

ASPECTS OF ART LECTURE

Rogier van der Weyden and his Workshop

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ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN was born at Tournai in about 1399, had settled in Brussels by 1435, was painter to the town of Brussels by 1436 and died in 1464. His career was prosperous and apparently uneventful and he achieved international fame in his own lifetime.¹ In 1445 a Spaniard called him ‘the great and famous Fleming’;² in 1450 a Ferrarese writer referred to him as ‘the excellent and illustrious painter’.³ Later in his life, he was described in superlatives: Nicholas of Cusa in 1453 wrote about him as ‘the greatest of painters’;⁴ while a Milanese ambassador in 1461 characterised him as ‘the most noble of painters’.⁵ His most

Read at Edinburgh 13 May 1993. © The British Academy 1994.

¹ M. Davies, *Rogier van der Weyden* (London, 1972).

² ‘Hoc oratorium à Magistro Rogel, magno, & famoso Flandresco fuit depictum’: ‘Libro del Becerro’ of the Charterhouse of Miraflores, now lost but transcribed in A. Ponz, *Viage de España*, vol. 12 (Madrid, 1783), p. 58.

³ ‘ducatos viginti auri quos dictus Paulus solvit... excelenti et claro pictori magistro Rogerio...’: ‘Registro dei Mandati’ of Leonello d’Este, Marquis of Ferrara, printed in the exhibition catalogue *Le Muse e il principe, Arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano* (Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan, 1991), p. 295.

⁴ *De Visione Dei*, written in 1453, the relevant passage being given by E. Panofsky, ‘Facies illa Rogeri maximi pictoris’, in *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr*, ed. K. Weitzman (Princeton, 1955), pp. 392–400.

⁵ ‘Magistro Johanetto hé corso a grande fatica cum Magistro Rogero, pictore nobilissimo...’: Prospero da Camogli to Cicco Simonetta, Brussels, March 1461 (P. M. Kendall & V. Ilardi, *Dispatches with related Documents of Milanese Ambassadors in France and Burgundy, 1450–1483*, vol. 2 (Athens, Ohio, 1971), p. 201).

celebrated paintings, four huge panels of *Scenes of Justice*, painted for the Town Hall of Brussels, were destroyed in 1695 and are known only from descriptions and from a very approximate copy in tapestry.⁶ His surviving authenticated pictures are: the *Miraflores Triptych*, now in Berlin, given in 1445 by the King of Castile to the Charterhouse of Miraflores outside Burgos;⁷ the *Descent from the Cross*, now in the Prado (Figure 1), painted before 1443 for the Great Archers' Guild of Louvain;⁸ and the *Crucifixion*, now in the Escorial, given by Rogier himself in about 1458 to the Charterhouse of Scheut near Brussels.⁹

Other paintings and drawings are attributed to Rogier because they resemble those three pictures. Few of the attributed works can be accurately dated and, not surprisingly, there is little agreement among art historians over attributions or over the chronology of Rogier's production. The situation is further complicated by the likelihood that Rogier, a successful and influential artist, would have run a large workshop in order to meet the demand for his paintings.

Very little is known about Rogier's assistants. The Brussels Guild allowed a master painter to take only one apprentice at a time, though, when that apprentice was in his fourth and final year, the master was permitted to take another.¹⁰ Most assistants would have been journeymen: painters who had completed apprenticeships but who were unable or unwilling to become masters of the Guild. Only those who had purchased the status of master were empowered to do business on their own accounts.¹¹ The Brussels Guild seems never to have

⁶ A. M. Cetto, 'Der Berner Traian- und Herkinbald-Teppich', *Jahrbuch des Bernischen Historischen Museums*, 43/44 (1963-4), 5-230.

⁷ R. Grosshans, 'Rogier van der Weyden. Der Marienaltar aus der Kartause Miraflores', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 23 (1981), 49-112.

⁸ Davies, *Rogier*, pp. 223-6, Pls. 1-9; J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, J. Dijkstra & R. van Schoute, *Underdrawing in Paintings of the Rogier van der Weyden and Master of Flémalle Groups* (*Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 41, Zwolle, 1992), pp. 18-22, 137-43.

⁹ Davies, *Rogier*, p. 211, Pls. 10-12; M. Soenen, 'Un renseignement inédit sur ... le Calvaire de la chartreuse de Scheut', in the exhibition catalogue *Rogier van der Weyden* (Musée communal, Brussels, 1979), pp. 126-8; van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 23-5, 144-51.

¹⁰ Regulations of 1387, printed by F. Favresse, 'Les premiers statuts connus des métiers bruxellois du duc et de la ville', *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'histoire*, 111 (1946), 37-91, (p. 78 (8)); see also C. Mathieu, 'Le métier des peintres à Bruxelles aux XIV^{me} et XV^{me} siècles', in *Bruxelles au XV^{me} siècle* (Brussels, 1953), pp. 221-35.

¹¹ L. Campbell, 'The Early Netherlandish Painters and their Workshops', in D. Hollanders-Favart & R. van Schoute, eds., *Le dessin sous-jacent dans la peinture, Colloque III, 6-7-8 septembre 1979, Le problème Maître de Flémalle-Van der Weyden* (Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut supérieur d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art, Document de travail 11, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981), pp. 43-61.



Figure 1. Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross*, oak panel, 220.5 x 259.5 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

restricted the number of journeymen employed by one master and most of Rogier's assistants were probably journeymen. An unspecified number of his assistants or 'ouvriers' went with his wife to Cambrai in 1459 to deliver a large triptych to the Abbey of St. Aubert.¹² Rogier presumably trained his nephew Louis Le Duc, who became a master at Tournai in 1453 and at Bruges in 1461,¹³ and his son Pieter van der Weyden, who was born in about 1437 and who was still living in 1514.¹⁴ Zanetto Bugatto, a Milanese court painter, was sent to Brussels in 1460–1 to be instructed by Rogier. Though he and Rogier quarrelled, their differences were settled after the Dauphin of France intervened; Zanetto stayed with Rogier until 1463 and probably worked with the other assistants.¹⁵ There is some slight historical evidence, as well as strong stylistic evidence, to support the idea that Memlinc spent some time in Rogier's workshop before settling in Bruges in 1465.¹⁶ Memlinc is the only one of these artists whose paintings have been identified.

