

BRUEGEL
THE HAND OF
THE MASTER

The 450th
Anniversary
Edition

KUNST
HISTORISCHES
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BRUEGEL THE HAND OF THE MASTER

Essays in Context

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HANNIBAL

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Observations on the Genesis of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Conversion of Saul* and the Examination of Two Copies

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When he chose to represent the conversion of Saul in 1567,¹ Bruegel was following an established tradition (fig. 1).² Nonetheless, he managed to reinvent the theme in a completely personal way, using a striking mountain landscape to accentuate the dramatic impact of the scene. As so often with Bruegel, the key theme – Saul's conversion to Christianity – is almost lost in the myriad of brightly coloured and multi-scaled figures. The subject is even harder to grasp today than it would have been originally, due to the absence in the sky of the source of the divine message to Saul.

Unlike so many of Bruegel the Elder's works, *The Conversion of Saul* was not reproduced multiple times by Pieter Brueghel the Younger and his studio, and there are no extant versions by Bruegel's other son, Jan. There are just two known copies, one

in the Villa Vauban in Luxembourg (fig. 4)³ and the other in a private collection in England (fig. 14 b).⁴ There is also a rare pastiche by Pieter Brueghel the Younger in the Arbroath Art Gallery, Scotland, comprising the Sermon of Saint John the Baptist with additional motifs taken from *The Conversion of Saul* and *The Massacre of the Innocents*.⁵

This study reassesses the techniques and creative process behind the production of the original version and examines the status of the two known copies, focusing primarily on the Villa Vauban version, which has technical links to the production of Pieter Brueghel the Younger. The anonymous, privately owned copy is considered in relation to Bruegel the Elder's original version, as this painting probably represents the best witness to the cropped top and left edges of the original composition.



[FIG. 1] Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Conversion of Saul*. 1567.

Oak panel, 108 × 156.3 cm. Signed and dated at lower right
· BRVEGEL · M · D · LXVII · · Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum,
Picture Gallery, inv. no. 3690.



[FIG. 2a] Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, detail, infrared reflectogram. 1566.

Panel, 95.2 × 161.7 cm. Signed and dated '· BRVEGEL · / · M · D · LXVI ·'. Budapest, private collection on loan to Szépművészeti Múzeum, inv. no. L.3.788.



[FIG. 2b] *The Conversion of Saul* (fig. 1), detail, infrared reflectogram.

THE ORIGINAL VERSION

Pieter the Elder's *Conversion of Saul* is on oak panel.⁶ Elke Oberthaler, Sabine Pénot and Alice Hoppe-Harnoncourt argue convincingly that it was cut down at the left side and at the top in the mid-18th century, citing the different dimensions mentioned in the Prague inventories of 1737 and 1777 and pointing out the absence of a fourth set of dowels to the left.⁷ They conclude that about 15 cm is lost from the top edge and 17 cm from the left.⁸ The composition itself betrays a modification at the top, as the bottom rim of what was probably a full celestial orb is discernible (compare the macrophotography of *The Conversion of Saul* from the Inside Bruegel website, www.insidebruegel.net, see screenshot 1, illustrated at the end of this essay, and this orb in the UK copy, fig. 14 c). Further evidence that the panel is cut down at the left would be the absence of an unprepared border there and the presence of such a border at the right.⁹ However, no such border appears to be present on either side (screenshot 2).¹⁰

In the body of the panel, the X-radiograph reveals what may be an original repair by the panel-maker, evidenced by a horizontal white patch under what would appear to be original underdrawing and paint, bordering the foot of the horseman in yellow (screenshot 3). This is probably a lead white-based filling, applied by the original panel maker to smooth over a defect in the panel surface prior to application of the ground.¹¹ A repaired defect prior to application of the ground layer can also be seen in *Children's Games*, where the panel maker encountered a knot in the wood (screenshot 4).¹²

As with most paintings by Bruegel the Elder, there is a white chalk ground, visible in tiny losses along the left edge (screenshot 5), followed by a thin, lead white-based *imprimatura*, visible in the X-radiograph (screenshot 6). The ground shows traces here and there of the scraper used to smooth down the ground (screenshot 7).¹³ Scraper marks are common in Bruegel's works and are seen, for example, in *The Massacre of the Innocents*, *The Magpie on the Gallows*¹⁴ and *Christ carrying the Cross* (screenshot 8).¹⁵ The *imprimatura* has been applied with broad, multi-directional brushstrokes as in other works by Bruegel such as the *Census at Bethlehem*, 156[-].¹⁶

The underdrawing is carried out in a dry medium, probably black chalk, and covers the whole composition. In places, it skips the ridges in the strokes of the underlying *imprimatura*, indicating that it was applied after priming rather than after ground application (screenshot 9).

Either before or during underdrawing, Bruegel marked his horizon with an incised line. There are two attempts, the upper line overlapping slightly the rocky cliffs to the right (screenshot 10). Other uses of a straight edge include the under-drawn line of the celestial ray of light coming down from the sky to Saul, as pointed out by Elke Oberthaler.¹⁷ There is what appears to be a trial line to the right of the final line, at a slightly different angle but still leading up to the now-missing celestial orb, ending at the horseman above Saul (screenshot 11). There are also traces of incised lines to mark certain lances, as well as the flagpole (screenshot 12). This is in keeping with Bruegel's technique in *The Massacre of the Innocents*, where incisions for lances are plainly visible.¹⁸

The drawing style in the main figures is sketchy and explorative and unlike the unwavering, wiry outline style revealed in several of Bruegel's paintings, such as *The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, executed a year earlier (fig. 2 a).¹⁹ This difference is particularly striking in the foreground figures. Indeed, the searching nature of the underdrawing in *The Conversion of Saul* suggests that Bruegel worked out his final outlines on the panel itself and probably did not rely on 1:1 cartoons to transfer the design to the panel, as demonstrated previously for the *Sermon*, the *Census at Bethlehem* and *The Battle between Carnival and Lent*, among others.²⁰ On the basis of the underdrawing, it seems more likely that Bruegel prepared for *The Conversion of Saul* by making sketches of details, as well as a smaller scale model

drawing of the whole composition. He may well have scaled this up through squaring, but there is no trace of this here or indeed in any paintings by Bruegel for which infrared reflectography is available. Lack of surviving markings, however, does not mean that squaring should be excluded from consideration.

As in most works by Bruegel, such as *Dulle Griet* (1563), studied during its 2017–18 conservation treatment at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage in Brussels (KIK-IRPA), he continued to refine and perfect his composition as he painted.²¹ Most of these modifications are for aesthetic reasons, such as in the caravan of figures in the valley, which reveals various dropped and changed figures, and minor adjustments in the centre to the left of Saul, such as a lance, raised during painting, a dagger, not carried through to paint, and some possible figures, also dropped. He changed the angle of the head of the figure to the left of the dog to a profile view and replaced his pointed helmet with a soft hat, perhaps to avoid repeating the pointed helmet to the right. To the right, he reduced the scale of the mounted figure in green's flamboyant headdress, leaving more breathing space between the figure and the right edge of the painting (screenshot 13).

