

TRIBUTES IN HONOR OF

*James H.
Marrow*

*Studies in Painting and
Manuscript Illumination
of the Late Middle Ages and
Northern Renaissance*



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edited by

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An Imprint of Brepols Publishers

London / Turnhout

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book

is available from the British Library

ISBN 1-905375-08-5



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Images as Aids for Earning the Indulgences of Rome

HENRI DEFOER

THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERSON was exceedingly worried about the health of his soul. He was convinced that after death his soul would continue for all eternity. If he were to die in a state of sin, his soul would go to hell, but if he had confessed his sins in time, his soul would eventually be lifted up into the heavenly paradise. Only with the return of the Lord at the Last Judgment would the matter be settled definitively. Before that moment, the soul might have to spend time in Purgatory in order to suffer for the sins that had been committed. One could indeed receive forgiveness for one's sins, but not remittance for the punishment of sins. One could reduce this punishment by doing penance, performing good works, reciting certain prayers, taking a pilgrimage, or obtaining indulgences. An indulgence is a plenary or partial remittance for the punishment of sin, which only the Church can grant on behalf of Christ. The medieval person comported himself in great uncertainty about how long he would have to remain in Purgatory after his death, before he was sufficiently purified to enter heaven. The purgatorial sentence could be shortened in two ways: after his death through the prayers of his surviving relatives in which he was remembered, or through Masses they commissioned for his salvation; or, before his death, through penance he performed himself or indulgences he earned. One could earn these indul-

gences not only for oneself, but also on behalf of the deceased. To earn indulgences, one had to recite certain prayers, complete pilgrimages, or donate money for a purpose indicated by the Church. The indulgences were limited at first. Beginning in the fourteenth century, indulgences became ever greater, and the requirements for earning them ever easier. Consequently, at the end of the Middle Ages, there arose a real hunt for indulgences, whose excesses would later motivate Martin Luther to act.

The most desirable indulgence was the plenary indulgence, by which one received remittance for all the punishments for the sins one had confessed. Initially, this could be earned only by going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, by taking part in a Crusade, or by supporting such activities financially.¹ This indulgence was called the "Jubilee Indulgence," after the "Jubilee Year" of the Old Testament, which was celebrated every forty-ninth year (7 x 7). During such a year a pilgrim who went to Jerusalem could earn a plenary indulgence. In 1300 Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) attached the Jubilee indulgence to Roman pilgrimage by establishing a Holy Year, which was originally intended to take place every century, but within a short time, it was celebrated every fifty, twenty-five, or thirty-three years. Everyone who visited the so-called Seven Principal Churches of Rome during a fourteen-day

1. The most important literature concerning indulgences is N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols. (Paderborn, 1922-23); B. Poschmann, *Der Ablass im Licht der Bussgeschichte* (Bonn, 1948); W. Nolet and P. C. Boeren, *Kerkelijke instellingen in de Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1951), 285-93; K. Rahner, *Ablass*, in

Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche I (Freiburg i. Br., 1957), 46-53; G. Schwaiger, "Der Ablass im Mittelalter," in *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen*, exh. cat., Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, ed. L. Kriss-Rettenbeck and G. Möhler (Munich, 1984), 341-45.

period in such a year received a plenary indulgence.² A century later, Pope Boniface IX (1389–1404) gave the inhabitants of certain countries and cities the chance to earn a Jubilee Indulgence without having to travel to Rome. One could thereby perform the service close to home by visiting certain churches and, at the same time, giving money for the restoration of the churches of Rome. The amount donated was to equal the cost of a pilgrimage to the Holy City.³

Even when there was no Jubilee Year going on, many people went to Rome to earn the large indulgences by a visiting the Seven Principal Churches: San Giovanni in Laterano, San Pietro, San Paolo fuori le Mura, San Lorenzo, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Sebastiano, and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. Indulgences, which grew in value over time, were attached to these churches and their altars so that by the beginning of the sixteenth century, people understood that a plenary indulgence was available in some churches on certain days. The explosive growth of these indulgences surfaces in the guidebooks that had been written especially for pilgrims to Rome since the fourteenth century.

