

Pieter Aertsen and *The Meat Stall**

Anyone who has ever seriously considered the genesis and development of still-life painting in the Netherlands sooner or later must come to grips with the remarkable works of Pieter Aertsen. For he was the crucial figure in the birth of Netherlandish still life, playing a role in that genre as important as that of Joachim Patinir in landscape painting.

Aertsen's still-life subjects were the first Netherlandish paintings to be dominated by images of meats, fruits, and vegetables. These are, without exception, large pictures, some of them ranging up to two meters wide, in which the still-life elements are brought close to the front plane of the picture and painted in a monumental and extremely realistic style. Colors and textures are rendered with extraordinary fidelity. In both their scale and their realistic presentation these victuals have an overwhelming visual impact that is unprecedented in the history of art.

Significantly, these still lifes are never separated from a human context. A series of them, beginning with *The Meat Stall* of 1551, are associated with biblical subjects, invariably seen far in the distance behind the still life. It is unquestionably this association of a magnificent still life with a biblical scene in a secondary role that has occasioned the greatest single problem in Aertsen criticism. This apposition of the animate and inanimate has been viewed as a stylistic peculiarity by a number of art historians, the most influential of whom was M.J. Friedländer. Writing in his monumental *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Friedländer said of Aertsen: 'He was a still life painter, indeed a founder of that genre. Unfortunately the demands of the time did not permit consistent development of his powerful talent in this direction. He had to smuggle in his still lifes, so to speak, in inconsistent juxtaposition with genrelike figures and biblical scenes, and he did so quite heedlessly.'¹ Ingvar Bergström described this 'inconsistent juxtaposition' primarily as a manifestation of Mannerist tendencies in Aertsen's work: 'An essential feature in the art of Aertsen ... is that the figure scenes have not been omitted from their compositions even if they are strongly subordinated. From the formal point of view they supplied the inverted value of a biblical subject and its accessories. This is to be regarded as true manneristic feature.'² This passage has given rise to the term 'Mannerist inversion' sometimes used to denote the special 'still-life-cum-biblical-scene' originated by Aertsen and taken up by his followers.

But the explanation of the pictures based on stylistic considerations alone has given way in the recent literature to a general recognition of their moralizing character and to a search for more precise interpretations.³

The earliest surviving example of a still life with an 'inverted' subject is the remarkable *The Meat Stall* with the Flight into Egypt in the background, now owned by Uppsala University (Fig. 1).⁴ The painting is dated 1551, 10 Martius,⁵ and there is reason to believe that the picture is the archetype of all Aertsen's inverted still lifes. There are two reasons this may be the case. First, the greater complexity of its imagery compared to Aertsen's subsequent compositions of



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this type – very often the first efforts in a new kind of painting tend to be overly complex. Second, the painting was probably ‘invented’ for a very special commission to be discussed below.

The Meat Stall, moreover, has long been recognized as the first still life of viands and victuals in the history of art.⁶ Once attributed to Aertsen’s nephew and pupil, Joachim Beuckelaer, the painting was assigned to Aertsen in 1908 by Johannes Sievers.⁷ How the picture came to Sweden is itself an interesting story. It was reportedly captured by the armies of Gustavus Adolphus in Bavaria in 1632 (the King was killed there in November that year). It later became part of the vast collections of his daughter, Queen Christina of Sweden, eventually coming to Uppsala University in 1840 by bequest.⁸

Like Aertsen’s other inverted still lifes, *The Meat Stall* is a large panel (124 × 169 cm.) bursting with the most extraordinary and monumental images of food. The entire front plane of the picture is filled with slaughtered and dressed meat beneath the shingle roof of a small shed. At the very center of the composition the partially skinned head of an ox stares out at the viewer. This macabre sight is surrounded on all sides by viands. Hanging from a post at the left is a whole side of a slaughtered pig. The animal has been split cleanly down the spine and the curving ribs and fatty tissues in the abdominal cavity are clearly visible. Lying on a table under this side of pork are many other butchered pieces. A shank of meat (a ham?) is seen in cross-section at the left, and beside it are two fish on a rod, apparently in preparation for smoking. Between the ox head and the ham there are pig’s feet lying on a cabbage leaf and four pies on a wooden tray.

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Pieter Aertsen, *The Meat Stall*,
1551. Uppsala University.

2
The Meat Stall (detail)



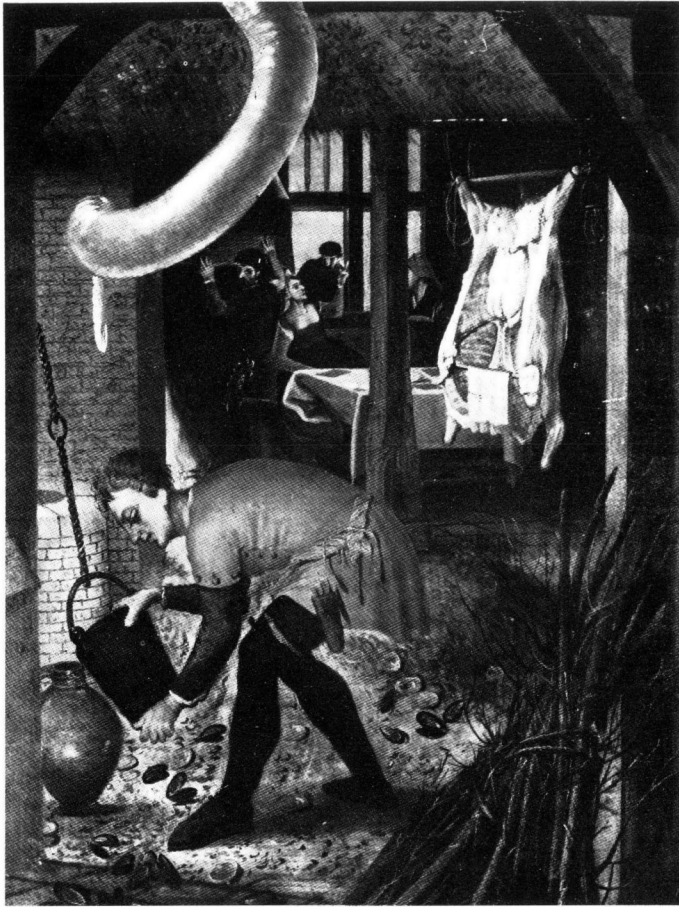
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Just above the ox head is a metal plate with two fish crossed upon it resting on the rim of a kettle. To the right of the ox head are a number of sausages on a fresh cloth and beneath them is a large bowl of rendered fat on a three-legged stool. At the far right is a wicker basket containing two dead chickens and a large cheese, partially unwrapped. Other pieces of meat hang on a pole projecting from the front edge of the roof. From left to right there are: a pig's head; a cluster of internal organs consisting of an esophagus, one lung, and a heart; a double lobed slab of fat; and finally, a long, curling segment of intestine that appears to be stuffed.

