

# Propagation of “Model”: The Reception of the *Donne Triptych* by Hans Memling and Early Netherlandish Arts in England \*

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## Introduction

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, paintings of the early Netherlandish school, started by Robert Campin (Master of Flémalle) and the van Eyck brothers, had a significant impact that reverberated throughout Europe. While much research has been done on the influence of early Netherlandish paintings on European art, it was the exhibitions held at Bruges in 2002 and in 2012 that first showed thoroughly how widely early Netherlandish paintings had spread throughout the Mediterranean world and Central Europe.<sup>1</sup> Despite this new understanding, it is somewhat surprising that the paintings’ impact on various regions of England has not been sufficiently examined. This situation is caused by the fact that at present, only a few Netherlandish panel paintings of the 15<sup>th</sup> century remain in England.<sup>2</sup> Generally, when we examine the propagation of works of art, we need to analyze what motifs and elements are conveyed, as well as opportunity of reception. However, as it is certain that the court of England was eager to obtain the Netherlandish paintings, manuscripts, and tapestries at that time,<sup>3</sup> we could reasonably assume that their importance can be revealed from a comprehensive examination of arts from the Netherlands.

In this article, we will analyze a triptych called *Donne Triptych* as a rare example of a Netherlandish panel painting found in England. It was commissioned by an Englishman, John Donne, from a Netherlandish painter, Hans Memling, and was acquired by the National Gallery in London. Concerning the *Donne Triptych*, extensive research has been done by L. Campbell,

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<sup>1</sup> Exh.cat., *The Age of Van Eyck: The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430-1530*, Till-Holger Borchert et al., eds., Groeninge Museum, Bruges, Ghent, 2002; Exh.cat., *Van Eyck to Dürer: The Influence of Early Netherlandish Painting on European Art, 1430-1530*, Till-Holger Borchert, ed., Groeninge Museum, Bruges, London, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> In England, enormous paintings were lost during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Today, in referring to paintings of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the expression “nothing to speak of has survived” is often used. Charles D. Cuttler, “Le rayonnement des Primitifs flamands,” dans Maryan W. Ainsworth et al., *Les Primitifs flamands et leur temps*, Tournai, 1998, pp. 584-619, in part. p. 619.

<sup>3</sup> As for the influence of Netherlandish Art on England, see Gordon Kipling, *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance*, The Hague, 1977; Charles Arthur John Armstrong, *England, France, and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century*, London, 1983; Scot McKendrick, “Tapestries from the Low Countries in England during the Fifteenth Century,” Caroline Barron & Nigel Saul, eds., *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*, London, 1995, pp. 43-60; Catherine Reynolds, “England and the Continent: Artistic Relations,” in Richard Marks & Paul Williamson, eds., *Gothic: Art for England 1400-1547*, London, 2003, pp. 76-85.

curator of this museum, with a particular concentration on its iconographies and functions.<sup>4</sup> Based on this situation, we will examine not only the *Donne Triptych* but also the Netherlandish illuminated manuscripts collected by Donne, paying particular attention to the overlooked motif of portraits at prayer, or devotional portraits. As portraits at prayer seem to have a key role in Donne and other English people's interest in Netherlandish paintings, we need to examine what element was an ideal "model" for them.

We will first examine the iconographies and sources of the portraits at prayer depicted in the *Donne Triptych* (Fig. 1). Then we will discuss the Sir Donne's motivation and background to posit the reasons he commissioned this triptych from the Netherlandish painter, paying particular attention to his social position. Finally, by considering the unique tastes of the English court at the time, we will show that the collection and Donne himself would have played an important role in propagation of Netherlandish art throughout England.



Fig. 1  
Hans Memling,  
*Donne Triptych*,  
ca. 1480, London,  
National Gallery.

