

Netherlandish and French Paintings 1400–1480

Critical Catalogue

For the Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
edited by Katrin Dyballa and Stephan Kemperdick

With art historical contributions by
Katrin Dyballa, Stephan Kemperdick, Christine Seidel, Erik Eising

and contributions on painting technology by
Sandra Stelzig, Beatrix Graf, Maria Zielke, Babette Hartwig, Maria Reimelt, Anja Wolf



Gemäldegalerie
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

MICHAEL IMHOF VERLAG

We would like to thank the DFG for their support of the project



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Editing
Katrin Dyballa, Stephan Kemperdick

Image editing
Stephan Kemperdick, Katrin Dyballa

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Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Matthäikirchplatz
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www.smb.museum

Director:
Dagmar Hirschfelder

Michael Imhof Verlag GmbH & Co. KG
Stettiner Straße 25 | D-36100 Petersberg
Tel.: 0661/2919166-0 | Fax: 0661/2919166-9
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Copy editing
David Sánchez Cano, Madrid

Publication management for the museum
Sigrid Wollmeiner

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FOREWORD

In the Gemäldegalerie’s encyclopedic collection of European painting from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, early Netherlandish painting represents a particularly important section. Yet, a scholarly catalogue of these works that meets current standards has been lacking until now. Anyone wishing to study them had to rely on monographic publications or make do with the 1978 “Catalogue of the Picture Gallery”. However, this collection of small illustrations and short texts on the West Berlin holdings, which was very commendable for the time, was not designed to meet academic standards. A detailed catalogue therefore remained a desideratum that urgently needed to be remedied, especially since most of the large collections of early Netherlandish painting, among which the Berlin gallery ranks at the top, now have comprehensive catalogues that address both art-historical and art-technological aspects of the works. Scholarly catalogues have already been published on some of the Gemäldegalerie’s holdings, for example on the German paintings of the seventeenth century in 2020, on the German works from 1230 to 1430 in 2010 and on the early Italian panels as early as 1987. The present new volume covers the most important section of early Netherlandish and French paintings with works created up to around 1480. The research and cataloguing project as well as its funding with the help of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) were proposed in 2014 by Katrin Dyballa, the curator Stephan Kemperdick and the then director of the Gemäldegalerie, Bernd W. Lindemann. We are extremely grateful that the DFG approved the funding proposal and financed the employment of Katrin Dyballa and the conservator Sandra Stelzig over a period of three years. On behalf of everyone involved in the project, I would like to thank the DFG for its generous support and Claudia Althaus in particular for her excellent supervision. The *Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung*, under the direction of Martin Hoernes, made it possible for Beatrix Graf, former conservator at the Gemäldegalerie, to contribute her knowledge from the technical investigations and restorations she once carried out. In addition, the *Siemens Kunststiftung* has made a substantial contribution to the publication of this catalogue. I would also like to thank Michael Eissenhauer, former Director General of the Staatliche

Museen Berlin, and the staff of the Directorate General, Florentine Dietrich and Angela Fischel, for making it possible to hire the external colleagues and for providing part of the financial funding. Many colleagues have contributed to the realization of this ambitious project, which has yielded numerous important new insights and in many respects represents a new starting point for further research into early Netherlandish painting. First and foremost, I would like to thank Katrin Dyballa and Stephan Kemperdick as the editors and main authors of this extensive catalogue. As head of conservation, Babette Hartweg provided substantial support in terms of content and organization for the art-technological investigations and wrote contributions herself. In addition, five other conservators are responsible for the technical studies and texts, above all Sandra Stelzig, followed by Beatrix Graf, Maria Zielke, Maria Reimelt, and Anja Wolf. In addition, studies on the wooden construction of the panels and dendrochronological studies were carried out by Peter Klein and Rainer Wendler. The majority of the photographs of the works and all new technical photographs were taken by Christoph Schmidt. Special technical studies were carried out in collaboration with Ina Reiche, Sabine Schwerdtfeger, Regine-Ricarda Pausewein, and Katharina Müller from the *Rathgen Research Laboratory*; additional investigations of pigments were carried out by Jens Bartoll from the *Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten*. Three of the art historical texts were written by Christine Seidel and Erik Eising. I am most grateful for their contributions. For the translations of this English edition, I sincerely thank Melissa M. Thorson, Steven Lindberg, and John Wheelwright as well as the copy editor David Sánchez Cano. Last but not least, I would also like to thank the Michael Imhof Verlag, in particular the owner Michael Imhof and the media designers Patricia Koch and Caroline Zentgraf, who have taken on the immense task of designing and publishing the catalogue in such an appealing way.

