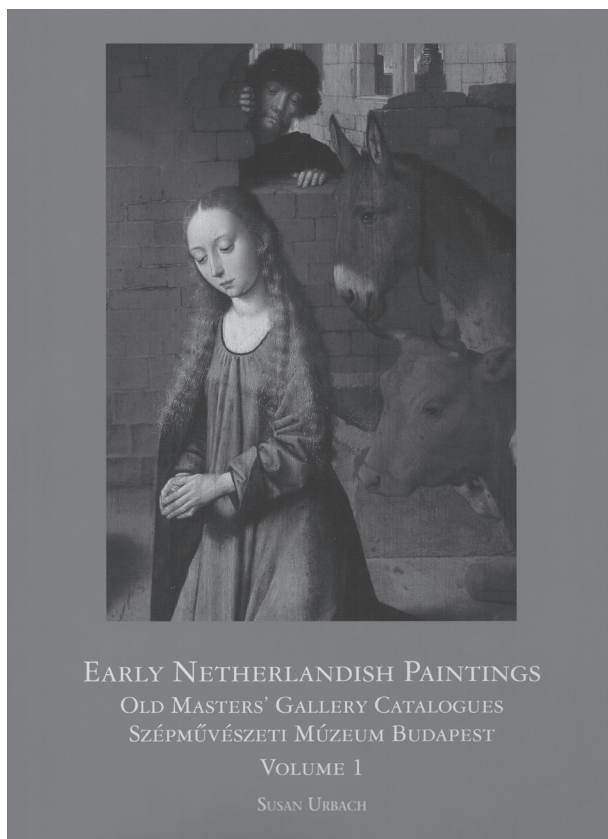


URBACH, Susan: *Early Netherlandish Paintings*, with the collaboration of Ágota Varga, photographs and technical examinations by András Fáy. Old Masters' Gallery Catalogues, Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest. Harvey Miller Publishers, London/Turnhout, 2015. (Distinguished Contributions to the Study of the Arts in the Burgundian Netherlands, editors of the series: Susie Nash and Till-Holger Borchert), Vols. 1-2, 271+325 pages; 275+271 colour and black and white illustrations

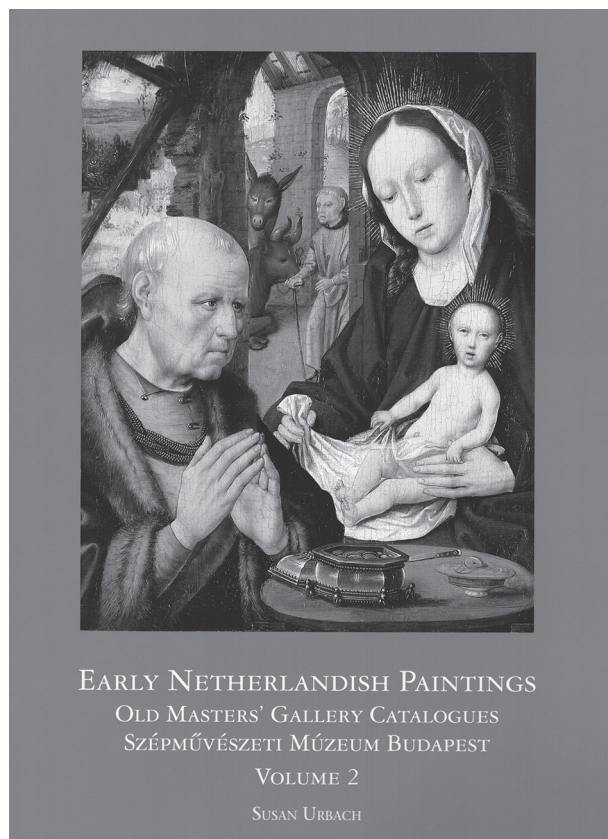
In the past twenty-five years, the Museum of Fine Arts has published many scholarly collection catalogues. Because of the importance of the task and the need for experts with in-depth knowledge, each specialized catalogue has been written by a different author. Here, we will concentrate on the volumes that survey the museum's best known collection, and the one most studied by art historians: the Old Masters' Gallery, which contains paintings from the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries. These volumes are long overdue. Their predecessor (Andor Pigler: *Katalog der Galerie Alter Meister*, I-II. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1967), although superb in its day, is now antiquated. In some cases, the attributions have changed, and the bibliography of each painting is certainly outdated.

