

# The Flemish Textiles Trade and New Imagery in Colonial Mexico, 1524-1646

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## INTRODUCTION

European imagery and textiles played complementary roles in the colonization and conversion of the indigenous population of New Spain.<sup>1</sup> When the Franciscan Order arrived, just three years after the fall of Tenochtitlán to Hernán Cortés, its members brought with them not only their devotion to Catholicism and representations of the Passion of Christ and other favorite images, they also created an immediate demand for textiles that were either unavailable, or present but in inadequate quantity, in local markets. The new demand stemmed from a requirement that the Indians be clothed and from a need for instructional charts and religious paintings. Linens served both ends, Flemish linens in particular. There had been Flemish houses trading internationally in textiles for years, and it required no great adjustment for some of them to add New Spain to their list of destinations. Those same firms just as easily added paintings to their shipments. Such specialized traders, rather than émigré artists, were the proximate agents through whom Flemish imagery came to infuse early colonial visual culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The claim with respect to paintings is by now almost a given, but complementarities between paintings and other components of material culture in colonial New Spain have been less fully explored. See, however, recent exhibitions, in particular the contributions of Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, Clara Bargellini and Jonathan Brown, in *Painting a New World: Mexican Art and Life, 1521-1821* (Denver: Frederick and Jan Mayer Center for Pre-Columbian and Spanish Colonial Art, Denver Art Museum, 2004) and those of Joseph J. Rishel and Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, in *The Arts in Latin America, 1492-1820*, Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Idelfonso and Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). We also greatly benefited from new concepts introduced by Serge Gruzinski & Heather MacLean, *Images at War: Mexico from Columbus to Blade Runner (1492-2019)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) and Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For an expanded statement see Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Exploring markets for Netherlandish paintings in Spain and Nueva España, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50 (2000), pp. 81-111. At this point the records of three important specialist traders have been studied; each combined textiles with paintings. By far the largest and the one with the most extensive network was the firm started by Willem Forchoudt. A selection of documents concerning the firm is Jean Denucé (ed.), *Kunstuitvoer in de 17de eeuw te Antwerpen. De firma Forchoudt*, I. Bronnen voor de geschiedenis van de vlaamsche kunst (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1931), but there exists a larger archive as yet not explored. For a second firm, the partnership of Mathijs Musson and Maria Fourmenois, see Erik Duverger, *Nieuwe gegevens betreffende de kunsthandel van Matthijs Musson en Maria Fourmenois te Antwerpen tussen 1633 en 1681*, a 1969 reprint from *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis en de Oudheidkunde*, vol. XXI (1968), supplemented by Jean Denucé (ed.), *Peter Pauwel Rubens. Documenten uit den Kunsthandel te Antwerpen in the XVIIe eeuw van Matthijs Musson* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1949). There is no published compilation of documents relating to the third firm, that of Chrisostomo Van Immerseel and his wife Marie de Fourmestraux, but their activities are well known to scholars. We will pay special attention to this firm in Parts II and III of our discussion.

In fact there were two sorts of support of particular importance to that culture: thin linen was one, copper the other. Paintings on these supports were known as *lienzos* and *laminas*, respectively. More has been written about copper, though linen mattered most in the early decades of European settlement. We will reverse this imbalance, devoting relatively more space to linen, and especially to the ways in which linen, and linen-cum-image, served the purposes of the Franciscans. Our decision to focus on the relationship between linen and image leads us also to bypass entirely familiar artists who worked in oil on canvas, such as Simon Pereyngs, who actually moved to Mexico City, and giants of Flemish painting such as Marten de Vos and Pieter Pauwel Rubens. We shall be equally selective in our treatment of copper: to what others have pointed out we simply add indications of the relative cost and numbers of paintings on copper shipped to New Spain. We also note how *laminas* and *lienzos* were used in strictly complementary ways in churches.<sup>3</sup>

Whether talking about paintings on linen or on copper, we shall stress the mediating role of international traders. Their role was crucial in an obvious sense – they were the carriers – but more importantly they also knew what was wanted in terms of imagery. This was particularly so for as long as religious paintings constituted the bulk of demand, simply because there was no great difference between Franciscan (and later Dominican and Jesuit) preferences in imagery in New Spain and in Antwerp. We also emphasize that the seventeenth-century trade in pictures, which has received the bulk of scholarly attention, was undertaken with relative ease because of the experience in trans-Atlantic trade in textiles built up in the course of the previous century.

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<sup>3</sup> The best source for details of the paintings trade remains Eddy Stols, *De Spaanse Brabanders of de handelsbetrekkingen der zuidelijke Nederlanden met de Iberische wereld 1598-1648* (2 vols. Brussels, 1971; Handelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, XXXIII, nr. 70). However, Stols does not give data on shipments. A very useful historical introduction to painting on copper is Edgar Peters Bowron, "A Brief History of European Oil Painting on Copper, 1560-1775," in *Copper as Canvas. Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper, 1575-1775*, Cat. Exh. Phoenix Art Museum and Mauritshuis, The Hague, Phoenix and Oxford 1999, pp. 9-30. On the prominence of Southern Netherlandish copper paintings in New Spain, see Clara Bargellini, "Paintings on Copper in Spanish America," in *idem*, pp. 31-44; also *Pintura Flamenca Barroca (Cobres, siglo XVII)*, Cat. Exh. Palacio Revillagigedo Caja de Asturias Gijón, San Sebastián, 1996.

Our discussion is in three Parts. The first deals with textiles and imagery in New Spain. In Part II we step back from details of the linen-image story and the Franciscan involvement with linen to ask why linen paintings have been so little studied. To give this question extra point we provide an overview of available estimates of potential production in Mechelen, chief supplier to Antwerp, whence these paintings were exported to Spain and Nueva España in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Annual supply capability, even in the worst of times, probably ran to several thousand paintings. In Part III we turn again to the demand side, focusing this time, however, not on users and the uses of linen in New Spain, but on the traders who had the task of mediating between consumers and those who produced linen paintings. We explore how traders knew what to commission and buy and how they dealt with some of the risks and uncertainties of the business.

## I

### TEXTILES IN NEW SPAIN

It is known that there was a strong demand for textiles of every description in the early phase of colonization in New Spain.<sup>4</sup> This is not surprising, given that an aspect of the Franciscans' evangelizing effort was their insistence that the local Indian population be appropriately clothed. Women were expected to wear a shift and the men at least pants, preferably pants and shirt. As a direct result there was a substantial increase in the demand for textiles.

Very soon the local demand in New Spain went beyond simple linen and cotton cloth; it came to include everything from tapestry to curtains and luxury fabrics for clothing: thus silk, taffeta (*tafetán*), satin (*raso*), velvet (*terçiopelo*), damask (*damasco*), and wool (*paños*). To the extent that this demand could not be met by local production new opportunities were created for European producers and traders. With the exception of fine woolens from the old city of

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<sup>4</sup> An excellent discussion is to be found in Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Spanish and European textiles in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," *The Americas*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1973), pp. 334-358.

Segovia, however, the demand could not be supplied by Spain. Imports came instead from the north of France (Rouen), Holland, England, Flanders and Brabant. A sign of the significance of imports other than from Spain is that it was common in shipments to use not only the Castilian vara, but also those of France and Flanders.<sup>5</sup>

Our particular interest is in cottons and linens, since these served for clothing and also as supports for paintings, maps, and the scrolls used both in schools, such as the one attached to the church of San José de los Naturales in Mexico City (Fig. 2) and, we must assume, in the evangelizing forays into the interior of the first group of mendicant friars, the Franciscans. In New Spain, cotton and especially linen was available in many degrees of fineness. Though generically known as *lienzos*, these included, at the high end, *Olandilla*, pressed linen from Holland used as lining for clothes, and *Olanda*, a heavier type of linen used for kerchiefs, quilts, pillow casings, tunics, etc. Shirts (*camisas*) and shifts (*camisones*), were also made from these fine textiles.

The names *Olandilla* and *Olanda* misleadingly suggest a uniquely Dutch origin. In the early sixteenth century, however, textile dealers bought *Olanda* and *Olandilla* for export to New Spain at fairs in towns all of which were in Brabant or Flanders: 's Hertogenbosch, Eindhoven, Helmond, Antwerp, Ghent, Eeklo, Oudenaarde, Bruges, Kortrijk, Izegem, Menen and Lille.<sup>6</sup> The products of Rouen competed with those from the towns farther to the north, serving in addition for stockings (*medias calças*) and tunics (*jubones*). At the opposite end, *presilla* from Oudenaarde (Audinarda) in south-west Flanders, was an inexpensive linen much in demand for shirts and nightgowns, while *brin*, a coarse, hemp-like fibre from the saffron plant was used for the tunics of slaves and peasants. *Angeo*, from the French town of Anjou, was even cheaper. It was a coarse linen that could be used to make sails or canvas wraps which were waterproofed with wax for sea voyages. Table 1 reproduces some numbers showing the origins of textile

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<sup>5</sup> All measures of fabric were expressed in Castilian *varas*, but not uncommonly also in the *ana de la mendida de Flandes* (= 0.81 of the Castilian vara) and the *ana de la mendida de Francia* (=1.55). Ibid. p. 336.

<sup>6</sup> Stols (as in n. 3), p. 148.

imports to Puebla, on the route from the port city of Veracruz to Mexico City, in the years 1540-1556.

Table 1. *Textile imports to Puebla by origin, 1540-1556*

ORIGIN	VOLUME (IN CASTILIAN VARAS)
Ruan (Rouen)	12,183
Presilla (Audinarda)	4,055
Esguan (Izegem)	2,118
Olanda (Holland ?)	1,660

Source: Boyd-Bowman 1973 (as in n. 4), pp. 354-355.

The groupings in Table 1 perhaps convey accurately enough the relative volume of textiles from Holland and Oudenaarde (Audinarda), though it is hard to tell since some of the trade originating in Holland, as well as some of that from London and Antwerp, also moved through Rouen. Although this fact also clouds the picture for Antwerp, it is known from traders' records that much of the linen shipped from there was in the form of supports for painted surfaces. These paintings were called *waterverfdoecken*, literally water-paint cloths, though the paint was pigment dissolved in water or rabbit glue and applied to thin linen.

