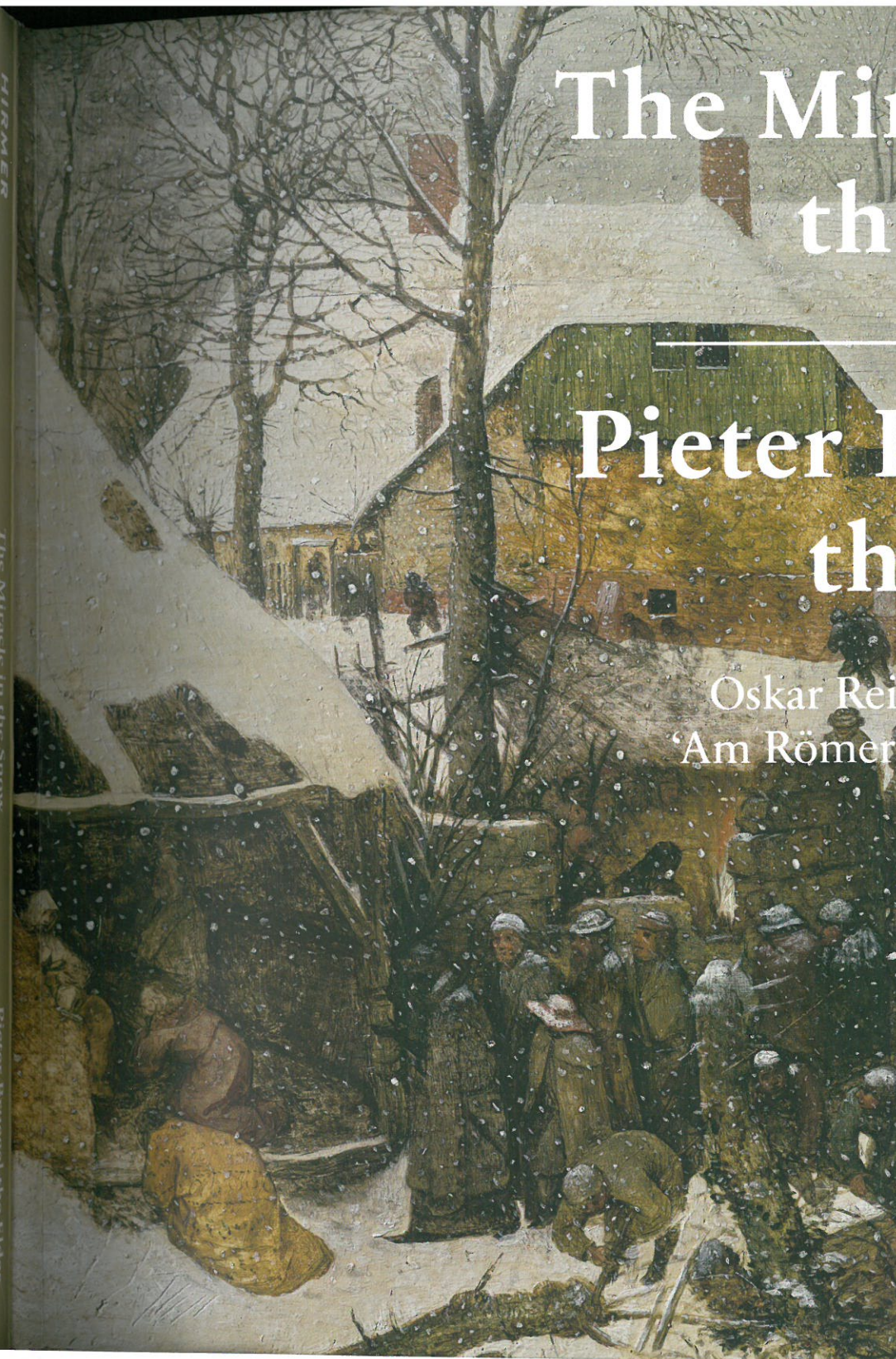


The Miracle in the Snow

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Oskar Reinhart Collection
'Am Römerholz' Winterthur



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*The Adoration of the Kings in the Snow:
The Making of a Masterpiece*

CHRISTINA CURRIE, DOMINIQUE ALLART, AND PASCALE FRAITURE

'Een cleyn stuxken daer het sneeut' (a small painting in which it is snowing): this is how collector and art lover Peeter Stevens referred to a painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder that he had seen, though, alas, he failed to give its location at the time.¹ It is of course likely that this was the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow now* in the Oskar Reinhart Collection, Winterthur (cat. 1). The depiction of snowfall is indeed exceptional in landscape painting and was a challenge that few artists dared to take on. Bruegel tackled it with incomparable technical mastery in the Winterthur *Adoration of the Kings*, which is not only the oldest surviving winter landscape painting by the artist, but also one of the first winter landscapes in easel painting in the early modern period.² By emphasizing the primordial importance of the landscape, the Winterthur painting contrasts strongly with the two other surviving versions by Bruegel on the same religious theme, in the Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels and in the National Gallery in London.³ In the Winterthur painting, for the first time, the artist places an episode from the Nativity of Christ in a Flemish village and treats it as a contemporary event taking place in the depths of winter. He had done the same in the *Massacre of the Innocents*, undated but probably painted around 1565–67, The Royal Collection in London and in the *Census at Bethlehem*, c. 1566, Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. Nonetheless, it is the *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap*, painted in 1565, also in the Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, which at first glance is closest to the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*. Both are small-format paintings typical of cabinet pictures. As we will reveal here, tree-ring analysis confirms a link between the two works and also connects them to several other paintings by Bruegel of the same size. On the other hand, their respective painting techniques will be shown to rely on entirely different working procedures. In the case of the Winterthur painting,

we will explore the brushwork at the heart of this iconic masterpiece, which showcases Bruegel's exceptional sensitivity and virtuosity. Lastly, even though the copies, notably those of Pieter Brueghel the Younger, do not come close to the original version in quality, we will demonstrate how they provide clues into an early stage in the creation of the Elder's original composition.⁴

Inscription

The signature and date of the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* are painted in dark paint with a fine brush at the lower left corner of the panel (fig. 1). They are applied on a light, yellowed underlayer in a rectangular reserve in the white snow paint. The date was previously read as 1567, but in fact it reads 'M·D·L XIII', despite being somewhat abraded and strengthened by later restoration. It is possible that the last three digits were originally dotted, as dots are faintly visible on the last two 'I's; such dotted 'I's are typical for Bruegel and also seen in his London *Adoration of the Kings*, painted the following year.