One of Bruegel's omissions may have iconographic significance. This is a curious scene in the upper right, where a person leans down to a kneeling figure (fig. 3 a–b). It is witnessed by a soldier dressed in a dashing red outfit, but whose pose is now meaningless. Bruegel initially intended this scene to be framed by trees, which start lower down in the underdrawing. This whole composition seems to be reminiscent of Pieter Coecke's design for the *Conversion of Saul* from his set of tapestries depicting the life of Saint Paul (fig. 3 c). Indeed, a similar detail is visible in the background of Coecke's composition, appearing to the right in a preparatory drawing and to the left in the tapestry now in Munich (fig. 3 d).²² According to the text woven into the tapestry's upper margin, this detail alludes to an episode that took place prior to the conversion, according to Acts 26:12: Saul is receiving letters from a chief priest, asking him to go to Damascus. Of course, as Coecke's presumed pupil, Bruegel may have known this composition. As to why he never followed through the motif to paint, we can only speculate.

Bruegel's painting technique was not limited to the use of a brush. The patternwork in the tunic of the figure making his way up the hill with a red shield on his back is drawn on with a blunt point into still-wet paint, exposing the underlayer – as Bruegel did in other paintings such as *Christ carrying the Cross* and *The Tower of Babel* (screenshot 14).²³ He also seems to have used a liquid green glaze for the costume of the figure on the far right, which he has blotted and which spills over on to the rock in front and has started to go brown (screenshot 15). This paint recalls the appearance of a similar browned blotted glaze in *Dulle Griet*, which was identified as a copper green.²⁴ The green of the tunic in *The Conversion of Saul* is therefore remarkably well preserved, unlike the blue sky, which has faded due to the use of smalt, as pointed out by Elke Oberthaler.²⁵



[3a]



[3b]

[FIG. 3] *The Conversion of Saul* (fig. 1), detail of upper right, (a) normal light, (b) infrared reflectogram.



[FIG. 4] Anon., *Conversion of Saul*. Canvas, 119.8 × 158.3 cm. Luxembourg, Villa Vauban, Musées de la Ville de Luxembourg, inv. no. 1691.

[FIG. 3c] Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *The Conversion of Saul*, preparatory drawing for tapestry. c. 1529–30.

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, bequeathed by Rev. Alexander Dyce.

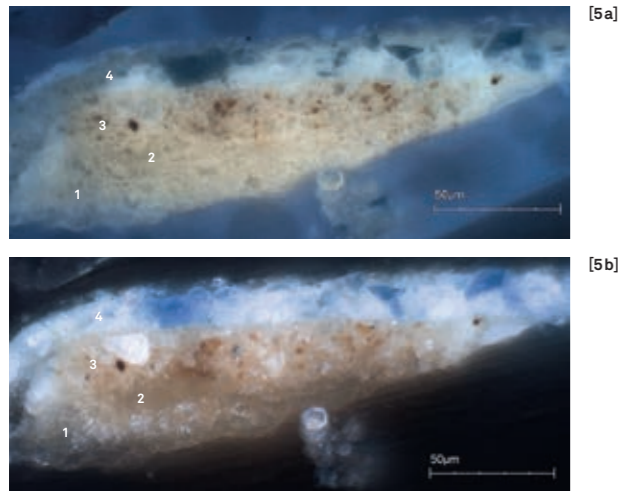
[FIG. 3d] Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *The Conversion of Saul*, detail from tapestry in a set of the *Life of St Paul*. c. 1529–30.

Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. no. T 3844.1.



THE VILLA VAUBAN VERSION: TECHNIQUE AND STYLE

The Villa Vauban *Conversion of Saul* is neither signed nor dated and is on canvas (fig. 4). Its turnover edges have been removed during lining, but there is garlanding on all sides except the left, which suggests a small loss to the canvas along the left edge. Compared to Brueghel the Younger's usual output, the painting presents numerous divergences in technique and style. Analysis of two cross-sections by Steven Saverwyns at the KIK-IRPA shows that the light-toned ground layer is based on chalk, mixed with some earth pigments or clay minerals, rendering it slightly off-white (fig. 5).²⁶ Normally, Brueghel the Younger's grounds are pure white. In the cross-sections, one taken from the sky and the



[FIG. 5] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), cross-section in (a) white light, (b) UV light.

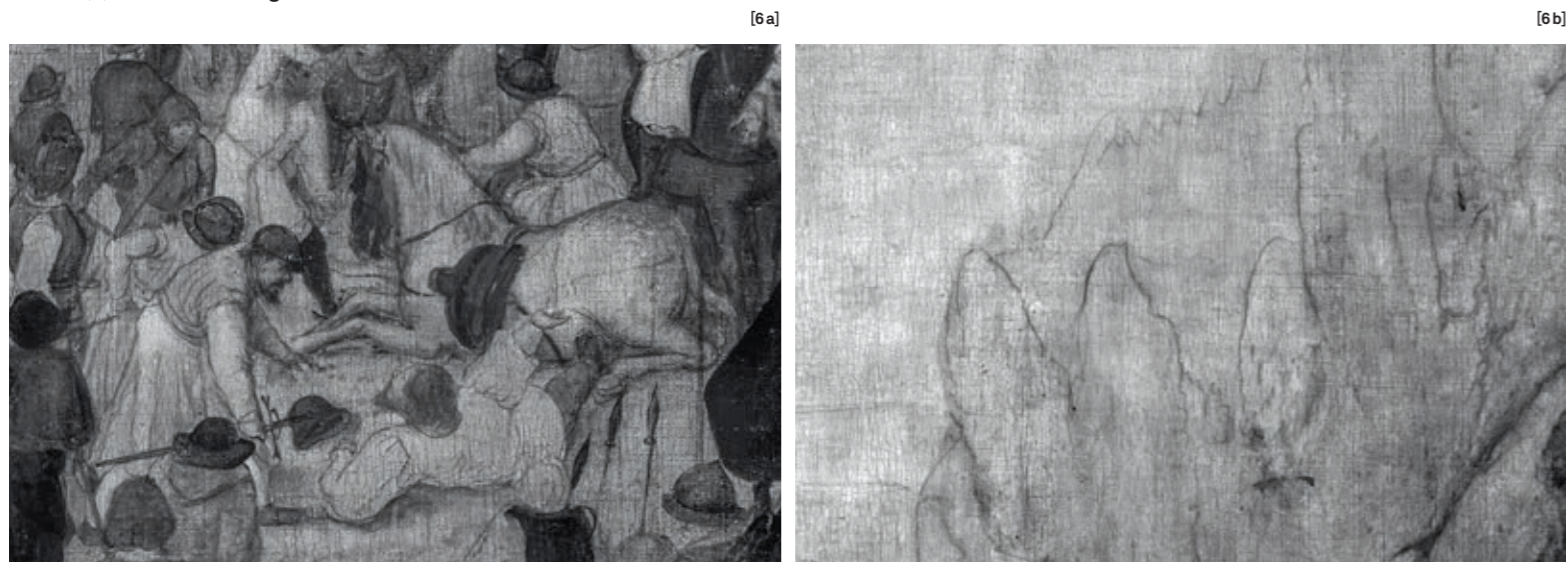
1. Ground: chalk, earth pigments or clay minerals
2. Isolation layer or binding medium of layer 3
3. Light brown: lead white, (brown) earth pigments
4. Blue: azurite, lead white

other from the brown rocks at the centre right edge, the ground is followed by an oily layer, which is either an oil isolation layer or an exudate from the paint layer above. This is followed by a light brown underlayer, which may or may not have been applied in all areas.²⁷

