Mary of Hungary and Binche Palace Strategic Collecting and the Politics of Display

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Abstract
This article examines Mary of Hungary's policy of acquiring works of art for Binche Palace during her governance of the Low Countries from 1531 to 1555. The main focus is on Rogier van der Weyden's painting *The Descent from the Cross*, the most admired work in the collection, and a key example. An analysis of the painting and the historical record reveals that Mary selected it and other pieces—which demonstrate her interest in the natural world and precious materials—not merely for their aesthetic value or her personal taste, but because these objects held significance for the Habsburgs. This approach sheds light on her important yet underexplored role as a temporary curator of her family's collections.

Keywords: Mary of Hungary, Binche Palace, Habsburg collections, works of art, Rogier van der Weyden, materials, nature

Introduction

In 1530, Margaret of Austria, duchess of Savoy and the first female regent of the Low Countries, died. Emperor Charles V (1500 – 1558) then appointed his younger sister, Mary, dowager queen of Hungary (1505 – 1558), as her successor. In her new role, Mary oversaw numerous artistic projects that promoted the Habsburg family in the Low Countries. Unlike her predecessor, Margaret of Austria (1480 – 1530), and her successor, Margaret of Parma (1522 – 1586), she distinguished herself through significant contributions to both military and civilian architecture in the region. Notable civilian projects she supervised included Coudenberg Palace in Brussels, the former seat of the dukes of Burgundy; the Château of Mariemont, a hunting lodge; the Château of Turnhout; and Binche Palace, her country residence and the focus of the present study. While the architecture of these buildings has been studied, less attention has been given to the works of art acquired for them. Binche Palace, one of the earliest Renaissance palaces in the Low Countries, held particular significance for the Habsburgs, as it hosted festivities introducing the future Philip II of Spain, Charles V's son and heir, to the elite nobility of the Low Countries. An examination of the works of art amassed for this palace, particularly Rogier van der Weyden's painting *The Descent of the Cross*, could therefore expand our knowledge of Mary's acquisition policies. It would clarify her process of selecting works of art and precious materials and, through this, her motivations for those policies. First, however, it is essential to take a closer look at her financial resources at the time—a topic often marginalized in existing scholarship but crucial to her activities as a collector and patron.

Mary of Hungary and Her Financial Sources

In 1515, an important event took place in Pressburg (now Bratislava): negotiations for the double royal weddings of two grandchildren of Maximilian I of the House of Habsburg (1459 – 1519), King of the Romans and Holy Roman Emperor. This was

part of the First Congress of Vienna, a pivotal diplomatic meeting at which Maximilian I and the Jagiellonian kings (Vladislaus II of Hungary/Bohemia and his brother Sigismund I of Poland) solidified their alliance against the Ottoman threat. It culminated in an agreement outlining strategic marital unions between the two houses. The final document, signed in Vienna, stipulated that Louis, son of Vladislaus II, was to become Maximilian's adoptive son and marry Maximilian's granddaughter, Mary, while Anna, his sister, was to marry one of Maximilian's grandsons, either Ferdinand or Charles, thereby securing the Habsburg inheritance in Central Europe.[1]

The marriage of Mary of Austria to Louis II (1506 – 1526), king of Hungary, Croatia and Bohemia, was solemnized and blessed in 1522 in Buda (now part of Budapest).[2] After the wedding, King Louis granted her a vast array of rights and estates as part of the dowry for Hungarian queens, in accordance with a long-established customary law. As a result, Mary gained direct access to valuable natural resources, including salt mines in Maramureş (now in northern Romania and western Ukraine) and lucrative mining centres in present-day Slovakia—Kremnica (German name Kremnitz/Hungarian name Körmöcbánya), Banská Štiavnica (Schemnitz/Selmecbánya), and Banská Bystrica (Neusohl/Besztercebánya)—rich in gold, silver, and copper.[3] Upon her coronation as queen of Bohemia on June 1, 1522, she received additional properties traditionally given to Bohemian consorts as part of their dowries.[4] These assets—including land north of Hungary (the present-day Slovak territories)—made her one of the largest landowners in the kingdom, providing financial independence and security, especially important if she should become a widow.

After King Louis II's tragic death at Mohács in 1526, Mary supported her brother, Ferdinand I of Austria (1503 – 1564), in his claims to the thrones of Hungary and Bohemia against rival claimants, such as John Zapolya (1487 – 1540), the counter-king of Hungary from 1526 to 1540, and Suleiman I, the Ottoman sultan.[5] In the divided kingdom, she served as regent on Ferdinand's behalf, albeit briefly. Once she moved to the Low Countries, she began to reclaim her Hungarian properties. Correspondence from the 1530s reveals that Ferdinand used Mary's properties to strengthen his position while presenting himself as her protector against the estates of

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[1] FRIMMOVÁ, E.: Cisársko-kráľovská svadobná zmluva z roku 1515. In: *Politický zrod novovekej strednej Európy. 500. výročie narodenia Ferdinanda I. – zakladateľa habsburskej monarchie.* Ed.: BAĎURÍK, J. Bratislava 2005, pp. 62 – 73; MAJOROSSY, J.: The Town of Pressburg and the Royal Summit in 1515. In: *Das Wiener Fürstentreffen von 1515. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Habsburgisch-Jagiellonischen Doppelvermählung.* Eds.: DYBAŚ, B. – TRINGLI, I. Budapest 2019, pp. 293 – 347.

[2] On the court of Louis II and Mary of Hungary see namely works of Orsolya Réthelyi. – RÉTHELYI, O. et al. : *Mary of Hungary. The Queen and Her Court 1521 – 1531*. Exh. cat., Budapest History Museum. Budapest 2005; RÉTHELYI, O.: The court of the King and Queen in Buda in the Jagiellonian Age. In: *Medieval Buda in Context*. Eds.: NAGY, B. – RADY, M. – SZENDE, K. – VADAS, A. Amsterdam 2016, pp. 452 – 471; her unpublished thesis RÉTHELYI, O.: *Mary of Hungary in Court Context (1521 – 1531)*. Central European University Budapest. Budapest 2010; FUCHS, M. – RÉTHELYI, O. (eds.): *Maria von Ungarn: eine Renaissancefürstin*. Münster 2007, and *Mária Uhorská. 1505 – 1558*. Exh. cat., Slovenská národná galéria. Ed.: LUDIKOVÁ, Z. Bratislava 2006.

[3] HATVANI, M.: *Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Magyar történelmi okmánytár a brüsseli országos levéltárból és a burgundi könyvtárból*, Vol. 1. Pest 1857, pp. 54 – 63; HEISS, G.: Die ungarischen, böhmischen und österreichischen Besitzungen der Königin Maria (1505 – 1558). In: *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, Vol. 29, 1976, pp. 52 – 121; and KENYERES, I: Verwaltung und Erträge von Königin Marias ungarischen Besitzungen in den Jahren 1522 bis 1548. In: *Maria von Ungarn (1505 – 1558): eine Renaissancefürstin*. Eds.: FUCHS, M. – RÉTHELYI, O. Münster 2007, pp. 170 – 207.

[4] *Atlas of the Dowry Towns of Bohemian Queens*. Eds. SEMOTANOVÁ, E. – VOJTÍŠKOVÁ, J. – GRULICH, P. – BERAN, Z. – BLÁHA, R. – VOJTÍŠEK, J. et al. Prague 2022, p. 24. SEMOTANOVÁ, E. – ŽEMLIČKA, J. a kol.: *Věnná města českých královen*. Prague 2022. Later her properties expanded through various donations and purchases. In 1524, for instance, Mary purchased several castles and lordships from Margrave Georg von Brandenburg in Croatia. – HEISS 1976 (see in note 3), pp. 52 – 121, esp. p. 109.

