

DISCOVERIES ABOUT *THE WINE OF ST-MARTIN'S DAY* (PRADO)

Britt CLAES & Marc MEGANCK (*)

Introduction

The Wine of St-Martin's Day, one of Pieter Bruegel's master pieces currently exhibited in the Prado Museum in Madrid, has yet to reveal its latest secrets. In this regard, a team comprising an archaeologist of the Royal Museums of Art and History (Belgium) and a historian of the Archaeology Department of Brussels Urbanism and Heritage, recently analysed the painting and came up with some surprising insights. The study concentrates on the architectural elements depicted in the composition which comprise a fragment of the Brussels city wall with one of its gates and a chapel and church at either end of the composition. These elements seen in the light of the theme of the painting as 'wine feast' give clues relating to the painter's visual inspiration in depicting this scene. What follows is an investigation of architectural and topographical viewpoints used by Bruegel in his work and a reflection on Bruegel's time in Brussels in the mid 16th century during his most productive period. In the painting he displays his many qualities notably his resourcefulness, his sense of humour, and his command of colour and composition. He also shows the rate of consumption and use of wine as a contemporary commodity.

The painting *The Wine of St-Martin's Day*

The Wine of St-Martin's Day (fig. 1) was painted by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525-1569) in the period 1566-1567⁽¹⁾. The composition represents a rural scene, outside of the city walls of Brussels, showing the arrival of the first wine of the year. This event was celebrated on 11 November on the day of St-Martin's feast (the saint is also known as St-Martin of Tours) on the eve of Advent, traditionally a fasting period in the religious calendar. The central scene is set near a group of country dwellings where a large crowd of men, women and children (some destitute) are greedily attempting to glean as much young wine from the red barrel placed on the wooden scaffolding. This country setting is not surprising, since the end of the vine harvest coincided with the distribution of surplus wine to villagers. In the lower right part of the composition St-Martin arrives on a white horse and splits his cloak in two with his sword. He donates one half to a beggar. The merciful act of the Holy man is thus in sharp contrast with the intemperate crowd. The whole scene is set against an urban background with the city of Brussels at the left top corner. The gate through which people are entering and leaving the city, is often referred to by art historians

(*) Britt CLAES: Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis; Marc Meganck: Université Libre de Bruxelles.

(1) SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011, p. 41. The exact date of the painting is unknown.



Fig. 1. *The Wine of St-Martin's Day*.
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as the Hal Gate⁽²⁾. As we will see below, it is unlikely that this building represented by Bruegel is indeed the Hal Gate.

From Bruegel's original painting two copies by unknown masters are still preserved⁽³⁾. In addition, an engraving in reverse represents a version of the composition, ordered by Abraham Brueghel around 1670⁽⁴⁾. Abraham Brueghel's grandfather, Jan Brueghel the Elder is mentioned as the *inventor* of the work. Abraham Brueghel was unaware that the original composition was by his great-grandfather Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

It is very likely that Bruegel was inspired by Hieronimus Bosch (ca. 1450-1516) when he created his *Wine of St-Martin's Day* composition⁽⁵⁾. Bosch's designs were used in 1566 in Brussels for tapestry weaving on the orders of Cardinal Granvelle (1517-1586). On one of them we find the representation of St-Martin, surrounded by beggars, exactly as Bruegel depicts them in his canvas. It is probable that the cardinal and the painter knew each other. Tine Meganck proposes Granvelle as the patron of the *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562)

(2) HUET 2016, p. 291; SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011, p. 9.

(3) In the past, these two works have been erroneously attributed to Bruegel's sons Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel the Elder. Klaus Ertz rejects these attributions and gives them to unknown masters (ERTZ 1998-2000, p. 466-467 and cat. A 453). The first one is in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts (Brussels), the second one is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna). Of this last painting only the right side with the image of St-Martin remains.

(4) MONBALLIEU 1979, p. 204-206; SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011, p. 16-17. The engraver is Nicolas Guérard. The original is in the British Museum (London).

(5) HUET 2016, p. 289-290.

and suggests that Bruegel visited Granvelle's curiosity cabinet which was in his long since vanished palace in the Rue des Sols⁽⁶⁾.