Infrared reflectography reveals a detailed, dry medium, carbon-based underdrawing (fig. 6). It is not visible with the naked eye due to the opacity of the paint, which differs from Brueghel the Younger's work. The outlines are loose, with mitten shapes to abbreviate hands and occasional hatching for tone. Background rocks are marked in freely (fig. 6 b). The drawing style is a little looser overall than we have come to expect from Brueghel the Younger's studio.

The paint is applied relatively thickly, and reserves are not precise. Indeed, the painterly touch, using opaque paint and smoothly blended transitions, is quite different from Brueghel the Younger's usual production, which favours translucent paint layers and delicate opaque highlights (fig. 7 a and c). Indeed, the painterly style is quite rudimentary, with crude outlining and scant attention to fine detail. Finally, several *pentimenti* are now visible to the naked eye, which is atypical of the work of Brueghel the Younger and his studio; these include distant rocks on the horizon, drapery folds, a horse's ear and the dog's tail,

[FIG. 6] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), details from (a) underdrawing, (b) infrared reflectogram.



[FIG. 7a] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail.



[FIG. 7b] Anon., *Conversion of Saul*, privately owned version, detail.



[FIG. 7c] Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *The Triumph of Death*, detail. 1608.

Panel, 123.3 × 166.5 cm. Unsigned, dated. Basel, Kunstmuseum, inv. no. G1995.29.



[FIG. 7d] Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Wedding Procession*, detail.

Panel, 61.3 × 114.5 cm. Unsigned. Brussels, Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles, Maison du Roi.



[8a]



[8b]

which was originally underdrawn and painted straight rather than curly (fig. 8 a–b). On the basis of technique and style, we cannot attribute this painting to Brueghel the Younger or his studio, as did Georges Marlier in 1969.²⁸ Klaus Ertz's suggestion of Jan Brueghel the Elder's authorship, perhaps in collaboration with his son Jan Brueghel the Younger,²⁹ cannot be substantiated either in our opinion, as the Villa Vauban *Conversion of Saul* is devoid of Jan Brueghel's meticulous but lively and often idiosyncratic brushwork, as seen in rare copies after his father, such as *The Triumph of Death*,³⁰ the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*,³¹ the *Wedding Procession* (fig. 7 d),³² the *Visit to the Farm*³³ and *The Wedding Dance in the Open Air*.³⁴ There is a passing resemblance to Jan Brueghel's painting style in the use of opaque colours and the modelling, but the painting lacks his deft precision.

[FIG. 8] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail of dog in (a) normal light, (b) infrared reflectogram.

[FIG. 9a] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), infrared reflectogram showing location of details from the *Procession to Calvary* underdrawing.



[9a]



[FIG. 9b] Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*, marked to show corresponding details in *Conversion of Saul* underdrawing. 1606.

Panel, 121 × 169 cm.
Signed and dated. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.

THE VILLA VAUBAN VERSION: A HIDDEN COMPOSITION

Surprisingly, a closer look at the sky in the Villa Vauban copy reveals a more concrete link to the Brueghel family, and more specifically to the studio of Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Upside down in relation to the *Conversion*, there are three distinct sets of underdrawn figures in the sky area (fig. 9 a). These are identical to those in Brueghel the Younger's many versions of the *Procession to Calvary*, a composition most likely taken after a lost work by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The three scenes are separate figure groupings, with some figures truncated at the edges. The light brown underlayer in the sky area may have been an attempt to camouflage this early design (see fig. 5).

IRR images from three secure versions of the *Procession to Calvary* by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (Bonnetantenmuseum, Maastricht³⁵ and Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp)³⁶ were compared with the IRR image of the hidden underdrawing in *The Conversion of Saul*. This comparison reveals that the four underdrawings are extremely close in notation and style, with drapery folds often in the same places, with similar curled ends to strokes, and comparable sets of hatching for tone (fig. 9 e).



[FIG. 9c] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail, infrared reflectogram, showing underdrawing of Christ carrying the Cross from the *Procession to Calvary* composition.



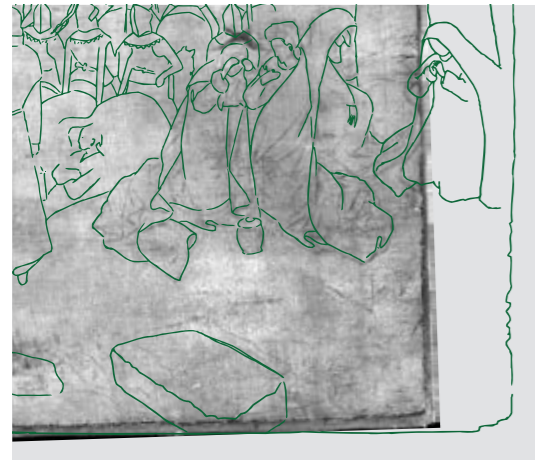
[FIG. 9d] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail, infrared reflectogram, showing underdrawing of the bird seller from the *Procession to Calvary* composition.



[FIG. 9e] Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*, detail, infrared reflectogram. Panel, 109.6 × 164.4 cm. Unsigned. Antwerp, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 31.



[FIG. 9f] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail, infrared reflectogram.



[FIG. 9g] Tracing of composition of Bonnenfantenmuseum version of Brueghel the Younger's *Procession to Calvary* (in green) overlaid on weeping women from infrared reflectogram of Villa Vauban version of *Conversion of Saul*.

Overlaying tracings of the painted compositions of the Maastricht and Antwerp versions with the hidden underdrawing in the sky of the *Conversion* shows that common cartoons could have been used for the different groups, since the correspondence is near perfect (fig. 9 g). This also confirms that for the *Procession to Calvary* composition, Brueghel the Younger used sets of smaller cartoons that he arranged on his prepared supports according to a model drawing of the whole composition.³⁷

The discovery of the first stages of a *Procession to Calvary* underneath the *Conversion of Saul* undeniably links the Villa Vauban painting to Brueghel the Younger's studio, even if technically and stylistically the work does not fit with his production. The *Conversion* was most likely made in the studio of a Brueghel family member or a closely related associate who could reuse one of Brueghel the Younger's unfinished canvases.