These small "Baedekers" provided the history of Rome and listed descriptions not only of the Seven Principal Churches, but also of the Station Churches.⁴ The notion of Station Churches was connected to an antiquated usage that stemmed

from the fourth century: on certain feast days the pope, in a solemn procession, would make his way to a given church in order to celebrate Mass there. After the eighth century, the pope no longer took part in the celebration of mass personally, and in the fourteenth century the processions were also abolished, but the idea of Station Churches remained. With an ever-growing magnitude, indulgences were also connected to these Station Churches. In this respect, it was certainly worth the difficulty for a pilgrim to also visit these churches.⁵ In the later Middle Ages, however, this was no longer necessary because Pope Gregory I (590–604) was said to have stipulated that pilgrims could also earn the indulgences from the small Station Churches on their respective days in the Seven Principal Churches. Moreover, in the fifteenth century the popes granted the possibility of earning the indulgences from the Station Churches in one's own city or convent, as they had already done with the Seven Principal Churches.⁶

Pope Gregory I's decree, which is, of course, apocryphal, appears in a booklet called *Die costelijke scat der gheestelijker rijdom*, published in Amsterdam in 1519 by Hugo Jansz. van Woerden. This booklet is one among many published in the early sixteenth century that described who could earn the indulgences of Rome without actually traveling to the city, and under what conditions this was possible.⁷ The booklet declares that

2. See Paulus, *Geschiede des Ablasses* (as in note 1), vol. 2, 101 ff.; Nolet and Boeren, *Kerkelijke instellingen* (as in note 1), 290–91; P. C. Boeren, *Heiligdomsvaart Maastricht: Schets van de geschiedenis der heiligdomsvaarten en andere jubelvaarten* (Maastricht, 1962), 145 ff.; J. van Herwaarden, *Pelgrimstochten* (Bussum, 1974), 56 ff.; J. Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London, 1975), 231 ff.

3. See Paulus, *Geschiede des Ablasses* (as in note 1), vol. 3, 181 ff.; Nolet and Boeren, *Kerkelijke instellingen* (as in note 1), 290–91; Boeren, *Heiligdomsvaart Maastricht* (as in note 2), 147; Van Herwaarden, *Pelgrimstochten* (as in note 2), 59; Sumption, *Pilgrimage* (as in note 2), 246 ff.

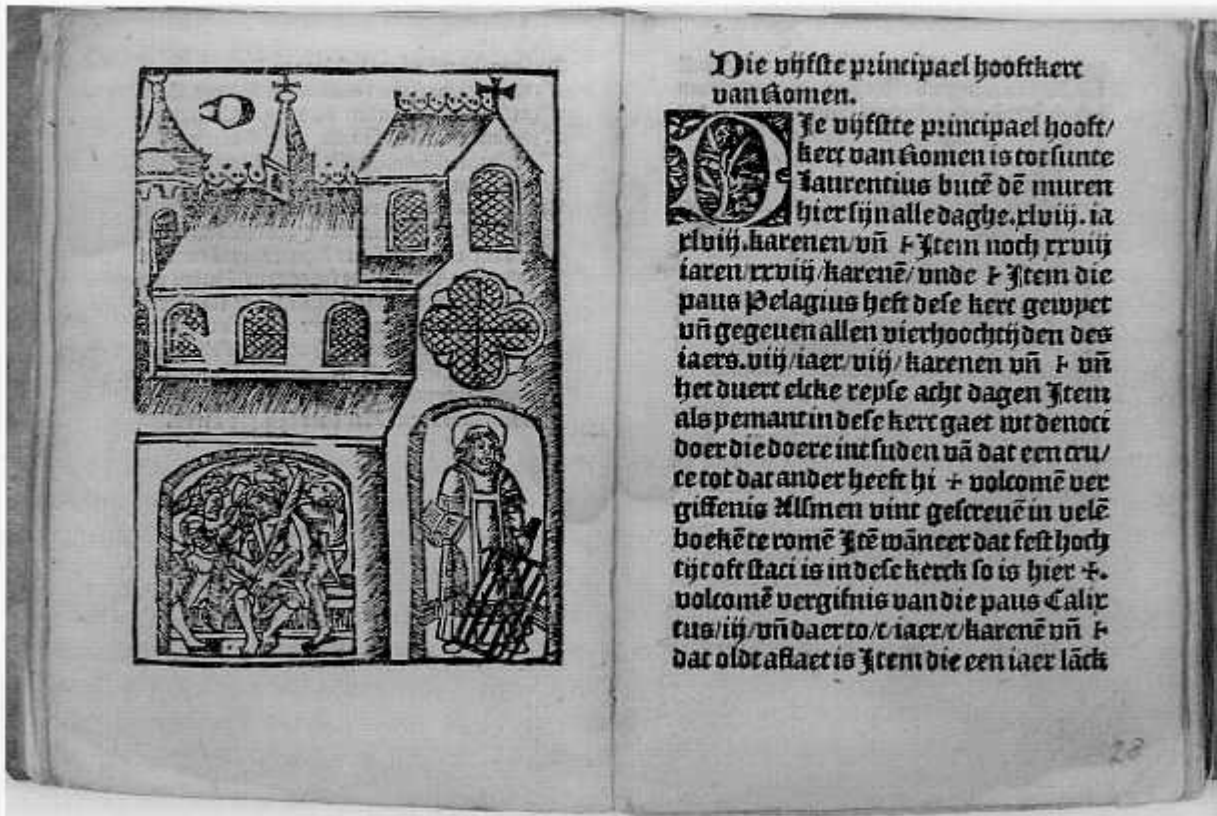
4. See Paulus, *Geschiede des Ablasses* (as in note 1), vol. 2, 292 ff.; vol. 3, 274 ff.; and Van Herwaarden *Pelgrimstochten* (as in note 2), 63–64.

