

Globalization of The Adoration: Pilgrimage, Trade, and Shifting Perspectives within The
Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1480-85)

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Maiana L. Wells
Department of Art History, DAAP
Dr. Anastasia Nurre
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A sense of place resonates from the works of Flemish artist, Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy (a. 1480-1510). Vibrant and reverent, his works remain especially pertinent to the development of discussions relating to topics of globalization, pilgrimage, and broadly, the unification of secular and religious artworks. Throughout the 15th century, depictions of the Adoration of the Magi began taking new forms. Merchants, pilgrims, and wealthy individuals were all part of a major shift in globalization, and this is reflected through the *Adoration of the Magi* (c. 1480-85) by the Master of the The Master of Legend of Saint Lucy, specifically. Rather than abiding to a strictly European vision, the artist now includes elements which reflect the culmination of trade in a Northern European context. While an emphasis on religion is still foremost at this time, inclusion of a landscape or “locale” creates intimate worship. Rather than creating a completely idealized scene, the artist employs historically relevant material as a reminder that religious activity happens in relatable contexts. By considering various depictions of the Adoration of the Magi between 1400 to 1485, I establish that the portrayal of the Magus within The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy’s painting directly reflects the economic realities in Bruges throughout the same period. In turn, my close examination of marketplace standards alongside themes of pilgrimage, shifting racial ideals, and a growing interest in secular subjects, offers new insight into 15th century adaptations of the Adoration.

Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy is somewhat undiscovered within the canon. Scholar Max J. Friedländer recognized the artist based on an altarpiece within the church of Saint James in Bruges, Belgium. The paintings reflects the life of Saint Lucy (c. 1480), hence the painter’s assigned name.¹ The artist’s hand is attributed to around thirty paintings, with a potential identity of Jan de Hervy, who painted in Bruges in a parallel timeline to the Master of the Legend of

¹ Hand, John Oliver, and Martha Wolff. *Early Netherlandish Painting*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. (Washington, D.C., 1986): 177.

Saint Lucy.² Though the painter's works cover a variety of religious themes, *Adoration of the Magi* tells a familiar story within the Bible. Also known as the Nativity, this piece depicts the biblical story in which three men³ are guided East by a star in order to offer gifts to the newborn Christ. It is said King Herrod called upon the Magi "secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared" (7). Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh are delivered by the hands of the Magus as an offering to Jesus, beginning with Melchoir. He is followed in line by Casper⁴ and finally, Balthasar. Throughout the late 15th century, depictions of the Adoration typically placed Melchoir as a representation of Europe, with Casper and Balthasar hailing from Asia and Africa, respectively.

Rather than the central focal point aligning with the Christ Child and Mary, as typical of this period, the painting (fig. 1) extends onward and into the landscape; driven by the diagonal lines of architecture. There is an emphasis on the scene as a narrative, as opposed to solely on the individuals.⁵ Outlined are three distinct areas which confront various individuals, beginning with Mary on the left; the newborn Christ in her lap. Joseph, depicted as an elderly man, stands behind Mary and the Christ Child. The North Star, used to guide the travellers, hangs above the Romanesque shelter. The first of the Magi, Melchior, presents the Virgin with a golden flask. He kneels beside the two; hat placed on a cloth below. His gaze illuminates as he looks towards Christ. Mary is dressed in a royal blue garment, typical of depictions at this time.⁶ Two animals, a donkey and oxen, stand in the rear of this quadrant. It is important to note the establishment of the crumbling structure as sacred ground. To the right of Melchoir, a polished, yet cracking pillar stands. He wears a crimson red tunic; belted and fashioned with gold detail, extending onto his

² Ibid.

³ Referred to as the Three Wise Men, in some contexts.

⁴ Also referred to as Gasper.

⁵ Mary Ann Scott. "Dutch, Flemish, and German Paintings in the Cincinnati Art Museum." *Cincinnati Art Museum Publications* (1987), 86.

