Qui a réalisé les stalles de Dordrecht?

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On sait, grâce à des inscriptions sur les stalles elles-mêmes, qu’elles furent réalisées autour des années 1538-1540. Les sources écrites manquent pour nous donner plus d’informations. Un nom cependant est lié à ces stalles, celui du sculpteur Jan Terwen Aertszn, cité par Matthijs Balen, dans sa Description de la Ville de Dordrecht de 1677 (136 ans après la réalisation des stalles). Différentes hypothèses ont été émises au sujet de ce Jan Terwen, qui serait originaire de Thérouanne, dans le Nord de la France.

Quelque travaux de sculpture de Jan Terwen sont connus: deux panneaux sculptés en bas-relief sont conservés au musée Van Gijn à Dordrecht. L’un des deux montre des ressemblances avec les stalles de Dordrecht, particulièrement avec la marche triompheale de Mucius Scaevola.

Il est tout de même étonnant de trouver à Dordrecht des 1540 un ensemble de stalles fortement influencé par la Renaissance, alors que dans le reste des Pays-Bas du Sud la tradition gothique est encore très fort à cette époque. Les donneurs d’ordre étaient sans doute très progressistes et ont su trouver des personnes capables de travailler dans ce nouveau style encore peu répandu en Hollande: mais où, en dehors de la Cour pouvait-on trouver des artistes capables de s’adapter à un style “étranger” comme le style Renaissance? Et c’est bien dand cette direction qu’il faut chercher.

A la cour de Marie de Hongrie, Marguerite d’Autriche et Charles Quint, à Bruxelles et Malines, étaient rassemblés un certain nombre de jeunes artistes flamands, parmi lesquels un certain Jan Mone.

Originaire de Metz et Lorraine (1484-1550), Jan Mone est à Anvers en 1521; il y rencontre Dürer. Quelques années auparavant, en Italie où il avait étudié, il était entré en contact avec le sculpteur espagnol Bartholomeus Ordonez. A partir de 1517, il travailla avec Ordonez notamment à des jouées qui devaient servir de fermeture à
l'ensemble de stalles de la cathédrale de Barcelone, qui datait des années 1400.

En 1524 Mone s'installe à Malines. Il est nommé par l'empereur Charles Quint "Maitre artiste de l'empereur". Il travaile beaucoup pour le cercle aristocratique de la cour de Malines: il fit notamment des pierres tombales, mais aussi l'ornamentation renaissance du château "le Gelnelslot" à Hoogstraten, château d'Antoine de Lalaing. Il est connu pour avoir travaillé comme sculpture sur pierre, sur albâtre, sur bois, mais aussi comme chef de projet et conseiller dans le domaine artistique et architectural.

D’après le livre Les Stalles de la Grande Eglise de Dordrecht de H. Duinen

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At last in the present book we have a proper authoritative study of the English misericord corpus! Choir stalls as furniture ensembles have recently received authoritative technical treatment in Charles Tracy’s two volumes of English Gothic Choir Stalls (Woodbridge, 1987 & 1990), so it is good to have a comprehensive iconographic survey of this still under-rated but most important body of medieval wood carving.

The very generous provision of fine photographs — and the photographer is to be congratulated on his success in recording these notoriously difficult subjects — allows one to judge for oneself when assessing the author’s iconographic identifications, a few of which seem to me to be questionable and which I note below.

The first part of the book describes the historical evolution of misericords, comparing Continental examples and, importantly, discussing native and foreign design sources in manuscripts and prints. Consideration is also given to the working practices of the carvers and the function of the often worrying imagery — worrying at least, to our conventional twentieth century notions of what is appropriate in a church. Who was the intended audience — the clerics who sat on the seats? The enigma of the misericord has always been the perceived disjunction between the nature of its subject matter — overwhelmingly ‘non-religious’ — and its location at the heart of the religious building; it was perhaps inevitable that modern scholars should see this intriguing body of ‘under-the-counter’, quite literally ‘upside down’ imagery as ‘marginal’ in much the same way as the miniatures in the borders of Gothic manuscripts, as (to quote the title of Michael Camille’s 1992 book on this subject) ‘Image(s) on the Edge’.