## 1. Memling's *Donne Triptych*

The *Donne Triptych* (Fig. 1) was painted by Hans Memling, who ran an atelier in Bruges, an international city of commerce in the Netherlands. While we cannot find any document recording when the triptych was finished, its style tells us that it would have been painted at some point in the middle of Memling's career, namely between the end of the 1470s and the beginning of 1480.<sup>5</sup> The oldest document we know of so far regarding the *Donne Triptych* was penned in 1744, when the work was owned by one of Donne's descendants, the third earl of Burlington.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> As for the *Donne Triptych*, see Martin Davies, *The National Gallery London*, III (*Les Primitifs flamands*, 1. *Corpus de la peinture des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux au quinzième siècle*, 11), Brussels, 1970, pp. 38-51; Kenneth Bruce McFarlane, *Hans Memling*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 1-15, 52-57; Jill Dunkerton et al., *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery*, London, 1991, pp. 320-321; Dirk de Vos, *Hans Memling: l'œuvre complet*, Anvers, 1994, pp. 180-183; Lorne Campbell, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, London, 1998, pp. 374-391; Barbara G. Lane, *Hans Memling: Master Painter in Fifteenth-Century Bruges*, London/ Turnhout, 2009, pp. 282-284.

<sup>5</sup> De Vos, *op.cit.*, pp. 180-182; Campbell, *op.cit.*, pp. 383-387; Lane, *op.cit.*, pp. 282-284. The frame was changed to a new one in 1957-58. The old frame was likely made around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We don't have any information on the original frame.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the provenance of the *Donne Triptych*, see Campbell, *op.cit.*, p. 374.

The triptych was continuously passed down to subsequent descendants until 1957, when the National Gallery obtained it.

An oil painting on oak, the *Donne Triptych* remains in good condition. What is impressive in the central panel is its symmetry, where the figures of the Virgin and Child serve as a vertical axis for the composition. The Virgin casts her eyes downward on a book, perched on a throne placed over an Oriental carpet. A brocade adorned with a plant pattern is hung behind her as a cloth of honor. On her lap, the Christ Child sits with his right hand blessing Sir John Donne on his right, kneeling in prayer.

John Donne was an English knight who served Edward IV (reign from 1461–70, 1471–83) and successive kings as a courtier and a soldier.<sup>7</sup> In this painting, he is intermediated by Saint Catherine, while on the opposite side, Saint Barbara mediates Donne’s wife, Elisabeth Hastings, and their daughter.<sup>8</sup> Wearing clothes of fine quality and praying solemnly in the foreground, these three portraits manifest a sense of dignity and stability.

The winged characters are Donne’s patron saints: John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. On the outside of the wings, we can see Saint Anthony Abbot and Saint Christopher carrying the Christ Child on his shoulder, both of whom are depicted as stone sculptures. While the place where this work was originally installed is unknown, based on its format of a medium-sized triptych, we could speculate that it was used as a private altarpiece.<sup>9</sup>

Of the six saints depicted in the *Donne Triptych*, the pair of Catherine and Barbara is frequently shown in Memling’s paintings such as the *Saint John Altarpiece* (Fig. 2) and the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> These works have the same symmetrical composition in



Fig. 2  
Hans Memling, *Saint John Altarpiece* (central panel), finished in 1479, Bruges, Memlingmuseum, Sint-Janshospitaal.



Fig. 3  
Hans Memling, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, in the beginning of 1480s, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>7</sup> On John Donne and his wife, see McFarlane, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-16, 56-57; Campbell, *op.cit.*, pp. 381-383.

<sup>8</sup> It is certain that Donne and his wife had two daughters and two sons, but the dates when they were born are not known. Considering the wife’s age, they would have already had one daughter around 1480. McFarlane, *op.cit.*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>9</sup> Dunkerton, *op.cit.*, p. 320; Campbell, *op.cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>10</sup> As for *Saint John Altarpiece*, see Shirley Neilson Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs: A Study in Patronage*, Berkeley/ Los Angeles, 1969, pp. 87-96; De Vos, *op.cit.*, pp. 150-157; Maximiliaan P.J. Martens, “Patronage and Politics: Hans Memling’s St. John Altarpiece and the Process of Burgundization,” in *Colloque X* (1993), 1995, pp. 169-176; Junko Ninagawa, “Memling’s *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* in the Hospital of St. John in Bruges,” *Bulletin of the School of Literature, Arts and Cultural Studies, Kinki University*, 8(1), 1996, pp. 33-61 (in Japanese); Lane, *op.cit.*, pp. 175-195. As for the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, see De Vos, *op.cit.*, pp. 166-167; Exh.cat., *From van Eyck to Bruegel*, Maryan W. Ainsworth & Keith Christiansen, eds., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1998, pp. 116-117; Lane, *op.cit.*, pp. 292-293.