⁶ See Mary's blue drapery in Fig. 2 and Fig 3.

matching cape. Melchior's presence near the column emphasizes Christ's position as the cornerstone of the "fellow people" as outlined in Ephesians 2:19-21.⁷ Each Magus passes through the sacred entry to Christ's position in the nativity. Casper stands as the next Magi, who is positioned centrally in the structure. The Master of Saint Lucy paints the edifice with open lines of sight in order to emphasize a view of the countryside extending into a hazy, blue horizon. The placement of travelers surrounded by lush, terrestrial countryside implements the idea of sanctity within a familiar setting. Instead of painting individuals in a scene reminiscent of ancient Judea, they are embedded within a local context. The painter employs atmospheric perspective in this area.⁸ The distant lands mimic a transition from land to sea, implying both travel and trade. Casper is usually depicted as an individual of Asian descent. Compared to Melchior, the central Magi does appear to represent a country outside of Europe; his Phrygian cap⁹ evoking designs partial to Eastern regions, specifically Persia.¹⁰ Casper's deep blue cape is a symbolic inclusion of his status; a reminder of Mary's presence. It is important to note Casper's clothing, though different from Melchior's, still imbues wealth. He, too, wears red. The "Blood of Christ" permeates the composition, as reflected in the crimson garments worn by the Magi and other travelers.¹¹

Balthasar stands near the first point of entry into the sanctified structure. His appearance, though still heavily Europeanized, contrasts with other depictions of Black individuals at this

⁷ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In let him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple of the Lord.* - Ephesians 2:19-21.

⁸ Atmospheric perspective begins to rise in popularity due to the Ars Nova movement, ca. 1420-40. Translucent layers of oil paint and dense copper pigments allowed for increased depth and attention to natural detail within the landscape.

⁹ "The Phrygian cap is a soft conical headgear with a forward bent top that fits the head, also known by the Mithraic cap and the sacrificial cap. All conical hats form has their names from the term "Mithradic" or 'Mithraic' in reference to god *Mittra* or Mithra."

¹⁰ Ahmad Khalaf, "Caps and Identity: Origin and Interpretation of Phrygian Caps in Coptic Art," *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management* 5, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 240.

¹¹ Associated with the Eucharist, specifically the blood shed by Jesus Christ during his crucifixion.

time. The image of a Black King derived from the passage of Pseudo-Bede¹² Dr. Yona Pinson believes Netherlandish painters adopted the Black King in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and this would inevitably peak in the 15th century. In the later Middle Ages, darker complexions were associated with the sin of Luxuria.¹³ In 1464, a celebration¹⁴ of the King's relic in Cologne led to their “clearing” of negative associations with any of the three Kings, and thus the Moorish individual would oblige under this decision. The transfer of the relic of the Kings to Cologne disengaged the pejorative connotation once associated with Balthasar, though they resided as spoils of war. Due to the relic's newfound presence in Germany, the Low Countries celebrated the African King's place in the Cologne Cathedral.¹⁵ Can we view this as a turning point associated with the changing depictions of the Black King in the Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's painting? He is represented more as an equal under the artist's hand according to the finery he wears and his position of status among the travelers.

Throughout the course of the Middle Ages, the Magus were defined as three distinct personas. Balthasar brings Myrrh, commonly used as an incense, perfume, and medicine from the Commiphora myrrha tree¹⁶ and sourced from the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. Earlier representations of the Adoration typically reveal a European Magi with an attendant of African descent. The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's representation of Balthasar, as paired with a Black attendant to his right, still implies a strong sense of human commodification flowing through Europe. A procession of travelers weaves from the manger; descending through the

¹² The appearance was distinguished through commentaries relating to Bede as an “Ethiopian or Black African.” Rooted in Irish exegetical traditions, the belief in this interpretation began in Germany, spreading to the Netherlands (Pinson article).

¹³ Yona Pinson. “Connotations of Sin and Heresy in the Figure of the Black King in Some Northern Renaissance Adorations.” *Artibus et Historiae* 17, no. 34 (1996): 160. “Being associated with the figure of the Moor, or Saracen, it was also related to heresy.”

¹⁴ Relics of the Kings were declared in Milan in 1158 and transferred to Cologne, Germany in 1164. The celebration was held for the 300th year of their presence within the city (Ibid, 161).

¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁶ Christ embalmed with Myrrh and aloe.

countryside and past rocky terrain. Horses with gold-saturated harnesses prance, appearing to circle as the crowd mingles. Two camels stand in union behind the crowd. Their presence cannot be ignored as an intentional detail to place emphasis on global travel, especially to visit dedicated holy sites. Camels are known to evoke a sense of Eastern travel and began showing in tempera paintings in the late 14th century.¹⁷ As reflected in Isaiah 60:6: "The multitude of camels shall cover thee [Jerusalem], the dromedaries of Madian and Epha: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense."¹⁸