The first half of the book surveys the more surprising areas of this iconography, including scatology, the fool, monde renversé, and humorous motifs, while the second half discusses the minority of overtly religious themes drawn from the Bible and Saints’ Lives,
animal representations (many of them drawn from the Bestiary, of course), and everyday ‘genre’ subjects.

After such a handsome acknowledgment of my own occasional help with inquiries in the Préface, I hope it will not seem too churlish that my duty as a reviewer requires me in what follows to point out one or two (trivial) slips and other infelicities, and supply one or two addenda.

In principle, I should like to have seen the caption to every photograph include the (estimated) date of the misericord in question — this was perhaps made difficult by the production schedule.

Dr. Grössinger raises the important question as to who was responsible for selecting the subjects the craftsmen carved, and concludes, rightly in my opinion, that “the choice... in general must have been left to the individual carvers, probably the master carver...” (p. 72), a view which receives some support from the wording of surviving Continental contracts.

The misericords of the Amiens Cathedral stalls, for example, were to be decorated, according to the early sixteenth century order, de feuillage ou mannequins et petis bestiaux et autre chose a plaisance (with foliage or little people and little animals and anything else, as it pleases you). Similarly, according to the 1519 contract, the stall elbows for the Abbey of St. Nicholas in Veurne, just over the French border in Belgium, were to be ronde personnaigen van liefden oft van ghedierten oft ronde loovers (round figures of lovers or animals or round foliage), and the carver, Gillis van Dickele was instructed to decorate the misericords of the new stalls of the abbey of St. Clare in Gentbrugge with figures corresponderende eenighe bysprake of dies ghelycke (corresponding to some proverb or the like). Like the ‘anything else, as it pleases you’ of the Amiens commission, this last order makes a token display of specificity in mentioning proverbs, in particular — and a most interesting reference it is — but then abandons the pretense of a detailed instruction with its ‘or the like’, which plainly leaves the choice of subject matter, in practice, to the carver.
To my mind, one of the most important aspects of research into the English misericord corpus is the ever increasing recognition of the derivation of a number of designs from Continental graphic sources, German and Flemish prints, and — a very significant subset — the border metal cuts (criblé cuts) found in early printed Parisian Horae (c. 1490-1510) — in the last number of our journal a photograph of a misericord at present in the Musée national du Moyen Age was published which owes its origin to just such a Horae criblé cut. It is an over-simplification to imply, as Grössinger does on p. 69 (acknowledging her use of M.D. Anderson's pioneering discovery), that these designs derive only from Horae printed by Thielmann Kerver, indeed, those printed by Pigouchet for Vostre were more influential. English misericord carvings based on these cuts additional to those mentioned on pp. 69-70 include the ‘humane ride’ (thinking to save her mount some of the burden by carrying the sack on her head) at Bristol, and the hare (a snail in the original) riding the dragon at Beverley, both c.1520.

Unnoticed by Grössinger, the design which she describes as “Two (wild) men running to attack each other” is the subject of one of the misericords in Henry VII’s Chapel, Westminster Abbey, although the central portion of the carving is damaged, depriving us of the wildmen’s shields and the intervening floral motif whose stalks are still visible’. This Westminster Abbey use of the design c.1512 is now the earliest securely dated employment of a Parisian horae motif in carving, and the earliest certain example in England in any medium.

It has long been known that this same design also appears carved in stone c.1532 in the De La Warr chantry at Boxgrove Priory in Sussex, but it is also found in contemporary woodwork, and I have noted it as the basis for part of one of the bench ends at Crowcombe, Somerset, which are helpfully inscribed with the date 1534. Another Crowcombe motif, the well known gastrocephalic dragon, also derives from another popular design, but also uniquely attested at Crowcombe is the grotesque in the form of a long necked monster in the mouth of another which is simply a head on legs, with a basket of birds which hangs from a collar round the neck of the former monster.
Netherlandish influence on the Windsor misericords is suggested because of the "representation of proverbs, difficult to identify" (p. 21) — firstly, although Flemish craftsmen are indeed recorded as having worked in St. George's Chapel, Charles Tracy found no (stylistic) evidence that they had worked on the late fifteenth century stalls, and I am bound to suggest that if they are so difficult to identify how do we know they are proverb representations at all? I suspect — though it is not quite the same thing — that what Dr. Grössinger has in mind is the presence of at least one avowedly Flemish motif, that of the zeeridder (armored merman) who brandishes a pig's trotter — a subject unknown to the indigenous repertoire.