which the Virgin and the Child are surrounded by saints or angels, with a pastoral landscape serving as the background. It is highly likely that his biggest work, *Saint John Altarpiece*, served as a prototype when Memling and his began to construct a painting, with parts of its composition and motifs adjusted to suit the clients' particular requests.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, the *Donne Triptych* has portraits of Donne's family in the foreground of the composition. This is the same position of female saints in his *Saint John Altarpiece*, with the Saints Catherine and Barbara retreated to the background. So far, it has been overlooked that the members of Donne's family are kneeling at the front, but if we compare this work with the tradition of portraits at prayer, we cannot miss its innovative character. As portraits at prayer had long been considered as marginal or a subordinate motif in a painting, it seems strange that the Donne family occupied the place of honor in this painting.

## 2. Innovation of Portraits at Prayer and its "model"

### 2.1. Innovation of Portraits at Prayer

Iconographies of portraits at prayer, those who devoutly pray to sacred figures, date back to the early Christian period.<sup>12</sup> Having been regarded as a subordinate motif, the portrait at prayer was generally shown as a smaller figure, head lowered reverently, placed at the marginal position or the wings of the painting. In contrast, the sacred figures enjoyed the central position of the painting, decorated with a golden circle or a canopy to emphasize their sacredness.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the number of portraits at prayer dramatically increased. At the same time, in Netherlandish paintings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, individuals came to share a space with sacred persons in a realistic style in an attempt to emphasize their intimacy.<sup>13</sup>

Among the early Netherlandish painters, Memling painted as many as 20 portraits at prayer. Indeed, his delicate, calm style was well suited to represent portraits. While his early works tended to depict portraits at the corner of the scene or in the subordinate wings, the motifs gradually shifted toward the central panel of the triptych.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, after completing the *Donne Triptych*, Memling increased the composition to place portraits at prayer in the front of the scene. It was also the case with Memling's assistants and followers.<sup>15</sup> We could consider that the new composition of the *Donne Triptych* had such a good reputation as to be repeated.

The innovation of the *Donne Triptych* was demonstrated not only by placing the devotional portraits in the front of the scene but also by highlighting the status of Donne's family. In fact,

<sup>11</sup> De Vos, *op.cit.*, pp. 154, 166; Exh.cat., *From van Eyck to...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>12</sup> As for portraits at prayer, see my book. Sumiko Imai, *Praying to the Virgin: Portraits of Prayers in the Early Flemish Paintings*, Kokusyokankoukai, Tokyo, 2015 (in Japanese).

<sup>13</sup> Imai, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-58.

<sup>14</sup> Lorne Campbell, "Memling et la tradition du portrait dans les Pays-Bas bourguignons," dans Till-Holger Borchert et al., *Les portraits de Memling*, Amsterdam, 2005, pp. 48-67, in part. pp. 49-54; Imai, *op.cit.*, pp. 275-285.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Memling's *Virgin and Child with Portrait at Prayer* (ca. 1480-85, National Gallery, London), *Virgin and Child with "Floreins" family* (ca. 1490, Musée du Louvre, Paris), *Virgin and Child with Portrait at Prayer* (ca. 1485, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), *Virgin and Child with Portrait at Prayer* (Copy after Memling, Petit Palais, Paris).

their status was emphasized by their fine clothing trimmed with furs and glittering collars, the gesture of Christ celebrating Donne, and the family crests of Donne and his wife decorated on the capitals of the columns in the background. In this way, Donne and his family are meant to be admired through the *Donne Triptych*.

## 2.2. “Model” of Portraits at Prayer

The representation of Donne and his wife was not the first in emphasizing the status of portraits at prayer; such representations had already appeared in the figures of the Dukes of Burgundy: Philip the Good (reign 1419–67), and Charles the Bold (reign 1467–77, Fig. 4), both of whom ruled over the Netherlands. We can see the same tendency in the representation of Charles’ wife, Margaret of York (1446–1503). While they are shown kneeling and praying to the sacred figures, their status as rulers was elevated in various ways by their arms, the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and even by representing one’s face with the same expressions of the patron saint (Figs. 5,7).<sup>16</sup>

Now let us point out that (Fig. 6) the Dukes’ particular fashion tastes, namely the black robe and a collar of the order to which they belong, also appear in the representation of John Donne. Indeed, the almost bobbed hairstyle of Donne, a well-fitted robe, and sleeves showing red cloth



Fig. 4  
*Portrait of Charles the Bold*,  
Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.