5. See A. Beekman, *De oorsprong en de beteekenis der Romeinse staties* (Louvain and 's-Hertogenbosch, 1929); *Liturgisch Woor-*

denboek, ed. L. Brinkhoff et al. (Roermond, 1958–70), cols. 2581–84.

6. See Paulus, *Geschiede des Ablasses* (as in note 1), vol. 3, 278 ff.; Boeren, *Heiligdomsvaart Maastricht* (as in note 2), 42; Sumption, *Pilgrimage* (as in note 2), 141 ff. One had to visit certain churches in a city, for example, or certain chapels, altars, or other places within a monastery or church, which were designated as such. See G. Goldberg, "Peregrinatio, quam vocant Romana. Miscellanea zu Stellvertreterstätten römischer Hauptkirchen," in *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen* (as in note 1), 346–51.

7. For related booklets printed in the Netherlands, see E. W. Moes, *De Amsterdamsche Boekdrukkers en Uitgevers in de zestiende eeuw*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1900), nos. 26, 48, and 49; W. Nijhoff and M. E. Kronenberg, *Nederlandsche Bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540* (The Hague, 1923), nos. 1165, 1279–83. The booklet cited above by Hugo Jansz van Woerden is listed neither in Moes nor in Nijhoff and Kronenberg. There is a copy in the Museum Catharijneconvent in



1. The Church of San Lorenzo in Rome with Saint Lawrence and the Mocking of Christ. Woodcut in Robert van Coelen, *Die costelyke seat der gheestelijker rijcdom* (The Hague, Hugo Jansz. van Woerden, 1519). Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, inv. no. BMH pi 88.

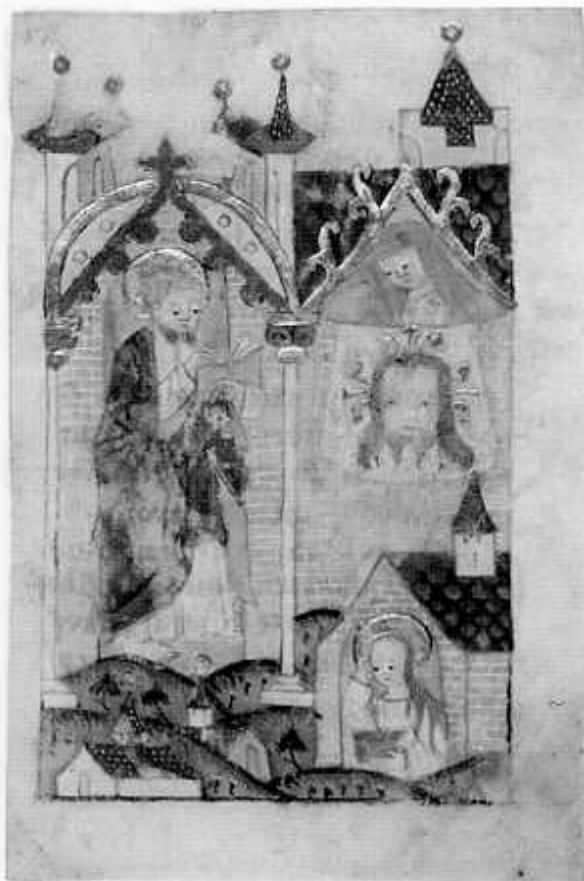
the Canons Regular from the Chapter of Windesheim, the Benedictines, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the members of the Guild of Our Dear Lady and Saint Anne in the Dominican Convent in Haarlem could all earn the indulgences of Rome at home. To accomplish this, they had to perform certain prayers, which varied from group to group. The Seven Principal Churches are also depicted in the booklet (fig. 1). The woodcuts are indicated by the letters A to G, and each shows a church with its patron saint standing in the door. The wall of the nave is opened and provides

