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Falkenburg, R.L.

Citation

Falkenburg, R. L. (1988). Iconographical connections between Antwerp landscapes, market scenes and kitchen pieces, 1500-1580. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/2651>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Iconographical connections between Antwerp landscapes, market scenes and kitchen pieces, 1500-1580*

One of the problems on which iconographical research on the market scenes and kitchen pieces by Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer has concentrated is the issue of the antithetical structure of these pictures. Jan Emmens in particular devoted attention to this problem, pointing out the existence of an antithesis between a broad display of earthly goods and wordly behaviour in the foreground and a religious story painted in the background in a whole series of market scenes and kitchen pieces by Aertsen and Beuckelaer dating from the third quarter of the 16th century.¹ Although Emmens was not the first to comment on this antithesis, he was the first to regard it as a fundamental and common phenomenon in these paintings.² In his analysis of paintings with an *Ecce Homo* scene in the background in particular (fig. 1), he tried to define the basis of their antithetical structure, launching a theory which, suprisingly, has been almost totally ignored until now.³ He explained the selling of meat, fish and poultry in a market place on the one hand and the *Ecce Homo* scene on the other as an antithesis between the *amor sui* of those who live the life of the flesh and wordly desires, and the *amor Dei*, to which the Passion scene in the background directs the attention of the beholder. He related this antithesis between *amor sui* and *amor Dei* to the concept of the two citizenships defined by St. Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*, where the citizenship of the world – the *civitas terrena* – is opposed to the citizenship of the Kingdom of heaven – the *civitas Dei*. Those who commit themselves to earthly desires and wordly occupations belong to the *civitas terrena*; those who strive for the Kingdom of Heaven live on earth as pilgrims, detached from the world and destined for their real home, the Heavenly Jerusalem.⁴

In Emmens' opinion this Augustinian concept forms the basis not only for the antithesis in *Ecce homo* pictures, but also for other market scenes and kitchen pieces by Aertsen and Beuckelaer which display earthly goods and wordly behaviour in the foreground and a religious story in the background, e.g. *Christ in the house of Martha and Mary*, *Christ and the woman taken in adultery*, the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Journey to Emmaus* (figs. 2-5).⁵

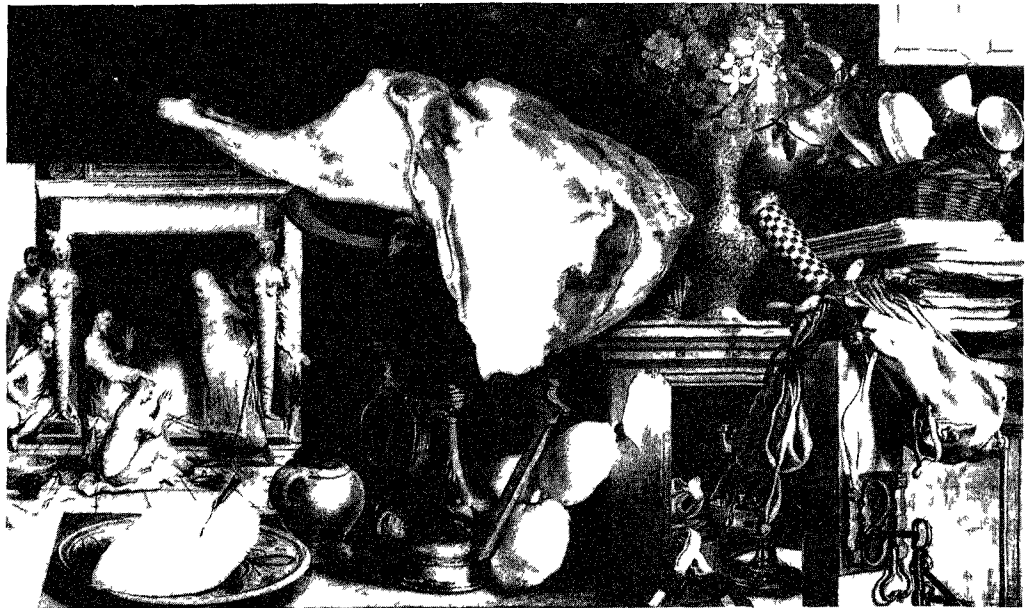
Emmens did not give much evidence for this theory, but confined himself to comparing these paintings with a very closely related, but somewhat earlier *Ecce homo* picture painted by the Brunswick Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel) around 1540 (fig. 6).⁶ In this he detected a direct relation between some of the foreground motifs denoting wordly behaviour, and late medieval illustrations of the *De Civitate Dei*, namely the town building activity, which St. Augustine

