MANUSCRIPTS IN THE MAKING

ART & SCIENCE

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ART & SCIENCE

VOLUME TWO

Edited by

STELLA PANAYOTOVA & PAOLA RICCIARDI

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ill. 1. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*: (a) front; (b) closed; (c) reverse and side view

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The Spanish Forger Exposed: an Interdisciplinary Study of Two of His Paintings

CHRISTINA CURRIE, STEVEN SAVERWYNS AND DOMINIQUE VANWIJNSBERGHE

Introduction

The elusive Spanish Forger, active both as a painter and an illuminator, paradoxically acquired a great notoriety, especially among manuscript scholars, following the 1978 exhibition at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York organised by Bill Voelkle with the assistance of Roger Wieck.[1] According to Voelkle, who maintains an on-going repertory of the Forger's known work, he was most probably French and worked in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century. All the clues seem to point in this direction: early acquisitions by Parisian collectors shortly after 1900; works purchased in Paris in the same period; models drawn from French illustrated volumes on medieval art and life; French newspapers used as linings in frames; the label of a Parisian framer on the back of one particular panel; French iconography, with special interest in the French monarchy and Joan of Arc; echoes of masterworks in French collections, such as Manet's *Olympia* and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, to cite just a few.[2] Although these indications might seem somewhat weak when considered separately, taken as a whole they form a compelling pattern of converging circumstantial evidence.

In 1958, a work by the Spanish Forger was studied at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) for the first time, in relation to a court case involving the collection of Jacques Trussart, a Brussels art dealer arrested for fraudulent practice.[3] The painting in question was a panel depicting the Martyrdom of St Lawrence.[4] It was identified as a fake and correctly attributed to the Spanish Forger.[5] Paul Coremans, Director of KIK-IRPA at the time, must already have known of the existence of the Forger, as the latter's production was known to the secret *Museen-Verband* of which Coremans had been a member since 1936. This association of experts and museum curators shared information on forged art works through the publication of its confidential *Mitteilungen*. As early as 1935, in the February issue, Friedrich Winkler had drawn attention to a series of miniatures by the Spanish Forger.[6]

The first painting by the Spanish Forger to come to KIK-IRPA recently is a triptych depicting the coronation of a French king **(ill. 1)**. It had lain hidden in a private Belgian collection since its acquisition in 1955 at a public sale in Ghent.[7] It is worth noting, in support of the Paris connection, that the composition draws its inspiration from a pair of panels in the Musée de Cluny. Dated 1502, they are by an anonymous Amiens painter and show the *Coronation of David* and the *Coronation of Louis XII* respectively.[8] The Forger could well have studied and copied these works if he were based in the French capital. Furthermore, the panels were displayed at the memorable 1904 Paris exhibition *Les Primitifs français*, which boosted interest in French medieval painting and illumination, and may at the same time have served as a reservoir of models and ideas for forgers. The paintings were reproduced in the lavish catalogue published by Henri Bouchot, which was evidently a source of inspiration for the Spanish Forger.[9] The Forger clearly liked this pair of panels, as he used them as models in another triptych depicting the coronation of a French king.[10] The king is extremely similar in scale and style to the one in the *Coronation* brought to KIK-IRPA.

From a typological point of view, the shape of the triptych examined at KIK-IRPA, with its narrow wings and spiky superstructure, is typical of the Forger's production, for example the Cincinnati Triptych with the Presentation of a Manuscript to Anne De Beaujeu.[11] This was once attributed to Jean Fouquet and thought to have been offered by Louis de Laval to King Charles VIII, before it was exposed as a fake by Millard Meiss in 1939. The current triptych is also similar in form and style to one in a New York private collection depicting a Baptism with Saints George and Barbara, documented by Voelkle in 1978.[12] Moreover, the motif of St George and the Dragon on the standard on the left wing seems to be based on the same design as that occupying the whole left wing in the New York panel, even if the colours are different.

The second panel represents a Knighting Ceremony: the aspiring knight is girded with his sword and spurs are fastened to his feet **(ill. 2)**. The provenance is unknown prior to the panel's purchase by the current owner at a sale in Brussels in 2006.[13] The knight holds a banner in his left hand with an as yet unidentified, possibly invented, coat of arms. An illustration in Paul Lacroix's *La vie quotidienne au Moyen Âge* might have been the Forger's inspiration for this panel.[14] Voelkle has also identified a miniature by the Spanish Forger with the same composition.[15] The Forger often reproduced identical themes in both panels and miniatures.

ill. 2. The Spanish Forger, *Knighting Ceremony*: (a) front; (b) reverse

Triptych with a Coronation of a French King

The triptych, which is the more complex of the two panels examined, was clearly made to give the impression of a small fifteenth-century transportable altarpiece with an integral gilded frame.[16] When the wings are closed, donor portraits are visible, and the two sides can be joined with a gilded clasp. The frame is embellished with crockets and a finial. The reverse side of the central panel is painted brown, and so are the sides, which means that there is no immediate way of identifying the type of wood. The triptych's ingenious construction can only be understood through the X-radiograph.

In the X-radiograph, it becomes clear that only the left wing is made of a single plank. Both the central panel and the right plank have additional small wooden strips. The wood appears to be deciduous, possibly poplar. It does not display the wood grain typical of oak, the wood favoured by medieval Northern European painters, and there is no warping or insect damage. The frame is not integral; it consists of small pieces of wood nailed on to the main panel. A crack between the main panel and the added framing elements is one of the only outward signs that the latter are not an integral part of the construction. The X-ray shows that the hinges holding the three panels together are held in place by machine-manufactured pins and that a thick lead-white based ground layer smooths the transition between the edge of the paint layer and the framing elements. A similarly dense material has been used to fill imperfections such as knots prior to painting. The X-ray also reveals that the wooden crockets, like the hinges, are attached with modern metal pins **(ill. 3)**.

