of the Virgin, Mary and the Seven Sorrows; and, on a copper plate, Mary and St. Francis. There was a painting of St. Jerome in the desert and one of the Prodigal Son.⁸⁵

The St. Jerome painting of Bosch is immediately eligible to be placed in a Carthusian monastery. As original residences of it, researchers have pointed to the Jerome Altar in St. John's church⁸⁶ and to the Brethren in the city who worshiped him as a patron saint. Painted probably between 1485 and 1495, it may as well have found an excellent place at the Carthusians, who had a great veneration for this holy hermit. Under their belongings was, as told, a painting of St. Jerome. It is not impossible that that painting was the one made by

⁸⁰ De Tolnay 1984, 323, 332 and 388.

⁸¹ Gerlach thinks that the use of the crescent by Bosch proves more German than Flemish influence (Gerlach 1988b, 114).

⁸² DCOO, vol. I, xxvi-xxviii and xli-xlvi.

⁸³ Sanders 2012, 92-93.

⁸⁴ Sanders 2012, 109-111. Several paintings of Bosch showed up for the first time in private collections in the nineteenth century. That can be an indication that they originated from religious institutions which were abolished in the decades around 1800.

⁸⁵ Sanders 2012, 228-229.

⁸⁶ In 1459 the altar in honor of the Holy Sacrament and St. Jerome still had to be built in St. John's church. The text in which this was stipulated in 1459 was written in a charter of 1467 (BHIC, 2006 Mechelse aanwinsten van het bisdom Den Bosch 1330-1719, inv.nr. 58-59).

Bosch. It is noted as a *Jerome in the Desert*. In the painting of Bosch, the saint himself lies in a barren environment. In the background, in contrast to his place of mortification, are a river, a farm, a pond and a monastery. Are these elements references to the Carthusian monastery on the Dommel? The Catalogue Raisonné says that St. Jerome's embracement of the cross is peculiar and unique.⁸⁷ That could be a Carthusian element. There is a painting with St. Bruno from around 1600, embracing the cross. It may have belonged to the charterhouse of Cologne, where it served as an altar piece.⁸⁸ The painting of Bruno by Gaspard de Crayer (c. 1623-1669) in York Art Gallery is another example. On many images Bruno holds a cross in his hand.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness and *John the Evangelist on Patmos* fit into this genre too. The two paintings are believed to be made for the altar of the Brotherhood of Our Lady in St. John's.⁸⁹ However, there are doubts about this hypothesis because of the detailed performance, too detailed for panels to be seen from a large distance. Bosch himself should have painted the founder away, who is suggested to be a provost of the brotherhood. Also remarkable is the signature of Bosch on the panel of St. John the Evangelist, ordered by the brotherhood and to be placed in his own city in the brotherhood's chapel. Regardless of the correctness of this attribution these paintings could easily be found in a Carthusian monastery. The image of a pelican on the back of John on Patmos refers to Christ as the savior of mankind. The *Hermit Saints Triptych* and *Triptych of the Temptation of St. Anthony* can also perfectly be connected with the Carthusian tradition. These saints are especially the ones whose image would fit in with the Carthusians.

When we try to link the Carthusians to other beloved hermit types of those days we can think of St. Mary of Egypt. Mary lived during her childhood as a prostitute in Alexandria in Egypt. When she wanted to participate in the pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on the occasion of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, she offered her body as payment for the voyage to seamen, who brought her to the Holy Land. When she wanted to enter the church to venerate together with the other pilgrims the Holy Cross, a mysterious force withheld her. After she had prayed outside the church to an effigy of the Virgin Mary, she could enter the church and venerate the Holy Cross. After this event she changed her life radically. With only three loaves of bread as food, she went into the desert on the other side of the Jordan. There she was found many years later by the hermit priest Zosimas. She was naked and her skin was blackened by the sun. The three loaves kept her alive all these years. He saw her, having made the sign of the cross, walking over the water of the Jordan River. A year later, the hermit visited her again. He found her dead and he buried her with the help of a lion. Her *vita* is in the *Legenda Aurea*, of which the Carthusian monastery held two copies, dating from 1485.⁹⁰ Denis the Carthusian wrote a sermon, taking her life as an example.⁹¹