By 1444, Rogier was living in the Cantersteen, where his workshop would have been established and where he owned two adjoining properties, one with an imposing entrance and both acquired from an alderman's heirs.¹⁷ Some notion of the contents of the workshop can be formed from an inventory taken in 1445 of the goods of a less successful Brussels painter, Jan van der Stockt. He owned seven 'wooden tripods', clearly easels, eighteen pictures or panels and four

¹² A. Wauters, 'Roger Vanderweyden, ses oeuvres, ses élèves et ses descendants', *Revue universelle des arts*, 1 (1855), 421–33, 2 (1855–6), 5–36, 85–99, 165–76, 245–65, 326–38, (p. 30 note 1).

¹³ A. Schouteet, *De Vlaamse primitieven te Brugge. Bronnen voor de schilderkunst te Brugge tot de dood van Gerard David*, vol. 1 (Fontes historiae artis neerlandicae, 2, Brussels, 1989), pp. 182–3.

¹⁴ A. Pinchart, 'Roger de la Pasture dit Van der Weyden', *Bulletin des Commissions royales d'art et d'archéologie*, 6 (1867), 408–94, pp. 461–7.

¹⁵ F. Malaguzzi Valeri, *Pittori lombardi del Quattrocento*, *Ricerche* (Milan, 1902), pp. 126–7; Kendall & Ilardi, *Dispatches*, p. 201.

¹⁶ M. J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, trans. H. Norden, 14 vols (Leyden & Brussels, 1967–76), vol. 6, pp. 14–16; idem, 'Noch etwas über das Verhältnis Roger van der Weydens zu Memling', *Oud Holland*, 61 (1946), 11–19.

¹⁷ Rogier's house with its 'groete poirte' had previously belonged to Renier van Herzele; Rogier also owned an adjoining property which he acquired in 1443–4 from the wife of Willem van Herzele (Wauters, 'Roger', pp. 35–6; Pinchart, 'Roger', pp. 472–4). Renier van Herzele was alderman of Brussels in 1402–3 and 1410–11; his son Willem van Herzele was receiver of Vilvoorde and Tervuren in 1415–17 and an alderman of Brussels in 1435–6 and 1440–1 (A. Henne & A. Wauters, *Histoire de la ville de Bruxelles*, 3 vols (Brussels, 1845), vol. 2, pp. 516–20; J. T. de Raadt, *Sceaux armoriés des Pays-Bas et des pays avoisinants*, 4 vols (Brussels, 1898–1903), vol. 2, p. 72).

stone slabs for grinding colours.¹⁸ Jan's property passed to his son Vrancke, who was also a painter and who certainly knew Rogier. Vrancke van der Stockt, making his will in 1489, bequeathed to his two painter sons all his possessions pertaining to the craft of painting, including his planes, frames, grinding slabs and brushes, his unfinished pictures — classed as large, small and very small — and his drawings.¹⁹ The painter's drawings were of course vitally important as reference material and were often singled out for special mention in wills.²⁰

When an important commission was placed, the artist would have produced a fairly elaborate design so that the patron, before signing the contract, would have known what he would be getting.²¹ Rogier obviously followed this practice in his triptych of the *Nativity* (Berlin), where scrolls appear in the underdrawing but were never painted. They reappear, however, in a version of the triptych painted by a later follower.²² The only reasonable explanation seems to be that Rogier had provided for his patron a design in which the scrolls were present. The design was then transferred to the panels but Rogier, his patron or both together decided against the scrolls. It is fairly common to find that copyists appear to follow underdrawings rather than the finished painted surfaces of their originals.²³ In fact, both the copies and the underdrawings depend on common sources, the preliminary designs, which, with sensible economy, painters kept for possible re-use. Stored

¹⁸ P. J. Goetschalckx, 'Vier ongekende schilders der XV^e eeuw', *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis bijzonderlijk van het aloude Hertogdom Brabant*, 2 (1903), 239–53, pp. 240–1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 245–9. On 6 September 1453 Vrancke van der Stockt and Rogier witnessed a deed signed in a dining-room in Rogier's house: E. Frankignoulle, 'Notes pour servir à l'histoire de l'art en Brabant', *Annales de la Société royale d'archéologie de Bruxelles*, 39 (1935), 13–204, p. 141.

²⁰ Campbell, 'The Early Netherlandish Painters and their Workshops', p. 53.

²¹ A sixteenth-century drawing, by Pieter Pourbus, may be taken as representative of this type: this is his drawing of 1555 for his 'Van Belle Triptych', discussed and reproduced by P. Huvenne, *Pierre Pourbus, peintre brugeois 1524–1584* (exhibition catalogue, Memlingmuseum, Bruges, 1984), pp. 154–9. See also R. Guislain-Wittermann, 'L'oeuvre-clef du Maître de la Légende de Sainte Barbe', *Bulletin de l'Institut royal du patrimoine artistique*, 17 (1978–9), 89–105.

²² The triptych of the *Nativity*, its underdrawing and the version by a follower (The Cloisters, New York) are discussed by R. Grosshans, 'Infrarotuntersuchungen zum Studium der Unterzeichnung auf dem Berliner Altären von Rogier van der Weyden', *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, 19 (1983), 137–77; see also van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 159–64.

²³ J. Dijkstra, *Origineel en kopie. Een onderzoek naar de navolging van de Meester van Flémalle en Rogier van der Weyden* (Academisch proefschrift, Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 55–65.

with the other workshop drawings, they were evidently available to be copied by assistants.

Less elaborate pictures may have been commissioned by clients who looked through collections of pattern drawings of popular subjects and picked out those that they preferred. Paintings of the desired subjects could then have been made from the patterns, with any additions or alterations that the clients might have wanted. Two *Virgins*, deriving from a design by Rogier, differ hardly at all; yet one was painted for Martin Reyngout, a Bruges apothecary, whose coat of arms appears on the window pane;²⁴ while the other was for a member of the van der Burch family of Furnes.²⁵

Other drawings, for example, of heads, hands, feet, animals, plants, precious patterned textiles, draperies or interiors, seem to have been kept in the workshop and used whenever suitable occasions arose. A silverpoint drawing of the Virgin, possibly by Rogier himself (Louvre), was re-used in reverse, and then slightly varied, in a painting by a follower (St Louis).²⁶ In Rogier's *Columba Triptych* (Figure 2), the Child's feet are so similar to His feet in Rogier's *St. Luke drawing the Virgin* (Boston) that they must be based on the same drawing,²⁷ just as the dogs in the *Columba Triptych* and the *Seven Sacraments* (Antwerp) must originate from common sources.²⁸ The same interior houses the Virgin in an *Annunciation* (Louvre) by a follower and a Count of Edessa in a miniature by another follower, an illuminator who evidently had access to Rogier's workshop drawings.²⁹

The drawings accumulating in an artist's workshop could have been made for many purposes: some were without a doubt studies from life; others may have been preliminary sketches; others would have been finished contract designs; while still others may have been copies after works by different artists. Stocks of drawings passed from generation

²⁴ Brussels: C. van den Bergen-Pantens, 'L'héraldique au service de l'étude d'un tableau des Musées royaux', *Bulletin des Musées royaux des beaux-arts*, 15 (1966), 243–6.