We turn now to the advantages of the linen support in the early colonial situation. Most of these were strictly practical, though one touches on visual rhetoric in a very idiosyncratic way.

## THE FRANCISCANS AND LINEN

The practical advantages of linen as a support accrued most directly to the Franciscan brothers who set about at once evangelizing the Indignes of New Spain. The friars wished to turn the Indians away from their own false religious beliefs and, secondarily, to protect these "innocents" from the predations of the Spanish colonists. In the pursuit of these goals they had both to destroy the records pertaining to false beliefs and simultaneously substitute instruction in the

Christian faith and teach doctrine and crafts to their “charges” so that they might become self-sustaining congregations of communicants, distinct from those made up of Spanish settlers and their Creole offspring.

To the latter end they set up schools, the first and best known being the arts and crafts school mentioned earlier, the one annexed to the chapel of San José de los Naturales in the Convento Grande de San Francisco de México.<sup>7</sup> That school was established by Pieter van der Moere from Ghent in Flanders, also known as Fray Pedro de Gante or Pedro de Mura, who was aided by Jan Dekkers and Jan vander Auwera (Ayora).<sup>8</sup> There, selected members from among the Indian elites learned the mysteries of the Catholic faith plus practical skills including the art of painting in the European manner. As part of their own preparation the friars learned Nahuatl, but they were assisted by the fact that their students brought with them well-established pictographic traditions for recording and transmitting knowledge. Making maps, or, in Mundy’s more accurate phrase, “pictorial and logographic records,” was part of this tradition.<sup>9</sup> Certain of these “maps” depicted the semi-divine and historical events leading to the establishment of communities and ruling dynasties, stressing key events such as conquests. Others focused more on the ways in which particular communities were organized and how they related to the spaces they occupied; for example, physical boundaries were marked to designate territory held communally and cared for as a shared responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Manuel Toussaint, *Colonial Art in Mexico* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 38. The school of San José de los Naturales is often considered the most important artistic center in Nueva España in the mid-sixteenth century, effectively controlling both the use of educational imagery, often based on Netherlandish prototypes, and theologically “correct” iconography. By an edict of Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco of 11 November 1552, all artists had to pass an examination conducted by the school in order to obtain a licence to paint in Nueva España. This measure effectively gave the Franciscans a controlling influence on local visual culture and taste. See Norma Lovera de Navarro, “De Fransiscaan Fray Pedro de Gante en de schilderkunst en architectuur van Nieuw-Spanje in de 16de eeuw,” in *America. Bruid van de Zon. 500 jaar Latijns-Amerika en de Lage Landen*, cat. exh. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, 1992, pp. 69-75.

<sup>8</sup> The compound of the Franciscans in Ghent was destroyed by the French in the invasion following the French Revolution. The destruction included both the buildings and the archives, which contained the correspondence with New Spain, among others.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain. Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-112.

These two types of “cartographic histories” sometimes merged yet are also recognizably distinct in surviving maps drawn up in connection with a Royal initiative to chronicle and delineate the New World. Those maps were part of local responses to the *Relación Geográfica* questionnaire sent out in 1578 by Philip II’s cosmographer-chronicler in chief, Juan López de Velasco. Factual answers were mainly supplied by colonial officials, but the complementary task of map-making was often passed to Indigenous artists. Mundy judges that roughly two-thirds of the 69 known surviving maps stemming from this initiative were made by such artists.<sup>11</sup>

Nor is our grasp of cartographic histories confined entirely to these particular maps; there are pre-colonial equivalents still extant. Though very few in number these corroborate the distinction between boundary-marking and genealogy. In this connection, there is an illuminating comparison by Mundy of the pre-colonial map of the Apoala Valley in the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall* with the map of Zacapetec in the modern state of Oaxaca, thought to date from the early post-Conquest period (1540-1560).<sup>12</sup>

In Mundy’s reading the maps made by post-Conquest Indian artists differed in important ways from the “densely-layered images” of the older “ritual-calendric” manuscripts.<sup>13</sup> They were accepted by Europeans as secular documents and therefore were not targeted for destruction, as were the suspect older “histories.”<sup>14</sup> And they were actually used by communities in appeals to higher authorities over boundary disputes.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, they were often much larger than the older histories, at least those that have survived.<sup>16</sup> These two features, plus the fact that they were easily read by ordinary people probably implies that the newer maps were in part “meant to be seen publicly,” even hung on the walls of the indigenous town council buildings, the *Cabildos*, perhaps on

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30, Table. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Mundy (as in n. 9), pp. 106-108. For more extended discussion of how to understand another, recently restored but more unusual and elusive early post-Conquest map, the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, see David Carrasco and Scott Sessions (eds.), *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest: An Interpretive Journey Through the Mapa de Cuauhtincha No. 2* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Mundy (as in n. 9), p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.



the occasion of public celebrations, as a reminder to members of the community of their shared history.<sup>17</sup> The modified retention and thus survival in post-Conquest maps of acceptable ancient traditions and artistic conventions may have been unintended on the part of the Spanish colonists, but the value of such visual records did not escape the notice of the first Franciscans in New Spain. For, as has often been remarked, the fact that the Indigenes possessed not an alphabetic but a pictographic language, made it both obvious and essential that the friars would have to exploit familiar visual elements if their teaching was to enjoy success.

Maps and scrolls are thus relevant to our own narrative in substantive ways. But a key physical aspect of their functioning well was their linen support. Linen was cheap, an important feature given the Franciscans' vows and limited resources. Furthermore, it was easily rolled and waterproofed for shipping from Brabant, Flanders and Rouen, thence via Seville. And, as a support for a map or scroll it was more durable than paper, being able to withstand repeated rolling and unrolling. In all probability, then, linen was preferred also for use on the friars' evangelizing forays into less settled parts. Finally, and still in the practical mode, linen was available in large dimensions. At least one linen-based map from this period survives, the Zacapetec map mentioned above, whose dimensions are 325 x 225 cm.

The Franciscans took up with alacrity the large scroll with painted pictographs of roughly Indian sort as a standard instructional aid. The writer of the sixteenth century *Códice Franciscano* declared of teaching: "for the Indians, the best method is with paintings." Another Franciscan, Jacobo de Testera, is said to have invented catechisms based wholly on images, and Pedro de Gante is known to have done exactly that.<sup>18</sup> His own catechism visualizes the point (Fig. 1).

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Fig. 1. *Illustrated catechism designed by Pedro de Gante to teach Nahua customary prayers in pseudo-Nahua pictographs*



A more encompassing demonstration of the use of imagery for instructional purposes is the engraving (Fig. 2) from Fray Diego Valadés' *Retórica Cristiana* [1579], the first published account of the evangelization of Mexico. At top left Pedro de Gante, identified by name, is shown teaching via pictographs fashioned after indigenous images.<sup>19</sup> At top right an unnamed Franciscan is teaching Christian iconography, using a Euro-style image of the *Creatio Mundi* (Fig. 3). This engraving shows in great detail how instruction proceeded at Los Naturales. Students, segregated by sex, sit in an open courtyard with four open-air chapels (a further Franciscan innovation), one at each corner. In the center of the engraving The Twelve – the first twelve friars to reach New Spain – are shown shouldering a model of the Church, flanked by Saint Francis and Fray Martín de Valencia. Scenes of the clergy at work unfold on either side of a burial scene and there is a chorus of children. The two tasks undertaken by Pedro de Gante (Fig. 3) and his anonymous Franciscan colleague (Fig. 4) evidently formed the most basic building blocks, enabling students to progress (down the page) to the deeper mysteries and offices of the church.

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<sup>19</sup> Diego Valadés, *Retórica cristiana* [Perugia: Pietro Giacompo Petrucci, 1579]. Also see Esteban Palomera, *Fray Diego Valadés O.F.M., evangelizador humanista de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Jus, 1962), and Esteban J. Palomera, Alfonso Castro Pallares, Tarsicio Herrera Zapién, María del Pilar Torres García and Marcela Frías Mondragón, *Diego Valadés Retórica cristiana* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).

as high as the instructor is tall, and appears to be roughly square. This would put them in the range of, say, 180cm high and wide.



Fig. 2. Fray Diego de Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579) with the courtyard of Los Naturales.



Fig. 3. (left) Detail of Fray Diego de Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579) with the courtyard of Los Naturales, showing a Pedro de Gante teaching with pictographs. Fig 4. (right) Detail of Fray Diego de Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579) with the courtyard of Los Naturales, showing a Franciscan friar teaching with large lienzo in the courtyard of Los Naturales.

There is more to be said about the role played by linen paintings. The *Retorica Cristiana* by Fray Diego de Valadés contains twenty-six original engravings illustrating various aspects of religious education in the New World. Valadés first specified popular visual material, including series of *The Apostles*, of the *Seven Capital Sins*, the *Seven Acts of Mercy* and the *Seven Sacraments*. This is relevant to our later discussion of the trans-Atlantic paintings trade, since a list of this sort would have served traders in paintings who bought or commissioned paintings in a center such as Antwerp; they could use it as a guide to the sort of imagery that might safely be shipped to New Spain even without explicit instructions having been received from a client. Valadés also noted that it was his Order that had been the first to teach the Indians by using paintings. This was no proud boast. The *Retorica* was written at a time when the Franciscans' social mission to protect the Indians by isolating them, and their monopoly on instruction, had been supplanted by the priorities of Dominicans and Jesuits. For us the point of interest here is that Valadés noted in passing, as if to say "of course," that the paintings his Order had used for instruction in the faith were

*lienzos*.<sup>20</sup>

One engraving of particular relevance shows a Franciscan preaching in a church on the Passion of Christ to a large group of women, men and children (Fig. 5). The preacher points to a Passion Cycle of seven *lienzos* lightly framed and attached horizontally to some sort of rigid backing, the whole suspended by a hook on a pillar. Presumably this assemblage was still quite light and could easily be put up and taken down. Notice that the members of the congregation are draped with an abundance of European-style cloth, looking more like Roman figures than Indians wearing native cotton blankets (*tilmas*), usually knotted and worn over the shoulder.<sup>21</sup> It is also intriguing that the Dominican church in Antwerp contains a sixteenth-century Passion series, an apparent borrowing from a Franciscan usage (Fig. 6), as was the Dominicans' wont. We will notice another such borrowing presently.