Painting support

Bruegel painted the *Adoration* on a single, radially cut oak plank measuring 34.5–35.0 × 54.9–55.2 cm. The panel's thickness ranges from 0.4 to 0.6 cm and its reverse side is intact, having never been cradled (see fig. 4 in the essay by Kerstin Richter in this publication). This is quite rare, and in this case the reverse of the painting contains crucial information on the painting's provenance. There are various inscriptions and labels, including a scratched-out, heat-branded round mark, perhaps a customs stamp (see fig. 2). The most significant inscription, however, is the number 243, painted in black (see fig. 2), which reveals that the painting was previously in the prestigious collection of the banker Everhard Jabach. It was in



Fig. 7 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Census at Bethlehem*, c. 1566, oil on oak panel, 115.3 × 164.4 cm, Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels



Fig. 1 Top: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, 1563;
Bottom: Detail of inscription with date and signature



fact number 243 of the inventory of his collection, drawn up on 17 July 1696. A collector's label on the reverse also states that the painting was at some point in the possession of Johan Moritz Graf Saurma, a Silesian nobleman (see fig 4 in the essay by Kerstin Richter in this publication).⁵

Dendrochronology, carried out in 2019, shows that the growth rhythm of the oak tree from which the panel derived was regular and slow, which means that the tree rings are narrow (with a mean ring width of c. 1 mm). The tree was more than three centuries old when it was felled; no less than 311 ring widths were recorded, excluding the first growth rings near the pith, and the last sapwood rings, which are missing. The slow growth and radial cut explain the panel's excellent condition today, although it is slightly warped. There are, however, distortions in the wood in the upper left, due to proximity to a knot, and visible in the X-radiograph (fig. 7). These have provoked circular cracking in the paint layer but no paint loss. Normally, a panel-maker would cut off parts of planks containing weaknesses such as knots. There is also a horizontal split spanning the width of the panel about eight centimetres from the top.

Dendrochronology led to a surprising new finding, which was made possible thanks to previous tree-ring analyses of Bruegel's paintings by the Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique, Brussels and by Ian Tyers in the UK (Dendrochronology Consultancy Ltd, Retford). The dendrochronological data from the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, when compared with Bruegel

the Elder's other works, proves that the painting was executed on a plank derived from the same tree as three other paintings of the same format, all carried out c. 1562–65: the *Death of the Virgin*, c. 1562–65, at Upton House in Warwickshire, the *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, 1563, at the Courtauld Gallery in London and the *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap*, 1565 (fig. 3).⁶ Bruegel therefore may have commissioned several supports of this specific format from a panel-maker as one order and used them over a period of two to three years. Unfortunately, we have no records of his dealings with suppliers.

The provenance of the tree providing the planks for these four panels is the eastern Baltic region, a typical source for paintings from the former southern Netherlands during the period. The last tree ring measured on the *Adoration* is dated 1548.⁷ The Brussels *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap* includes more recent tree rings, giving 1553 as the earliest possible date for the felling of the tree.⁸ This is only ten years before the painted date of 1563 on the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*; the interval between felling and use could well have been shorter.⁹

Comparison with the other panels made from the same tree reveals that the *Winterthur* painting is shorter in height by about 2 cm and a little narrower than the other three. This could suggest that the work has been slightly cut down. The hypothesis is supported by the lack of bevelling at top and left on the reverse. The upper and right edges are also straighter and smoother than the other two sides and have no patina.



Fig. 2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, reverse side, details. Left: possible customs stamp; Right: Everhard Jabach's inventory number in black paint (partially hidden behind label and red paint)

A reduction in height and width would also account for the fact that the copies of the *Adoration* include more of the upper left tree and ruined castle, and slightly more of the tent in the lower right, giving a more balanced composition. One particularly faithful copy, formerly in the Louis Dimier collection, (cat. 2), which would appear to have been painted directly after Bruegel's original by an anonymous follower, probably represents the Winterthur panel's true initial height (fig. 4 and cat. 2).¹⁰

Preparatory Layers

The ground and paint layers extend right up to the edges of the panel on all sides. The ground layer is white, and is likely to be chalk-glue, although no sampling was carried out. In places, patches of diagonal striations in the ground layer betray the use of a scraper, which would have been used to smooth it down and render it even. A chalk ground, sometimes with traces of scraper marks, is entirely typical of Bruegel's paintings.

Some vertical, streaky brushstrokes running down the left side of the painting indicate the presence of an imprimatura, or priming layer above the ground. Elsewhere, light-toned strokes applied with a wide brush in varying directions can sometimes be seen through thin paint. It is likely that this is part of an overall, medium-rich imprimatura, probably oil-based and now slightly yellowed, which would have served as a sealing layer between the chalk-glue ground and the paint. A thin, lead-white based imprimatura layer has been identified in most of Bruegel's analysed paintings and indeed it was common practice to apply such a layer on top of the ground in sixteenth-century northern panel painting.