1
Joachim Beuckelaer, *Market scene with Ecce Homo*, Formerly Schleissheim, Gemaldegalerie

2
Pieter Aertsen, *Still-life with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



1



2

associated with the sons of Cain, the representative of the *civitas terrena*. Here, Emmens's argument stopped, but it is at this very point that I would like to take it up again, for in my opinion, there is more evidence to be found for the idea that an Augustinian antithesis underlies this picture, as well as other market scenes and kitchen pieces by Aertsen and Beuckelaer. For this purpose I would like to recall some of the findings I presented in my dissertation on the iconography and function of the landscapes by Joachim Patinir.⁷

Basic to the iconography of Patinir's landscapes is a complex of related metaphors of the two paths of life, the traditions of which go back to biblical and classical sources. To this complex belonged, first of all, the biblical metaphor of the broad gate and broad way and the narrow gate and narrow way, as it is



3



4

found in Matthew, 7:13-14. This group of related metaphors further included the allegory of the *Y* sign – the ‘*littera Pythagorae*’ –, the fable of Hercules at the Crossroads and Hesiod’s metaphor of the two paths of life, the one leading to the lofty residence of Virtue, the other to the lower realm of Vice. Ever since antiquity these metaphors have been intertwined and this has resulted in the development of a muliform tradition around the landscape symbolism of the

3
Pieter Aertsen, *Christ and the woman taken in adultery*, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum

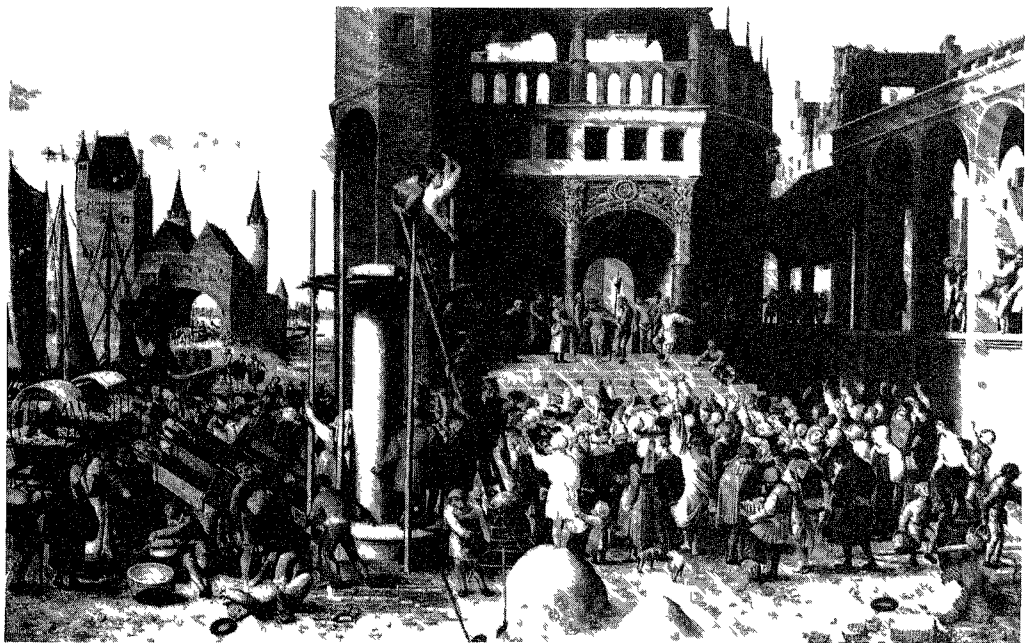


4
Joachim Beuckelaer, *Flight into Egypt*, Brussels, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten

5
Joachim Beuckelaer, *Still-life with the Journey to Emmaus*, The Hague, Mauritshuis

6
The Brunswick Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel), *Ecce Homo*, The Hague, Mauritshuis

5



6

two paths of life.⁸ During the Middle Ages St. Augustine's conception of the two antithetical *civitates* had also been closely connected with these metaphors, which acquired a Christian moralizing and eschatologically oriented interpretation.⁹ The first pictorial representations of these metaphors of the two paths of life, which appear around 1500, also partake in this tradition. They are to be found in the work of Raphael, Durer and Hieronymus Bosch and, above all, in the landscapes of Joachim Patinir.¹⁰ One example is his *Landscape with St. Jerome* in Madrid (fig. 7), but what is said here about the antithetical structure of this picture and the iconography involved, is equally valid for a whole group of landscapes by Patinir.¹¹ The landscape as a whole consists of



