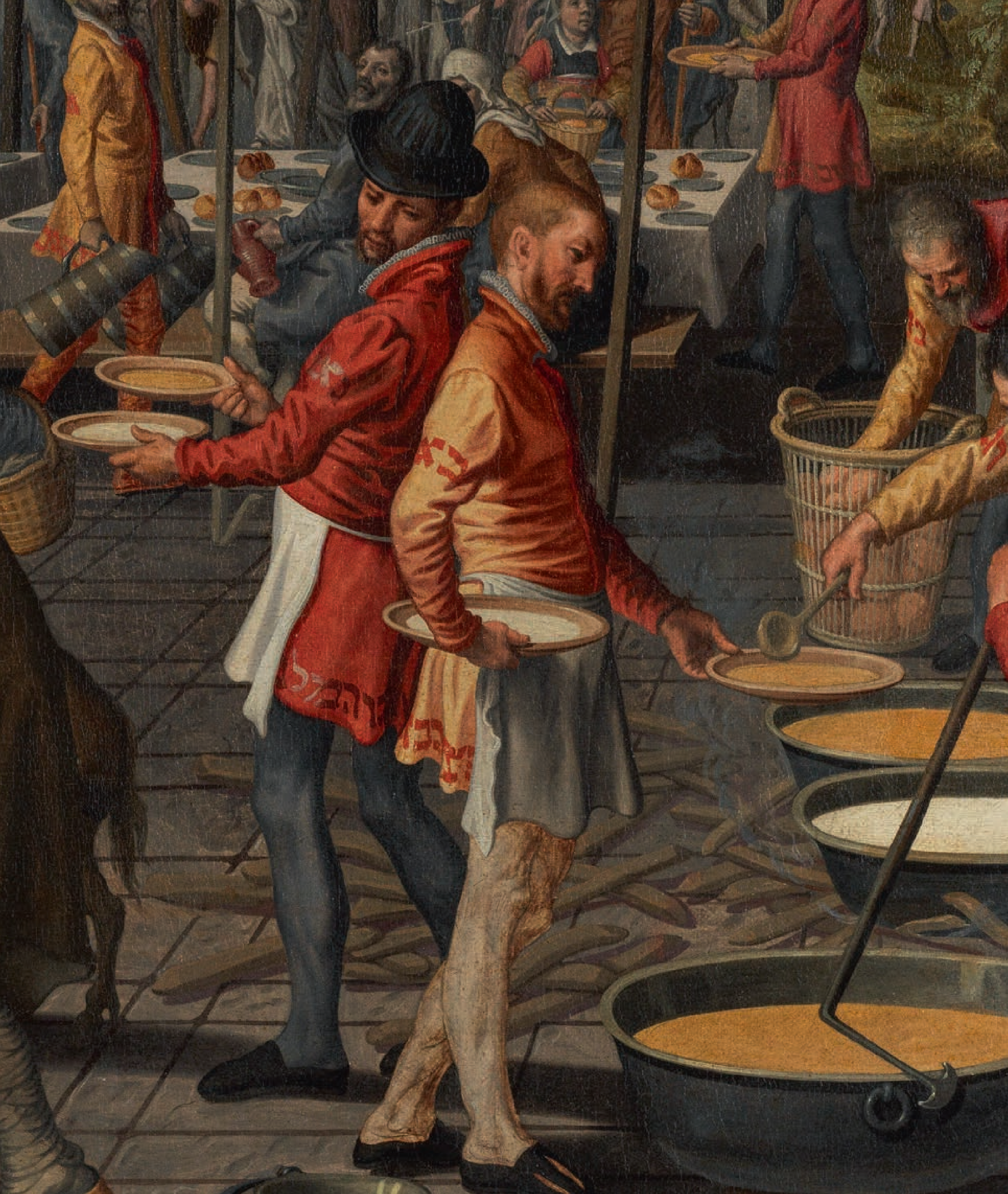
From Antwerp
to Amsterdam

From Antwerp to Amsterdam

Painting from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

HANNIBAL



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‘Ode to Antwerp: The Secret of the Dutch Masters’

Marieke Van Schijndel,
Director, Museum
Catharijneconvent, Utrecht

This is the title of the exhibition at Museum Catharijneconvent devoted to painting from Antwerp and Amsterdam from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; the period, in other words, prior to, during and after the wave of iconoclastic violence that swept through the Low Countries in 1566. No previous exhibition has paid such detailed attention to paintings from the 1560s until the fall of Antwerp to Spanish forces in 1585, a pivotal historic event that triggered the permanent separation of the Northern and Southern Netherlands. The region to the north of Antwerp became the territory of Protestant insurgents, while Antwerp itself and everything south of the river Scheldt remained in Spanish Catholic hands. Protestant inhabitants were given four years to convert to Catholicism or leave. The resulting wave of migration and the fact that the northern rebels denied the Spaniards use of the Scheldt as a commercial artery spelled the end of Antwerp as the economic heart of the Low Countries. The same factors also marked the beginning of Amsterdam’s development in the seventeenth century into the cultural, economic and political powerhouse of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, roughly corresponding with the modern-day Netherlands.

The exhibition and its accompanying publication would not have been possible without the enthusiastic cooperation of The Phoebus Foundation in Antwerp, established in 2011 by the entrepreneur, art collector and Antwerp native Fernand Huts. The Phoebus Foundation pursues philanthropic goals, acquires works of art, guarantees a professional preservation and management framework, and oversees the conservation of the objects (of which you can read more in the essay by Sven Van Dorst, conservator and founder of The Phoebus Foundation’s conservation studio, on page 58). It was during the Covid pandemic in 2020 that preliminary talks took place – online at first and later in person – between

Micha Leeflang, Curator of Museum Catharijneconvent, and The Phoebus Foundation's Collection Consultant Katrijn Van Bragt, Project Coordinator Niels Schalley, and Chief of Staff Katharina Van Cauteren. The intensive collaboration which resulted led ultimately to the present book and exhibition. The expertise and enthusiasm of the project group, consisting of Micha Leeflang, Marieke Meijers, Marije De Nood, Aukje Lettinga and Dieuwke Beckers, were indispensable. Together, they developed a narrative to introduce museum visitors to the characteristic features of seventeenth-century Dutch painting and how it was shaped by sixteenth-century Flemish Masters.

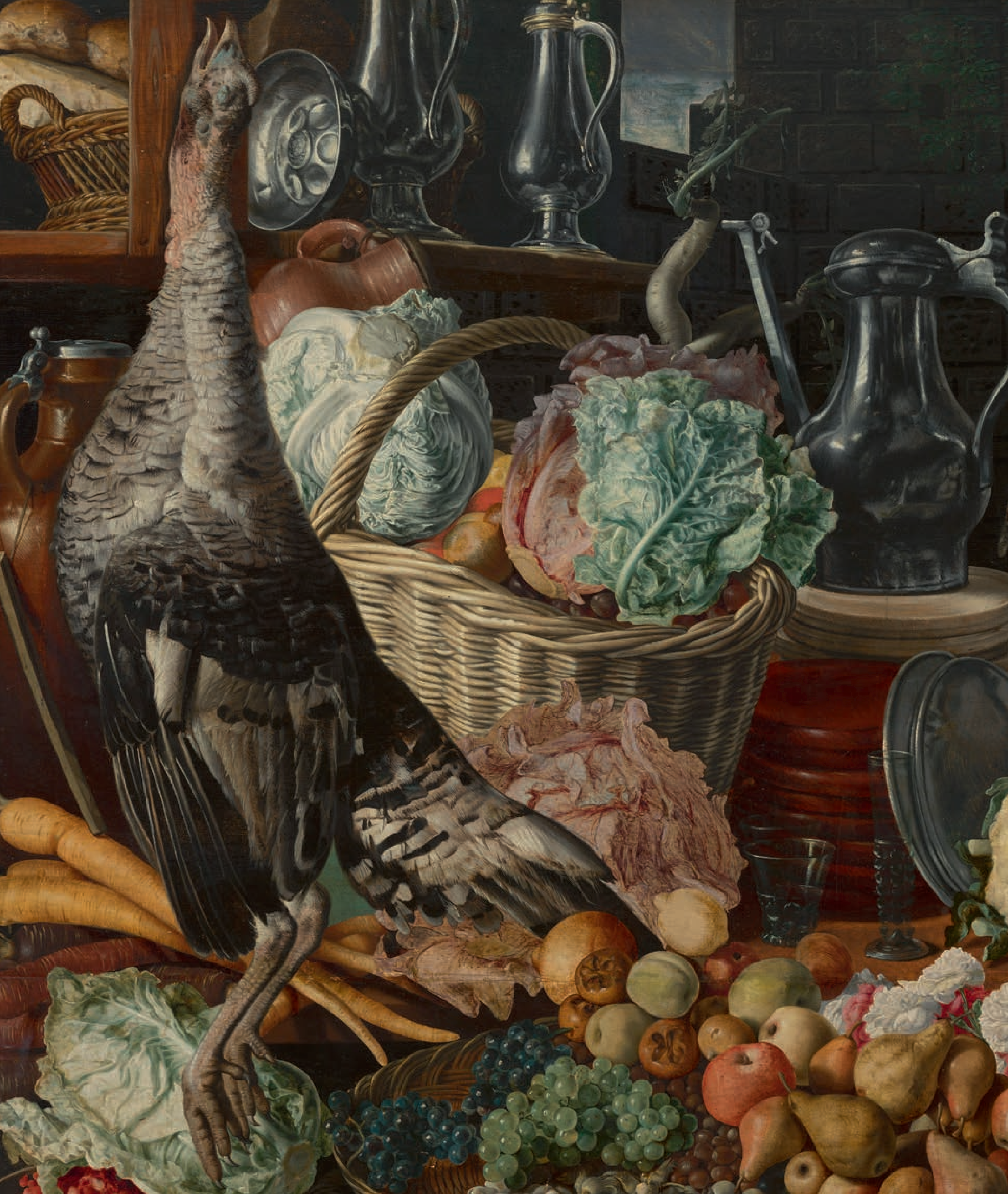
Biblical painting from the Northern Netherlands is richly represented in Museum Catharijneconvent while The Phoebus Foundation has a correspondingly large number of Southern Netherlandish (Flemish) masterpieces in its collection. The two collections complement and enhance one another. Generous loans have also been provided by the Rockox&Snijders House Museum in Antwerp, the Amsterdam Museum, Rijksmuseum and P. and N. de Boer Foundation in Amsterdam, the Mauritshuis in The Hague, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, Dordrechts Museum and a number of private collectors.

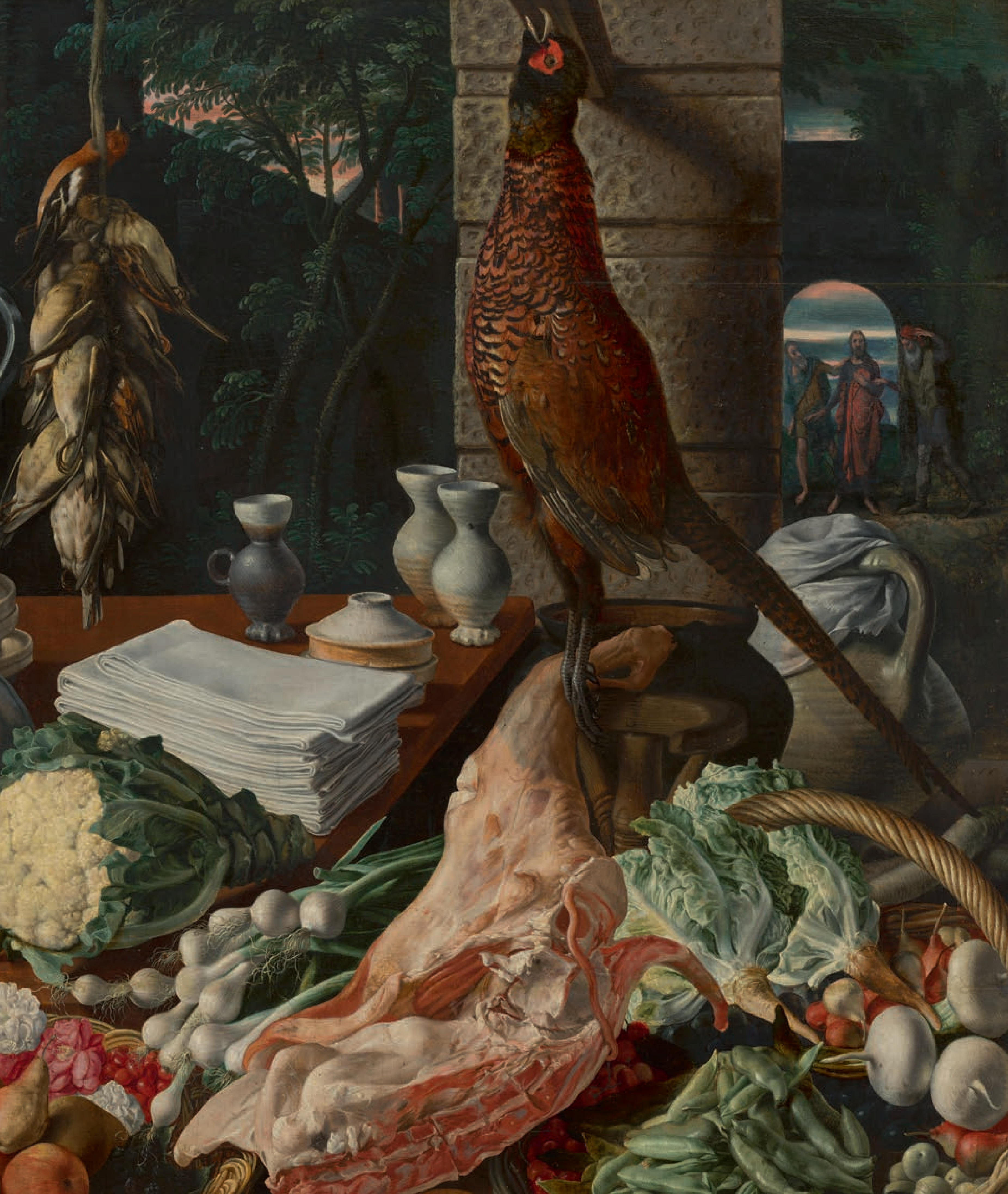
While preparing the publication and exhibition, Micha Leeflang was able to exchange views with members of the advisory committee: Marten Jan Bok, Filippe De Potter, Koenraad Jonckheere, Tanja Kootte, Henk Looijesteijn and Matthias Van Rossem. We are extremely grateful to all of them. Koenraad Jonckheere penned the second essay in this book on the significance of the debate between Catholics and Protestants regarding the use of visual images, while Tanja Kootte, former Van Oord Curator of Protestantism at Museum Catharijneconvent, provided indispensable contributions in the form of catalogue notes and commentary on the content of the other essays.

