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## **A lost portrait by Pieter Cristus and its contemporary Italian copy An exploration of Flemish-Italian artistic interactions in the fifteenth century<sup>1</sup>**

*In 2016, a captivating fifteenth-century portrait of a self-assured man, dressed entirely in accordance with the Burgundian-Flemish fashion, featuring a striking black headdress, caught the attention of experts engaged by the Swiss auction house Koller. Despite the attached thin oak slats above and below, it was evident that the panel was painted on Mediterranean pine wood. Since then, the panel has undergone numerous technical examinations, both in Italy and Belgium. This contribution presents the results of complementary technical and art historical analyses, gradually forming a clear picture of a complex fifteenth-century reality.*

*The panel emerges as a unique witness to a cosmopolitan Eyckian-inspired Flemish painter, a fashion-conscious Italian businessman travelling between Bruges and Lucca, and a talented Italian painter who adeptly imbues a Tuscan panel with Burgundian allure. While the identities of the painter and the sitter may remain anonymous, the significance of this gem is profound: the transcendent, cross-border, unifying visual language of late medieval Europe, poised with confidence on the cusp of modernity, crystallizes in the blue sky, black velvet, and subtly illuminated facial tones of this “Burgundian Portrait”.*

### *Introduction*

A curious fifteenth-century portrait in the Burgundian style surfaced at a Swiss auction in 2016, catalogued as «Italian, after Flemish model, c. 1500», originating from a private Swiss collection for at least three generations (fig. 1)<sup>2</sup>. The panel painting, measuring 19 cm by 24.5 cm, shows a bust-length portrait of a confident young man, 30 to 40 years old, posed in three-quarter view. Dressed in a style that was popular in the fifteenth-century Burgundian territories, he wears a black velvet robe trimmed with grey fur and a black chaperon on his head that leaves a rectangular opening to the sky below his left ear. Behind his shoulders, we observe a strip of a hilly landscape under a pale blue sky. A light source from the left illumines subtle flesh tones in the face. He is clean-shaven and has a serious but somewhat dreamlike gaze.

In 2017, this panel, titled *Burgundian Portrait*, currently in a European private collection, underwent a technical analysis and a restoration of the paint layers. In 2021, it was included in a multidisciplinary research project on post-Eyckian panel paintings. The Centre for the Study of Flemish Primitives catalogued the portrait as a work by Petrus Christus or a contemporary follower in the Friedländer database<sup>3</sup>. Petrus Christus was the cognomen of Pieter Cristus, an important post-Eyckian painter active in Bruges from 1444 until 1475, who emulated Jan van Eyck by signing some of his works «Petrus XPI me fecit». Although many art historians

use this Latinized version of the artist's name, he is commonly referred to in the historical and archivally based literature by his Middle Dutch name, Pieter Cristus, which is how he was known to his contemporaries<sup>4</sup>. For the sake of consistency, I will call him by the latter, most authentic name, following the convention employed when referring to his peers Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling. However, the Burgundian Portrait discussed in this article is not an original by Pieter Cristus but rather a copy made by an Italian painter after a prototype by the Flemish master. Recent technical, stylistic, and art-historical investigations indicate that it was probably made during the lifetime of the sitter. Not only was the initial auction catalogue note correct, but also the portrait testifies to a fascinating, complex reality of transnational artistic interactions created by travelling patrons and talented painters.

I will begin by discussing the dynamics of the artistic transfer between Flanders and Italy during the fifteenth century, focusing on the copying tradition and the indirect role played by Jan Van Eyck, Pieter Cristus, and Hans Memling<sup>5</sup>. Then, I will detail the technical analyses of the painting performed between 2017 and 2022 and assess its authenticity. To complement the technical discussion, I will offer a stylistic, art-historical, and historical analysis that sheds light on the probable date, region of origin, and authorship of the painting and an examination of the Italian merchants' community in Bruges that provides a clue to the circumstances of the commission.

Combining these perspectives and disciplines produces a corroborated and consistent picture that reveals the panel to be a contemporary Italian copy of an original Pieter Cristus, which likely originated in the Lucchese community in Bruges and had an afterlife in Lucca, Tuscany. Like the works of other Flemish painters who were popular on the Italian Peninsula, Pieter Cristus's paintings functioned as conduits for the artistic transmission of the post-Eyckian visual language from Flanders to Italy<sup>6</sup>.

### *1. The tradition of copies in Flemish-Italian artistic exchange (1440-1500)*

In 2016, Frédéric Elsig (University of Geneva, Switzerland) inspected the painting. He described it as an interpretation of a Flemish prototype in the style of Italian works in the second half of the fifteenth century and, in this case, possibly done after a model by Jan Van Eyck or Pieter Cristus. The landscape is a pictorial concept developed after 1470, which led him to assign the painting to the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Bert Meijer, the Florence-based former director of the Dutch Interuniversity Institute for History of Art (NIKI), associated

the work with Pieter Cristus based on its stylistic features<sup>7</sup>. These first preliminary assessments suggested that the picture, called *Burgundian Portrait*, might be a fifteenth-century panel painting made in Italy after a Flemish Eyckian model, possibly by Pieter Cristus.

Painting exact copies was a new and increasingly common technique in post-Eyckian workshops. A «replica» is a duplicate of a painting produced in the same workshop as the original, whereas an «exact copy» is a later copy made by a painter after a model by another artist<sup>8</sup>. The first documentation of copying paintings by the Flemish Primitives dates from 1454<sup>9</sup>. On 24 April 1454, the chapter of the cathedral of Cambrai certified that the three copies of the miraculous *Notre Dame de Grace*, ordered by the Count of Estampes, would be painted by Pieter Cristus<sup>10</sup>. Copying a painting was not considered inferior work but a unique craft that required a talented master<sup>11</sup>. Dijkstra found that 11 out of 31 painters' contracts in fifteenth-century Flanders dealt with the delivery of a copy after a model<sup>12</sup>. In his will of 10 February 1470, Anselmus Adornes, a Bruges patrician with Genoese roots, mentioned a painting by the hand of Jan van Eyck, which Adornes possessed in duplicate so that he could give his two daughters Margriet and Lowyse identical versions. Both paintings had wings painted with portraits of Anselmus and his wife<sup>13</sup>. The two Eyckian paintings representing Saint Francis receiving the stigmata are identified. One is kept at the Philadelphia Museum, and the other is at the Galleria Sabauda in Turin<sup>14</sup>. Contemporary painters' manuals specified the techniques to make such copies<sup>15</sup>. The copying of paintings that occurred in the workshops of Pieter Cristus and Jan Van Eyck rapidly became an established practice in painters' workshops in the second half of the fifteenth century<sup>16</sup>. The will of Anselmus Adornes clearly states that two identical portraits should be made of Anselmus Adornes and his wife to be gifted to the daughters. It is perhaps the first explicit mention of a portrait ordered in duplicate<sup>17</sup>.

