

THE MAN WITH THE ARROW – ANALYSIS OF A PORTRAIT

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PART 1: JOÃO DE COIMBRA



The first time I saw this portrait, I was just a child, fourteen maybe. I don't remember where I saw it. I think it was in one of the art books of our family library and in that book, the

painting's title was 'Man with the arrow', by Rogier van der Weyden. I have a vague recollection of seeing the original for the first time, in the Old Masters Museum in Brussels, I do not really remember when that was. But it does not matter where I saw it first. I have seen it several times more and it is still one of my favourite medieval paintings, even though it is quite dark.

However, in more recent books and on the website of the museum, the portrait is no longer described as an anonymous man with an arrow but as a portrait of Antoine de Bourgogne, the illegitimate son of Philip the Good, half-brother of Charles the Bold, and who is also known as the Big Bastard of Burgundy (le grand Bâtard).

Yesterday I came across a post on Instagram showing the above portrait, with the information that it is a portrait of João de Coimbra, or John, Prince of Antioch (1431-1457). I was very surprised by this and also intrigued, keeping the original title of the painting in mind. So why was the title changed over time and is it correct? There is no information on the portrait so the identity of the sitter cannot be deduced from the panel, only that he must be a knight of the Golden Fleece, the distinctive collar proves this. So who was this João and why would anyone think that the man with the arrow is him and not Anthony?

I thought it would be simple to solve, just a mere oversight on my or the poster's side but the research proved quite useful and I learned some new things.

WordPress posts are probably not the best medium for long explanations so I'm going to distribute everything over a few posts. The first will be about João.

João de Coimbra, Prince of Antioch (1431-1457)

I do not have a lot of documentation on Portugal and the Middle Ages so I am just going to take this from Wikipedia and hope there is not too much nonsense in them. The rest of my material is thoroughly checked in all sorts of books and articles.

He was the second son of Infante Peter, Duke of Coimbra, and Isabella of Urgell, Duchess of Coimbra.

He took part in the battle of Alfarrobeira, where his father's army was defeated by the Portuguese royal army.

He was imprisoned and was to be executed. However, due to the intervention of his aunt Isabella, he was sent into exile in Burgundy together with his brother James and sister Beatrice. His aunt Isabella, Duchess of Burgundy, was able to offer protection to her nephews and niece as wife of Duke Philip the Good. In 1456, John was elected a Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

In 1456, John married Charlotte of Cyprus in Nicosia and was accorded the title Prince of Antioch. He was poisoned on the orders of his mother-in-law, Helena Palaiologina.

He was buried in Nicosia in a tomb which bears his coat of arms.

There are a number of things that match with the portrait. His age his right, he was a relative of the dukes, he was a knight of the Golden Fleece and he was in Burgundy around the time the portrait was painted. Also, the man on the portrait could be the son of João's father, given the vague likeness.

Peter could be one of the men on the St Vicente panels, painted by Nuno Gonçalez. This painting is interesting on its own so I'll keep that for a separate post. But here is the presumed portrait.



But what is the identification of the Man with the arrow based on?

THE MAN WITH THE ARROW – PART 2: ANTOINE



In this chapter I want to focus a little on Antoine of Burgundy (1420?-1504), also known as the Grand Bâtard or the Big Bastard. He did not receive that name because he was a bully but because he was the official main bastard son of Philip the Good. In my small unimportant opinion his role is direly neglected in history books. This becomes clear when reading the various contemporary chronicles where his name pops up constantly. However, a study of his career would lead us too far here. I do not want to reinvent the wheel so I'll just borrow the main facts from the internet for a quick summary.

Antoine is the son of Philip the Good (1396-1467), Duke of Burgundy and his mistress Jeanne de Presle.



Philip the Good

The birth date of Antoine is uncertain, probably somewhere around 1420-1421. The original Grand Bâtard was his half-brother Corneille, with Antoine Philip's most favourite natural sons. Corneille died in 1452 in a battle during the revolt of Ghent, after which Antoine inherited his title of Grand Bâtard. In 1459, he married Marie de la Viesville by whom he had five children.

Antoine was a military man and took part in a number of campaigns of his father. He became a knight of the Golden Fleece in 1456. After the death of Philip in 1467 he fought in the service of his half-brother Charles who was now Duke of Burgundy. He took part in most of his hot-headed brother's campaigns and saved his life during the battle of Monthléry (and probably a few times more). After the battle of Nancy Antoine was captured and delivered to Louis XI by Rene of Lorraine and came into his service. He played an important role in the arrangement of the marriage of Charles' daughter Mary and Maximilian..