THE VILLA VAUBAN VERSION: THE QUESTION OF THE MODEL(S)

The Villa Vauban version has many colours and motifs in common with the original painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder – for example, the yellow robe of the horseman in the foreground, the blue garment worn by Saul and the flamboyant green costume of the mounted official to the right, with similarly slashes in the tunic. However, the pair of army followers walking up the steep

path in the foreground display considerable differences in colour and patterning, as if the copyist was simply unaware of Brueghel the Elder's original version in this part (fig. 10 a–b). In the original painting, the shield is painted red with a yellow Habsburg eagle, but in the copy it is yellow with a black eagle. The copy ignores the decorative pattern of the left tunic entirely, giving the figure a green skirt and blue top. The figure to the right has red leggings, whereas they are green in the original.

Motifs are also sometimes misinterpreted. In the aforementioned figures, the Vauban version sees the helmet of the soldier to the left of the pair as an empty helmet hanging off the figure with the shield, a natural error if the artist were copying a line drawing rather than the painting itself. Likewise, the youth with the dog wears a water bottle in the original, but this is transformed into a V-shaped hood in the copy (fig. 11 a–b). At other times, the Vauban copyist seems to have been aware of a detail in the original, but chose to drop it or change it, for example the dog's straight tail, which is painted curly although initially drawn straight (see fig. 8 a–b). Another example is given by Saul's horse's straps, which are visible in the underdrawing of the Vauban copy, but not in the paint layer. A more obvious misinterpretation is the rock/horse juxtaposition in the lower right, where the copyist does not seem to have realized that the horse was overlapped by a rock.

This evidence suggests that the copyist had access to a drawing, either partially coloured or with colour notes, but that he did not have the original painting in front of him when painting this copy. But given the fact that the canvas came from Brueghel the Younger's workshop, it is worth considering whether the copyist might also have had access to preparatory material inherited from Brueghel the Elder, such as model drawings or cartoons. If this were the case, we would expect to see motifs that Brueghel dropped or changed in the original reappearing in the copy.

In fact, none of Brueghel the Elder's dropped or shifted motifs reappear in the copy, such as the pair of small figures in the upper

[FIG. 10] *Conversion of Saul*, detail, (a) Pieter Bruegel the Elder's version, (b) Villa Vauban version, (c) privately owned version.



[FIG. 11] *Conversion of Saul*, detail, (a) Pieter Bruegel the Elder's version, (b) Villa Vauban version, (c) privately owned version.



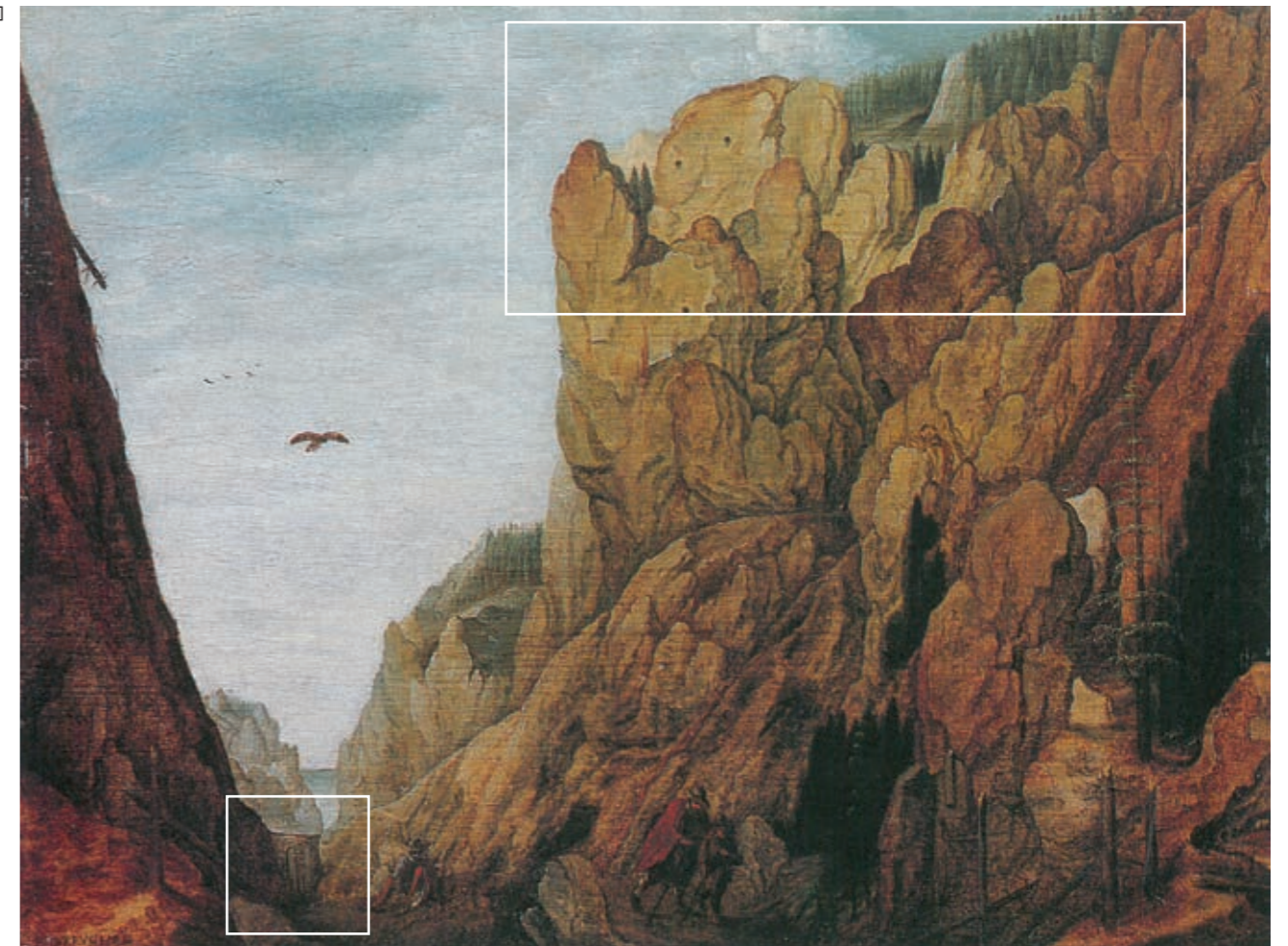
[12a]



[12c]



[12b]



[12d]

[FIG. 12] Identical rocky cliffs, trees and clearing in four paintings (upper rectangles) and location of viaduct in two paintings (lower squares):

[a] Pieter Bruegel the Younger, *Crucifixion*. 1615.

