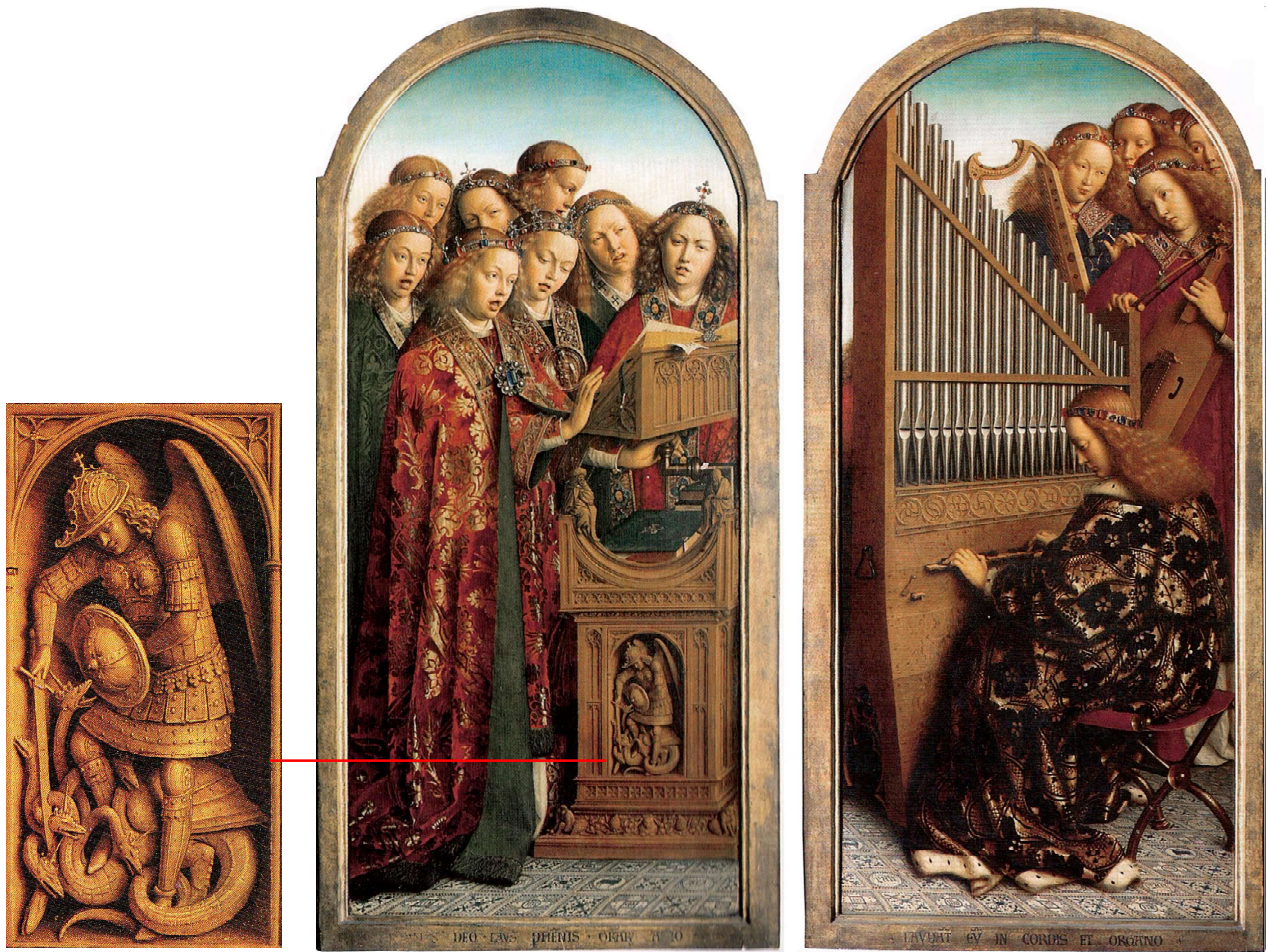


The Singing Angels.



On the lectern of the singing angels, Coxcie depicts a Saint Michael clad in 14th-century Roman armor or 15th-century Spanish armor and a helmet that did not exist in the 15th century. Therefore, Coxcie cannot have copied the Ghent Altarpiece with a helmeted Saint Michael because such a depiction was impossible in the 15th century.

If the panel is the authentic Coxcie, Coxcie adapted it to 16th-century standards.

Saint Michael alone reveals five errors:

- Saint Michael does not wear a helmet in the 15th century.
- The helmet does not belong to the 15th century.
- Roman armor of the 14th century / Spanish of the 15th century.
- Shield dating from the end of the 15th century.
- The devil was a person, not a seven-headed dragon.