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<sup>20</sup> The original reads: 'Por medio de las imágenes que se nos imprimen de los lugares, podemos venir en conocimiento de lo que en esos lugares se encuentra. Por lo cual los religiosos, teniendo que predicar a los indios, usan en sus sermones figuras admirables y hasta desconocidas, para inculcarles con mayor perfección y objectividad la divina doctrina. Con este fin tienen lienzos en los que se han pintado los puntos principales de la religión cristiana, como son el simbolo de los Apóstoles, el Decálogo, los Siete Pecados Capitales, con su numerosa descendencia y sus cricunstancias agravantes, las Siete Obras de Mesericordia y los Siete Scramentos [...] and a bit further: "la Orden de San Francisco que fuimos los primeros en trabajar afanosamente por adoptar ese nuevo método de eseñanza." *Retórica cristiana* [1579], p. 95 and Palomera 2003 (as in n. 19), pp. 230-231.

<sup>21</sup> Don Paul Abbott, *Rhetoric in the New World: Rhetorical Theory and Practice in Colonial Spanish America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p. 46.



Fig. 5. (left) *Engraving from Diego Valadés, Retórica Cristiana [1579], showing a Franciscan teaching congregation the Passion of Christ with series linen paintings*. Newberry Library: Wing ZP 535 .P447. Fig. 6. (right) *Series of fifteen paintings with the Mysteries of the Rosary by diverse seventeenth-century Antwerp masters still in their (Franciscan inspired) original hanging in the Dominican Church of St. Paul's, birthplace of the Antwerp art market* (photo authors).

Valadés adds an explanation for why linen hangings like those in the engraving were effective. The Indians, he said, liked to view them closely after a sermon, a practice he interpreted as their way of fixing the message in the memory. The text in question reads, in translation:

“N. This point deals with inculcating the Christian doctrine through images and shapes drawn on very large hangings and conveniently arranged, beginning with the articles of faith, the *Ten Commandments of God*, and capital sins, and this is done with great care and skill. During sacred sermons, something about each of these is always addressed. The

*lienzos* are hung on pillars in the chapels so as to be visible. Afterwards the Indians gather around and examine them closely. This way, the lessons are more easily attached in their memory, as well because of the few characters the Indians have, and their special liking for this kind of learning [...]"<sup>22</sup>

A similar explanation is given by Gerónimo de Mendieta, in his *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (1596):<sup>23</sup>

“And when the preacher wished to teach the Commandments, they would hang the canvas with the Commandments next to him, on one side, so that with a pointer...he could go about showing the section he wished. And he did the same when he wished to preach about the articles of faith, hanging the canvas on which they were painted. And in this fashion the entire Christian doctrine was clearly and distinctly revealed to them, in their own way [...]"



Fig. 7. Francesco Orimano, *Lienzo with seated Madonna with the Magdalene and St. Clare, patron Saint of the female branch of the Franciscans* (1335-1340).

From these accounts it seems there was something quite specific to Franciscan colonial practice about the way *lienzos* were used in churches. Nevertheless, the invention might not have been wholly a local invention; there are fourteenth-century paintings that hint at a European, though still possibly a Franciscan origin, even if

the rationale cannot have been quite the same.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Valadés, *Retórica cristiana* (as in n. 19), p. 221. The Original reads: “N. Aquí se trata de inculcarles la doctrina cristiana por medio de figuras y formas dibujadas en muy amplios tapices y dispuestos muy convenientemente, dando comiezo desde los articulos de la fe, los Diez Mandamientos de la Ley de Dios, y los pecados mortales, y esto se hace con grande habilidad y cuidado. En los sermones sagrados se repasa continuamente algo de ellos. En las capillas se extendien estos lienzos para que los vean. Una vez hecho esto, ellos mismos se llegan más de cerca y los examinan con mayor cuidado. Asi, más fácilmente se les graba en la memoria, tanto por las pocas letras que los indios tienen, como porque ellos mismos encuentran especial atractivo en este género de enseñanza [...]” Mentioned in Palomera 1962 (a in n. 19), p. 139, and also quoted in Gruzinski (as in n. 1), p. 77. Also see Palomera 2003 (as in n. 19), pp. 492-493. We are indebted to Sandra Van Ginhoven for translating this text.

<sup>23</sup> This work, completed in 1596, was widely copied and circulated but did not appear in printed form until 1870.

THE TEXTILIZATION OF RELIGION: VISION INTO LINEN<sup>25</sup>

An instructive instance, in which the bond between textile and image goes well beyond the functional and becomes metaphysical, occurs in connection with the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The beginnings of this cult remain obscure, in spite of which the associated miracle has become predominant in the Latin American Catholic tradition.<sup>26</sup> Legend has it that on 9 December 1531, the Virgin Mary appeared to one Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac. She asked this humble Indian in Nahuatl to build a church there. Juan Diego reported the apparition and the Virgin's request to the Franciscan bishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga who, however, wanted more tangible evidence, preferably a miraculous sign. The Virgin obliged; she asked Juan Diego to gather some Castilian roses for the bishop from the top of the hill. Since it was winter and no roses were in bloom, much less Castilian roses, which at the time were not grown in New Spain, that Juan Diego was able to present some of these roses to the bishop was powerful evidence in favor of the Virgin's original appearance having been miraculous. This time the bishop was convinced of the miraculous nature of the intervention, the more so as a life-size image of the Virgin became imprinted on Juan Diego's *tilma*.

This miracle, with some delay, came to serve the Franciscans well. We referred earlier to the displacement of the Franciscans from mid-century. To be specific about this, in 1551 the Dominican Alonso de Montufar, a traditionalist theologian, was appointed head of the Mexican Church by Charles V, basically to break the visual and evangelizing monopoly held until then by the Franciscans. It was obvious that the miracle at Tepeyac could be used to help the Franciscans resist this challenge. A Virgin of Guadalupe hermitage was quickly built on

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<sup>24</sup> We are grateful to our colleague Caroline Bruzelius for drawing our attention to some fourteenth-century *lienzos* in a Neapolitan church. These are reproduced in Ferdinando Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli*, Rome, 1969, pp. 235-245.

<sup>25</sup> With apologies to Victor I. Stoichita, who uses the phrase "vision into painting" in his *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), in an instructive discussion of *Deus Pictor* and *Pictor Divinus*: chapter 5, esp. pp. 106-117.

<sup>26</sup> The literature on this topic is quite voluminous. For a good introduction, see William B. Taylor, "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An inquiry into the Social History of the Marian Devotion," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987), pp. 9-33; Jody Brant Smith, *The Image of Guadalupe* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1994) and Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).



Tepeyac Hill and a Franciscan announced the new cult from the pulpit on 8 September 1556.<sup>27</sup>

This announcement caused a scandal, but the Dominicans, ever alert to the possibility of appropriating an effective Franciscan visual strategem to their own ends – as with the Passion series in their Antwerp church (Fig. XX) – had already inserted themselves into the Guadalupe story. In 1555, Montufar had had made an image by a native painter, which was then placed discreetly next to an Indian devotional image already in the hermitage. Its unexplained appearance gave this new image its own aura of mystery. The Spanish authorities were attracted by it and it became known as *Our Lady of Guadalupe*.<sup>28</sup>

There is no record as to what Montufar's visualization looked like, but the central idea realized in subsequent images to do with Tepeyac miracle quickly became that the image of the Virgin was actually part of a painting of the Immaculate Conception done by God the Father. That is to say, it was very much more than just an impression of the Virgin on Juan Diego's *tilma* akin to that of the head of Christ on Veronica's cloth. The earliest known large-scale version emphasizing this additional feature was by Baltasar Echave Orio.<sup>29</sup> Note that this was not, technically speaking, a copy of the image of the Virgin; it was instead a representation of the cloak on which Her image had appeared. Later versions varied in the details they emphasized, some, for example, introducing a particular brother, as with Fray Zumárraga or saint, or in Miguel Cabrera's version, Juan Diego (Fig. 8).<sup>30</sup> But the dominant variant was that showing God as the divine painter, as in the version by Joaquín Villegas (Fig. 9), where The Father is shown actually painting the Virgin on a linen cloth.<sup>31</sup> Writers throughout the seventeenth century reiterated that the image itself was a supernatural sign, analogous to the

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<sup>27</sup> Gruzinski (as in n. 1), p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Gruzinski (as in n. ), pp. 98-101.

<sup>29</sup> Clara Bargellini, "Originality and Invention in the Painting of New Spain," in Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, Clara Bargellini (eds.), with an Introduction by Jonathan Brown, *Painting a New World. Mexican Art and Life 1521-1821* (Austin: Denver Art Museum-University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. 78-91, esp. p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte. Oil on copper, 56 x 44 cm. See Jaime Cuadrillo, *Catálogo comentado del acervo del Museo Nacional de Arte. Tomo I. Nueva España* (Mexico City: Munal, 2000), pp. 70-72, with reference to provenance, and research bibliography.

<sup>31</sup> Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte. Oil on canvas, 101 x 76.5 cm. See Cuadrillo (as in n. 30), pp. 169-173, with reference to provenance, and research bibliography.

vision known as the *Woman of the Apocalypse*. This last could easily be copied and, with only minor adaptations, be passed off in New Spain as *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. But unlike the Apocalyptic Madonna, which was copied extensively in Antwerp and Mechelen, copying *Our Lady of Guadalupe* became constrained by edicts, such as one in 1637, which required that copies maintain through their accuracy the integrity of the original.<sup>32</sup> It is not known whether this was a reaction against copies imported from the Southern Netherlands, though that is not unlikely, or strictly theologically inspired. In any case, in 1666 a commission of New Spanish painters declared the image itself miraculous, using as proof that it is quite impossible to paint on unstretched cloth.<sup>33</sup> Only God could do that.



Fig. 8 (left) Miguel Cabrera, *Retable of the Virgin of Gualalupe with John the Baptist, Fray Juan de Zumárraga and Juan Diego*. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte. Fig. 9 (right) Joaquin Villegas, *God the Father painting the Virgin of Guadalupe on textile*. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte.