²⁵ Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge (Mass.): C. T. Eisler, *Les Primitifs flamands, I. Corpus 4, New England Museums* (Brussels, 1961), pp. 13–27.

²⁶ M. W. Ainsworth & M. Faries, 'Northern Renaissance Paintings, The Discovery of Invention', *Bulletin of the Saint Louis Art Museum*, NS, 18 (1, Summer 1986), 12–13.

²⁷ Davies, *Rogier*, Pls. 61–9, 76.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Pls. 54–7.

²⁹ For the *Annunciation*, see Davies, *Rogier*, Pl. 21; the miniature is in the 'Chroniques de Jérusalem abrégées', Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, cod. 2533, f. 15: O. Pächt, U. Jenni & D. Thoss, *Die illuminierte Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Flämische Schule I* (Vienna, 1983), vol. 2, Pl. 118.



Figure 2. Rogier van der Weyden, *Columba Triptych*, oak panels, 138 × 153 × 70 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

to generation and indeed some, if not all, of Rogier's workshop drawings came into the possession of his grandson Goswijn van der Weyden, who made good practical use of his inheritance in his *Donation of Kalmthout* painted in the 1510s.³⁰

I assume that Rogier usually delegated to his assistants routine, tedious and minor tasks, which might well have included working up underdrawings from finished contract designs. It may be that, as his fame grew and as demands on his time increased, he would have delegated more and more and that highly trained assistants, working under his supervision, from his designs and with his pattern drawings, could have taken over responsibility for many commissions.

It is a delicate problem to make distinctions between Rogier's unaided work and work partly delegated to assistants; between work produced by assistants after his designs and under his supervision and work by gifted assistants who had left his workshop; or indeed between the work of former assistants and that of painters strongly influenced by Rogier and imitating his style. His authenticated pictures set superbly high standards of design and execution. It is the standard of design that must be applied to separate Rogier's own pictures, even if parts were executed by assistants, from paintings by imitators.³¹

Standards of design are of course difficult to judge objectively but to some extent they can be discussed in terms of geometric harmonies. This is not to suggest that Rogier worked out his compositions with a compass, ruler and set square, but rather to say that his instinctive feeling for beautiful shapes can be partly explained by reference to the harmonious patterns of simple lines such as those of the circle and rectangle. Many commentators have noticed the circular rhythms of the Prado *Descent from the Cross*, notably the great circle formed partly by the contours of the Magdalen's right forearm, back and falling mantle. This circle dictates the angle at which the head of the man next to the Magdalen is placed: his nose is a radius of the circle. His head was underdrawn in a different position but, when it was moved, it was shifted upwards along the same radial axis. The Virgin's right hand was underdrawn to echo directly Christ's right hand but has been turned into an arc to echo the rhythm of the Magdalen's circle.³²

Rogier's compositions are often built up on patterns of intersecting

³⁰ Campbell, 'The Early Netherlandish Painters and their Workshops', p. 53 and references.

³¹ See L. Campbell, *Van der Weyden* (London, 1979), p. 9.

³² Van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 139, 141.

diagonals and frequently the principal diagonals, linking the corners of the panels, determine the angle of the diagonal accents. Almost invariably, tall narrow panels will have steeper diagonal stresses than broader panels. In the Prado *Virgin and Child* (Figure 3), for example, the Child's left leg, the cover of the book beneath the Virgin's left hand, the highlighted edge of her mantle are all almost parallel to the main diagonal; while in the Washington *Portrait of a Lady*, the veils on our left are parallel to the main diagonal, while many of the contours are simplified as straight lines or arcs.³³

The pattern-making is not an end in itself. Rogier was interested not merely in the decorative but also in the emotional forces that can be generated by patterns. In the *Descent from the Cross*, the geometric rhythms create a sense of immutability quite at variance with the precarious, falling poses of most of the figures, and this is one among the many factors that create the terrible unease which the *Descent* conveys. In his Beaune *Last Judgement*, the damned outnumber the elect not, I think, because Rogier took a pessimistic view of human nature but because he wished to contrast the orderly, open pattern made by the elect with the chaotic disorder of the damned, whom unseen forces draw into Hell.³⁴ In the *Annunciation* of his *Columba Triptych* (Figure 4), many of the lines — the step, the bed, the right hands of the angel and the Virgin — run parallel to the principal diagonal; there are many vertical accents too and all stress the harmony of the relationships between the angel and the Virgin, between them and their surroundings. The Virgin, rising to greet the angel, opens her legs in an extraordinary balletic movement which re-echoes and is emphasised by the parallel diagonals and verticals. Pattern once again stresses the crux of the narrative.

Basic points of harmonious composition, if consciously applied, can be taught: some of Rogier's pupils may have been talented enough to imitate his skill at pattern-making. The use of pattern for expressive effect is more difficult to describe and communicate. As far as I can judge, none of Rogier's pupils, not even Memlinc, who was probably the most gifted of them, was able to follow his master far in this direction. The profundity of thought behind the pattern-making of such pictures as the *Descent from the Cross* appears to have eluded them

³³ Davies, *Rogier*, Pl. 107.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Fig. 11 and Pls. 40–48.



Figure 3. Rogier van der Weyden, *Virgin and Child*, panel, 100 × 52 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



Figure 4. Rogier van der Weyden. *Annunciation*, oak panel, 138 × 70 cm, left wing of the *Columba Triptych* (see Figure 2).

and for that reason their imitations of his work seem superficial and without power.

The six pictures associated with van der Weyden and his followers in the National Gallery in London form a particularly interesting group and I have been privileged to examine them with all the facilities and help that anyone could desire. I want now to present some of the results of our investigations of three of the pictures and to consider the light they cast on the question of Rogier's workshop.³⁵

The *Magdalen Reading* (Plate 1) is a fragment, measuring 62.2 by 54.4 cm, cut at an unknown date and for unknown reasons from a large altar-piece of the *Virgin and Child with Saints*. The back and arm of the Virgin's throne are visible at the upper left edge; the kneeling figure is St. John the Evangelist; the standing man, holding prayer beads, is probably St. Joseph. Another fragment, showing his head, is in the Gulbenkian Foundation at Lisbon (Figure 5). A late fifteenth-century drawing, evidently a selective copy of parts of the altar-piece, gives some idea of its original appearance.³⁶ The small figures in the landscape have no apparent narrative significance.