Let's now turn our attention to the panels with Van Eyck's Singing Angels.

The Singing Angels have no wings, neither in Van Eyck's nor Coxcie's works.

In all 15th-century depictions of singing angels, the angels have wings. In Spain alone, there are 150 paintings from the 14th and 15th centuries that portray Mary with singing angels. The only exceptions are the Ghent Altarpiece and two other paintings in Spain that are linked to the Ghent Altarpiece: **the Fountain of Life in the Prado** and **the Consellers by Lluís Dalmau in the MNAC of Barcelona**.

These three paintings do not belong to the 15th century, as we will argue.

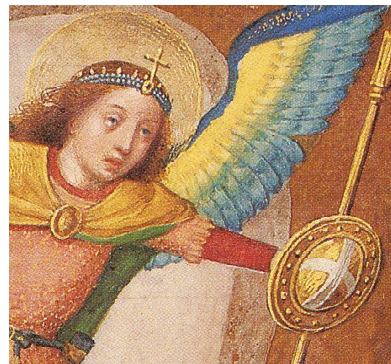
Jan van Eyck 1432 *The Ghent Altarpiece, Saint Michael and the shield.*



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece



The angels are wingless. One singing angel bears a diadem with a cross reminiscent of Saint Michael's iconography. However, Saint Michael is universally depicted with wings, a feature that distinguishes him from Saint George. The round shield emblazoned with a heraldic cross is characteristic of the late 15th and early 16th century. The elaborate sculpture adorning the lectern, with its intricate details and complex composition, is far too sophisticated for the year 1432, suggesting a later origin.



Bruges ca. 1522-23 *Hours*
Tenschert, 1989, nr. 44

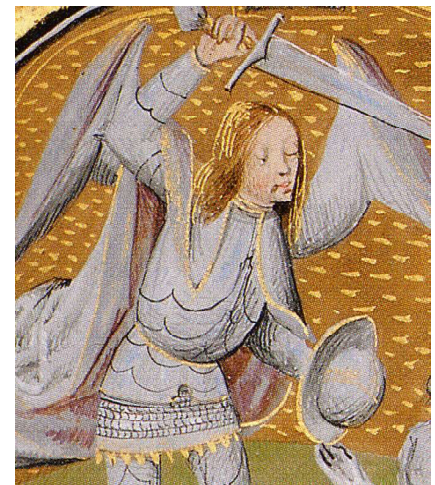


Rouen ca. 1490 *Hours*
Tenschert, II, 54



Jan van Eyck ca. 1425
Last Judgment
New York, Metropolitan

Jan van Eyck painted the same round shield as early as 1425! The perspective of the shield is incorrect: the shield is circular and facing the viewer, yet the cross on it appears to be oriented to the right as if the shield had been turned to the right. The armor differs from the armor depicted on the Mystic Lamb; neither of these armor styles are found in Flanders. Saint Michael is not depicted wearing a helmet in this instance. **"Van Eyck" does not adhere to common customs in his representation.** The inscriptions on the shield and armor consist of incoherent letters.



Bruges ca. 1522-23
Hours Claude de Toulangeon,
Tenschert, I, nr. 39

The shield.



Paris ca. 1462 *Hours*
Jacques de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,
 Tenschart, NF IV, nr. 21



Rafael Vergos? ca. 1480
Retablo Lliçà d'Amunt
 Barcelona, MD



Circle of Jaume Huguet
 ca. 1470
 Barcelona, MNAC



Pere Garcia ca. 1494
Retablo de Verdú
 Vic, Museu Episcopal

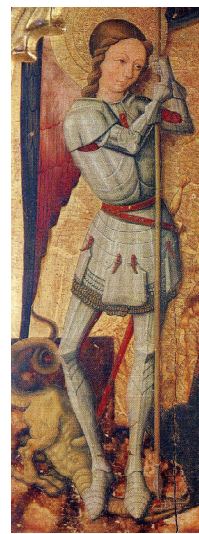
Saint Michael does not wear a helmet in the first half of the 15th century.



Bernat Martorell 1437-42
Retablo de san Pedro
 Gerona, Museo de Arte



Bernat Martorell 1435
Retablo La Pobra de Cérvoles
 Tarragona, MD



Maestro de las Predelas
 ca. 1470
 Mallorca, Monasterio Palma



Memling ca. 1470
Last Judgement
 Danzig, Nationalmuseum



Brussels ca. 1470-80
Ambierle



Flanders ca. 1510 *St Michael*
 Granada, Capilla Real



Juan de Flandes ca. 1505-06
Triptych of Francisco Rodriguez
 Salamanca, Museo Diocesano



Ca. 1500 *Detail Last Judgement*
 Paris, Arts décoratifs Pe 158

Saint-Michael.