Two other versions of the same composition are from the hand of Pieter Baltens (ca. 1527-1584)⁽⁷⁾. The general scheme and iconography are very similar, although there are some differences: the wine barrel is much smaller, the village on the right side is missing and there is a lack of unity in the group of people depicted in the central scene. Since neither painting is dated and the artists are contemporaries, we cannot be certain as to whom inspired whom, although it is tempting to suppose that Bruegel's work inspired Baltens, and that it was not the other way around⁽⁸⁾.

What actually happened to the painting in the early years after Bruegel's death is not certain. Most probably it ended up in the Gonzaga collection in Mantua⁽⁹⁾, a very influential art collection at the beginning of the 17th century, after which it was brought to Spain around the turn of the century by the 9th Duke of Medinaceli (1660-1711)⁽¹⁰⁾. The canvas remained for centuries in the hands of the Medinaceli family. Finally, in 2009, the Prado Museum in Madrid restored it and later, in 2010, acquired the painting. Although it was first attributed to Pieter Brueghel the Younger⁽¹¹⁾, the restauration of the painting revealed the signature of Pieter Bruegel the Elder⁽¹²⁾. Since then, *The Wine of St-Martin's Day* has been officially added to the painter's oeuvre.

Brussels as a source of inspiration

Very little is known about Bruegel's biography in general, and more particular about his life in Brussels. In 1563, the artist moved from Antwerp to Brussels with his fiancée Mayken Coecke, daughter of Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550). The couple married around August 1563 in the Chapel Church near the Sablon, where he was buried in 1569⁽¹³⁾. It has long been thought that the newlyweds settled in the rue Haute at the current number 132⁽¹⁴⁾, not far from the Chapel Church and the Hal Gate. Recent research has nevertheless shown that Bruegel most probably lived in a house located between the convent of the Bogards and the fountain of Manneken Pis⁽¹⁵⁾. In his article on Bruegel's domicile, Jean Bastiaensen suggests the painter might have been inspired by his immediate surroundings while painting *The Beggars* (1568)⁽¹⁶⁾, the convent of the Bogaerts being so close to his home⁽¹⁷⁾.

(6) MEGANCK 2014, p. 145-158.

(7) Two signed versions of this composition are still preserved today, one in the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam) and one in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Antwerp).

(8) VAN DER COELEN & LAMMERTSE 2015, p. 239.

(9) SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011, p. 40.

(10) CAÑAL 1989; SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011, p. 20.

(11) DÍAZ PADRON 1989, p. 306.

(12) SILVA MAROTO *et al.* 2011.

(13) MEGANCK 2014, p. 60; HAAG 2018, p. 16.

(14) MARTINY 1964, p. 9-23.

(15) BASTIAENSEN 2016, p. 22-27.

(16) Louvre (Paris).

(17) BASTIAENSEN 2016, p. 26.

It has been attested that Bruegel used Brussels and its environs as a source of inspiration. This is the case for the drawing of the *Pilgrimage of the Epileptics to the Church of Molenbeek* (1564). The original is lost, but three copies still exist⁽¹⁸⁾. These diagrammatically depict the now disappeared church of St John the Baptist in Molenbeek-St-Jean⁽¹⁹⁾. For the painting of *The Blind leading the Blind* (1568)⁽²⁰⁾, the small church of St Anne in the hamlet of St-Anna-Pede in Itterbeek (municipality of Dilbeek) is thought to be represented⁽²¹⁾. As we will see further on, Bruegel found inspiration in Schaerbeek, just outside the Brussels city walls, for his *Wine of St-Martin's Day*.

As such, the recent analysis of *The Numbering at Bethlehem* (1566)⁽²²⁾ is enlightening: the artist excels in combining reality and imagination and also incorporates precise spatial references, in this specific case the farm of the lordship of Wijnegem (Province of Antwerp).

Analysis of the painting

The iconography of the architecture

The composition of Bruegel's *The Wine of St-Martin's Day* is delimited by a city gate and a church. Until now, the city gate in the upper left corner (fig. 2) has been identified as the Hal Gate, the last architectural witness of the 14th century urban wall around Brussels still existing today. Bruegel was supposed to have lived nearby (see above). However, comparative analysis and study of the other buildings in the painting point to a new conclusion: the painted fortified structure that is preceded by a forebuilding flanked by turrets is not the Hal Gate, but the Schaerbeek Gate (also called Cologne Gate), demolished in 1784 by order of emperor Joseph II. Where this city gate once stood, we find today the Tower of Finances, on the corner of the Rue Royale and the Boulevard du Jardin Botanique⁽²³⁾. Various documents show the location and the architecture of the Schaerbeek Gate. In the first place there are the 16th century maps by Deventer (fig. 3) and Braun & Hogenberg (fig. 4). Then there is the drawing of Cantagallina of 1613⁽²⁴⁾ (fig. 5) and two 18th century drawings (figs. 6 and 7)⁽²⁵⁾. The latter show that the entrance building protecting the medieval gate was demolished in later times. The comparison of these different views with the painting of Bruegel confirms the identification of the Schaerbeek Gate. Also, the topography of the gate's location can be seen as an additional determining factor. As such, the building is situated at the precise location where the rampart of the city wall