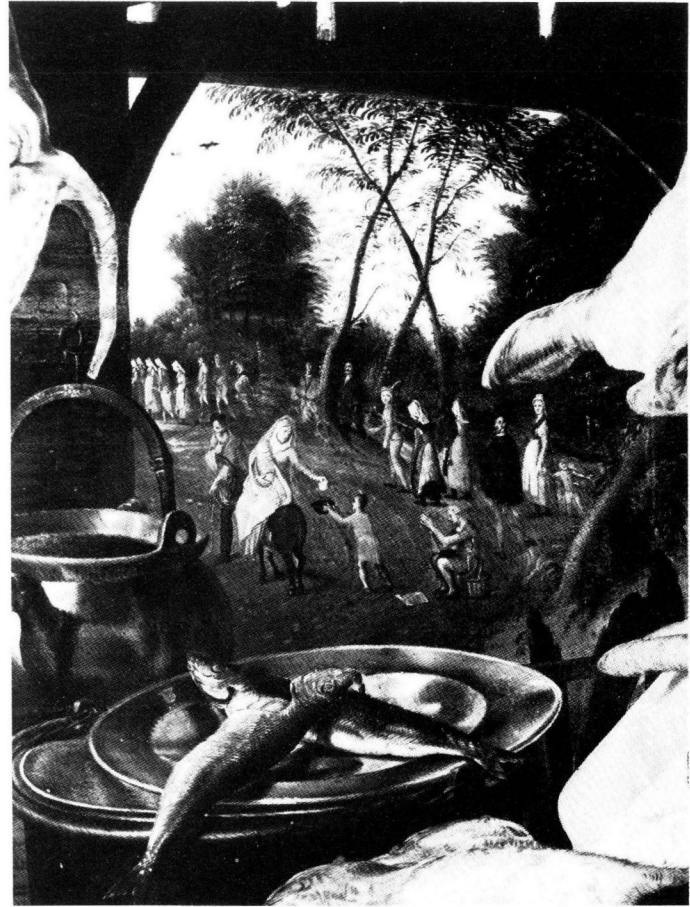
Piled one atop the other, the items in this still life give a sense of astonishing profusion, each object differing from its neighbor in form, color, and texture. The tactile qualities of the still life are overpowering: the bristly muzzle of the ox head, the shining surfaces of the metal plates and pots, the downy soft underside of the dead chickens, the glistening skins of swollen sausages – all are rendered with amazing visual fidelity.

But there is more to this painting than the artist's wish to display his skill in still life. A sign board nailed prominently to the upper right corner of the shed invites the viewer to contemplate the background (Fig. 2). It reads: 'hier achter is erue te coope terstōt metter roeyē elck syn gericf oft teenemale 154.' ('Behind here there is now farmland for sale by the rod each at his own convenience or altogether 154 rods.')

⁹ The little sign purposefully draws attention to three diminutive scenes in the background of the painting, each visible through an opening of the meat stall. At the right (Fig. 3) a man stands in a yard near a



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well. Behind him is a cut-away view into a house where a number of people can be seen. At the center of the painting is a landscape with the Flight into Egypt (Fig. 4). While at the left there is another landscape with a church tower rising in the distance above the trees (Fig. 5).

Considering only its formal aspects, the painting is clearly composed on two levels. The still life with its overwhelming impact dominates the foreground while a series of small figural scenes, viewed through interstices of the architecture, occupies the background.

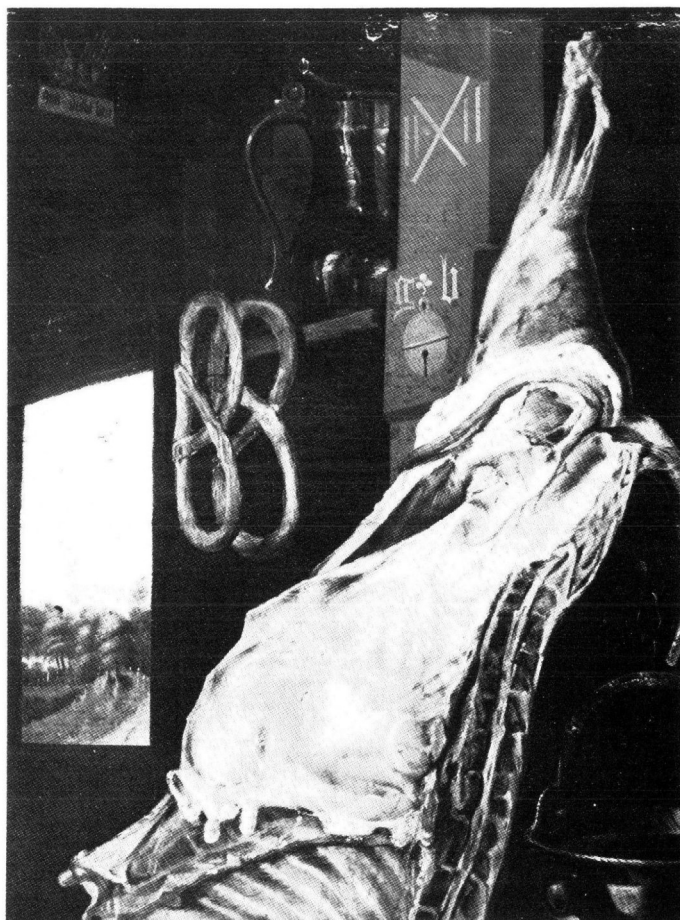
The Flight into Egypt (Fig. 4) is the central scene in this scheme. It is neatly framed on all sides by various elements of the still life which subtly draw attention to it. The crossed fish on the platter, a clear Christological symbol,¹⁰ points directly into the background; but so also do the left ear of the pig's head that hangs above on the pole and the tail of the pig at the left. Indeed, the strongest diagonals in the painting – the pole with its dangling victuals and the sharply foreshortened head of the ox – both lead the eye forcefully toward this small, central background scene.