In this instance, intriguingly, a textile has become an essential feature of a painting. It is no longer just a support but has become a part of the representation of a vision; as such, moreover, it is itself invested with the miraculous.

<sup>32</sup> Bargellini (as in n. 29), p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87.

## II

## GIVING THE ABSENT THEIR DUE

We have tried in the first Part of our discussion to highlight those early post-Conquest Franciscan circumstances and practices that brought them to use linen in New Spain in special ways and to an unusual degree. The result was a new demand, particularly in the years 1524 to ca.1550, much it probably met by imports. After that period we suppose, though without really knowing, that the demand slackened. But our real interest is less in linens per se, more in linen-backed paintings, or *waterverfdoeken*, large numbers of which were made in Mechelen and shipped from Antwerp. It is worthwhile spelling out what is known in this regard.

Unfortunately no records are known for shipments of *waterverfdoeken* prior to the seventeenth century, though there are various sorts of information from which production in Mechelen can be inferred. Thus, we have guild records giving the numbers of annual acceptances of new master painters and of apprentice painters into the Mechelen guild (Fig. 10). More importantly for estimating total production, there are plausible order-of-magnitude estimates of the absolute number of painters just after the height of the profession's success in the early 1560s and in the early seventeenth century: possibly 159 masters and journeymen in the mid-to-late 1560s, and 69 in the 1620s.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, there is documentary evidence of output per week for artists making small *waterverfdoeken*. This evidence is for a contract of 1632 and, with one minor added assumption, generates the number of small *waterverf* paintings that could be produced in a six-day week, namely  $\approx 3.8$ .<sup>35</sup> Since technique had not altered, this early-seventeenth century result can be applied to the sixteenth century as well as to the 1620s. We must allow for the likelihood that painters did not work full time at painting. A generous allowance for this factor would have the working

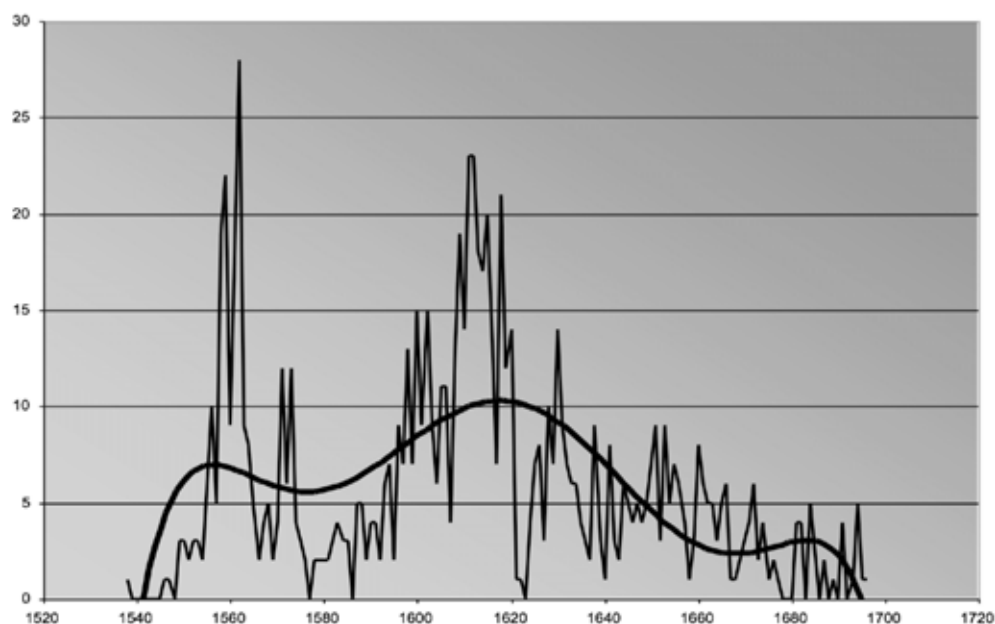
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<sup>34</sup> See Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "The Antwerp-Mechelen Production and Export Complex," in A. Golahny, M.M. Mochizuki and L. Vergana (eds), *In His Milieu. Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 133-147, esp. pp. 136-137.

<sup>35</sup> See Jean Denucé (ed.), *Lettres et documents concernant Jan Breughel I et II* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1934), p. 82.

year be just 25 weeks. Then, combining this assumption with our output-per-week result and using the estimates for total number of painters in Mechelen, total output there could have been as high as 15,105 ( $3.8 \times 25 \times 159$ ) in the mid-to-late 1560s and 6,555 in the 1620s ( $3.8 \times 25 \times 69$ ). Not all paintings made in Mechelen were *waterverfdoeken*, and not all those were small, but these results give us a sense of the upper bound of annual output in each of the two periods.

Fig. 10. Annual additions to the number of Master artists and apprentices, Mechelen guild of St Luke 1540-1700.



Source: Mechelen, Stadsarchief, *DD Notices S1 no. 32*, De Marchi & Van Miegroet 2007 (as in n 34).

As to shipments, there are also some indications that we can bring to bear. Toll registers for Antwerp – port of shipment for Mechelen paintings – have been studied for the years 1543-1545 and 1553. Note, however, that Mechelen paintings are not separately specified in these data. In the two-year period 1543-1545 there were 48 shipments involving paintings from Antwerp to the Iberian Peninsular, amounting to 34% by value of all registered exports of paintings.<sup>36</sup> Reducing this to a yearly average of 24 shipments permits comparison with the

<sup>36</sup> Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market. Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 82-83, graph. 4.

single year 1553. Shipments in 1553 numbered 52, more than double those for the earlier period.<sup>37</sup> These numbers leave unanswered the question how many paintings on linen might have been involved; neither are we able to give figures for linen exports that were intended for New Spain. Nonetheless, they testify to a vibrant traffic.

Good records for Antwerp traders do exist for the seventeenth century, and those for the first half of the century at least inform us about shipments of *watervelf* painting intended for New Spain. The archive we draw on here is that for the partnership of Chrisostomo Van Immerseel and Marie de Fourmestraux. They traded in paintings to New Spain from the early 1620s till 1646. In the five-year period 1627-1631, to take one sample, this firm sent 813 *watervelf* paintings to Seville for transshipment to New Spain, for an annual average of 163. In four such shipments between 1629 and 1643 that we have analyzed in detail, 55 percent of the paintings were *watervelf doeken*.<sup>38</sup> If the same average volume as in these four shipments applied to all the shipments these two sent, they might have shipped a total of 6,000 paintings to Seville and New Spain in the period 1626 to 1646. Applying the 55 percent share of *watervelf doeken* to the whole, this would have meant some 3,300 linen paintings. This is a very substantial number, though only half the potential maximum output in Mechelen for a single year in the 1620s. Recall, however, that Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux were but one firm, whose records happen to have been preserved. The number of Flemish traders in Seville throughout this same period always exceeded two hundred.<sup>39</sup> Not all were directly engaged in the traffic of paintings to New Spain, but enough were to take off a good portion of the potential yearly output of linen paintings from Mechelen.

Trade in *watervelfdoeken* (*lienzos*) continued beyond mid-century, but the records we have examined suggest that, while these continued to comprise a substantial part of the paintings trade in general, that was no longer true of the traffic to New Spain. Among paintings shipped from Antwerp and bound for New Spain small and large copper plates, and oils on canvas, plus *escritorios* with

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> De Marchi and Van Miegroet 2000 (as in n. 2), pp. 81-111, esp. tables 2-5.

<sup>39</sup> Stols (as in n. 3), p. 58.

small copper paintings attached (on which more presently), assume the place formerly occupied by linen paintings.

Nevertheless, to illustrate the ongoing demand for linen paintings per se, if we take just one Mechelen artist, Jan Verhuyck (1622-16781/82), we find the other two Antwerp traders for whom we have seen records both making significant purchases into the 1660s and even later. Thus, in 1658 the partnership of Matthijs Musson and Maria Fourmenois purchased from Verhuyck, up to 22 September of that year, 132 *watervferdoeken*, including seascapes and *plesantien* (scenes of pleasure, celebration, cheerfulness). A week later Verhuyck wrote Musson that he had another ten to twelve dozen in stock should they be needed. And as late as march 1677 he wrote, again in response to an inquiry, that he had linens of the sort Musson had asked about – sea battles, landscapes, *plesantien* and peasant feasts – at various prices.<sup>40</sup> Verhuyck also supplied the major international trader Willem Forchondt I. In 1664, for example, Forchondt bought from him 114 *watervferdoeken*, the subjects ranging from *rencontres* (encounters, adventures) (48) and seascapes (24), to hunt scenes (18) and peasant feasts (24).<sup>41</sup> Average prices varied, but fell always within a range that was at the very bottom of the scale for paintings. The 114 cost Forchondt 1.3 guilders apiece, while Musson-Fourmenois paid 0.6 guilders each for their 132. Again, we should note that in the 1650s Musson-Fourmenois were sending linen paintings to Messina, but none that we know of to New Spain. Forchondt, for his part, in the 1660s was shipping them to Vienna but also not to New Spain. This conclusion for Forchondt may need to be modified following further study of his archive, though for Musson-Fourmenois the shift we note is less likely to require later modification.

Returning to Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux, we are able to trace an almost daily record of orders they placed, using their transactions logs and correspondence. It is interesting that they commissioned and bought from a wide range of artists, including relative unknown as well as prominent artists. Thus there is Gaspar Goossens, Frans Francken II, Damiaan van der Vecken, Daniel de

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<sup>40</sup> Duverger 1969 (as in n. 2), pp. 102, 246, and Denucé (1949, as in n. 2), p. 191.

<sup>41</sup> Denucé 1931 (as in n. 2), pp. XXX,

Coster, Antoon Cosiers, Marten Pepijn and Jan Brueghel II, among others.<sup>42</sup> Not all these artists made linen paintings; both canvases and small copper plates were prominent supports, and among the former the oils of Joos de Momper and his emulators figure prominently (Fig. 11). These too were cheap, involving a restricted range of tones and often enough one or a very few paint layers, many times involving the wet-in-wet technique to reduce time to completion.



Fig. 11. Joos de Momper, *Landscape with Travelers*. Mexico City, Pérez Simón Collection, JAPS Foundation, Mexico City.