Panel, 98.9 × 148.1 cm. Signed and dated.
Perth, Kerry Stokes Collection inv. no. 2014.113.

[b] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4).

[c] Anon., *Night Landscape*.

Panel, 30.3 × 49.8 cm. Vienna,
Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 3582.

[d] Pieter Bruegel the Younger (attributed), *Rocky Landscape*.

Panel, 15.5 × 33.5 cm. Sotheby's Amsterdam,
Sale 12-13 November 1991.

right, the dropped or shifted motifs in the centre to the left of Saul, and the figure in green's headdress. This suggests that the copyist did not have access to a preliminary model drawing of the composition by Bruegel the Elder. Nonetheless, a tracing of the Vauban version's painted composition shows good correspondence in parts with the painted outlines of the original, namely the figures around Saul, the figures in the lower right and the figures in the centre and left, which raises the possibility of record cartoons. Someone could have made tracings of certain figure groupings from the original version and these could have been used by the artist for the painting of the Vauban version. Whoever this might have been – Bruegel the Elder, his mother-in-law Mayken Verhulst, one of the sons or grandsons or another artist – we have no way of knowing. The copyist could also have scaled up his figures from a model drawing rather than using cartoons, although we have spotted no signs of squaring-up.

The background of the Vauban copy is somewhat different to that in Bruegel's original, even if we acknowledge that the original has lost a little in height (see above). This suggests that the copyist had to reinvent the background or simply used a different model for this zone. In fact, the evidence suggests the

latter. As Klaus Ertz has already pointed out, the central cliffs and trees of the Villa Vauban painting correspond to those in several versions of Bruegel the Younger's *Crucifixion*,³⁸ which is itself probably based on a lost composition by Bruegel the Elder (fig. 12 a–b). The rocks correspond perfectly, as do the trees and grassy clearing. Even the *pentimenti* of rocks in the Vauban version seem to relate to corresponding rocks in the *Crucifixion*.

Moreover, the upper background in the Vauban painting also corresponds well with the rock formation in a *Night Scene* by an anonymous Netherlandish artist (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), which has a provenance going back to Prague in 1685 (fig. 12 c).³⁹ Finally, this same rock and tree formation is seen in two landscape paintings, one attributed by Klaus Ertz to Pieter Bruegel the Younger,⁴⁰ the other in a sale catalogue to Roelandt Savery (fig. 12 d).⁴¹

All these visual citations of the same rock and tree arrangement in paintings by different artists suggest a common and quite influential source. This could, of course, be a lost *Crucifixion* by Bruegel the Elder. There are several mentions of *Crucifixions* by Bruegel that have not come down to us, including one in Archduke Ernest's inventory in 1595.⁴²

The lower left part of the composition does not correspond to the original version of *The Conversion of Saul* by Bruegel the Elder either, but it does match with the two aforementioned landscapes (attributed to Bruegel the Younger and Roelandt Savery). In comparison with these two paintings, the Vauban version would appear to have lost a few centimetres to the left, as was already suggested by the lack of garlanding in the canvas along this edge. Interestingly, in both rocky landscapes, there is also a viaduct spanning the narrow gorge, a feature that is not present in Bruegel the Elder's *Conversion of Saul*, but is clearly visible in the underdrawing of the Villa Vauban version (fig. 12 b and d; 13 a–b). The artist even started to paint it before changing his mind; it appears now as a *pentimento*.

There are no precedents for a viaduct across a gorge in Bruegel the Elder's extant drawings or paintings, but one does appear in a drawing dated 1555 by Bruegel (Louvre, Paris), which was the model of a print from the *Large Landscapes* series (1555–57) by Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum.⁴³ The lower left part of the composition in the Vauban painting may therefore relate to a lost drawing or painting by Bruegel the Elder.

THE PRIVATELY OWNED UK VERSION: WITNESS TO BRUEGEL'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

The privately owned UK version, unlike the Vauban version, is on oak panel (fig. 14 b). The landscape background has been previously attributed to Joos De Momper, given its Momperesque style and colour.⁴⁴ The painting was not examined in infrared, but the black and brown painted outlines that are present in many places could be partly due to a liquid underdrawing, which would be atypical for Bruegel the Younger's practice.

The style of the painting is far removed from the Vauban version in terms of its modelling of faces and treatment of draperies and, indeed, has nothing in common with the painting styles of Pieter Bruegel the Younger or Jan Bruegel the Elder (see figs 7, 10 and 11).

A comparison of the original version with this copy shows that, as in the Vauban version, many of the colours are faithfully reproduced, such as the foreground horseman, painted yellow, Saul, painted blue and the mounted figure to the right, painted green (see fig. 10). In some places, however, this UK copy is even more faithful to the original than the Vauban painting, and the motifs are better understood. The cloth coat of the figure with a Habsburg shield, for example, is decorated with patternwork clearly inspired by the original, unlike the Vauban version. The soldier's head to the left of this figure is correctly interpreted as such and the rock overlapping the green tunic on the far right corresponds to the original. The water bottle on the back of the youth is faithfully copied (see fig. 11) and the dog has a straight tail, both appearing as they do in Bruegel's prototype.

Despite some simplifications, the UK version is closer to the original by Bruegel the Elder than the Vauban copy and

may therefore better reflect Bruegel's lost design at the left and top (fig. 14 a–b).⁴⁵ In the lower left, a group of snapped-off trees could have been present initially in the original, instead of just one tree trunk. At the top, the rocks and trees could also reflect the missing rocks in the original version.

In the sky, the celestial orb with its inscription may bear witness to the appearance of the lost celestial orb in the original, for which only the bottom rim is still present (fig. 14 c). The inscription, 'SAVL. SAVL WAIVERVOLGUT. GHY. MY.' ('Saul, Saul why do you persecute me'), is also present in the Vauban version, but is abraded. The fact that both these independently produced copies contain the same inscription gives extra weight to the idea that it featured in Bruegel's prototype. Adding the divine words to the scene is not frequent, though well attested in illuminated manuscripts and paintings, for instance in the *Hours of Etienne Chevalier* by Jean Fouquet, c. 1450–60 (Musée Condé, Chantilly) and in the version of the theme painted in oil on canvas by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, c. 1675–82 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid).