He was legitimised by Charles the VIII in 1485 or 1486 (I found two dates). [As a side note, this was around the time Jean VI Rolin was legitimised (see earlier posts). I don't know if the events are connected, but it is worth looking into.]

He was good at archery and a skilled tournament fighter. Unlike Charles, he was a bit of a player, like his father, and had at least two natural children. He was also an avid collector of illuminated manuscripts.

He is supposed to have died at Tournehem, near Calais, in 1504, at the age of about 83/84. He must have led a very fulfilling life.

Some smaller things of interest:

Antoine's signature (source: Lauer)

ob. de Bourayne

His arms painted by Coustin (the bar signifies a bastard):



His motto/blason in Les croniques de Pise:



It is a barbican on fire with the words NUL NE SI FROTE (Nul ne s'y frotte), Nobody rubs on it, which is an odd motto, but it was used by others too. Wonder if it can be paraphrased as Can't touch this? There is a proverb saying: "A femme sottte nul ne s'y frotte".

Medal with the image of Antoine by Candida Giovanni, 1475:



Sources of the documentation:

- *Déchiffrement de l'ex-libris du Grand Bâtard de Bourgogne. Philippe Lauer, 1923.*
- *Wikipedia*
- *The contemporary chroniclers*
- *Les croniques de Pise (Bibliothèque Nationale de France)*

The next post will probably be a small piece about the Vincent panels.

THE MAN WITH THE ARROW – PART 3: THE SAINT VINCENT PANELS



This is somewhat of an interlude as the Saint Vincent panels have no direct connection with the painting of the man with the arrow by Rogier van der Weyden.

I only learned of this panel quite recently, as I have not yet looked very closely at Charles the Bold's link with Portugal. It is worth doing so, however, as he was quite proud of his Portuguese ancestry.

I'll try to explain what these panels are, but as they are new to me, allow me some mistakes. I'll make corrections when necessary. This is just a random brainstorm of my garbled mind and I'm open to roasts, additions and corrections.

The Saint Vincent Panels, or the Adoration of Saint Vincent panels, are a polyptych consisting of six panels that were perhaps painted in the 1450s. They are attributed to the Portuguese painter Nuno Gonçalves. Since their discovery in the late 19th century, there has been a continuing dispute over the identity of the painter and the subjects portrayed on the panels. Some basic questions, still unanswered, are these:

- What scene, or scenes, are depicted in the panels?
- Who are the sixty persons portrayed?
- What symbolism is expressed in the panels?
- Who commissioned these panels to be painted?

The majority of experts who have studied this polyptych agree that the panels display several social groups of 15th-century Portugal. They also agree that the children of King John I are represented on these panels, but there is disagreement about their placement and identity.

was active from 1450 to 1471.

There has also been speculation that the father of Hugo van der Goes collaborated in the painting of the panels, but no firm evidence to support this hypothesis exists.

Previous text hijacked from Wikipedia).

There are a number of things that pop up in my mind. Why are there only six panels? In the logic of the universe there should be twelve. Have they disappeared? Were they never made? What was on them?

I don't know much about Portuguese history yet so I am looking at these panels with the eyes of a newborn. Uneducated but willing to learn. The first thing I notice is that some faces are paler than others, as if they are in the spotlight.

THE MAN WITH THE ARROW – PART 4: A PRIMITIVE MYSTERY



The previous instalments covered João of Coimbra, Anthony of Burgundy and the Saint Vincent panels.

The first thing I did when I read about the identity of the portrait's sitter, was to try and find out where this information came from.

The source turned out to be the Portuguese Wikipedia page about João, where the following can be read:

“Um dos seus retratos foi pintado por Rogier Van Der Weyden, que está num museu real da Bélgica e está representado com o colar do Tosão de Ouro ao pescoço.”

Translation: One of his portraits was painted by Rogier van der Weyden, which is in the royal museum of Belgium, where he is represented with the collar of the Golden Fleece around this neck.

This information is not on any of the Wikipedia pages that I can more or less understand or usually check. The footnote led to the scans of an article by Jose Cortez: **Dom João de Coimbra - Retrato por Rogier van der Weyden**. The text appears fairly vintage. There are many mistakes on Wikipedia but this was a solid article, so I wanted to try and find out more. My knowledge of Portuguese is non-existent, but the gist is, I assume, proof that the portrait represents João.