In this green landscape Joseph leads the donkey which Mary and the swaddled infant Jesus ride. The Virgin, dressed in nun-like garb, turns momentarily to give a loaf of bread to a little boy.¹¹ The child stands holding his hat in his outstretched hands to receive the gift, while at the right, his beggar father sits on a wicker basket with his beggar's cloth spread before him and his hands held in prayer. Behind the Holy Family, watching this act of charity, is a line of pilgrims dressed in their Sunday finery all walking toward the left. As if to emphasize the theological significance of this event, Aertsen has placed crossed trees in the very center of the landscape; their dark trunks stand out against the blue

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The Meat Stall (detail)

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The Meat Stall (detail)

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The Meat Stall (detail)

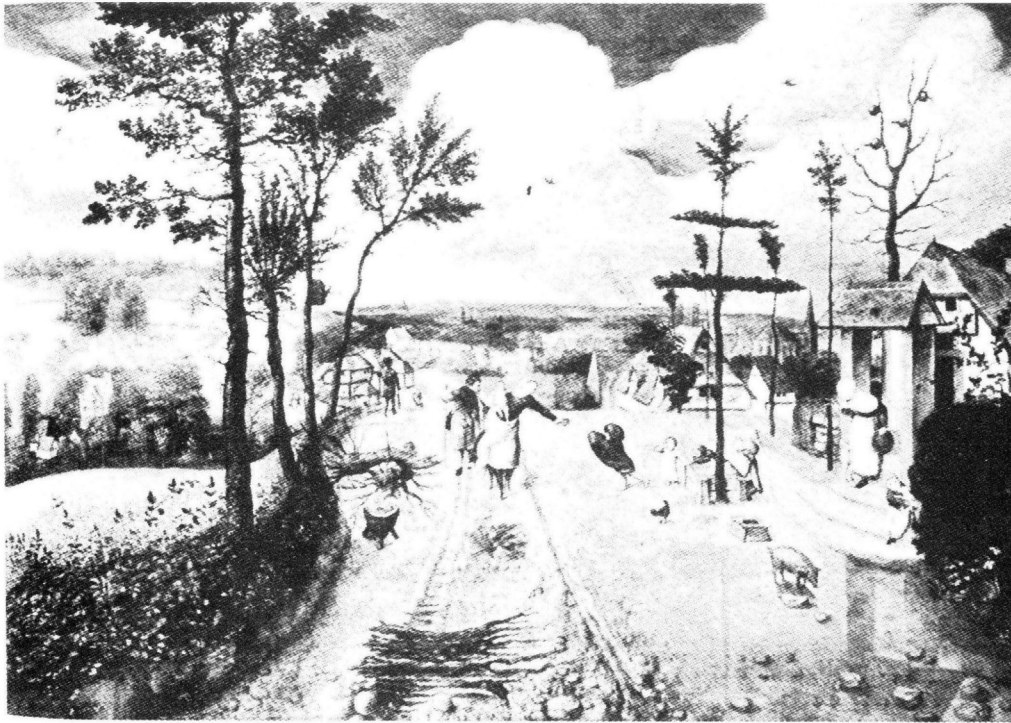


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sky, providing a dramatic backdrop to the small scene.

This is not, however, one of the familiar legends of the Flight into Egypt; no such incident is known from the apocryphal gospels, the Pseudo-Bonaventura, the *Vita Christi*, or the *Golden Legend*.¹² But whatever the source of this story, it appears to be connected with the city of Antwerp, for two other Antwerp artists are known to have represented this rare tale. One of these paintings (Fig. 6) is attributed to the Braunschweiger Monogrammist (Jan van Amstel) or his circle.¹³ This small painting shows the Holy Family wending their way through the Flemish countryside on a dirt road. They pause momentarily beside a group of children playing in their yard in front of a house. One child rushes forward holding out her skirts to receive the gift offered in the extended hand of the Virgin Mary. As in Aertsen's painting, here too the Virgin gives the child a loaf of bread. The wonderfully broad landscape is dotted with delightful thatched houses, but the most striking feature of the vista is a remarkable tree that has grown in the shape of a cross and which shelters the small children below. There appears to be a similar reference in Aertsen's painting too, where trees in the landscape also form a cross. The significance of the tree in the Monogrammist's panel is made even more apparent by its contrast to a dead, leafless tree that rises above the little house at the right.

Another painting, dated 1543, represents the same story (Fig. 7).¹⁴ The picture was once attributed to Jan van Amstel, but is certainly the product of a minor follower. Here the Holy Family crosses a wooden bridge in front of a peasant house. A little girl, dressed in bonnet and apron, rushes forward to receive a loaf from the Virgin.¹⁵ In the background of the picture a pagan idol falls from its flaming perch, a part of the legend of the Flight familiar from Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*.¹⁶ Also in the landscape, immediately behind the Holy



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Family, are two trees that have leaned together to form a cross. This detail, replicated in each of the three known versions of the story, would seem to be an essential part of the legend – a marker perhaps for the site of the Holy charity. The fact that a child is the recipient of the food in each of these three representations (Figs. 4, 6, and 7) identifies the Virgin of this story with the Renaissance image of *Caritas*, most often shown as she succors infants and children. Specific stories of the Virgin's charity are known. Jacobus, for instance, reports that the Virgin probably gave all of the rich gifts of the Magi to the poor.¹⁷ Yet in Acrtsen's *Meat Stall* (as well as the other two paintings of the story) the gift which the Virgin offers is *bread*. Clearly the significance of this act, occurring in a landscape marked with a cross, is a reference to spiritual food. Bread coming from the Holy Family must certainly refer to the eucharistic bread, to the sacrifice of Christ, to the words of Christ who said: 'I am the bread of life... I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.' (*John*, 6:48–52)

Therefore, *The Meat Stall* sets a contrast between corporeal food, represented by butchered meats in the foreground, and spiritual food represented by a gift of bread from the Virgin Mary, in the background. Implicit in this contrast is the idea of the temporal efficacy of corporeal food as against the lasting effect of the spiritual food of Christ. No more forceful image of temporality or transience could exist than the dead and butchered animals of *The Meat Stall* painted in Acrtsen's vividly realistic style; and from the midst of which stares the antique symbol of death, the bucranium.