Underdrawing

Bruegel appears to have worked in more than one phase to establish his design on the panel. Trees and architectural elements seem to have been laid out first, using a dry, dark medium such as black chalk. These outlines are faintly distinguishable here and there in the infrared images (IR reflectography and IR photography) and through areas of thin, light paint in visible light. Near the upper edge to the left, for example, there are underdrawing lines for thick tree branches as

well as the outlines of a branch that was never carried through in paint. Faint lines are also seen in some roof profiles and there is a drawing line for the arch of the bridge, seen where it overshoots onto the frozen canal. In the canal itself, there are some underdrawn side branches of logs that have been left out during painting. The Holy Family, the child on the sled, and the figure stepping up from the canal carrying a bucket may also be part of this first drawing phase. In the figure with the bucket, there are some unexplained sketchy lines under the paint, and his left leg seems to have been moved slightly left during painting. Likewise, the right ice pick held by the child on the sled seems to have shifted left slightly from its initial position (fig. 5). On the brick canal wall, to the upper right of the child, there is a circular form that has not been painted; this might be a mooring ring. This drawing stage is almost certainly more extensive than we can make out but is concealed beneath dark paint or thick paint representing snow.¹¹

In the main areas of figures, there are no distinguishable drawing lines at all. These figures were likely applied in a later phase, on top of a first layer of snow and after the painting of buildings and trees. Indeed, the figures clearly overlap the background motifs and have almost never been painted in reserve. Bruegel appears to have 'drawn' them in at the same time as painting them, using a fine brush and black paint.

There do not appear to be any significant changes in composition, suggesting that Bruegel had planned out his design carefully on a separate support prior to painting. This hypothesis is borne out by the study of the copies, discussed at the end of this chapter.

IRR examination of the *Winter Landscape Skaters and Bird Trap* (1565) revealed a very different style of underdrawing to that glimpsed at in the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*.¹² The *Winter Landscape with Bird Trap*'s underdrawing is much sketchier and demonstrates significant changes between drawing and painting and the iconic trap itself is not underdrawn, at least not in its current position. This suggests that the *Winter Landscape with Bird Trap* was conceived on the basis of little more than a rough sketch, unlike the *Adoration of the Kings*, which relied on more detailed planning and a model drawing, as we shall see later.

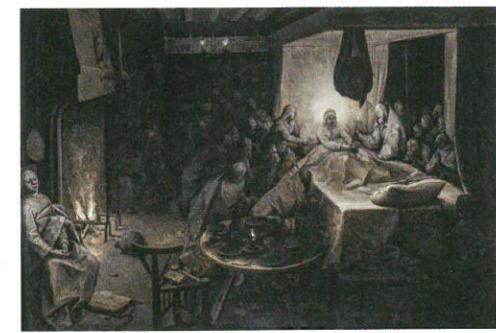
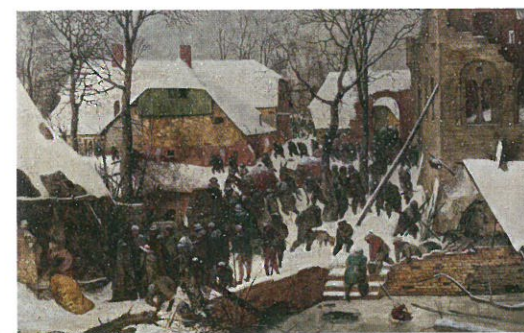
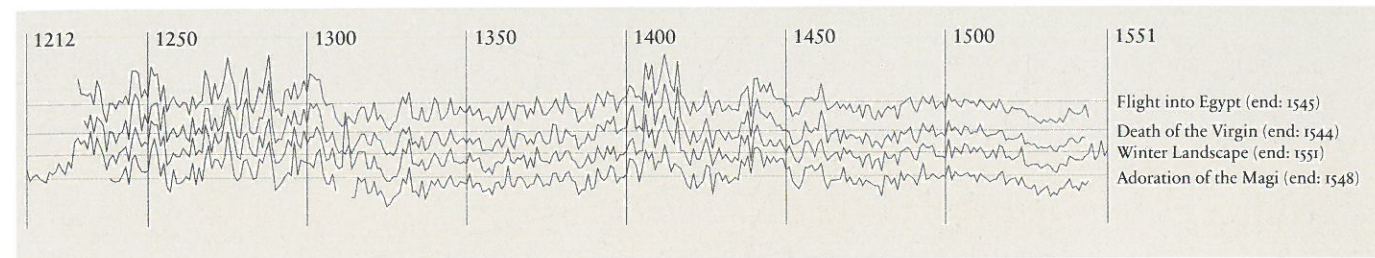
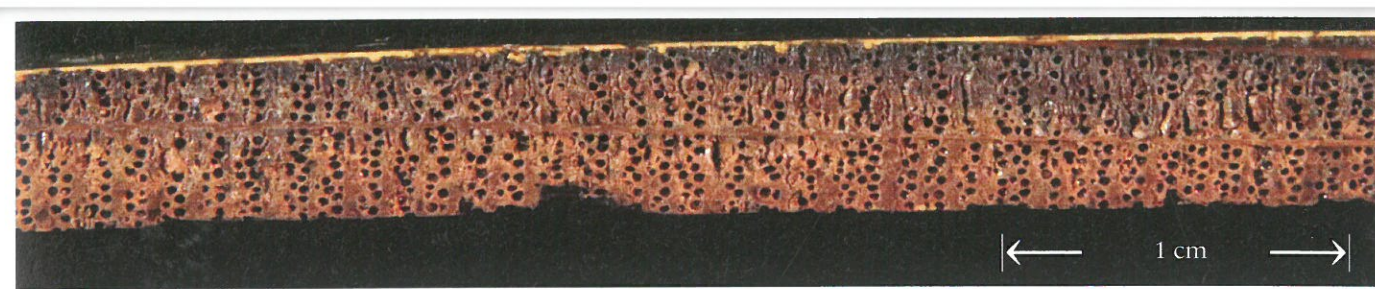


Fig. 3 Top: Edge of panel prepared by brush for dendrochronology; Middle: Visual match between planks from four different panels deriving from the same eastern Baltic oak; Bottom: Bruegel's four paintings on panels from the same tree: *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, 1563;