Italian painters' copies of Flemish masters became an important element of the artistic exchange between Flanders and Italy. Probably the first Italian painter to be highly receptive to Flemish art was Niccolò Colantonio, who is said to have copied Jan van Eyck's *Saint George* when it was in Naples around 1445<sup>18</sup>. The source for this anecdote, Pietro Summonte, writing in 1524, claimed that Colantonio copied several other Flemish painters' works as well<sup>19</sup>. Possibly, Colantonio was aware of the instructions of Cennino Cennini, who considered the copying of superior masters an essential part of a painter's education and explained the technical process of copying in detail<sup>20</sup>. Not only painters in Naples but also those in Venice, Genoa, Lucca, and Florence were highly receptive to Flemish art. Perhaps Jan van Eyck's most prominent patron in Bruges was the

Lucchese merchant Giannino Arnolfini (known as Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini in the older literature), of whom two portraits have survived<sup>21</sup>. Actually, there was a large concentration of Lucchese merchant bankers in Bruges in the 1430s<sup>22</sup>. When one of these, Paolo di Poggio, moved back to Lucca, he brought a *Lamentation* by Jan van Eyck with him<sup>23</sup>. In 1480, his wife, Agata di Poggio, asked two artists from Lucca, Matteo di Giovanni Civitali and Michele di Michele Ciampanti, to make an exact copy of this painting<sup>24</sup>. Interestingly, Bartolomeo Facio, the first Italian to write about Jan van Eyck's talent – circa 1450 in his *De Viris Illustribus* – had been active as a notary in Lucca in 1435 before he moved to Naples. He must have been aware of Van Eyck's famous Arnolfini portrait, painted in 1434<sup>25</sup>.

In addition to the documentary evidence, we have material proof that other Italian painters took on the challenge of copying Flemish paintings that had reached the Italian Peninsula<sup>26</sup>. A famous example is the unfinished Eyckian *Crucifixion* in the Musei Civici of Padova, identified as an Italian-made copy – on a poplar panel – of the *Crucifixion* in the Ca' d'Oro of Venice that was painted by Jan van Eyck or members of his workshop on an oak panel. The paintings have identical dimensions and compositions, suggesting that some kind of copying technique was used<sup>27</sup>. Two other panel paintings, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* and *The Virgin in Prayer*, both dated circa 1485-1490, convincingly attributed to Hans Memling and believed to have arrived as a diptych in Italy at an early date, offer further intriguing examples<sup>28</sup>. Two of their many contemporary copies – those in the Strasbourg Musée des Beaux-Arts – have an early provenance indicating an Italian origin (fig. 2). The addition of the landscape in the background is fascinating; such backdrops must have been fashionable at the time and place that the copies were made<sup>29</sup>. Even the great Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio copied Memling's *Man of Sorrow* (dated circa 1480-1490)<sup>30</sup>. The original diptych by Memling must have been in Florence at an early date<sup>31</sup>. There is also a work by Pieter Cristus known for its early Italian "duplication" in sculpture. Cristus's *Death of the Virgin*, now in the Timken Art Gallery in San Diego (US), has an old provenance, placing it in Sicily in the sixteenth century and perhaps even earlier. In 1503, Antonello Gagini sculpted an almost exact copy in marble as part of an altarpiece for the Santa Zita church in Palermo<sup>32</sup>.

The copying of original Flemish paintings on Italian soil was not limited to devotional images. Petworth House and Park contains a work on a pinewood panel made after Memling, *A Man in a Black Cap with a Letter* (fig. 4), which is thought to be of Italian origin<sup>33</sup>. The original by Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Letter* (fig. 3), can be traced to 1880 when it was in the Corsini Gallery in Florence. It was probably brought to Florence at an early date. The sitter could have been

an Italian merchant residing in Bruges who gave his children identical portraits of himself when he returned to his native country. This supposed function is a logical assumption if we keep in mind Adornes' will (from the same city and time), in which a copied portrait of the parents is part of an inheritance. The result of the commission, whatever inspired it, was an Italian panel painting with features characteristic of Flemish art, down to the stylistic idiom of Hans Memling. Several scholars suggested that not only portraits by Memling but also, even earlier, portraits by Pieter Cristus must have been in Florence and were copied by local painters<sup>34</sup>.

In such examples, the wood type often clarifies the place of creation. Flemish painters in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries worked almost exclusively on oak panels, whereas Italian painters typically used poplar wood. The panels of the copied diptych in the Strasbourg Musée des Beaux-Arts are identified as «poplar or lime wood»<sup>35</sup>. In conclusion, documentary and material evidence support the existence of an Italian tradition of copying Flemish work (by Jan van Eyck, Pieter Cristus, and Hans Memling) in the second half of the fifteenth century. The Italian copy is always on an "Italian" wood panel, which is often poplar or pine but never oak. Not only popular devotional images but also private portraits were copied.

## 2. *Technical investigations of the Burgundian Portrait and its support (2017-2022)*

Over the past seven years, the *Burgundian Portrait* has been subjected to multiple diverse technical analyses. They allow us to draw conclusions about authenticity, pigment use, restoration stages, and dating with considerable confidence. Meaningful results were obtained from several non-invasive imaging techniques, in particular the macro X-ray fluorescence scans (MA-XRF). In this technique, X-rays are directed at the panel. In response, the chemical elements in the paint layer start to emit radiation as fluorescent rays that deflect the absorbed energy. The fluorescent rays, whose wavelengths are element-specific, are captured by a movable sensor that digitally maps where each element occurs on the surface of the painting<sup>36</sup>. Also, the visual macro photograph is instructive because its high resolution permits magnifying the image to show the different craquelure patterns (genuine and fake).