The velvet tape applied between the paint and the frame conveniently hides a rather awkward transition zone. This tape is missing in a photograph taken during the conservation treatment in the 1950s, suggesting that it was either removed during treatment and put back afterwards, or was an addition by the restorer to hide the rather scruffy edges of the painting. The tape hides a painted line indicating the edge of the composition and a brownish colour imitating wooden edges.[17]

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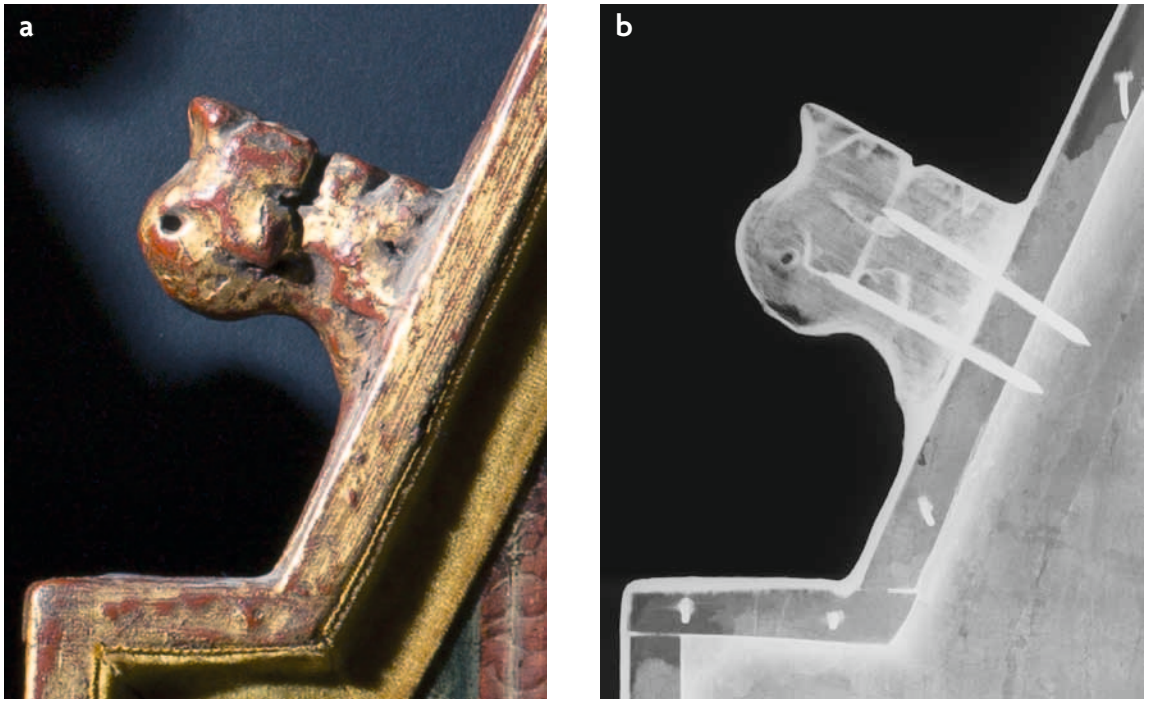

ill. 3. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*, (a) wooden crocket, attached to frame with modern pins, with (b) X-radiograph

The gilding on the crockets, finial and frame has been applied on a reddish under-layer of red earth and chalk to imitate water gilding on a red bole. It was probably rubbed to reveal this warm undercoat. Analysis of a cross-section from the gilding shows that it is an alloy of copper with zinc (brass) and a trace of aluminium, rather than gold. Beneath the red under-layer there is an organic layer, probably a varnish; the lowest layer detected is also organic, its orange fluorescence suggesting shellac.

The ground layer was investigated through four cross-sectional samples: one from a red zone in the background of the central panel, one from the edge paint underneath the velvet tape in the right interior panel, one from red paint in the left interior panel and one from the brown paint on the reverse of the central panel. In all four samples, the ground is white, very thick in relation to the paint layer, and applied in at least three sessions. This colour and thickness would be expected in a fifteenth-century painting, but the pigments are completely atypical. Gypsum mixed with lead white was identified, whereas chalk would be the expected constituent of a ground layer in a northern French or Flemish late fifteenth-century panel. This mixture was also identified on a panel painting by the Spanish Forger, a portrait of a Queen of France.[18]

To find out how the Forger transferred his designs to panel, the triptych was examined with infrared reflectography. There is indeed a carbon-based underdrawing present, but it is not easy to distinguish as the paint absorbs infrared light strongly. It can be spotted occasionally in the few places where it diverges from the final composition. In the painted retable, for example, the architectural elements appear to have been indicated with ruled lines, and the arms and torso of Christ and the beard of the bishop are marked with hand-drawn outlines.

In the motif of St George and the Dragon, underdrawn outlines are also visible in places. They appear to be in a dry medium, such as black chalk or graphite. The donor panels are underdrawn in a somewhat sketchier manner than the interior sides and several significant changes in composition were introduced during the painting stage. The curtain above the donors originally dipped downwards instead of being gathered up at the top. Both donors are outlined, but in the case of the female donor there is an additional frontlet on her forehead that was omitted during painting **(ill. 4)**. The sleeves of both donors were drawn higher up than they were eventually painted, and in the case of the female donor her underdrawn proper left arm was covered over by her blue mantle during painting.