The idea of journey was not new to individuals during this time. Trade and profiting merchants prospered across Europe. In Northern Belgium, Antwerp permeated the market scene, and in the 1480s the city surpassed their German competition in Lyons.¹⁹ Following this exponential growth, Antwerp's local government banned the sale of any artworks outside of the Our Lady's *Pand*, establishing the first art-specific market in Europe.²⁰ Their monopolistic approach commodified art; changing local economics, as well as the livelihoods of artists. Artisans often traveled to Bruges and Antwerp in order to market their works to potential customers.²¹ Representatives of varying regions of the Northern Netherlands typically embarked on long journeys to purchase ready-made panel paintings. The two cities would have been considered hotbeds of this sort of commerce and prior to 1500, Bruges held the monopoly of trade.²² Due to multiple variables, including shifting favor from the Duke of Burgundy and a

¹⁷Richard Stracke. "The Adoration of the Magi." *The Adoration of the Magi in Art, Legend, Iconography*, 2015.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ By the 1480s, the scale of Antwerp's fairs was so great that German merchants were claiming they had surpassed the fairs of Lyons, their chief rival (Ewing, 559).

²⁰ In 1484 a municipal decree was issued that prohibited the sale of art in Antwerp during the fairs at any location other than the *Pand* (Ibid, 563).

²¹ Ewing, "Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460-1560: Our Lady's *Pand*," 560 and 581.

²² Following a major storm in the 12th century, a tidal inlet allowed Bruges to operate as the only Flemish cloth town with access to the North Sea (Burkhardt, 132).

quickly drying seaport.²³ This would mark the end of a major chapter for Bruges, as the city prospered for over 200 years as a result of their foundation role in broadcloth production. Bruges' formed the city's first art markets in 1482, signifying the beginning of a free market system for merchants and artisans alike.²⁴ Antwerp inevitably consecrated Our Lady's Pandt as a permanent marketplace within the first decade of the 16th century, though it was not uncommon for artists to travel with merchants across Europe to continue selling art.²⁵ It is clear that Bruges established a market system early on, which was then adopted by other European cities as they rose to favor.

The main sequence of The Master of Saint Lucy's *Adoration* falls within the aspect of pilgrimage. Throughout the Middle Ages, trade began to flourish among port cities. Bruges held its place as a center of textile production, but there was also a cache of deeply rooted interest in partaking in a journey of devout means. The sale of indulgences under the Catholic Church created desire for those hoping to receive forgiveness and receive a "fast pass to heaven."²⁶ Due to growing inaccessibility of access to actual Holy Lands²⁷, it became best practice to construct local shrines and assign the tombs of saints as alternate pilgrimage sites. One's decision to journey to locations associated with venerated people or events meant that one could establish an emotional link that could transcend time, and bring one close to worship.²⁸ Wax ex-votos²⁹ became a popular memento of pilgrimage as a physical commodity, similar to the purchase of goods made from materials relating to the holy grounds (ex. bowl made from sacred soil). It was

²³ De Marchi, Neil, and Hans J. Van Miegroet. "Rules versus Play in Early Modern Art Markets." *Recherches Économiques de Louvain / Louvain Economic Review* 66, no. 2 (2000): 147.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁶ Barnes, Ruth, and Crispin Branfoot. *Pilgrimage: The Sacred Journey*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum (2006), 38.

²⁷ The fall of Constantinople in 1543 marked the loss of Christianity's final greatest city.

²⁸ Barnes, Ruth, and Crispin Branfoot. *Pilgrimage: The Sacred Journey*, 40.

²⁹ Tin or wax models of a body part, usually as healed. Left behind by pilgrims at designated shrines during visitation.

not uncommon for individuals to collect dust from sacred areas to inevitably mix with water or oil as a consecrated mixture.³⁰ While the emphasis on pious reflection remains at the forefront of pilgrimage, it allowed for the commodification of religion. Local craftsmen and merchants would take part in the production of items designated for travelers. In Canterbury, for example, merchants sold their wares within a courtyard inside the cathedral's inner walls; easily accessible to those coming and going. Merchants had access to a stream of incoming travelers, and the pilgrims fulfilled their spiritual desires.

Located in Bruges, the Basilica of the Holy Blood (1137-57) is distinguished by its relic of "the precious blood" and attracts hundreds of visitors. The Procession of the Holy Blood (*ommegang*) would have been held to not only celebrate, but also protect, the reliquary of Christ's sacred blood. The sight was likely vivid and solemn, yet filled with various chants to heighten the connection between an earthly, yet heavily spiritual experience.³¹ Individuals paraded through town with red garments with local governmental figures in attendance. We can see the importance placed on red details through The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's Adoration scene. Processional reliquaries were produced as visual cues for such events and attendees viewed such artworks as they gathered. Though *The Adoration of the Magi* does not directly reflect a scene containing a narrative relating directly to Christ's blood as a Relic, we are presented with a painting which places value on not only the color red, but also elements of procession (long line of worshippers) and reverent themes. Bruges became known for administering guidebooks so individuals could establish an image of what visiting a certain sacred site could be akin to in their current surroundings. These guide books would become a device for withstanding difficult elements of travel; often containing prayers and mental support

³⁰ Barnes, 28.