My own examination of the stalls commissioned by Edward IV at Windsor (c.1480) has revealed — as might be expected at a royal site — the influence of the latest 'Germanic' prints, including those by Master E. S., the Master of the Banderoles, and the Master of the Berlin Passion — one of the animal prints which Lehrs characterized as models for goldsmiths and miniaturists attributed to the Master of the Berlin Passion, i.e. the "Swan, Stork and Ostrich" (Lehrs 91) reveals such an exact correspondence with one of the Windsor supporters, that what M. R. James took for a second horseshoe lying on the ground, can now be seen to be the uncurled tip of the tail of the snake in the beak of what was probably intended by the anonymous Master to be a stork rather than James's ibis. In discussing the copying and, indeed, tracing, of designs from this Master's prints (including this one) in the *Harley Hours* in 1978, James Marrow was able to date that book to 1463-1476, which is thus a *terminus ante quem* for the Master's bird print, and — in order for it to have had time to reach the carver of the Windsor misericord c. 1480, a date towards the earlier part of that bracket is perhaps likely — (Marrow favors Flemish Limburg in his search for the localization of the Master of the Berlin Passion's workshop.

The hinted derivation of one of the Beverley misericords bears from a design by the German Master of the Playing Cards (caption to fig. 23), I do not find convincing, not least, because we know that in the very year the misericords were carved, an usarius named John Grene — a regular performer in the town — was paid 6s. 8d. by the town council for exhibiting his dancing bears (*agitationis ursonum*) in the market place, and this may be one of those rare
instances where we can detect a relatively humble topical allusion memorialized by the carvers (a much more grandiose piece of topicality is commemorated in the outsize Sovereign’s stall at Windsor, the meeting at Picquigny (misspelled on p. 34) between Edward IV and Louis XI). That said, I do believe that Dr. Grössinger is right to see the distinctive head scratching bird supporter of another Beverley misericord as deriving ultimately from one of the Playing Card Master’s designs at whatever remove — some sixty years, be it noted, after their last recorded use elsewhere.

Whatever date in the fifteenth century is assigned to the Great Malvern misericord reproduced as fig. 17 on which, to quote the caption, “A man (in fact, as he is cowled, he would seem to qualify as a friar — see below) rushes toward an apish demon and thrusts bellows up his backside”, the scene itself is curiously reminiscent of Abraham Holland’s later continued inquisition against paper-persecutors in John Davies’ Scourge for Paper-Persecutors (London, 1624) which refers to the taste for similar scatological pictures in North Villages:

So if upon the wall
They see an Antique (=grotesque) in base postures fall
As, a Friar blowing wind into the taile
Of a Babboone, or an Ape drinking Ale,
They admire that, when to their view perhaps
If ye should set one of the Mercators Mapps
Or a rare Piece of Albert Durer, they
Would hardly sticke to throw the toy away,
And curse the botching painter.

— fascinating evidence for the history of taste (and snobbery)!

The Bristol supporter depicted in fig. 158, according to the caption, “A woman… playing with a man’s private parts”, has long been the subject of misdescription, one earlier commentator describing it as ‘a monkey playing on the flute’ (pink oboe?). The Bristol misericords, now 28 in number, were formerly at least 32, three of the missing four or five having been removed in the late nineteenth century as ‘obscene’ — fortunately, two such subjects seem to have been missed, one of which is this unique depiction of a woman
drinking from a phallovitrobolus or phalliform drinking vessel, of which late fifteenth century German examples in glass survive. I have discussed this representation elsewhere, comparing the scene with the court record of a brothel keeper in Elizabethan Essex who was arraigned before the local magistrates for keeping a bawdy house in which part of the entertainment of guests consisted in drinking from just such a vessel described as shaped like a pintle and two ballocks.