A small online search later I came across a scan of an article in *Openbaar Kunstbezit* of 1972, written by Dirk De Vos, *adjunct conservator van de Stedelijke Musea Brugge*. In this article Dirk De Vos states that the identifications of the man with the arrow as Anthony of Burgundy or the more likely João de Coimbra are not very convincing. Now I was even more surprised because in his book about Rogier van der Weyden published in 1999, the portrait of the man with the arrow is described as a portrait Anthony of Burgundy tout court. The same goes for other more recent books about Rogier van de Weyden.

The portrait in the Royal Museums of Belgium, the prime piece of evidence, is labelled as a portrait of Anthony of Burgundy. The extra information on their website describes it as: oak; dimensions: 38,4 x 28 x 0,4; provenance: John Nieuwenhuys, art dealer, Brussels, 1861. The portrait was sold as a portrait of Charles the Bold but was later renamed to Man with the arrow. In older art books it is still labelled that way.

The portrait was displayed in an exhibition about the Golden Fleece at Bruges, in 1907. In the catalogue it is described as *Knight with the arrow*. More interestingly, the catalogue states that the portrait bears a great resemblance to Anthony, the bastard of Burgundy. It also tells us that it was once attributed to Hugo van der Goes. Side note: in the same catalogue the portrait of Philippe de Croy by Rogier van der Weyden, is still attributed to Hugo van der Goes.

There is a saying that everybody has a doppelganger, so it's no big surprise that people resemble one another. Inbreeding and family relations are not really an explanation here, because as far as I know, Anthony had no close Portuguese ancestors.

But there are other portraits of Anthony so it's logical to make a comparison. One thing has to be kept in mind, though. Rogier and his atelier have a tendency to what I call stockfacing their portraits, especially the individual ones. The portraits are somewhat idealised, with somewhat enlarged, rounded eyes. The men all seem to have the same hairdo as well, the wretched Burgundian bowlcut which was still popular when the painter was active.

There are two versions of a portrait of Anthony attributed to (or copies of) Hans Memling. One of these portraits belonged apparently to the Duchess of Sutherland. She contacted a certain Mr. Planche, who proved that the portrait was not, as the Duchess thought, Charles of Burgundy, but his illegitimate half-brother Anthony of Burgundy. This could be deducted from Anthony's blason and motto that was painted on the portrait. I have not yet figured out which of the versions belonged to the Duchess of Sutherland.

The best known version is this one, currently property of the Gemäldergalerie in Dresden:



Another, lesser known variant perhaps, is located in the Musee Condé at Chantilly:



There is a good resemblance with the Man with the arrow, if you think away all the photoshopping Rogier has done. His eyes are smaller and his jaw less prominent. The basic features are still there

though: his brown eyes, his cleft chin, and his nose. It is hard to tell from these pictures but his nose is slightly shorter than those of Philip and Charles and it is straight but points a little more upwards.

He is older in this portrait, which is not just clear from the face, which shows more lines but also by the fashion of his clothes and hair. He is wearing a different type of hat and clothes. His hair is also much longer, going towards a renaissance haircut. Some people suggested he is wearing a wig (when his father Philip was gravely ill, doctors told him to shave his head and Philip ordered all the nobleman to do the same), but he was more likely a hipster in those days. With this in mind the portrait must likely have been painted after 1467.

The other remarkable thing is the collar of the Golden Fleece. Theoretically knights had to wear the large collar during all official occasions and only could wear the smaller chains on certain occasions, such as travelling. Note the portrait of Charles by Rogier on which Charles is also wearing the small chain.

The information on the website of the Musée Condé states:

“Le revers du panneau est peint : on trouve les lettres I.N.E. (jusqu’ici inexplicables) reliées par une cordelière de saint François, car le Grand Bâtard appartenait au Tiers Ordre, sa devise : " nul ne si frote ", qui apparaît sur sa médaille italienne et sur sa cotte d’armes à Tourneham, près d’Ardres, où il est enterré, et un emblème, une hotte de guerre, sorte d’auvent mobile en bois et en fer servant à jeter sur les assiégeants des matières enflammées. Cet emblème et la devise Nul ne s’y frote se retrouve au revers d’une plaque conservée au musée de Cluny et représentant Le Calvaire.”

The provenance is listed as follows: 1886 Donation sous réserve d'usufruit : Henri d'Orléans duc d'Aumale.

With regard to the quality I like the Chantilly portrait a lot better.