Given that the role of the Franciscans in New Spain was diminished after about 1550 what could explain this sustained traffic of *lienzos* through at least the first half of the seventeenth century? No obvious answer comes to mind, though there are many possibilities, including of course the need to replace worn-out linens used in instructional roles and the possibility that *lienzos* had become part of the visual horizon. Cheapness too must have played some role, not least among Franciscans. In this regard it is worth bearing in mind that even after their role was diminished, the Franciscan Province of the Holy Gospel alone numbered at least 115 churches and friaries, while there were 40 more churches transferred to Archbishop Montufar to be run by the diocesan clergy after 1550. These numbers are impressive, even though they are for a single province and thus exclude churches in present-day New Mexico, as well as those in territories that later became independent provinces.<sup>43</sup> But beyond what we know about output in Mechelen and shipments from Antwerp by Van Immerseel and de Fourmenstraux,

<sup>42</sup> Based on unpublished *Rekeningen Courant* (Current Accounts) in the *Insolvente Boedelkamer, Antwerp Stadsarchief 5.Van Immerseel. IB 218. Rekeningen. Rekeningen Courant*. We are indebted to Sandra Van Ginhoven for transcribing these unpublished records.

<sup>43</sup> Marion A. Habig, "The Franciscan Provinces of Spanish North America," *The Americas*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1944), pp. 215-230, esp. p. 220. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor/stable/978064>.

there remains the larger problem that there is simply too little known about linen paintings in New Spain. It is known that some two dozen depicting biblical stories reached Puebla between 1540 and 1556.<sup>44</sup> But this tells us very little, and the lack of information holds even for the particular focus we have adopted, namely the relationship between Franciscans and Flemish linen paintings. Our own account is based on gleanings, and while we clearly believe there is value in having placed them in juxtaposition, it remains a sketch.

At root the problem is one of absence; almost none of the linen paintings made still exists. Linen was a vulnerable support. We have stressed its advantages over paper for scrolls, its cheapness and ease of shipping and transporting overland, but it was also much less durable than canvas or copper. The loss rate for linen paintings therefore was almost certainly many times greater than for these alternative support materials. Compounding this has been the natural inclination of art historians to favor what is viewable over what is missing. As to colonial New Spain in particular, art-historical scholarship from the 1970s onwards has focused on distinctive religious and secular iconographies, accenting subject matter.<sup>45</sup> Missing linen paintings also have no subjects, unless these are known from texts, including correspondence, and traders' shipments. Moreover, focusing on subject matter meant ignoring materiality.

Indeed, absence itself needs to be studied, in all its implications. The plate commemorating de Gante in Ghent (Fig. 12) is a poignant reminder of absence, since not only did De Gante and a cohort of his brothers leave Ghent, but most of the archival records of the Franciscans in that city were destroyed during the French invasion following the Revolution.

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<sup>44</sup> Based on material in the Puebla City Archives, *Indices y extractos del Archivo de Protocolos de Puebla (1540-1556)*, cited by Boyd-Bowman (as in n. 4), p. 351.

<sup>45</sup> Clara Bargellini, "Originality and Invention in the Painting of New Spain," in Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, Clara Bargellini (eds), with an Introduction by Jonathan Brown, *Painting a New World. Mexican Art and Life 1521-1821* (Denver Art Museum- University of Texas Press), Austin, 2004, pp. 78-91, esp. p. 81.





Fig. 12. Another illustration of Franciscan presence through absence, a plaque commemorating Pieter van Gent and the large Franciscan compound in Ghent, destroyed by the French in 1794, inscribed as follows: "From this location, where once stood the Franciscan cloister, departed in 1522 to Mexico Fray Pedro de Gante (Pieter van Gent) friar-minorite. For fifty years he has been an excellent educator, protector and father of the Indians. Ghent 1480-Mexico 1572." (photo authors)

Surviving traders' records, as we have noted, often specify subject matter in a purchase or shipment. However, subjects tend to be generic for cheaper paintings such as linens; the degree of specificity increases with price and is thus more available in records of shipments from the second half of the seventeenth century than the first. But even if this were not so, from an art-historical point of view there is another barrier to studying subject matter from traders' records, for linen paintings. Being cheap, linen paintings were also expendable and, for the Franciscans at least, largely functional. They simply did not have the aura of,

say, the large, exuberant paintings by Rubens and Villalpando made in the service of the Jesuit celebration of the Church Triumphant.<sup>46</sup>

The joint upshot of this mix of causal factors is that extant *waterverf* paintings are both very scarce and lightly attended to. All the more reason to take seriously the surviving traders' records, though knowledge of numbers, size, support and cost price can never substitute for the images themselves.

### III

#### MECHELEN: CENTER FOR PRODUCTION OF LINEN PAINTINGS

We have discussed potential production in Mechelen, but it is worthwhile making the case, without numbers, for considering Mechelen an essential element in the links between linen, linen paintings, New Spain and the Franciscans that were explored in Part I.

Why Mechelen? A small city of Brabant in the sixteenth century, relative to Antwerp, Mechelen was also in a state of decline. After the death of the Burgundian Duke Charles the Bold in 1477, his heiress Mary, betrothed to Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, granted favorable conditions to cities in Flanders, and important institutions that had been placed in Mechelen were removed, including the *parlement* and the Chamber of Accounts. The chief trade of Mechelen had been in luxury woolens, In addition, the Mechelen luxury textiles trade had been weakening since the early fourteenth century. Yet in the 1530s the painters, who had comprised a fraternity, sought permission to reorganize as a guild proper; soon masters were being added at a rapid pace and apprentices in even greater numbers (Fig. 10).

Set against the general situation of the city this sudden turnaround for painters seems improbable. It becomes much less so when set against the demand for linen paintings in New Spain. This demand was responsible for the

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<sup>46</sup> These shifts, as they relate to the Jesuits especially, are described by John W. O'Malley, *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999) and Gauvin Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999).

turnaround cannot be demonstrated, but two things suggest it. First, while there were other cities able to supply fairly inexpensive linen to New Spain, Mechelen – near-neighbor of Antwerp – became in the sixteenth century the single most important center for the production of *watervelf* paintings in Europe. Together with Kortrijk (Courtrai), it succeeded Bruges and, though less dramatically, Ghent. By early in the sixteenth century Antwerp had taken the place of Bruges as *the* great international entrêpot of the north, and linen, though produced in various places, was assembled in towns such as Kortrijk and Izegem, where it was simply bought up by Antwerp dealers for trade purposes.<sup>47</sup> In the seventeenth century, as we have seen, linen paintings made in Mechelen were bought and exported by Antwerp traders, and it seems likely that this system had roots in the sixteenth century.

Second, a special feature of the Mechelen paintings revival is that the years 1540-ca.1566 correspond closely with the period of the early successes of the Franciscans in New Spain. Mechelen's painters had long had close relations with the Franciscans in their own city.<sup>48</sup> A century earlier, on 16 October 1443, they had signed a contract with the Order to conduct annually a service in their chapel, the Chapel of the Magdalene, in the Franciscan church.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Order's compound was located on the road to Antwerp, where there were located in the sixteenth century both prominent dealers and artist families, such as the Verhulsts and the Brueghels. There are also hints that exhibitions and presumably sales of paintings were held in the Franciscan's cloister.<sup>50</sup> Such an

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<sup>47</sup> E. Sabbe, *De Belgische Vlasnijverheid. Deel I: De Zuidnederlandsche Vlasnijverheid tot het verdrag van Utrecht (1713)* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1943), pp. 87, 253-54, 291-92.

<sup>48</sup> Josef Baetens, "Minderbroederskloosters in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden: Kloosterlexikon," *Franciscana: Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de Minderbroeders in de Nederlanden. St. Truiden, België* 39 (1984), pp. 97-124, and Thomas Coomans, "l'Architecture Médiévale des Ordres Mendicants (Franciscains, Dominicains, Carmes et Augustines) en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas," *Révue Belge d'Archéologie de Belgique* 70 (2001), pp. 3-81, with thanks to Robert Mayhew for sharing these references with us.

<sup>49</sup> The original reads: "jaerlycx een mysse te syngene metten orghelen, op Sint Lucas dach, int convent voerscreven, in Sinte Maryen Magdelenen capelle tot salicheyen ons voirscreven vryents Jans van Battele ende te weerdicheyen des eerbaren ambacht der schylders met haren medegesellen [...]. Quoted in Emmanuel Neeffs, *Histoire de la peinture et de la sculpture à Malines*, vol. I, Ghent, 1876, pp. 6-7. We are drawing here on material first published in Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "The Antwerp-Mechelen Production and Export Complex," in A. Golahny, M.M. Mochizuki and L. Vergara (eds.), *In His Milieu. Essays in Nethelandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), pp. 133-147.

<sup>50</sup> This idea was first introduced by Neeffs, who noted that there is much information in the Mechelen archives on "exhibitions of paintings" and that paintings were put on display in the cloister of the monastery:

arrangement would not have been unusual, for the first public outlet for the sale of art in Antwerp was situated in a cloister, in Antwerp's case, that of the Dominicans.<sup>51</sup>

These connections help account for the flourishing situation of the St. Luke's guild up to the iconoclastic riots in 1566 but they must also have made for an acquired and subsequently embedded understanding of precisely the sorts of images required in Mexico. For the Franciscans in Mechelen naturally maintained contact with their brethren in New Spain and no doubt had in their library writings such as those by Fray Diego Valadés. This, as noted earlier, would have significantly reduced the uncertainty of any trader purchasing paintings for that part of the colonial trade, making it less risky and easier to sustain.

It is true that Pedro de Gante was not from Mechelen; he might even have trained as a *waterverf* painter. Neither this detail nor the extent to which Ghent had a tradition in linen painting is known with certainty. What we can say with assurance, however, and this is what counts, the best information as to appropriate imagery came from and via Mechelen, which was an Archbishopric. When new guidelines issued from the Council of Trent (1543-1563) governing correct imagery in the service of Church doctrine and devotional practice, Mechelen was among the first cities in the Netherlands formally to accept them. And it was the Archbishop of Mechelen, Jacques Boone, who ordered destroyed all paintings and statues he considered either indecent or otherwise not in conformity with the Tridentine guidelines.<sup>52</sup>

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"Le local habituel ou s'ouvraient ces galleries était le cloître du préau, au monastère des Frères-Mineurs, dits Rêcollets." Neeffs (as in n. 49), p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> Dan Ewing "Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460-1560: Our Lady's Pand," *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), pp. 558-584, and Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the Market*, as in n. X.