In 2017, the painting was investigated by Art-Test in Florence. A pointwise X-ray fluorescence analysis has revealed the chemical elements in six selected points. In 2021, the painting was subjected to a detailed diagnostic investigation conducted by the Royal Institute of Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA, Brussels), consisting of infrared reflectography (IRR), macro photography, photographs taken in ultraviolet

(UV) and infrared (IR) light, microscopic wood analysis, cross-section analyses, a macro-XRF scan and carbon-14 dating. Finally, in December 2021, the research group AXIS (University of Antwerp), in collaboration with KIK-IRPA, executed a macro-X-ray powder diffraction scan (MA-XRPD). The scan revealed the crystalline compounds in the pigments of the paint layer, complementing the maps of the elements delivered by the MA-XRF technique<sup>37</sup>.

All the photographs (IRR, VIS, UV, X) and detailed research data of these investigations can be consulted online in a data repository published by KIK-IRPA Brussels<sup>38</sup>. Below, I have summarised the results of the investigations on the ground layer, the nineteenth-century restoration, the 2017 restoration, the date and origin of the wooden panel, and, finally, the authentic paint layers and pigments.

### *Ground layer*

The cross-sections revealed a ground layer of calcium sulfate (gesso or gypsum) that also contained some calcium carbonate (chalk). The chalk was heterogeneous, present in small quantities, or simply absent<sup>39</sup>. Painters north of the Alps exclusively used a chalk ground on their panels, whereas in the Mediterranean area, a gesso ground was applied, occasionally with an admixture of chalk<sup>40</sup>. Justus of Ghent, working at the ducal court of Urbino in the 1470s, used a double ground layer of gypsum and traces of chalk, combining Italian and Flemish preparation techniques<sup>41</sup>. Similarly, the *Burgundian Portrait's* gesso-based ground layers indicate a Mediterranean origin modified by a Northern-inspired use of chalk.

Flemish paintings of this period almost always have underdrawing, but this portrait does not. The crosshatched shading on the face revealed by the infrared reflectography (IRR) was executed with a broad brush. It is not underdrawing but rather part of the pictorial layer<sup>42</sup>. The gesso ground and absent preparatory sketch suggest a Mediterranean rather than Flemish origin for the portrait.

### *Paint pigments, craquelures, and restoration campaigns*

The MA-XRF scan revealed a notable restoration zone in the landscape area illuminated with a bright barium signal (fig. 5)<sup>43</sup>. Barium became available as a paint pigment in the form of baryte (barium sulfate) from 1820 onwards<sup>44</sup>. The macro photo reveals that the landscape has been heavily restored<sup>45</sup>. The paint is too new to have formed small craquelures here. This repainted area was not revealed by the UV image (fig. 6), suggesting that it is an old restoration covered by a later varnish. The cross-section taken from the landscape (on the left) revealed

a layer of green paint containing chromium and zinc white on top, between two layers of varnish<sup>46</sup>. The current landscape was, therefore, entirely created after 1850, possibly covering an older landscape.

A recent restoration of the panel is documented by a photograph (dated January 2017; fig. 6). As old paint and varnish readily reflect UV light while more recent paint does so less, a UV image of a painting reveals the recent retouching as darker areas (fig. 7). It shows two long horizontal cracks with a slight inclination to the right, one just below the nose, and another just below the chin. There are several retouched areas in the sky, most notably at the upper border of the painting, but also in the facial area to the left of the ear. Apparently, the restorer decided, for aesthetic reasons, to cover the retouched zones on the sitter's temple and at the upper border with a subtle, painted craquelure pattern (figs. 8 and 9). The fake craquelure coincides with the retouched zones revealed in the UV photograph, except for a small, forgotten area between the hat and the right edge of the painting (fig. 10, samples B1 and B2). In a lightly retouched zone on the cheek and temple of the sitter, there are virtually no small cracks visible, indicating the presence of a thin retouching layer over the original paint that disguises the smallest cracks. The restorer used baryte and vermilion for the cheek area<sup>47</sup>. The element titanium, which first appeared in the pigment titanium white in the 1920s, could only have been used in the last restoration, making the Ti-K-scan an accurate map for the recent restoration zones (fig. 5). Lead is a major component of the fifteenth-century pigment known as lead white or *biacca*, which was replaced by zinc white (ZnO) in the nineteenth century and titanium white after 1920. The Pb-L-scan shows where the original lead white in the background had disappeared. It is exactly in those places that titanium white was added. Every trace of titanium is accompanied by a faint presence of the element barium. A commercial titanium white with baryte filler may have been used<sup>48</sup>.

The old landscape restoration covers 2.6% of the painted surface, and the 2017 restoration treated 6.7% of the surface. The rest of the painting seems to be authentic, judging by the craquelures and the omnipresence of old pigments. The MA-XRPD scans, focussing on the pigments used in two nearly immaculate sections around the left eye and just above the headdress, convincingly support its authenticity. The eye area consists exclusively of fifteenth-century pigments: lead white, gesso, chalk, red ochre, and bone black. Apart from two tiny titanium dots and zinc dots, the sky and the headdress feature only bone black, lead white, chalk, and gesso<sup>49</sup>.



### *Date and geographical origins of the wooden support*

The most surprising element of this painting is the wood of the support. Microscopic investigation of its structure identified it as pine – more specifically, maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*)<sup>50</sup>. Painters in medieval and early modern times always used locally available wood for panels, with the single exception of Flemish painters using Baltic oak<sup>51</sup>. In Marette's study, only 11 out of 1061 medieval panel paintings from Western Europe were on maritime pine wood<sup>52</sup>. The distribution area of maritime pines includes Spain, Portugal, the Bordeaux region, the French Riviera, Corsica, Liguria, and Tuscany (fig. 11). In our case study, Tuscany is the most likely origin of the panel because the Italian peninsula in particular had a tradition of local painters copying Flemish panel paintings. Italian painters mostly used poplar, but as Cennino Cennini made clear in his influential treatise *Il libro dell'arte* (written circa 1400), other species could be used as well<sup>53</sup>. Fioravanti mentions the use of different types of pine in Italian paintings<sup>54</sup>. Bruzzone and Galassi argued that the incidence of poplar in Italian panel paintings has been overestimated, and they found several examples of panel paintings on pine wood in Tuscany and Lazio<sup>55</sup>.