[5] PÁLFFY, G.: *Hungary between Two Empires 1526 – 1711*. Trans.: EVANS, R. Bloomington 2021; and about John Zápolya KUCHARSKÁ, V.: *IMAGO REGIS. Ján Zápoľský a jeho doba v pamäti 16. storočia.* Bratislava 2026.



Fig. 1a-b: Christoph Füssl, obverse LVDO : VNGAR : BOHE : QVE / REGIS · ET · MARIÆ · RE/GINÆ · DVLCISS · COIV/GIS · AC · PROCES) / IN · FLAN, reverse LVDO : HVNG : BOEM : ZC · REX / ANV: AGENS · XX · IN · TVRCAS / APVD · MOHAZ · CVM · PAR/VA · SVORVM · MANV · PV/GNAS · HONESTE / OBYT · M·D·XXVI, medal, gold, recast (of a struck original), diam. 44 mm, weight 25.14 g. Münzkabinett, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. No. MK 2639bβ. Photo: KHM-Museumsverband

the Kingdom, which strongly opposed the flow of cash to the Low Countries.[6] In 1531, Mary passed her rights to the Bohemian territories to her sister-in-law, Anna of Jagiello (1503 – 1547), daughter of Vladislaus II, who in 1521 had become Ferdinand's wife and the new queen. However, she retained title over the Hungarian estates, using art as a powerful tool to support her claims.[7] Inspired by Margaret of Austria, Mary commissioned a number of portraits to shape her public image—most notably by prominent European artists such as Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, Titian, and Leone Leoni.[8] Many of these depicted her as a mourning widow—dressed in black with ermine trim, a white wimple, and a widow's hood—alone or shown together with King Louis to evoke their years as Hungary's royal couple. They honored his memory while emphasizing Mary's virtue and—as Noelia Garcia Pérez observed—her ties to the Hungarian lands and monarchy.[9] What Pérez did not discuss is that these portraits also provided evidence of her rights to the financial benefits associated with her status as the dowager queen of Hungary.

Part of these lands was Kremnica, home to one of Europe's oldest mints, where artisans made medals from locally sourced gold and silver for generations of Habsburgs.[10] One example is a struck medal featuring Mary of Hungary and Louis II on the obverse and the Battle of Mohács on the reverse, attributed to Christoph Füssl (d. 1561), a prominent medalist documented as *ferricisor* at the Kremnica mint in

[6] *Die Korrespondenz Ferdinands I. Familienkorrespondenz Bd. 5: 1535 und 1536/The Correspondence of Ferdinand I. Family Correspondence Vol. 5: 1535 and 1536*. Eds.: HOFINGER, B. – KUFNER, H. – LAFERL, C. F. – MOSER-KROISS, J. – TSCHUG-MEL, N. Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2005, pp. 71 – 73.

[7] Letter of Mary to Ferdinand I, dated 13/14 March 1531 in Linz. – WOLFRAM, H. et al.: *Die Korrespondenz Ferdinands I*, Vol. III. Vienna 1912, pp. 63 – 64. The dispute over Hungarian estates was resolved in 1548 through the intervention of Emperor Charles V. Mary agreed to relinquish her claims, which then passed to Ferdinand I, in exchange for a share of the profits from the mining region. For further discussion of Mary's income from her Hungarian possession after the battle of Mohács see KENYERES 2007 (see in note 3), pp. 170 – 207, esp. pp. 204 – 206.

[8] GLÜCK, G.: Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg II., Königin Maria von Ungarn. In: *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien, Neue Folge*, Vol. VIII, 1934, pp. 173 – 196; HELMSTUTLER DI DIO, K: "A Woman who is so much like a man": Mary of Hungary, Female Rulership, and Portraits by the Leoni. In: *Mary of Hungary. Renaissance Patron and Collector. Gender, Art and Culture*. Ed.: GARCÍA PÉREZ, N. Turnhout 2020, pp. 109 – 122.

[9] GARCÍA PÉREZ, N.: Estrategias políticas y representaciones artísticas: María de Hungría y la construcción de la imagen post mortem de Luis Jagellón. In: *Culture & Digital Journal*, Vol. 12, June 2023, No. 1, doi: https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2023. See also JAROŠOVÁ, M.: Význam vdovských portrétů Marie Uherské a posmrtných podobizen Ludvíka Jagellonského. In: *Ecclesia docta. Společenství ducha a umění. K životnímu jubileu profesora Jiřího Kuthana*. Praha 2016, pp. 408 – 423.

[10] KATZ, V.: Kremničtí řezači železa a medailéři Kryštof Füssl, Lukáš Richter a Abraham Eysker. In: *Numismatický časopis československý*, Vol. VI, 1929, pp. 139 – 180.

1559 (Fig. 1).[11] Though there is no direct evidence that Mary commissioned the medal, its creation in a country rife with instability, rival kings, and a constant Ottoman military threat could be significant, as it portrayed both the last Jagiellonian king of Hungary and Mary, alluding to the diplomatic agreements of 1515, which addressed Habsburg succession rights. The inscription on the obverse identifies Mary as both Queen and wife, referring to her as MARIÆ · RE/GINÆ · DVLCISS · COIV/GIS · AC · PROCES' / IN · FLAN (Mariae Reginae dulcissimae conjugis ac pro Caesare in Flandris), indicating her departure to Flanders and confirming that the medal was made later but not as a widow. The use of precious metals suggests the medal's potential use as a diplomatic gift. Such medals may have been presented to both prominent supporters and rivals of the Habsburgs, whether commissioned by Mary of Hungary herself or by Ferdinand I, who at that time ruled the principal mining region of the Hungarian Kingdom.

Binche Palace and Netherlandish Painting

In the Low Countries, Mary of Hungary played a pivotal role in the furnishings and decoration of residences, as can be seen in Binche Palace. Construction of the palace began in 1545 on land granted to her by Emperor Charles V in recognition of her service.[12] For the palace, she commissioned Jacques Du Broeucq (c. 1505 – 1584), a local sculptor and architect from Mons, noted for his supposed stay in Rome. She also employed other contemporary artists from the Low Countries to contribute to the palace's decoration, influenced by Italian masters such as Michiel Coxcie (1499 – 1592).[13] Prominent contemporary Italian artists were also involved, further enhancing its splendor. The grand hall displayed paintings by Titian (about 1487 – 1576), a Venetian artist favored by Emperor Charles V, while the regent planned to exhibit a series of sculptures in the gallery by Leone Leoni (1509 – 1590), a Milanese sculptor.[14] These choices, together with copies of ancient sculptures in the Binche garden, demonstrated her preference for Italian Renaissance and ancient Roman imperial art.

It is likely that Mary's support for Italian artists was shaped by her earlier experiences in Buda, a city renowned for its early embrace of Renaissance art and ideas. From the 1470s, the royal court of Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, and his wife, Beatrice of Aragon, daughter of the king of Naples, drew Italian artists, architects, and scholars to Buda. Many works from this period remained there, allowing her to see and appreciate them firsthand. For instance, the *Missale Romanorum*, illuminated for Matthias Corvinus by the Florentine artist Attavante degli Attavanti (1452 – 1520/25) between 1485 and 1488, is now in the Royal Library of Brussels (ms 9008) and was probably brought to Brussels by Mary.[15]

[11] KATZ 1929 (see in note 10), cat. 5, pp. 140 – 141, HUSZÁR, L. – PROCOPIUS, B.: *Medaillen- und Plakettenkunst in Ungarn*. Budapest 1933, cat. 15, pp. 56 – 57; VILČEKOVÁ-GERHÁTHOVÁ, M.: *Kremnické medailérstvo 16. a 17. storočia*. In: *ARS*, Vol. 4, 1970, Nos. 1 – 2, pp. 75 – 108; WYNANTS, B.: Maria van Hongarije in medaille. In: *Jaarboek van het Europees Genootschap voor Munt- en Penningkunde*, 1997, pp. 182 – 183.