The Magdalen is identified by her ointment jar. Her expensive clothes, particularly her cloth of gold under-dress, refer to her sinful past. Her figure is arranged so that it forms a semicircle, the centre of which is in the region of her right knee; the axis of her head is perpendicular to its diameter. Her geometric containment reflects her absorption in her book. This is the Mary Magdalen about whom Martha asked, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?'³⁷ Such an exploitation of geometric harmonies for expressive purpose may be taken to be typical of Rogier.

Reflectograms reveal an astonishingly bold and rapidly brushed in underdrawing (Plates 2, 8), similar in style to that of the Prado *Descent from the Cross* where, in the head of St. John, the skill and speed with which the hair is suggested and the continuous zigzags scribbled in to suggest the shadows on his neck and cheek reveal an even greater confidence and control.³⁸ The underdrawing of the Magdalen's head,

³⁵ The three pictures not discussed here, NG 1086, *Christ appearing to the Virgin*, NG 1433, *Portrait of a Lady*, and NG 6394, *St Ivo* (?), are nonetheless of great interest in connection with the question of Rogier's workshop.

³⁶ Davies, *Rogier*, pp. 218–19, Pls. 16–18. The drawing (Stockholm) is discussed by M. Comblen-Sonkes and reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Rogier van der Weyden* (Musée communal, Brussels, 1979), pp. 162–3, Pl. 26.

³⁷ Luke 10: 40.

³⁸ Reflectogram reproduced in van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, p. 18.

especially her nose, mouth and chin, resembles that of the Virgin in the Escorial *Crucifixion*.³⁹ The point of the Magdalen's nose has been diminished in the painting. Otherwise, as in the *Descent* and the *Crucifixion*, there are remarkably few changes. Because of their skill and consistency, these underdrawings are probably by Rogier himself. Since there are few changes, I assume that designs had already been made and approved before being transferred to the panels and that Rogier undertook to do the underdrawings himself because those pictures were of particular interest to him. The preliminary design would have been smaller and Rogier had at least one slight problem when he came to enlarge it in his underdrawing. At the point where the Magdalen's left hand meets her book, its covering cloth, her skirt and the background, there is an area of scribble where he seems, in a rare fit of impatience, to have postponed resolving the relationships (Plate 8).

The painting itself reveals no such impatience. The text columns of the Magdalen's book are ruled in red, but the rulings are invisible to the naked eye. The bookmarks are just discernibly of different colours: one blue, one red, and two green. On the right shoe of the man in the background (his left shoe is a restorer's reconstruction) is a tiny fleur-de-lis. Magnified enormously, the small background figures, and their reflections in the river, look like the work of some extremely gifted Impressionist. As the lady on the left is just over 1.5 cm high, this is a tribute to Rogier's immense skill, which is also apparent in the lips or in the fur on the Magdalen's dress, striped wet in wet into the greys of the first painting and then dragged to give a feathered effect. In the cloth of gold, one can admire the sureness of his touch, see how impasto is used and calculate the order in which the brush strokes were applied. St. Joseph's beads are amber-coloured on a green string. The principal highlights, on our left, are yellow with intense lead-white dots at their centres; the secondary lights, on our right, are red with dots of translucent white, possibly containing chalk, rarely used as a pigment. The technical skill suggests that Rogier himself painted all the principal parts of this fragment. He could have left the cupboard, the architecture and the floor to his assistants and indeed the nail-heads in the floor are painted according to two differing conventions, perhaps by two different assistants. The details cannot have been fully appreciated when the painting was in place on its altar. Rogier included

³⁹ Reflectogram reproduced in van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, p. 22.



Figure 5. Rogier van der Weyden, *St. Joseph* (fragment), oak panel, 20 × 18 cm, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.



Figure 6. Rogier van der Weyden, detail from the *Columba Triptych* (see Figure 2).

them perhaps because he wanted to impress a very demanding patron but more probably because he was in love with his picture.

Apart from the translucent white, there is nothing unusual about the pigments used. The medium is linseed oil⁴⁰ and the impasted areas in the cloth of gold indicate that the oil was employed without any turpentine-like thinner: which makes the technical skill seem all the more miraculous. The *Magdalen*, painted probably in about 1435, seems to have been designed, underdrawn and painted by Rogier himself, perhaps with some help from assistants in minor, routine areas of the painting.

The original design evidently remained in the workshop. The *Magdalen* herself was repeated, in reverse, as a gap-filling figure in the right wing of the *Seven Sacraments*;⁴¹ while St. Joseph reappeared as the oldest king in the *Columba Triptych* (Figure 6). The two heads correspond so closely as to suggest that a very detailed version of this face remained in the workshop for many years.

The *Exhumation of St. Hubert* (Plate 3), which measures 88.2 by 81.2 cm, was noticed by a French traveller in the 1620s, when it was in the chapel of St. Hubert in the church of St. Gudule in Brussels. It then formed a diptych with the *Dream of Pope Sergius*, now in the Getty Museum (Figure 7), and both panels were attributed to Rogier.⁴² As a diptych, they make no narrative sense. St. Hubert was exhumed in 825. The *Dream*, which was on the right of the *Exhumation*, depicts events that took place over a century earlier, around 705, the beginning of St. Hubert's career as a bishop. It seems unlikely that the panels were designed as a diptych and more probable that they were all that remained of a series, broken up during the religious troubles of the sixteenth century.

The chapel of St. Hubert was the joint foundation of Jan Cools and Jan Vrientschap,⁴³ who were brothers-in-law.⁴⁴ Vrientschap, Dean of the Mercers' Guild in 1423–4 and town councillor in 1428–9 and 1433–4, supposedly obtained permission from Rome in 1432 to found the chapel.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Unpublished report by R. White and J. Pilc, 11 December 1992.

⁴¹ Davies, *Rogier*, Pl. 57.

⁴² M. Davies, *Les Primitifs flamands, I. Corpus 3, The National Gallery, London, II* (Antwerp, 1954), pp. 179–93.

⁴³ Archives générales du Royaume, Brussels, ASG 5162, Pieter van der Heyden, 'Liber Capellaniarum' (datable between 1466 and 1474), f. 19 v.

⁴⁴ Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, MS II 6603, f. 42 v.

⁴⁵ Henne & Wauters, *Histoire... de Bruxelles*, vol. 2, pp. 519–20; vol. 3, pp. 94–5; Davies, *Les Primitifs flamands*, p. 188.