Fig. 5  
*Portrait of Philip the Good (Detail), Traité sur la salutation angélique*, 1461, Bruxelles, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, ms. 9270, fol. 2v.



Fig. 6  
Detail of Fig. 1.



Fig. 7  
*Portrait of Charles the Bold*, in *Prayer Book of Charles the Bold*, 1469-71, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS 37, fol. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Smeyers, *Flemish Miniatures from the 8th to the mid- 16th Century*, Turnhout, 1999, pp. 288-325, 354-391; Imai, *op.cit.*, pp. 259-275; Sumiko Imai, “Portraits of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy at Prayer,” *Bulletin of Osaka Ohtani University*, 55, 2021, pp. 135-158.



on the revers reflect the fashion of the court of Burgundy in 1470s.<sup>17</sup> Based on this resemblance, it is extremely probable that Burgundian courtiers influenced Donne as his ideal model to imitate.

We can also find Donne's images wearing clothes in the Burgundian style in a *Book of Hours*, which was likely commissioned by Donne himself around the same time of the *Donne Triptych*.<sup>18</sup> In this book, one image shows Donne wearing black clothes and a collar around his neck, and another depicts him kneeling in armor, which is very similar to the image of Charles the Bold (Figs. 7–9). In both cases, Donne's arm is decorated at the margin of the page.

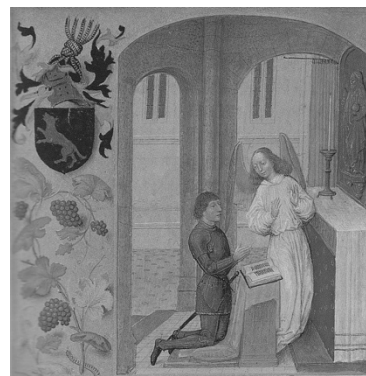


Fig. 8  
Portrait of John Donne (Detail), *Book of Hours of John Donne*, ca. 1480, University of Leuven, A.2, fol. 100v.

Curiously, portraits of Donne's wife and daughter have similarities with women of the Burgundian court (Fig. 10). Donne's wife wears a velvet robe hemmed with ermine fur with a slender, elegant *hennin* hat, and her daughter's robe reveals a peep of red undergarments with a hat decorated with jewelry. Although they must have stayed in England at that time, they are shown as such, gracefully wearing the dresses of the Burgundian style.

Furthermore, it is surprising that the features, clothes, and gestures of Donne's wife strongly evoke the Duchess Margaret of York (Figs. 11, 12). Margaret's image itself was depicted



Fig. 9  
*Annunciation and Portrait of John Donne*, *Book of Hours of John Donne*, ca. 1480, University of Leuven, MS A.2, fol. 13.



Fig. 10  
Detail of Fig. 1.



Fig. 11  
*Portrait of Margaret of York* (Detail), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 365, fol. 115.

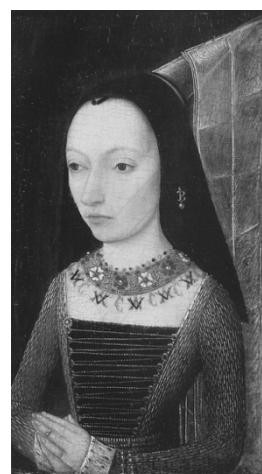


Fig. 12  
*Portrait of Margaret of York*, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, 1998, p. 381. Concerning the fashion of clothing at the court of Burgundy, see Anne H. van Buren, *Illuminating Fashion: Dress in the Art of Medieval France and the Netherlands, 1325-1515*, New York, 2011, pp. 69-80.

<sup>18</sup> As for this *Book of Hours*, see Antoine de Schryver, "The Louthe Master and the Marmion Case," in Thomas Kren, ed., *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and the Visions of Tondal*, Malibu, 1992, pp. 171-180. It was recently identified that John Donne commissioned this *Book of Hours*. Anne Dubois, "The Donne Hours: A Codicological Puzzle," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, 6:1, 2014. <http://www.jhna.org/index.php/past-issues/volume-6-issue-1-2014/249-dubois-the-donne-hours>.

repeatedly in various works, almost always wearing the same type of hennin and a fine robe hemmed with ermine fur.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the resemblance between Margaret and Donne's wife should not be overlooked.