[12] HEDICKE, R.: *Jacques Dubroeucq de Mons*. Trans.: DONY, E. Brussels 1912, p. 272, and, most recently, DE JONGE, K.: Marie de Hongrie, princesse-architecte de la Renaissance: palais et maison de plaisance. In: *Marie de Hongrie: art et pouvoir à la Renaissance*. Exh. cat., Morlanwelz, 2025. Eds.: CAUCHIES, J.-M. – DOCQUIER, G. Morlanwelz 2025, pp. 195 – 201.

[13] Van den BOOGERT, B.: Michiel Cocxie, Hofschilder in dienst van het Habsburgse huis. In: *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Kring voor Oudheidheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen*, Vol. 92, 1992, No. 2, pp. 119 – 132; DE JONGE, K.: A Model Court Architect. Mary of Hungary and Jacques Du Broeucq (1545 – 1556). In: *Sponsors of the Past*. Eds.: VLIEGHE, H. – Van der STIGHELEN, K. Turnhout 2005, pp. 1 – 15; *Michiel Coxcie (1499 – 1592) and the Giants of His Age*. Ed.: JONCKHEERE, K. London 2013.

[14] On Charles V and Titian see HOPE, C.: Titian as a Court Painter. In: *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 2, 1979, No. 2, pp. 7 – 10. On Mary of Hungary, Leone Leoni and the gallery of the Binche Palace see CUPPERI, W.: Sculptures et jardins dans le palais «à l'antique» de Binche: un programme iconographique précis? In: *Marie de Hongrie: politique et culture sous la Renaissance aux Pays-Bas*. Eds.: FEDERINOV, B. – DOCQUIERS, G. Mariemont 2008, pp. 174 – 188, esp. pp. 178 – 180.

[15] HOREMANS, J.-M.: Le Missel de Mathias Corvin et la Renaissance en Hongrie. In: *Dossiers de la Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier*. Brussels 1993; Van den BERGEN-PANTENS, C.:

Additionally, Visegrád, a medieval castle transformed by King Matthias into a luxurious retreat, featured architectural elements such as a courtyard loggia, a façade balcony, a Hercules fountain, and a terrace garden, all reflecting Italian models. The Habsburgs valued Visegrád as this impressive site until it was considerably damaged during the Ottoman siege in 1544.[16]

Mary's engagement with Italian art went beyond works from the time of King Matthias. While earlier research has often focused on the contribution of Louis II's court painter, Hans Krell (c. 1490 – 1565), especially his portraits of the royal couple, and the Habsburg painter Hans Maler (c. 1480 – ca. 1529),[17] it is equally important to recognize the brief presence there of the illuminator and painter, Giulio Clovio (1498 – 1578). Giorgio Vasari states in his *Vita* that Clovio joined the court in Buda and created, among other works, a chiaroscuro piece depicting the *Judgment of Paris* for the king and a picture of Lucrezia's suicide for Mary.[18] Although Clovio left soon after the king's death, he continued to work for other prominent Habsburgs.[19] Thus, during her time in Buda, Mary gained invaluable firsthand experience of Italian art made during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

When Mary arrived in the Low Countries, she entered a political and cultural scene distinct from that of Hungary and Bohemia. Nevertheless, she soon established herself as an advocate of Italian artistic innovation, integrating both contemporary Italian and classical Roman art into the regional culture. At the same time, historical records show that, in addition to these interests, Mary also eagerly sought out earlier works of art from the Low Countries, focusing on monumental religious works by well-known fifteenth-century artists of the region. Her efforts to acquire Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child Madonna with Canon van den Paele* (1434) and Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* testify to this.

In 1547, she attempted to secure a painting by Van Eyck from St. Donatian's Church in Bruges, but the city's canons politely declined.[20] The following year, however, she successfully negotiated with the Grand Guild of Archers in Louvain for *The Descent from the Cross*, which was installed in their private chapel of Our Lady Outside the Walls (Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Ginderbuiten or Notre-Dame-hors-les-Murs). To obtain the work, Mary agreed to pay five hundred florins, cover the costs of a new organ, and commission a painted copy to replace the original in the Guild's chapel.[21] The original altarpiece was relocated

Missale romanum ou Missel du roi Mathias Corvin. In: DELSAERDT, P. et al. (eds.): *Cent trésors de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. À l'occasion de l'Exposition Cent Trésors de la Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, organisée du 22 avril au 30 juillet 2005*. Antwerp 2005; TANNER, M.: *The Raven King. Matthias Corvinus and the Fate of his Lost Library*. New Haven – London 2008, p. 169.

[16] Ferdinand's letter to his sister, written before his coronation, praises Visegrad Castle, calling it "fort belle." – GÉVAY, A.: *Urkunden und Actenstücke zur Geschichte der Verhältniße zwischen Oesterreich, Ungarn und der Pforte im 16. und 17. Jahrhunderte. 1. Gesandtschaften König Ferdinand I. an Suleiman I. 1527 – 1532*. Vienna 1838, pp. 97 – 98. On Visegrád see BUZÁS, G.: The Royal Palace in Visegrád and the Beginnings of Renaissance Architecture in Hungary. In: *Italy and Hungary. Humanism and Art in the Early Renaissance*. Eds.: FARBAKY, P. – WALDMAN, L. A. Florence 2011, pp. 369 – 407 (with earlier literature).

[17] LOCHER, K.: Hans Krell – Court Painter to King Louis II of Hungary and his Consort, Mary of Hungary. In: RÉTHELYI 2005 (see in note 2), pp. 69 – 78. KRAUSE, S.: Die Bildnisse des Malers Hans Maler – Spiegelbild der Tiroler Wirtschaft um 1520. In: *Nur Gesichter? Porträts der Renaissance*. Ed: MEIGHÖRNER, W. Innsbruck 2016, pp. 157 – 172.

[18] VASARI, G.: *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Vol. VII. Florence 1881, pp. 557 – 569, esp. p. 558.

[19] His works are linked to Charles V, Margaret of Parma, the regent of the Low Countries, and King Philip II of Spain. See FERBER BOGDAN, J.: Patrona and Servitor – New Insights into the Patron/Artist Relationship between Duchess Margaret of Parma and Giulio Clovio. In: *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, 2017, No. 41, pp. 109 – 118. On Clovio's works and Habsburg taste, see CALVILLO, E.: Inventive Translation, Portraiture and Spanish Habsburg Taste in the Sixteenth Century. In: *The Spanish Presence in Sixteenth-Century Italy. Images of Iberia.Transculturalism*. Eds.: BAKER-BATES, P. – PATTENDEN, M. Ashgate 2015, pp. 175 – 197. On Clovio and Hungary see also MIKÓ, A.: Italienische Künstler in Ofen/Buda zur Zeit der Jagiellonen. In: *Maria von Ungarn* (see in note 2), pp. 347 – 362 (with earlier literature).

[20] PARMENTIER, R. A.: Marie de Hongrie et la Madone vander Paele. In: *Annales de la Société d'Émulation de Bruges*, Vol. 69, 1926, pp. 388 – 390.