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two geographically opposite regions: a cultivated one showing the inhabited world on one side and a rough one with steep mountains on the other. This contrast can be interpreted as an allegory of the two paths of life, based on the landscape symbolism in Hesiod's metaphor of the difficult path of life, leading to the steep and rocky heights where Virtue has her residence, and the easy path, leading to the plains where Vice has her home. St. Jerome, extracting the 'thorn of sin' from the lion's foot, is the example for those pilgrims who go through the narrow gate – the opening in the rock behind the saint – and take the narrow path upwards. The blind pilgrim and his small guide in the foreground on the right are 'false pilgrims', taking the opposite direction; they are the prototypes of the sinner.¹² At first sight the cultivated region behind these figures is fairly innocent looking. However, on closer inspection, it appears to contain individual motifs which belong to a repertoire constantly used by Patinir in his paintings to illustrate the worldly occupations of the inhabitants of this part of the landscape. Here we can discern, among other details, extensive shipping traffic on a river, a harbour scene, a watermill and mining activities. In a similar *Landscape with the Penitence of St. Jerome*, in Paris (fig. 8),¹³ we see in the corresponding cultivated part of the landscape a windmill, a shepherd with his flock, a farmer ploughing and a harbour scene in the background. Also visible, in the village nearer the foreground, are a man and a woman talking to each other in the doorway of a house which is marked as a brothel by the dovecot behind it. Some of these motifs can be related directly to 15th-century illustrations of the *civitas terrena* in manuscripts of St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Others seem to be derived from the backgrounds of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings representing the sinful world.¹⁴ Seen against the antithesis between the two paths of life involved here, the travellers on the left of the Paris land-

7
 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape
 with St. Jerome*, Madrid,
 Museo del Prado

8
 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape
 with the Penitence of St. Jerome*,
 Paris, Musée du Louvre