Paris ca. 1410 *Hours*
Tenschert, LXVI, C



Paris ca. 1425 *Hours*
Tenschert, LXVI, nr. 2



Paris ca. 1430-40 *Libro d'Oro*
Biblioteca Trivulziana, Cod. 2164



Paris ca. 1462 *Hours*
Jacques de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,
Tenschert, NF IV, nr. 21



Rafael Vergos? ca. 1480
Retablo Lliçà d'Amunt
Barcelona, MD



Environment Jaume Huguet
ca. 1470
Barcelona, MNAC

Saint Michael does not wear a helmet in the 15th century. See also Saint Michael at the Last Judgment as Soul-Weigher p. 287-289 (in the book).



Pere Garcia ca. 1494
Retablo de Verdú
Vic, Museu Episcopal



Brussels ca. 1470-80
Ambierle



Flanders ca. 1510 *St Michael*
Granada, Capilla Real



Juan de Flandes ca. 1505-06
Triptych of Francisco Rodriguez
Salamanca, Museo Diocesano



Ca. 1500 *Last Judgement*
Paris, Arts décoratifs Pe 158



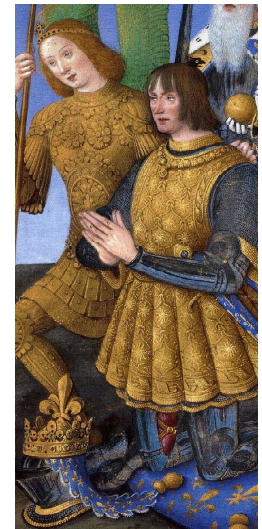
Paris ca. 1440-50 *Hours*
Tenschert, LXVI, H



Environment Hans Clemer ca. 1510-20
Affresco Pagno, Chiesa dei Santi Pietro e Colombano



Maestro de las Predelas
ca. 1470
Mallorca, Monasterio Palma



Jean Bourdichon 1498
Hours of Henry VII
London, BL ms. 35254



Bernat Martorell 1437-42
Retablo de san Pedro
Gerona, Museo de Arte



Bernat Martorell 1435
Retablo La Pobla de Cérvols
Tarragona, MD



Environment Jaume Huguet
ca. 1470
Barcelona, Museu de la Catedral



Jaume Huguet
ca. 1470
Vic, Museu Episcopal



Memling ca. 1470
Last Judgement
Danzig, Nationalmuseum



Albert Cornelis ca. 1517-22
Crowning
Bruges, Sint Jacobskerk



Belbello de Pavia ca. 1410
Hours Visconti
Firenze, BN



Firenze ca. 1502
Messale per il Battistero di Firenze
Rome, BAV, Barb. lat. 610 fol. 7r.

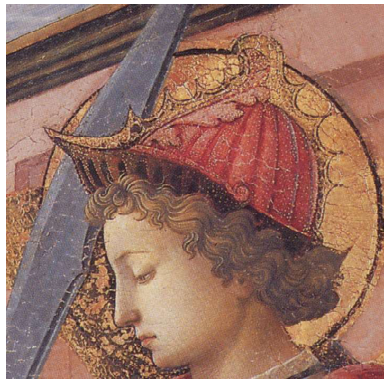


Botticini ca. 1470

Saint Michael in Italy.



Antonio en Piero del Pollaiuolo ca. 1480
Saint Michael and the Dragon
Firenze, Museo Bardini



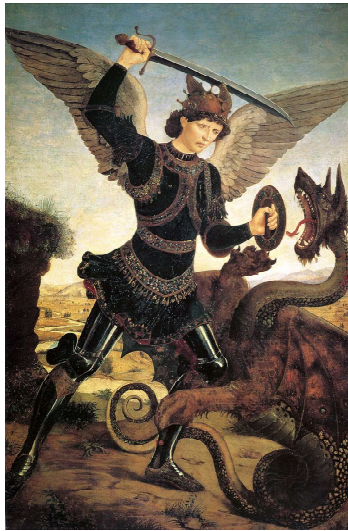
Fra Filippo Lippi ca. 1450-60
Saint Michael
Cleveland, Museum of Art