Landscape with the Flight into Egypt, 1563 The Courtauld Gallery, London; *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap*, 1565, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels; *The Death of the Virgin*, c. 1562–65, National Trust, Upton House, Warwickshire



Fig. 4. Top: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, 35×55.2 cm; Bottom: Anonymous, *Adoration*, 37×58 cm, formerly in the Dimier collection

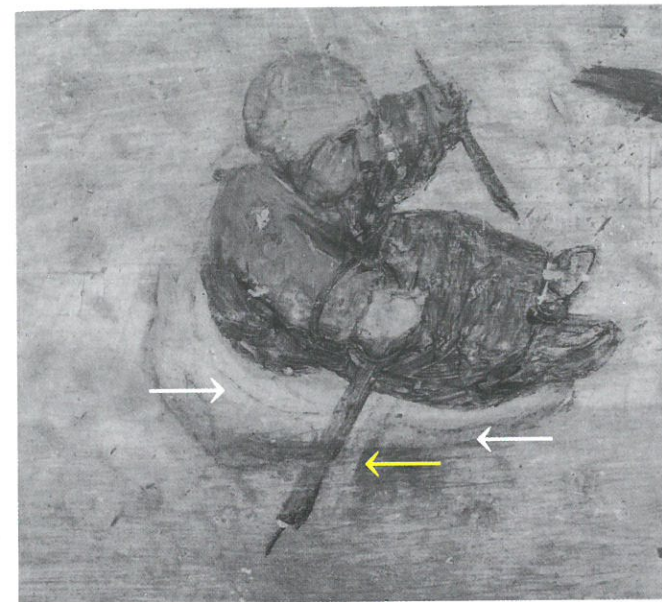


Fig. 5 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, detail, child on sled; Left: infrared photography; Right: raking light. White arrows indicate underdrawing; yellow arrow indicates former position of ice pick.

Paint Layer

The paint layer of the *Adoration* is in generally good condition, although dark, translucent areas have suffered abrasion damage at some point during cleaning. The provisional roof of the shelter with the fire in the centre, as well as two figures profiled just above it, executed in the same type of black, glaze-like paint, have been virtually effaced. These motifs would have been particularly susceptible to cleaning damage, given that they are painted with such a thin, glaze-like, dark paint. Interestingly, these two elements are intact in the faithful copy (see fig. 4 and cat. 2), which means that it must have been painted prior to the damage to the original. The brown wall to the left of the Virgin also appears to have lost some of its colour, and the patternwork on a King's yellow robe is slightly abraded (fig. 6).

It is possible that the lower part of the Virgin's robe, also in that detail, was originally blue. The current nebulous greyish appearance of her skirt could indicate the presence of discoloured smalt, a pigment found in many paintings by Bruegel, including in the *Dulle Griet* from 1563,¹³ painted the same

year as the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*. On ageing, smalt often loses its blue colour and turns grey. Scientific analysis would be necessary to confirm the presence of smalt in the *Adoration of the Kings*. The corresponding detail in the former Dimier collection version (fig. 4 and cat. 2) could also be painted in smalt, as it has a semi-transparent grey appearance typical of the pigment.

Palette

The deliberately restrained palette, based on harmonies of white, grey-brown, and a subtle range of yellow and pink ochres, perfectly embodies the muffled and intimate atmosphere brought about by the leaden sky and heavy snowfall. In this way, Bruegel creates a delicate tonal balance, enlivened by motifs painted in more intense colours, such as the mules' red packs and harnesses. Likewise, although most figures are painted in black with brown-coloured hose, the eye is ineluctably drawn to the child in red sledding on the ice, the pair in blue and red carrying water buckets, the soldiers with their red trouser hose standing guard on the bridge, and the kneeling



Fig. 6 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, detail

King with their rich yellow ochre and red (now somewhat faded) robes (see fig. 6). Bruegel has also paid special attention to the different hues and tonalities in the brick, stonework, wood, and the rendering of his architectural motifs, much as he would do later in his *Census at Bethlehem*.¹⁴

Sequence of Painting

Bruegel's sequence of painting can be partially worked out based on clues from the paint layer and the X-radiograph (fig. 7).

On his light underlayer, Bruegel applied a thin white layer of paint for the snow-covered earth, without reserving spaces for the figures or animals to be painted later. Likewise, he applied a thin, whitish-grey layer to suggest the frozen ice of the canal in the foreground. At this stage, he probably also brushed in the thin, grey sky, leaving a reserve for the trunk of the larger tree to the left.

He appears to have applied the snowy rooftops next, leaving reserves for certain, but not all, tree trunks, and for the adjacent brickwork. In the upper right, at the back of the procession, the brown paint of a jagged brick arch extends over its straighter-edged reserve. Spaces were reserved for the tall, straight tree to the right and larger tree to the left, but not for the undulating tree in the centre right, through which snow paint can clearly be distinguished. The thickness of the white paint on rooftops varies from one house to another, as in the *Census at Bethlehem* and the *Massacre of the Innocents*; there is, for example, a thin covering of paint for the rooftops on the far left which allows the light, underlying layer to shine through, and a considerably thicker layer for the rooftop in the lower right.

The various brick, stone, and plaster rendering on buildings appear to have been painted next, without reserving spaces for trees or figures. After these, architectural details, Bruegel painted in the trees. He then established the various figure groups and animals. In most cases the underlying snow paint is clearly visible through the thin black and brown brushwork of the figures. Likewise, where people are silhouetted against brickwork and tree trunks, the forms of the latter can be made out underneath the paint of the figures. In the case of the small child on the sled, the greyish, opaque ice paint is clearly visible through the thinly painted head covering (see fig. 5).

The artist took a different approach for the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* group, where the figures are painted directly on the light underlayer rather than on the dark paint of the interior, thus ensuring that they retained their luminosity (see fig. 6).