(18) The original drawing is lost, but has been the subject of a series of copies, including engravings, published in the first half of the 17th century by the Dutch engraver and print publisher Hendrik Hondius (see on the subject: MICHEL 2017; MIELKE 1996; BERGMANS 1974).

(19) GUILLAUME & MEGANCK 2007, p. 48-49; DENHAENE 2006, p. 118-124.

(20) Museo di Capodimonte (Naples).

(21) LEONARD 2002.

(22) Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels).

(23) This identification has also been proposed by LICHTERT 2014, p. 251-252.

(24) Remigio Cantagallina, *La porte de Schaerbeek*, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels), inv. 2994/55; VAUTIER & LOZE 2017, p. 116.

(25) P. Vitzthumb, *La porte de Schaerbeek*, 1783 (Royal Library of Belgium, SH 23617) et L. Spaak, *La porte de Schaerbeek*, ca 1780 (Brussels City Museum).



Fig. 2. Detail of the Schaerbeek Gate represented on *The Wine of St-Martin's Day*.
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Fig. 3. Detail of the Schaerbeek Gate represented on the Brussels map of J. van Deventer; mid-16th century. Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles, *Cartes et plans de Bruxelles et de la Région bruxelloise*, 1.
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Fig. 4. Detail of the Schaerbeek Gate represented on the Brussels map of Braun & Hogenberg, 1576. Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles, *Cartes et plans de Bruxelles et de la Région bruxelloise*, 3.
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Fig. 5. Remigio Cantagallina, The Schaerbeek Gate, 1613.
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Fig. 6. The Schaerbeek Gate, L. Spaak, around 1780. Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles.
© Musée de la ville de Bruxelles



Fig. 7. The Schaerbeek Gate, P. Vitzthumb, 1783. Bibliothèque royale de Belgique.
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Fig. 8. Detail of the old St-Servatius church represented on *The Wine of Saint-Martin's Day*.
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starts its descent towards the lower part of the city of Brussels. The gate is thus situated in the north-east of Brussels, facing the crest line that separates the valleys of the Maelbeek and the Senne.

Given the topography and the location of the scene not far from the Schaerbeek Gate we can identify the church represented by Bruegel in the upper right corner (fig. 8) as the old church of St-Servatius, well known from numerous iconographic documents (figs. 9 to 11). Several architectural elements confirm this identification: the western tower (the oldest part of the church was rebuilt at the end of the 16th century), as well as the three-sided Gothic choir. Around the church, some houses in traditional architecture suggest the village nearby. However, these constructions are not faithful to reality. Bruegel seems to depict the same 'typical houses' that we find in other compositions such as *The Blind leading the Blind*⁽²⁶⁾. Demolished in 1905, the parish church of Schaerbeek was located at top of the current Avenue Louis-Bertrand⁽²⁷⁾.

If we look closely at the composition, a third zone draws the attention at the left end of the painting. This is a Calvary, in the midst of a few trees, associated with a small chapel with a saddle roof (fig. 12) that can be identified with certainty as the Capelledriesch,

(26) LICHTERT 2014, p. 79-80.

(27) GUILLAUME & MEGANCK 2006, p. 56-58.



Fig. 9. The old St-Servatius church in the beginning of the 18th century.
Archives du CPAS de Bruxelles, *Cartes et plans*, SJ 50.
© Archives du CPAS de Bruxelles



Fig. 10. The St-Servatius church after a map of Schaerbeek realised by Jean de Refroissart in 1648. Archives générales du Royaume, *Cartes et plans manuscrits*, 689.
© Archives générales du Royaume



