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ABSTRACT

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Rosary devotion has long been considered a "female-centered" religious practice. Despite this correlation, no scholars have investigated the relationship between women and the rosary. In this thesis I attempt to fill that void by examining a range of meanings the rosary held for laywomen in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Northern Europe, c. 1470 to c. 1530. Using a theoretical framework informed by materialism, gender theory, and Marian theory, my thesis argues that beyond its usual associations with indulgences, the rosary also signified prayers for conception and safe childbirth. In reciting prayers to the Madonna, laywomen spiritually and mystically projected themselves into the narrative of the Virgin's pregnancy, desiring to bear a child as Mary bore Christ.

To explicate the relationship between women and the rosary, my thesis considers a variety of rosary images: female donors with their prayer beads, *Andachtsbilder* portraying the Christ Child holding and playing with a string of beads, images of the Holy Kinship, instructive prints from rosary manuals, and early family portrait scenes. As a whole, these images suggest that the rosary symbolized a budding womb, a wife's ideal piety, the desire for children, the maternal qualities of the Virgin, and an amulet to assuage the rigor of childbirth.

Lastly, my thesis considers the rosary as religious jewelry. By looking to several examples of women depicted with ornate rosaries, my thesis argues that laywomen wore beads to elevate their status and to emulate the aristocracy. Moreover, wearing rosaries and/or being painted with one's rosary allowed for a public pronouncement of one's private piety. For women, then, wearing a rosary was another way in which they could enter into the public devotional realm. In arguing that the rosary was perceived by women as a blossoming vine, as a piece of religious jewelry, and as an aid in childbirth, I hope to have contributed new ways of understanding this multivalent devotional tool, and to have opened new avenues for others to consider the rosary beyond its usual associations with prayer counting and indulgences.

Keywords: Rosary, Northern Renaissance, Laywomen, Childbirth, *Andachtsbild,* Family Portraiture, Jewelry

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DEDICATION

To my brother, Elliott, who taught me my first rosary

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Introduction

"Hail Mary full of grace, Our Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."[1] So recited hundreds of thousands of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Christians each day in the Low Countries, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Italy while fingering their rosaries. The Hail Mary, or Ave Maria prayer, derives from the Angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth's salutations to the Virgin Mary.[2] After pulling a series of Hail Mary beads through their fingers, devotees would come to a paternoster bead and recite the Our Father prayer. With beads woven between their fingers, worshipers continually cycled through these two prayers while meditating on the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries from the lives of the Virgin and Christ.

Rosary worship came into full bloom in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In keeping with late medieval trends toward a more inner and personal devotion, the rosary pervaded the intimate, spiritual practices of the laity, primarily through the establishment of rosary confraternities—communities of worshipers devoted to rosary meditation in both private and public spaces. In contrast to mainstream religious brotherhoods, rosary confraternities were remarkably inclusionary: there was no cost for admittance, few rules applied for saying the rosary,[3] and women could join. Indeed, in cases where records were kept, women constituted the majority of members, a fact which prompted Christopher Black to describe rosary societies as

[1] For a full history of the Hail Mary prayer, see John D. Miller, *Beads and Prayers: The Rosary in History and Devotion* (New York: Burns and Oaks, 2002), 39–47, Herbert Thurston, "Notes on Familiar Prayers: I. The Origins of the Hail Mary," *The Month* 121 (1913): 169, and Herbert Thurston, "Our Popular Devotions: II. The Rosary," *The Month* 96 (1900): 403–418.

[2] The words "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen," the Creed, and the Gloria, were added in the sixteenth century.

[3] Miller, 19–20. Anyone was allowed to join as long as they signed a membership roll, declared their marital status, and indicated whether they were an ecclesiastical or lay person. The best source to date on the formation and practices of rosary confraternities is Anne Winston-Allen's *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

"female-centered" and rosary recitation as "a female devotion."[4] Likewise, in his tome on medieval jewelry, Ronald W. Lightbrown claims that from its inception, the Hail Mary prayer has been closely aligned with female devotion.[5]

Yet despite the parallel Black and Lightbrown have drawn, the connection between women and the rosary has been mostly unnoticed by historians.[6] Scholarship to date has mainly been dedicated to untangling the rosary's convoluted history, and almost exclusively in Germany.[7] In the past decade, however, there has been a proliferation of scholarship considering

[4] Christopher Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38, 103. Black further claims that "penitential flagellation" was more often associated with male brotherhoods, 103.