In the donors' robes, the Forger appears to have been feeling his way in the drawing. He doubled back on the line several times during drawing, and adjusted the positions of the folds while painting. These motifs were most likely inspired by a model, but the artist was clearly not concerned with slavish imitation. There are no signs of tracing or pouncing; indeed, he seems to have worked freehand.

In the tiles, the Forger did not employ any mechanical device to transfer the pattern to the panel, nor did he use underdrawing or incised guidelines. He simply painted rather carefully, lifting his brush after painting a small portion of each outline, leaving a small blob at the end of strokes. He

ill. 4. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*: (a) detail of female donor's head under visible and (b) infrared light

most likely used a mahl stick to keep his hand steady for the longer straight sections. In the interior panels, the tiles have been roughly underdrawn, and the lines diverge here and there from the final painted lines. Again, they appear hand drawn.

To investigate the pigments used to make the triptych's Neo-Gothic colour scheme, three cross-sections were analysed using scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy and many areas were analysed non-invasively using X-ray fluorescence analysis and micro-Raman spectroscopy.[19]

The red standard with beige border decoration in the left interior panel shows a remarkably straightforward layer structure **(ill. 5)**. Working from the thick white ground, the artist first applied a deep red layer, representing the standard, made up of vermilion, alizarin crimson (a synthetic organic pigment also known as Pigment Red 83) and red earth. He followed this with a beige layer, representing the decorative border and composed of chrome yellow. On top of this he applied a transparent organic layer, which is probably varnish as it fluoresces under ultraviolet illumination. This is followed by a thin black layer (dirt or possibly false patina), a thin chalk-based layer and a thin, deep red layer made up of a large mixture of pigments. These last two layers may well be later retouching.

Alizarin crimson, which gives the rich translucent red of the standard, was only produced from 1868 onwards and represents the most recently introduced pigment in the entire triptych.[20] Chrome yellow, which is the main pigment in the beige border stroke, was discovered in 1804–1809 and first commercialised between 1814 and 1816.[21]

The dark green paint of the flamboyant green pillar in the central panel consists of just one thin paint layer, composed of a toxic green copper arsenite, which is either Scheele's green or emerald green **(ill. 6)**.[22] Scheele's green was first discovered in 1775; a more stable alternative, emerald green, was commercialised in 1814. Scheele's green and emerald green have already been identified in other works by the Forger, for example in a series of miniatures acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008.[23] The *Hunt of the Unicorn Annunciation* was also found to contain copper arsenite.[24] The same layer also contains chrome green, which in this case is a composite pigment made up of Prussian blue precipitated on chrome yellow.[25] The lighter green in the same pillar is also mostly

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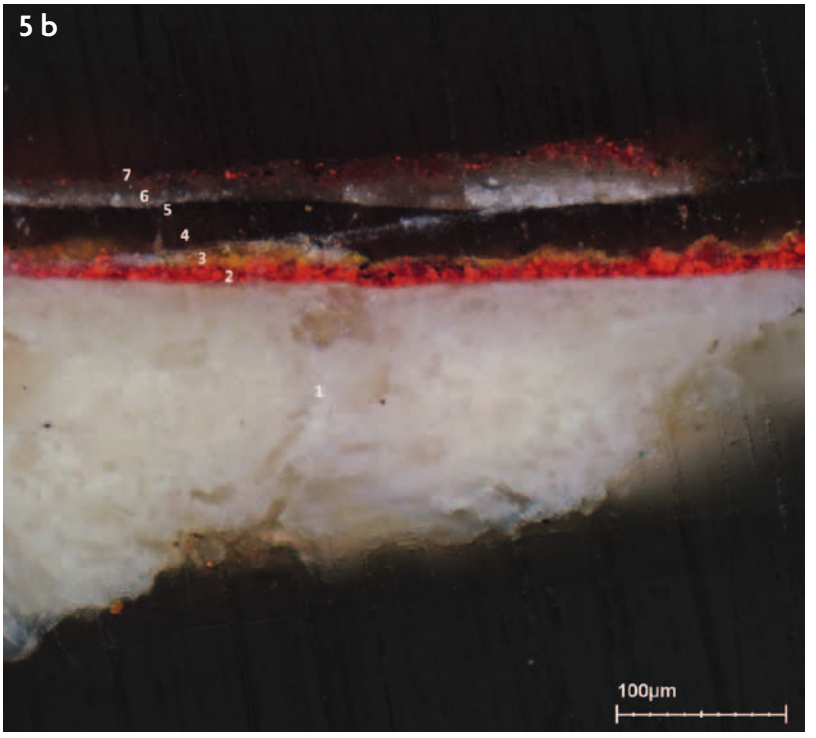
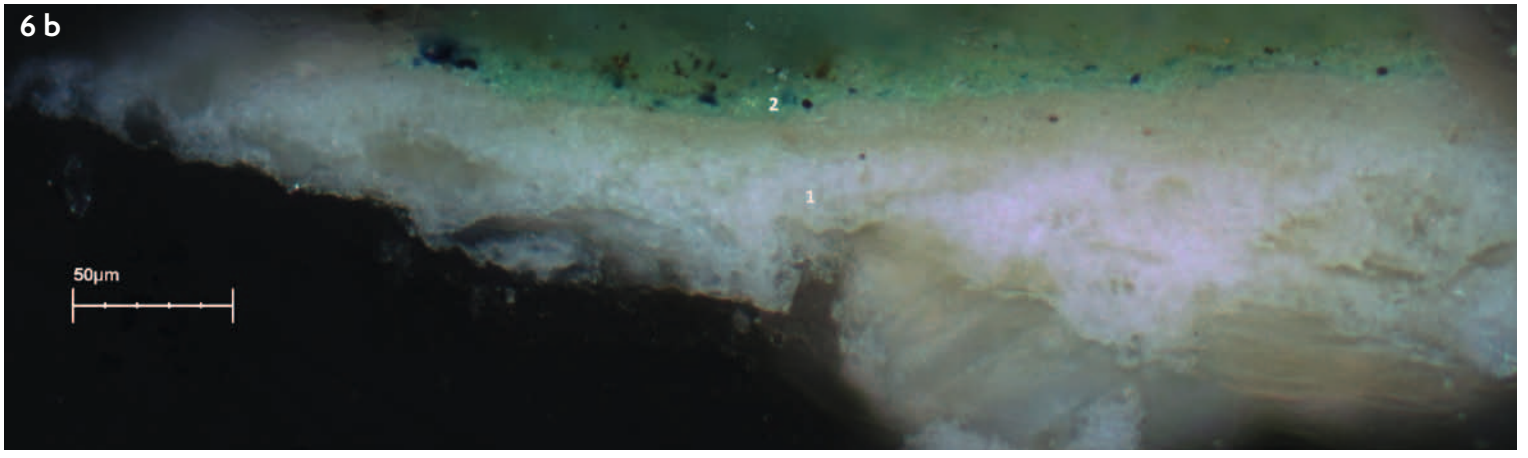