The earliest of the 'new' publications is a series referred to as the 'Summary Catalogue,' which was the first to present a reproduction of every single painting. Only the most essential information was included: the name of the artist, the title of the work and its dimensions, provenance and the most important findings in the post-1967 professional literature, accompanied by often tiny reproductions. The series consists of three volumes:

1. *Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Old Masters' Gallery. Vol. 1. Summary Catalogue of Italian, French, Spanish and Greek Paintings*, ed. by Vilmos Tátrai. Contributors: Vilmos Tátrai, Ágnes Szigethi, Éva Nyerges, István Barkóczi, György Ruzsa. Visual Arts Publishing, London – Startcolor C. Ltd., Budapest, 1991.



Cover illustration: Cat. 9: Gerard David: The Adoration of the Shepherds (detail), c. 1485; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 1336 (photo: András Fáy)



Cover illustration: Cat. 32: Master of the Khanenko Adoration: The Adoration of the Magi (detail), c. 1500/10; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 76.5 (photo: András Fáy)



Fig. 1. Cat. 5: Joos van Cleve: *The Virgin with the Infant Christ Drinking Wine*, after 1508, c. 1510/20; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 4329; infrared photograph (András Fáy)



Fig. 2. Cat. 6: Joos van Cleve: *The Virgin with the Sleeping Child*, after 1504, c. 1510/15; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 4314; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

2. *Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Old Masters' Gallery. Vol. 2. Summary Catalogue, Early Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish Paintings*, ed. by Ildikó Ember and Zsuzsa Urbach. Authors: Ildikó Ember, Annamária Gosztola, Zsuzsa Urbach. Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2000.

3. *Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Old Masters' Gallery. Vol. 3. Summary Catalogue of German, Italian, Bohemian and British Paintings*, ed. by Ildikó Ember and Imre Takács. Authors: Éva Benkő, Klára Garas, Zsuzsa Urbach. Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2003.

The volumes of the most recent series present the paintings of the Old Masters' Gallery in considerably narrower units, and thus with more detail. The format allows more space for basic information and a far more detailed bibliography (generally beginning with early nineteenth-century references). The research history and earlier

restorations of the paintings are discussed, and evidence is offered for the current attributions, which frequently differ from earlier ones. The reproductions are larger and sometimes images of details and analogies are also included. In contrast to the previous series, the text is provided in English and Hungarian. The following volumes are now available:

1. Ekkart, Rudi: *Old Masters' Gallery Catalogues. Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest Volume 1. Dutch and Flemish Portraits 1600–1800. A Régi Képtár katalógusai. Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest Volume 1*. Primavera Press & Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2011.

2. Ember, Ildikó: *Old Masters' Gallery Catalogues. Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest Volume 1. Dutch and Flemish Still Lifes 1600–1800. A Régi Képtár katalógusai. Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest Volume 2*. Primavera Press & Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2011.

Although not a part of this series, another similarly high quality catalogue is in preparation on late Gothic and early Renaissance Sieneese paintings in Hungary (and not just those works in the Museum of Fine Arts; in fact, a larger por-



Fig. 3. Cat. 9: Gerard David: The Adoration of the Shepherds, c. 1485; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 1336; infrared reflectography, digital mosaicing, composit (András Fáy)



Fig. 4. Cat. 9: Gerard David: *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail), c. 1485; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 1336; infrared photograph (András Fáy)



Fig. 5. Cat. 9: Gerard David: *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (detail), c. 1485; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 1336; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

tion are housed in the Christian Museum in Esztergom). Thus far, only one of the three planned volumes has been published – surprisingly the middle volume.

Sallay, Dóra: *Corpus of Sienese Painting in Hungary, 1420–1510*. Centro Di, Firenze, 2016.

Great emphasis is placed on the history of collecting. The catalogue entries always present the painters and offer a detailed description of the painting in detail (including the condition of the paint layer, technical examinations and iconography). Providing support for the attributions was the author's priority. Some photographs reconstruct polyptychs to which the panels in Hungary once belonged.