[5] Ronald W. Lightbrown, Medieval European Jewellery: With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), 342. See also Eithne Wilkins, The Rose-Garden Game: A Tradition of Beads and Flowers (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 26.

[6] A notable exception is Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania state University Press, 1997), who briefly discusses females and rosary devotion, 117–118. See also Wilkins, 26.

[7] There have been many publications on the history of the rosary. The following is a list of the most germane: John D. Miller, *Beads and Prayers*; Herbert Thurston, "Our Popular Devotions: II. The Rosary," *The Month* 96 (1900): 513–527, 620–637; Herbert Thurston, "Our Popular Devotions II. The Rosary," 97 (1901): 67–79, 172–188, 286–304; Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose*; the essays and catalogue included in Hatto Küffner and Walter Schulten, *500 Jahre Rosenkranz, 1475 Köln 1975: Kunst und Frömmigkeit im Spätmittelalter und ihr Weiterleben* (Cologne: Bachem, 1975); Eithne Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game*; Sixten Ringbom, "*Maria in Sole* and the Virgin of the Rosary," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 25, no. 3/4 (July–December 1962): 326–330; Frances Henriëtte Annemie van den Oudendijk Pieterse, *Dürers Rosenkranzfest en de ikonografie der Duitse rozenkransgroepen van de XV^e en het begin der XVI^e eeuw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversbedrijf "De Spieghel," 1939); Karen Barbara Roberts, "The Influence of Rosary Devotion on Grunewald's Isenheim Altarpiece," (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1985); Bernard Berthod and Élisabeth Hardouin-Fugier, *Dictionnaire des objets de devotion dans l'Europe catholique* (Paris: Amateur, 2006), 64–87; Andreas Heinz, "An den Wurzeln des Leben-Jesu-Rosenkranzes: Der Rosenkranz als christozentrisches Betrachtungsgebet," in *Christus- und Marienlob in Liturgie und Volksgebet* (Trier: Paulinus, 2010), 58–87; Sarah Jane Boss, "Telling the Beads: The Practice and Symbolism of the Rosary," in *Mary: The Complete Resource,* ed. Sarah Jane Boss (New York: Continuum, 2007), 385–394; J. A. F. Kronenburg, *De Middeleeuwen: De Vereering der H. Maagd door onze Kloosterlingen,* vol. 3 of *Maria's Heerlijkheid in Nederland: Geschiedkundige Schets van de Vereering der H. Maagd in ons Vaderland, van de eerste tijden tot op onze dagen* (Amsterdam: Bekker, 1904–1931), 282–381; Guy C. Bauman, "A Rosary Picture with a View of the Park of the Ducal Palace in Brussels, Possibly by Goswijn van der Weyden," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* 24 (1989): 135–151; Manfred Brauneck unter Mitarbeit von Hildegard Braunec, "Der Rosenkranz," in *Religiöse Volkskunst: Votivgaben, Andachtsbilder, Hinterglas, Rosenkranz, Amulette* (Köln: DuMont, 1978), 238–262; Bertilo de Boer O.F.M., "De Souter van Alanus de Rupe III," *Ons geestelijk erf* 31 (1957): 187–204; Klara H. Broekhuijsen, "The Institution of the Rosary: Establishing the Context for a Recently Discovered Copy After a Lost Panel by Geertgen tot Sint Jans in the Pommersfelden Book of Hours, Ms. 343," *Oud Holland Jaargang* 123 (2010): 220–234. Kaat Depstele, "De verspreiding van de devotie van de rozenkrans gekoppeld aan het gebruik van devotionele handboeken in de Nederlanden (1470 tot 1540)," (master's thesis, Universiteit Gent, 2010); Jean-Louis Olive, "Réciter le temps en Catalogne: La révolution culturelle du Rosaire," *Bulletin de la Société de mythologie française* 172 (1994): 23–42; Pierre Lançon, "Les Confréries du Rosaire en Rouergue aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles," *Annales du Midi* 96 (1984): 121–133.