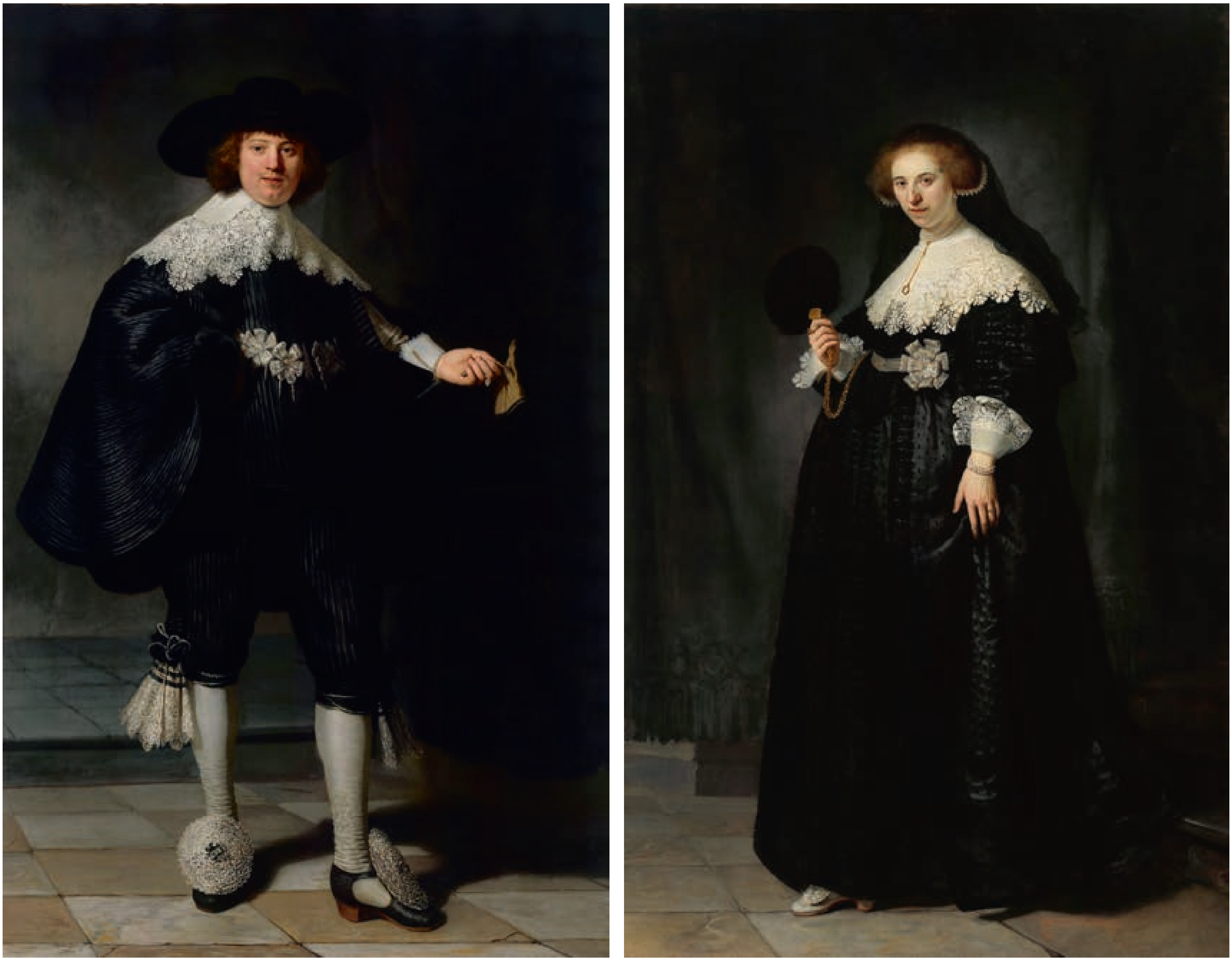
Colleagues from the aforementioned institutions, and many others besides, played a crucial part in preparing the exhibition and this book, which has been magnificently designed by Tim Bisschop and published by Hannibal Books. We worked closely with Ted Alkins, Xavier De Jonge, Sofie Meert and Jan Vangansbeke. Moreover, our gratitude is due to Frank Van der Velden, project leader for the Museum Catharijneconvent publication, and Gautier Platteau, Hannibal's director.

I would like to thank Micha Leeflang for her enthusiasm and her unwavering commitment to the realization of this publication on the shared history of the Netherlands and Belgium. Our benefactors made an essential contribution too. We are grateful to the Flemish Government, Van Baaren Stichting, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, K.F. Hein Fonds and the Zabawas Fund for the financial support they have provided for the research and organization of *Ode to Antwerp*. We are also indebted to Museum Catharijneconvent's regular partners: the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Vriendenloterij. Lastly, we would like to extend our thanks to the donors to our Museum Catharijneconvent Fund and, in particular, to Bert Twaalfhoven for his many years of support and involvement with the museum.

Next page
Joachim Beuckelaer, *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus*, c. 1560–65
Oil on panel, 109.5 x 169 cm
The Hague, Mauritshuis (long-term loan from Amsterdam, the P. & N. de Boer Foundation, since 1960)







Rembrandt Van Rijn, *Portraits of Marten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit*, 1634
Oil on canvas, 207.5 x 132 cm (each)
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-A-5033/ SK-C-1768
and Paris, Musée du Louvre

Introduction: Golden times?

Micha Leeflang

Seventeenth-century Dutch art is famed throughout the world. Yet how ‘Dutch’ are these paintings in actual fact? They immediately conjure up an image of individual and group portraits of men and women dressed in dark clothing with white ruffs, landscapes, history paintings, still lifes and scenes from everyday life. But did these truly originate in cities like Amsterdam, Haarlem, Delft and Leiden? Or was the cradle of these genres actually located somewhere else, namely in Antwerp?

If we search online for ‘painters of the Dutch golden age’, the second name that comes up after Rembrandt is the almost equally world-famous Frans Hals (Antwerp, 1582–Haarlem, 1666).[1] Yet Hals was born in Antwerp in 1582, son of the Mechelen cloth merchant Franchois Fransz. Hals (Mechelen, c. 1542–Haarlem, 1610) and his second wife, Adriaentje Van Geertenryck (Antwerp, 1552–Haarlem, 1616) from Antwerp. Like a great many other Antwerpers, the family relocated in 1586 – shortly after their city was captured by Spanish troops in 1585 – to the more tolerant North, in their case Haarlem. The Halses were just one of the numerous Flemish migrant families that went on to play a key role in the seventeenth-century efflorescence of the Dutch Republic. This glorious period has traditionally been called the 'Golden Age', yet it was by no means golden for everyone. A wealthy bourgeoisie acted as a catalyst for the development of Netherlandish painting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, first in Antwerp and later in Amsterdam. They commissioned or bought paintings including portraits, genre pieces, and biblical and mythological scenes. But where did they get the money to do that?

New trade routes

The 'discovery' of the Americas by Christopher Columbus (Genoa, 1451–Valladolid, 1506) in 1492 led to a period of European global dominance through the continent's colonization of the 'New World' and the immense volumes of land and resources it was now able to procure. An immensely lucrative trade grew up – first in Bruges, then in Antwerp and later in Amsterdam – in goods such as cloth and other textiles; construction materials like iron, copper, stone and wood; and foodstuffs including wine, grain and herring; not to mention luxury products such as coffee, tea, tobacco, cocoa, pepper, nutmeg and mace. Merchandise was sourced from the Baltic, France, China, Japan, Brazil, India and Africa. The trade in sugar, herbs and spices was only rendered possible, however, by the large-scale deployment of enslaved people, an issue that has recently come in for increased attention in the field of art history too.

The Antwerp painter Joos Van Cleve (Cleves, c. 1485–Antwerp, 1540/41), for instance, created an altarpiece for the Genoese merchant Antón Cerezo which was intended for a chapel in the church of Nuestra Señora de la Merced, adjacent to Cerezo's sugar refinery in Agaete on Gran Canaria.[2] The substantial amount of Flemish art found on other Canary Islands and the Portuguese island of Madeira, including work by Rogier Van der Weyden (Tournai, 1399/1400–Brussels, 1464), Jan Provoost (Mons, 1472–Bruges, 1529), but also the Antwerp artists Pieter Coecke Van Aelst (Aalst, 1502–Brussels, 1550) and, once again, Joos Van Cleve, is linked to the trade in and processing of sugar.[3]

Most wealthy traders, and by extension the artists who worked for them, thus appear to have been connected either directly or indirectly to slavery. It was recently established, for example, that Marten Soolmans, son of a migrant from Antwerp, and Oopjen Coppit, who had their portraits painted by Rembrandt (Leiden, 1606–Amsterdam, 1669), had links to the slave trade.[4] They made their fortune in Amsterdam from the processing of raw sugar from Brazil, sugar that was grown, harvested and processed by enslaved Africans. Huge amounts of money were made in Europe from sugar, which had swiftly become a popular luxury product. Amsterdam's sugar industry met a substantial proportion of the continent-wide demand that resulted.

Following Marten Soolmans' death, Oopjen remarried to Maerten Daey, who had previously spent several years in Brazil. We know from contemporary sources that he held an enslaved woman called Francisca captive and raped her several times, only sending her away when she fell pregnant. Which brings us to another facet of the past that resonates with a pressing topical issue, namely the #MeToo movement, which has been active since late 2017 (see cat. 19). Transgressive sexual behaviour is also found in all eras, as echoed in paintings with biblical themes like *Joseph Fleeing Potiphar's Wife* (cat. 19) and *Susanna and the Elders* (cats. 25, 88), acting as a warning to the viewer. There are more similarities between our own era and the themes addressed in this exhibition and catalogue. For instance, the late Middle Ages and early modern period endured a series of epidemics which from time to time became pandemics when spread beyond Europe by explorers. Rather than Covid, the disease in question was the plague, sometimes called the 'Black Death' (see cat. 8). Contemporary records inform us about the measures that were taken to resist the spread of the virus, measures not a million miles away from those announced in recent years by ministers in the Netherlands and Belgium. Fear of the virus assumed an additional religious dimension in the sixteenth century – was it some kind of divine punishment? – and this too was reflected in painting, where we find a striking number of images of 'plague saints' like St Roch and St Christopher.

Iconoclastic violence: never far away

Few issues are quite as culturally sensitive, however, as that of the visual representation of holy figures, most notably cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Visual images of God and of living beings is prohibited in the Old Testament and this applies to one degree or another within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The way such rules are interpreted and applied provides us with information regarding the religious identity of human beings within the spirit of the times and the prevailing culture.

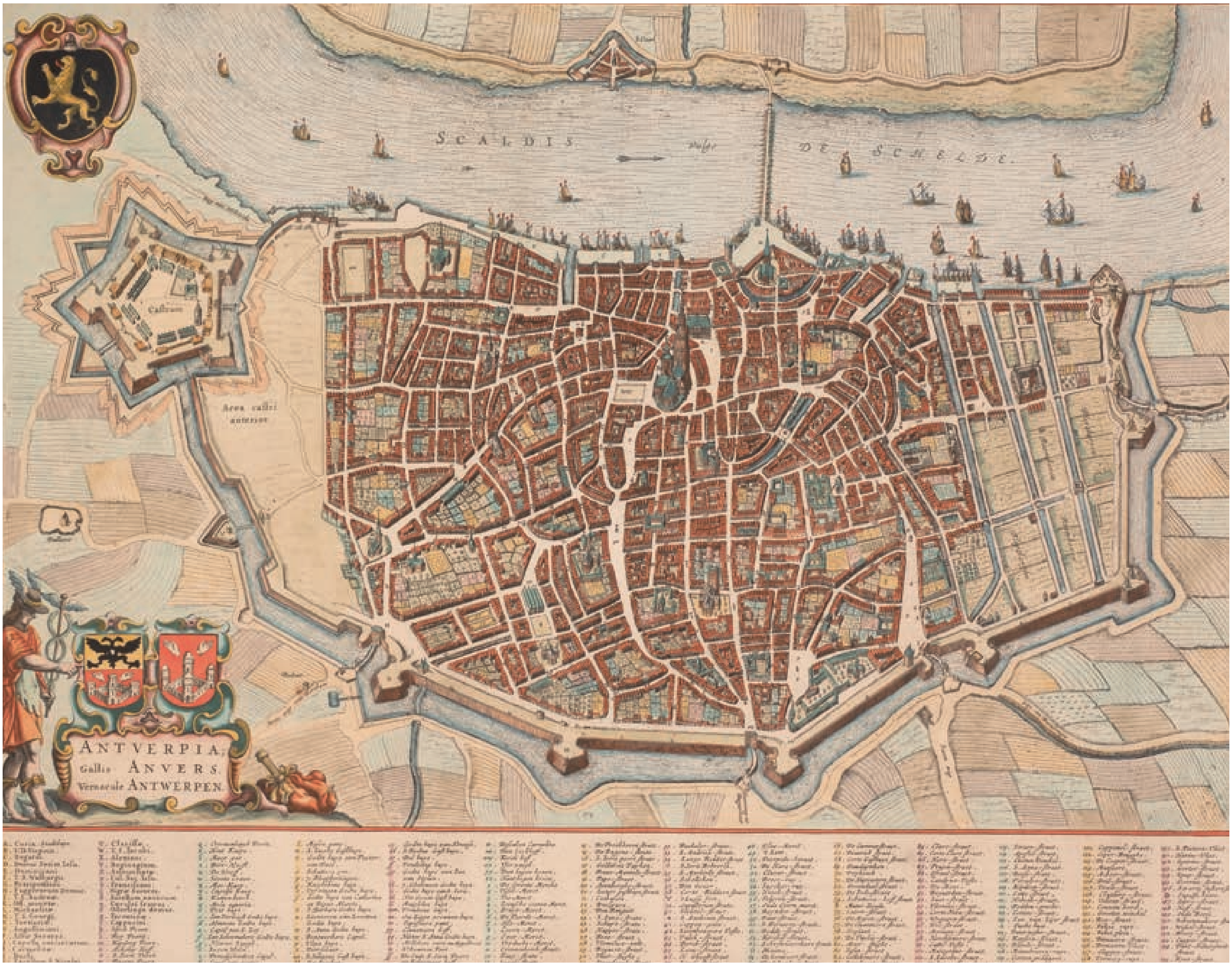
Deliberate damage to or destruction of art works dates back to the eighth century, when the first Byzantine Iconoclasm occurred during the rule of Emperor Leo III with the removal of a statue of Jesus from a palace gate.[5] Conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the Low Countries in the sixteenth century culminated in the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566, a pivotal event for this publication and the exhibition it accompanies. Religious buildings were purged of saints' statues, altarpieces and other examples of image veneration to make them suitable for Reformed devotion, in which the Bible and the Word of God were central. Even now, however, sculptures continue to be deliberately destroyed. Statues of Civil War figures have been a focus of anger in the United States in recent times, followed by Christopher Columbus, 'discoverer' of the New World.[6] A statue of the Italian explorer was beheaded in Boston, for instance, while protesters tore down another in Richmond, Virginia, and threw it in a lake. Similar campaigns spread to Europe, with a debate flaring in both the Netherlands and Belgium regarding figures previously considered historical heroes. A statue of Gandhi in Amsterdam was splashed with red paint and the word 'racist' scrawled across the plinth.