Van Eyck 1432 *The Mystic Lamb*



Holland ca. 1480-90
Calvary
Douai, Chartreuse



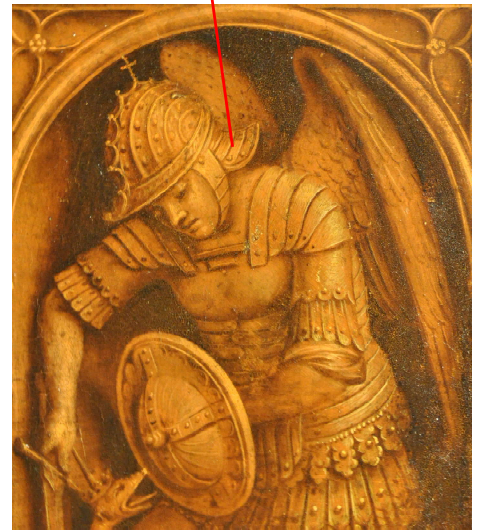
Pollaiuolo ca. 1480
Saint Michael and the Dragon
Firenze, Museo Bardini



Fra Filippo Lippi
ca. 1450-60
Cleveland, Museum of Art



Ercole de' Roberti
ca. 1496 *Saint Michael*
Paris, Louvre 1667a



Michiel Coxcie 1559, Brussels KMSK

The overwhelming majority of 15th-century depictions of Saint Michael portray him without a helmet. The few instances where he is depicted with a helmet all date from the second half of the 15th century and are exclusively found in Italy. These Italian examples cannot serve as a reference point for the representation of Saint Michael in Flanders during the first half of the 15th century. There is no valid argument to support the dating of the Ghent Altarpiece to 1432. Van Eyck's helmet for Saint Michael could have been inspired by the one worn by Filippo Lippi's Saint Michael. In this case, Van Eyck would have borrowed the helmet design but not the Roman armor or the Italian shield. The helmet in Coxcie's copy retains the Italian design for the upper part, but Coxcie adds a neck piece, a style prevalent in the second half of the 16th century. However, the neck piece is articulated with joints, while elsewhere Coxcie depicts neck pieces as a single piece. Coxcie also incorporates a classical Roman armor, distinguishing his depiction from those of Lippi, Pollaiuolo, de' Roberti, and Van Eyck.

The mode of representation (iconography) is a form of language and like language it relies on conventions in order to convey meaning. A viewer in 15th-century Flanders would not recognize a figure with a helmet as Saint Michael. He would not be familiar with the iconographic conventions of other countries and would find the image as foreign and unintelligible as any unknown language.



Matteo Torelli ca. 1394 *Corale 5*
Firenze, Bibl. Laurentiana



Angelo Puccinelli
ca. 1394 Varano,
Chiesa di San Nicola



Anconetta ca. 1410
Firenze, Pr. Coll.



Girardo Starnina
ca. 1410-20
Philadelphia,
M. of Fine Arts



Ca. 1440-50 Lucca,
Museo Nazionale
di Villa Guinigi



Crivelli ca. 1470



Giacobello del Fiore ca. 1420-30
Venezia, Gall. Accademia



Sassetta ca. 1440
Cortona, Museo Diocesano



Bologna ca. 1450
Dr. Jörn Günther, cat. 8, nr. 16



Michele Giambolo
ca. 1455
Venezia, Gall. Accademia



Biagio/Civitali o ca. 1468
Greenville, Bob Jones UM



Milan ca. 1490 *Hours Bona Sforza*
London, BL Add. ms. 34294 fol
186v.



Ghirlandaio ca. 1485
Firenze, Uffizi



Pietro Perugino ca. 1496-99
London, National Gallery

Devil/Dragon.



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece



Paris ca. 1425 Hours
Tenschart, LXVI, nr. 2



Bernat Martorell 1435
Retablo La Pobra de Cérvoles
Tarragona, MD



Bruges ca. 1522-23
Hours Claude de Toulangeon,
Tenschart, I, nr. 39

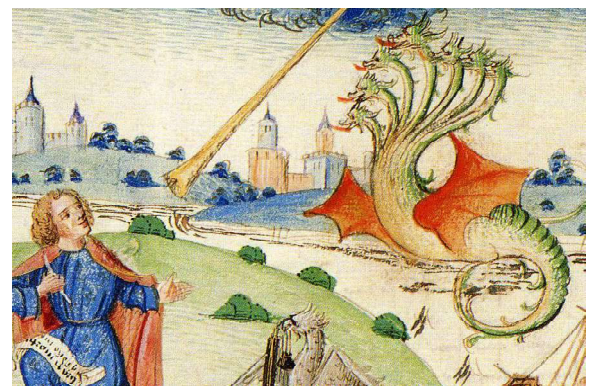
In the early 15th century, Saint Michael is often depicted slaying a dragon and portrayed as a mythical beast with a single head. Soon after, the dragon's form begins to evolve, taking on more human-like features while retaining animalistic traits. The devil is often depicted with dark, hairy skin, sometimes with a venomous green hue. He may have horns, bat-like wings, a tail, claws, or goat legs. In some depictions, features of sexuality are evident, such as prominently displayed female breasts. At times, the devil is portrayed with multiple faces on his body.