The Flemish painters of the fifteenth century painted almost exclusively on oak. In Marette's study of 66 Flemish panel paintings, two were on walnut, and all the others were on oak<sup>56</sup>. We collected our own statistics from a larger sample size. Among the paintings included in the *Corpus of Flemish Primitives* published by the Centre of Study for Flemish Primitives (242 paintings) and the catalogue of the Royal Museums of Fine Art in Belgium (58 paintings), 26 are on unidentified wood types, on canvas or have been transferred<sup>57</sup>. The Spanish-based and Italian-based works of Juan de Flandes (3 paintings) and Justus of Ghent (5 paintings), respectively, should be discounted. Of the 266 Flemish paintings that were not made abroad and have panels of an identified wood, 98% are on oak, and the remaining 2% are on wood from locally available species (walnut, lime, and maple)<sup>58</sup>. It is safe to conclude that a panel painting on maritime pine was not painted in Flanders.

The panel painting shows a tangential section of 25-year rings. A sample was taken from the most recent year rings, and the proportion of radioactive carbon was measured. This yielded a date between 1425 and 1480<sup>59</sup>. Incorporating approximately 40 rings of sapwood, we arrive at an estimated production date between 1465 and 1520<sup>60</sup>. The age (which matches the art historical dating) and the type of wood rule out the possibility that it is a later forgery. In that case, oak would have been used.

The art-historical assessment, age of the pinewood, genuine craquelures, and omnipresence of the old pigments in the untouched parts of the painted surface

testify to the authenticity of the painting. Even though the recent retouches with fake cracks are worrisome, they are precisely delineated and limited to a small area. Such alterations were standard in restoration from the end of the nineteenth century onwards<sup>61</sup>. Despite the modifications in the sky, we can be sure that it is almost identical to the original one. The nineteenth-century restorer may have mimicked the original landscape as well, but we cannot be certain. Without the restorations, we would have seen a more authentic but damaged and incomplete panel painting. This classical restorer's dilemma reminds us of the paradox of the Ship of Theseus, as told by Plutarch in the early second century:

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned from Crete had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their places, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same<sup>62</sup>.

Plutarch confronts us with an uncomfortable truth, reminding us that every fifteenth-century painting stands somewhere on the continuum between perfect original and complete replica. In this portrait, the most characteristic part, the masterfully elaborated facial area, is largely authentic. The overall appearance of the painting corresponds to its original state, albeit with caveats for the landscape section.

The visual analysis, cross-section analyses, macro-XRF scan, and macro-XRPD scan affirmed that retouching was performed in restricted and identified zones during two distinct restoration campaigns. The genuine fifteenth-century panel painting originates from an area where maritime pines grew, probably in northern Tuscany. The landscape is mostly a modern creation. The painter's technique reveals an openness towards Flemish art, but the gesso in the ground layer and the wood of the panel are definitely of Mediterranean origin.

### 3. Iconographical, stylistic and historical analysis

#### *Dating by fashion: the black chaperon and the velvet coat*

An old label naming the painting's author «Maître de la Bourgogne» was probably inspired by the distinctive Burgundian fashion depicted in the work, most notably the black headdress, a *chaperon à bourrelet*. Based on many archival references, the development of this element of Burgundian costume can be reconstructed. Introduced around 1419 as a black silk scarf loosely wrapped like a turban, the *chaperon* evolved into a headdress with two components: a turban-

like *bourrelet* (in Italian, *mazzocchio*) filled with cotton or wool and a loosely hanging scarf, the *cornette* (in Italian the *becchetto*)<sup>63</sup>.

Philippe the Good introduced this new style *chaperon* with *bourrelet* in 1435 at the conference of Arras, but it became generally accepted after 1440<sup>64</sup>. The Burgundian duke always wore a black *chaperon*, and in 1442, he decided that the accompanying *bourrelet* should be filled up and enlarged, like they used to wear it at the Bourbon court. In contemporary descriptions we read of the «chaperon à gros bourrelet à la bourbonnaise»<sup>65</sup>. This is the type of *chaperon* we observe in our portrait. Apart from some rare exceptions, this headdress was black. It concealed all the hair; men's fashion dictated a hairline shaven above the ear. After 1455, the black silk *chaperon* quickly went out of fashion in Flanders<sup>66</sup>. Therefore, Flemish portraits of sitters wearing black *chaperons* were made between 1445 and 1460. Well-known are the portraits of Philip the Good, existing in several copies, believed to stem from an original from circa 1450 (fig. 12)<sup>67</sup>. The fashion worn by the Duke of Burgundy was quickly adopted by others. When Edward Grimston, England's ambassador at the Burgundian court, had his portrait painted by Pieter Cristus in Bruges, he wore his black *chaperon* (fig. 13). Another documented commissioner of a portrait by Pieter Cristus was Jean de Bourgogne, Count of Estampes. A copy of a painting by Pieter Cristus in the collection of Château de Beloeil is probably a portrait of this important Burgundian courtier, depicted shortly after being registered as Knight of the Golden Fleece in 1456 (fig. 14)<sup>68</sup>. Italians liked the Burgundian fashion as well. Marco Barbarigo (1413-1486), a Venetian consul to London, ordered his portrait around 1449 and had himself depicted with his black headdress<sup>69</sup>. Later, as the doge of Venice, he was mocked because of his old-fashioned black *chaperon*. Sanuto wrote in 1493 that the doge wore «capuzo negro all'antiga, che solo tre mantene il portar del capuzzo... che tutti li altri di Venezia portevano barete et becheto su la spala»<sup>70</sup>. The fashion of the Burgundian black *chaperon* lasted longer on the Italian peninsula than in the Burgundian territories. There is an Italian portrait, attributed to Botticelli, in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina (Florence), dated around 1470, of a young man wearing the *cappuccio nero* (fig. 15)<sup>71</sup> and a bystander sports one in a fresco in the Tornabuoni Chapel (circa 1486-1490, Florence, Santa Maria Novella), the *becchetto* draped over his head and right shoulder (fig. 16). The *Italian Portrait of a Young Man with a Pink* (Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, nr. 55.88)<sup>72</sup>, usually situated in Florence and dated around 1475-1485, shows another example of a black *chaperon*, Italian style (fig. 17). The pictorial record reveals a clear distinction between the Italian and Burgundian black *chaperon*: the Italian *cappuccio* lacked the Burgundian *gros bourrelet*, featuring just a rolled-up piece of cloth and leaving the hair on the head visible.