In 2015, centuries-old works of art were deliberately damaged and destroyed because of their so-called pagan character.[7] On 26 February of that year, Islamic State (IS) released a video showing exhibits from Mosul Museum and an ancient city gate being destroyed with sledgehammers and pneumatic drills. But iconoclasm continued: IS also blew up Mosul's public library, which housed over 8,000 manuscripts and historical prints.

Fortunately, there are people – both now and in the past – committed to protecting and preserving cultural heritage for future generations. This exhibition and the accompanying publication focus on painting prior to, during and after the Iconoclastic Fury of 1566 in the Low Countries. Art from the preceding period received a considerable amount of attention in the Netherlands in 1986.[8] However, as Koenraad Jonckheere noted in 2012, Netherlandish painting in the period immediately afterwards, the years 1566–85, has largely been neglected by art historians.[9] We hope that the present book, published to accompany the exhibition *Ode to Antwerp: The Secret of Dutch Masters*, will help put this right. It offers an insight into the emergence of Antwerp as a metropolis with a school of painting of its own in the sixteenth century, and the shift of that artistic and economic hub to Amsterdam in the seventeenth century in response to political, economic and religious upheavals. The prosperity of both cities had a major influence on art. As Koenraad Jonckheere sets out in his essay, we cannot understand the art of the Low Countries in the second half of the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century without taking note of the debate between Catholics and Protestants regarding the use of visual images. The resulting polemics influenced both the themes and the use of art objects, something we also find in the descriptions of the exhibited paintings in the catalogue section. Themes and genres evolved over time, with the religious beliefs of the painter or patron influencing the way the work was executed.

When Antwerp fell to the Spanish in 1585, a wave of migration followed that marked the beginning of Amsterdam's development. The city on the river Amstel swiftly took over Antwerp's status as a commercial metropolis, enabling Dutch painting to reach its zenith in the seventeenth century in the work of artists like Rembrandt, Vermeer, and also Frans Hals, who had emigrated from Antwerp as a child. Precisely how it all came about, however, is what you will discover in this publication.

[1] Google search, 23 February 2023.
[2] Leeflang 2015, pp. 143–50.
[3] Dias in Pauwels 1991, p. 108; Clode 1997; Gaspar 2004.
[4] See, among others, www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/20160--rijksmuseum/collections/rijksmuseum-slavernij-1500-1650 (accessed 18 August 2022).
[5] Kila 2020, p. 77.
[6] Idem, p. 76.
[7] Idem, p. 84.
[8] Filedt Kok/Halsema-Kubes/Kloek 1986; Dirkse 1986.
[9] Jonckheere 2012, p. 7. An exhibition on the influence of Flemish and Brabant artists on the Haarlem School, entitled *Nieuwkomers, Vlaamse kunstenaars in Haarlem, 1580-1630*, could be seen at the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem from 30 September 2022 to 8 January 2023.


SCALDIS
DE SCHELDE
Castrum
Area castri anterior
ANTVERPIA,
Gallis ANVERS,
Vernacule ANTWERPEN.

1.1 Johannes Blaeu, *Map of Antwerp*, 1649
Coloured engraving, 530 x 625 mm
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation

1.

‘Art desires to be near wealth’ From Antwerp to Amsterdam

Micha Leeflang

In his famous *Schilder-boeck* of 1604, the artists’ biographer and painter Karel Van Mander (Meulebeke, 1548–Amsterdam, 1608) wrote of the artists and merchants who settled *en masse* in sixteenth-century Antwerp that ‘art desires to be near wealth’.[1] By the period in question (fig. 1.1), the port on the river Scheldt had developed into a cultural and financial powerhouse, the most important commercial metropolis north of the Alps and, in Van Mander’s eyes, the veritable ‘Mother of Artists’.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, however, intensifying political and religious unrest triggered a wave of migration to the Northern Netherlands, most notably to cities like Middelburg, Leiden, Haarlem, Rotterdam, Delft, The Hague and Enkhuizen, as well as Amsterdam. The fall of Antwerp in 1585, when the metropolis was captured by Spanish troops and the Scheldt blockaded, marked the beginning of Amsterdam’s development. The Dutch city swiftly took over Antwerp’s position as a major commercial centre, and business and the arts took off there in unprecedented fashion. But how did all this come about?

Antwerp's emergence as a metropolis

Antwerp's geographical location contributed to its burgeoning prosperity in the late fifteenth century at the expense of Bruges, hitherto North West Europe's leading centre of trade. The rivers Scheldt, Meuse and Rhine were the northern economy's principal arteries.[2] A number of storm surges in the fifteenth century made the harbour in Antwerp more accessible than it had been before, just as Bruges found itself in a state of crisis from 1480 onwards.[3] The sudden death in 1482 of Mary of Burgundy (Brussels, 1457–Bruges, 1482), followed by the Flemish Revolt[4] against Maximilian of Austria (Wiener Neustadt, 1459–Wels, 1519) heralded the end of Bruges' economic and cultural pre-eminence.[5] The Zwin, the waterway connecting the Flemish city to the North Sea, had been blockaded for ten years, and Maximilian ordered foreign trading houses to leave.[6] Antwerp took advantage of the political turmoil in Bruges by offering favourable trading opportunities to merchants from other countries (see also cat. 22).[7] By the early sixteenth century, more and more of them quit Bruges for Antwerp, which was now able to flourish like never before.

Antwerp school of painting

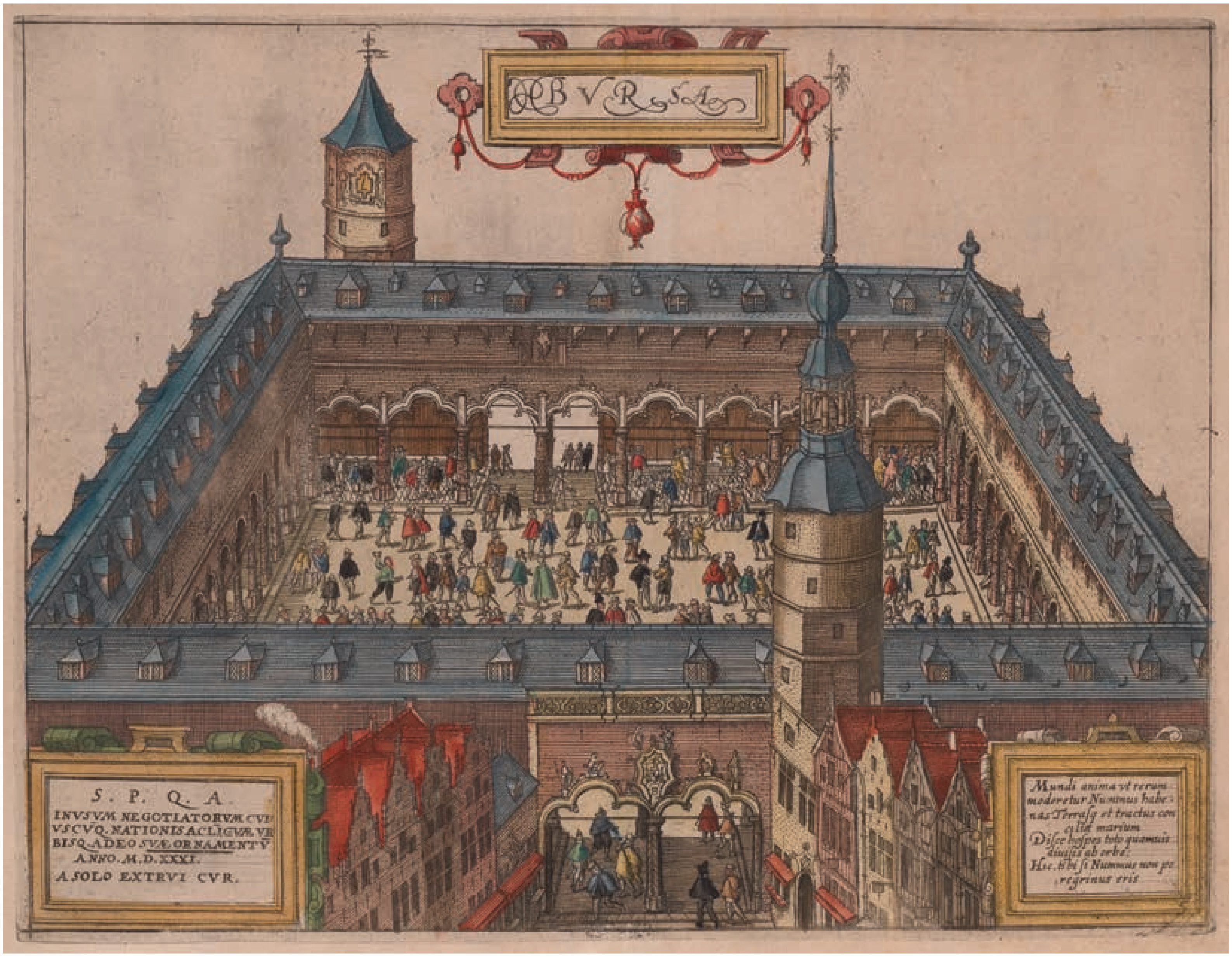
Unlike Bruges, Ghent or Brussels, there was no painting tradition in Antwerp at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[8] Only then did an 'Antwerp School' begin to develop in response to the booming economy: after all, where there is money, there is a demand for luxury goods. The city swiftly established itself as market leader in the large-scale production and export of high-quality paintings and carved altarpieces with painted shutters. The artists who produced them, many of whose names remain unknown and are now referred to as 'Antwerp Mannerists', based themselves on their predecessors, the so-called 'Flemish Primitives', who had been active in artistic centres like Bruges, Ghent and Brussels, while simultaneously incorporating the new Renaissance idiom developed in Italy.[9]

The founders of the Antwerp school of painting were Quinten Metsys (Leuven, 1465/66–Antwerp, 1530), Joos Van Cleve (Cleves, c. 1485–Antwerp 1540/41) and Pieter Coecke Van Aelst (Aalst, 1502–Brussels, 1550).[10] Where the first of these artists continued to work firmly in the tradition of his great Flemish predecessors, the latter two adopted a more creative approach and were more strongly influenced by Italian Renaissance art, leading them to create new prototypes. Van Cleve and Coecke both headed successful workshops with several employees.[11] They focused on commissions but also turned out copies of popular images like *The Virgin and Child* (cats. 13–14), *The Holy Family* (cat. 23), *The Infant Christ and St John Embracing* (Van Cleve, cats. 15–16) and *The Last Supper* (Coecke), for sale on the open market (see further). Van Cleve and Coecke took their cue for the latter two compositions from Italian examples (see also cats. 19–20).

The following generation of Antwerp painters, including Maarten De Vos (Antwerp, 1532–Antwerp, 1603), Frans Floris (Antwerp, c. 1515-20–Antwerp, 1570) and Willem Key (Breda, 1515/16–Antwerp, 1568), continued along the same path.[12] They too based their compositions on earlier Flemish masters, on the one hand, and Italian Renaissance artists, on the other. These two aspects were thus the most important features of the sixteenth-century Antwerp painting school.