Such a representation of Donne's wife would have been motivated by the origin of Margaret of York, as she was the sister of the King of England, Edward IV. As we will see, we could hypothesize that Donne wished to imitate, directly or indirectly, the portraits at prayer of the Duke and the Duchess of Burgundy, in order to evoke admiration for his own family.

### 3. Social Position of John Donne

Then, what social position did John Donne occupy when he commissioned to paint the triptych? Donne was born in the region of Picardy, now in France, while his family was from Kidwelly in the west of Wales.<sup>20</sup> In his youth, he served Richard of York as a soldier, and by the year 1465, came into the service of the King of England, Edward IV. Around the same time, he married Lady Elisabeth Hastings, a member of a distinguished family who served queen of England.

At the end of the 1460s, Donne had many opportunities to travel the European continent. The most important event he attended was the marriage ceremony of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, held at Bruges in 1468. Among many guests, Donne was presented at this splendid ceremony as one of Margaret's attendants.<sup>21</sup> In the same year, he opened an office at Calais to conduct several projects.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when Edward IV was in exile to Bruges in 1470, it was very likely that Donne accompanied him.<sup>23</sup> In Bruges, it was the family of Gruuthuse who sheltered them, which also happened to own many excellent Netherlandish arts. After returning to England to reassume the throne, Edward IV continued to keep in touch with the Gruuthuse family. Therefore, we could consider that the king's exile was one of the important factors concerning the propagation of Netherlandish art.

Bruges was the very place where Memling ran his atelier. In the 1470s, the painter had the honor of becoming a member of the confraternity of Virgin of Snow. The affiliation meant a good status as well as a networking opportunity for Memling, as the Duke of Burgundy, the elites of

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<sup>19</sup> As for Margaret of York's portraits at prayer, see Wim Blockmans, "The Devotion of a Lonely Duchess," in Kren, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-46; Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "Margaret of York and the Burgundian Portrait Tradition," in Kren, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-56; Smeyers, *op.cit.*, pp. 374-391; Dagmar Eichberger, ed., *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York, Margaret of Austria*, Turnhout, 2005, passim.

<sup>20</sup> McFarlane, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-16.

<sup>21</sup> Burgundian chronicler Olivier de la Marche referred to John Donne in his *Mémoires*, "Et du cousté des Angloix avoit beaucoup de gens de bien à pied tenans la littiere...maistre Jehan Don..." H. Beaune Olivier & J. d'Arbaumont, éd., *Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche: maître d'hôtel et capitaine des gardes de Charles le Téméraire*, III, Paris, 1885, p. 111. Concerning the marriage ceremony of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, see Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy 1446-1503*, New York, 1989, pp. 30-60.

<sup>22</sup> For the geographical importance of Calais, where John Donne worked, see McFarlane, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-10; Reynolds, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> Livia Visser-Fuchs, "Il n'a plus lion ne lieppart, qui voeulle tenir de sa part: Edward IV in exile, October 1470 to March 1471," *Publications du Centre Européen d'Etudes Bourguignonnes*, 35, 1995, pp. 91-106.

Bruges, and foreign merchants were all members.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, there must have been ample chances for Memling to become acquainted with John Donne.

After Edward IV died in 1483, Donne served successive kings: Richard III and Henry VII. Donne passed away in 1503 and was buried in Saint George's Chapel at Windsor. Notably, this was an exclusive church where only the members of the royal family and those who connected closely with them were buried.

As we have discussed, Donne seemed to have had a satisfactory social life by serving the kings of England. We can observe Donne's loyalty to kings in the portraits depicted in the *Donne Triptych*, as Donne and his wife wear an impressive collar (Figs. 6, 10) decorated with a golden rose, the sun, and a lion; such a collar was exclusively by Edward IV and his inner circle.<sup>25</sup>

This triptych also demonstrates Donne's loyalty by depicting his wife with the resemblance of Margaret of York. Donne, who frequently worked in the Netherlands, certainly respected the duchesse from the same country, so far as to feel sympathy. It was likely that Donne had many opportunities to receive an audience with Margaret; for example, he was sent to the Netherlands as a delegate of Edward IV in the latter half of the 1470s. Interestingly, their close relationship is implied by the manuscript describing the life of Alexander the Great. On the last page, we find a message Margaret herself wrote, saying, "For yet not har that ys on of yor treu frendes Margarete of Yorke (not to forget your true friend Margaret of York)" (Fig. 13).<sup>26</sup> It is likely that the reason she dared to write in English was to show her friendship and affection for Englishman Donne.