9
 Herri met de Bles, *Landscape
 with the Flight into Egypt*,
 Copenhagen, Statens Museum
 for Kunst



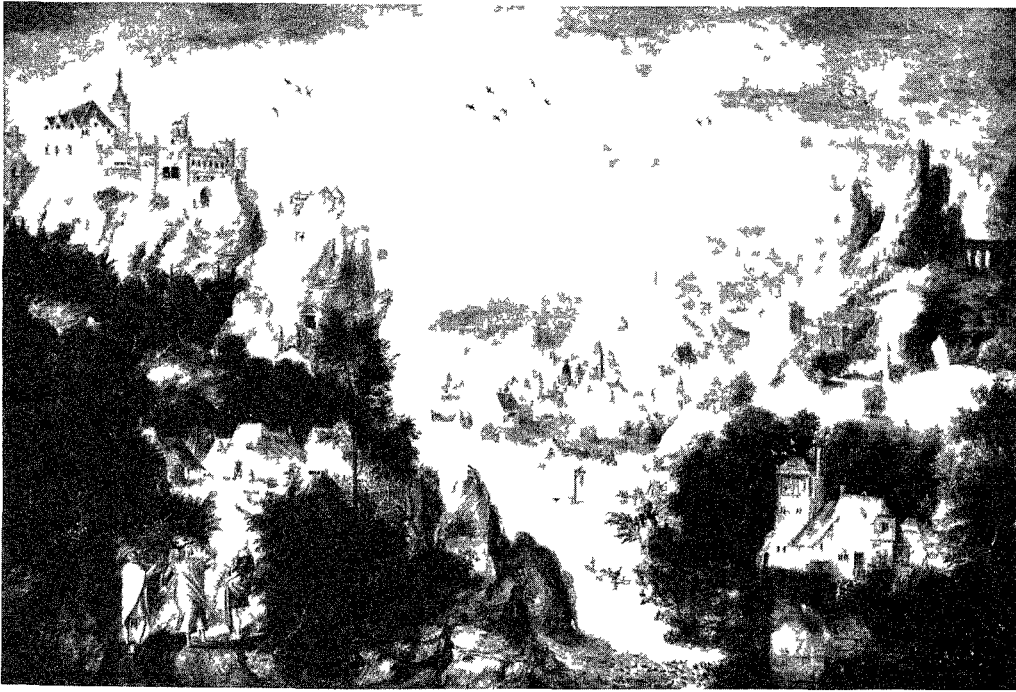
8



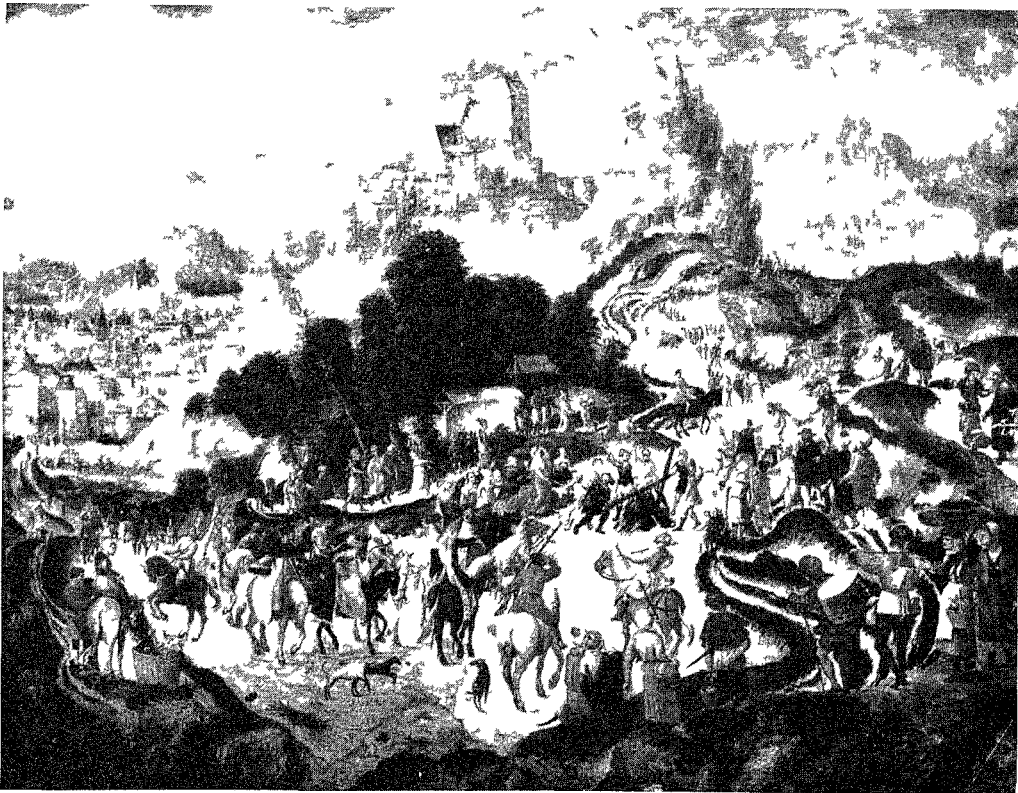
9

scape – a man with a big pack on his back and a woman with a jar on her head – seem to be the representatives of the *civitas terrena*, while their antipole, the pilgrim on the path through the mountains on the right, is the representative of the *civitas Dei*.

Not only the same repertoire of motifs, but also the same antithetical basic structure of the landscape and contrasting figure groups are to be found in the landscapes of Herri met de Bles.¹⁵ In his *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* in Copenhagen for example (fig. 9),¹⁶ the Holy Family on the left are trying to find their way through the bush – an image of the difficult path through life. On the right a pleasure cart with a merry, carnivalesque company is heading for the village in the background. They are shown the way – the way of the flesh, we may assume – by a swineherd. Here too can be seen the traveling couple – with the woman carrying a jar on her head – we have already encoun-