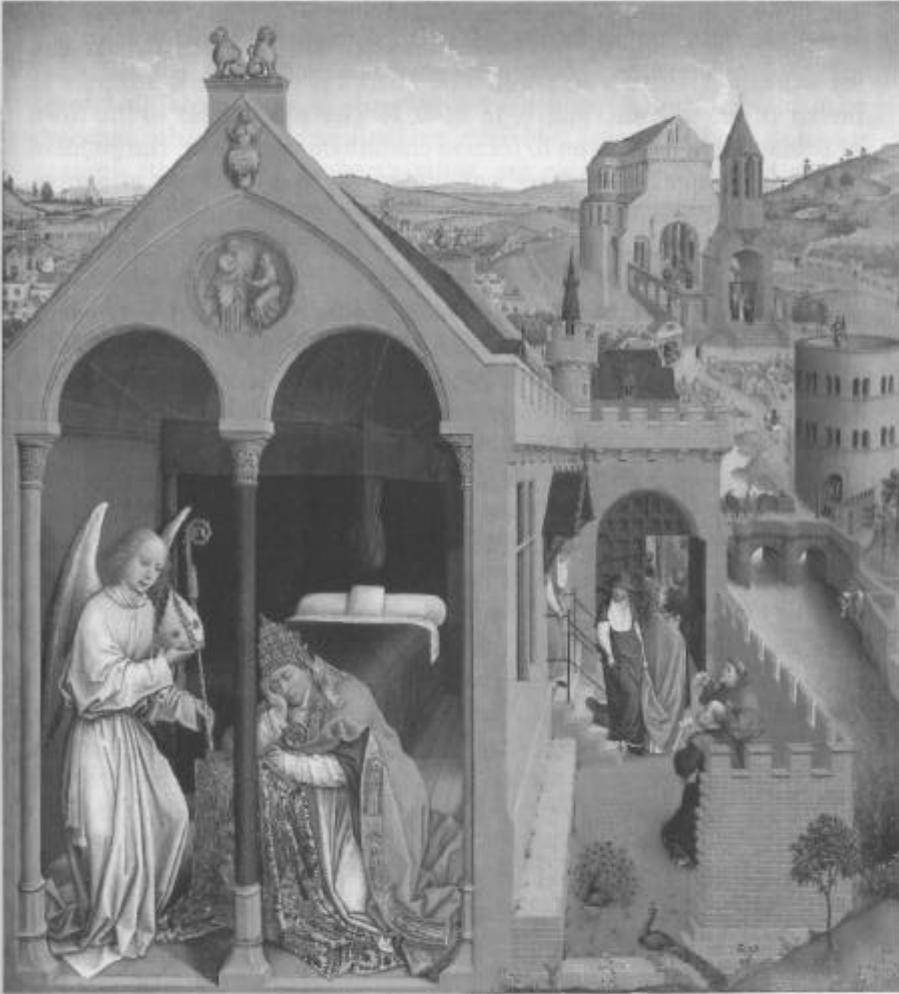


Figure 7. Rogier van der Weyden and Workshop, *Dream of Pope Sergius*, panel, 89 × 80 cm.
J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu.

The scene is set within a Gothic architectural structure, possibly a church or a palace. On the left, an angel with large, feathered wings stands in a niche, holding a scroll. In the center, a figure, presumably Pope Sergius, is shown in a state of distress, leaning against a pillar and holding his head. To the right, a complex architectural structure with multiple levels, arches, and a tower is visible, with several figures moving through the space. The background shows a landscape with a distant city and a church with a tall spire. The overall style is characteristic of the Northern Renaissance, with detailed architectural and landscape elements.

Cools, who was receiver of the ducal revenues in Brussels and who in the 1430s was involved in the extension of the ducal palace and park, made over in 1437 certain revenues for the support of the foundation.⁴⁶ The paintings were probably commissioned in about 1437 and before 1439, when the altar was in use; the costume of the fashionably dressed young man suggests a date around 1440.⁴⁷

The *Exhumation of St. Hubert* has been attributed to Rogier and his workshop, or to a follower. The historical evidence is strongly in favour of the first alternative. In 1440, Rogier was painter to the town of Brussels and had begun to receive commissions from the Burgundian court; the *Justice Scenes* were well under way and attracting attention. The St. Hubert series was an important commission for the principal church in Brussels and it seems unlikely that Vrientschap and Cools would have employed an imitator rather than Rogier himself. It may also be pointed out that the textile of the altar-cloth recurs in Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* and in the *Annunciation* of the *Columba Triptych*; while the young man on the right seems to be an initial realisation of an idea more fully resolved in the youngest king of the *Columba Triptych* (Figures 1, 2, 4).

The *Exhumation*, however, is undeniably different in conception and in technique from the *Descent from the Cross* and the *Magdalen*; it is not even particularly like the *Dream of Pope Sergius*, which comes from the same series. In fact, both the *Exhumation* and the *Sergius* look to have been produced by teams of artists of varying abilities. In both, especially in the *Sergius*, there is an interest in the third dimension which seems foreign to Rogier, who favoured frieze-like compositions. Yet, while the architecture in the *Exhumation* is impressively painted, while its composition is coherent and while the pattern-making stresses the solemnity of the exhumation and the excitement of the background spectators, in the *Sergius*, the architecture is badly drawn and the composition has little coherence.

The reflectograms of the *Exhumation* (Plates 4, 5), which show many changes at both the underdrawing and the painting stages, indi-

⁴⁶ L. P. Gachard, *Inventaire des archives de la Belgique, Inventaire des archives des Chambres des Comptes*, vol. 2 (Brussels, 1845), pp. 22, 67; A. Pinchart, *Inventaire des archives des Chambres des Comptes*, vol. 4 (Brussels, 1865), p. 310; De Raadt, *Sceaux armoriés*, vol. 2, p. 234; Davies, *Les Primitifs flamands*, p. 189.

⁴⁷ P. Lefèvre, 'La Collégiale des Saints Michel et Gudule . . . à la lumière des textes d'archives', *Annales de la Société royale d'archéologie de Bruxelles*, 49 (1956-7), 16-72, p. 27 note 5; M. Scott, *Late Gothic Europe, 1400-1500* (The History of Dress Series, London, 1980), p. 128.

cate that it was planned in haste.⁴⁸ Many of the architectural elements have been shifted. Most of the figures in the middle ground have been radically altered, perhaps in order to accommodate donor portraits. Heads have been transformed, some more than once: women have become men and men have become women. Hands have been drawn that were never painted and the two boys on the left and the man on the right of the altar were added after the objects behind them had been painted. The underdrawn heads are not consistent in style, for several different ways of drawing eyes, eyebrows and hands can be detected. The painting is similarly variable. Some of the jewels, for example, those in St. Hubert's mitre, are painted with a skill almost worthy of the *Magdalen*, whereas other jewels are unremarkable. In some of the faces, the shadowed areas of the flesh are mainly blue but in other faces shadows are rendered in mixtures with black and without blue. The occurrence of black or blue in the shadows of the flesh has nothing to do with the age of the figure or with his position in relation to the light sources or with the stage at which his head was altered. On the left, the heads shadowed in blue are those of the cleric, never changed, the two boys, added at a very late stage, and the spectator third from the left in the back row. The shadows in the *Magdalen's* flesh, I should add, contain particles of blue and black pigments.