<sup>52</sup> R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 159.

## KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM THE TEXTILES TO THE PAINTINGS TRADE

We suggested in our Introduction that the techniques of trading textiles transferred readily to paintings thus facilitating the trans-Atlantic movement of paintings from centers such as Mechelen and Antwerp. Up to this point our argument has been that in the realm of religious imagery there had to have been considerable matching of knowledge and understanding on both sides of the Atlantic. This seems to stand up. Here therefore we shall concentrate on the issue of commonality of practice between the textiles and the paintings trade.

Of the traders in paintings whom we have mentioned, all but one had a background in the textiles business. This is true of both Chrisostomo Van Immerseel, who trained in and subsequently inherited his father's textiles trading company, and of his wife Marie de Fourmestraux, whose family were in the textiles trade in Lille and Rouen. The same holds for Willem Forchond. It was not the case with Matthijs Musson, though the first husband of his second wife, Maria Fourmenois had been a trader in cloth. This preponderance of a textiles background in the group, small though the sample is, may not be accidental, not just because textiles were produced in so many towns in the Southern Netherlands, but because in terms of logistics there was little that had to change in order for paintings to be added as a product line. This is a case of what economists sometimes call economies of scope: the know-how, capital requirements and organizational framework of one line of business apply fairly readily to another. To trade in textiles or in paintings required working capital to buy product and wait for the returns from its sale, a network of trustworthy agents in ports of transshipment and final destination, a knowledge of the necessary documentation for importing and exporting and of the rates of duty applicable, plus a knowledge of how the product is best packed, of insurance and of how to price. These common elements did not apply to all products. Both tapestry and print production, for example, required relatively heavy up-front capital invest-

ments (looms, and presses for the one, copper plates for the other), and in cartoons and drawings.<sup>53</sup>

There was, however, greater uncertainty affecting paintings at the selling end. Prints were usually based closely on known originals; books were ordered by title, from specific printers; lace by pattern; linens by place of origin (*Olandilla*, *Audinarda*, *Esguan*), while origin connoted known characteristics such as fineness, weight, whiteness, and so on. But paintings, even of a specified and standard subject, could vary in a thousand subtle ways from artist to artist, in points ranging from design to composition, coloration to finish.

Information about local preferences in imagery in Spain, whether it was the court culture in Madrid or the urban merchant culture of Seville, was readily available to a merchant through contact with other merchants and through commission agents and travelers. The same information channels were available for Nueva España, though communication was less regular and took longer, and the information received was scarcer and less easily verified. Allowing for those factors affecting the amount, timeliness and trustworthiness of information, however, the process itself was similar. Information from contacts could be obtained either in Antwerp or Seville or directly from agents in Puebla or Mexico City. As regards preferences for religious imagery, Antwerp even had an advantage. As model Catholic outpost, Antwerp enjoyed unusually direct links with Counter Reformation culture in the person of Spanish official and Church representatives: administrators and military officers; and the city was full of clergy and members of religious orders.

Yet even, and in some respects especially, in the supplying of doctrinal and devotional paintings, there could be problems. We have noted that at a certain point copying the *Virgin of Guadalupe* in New Spain became virtually

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<sup>53</sup> On the financial commitment of tapestry dealers, see Lorne Campbell, "The Art Market in the Southern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century," *Burlington Magazine* CXVIII (1976), p 194; and on the print industry, Jan Van der Stock, *Printing Images in Antwerp. The Introduction of Printmaking in a City: Fifteenth Century to 1585* (Rotterdam, 1998), esp. p. 144. Koen Brosens, "The organisation of seventeenth-century tapestry production in Brussels and Paris: a comparative view," *De zeventiende eeuw: cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief* 20 (2004), pp. 264-284 and Koen Brosens, *European Tapestries in the Art Institute of Chicago* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008). On smaller tapestries, see Wim Mertens, *Meubeltapisserieën in de Nederlanden en Frankrijk vanaf de late middeleeuwen tot 1900: aspecten van productie, iconografie, distributie en gebruik* (Ph.D. Leiden University, 2008).

impossible, because the Church insisted that copies change nothing in the original, miraculous image. Such strictures eventually moved painters to apply for relief, resulting in a certain relaxation of the rules.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless restrictions remained in place, causing painter's guilds in New Spain to become more closed and more careful in controlling content as well as quality than in Antwerp or even, we suppose, Mechelen.

In fact, in Nueva España no Spanish or Indian painter could create or copy any image or altarpiece without Church approval.<sup>55</sup> That applied also to imported imagery. In keeping with this, later in the century there was even inspection by Jesuits of paintings being off-loaded at Veracruz. Knowledge of local regulations, therefore, as well as local pricing and locally preferred subject matter, was crucial to successful exporting to New Spain. None of this, we have urged, was knowledge that was especially difficult to obtain. Apart from anything else, Church restrictions as well as Franciscan, Dominican and Jesuit visual preferences were publicized repeatedly and must have been well understood. Testimony to this is that in the seventeenth century orders given to the traders known to us for the New Spain trade contained almost no specific instructions other than as to size, support and subject. The rest could be safely assumed. It is possible that restrictions governing religious imagery were relatively relaxed by this time, but the likelihood that earlier generations of artists knew the rules and understood all that they implied is high. As to copying in New Spain itself, moreover, it is telling that the largest numbers of images found in late-colonial Toluca households were of the *Virgin of Guadalupe*, one of the very images whose copying was in principle almost prohibitively circumscribed.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The new regulations (*Ordenanzas de Pintores y Doradores*) modified the all-encompassing influence on the production of imagery the Church had obtained after the *Constituciones Sinodales* of 1555. See Norma Lovera de Navarro (as in n. X), p. 72. The issue is explored more fully by Rogelio Ruiz Gomar in "Unique Expressions. Painting in New Spain," in Donna Pierce, Rogelio Ruiz Gomar and Clara Bargellini (eds.), with introduction by Jonathen Brown, *Painting a New World. Mexican Art and Life 1521-1821* (Denver Art Museum and University of Texas Press, Austin, 2004), pp. 47-77.

<sup>55</sup> Toussaint (as in n. 7), pp. 132-34.

<sup>56</sup> Stephanie Wood, "Adopted Saints: Christian Images in Nahua Testaments of Late-Colonial Toluca," *The Americas* 47 (1991), pp. 17-24. Recall that the Antwerp equivalent of this image, the *Apocalyptic Madonna*, was widely copied there.

Along these same lines, one also finds innovatory religious imagery emerging in Antwerp in the first decades of the seventeenth century, by artists such as Rubens and Jan Brueghel I. Rubens and Brueghel of course enjoyed powerful Church and secular protection and their own Catholic credentials were unquestionable, but their joint religious images marked out a path of such striking aesthetic and persuasive appeal that it would have been difficult to reject them as gratuitously inventive and thus possibly suspect. Take, for example, Brueghel's insertion of a flower garland into a devotional image of *The Virgin and Child* (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Pieter Paul Rubens and Jan I Brueghel, *Madonna in a Flower Garland*, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Rubens's Virgin, contained by the garland, is a sweet, gentle mother, full of grace, and thus also crowned by Heaven. She is both earthly and transcendent. Functionally, in the image, the garland serves to separate the two spheres, yet it also contains in itself both sides of the Virgin's nature: Brueghel's flowers are completely natural but at the same time exquisite, persuasive reminders of the perfection of Gods' creation and purposes. Moreover, the garland accomplishes this complicated double task in an appealing, wholly naturalistic way, quite unlike the often clumsy interposition of an encasing shell or preposterous supporting cloud formation common in Spanish representations of the Immaculate Conception. The Rubens-Brueghel composition walks a fine line in collapsing the



distinction between the artist as pure craftsman and as instrument of doctrinal persuasion, yet this particular invention was tacitly approved, appropriated and



adapted to the taste and demand of specific markets. In Seville, Juan Valdés de Leal turned the *Madonna with Garland* into a saint within a garland (Fig. 14), and Melchior Perez Holguin adapted it into a *Young Maria spinning*, especially for Hispano-American viewers (Buenos Aires, Museo de Arte Hispanoamericano Isaac Fernandez Blanco, inv. No. 2127).

Fig. 14. Juan Valdés de Leal, *Saint Thadeus in a Flower Garland*, Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos.

Outside the realm of religious images, unsurprisingly, there were also subjects and compositions in which Antwerp artists enjoyed a certain comparative advantage over Spanish and colonial painters. These types include still lifes and landscapes and landscapes peopled with small figures, involving either religious or secular narratives. The ability to do small figures came out of an earlier illuminator tradition, in which the Flemish excelled. There was high demand for such paintings. It is true that pictures of the Rubens-Brueghel sort are from the early seventeenth century and thus constitute no evidence for or against the proposition that religious strictures affecting paintings in New Spain in the second half of the sixteenth century were applied less rigorously than their formulation would imply. But that does not exclude as irrelevant much earlier Flemish inventions, including religious scenes comprising small figures in a landscape.

## THE ADVANTAGE OF SCALE

We have noted that traders had prior knowledge of the techniques necessary to traffic in paintings, and we have argued that they must have had knowledge also of the strictures and demands covering religious images. On both counts they were able to function with success as intermediaries in the paintings trade. Nonetheless, delays were common and hard to predict, risks remained high and thus also the cost of insurance, and for those without trusted agents on the spot in New Spain uncertainties as to what exactly was wanted remained simply because society was evolving in ways and at a pace difficult to discern in timely manner at a distance. In this context, we wish to argue that the sheer scale of their operations enabled a pair such as Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux to minimize some of the risks and the possible impact of uncertainties. In this respect, traders were differently equipped than were sedentary dealers. In particular, traders can spread risk, whereas a dealer can only specialize in the kind of artists and art he or she carries. This form of narrowing actually raises the exposure of dealers when economic circumstances alter and tastes are shifting.