On the other hand, from a practical point of view, we could point out that Donne's wife, who continuously served the queen of England, was unable to visit Netherlands as frequently as Donne. Therefore, it was natural that Donne asked Memling to depict his wife's face as that of Margaret's, whom they both highly respected. Such an intention could be shown in the underdrawings of Donne's wife (Fig. 14).<sup>27</sup> Curiously, her face was drawn with a youthful appearance and the resemblance seems closer to that of Margaret of York. Therefore, we could posit that she was

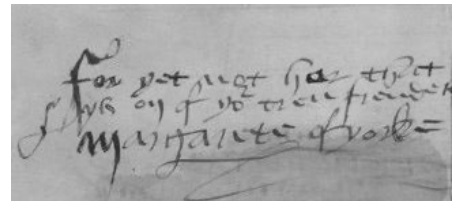


Fig. 13  
Sign of Margaret of York, *The History of Alexander the Great*, London, British Library, MS. Royal 15D IV, fol. 219.



Fig. 14  
Infrared reflectogram of  
Fig. 1 (Detail).

<sup>24</sup> De Vos, *op.cit.*, pp. 36, 408.

<sup>25</sup> For other examples of courtiers wearing such collars, see Tudor-Craig Pamela, *Richard III: Catalogue of an Exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery*, London, 1973, pp. 59-60.

<sup>26</sup> London, British Museum, MS. Royal 15D IV, fol. 219. Janet Backhouse, "Sir John Donne's Flemish Manuscripts," in Peter Rolfe Monks & Douglas David Roy Owen, eds., *Medieval Codicology, Iconography, Literature, and Translation, Studies for Keith Val Sinclair*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 48-57, in part. p. 48. Under the sign of Margaret of York, we find a message of her sister-in-law, Mary of Burgundy ("[P]renez moy ajames pour v[ost]re bonne amie Marie D. de bourgne"). Based on this information, this manuscript was likely presented to Donne before Mary of Burgundy died in 1482.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, 1998, pp. 376, 378-379.



initially depicted as a Margaret and later changed to reflect the wife’s features.<sup>28</sup>

Let us resume examining the reason why the image of the Duchess was a “model” for the *Donne Triptych*. The first explanation is quite simple: they were both English and Margaret was an English princess. In addition, we could point out that the painting was done during the time of the Wars of the Roses. Therefore, Donne’s position, which might seem very fixed and secure, was, in fact, not safe.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, his ties with the Burgundian court functioned as a strong “brand” to heighten Donne’s value. Accordingly, it appears that Donne commissioned this triptych to the Netherlandish master Memling for his prestige, with a condition that the couple should be praised in the Burgundian manner.

Other than the *Donne Triptych*, Donne owned at least four Netherlandish manuscripts in which we could find Donne’s family crests.<sup>30</sup> Based on the presumption that all of the manuscripts were made around the same time of the *Donne Triptych*, we could consider that John Donne had fully recognized the influence of the court of Burgundy by this time.

It is highly probable that the behavior and artworks made in the court of Burgundy were regarded as a strong “model” for the court of England in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the next chapter, we will examine how the court of Burgundy had an important influence on English art, and show the role of John Donne and his collection by analyzing the reception of Netherlandish art in England.

#### 4. Court of Burgundy as a “model” and the reception of Netherlandish Art

The *magnificence* of the court of Burgundy reached its peak at the marriage ceremony of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York, which greatly influenced other European courts.<sup>31</sup> In England, Sir John Fortescue referred to the necessity of magnificence for a king and of furnishing his court as luxuriously as possible with precious clothes or other ornaments, in order to

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Donne’s wife bears a similar resemblance to Saint Barbara, who is standing behind her. Moreover, when Memling painted Saint Barbara and Margaret of York, their similarity was pointed out. Therefore, we could consider Donne’s wife Elizabeth, Saint Barbara, and Margaret of York shared the same features. Margaret of York actually became an honorary member of the Guild of Saint Barbara in the city of Ghent after 1472. Blockmans, *op.cit.*, pp. 39, 43; De Schryver, *op.cit.*, p. 175. It is likely that Margaret of York was regarded as an ideal model of a woman.