[21] MOLANUS, J.: *Historiae Lovaniensium Libri XIV*. Lovanii 1861, Vol. 1, p. 609. Reprinted in DHANENS, E.: *Rogier*

to the palace grounds and displayed in the Binche chapel, illuminated by a lantern and decorated with tapestries depicting the biblical story of Tobias. The panel presumably occupied a central position in the apse, granting Mary direct access via her personal oratory on the left side of the choir.[22] Given her support for Italian artists, Mary's decision to acquire a fifteenth-century painting from the Low Countries is intriguing and raises a crucial question: Did she purchase this work of art out of admiration for the "Flemish primitives," as Jozef Duverger suggested, or were other significant factors at play?[23]

The Descent from the Cross and the Politics of Display

Although the inventory of Binche Palace appears to have been lost over time, there is still evidence that it once housed extraordinary works of art. Contemporary written and visual reports describe the Great Hall when it was filled with magnificent paintings by masters such as Titian and Cocxie, while luxurios textiles, including satin, brocade, damask, and velvet, adorned the palace apartments. Tapestries, chiefly woven in Brussels workshops, and Middle Eastern carpets from the Levant, further added to the spledor.[24] The palace also housed exquisite decorative pieces, including precious-metal tableware (displayed on buffets and dressers), porcelain plates, and crystal-crafted cups. Among the treasures kept at Binche were also expensive, exquisite personal objects, such as a fan embellished with a mirror and a handle encrusted with gems and pearls, which Mary presented to her sister, Eleanor of Spain (1498 – 1558), the dowager queen of Portugal and France, during festivities in 1549.[25] Mary assumed the role of curator with due deliberation, arranging works of art throughout her residence with a clear strategic vision. She not only understood the significance of the ideas and values these works of art held for their original creators and audiences, but also recognized their potential to convey a different set of ideas and values when displayed in this Habsburg residence.[26] For her, Binche Palace served as an ideal platform for exhibiting a collection of objects from various cultures—European and non-European—in one unified setting, as a means of demonstrating the Habsburgs' authority in Europe and beyond.

One example of this strategy is a seven-piece set of tapestries depicting Charles V's victory over his political rival, Francis I (1494 – 1547), the king of France, at the Battle of Pavia in 1525. Designed by Bernard van Orley and woven in Willem and Jan Dermoyen's Brussels workshop, the set was commissioned by the States General of the Low Countries and presented to Charles at the Royal Palace of Brussels (Coudenberg) in 1531. Shortly thereafter, it became part of Mary's collection and was exhibited prominently in Prince Philip's ground-floor apartment at Binche Palace.[27] Woven from fine wool and

van der Weyden: revisie van de documenten. Brussels 1995, pp. 134 – 135. See also POWELL, A.: The Errant Image. Rogier van der Weyden's Deposition from the Cross and Its Copies. In: *Art History*, Vol. 29, 2006, pp. 540 – 562, esp. pp. 547 – 549.

[22] On the interior of the chapel, see Robert Hedicke. – HEDICKE 1904 (see in note 12), pp. 260 – 261.

[23] DUVERGER, J.: Marie de Hongrie, gouvernante des Pay--Bas, et la Renaissance. In: *Évolution Générale et Développements régionaux en Histoire de l'Art. Actes du XXIIè Congrés International d'Historie de l'Art*. Ed.: RÓZSA, G. Budapest 1972, 3 vols., Vol. 1 (1972), pp. 715 – 726, esp. p. 720.

[24] Carpets from Levant became sought after artifacts in the first half of the sixteenth century as documented by the Medici. In 1545, Iacopo Capponi travelled to Alexandria with instructions from Cosimi de'Medici to have some rugs made to order and two years later these arrived to Florence from Cairo. – SPALLANZANI, M.: *Oriental Rugs in Renaissance Florence*. Florence 2007, p. 23.

[25] JORDAN, A.: Exotic Renaissance Accessories. Japanese, Indian and Sinhalese Fans at the courts of Portugal and Spain. In: *Apollo*, Vol. CL, November 1999, No. 453, pp. 25 – 35, esp. p. 32. The gift was chronicled by DE BOURDEILLE, P. (Brantôme): *Receuil des Dames, poésies et tombeaux*. Ed.: VAUCHERT, E. Paris 1991, p. 446

[26] BAXANDALL, M.: Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects. In: *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Eds.: KARP, I. – LAVINE, S. D. Washington, D.C. 1990, pp. 33 – 41.

[27] BUCHANAN, I.: The 'Battle of Pavia' and the Tapestry Collection of Don Carlos: New Documentation. In: *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 144, June 2002, No. 1191, pp. 345 – 335, esp. p. 346.



Fig 2: Rogier van der Weyden: The Descent from the Cross, before 1443, oil on oak panel, 204.5 × 259 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Inv. No. P002825. Photo: Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado

also featuring gold-and-silver-wrapped silk threads, the tapestries depicted key moments from the battle, including the surrender of Francis I, serving as a reminder of the Habsburgs' supremacy in Europe.

In this regard, the painting by Rogier van der Weyden (acquired from the Grand Guild of Archers in Louvain) was no less crucial. In the palace, the painting stood out as an exceptional, monumental early Netherlandish work, probably the only one on display there (Fig. 2). Measuring over two and a half meters in height the panel resembles an opulent gold shrine and features ten nearly life-size human figures. Almost all these figures wear exceptionally fine garments made of velvet, satin, or silk, combined with squirrel fur—luxurious and costly materials typically reserved for the nobility and the wealthiest at that time.[28] While the painting is now regarded as a museum masterpiece, for Mary, it served primarily

[28] Rogier van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross*, oil on oak panel, 204.5 × 262 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, Inv. No. P002825. Panofsky suggested that the painting was originally the central panel of a triptych. – PANOFSKY, E.: *Early Netherlandish Painting. Origins and Characters*. Cambridge 1953, pp. 256 – 257. The published restoration report of the painting does not mention side panels. See GARRIDO, C. – BISACCA, G. – DAVILA, M. T.: Rogier van der Weyden.

as a significant Burgundian artifact that promoted the connections between the Burgundian dynasty and the Habsburgs, their only legitimate heirs—a point emphasized by Antonia Putzger.[29] Beyond its historical significance, the biblical subject also resonated deeply with the Habsburgs' interests. The theme of Christ's descent from the cross conveyed human grief, and Rogier van der Weyden portrayed that emotion with extraordinary reverence and a true sense of nature. In this way, in the chapel of Binche Palace, this religious masterpiece served as a proclamation of Catholic devotion at a time when Protestantism was gaining ground in the Low Countries. It supported Charles V and his role as a defender of the Catholic faith, particularly in light of his recent victory over the Protestant Schmalkaldic League at the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547.

Two years later, in August 1549, the emperor and his son and successor, Prince Philip, accompanied by their entourage, made a grand visit to Binche Palace. The art on display, particularly Van der Weyden's painting, attracted considerable attention. The Spanish courtier Juan Cristóbal Calvete de Estrella reported seeing a divinely painted *Deposition from the Cross*, while Bernardo Antonio de' Medici, a Florentine diplomat, wrote to Cosimo de' Medici that the painting, done in the antique manner, was so beautiful that even Michelangelo would not disdain to have been its master.[30] In 1551, another Spanish nobleman, Vicente Alvarez, declared the work not only the finest in the palace but the greatest in the whole world.[31] Despite this high praise, none of the eyewitnesses mentioned the artist's name.[32]