Rise of the art market

Prior to the early fifteenth century, it was chiefly the Church and the nobility that purchased art. Aristocratic commissions fell off, however, following the death in 1477 of Charles the Bold (Dijon, 1433–Nancy, 1477). Instead, artists focused increasingly on the wealthy middle class that was emerging on the back of burgeoning trade and economic activity. The hierarchy of the time was headed by the clergy, followed by the nobility, with the ordinary folk or working class at the bottom.[13] At first, this lowest stratum of society consisted purely of peasants, but with the rise of trading centres and cities, an increasing number of them became entrepreneurs. The burgher class grew steadily richer until, by the final quarter of the fifteenth century, the world had become the bourgeoisie's oyster.[14] They ordered altarpieces for private chapels in churches but also began to decorate their homes with art, often in the form of relatively small devotional panels but also of portraits, including those of royalty (see below). Works like this were no longer produced only on commission; wealthy clients also began to buy ready-made products, whether directly from the artist's workshop or at annual fairs.[15] This marked the beginning of art production for the open market. The resulting art trade originated in Bruges, before Antwerp assumed the leading role in the sixteenth century.[16]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A SOLO EXTRVI CVR.
Mundi anima vt rerum
moderetur Nummus habe-
nas Terrasq et tractus con
celsa marium
Disce hospes toto quamuis
diuisus ab orbe.
Hic tibi si Nummus non pe
regrinus eris

1.2 *Bursa Antverpia*, 1531
Coloured engraving, 237 x 320 mm
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation

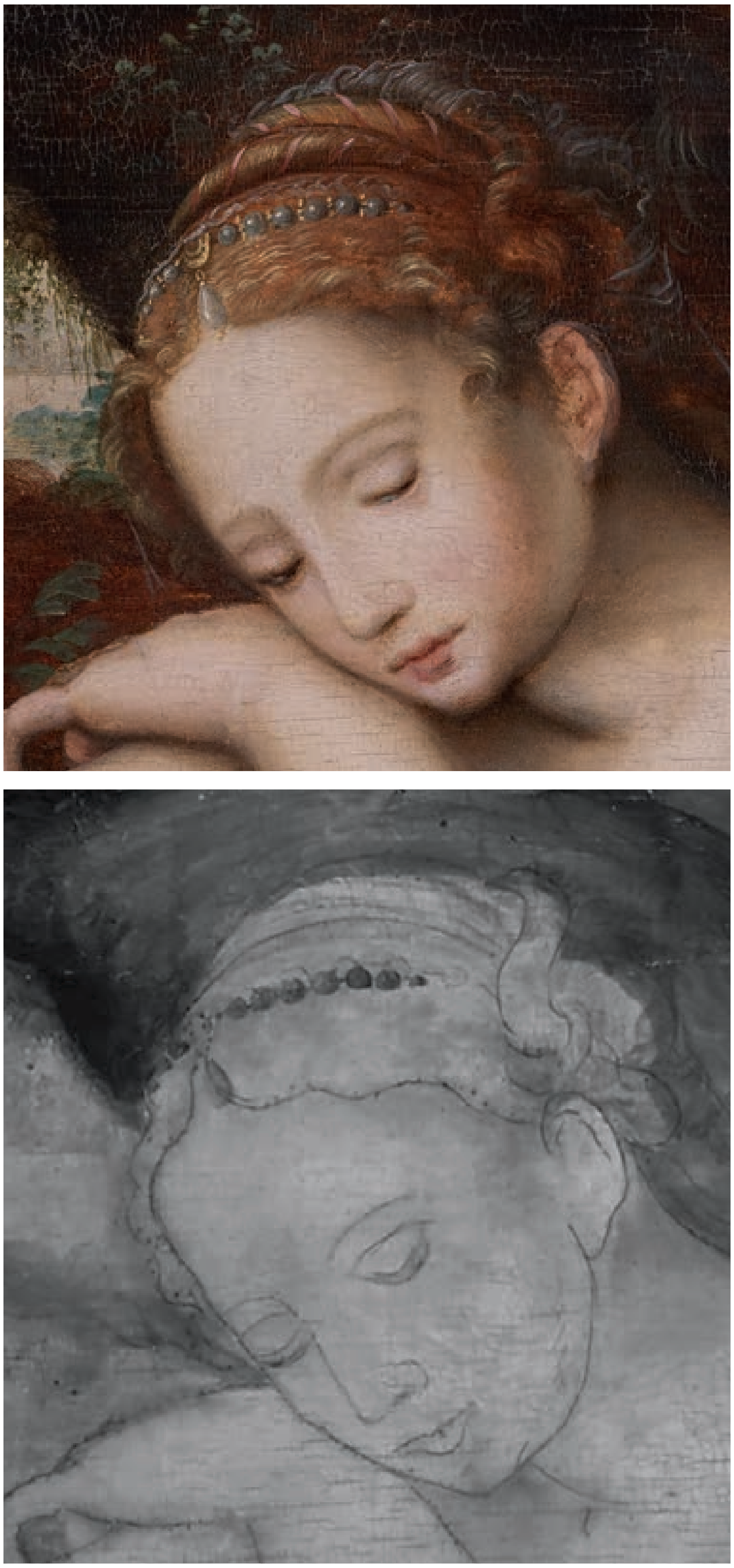
Between 1460 and 1560, painters, sculptors, joiners and booksellers could rent stalls in a covered art market in Antwerp called the ‘Pand’ (or ‘Our Lady’s Pand’),[17] where they offered their products for sale. It was the largest art fair in Europe at the time. A gallery with a hundred shops – the *Schilderspand* (‘Painters’ Building’) – opened in 1540 at the city’s commercial exchange (fig. 1.2), where members of the Guild of St Luke, the local painters’ corporation, were able to sell their wares. The original Pand ceded its leading position as a market for paintings, but the *Schilderspand* continued to flourish.

The export of compounded altarpieces, paintings, sculptures and prints meant that Antwerp art had an immense influence throughout Europe and beyond.[18] At the same time, painters from the city travelled far and wide, spreading their artistic ideas further. The city also exerted a powerful attraction on foreign merchants and artisans, who came into contact, in turn, with Antwerp art. The travel journal of the German artist Albrecht Dürer (Nuremberg, 1471–Nuremberg, 1528) and the writings of the Italian merchant, historian and humanist Lodovico Guicciardini (Florence, 1521–Antwerp, 1589), who settled in Antwerp in 1541, are among the sources that paint a picture of Antwerp’s international importance as a European economic and artistic hub.[19] Guicciardini stated that no fewer than 300 artists were active in Antwerp in 1560, producing an immense amount of work.

Paintings were done to order or for sale on the open market. The subject matter was mostly religious, but new genres also began to emerge with increasing frequency in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including landscapes, market scenes and images from everyday life.
In order to sell their work, painters had to be registered as independent masters with the guild, which, in turn, required them to be citizens of the town and to have the necessary starting capital[20] to fund the purchase of raw materials such as pigments, binding agents and the wooden panel or canvas itself.

Works aimed at the open market were often done on a modest scale – to match equally modest budgets – and often featured popular devotional themes such as *The Virgin and Child*, *The Holy Family* and *The Adoration of the Magi* (cat. 22). The compositions were not necessarily reinvented each time, and paintings tended to be produced in series (cats. 15–16). Painters developed a variety of methods to make production as efficient and economical as possible. The underdrawing, for instance – the initial application of the design prior to painting – was often set down on the panel or canvas in the ‘woodcut style’ (cat. 10),[21] which meant it was highly detailed so that workshop assistants could readily execute some or all of the actual painting. In some cases, the underdrawing also served as a kind of underpainting, allowing the total number of paint layers to be reduced. This saved both money and time, in terms of actual labour and how long the painting took to dry.

Another practice that took hold at this point was the use of cartoons to reproduce compositions and allow them to be used several times through either tracing or ‘pouncing’ (cats. 15–16).[22] The tracing method was similar to the use of carbon paper: the back of the cartoon (model drawing) or that of a separate, intermediate sheet was rubbed with charcoal. After positioning the cartoon on top of a prepared panel, the outlines of the drawing were traced over with a stylus, leaving an imprint in charcoal on the support. The pouncing technique, meanwhile, entailed pricking holes along the outlines of the cartoon. The sheet was then laid onto the primed panel and charcoal powder from a bag was tapped through the perforations, transferring the composition as a series of dots. In some cases, these were subsequently joined up, as in *Mary Magdalene Asleep in a Cave* by the Master of the Prodigal Son (cat. 24), but in others, the dots were used as they were (fig. 1.3).

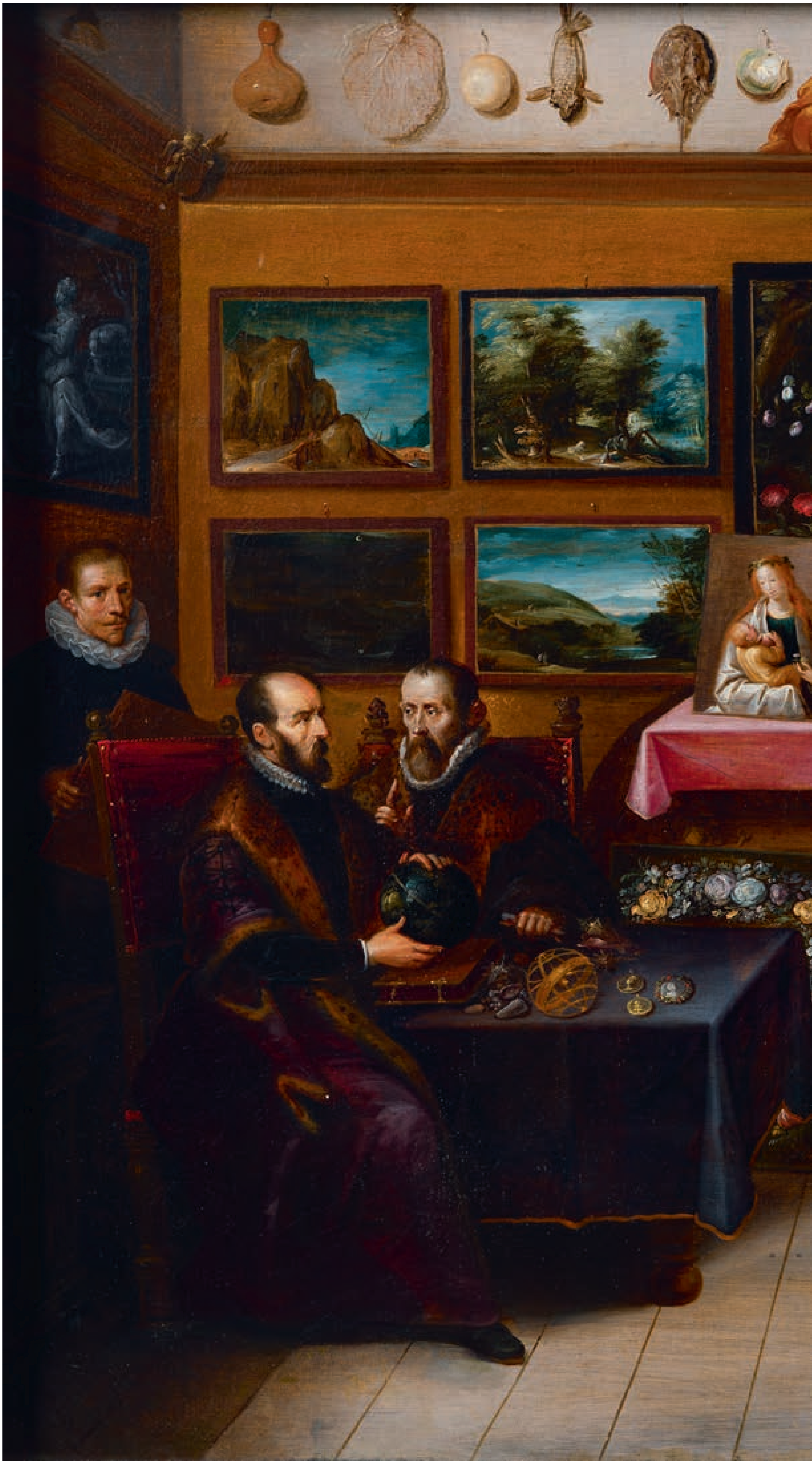


1.3 IRR detail in which the dots created by the pricked cartoon are clearly visible: Master of the Prodigal Son, *Mary Magdalene Asleep in a Cave*, c. 1530–60
Oil on panel, 63.3 × 95.2 cm, Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation

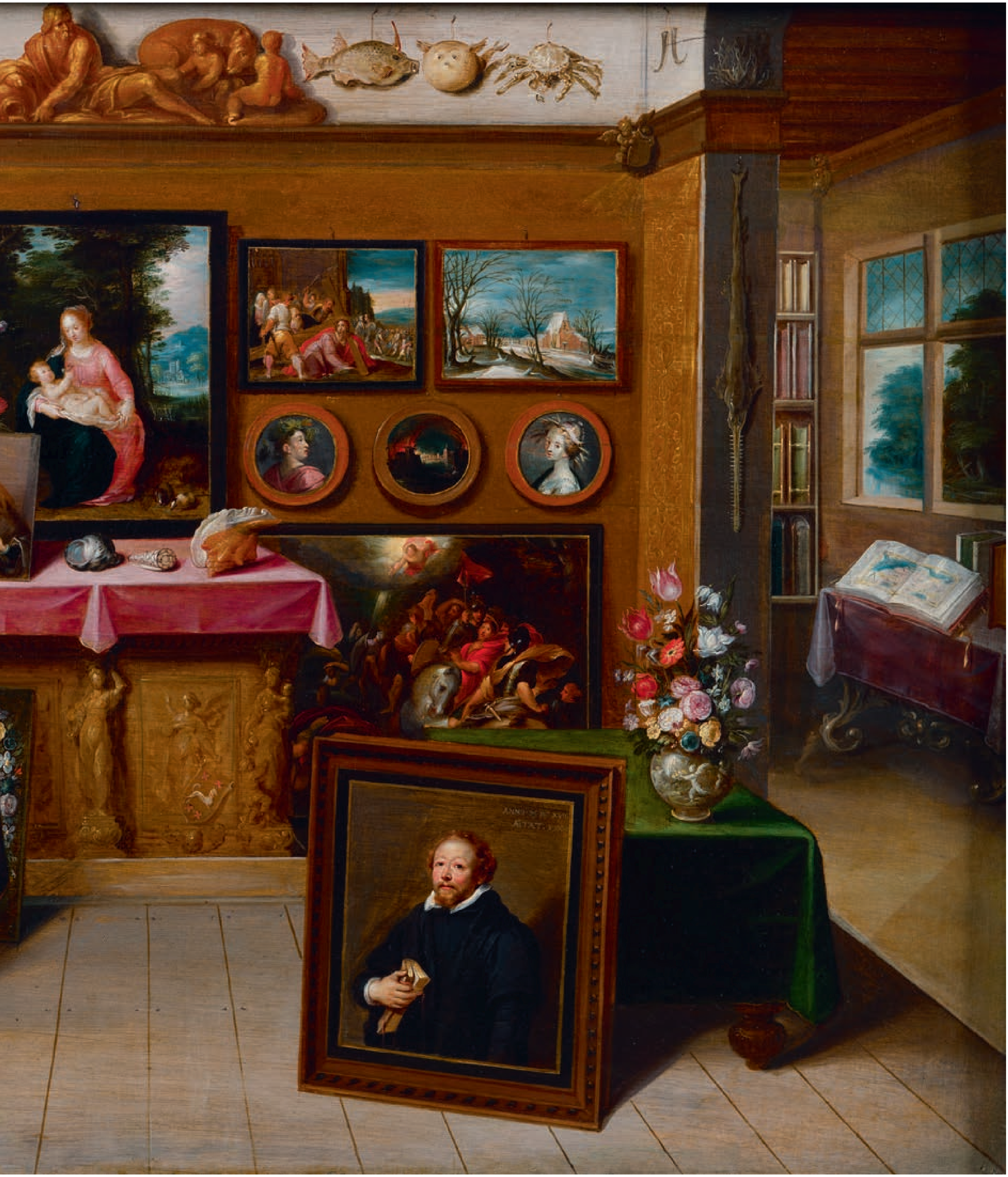
New art buyers

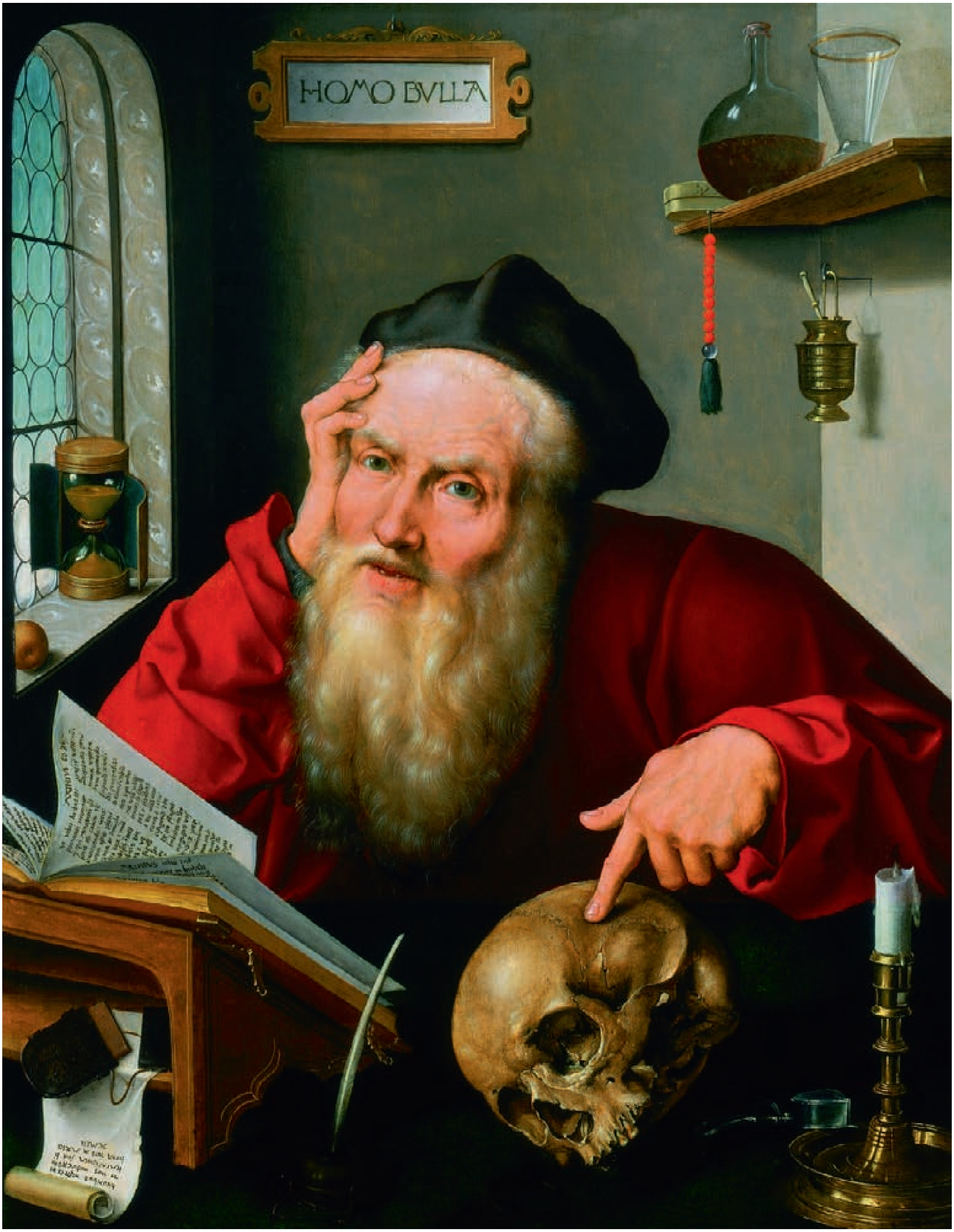
Inventories drawn up following the deaths of the Antwerp art dealers Hans Van Kessel (Mechelen, c. 1533–Antwerp, 1581) in 1581 and Pauwels Van der Borcht (Mechelen, ?–Antwerp, 1599) in 1599 tell us that businesses of this kind could build up substantial holdings of paintings.[23] The former had 610 works in stock and the latter 466. Demand for art was huge: research shows that between 1565 and 1585, families in Antwerp owned more than ten painted scenes on average, with depictions of the *Adoration of the Magi* the most popular (cat. 22). It was not apparently a problem to have several works with the same theme in your house. Paintings in private homes mostly had a religious subject, reflecting people's decision to invest in art in the hope of securing their place in heaven. Fernand Huts and Katharina Van Cauteren expressed this idea in the following terms: 'The number of saints might have doubled one's claim to a place in heaven come the End Days. [...] A one-way ticket to paradise remained an obsession in the early and late Middle Ages alike. Life in the here and now was temporary, but if you were not careful, you risked burning in hell for all eternity.'[24] Besides religious subjects, people owned portraits of themselves or members of their family. And, before the outbreak of the Eighty Years War, at least, portraits of princes like Emperor Charles V (cat. 1) and King Philip II (cat. 52) also hung in many a wealthy citizen's home.

Standard rooms swiftly became too small to house growing collections of art,[25] and Antwerp's social elite increasingly set up dedicated 'cabinets' to accommodate them (cat. 5) (fig. 1.4). When even these proved too limited in size, wealthy burghers had larger, Renaissance-style residences built, complete with impressive *Kunstkammers* or even out-and-out private art galleries. In doing so, the new breed of art collector thus began to exert their influence on the cityscape.



1.4 Frans Francken II, *Picture Gallery with Abraham Ortelius and Justus Lipsius*, 1617
Oil on panel transferred to canvas,
52.5 × 73.5 cm, Antwerp, The Phoebus
Foundation



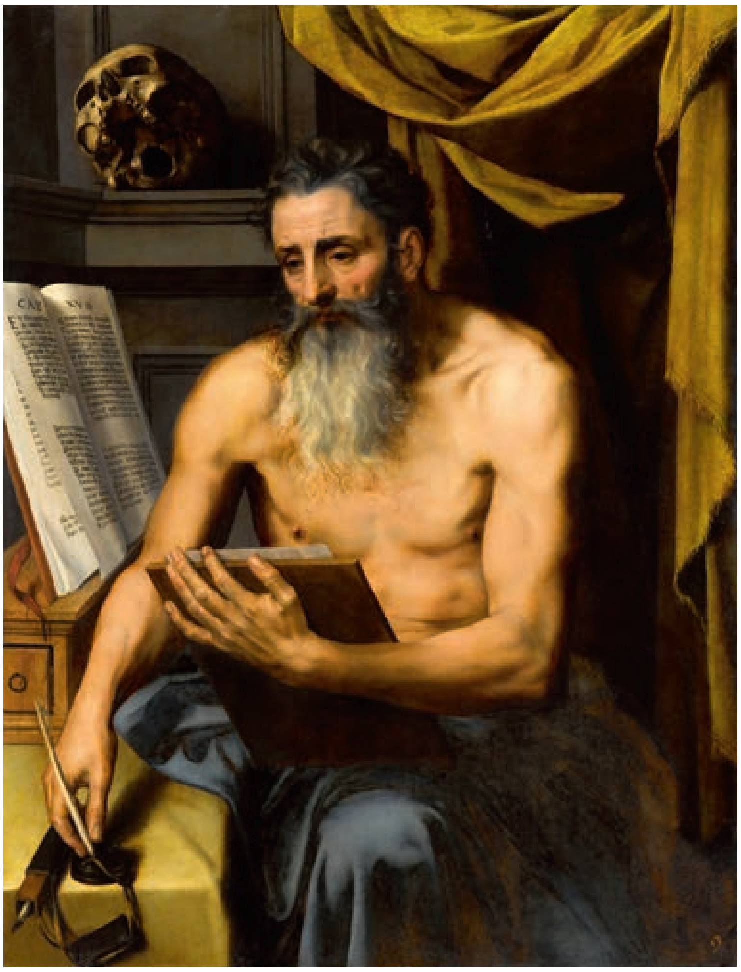


1.5 Joos Van Cleve, *St Jerome as a Scholar*, c. 1535
Oil on panel, 60.7 × 46.7 cm, private collection (courtesy of Habolt & Co, Paris)

From religious to secular

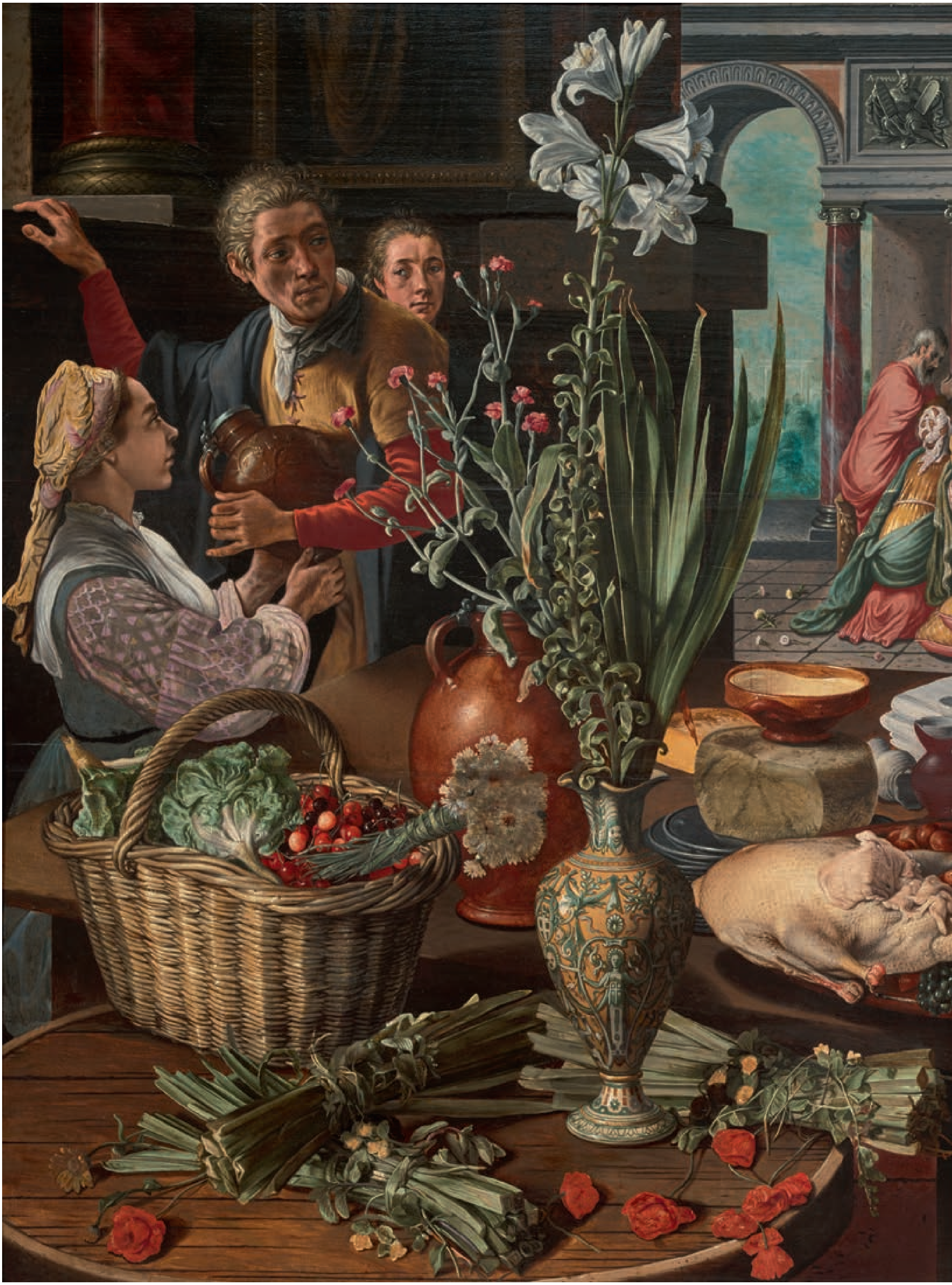
Changes within particular themes occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while new painting genres also developed. An evolution of this kind in the depiction of St Jerome, for instance, can be traced in Antwerp around 1520/21 (fig. 1.5).[26] The Church Father was a frequent subject, as he had been in the fifteenth century, accounting for as much as thirty per cent of all saints' images. But his traditional attributes, the lion and the cardinal's hat, were increasingly omitted, possibly under the influence of Desiderius Erasmus (Rotterdam, 1466–Basel, 1536).[27] The humanist scholar was in Antwerp around 1520, while several highly influential texts of his had been published a few years earlier, in 1516, including a critical edition of Jerome's collected works. These *opera omnia* were introduced with a newly penned biography, based on the Church Father's own writings. Erasmus had little patience, however, with stories of miracles such as the frequently depicted legend of Jerome and the lion, or his supposed ordination as a cardinal – an office that did not yet exist. He considered digressions of this kind to be utter nonsense, which clearly had immense implications for the visual arts. Henceforward, the emphasis in depictions of St Jerome would be on his erudition, with no further room for 'superfluous attributes'. Jerome underwent a further makeover around the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Calvinist artist Adriaen Thomasz. Key (Breda, 1544–Antwerp, 1589) painted him with dirty fingernails (fig. 1.6). As Jonckheere notes, this was probably a reference to Erasmus' commentary on Jerome in his *Adagia* ('Adages'), where he refers to the Church Father working on his Bible translation and studies with proverbially 'washed hands and clean feet'.[28] Could it be that Key, like Erasmus, was seeking to criticize Jerome's writings?