The fortress in the top-right corner, whose bottom edge may still be visible in Bruegel's prototype, is also present in the Vauban version, suggesting that it was also present in the original painting. Finally, the black double-headed Habsburg eagle on the flag in the upper right, which also appears in the Vauban version but set at a different angle, may have been present initially in the original.⁴⁶ There is no trace of such an eagle on the flag in Bruegel the Elder's version today, either in the underdrawing or the paint layer, but it might have been cleaned off at some point. If this were the case, it would be a similar situation to that in *The Massacre of the Innocents* (Windsor Castle, London), where the Habsburg eagle motif on the tabard of a herald has been repainted at an early date along with other details, possibly at the behest of one-time owner Rudolf II, who also owned *The Conversion of Saul*.⁴⁷

The artist responsible for the UK version could have been some privileged artist-visitor or court artist working for Rudolf II in Prague, in whose collection *The Conversion of Saul* is documented in 1604.⁴⁸ He most likely made a coloured or annotated drawing of the painting in the Imperial Galleries that he later worked up into a full-format panel painting.⁴⁹

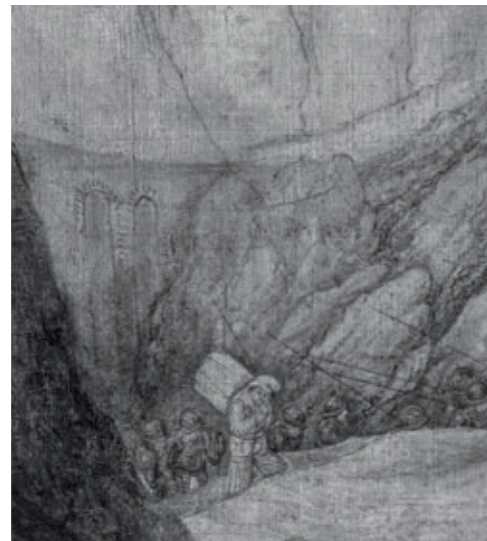
CONCLUSION

The underdrawing of Bruegel the Elder's *Conversion of Saul*, with its sketchy, searching outlines, suggests that in this case the artist proceeded without making detailed 1:1 cartoons of the composition. He most likely prepared his design with sketches of figures and a model drawing of the composition. The two underdrawn and ultimately abandoned figures in the upper right betray his debt to Pieter Coecke van Aelst, whose tapestry design for the *Conversion of Saul* he must surely have known.

[13a]



[13b]



[FIG. 13] *Conversion of Saul*, Villa Vauban version (fig. 4), detail of viaduct in underlayer, not carried through to final paint layer, in (a) normal light, (b) infrared reflectogram.



[14a]



[14b]



[14c]

[FIG. 14] (a) Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Conversion of Saul* (fig. 1). (b) Anon., *Conversion of Saul*, privately owned version, showing motifs that may have originally been present in the original version: snapped-off trees in the lower left, the celestial orb, a fortress in the upper right and a Hapsburg eagle on the flag. (c) detail of the celestial orb with the inscription 'SAVL. SAVL WAI VERVOLGUT. GHY. MY.'

The Villa Vauban version shows a clear technical link to Pieter Bruegel the Younger's studio in that the canvas was partially underdrawn with one of his compositions, the *Procession to Calvary*, before being abandoned. Nonetheless, the Vauban *Conversion of Saul* is atypical in technique and style and was probably made by a close family member or associate, perhaps after Bruegel the Younger's death. Its upper background, given its identical design to that in other unrelated landscape paintings, may reflect the rock and tree arrangement in a lost painting by Bruegel, most likely a formerly well-known *Crucifixion*. The lower left gorge with its viaduct, on the other hand, probably derives from another lost Bruegelian source, whether a painting, drawing or engraving.

The UK copy is unrelated to the Vauban version or the Bruegel sons' output in its style and technique and was probably painted by a court artist or artist visiting Rudolf II's palace in Prague. This version probably offers the most accurate rendering of the missing left and upper sections of Bruegel the Elder's original painting, now in Vienna. Most worthy of note is the presence of the inscription on the celestial orb, 'SAVL. SAVL WAI VERVOLGUT. GHY. MY.', which probably featured in Bruegel's original version.

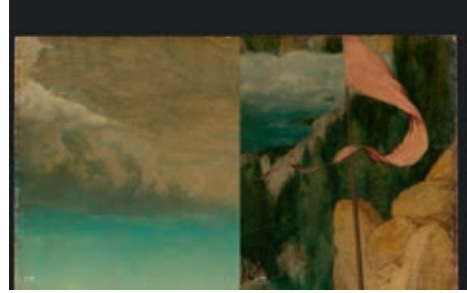
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Sabine Pénot, Curator of Netherlandish and Dutch Paintings at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and Elke Oberthaler, Chief of Paintings Conservation at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, for providing high-quality infrared and macro images in advance of the 2018–19 exhibition. We also thank Elke Oberthaler for informing us of the existence of the privately owned version of *The Conversion of Saul*. We are indebted to Gisèle Reuter, conservator-restorer at Les 2 Musées de la Ville de Luxembourg, who invited us to examine the Villa Vauban's *Conversion of Saul*, and to the owners of the UK version for allowing us to photograph their painting. We also thank Paul Huvenne, former Director of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, for his permission to study their two versions of Bruegel the Younger's *Procession to Calvary*, and Lars Hendrikman, Curator of Old Master Painting and Applied Arts at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, for allowing us to document their version.

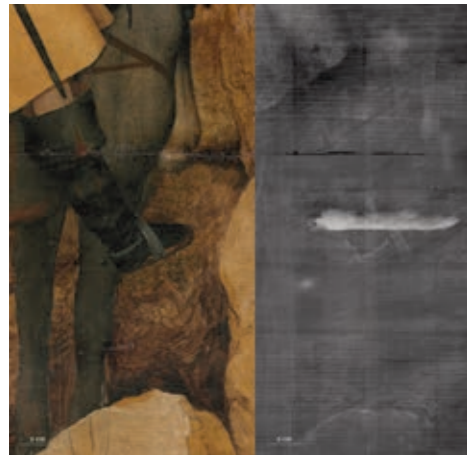
We thank the KIK-IRPA imagery team – Sophie De Potter, Jean-Luc Elias and Hervé Pigeolet – for the on-site documentation of the Villa Vauban *Conversion of Saul* and the three versions of the *Procession of Calvary*.



Screenshot 1:
Macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



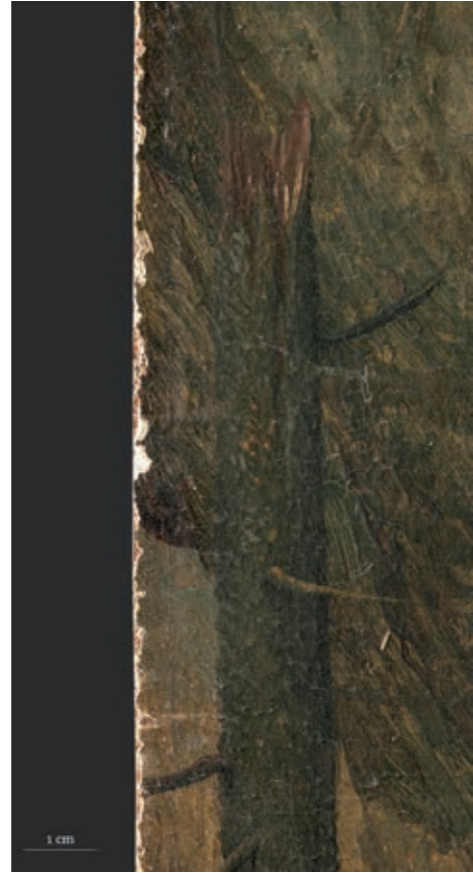
Screenshot 2:
Macrophotographs
of the borders of
The Conversion of Saul.