Descente de croix (Madrid, Musée du Prado). In: *Restauration: exposition documentaire. Colloque XI pour l'étude du dessin sous-jacent et de la technologie dans la peinture. Louvain-la-Neuve, 14. – 16. 9. 1995*. Trans.: Van SCHOTE-VERBOOMEN, M., 10 pp. (The Centre for the Study of the Flemish Primitives, IRPA-KIK, Brussels). The dating of the work is generally linked to the Edelheere triptych, a free copy of the original, and 1443 is usually considered the terminus ante quem for the creation of Rogier's original. However, a recent article by Stephan Kemperdick suggests that this copy may have been produced after 1480. KEMPERDICK, S.: The date of the Edelheere altarpiece. In: *Cahier d'études des Annales d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie*, Vol. 12, 2024, pp. 40 – 49. On Van der Weyden's painting, see DAVIES, M.: *Rogier van der Weyden. An Essay with a Critical Catalogue of Paintings Assigned to Him and Robert Campin*. London 1971, pp. 223 – 226; KEMPERDICK, S.: *Der Meister von Flémalle. Die Werkstatt Robert Campins und Rogier van der Weyden*. Turnhout 1997, pp. 46 – 52; DE VOS, D.: *Rogier van der Weyden. The Complete Works*. Antwerp 1999, No. 4 (with earlier literature); KEMPERDICK, S.: Von der Vorlage zum Kunstwerk Rogier van der Weydens 'Große Kreuzabnahme'. In: *Original – Copie – Zitat. Kunstwerke des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Wege der Aneignung – Formen der Überlieferung*. Eds.: AUGUSTYN, W. – SÖDIG, U. Passau 2010, pp. 207 – 230; CAMPBELL, L.: *Rogier van der Weyden and the Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula*. Madrid 2015, cat. 1; and more recently PÉREZ PRECIADO, J. J.: *Fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting at the Museo del Prado*. Madrid 2024, cat. 41. On used textiles, see MONAS, L.: Textiles in the Painting of Rogier van der Weyden. In: *Rogier van der Weyden y España: Proceedings of the international symposium, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, May 2015*. Madrid 2016, pp. 118 – 131, esp. 120 – 122.

[29] PUTZGER, A.: *Kult und Kunst – Kopie und Original: Altarbilder von Rogier van der Weyden, Jan van Eyck und Albrecht Dürer in ihrer frühneuzeitlichen Rezeption*. Berlin 2021, pp. 67 – 75; PUTZGER, A.: Historical Substance and Acquired Meaning of Rogier van der Weyden's Deposition of Christ at the Court of Philip II. In: *Netherlandish Art and Luxury Goods in Renaissance Spain. Studies in Honour of Professor Jan Karel Steppe (1918 – 2009)*. Eds.: Van HEESCH, D. – JANSSEN, R. – Van der STOCK, J. London – Turnhout 2018, pp. 133 – 146, esp. pp. 136 – 138.

[30] Printed in French translation in CALVETE DE ESTRELLA, J. C.: *Le très-heureux voyage fait par très-haut et très-puissant prince Don Philippe, fils du grand empereur Charles-Quint, depuis l'Espagne jusqu'à ses domaines de la Basse-Allemagne, avec la description de tous les États de Brabant & de Flandre, écrit en quatre livres par Juan Christoval Calvete de Estrella*. Trans.: PETIT, J. Vol. III. Brussels 1876, p. 83. The letter of Bernardo Antonio de' Medici to Cosimo de' Medici, dated 28 August 1549 (The Medici archive project, Vol. 4307). I am thankful to Annemarie Jordan Gschwend for bringing this letter to my attention. The comparison of Van der Weyden with Michelangelo reappears in another Italian report on the Binche festivities. See Litera del la gloriosa et trionfante entrada del serenissimo prencipe di Spagna in Bins citta di Fiandra, 1549. In: RUELENS, Ch.: *Le Siège et les fêtes de Binche* (1543 et 1549), Publications de la Société des bibliophiles belges, Vol. 25. Mons 1878, pp. 65 – 119, esp. p. 71.

[31] VICENTE, A: *Relation du beau voyage que fit aux Pays-Bas, en 1548, le prince Philippe d'Espagne, notre seigneur*. Ed. and trans.: DOVILLÉE, M.-T. Brussels 1964, p. 95.

[32] The earliest record of Rogier's name in association with the *Deposition* appeared in 1565, when Hieronymus Cock, head of the Antwerp publishing house 'At the Sign of Four Winds,' published an engraving by Cornelis Cort reproducing Rogier's

This omission is intriguing, especially since the 1516 inventory of possessions belonging to Margaret of Austria, Mary's aunt, explicitly lists paintings made "par" or "de la main de Rogier."[33] Some of Margaret's Netherlandish works of art entered Mary's collection after her death, suggesting that Mary was probably aware of the most prominent artists of the region, including the one responsible for her painting from Leuven. Rogier van der Weyden´s reputation among prominent patrons and collectors in Italy could also have played a role, at least after 1449, when Duke Leonello d'Este showed his triptych of the *Descent* by Van der Weyden to the antiquary and humanist Ciriaco d'Ancona on his visit to Ferrara (not preserved).[34]

To fully understand the motivations behind the regent's acquisition of Van der Weyden's painting for Binche Palace and to address the questions raised, it is essential to consider the political climate in the Low Countries during the early decades of the sixteenth century. The Habsburgs faced a turbulent period, engaged in wars with France over European hegemony, particularly in the Burgundian territories. During this time, local paintings from the region carried significant political weight. The Habsburgs strategically gathered and exhibited emblematic works of art from the Low Countries as material evidence to legitimize their rule, a practice already evident in the collection of Margaret of Austria, daughter of Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy. Dagmar Eichberger argued that Margaret's choice and arrangement of works of art from her collection, particularly portraits at her Mechelen palace, corresponded with her deliberate efforts to visually underscore the Habsburg family's dynastic ties and reaffirm their succession rights in the Low Countries.[35] The use of various art media to promote their dynastic accomplishments is already rooted in earlier initiatives by Mary's grandfather, Maximilian I. Larry Silver convincingly showed that these initiatives instilled a profound respect for the Habsburg dynasty's achievements among its heirs, fostering a shared appreciation for art that served both familial and political purposes.[36] Maximilian's interest in collecting and displaying earlier artifacts only reinforced this agenda, even though he did not distinguish between ancient and medieval, or sacred and secular.[37] By acquiring and displaying Van der Weyden's painting, Mary not only adhered to but also advanced this family tradition. Consequently, rather than merely admiring them, Mary used early Netherlandish paintings pragmatically, in service of the Habsburgs' political ambitions.

Materials and the Grotto Fountain

Mary valued both the visual appeal and provenance of the works of art she acquired as much as the materials from which they were made. Contemporary sources cite rare and costly natural materials—including jasper, porphyry, and coral—and offer insights into their staging. Alvarez and Estrella, for example, describe a chimney in the Grand Hall and a portico leading to the chapel of Binche Palace, both made of jasper. Long-prized since antiquity and associated with ancient Roman emperors, the medieval lapi-

painting, inscribed with the words "M. Rogerij Belgiae inuentum." – Van GRIEKEN, J.: 'Rogerij Belgae inventum'. Rogier van der Weyden's Late Reception in Prints (c. 1550 – 1600). In: *Rogier van der Weyden in Context*. Eds.: CAMPBELL, L. – Van der STOCK, J. – REYNOLD, C. – WATTEEUW, L. Papers presented at the Seventeenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology of Painting held in Leuven, 22 – 24 October 2009. Paris – Leuven – Walpole 2012, pp. 353 – 361, esp. p. 354.

[33] Margaret of Austria, Inventory of the paintings, 17 July 1516, Lille, Chambre des Comptes de Lille, No. 123904, p. 3, fol. 2, p. 4, fol. 2v. – CHECA CREMADES, F.: *Los inventarios de Carlos V y la familia imperial*. Vol. III. Madrid 2010, p. 2392.

[34] *Cyriac of Ancona. Later Travels*. Ed. and trans.: BODNAR, E. D. Cambridge, MA 2003, p. 365.

[35] EICHBERGER, D. – BEAVEN, L.: Family Members and Political Allies: The Portrait Collection of Margaret of Austria. In: *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, 1995, No. 2, pp. 225 – 248; EICHBERGER, D.: Margaret of Austria's Portrait Collection. Female Patronage in the light of dynastic ambitions and artistic Quality. In: *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 10, 1996, No. 2, pp. 259 – 279; GELFAND, L. D.; Regency, Power, and Dynastic Visual Memory: Margaret of Austria as Patron and Propagandist. In: *The Texture of Society. Medieval Women in Southern Low Countries*. Eds.: SUYDAM, M. A. – KITTEL, E. E. New York 2004, pp. 203 – 255.