ill. 5. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*: (a) inner left panel, detail of a red standard and (b) paint cross-section removed from area indicated by the white arrow: 1. white ground (gypsum and lead white); 2. standard: vermilion and alizarin crimson; 3. decorative border: chrome yellow; 4. organic layer, probably varnish; 5. thin black layer (patina or dirt?); 6. chalk layer (retouching?); 7. dark red: vermilion, red earth, barium sulphate, lead tin yellow, chrome yellow, cobalt blue, zinc white (retouching?)

ill. 6. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*: (a) central panel, detail of green pillar and (b) paint cross-section removed from area indicated by the white arrow: 1. white ground: gypsum and lead white; 2. green pillar: copper arsenite (either Scheele's green or emerald green), Prussian blue, chrome yellow, lead white



chrome green. Indeed, in the whole triptych, Prussian blue was never detected without the presence of chrome yellow, suggesting that it was not used as a stand-alone blue. Prussian blue was discovered around 1704–1710.[26]

The rich blue areas are composed of ultramarine blue, most likely the synthetic variety, which was discovered in 1826–1828 and became available around 1830.[27] Synthetic ultramarine was also employed in the Victoria and Albert Museum miniatures.[28]

The yellow pigment in the fleur-de-lis is again chrome yellow, which appears to be the principal yellow used in the painting, as with the Victoria and Albert Museum miniatures.[29] Since this pigment tends to darken on exposure to light, the yellows in the triptych may have been brighter originally. Chrome yellow is also responsible for the yellow colour in the turban of the female donor on the exterior sides.

The whites in the painting are principally the traditional pigment lead white, as in the Victoria and Albert Museum miniatures,[30] rather than the more recent zinc white. Lead white is also present in mixtures of other colours.

The brown painted reverse of the central panel has a simple layer structure. On the ground layer the artist applied a thin, brightly coloured layer of vermilion, followed by an organic layer, probably varnish, and then a dark red-brown layer made up of red earth and chrome yellow.

The Forger, therefore, used a combination of traditional and modern materials in this triptych, well before the days of chemical analysis that would ultimately reveal his recipes.

In the build-up of his paint layers, the Forger mostly respected the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century principle of painting light colours in reserve. For the gloved hands of a bishop, for example, the deep blue paint of the robe was painted first, leaving a space for the hands. The hands themselves were painted in a creamy-white – overlapping very slightly the blue – and finally, the separations between the fingers were indicated with thin, dark grey lines. The artist seems to have gone over the blue parts again, which would explain the splodge of blue paint on the thumb.

ill. 7. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*: (a) inner left panel, dragon; (b) central panel, tonsured cleric

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The artist relied on a trusted formula that is repeated throughout the triptych. The dragon and saint, for example, are painted on a body colour of ochre and this remains visible as a mid-tone **(ill. 7a)**. The motif is then loosely painted in with dark outlines, and highlighted in light yellow. This gives a sense of three-dimensional volume and an intentionally decorative effect. Another example is the Forger's way of embellishing liturgical vestments. His recipe involved an ochre base colour, on which he outlined precious stones with dilute brown strokes. Next, he painted the stones in blue or red, reinforcing their shadow sides with a deeper, more translucent colour. Lastly, a stroke or blob of yellow or white rendered them three-dimensional. Similarly, a few judicious yellow and white strokes on the upper left sides of the jewelled clasp were enough to define the motif.

For the embroidered miniature of a saint on the robe of a bishop in the right wing, the artist used simple brown outlines and yellow highlights. For the gold fringe of the same robe, he applied tiny brown strokes at the bottom to give the impression of a shadow, making the fringe instantly stand out in relief.

The Forger had a formulaic manner of painting armour that he repeated for all the soldiers. He started with an evenly applied layer of blue, on which he established the contours of the metal plates with delicate white strokes and dark blue shadows. He then outlined the form in bold white and dark blue strokes, sometimes using small hatching strokes to soften corners. The effect is intentionally ornamental and pattern-like.

Finally, the hair of the young king and that of the male donor are painted with similarly stylized brushwork that is also found in the *Knighting Ceremony*. On a thin, dry brown paint layer, light and dark undulating paint strokes indicate the curls.