The *Sergius* has comparable fluctuations in quality, from the figure of the pope himself, which is rather good, to the peacocks, which are dreadful. The petitioners are reminiscent of the figures in the drawing of the *Scupstoel*, a design for a capital on the Town Hall of Brussels and therefore attributable to the workshop of Rogier, the town painter.⁴⁹ The *Scupstoel* in turn has been related to a drawing of a *Procession*, which can be linked with certain figures in the *Exhumation*.⁵⁰

Eventually it may prove possible to make more sense of the changes in the *Exhumation* and to identify the principal artists who collaborated on the underdrawing and the painting. I believe that some conclusions can already be proposed. The *Exhumation* comes from Rogier's workshop and would have been painted in about 1440, when he was overbur-

⁴⁸ Van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 306–10.

⁴⁹ Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection: discussed by M. Comblen-Sonkes and reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *Rogier van der Weyden* (Musée communal, Brussels, 1979), pp. 169–70, Pl. 34.

⁵⁰ British Museum, London: M. Sonkes, *Les Primitifs flamands, III. Contributions 5, Dessins du XV^e siècle: groupe Van der Weyden* (Brussels, 1969), pp. 167–71, Pl. XL.

dened with other work. The huge *Justice Scenes* must have been taking up a great deal of his energies and the Prado *Descent* was probably done at this period. The St. Hubert series was perhaps a commission which he could not refuse, but possibly one for which he had little sympathy, since it required him to distribute the episodes of a narrative throughout his painted spaces. He must have relied very much on his principal assistants and he may have been taking on new assistants whom he had not fully trained. The team that executed the *Exhumation* and the *Sergius*, painting in Rogier's workshop, under his supervision and perhaps with his participation, was not fully under his control. Pressure of work may have led him to delegate to assistants not just the execution of these panels but even their design. He may have intervened at the design stage, with initial ideas; at the underdrawing stage, with suggestions for some radical changes; and at the painting stage, with proposals for further alterations and some finishing touches, notably to the corpse of St. Hubert. His principal assistants, though working in a manifestly Rogerian style, were allowed some freedom. They do not seem to have specialised to any great extent. In any case, the assistants who drew and painted the architecture in the *Exhumation* cannot have been responsible for the buildings in the *Sergius*. It is difficult to make sense of the ways in which the assistants collaborated and there is little indication that one chief assistant took command over the others. At this stage of Rogier's career, he may have had many helpers but they were not well disciplined.

Finally, the *Pietà* with Saints Jerome and (?) Dominic and an unidentified donor (Plate 6) relates very closely to two other *Pietàs*, in Brussels and in the Prado (Figure 8).⁵¹ Both the London and the Prado donors have clothes and haircuts fashionable in the early 1440s. All three pictures are small — the London painting measures 37 by 46.7 cm — and all three are closely related to the *Pietà* of Rogier's *Miraflores Triptych*, where the Virgin has a rather more secure grasp on the rigid corpse of Christ.⁵² It seems that these *Pietàs* were popular adaptations of the Miraflores composition, simplified to avoid the most difficult foreshortenings and easily altered to suit the requirements of different clients. There is not time now to examine in detail the genesis of this group of paintings but I suspect that the basic

⁵¹ M. Davies, *Les Primitifs flamands, I. Corpus 11, The National Gallery, London*, III (Brussels, 1970), pp. 52–8; Davies, *Rogier*, p. 221; van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 257–70.

⁵² Van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, p. 236.

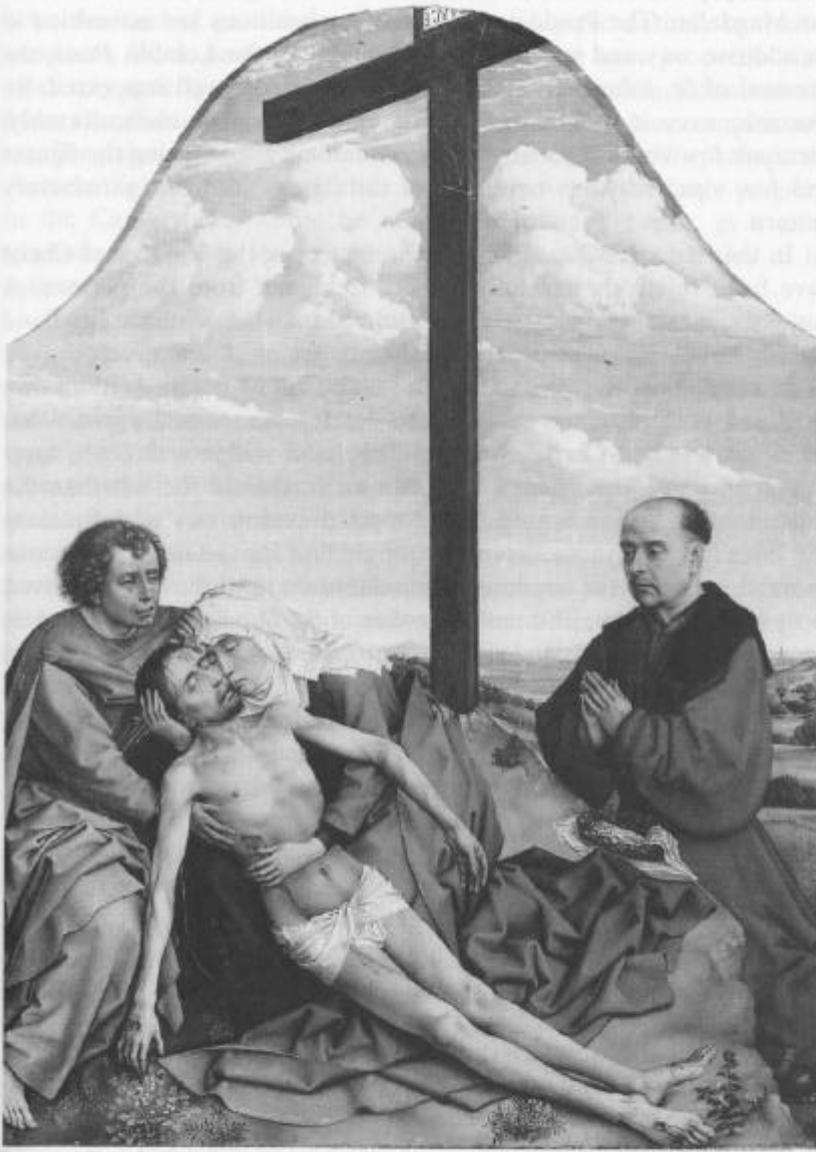


Figure 8. Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *Pietà*, oak panel, 47 × 34.5 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