a view onto a representation of one of the Seven *Bloedstoringen* of Jesus, that is, the events of his life, whereby he shed blood for the salvation of mankind, beginning with circumcision, and ending with death on the cross. The woodcuts were therefore not simply decorative illustrations but had a function in the earning of indulgences.⁸ There are also two Flemish manuscripts from the end of the fifteenth century with representations of the Seven Principal Churches of Rome, along with instructions for earning the indulgences attached to these churches. These manuscripts

Utrecht (inv. no. P.I. 88). See H. L. M. Defoer, "Een laat-gotisch schilderijtje met St. Jan voor het verdienen van de allaten van de zeven hoofdkerken van Rome," *Antiek* 16 (1981–82): 318–20; W. Cahn, "Margaret of York's Guide to the Pilgrimage of Rome," in *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and the Visions of Tundal*, ed. T. Kren (Malibu, 1992), 95, n. 17; W. C. M. Wüstefeld, *Middeleeuwse boeken van het Catharijneconvent*, exh. cat., Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht (Zwolle, 1993), no. 89; T. van Bueren

with contributions by W. C. M. Wüstefeld, *Leven na de Dood. Gedenken in de late Middeleeuwen*, exh. cat., Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht (Turnhout, 1999), no. 36/1.

8. This booklet not only provides information about the indulgences for Rome, but also about those for the Holy Land, the Brotherhood of the Rosary, and the Brotherhood of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin.



2. *The Church of San Pietro in Vaticano in Rome with Saints Peter and Veronica*. Northwest Germany, ca. 1500–1520. Single leaf miniature, 11.5 x 7.5 cm. Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, inv. no. 5.

were both published by Walter Cahn.⁹ One of them, now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University (Ms. 639), was once in the possession of Margaret of York (1446–1503), wife of the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold. The other manuscript is kept in the Bibliotheca Reale of Turin (Ms. Varia 81). The miniatures show the patron saints of the churches alternately inside the church's interior or standing in front of its exterior.

A single miniature in the Rijksmuseum Twen-

the in Enschede suggests the production of other, related booklets (fig. 2).¹⁰ The leaf, which must have been painted in the sixteenth century in northwest Germany, would have originally formed part of a booklet with which one could earn the Roman indulgences.¹¹ Represented in the image is a stylized church, consisting of a roof with towers and two Gothic niches below. Peter stands in one, and Veronica with her cloth bearing the face of Christ stands in the other. Veronica's cloth was one of the most important relics from St. Peter's. Because it promised such generous indulgences, it attracted large crowds of pilgrims. The small chapels that appear in the foreground of the image may be the Station Churches that fell under the jurisdiction of San Pietro. In the one furthest to the right, one sees a half-length figure of a holy virgin in the doorway. The identity of this saint is uncertain. In any case, it is not a patron saint from one of San Pietro's Station Churches, since all of those had male patron saints. On the verso of the leaf are two prayers to Saint Peter, and underneath that, the rubric of a prayer to Saint Paul. This is understandable, since San Paolo fuori le Mura was the third of the Seven Principal Churches of Rome, and in descriptions in similar booklets, San Paolo always follows San Pietro. Apparently, one had to read the prayers to Saint Peter in order to earn the indulgences available at his church.