At a late stage, Bruegel loaded his brush with white paint and turned around many motifs in the foreground, including the kneeling King, the willow log and the rectangular space destined for the signature. He gave hats and shoulders a dusting of fresh 'snow'. He applied thick dabs of white paint around and on people's shoes and between figures, while outlining rooftops with a thicker line of white paint, as in the *Census at Bethlehem*. Similarly, he brushed extra white paint onto the tops of walls beside the canal and on the steps down to the water to suggest settled snow.

Around this time he also must have applied the thick yellow paint for the fire in the ruined house in the centre left, which spills over somewhat onto the brown brickwork of the wall in front (fig. 8).

Bruegel's final and most radical step was to apply random dabs of white paint all over the composition, representing cottony, softly falling snowflakes. This was new in his work, and something he did not repeat, although he may have painted others that have since disappeared. This freshly falling snow inspired Lucas van Valckenborch, who used it to dramatic effect in several paintings, such as the *Winter Landscape with Snowfall in Antwerp*, painted 1575, Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt, *Winter Landscape (January or February)*, 1586, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien and *Fish and Meat Market (Winter)*, c. 1595, Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal.¹⁵ Nonetheless, these later imitations of snowfall appear systematic and heavy. They do not capture the exceptional quality and poetry of the Winterthur *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* and Bruegel's ability to suggest the weightlessness of snowflakes suspended in the air and the variety in their size and thickness.

Brushwork and Handling

The *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* set a new standard in brushwork for the period, and shows Bruegel trying out new means of painterly expression. Except for the Holy Family and the foreground peasants, figures are rendered in black,

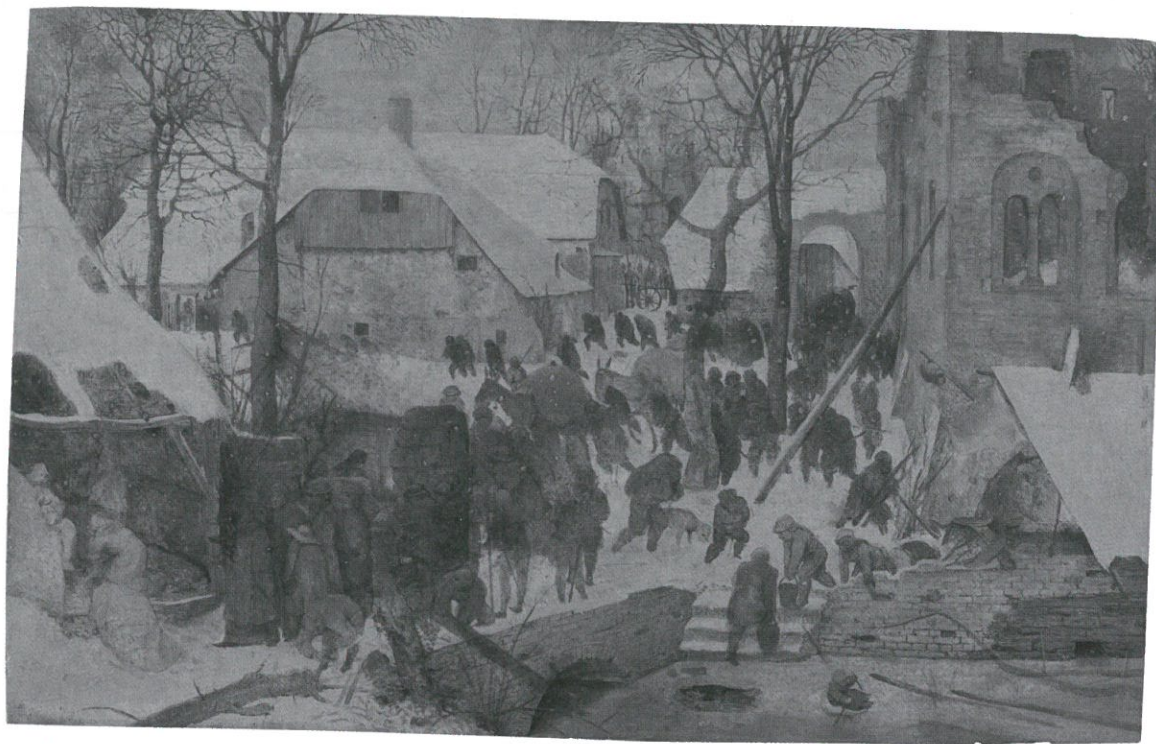


Fig.7 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, X-radiograph

glaze-like paint and outlined in black. Movement and expression are captured with a few sparse brushstrokes. Faces are painted simply, with no modelling. Muted opaque reds indicate highlights while dark strokes suggest features.

One of the *Adoration*'s most captivating qualities is Bruegel's ability to paint the barely visible. The figures around the fire in the ruined house are merely alluded to with a few dark expressive outlines, presenting a particularly audacious solution to the problem of portraying forms through smoke and heat. These figures, whose heads alone can be made out, take on a ghostly appearance (fig. 8). A similar effect is seen in the tent below the ruined castle, where a dark figure warming himself before a fire melts into the shadows.

This is also true of Joseph's face and attire. He is hidden in the shadow of the barn and summarily indicated in thin, greyish brushstrokes, with key features outlined in black (see fig. 6). This recalls a similar treatment of figures in a darkened window in the later *Census at Bethlehem*. In the years following the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, Bruegel continued to experiment with the limits of visibility in near-darkness in the *Death of the Virgin*, c. 1562, and on a larger scale in the *Gloomy Day*, 1565¹⁶ while in *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565 (see fig. 5 in the essay by Kerstin Richter in this publication) he played on the translucent effects of smoke and fire. Here, in the *Adoration*'s barn, however, he introduced a note of contrast with the robes of the worshipping Kings, smoothly modelled in ochre and

red, with drapery folds and patternwork added in brown and red transparent paint.