Mary of Egypt was initially named as patron by the first founders of the monastery and the bishop of Liege. She enjoyed great veneration in 's-Hertogenbosch and surrounding areas.⁹² A calendar of Xanten from the thirteenth century and the calendar of the Chapter of St. Odrada in Alem from the fifteenth century or earlier hold her feast day on April 9.⁹³ The Chapter of 's-Hertogenbosch and the Brotherhood of Our Lady also celebrated her feast on

⁸⁷ IIsink et al. 2016, 113-114.

⁸⁸ <https://www.lempertz.com/en/catalogues/lot/1029-2/1124-german-school-circa-1600.html> (consulted 2016-05-09).

⁸⁹ Koldewey 2001, 70-78.

⁹⁰ Verschuere 1935-1936, 37.

⁹¹ DCOO, vol. XXXII, 27-30.

⁹² Sanders 2012, 31-33.

⁹³ Schutjes 1870-1876, vol. 1, 390-392 and vol. 2 between 282 en 283 'Officia propria in het bisdom 's Bosch'.

that date.⁹⁴ How popular she was in the fifteenth century was already evident from the mural in the chapel of the brotherhood. The testament of the canon of the 's-Hertogenbosch chapter Jordanus Monix of 1483 is an example from the time of Bosch. He wanted to bring luster to the feast of Mary of Egypt and wished it to be celebrated on a higher level, to which aim, among other things, he donated pillows to the chapter and the brotherhood. After his death, the chapter had to chain his breviary and the *Legenda Aurea*, in which her life was written, at his side of the choir stalls.⁹⁵

She usually is depicted nude, fully or partly covered by hair, most of the time with three loaves.⁹⁶ Sometimes she is confused with Mary Magdalene, another penitent sinner with a supposed similar background in her youth. Mary of Egypt had an altar in St. John's, right opposite the entrance of the Lady's Chapel, where her legend was painted, probably by Bosch's grandfather. She had, however, to share it with the saints Matthew and George. The latter was prominently displayed on it, not surprising on the altar of a division of the local guardian forces ('Jonge Schuts').⁹⁷ A painting of Mary is believed to have been made by Bosch. In 1504 it was in the possession of Isabel I, queen of Castile, whose daughter Joanna married Philip the Handsome.⁹⁸

3.3 Memorial paintings

The *Crucifixion with a Donor* gives a view of Christ hanging on the cross on the Calvary. Below the cross stand Mary and John the Evangelist. At the right is the donor of the painting kneeling and behind him stands his patron St. Peter, recognizable by the key. The kneeling person is according to his clothes no peasant or nobleman. The latter is confirmed by the absence of a coat of arms. He wears something that can be interpreted as a sword, but his clothes do not have a military look at all. Far from that. It is unlikely that a person with a low military function should have ordered such a devotional painting. In the background we see a city and at the right side a building that is reminiscent of a monastery. It has often been suggested that the city 's-Hertogenbosch could have served as a model for this town (Jeruzalem). Especially the windmill outside the city wall feeds that idea. The landscape looks familiar to those in Brabant.⁹⁹ We must not forget that until far into the twentieth century certain elevations ('donken') in the direct surroundings of 's-Hertogenbosch were clearly visible. Does the building on the right refer to a monastery: the Carthusian monastery in Vught? The painting of *St. Jerome* also has such a monastery-like building in the background. When we consider the city in the background based on 's-Hertogenbosch and the building on the right based on the Carthusian monastery, the site of the crucifixion is more or less the execution site of the city of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Vught moor. And the way below the monastery and below the mill looks like the way from the charterhouse towards the southern city gate. Coincidence? Some art historians have noticed a relationship between this Calvary and the mural of the crucifixion in St. John's church of 1444. For that painting Bosch's grandfather Jan van Aken is sometimes assumed to be the creator. Others believe to see traces in it of the *Crucifixion Diptych* of Rogier van der Weyden, which he made for the Carthusian monastery of Scheut near Brussels. Seen from the Carthusian monastery both options are

⁹⁴ Roelvink 2015, 580, 587 and 634.