Given the unavoidable risks and potential difficulties associated with long-distance trading, however, Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux hit upon what must be judged an optimal organizational form. Marie remained in Seville, while Chrisostomo traveled between the two cities and spent long periods in Antwerp, placing orders for textiles and paintings, overseeing their production, and attending to packing and shipping. Being on the spot in Seville Marie had immediate access to the latest news and currents there, and from across the Atlantic, reflecting preferences. Her market intelligence, of course, included information about prices and the general strength of demand, and she conveyed all these things to Chrisostomo in letters, translating them into advice on what to buy and in what price range.

Early on, for example, Marie reported that battle scenes on panel by Sebastian Vranckx were not selling in Seville. The work was painstakingly done, but was simply too expensive for local buyers. She urged Chrisostomo instead to

commission in Mechelen one hundred *waterverfdoeken* (*lienzos*) with sieges and battle scenes at prices not to exceed six guilders apiece.<sup>57</sup> Chrisostomo, for his part, could tell his wife about conditions, availability, and so on, in Antwerp, and advise her on possible ventures she could set up to secure them more ready cash, always in short supply, for investing in paintings. Thus in August 1634, though paintings were “now very cheap,” Chrisostomo had already expended his immediately available funds on his customary artists Antoon Cossiers, Jan Brueghel II and Marten Pepijn.<sup>58</sup> He therefore asked Marie to persuade one of their co-principals in Seville, Levinio Cornelio, to arrange a shipment of gold leather from the New World to Antwerp. There he, Chrisostomo, would act as agent for the sale of the leather (used for wall hangings) and with the revenues he could take advantage of the favorable conditions of supply in paintings at the time. Marie should also induce Cornelio to advance Chrisostomo 600 guilders in anticipation of a successful sale, so that he could buy up pictures and ship them more quickly.<sup>59</sup>

Good as their information and knowledge-exchange system was for Seville, however, Marie and Chrisostomo, as noted, had only relatively imperfect, and lagged, knowledge about sales conditions and buyer preferences in New Spain. There were the sporadic missives from the Flemish colony in Mexico City, though the Van Immerseel enterprise also maintained flexible relationships with agents on the spot. Ideally, they would receive direct orders with specifics from Mexico City, as was the case with Paul de Chaves with whom Chrisostomo's brother, Guillermo was corresponding and who placed orders for large amounts

<sup>57</sup> Stadsarchief, Antwerp, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 214, *Letter of Marie de Fourmestraux to Chrisostomus Van Immerseel* (24 April, 1629). See also Stols (as in n. 3), p. 171.

<sup>58</sup> “de 200 es al uytgegeven .. aan antonio coussiers, breugel, en puppyn [...]” (I have spend the 200 guilders to pay Coussies, Breughel, and Pepijn). Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204 (3) 13, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (14 August 1634), fol. 155v.

<sup>59</sup> Chrisostomo added that for his trouble he would content himself with half of the profit from the transaction, since he would be bearing half the risk. The capital, however, would be all Cornelio's! His letter to Marie reads: “.het retoer hier gevuechelyck in/ schilderien kunnen besteden die nu hier gansch goeden coope syn int hem belieft/ mach hem nu hier ben van deze occasie dienen. ick sal my voor myne moyte met/ de helft vande winste contenteren ende mede den riesgo halff loopen [...]” Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204 (3) 13, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (14 August 1634), fol. 155v.

of “lienzos al temple” to be shipped to New Spain in 1616.<sup>60</sup> In response to the associated uncertainty, the enterprise pursued a strategy that was both prudent and sophisticated. As we have discussed in detail elsewhere, they appear to have treated each of their shipments as if it were an investment portfolio, varying the composition of the “assets” (their paintings) by size, subject, type of support, medium, artist and price. Without abandoning lines they knew were selling well, they so arranged these variables that the average price per painting was roughly constant across shipments, though differing somewhat between “large” and “small” shipments (roughly 200 and 100 paintings, respectively). Assuming that they aimed at the same percentage markup on costs across shipments, this strategy would have given them a more or less constant rate of return on the cost of their paintings. This approach seems analogous to that of a financial portfolio manager seeking a given target rate of return across all available investment instruments.<sup>61</sup>

Such a strategy was no protection against the wholly unexpected, which is how cash flow problems often arose. Timing too was difficult to manage. There were always new shipments to be contracted for, and a delayed sale or a slow remittance of profits from previous shipments, or a bad exchange rate, could mean straightened circumstances at the very moment when cash was most needed. But to return to the unpredictable, hence uninsurable, here is an episode involving an “Act of God” and a response that further confirms the ingenuity of Van Immerseel in the face of economic constraints.

In August 1634, recall, he had found cheap paintings available but lacked the funds with which to procure them. A month later, it seems, paintings could still be bought in Antwerp at “reasonable prices.”<sup>62</sup> But around the turn of the year, Chrisostomo informed Marie that paintings on large copper plates were in

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<sup>60</sup> IB 216, *Letter of Paul de Chaves (Mexico City) to Guillermo Van Immerseel* (25 January 1616). See also Stols (as in n. 3), p. 149, note 47.

<sup>61</sup> More detail, and the basis for our tentatively adopting this interpretative hypothesis, is to be found in De Marchi and Van Miegroet 2000 (as in n. 2), pp. 81-111. There we note that the rough constancy in average price per painting is in fact disturbed by an upward trend in prices over time as the partners increased the share per shipment of more expensive paintings.

<sup>62</sup> “... in schilderien te emploieren die men hier tot nu tot redelycke pryse te vinden es [...]”. Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204 (3) 13, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (12 September 1634), fol. 157.

short supply, partly because Marten Pepijn had died.<sup>63</sup> Answering Marie's urgent request for paintings for New Spain, he informed her that they were no longer as cheap as she might imagine from his earlier communications. It is also instructive to learn that the quantities of *lienzos* he needed immediately for export (200-300) were no longer obtainable.<sup>64</sup> The problem was a sudden drop in supply, directly related to an episode of the plague which, in the course of 1635, killed great numbers of Antwerp's artists. Not two or three hundred paintings were to be had, Chrisostomo reported, as early as January 1635. The shortage of paintings in the spot market also put large copper plates and battle scenes out of his price range, forcing him to visit additional studios in search of cheaper work. But he was in a hurry at this point, perhaps because he intended to depart Antwerp and its epidemic, and insisted on buying completed paintings, stating that he was unwilling even to make forward contracts for *watervrdoeken*.<sup>65</sup>

This didn't prevent Van Immerseel from being forward looking. He told Marie that he was sampling several ateliers simultaneously, "to see their prices and to judge the appropriateness of their product, so as to be able to assess which will serve us best in the future."<sup>66</sup> In doing this, he put studios on notice about his preferences as to subject matter, size, finish, and especially price. With taste and subject-matter in Spain and Nueva Españā relatively straight-

<sup>63</sup> "...de groote/ laminas syn qualyck te becomen door dien den man/ gestorven is die deselve coppierde dan sal eenige/ andere de helft cleender coopen ende doen laeden [...]" Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (17 January 1635), fol. 167. This repeats a similar message to Marie of 9 December, 1634, when he wrote that the man who made the copies of large panels (*laminas*), the brother of one Hendrik Verbruggen, who had painted the *principaelen* for him, had died and he knew of no one who could do the copying work as cheaply (... den man die de coppien/ van de groote laminas gemaect heeft te weten den broeder van henricq verbrucq (?)/ die de principalen schilderde is gestorven ende en wete nu niemant/ sulcx soo goeden coop saude aen te werven. toch salder noch naer vememen [...]. Antwerp, Standsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (9 December 1634), fol. 163v.

<sup>64</sup> "...en is hier soo goeden/ coop niet als meynt. waterverve doecken op tyt te/ coopen is myne meynige niet noch men saude in antwerpen/ nu cont geen 2. a 300 doecken seffens te coop vinden soo/ datter weynige mede sal brengen [...]" Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (17 January 1635), fol. 168.

<sup>65</sup> "...voor de batallien die groot syn/ en vinde my met geen gelt want die veel costen/ ick ben genoch lettende op de groote laminassen. dan/ vinde geene comoditeyt van prysen als de voorgaande/ als op de been ben sal noch differente schilders huysen gaen/ besoecken om van alles wetenschap ende experiencie/ nemen [...]" Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (17 January 1635), fol. 168.

<sup>66</sup> "...ick hebbe doen maecken by differente meesters van/ elcx wat ende weynich om aldaer van elcx handelinge te/ siene. ende naer de prysen ende deucht te jugeren welck/ ons in toecomende best dienen sal [...]" Antwerp, Standsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (17 January 1635), fol.167.

forward, price was the one area where the Van Immerseel-de Fourmestraux enterprise really had to be competitive. In any event, Chrisostomo's response to the crisis seems to have worked. In March 1635, and still in Antwerp, he reported that he had acquired plates from various masters, at various prices, giving himself and Marie a basis on which to consider what would serve them best in the future.<sup>67</sup> While assiduous searching had yielded some affordable works, Chrisostomo still lacked the means to ship them.<sup>68</sup> Yet even then he resisted putting short term interest ahead of the future strength of the business. Marie, herself pressured for cash, repeatedly asked Chrisostomo to send the Breughel *principaelen* to Seville, where they would sell easily. He refused, arguing that they would generate more profit if kept in Antwerp, where they would be available for copying as demand required.<sup>69</sup> Maintaining capital intact and thereby retaining the room to maneuver on which viability rested, emerge (as they should) as fundamentals of this partnership's business strategy.

## THE ADVANTAGE OF COPPER

Copper shared many of the advantages of linen as a support of paintings shipped to New Spain. It was easily packed and transported and resistant under the rigors not only of overland transport but also to a climate of temperature extremes and humidity, the traditional enemies of *lienzos*. Letters to the Antwerp-based dealers Matthijs Musson and Maria Fourmenois from their agents in Cadiz in the second half of the seventeenth century sometimes complained that the painted copper plates glued onto *escritorios* (Fig. 16) had come loose. But this

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<sup>67</sup> "...ick hebbe al sommige goede laminessen byeen vergeirt/ van differente pryzen en meesters, om ons aldaer wesende te beraeden/ wat sorte ons int toecomende best dienen sal [...]" (I have acquired here quite a few good laminas at various prices by different masters, so that we can determine in the future what will sell best [in Seville en New Spain]). Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (30 March 1635), fol. 173v.