Susan Urbach's work continues the new series on the Old Masters' Gallery mentioned above (Ekkart, Ember). The organization of the three volumes and the structure of each catalogue entry is the same. Even the dimensions of the book are uniform and an identical title (*Old Masters' Gallery Catalogues. Szépművészeti Múzeum Budapest*) appears in a corresponding location on the title page; yet Urbach's volume

cannot be considered part of the same series, as a different publisher was used, in some places the typography is different and no Hungarian language texts are included. These changes were made because of Urbach's lengthier discussions of each item, which were necessary because of the uncertainty that looms over the authorship of many of the paintings. If the paintings in a part of a collection are signed and dated and their origin is clear, little needs to be written. However, the more imprecise our knowledge, the more extensive justification we need when we establish, or in some cases merely posit authorship. The early Netherlandish panel paintings found in Budapest fall into this category. The portrait volume (Ekkart) contains 105 paintings, while the still-life volume (Ember) has 92. The early Netherlandish catalogue, on the other hand, has altogether 49 entries, and although some contain several parts, the total number of images discussed is no more than 61. Urbach undertook to present roughly a

century of panel painting, from the middle of the fifteenth to the first third of the sixteenth century. The earliest is a painting by Petrus Christus made after 1450 and the latest is a work painted after 1540 by an unknown artist. (Of course, Urbach occasionally includes seventeenth-century copies of lost works from the early sixteenth century too, such as cat. nos. 7, 27 and 28).

Each entry begins with the name of the artist and the presumed date of execution, but the painter himself and his other works are not discussed. None of the paintings are signed, thus simply identifying the painters already entails considerable responsibility. Sometimes a concrete name, other times only a provisional name, is provided. If the painting does not appear to be a master's own work, then terms such as 'Workshop of' and 'Copy after' are used, and if only the region can be identified, then we find 'Flemish,' 'Dutch' or the broader designation of 'Netherlandish painter.' The entries are organized in alphabetical order according to the name of the artist. For each work, the dating is only approximate, inferred from the specific stylistic features or other known works by the painter, and also based on examinations of the wood panel itself. Next are the provenance and a list of each exhibition in which the painting was displayed, followed by a new section containing every substantial mention of the work in the professional literature. A brief, but annotated bibliography with further references appears in the footnotes.

The *Technical Notes* are an important part of the catalogue; here we find an extraordinarily detailed description of the paintings thanks largely to non-invasive examination methods developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The notes devote considerable attention to the condition of the paint layer (noting for example 'damaged areas,' 'minor losses,' 'probably damaged by candle flames,' 'overcleaned,' and so on), occasional repairs, craquelures, and even the degree to which the original, unpainted border is visible. Images of details are sufficiently enlarged so that the reader, too, can examine these elements. Also included here are the results of the technical examinations – the preparation and evaluation of infrared images and infrared reflectograms (András Fáy's important contribution to the catalogue.) Other techniques such as X-ray imaging (cat. no. 32) and pigment analy-



Fig. 6. Cat. 31: Master of the Holy Blood: Lucretia Romana, c. 1500/20; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 127; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

sis (cat nos. 4, 36, 42) are scarcely mentioned. Underdrawings are given special prominence in this book, published here for the first time in Hungary. For example, they are crucial in supporting the author's claim of whether certain panels are copies. The author notes in particular when an underdrawing cannot be evaluated because it was made with red or brown paint, which current methods of examination are incapable of revealing (cat. no. 3). Similarly, Urbach also observes when a painter changes concept twice or even three times during the creative process (cat. no. 18). With each painting, she also provides the results of dendrochronological examinations, most of them performed by Dr. Peter Klein of the University of Hamburg. She makes special note of any of the more important panels that could not be subjected to this kind of examination. No captions are included, but a separate section is devoted to iconographic observations, and the author's scholarly inquiry and efforts thus far have always been of an appropriately high standard. The entries always close with an *Attribution*, in which Urbach considers earlier opinions and



Fig. 7. Cat. 32: Master of the Khanenko Adoration: The Adoration of the Magi, c. 1500/10; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 76.5; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

technical examinations in expressing her own view on the authorship of the painting.

The text is thorough and clear and addresses all the essentials without indulging in excessive detail. For those familiar with the literature, Urbach's book is not as laconic as *Corpus de la peinture des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux* or *The Flemish Primitives* (Catalogue of Early Netherlandish Painting: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium), nor as verbose as the Frankfurt catalogue *Niederländische Gemälde im Städel 1400–1550* (Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein, 1993). Moreover, the text is accompanied by quality visual documentation. As with all serious catalogues, Urbach's book is quarto size and the front and back of the paintings are reproduced as full page size images, making the paintings easy to examine. Detail photos are also included, often more than ten per painting with a maximum of 39. A significant portion of the illustrations are infrared photograms and are

placed next to the corresponding detail visible on the paint surface. In a few cases, an image of the analogy referred to is illustrated, although these are generally smaller and less frequent. The visual material is not designed to illustrate the debates over attribution, but rather gives readers an opportunity to determine whether they agree with the author; therefore, the images always show the unpainted border of the panel, and the photos of the back sides always present in a separate reproduction any stamps or inscriptions of the previous owners or auction house. Inscriptions receive special attention, displayed in close-up images, and the author, whenever possible, attempts to decipher them. Occasionally, however, the writing is deemed unintelligible (cat. no 10, ill. 10.8, 10.9 or cat. no. 30, ill. 30.9), and the author states: '... have not yet been interpreted.'