³¹ Barbara H. Hagg. "The Beguines of Bruges and the Procession of the Holy Blood." *Epitome Musical*, January 2009.

for those on a physically demanding journey.³² God's word was meant to withstand the pilgrimage with you.

Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint Columba Altarpiece* (fig. 2) resides in Cologne, Germany.³³ Painted between 1450 and 1455,³⁴ the piece recognized for its immense size and emphasis as a religious narrative scene with secular attributes. The artist was once known for his work in the Burgundian Court and local guilds, having painted throughout Brussels in the 15th century.³⁵ In this triptych, Weyden opts for a recessive background, inclusion of donors, and cohesive themes throughout each of the three panels.³⁶ It is known that this altarpiece was commissioned by a wealthy patron in Cologne, likely to assert their position within the church and solidify their "earned" place in heaven. As noted by Dr. Thomas Kaufmann, Weyden, like other Netherlandish painters of the time, produced their works for export and to suit specific buyer tastes.³⁷ From left to right, the scenes represent the Annunciation, Adoration of the Magi, and the Presentation. Scenes of the Virgin and Child were especially popular in Bruges, while the Adoration transcends the markets of Antwerp³⁸. Even though different areas produced specific preferences, this melding of styles within the Lowlands can be noted. It is possible Weyden chose the place for the Annunciation of the left-most panel to be reminiscent of Cologne traditions, rather than Netherlandish.³⁹ Upon inspection, Weyden and The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy both place their narratives within a specific locale, which in this case reflects both

³²Mark Trowbridge. "Jerusalem Transposed: A Fifteenth-Century Panel for the Bruges Market." *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art*, September 11, 2019 (section 24).

³³ Weyden is said to have lived from c. 1400-1464.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Stephanie Porras, *Art of the Northern Renaissance: Courts, Commerce and Devotion* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2018), 58.

³⁶ Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann. "Regional Boundaries: Rogier van der Weyden Columba Altarpiece." (Cambridge Press. *Netherlands Yearbook of History* [Brill]: Vol. 66), 1.

³⁷ Ibid., 169

³⁸ Ibid., 174.

³⁹ Ibid., 175.

a countryside and cityscape. The undulating hills transition into an architecturally dense background. Though the emphasis on sanctity remains foremost, the development of a familiar setting leans into the importance of worship going beyond the walls of the church. It was encouraged to allow the religious experience to transcend beyond a terrestrial space. A sense of proximity is extremely relevant, as well as attention to naturalistic portrayals of the Magi and other individuals throughout the scene.

Weyden's altarpiece was commissioned by a donor, hoping to achieve higher power and eternal sanctity. He sits behind Joseph, hands joined in prayer against a stone wall. Although he appears present, the scene playing out in front of him is nothing more than a vision. Weyden's depiction of the Adoration on the central panel is flanked by two other Biblical scenes.⁴⁰ The *Saint Columba Altarpiece* does reflect the inclusion of a familiar (secular) place, marked by the distant hamlet. It envelops the perimeter of the nativity; green space and rolling hills remain present in the middle ground. The difference here is the lack of emphasis on iconographic elements which reflect marketplace practices and the growing commonality of traveling, especially in religious contexts. An emphasis on experiencing Holy Lands in adjacency is reflected within research by scholar Mark Towbridge. "Many Bruges citizens had made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the fifteenth century, most famously Anselm and Jan Adornes, who went to Jerusalem in 1470-71, following the example of others from their family, and used the experience to found the family's *Jeruzalemkapel*⁴¹, based on the design of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher." It is clear that pilgrims would travel to sacred destinations not only with the desire to attain improved health or gain a higher status of reaching heaven, but also to explore ways to bring Holy Sites to their own towns. The *Saint Columba Altarpiece* in Cologne aligns

⁴⁰ The Adoration on the left wing, and the Presentation on the right reflects a total narrative of Jesus' divine birth.

⁴¹ Jerusalem-style chapel.

with the housed relic of the Shine of the Three King (c. 1180-1225). Due to the proximity of this relic to nearby cities, it would not have been unusual for individuals to travel to see the golden shrine in its true, physical form. the Magi. The relic, located within Cologne Cathedral, became a designated site for pilgrims.⁴² Bruges accessibility⁴³ to Cologne implies a parallel between desires of paintings related to the relic of the Three Kings, similar to The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's panel painting, *Adoration of the Magi* and Weyden's *Saint Columba Altarpiece*.