the rosary in narrower contexts: the nature of the rosary in a post-Tridentine world,[8] the function of decorative rosaries framing the pages of prayer books, and the relationship between weaving and rosary recitation,[9] not to mention the many incisive essays included in the catalogue following the Museum Bruder Klaus' exhibition, "Zeitinseln—Ankerperlen: Geschichten um den Rosenkranz."[10] Despite these fruitful inroads into rosary scholarship, unanswered questions still loom about the correlations between the rosary and women.

My thesis attempts to fill this void. Rather than languish in early feminist arguments over whether the rosary is a "female devotional" tool, when it was unquestionably used by both genders, I will instead consider a variety of meanings the rosary held for Northern European laywomen during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Given the paucity of scholarly attention to the rosary in the Netherlands,[11] my study will center on the Lowlands with occasional recourse to Germany. Fundamentally, the rosary carried different significance for laywomen, whose social experiences distinguished them from men and the female religious. To uncover these meanings, my thesis will address several types of rosary images: female donors with their prayer beads, *Andachtsbilder* portraying the Christ Child holding and playing with a string of beads, instructive prints from rosary manuals, and early family portrait scenes. With

[8] Nathan Mitchell, The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[9] Anne Margreet W. As-Vijvers, "Weaving Mary's Chaplet: The Representation of the Rosary in Late Medieval Flemish Manuscript Illumination," in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 41–80 and Hanneke van Asperen, "Praying, Threading, and Adorning: Sewn-in Prints in a Rosary Prayer Book (London, British Library, Add. MS 14042)," in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: Textiles and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages,* ed. Kathryn M. Rudy and Barbara Baert, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 81–120.

[10] Urs-Beat Frei and Fredy Bühler, Der Rosenkranz: Andacht, Geschichte, Kunst (Bern: Benteli, 2003). Lorenzo Candelaria, The Rosary Cantoral: Ritual and Social Design in a Chantbook from Early Renaissance Toledo (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007); Bernadette Kramer, "Verbondenheid verbeeld: Over de uitbeelding van een rozenkranssnoer op een schilderij van de Meester van Sint-Goedele," Ons geestelijk erf 82, no. 2 (2011): 136–159; Michael P. Carroll, "The Anal-Erotic Origins of a Popular Catholic Devotion," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 26, no. 4 (Dec 1987): 486–498.

[11] Most scholarship on the rosary has dealt exclusively with Germany, the seedbed of fifteenth-century rosary devotion.

these works of art I argue that the rosary encompasses a range of meanings beyond its usual associations with indulgences and Marian devotion: for laywomen, who likely composed the majority of rosary devotees, the beads also signified prayers for conception or safe childbirth. In reciting prayers to the Madonna, laywomen spiritually and mystically projected themselves into the narrative of the Virgin's pregnancy, desiring to bear a child as Mary bore Christ. I argue that laywomen's desire to model their motherhood on the life of the Virgin becomes particularly evident with the dawn of family portrait scenes, where mothers surrounded by their children frequently hold and display their rosaries.

Moreover, the often ostentatious and gaudy nature of displayed rosaries has prompted scholars to call the beads "religious jewelry."[12] The term is apt, but religious jewelry contains a more specific meaning for laywomen. Subjected to a patriarchal church and a world circumscribed by marriage and bearing children, laywomen's opportunities for public devotion and piety were limited to an extent. Yet the many depictions of women bejeweled with the rosary function in a public way to advertise laywomen's fashion, piety, wealth, emulation of the Virgin Mary, and importance as consumers of spirituality. While the rosary can be seen as a woman's means to a religious public voice, it is also apparent that the rosary additionally signified the mind-numbing repetitive prayers of a quiet, insular, and dutiful wife. Indeed, the rosary is a lens to critically observe the sometimes liberating, and other times repressive, nature of female devotion in Northern Europe. In order to reconstruct the relationship between women and their beads, my study will consider many works of art over a series of decades, c. 1470 to c. 1530: years that span the establishment of the first rosary confraternity in Northern Europe and the first decades of a more systematic, lay rosary devotion; I will also refer to a few earlier and later examples. Despite the breadth of my enterprise, however, I hope to suggest a number of