In terms of painting medium, the triptych presents a peculiar juxtaposition of what appears to be an oil technique and a water-based technique. There is a stark difference between the flat, matte, delicate paint strokes that have been used to delineate the mouth, nose and face contours, on the one hand, and, on the other, the bold, thick, glossy planes of colour in textiles, still life motifs **(ill. 7b)** and armour. In faces, the paint appears to have dried instantly, and there is often a blob of accumulated pigment at the end of a stroke. This would be expected of an aqueous medium, such as egg tempera, glue tempera or gouache. Conversely, no brushwork at all is discernible in rich red and blue zones, which have the appearance of oil paint. Likewise, the yellow strokes on motifs such as the staff of a crozier have considerable body, suggesting a slower-drying medium such as oil. The painting medium was not analysed, given the difficulty of sampling and separating a potentially multi-medium layer structure.

Mixed media is also notable in the ostrich feathers on a soldier's helmet in the left interior panel **(ill. 8)**. The rounded forms of the ostrich plumes have been worked carefully with what appear to be water-based strokes, but the white dotted highlights in relief are clearly done in another medium,

ill. 8. The Spanish Forger, *Coronation of a French King*, inner left panel, soldier's ostrich feather

probably oil. The effect is elegant and stylized. It is possible that the Forger, in using an aqueous medium for such details, was simply transposing his way of painting on parchment to his panel painting, but examination of one of his illuminated manuscripts would be necessary to test this hypothesis.

The Forger used a gamut of ageing devices in the triptych to convince an unsuspecting collector that this painting was medieval. These are not always easy to distinguish from retouching applied during the last known restoration of the painting, carried out in 1955, just after the painting's purchase by the present owner's father. Paul Aelman, the Ghent restorer who worked on the painting, issued a certificate of authenticity on the painting dated 22 June 1955.[31] In the typed statement, on his letterhead, he describes the triptych as being painted in egg white on panel, and discusses the subject matter. He finishes with the following statement, under '*certificat*' and signs his name: 'I, the undersigned Paul Aelman, restorer in Ghent, certify by the present, that this very beautiful work dates from the beginning of the second half of the fifteenth century. Franco Flemish, the subtle style and careful design

recalls strongly the way of painting of the painter known as the Master of St Gilles.'[32]

One wonders whether this was an honest statement. Aelman did, however, take photographs of his conservation treatment, and these are helpful for the interpretation of the triptych's condition.[33] There is a 'during cleaning' and an 'after cleaning' photograph, which show an enormous difference in tone due to the removal of a dark surface coating. Today there are remains of a layer of patina in the lower right of the left interior panel. This was most likely rubbed into the painting by the Forger to age it artificially. Whether the dark appearance of the painting before cleaning is because this patina once covered the entire surface, or whether it is due to the presence of a former layer of dark varnish – perhaps also applied by the Forger – is unclear. In any case, it appears that the restorer significantly brightened the appearance of the painting in the 1950s, bringing out its Neo-Gothic colour scheme.

The ultraviolet fluorescence image may go some way to help distinguish the Forger's touch from later restoration. There is a milky fluorescence, characteristic of an oxidized natural resin varnish, over all painted surfaces. It is affected, here and there, by black marks, which indicate retouching. Some retouching is blacker than the rest, suggesting at least two phases of restoration. The patina in the corners lies underneath this milky fluorescence, revealing that it was applied much earlier than the present varnish. The dark patches of retouching were either applied immediately before or after the application of this varnish. The varnish itself, as can be seen in the normal light image taken recently, is only lightly yellowed and therefore of relatively recent origin. It was probably applied by Aelman in 1955 as part of his comprehensive restoration treatment.

On the donor panels, the ultraviolet image shows fluorescence characteristic of natural resin varnish, and light and dark patches of retouching. There are also greyish patches in the curtains. When the 1955 'during cleaning' photo is compared with the modern ultraviolet fluorescence image, it is clear that there are patches of old retouching lying underneath the present varnish that do not disturb the milky fluorescence. These were probably applied at an earlier period and may in fact be interventions carried out by the Forger himself to age the painting. Patches of recent retouching, appearing dark in the UV image, conceal losses exposed during the 1955 cleaning. This crude retouching was most likely applied by Aelman in 1955.

The soldier's red tunic in the central panel has an artificially provoked age crack pattern that has been partially masked with a translucent red of the same hue as that used for the main body of the skirt, suggesting that the cracks were the handiwork

ill. 9. The Spanish Forger, *Knighting Ceremony*, detail of aspiring knight and soldier under (a) visible and (b) infrared light

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of the Forger himself. In the king's head, too, there appears to be deliberate damage to the eye and hair. This has been retouched, once prior to the application of the present varnish and again later. Comparison with the 1955 'after restoration' photo suggests that the extensive retouching around the eye and cheek may well have been applied by Aelman, since it does not appear to be present in the 'during cleaning' photo.

Knighting Ceremony

This panel is smaller and less ambitious than the triptych **(ill. 2)**,[34] but its structure is remarkably similar. Again, the X-radiograph reveals that it is a panel made up of two planks and not a single board with an integral frame as the Forger would have us believe. In the lower part, the frame elements have been glued and nailed to the unusually thin original planks. The reverse side is prepared with the same ground as the front side and painted a dark colour.

The ground layer of the *Knighting Ceremony*, however, is not at all similar to that in the triptych. It is instead a rich beige colour, made up of yellow ochre with a little red ochre and chalk, and no lead white. A cross-section, taken from the front side at the bottom, also reveals that the artist applied three organic layers above the ground before beginning to paint, unlike his approach in the triptych. The lower layer is probably shellac as it fluoresces orange under ultraviolet illumination. Whether these layers could have served some purpose in enabling the Forger to provoke his distinctive age cracks and cupping is an open question.