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11
 tered as the representatives of the *civitas terrena* in Patinir's landscape in Paris Herri met de Bles's *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus* in Antwerp (fig 10)¹⁷ shows the three biblical pilgrims on the left on their way to the castle in the mountains behind them, where the scene of the supper at Emmaus is barely visible. In the opposite part of the landscape the sinful world is again depicted, with gallows – a motif borrowed from Bosch – and details derived from Patinir's repertoire: a farm with a dovecot, a pleasure cart next to the 'false pil-

10
Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus*, Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh

11
Herri met de Bles, *Landscape with Christ bearing the Cross*, Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphili

12
Herri met de Bles, *St. John preaching in the Wilderness*, Formerly in The Hague, H. M. Cramer

13
Herri met de Bles, *Christ appearing at the Lake of Tiberias*, Padua, Museo Civico



12



13



14

grims' and a harbour scene in the far distance. In some landscapes by Bles the geographical division of the landscape is less clear than in Patinir's paintings, however, the phenomenon of contrasting figure groups is always obvious. This is the case, for example, in his *Landscape with Christ bearing the Cross*, in Rome (fig. 11).¹⁸ Here we have a series of Passion scenes in the background, of which Christ bearing the cross is the most prominent. Posed in the foreground – on the left and on the right – are two groups of peasants who seem to have no concern for the suffering Christ, but are on their way to the market with the products of the field. In quite a lot of landscapes by Herri met de Bles a similar opposition can be seen between such peasants, heading for the market with jars, baskets, sledges and carts, and a religious story – for example *St. John preaching in the wilderness*, or *Christ appearing at the Lake of Tiberias* (figs. 12-13).¹⁹ In all these paintings, in my opinion, we are presented with an analogous antithesis between the religious protagonists and the representatives of the sinful world, who only care for earthly goods. At the same time Herri met de Bles has partly used the same repertoire that Patinir had already been employing to denote the inhabitants of the sinful world, and has partly elaborated on this repertoire.

It is the same repertoire that we encounter in the *Ecce Homo* picture by Jan van Amstel, which Emmens analysed (fig. 6). The market scene on the left is situated near a harbour, where ship's cargoes have been stacked on a quay. In the far distance a few peasants are approaching with a horse pulling a sledge with barrels. Among the crowd amid the market stalls can be discerned a woman carrying a flat basket on her head and another with a jar on her head. Moreover, exactly the same motifs are found again later in many paintings by Aertsen and Beuckelaer and that not only in pictures with a landscape setting (see figs. 4, 14-15), but also in those featuring a market place (figs. 1, 3), or a market stall, wheelbarrow or table in close-up (figs. 16-17).²⁰

Close connections between the artistic productions of, firstly, Joachim Patinir and Herri met de Bles, secondly, Herri met de Bles, Jan van Amstel and the



17
Joachim Beuckelaer, *Fish-market with Christ appearing at the Lake of Tiberias*, Naples, Museo di Capodimonte

17

Beuckelaer has its direct antecedent in a similar antithesis that underlies the landscapes of Patinir and Bles. Secondly, Jan van Amstel, Aertsen and Beuckelaer used a recurrent repertoire of motifs, which seems to be based on and to be an extension of that used by Patinir and Bles to denote a concern for earthly goods and worldly desires.²³ Taken together with my observation on the corresponding biblical themes in the paintings of all these masters, these conclusions lead to the hypothesis, that, from an iconographical point of view, all the paintings under consideration form a single group sharing a similar antithetical structure. At the root of this structure lies a complex of metaphors of two antithetical ways of life, of which the Augustinian opposition between the two *civitates* is an integral part.²⁴

NOTES

* This study was prepared during my stay as a fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (N.I.A.S.), Wassenaar (1986/87).

¹ J. A. Emmens, "'Eins aber ist nötig' – Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Kuchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts", in: *Album Amicorum J.G. van Gelder*, The Hague 1973, pp.93-101.

² G. Marlier, 'Het stilleven in de vlaamsche schilderkunst der xvie eeuw', *Jaarboek Kon. Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1941, p.94, had already arrived at a general hypothesis about such an antithesis.