Dagmar Hischfelder,
Director of the Gemäldegalerie, February 2024

Johan Maelwael or Henri Bellechose (?)

4 VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH BUTTERFLIES

Ca. 1415

Kat.Nr. 87.1

Canvas, 107.5 × 80.9 cm

Painted surface: trimmed on all sides, 107.5 × 80.9 cm

TECHNICAL NOTES

Support: This very early example of a painting on canvas is executed on a single piece of fabric in a simple plain weave. The weave is fine and dense, with a high thread count of 19 to 21 vertical threads and 16 horizontal threads per centimeter. Both warp and weft threads are spun with a Z-twist. Faint tension garlands at the upper and lower edges indicate that the trimming here cannot be very extensive. The sides were presumably also only slightly trimmed, so that an original web width of about 84 cm, or some five quarter-ells, is probably conceivable.¹

Ground: The canvas is covered with an extremely thin, light sand-colored primer, which simply fills the interstices between the threads (fig. 4.2). Its main component is chalk, with the addition of aluminum silicate and some iron.² Comparable primers can also be found in examples of so-called *Tüchlein*.³

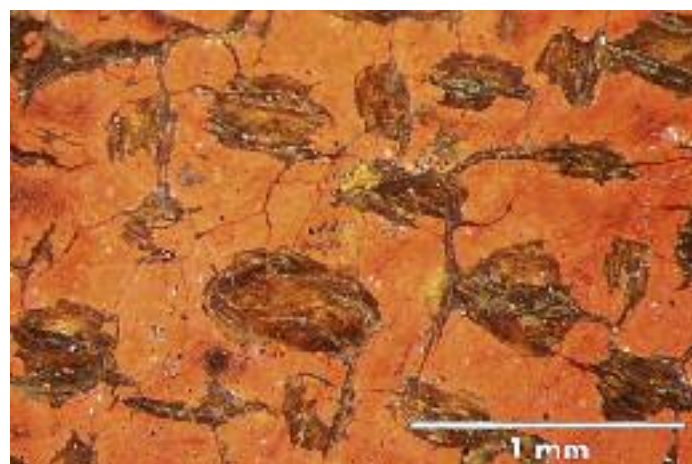
Underdrawing: The IRR (fig. 4.3) shows a confidently executed, dark brush underdrawing with hatchings and cross-hatchings, a thick, black paint application that is microscopically recognizable. Its darkness stands out particularly in the figures of the angels. In the IRR there are additional, less securely executed strokes in

the main figures that cannot be detected microscopically. They are lighter, very fine and obviously made with a dry drawing material. The differences between the underdrawings of Mary's hair or the angel figures and the very delicate strokes on the Child's upper arm are particularly striking.