⁹⁵ BAH, Chapter of 's-Hertogenbosch, box nr. 15. See also Heeswijk, Abbey of Berne, ms. 97, f. 13r. The rank of the feast was already high and rose probably from *duplex* to *totum duplex*. See for the differences about the rank in the calendars of the chapter and the brotherhood: Roelvink 2015, 254 and 587.

⁹⁶ In St. John's church she was shown so nude that as a result of a visitation in 1615 orders were given to remove her sculpture out of the church (Koldeweij 2001, 68).

⁹⁷ Mosmans 1931, 337.

⁹⁸ IIsink et al. 2016, 27, 51.

⁹⁹ IIsink et al. 2016, 268.

possible. But the way of painting Christ is not so distinctive or different that a concrete example should be necessary.

Who is the kneeling person? He is apparently a single person. If we try to identify him with our knowledge of the Carthusian monastery in mind, this person could be Peter van Laar., although the person on the painting is relatively young. Together with his parents he made conditions in 1465 for the transfer to the Carthusians of a small farm in Houthem near Olland, even before the first monks arrived. The new monastery would lodge Jan van Laar, his wife and their son Peter for the rest of their life. When they had deceased they were registered in the calendar of the monastery on January 19 as prebendaries. On that day an anniversary was celebrated for them in the monastery. The Carthusians were quite pleased with them because in the margin the word *benefactoris* is notated. Considering the singular of this word, it seems to apply to only one of these three individuals. Maybe Peter? The addition indicates that this person had a special significance for the monastery. The work is dendrochronologically dated 1490-1500.¹⁰⁰ Registration of the anniversary of Peter and his parents in the calendar dates between about 1481 and 1500,¹⁰¹ which raises no conflict. In the contents of the last Carthusians in the bailiwick of 1660, there were two paintings of Christ on the cross. The painting belonged in 1886 to the collection Fétis in Brussels.

The *Ecce Homo* painting from Frankfurt is supposed to be painted between 1475–1485 and is an early work. The founders are in the foreground, but they are painted over, so hard to recognize. It has been suggested that it was a Dominican with his family or a patron, because the Dominicans are the only order for which Bosch, as far as is known, painted.¹⁰² Besides that, the religious habit points toward that order.¹⁰³ Better support is not possible. Could it have been a Carthusian in his travelling coat? The copy in Uden was probably made for the Bridgettine Sisters of Coudewater near 's-Hertogenbosch. Because of the similarity, it is assumed that at the time of copying the original could have been still in the city or surrounding area. The founder family, which has been painted over on the original, is not affixed to the copy. The Ottoman flag in the background in the city could refer to Islam in general, but also to the Carthusian monastery, which bore Constantinople in its name. One of the original texts on the bands in the painting runs as follows: 'Salva nos, Christe Redemptor'. Although this spell was very common, it certainly applies to the Carthusians, who saw Christ as redeemer and savior of humanity in those days fraught with danger. The seal that the Antwerp Carthusians had taken over as heirs of the Carthusians of 's-Hertogenbosch showed the image of Christ and had the edge inscription 'Salva nos, aeterna Sophia.'¹⁰⁴ The painting appeared for the first time in 1889 in the collection of the family Dellafaille in Antwerp/Ghent. Did it once belong to the heir of the Carthusians of 's-Hertogenbosch, the Antwerp charterhouse whose possessions were confiscated by the state in 1783?