[36] SILVER, L.: *Marketing Maximilian: The Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor*. Princeton, N.J. 2008.

[37] WOOD, C.: Maximilian I as Archaeologist. In: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 58, 2005, pp. 1128 – 1174.

daries often mentioned this durable gemstone as a protective talisman with religious significance. The gem was believed to have been the first foundation stone of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:19), with its color evoking the sacrificial blood of Christ, and one of the twelve stones in the breastplate of the Hebrew High Priest (Exodus 28:20).[38] The second of these valuable materials, porphyry—referred to as "pierre de Porphyre"—was noted in the French edition of Lodovico Guiccardini's *Descrittione de tutti I Paesi Bassi* (1567), published in 1625, as having been used for a basin in the garden of Binche Palace.[39]

Historically, porphyry of spectacular purple color was the exclusive property of Roman and Byzantine emperors. They used it in their effigies as well as for columns in their temples and tombs.[40] The cultural tradition persisted in the early modern era, and powerful families such as the Medici in Florence commissioned tombs made of porphyry, often combined with other precious materials—as exemplified by the tomb of Piero and Giovanni de' Medici by Andrea del Verrocchio, completed in 1472, set in an archway of the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo in Florence. Porphyry remained a highly sought-after material in the sixteenth century, and records also attest to its presence in the collections of the Habsburgs, including Emperors Maximilian II and, later, Rudolph II.[41]

Although Guiccardini's text mentions luxurious imported materials at Binche, there is no evidence that either jasper or porphyry were used at the palace. Instead, Robert Hedicke's study confirmed the use of local resources as substitutes, especially "red marble" from Rance, a reef limestone from Hainaut. The misidentification of these stones as jasper or porphyry probably stemmed from the limited geological knowledge and mineral classification of that era. The high status of the owner also played a crucial role in how visitors perceived the construction materials. Michal Wardzyński noted that the Habsburgs deliberately imitated porphyry with local stones, a practice used in the tomb commissioned by Maximilian I for Speyer Cathedral, the red marble imperial monument, left unfinished at Maximilian's death in 1519.[42] It is likely that Mary, having spent time with her grandfather in Innsbruck, was aware of these associations. There is additional evidence about the materials used in Binche Palace in extant visual records, specifically, two drawings from festivities held in August 1549 during the visit of Charles V and Prince Philip. One drawing depicts a masked ball in the Great Hall featuring a chimney made of red stone. The other focuses on the Enchanted Chamber, where desserts were served (Fig. 3),[43] particularly notable for its little-studied fountain,

[38] On gems in the early modern period see BYCROFT, M. – DUPRÉ, S.: *Gems in the Early Modern World. Material, Knowledge and Global Trade, 1450 – 1800*. London 2019.

[39] *Description De touts les Pays-Bas, par M. Loys Gvicciardin, gentil-homme Florentin, Amstelodami, Apud Ioannem Ianssonium*, 1625, p. 415. According to Hedicke, the basin was made from Rance marble. – HEDICKE 1904 (see in note 12), p. 269. On the cultural significance of purple, see FRIESS, G.: *Edelsteine im Mittelalter: Wandel und Kontinuität in ihrer Bedeutung durch zwölf Jahrhunderte (in Aberglauben, Medizin, Theologie und Goldschmiedekunst)*. Hildesheim 1980, p. 63.

[40] DELBRÜCK, R.: *Antike Porphyrwerke. Studien zur spätantiken Kunstgeschichte*. Berlin 1932; DEL BUFALO, D.: *Porphyry: Red imperial porphyry; power and religion*. Torino 2012; VASILIEV, A. A.: Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople. In: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 4, 1948, pp. 1 – 26.

[41] BUTTERS, S. B.: *The Triumph of Vulcan. Sculptor's Tool, Porphyry and the Prince in Ducal Florence*. Florence 1996. The sculpted porphyry gem depicting the Head of Christ made by Francesco del Tadda is in the National Gallery in Prague (Inv. No. P5). It was part of the collections of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II and then Rudolph II. – DI CASTRO MOSCATI, D.: The Revival of the Working of Porphyry in Sixteenth-Century Florence. In: *Apollo*, Vol. 126, 1987, pp. 242 – 248.

[42] WARDZYŃSKI, M.: On the Road to the "New Empire". The Afterlife of Roman and Byzantine Porphyry and the White Marble Tradition in Central Europe during the Early Modern Era. In: *The Land between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea 1300 – 1700*. Ed.: PAYNE, A. Leiden 2022, pp. 354 – 377, esp. p. 357.

[43] Van de PUT, A.: Two Drawings of the Fêtes at Binche for Charles V and Philip (II) 1549. In: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 3, October 1939 – January 1940 Nos. 1 – 2, pp. 49 – 55; POPHAM, A. E.: The Authorship of the Drawings of Binche. In: Ibidem, pp. 55 – 57.



Fig. 3: Anonymous artist: The Enchanted Room of the Binche Palace, c. 1549, pen and brown ink, gray-brown wash, watercolor, body color, and gold paint on paper, 40.9 × 38.7 cm. The Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels, Inv. No. F 12931. Photo: The Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels

identified by Ian Buchanan as a grotto fountain, one of the Habsburgs' earliest.[44]

Contemporaries described this structure as a wooden object resembling a marine rock, mounted against the wall near the central table. The "rock" combined elements from land and sea, with herbs, plants, and flowers growing on coral branches. At the top were objects such as small sculptures of li-

[44] BUCHANAN, I.: *Habsburg Tapestries.* Turnhout 2015, p. 80. The grotto fountain was described in contemporary accounts of the Spanish courtiers. See namely CALVETE DE ESTRELLA 1876 (see in note 30), pp. 81 – 153, esp. p. 153; and DE CABANILLAS, H.: Relación muy verdadera de las grandes fiestas que la Serenissima Reyna dona Maria ha hecho al Principe nuestro sehor en Flandes en un lugar que se dize Vince, desde XXII. de Agosto hasta el postrero dia del mes. Embiada por el sehor don Hieronymo Cabanillas, Hecha imprimir por Juan Rodriquez librero de Medina del campo a diez y ocho de Noviembre, Ano.M.D.XLIX. In: PÉREZ PASTOR, C.: *La Imprenta en Medina del Campo.* Madrid 1895, pp. 57 – 67, esp. pp. 66 – 67; and WIERSMA, L.: A Garden of Cast Flowers. The 'Enchanted Salon' and the Making of Sculptures for Festivals. In: *Charles V, Prince Philip, and the Politics of Succession, Imperial Festivities in Mons and Hainault, 1549*. Eds.: McGOWAN, M. – SHEWRING, M. Turnhout 2020, pp. 205 – 221, esp. pp. 209 – 212.



Fig. 4: Wenzel Jamnitzer (attributed): Lizard, c. 1540 – 1550, silver (life cast), 7.0 × 4.1 cm. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Inv. No. HG 11135. Photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Jürgen Musolf



Fig. 5: Anonymous artist: Box in the Form of a Crab, Padua, early 16th century, bronze, 4.8 × 17.1 × 9.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, Inv. No. 1957.14.86. Photo: Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

zards, large turtles, snakes, and other rock-inhabiting creatures, probably made as life casts. Artisans in sixteenth-century Europe, primarily from northern Italy and Nuremberg, made these casts in silver, bronze, lead, and other metals (see Figs. 4 and 5). They revived ancient techniques and combined them with the use of cold enamel to create naturalistic effects. Wenzel Jamnitzer (1508 – 1585), a Nuremberg goldsmith known for his life casts and favoured by the Habsburg Emperors, including Charles V and Ferdinand I, was one of the most distinguished.[45]

Another leading artist was Jean Boulogne, better known as Giambologna (1529 – 1608), a Flemish sculptor who worked in Jacques du Broucq's workshop from 1545 to 1550, the years when Binche Palace was under construction;[46] his small bronze animal sculptures were later praised in Italy. Around 1550, Luca Lancia (d. 1553), a sculptor from Naples, also created works for the regent at Binche, specializing in plaster casting. He had been noted for his contributions at the Ulysses Gallery in the Château de Fontainebleau, where he may have seen the Grotto of the Pines, an early notable example of an artificial grotto in France, created in the 1540s.[47] Hedicke's study of Binche Palace does not mention the grotto fountain in the Enchanted Chamber, and the question of collaborating sculptors remains unsettled.