Metal Applications: The gilding in both phases of execution was executed as mordant gilding with a thick, light-brown layering medium containing ferruginous ochre, white lead, chalk, and a few particles of vermillion.⁴

Painting Technique: The painting is executed in opaque and multilayered paint apparently using oil-based binders, which makes this work technically fundamentally different from *Tüchleins* with their aqueous binders. Once the underdrawing was done, the black background was laid directly on the primer, leaving out the figures. The figures were then underpainted in greyish blue; the variation in brightness values makes it possible to assume that modeling probably began at this stage. Areas to be gilded were consistently left unpainted. Then, in a first gilding phase, Mary's halo and the angels' hair and robes were gilded, followed by the further elaboration of the painting. Later, in a second gilding phase, rays, diadems, and braids were added. Finally, the last details were colored. The painting was carried out according to the basic principle of an initial overall application of the local tone, followed by an opaque modeling of the highlights and a final shading with darker glazes. In this manner, Mary's mantle, pigmented with precious lapis lazuli (VIS, ESEM-EDX),⁵ began with initial modeling in a layer of blue and was finished with a blue glaze. Correspondingly, the red seraphs were modeled with a light orange containing red lead (XR) over an evenly applied medium red. Flesh tones, on the other hand, are built up in rose modeling and covered by thin shadows mixed with blue pigment. In the gilded vestments, the ornaments were mainly executed flat, the folds subsequently indicated with brownish black and red glazes. It is noteworthy, however, that in some vestments the ornamentation has already been applied staggeredly, corresponding to the folds; the angel on the left-hand edge of the picture is a case in point. Pentimenti can be detected on Mary's left hand,

Fig. 4.2 – Photomicrograph: bright ground under orange-colored paint



Petrus Christus

17 TWO WINGS OF A TRIPTYCH: ANNUNCIATION AND NATIVITY | LAST JUDGMENT

1452

Inscription on separate text field: left wing: “petrus xpi me fecit”, right wing: “anno domini m cccc liij”

Kat.Nr. 529A, 529B

Oak, left wing: 147.3 × 59.5 × 0.4–0.5 cm, right wing: 147.3 × 59.4 × 0.4–0.5 cm

Painted surface: left: 135.1 × 56.6 cm (image field) and 4.9 × 56.6 cm (text field), right: 135.0 × 56.5 cm (image field) and ca. 4.2 × 56.5 cm (text field)

TECHNICAL NOTES

Support: For each of the panels, three radial boards with vertical grain were joined with four dowels each. The unprimed edges and a horizontal strip with exposed wood on each panel with remnants of four wood pegs are indications of an original grooved frame with a rail applied to the front. According to the dendrochronological analyses, Boards I and II of 529A are from the same tree as Board II of 529B, and Board III of 529A from the same tree as Boards I and III of 529B. The center boards of both panels are very narrow and together once formed a broad board.¹ With a youngest growth ring of 1419, a felling date from 1428 onward is possible, and from 1434 onward probable.²

Ground: The panels were given a bright ground, probably on both sides; the original barbes are still largely preserved on the obverse.

Underdrawing: The IRR of the left panel reveals extensive, confident underdrawing with hatching and crosshatching (fig. 17.2). Under the microscope it is identifiable as black brush underdrawing. Paths and trees were drawn under the figure of Joseph; in the window opening of the *Annunciation*, there are hills and ships on the horizon. The Child’s leg was shorter in the underdrawing. In the *Annunciation* scene, a vanishing point can be reconstructed where the central vertical axis meets the horizon. The angels of the *Nativity* are already wingless in the underdrawing. The underdrawing of the *Last Judgment* (fig. 17.3) consists of both a black brush underdrawing of the entire work and an underdrawing in the rainbow with traces of two different, probably dry drawing media. The semicircle was constructed with a compass, whose prick hole lies on the vertical central axis, as does the vanishing point of the choir stalls. Compared to the left panel,



Fig. 17.2 – Infrared reflectogram of Kat.Nr. 529A, detail: Angel of the Annunciation

the *Last Judgment* reveals a larger number of more extensive penimenti: the position of several of the angels’ wings were planned differently, and five additional figures among the resurrected are underdrawn. The underdrawing of the foot and leg positions of the creatures from hell on the skeleton differs from the painting in several points. The skull in the first draft was more foreshortened and was looking downward, with the eye sockets foreshortened into ellipses (fig. 17.4), before the direction of the gaze was changed to a frontal one toward the viewer. The artist nevertheless retained the highly foreshortened form of the skull. Lines are visible in the IRR above the outstretched arms of the skeleton that mark—perhaps analogously to van Eyck’s *Last Judgment*—the boundary between light and dark depicted there. At lower right, next to the mouth of hell, there is a standing figure in the under-