He is often depicted grasping an iron poker with three hooks in his claws ready to ensnare his prey.

Over the course of the 16th century, the devil's portrayal gradually shifts towards a more human form, shedding the hairy skin but retaining a menacing visage. This is depicted and can be seen in the works of Jacob de Backer, Frans Floris, and Crispiaan van den Broeck, contemporaries of Coxcie.

The seven-headed dragon of the Apocalypse is typically depicted with John the Evangelist on Patmos.

By around 1432 (The Mystic Lamb), the devil is no longer represented as a seven-headed dragon in Northern European art.



Flanders ca. 1460, *Biblia Historiale*
Saint John on Patmos
Coll. Dr. Jörn Günther 2011 nr. 20



Bruges ca. 1440-50 *Bernardus*
Tenschert, LM III, nr. 3



Lyon ca. 1483
La Légende Dorée



Flanders ca. 1510 *St Michael*
Granada, Capilla Real



Bruges ca. 1522-23
Hours Claude de Toulangeon,
Tenschert, 1989, nr. 39



Ghent/Bruges ca. 1480-90
Coll. Tenschert III 16



Tours ca. 1485 *Saint Michael*
Tenschert, NF VI, nr. 14



Milan ca. 1490 *Hours Bona Sforza*
London, BL Add. ms. 34294 fol 186v.



Rouen ca. 1490 *Hours*
Tenschert, II, 54



Rouen ca. 1450
Coll. Tenschert II 46



Paris ca. 1495 *Hours*
Tenschert, N.F. VI, 21

Jan van Eyck ca. 1435-37 *Madonna Bruges/Dresden, Helmet and armor.*



Jaime Baço ca. 1450 *San Miguel*
Reggio Emilia,
Galleria Parmeggiani



Jan van Eyck ca. 1437
Dresden Triptych Dresden,
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen



Jan van Eyck ca. 1435
Madonna with Joris van der Paele
Bruges, Groeningemuseum



Jaime Baço y Joan Reixach ca. 1448-1458
Triptico, San Miguel
Frankfurt, SK

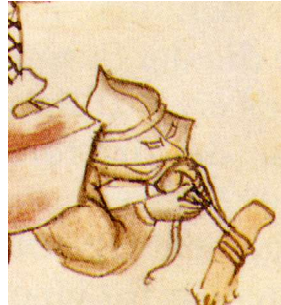


We will now examine the figures of Saint George in the "*Madonna with Joris van der Paele*" painting, Archangel Michael in the "*Dresden Triptych*," and Archangel Michael on the lectern of the "*Ghent Altarpiece*."

Prior to 1420-1430, depictions of soldiers typically featured a bascinet helmet with a chain mail neck guard. This was followed by the introduction of various forms of sallet helmets, often equipped with a folding visor.



Ca. 1400
Fragments from a Graduale
Darmstadt, ms. 2296



Vienna ca. 1439
Hartlieb: Iconisimi bellici
Tenschert, II, 21

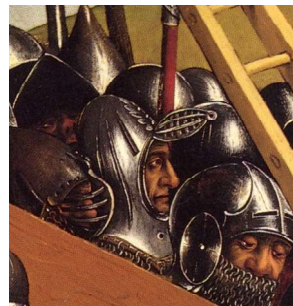


Bruges ca. 1410
Spiegel der Menschelicher Behoudenisse
London, BL Add. ms. 11575 fol. 52v.

The armor depicted in the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck exhibits a closer resemblance to Spanish armor from the mid-15th century compared to Northern European armor of the same period. In the North, the soldiers had an all-metal harness.



Ca. 1450
Karlsruher Passion



Ca. 1450
Karlsruher Passion



Ca. 1450
Karlsruher Passion



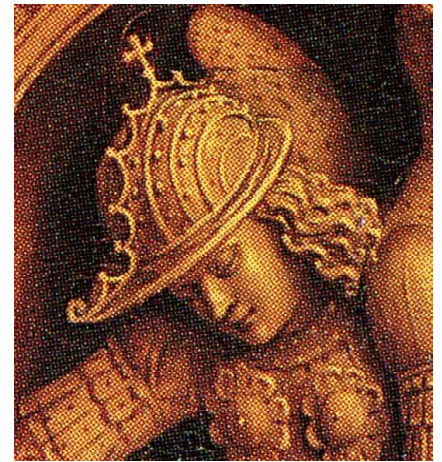
Brussels ca. 1480 (tapestry)
Adoration of the Epiphany
Sens, Cathedral



Jan van Eyck ca. 1435, *Madonna with Joris van der Paele*
Bruges, Groeningemuseum



Jan van Eyck ca. 1437, *Dresden Triptych*
Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece

Saint Michael in the Dresden Triptych and Saint George attributed to Jan van Eyck share a similar helmet design, characterized by a rounded shell shape with a hinged flap. If this attribution is accurate, it raises the question why the same painter would depict Saint Michael with a different helmet on the lectern of the Singing Angels in the Mystic Lamb. Moreover, it is important to note that during the 15th century in Northern Europe, archangels were typically not depicted wearing helmets. The anachronistic helmet worn by Saint Michael in the Dresden Triptych further casts doubt on the authenticity of the helmet worn by Saint George in the *Madonna with Joris van der Paele* painting attributed to van Eyck.