<sup>29</sup> In 1483, William Hastings, the brother of Donne’s wife, was executed. For the recent study on the Wars of the Roses, see Trevor Royle, *The Wars of the Roses: England’s First Civil War*, London, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> *Romance of Sydrac and Boctus* (London, British Library, MS. Royal 16F V), *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (London, British Library, MS. Royal 20B II), *Book of Hours of Donne* (University of Leuven, MS A2), *The History of Alexander the Great* (London, British Library, MS. Royal 15D IV).

<sup>31</sup> Magnificence (*megaloprepeia*) dates back to the conception of Aristotle. It relates to the magnanimity, grandeur, and political power by its character of affluent materiality and consumption. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Roger Crisp, ed., Cambridge, 2014. For more about the magnificence of the Burgundian court and its influence on Europe, see Werner Paravicini, “The Court of the Dukes of Burgundy: A Model for Europe?,” in Ronald G. Asch & Adolf M. Birke, eds., *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 69-102; Susan Marti et al., eds., *Splendour of the Burgundian Court: Charles the Bold (1433-1477)*, Antwerp, 2009; Werner Paravicini, éd., *La cour de Bourgogne et L’Europe: Le rayonnement et les limites d’un modèle culturel*, Ostfildernt, 2013.



Fig. 15  
Copy after Hans Memling (?), *Portrait of Edward IV*, London, National Portrait Gallery.

appropriately demonstrate his dignity.<sup>32</sup> Curiously, Edward IV had not only followed the ordinances of Charles the Bold's court<sup>33</sup> but also acquired an interest in Netherlandish tapestries. Such tapestries embodied Burgundian magnificence; thus, the king obtained a set of ornate tapestries from one of the traditional tapestry ateliers in Tournai.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, a great many Netherlandish manuscripts were brought to the English royal court. Some were obtained by the king himself while others were presented as gifts.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, we can find manuscripts made in Bruges among them, some of which had formerly been possessed by John Donne. As for the above-mentioned manuscript, the *History of Alexander the Great* (Fig. 13), approximately 30 copies remain. Among them, the one Edward IV owned was probably commissioned by Charles the Bold and is of excellent quality with Margaret of York's handwriting.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, we could consider that Donne played an important role in propagating Netherlandish art in the court of England.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, concerning the medium, the Burgundian court did not always regard the panel painting as the best for demonstrating its magnificence.<sup>38</sup> However, we find some examples of panel paintings existing in England, which must have adopted the Burgundian style through the *Donne Triptych*, such as the *Portrait of Edward IV* (Fig. 15).<sup>39</sup> The patterns of the gorgeous brocade clothes that adorn Edward IV are quite similar to those Memling painted in the *Donne Triptych* and the *Saint John Altarpiece*.

Moreover, during the reign of Henry VII, the king's portrait was painted by a Netherlandish

<sup>32</sup> "Item, it shall nedde that the kyng haue such tresour, as he mey make new bildynges whan he woll, ffor his pleasure and magnificence; ... And often tymes he woll bie riche hangynges and other apparell ffor his howses; ... Ffor yff a kyng did not so, nor myght do, he lyved then not like his estate..." Sir John Fortescue, M.A. Charles Plummer, ed., *The Governance of England: Otherwise called the Difference between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy*, Oxford, 1885, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p. 415.

<sup>34</sup> Scot McKendrick, "Edward IV: An English Royal Collector of Netherlandish Tapestry," *The Burlington Magazine*, 129, 1987, pp. 521-524, in part. p. 523, n. 35, p. 524.

<sup>35</sup> For the tradition of Netherlandish illuminated manuscripts and its influence on England, see Smeyers, *op.cit.*, pp. 466-470; Exh.cat., *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, Thomas Kren & Scot McKendrick, eds., Los Angeles/ London, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Backhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Originally Donne's arm was represented on the right of Margaret's sign but was later repainted by the emblems of Henry the VIII. Smeyers, *op.cit.*, p. 467. Therefore, we can consider that this manuscript was presented to Henry the VIII by Donne's son, who served the king. Backhouse, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> As for the hierarchy of medium among arts, see Hugo van der Velden, *The Donor's Image: Gerard Loyet and the votive portraits of Charles the Bold*, Turnhout, 2000, in part. pp. 67-73.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, 2005, pp. 55-56.