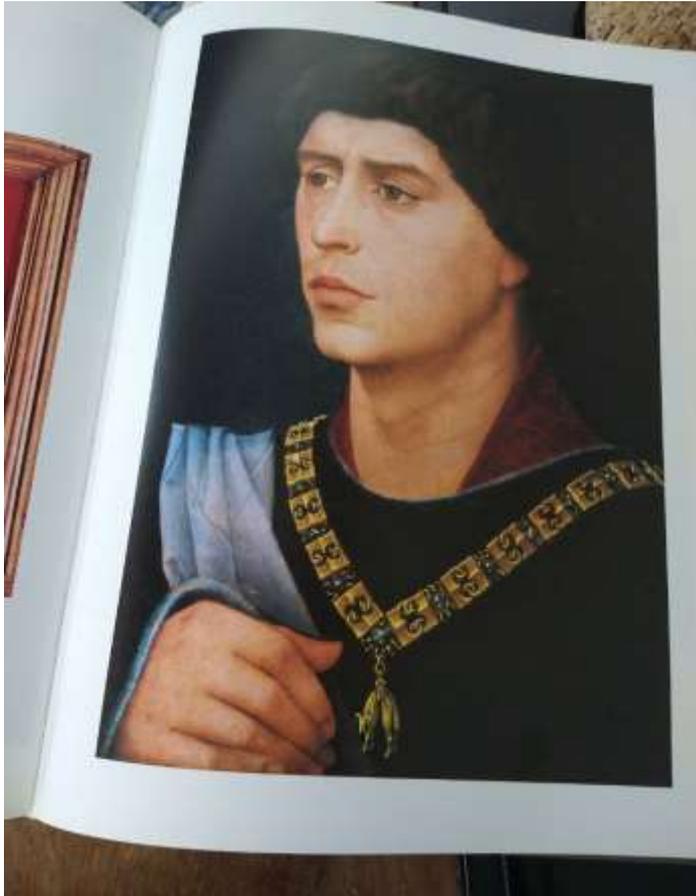
There are a number of other representations of Anthony in art but most are based on the above prototypes.

We know for sure that this is Antony, due to his motto on the back. But is the Man with the arrow Anthony? Or does he just look like him?

That is for the last post of the series.

THE MAN WITH THE ARROW – PART 5: THE KEY TO THE LOCK

The key to the solution lies in a copy of the painting that is – according to the scarce information I can find about it – in a private collection in Australia.



I do not know about the current when, where or what of the portrait but I can reconstruct a little bit of its past with the help of some books I have lying around and scattered information on the internet.

The portrait was part of the Edward Speelman collection, London (Edward Speelman was an art dealer). In the 19th century it was considered to be a portrait of Charles the Bold. It was forgotten about until it was published by Lorne Campbell.

The damaged backside allows to identify the sitter. It shows a barbican containing a flaming brand, surrounded by a golden cord with tassels. Above it are the letters. N.I.(?) E., letters which, as far as I know, have not been identified yet. Below is the device: “AINSI LE VEUL”, which is the second part of Antony’s device. (The first part is “NUL NE SI FROTE”.)

The portrait appears in two catalogues of local exhibitions I have here so I assume it was on display during those exhibitions. The first occasion was during The Brussels Millenium from October 6 – November 18, 1979: “Rogier van der Weyden – Rogier de le Pasture”, City Museum of Brussels. The painting bears number 15 in the catalogue and it is stated that is on loan from the Getty Museum, Malibu, Speelman collection.

The best image of it I have seen so far is in the catalogue of “De eeuw van Van Eyck 1430-1450. De Vlaamse Primitieven en het zuiden.” The exhibition took place in the Groeningemuseum, Bruges, 15 March until 30 June 2002. The portrait bears number 58 and the owner is listed as “Private collection”. With regard to provenance, the catalogue entry lists the following extra information: Before 1895: Robert Jackson, England. In this catalogue it is suggested that both paintings, The Man with the

arrow and this one may be based on the same portrait sketch and were executed simultaneously by the atelier of the master.

Maybe the painting has been on display at other places, but so far I have no additional information about it.

Interestingly enough, both Anthony and João became knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece during the same chapter of the Golden Fleece in 1456. It could well be possible they both had their portrait painted for the occasion? If so, what happened with the painting of João.

In any case there is no doubt about the identity of the Man with the arrow: it is Anthony the Bastard of Burgundy.

Until new information comes to light, obviously.

Nothing is certain, only taxes and death.

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