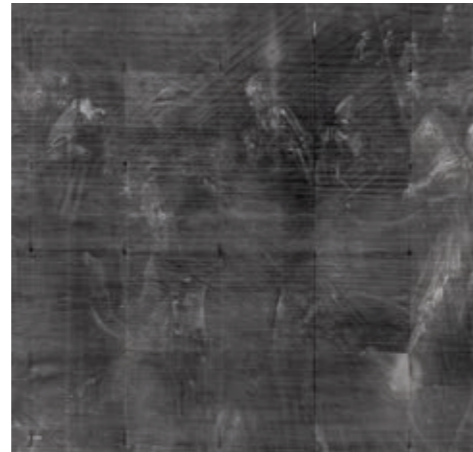
Screenshot 3:
Macrophotograph
and X-radiograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 4:
X-radiograph and
macrophotograph of
Children's Games.



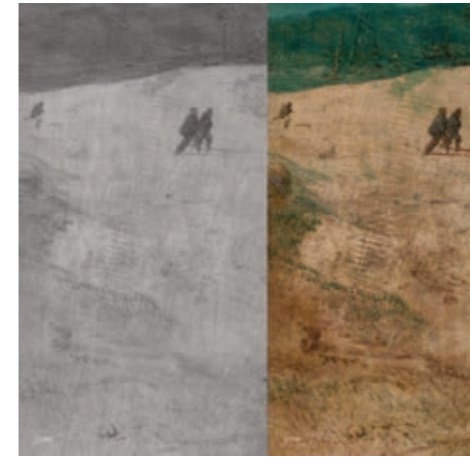
Screenshot 5:
Macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 6:
X-radiograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 7:
Infrared macrophotograph
and macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 8:
Infrared macrophotograph
and macrophotograph of
Christ carrying the Cross.



Screenshot 9:
Infrared reflectogram
and X-radiograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



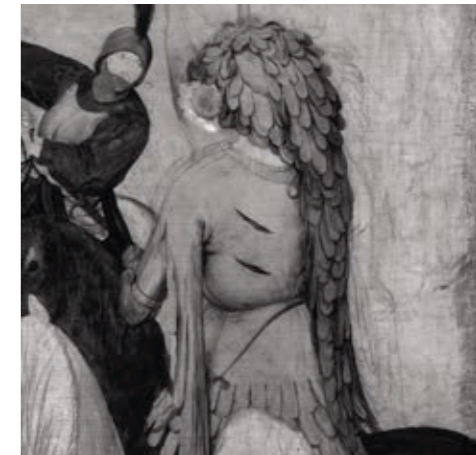
Screenshot 10:
Infrared reflectogram
and macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 11:
Infrared reflectogram of
the Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 12:
X-radiograph, infrared
reflectogram and
macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 13:
Infrared reflectogram of
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 14:
Macrophotographs of
Christ carrying the Cross,
The Tower of Babel and
The Conversion of Saul.



Screenshot 15:
Macrophotograph of
The Conversion of Saul.

1 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Conversion of Saul*. 1567. Oil on panel, 108 × 156.3 cm. Signed and dated. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery, inv. no. 3690.

2 This is not the place to quote the extensive bibliography on the iconography of the conversion of Saul in the 16th century and the possible sources and meanings of Bruegel's version. See, for example, Nakada 2009 and Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat's essay in this volume.

3 Anon., *Conversion of Saul*. Oil on canvas, 119.8 × 158.3 cm. Luxembourg, Villa Vauban, Musées de la Ville de Luxembourg, inv. no. 1691 (Marlier 1969, pp. 99–101, figs 40–41; Ertz 1998–2000, pp. 457–59, cat. A443, p. 471).

4 Anon., *Conversion of Saul*, Oil on panel, 123 × 280 cm. Private collection, UK. According to Karl Asplund, the painting was acquired in Germany in 1918 by Richard Bergh, then director at the Swedish National Museum (Asplund 1943).

5 Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*. Oil on panel, 105 × 150 cm. Unsigned. Scotland, Arbroath Art Gallery, inv. no. A1978.27 (Marlier 1969, p. 59; Ertz 1998–2000, cat. F344, p. 376). This painting is the subject of an ongoing study by Christina Currie.

6 For more information on the panel structure of Bruegel the Elder's *Conversion of Saul*, see Ingrid Hopfner and Georg Prast's essay in the present volume. For dendrochronology, see Pascale Fraiture's essay, also in the present volume.

7 Pénot and Oberthaler in Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, p. 249 and note 4; Hoppe-Harnoncourt (2018) 2019, included in this volume, p. 385 and note 78; Oberthaler (2018) 2019, included in this volume, p. 419.

8 On the positions of dowels in Bruegel's panels, see Ingrid Hopfner and Georg Prast's essay in the present volume.

9 Unpainted edges at right angles to the wood grain are witness to the former presence of channel edge supports, applied by the panel maker to prevent warping during the application of the ground and painting. These pre-framing reinforcements were common in large-format panel paintings of the period in the North and are seen not only in works by Bruegel the Elder from both his Antwerp and Brussels periods, but also in works by Brueghel the Younger, Frans Francken, Pieter Paul Rubens, Marten de Vos and Jan Brueghel the Elder. For an explanation of this practice, with illustrations, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 246–48, vol. 2, pp. 346–47, 389, 452, 622, and vol. 3, pp. 732–33. See also Elke Oberthaler's discussion of this in relation to Bruegel's large-format paintings in the Kunsthistorisches Museum: Oberthaler (2018) 2019, pp. 416–17.

10 There seems to be ground and original paint in many areas along the upper half of the right border, which has probably not suffered any cutting down. In places the underdrawing seems to extend almost to the edge of the panel. In the bottom half, however, it is not certain from the infrared and normal light images whether material covering the right border is original paint, perhaps somewhat squashed by the frame, or later retouching over an original unpainted border.

11 Original fillings are common in paintings by Brueghel the Younger and have the same kind of appearance in X-radiograph or infrared reflectography, often containing tiny bubbles. On this topic, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 736–42.

12 The knot is found underneath the motif of the child in a black tunic and black hose near the middle of the right edge of the panel.

13 Scraper marks are seen at the top of the rock to the right of the pink flag near the right edge of the panel, see screenshot 7.

14 For a discussion of scraper marks, and illustrations of such markings in *The Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Magpie on the Gallows*, see Currie – Allart 2012, pp. 249–50 and note 44. On scraper marks, see Postec 2012, who made

special reconstructions to demonstrate their use in the context of Rogier van der Weyden. On smoothing down the ground layer in Bruegel's work, see also Oberthaler (2018) 2019, p. 420.