Fig. 11. The old St-Servatius church before 1905.
Collection Belfius Banque – Académie royale de Belgique.
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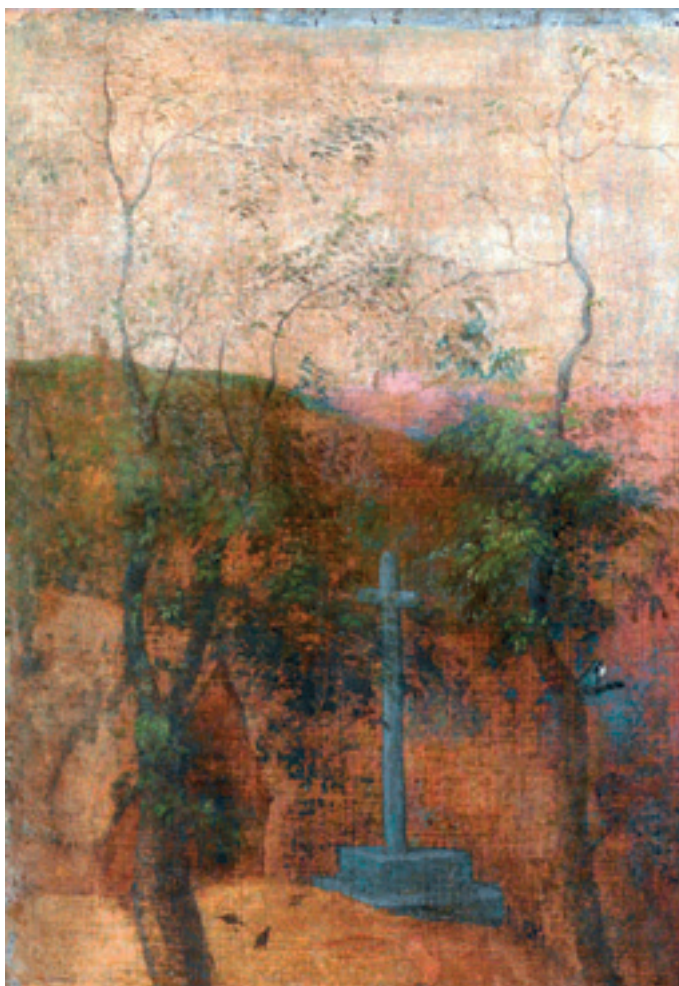


Fig. 12. Detail of the Calvary and small chapel with saddle roof represented on *The Wine of St-Martin's Day*.

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the narrow crest plateau that separates the valleys of the Senne and the Maelbeek, north of the city wall of Brussels (fig. 13). Today the Chaussée de Haecht follows this crest between the former Schaerbeek Gate and the village of Schaerbeek through the Zavelberg that was used later for sand extraction⁽²⁸⁾. From this viewpoint (56 meters) it is possible to see: Brussels in the south, Laeken in the north-west, Schaerbeek in the north and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode in the southeast. At about 400 meters north of the city rampart, a smaller road (the present Rue du Moulin) leaves the road towards the east in the direction of the Maelbeek valley. A chapel and a leprosarium were situated at this

(28) DENHAENE 2002, p. 19.