Michiel Coxcie 1557
Brussels KMSK

In the so-called Coxcie copy (1559), Saint Michael bears a similar helmet with a movable neck piece instead of flowing hair. He is clad in Roman armor, a style commonly employed in Renaissance depictions of Calvary scenes. In Northern Europe during the 15th century, archangels were not portrayed wearing helmets. Saint Michael does not wear a helmet over his long hair. Occasionally, he is depicted with a diadem adorned with a cross, rather than a helmet bearing a cross. In Italy, representations of Saint Michael feature a flame, a pointed diadem, and occasionally a helmet (dating back to the late 15th century). The Antwerp copy (1625?) mirrors the Ghent depiction of Saint Michael, featuring the same helmet design.



In the so-called copy of Coxcie (1559) Saint Michael wears a similar helmet with a movable neck piece instead of waving hair. He wears Roman armor as was usual in the Renaissance. Coxcie himself draws that armor with articulated shoulder pads like the Romans and a helmet with flap, an articulated neckpiece and ear protection. Coxcie paints contemporary details of the 16th century. Details that did not exist in the 15th century.

Michiel Coxcie 1557
Brussels KMSK



Michiel Coxcie ca. 1555
The road to Calvary
Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid
Of this painting there are more copies.

The depiction of Saint Michael in the so-called Coxcie copy (1559) reflects the artistic conventions and styles of the 16th century, rather than those of the 15th century. The helmet, with its movable neck piece and ear protection, is a clear indication of the anachronistic nature of the representation. Similarly, the Roman armor, with its articulated shoulder pads, aligns with the Renaissance-era fascination with classical antiquity. These details, which were not prevalent in the 15th century, highlight the temporal disconnect between Coxcie's interpretation and the artistic norms of the earlier era.



Coxcie paints contemporary details such as the decoration on the breastplate and the articulated thigh protection. Details that did not exist in the 15th century.