The belief that butchered animals were appropriate metaphors for eucharistic food was also expressed by the widely read French theologian Théodore Bèze.¹⁸ In 1580 Bèze published an emblem which shows a man behind a table laden with food (Fig. 8).¹⁹ There are two fish on a platter, a dressed chicken, some vegetables, a goblet of wine, and a loaf of bread. The Latin explication reads: 'What you eat and what you drink has to die to sustain life: And we obtain life from the death of Christ. Do you laugh at this impious Philosopher?'²⁰ The

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Braunschweiger Mono-
grammist (?), *Flight into Egypt*.
Lugano, Galerie Schloss
Rohoncz.

7
Follower of Braunschweiger
Monogrammist, *Flight into
Egypt*. Thieme Collection, Ber-
lin (1924).



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thrust of the emblem is that the dead food sustains our temporal lives just as the sacrifice of Christ sustains our spiritual lives. This seems to be the meaning behind the slaughtered animals of *The Meat Stall* too (Fig. 1). Certainly the food is carefully displayed for the inspection of the viewer. The attention given to the exceptional naturalness of detail forces the eye and the mind to dwell on this food. Each item is literally offered to the viewer. And some items are offered in a very special way. The fish lie on the platter forming the symbol of the cross. The sausages are offered on a clean white cloth as a priest would present the Host or chalice without touching it. Aertsen intends the viewer to look at this food and be reminded of another, more important kind of food – the spiritual food which Mary offers to the child in the background. Like the food in Bèze's emblem, the dead animals of Aertsen's *Meat Stall* inspire the viewer to think of the sacrifice of Christ: Food for the body is a visual metaphor of food for the soul.

At the very left of *The Meat Stall* is another view through a window where a church tower rises almost imperceptibly above the trees in the distance (Fig. 5). Many small figures walk along a road toward the church. This may be a continuation of the center background with the Flight into Egypt. The long line of pilgrims of the center scene may be on their way to church. The tower visible through this window seems to be based on the south tower of the Antwerp cathedral. It has the distinctive profile with conical roof and corner buttresses of that tower (compare Fig. 9).²¹ Among the curious symbols in the foreground of this part of the picture is one that might confirm this identification. Nearly hidden in the dark corner above the window is a sign with a pair of hands placed together, palms out (the inscription beneath these hands is unrecognizable) (Fig. 5). This motif derives from the coat of arms of the city of Antwerp where Aertsen lived when he painted this picture. A familiar image to citizens of Antwerp, the coat of arms shows two hands held up, palms out, over the walls of the city. (One version of this emblem is held by the female personification of Antwerp

EMBLEMA XI.



*Quidquid edis quodcumque bibis, moriatur oportet,
 Ut inde vita suppetat:
 Et nos à Christi quòd vitam morte petamus,
 Philopophe rides impie?*

8

who floats on the clouds above the seventeenth-century view of the city in Fig. 9). The hands are a reference to the old myth of the giant Druron Antigon who guarded the river at Antwerp like some great troll, levying taxes on any merchant's ship that wished to pass. He would cut off the hands of those who would not pay the tax or who tried to cheat him.²² The brave knight Brabo (a personification of Brabant?) finally put an end to Druron's tyranny and promptly cut off the giant's hands which he then threw into the Schelde. This less than pleasant little tale was one version of how the city got its name: Hand werpen = Antwerp. Be that as it may, the church tower with the hands above it practically duplicates the armorial of the city and strongly suggests that the picture was executed for Antwerp patrons.

Equally interesting are a number of other highly curious markings on the post at the far left of the painting that may also be associated with this view of the church tower (Fig. 5). At the top is an 'X' flanked by paired parallel vertical lines. These marks are similar to merchant's identification marks often put on boxes and crates,²³ but it is also possible that they are some form of accounting marks. But however the marks are read on the literal level, they are probably another instance of the disguised symbol of Christ's cross, like the crossed fish on the metal plate and the crossed trees of the landscape.

Just below the cross on the post is a picture of a little bell. Over it hangs a clover-like image and beside it are the lower case letters 'g b' – a common abbreviation for the Latin words *gens bona* 'the good people.'²⁴ The clover is certainly reminiscent of the trefoil motif which is associated with the Trinity in Christian design.²⁵ The presence of the trefoil above Aertsen's little bell indicates that it may be an object with religious significance. The small bell appears in one especially interesting religious context: a woodcut by the Amsterdam artist Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen dating from the first third of the sixteenth century (Fig. 10).²⁶ It shows the Host in the fire being adored by two angels. In the upper left corner is a small bell of the same type as the one in Aertsen's painting. The connection of the bell with the Host is, of course, an important one. From the Middle Ages

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Théodore Bèze, Emblem No. 11, in: *Icones, id est verae imagines virorum...*, Geneva 1580.

9

Jean Baptist Vrints, *View of Antwerp* (detail), 1610. Engraving.



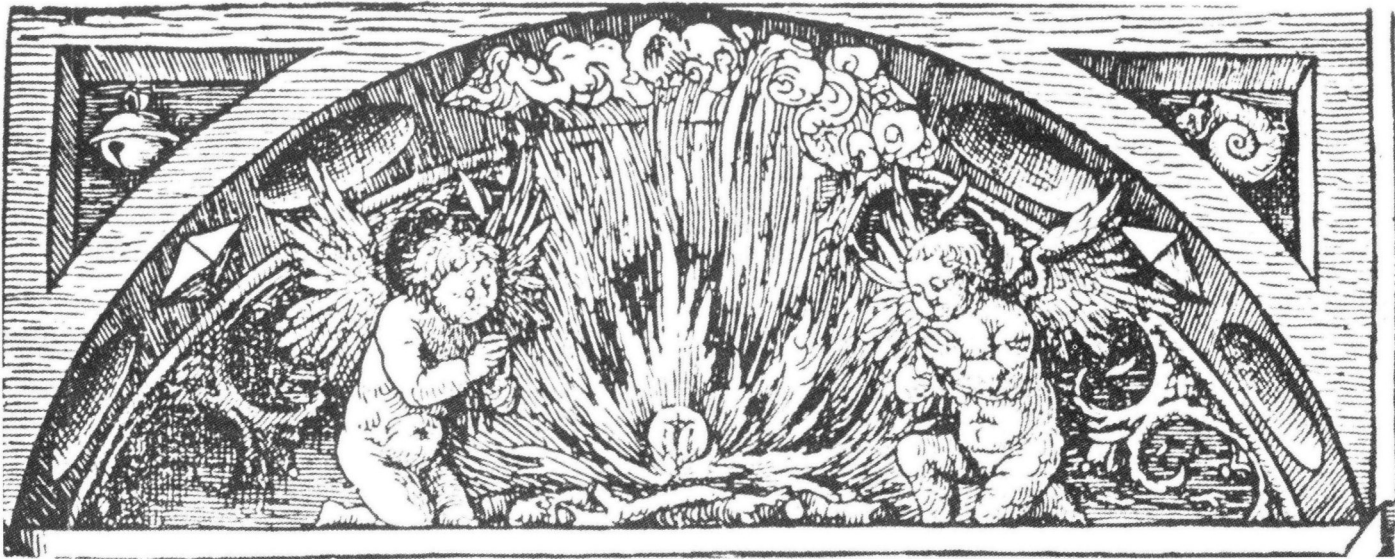
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even into this century small bells were rung during the Mass at the elevation of the Host to announce the precise moment when transubstantiation takes place.²⁷