[12] Winston-Allen, 112. Lightbrown, 342–354, Wilkins 47.

specific meanings this profoundly multivalent tool held in the minds of worshipers.

I will begin with an explanation of the theoretical framework that informs my research and methodology, followed by a brief history of the rosary with particular focus on its development in the fifteenth century. Next, I shall address the rosary as a signifier of fertility and childbirth in various Northern devotional works of art. I will conclude by considering the rosary in the context of religious jewelry and in terms of the social and religious status such beads provided women.

Before beginning, however, a disambiguation of the word "rosary" is needed. The term "rosary" always refers to a string or circlet (chaplet) of prayer beads consisting of both Hail Mary and Our Father beads. Because the standardization of the rosary did not take place until the sixteenth century, the number of Hail Marys and paternosters per rosary varies significantly. Predecessors of the rosary, such as separate strings of paternosters or Ave-beads, cannot technically be categorized as rosaries. Nevertheless, rosary antecedents were, of course, instrumental in the development of fully-fledged rosaries, and therefore my paper will still address them.

Theory and Methodology

Given that rosaries are everyday objects fingered and worn by worshipers, my study intersects with questions of materiality, specifically questions of gendered, Christian materiality. Following on the heels of recent studies in early modern material culture and more general examinations of women and material culture,[13] my thesis attempts to investigate, in the words of

[13] For late medieval and early modern studies, see Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009). For studies of women and material culture, see Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *Women and Things, 1750–1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009) and Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, eds., *Women and Material Culture, 1660–1830* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For the general tenets and principles of material culture, see Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (London: University College London, 1998).

Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, the "nature of experience in the encounter between people and things": in my case, women and their rosaries.[14] This "encounter" provides a particularly useful way of entering into the devotional practices of devout, Northern women. Studies in material culture are grounded in the "life cycle" of an object—its creation, design, and production. My thesis, however, will focus on the ways the rosary was conceptualized, used, and exchanged.[15] Moreover, material culturists have frequently been criticized for disregarding the visual aspects and iconography of their objects.[16] As an art historian, however, the visual representation of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century rosaries will be my main evidence for understanding the nature of women's encounters with their beads.

Beyond questions of materiality, the methodology of my thesis is also shaped by Judith Butler's theories of gender as well as anthropologists' explorations into the nature of women's relationship with the divine. A philosopher of feminist and post-structuralist theory, Judith Butler asserts that gender, and even childbirth, are social practices, bred by patriarchal, hegemonic "regulative discourses."[17] In other words, gender is a performance, learned and reiterated through the prevailing ideology of a particular culture. But Butler claims that even in a specific culture at a given time, the category of "woman" is not stable or consistent, as it bisects with other pertinent characteristics of identity, such as race and social status.[18] With Butler as a guiding force, my study will eschew the proposition that rosary worship can be termed a feminine enterprise or that all women had a similar experience while praying their beads. Indeed, Butler's arguments have prompted me to distinguish between the category of "women and the rosary" and the more narrow category of "*laywomen who desire children and social*

[14] Hamling and Richardson, 11.
[15] These are the categories of Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, 2.
[16] Tara Hamilng and Catherine Richardson, 11.
[17] Judith P. Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990).
[18] Ibid., 6.

status and the rosary." My study considers the latter category, which, with the exclusion of the female religious, still probably encompassed a large percentage of women in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Northern Europe. Furthermore, I fully acknowledge that the prevailing ideologies of late medieval culture interpellated laywomen, shaping their identity as well as their affinity for rosary devotion.