As with the triptych, the design for the *Knighting Ceremony* was drawn onto the ground with a carbon-based material, either black chalk or graphite **(ill. 9)**. The Forger's approach to underdrawing is also comparable. Straight motifs are outlined with the help of a ruler, contours and outlines of figures are hand-drawn, and the line is often quite sketchy. This suggests that the Forger copied the motifs by eye rather than using tracings or other aids. Indeed, the positions of the fleurs-de-lis on the banner are marked with hand-drawn vertical guidelines. The fact that there are no signs of the use of cartoons or precise means of design reproduction in the two paintings fits in with what we know about the Spanish Forger. He did indeed reproduce similar compositions and reuse motifs, but never, as far as we can see, in precisely the same guise.

Scientific analysis revealed that the range of pigments used is narrower than in the triptych, but that the palette is essentially the same. Scheele's green is present, with possibly some emerald green, as well as chrome green, chrome yellow,

ill. 10 The Spanish Forger, *Knighting Ceremony*, detail of lower centre, showing (a) artificially provoked age cracks and imitation filling and (b) retouching with ultraviolet fluorescence image

ultramarine blue, vermilion and lead white. The chrome green is a mixture of chrome yellow and ultramarine, rather than Prussian blue as with the triptych. A sample from the green-coloured reverse side of the panel also revealed a mixture of chrome yellow and ultramarine blue, mixed with some Scheele's green and possibly emerald green.

This compares well with earlier studies on other paintings and miniatures made by the Spanish Forger, including the five miniatures at the Victoria and Albert Museum.[35]

The *Knighting Ceremony* displays similar but less elaborate brushwork to that in the triptych. A comparison of male heads shows the traits they have in common: the hair, with its stylized waves, and the mouth with its full lips and side markings. The detailed modelling strokes for the shadows of faces in the triptych are not present in the *Knighting Ceremony*, probably due to its smaller scale. As with other works by the Forger, both illuminated leaves and paintings, the stylized three-tone armour is typical, as are his 'lollipop' trees.[36] Likewise, the faces are bland and expressionless.

In terms of its patina, the panel shows a pronounced cupped crack pattern, unlike the triptych. The artificially provoked age cracks are not evenly distributed, but affect mostly the area around the join between the two planks making up the support. The ultraviolet fluorescence image also reveals what might be original damage and retouching on part of the Forger. One area of loss has been crudely textured to imitate a restorer's filling and then retouched using similarly coloured pigments to the original paint **(ill. 10a)**. Under ultraviolet illumination, the peculiar orange and yellow fluorescent patches suggest the presence of either lake or synthetic organic pigments **(ill. 10b)**. The orange fluorescence seems to correspond to dark red strokes. Finally, in the corners, there is the same sort of patina layer as that observed in the triptych, most likely rubbed on and then partially removed by the Forger himself.[37]

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, forgers and forgeries were a hot topic in the French art world. Paul Durrieu uttered a famous *caveat emptor* as early as 1904, in the wake of the *Primitifs français* exhibition. He urged potential buyers to beware of 'the large quantity of fakes circulating, some of them very well executed. […] The Paris market was inundated with them. One particularly saw a whole invasion of portraits of Joan of Arc, arriving freshly hatched from foreign studios [perhaps active in Siena].'[38] A year later, writing in the French periodical *Je sais tout*, the French critic Armand Dayot stressed the industrial scale of this production: 'Following the latest fashion, there are factories in Paris producing [paintings]; in these workshops, in Montmartre, daubers churn them out by the dozen, the cost varying according to size; in Belgium, they specialise in Old Masters: the Teniers, the Van Eycks, the Vravalings (*sic*), the Van Ostades are commonplace.'[39]

These critics also stressed the fact that old paintings were very much in demand, especially in the English-speaking world. This undoubtedly inspired gifted and greedy crooks to supply these international markets.

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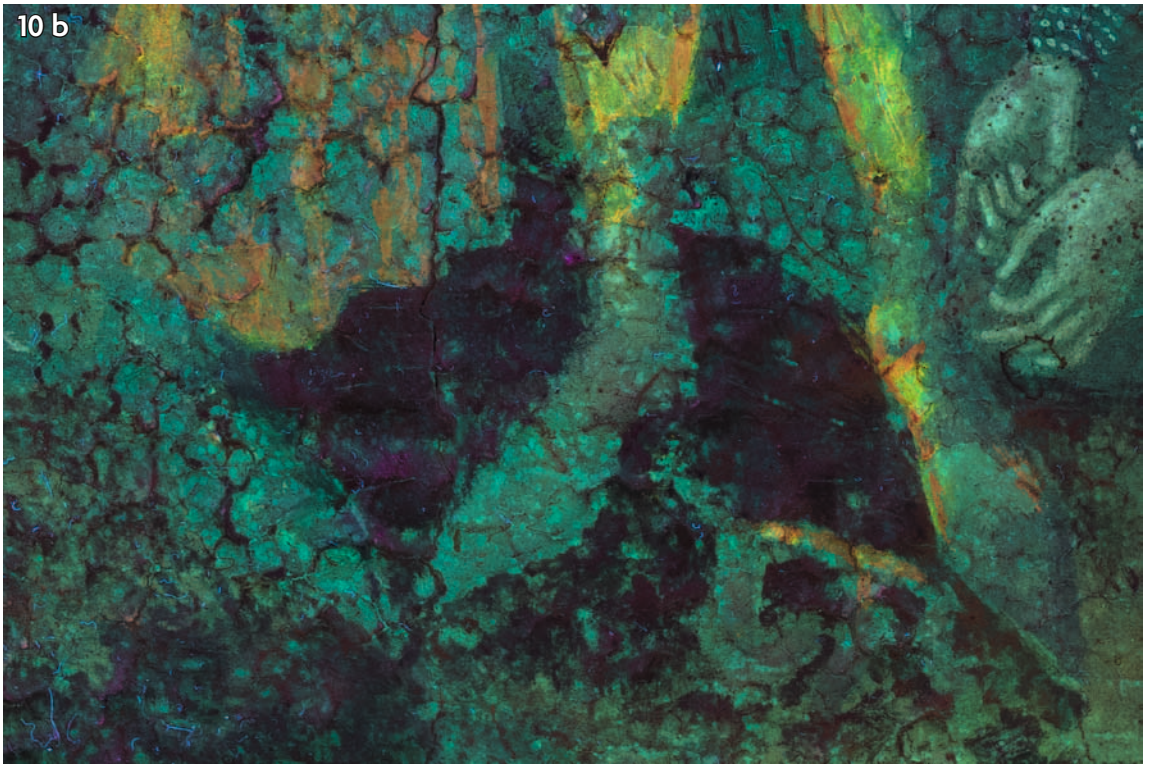