Four candelabra illuminated the grotto, enabling close inspection. The grotto housed a fountain with a mechanical system that dispensed running water—an essential natural element that created the sound

[45] ROSENBERG, M.: *Jamnitzer: alle erhaltenen Goldschmiedearbeiten, verlorene Werke, Handzeichnungen*. Frankfurt a. M. 1920; SMITH, P. H.: Collecting Nature and Art: Artisans and Knowledge in the Kunstkammer. In: *Engaging with Nature. Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Eds.: HANAWALT, B. A. – KISER, L. J. Notre Dame 2008, pp. 115 – 135, SMITH, P. H. – BEENTJES, T.: Nature and Art, Making and Knowing: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Life Casting. In: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 128 – 179.

[46] WELLENS, R.: *Jacques du Broeucq. Sculpteur et architecte de la Renaissance (1505 – 1584)*. Brussels 1962, p. 31.

[47] Lancia or Lange worked at the Château de Fontainebleau between 1541 and 1547. Hedicke mentions his works for Mary of Hungary. See HEDICKE 1904 (see in note 12), pp. 269, 413. On Lancia see DUVERGER, J.: Luca Lancia. In: *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, Vol. IV, col. 477 – 479, https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/nbwv/; DEBERGH, J.: Luc Lange, "molleur en plâtre" actif en Hainaut entre 1550 et 1553. In: *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art. Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Oudheidkunde en Kunstgeschiedenis*, Vol. 59, 1990, pp. 75-89; DEBERGH, J.: Luc Lange et Jacques du Broeucq: quatre considérations. In: *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art. Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Oudheidkunde en Kunstgeschiedenis,* Vol. 63, 1994, pp. 63 – 72; and CUPPERI 2008 (see in note 14), esp. pp. 176 – 177.

and ambience of a natural spring. During special occasions in Binche, beverages such as white and red wines flowed into a basin from the open mouths of four snakes with gold-and-green necks, enhancing the work's overall theatrical effect. Among the various items in the grotto, one genuine organic item particularly caught the eye of the guests: red coral. Unlike other grotto items, coral is distinctly visible in the drawing of the Enchanted Chamber (Fig. 3). Ovidius, in his *Metamorphoses*, linked coral to distant Ethiopia, while Pliny the Elder extensively detailed its origin, harvesting, and use, including its widely believed apotropaic and healing properties.[48] The Habsburgs collected coral, and before Mary, her aunt, Margaret of Austria, had assembled examples of coral in different colors.[49] Filled with so many small and intriguing objects, the grotto fountain in the Enchanted Chamber entertained distinguished visitors. But it was not only about the entertainment. The grotto, by linking Mary and the Habsburgs to natural forces—through its replication of natural wonders and its manipulation of natural elements such as water—enhanced the reputation of this noble family as powerful rulers capable of mastering nature.[50]

In the 1530s and 1540s, the construction of grottoes became a fashionable trend among the nobility in Italy and, soon after, in France. These grottoes were lavishly decorated with shells, coral, minerals, and sculptures, often incorporating moving water. For the Habsburgs, though, a grotto represented more than a fashion. As Pamela Smith explained, their interest in nature can be traced back to the Carrara family (rulers of Padua from 1318 to 1405), who supported artists known for their naturalistic depictions.[51] Their palace featured lifelike animal imagery, and during this period, Cennino d'Andrea Cennini (c. 1360/70 – before 1470) wrote his influential handbook for painters, *Il libro dell'arte*, which included instructions for life casting.[52] The Burgundian dukes, renowned for their impressive collections of natural curiosities, adopted this approach, and the Habsburgs followed. Crucially, this adoption had political significance, aligning with the belief among the jurists at the University of Padua that effective governance should imitate nature. The death of the last "natural" ruler of the Low Countries, Margaret of Austria, who had unified the Habsburg and Burgundian lines, probably reinforced the Habsburgs' claims over the region. Consequently, the grotto fountain at Binche Palace, adorned with its animal imagery, transcended mere fashion and entertainment, reminding visitors of the Habsburgs and their right to rule the region.

Unfortunately, neither the grotto nor many other works of art that had once been in Binche Palace have survived. On July 22, 1554, the troops of King Henry II of France captured the town and burned the palace. Nevertheless, after initial reports of the French invasion, the most valuable items had been

[48] OVIDIUS: *Metamorphosis*, 740 – 752; PLINY: *Natural History*. Vol. VIII, XXXII. London 1938, pp. 477 – 479.

[49] She owned nearly fifty branches of uncarved coral, exhibiting them both in a garden cabinet and an upstairs study at her Mechelen palace, several mounted on green-painted clay hills. EICHBERGER, D.: *Leben mit Kunst. Wirken durch Kunst.* Turnhout 2002, pp. 399 – 402; EICHBERGER, D.: A noble residence for a female regent: Margaret of Austria and the 'Court of Savoy' in Mechelen. In: *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Ed.: HILLS, H. Aldershot 2003, pp. 25 – 46, esp. pp. 30 – 31. The appreciation of coral continued with Ferdinand II of Austria, who developed refined ways for its staging. One was to attach coral branches to a piece of wood covered with a naturalistically painted plaster to mimic a rock—a practice likely employed at the Binche grotto fountain. It is evidenced by surviving coral pieces in his collection at Ambras Castle, e.g. coral branches attached to pedestals (Italian, Genova?), 16th century, red coral, plaster, wood, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Schloss Ambras Innsbruck, Inv. Nos. PA 954, 973, 996.

[50] BREDEKAMP, H.: Die Erde als Lebewesen. In: *Kritische Berichte*, Vol. 9, 1981, Nos. 4 – 5, pp. 5 – 37, esp. pp. 20 – 27; and MOREL, P.: *Les Grottes maniéristes en Italie au XVIe siècle. Théâtre et alchimie de la nature.* Paris 1998.

[51] SMITH, P. H.: *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution.* Chicago 2004, pp. 34 – 35; GRAMACCINI, N.: Das genaue Abbild der Natur – Riccios Tiere und die Theorie des Naturabgusses seit Cennini. In: *Natur und Antike in der Renaissance.* Exh. cat., Liebieghaus, Museum alter Plastik. Eds.: BLUME, D. – BECK, H. Frankfurt a. M. 1985, pp. 198 – 225.

[52] CENNINI, C.: Das Buch von der Kunst oder Tractat der Malerei des Cennino Cennini da Colle di Valdelsa — *Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttechnik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, 1. Vienna 1871, pp. 132 – 135.

safeguarded and transferred to Mons.[53] Among these may have been the painting by Rogier van der Weyden (which later entered the collections of King Philip II of Spain) and the *Battle of Pavia* tapestry set (documented as having been bequeathed by Mary to Don Carlos, Philip II's eldest son, after her death).[54]

Conclusion

This study brings further attention to a well-known yet often overlooked aspect of Mary of Hungary's regency in the Low Countries: her financial independence, sustained by revenues from the Hungarian kingdom, including what is now Slovakia. These funds are likely to have enabled her to act as a patron and undertake ambitious artistic projects, such as the construction and furnishing of Binche Palace. A closer look at the palace's prominent works of art shows that Mary was not merely a wealthy patron and collector but also a temporary curator with a clear acquisition strategy to attract, engage, and influence her audiences.