The velvet coat in the *Burgundian Portrait* is noteworthy too. This pleated *pourpoint* is closed at the front and has stuffed shoulders (called *maheutres*) and a grey fur collar. This fashion originated at the Bourbon court around 1442 and was assimilated by the Burgundian court during the following decades (circa 1445-1470). The distinctive *maheutres* were introduced shortly before 1448 at the Burgundian court<sup>73</sup>. This Bourbonnaise/Burgundian fashion is illustrated in an anonymous French painting from the collection of the Louvre Museum, showing a man with a glass of wine. He is clothed in the same fashion as the model in the *Burgundian Portrait*: in a black velvet *pourpoint* that is closed in the front and has a grey fur collar, a black shirt, and a black *chaperon* with the large *bourrelet à la Bourbonnaise*. This painting has been recently dated by Brinkmann as «around 1460» (fig. 18)<sup>74</sup>.

With the help of the pictorial record and the history of fashion, we can locate the original version of the *Burgundian Portrait* in the Flemish/Burgundian region and date it between 1445 and 1470, not excluding the possibility that it is a later copy. When, in 1470, Hans Memling became the foremost Flemish painter, the Burgundian black *chaperon* had completely vanished among his patrons. The headdress was replaced by compact, brimless bonnets (e.g., figs. 3, 4, and 19).

#### *A curious novelty: the landscape in the background*

Although the strip of a landscape is barely noticeable in the *Burgundian Portrait*, it is, on an iconographic level, a remarkable feature. Already in the 1450s and 1460s, Pieter Cristus and Dirk Bouts were integrating strips of landscape into their portraits<sup>75</sup>. These landscape views enshrined by windows or portals became very fashionable, but until 1470, no painter displayed an open landscape behind a portrait. After he painted his *Portrait of a Man in a Red Hat* (Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum) circa 1465-1470, in which the window is only a slim frame around the landscape, Memling became the inventor of a new iconographic scheme: a portrait in an open landscape, with the horizon line at the level of the chin and the hands of the sitter on display (fig. 19)<sup>76</sup>. Many patrons of Hans Memling were Italian merchants in Bruges, and the new pictorial fashion was almost instantly picked up by Tuscan painters like Leonardo da Vinci (*Portrait of Ginevra de Benci*, circa 1474-1478, Washington, National Gallery of Art), Piero della Francesca (*Double Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino*, circa 1472, Florence, Uffizi Museum) and Botticelli (*Portrait of a Man with a Medal of Cosimo the Elder*, circa 1474, Florence, Uffizi Museum). The abovementioned Italian copy of Memling's *Man with a Letter* (see fig. 4) and the anonymous *Italian Portrait of a Young Man with a Pink* (fig. 17) are part of the same tradition. If the new pictorial scheme

of the portrait landscape had so much impact shortly after 1470, it is almost unimaginable that the *Burgundian Portrait*, with its open landscape above the shoulders of the sitter, was executed in this form long before that date. Yet what patron would let himself be painted after 1470 wearing an old-fashioned black chaperon?

The technical analyses show that the landscape in its present form is a modern construction, likely hiding the original landscape. Thus, the landscape could be an Italian, post-1470 addition to a painting that copied an older prototype without a landscape, much as landscapes were added to the copied Memling's in Florence (fig. 2).

### *Stylistic analysis*

The Mediterranean wood and preparation layer exclude an origin in Flanders, and yet the overall aspect of the painting is Flemish, in a post-Eyckian tradition. As mentioned earlier, Frédéric Elsig and Bert Meijer suggested Pieter Cristus as the author, a tentative attribution that had some justification. Between 1450 and 1470, Cristus was the most famous Flemish portrait painter in the tradition of Jan van Eyck, known to the Italian public before his fame was eclipsed by Memling's. The Medici collection mentioned a portrait by Pieter Cristus in its inventory in 1492, possibly the same panel as Cristus's masterpiece, *Portrait of a Young Lady* (fig. 20)<sup>77</sup>.

Compared to Memling's portraits, with their gentle human psychology, the portraits of Pieter Cristus have a chilly, emotionless aspect<sup>78</sup>. The subject of the *Burgundian Portrait*, with his absent-minded gaze, is closely related to the sitters depicted in Cristus's portraits. Perhaps the most skilful feature of the *Burgundian Portrait* is the very subtle light/dark modelling of the flesh tones, which is a key characteristic of Pieter Cristus's art<sup>79</sup>. The stroke of reflected light on the chin, contrasting with the shadowed neck, belongs to his pictorial vocabulary. Similar reflected light can be seen in his *Virgin and Child* (Madrid, Museo del Prado) and his *Virgin with Saint Barbara and Jan Vos* (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie). He also applied the technique in silver point drawings such as the *Portrait of a Young Woman* (Rotterdam, Museum Boymans van Beuningen)<sup>80</sup>. The light that illuminates the chin from below is reminiscent as well of the portrait at Château de Beloeil (fig. 14), generally considered to be a copy of a portrait by Pieter Cristus<sup>81</sup>. In the latter painting, a nearly rectangular area in the *chaperon* is left in reserve, just below the ear. The back of the *chaperon* is squeezed into the picture plane. All these features reappear in the *Burgundian Portrait*.

Although attempts could be made to determine which skilled Italian crafted this copy, this seems a futile endeavour. Virtually all known fifteenth-century Italian

copies of Flemish work have remained anonymous precisely because the copyist was able to approximate the original so well. If we assume that the nineteenth-century intervention did not change the appearance of the landscape too much, we may be able to see in it a glimpse of the copyist's hand. The pale blue sky that fades to white on the horizon and the hills with randomly scattered, amorphous, brown trees seem to have been inspired by landscapes in Piero della Francesca's paintings, such as those in *St Jerome and Donor* (Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia) and the *Diptych of Federico de Montefeltro and Battista Sforza* (Florence, Uffizi Museum).