Is it possible that Aertsen's bell, too, functions as a visual signal announcing the presence of the Eucharist?²⁸ To the left of the bell and just above it on a shelf are a pair of three-lobed pretzels and a wine pitcher (Fig. 5). The presence of bread and wine, elevated in this manner in conjunction with the bell might easily symbolize the Eucharist. The tri-lobed nature of the pretzels again recalls the Trinity and it should be noted that pretzels were eaten during fast periods in the religious calendar, especially at Lent. It would appear to be no accident that these things are placed nearest to the view of the church through the window, for like the fish on the platter, these items prefigure a scene of spiritual import in the background.

The most obvious device which Aertsen uses in *The Meat Stall* to draw attention to the background is the little sign board in the upper right corner. Starting off with the words 'hier achter' (behind here), it directs attention to a scene in a house that also has to do with food. It appears that a meal or a feast has just taken place here (Fig. 3).

One man pours water he has just drawn from a well into a jug. Oyster and mussel shells are strewn on the ground nearby. Beyond this figure is a small thatched house with a wall cut away so that the viewer may see the interior. There are four people in the room, two men and two women. One man stands with his arms raised warming himself before a fire and he turns his head to look over his shoulder. A second man leans in through a rear window to talk in a familiar manner to the two women seated at a table. The woman at the left holds up her finger and gestures in an animated fashion. Also inside this little building is the whole carcass of a slaughtered ox, raised up and hanging by its hind legs from a horizontal pole. A wooden rod with a towel draped over it holds the sides of the slaughtered beast apart so that the visceral cavity is clearly visible.²⁹ This little scene is very reminiscent of tavern and brothel paintings so common



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in the north. It recalls many versions of the Prodigal Son which show the Prodigal and tavern women around a table 'wasting their substance with riotous living.' This is not to suggest that Aertsen's scene represents the Prodigal Son, but it is a scene of 'worldly' pleasures charged with a certain erotic undertone.³⁰ This feeling is conveyed in part by the attitudes and gestures of the people and by the fact that the meal which the little group has just consumed was of oysters and mussels, reputed to be aphrodisiacs in Aertsen's day.³¹

Although the three background scenes of *The Meat Stall* are not contiguous, they probably should be read as a progression from right to left. At the right is a scene that represents the worldly aspects of life – feasting, drinking, love-making. The scene at the center offers alternate behavior as pilgrims accompany the Holy Family who proffer the gift of bread. Finally, the church tower rises above the trees like the ethereal goal of life's spiritual wanderings. Each of these scenes is prefigured in some way by elements of the foreground. Also, each of the scenes appears progressively deeper into the space of the picture and each seems conceptually further removed from the temporal world of the burgeoning foreground.

One of the more interesting aspects of Pieter Aertsen's *Meat Stall* is the question of who might have commissioned it. The patrons were certainly Antwerpers. The reference to the city armorials in the cut off hands should be adequate demonstration of that. But in addition, the very special legend of the Flight into Egypt which Aertsen represents appears, for the moment at least, only in the oeuvre of Antwerp painters.

Yet even if *The Meat Stall* can be connected with Antwerp with some certainty, who in the city would want a painting in which butchered animals occupied such a prominent part? Who would want a picture that guides the viewer to think of Christ's spiritual sustenance by means of an ox head, a few pig's feet, and a string of sausages?

The identification of the most prominent human figure in the painting may be of some assistance here (Fig. 3). The man who is filling the jug from the well is not only the largest figure in the picture, but also the artist has made a special effort to draw attention to him by means of the great, curling, stuffed intestine which seems to issue a droplet of its contents directly over his head. This man is dressed in plain everyday working clothes (in contrast to those who occupy

10
Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen,
The Host in the Fire. Woodcut.

11
Herman de Waghemakere,
Butchers' Hall, Antwerp. Be-
gun 1501.



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the little room behind him). On his belt he carries a leather sheath, and in it are some instruments or tools. This sheath and its contents can be identified as the characteristic implements carried by butchers.³² It seems safe to assume that the man at the well is in fact a butcher. Considering the predominance of meat images and the presence of the butcher in such an important role, might not this painting have been commissioned by the Butchers' Guild of Antwerp, perhaps to hang in their guild hall?

The Butchers' Hall at Antwerp was one of the largest and most important guild halls in all the Netherlands at this time (Fig. 11). As seen in an engraved view of the city from the early seventeenth century (Fig. 9), 'Het Vleeshuis' or the Butchers' Hall is a landmark in the middle of the old town not far from the cathedral itself. Until the completion of Antwerp's City Hall in 1565 the Butchers' Hall was the largest secular building in the city. Its vaulted and spacious first floor served as a vast meat market while the second floor was occupied by comfortable meeting and function rooms. The architect Herman de Waghemakere (c. 1430–1503) began the building in March, 1501.³³ This means, of course, that the guild celebrated a golden anniversary in March, 1551 – the very month and year in which Pieter Aertsen dated *The Meat Stall*.³⁴ The painting could well have been among the special commemorative projects that the guild undertook that year.³⁵

Moreover, the practice of executing religious paintings with rather special subjects for the guilds is well-attested. Documented examples include Maerten van Heemskerck's *St. Luke Painting the Virgin* done for the Painters' Guild at Haarlem.³⁶ Karel van Mander reports that Pieter Pietersz., Pieter Aertsen's son,

painted the Old Testament story of *The Three Boys in the Fiery Furnace* for the Bakers' Guild at Haarlem in 1575.³⁷ A third example, Petrus Christus' *St. Eligius in his Goldsmith's Shop* has been claimed for the Goldsmiths' Guild at Antwerp.³⁸ Thus, the production for guilds of religious paintings with rather special iconography slanted to the interests of the guild was not uncommon in the north. *The Meat Stall*, with its powerful images of dressed and butchered meats and its prominent inclusion of a butcher, would have been a most appropriate addition to the 'Vleeshuis' of Antwerp on its 50th anniversary.³⁹