In the introduction, Urbach explains her research – that is, how the catalogue came into being – with a few poignant remarks about how



Fig. 8. Cat. 32: Master of the Khanenko Adoration: The Adoration of the Magi (detail), c. 1500/10; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 76.5; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

research opportunities have changed. Next, Ágota Varga provides an overview of the development and creation of the collection.

The following is a discussion of some of the more important works in the collection and also those that present interesting problems.

What is remarkable about the copy of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is that it was painted on canvas rather than wood (cat. no. 3). In an article written in 1969, Urbach already championed the idea that it was a very early copy made in the master's workshop, where the original could still be seen, as even the most minute nuances of colour are the same in both paintings. Since then, this view has gained general if not universal acceptance. Some areas in the original painting (now in Madrid) were repainted, which explains certain discrepancies between the two works.

The author calls attention to Petrus Christus' *The Virgin and Child* (cat. no. 4) with the follow-

ing words: 'This small masterpiece is one of the most important in the collection and, since its restoration in 2006, can once more be seen in all its glory.' She is justified in highlighting the importance of the doorway surrounding Mary, as it is without question the doorway to Heaven. She also makes an interesting supposition: the painting had a companion piece with a depiction of the patron accepting Jesus' blessing, although the Child's posture does not make this an inevitable conclusion. As a result of conservation work performed ten years earlier, some sixteenth-century inscriptions have been rendered visible, which Urbach relies on to refute the notion that the artist was forgotten in the subsequent century. She reasonably posits that the inscriptions were copied from the frame, which has since been lost, to a less conspicuous place on the painted surface.

Joos van Cleve's painting *The Virgin with the Infant Christ Drinking Wine* (cat. no. 5) has allowed for several important conclusions to be



Fig. 9. Cat. 38: Hans Memling: Crucifixion Triptych (detail of the central panel), 1480s; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 124; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

drawn. (Fig. 1) First is the identity of the painter. Several works have an identical composition (Fig. 2), and the Budapest painting has been considered a later copy. However, a study primarily of the underdrawing has revealed that the Budapest painting was the first and, moreover, was painted by van Cleve himself. The absence of the *sfumato*, a common feature in van Cleve's painting, can be explained by the abrasion and damage to the work. According to Urbach, in the painting the red wine, an iconographic rarity, is Christ's own blood – at every Catholic mass, during the consecration of the wine, we hear: 'Drink from it: for this is the chalice of my blood.' The specific reason for the painting of this motif, however, was the influence of the thriving cult of the Holy Blood in Bruges.

Special attention was given to Gerard David's painting *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (cat. no. 9) because of the extraordinarily rich underdrawing and the interesting use of two different

methods, one of which allows us to observe the charcoal content of the paint. (Figs. 3–5) (The author also notes this peculiar feature of underpainting in Maerten van Heemskerck's panel, cat. no. 17). The artist continually developed the composition as he painted, for example, omitting one of the shepherds in the crowd, changing the cityscape significantly and excluding the soaring tower of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the underdrawing, a strange form appears next to the tower, which Urbach considers may be the head of God or an angel. Only the latter is likely, as wings are discernible on either side of the figure. Strangely, the painting's iconographic curiosity, the Holy Family seeking lodging in the background, is nowhere to be seen in the underdrawing.

In Cornelis Engebrechtsz' tondo, the young man and woman (cat. no. 10) were long thought to be a married couple, but today the idea that they are Sts Cecilia and Valerian has perhaps gained too much currency. Urbach postulates that this depiction of the holy figures may in fact be a hidden portrait of the commissioners of the painting. We have to consider, however, that a well-to-do couple is portrayed and not members of royalty.