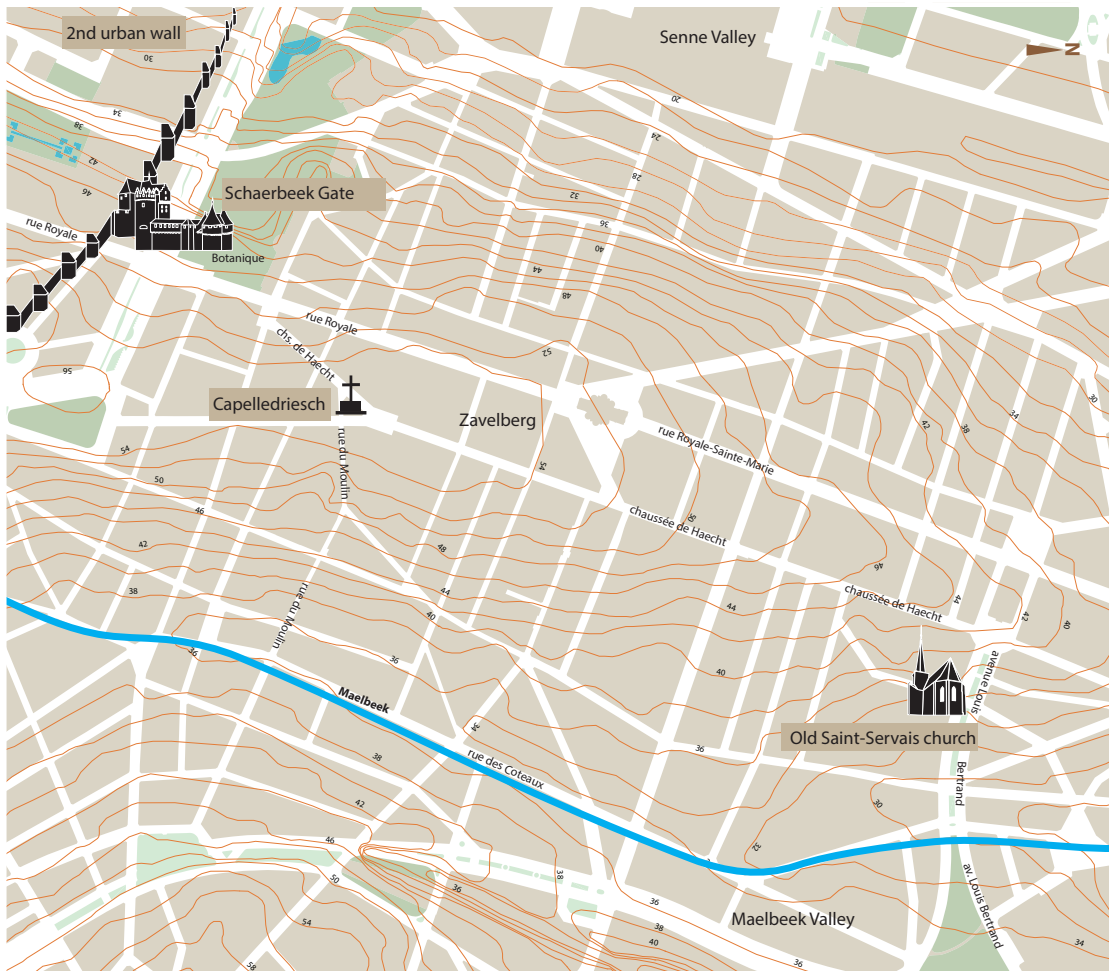


Fig. 13. Localisation of the built elements represented by Bruegel.
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bifurcation, giving the name Capelledriesch to the place. Both buildings disappeared during the Wars of Religion; only the chapel was rebuilt in 1610⁽²⁹⁾. During the second half of the 17th century an important defensive complex, reinforcing the Schaerbeek Gate, was erected between the city gate and the chapel. The Marshal of Saxony built his trenches on the same place during the Siege of Brussels in 1746⁽³⁰⁾. These events probably caused the final disappearance of the chapel.

(29) CABUY *et al.* 1994, p. 48.

(30) SALMON 2005, p. 36-37.

Wine production

Let us now concentrate on the wine that Bruegel puts at the heart of his composition. Taking previous conclusions into account, Bruegel made drawings in the outskirts of Brussels, near the village of Schaerbeek, in preparation for his *Wine of St-Martin's Day*. Vineyards are indeed documented around Brussels since the Middle Ages. The most reputable ones were those of the Benedictine abbey of Forest in the valley of the Senne, mentioned in 1435⁽³¹⁾. In several parts of the village, hillsides were planted with vines on behalf of the nuns. These wines were not of exceptional quality and were mainly used for altar wine and for local consumption.

During the Middle Ages vineyards were exploited both in Schaerbeek and Saint-Josseten-Noode: the existence of state vineyards is attested in the first ducal censor of 1321⁽³²⁾. Later, in 1430, the 'cru de Bruxelles' is mentioned in the accounts of the Duke of Burgundy. The ducal vineyard then stretched from the village of Saint-Josseten-Noode to the hamlet of Ophem. In 1467, we find a mention of the vineyards of Charles the Bold (1433-1477) at the level of the current Rue de la Consolation in Schaerbeek⁽³³⁾. As attested on cadastral maps, this place will be designated until the 19th century as 'Wijngaerdberg' or 'vineyard hill'. At the time of Charles the Bold the 'tête du cuvée', known as miracle wine, was sent directly to the Duke (he hardly ever resided in Brussels). The rest was distributed to the poor⁽³⁴⁾.