In many ways, devotion, too, can be seen as a performance, and the extent to which gender affects such practices has been debated for years. Medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum first emphatically argued that the religious experience of men and women is always different.[19] A few years later anthropologist Susan Starr Sered nuanced the early feminist view in claiming that "gender has a significant—although not absolute or universal—impact on . . . the form and interpretation of the rituals performed."[20] I agree with Susan Starr Sered because gender is only one aspect among many that determine how people perceive religion. Nevertheless, gender still profoundly colors the way individuals respond to and perform their religious duties. It also contributes to the dynamics of gender relations. For instance, Andrea G. Pearson argues in her study of religious worship in the Burgundian Netherlands that devotional practices of men and women provide examples of the way gender has been "navigat[ed], negotiat[ed], and transact[ed]."[21] Likewise, Patricia Crawford claims that religion allowed women a space of their own and an "alibi for incursions into the male domain."[22] In my investigation as well, rosary devotion is a means by which women perform public piety, thereby *navigating, negotiating,* and *transacting* the limitations of their gender.

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[19] Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrel, and Paula Richman, *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

[20] Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated By Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8.

[21] Andrea G. Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art, 1350–1530* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2005), 3.

[22] Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

By situating my thesis in the theoretical frameworks of materiality, gender, and devotion, I hope to refine my arguments about laywomen and the rosary and make them relevant to and conscious of new directions in feminist art history. These theories have provided an avenue for understanding the signification of a laywoman's string of beads, dangling from her fingers, strung around her neck, or hanging from her belt, and the role of their visual representation.

History of the Rosary

The origins of the rosary in the West are uncertain.[23] While there are records of third-century hermits using pebbles and knotted strings to count their prayers,[24] beads did not become widely used until the beginning of the Middle Ages. In the early forms of the rosary, ecclesiastics and laity often recited one hundred fifty Psalms along with their preceding antiphons. But the difficulty of remembering lengthy and complex Psalms led to the popularization of reciting the simpler and shorter Our Father and Hail Mary prayers. Consequently, the antiphons were replaced by short celebratory Marian verses, and by the fourteenth century, Ave Marias were also combined with succinct narrative sequences from the life of Christ.

Several events in the fifteenth century helped homogenize the rosary and disseminate it across Europe. In the early fifteenth century, the Carthusian Dominic of Prussia wrote new truncated meditational sentences on the life of Christ, which were distributed among his order. Disliking this new abbreviated version, the Dominican Alanus de Rupe[25] wrote his own longer Psalter of Our Lady, consisting of one hundred fifty Aves, interspersed with fifteen Our Fathers, which were to be said while mediating on life-of-Christ verses. He also claimed to know the

[23] For a more detailed history of the rosary, see the sources listed in footnote 7.

[24] Specifically, Paul of Thebes and St. Anthony; Winston-Allen, 14.

[25] Sources disagree on his nationality: some claim he was born in Belgium, others in Germany, and still others in Brittany. See J. McNicholas, "Alanus de Rupe," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), accessed 10 February 2013 < http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01246a.htm>.

origins of the rosary: the Virgin Mary had appeared to Saint Dominic in a vision, bestowing upon him a rosary to use for meditation. Furthermore, Alanus de Rupe reported having seen Mary in a vision, himself, in which she instructed him to establish rosary confraternities—communities of Catholic worshipers devoted to rosary meditation. With zeal he founded his first rosary confraternity in Douai, and by the end of the century multiple rosary confraternities had opened across Europe, in Germany, Brabant, Flanders, Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

Men and women of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries would have been using a version of the Alanus-inspired rosary, consisting of one hundred fifty Hail Mary beads divided into three groups of fifty, each group representing a cycle of mysteries (joyful, sorrowful, and glorious) of the Virgin and Christ. Each mystery was further made up of five sequences from the lives of Christ and Mary, such as the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity. [26] Worshipers, then, would recite ten Hail Marys and one Our Father for each sequence of the fifteen mysteries.