But whether or not the owners of *The Meat Stall* were the Antwerp butchers, as seems likely, one vitally important aspect of the painting needs to be reemphasized. The juxtaposition of images of everyday objects presented in monumental fashion and played against a diminutive religious scene shown far off in the background cannot here be the result of merely an overpowering preference for still life at the expense of the religious subject. In Aertsen's painting the still life is important on a symbolic level. Temporal food in the foreground is intentionally contrasted with a biblical story that proffers spiritual food in the background. Food for the body is used to remind the viewer of food for the soul. *The Meat Stall* presents a kind of visual metaphor that beckons the viewer to consider the sustenance of his spiritual life. With the help of the little sign, the viewer is exhorted to look beyond the front plane of the picture both literally and symbolically. He is urged to think beyond the things of this world to apprehend a world of spiritual truth that underlies temporal existence. For while *The Meat Stall* is unquestionably a feast for the eyes, so too is it food for the mind.

Compositionally, *The Meat Stall* is a *tour de force*.⁴⁰ As the first inverted still life in the history of art it is the archetype of numerous other paintings by Aertsen and his followers and it stands at the head of a long tradition of still-life painting in Dutch and Flemish art.

NOTES

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¹ M.J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. 13, Leiden 1976, p. 58. The influence of this statement has been widespread since its first publication in the German edition of 1936. Earlier, Ludwig von Baldass had spoken of the religious scenes as a 'cloak' for the still life ('Sittenbild und Stilleben im Rahmen des niederländischen Romanismus,' *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 36 (1923), p. 19).

² Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, New York 1956, pp. 22–24. The author does hint at iconographic interpretation of the Mannerist inversion (p. 26), where he cites the still life in Aertsen's Martha and Mary pictures as an attribute of what is worldly. Bergström's book, first published in Swedish in 1947, is still the best survey of Dutch still-life painting.

³ The general moralizing intent of these paintings by Aertsen has been recognized for quite some time. Julius Held was one of the first in a review of Friedländer's *Early Netherlandish Painting in Art in America*, 27 (1939), p. 82. Held was closely followed by Georges Marlier ('Het stilleven en de vlaamsche schilderkunst der XVI^e eeuw,' *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, (1939–1941) p. 94) who thought that the still lifes with biblical subjects must somehow refer to man's preoccupation with physical riches although Marlier never expanded on the idea. More recently J. A. Emmens has discussed Aertsen's inverted paintings as well as a number of his other 'genre' works in terms of the concepts of *Amor Dei* and *Amor Sui* which St. Augustine

develops in *The City of God* (cf. especially Bk. XIV, 28), in "Eins aber ist nötig" – Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt – und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts,' *Album Amicorum J.G. van Gelder*, The Hague 1973, pp. 93–101, esp. p. 99. In a very interesting article Ardis Grosjean recognized the moralizing intent of such pictures; his explanation of them in terms of Dutch proverbs and puns is correct in many of its particulars, although it does not account for the fundamental reason for associating food still life with a biblical story ('Towards an Interpretation of Pieter Aertsen's Profane Iconography,' *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, 43 (1974), pp. 121–143). It should be noted that neither Emmens nor Grosjean discuss *The Meat Stall*.

The moralizing intent of *The Meat Stall* has been recognized in passing by Barry Wind in 'Annibale Carracci's "scherzo": The Christ Church Butcher Shop,' *Art Bulletin*, 53 (1976), p. 93. Detlev Kreidl sees moralizing intent in all of Aertsen's inverted pictures ('Die Religiöse Malerei Pieter Aertsens als Grundlage Seiner Künstlerischen Entwicklung,' *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, 68 (1972), pp. 43–108, esp. pp. 80–81). A more lengthy discussion of *The Meat Stall* also based on a moralizing approach identifying the picture as the representation of a feast day is to be found in Mary Buchan, 'The Paintings of Pieter Aertsen,' unpub. Ph. D. dissertation, New York University, 1975, pp. 81–95. See also Charles Cuttler, *Northern Painting from Pucelle to Bruegel*, New York 1968, p. 459.

Keith P.F. Moxey treats the inverted pictures and Aertsen's oeuvre in general as if secular imagery were somehow incompatible with moralizing content (*Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer and the Rise of Secular Painting in the Context of the Reformation*, New York: Garland, 1977 and 'The "Humanist" Market Scenes of Joachim Beuckelaer: Moralizing Exempla or "Slices of Life?"' *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, (1976), pp. 109–187, esp. pp. 142–152). In regard to this one should keep in mind what Panofsky has already observed, that the existence of images of a secular kind, painted in highly naturalistic style, far from precluding disguised symbolism, is on the contrary, a necessary precondition for it (*Early Netherlandish Painting*, New York: Icon, 1971, pp. 140–141).

⁴ Uppsala University, inv. no. L-1.

⁵ Dated on the post at the far right, just visible in Fig. 3.

⁶ Cf. Baldass, 'Sittenbild und Stilleben,' op. cit. (Note 1), p. 15.

⁷ Johannes Sievers, *Pieter Aertsen, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Niederländischen Kunst im XVI Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1908, pp. 43–49. The painting was once given to Beuckelaer by August Hahr, 'Gammalfamsk konst i Uppsala universitets Tafvelsamling,' *Studier tillagnade Henrik Schück*, Stockholm 1905, pp. 97–98.

⁸ *Christina, Queen of Sweden* (exhibition catalogue), Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 1966, p. 506, no. 1269.

⁹ For a similar, if somewhat freer translation of the sign, see *Christina, Queen of Sweden*, op. cit. (Note 8), pp. 506–507. For assistance with this inscription I am indebted to Sadja Herzog and Henri Pauwels.

¹⁰ The significance of the fish in their relationship to the background scene was first noted by Cuttler, *Northern Painting*, op. cit. (Note 3), p. 459.