Bill Voelkle thinks that the Spanish Forger was based in Paris and his circumstantial evidence seems convincing. But a respected scholar like Charles Sterling, following in the footsteps of Paul Durrieu, argued that the Forger might have been Italian.[40] In this context, it is interesting to note that a triptych by the Spanish Forger once in the possession of one Mrs Johnson was bought from an Italian dealer named Manette, who claimed to own other paintings by the same hand, which he sold in Paris. They presumably came from a 'great family in Piacenza' and, to make things easier, they were attributed 'to a Flemish artist who worked for a long time in Venice, where he was subject to Italian influences.'[41]

This reference to a Flemish artist is particularly interesting since over the past few years a new name has been cited repeatedly in conjunction with the Spanish Forger, and the hypothesis seems so attractive that is even mentioned on the Wikipedia page of the Forger. Several members of the Bruges family of illuminators, de Pape, have been suggested as possible culprits.[42] Ferdinand de Pape, the most productive of them, can be excluded right away on both chronological and stylistic grounds: he was active from about 1840 until his death in 1885, much too early to be the Forger. Furthermore, his style and models have nothing to do with those of the Forger: he drew his inspiration mainly from manuscripts of the Burgundian Library and from paintings by fifteenth-century Flemish painters. His art is religious and local. As it happens, KIK-IRPA documented one of his works, the *Album historique de l'église de Jérusalem à Bruges*, which was offered as a gift to King Leopold I of Belgium in 1843.[43] It is not comparable either stylistically or technically to works by the Spanish Forger. Little is known of Ferdinand's closest associate, his brother François (d. 1863), except that he specialised in secondary decoration of manuscripts and calligraphy. Ferdinand's son Charles, who died in England in 1915, has also been considered a possible candidate. But Charles took over François de Pape's job as manuscript decorator and it is unlikely that he was also a painter.[44] If he worked in close collaboration with his father and followed the family tradition, he was probably not interested in courtly scenes, damsels, knights and heroes of French history.

The identity of the Spanish Forger remains a mystery. But we can be confident that it eventually will be possible to unmask him thanks to a simple psychological paradox: forgers can go on wheeling and dealing as long as they remain anonymous; at the same time, most of them feel the need to be publicly recognized for their talent. Forgers are gamblers. They are bound to lose the game in the end.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the owners of both paintings for allowing us to examine their works at KIK-IRPA and Valentine Henderiks for bringing the smaller panel to our attention. We also thank Bill Voelkle and Roger Wieck for corresponding with us regarding the Spanish Forger and for their helpful comments, and Dominique Deneffe for sharing her discovery of the St Lawrence panel in the KIK-IRPA archives.