Petrus Furnius after
Michiel Coxcie ca. 1560
Crucifixion, Engraving



Michiel Coxcie ca. 1555
Christ Carrying the Cross
Real Monasterio de El Escorial



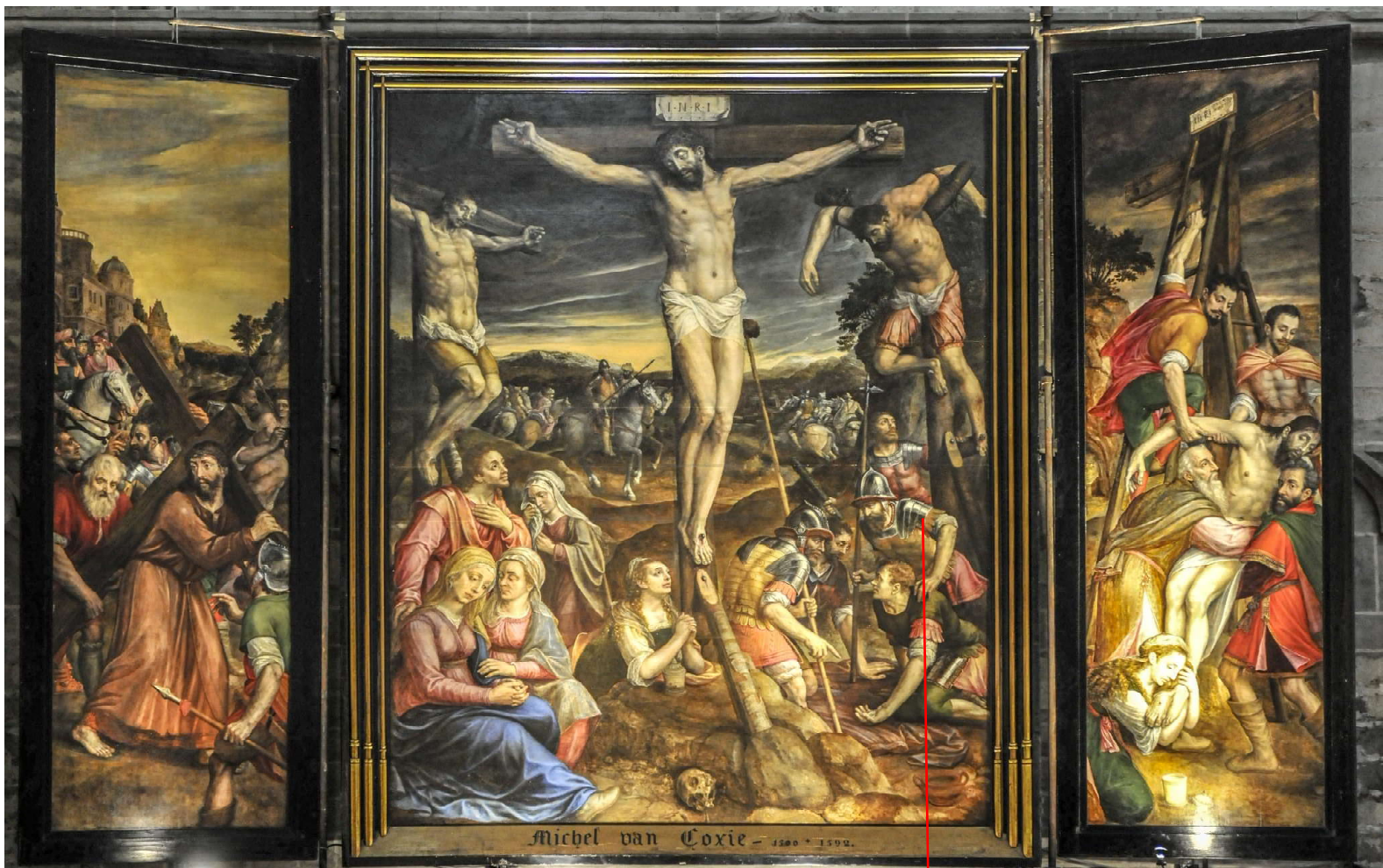
Michiel Coxie ca. 1571
Triptych
 M - Museum Leuven



Michiel Coxie
St George Triptych
 Saint Rombout's Cathedral in Malines



Michiel Coxie ca. 1571
Hosden Triptych
 M - Museum Leuven



Michiel Coxie
Triptych
 Cathedral of Saint Michael and Saint Gudula, Brussels

Significance of the image.

In the 16th century, soldiers in depictions of the Calvary scene were typically portrayed as Romans. Coxcie consistently adhered to this convention in all his representations of the Passion story.

In the representation of Saint Michael, this reference to the Romans is wrong and Saint Michael is always represented with the armor contemporary to the painter (like we see below). It is unlikely that Coxcie would have intentionally portrayed Saint Michael in Roman armor, given the negative connotations associated with Roman soldiers in Christian imagery. This was a well-known convention among 16th-century painters. The only exceptions are Saints Quirinus, a Roman tribune, and Mauritius, leader of the Theban Legion, who are rightfully depicted in Roman attire due to their historical roles.

The "Coxcie copy" was not painted by someone from the 16th century, but belongs in a time when that connection was no longer made.

Was the copy meant to serve as an alibi for the Ghent Altarpiece?

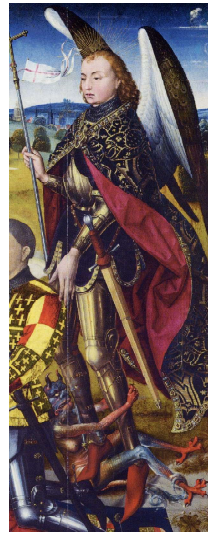
The (false) witness here is Coxcie's copy.



Paris ca. 1462 *Hours*
Jacques de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam,
Tenschart, NF IV, nr. 21



Hans Memling ca. 1471.
National Museum in Gdansk



Brussels ca. 1470-80
Ambierle



Lucas d'Heere, ca. 1560
Virgin and Child with the
Archangels Michael and Gabriel



Flanders ca. 1510 *St Michael*
Granada, Capilla Real



Juan de Flandes ca. 1505-06
Triptych of Francisco Rodriguez
Salamanca, Museo Diocesano



Ca. 1500 *Detail Last Judgement*
Paris, Arts décoratifs Pe 158



Coxcie, *Self-portrait as*
Saint George ca. 1575
(part of a triptych)
Antwerp, MSK

Jan van Eyck 1432 *The Mystic Lamb Ghent, St Bavo, copy Coxcie.*



Michael Coxcie 1557
Brussels KMSK

On the photograph we see adhesive leaves to prevent flaking.
Pictures are taken by the author in the basement of the Brussels museum.

The shadow at Coxcie's copy falls correctly from the lateral right.