workshop pattern from which all three derive included St. John and the Magdalen. The Prado and London compositions are assembled in an additive way and without much thought. In the London *Pietà*, the removal of St. John has left Christ's body still less well supported; St. Dominic, even if he is kneeling, is jammed in rather uncomfortably; there are few visual links to establish communication among the figures and few visual rhymes to make all the figures into one satisfactory pattern.

In the underdrawing (Plate 7), the figures of the Virgin and Christ have been relatively carefully copied, freehand, from the pattern. A few changes were made later, for example, to the Virgin's left hand and to Christ's feet. The other three figures are more tentatively drawn. St. Jerome's head has been tried in two positions before settling in a third and both his arms have moved: his left arm was drawn so that his elbow touched Christ's head and his hand was in a difficult, fore-shortened pose. The donor's head, drawn further to the left than the painted head, was indicated in the most summary way with bracket-like lines for the eye sockets and a single line for the nose. There was no need, perhaps, for anything more elaborate until the donor arrived to sit for his portrait. The underdrawing of St. Dominic is only slightly less schematic and the landscape is sketched in a rudimentary fashion. The skull, drawn exactly in the centre, has been displaced in the painting. This is not the bold and confident drawing of the *Magdalen*; it is a much less skilful sketch, though by a practised artist. The painting is accomplished but does not approach the matchless sophistication of the *Magdalen*. The whole picture, underdrawing and painting, could be the work of one artist, an assistant of Rogier. He has taken a Rogier pattern, perhaps conceived with the intention that it should be repeated in the workshop, and from it has extracted the figures of Christ and the Virgin. He has then sketched in the two saints and the donor, made some alterations and begun to paint. As the X-rays show, a few more changes were made at the painting stage, when he seems again to have resorted to Rogier's pattern drawings. St. Dominic's book is so similar to the Magdalen's in the arrangement of the texts and in the placing of the initials D and A that there may have been a common source for both books.

Like the related pictures in the Prado and Brussels, the London *Pietà* is a small panel, a relatively unimportant and routine commission. There are indications that all three *Pietàs* were for Italian clients and other evidence suggests that Rogier may not have had much respect

for the Italians' judgement.⁵³ In any event, the *Pietàs* seem to have been the kind of commission that Rogier delegated entirely to trusted assistants. Work on the London *Pietà* appears to have proceeded in a relatively orderly way and in that respect the *Pietà* differs dramatically from the *Exhumation*. Perhaps the *Pietà*, a much less complex and smaller painting, could have been left to one assistant. Or perhaps the *Pietà* is slightly later, done after Rogier's move to the large property in the Cantersteen, where he may have found it easier, in a more spacious workshop, to organise more efficiently the activities of his assistants.

I will not try your patience further by speculating on the identities of the assistants who collaborated on the *Exhumation* or on the painter of the *Pietà*. It is, I think, possible to do so and such speculation can become more securely based when more paintings in other collections are thoroughly investigated. Patterns of collaboration may emerge which will allow us to follow in some detail staffing changes within Rogier's workshop. Many of Rogier's paintings are by teams of assistants working under the guidance of a supreme genius. On occasion, as in the *Magdalen*, the genius chose to work more or less unaided. When he designed, and when he directed his collaborators, his achievements were truly awesome. When he was carrying through his own designs in paint, as in the *Magdalen*, he could not be surpassed and was indeed, as his contemporaries affirmed, the greatest, the most noble of painters.

Note. In this lecture, I am presenting some of the results of my work at the National Gallery, London, made possible by awards of a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Senior Fellowship and a British Academy Research Readership. In preparing the new catalogue of the Early Netherlandish School pictures, I have received indispensable help from members of the Conservation, Curatorial, Scien-

⁵³ An enlarged copy after the London *Pietà*, thought to be fifteenth-century and presumably Italian, is in a private collection in Palermo (L. Collobi Ragghianti, *Dipinti fiamminghi in Italia 1420–1570, Catalogo* (Musei d'Italia — Meraviglie d'Italia, 24, Bologna, 1990), pp. 14, 16). The Brussels *Pietà* was acquired in 1899 at the Pallavicino-Grimaldi sale in Genoa. The Prado *Pietà*, which has been enlarged in much the same way as the Palermo copy of the London *Pietà*, is thought to have come from an Italian collection (A. Mendez Casal, 'Los primitivos flamencos en España', *Gaceta de bellas artes*, 12 (No. 164, 15 March 1921), 3–5) and an early copy at Berlin was acquired in Florence in 1901. I believe that the *Sforza Triptych* (Brussels), the '*Medici*' *Virgin* (Frankfurt) and the *Lamentation* (Uffizi) are all examples of Italian commissions delegated by Rogier to assistants (reproduced in van Asperen, *Underdrawing*, pp. 311, 254, 165).

tific and other departments. I would like to thank in particular David Bomford, Susan Foister, Jo Kirby, Jennifer Pilc, Ashok Roy, David Saunders, Marika Spring and Raymond White. Rachel Billinge, Leverhulme Research Fellow, has worked closely with me in examining the paintings, has contributed many important observations and has made the infra-red reflectograms. On reflectograms, see R. Billinge, J. Cupitt, N. Dessipris and D. Saunders. 'A Note on an Improved Procedure for the Rapid Assembly of Infra-Red Reflectogram Mosaics', *Studies in Conservation*, vol. 38 (1993), pp. 92–8.



Rogier van der Weyden, *Magdalen Reading* (fragment), transferred to mahogany,
62.2 × 54.4 cm, National Gallery, London.