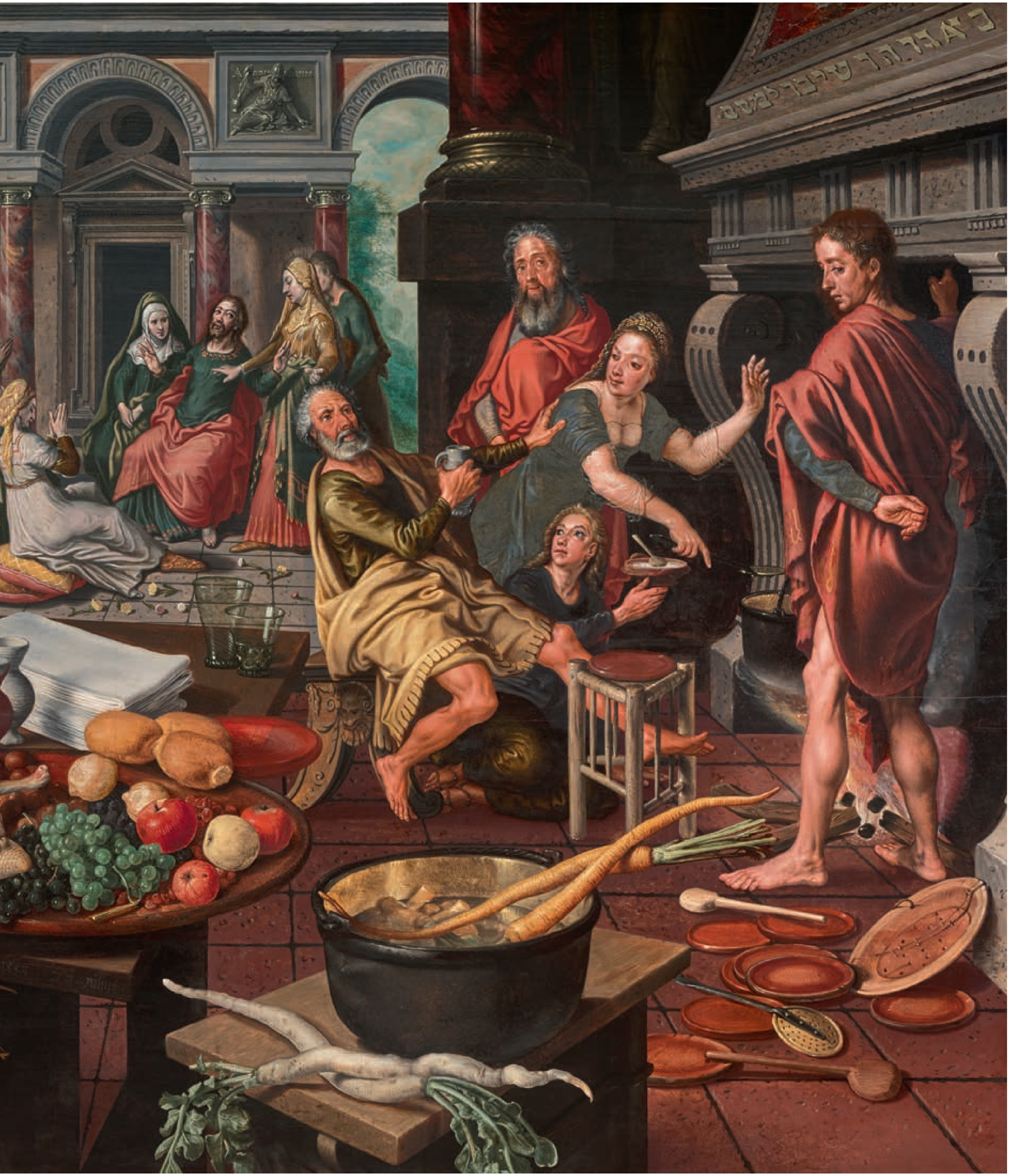
The rise of Protestantism, meanwhile, also considerably reduced the number of visual representations of saints around 1550, just as artworks centring on the Passion of Christ were increasing.[29] It was through Jesus' death on the cross, after all, that the sins of humankind were redeemed. Renditions of the Nativity or the Adoration of the Magi likewise placed greater emphasis on the advent of the Saviour than on Mary, as had been the case previously. There was a decline, therefore, in the volume of devotional panels depicting *The Virgin and Child*, since Christians were better off turning directly to God rather than to intercessors like the saints or Mary herself.

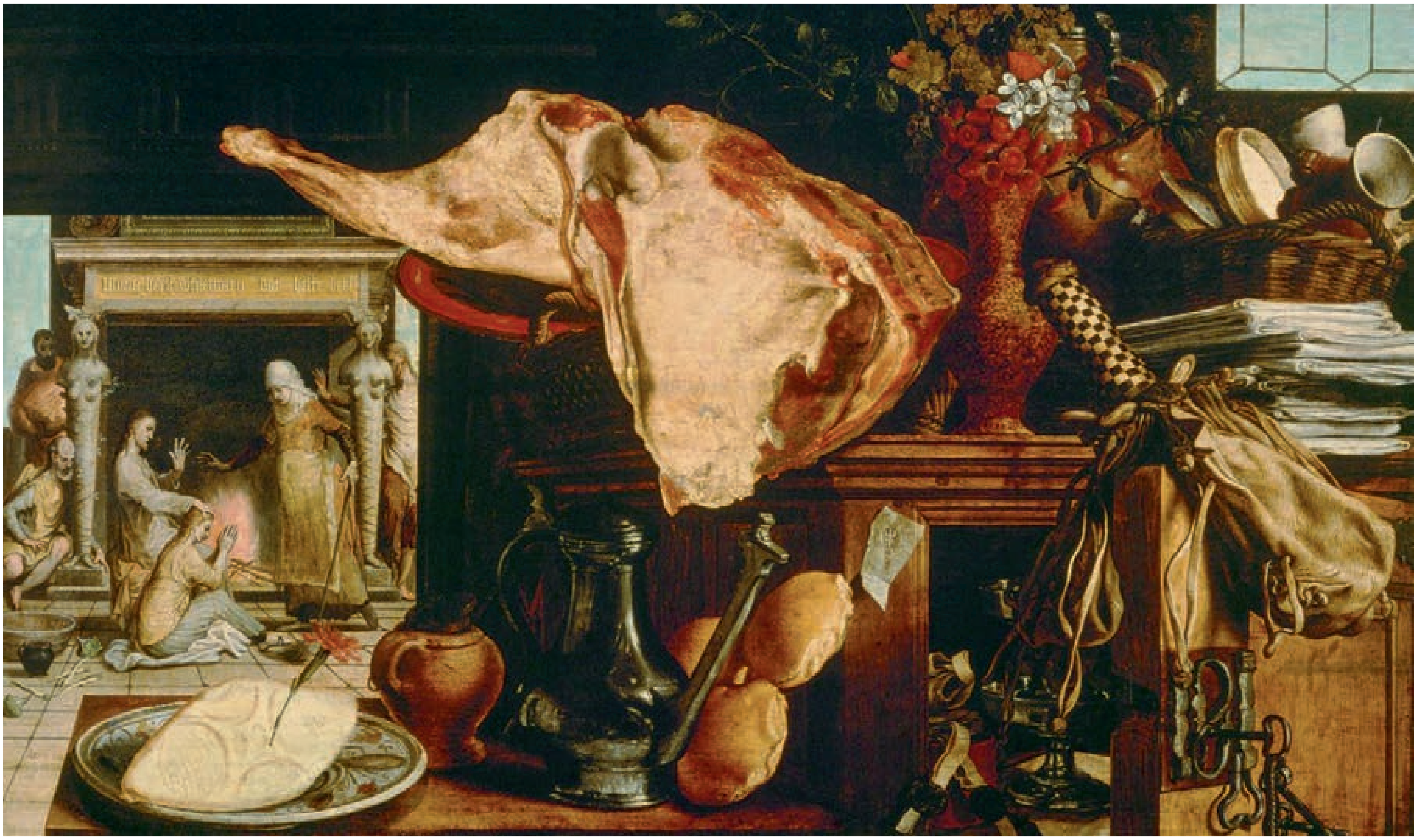


1.6 (Willem or) Adriaen Thomasz. Key, *St Jerome as a Scholar*, c. 1550
Oil on panel, 94.5 × 72.4 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, RF 2008-46

1.7 **Next page**
Pieter Aertsen, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1553
Oil on panel, 126 × 200 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen







1.8 Pieter Aertsen, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1553
Oil on panel, 126 × 200 cm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

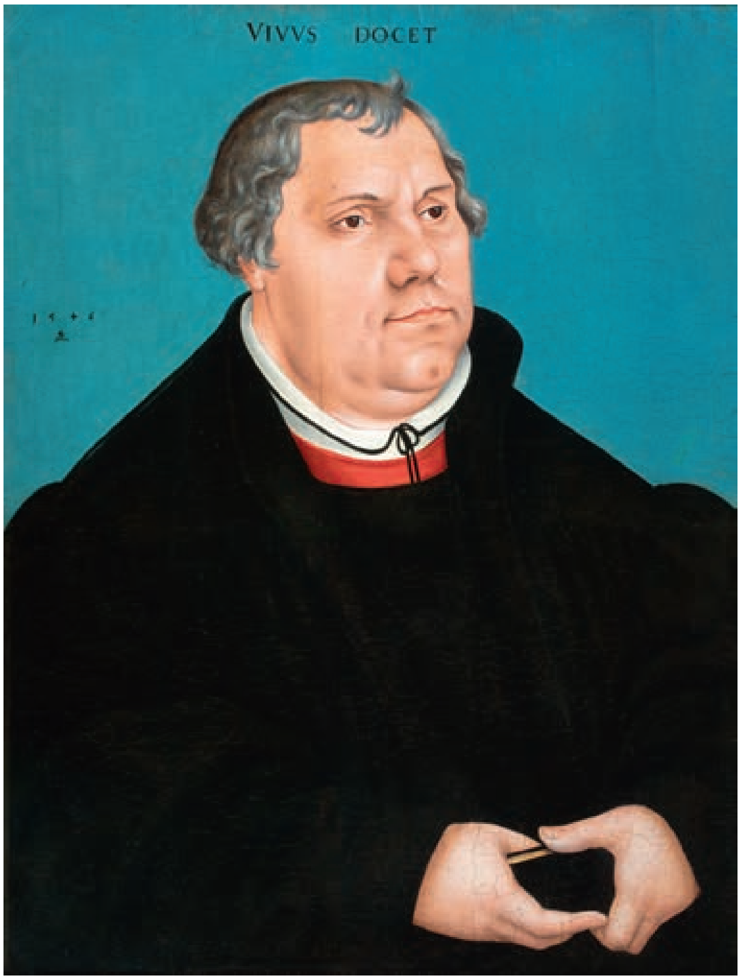
Influenced by the new group of art buyers, who also purchased works for their homes, new genres were now created in which the Christian message seems less prominent.[30] Religious scenes were sometimes pushed literally into the background. Holy figures in the paintings of Joachim Patinir (Dinant, c. 1475-80–Antwerp, 1524) and his followers in the first quarter of the sixteenth century were often depicted very small and secondary to the panoramic landscape (cats. 6–9). Yet even in representations of *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, which were popular works for residential kitchens and monastery refectories, the emphasis was increasingly on the secular, non-religious part of the composition, in this case the kitchen still life (cat. 28).

Pieter Aertsen (Amsterdam, 1507/08–Amsterdam, 1575) produced no fewer than seven versions of *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*. In paintings now in Utrecht (cat. 28) and Brussels, he still placed the biblical scene in the foreground,[31] whereas in a work in Rotterdam the foreground is given over to a lavish kitchen still life, the disciples are placed in the middle ground, and the New Testament action as such is rendered on a rather small scale in the background (fig. 1.7).[32] In a version in Vienna, meanwhile, the religious scene is limited to a view into another space in the background, which is, moreover, painted in monochrome (fig. 1.8).[33] The principal role in this instance is seemingly played by a large piece of meat and other still-life elements. But appearances can deceive: kitchen still lifes of this kind had a didactic function too (see cats. 28 and 39) in that they express the opposition between the material and the spiritual life – a *vita activa* and a *vita contemplativa*.[34] In the course of the seventeenth century, these ultimately spawned market scenes, kitchen still lifes and genre works, including brothels and peasant scenes without a biblical element.[35] Works of this kind continued to serve as a warning against an excessive and sinful life, while market and kitchen pieces belong to a highly period-specific genre that seems to have arisen in the first instance as a critique of Antwerp's wealth.[36]