3.4 City and landscape

The city with the windmill on the *Crucifixion* can be derived from the view of 's-Hertogenbosch. We see the same sort of town in the center panel of the *Adoration of the Magi*.¹⁰⁵ On the right panel of the *Adoration* in Madrid is a city with a windmill in the foreground, in the midst of the water. This may be again based on a view of 's-Hertogenbosch, the city which was surrounded by water during a large part of the year. *St.*

¹⁰⁰ **Ilsink et al. 2016, 268.**

¹⁰¹ **Gaens et al. 2016, 222.**

¹⁰² **Van Dijck 2001, 63.**

¹⁰³ **Ilsink et al. 2016, 228.**

¹⁰⁴ **Felixarchief Antwerpen, Kerken en kloosters, inv.nr. 510, p. 6; Foppens 1721, 280.**

¹⁰⁵ **Gerlach 1984, 105-106; Vermet 2001, 94.**

John on Patmos also shows a city surrounded by water, but the mill is missing here. The same can be seen on the back side of the right wing of the *St. Anthony triptych*. On the front of that wing we see again a town with a windmill in the foreground, and also one behind the city. The city in the middle of the water on the center panel of the *Hermit Saints* brings quickly to mind the image of 's-Hertogenbosch, which can also be seen on the left panel of the *Ecce Homo triptych* of Boston. The right panel of the *Garden of Earthly Delights* depicts a mill in front of a burning city. A mill just out of town appears on the *Stone Operation* as well as on the center panel of the *Crucified Martyr*. The cityscape of the *Carrying of the Cross* in Madrid shows also the mill.

Bosch logically derived these urban images from the image he had of 's-Hertogenbosch. His paintings give the perspective of a view of the city from the south, from the direction of Vught: a town surrounded by a stone wall and water with a windmill just outside, located in an area with some elevations and marshland, which is during a large part of the year under water. When we look for locations from which Bosch depicts the city on the *Crucifixion* and the *Adoration of the Magi*, we are in both cases around the spot where the Carthusian monastery once stood.

A contemporary photograph from that spot, taken from an altitude of about 50 meters in the direction of 's-Hertogenbosch, displays the same features: few dry places, many wet spots and in the background the city with canals and walls and churches towering above it. With some imagination we recognize this area, the Bossche Broek, and the town lying behind, viewed from the Carthusian monastery, also on the center panel of the *Garden of Earthly Delights*. There are parallels with the landscape of the *Crucifixion*.¹⁰⁶ In the foreground are groups of people in and around ponds and pools, in addition to many mythical creatures, various birds and beasts that then populated the countryside surrounding the city, and various fruits that could be found there. Young people radiate happiness and pleasure. Behind, from the left to the right, a wide water body like the city moat separates urban and rural. Bosch painted on the right and on the left two tower gates in two main buildings of the city like huge, strange, plant constructions. People are living in them, except in the structure on the right that seems inhabited by monkeys. The building in the center stands on a globe and has gargoyles and flying buttresses as if it were a St. John's church. Such a structure, including gargoyles, the artist has also displayed on the left panel, the Source or the Fountain of Life. In its opening is an owl as predictor of doom. There is a connection between these two elements: both of them are located in the center of the performance. The fountain is also shown in the middle panel, but now in a corrupted state by the wickedness of men. In the opening three figures in obscene postures are presented: on the left a man and a woman, on the right a bent person in a position *contra naturam*. The penalties for these sexual perversions are described by Denis the Carthusian and brought in focus by Bosch with snakes, toads and dragons, like Denis had written and, and with the tree man as a central element on the right panel. Further up on the center panel river arms are running into the 'city'. In the end they are overvaulted, as if the painter here envisioned the canals in the city, the Binnendieze. What we lack in the range of these landscape elements is the characteristic mill outside the city wall. Unless we want to consider the artificial lake with women in it and the circle of men riding animals in a left direction around them as derived from the two millstones: the women as the lower stationary stone (the bed stone) and the circle of men as the counter-rotating upper stone (the