#### *Historical context – a possible commissioner*

Whereas Memling's Italian patrons were mostly Florentine bankers and merchants, Pieter Cristus's circle of Italian friends consisted almost exclusively of Lucchese merchants. During the reign of Philip the Good, the merchants of Lucca (like Giannino Arnolfini) lived and flourished as deliverers and counsellors at the Burgundian court in Bruges<sup>82</sup>. After 1470, the Florentine merchants and bankers (like Tommaso Portinari) took over this firstrank position and became wealthy art patrons. In the 1460s, Pieter Cristus was enrolled in the high-profile Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Dry Tree. Ten Italian merchants belonged to this elite club, with seven of them from Lucca, namely Carlo Gigli, Paolo Meliani, Antonio Damast, Giovanni Arnolfini, Michele Arnolfini, Francesco Sandei, and Martino Cenami<sup>83</sup>. The most prominent member of this network, Giovanni Arnolfini, was married to Giovanna Cenami, Martino's niece. Most of the men from the Lucchese community in Bruges had birth dates between 1400 and 1410 and lived permanently in Bruges; only Martino Cenami returned to his home city of Lucca, making the journey in or shortly before 1460. In Lucca, he was known as the younger son of Piero Cenami, head of an important silk trading company that did business in Lucca and Venice<sup>84</sup>. Piero, who was murdered in 1436, had been an influential political figure in Lucca<sup>85</sup>. His young son Martino, probably still a minor, went to Bruges around 1444<sup>86</sup>. Martino Cenami's employer, Gioffredo Rapondi, made him an associate and tried to strengthen ties with the Cenami family by arranging a marriage between his daughter Caterina and Martino in 1452<sup>87</sup>. However, the relationship between Martino Cenami and Gioffredo Rapondi was troubled by lawsuits, which were finally settled by judgements in 1452 and 1456<sup>88</sup>. Somewhere between 1452 and 1463, Martino Cenami and his wife Caterina Rapondi registered in the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Dry Tree, affirming their membership in the Lucchese establishment in Bruges and the social network they shared with the painter Pieter Cristus, who was then the most prominent portrait

painter in Bruges<sup>89</sup>. They could not have missed Pieter Cristus, whose residence and workshop in the Vlamingstraat placed him in close proximity to the Italian business community in Bruges<sup>90</sup>. After some annoying legal troubles in both his private and business life, Martino Cenami decided to return to Lucca in 1460. He was active in the political life of the city and served as *gonfaloniere* in 1464, 1470, 1480, and 1483<sup>91</sup>. When a contract from 1469 mentions all the active members of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Dry Tree in Bruges, Martino Cenami, not surprisingly, is not mentioned anymore<sup>92</sup>. Martino Cenami was born between 1425 and 1430, so he must have been around 30-35 years old when he moved from Bruges to Lucca, where he is still mentioned in 1488 as an associate in a large company of silk merchants<sup>93</sup>.

We lack archival documentation that would allow us to offer any trustworthy hypothesis about the identification of the sitter, but someone like Martino Cenami is certainly a possibility. He knew Pieter Cristus, or at least shared his social network, and had witnessed the growing fashion among rich and influential merchants to commission portraits of themselves from a Flemish painter, just like his compatriot Giannino Arnolfini did<sup>94</sup>. As mentioned above, Paolo di Poggio brought a *Lamentation* by Jan van Eyck home from Bruges in 1457, and in 1480 he ordered a copy made in Lucca<sup>95</sup>. If we consider that Lucca perfectly falls into the distribution area of the maritime pine, then this hypothetical identification gathers at least some likelihood. The sitter in this portrait must have had a life that was not so different from that of Martino Cenami, who exchanged a position in the Italian community in Bruges for a new life in the city of his birth.

### Conclusion

The wood used for the panel and the gesso ground indicate that this painting was executed in a Mediterranean region, most probably Tuscany. However, its artist worked in a style so close to that of Pieter Cristus that he probably copied an existing painting by Cristus. The iconographical details of the black *chaperon* and the velvet coat suggest that the composition originated between 1450 and 1470 and may have been copied with the addition of a landscape after 1470. That would explain the chronological mismatch between the fashion on display and the iconographical novelty of the landscape in the background, suggesting an execution of the painting after 1470. The carbon-14 dating confirms that the panel was painted not long after 1470. The Lucchese Martino Cenami, whose biographical data make him a perfect match for a "portrait transfer" from Bruges to Lucca in 1460, could be the sitter, but in the absence of documentary evidence,

he can only serve as an example of the type of individual who might have commissioned a portrait by Pieter Cristus in Bruges and its copy on Italian soil. We do not know whether the original portrait was destroyed in the maelstrom of the passing centuries or whether it is secreted in a private collection.

Although we must bear in mind the cautionary tale of the ship of Theseus, it is possible to visualize the original through the lens of the copy. The copying process and the imperfect restorations of the panel cannot hide the true spirit of the original portrait. A young, ambitious, wealthy Italian merchant in Bruges, circa 1460, displays his self-assured and fashionable presence. He commissioned the most famous portrait painter of his era – and many years later, a talented Tuscan painter as well – to present himself to his fellow countrymen in the much-admired, post-Eyckian pictorial language imported straight from Flanders.

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- 2 Information kindly given by Stéphanie Egli (Koller International Auctions) by email (8 July 2021).
- 3 *Petrus Christus: Portrait of a Man at bust-length*, Friedländer Database, Centre for the Study of the Flemish Primitives, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Brussel, <https://www.kikirpa.be/en/friedlaender/6879> (last accessed 18 March 2024). A painting classified under a certain artist includes work by his own hand as well as works of anonymous assistants, pupils and contemporary followers and copies.
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  - 11 Mund, *La copie*, cit., p. 231.
  - 12 Dijkstra, *Origineel en kopie*, cit., p. 13.
  - 13 A. De Poorter, *Testament van Anselmus Adornes*, in «Biekorf», 37, August 1931, pp. 25-39.
  - 14 J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer, *Jan van Eyck: two paintings of Saint Francis receiving the stigmata*, Philadelphia, 1997; L. Silver, *Eyckian Icons and Copies*, in *Making Copies in European Art 1400 – 1600, Shifting Tastes, Modes of Transmission and Changing Contexts*, ed. by M. Bellavitis, Leiden-Boston, 2018, pp. 130-164, in part. p. 158.
  - 15 Dijkstra, *Methods for the copying of paintings*, cit., p. 67; C.M. Van Daalen, *Preparations and materials. Methods of compositional transfer*, in *La peinture ancienne et ses procédés. Copies, répliques, pastiches*, ed. by H. Verougstraete, J. Couvert, Leuven-Paris-Dudley, 2006, pp. 212-217.
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- 66 *Ivi*, pp. 131-133.
- 67 L. Campbell, J. Van der Stock, *Rogier van der Weyden 1400-1464, Master of Passions*, Leuven, 2009, pp. 289-291.