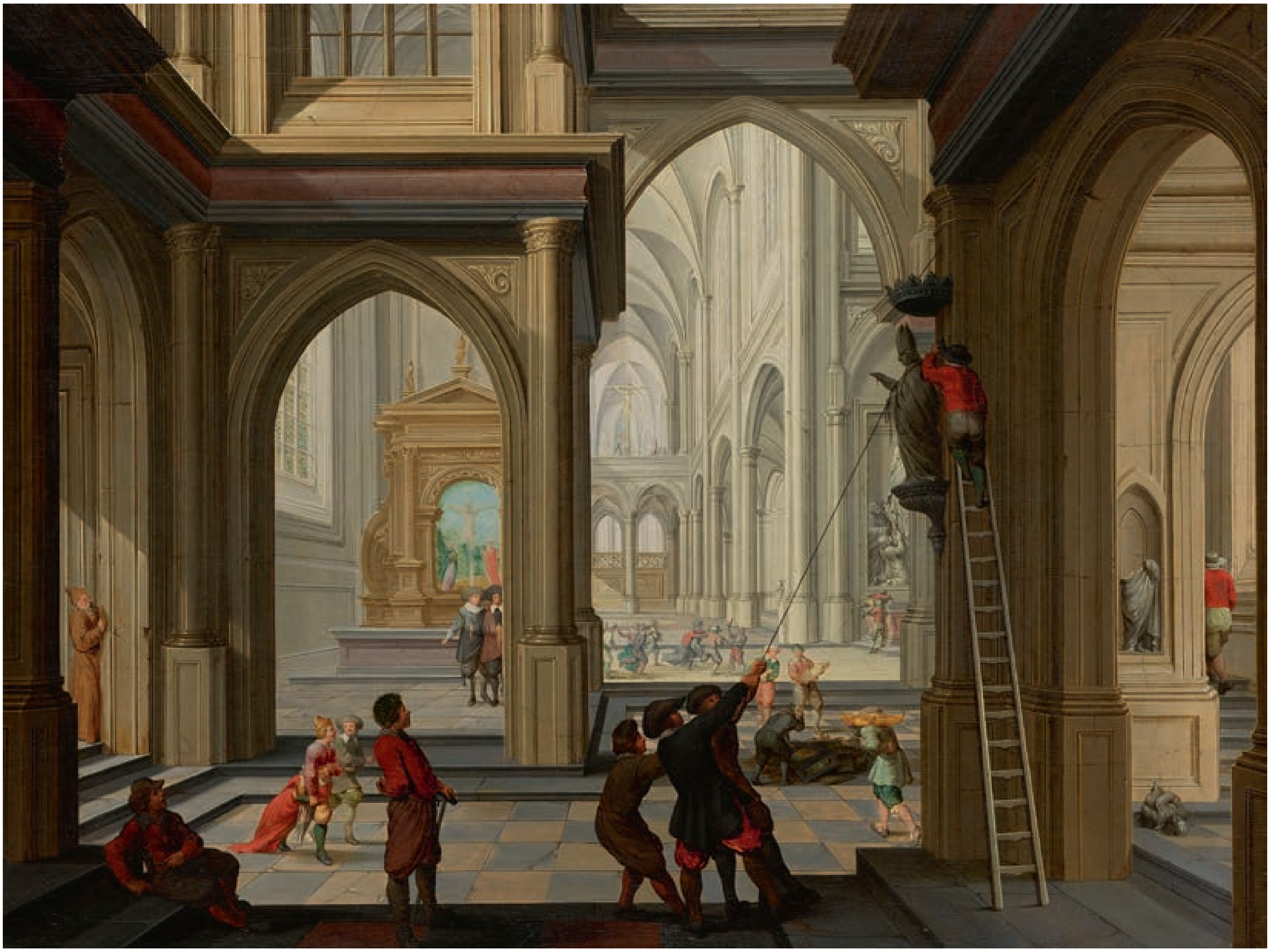
Pivotal moment

As of 1477, when Mary of Burgundy married Maximilian of Austria, the Low Countries (roughly the area of the modern Netherlands and Belgium) formally belonged to the house of Habsburg. Maximilian was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1486 and went on to add even more territories to his empire. He was succeeded by his grandson Charles (Ghent, 1500–Cuacos de Yuste, 1558),[37] who ruled over the Low Countries from 1506 to 1555 and was King Charles I of Spain from 1516 to 1556 and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V from 1519 to 1555.

Europe found itself in crisis in the second half of the sixteenth century. Poor harvests, an English trade embargo and other setbacks resulted in economic problems, just as religious unrest was intensifying. Adherents of new religious movements resisted certain Catholic practices and sought to reform the Church, ultimately leading to the Reformation and a schism between Protestants and Catholics. The reformers – most notably Martin Luther (Eisleben, 1483–Eisleben, 1546) (fig. 1.9) and John Calvin (Noyon, 1509–Geneva, 1564) – wanted to return to a 'pure' Christian religion centred on the Bible and the Word of God.[38]

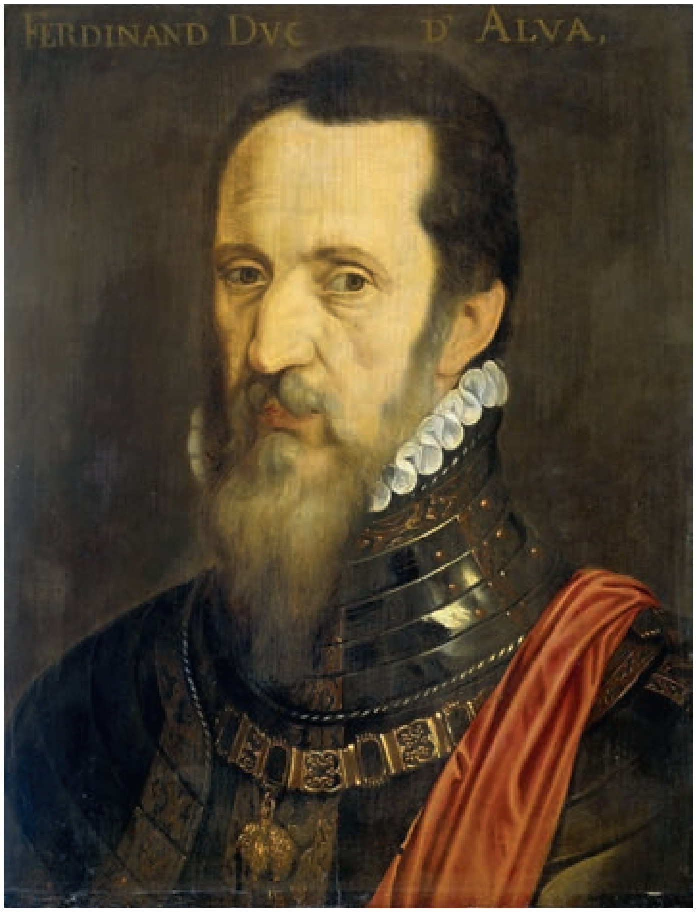


1.9 Lucas Cranach, *Portrait of Martin Luther*, 1546
Oil on panel, 63.3 × 48.5 cm, Utrecht
Museum Catharijneconvent, RMCC s107



1.10 Dirck Van Delen, *Iconoclastic Fury in a Church*, 1630
Oil on panel, 50 × 67 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-A-4992

Charles V (cat. 1) and above all his son and successor Philip II of Spain (cat. 52) – ruler of the sixteenth century's largest colonial empire – were strict Catholics who set out to create a realm with a central authority and a single religion, namely Roman Catholicism (see also cat. 70). In their eyes, Protestants were heretics to be hunted down and persecuted by the Inquisition. The situation grew extremely tense, and several nobles turned to the region's governess, Margaret of Parma, to beg her to end the violence inflicted on dissenters. During their audience with her, Margaret's councillor Charles of Berlaymont dismissed the supplicants, calling them 'des gueux' ('beggars') in French. The rebels would later adopt *geuzen* as their honorific in Dutch. As the situation continued to escalate, a Calvinist-inspired wave of iconoclastic violence erupted in 1566 (fig. 1.10), resulting in churches and monasteries in the Low Countries being brutally stripped of their religious works of art.[39]



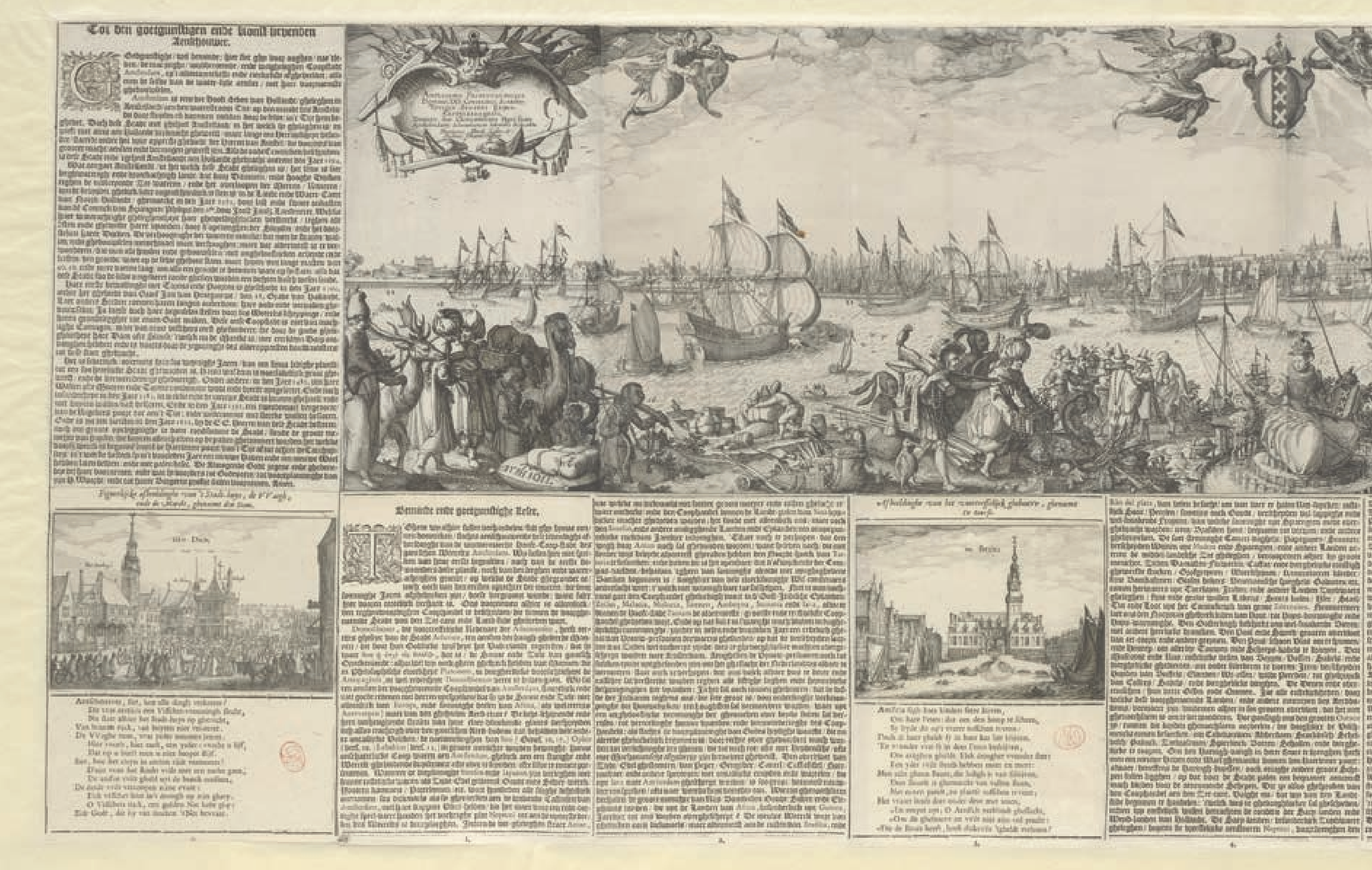
1.11 Copy after Willem Key, *Portrait of Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alva*, seventeenth century
Oil on panel, 49 x 38 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-A-18

King Philip responded by dispatching Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alva (fig. 1.11), to the territory to restore order by force (see also cats. 70–71). To fulfil his mission, Alva was provided with a 10,000-strong army. He arrived in Brussels on 22 August 1567 and replaced Margaret of Parma as governor. He and Philip then issued placards that made the persecution of Protestant 'heretics' even more severe and inhumane. This triggered a first wave of migration of thousands of people opposed to Spanish rule, including William of Orange and his family (see also cat. 70), mainly to Germany and England. William was committed to freedom of worship and conscience, and so Philip and Alva held him principally responsible for the unrest,[40] prompting the Prince of Orange to side with the *geuzen* in 1568 in their struggle against the Spanish. The 'Dutch Revolt' (1572–84) that now began was the first phase of what came to be called the 'Eighty Years War' (1568–1648). City after city rallied behind the Orange banner, and for many years William led the defence of Holland and Zeeland against the Spanish army. Amsterdam alone remained loyal to Spanish rule. In 1578, however, the year of the so-called 'Alteration', the city was obliged to make peace with the other provinces of the Netherlands (see also cat. 53), and on 26 May the civic authorities were replaced by Protestants and supporters of William of Orange.

The fall of Antwerp and rise of Amsterdam

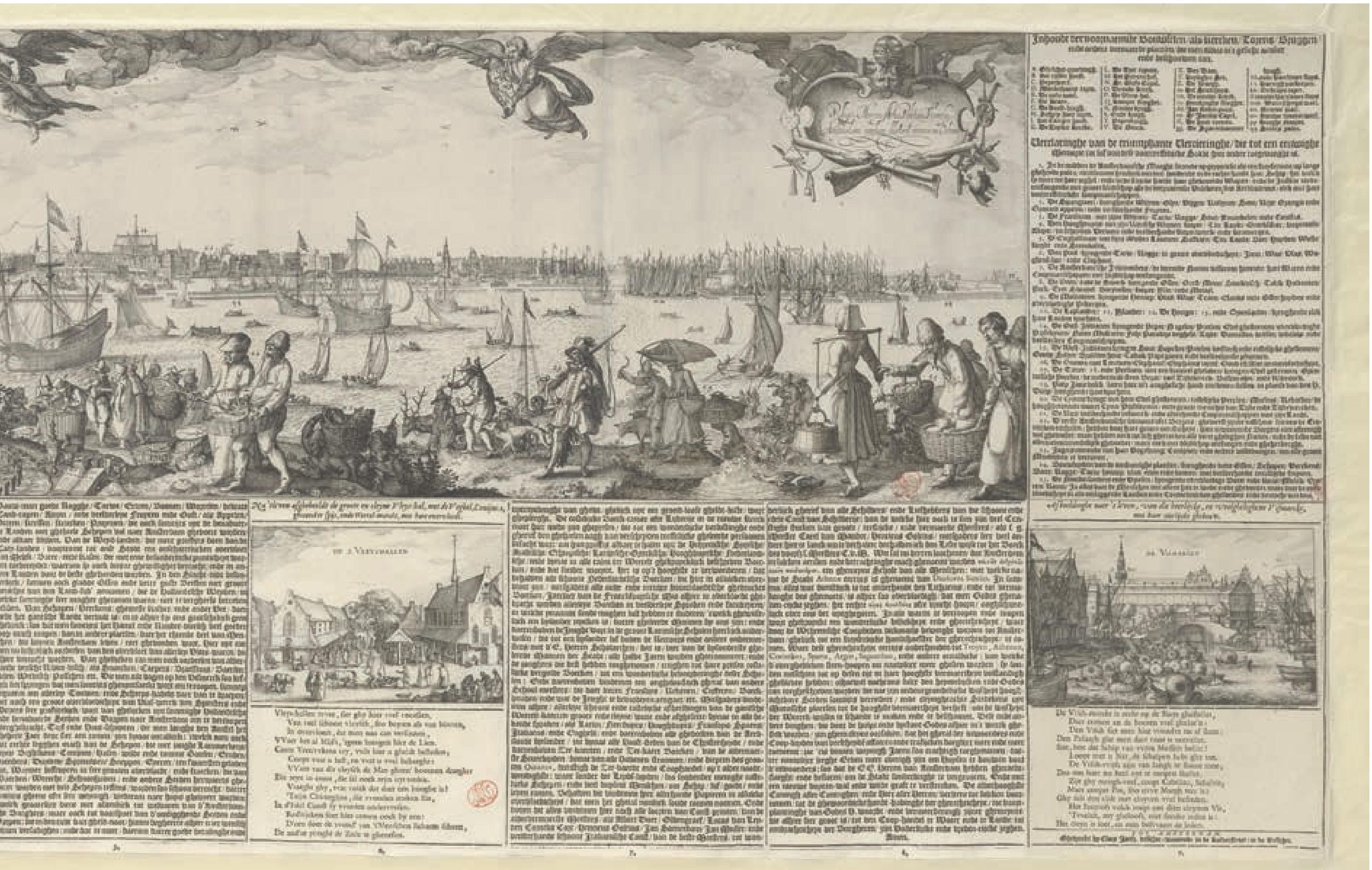
The Low Countries were initially united in their opposition to their Spanish ruler, but North and South grew increasingly apart after 1576 as the Reformation took deeper root in the Northern Netherlands than it did below the river Scheldt. In 1578, Philip II appointed Alexander Farnese (Rome, 1545–Arras, 1592), Duke of Parma, as the region's new governor. Farnese reconquered Tournai for the Spanish Empire in 1582, followed by Ypres, Bruges and Ghent in 1584 and Brussels, Mechelen and Antwerp in 1585.