Notes

1 New York 1978 ; Voelkle 2007.
2 Voelkle 2007, 224–26.
3 Letter from Robert Grosemans, investigating judge at the court of first instance in Brussels, to Paul Coremans, Director of KIK-IRPA; Brussels, KIK-IRPA, Archives, Ref. L2/89.314. On the Trussart affair, see 'Bilder von X.', in *Der Spiegel*, 14 August 1957, 55.
4 Wood, 28 × 25.5 cm (34 × 30.5 cm with frame); photo KIK-IRPA B171264 (photographic mission order 2363). For a miniature with the same composition, see Voelkle 2007, 218, fig. 11.11.
5 Letter from H.L.C. Jaffé, Assistant Director at the Gemeente Musea Amsterdam, to Paul Coremans; Brussels, KIK-IRPA, Archives, Ref. L3/11/89.250.
6 Winkler 1935.
7 The sale catalogue (Ghent 1955), kindly provided by the present owner, states: 'Vente publique. Antiquités et tableaux Anciens provenant en partie de la collection du peintre Willaert [Ferdinand Willaert (1861–1942)]. Le notaire José Verstrynge, Place Van Artevelde 14, Gand (Tél. 15.00.06) vendra publiquement, dans la salle Concordia, place H. Lippens – plaats, 4, sous la direction de l'expert Monsieur J. Walraevens. Lundi 18 avril 1855 à 14 heures de l'après-midi.' The triptych was lot 101 and cited as follows: 'Triptique [*sic*]. Ec. Française. XVe s. Panneau central représentant Le couronnement d'un roi de France. Bois.' It sold for 8000 Belgian francs, according to a hand-written annotation next to the lot number.
8 Paris, Musée national du Moyen Âge – Thermes de Cluny, inv. Cl 822a-b.
9 Bouchot 1904, pl. C.
10 New York 1978, P30. This painting was stolen at Brussels airport in 1997; Natale 2009, 171.
11 New York 1978, P4.
12 New York 1978, P21.
13 Hôtel de vente Galerie moderne, 21 November 2006.
14 Lacroix 1877, 425, fig. 316.
15 New York private collection. We thank Bill Voelkle for drawing our attention to this unpublished leaf (SL118 in his ever-growing list) and for sending us an image (communication, 8 January 2017).
16 Triptych measurements including frame: open: height 83.3 cm, width 57.1 cm, thickness 3–3.5 cm; closed: height 83.3 cm, width 27.7 cm; thickness approx. 7 cm.
17 A cross-sectional sample taken from behind the yellow tape shows that the paint is made up of two dark paint layers, in between which there is a layer of medium, probably oil-based as it does not fluoresce in ultraviolet illumination.
18 Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, inv. 1938–12/46; Elsig 2005, 152 (the full technical study of this painting is on pp. 152–155).
19 Scanning electron microscopy in combination with energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDX) was carried out using a Jeol 6300 instrument with a Si[Li] detector (Pentafet, Oxford Instruments). Prior to analysis, samples were coated with an ultra-thin gold layer. X-ray fluorescence analysis (XRF) was performed with an ARTAX portable micro-XRF spectrometer (Bruker) using a Rh rube at 50 kV, a current of 600 μA and a measuring time of 180 seconds per point. Polycapillary X-ray optics were used to reduce the X-ray beam diameter to c.70 μm. Dispersive micro-Raman spectroscopy analysis was conducted with an inVia instrument (Renishaw), equipped with a near-infrared laser (Innovative Photonic Solutions) operating at 785 nm. With the aid of an optical fibre, measurements could be taken directly on the surface of the objects without sampling. Cross-sections analysed with micro-Raman spectroscopy were placed under the integrated Leica DM light microscope at a magnification of 500x or 1000x. Measuring conditions were chosen in order to obtain an adequate signal-to-noise ratio, at the same time preventing any damage to the samples.
20 Lutzenberger 2009, 78.
21 Eastaugh et al. 2008, 105.
22 Eastaugh et al. 2008, 128.
23 Burgio, Clark and Hark 2009, 2033.
24 New York 1978, 12 (painting listed as no. M3.9 on pp. 38–39, fig. 124, and reproduced in colour on the cover). A copper arsenite green was also detected in two single leaf illuminations by the Spanish Forger, one showing a seated ruler with two women and a standing saint (New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MS M.786c; Voelkle 2007, 220) and one with a Crucifixion (Cambridge, FM, Marlay cutting Z. 16; Cambridge 2016, 181, cat. 34).
25 Eastaugh et al. 2008, 107–108.
26 Eastaugh et al. 2008, 314–15.
27 Eastaugh et al. 2008, 381.
28 Burgio, Clark and Hark 2009, 2033.
29 Burgio, Clark and Hark 2009, 2033.
30 Burgio, Clark and Hark 2009, 2033.
31 Little information is available on the work and activities of Paul Aelman. KIK-IRPA's on-line photo library, BALaT, lists only two works by him: a copy of a portrait by Joseph Janssens de Varebeke, dated 1929 (http://balat.kikirpa.be/object/90936), and the restoration, before 1938, of a sixteenth-century painting in the church of Watervliet (http://balat.kikirpa.be/object/55336).
32 'Je soussigné, Paul Aelman, restaurateur à Gand, certifie par la présente, que cette très belle oeuvre, dâte [*sic*] du commencement de la seconde moitié du XV siècle. Franco Flamand, la facture subtile au dessin soigné se rapproche énormément de la manière du peintre dit le Maitre de St Gilles.' Aelman's certificate was kindly provided by the present owner. The letterhead describes Paul Aelman as an artist-painter as well as a restorer of old and modern paintings.
33 We thank the present owner for sharing these images with us.
34 Measurements including false integral frame: height 46.1 cm, width 30.2 cm, main plank thickness approx. 7 mm.
35 Burgio, Clark and Hark 2009.
36 Wellesley 2015.
37 This could possibly suggest that Paul Aelman did not remove the layer in the case of the triptych and that the dark layer he removed during cleaning was in fact the varnish.
38 Durrieu 1914, 42 : 'Avant de quitter les miniatures de manuscrits, je dois signaler que, pour cette catégorie comme pour les tableaux et même encore beaucoup plus que pour les tableaux, il circule quantité de faux, quelques-uns exécutés très habilement. Il y a quelques années, le marché de Paris en était comme inondé. On vit notamment toute une invasion de prétendus portraits de Jeanne d'Arc, arrivant tout frais éclos d'un atelier de l'étranger.' See also Reinach 1908–1909.
39 Dayot 1905, 284: 'Suivant la nécessité de la mode, fonctionnent à Paris des usines de [tableaux]; dans des ateliers, sur la Butte, des rapins fabriquent cela à la grosse, le tarif varie suivant la grandeur; en Belgique, on travaille dans le vieux: les Teniers, les Van Eyck, les Vravaling (*sic*), les Van Ostade sont de besogne courante.'
40 Sterling 1973.
41 Voelkle 2007, 210 n. 11.
42 On the de Pape family, see Bethune 1901; Barthélemi 1980; Dumont 2007. Concerning the identification with the Spanish Forger: Natale 2009, 184.
43 Photos on BALaT: http://balat.kikirpa.be/object/11003281. See also Dumon 2007, 253–54, 266 (no. 6).
44 Bethune 1901, col. 578–579.

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