Similar prayers appear in other booklets, such as in one printed by the Amsterdam printer Doen Pietersz., titled *Figuren van die seven kerkcken van Romē daermen stacien hout vanden aflaten der broederschap vander prekerorden van Haarlem* (Images of the Seven Principal Churches of Rome where One Celebrates the Stations of the Indulgences of the Brotherhood of the Dominicans of Haarlem), now kept in the Royal Library in The

9. Cahn, "Margaret of York's Guide" (as in note 7), 89–98.

10. E. P. van 't Hull-Vermaas, *Handschriften en incunabelen van het Rijksmuseum Twenthe Enschede*, exh. cat., Rijksmuseum Twenthe (Enschede, 1975), no. 8. On this miniature, see also K. M. Rudy's

essay, "Fragments of a Mental Journey to a Passion Park," in this volume.

11. The leaf was probably copied from a fifteenth-century exemplar.

Hague.¹² According to the instructions in this booklet, the members of the brotherhood had to recite one of the seven Psalms as well as a prayer to the patron of the respective church in front of the representation of one of the Seven Principal Churches on one of its "station days." Furthermore, they had to meditate on one scene from the Passion of Christ and, as the instructions relate: "in gehoechnisse der seven bloetstortinghen ons Heren, als die Figuren deser Kercken wt wysen, sal men lesen de Gebeden, die by elcke Figure van deser Kercken staen tegen dye seven Doot-sonden" [in memory of the Seven Sheddings of Blood of Our Lord, as the images of these churches indicate, one should read the prayers against the Seven Deadly Sins, which appear by each image of these churches].

This also provides a clarification for the Seven Sheddings of Blood that appear in the booklet by Hugo Jansz. van Woerden but lack a specific connection with the accompanying text. Bound with the booklet published by Doen Pietersz. mentioned above, there is a second work printed by him, titled *Hier begint een cleyne coerte Informacie, om te verdienen dye Stacien ende Oflaten der seven kercken van Romem* (A Short Guide to Earning the Stations and Indulgences of the Seven Churches of Rome).¹³ Among other things, it describes the requirements for earning the following indulgences: "Item, men sal kiezen seven Altaren in dye kercke. Off daer so veel Altaren nyet en zyn, seven plaetsen. Ende op een yghelick Altaer oft plaetse een teyken hangen om die plaetse te kennen. Ende daer toe een cleyne ghemeeen Bordeken, daer in sal staen ghescreven: Hier ist Stacie" [Item, one should choose seven altars in the church. If there are not enough altars, then seven places. On each altar or place [one should] hang a sign in order to



3. The Church of San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome with Saint John the Baptist. Northern Netherlands, ca. 1500. Panel painting, 30 x 17 cm. Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, inv. no. ABM s 37.

mark the place, and attach to it a simple little board, which should read, "Here is the station"].

The "sign" mentioned could naturally be the name of the Principal Church in question, but it is more likely that it consisted of a representation of one of these churches. The Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht preserves such a little panel (fig. 3).¹⁴ Connected to the earning of indulgences,¹⁵ the panel shows John the Baptist stand-

12. Moes, *De Amsterdamse Boekdruckers* (as in note 7), no. 49; Nijhoff and Kronenberg, *Nederlandse Bibliographie* (as in note 7), no. 1181. The text in this booklet is transcribed in full in I. Le Long, *Historische Beschrijvingen van de Reformatie der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1729), 465 ff.

13. Nijhoff and Kronenberg, *Nederlandse Bibliographie* (as in note 7),

no. 1185. This text is also transcribed by Le Long, *Historische Beschrijvingen* (as in note 12), 461 ff.

14. Northern Netherlands, ca. 1500, 30 x 17 cm, inv. no. ABM s 37.

15. When I published this panel for the first time in 1981, I connected it to the earning of indulgences (Defoer, "Een laat-gotisch schilderijtje" [as in note 7], 316-18). See also Cahn, "Margaret of

ing in front of a church façade with two towers.¹⁶ With his right hand he points to the Lamb of God that sits on the book, which he holds with his left. The roof has an openwork decoration, which is similar to that in the woodcuts in the booklet described above. The panel and its frame were cut from a single piece of wood. The frame is hollowed out on the sides and at the top and decorated with pairs of pearls alternating with four-leafed flowers. The lower edge of the frame slopes upward. The letter *A* appears in gold at the upper right, above the roof of the church. This connects the panel to the woodcut series and indicates that it was part of a series of panels bearing the representations of the Seven Principal Churches of Rome for earning the indulgences connected to these churches.