Antwerp fell on 17 August 1585, triggering the permanent separation of the Northern and Southern Netherlands. The region to the north of Antwerp became the territory of Protestant insurgents, while Antwerp itself and everything south of the city on the river Scheldt remained Catholic and Spanish. The rebels did, however, deny the Spanish use of the Scheldt as a commercial artery, spelling the end of Antwerp as the economic heart of the Low Countries.

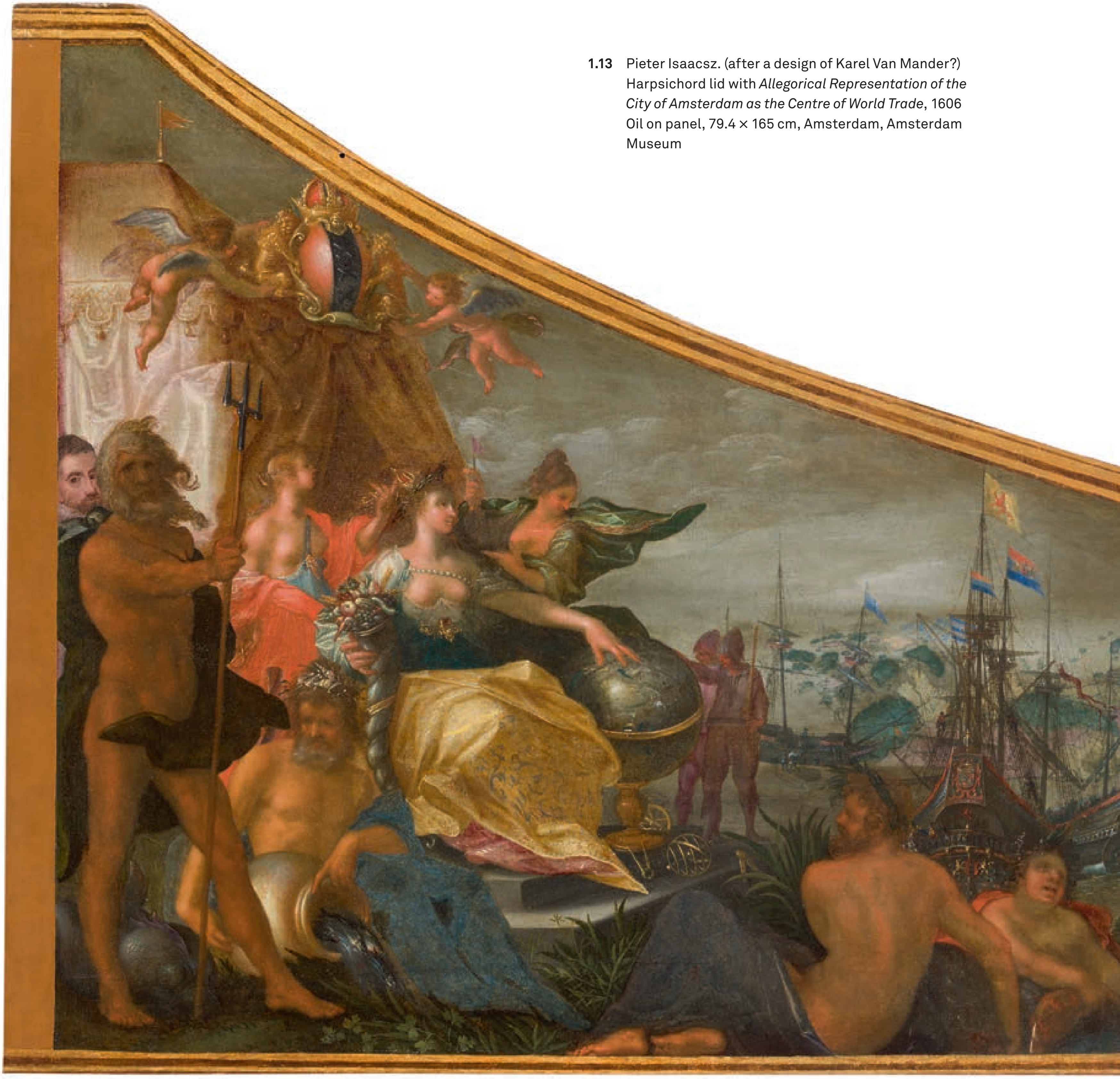


1.12 Claes Jansz. Visscher, *View of Amsterdam*, 1611
Etching and engraving with text in letterpress, 62.8 x 171.7 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-AO-20-22

At this point, virtually everyone who mattered abandoned the city in order to migrate north. Farnese gave the Protestants of Antwerp four years to decide whether to convert to Catholicism or leave.[41] In the space of those years, the city's population halved from 82,000 inhabitants in 1585 to 42,000 in 1589.[42] Of the 221 painters registered in the Guild of St Luke, twenty-seven per cent left, largely for Amsterdam. Yet most opted to stay put,[43] some preferring to convert to Catholicism rather than migrate. It was not easy, after all, to leave everything behind. The crisis made it impossible to sell their houses for a reasonable price, while few of them were familiar with the art markets in other cities. With its close trade links with Antwerp, the city of Middelburg in Zeeland might have seemed a more obvious destination. Yet most of the departing painters chose Amsterdam, even though it was still quite a nondescript town at the time. However, its favourable geographical position made it very attractive to émigré merchants drawn from a prosperous bourgeoisie. So it was that Amsterdam grew rapidly after the fall of Antwerp in 1585: in the space of just fifteen years, its population doubled to 60,000[44] and by 1660, just over half a century later, the number had risen again to more than 220,000 people, making Amsterdam the third largest city in Europe after London and Paris. Almost three quarters of its citizens were immigrants.



Barely twenty painters had been active in Amsterdam in the period from 1580 to 1585, compared to 221 in Antwerp.[45] They worked solely to commission and mostly produced history pieces and portraits. There was no art market like the one in Antwerp, and new genres such as still lifes, landscapes and genre pieces had yet to make their appearance in Amsterdam. With the arrival of the migrants from Flanders and Brabant, however, demand for art – especially for affordable paintings offered ready-made – also began to grow: demand that the painters who had fled Antwerp were ideally placed to meet. Compared with other Dutch cities like Delft, Utrecht and Haarlem, Amsterdam had further advantages besides to offer painters from elsewhere. The local painters' corporation, the Guild of St Luke, had only been established in 1579, and so its rules were less strict. And even though painters still had to register as citizens and pay their membership dues, the archives suggest that they could still do business even without complying with those rules.



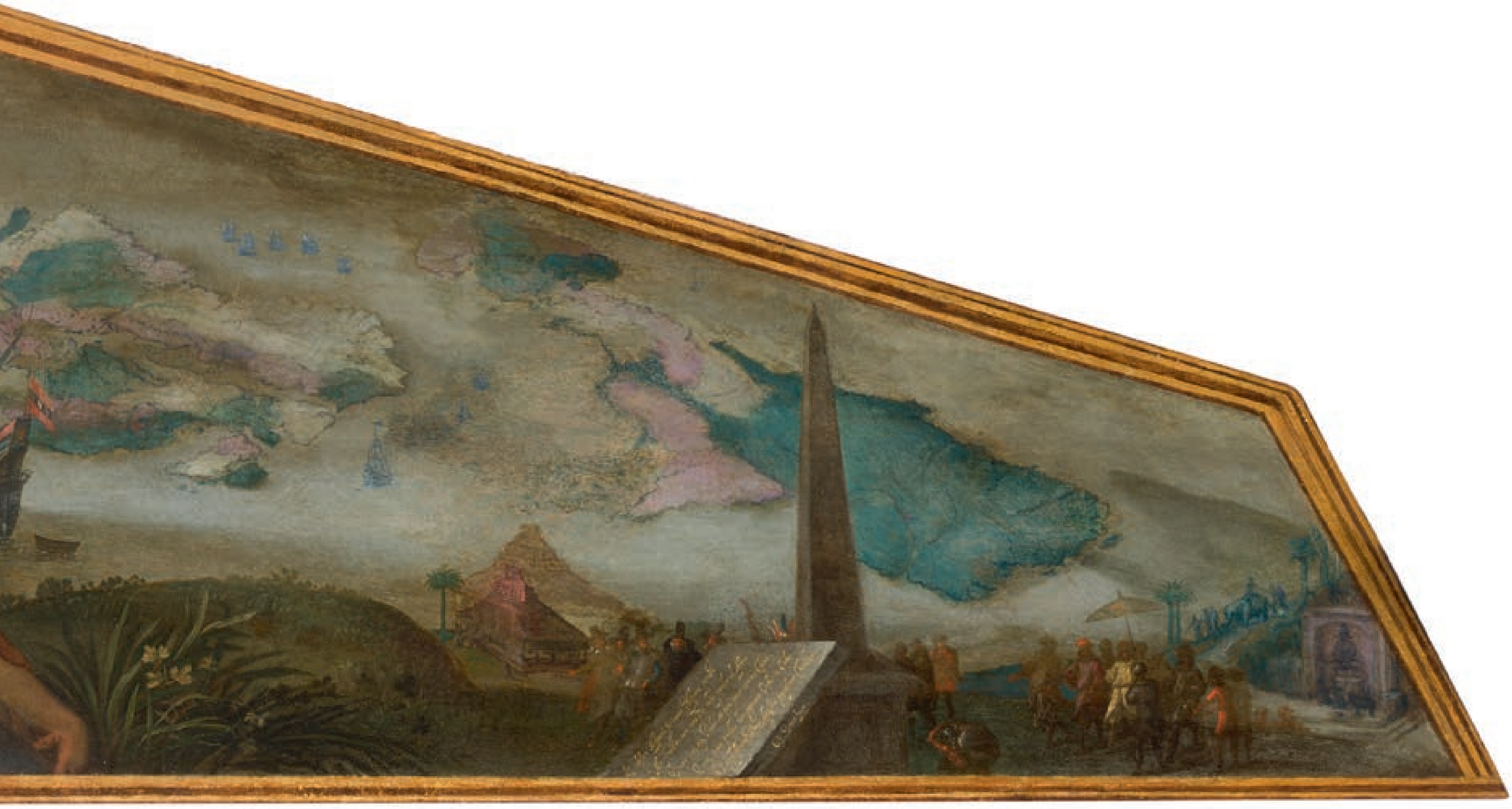
1.13 Pieter Isaacsz. (after a design of Karel Van Mander?) Harpsichord lid with *Allegorical Representation of the City of Amsterdam as the Centre of World Trade*, 1606 Oil on panel, 79.4 × 165 cm, Amsterdam, Amsterdam Museum

Amsterdam as metropolis

In the course of the seventeenth century, Amsterdam took over Antwerp's former position as North West Europe's leading economic, political and artistic centre (fig. 1.12).[46] It developed into a commercial metropolis and soon became known as the 'Antwerp of the North' (fig. 1.13). The city imported goods like timber and grain from the Baltic, along with iron ore, furs and cod. The salt used to preserve the fish was sourced in Portugal. In this way, Amsterdam became a staple market at which northern and southern products were stored, processed, sold and distributed across Europe. Other activities grew up around this trade, including cartography, printing, and banking and insurance.[47] The river IJ offered another link to the sea, with a harbour connected to the Damrak, a stretch of the river Amstel (cat. 90). This allowed sea-going vessels to sail right into the city as far as what is now Dam Square, Amsterdam's central hub.

Following the example of the Spanish and Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, speculative trading companies now dispatched explorers from Amsterdam to every corner of the world. The Dutch East India Company – *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC; see cat. 83) – was founded in 1602 to provide fitted-out ships, trade goods and money to buy costly spices. The success of this model led to the creation in 1621 of a West India Company (WIC) to target the Americas and West Africa. The Dutch Republic's merchant fleet, in which Amsterdam enjoyed the largest share, was bigger at the time than those of England, Scotland and France combined.

Amsterdam prospered, the art market flourished and demand for art increased explosively. Huge residences were constructed along the ring of canals dug since 1613 – a grandiose urban planning project that offered the clearest testimony to the extent of Amsterdam's newfound prosperity. Demand for history paintings, portraits, landscapes, seascapes, city views, genre scenes and still lifes to decorate these fine houses grew accordingly.[48] The city's social elite – most of whom were migrants – vied with one another to show off their wealth and status, an aspiration to which portrait painting lent itself perfectly.[49] The poet,



Colophon

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Cover
Sebastiaan Vrancx, *The Kranenhoofd and Werfpoort on the Scheldt in Antwerp*, 1616–18
Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 138.5 cm
Antwerp, The Phoebus Foundation

Inside
Jan Anthonisz. Van Ravesteyn, *Memorial Painting of Adriaen Van Maeusyenbroeck and Anna Elant* (detail), 1618
Oil on panel, 128 x 144.5 cm, Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, StCC s30 (acquired with the support of the Friends of the Catharijneconvent and the Vereniging Rembrandt)