Fig. 24.9 – Reconstruction of a possible diptych with the Mass of St. Gregory from the circle of Rogier van der Weyden, copy, ca. 1500, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-arts de Belgique

1214).²⁵ It is also noteworthy that the depiction of St. Gregory's Mass also seems to occupy a special place in the Cistercian Order. The combination of the Crucifixion and the Bernhard "quotation" thus fits well with the Gregory Mass, which would suggest that the Berlin painting is in fact the left wing of Margaret's diptych. Several depictions of Gregory masses are associated with the Cistercians, including the panel by the Master of the Holy Kinship the Younger mentioned above; furthermore, the tympanum on the south transept of the Cistercian church in Heilsbronn (ca. 1400) shows a Gregory mass, as do the paintings on the exterior of an Antwerp carved retablo (ca. 1510) commissioned for the Cistercian monastery of Ihlow in East Frisia.²⁶ And there is a bursa with this pictorial theme that came from the Cistercian monastery of Derneburg near Hildesheim.²⁷ Hence, it is conceivable that Margaret's diptych was originally created for a Cistercian monastery or a person associated with the order. How it could have reached her collection from there, however, remains undetermined.

ATTRIBUTION AND DATING

Johann David Passavant first drew attention to the *Crucifixion* in 1853, when he saw it in Madrid in the collection of Vicente Peleguer, court painter to the Queen of Spain.²⁸ He attributed the panel to the young Rogier van der Weyden—contrary to the opinion of the owner, who thought it was a work by Jan van Eyck. Almost forty years later, at the auction of the Hulot Collection in

Paris, the painting was offered as the work of Quentin Massys,²⁹ but with the remark that the attribution could not be guaranteed and was based primarily on the fact that the painting had already been offered under this name at a previous auction.³⁰ Hugo von Tschudi, who examined the painting in Paris and recommended it for purchase, placed it in the circle of the Master of Flémalle, whom he regarded as the successor to Rogier van der Weyden.³¹ Thus, the work was seen from the outset as a link between the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden. In short, it marks the transition from the Flémallesque to the Rogiersque style.³² The Berlin picture was probably somewhat overlooked due to Erwin Panofsky's disparaging assessment. He attributed it, together with the *Abegg Triptych*,³³ to a less talented painter from Rogier's workshop. For the *Crucifixion*, he determined this from the awkwardly designed figure of John and the overdramatized figure of the Virgin; the works could hardly have been painted before 1450.³⁴ It was Dirk De Vos who brought both pictures back to the center of art historical awareness, attributing them to Rogier van der Weyden himself.³⁵ In the *Abegg Triptych*, too, there are motivic similarities and an exaggerated pathos that manifests itself in the darkening sky and the sinuous figure of the Virgin.³⁶ At first glance, the two works do not seem very close. On the basis of a comparison of the heads and bodies, the *Abegg Triptych* should rather be placed in the vicinity of the *Miraflores Altarpiece* (Kat.Nr. 534A), which might suggest that it was probably created in the early 1440s and possibly by the same hand.³⁷ In the Berlin