15 In *Christ carrying the Cross*, scraper marks of different widths are visible in the upper-right grassy clearing, between the breaking wheels and gallows; see screenshot 8).

16 For the X-radiograph of the *Census at Bethlehem*, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, fig. 33a, pp. 120–21 and web 7. On Bruegel's use of *imprimatura* or isolation layers in general, see *ibid.*, pp. 251–59 and Oberthaler (2018) 2019, p. 421. On the missing digit in the inscribed date of the *Census at Bethlehem* see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 103–04 and fig. 18.

17 Oberthaler (2018) 2019, p. 436.

18 For the incised lances in *The Massacre of the Innocents*, see Currie – Allart 2012, pp. 259 and 262, fig. 137, web 120.

19 For Bruegel the Elder's underdrawing in *The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 148–61, figs. 58–64 and web 57 for the zoomable infrared reflectogram in its entirety; see also, in relation to the sons' copies, Currie – Allart 2020 (forthcoming).

20 On the use of cartoons in Bruegel the Elder's paintings, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 880–98, Currie – Allart 2017, Currie – Allart 2020 (forthcoming).

21 On the creative process in *Dulle Griet*, see Currie et al. 2020a (forthcoming) and Martens 2012.

22 On this drawing and the Munich tapestry, see Exh. Cat. New York 2014–2015, pp. 112–22 (S. Alsteens) and nos. 27–29 (E. Cleland).

23 In *Christ carrying the Cross*, a pattern of tiny loops is pulled through the wet paint of the tunic of the horn player, to the right of Christ (see also Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, fig. 175, p. 313) and in *The Tower of Babel*, the border of the attendant's yellow robe is marked by vertical dashes into the soft paint (Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, fig. 146, p. 313). On incised markings and other textural effects in Bruegel's paintings, see 'Brushwork and Handling' in Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 294–313 and 'Consistency and Application of the Paint' in Oberthaler (2018) 2019, pp. 446–52.

24 New scientific analysis of the pigments and layer structure in *Dulle Griet* was carried out by Steven Saverwyns at the KIK-IRPA in 2017–18; see Currie et al. 2020a (forthcoming).

25 On the use of smalt in the sky of this painting, see Oberthaler (2018) 2019, p. 445, 467 and fig. 53.

26 Cross-sections analysed with the scanning electron microscope.

27 Further cross-sections would be necessary to confirm that the brown underlayer is present throughout.

28 Marlier 1969, pp. 99–101, figs. 40–41.

29 Ertz 1998–2000, pp. 457–59, cat. A443, p. 471.

30 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*. Canvas, probably transferred from panel, 119.3 × 164.5 cm. Graz, Landesmuseum Joanneum, Alte Galerie, inv. no. 58, see Currie – Allart 2020 (forthcoming).

31 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*. Panel, 114.6 × 165.4 cm. Basel, Kunstmuseum, inv. no. 139, see Currie – Allart 2017.

32 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Wedding Procession*. Panel, 61.3 × 114.5 cm. Unsigned. Brussels, Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles, Maison du Roi. This painting was examined with scientific imagery by Christina Currie in 2013.

33 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Visit to the Farm*. Panel, 30.3 × 47.1 cm. Unsigned. Antwerp, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 645, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 840–41.

34 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Wedding Dance in the Open Air*. Copper panel, 40 × 50 cm. Unsigned. Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. Bx E 103, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 834–41.

35 Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*. 118 × 165 cm. Unsigned. Maastricht, Bonnefantenmuseum, inv. no. 4142. This painting was documented by the KIK-IRPA in 2013.

36 Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*. 117.1 × 164.3 cm. Signed and dated 'P.BRVEGHEL./1603.' Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. no. 5006 (Marlier 1969, no. 3, p. 282; Ertz 1998–2000, E394). Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Procession to Calvary*. 109.6 × 164.4 cm. Unsigned. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. no. 31 (Marlier 1969, no. 13, p. 284; Ertz 1998–2000, E397). For these underdrawings, see Currie – Allart 2012, p. 756, fig. 529, p. 790, fig. 549a and web 616, 643–45, 650–51, 655.

37 On the role of cartoons in Brueghel the Younger's work, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 746–52.

38 Ertz 1998–2000, p. 457.

39 Anon., *Night Landscape*. Oil on panel, 30.3 × 49.8 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 3582. We would like to thank Dr Yoko Mori for pointing out this similarity to us.

40 Ertz 1998–2000, p. 376, fig. 134a (black and white image), where cited as Dusseldorf, Galerie Lingenauber, 1992–1993, on wood, 25.5 × 33.5 cm, with, according to Ertz, a late signature with an original appearance: P. BREVGHEL'; Ertz 1998–2000, cat. E1336, illustration missing although cited as fig. 759; Sotheby's, Old Master Paintings and Drawings, Amsterdam, 12–13 November 1991, lot 148, as 'Pieter Brueghel the Younger', signed or inscribed in the lower left: 'P. BREVGHEL'. In the sale catalogue, which illustrates the painting in colour, it mentions that the figures are carried out by a later hand. Since we have not examined this painting, we cannot comment on its attribution.

41 Ertz 1998–2000, pp. 946–47, fig. 760, on sale at Glerum, Amsterdam, 11 September 1998, lot 33 as Roelandt Savery, 25.5 × 35.5 cm, c. 1608–1610. Since we have not examined this painting, we cannot comment on its attribution.

42 On the various mentions of Crucifixions by Bruegel the Elder in source documents, see Currie – Allart 2012, vol. 2, p. 637.

43 Exh. Cat. Rotterdam – New York 2001, no. 29; Sellink (2007) 2011, cat. no. 26, p. 64 and 70.

44 The attribution of the landscape background to Joos de Momper was made by Karl Asplund (Asplund 1943, cat. no. 8). We are grateful to the owners of the painting for drawing our attention to this publication, which as far as we know is the only published source on the painting.

45 See Pénot and Oberthaler in Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, p. 248, fig. 2, for a reconstruction of the lost edges using the Vauban version.

46 We have also examined a *Conversion of Saul* by an unknown master in the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht (inv. no. 3761), which includes four horsemen in the foreground taken directly from Bruegel the Elder's *Massacre of the Innocents*. This painting also has a flag with the double-headed eagle.

47 On the transformations to *The Massacre of the Innocents* and its relationship to Brueghel the Younger's copies, see L. Campbell in Cat. London 1985, pp. 18–19 and Allart et al. 2012.

48 See principally Pénot and Oberthaler in Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, p. 247; Hoppe-Harnoncourt (2018) 2019, pp. 377–78.

49 Another anonymous artist made a coloured pen and ink and watercolour drawing of *Dulle Griet* in the Imperial Collections at a very early date, see Currie et al. 2020b (forthcoming).