Political scientists and historians of diplomacy and political theatre have already demonstrated that the practice of winning people over through cultural appeal rather than force—what we now call "soft power"—was pursued in the early modern period. This is especially true of diplomatic efforts in peacemaking and peacekeeping, which were closely intertwined with cultural practices.[55] Mary's approach to works of art acquired for Binche Palace resembles these practices. As the supreme political authority in the Low Countries at that time, she deliberately selected and displayed works of art to influence her visitors through their aesthetic appeal. In doing so, she wielded a sophisticated form of "soft power" to strengthen the legitimacy of the Habsburgs' matrimonial alliance with the House of Valois and to manifest the dynasty's commitment to the Catholic faith as the Reformation spread and attracted large numbers of adherents. This is particularly evident in her decision to purchase and display Rogier van der Weyden's painting—a choice motivated more by political and religious considerations than by her personal preferences for Netherlandish paintings or by aesthetic considerations.

This painting and other works of art acquired by Mary significantly contributed to transforming Binche Palace into a site celebrating the Habsburgs. However, during the critical transfer of power within the Habsburg family, Mary's curatorial work can also be viewed from a broader diplomatic perspective—as a deliberate effort to create a space for contemplation and communication, designed by a woman for a predominantly male and noble audience gathered here during the festivities. The message was clear: to foster peaceful unity rooted in shared values, education, and common taste; to promote stability; and to advocate the pursuit of political aspirations through peaceful means rather than by warfare as the sixteenth-century Habsburgs did—preferably through their numerous marriage alliances.

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[53] HEDICKE 1904 (see in note 12), pp. 280, 417, No. 64.

[54] BUCHANAN 2002 (see in note 27), pp. 345 – 351, esp. p. 345.

[55] NYE, J. S. Jr.: *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.* New York 2004; RIVÈRE DE CARLES, N.: The Poetics of Diplomatic Appeasement in the Early Modern Era. In: *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power: The Making of Peace.* Ed.: RIVÈRE DE CARLES, N. London 2016, pp. 1 – 25.

Mary of Hungary and Binche Palace
Strategic Collecting and the Politics of Display

Summary

This study draws attention to Mary of Hungary's important yet underexplored role as curator of her family's collections during her regency in the Low Countries (1531 – 1555). Supported by her continued access to income from her dowry (mainly from lucrative mining towns in the Hungarian kingdom, present-day Slovakia), Mary exercised notable financial independence. This autonomy enabled her to undertake remarkable artistic projects, including the construction and furnishing of her Binche palace. The examination of key works of art she acquired for Binche palace, demonstrates that she was not just a wealthy patron but also a temporary curator with a deliberate plan to impress and influence visitors.

Political scientists and historians of diplomacy and political theatre have recognized the importance of culture in winning people over—what we now call "soft power"—as a strategy already used in the early modern period. Mary's approach to the works of art she assembled at Binche Palace aligns with these cultural practices. As the highest political authority in the Low Countries, Mary systematically gathered and exhibited aesthetically captivating works of art—ranging from paintings and tapestries to multimedia installations like the grotto—that directly or indirectly supported the interests of the Habsburg dynasty. This is particularly evident in her decision to acquire and display in the chapel of Binche Palace the fifteenth-century painting, *Descent from the Cross*, by the prominent Netherlandish painter Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400 – 1464). Her choice was motivated by political and religious considerations, as that painting, created in a period of the Burgundian reign, asserted the Habsburgs' claim to Burgundian territories. Its emotive subject further resonated with Habsburg Catholicism at a time when the Reformation was on the rise in the Low Countries.

During the transition of power from Emperor Charles V to his son, Prince Philip, Mary's curatorial work at Binche Palace primarily celebrated the Habsburg family. However, it also operated within a broader diplomatic context, providing a forum for a peaceful dialogue, designed by a woman for the largely male noble audience gathered at Binche during the visit of Emperor Charles V and his son in 1549. At a time when Habsburg-controlled nobility in the Low Countries often staged rebellions, Mary's intent was clear: to foster peaceful unity rooted in shared values, education, and taste—an approach the Habsburgs employed in the sixteenth century, especially through strategic marriage alliances.

Mária Uhorská a Palác Binche
Strategické zberateľstvo a politika vystavovania

Resumé

Táto štúdia upriamuje pozornosť na dôležitú, no stále nie dostatočne preskúmanú úlohu Márie Uhorskej ako dočasnej kurátorky rodinných zbierok počas jej regentstva v Nizozemsku (1531 – 1555). Mária, ktorá po svadbe s Ľudovítom II. Jagelovským získala značné veno (zahŕňajúce lukratívne stredoslovenské banské mestá v Uhorskom kráľovstve, dnešnom Slovensku), si udržala finančnú nezávislosť aj po jeho smrti. Táto autonómia jej ako regentke umožnila realizovať viacero pozoruhodných umeleckých projektov, vrátane výstavby a zariadenia paláca v Binche. Analýza kľúčových umeleckých diel, ktoré Mária pre tento palác získala, ukazuje, že nebola iba bohatou mecenáškou, ale aj dočasnou kurátorkou s konkrétnou víziou, ktorej cieľom bolo sústrediť a vystaviť získané umelecké diela tak, aby upútali a ovplyvnili návštevníkov.

Politológovia, ako aj historici diplomacie a politického divadla, zdôraznili schopnosť kultúry formovať preferencie ľudí prostredníctvom príťažlivosti – to, čo dnes nazývame „mäkkou silou" – ako stratégiu používanú už v ranom novoveku. Máriin prístup k umeleckým dielam, ktoré zhromaždila v paláci v Binche, korešponduje s touto praxou. Ako najvyššia politická autorita v Nizozemsku, Mária systematicky a cielene zbierala a vystavovala esteticky mimoriadne príťažlivé umelecké diela – od obrazov a tapisérií až po multimediálne inštalácie, ako napríklad grotto – aby prostredníctvom nich priamo alebo nepriamo podporila záujmy a ciele svojej rodiny. Tento postup je obzvlášť zreteľný v Máriinom rozhodnutí získať a vystaviť v kaplnke paláca v Binche obraz *Snímanie z kríža* od Rogiera van der Weyden, významného nizozemského maliara 15. storočia. Jej voľbu tu motivovali tak politické, ako aj náboženské aspekty. Obraz, vytvorený počas burgundskej vlády, nepriamo podporoval nárok Habsburgovcov na burgundské územia a jeho emotívna náboženská téma rezonovala s habsburským katolicizmom v čase, keď reformačné hnutie bolo v Nizozemsku na vzostupe.

V čase prechodu moci z cisára Karola V. na jeho syna, budúceho kráľa Filipa II., bola Máriina kurátorská práca zameraná predovšetkým na oslavu habsburského rodu. V širšom diplomatickom kontexte však jej výber umeleckých diel a ich inštalácia v priestoroch paláca vytvárali aj priestor na kontempláciu a mierový dialóg, ktorý ako žena a regentka ponúkala početnému, prevažne mužskému šľachtickému publiku, zhromaždenému počas návštevy cisára Karola V. a jeho syna Filipa v roku 1549 v Binche. V čase, keď domáca šľachta v Nizozemsku pod habsburskou vládou často rebelovala, bol Máriin zámer jasný: podporiť mierovú jednotu zakotvenú v spoločných hodnotách, vzdelaní a vkuse – prístup, ktorý Habsburgovia v šestnástom storočí uplatňovali, najmä prostredníctvom uzatvárania strategických sobášnych aliancií.

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