The textures of building materials are indicated in dilute, semi-opaque paint on the light underlayer. Bruegel played with effects of translucency and used brushwork to create interesting textures to render details such as grouting, which is deftly drawn in dilute black or brown paint strokes, applied while the underlying paint was still soft. The impression of depth in the hole in the ice was quickly painted in brushy, black strokes, in the same way as he did later for the black hole in the ice prominently placed in the right foreground in the *Census at Bethlehem*. Nonetheless, it is likely that the natural ageing process has increased the degree of translucency in the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, as the background can be made out through the dark trunks of certain trees, a phenomenon seen in so many paintings by Bruegel, for example the *Massacre of the Innocents*.¹⁷

Bruegel created a magnificent sense of aerial perspective through his judicious placing of fine tree branches over a thin, opaque blue sky which was applied so thinly that it allows the light underlayer to shine through, as well as with his rendering of a barely perceptible building at the back of the scene in the middle of the composition.

Snowflakes are painted in dabs of paint of different sizes and shapes; these are pure white in most places but grey in tonality where they traverse the frozen canal. In contrast to the thinly painted figures, the physical thickness of the snowflakes convincingly evokes the realism of the scene and the bright, frigid silence that accompanies falling snow (fig. 9). Likewise, in the *Census at Bethlehem*, Bruegel applied thick dabs of white paint to evoke realistic snowballs and kicked-up snow.

Occasionally, fresh snow paint has been used to soften or even correct forms; the smudged dark paint to the left of the



Fig. 8 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, detail



Fig. 9 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, detail

leg of a figure in the lower right might be a mistake that Bruegel tried to camouflage.

Bruegel's treatment of figures in this small panel is often looser than in his larger works. This *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*, with its novel snowflakes, may have represented a somewhat experimental work for Bruegel, which could explain the relatively spontaneous handling.

Evidence for a Lost Drawing for the Adoration of the Kings in the Snow

The fact that there are no significant changes in composition during execution and that most of the larger motifs are reserved in the paint layer underneath suggests that Bruegel planned the composition of the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* prior to painting. For this he would have made a model drawing, itself probably based on preliminary sketches. All such material has been lost, but Pieter Bruegel the Younger's copies give us some clues as to the appearance of this initial prototype.

Pieter Bruegel the Younger's versions of the composition share a number of small common differences in motif and colour in relation to the original, suggesting that they were not directly copied after his father's painting, but instead followed an earlier, now-lost drawing (fig. 10).¹⁸ The most obvious differences are the lack of substantial snowfall in the copies¹⁹ and the absence of the two figures just above the warming tent to the left. Other discrepancies include the array of soldiers guarding a side street at the very back of the village, more numerous in the copies and with two cartwheels in front of them instead of one; the absence of birds in the original version; and the colours of two standing figures in the centre left, inverted in the copies.

Clothing is generally more intensely coloured in Bruegel the Younger's copies. An example is given by the figures warming themselves inside the tent in the centre left. They are dark and sketchily painted in the original but clearly described and brightly coloured in the copies. In the background, the dark attire worn in the original is replaced by gaily-hued apparel in the copies.

Further differences include the shape and colour of the dog, the embroidery pattern on a King's yellow robe, and the

sumpter cloths in the centre of the painting, emblazoned with the Habsburg coat of arms only in the copies. Finally, the child on the ox-jaw sledge wears a white apron in the copies but a dark one in the original.

The presence of these 'fixed' differences between the original and Bruegel the Younger's copies favours the argument initially put forward by Georges Marlier, whereby Pieter the Younger never saw his father's final version of the composition but relied on a preliminary drawing instead.²⁰ This must have been extraordinarily detailed to allow Bruegel the Younger to produce such faithful copies, notwithstanding the minor differences discussed above. Colour notes or partial colouration of the drawing could explain the instances where colours do correspond, for example the red hose of the two standing men in the left foreground.²¹ A model drawing would obviously have been useful to Bruegel during painting, but he may also have made it to solicit prior approval of his design from the person commissioning the painting.

Bruegel the Younger's copies therefore probably reproduce the father's initial design as it appeared on this model drawing. Pieter the Elder would have made slight modifications during painting which are not reflected in the copies, such as the addition of the two figures above the warming tent. The fact that few soldiers are present in the background in relation to the copies and the lack of the Habsburg coat of arms on the sumpter cloths may mean that Bruegel the Elder had initially introduced these allusions to the ruling power in his model drawing and afterwards decided to omit them in his final painting. Pieter Bruegel the Younger is unlikely to have taken the initiative to refer to the political turmoil of the past himself. Indeed, in general, he kept as closely as possible to his father's models.

The thick snowflakes in the original painting as well as the layer of snow on the heads of all the figures and sumpter cloths exposed to the elements would not have been necessary to note on a model drawing, which is probably why they do not feature in Bruegel the Younger's copies.

The technical study of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* reveals new information about his choice of materials and techniques. The panel he used was sourced from the same Baltic oak tree as at least three of his



Fig. 10 Top: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration*, detail; Bottom: Pieter Bruegel the Younger, *Adoration*, detail, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. The original version has a more muted colour scheme than the copy and active snowfall. It also has two additional figures (1), no Habsburg insignia (2), fewer soldiers (3), only one visible cart wheel (3) and an open right window at the top of the house (4).

other small-format paintings. This picture was originally a little taller and wider, which explains why the ruined castle is cropped at the top and the trees are slightly truncated in relation to later copies. The fact that the underdrawing is limited and that there were no significant modifications during execution suggest that the design was carefully planned in advance. Moreover, Bruegel the Younger's copies provide convincing evidence for a lost model drawing by Bruegel the Elder. This lost model must have been extraordinarily detailed, given the level of detail in the copies, which were clearly made in the absence of the original. Noteworthy is the presence of the Habsburg coat of arms and additional soldiers in the copies, which could suggest that Bruegel's initial prototype had more conspicuous political overtones.