¹⁰⁶ Ilsink et al. 2016, 271; Marijnissen 1972, 72. P. Gerlach does not see the middle panel as sinful but as a representation of the heavenly life if man would not have sinned in Adam. He interprets the top blue part as the area of the four streams of paradise (Gerlach 1972, 147-149). However, there is no apparent connection between these waters and the water on the left panel.

runner stone). The mill and the couple of millstones are regularly used as a symbol of marriage, reproduction and making love.¹⁰⁷

Around 1625 the chronicler of the Carthusian monastery, Eligius, described this area as perverse. At first, the place where the monastery stood gave problems. This hallowed ground was sold in 1471 without ecclesiastical permission. The Sisters of Orthen were fined by the bishop of Liege because of that offense. But according to Eligius, it was forgivable. A woman (Aleid Pieck) dealing with women (the Sisters) meant that something was bound to go wrong. Ludolf van de Water did not involve, so he was not to blame. Eligius had more problems with the visions that occurred to Denis the Carthusian around 1468 in St. John's church. The abbot of St. Martin in Cologne, who was with him, had pulled him quickly into a chantry where he stayed in ecstasy for several hours. Denis told afterwards that he had seen that his monks would live in Vught. That blemish stuck to the monastery ever since, and pillage and destruction by the Iconoclasts in 1566 was, according to Eligius, the divine punishment to be suffered. During the decades preceding that disaster the inhabitants of 's-Hertogenbosch were misbehaving in that area. On Sundays and holidays they went to the monastery. In the words of Eligius:

The lower classes sang loudly: 'Vught is a good hostel that can be reached on a horse and by foot'. Especially on Sundays and holidays, the following slogans could be heard: 'Let's go to Vught. We'll eat hake and drink ordinary beer, barley beer and Carthusian elixir', etc. You could see notorious men of the lowest ranks, scum, in boats and barks, in droves by foot, flock to this house, especially on holy days (as the gods will), because on the weekdays they had to work, and so they spent the most holy days in our monastery.¹⁰⁸

Was this area, the Bossche Broek, a comparable idyllic spot for the population of 's-Hertogenbosch at the time of Bosch?

Conclusion

In 1472, when the painter Jheronimus Bosch was about 22 years old, a Carthusian monastery was definitely founded in Vught near 's-Hertogenbosch, with as *primus fundator* Charles the Bold. The buildings that the monks had bought from the Sisters of Orthen had to be adapted to the requirements of Carthusians. The church was reconstructed to accommodate in one part the choir monks and the other the lay brothers. The lay brothers were to be housed in the forecourt. Aleid Pieck furnished the monastery with money for this purpose. Her husband Arnt van Herlaar funded eight cells for the first monks.

After the first renovations were made the charterhouse could soon expand, as more people were interested in building cells. Among the founders of cells Herman van Brakel, the provost of Cleves, stands out. As a reward he received four anniversaries, while other

¹⁰⁷ The drawing of the nine women (figures of Shrove Tuesday or witches?) in the Louvre from Bosch shows a woman with spurs on her feet, riding a millstone (Ilsink et al. 2016, 510 speaks about a wheel). Do we see here the world upside down on Shrove Tuesday? In the Antwerp songbook from 1544, song number 21 is an example of the mill and the mill stones as symbols of lust. From 1586 dates the statement of Coornhert: "The mill of the thoughts runs continuously. Throw good wheat in it and it will mill good flour. But throw chaff in it, as representations of the naked Venus, what else can it mill than fiery unchastity, burning desire and searing making love.' The poet Jacob Cats wrote in the seventeenth century. 'Man and woman are like two millstones. Because if one of the two stops moving although the others mills, no flour is milled!' The Dutch word 'malen' meant in the Middle Ages: to paint, but also: to marry and to have intercourse.