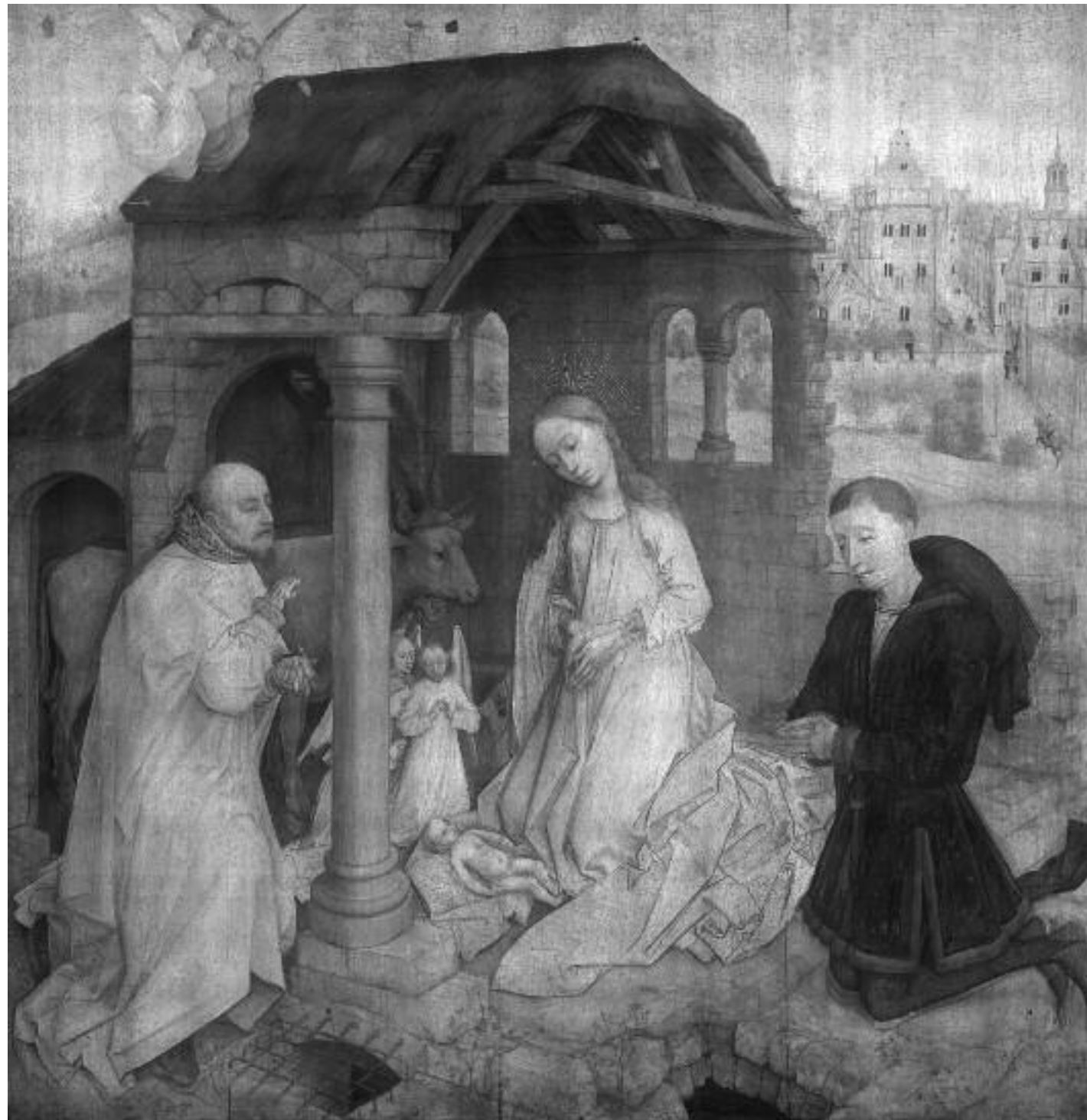


Fig. 27.4 – Central panel, infrared reflectogram



Fig. 27.5 – Central panel

further to the left. Other sketched trees were not executed. In connection with the changes to the wall, the still life was moved within the niche, further to the left and downward, and now with two vessels rather than one.

Object History and Condition: At an unknown time, the panel's central extension was sawn flush with the outer edge of the frame, and the gap filled with the upper molding from the removed piece of the frame (see fig. 44.13). Most of the joints of the panel have opened slightly in places and the boards are somewhat warped. Dovetails and wooden blocks inserted later were intended to prevent the expanding and contracting of the wood.