Bruegel's expressive and innovative brushwork in the *Adoration of the Kings in the Snow* puts it in a class of its own. He contrasts thin, dark, glaze-like brushwork in figures with textured dabs for the snowfall, drawing attention to key motifs through the use of more intense colour. The lack of reserves for the figural procession and their relatively loose brushwork gives an impression of spontaneity, although we know that everything was planned out in advance. Ultimately, it is the subtle chromatic harmony and the depiction of transient effects such as falling snow and smoky haze that confer a unique quality to the work and set it apart from the many copies by Pieter Bruegel the Younger and other snow scenes by later followers.

Endnotes

The Path to the Collection: The History of *The Adoration of the Kings in the Snow*

- 1 See cat. SOR 2003, no. 27.
- 2 See Sabine van Sprang and Tine Luk Meganck, 'A Winter's Voyage with Pieter Bruegel the Elder: An Introduction to the Dialogue', in Meganck and Van Sprang 2018, pp. 16–23, here p. 18 and note 19.
- 3 On the relative prosperity of the two towns, see Wim Blockmans, 'Longing for Better Times: Freedom and Prosperity under Pressure', in Meganck and Van Sprang 2018, pp. 202–23.
- 4 On Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle and his collection, see Banz 2000.
- 5 On the *Death of the Virgin* panel see, for instance, exh. cat. Vienna 2018, cat. nos. 68 and 69; exh. cat. London 2016, cat. no. 1; quoted according to the picture caption in the cartouche of the print. In the original it reads: 'Abrah. Ortelius, / sibi & amicis, / fieri curabat.'
- 6 The book with the marginalia is now in the collection of the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome. For the transcription of the marginalia see the *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, 1980, pp. 206f (translated for this essay).
- 7 On the date of purchase see Annette de Vries, 'The Cultural Appropriation of the First Netherlandish Book on the Visual Arts System of Knowledge in a Series of Artists Portraits', in Heiko Damm, Michael Thimann, and Claus Zittel, *The Artist as a Reader* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 259–304, here p. 29.

- 8 As cited in *Extrait des Mémoires de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, vol. 21, ed. Le Vicomte de Grouchy, Everhard Jabach. Collectionneur Parisien (1695), Paris, 1894, p. 46 (translated for this essay).
- 9 Romdahl's text draws on his dissertation of the same title and was published in the *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 1905, pp. 12–169.
- 10 Romdahl 1905, p. 99.
- 11 Van Bastelaer and Hulin de Loo 1907, p. 362.
- 12 Introductory essay by René van Bastelaer, 'Origine et caractère de l'art de Bruegel son affinité avec celui de ses prédécesseurs', in Van Bastelaer and Hulin de Loo 1907, pp. 1–148, here p. 148.
- 13 Friedländer 1921, p. 189.
- 14 Friedländer 1921, p. 190.
- 15 Friedländer 1921, p. 191.
- 16 Oskar Reinhart to Werner Reinhart, 25 July 1923, Dep. MK 337/86,5 Winterthurer Bibliotheken, Sammlung Winterthur, Archive of the Musikkollegium.
- 17 Bruegel's *Haymaking* (1565), in the Lobkowitz Collection, was already on Oskar Reinhart's wish list in 1924; see the archive of the Oskar Reinhart Collection (ASOR), Notizblätter (notes) no. 12; note on the conversation with Julius Böhler in 1927, in ASOR, notebook 'Was mir durch den Kopf geht', 1916–27, p. 81. Bruegel's *Haymaking* is still in the same collection as it was then.

- 18 ASOR Reisetagebuch (travel journal) II, entry for 27 September 1930.
- 19 ASOR Reisetagebuch (travel journal) II, entry for 1 October 1930: '10 a.m. to Cassirer. acquired Brueghel!'
- 20 ASOR letter, signed by Grete Ring, from Galerie Cassirer to Oskar Reinhart, 1 November 1930.
- 21 On the *Hunters in the Snow* and the sequence of seasons, see, for instance, exh. cat. Vienna 2018, nos. 72–75.
- 22 See Tine Luk Meganck, 'The Census at Bethlehem: Winter of a Golden Age', in Meganck and Van Sprang 2018, pp. 82–127.
- 23 See Sabine van Sprang, 'Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap or Time Suspended', in Meganck and Van Sprang 2018, pp. 57–81. On the dating of this painting, see the essay by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, and Pascale Fraiture in this volume, note 15.
- 24 On the change in climate conditions see Blom 2018; see also Clair Billen and Chloé Deligne, 'Bruegel's Winter Scenes: Reflections of Everyday Experience', in Meganck and Van Sprang 2018, pp. 130–49.

The Adoration of the Kings in the Snow: The Making of a Masterpiece

- 1 This is a handwritten annotation by Peeter Stevens to his copy of Van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck*, which is now in the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome. See the essay by Kerstin Richter in this publication; see also Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 226 and 242, note 3 (with context and bibliography), and Briels 1980, p. 206.
- 2 In this respect, miniature painters were more advanced in this achievement. The snowy landscape and even snowfall appear in illuminated manuscripts from the fifteenth century onwards.

- 3 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1556, distemper on canvas, 124 × 169 cm, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels; Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Adoration of the Kings*, oil on panel, 112.1 × 83.9 cm, signed and dated 1564, National Gallery, London.
- 4 For comprehensive technical-stylistic studies of winter landscapes by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger, see Currie and Allart 2012.
- 5 On the painting's provenance, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 226 and 242, notes 4 and 6. See also Winterthur 2005, p. 198, and the essay by Kerstin Richter in this publication.
- 6 *The Death of the Virgin*, oil on panel, 36.9 × 55.5 cm, signature barely visible, c. 1563–65, Upton House, Warwickshire, (dendrochronological analysis by Ian Tyers, Dendrochronological Consultancy Ltd, Retford, in 2014); *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, oil on panel, 37.1 × 55.6 cm, signed and dated 1563, The Courtauld Gallery, London, (dendrochronological analysis by Ian Tyers, Dendrochronological Consultancy Ltd, Retford, in 2015); *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap*, oil on panel, 37.0 × 55.4 cm, signed and dated 1565, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (dendrochronological analysis by J. Vynckier, KIK-IRPA, in 1993). For dendrochronological analysis of another small-format panel painting by Bruegel, *The Suicide of Saul*, signed and dated 1562, see Fraiture 2019 (forthcoming).