painter (London, National Portrait Gallery), as well as a panel painting which strongly resembles the central panel of the *Donne Triptych* (London, Hampton Court Palace).<sup>40</sup> Surprisingly, the latter Hampton version has a composition nearly identical to the *Donne Triptych*; in an almost square space, Henry VII and his family kneel in front surrounding a standing Saint George, who is positioned at the center.<sup>41</sup> Although this painting might not have imitated the *Donne Triptych* in terms of style, they share the composition and the self-admiring representation of portraits as the portraits occupy an indispensable place in the composition, with fine clothing like that worn by Donne and his family. Therefore, this work would tell us that the kings of England well recognized the fashion of the Burgundian court and the power of Netherlandish art through the *Donne Triptych*.

## 5. Placement and Function of the *Donne Triptych*

As we have examined, Netherlandish paintings possessed by the court of England imply that several members of the court could have seen the *Donne Triptych*. In addition to having functioned as a part of the altarpiece for the liturgy, these portraits of Donne and his wife had a strong purpose to demonstrate the family's status, even to function as an ideal "model" for others. If the *Donne Triptych* had a more public character than we have recognized, it would have been exhibited in a place where many people could see it.

Unfortunately, there is no document referencing the place where the *Donne Triptych* was originally installed. However, the provenance recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century tells us that the triptych had been passed down the family line to Donne's descendants. On the other hand, as John Donne's parents had been permitted to possess the portable altar in 1443,<sup>42</sup> it was possible that the *Donne Triptych* didn't remain in one place. We could assume that the triptych might have been installed at Donne's house at Calais or Buckinghamshire,<sup>43</sup> but if this were the case, it would have been quite difficult for English courtiers to see the triptych.

A more appropriate place for the *Donne Triptych* would have been the one royal church called Saint George's Chapel at Windsor, where Donne himself sleeps.<sup>44</sup> His grave was situated nearby the tomb of Edward IV at the north of the choir, near the tomb of Donne's brother-in-law. As Saint George's Chapel boasted the highest status in England, it must have been an honor for Donne to have been laid to rest there. In this regard, it was very natural that Donne's wife relayed that she wished to be buried in the same place as Donne in her will.<sup>45</sup> If the *Donne Triptych* was really installed in such a family chapel, it would have helped in prayers for Donne's family. At the same time, it would have effectively demonstrated the family's status to church visitors, which

<sup>40</sup> Kipling, *op.cit.*, pp. 41-71.

<sup>41</sup> Kipling, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-65; Frederick Hepburn, "The Portraiture of Prince Arthur and Katherine of Aragon," in Steven Gunn & Linda Monckton, eds., *Arthur Tudor, Prince of Wales*, Woodbridge, 2009, pp. 31-49.

<sup>42</sup> For the dispensation of the Pope, see J.A. Twemlow, ed., *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, London, 1904, p. 369.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, 1998, p. 387.

<sup>44</sup> As for Saint George's Chapel, see Tim Tatton-Brown, "The Building of the New Chapel: The First Phase," in Nigel Saul & Tim Tatton-Brown, *St George's Chapel Windsor*, Stanbridge, 2010, pp. 69-80.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, *op.cit.*, 1998, p. 387.

meant a decisive occasion for propagating the Burgundian court culture.

## Conclusion

As we have examined, the *Donne Triptych* has an innovative composition in terms of the portraits at prayer. It was also modelled after devotional portraits of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York to elevate Donne and his family.

In light of Donne's social position, it is certain that the *Donne Triptych* and manuscripts Donne had obtained had a strong purpose to demonstrate his family's status. At the same time, these works played an important role in propagating the brand of Burgundian culture and Netherlandish art in England. Their significance can be confirmed by the fact that Netherlandish artists were preferred in England from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward.<sup>46</sup>

For John Donne, his collection of Netherlandish art was certainly indispensable to fulfill his life. It was also meaningful for Memling, who was also a foreigner in the Netherlands. As the painter vigorously received commissions from Italy and other European areas, Donne's commission presented a perfect opportunity for Memling to appeal to future commissioners in England. Therefore, Memling painted this triptych in earnest to grant Donne's request. Consequently, the triptych's innovative representation of devotional portraits was positively received and propagated throughout England. In this regard, we could consider that the *Donne Triptych* was significant in that it brought success to Memling.

## Sources of figures

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<sup>46</sup> Kipling, *op.cit.*

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