- 68 Schabacker suggests this portrait may be painted during Pieter Cristus's presence at the ducal court. Schabacker, *Petrus Christus*, cit., pp. 130-131; *Les Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or au XVe siècle: notices bio-bibliographiques*, ed. by R. de Smedt, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern-Brussel-New York-Oxford-Wien, 2000, pp. 125-129.
- 69 For the dating and the context of the painting, Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools*, cit., pp. 224-227.
- 70 M. Sanuto, *Vitae Ducum Venetorum (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 22), Milano, 1733, col. 1238. See also R.L. Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia*, Milano, 1964, p. 354; Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools*, cit., p. 227, note 23.
- 71 *Botticelli. Bildnis, Mythos, Andacht*, exhibition catalogue (Frankfurt, Städel Museum, 13 November 2009 – 28 February 2010), ed. by A. Schumacher, Ostfildern, 2009, pp. 196-197, cat. 18.
- 72 See <https://emuseum.mfah.org/objects/46953/> (last accessed 18 March 2024).
- 73 M. Comblen-Sonkes, *Le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon*, Bruxelles, 1987, pp. 229-230; Jolivet, *Pour soi vêtir honnêtement*, cit., pp. 104-105.
- 74 *Primitifs français. Découvertes et redécouvertes*, exhibition catalogue (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 27 February – 17 May 2004), Paris, 2004, p. 65; B. Brinkmann, *Eine flémalleske Geburt Christi, der Kardinal Rolin und der "Mann mit dem Weinglas" im Louvre*, in «Städel-Jahrbuch», n.s. 16, 1997, pp. 91-112, in part. pp. 105-109.
- 75 Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools*, cit., pp. 46-47, 104-105.
- 76 Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence*, cit., p. 191; ead., *Memling and the Renaissance Portrait*, cit., p. 78.
- 77 «Una tavoletta dipintovi di una testa di dama francese, cholorita a olio, opera di Pietro Cresti da Bruggia», Florence, Archivio di Stato, Mediceo avanti il principato, nr. 165, fol. 40r. See also E. Müntz, *Les Collections des Médicis au XVe siècle*, Paris-London, 1888, p. 79; R. Stapleford, *Lorenzo de' Medici at home. Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico. The Inventory of the Palazzo Medici in 1492*, Philadelphia, 2013.
- 78 Upton, *Petrus Christus*, cit., p. 32.
- 79 The description of Cristus's style in the Berlin *Portrait of a Young Lady*: «The flesh tints and dress are painted in the technical manner of the Van Eycks in cold but soft and harmonious tones, with careful modelling and copious colour», J.A. Crowe, G.B. Cavalcaselle, *Lives of the Early Flemish Painters with Notices of their Works*, London, 1879, p. 145. See also *Petrus Christus, Renaissance Master in Bruges*, cit., p. 168.
- 80 *Ivi*, cit., pp. 102, 142, 184-185.
- 81 Schabacker, *Petrus Christus*, cit., pp. 130-131.
- 82 See notes 20 and 21.
- 83 Bruges, Stedelijk Archief (SAB), Gilde Droogenboom, nr. 505, portfolio 2, *Ledenlijst van de gilde*, fols. 2v, 3r-v, 4r, 5r-v, 11r-v.
- 84 L. Molà, *La comunità dei Lucchesi a Venezia. Immigrazione e industria della seta nel tardo medioevo*, Venezia, 1994, p. 231.
- 85 M.E. Bratchel, *Lucca 1430-1494: The reconstruction of an Italian city-republic*, Oxford, 1995, pp. 23, 31-32, 34.
- 86 B. Lambert, *The city, the duke and their banker. The Rapondi family and the formation of the Burgundian state (1384-1430)*, Turnhout, 2006, p. 158. According to Bratchel there was a

traditional practice among Lucchese businessmen according to which young men aged 16 or 17 were sent abroad to serve a commercial apprenticeship, Bratchel, *Lucca 1430-1494*, cit., p. 167.

- 87 *Ivi*, p. 199, note 88.
- 88 Lambert, *The city, the duke and their banker*, cit., p. 158.
- 89 Bruges, SAB, Gilde Droogenboom, nr. 505, portfolio 2, *Ledenlijst van de gilde*, fol. 5v. The first following dated entry, « Messire Anthoine Baestaerd van Bourgoingnen cam int gheselscip int jaer lxiij, m cccc in meye» is mentioned on fol. 13r.
- 90 Verheyen, *Schilders en hun huizen in het vijftiende-eeuwse Brugge*, cit., pp. 73-74.
- 91 Galoppini, *Mercanti toscani*, cit., pp. 301-302. See also Lucca, Archivio di Stato, Armario 58, reg. 17, published in *Documenti Archivio di Stato*, vol. 10, 1847, p. 222.
- 92 *Petrus Christus, Renaissance Master in Bruges*, cit., p. 201.
- 93 P. Pelù, *I libri dei mercanti lucchesi*, Lucca, 1975, p. 190.
- 94 This phenomenon is described in great detail in Wilson, *Painting in Bruges*, cit., p. 74.
- 95 Cf. *supra* (notes 22 and 23).



Fig. 1: After Pieter Cristus, *Burgundian Portrait*, c. 1470-1500, oil on pinewood. European private collection. Photo © Koller International Auctions.



Fig. 2: From left to right and top to bottom: Hans Memling, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, c. 1485, oil on panel. Genova, Musei di Strada Nuova – Palazzo Bianco. Photo © Genova, Musei di Strada Nuova; Hans Memling, *The Virgin in Prayer*, c. 1485, oil on panel. Private collection in Great Britain. Photo: Sotheby's London; French/Italian painter, *Diptych with Christ as the Man of Sorrows and The Virgin in Prayer*, c. 1490, oil on panel. Strasbourg, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Photo © Strasbourg, Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg.





Fig. 3: Hans Memling, *Portrait of a Man with a Letter*, c. 1480-1490, oil on oak panel. Florence, Uffizi Gallery. Photo © Florence, Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Fig. 4: After Hans Memling, *A Man in a Black Cap*, c. 1480-1490, oil on poplar (or pinewood). West-Sussex, Petworth House and Park.  
Photo © National Trust / Andrew Fetherston.



Fig. 5: MA-XRF scans of the *Burgundian Portrait*. Photo © KIK-IRPA, Brussels: Pb-L scanning (upper left), Ba-L scanning (upper right), Ti-K scanning (lower left), and Zn-K scanning (lower right).



Fig. 6: UV image of the *Burgundian Portrait*. Photo © KIK-IRPA, Brussels



Fig. 7: *Burgundian Portrait* before restoration (January 2017). Photo © Private collection.



Fig. 8: *Burgundian Portrait*, painted craquelure in a retouched zone left from the ear.  
Photo © KIK-IRPA, Brussels.