- 7 Three sapwood rings are preserved.
- 8 Four sapwood rings are preserved. Estimation of the earliest felling date is after Sohar, Vitas, and Läänelaid 2012.
- 9 The earliest felling date of 1553 is based on the minimum number of sapwood rings that such a tree could have had, but it might have contained more. Statistics by Sohar, Vitas, and Läänelaid 2012 prove that there is a range of 6 to 19 sapwood rings for oaks from the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and southern Finland.
- 10 Anonymous, *Adoration of the Kings*, oil on oak panel, transferred onto canvas, unsigned, 37 × 58 cm, former Louis Dimier collection, Sotheby's London, 14 December 2000, lot 7 (Currie and Allart 2012, pp. 539–40, and fig. 357; exh. cat. Maastricht and Brussels 2001, no. 20, ill. p. 158). Given the narrower width of Bruegel's other same-tree panels, it is likely that the composition of the Dimier copy extends further to the right than Bruegel's original version. A reproduction of the only other faithful copy, in the former Lainé collection, does not show this extension to the right (Ertz 1998–2000, cat. 248 and p. 301, fig. 217).
- 11 Infrared reflectography was carried out by Michael Eder using an OSIRIS infrared camera (Opus Instruments). The painting's surface was divided into two and captured in two scans.
- 12 On the underdrawing in the *Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap*, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 195–201, and fig. 93.
- 13 *Dulle Griet*, oil on panel, 116.4 × 161.6 cm, signed and dated 1563, Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp. See Currie et al. 2020 for discussion of smalt in the *Dulle Griet*.
- 14 *Census at Bethlehem*, oil on panel, 115.3 × 164.4 cm, signed and dated 156[-] (last digit missing), Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels; for stylistic and technical analysis, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 100–141).
- 15 See Wied 1990, nos. 25, 51, 80; figs. 7, 13, 22.
- 16 *Gloomy Day*, oil on panel, 117.6 × 162.2 cm, signed and dated 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.
- 17 Increased transparency is also seen in Bruegel's *Dulle Griet*, also painted in 1563 (Currie et al. 2020); on increased transparency in Bruegel's paintings in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, see Elke Oberthaler, 'Materialien und Techniken', in exh. cat. Vienna 2018, pp. 369–427.
- 18 For the full arguments behind this assertion, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 2, pp. 537–43.
- 19 There are a few snowflakes in the version in the National Gallery in Prague, but they lack the expressive force and freshness of those in the original.
- 20 Marlier 1969, pp. 80–82.
- 21 If the pigment of the Virgin's robe in the original is indeed smalt (blue), then colour notes in the original model drawing could explain why the Virgin's robe is also blue in Brueghel the Younger's copies. However, blue is traditional for the Virgin's robe so Brueghel the Younger could have opted for blue anyway.

- 7 Johann Georg Krünitz, *Oekonomische Encyclopädie*, vol. 6 (Berlin 1775), p. 86, s.v. Böttcher.
- 8 The oak tree trunk, 160 cm in length, weighed over 450 kg. The 150-year-old oak growing in the forests on the Dresden Heath was felled in December 2017. It was split and worked in May 2018. Four planks were made from this oak replicating the panels used for the *Building of the Tower of Babel* (114×155 cm) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Author's picture panels and a cross-section of an oak tree trunk were exhibited in the exhibition *Bruegel – Die Hand des Meisters* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, 2018–19.
- 9 Also known in German as *Wagenschrot* or *Wagenschoss*; on 'wainscot', see Marjorie Lorvik, 'Mutual Intelligibility of Timber Trade Terminology in North Sea Countries during the Time of the "Scottish Trade"', *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003): 223–43, here pp. 236–37. With thanks to Fiona Elliott for alerting me to this source. On the German terms, which are documented in sources as early as 1421 in Reval and Tallin and later on also in Lübeck, see the databank (with a search function) at RDK-Labor: http://www.rdklabor.de/wiki/RDK_Labor:Quellen_und_Materialien (2 September 2019).
- 10 Numerous unworked oak boards (now in the National Maritime Museum in Danzig) were salvaged from the wreck of a ship that sank in Danzig harbour in the early fifteenth century. These boards are up to 30.5 cm in width and a maximum of 252 cm in length. See Waldemar Ossowski, 'The Copper Ship's Cargo', in *The Copper Ship. A Medieval Shipwreck and Its Cargo / Miedziowiec – wrak redniowiecznego statku i jego ładunek*, Narodowe Muzeum Morskie (Gdańsk, 2014), pp. 141–300, here p. 254.
- 11 Duhamel du Monceau, 1764 (see note 5), vol. 2, p. 580.
- 12 In 2018 the experimental boards (with a thickness of 13 mm) dried in six months without cracking or warping.
- 13 Peter Klein, 'Dendrochronologische Untersuchungen', in *Brueghel. Gemälde von Jan Brueghel d. Ä.*, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen (Alte Pinakothek), ed. Mirjam Neumeister (Munich, 2013), pp. 410–15, here p. 410.
- 14 See exh. cat. Vienna 2018, pp. 157, 202, and 212; and the essay by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, and Pascale Fraiture in this publication.
- 15 The width of the panels corresponds to the height of the panels used in a horizontal format. See the essay by Christina Currie, Dominique Allart, and Pascale Fraiture in this publication.

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