The most referred to early Netherlandish painting in the Budapest collection is a depiction of the Road to Calvary, a copy of a lost composition by Jan van Eyck (cat. no. 11). For some time, the work has been considered a late copy. Now, however, a study of the underdrawing and the results of dendrochronological examinations clearly show the panel was painted in the early sixteenth century, and that numerous restorations left very little of the original paint surface. In the section on iconography, Urbach makes a noteworthy identification of the lone, exposed figure in the foreground: the Wandering Jew, the little-known legendary figure who offended Christ on his way to the Crucifixion and was thus condemned to wander the earth until the Second Coming. She also discusses extensively the proposals put forth concerning the identity of the horsemen in decorative attire in the procession, but she considers each supposition unfounded. Finally – after examining numerous analogies, comparing the Budapest painting to copies (some made directly of it and others independently), and conscientiously taking into account a fresco in Antwerp never before included in the



analysis – she concluded that it was impossible to determine the original purpose of the painting, the identity of the master or copier, or the exact date of execution.

Catalogue item 14, *Falconry*, is not a high-quality painting (given the carelessness of the details, it was certainly a copy), but the extraordinarily rare subject-matter imbues it with documentary value. Therefore, it deserves more attention and a more detailed discussion, such as that received by another painting of lower quality but with an interesting subject-matter: *The Card Players*, a copy after Lucas van Leyden (cat. no. 21).

A late sixteenth-century copy of a work by Hugo van der Goes is interesting because it was painted on a copper sheet (cat. no. 15). This technique was not completely unknown in this period, but it was extremely rare. As the underdrawing of van der Goes' painting contains no parallel hatching, perhaps it is a copy of a copy. It portrays the same subject, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, as Maerten van Heemskerck's painting, which appears two items later in the catalogue. Because of this, the iconographic description and the list of sources for the two paintings should be the same, but the author resolves this problem by addressing those parts that clearly belong in the *Iconography* section in catalogue entry 17 (referencing a few contemporary Netherlandish depictions of the theme), while the buildings clustered around the tower visible in the background are addressed in catalogue entry 15. Normally, discussions of the technical examinations, the iconography and the attribution are strictly separated in this volume, but here they are merged to a certain extent. It should be noted that Urbach sees an analogy to Heemskerck's rendering of Christ's midriff in the famous *Belvedere Torso* in the Vatican Museum.

Since the early twentieth century, the painting *Lucretia Romana* (Cat. 31) has been considered the work of either Quinten Massys or the Master of the Holy Blood. (Fig. 6) Urbach settles the disagreement by identifying the source of the composition as a lost work by Massys, but holds that the panel was painted by the Master of the Holy Blood based on a thorough analysis of the style. She further substantiates this identification by noting the exceptional quality of the execution and the underdrawing. Dendrochronological examinations led her to postu-

late a date of execution in the 1510s–1520s or even earlier, in contrast to the date previously assigned to the work.

The Budapest *Adoration*, by the Master of the Khanenko Adoration, is of particular interest because it was originally a triptych which was transformed around 1600 into the present horizontal rectangular panel (cat. no. 32). (Figs. 7–8) Urbach rightfully defends the decision made during the previous restoration to preserve the condition of the work with its later additions and repainting as it faithfully reflects the painting's history. Moreover, the additions, which were largely adapted to the original, were superbly executed. Urbach's identification of the wise man in the right-hand side of the painting as Frederick III, in contrast to the 1969 publisher's identification of him as the son, Maximilian I, is acceptable, although it is puzzling why two decades after his death, a painter in the distant Netherlands would want to portray him.

The painter of the superb northern Netherlandish panel (cat. no. 35) has been referred to as the Master of the St John Altarpiece for only a few decades; Urbach, however, has always referred to him this way. During an examination in conjunction with fairly recent restoration work, a fragmentary *Behold the Man* figure was found on the verso. This led Urbach to conclude that it belonged to a small diptych made for private devotion. Its companion was most likely a *Mater Dolorosa* image. What the front side of the companion piece contained is an interesting question.

The next panel painting (cat. no. 36) is identified as the work of either the workshop or follower of the Master of the Legend of St Ursula (Bruges). The painting is of poor quality (and was purchased by the museum so a conservator could practice on it), but its iconographic features make it especially noteworthy. We see a rare anthropomorphic Trinity with Jesus Christ as the central figure(!). The throne follows a lost van Eyck composition that was still vivid in the memory of Bruges residents around 1500. Its function is uncertain; it could not have been an altarpiece, but was perhaps an epitaph for the donor, portrayed alone, thus certainly a bachelor.