The Franco-Flemish version (fig. 3) is still within the International Gothic mode, which continues to emphasize gold as a sense of heightened piety. The artist establishes a crimson background; sparkling with diminutive spheres of gold. Their scene aligns with the International Gothic Style of painting during the Middle Ages. Elongated forms and fur-lined robes envelope the well-established style. While Mary is still seated in blue, her garment is a lighter shade of the color, rather than the popular azurite in later depictions. Her seated position reflects a departure from previously common depictions as seated in a throne.⁴⁴ This is a transition to Mary becoming the throne of Christ, herself. Her blue gown covers any potential view of what she is seated upon. Not only is this present in the Franco-Flemish *Adoration*, but also in The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's treatment of Mary's drapery as a chair for the newborn Christ. Saint Anthony Abbot calls to a boar, signifying a connection to St. Anthony's fire, which is named after the Saint. It is likely a church or hospital commissioned this piece, as he could have been their patron saint.⁴⁵ In this version, it is clear the focus of devotion was still within the church, rather than extending into a shifting display of secular reliquary culture. Among the three Magus

⁴² Erika Zwierlein-Diehl. "'Interpretatio Christiana': Gems on the 'Shrine of the Three Kings' in Cologne." *Studies in the History of Art* 54 (1997): 63.

⁴³ The two cities are approximately 200 miles, or 320 kilometers from each other. This journey would take the average traveler 2-3 using transport typical of the Middle Ages.

⁴⁴ Stracke, "The Adoration of the Magi," 1.

⁴⁵ Franco-Flemish Master. "The Adoration of the Magi with Saint Anthony Abbot (the J. Paul Getty Museum Collection)."

is a Black attendant⁴⁶ to the right of Balthasar reflects a sense of travel from distant lands.⁴⁷ Rather than the three kings imbuing a sense of global influence, such as we see in The Master of the Legend Saint Lucy's depiction, they are painted as strictly European. Casper, the eldest and first in line, confronts Mary. Melchoir and Balthasar follow closely. Contrasting from the Legend of the Master of Saint Lucy's painting, this Franco-Flemish artist places Casper as the Magi confronting Mary and Christ first, followed by Melchoir and lastly, Balthasar. Though each Magi reflects a sense of individuality, for example, Balthasar is rather young, there is still a lack of shifting global perspective compared to works dating to the late 15th century. It is clear the Franco-Flemish artist chose to emphasize a standard European appearance for their treatment of the Magi. This aligns with the lack of global influence at the beginning of the 15th century compared to the end of the same century, though the inclusion of the attendant reflects a global taste; reflecting the long journey from afar to visit the newborn Christ.

The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy combines influences relating to not only other Netherlandish painters, but also current trends relating to religious and growing secular interests. Depictions of the Adoration throughout the 15th century continued to recast, while also maintaining influence from prior Flemish Adoration scenes. Rogier van der Weyden's *Saint Columba Altarpiece* sets the standard for depictions of the Three Kings, as his influence departs from a strictly revenant scene with inclusion of a familiar cityscape; creating a growing emphasis on preferred representations of worship. The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy's composition reflects Northern European workshops, especially regarding the adoption of Balthasar as consecrated as the Black King. I concur that the growing emphasis on expanding global markets within *Adoration of the Magi* is justified by marketplace standards, sanctity, shifting ideals of

⁴⁶ Also known as a page or servant.

⁴⁷ Franco-Flemish Master.

race, and a newfound emphasis on patron needs. Each factor sheds new light on adaptations of the Adoration of the Magi; ultimately proving a shift towards the importance of stylistically melding secular and religious desires. Individuals could now feel and achieve their sanctity in the most physical way possible; a true earthly bond with Christ, himself.



Fig. 1. The Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy, *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1480-1485. Oil and tempera on panel, 93.3 x 133.4 cm. The Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati.



Fig. 2. Rogier van der Weyden, *Saint Columba Altarpiece*, c. 1450. Oil on oak panel, 138 x 70 cm, 138 x 153 cm, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.





Fig. 3. Franco-Flemish Master, *The Adoration of the Magi with Saint Anthony Abbot*, c. 1410-1420. Oil and tempera with gold and silver leaf on panel, 104.8 x 188.6 x 4.4 cm. The Getty Center, Los Angeles.

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