PLATE 2

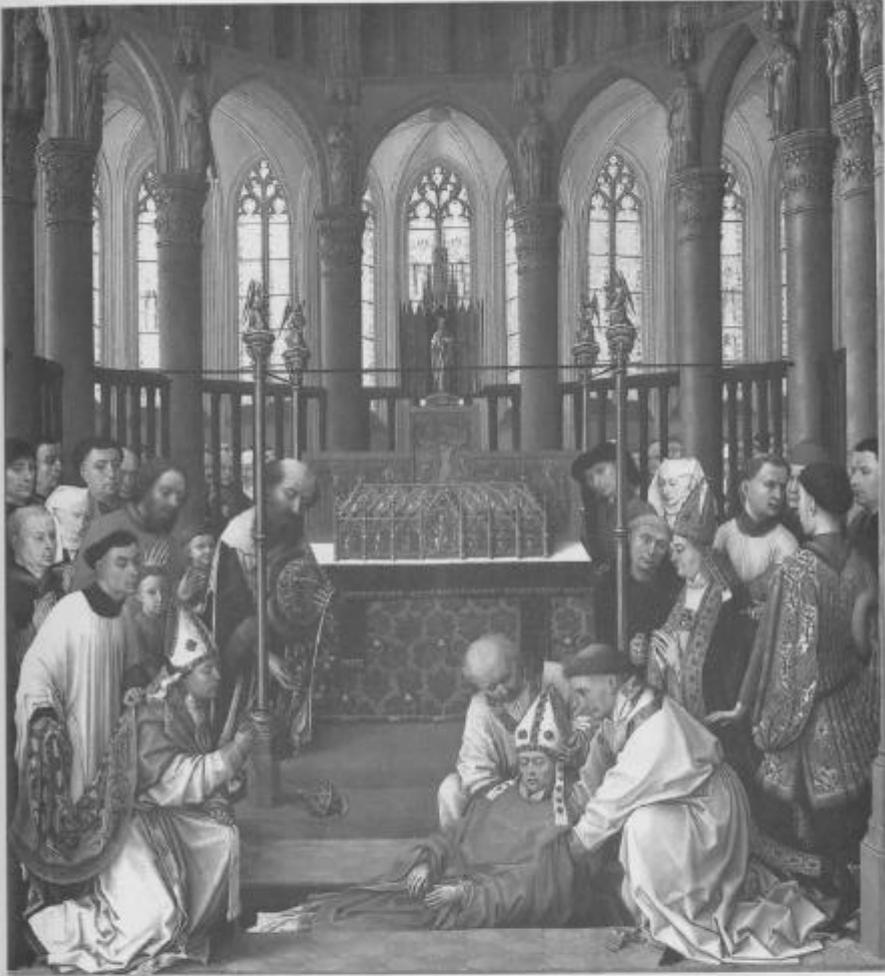
Lorne Campbell

the and other departments I would like to thank in particular David Marshall,
Peter Pinner, N. Kelly, Jennifer Pat. Adams, Prof. David Saunders, Martin Spring,
and Stephen White, Rachel Hillings. Copyright Research, Writing and artwork



Rogier van der Weyden, *Magdalen Reading*, infra-red reflectogram of the head (see Plate 1).

Figure 1. Infra-red reflectogram of the head of the Magdalen Reading.



Rogier van der Weyden and Workshop, *Exhumation of St. Hubert*, oak panel,
89.9 x 81.2 cm, National Gallery, London.

PLATE 4

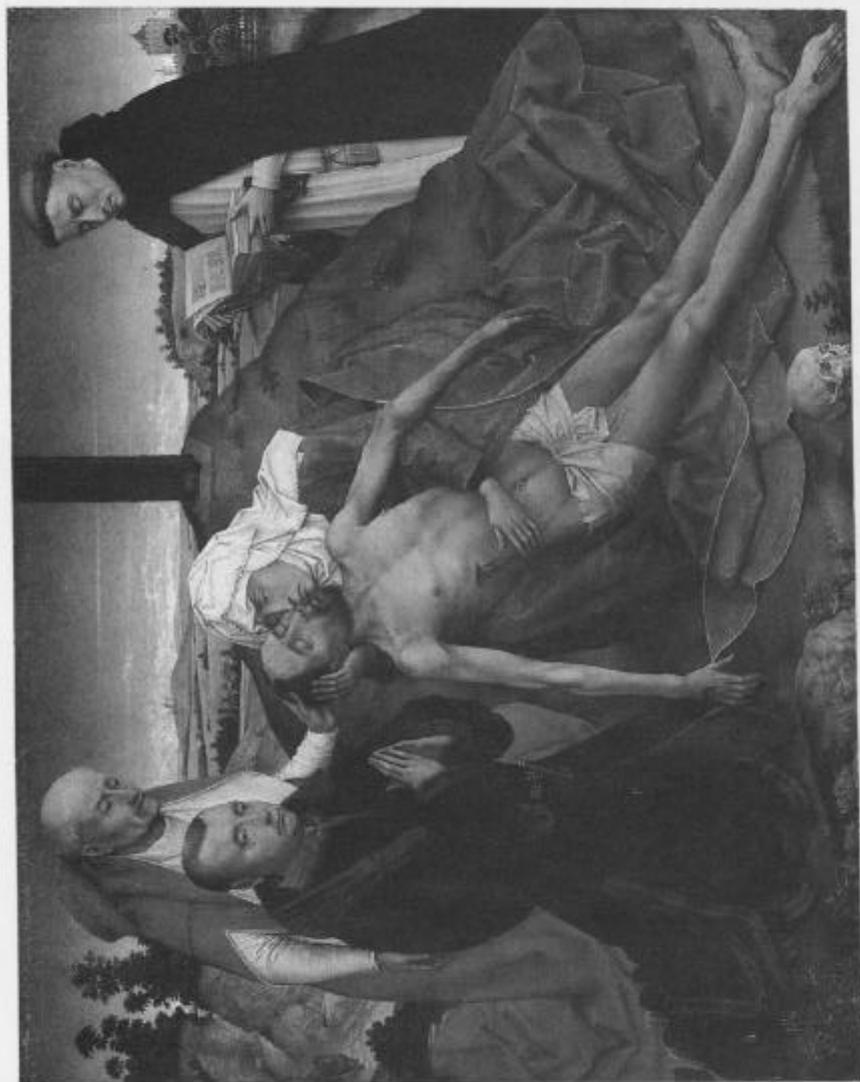


Rogier van der Weyden and Workshop, *Exhumation of St. Hubert*, infra-red reflectogram of the heads on the left (see Plate 3).



Rogier van der Weyden and Workshop, *Exhumation of St. Hubert*, infra-red reflectogram of the heads on the right (see Plate 3).

PLATE 6



Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *Priest*, oak panel, 37 x 46.7 cm, National Gallery, London.



Workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, *Pietà*, infra-red reflectogram (see Plate 6).

PLATE 8



Rogier van der Weyden, *Magdalen Reading*, infra-red reflectogram of the hands (see Plate 1).