<sup>68</sup> "...de schilderyen en schriftorye die hier hebben en can niet versenden sonder gelt [...]" (I can not ship the paintings and escritorio to you without cash). Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (26 April 1635), fol. 176.

<sup>69</sup> "...de principaelen en dienen in geenderley manieren (?) gesonden wy/ sullen der hier beter proffeyt mede doene in die daernaer noch meer/ te doen coppieren [...]" (we will not ship principals, for we will make profit by keeping them here to have them copied). Chrisostomo added: "later you will appreciate the wisdom of keeping the principals here.." Antwerp, Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, IB 204, *Letter of Chrisostomus Van Immerseel to Marie de Fourmestraux* (17 January 1635), fol. 173v.

was not a complaint against copper, and the corrective was simply to be more generous in the initial application of glue. Nor was dissatisfaction expressed with the painted surfaces, which is not surprising since paint adheres well to a properly prepared copper surface. Many paintings on copper for New Spain were also small and, when sent without frame, were as easy as linens to transport. Like linens, too, paintings on copper were quickly made: it is straightforward to use fine brushes, and there is less drag than with canvas, conserving time even when meticulous detail is required. Painted copper plates can also present stunning, enamel-like visual effects, with strong colors that would not have been wholly lost in the dim interiors of spaces constructed so as to exclude the glare of powerful sunlight.

Nor were copper plates as expensive as is often thought. There were several reasons for this. First, those used for painting were thinner than those prepared for engraving.<sup>70</sup> That they were produced by the same craftspeople who manufactured and delivered plates to engravers and printers also meant that specialized, hence more efficient, labor was involved in preparing them. Finally, often traders themselves supplied the copper plates to their artists, and their “bulk” buying must have meant lower unit prices than an artist could achieve.<sup>71</sup> As to relative cost, study of purchases by Musson and Fourmenois suggests that aside from quarter-*doecken*, canvases were more expensive than a whole range of copper plates. This holds for the very popular *passie* plates (used for depictions for the Passion, quite often after Rubens (Fig. 15), saints, and other devotional subjects), *griecken* (favored for mythological, but also for religious narratives), and even for so-called “one-guilder plates” (actual cost circa 0.7 guilder).

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<sup>70</sup> Average prices of copper plates are detailed in some of the documents collected by Denucé 1949 (as in n. 2) and Duverger (as in n. 2). These bear out in direct fashion the inferences made concerning cost by Jørgen Wadum, “Antwerp Copper Plates,” in *Copper as Canvas. Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper, 1575-1775*, Cat. Exh. Phoenix Art Museum and Mauritshuis, The Hague, Phoenix and Oxford 1999, pp. 99-101.

<sup>71</sup> In 1631, for example, Van Immerseel supplied Frans Francken II with four copper plates and four ebony frames for a total value of 36 guilders; and in 1632 he ordered plates from the engraver Philippe Malery and had these sent to Adriaen van Stalbeem’s atelier, and from platemaker David Michielsens for delivery to Jan Bruegel II, in 1632. See Denucé 1934 (as in n. 35), pp. 59-60, and Wadum (as in n. 70), p. 98.



Fig 15. Antwerp Workshop, *Copper Plate made for export with the Deposition of the Cross after Rubens*. Calahorra (La Rioja), Museo de la Catedral.

Still on the cost side, we might note too that traders adopted a careful practice in dealing with their artists, paying an advance but thereafter in tranches, according to the progress of the work, thus reducing the risk that money might be spent with nothing in return. Thus in 1631 we find Van Immerseel listing an advance of 9.13 guilders to Frans Francken II, and a second payment a few weeks later of 26.6 guilders, each of these being roughly 25% of the final cost.<sup>72</sup> As to shipments of paintings on copper, there is a striking shift between the first and second halves of the seventeenth century. In the four shipments by Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux that we have studied closely (1629 x 2, 1642 and 1643), the total number of paintings with specified support was 586 and the percentage of copper paintings rises from zero to a modest fraction: 0% to 0.1% to 7.3% to 11%.<sup>73</sup> Contrast this with seven shipments to Cadiz by Musson and Fourmenois for the period March 1664 to July 1667. For one thing, the total number of paintings is much smaller, at 170. For another, although there were no laminas in one shipment, in the others they averaged

<sup>72</sup> Antwerp Stadsarchief, *Insolvente Boedelkamer*, 5. Van Immerseel. IB 218 Rekeningen, *Rekenigen Courant Crisostomo van Immerseel 1609-1643*, p. 13v, p. 16v, transcribed by Sandra van Ginhoven. The original reads: In 1631 [month not specified] “gl. 9.13 betaelt voor order van Francois Franck voor vier ebben lijsten en 4 plaetten tot schilderyen die hij te maecken heeft [...] and on 20 August 1631, “ gl. 24.3.4. betaelt aen Francois Franck voor de reste dat hem quam van 6 coppijen en 2 originelle met de plaeten [...].

<sup>73</sup> The 7.3 figure is an average of 5.2 and 9.4. The true percentage cannot be calculated because there are 8 paintings said to be *tabla y laminas* without further specification. We have assumed all of these were *laminas* or none were, to provide a range, and then averaged.



75%, a fraction almost seven times larger than the highest percentage reached by Van Immerseel and de Fourmestraux. Only one shipment by Musson-Fourmenois in this period contained *lienzos*. We have not yet studied closely the Forchondt records, but these apparent changes – a shift to smaller numbers of paintings and a much higher component of laminas – raise tantalizing questions.

In terms of the uses of paintings on copper, there is more of a visual record than in the case of linens. Many churches in Mexico hold tiny copper paintings set into the walls of side chapels and sometimes in an apse surrounding the altar. This makes them strict complements in the economic sense to both frescoes and to the linen hangings in churches discussed in Part I. It follows that at least for religious subject matter copper paintings shared to a degree in the same demand-side forces that operated for *lienzos*. The notion of strict complementarity can be applied also in reverse: that there are as many *laminas* in churches as there are is evidence for the existence of their contemporary but now missing complement, *lienzos*. We have stressed that both *lienzos* and small paintings on copper were relatively cheap, and this must have contributed positively to their complementary purchase and use in New Spain. However, there was also an independent demand: painted copper panels were often attached as decoration, sometimes in complete series, to the small drawers and doors (outside and in) of *escritorios*. In such cases, fourteen and even more paintings at once were the strict complements of a single piece of functional furniture (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Antwerp ca. 1640, *Novelty furniture with copper plate paintings for export (Escritorio)*  
The Hague, Collectie Haags Gemeentemuseum.

## CONCLUSION

We began by showing that linens and paintings on linen were closely linked to the Franciscan Order in the early decades of post-Conquest New Spain. Our particular contribution in this respect has been to bring together disparate bits of information concerning how linens were used. That is almost a forensic exercise, since linen was vulnerable and all but a few linen paintings, in particular, have disappeared. But there is more known than at first appears, and we have drawn on contemporary Franciscan writings, notably Fray Diego Valadés' *Retorica Cristiana* [1579], which contains both contemporary commentary on use and clarifying engravings on this point.

If so few linen paintings have survived, can we really be sure that their presence and influence was significant? We addressed this question in Part II by invoking estimates of the artist population, and their potential output in Mechelen, main supplier of these paintings to Antwerp. The production capability, even after Mechelen's artist population was reduced from its peak in the mid-sixteenth century, seems likely to have run to several thousands per year. Traders such as

Chrisostomo Van Immerseel and Marie de Fourmestraux in the first half of the seventeenth century continued to buy up and ship large numbers of linen paintings to Spain and New Spain. Demand for linen paintings by Antwerp traders for linen paintings in the second half of the seventeenth century did not dry up, but it seems that much less was shipped to New Spain than in the sixteenth century or in the first half of the seventeenth. The records we have viewed show increased demand for more expensive paintings: those on copper plates, large and small, and for canvases of all sizes. As noted too *Waterverfdoeken* (lienzos) seem to have all but disappeared from shipments to Cadiz, the de facto port of departure for the Americas after c. 1650. If closer study sustains this conclusion, it heightens the need to have more information about how preferences in New Spain, both secular and religious shifted over time, and why.

Those issues were beyond our scope here, but in Part III we did explore a number of collateral aspects. For example, we drew attention to the fact that in the sixteenth century Flemish *lienzos* and *laminas* appear to have been deployed in colonial Mexican churches as complements. We also argued that the links between painters in Mechelen and the Franciscans were close enough to guarantee awareness by artists as to what was required by the end-users in New Spain. Traders in paintings, we suggested, were also in a position to know with some accuracy and assurance what sorts of paintings would sell. That is to say, they were fully aware of guidelines and constraints on religious paintings, though Antwerp artists may have enjoyed somewhat greater freedom than their counterparts in New Spain. In terms of the difficulties faced by traders – delays, uncertainties, Acts of God – we showed that the two whose records we have for the early seventeenth century, pursued sensible, effective strategies towards ensuring their survival.

An urgent need is to bring supply and demand aspects of the trans-Atlantic trade in paintings together. We have underlined that need by stressing how substantial was the production of linen paintings in Mechelen. Potential output there would not have been as great as appears to have been the case without a

matching demand originating in Spain and New Spain, among others. However, since most of the visual evidence no longer exists in New Spain (or elsewhere), it will be necessary to tease out demand from textual evidence. Fortunately, though we did not invoke it here, Antwerp traders' records for much of the seventeenth century contain details on the support, size, price and subject matter of paintings, so that it is possible to begin distinguishing different categories of buyer by income, educational background and religious affiliation, and to observe how these altered over time.<sup>74</sup> A useful next step would be to link this information to sources in Mexico such as inventories, dealer and customs records, and shipping documents. These can then be traced backwards in time.

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<sup>74</sup> Strictly speaking, traders' records contain prices (from which, however, one can infer *relative* income status), the preponderance of mythological and Roman-historical subjects (from which, perhaps, it is legitimate to infer relative degree of humanistic background and taste), and specific religious subjects (from which one can infer Dominican or Jesuit preferences, for example). Clearly any such distinctions among clients are merely tentative, but they help shape new questions and hypotheses.