I would also take issue with the description of the Bristol misericord reproduced in fig. 135; in my opinion it illustrates the misogynist proverb that “Old maids lead apes in hell” (as their single status prevents them from leading children into heaven), the Bristol carving is thus an important example of the antedating of verbal idioms in art. It is clear from Dr. Grössinger’s caption to fig. 135 in which she sees the apes as the women’s “suitors, the fools” that she associates it with the engraving by the so-called ‘Master of the Power of Women’ (Meister der Weibermacht) which depicts a woman riding a donkey leading a group of fools on ropes, but here there is neither donkey nor fool, but unambiguously delineated apes.

Nor can the avian mount of one of the Bristol parodic jousters (fig. 133) be a goose as the caption suggests, as it has talons rather than webbed feet and wattles — if not an imaginary bird, it might have been intended as a turkey cock.

The point of the lefthand supporter to the Chester miracle of the wild geese misericord (fig. 186) has perhaps been slightly missed — certainly “the saint (Werburgh) saw fit to have them penned in” as the caption says, but the miracle is that they stayed penned in an unroofed pen rather than flying straight out! This incident, also commemorated on the little lead badge souvenirs of pilgrim’s visits to the saint’s shrine in the Cathedral, shows the saint as God’s fool, achieving what for anyone else (most famously the ‘Wise Men of Gotham’ who similarly attempted to pen in the cuckoo) would be a proverbial folly.

Similarly, the man who leans over the horse on the Greystoke misericord (fig. 256) is not “brushing” it — close inspection of the excellent photograph shows a currycomb, and I have suggested
elsewhere that this may be a representation of the *curry Favel* idiom. Again, close inspection of the late fifteenth century misericord at Lavenham (fig. 140) captioned "creature... half-man half-beast playing on bellows with a crutch" will disclose the double stem of a pair of tongs, and this particular combination is popular in the early fourteenth century, e.g. in a similar grotesque context in the 'East-Anglian' Ormseby Psalter and in at least four contemporary examples in the margins of Franco-Flemish manuscripts — and may well be evidence of artistic contact with Flanders so evident elsewhere in this church.

The Stratford-on-Avon misericord with its unusual three equal sized heads looks to me to illustrate three stages in the 'taming of the shrew'. The right hand head is not "biting on a sausage" as the caption to fig. 173 has it, but a gag.

Charles Tracy has recently dated the Exeter misericords to c.1240 (they are misdated c.1350 on p. 30), thus removing any possible dependence of the celebrated éléphant (fig. 202) with the drawing by Matthew Paris.

Whatever may have been the contemporary carvers' interpretation of the naked figure who rises from a whelk shell to fight with a dragon (fig. 118, Lincoln, etc), I have shown elsewhere that, as a design, it derives from the two adjacent illustrations in Monstrous Races manuscripts of a pigmy emerging from his hole, and the hydra.

It is misleading — in that it implies a direct relationship between the two — to describe the Ludlow Dishonest Ale-wife as "deriving" from the Chester Mystery Plays (p. 81) — it is a relatively common motif found in this as well as in other English, and indeed, Continental mystery play avoles.

I close with a few trivial corrigenda. A couple of dates have gone awry: Brant's *Ship of Fools* (1494) is misdated 1497 (the date of the Latin translation) on p. 105, and Bruegel's *Proverbs* painting was painted in 1559, not 1565, as stated on p. 85, while on p. 177 the mid twelflh century *Ysengrimus* is dated c. 150! In the transcription of the important proverbial inscription on the Whalley goose shoeing misericord (fig. 122), for *y* read *y(a)t* (the final *t* is a
superscript but clearly visible). Blemyae as given on p. 135 is a plural, the sense requires the singular blemya.

Whatever disagreements I may have over certain of the author’s iconographical interpretations, there is no doubt that this book will long remain the standard authoritative survey of this fascinating sculptural genre, and a must for all readers of this journal.

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