¹¹ Kreidl, 'Die religiöse Malerei Pieter Aertsens,' op. cit. (Note 3), p. 80 says only that the Virgin is giving 'alms' ('spende'). Mary Buchan, 'The Paintings of Aertsen,' op. cit. (Note 3), calls the gift 'a small package' (p. 87) but there can be little doubt that it is bread.

¹² Nor has a voluminous amount of Netherlandish folklore yielded up a source. For a summary of many of the stories connected in popular tradition with the Flight into Egypt see L. Conrady, 'Die Flucht nach Aegypten und die Rückkehr von dort in den apokryphen Kindheitsgeschichten Jesu,' *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 72 (1904), pp. 172–220. See also the Ph. D. dissertation by Karl Vogler, *Die Ikonographie der 'Flucht nach Aegypten'*, Arnstadt 1930.

¹³ Panel, 42 × 59 cm. Lugano, Galerie Schloss Rohoncz. Keith Moxey kindly drew this picture to my attention. See also Dietrich Schubert, *Die Gemälde des Braunschweiger Monogrammisten*, Cologne 1970, figs. 67 and 68, who reproduces this painting as well as a second version in the R.G. de Boer Collection, Laren. It is now generally conceded that the Braunschweiger Monogrammist is Jan van Amstel and G.J. Hoogewerff has suggested that van Amstel was Pieter Aertsen's brother (*De Noordnederlandse Schilderkunst*, vol. 4, p. 488). While stylistically they are certainly kindred spirits, there is no documentary evidence of a blood relationship.

¹⁴ Thieme Collection, Berlin (1924). Reproduced after F. Winkler, *Die altniederländische Malerei* Berlin 1924, fig. 182.

¹⁵ Winkler, *Die altniederländische Malerei* op. cit. (Note 14) p. 307 correctly describes the action here as the Virgin handing a loaf to the child, not vice versa. When Vogler discussed this painting (*Die Ikonographie der 'Flucht nach Aegypten'*, op. cit. (Note 12), p. 27) he misinterpreted the action as the child handing the bread to the Holy Family and was thereby led to associate the lines from an old German song that speak of angels attending Joseph, the Virgin, and Jesus, 'Die Engel zeigten ihm Steig und Stag / Sie dienten auff der Raiss und Weg / Jesu dem Herrn' which have nothing whatsoever to do with these pictures. There are, of course, a number of paintings that show the Holy Family attended by angels including versions by Rubens (1619, Cassel) and Caravaggio (1595–1596, Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome).

¹⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by Ryan and Ripberger, New York 1969, p. 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁸ Théodore Bèze (1519–1605) was one of the principal scholars of the Reformation in France, the spiritual heir of John Calvin.

¹⁹ Bèze, *Icones, id est verae imagines virorum...*, Geneva 1580, no. 11.

²⁰ The Latin is: Quidquid edis quocumque bibis, moriatur oportet / Ut inde vita suppetat / Et nos à Christi quod vitam morte petamus, / Philosophie rides impic?

²¹ View of Antwerp, engraving by Jean Baptist Vrints, 1610; the detail reproduced here shows the center of town.

²² Cf. Leon Voet, *Antwerp: the Golden Age*, Antwerp 1973, p. 119. There are a variety of stories and a considerable body of literature on the question of how Antwerp got its name. See Albert van Laar, *Bibliographie van de geschiedenis van de stad Antwerpen*, vol. 1, The Hague 1927, pp. 37–42. Buchan has also recognized this as the emblem of the city ('*The Paintings of Aertsen*,' op. cit. (Note 3), p. 94).

²³ Pieter Bruegel the Elder shows the great variety these marks can take in his engraving *Everyman*. The marks in *The Meat Stall* could also conceivably be Roman numerals for 14.

²⁴ Adriano Cappelli, *Dizionario di Abbreviature Latine ed Italiane*, Milan 1973, p. 460.

²⁵ In the context of an interpretation of *The Meat Stall* as a festival scene Buchan identifies these marks as suits of sixteenth-century playing cards (bells and clubs) and the entire grouping as the tally for a card game or drinking bout ('*The Paintings of Aertsen*,' op. cit. (Note 3), p. 90). The location of the marks as well as their careful arrangement precludes that, however.

²⁶ Woodcut, 8.8 × 22.4 cm. Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen (c. 1470–1533) was an Amsterdamer, active in that city at the time of Aertsen's first artistic training. (Cf. F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts*, vol. 5, p. 36, no. 161). The print commemorates a miracle said to have occurred at Amsterdam in the fourteenth century when the consecrated Host in its tabernacle survived a terrible conflagration that destroyed the church in which it reposed. (See F.G. Holweck, *Calendarum Liturgicum Festorum Dei et Dei Matris Mariae*, Philadelphia 1925, pp. 68–69). The snail in the right spandrel of the print is probably a reference to the nature of this miracle since the snail is protected inside its shell just as the Host survived inside its tabernacle. (In later emblem literature the snail becomes a symbol of independence and self-sufficiency because it wears its protective house on its back.)

²⁷ Yrjö Hirn describes it thus: '...there was needed some signal, however unobtrusive, by which the attention of the spectators might be directed to the altar at the critical moment. Such a cue is given by the ringing of the small silver bells, which the deacon sets in motion at the precise moment when the bread and wine are transformed and the eucharistic God is raised above the Mass table in the priest's hands for his renewed sacrifice. The clear sound, the pure tones of which carry throughout the greatest cathedrals, is by reason of its symbolical meaning the most significant of all the impressions that church music can convey to a believer's mind. It prepares the congregation for vision of lofty things, and awakes a reverence for the Host and the Chalice.' *The Sacred Shrine*, London 1958, p. 117.