The panel shows signs of old pest infestation and traces of earlier restorations. Several areas of the paint layer have been abraded. The large losses primarily affect the green areas: the entire cloak of the youngest Magus (with the exception of a thin strip of the train), parts of the brocade sleeve of the eldest Magus, and a piece of the front part of his belt, to which a bag or purse was probably attached originally. The old reconstructions of these areas were retained in the most recent restoration. When these earlier interventions took place is not recorded. In 1909 the prior of Monforte had the panel washed with lukewarm water, which is said to have removed layers of dirt and several overpaintings.⁷ A cradling by the restorer Alois Hauser that was supposedly planned in Berlin for early 1914 was not carried out.⁸ Smaller measures

are documented in 1958 (Hans Böhm?), in 1966 (Alexander Lobodzinski), and in 1979 (Beatrix Graf). An extensive restoration was undertaken between 2001 and 2003 by Beatrix Graf.⁹

Labels and Inscriptions on the Reverse: Several modern inventory slips; printed slip for removal from storage (?): Hugo van der Goes, IV.771, Adoration of the Magi.

Frame: The original gilded frame has been preserved. The panel is affixed to it by two oak crossbars, attached to the center board by two staggered dowels each,¹⁰ whereby the upper crossbar lies on the upper molding of the frame; these crossbars are fastened to the frame with iron nails (fig. 44.2). Attached to each of the side moldings of the frame are two original iron hinges for the wings; the one on the bottom right still has the original pin.

B. G.

PROVENANCE

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the panel was located in the church of the Colegio de Nuestra Señora de la Antigua (Colegio del Cardenal) in Monforte de Lemos (Galicia, Spain). That teaching college, founded in 1593 by Cardinal Rodrigo de Castro (1523–1600), archbishop of Seville, was run by the Jesuits until the order was dissolved in 1767.¹¹ After 1841 it was in the possession of the Escuelas Pías order. The *Adoration* served as

Fig. 44.5 – Infrared reflectogram, detail: Joseph



Fig. 44.6 – X-radiography, detail: Joseph



1825 by order of the Archduke of Tuscany, Leopold II; the *Madonna* painting must already have been sold by that time.¹⁵

DESCRIPTION

The painting appears like a snapshot, as if the action has come to a standstill and calm has returned.¹⁶ Mary has humbly lowered her gaze, which, however, seems to be turned inwards, for it does not register the naked Christ Child sitting before her on a brocaded cushion. She clasps him supportively with her right hand and gives him an apple, which he grasps. At the same time, Christ focuses on something outside the picture that causes him to raise his right hand in blessing. A fine gauze cloth is unable to cover his private parts, so that the Son of God’s human nature is made apparent to the viewer. The apple refers to the Fall of Man, at the same time designating Mary as the new Eve and Christ as the new Adam. Behind the figures, two arcaded windows open onto a view of a lush, green landscape with meandering paths and a mighty castle rising in the hazy blue of the horizon. When one imagines this image of the Virgin and Child supplemented by its associated images of St. Benedict and the donor (fig. 51.7), one sees the arcaded windows and the landscape background continued there, along with the stone parapet in the foreground supporting a colonnade.

DISCUSSION

ATTRIBUTION AND DATING

The painting was already listed in the Naumann Collection as a work by Hans Memling.¹⁷ In 1862 Gustav Friedrich Waagen accepted the attribution,¹⁸ which was thereafter hardly doubted.¹⁹ The chronological classification of the Madonna painting did not need to be discussed for long,²⁰ because as early as 1899 Friedrich Kaemmerer noticed the similarity in dimensions with two paintings in the Uffizi—a *St. Benedict* and a portrait of a donor (fig. 51.7). This led him to assume that the Berlin panel was related to them, and the portrait of the donor was dated 1487 in its inscription.²¹ The Berlin Madonna was thus created in the same year as the *Diptych of Maarten van Nieuwenhove* (fig. 51.8),²² to which it is related not only in its composition, but also in regards to the use of partial patterns, as mentioned above.