Fig. 9: *Burgundian Portrait*, genuine (below) and fake (above) craquelure patterns in the sky area at the upper edge (middle). Photo © KIK-IRPA, Brussels.

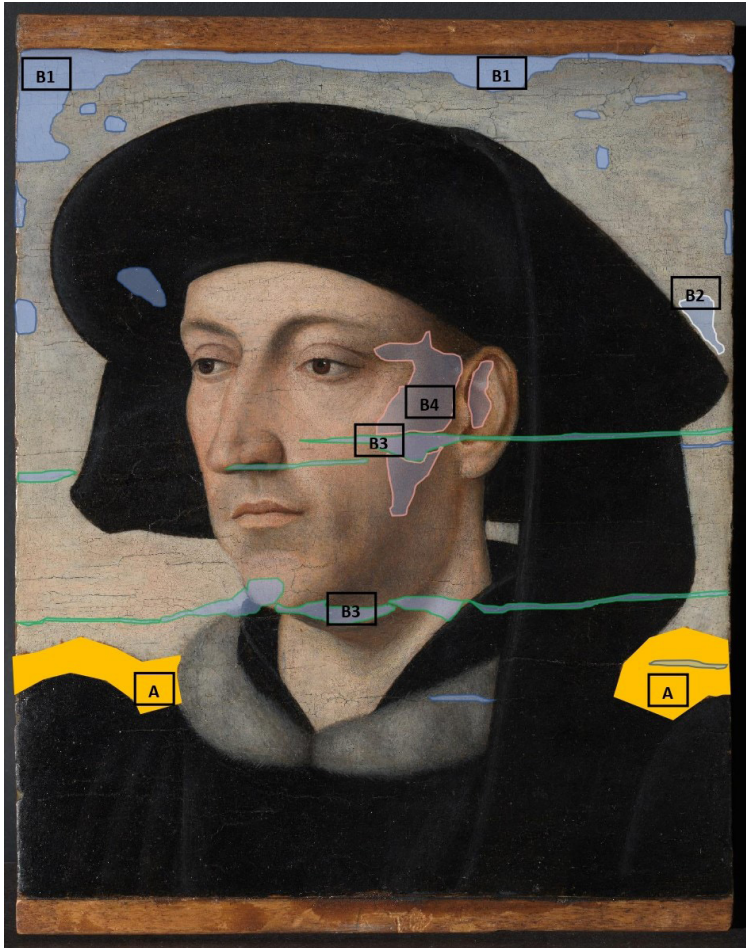


Fig. 10: *Burgundian Portrait*, A: Early restauration phase (1850-1950?); B: Restauration 2017 (B1: sky zone with fake craquelure; B2: sky zone without craquelure; B3: restoration of cracks based on titanium white and zinc white; B4: superficial restoration with vermillion and titanium white). Graphical representation by the author.



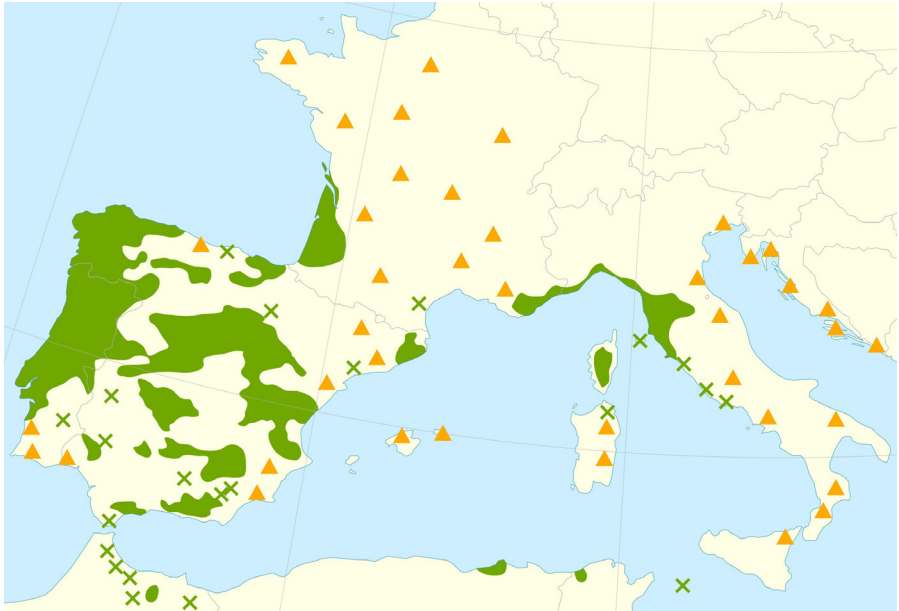


Fig. 11: Distribution map for Pinus Pinaster. Photo: European Forest Genetic Resources Program – euforgen.org.



Fig. 12: After Rogier van der Weyden, *Portrait of Philip the Good*, c. 1450, oil on oak panel. Dijon, Musée des Beaux Arts. Photo © Musée des Beaux-Arts/ François Jay.



Fig. 13: Pieter Cristus, *Portrait of Edward Grimston*, 1446, oil on panel.  
London, National Gallery. Photo © Private collection.



Fig. 14: After Pieter Cristus, *Portrait*, probably of Jean de Bourgogne, Count of Estampes, c. 1456, oil on panel. Beloeil, Château de Beloeil. Photo © KIK-IRPA, Brussels, cliché B157996.



Fig. 15: Botticelli, Portrait of a Young Man, c. 1470, tempera on panel. Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina. Photo © Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi.



Fig. 16: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Angel appearing to Zacharias*, detail, 1486-1490, fresco. Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Tornabuoni Chapel. Photo: Web Gallery of Art.



Fig. 17: Anonymous, *Italian Portrait of a Young Man with a Pink*, 1475-1485, tempera on wood. Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, nr. 55.88, Robert Lee Blaffer Memorial Collection, gift of Sarah Campbell Blaffer. Photo in the public domain.



Fig 18 : French painter, *Man with a Glass of Wine*, c. 1460, oil on walnut panel. Paris, Musée de Louvre, RF 1585. Photo © 2017 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/ Michel Urtado.





Fig. 19: Hans Memling, *Bernardo Bembo, statesman and ambassador of Venice*, c. 1480, oil on oak panel. Antwerp, Royal Museum of Fine Arts. Photo: Dominique Provost, Collection Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (public domain).



Fig. 20: Pieter Cristus, *Portrait of a Young Lady*, c. 1470, oil on oak panel. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo © Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie / Christoph Schmidt.