²⁸ In this context one usually thinks of the standard bell shape with clapper, but single 'sleigh' bells are also used. The Christ Child himself rings this kind of bell in Geertgen tot Sint Jans *Madonna of the Sanctus*, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

²⁹ The slaughtered ox has a traceable history in sixteenth-century Netherlandish art, appearing in contexts that suggest the image is a special kind of *memento mori* and connected closely in meaning to the slaughtered animals of the foreground of the picture. The slaughtered ox appears in two paintings by another Antwerp artist, Maerten van Cleve. One, called *Cavalier in a Peasant Household*, shows the image as part of a carousing scene with obvious lustful and gluttonous behavior. In a second picture the ox appears with children blowing up a bladder (*homo bulla*) and a man drinking lustily from a wine tankard. (Both pictures are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; for reproductions see R.H. Wilenski, *Flemish Painters*, 2 vols., New York 1960, vol. 2, pls. 394 and 396). The slaughtered ox also appears in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's design for the engraving of *Prudence*, one of the series of the 'Seven Virtues.' Here in this ironic or 'topsey turvey' context (as de Tolnay has called it) the ox stands among many images of man's misdirected preparations for a future that is only temporal and therefore transient. It may serve as a kind of warning. In Pieter Aertsen's vignette of the slaughtered ox in *The Meat Stall* Charles Cuttler saw allusions to the crucifixion of Christ (*Northern Painting*, op. cit. (Note 3), p. 459). It should be noted that the slaughtered ox is a kind of corporeal sacrifice, like the butchered food of the foreground of the picture, and should stand in marked contrast to Christ's spiritual sacrifice on the cross. What bearing, if any, this all has on Rembrandt's famous versions of *The Slaughtered Ox* (Glasgow, Art Gallery; Paris, Louvre), remains to be determined. For further discussion see Mary Buchan, '*The Paintings of Aertsen*,' op. cit. (Note 3), pp. 86–87, who supports Cuttler's interpretation and the author's Ph. D. dissertation '*Pieter Aertsen's Inverted Still Life*,' op. cit. (Note *), pp. 130–136.

³⁰ Cf. Konrad Renger, *Lockere Gesellschaft*, Berlin 1970, p. 16, for the point of view that these ca-

rousing scenes are, like the Prodigal Son pictures from which they derive, moralizing in intent.

³¹ Athenaeus of Naucratis was the authority on this point most familiar to the sixteenth century. He wrote in *The Deipnosophists* in the second century A.D., 'Pinnae, crayfish, bulbs, snails, buccina, eggs extremities, and all that. If anyone in love with a girl shall find any drugs more useful than these.' (Pinnae are a general class of bivalves which includes oysters and mussels). From *The Deipnosophists*, London 1927 vol. 1, p. 277. Athenaeus went through two editions before the date of Aertsen's painting, 1514 in Venice and 1535 in Basel (Ibid., p. xix). This reference courtesy of Sadja Herzog. Richard Tarlton said of them, 'Oysters be ungodly meate, uncharitable meate and unprofitable meate. They are ungodly because they are eaten without grace, uncharitable because they leave nought but shells, and unprofitable because they must swim in wine.' *Tarlton's Jestes*, London 1611, p. 6.

³² Compare, for instance, the same sheath with tools (probably knives) worn by the fat butcher riding the barrel in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Battle of Carnival and Lent* (1559, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). These items also appear in a Rembrandt drawing *Two Butchers Slaughtering Hogs*, (Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut, inv. no. 3626, Benesch no. 400).

³³ De Waghmakere also worked on the Cathedral and St. Jacobskerk. (Cf. Thieme-Becker, *Künstler Lexikon*, vol. 35, p. 25.) Documents relating to the building of the Butchers' Hall are still preserved in the city archives of Antwerp (cf. Grederic Verachter, *Antwerp Archives de la Ville*, Antwerp 1860, p. 186). The building was purchased by the city in 1899 and is now restored to serve as a museum. It houses many period pieces as well as some Egyptian antiquities.

³⁴ The painting is dated March 10, 1551; the Butchers' Hall was begun sometime in March, 1501. The date on the painting may be a commemoration to the very day of the founding of the building. It was not unusual for Aertsen to date his pictures in this special way. Two of his versions of *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, July 25, 1552; Rotterdam, Museum Boymans, July 27, 1553) are dated half-way into the week between the feast of St. Mary (July 22) and the feast of St. Martha (July 29). There is an old tradition in Netherlandish art for dating paintings on appropriate anniversaries that goes back to the *Ghent Altarpiece*, which is dated May 6, 1432, the feast of St. John at the Porta Latina. In such cases the dates do not necessarily indicate when the works were finished but probably when they were dedicated. For information regarding the date of the building of the Butchers' Hall I am grateful to Mrs. J. Lambrechts-Douillez, Associate Curator of the Museum Vleeshuis, Antwerp.

³⁵ The Butchers' Guild had a special privilege book made up on this, their 50th anniversary. It includes some delightful illuminations and a prayer as well as the list of members for that year. (Cf. Voet, *Antwerp*, op. cit. (Note 22), p. 283.)

³⁶ 1532, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, 1969 Cat. no. 150. Karel van Mander, *Dutch and Flemish Painters*, trans. by C. van de Wall, New York 1936, p. 120.

³⁷ 1575, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, 1969 Cat. no. 234. Van Mander, *Dutch and Flemish Painters*, op. cit. (Note 36), p. 118.

³⁸ 1449, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Lehman Collection. Cf. W.H. James Weale, *Peintres Brugeois: Les Christus*, Bruges 1909. Weale's suggestion has been generally accepted; cf. M.J. Friendländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. 1, p. 83.

³⁹ The fact that the butcher in *The Meat Stall* is shown among the worldly people and thus in unflattering spiritual circumstances should not be an objection to ownership of the painting by the Butchers' Guild. They were certainly capable of recognizing the 'transience' of their own work and that the message of *The Meat Stall* was intended as much for them as for anyone. An interesting parallel here are the *vanitas* paintings of David Bailly. Working in the university town of Leiden, Bailly filled his panels with images of books, maps, and charts, the very products of human knowledge. These things became the symbols of human vanity not because either Bailly or his patrons were anti-intellectual but because the very intellectuals who pursued these interests – and who were no doubt Bailly's principal patrons – recognized their own vanity in their work and acknowledged God's greater and perfect wisdom. *The Meat Stall* may well represent a similar expression on the part of the butchers.

⁴⁰ Strictly speaking, the inverted compositional form is not exclusively Mannerist in origin. While Aertsen was the first to employ an inverted composition with still life, examples in other subjects can be found much earlier. Lucas van Leyden's engraving of *Susanna and the Elders* (Bartsch no. 33) could be cited here and so could Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ* (Palazzo Ducale, Urbino). For other possible parallels see Moxey, 'The Humanist Market Scenes of Joachim Beuckelaer,' op. cit. (Note 3), pp. 146–148. David Summers has written about the idea of 'contrast' as one of the guiding principles of Renaissance and Mannerist composition in 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art,' *Art Bulletin*, 59 (1977), pp. 336–361. Summers' thesis that composition itself is often a carrier of ideas in works of art 'making form and meaning structurally congruent' (p. 358) has obvious and direct application to this picture by Pieter Aertsen.