³ Joachim Beuckelaer, *Market scene with Ecce Homo* (1561), formerly Schleissheim, Gemaldegalerie, inv. nr. 4140. The latest contributions on the iconography of Aertsen's and Beuckelaer's paintings also fail to take real notice of Emmens's ideas; see exhib. cat. *Kunst voor de beeldenstorm*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1986, pp. 342-346; exhib. cat. *Joachim Beuckelaer. Het markt- en keukenstuk in de Nederlanden 1550-1650*, Gent (Museum voor Schone Kunsten) 1986-1987, and G. Irmischer, '*Mimstrae voluptatum*, stoicizing ethics in the market and kitchen scenes of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer', *Simiolus*, 16 (1986), pp.219-232. The idea of an antithesis with a moralizing tenor in the paintings under consideration has been generally accepted (with the exception of K. P. F. Moxey, *Pieter Aertsen, Joachim*

Beuckelaer and the rise of secular painting in the context of the Reformation, (diss Chicago 1974), New York London 1977), but not the specific explanation given by Emmens

⁴ For this antithetical concept see W. Schultz, 'Der Gedanke der Peregrinatio bei Augustin und das Motiv der Wanderschaft bei Goethe', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 8 (1966), pp 79-110, G. B. Ladner, 'Homo viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order', *Speculum*, 42 (1967), pp 233-259, J. van Oort, *Jeruzalem en Babylon Een onderzoek van Augustinus' De stad van God en de bronnen van zijn leer der twee steden (rijken)*, The Hague 1986, esp pp 78-137

⁵ Fig 2 Pieter Aertsen, *Still-life with Christ in the house of Martha and Mary* (1552), Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv nr 6927, fig 3 Pieter Aertsen, *Christ and the woman taken in adultery*, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv nr 2106, fig 4 Joachim Beuckelaer, *Flight into Egypt* (1563), Brussels, Kon. Musea voor Schone Kunsten, inv nr 3888, fig 5 Joachim Beuckelaer, *Still-life with the Journey to Emmaus*, The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv nr 965

⁶ The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv nr 960

⁷ R. L. Falkenburg, *Joachim Patinir het landschap als beeld van de levenspelgrimage*, (diss Amsterdam) Nijmegen 1985, part II, esp pp 100 ff

⁸ For these metaphors and the intertwinement of their traditions see E. Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege, und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst*, Leipzig-Berlin 1930, pp 42 ff, pp 65 ff, W. Harms, *Homo Viator in Bivio Studien zur Bildlichkeit des Weges*, (Medium Aevum, 21), Munich 1970, pp 40-49, pp 158 ff, R. Schleier, *Tabula Cebeus, oder 'Spiegel des menschlichen Lebens | darin Tugend und untugent abgemalet ist' Studien zur Rezeption einer antiken Bildbeschreibung im 16 und 17 Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1973, pp 118-119, 129, see also Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 109-112

⁹ Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 121-124

¹⁰ For Raphael and Durer see Panofsky, *op cit* (note 8), pp 79, 166-173, for Bosch C. de Goinay, *Hieronymus Bosch*, Baden Baden 1965 (1st ed Basel 1937), cat nr 28, I. L. Zupnick, 'Bosch's Representation of Accidia and the Pilgrimage of Everyman', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 19 (1968), pp 115-132, W. S. Gibson, *Hieronymus Bosch*, London 1973, pp 101-110, A. Boczkowska, *Hieronim Bosch Astrologiczna Symbolika Jego Dziel*, Wrocław 1977, pp 49 ff and 167-169, Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 124-126

¹¹ Museo del Prado, inv nr 1614, see Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 132-137

¹² For these 'false pilgrims' see K. Jones Hellerstedt, 'The blind man and his guide in Netherlandish painting', *Simiolus*, 13 (1983), pp 163-181

¹³ Musée du Louvre, inv nr R F 2429

¹⁴ For similar motifs in *De Civitate Dei* illustrations see G. Dunlop Smith, 'New themes for the *City of God* around 1400: the illustrations of Raoul de Presles' Translation', *Scriptorium*, 36 (1982), pp 76-77, figs 8a, 8b and 9, for the landscape as the sinful world in Bosch's paintings L. Brand-Philip, 'The Prado *Epiphany* by Jerome Bosch', *Art Bulletin*, 35 (1953), pp 267-293, *idem*, *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton (N.J.) 1971, pp 214-218, see further on these motifs and their meaning Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 92-102