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece

Coxcie paints on the copy of the Mystic Lamb the four evangelists: logically, they belong together.



Michael Coxcie 1557
Brussels KMSK



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece

The historicist/forgere likely drew inspiration from Conrad Witz and Dürer for the folds of John the Evangelist's clothing.

Karel van Mander also noticed this and writes: *The sheets are after the nature of Albertus Durerus' foldings.*

The arches behind the heads of John the Evangelist and John the Baptist echo the niches above the heads in the Coxcie copy.

However, this detail is absent from the panel of the two donors in the Ghent Altarpiece.

The shadow should follow the Gothic decoration of the arcade. The light comes in simultaneously from the top left and right.

The overall shadow originates from the right side of the scene.



Albrecht Dürer 1526
München,
Alte Pinakothek

The attire of John the Evangelist, attributed to Jan van Eyck, also exhibits an anachronism.

In the Ghent Altarpiece, John is depicted wearing shoes or overstockings, while in the Coxcie copy, he is barefoot.

This discrepancy raises questions about the historical accuracy of both representations.



Van Eyck 1432
Ghent Altarpiece



Michael Coxcie 1557
Brussels KMSK

During the 15th century, apostles and evangelists were portrayed either barefoot or wearing open sandals.

This tradition stemmed from the biblical accounts of Jesus' disciples, who often went barefoot as a sign of humility and poverty.

Therefore, the depiction of John wearing shoes or overstockings in the Ghent Altarpiece would have been considered anachronistic by contemporary viewers.

The disparity in the clothing of John the Evangelist between the Ghent Altarpiece attributed to Jan van Eyck and the Coxcie copy is striking. While the left sides of their garments exhibit some resemblance, the right sides diverge significantly.

This inconsistency further highlights the differences between the two representations and raises questions about the accuracy of the Coxcie painting as a copy of the Ghent altarpiece.



Michael Coxie in the basement of Brussels KMSK

We will delve deeper into the errors, anachronisms, and anomalies found within the Ghent Altarpiece.

We have already touched upon some of these inconsistencies, including the depiction of Saint Michael, the attire of Vijd and Borluut, and the footwear of Saint John the Evangelist. A general observation worth noting is that broken folds in garments only emerged after 1440 in both Flanders and Germany. This stylistic innovation was adopted in Spain and Italy approximately two decades later.

Beyond the unusual arrangement of the panels, there are over 40 details where the Ghent Altarpiece deviates from the established iconography and customs of the 15th century. For a comprehensive examination of these discrepancies, we refer readers to our book on the Flemish Primitives.



Iconographic study and comparison.

Iconography is a visual language, a system of symbols and images that conveys meaning and communicates information within a particular culture and era. This visual language is shared by artist/craftsman and spectator: both know and share an arsenal of conventions. An element alien to that language (Fremdkörper / foreign body), is incomprehensible to the spectator. And like any language, visual language and thus conventions also evolve.

The traditional method of style criticism, which relies heavily on comparing facial features, has its limitations. While examining facial features can provide valuable insights into an artist's style, it often overlooks other critical elements, such as clothing, hairstyles, and accessories, which can be equally informative in determining the date and origin of a work of art.

The style, which is vague and general, only becomes concrete when we also analyze the style of the various features such as clothing, headgear, armor, weapons, shields, flags, household items, and furniture, etc.

All these things have their own development (or style) and these developments may not always evolve at the same time.

Other formal elements also have their evolution. How are folds painted? Hanging folds, broken folds, flapping folds, which color to use, etc.

Furthermore, the evolution of uses and ways of representation must be taken into account. A work of art, with all its details, appears to contain dozens of clues to the dating and location.

When analyzing a painting, all elements must correspond to the predetermined period. If one of these elements is anachronistic and belongs to a later period, it must be investigated whether this detail may be a restoration. If this is not the case, it must be decided whether the whole painting either originates from a later period or claims to represent something which it is not of that period and is therefore a fake.

Panofsky has questioned the unity of the Ghent Altarpiece on stylistic grounds.

Reaction by Bernhard Ridderbos in *"To know something about the old masters.*

The Flemish Primitives - Rediscovery, Appreciation and Research". Nijmegen 1995:

Iconographic idiosyncrasies are no argument for considering the altarpiece as an amalgamation of various elements. The art historian should not use a tradition as a coercive scheme that leaves no room for unique creations."

However, such iconographic idiosyncrasies or peculiarities are the only (certain and material) guidance we have. If we have to push aside that handhold, then art history becomes a religion: we have to accept as true what we cannot verify.

Unique creation then becomes a magic formula that explains everything.

All details of the Ghent Altarpiece will now be carefully examined.