ADDITIONS AND RECONSTRUCTION

In 1841 Johann David Passavant had already written about Memling’s masterly execution of a *St. Benedict* and a donor portrait dated 1487 in the Florentine gallery.²³ As it would later turn out, they both belonged to the Berlin Madonna: *St. Benedict*, reading and with his abbot’s staff, formed the left wing; on the right wing



Fig. 51.7 – Reconstruction of the triptych with the panels of *St. Benedict*, the donor, and the *Madonna* without the modern additions

was a young man with a fashionable hairstyle, the *zazzera*, and hands folded in prayer. The reconstruction as a triptych is widely accepted today, as the individual backgrounds fit together wonderfully.²⁴ Nevertheless, doubts about this reconstruction were expressed. Kenneth Bruce McFarlane recognized in the Florentine panels a diptych, to which the Berlin Madonna did not belong.²⁵ Previously, Friedrich Winkler had declared the donor’s picture to be a diptych together with the Madonna picture.²⁶ As late as 1996, Hélène Verougstraete and Rogier Van Schoute posited a diptych with the Madonna and the donor, while *St. Benedict* was a later addition.²⁷ Martin Conway also had earlier argued against the combination of all three panels in 1921: Since the backgrounds do not match, the images could not have been framed together or otherwise related.²⁸ Conway’s rejection may have had a simple reason: he probably had in mind an image of the Berlin Madonna painting with its extensions. These continue the truncated arcade architecture and do not permit a prolongation of the background with the pictures in the Uffizi. Ludwig Baldass also misunderstood the actual or original dimensions of the picture, which led him to false conclusions. He thought that the additions of the picture to 43 × 31 cm had been done in order to establish the Madonna picture as the centerpiece of a hinged altarpiece. Until recently the extensions had not been recognized as later additions,²⁹ and in fact Waagen gave the picture dimensions including the extensions in 1864.³⁰ Stylistically, the added painting on the extensions could have been created at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although according to the dendrochronological results a much earlier date would have been possible. It is noteworthy that the

narrowly framed pictorial framing of Memling’s *Virgin and Child* (Kat.Nr. 549A) also underwent a very similar enlargement to approximately the same image size (fig. 48.5): the cropped painted frame was extended, just as the arcade windows with their columns were continued in the present picture. Since both these pictures were in the collection of Stadtgerichtsrat (Municipal Court Councilor) Naumann, it is obvious that the picture extensions can be traced back to this owner, who evidently wanted his smaller paintings to have a more suitable format. During the purchase negotiations, reference was made to the poor condition and severe trimming of the painting, as well as its failed restoration, which was “indisputably evident in the otherwise inexplicable springing of the arches behind Mary’s head, and the metal bases of the columns at the front of the window balustrade.”³¹ How the Berlin collector came into possession of Memling’s Madonna paintings in 1835 remains unclear. His widow only knew that her “dear Naumann” had paid 800 in gold for both panels.³² All three panels of the triptych were individually framed, connected with hinges, and could be folded over each other—as can also be assumed from Rogier van der Weyden’s *Miraflores* and *St. John* altarpieces (Kat.Nr. 534A and Kat.Nr. 534B). The most likely scenario is that the left wing with *St. Benedict* was first folded over the Madonna image, then the donor’s wing was folded over the other two panels as a “lid”;³³ such a folding scheme can be found in two other works by Memling.³⁴ Thus, when closed, one could see on the one hand the reverse side of the Madonna image, about whose appearance nothing is known; on the other hand, the reverse side of the right wing

Fig. 51.6 – a) Overlay of the painted head of the Child in the Berlin (blue) and in the Lisbon painting; b) overlay of the painted head of the Child in the Berlin painting and the Nieuwenhove Diptych; c) overlay of the painted head of the Virgin in the Berlin painting and in the Nieuwenhove Diptych