¹⁵ Falkenburg, *op cit* (note 7), pp 155-158

¹⁶ Statens Museum for Kunst, inv nr 1965

¹⁷ Museum Mayer van den Bergh, inv nr 40

¹⁸ Galleria Doria Pamphilj, inv nr 493

¹⁹ Fig 12 formerly in The Hague, kunsthandel H. M. Cramer, fig 13 Padua, Museo Civico, inv nr 283

²⁰ Fig 14 Pieter Aertsen, *Christ bearing the Cross* (1552), formerly in Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, inv nr 726, fig 15 Joachim Beuckelaer, *Christ appearing at the Lake of Tiberias* (1563), Mahiba, J. Paul Getty Museum, inv nr 71 PB 59, fig 16 Pieter Aertsen (one of four versions after a lost original), *Vegetable stall with the Flight into Egypt*, priv. coll., Genoa, fig 17 Joachim Beuckelaer, *Fishmarket with Christ appearing at the Lake of Tiberias* (1570), Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, inv nr 163. Apart from the details mentioned, the *Ecce Homo* by Jan van Amstel in The Hague shows motifs which make the central position of this picture between early Flemish landscapes on the one hand and Aertsen's and Beuckelaer's paintings on the other even more evident. A motif like the pedlar in the foreground derives from the landscape tradition, but does not occur in later market scenes and kitchen pieces. The motif of the man offering a fowl to a lady is frequently met with later, but such merchandise is only sporadically to be found among the wares with which peasants are heading for the market in landscapes by Herri met de Bles and Jan van Amstel. In Netherlandish art of the 16th century, in addition to the traditions mentioned here, the motif of the peasant on his way to the market with a basket filled with eggs and poultry has some prominence only in a few brothel scenes in the art of Cornelis Massys and his circle - see H. J. Raupp, *Bauernsatiren Entstehung und Entwicklung des bauerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst, ca 1470-1570*, Niederzier 1986, pp 208-211. Raupp, p 217, sees the 'Marktbauern' in these brothel scenes as the predecessors of the peasants in Aertsen's paintings

²¹ For recent publications on the connection between Patinir and Bles see H. G. Franz, *Niederländische Landschaftsmalerei im Zeitalter des Manierismus*, 1, Graz 1969, pp 78 ff and 99 ff, and note

¹⁵ For Bles, Van Amstel and the early Aertsen see R Koch, 'A rediscovered painting "The Road to Calvary" by Henri met de Bles', *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 14 (1955), pp 31-51, D Schubert, *Die Gemälde des Braunschweiger Monogrammisten*, Cologne 1970, R Genaille, 'Au temps d'Erasmus et de Luther L'oeuvre de Jan van Amstel, Monogrammist de Brunswick', *Bull Kon Mus v Schone Kunsten van Belgique*, 23 (1974-80), pp 65-96, M B Buchan, *The paintings of Pieter Aertsen*, (Ph D New York 1975), Ann Arbor-London 1981, esp pp 36-68, H G Franz, 'Landschaftsbilder als kollektive Werkstattsschöpfungen in der flämischen Malerei des 16 und frühen 17 Jahrhunderts', *Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch Graz*, 18 (1982), pp 165-181, and J Bruyn, 'De Meester van Paulus en Barnabas (Jan Mandijn?) en een vroeg werk van Pieter Aertsen', in *Rubens and his World Bijdragen Etnudes - Studies - Beitrage Opgedragen aan Prof Dr Ir R-A d'Hulst*, Antwerpen 1985, pp 17-29, for Aertsen and Beuckelaer see Moxey, *op cit* (note 3), pp 1-107

²² For other paintings by Aertsen and Beuckelaer showing these themes see Moxey, *op cit* (note 3), pp 61-64, 92-93, 96-97, 99-101, and exhib cat *Joachim Beuckelaer, op cit* (note 3), cat nos 1, 6, 8, 9, 18 Irmscher's assertion, *loc cit* (note 3), p 277, that 'the background scenes on the life of Christ [in Aertsen's and Beuckelaer's paintings] deal almost exclusively with three subjects Christ in the house of Mary and Martha, Christ and the adulteress and the Ecce Homo', is unfounded

²³ This refutes Irmscher's contention, *loc cit* (note 3), pp 219 ff, that the iconography of the food sellers in these paintings is rooted in Cicero's *De officis*

²⁴ This hypothesis will be elaborated in a forthcoming book on the meaning and function of Aertsen's and Beuckelaer's market scenes and kitchen pieces