The scene depicted by Bruegel takes place on the summit of a small hill that descends towards the valley of the Maelbeek, a particularity of the landscape that we still find today in the Rue des Coteaux, or 'wine hill street'. This long artery, created on a vaulted section of the Maelbeek, connects the Rue du Moulin in Saint-Josseten-Noode with the junction of the avenues Louis Bertrand, Paul Deschanel and the Rue Édouard Fiers in Schaerbeek⁽³⁵⁾. We can thus conclude that Bruegel had this 'wine hill' in Schaerbeek in front of him as inspiration for his wine feast.

The decline of these local vineyards is attested not long after the making of the painting. This was probably partly caused by the harsh competition with imported, more sophisticated wines from France and Germany, as well as high transport costs and reduced trade which remained the preserve of the rich. In addition, climate change and reduced sunshine in the late Middle Ages had a documented negative effect on vine culture in this region⁽³⁶⁾. Indeed, viticulture is a labour intensive and costly process that requires willpower and a great ability to plant new vineyards after harsh winter weather. As a result, during the 16th century, wine was gradually replaced by beer that had improved in quality due to the introduction of hops. Both wine and beer were often the only alternatives for polluted and unhealthy water. It is of note that local vineyards are still reported in Brussels around the late 18th century.

(31) VERNIERS 1949, p. 26.

(32) MARTENS 1958, p. 62.

(33) SCHAYES & VAN DEN HAUTE 1960, p. 25.

(34) CABUY *et al.* 1994, p. 34.

(35) DEKOSTER 1981, p. 132.

(36) VAN UYTVEN 2007, p. 98-100.

Conclusion

The latest research on Bruegel shows that the architectural structure he reproduces in his paintings are often more than just decorative components. The *Wine of St-Martin's Day*, topographical and architectural analysis shows that the composition undoubtedly had a specific textual dimension. It is part of a landscape scene with existing built elements that have been accurately mapped: the Schaerbeek Gate and the ramparts of the second town wall; a chapel; a Calvary scene; and finally the St-Servatius church. Furthermore, the topography thus located and viewed together with the skyline make it possible to situate the central scene of the painting on the heights separating the valleys of the Senne and Maelbeek. These cartographic and 'archaeological' findings firmly anchor Bruegel's *Wine of St-Martin's Day* in his own familiar surroundings, as has been previously demonstrated for certain of his other works.

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RÉSUMÉ

Découvertes concernant *Le vin de la Saint-Martin* (Prado)

S'il n'a pas représenté Bruxelles intra-muros, Pieter Bruegel l'Ancien livre cependant une vue des abords de la ville avec *Le vin de la Saint-Martin* (vers 1566-1567). Conservé au Musée du Prado, à Madrid, ce tableau a été réalisé quelques années après l'installation du peintre à Bruxelles. Il illustre un aspect de la viticulture en région bruxelloise: le jour de la Saint-Martin (11 novembre), lorsque la fin des vendanges était célébrée par une distribution du premier vin. L'analyse des éléments architecturaux et topographiques de cette peinture indique que la scène se situe dans la vallée du Maelbeek, sans doute à hauteur de la rue des Coteaux, à Schaerbeek. A l'arrière-plan, Bruegel a représenté la porte de Schaerbeek (démolie à la fin du XVIII^e siècle) de même que les remparts de l'enceinte urbaine du XIV^e siècle, l'ancienne église Saint-Servais ainsi qu'une chapelle et un calvaire situés au *Cappelledriesch*.

SAMENVATTING

Nieuwe inzichten over *De Wijn van Sint-Maarten (Prado)*

Pieter Bruegel de Oude werpt met zijn *Wijn van Sint-Maarten* (rond 1566-1567) een blik op de omgeving net buiten de Brusselse stadsmuren. De schilder realiseerde het schilderij, dat bewaard wordt in het Prado Museum te Madrid, enkele jaren nadat hij naar Brussel verhuisde. Het toont een aspect van de wijnbouw dichtbij de stad op de dag van Sint-Maarten (11 november), wanneer het einde van de oogst gevierd werd met de uitdeling van de eerste wijn. Uit de analyse van de weergegeven architecturale en topografische elementen kan afgeleid worden dat het tafereel zich afspeelt in de vallei van de Maalbeek, naar alle waarschijnlijkheid ter hoogte van de Wijnheuvelenstraat in Schaarbeek. Op het achterplan schildert Bruegel de Schaarbeekse poort (afgebroken aan het einde van de 18^{de} eeuw), net zoals de 14^{de}-eeuwse stadsmuren, de oude Sint-Servaaskerk en een kapelletje en calvarie ter hoogte van de *Cappelledriesch*.