¹⁰⁸ Hoekx et al. 2016, 91, 92, 129.

founders only received one. We suspect that this is due to the favourable conditions he created for cheap transport of construction stone from Cleves to Vught. Together with the monastery the Brotherhood of Our Lady in 's-Hertogenbosch also benefited from this privilege during the construction of the new chapel.

Another founder of a cell was Frederik van Egmond. He was present at the negotiations of the brotherhood on the toll-free transport of stone through Cleves. Frederik's son, Floris van Egmond, had a bastard son Frederik van IJsselstein, who was housed in the monastery as a Carthusian monk. This strengthened the close relationship between the Carthusians and the family Van Egmond, which dated from the time of Arnold of Egmond, Duke of Guelders and nephew of Frederik van Egmond. Also through Floris' wife, Margaretha van Glymes van Bergen, there was a connection with the Carthusians. Her father, Cornelis van Glymes van Bergen, was married to Maria van Zevenbergen-van Strijen. Maria's uncle, Gerijt van Strijen, 'brother van Zevenbergen', was the second husband of Aleid Pieck, one of the main founders of the monastery. Besides these families the Heym family was of interest to the monastery. Frederik Heym, son of high bailiff Jan Heym, made his solemn vows in the monastery; Frederik's brother Simon was buried there.

Jan Heym's natural daughter Goossen married Alart du Hamel, pilot master of St John's church and the renovated chapel of the brotherhood. In 1495/1496 the monastery took over the building lodge of the brotherhood. William of Zittart, one of the leading persons of the building lodge of St. John's church, also appears to have been connected to the charterhouse. These are clues to suppose an intensive structural relationship between the monastery on the one hand and St. John's church and the brotherhood on the other hand regarding the building activities. In this era of construction and expansion of the monastery Hubert van Loon was charged with the lead of the monastery. He was originally from 's-Hertogenbosch and a professed Carthusian of Scheut near Brussels. Financially the monastery was in healthy shape when Hubert arrived in 1502. The interior of the Carthusian monastery is hardly known but, looking at other Carthusian monasteries, devotional and memorial pieces will probably also have been present in the Vught charterhouse. For the decoration of the building the Carthusians will have made an appeal to painters in the city and hence the workshop of Bosch, the only painter family at a sufficiently high level.

The families Van Egmond, Van Glymes, Zevenbergen and Heym belonged to the high nobility of Brabant and had close contacts with the new Carthusian monastery. Their members were employed by the dukes of Brabant as military commanders in their fights against their enemies. They led the visits of the duke to the city of 's-Hertogenbosch. It is therefore likely that they brought about the relationship between the studio of Bosch and the duke and his court.

We have no direct evidence that paintings of Bosch or from his workshop had been delivered to the monastery. The theme of Bosch is very similar to the mindset of the Carthusians, even more than of the Modern Devouts. It is a black view of the future of a sinful humanity, confused by an encroaching Islam. The name and seal of the monastery present this fear in the picture: Christ alone could bring salvation. Especially Denis the Carthusian, first rector of the charterhouse, had described these fears and horror in some tracts, from which Bosch could have gained inspiration. These writings and Denis in person were well known in 's-Hertogenbosch. Because his works also penetrated in Spain and Italy, the world Bosch painted was very recognizable to the ducal court.

Looking at the surviving works of Bosch, especially his paintings with early Christian saints and hermits fit perfectly in the interior of a charterhouse. *St. Jerome in the Desert* and the *Ecce Homo* of Frankfort show elements that can be connected with the Carthusians. The *Crucifixion with a Donor* may have been commissioned by Peter van Laar, prebendary and benefactor of the monastery. On this painting as well as some others, like the center panel of

the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, the cityscape of 's-Hertogenbosch, seen from the Carthusian monastery, may have influenced Bosch. However, to connect works of Bosch directly to the Carthusian monastery remains highly hypothetical because of a lack of evidence.

Abbreviations

BHIC Brabants Historisch Informatie Centrum
f. folio
ILVB Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap
inv.nr. inventory number
SAH Stadsarchief 's-Hertogenbosch

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