In October 1997, Dr. Catherine Reynolds from London brought to my attention a panel depicting Mary standing before a church with the letter *D* above it (fig. 4). The panel, which is housed in the Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery in South Carolina, is clearly from the same hand as the Saint John in Utrecht and is also of a comparable size.¹⁷ It must therefore represent Santa Maria Maggiore and belong to the same series as the John the Baptist.

In addition to these panels, there are two more little paintings in the Erzbischöfliches Diözesan-Museum in Cologne, which must have come from similar series. In one of these, Mary is depicted standing in the entrance of a church with many towers, and on the other a crucified Christ appears before a similar sort of building. Although there are no letters on these panels, they



4. *The Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome with the Virgin and Child*. Northern Netherlands, ca. 1500. Panel painting, 12 x 7 inches. Greenville, S.C., Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery; inv. no. p.60.219.

York's Guide" (as in note 7), 95; Wüstefeld, *Middleleeuwse boeken* (as in note 7), no. 89; Van Buuren, *Leven na de Dood* (as in note 7), no. 36/2; J. Dijkstra et al., *De schilderijen van Museum Catharijneconvent* (Zwolle, 2002), 117.

16. In the booklet by Hugo Jansz. van Woerden and on the panel in the Catharijneconvent, the Church of San Giovanni in Laterano is represented with John the Baptist, while the same church is personified in the Yale University manuscript with John the Evangelist. This is understandable, since this church was dedicated to both Johns.

17. Panel, 12 x 7 inches. See *The Bob Jones University Collection of Religious Paintings*, vol. 1, *Italian and French Paintings*, intro. A. Scharf (Greenville, S.C., 1962), no. 96. The catalogue attributes the panel to the French School and dates it in the fifteenth century. A date at the end of the fifteenth century seems quite possible to me, given the round neckline of Mary's dress and the rather pointy shoes. A date shortly after 1500 would also be possible. In my opinion, it seems best to date both panels around 1500. Until now, a date between 1500 and 1525 has been given for the panel depicting John the Baptist.



5. *The Church of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome, with Saint Paul and Two Praying Monks (Hermits of Saint Paul?).* Rhineland or Westphalia, ca. 1490–1500. Panel painting, 31.8 x 42.5 cm. Krakow, Czartoryski Museum, inv. no. XlIA-763.

clearly represent Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and formed part of a series of the Seven Principal Churches.¹⁸

In 1997, I found a small panel in the Czartoryski Museum in Krakow, which must have also belonged to such a series (fig. 5). It shows Saint Paul, identifiable by his sword, with a balding head and a long beard, standing in the entrance-way to a church with two monks kneeling at the

left.¹⁹ It is clear that San Paolo fuori le Mura is represented here. Because the top of the picture is lost, it is impossible to know whether a letter originally appeared on the image. The panel dates from the end of the fifteenth century and has a certain stylistic relationship with the work of the Master of the Legend of Saint George and the Master of Liesborn, and was probably painted in the Rhineland or in Westphalia. As the monks

18. 57.5 x 33.5 cm and 58 x 33.5 cm, respectively. Lower Rhine, mid-fifteenth century. The panel depicting Mary is on loan from the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. See W. Schulten, *Kostbarkeiten in Köln*, exh. cat., Erzbischöfliches Diözesan-Museum (Cologne, 1978), nos. 222, 223; Defoer, "Een laat-gotisch schilderijtje" (as in note 7), 316–18; Cahn, "Margaret of York's Guide" (as in note 7), 95. For the Marian panel, see also I. Hiller, H. Vey, and T. Falk, *Katalog der deutschen und niederländischen Gemälde bis 1550 im*

Wallraf-Richartz-Museum und im Kunstgewerbemuseum der Stadt Köln, Kataloge des Wallraf-Richartz-Museums 5 (Cologne, 1969), 108–9, no. 338.

19. Krakow, Czartoryski Museum, inv. no. XlIA-763; 30.9 x 41.5 cm, linen glued on wood panel (31.8 x 42.3 cm). The panel may have been cut down on all four sides; above all, a large piece is missing from the top, so that the top of the door and the roof have been cut off. The right side may have also had kneeling monks.