One of the significant pieces in the collection, Hans Memling's *Crucifixion Triptych* (cat. no. 38), is generally discussed in connection to his altarpiece in Lübeck, which portrays the



Fig. 10. Cat. 46: Barend van Orley: *The Agony in the Garden*, before 1533; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 2006.2; infrared photograph (András Fáy)



Fig. 11. Cat. 46: Barend van Orley: *The Agony in the Garden* (detail), before 1533; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 2006.2; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

same subject. (Fig. 9) The Budapest painting is most often described as a copy of the Lübeck work or another Memling *Crucifixion*. The changes the painter made during the painting process, revealed during a thorough evaluation of the underdrawings, led Urbach to declare the work original. (The decision was complicated by the fact that the Lübeck altarpiece has not yet been examined as comprehensively as the Budapest work.) Urbach concluded that Memling made two *Crucifixion* paintings before the Lübeck version, and one of them is the Budapest work, which dendrochronological examinations suggest may have been painted ten years earlier. She also makes an important iconographic discovery: the figure of Christ in the Resurrection scene is not standing by the grave, but is floating above the sarcophagus. This motif was common in Italian painting one hundred years earlier, and first appeared north of the Alps in the oeuvre of Memling. In any case, the triptych's Resurrection scene diverges most strongly from the other panels with regard to both the underdrawing and the execution. Urbach posits that one of the painter's journeymen may have painted this – at least in part. This triptych seemed to capture Urbach's

attention in particular as she offers the longest discussion and includes the largest number of illustrations.

In her discussion of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen's panel of St Erasmus (cat. no. 44), Urbach offers an interesting supposition: the work is a crypto portrait of none other than Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg. The resemblance is undeniable and we also have a motive: the cardinal was an enthusiastic disseminator of the cult of Erasmus and even obtained the saint's relics. If we compare this painting to genuine portraits of the cardinal, however, we see the face is not long enough; the portrait is not faithful enough. Yet, if we suppose that perhaps the artist did not have a prototype or sketch to work from and relied only on memory, then Urbach's hypothesis becomes acceptable.

Barend van Orley's *Agony in the Garden* (cat. no. 46) is one of the newest acquisitions in the collection. (Figs. 10–11) Dürer prototypes have already been postulated in connection with the composition, and Urbach adds Schongauer as another inspiration, but also proposes more modern influences. For example, the slightly bigger hands suggest van Orley, like other Manner-



Fig. 12. Cat. 46: Barend van Orley: *The Agony in the Garden* (detail), before 1533; Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, Inv. 2006.2; infrared photograph (András Fáy)

ist painters, emulated the energetic presentation mode of Michelangelo.

In discussing one of the copies (cat. no. 49) of Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* (or another sixteenth-century version of it), Urbach states that one hundred and fifty versions, all of the same approximate size, are known. Thus, a special cult may have surrounded the picture; perhaps it was a miraculous or indulgenced image. With some of the preceding items in the catalogue, Urbach already lamented the inchoate state of research in the Netherlands on pictures of this kind, which means it will take some time before the Budapest panel's place among these is determined.

The larger part of the author's career, between 1966 and 1992, was devoted to the early Netherlandish paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts. During these years, she was the curator of Early Netherlandish and Early German Painting. Superb scholars have written about one or another of the images, but none could be considered masters of this collection. During Urbach's years at the museum, conservation work intensified, which allowed her to reach new conclusions or refine earlier ones. She gave lectures abroad and produced various publications on her findings, resulting in greater international interest in the paintings and more visits from colleagues. At just this time, new methods of examination emerged, such as dendrochronology, infrared photography and infrared reflectography, and a

larger proportion of early Netherlandish panels – and German panels – were studied with these techniques than those in any other collection in the Old Masters' Gallery.

All of these techniques were used in the intensive research of recent decades, and naturally their results were summarized in the catalogue. Urbach's name appears in twenty-nine publications in the bibliography at the end of the volume; therefore, it is safe to say there is no painting in the book about which she had not written something previously. Naturally she is also the author of the entries for the early Netherlandish paintings in the *Summary Catalogue* mentioned above. (In publications, her given name appears sometimes in the Hungarian form, Zsuzsa, and sometimes in the English form, Susan.) Numerous conclusions of lesser and greater magnitude have appeared in her articles, and now, as her crowning achievement, these are organized, summarized and presented in a balanced form to her fellow scholars.

Unfortunately, the doleful statement is true that as soon as the catalogue of a collection is published, it is already out of date. Urbach completed her work in 2010 and only a small number of newer bibliographic references were added to some entries. Nevertheless, users will appreciate the richness of the catalogue rather than notice any minor deficiencies. In any case, we can assert that Urbach achieved her goal stated in the introduction: 'we hope [this] will provide a basis for further research on the collection.'

*János Vég*