Alanus de Rupe proclaimed indulgences of up to thirty thousand years for those who recited their beads. In 1479 Pope Sixtus IV officially extended the indulgence to apply to the deceased suffering in purgatory.[27] With its promised spiritual benefits, the rosary prospered across Europe and gained additional significance beyond its function for accumulating salvific capital: meanings such as the assurance of fertility and safe childbirth.

One of the earliest precedents for considering the rosary as a device for assuring

[26] Below is a list of the meditations for each cycle of mysteries found in *The Ulm Picture Rosary* (1483). The joyful mysteries included: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, and the Finding. The sorrowful mysteries included: the Agony, the Flagellation, the Thorns, the Carrying, and the Crucifixion. The glorious mysteries included: the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Pentecost, the Assumption, and the Glory of Paradise/Judgment. Quoted in Winston-Allen, 75.

[27] For a history of indulgences offered for rosary recitation, see Winston-Allen, 5, 116, 127–128, 130, 137–144. Because of the rosary's direct association with indulgences, Martin Luther caustically criticized and mocked the devotion and its brotherhoods. In his own rosary manual, Luther wrote commentary such as, "Where in the Devil do so many and various lies come from?" See Winston-Allen, 130. But even during the early years of the Reformation, and certainly after the Council of Trent, the rosary maintained its popularity because, as Nathan Mitchell has argued, of its inherent "durability and resilience." See Mitchell, 1.

conception and safe birth can be seen in Robert Campin's *Mérode Triptych* (1425) (Fig. 1). In the left panel Peter Inghelbrechts kneels to witness the Annunciation, while Margarete Scrynmakers prays behind him and holds coral beads threaded through her fingers.[28] Attached to her Hail Marys is a pendant of St. Christopher, the "Bearer of Christ" (Fig. 2). Reindert Falkenburg corroborates the claim made by Maryan Ainsworth that St. Christopher symbolizes the female donor's "desire to bear a child, as Mary once gave birth to Christ."[29] Additionally, although the identification of the donors is not definitive, the names "Inghelbrechts" and "Scrynmakers" are descriptive Dutch terms evoking the Annunciation and Joseph.[30] But it is not just the St. Christopher medallion or the double meaning of the patrons' names that creates associations with pregnancy: the small rosebud on the man's hat references the coral Hail Mary beads hanging from Scrynmakers's fingers (Fig. 3). As a "baby rose," the bud petitions for birth and new life, just as the devotional Passion text, *Die rose onse here* or *The Rose of Our Lord* (c. 1425), characterized Christ as the rose that budded from another rose, namely the Virgin Mary.[31] Written by the Carthusian Adolf of Essen and/or Dominic of Prussia, both avid promoters of the rosary, the Passion tract further illuminates the garden symbolism of rosary beads.[32]

The rosary's connection to roses was well established by the fifteenth century. The first

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[28] There is uncertainty over the identity of the couple, as well as the spelling of their names. For a concise summation of various theories regarding their identities, see Maryan W. Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen, eds., *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 95.

[29] Ibid., 91. See also, Reindert L. Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the *Mérode Triptych"* in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies,* ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 14.

[30] Ibid., 5.

[31] For the history of the tract, see Reindert L. Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450–1550,* trans. Sammy Herman (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 41–42. The manuscript containing the meditation has been lost, but a photograph of the manuscript is kept in the Titus Brandsma Collection of Nijmegen University Library (Albums 20–32, fols. 189r–191v).

[32] *The Rose of Our Lord* is one example of many fifteenth-century devotional texts that used garden imagery to expound on the love relationship between Mary and Christ. The texts also urged devotees to metaphorically plant and cultivate a garden in their souls that would grow and flourish according to their devotion.

correlation between the Ave prayer and roses occurred in the second half of the thirteenth century when a layman, reciting Aves in the forest, was visited by the Virgin Mary, who plucked roses from his mouth to add to the chaplet she held.[33] The story was widely circulated because it was included in many instructional rosary handbooks, sometimes accompanied by an illustrative woodcut depicting the Madonna pulling a full-stemmed rose from the male worshiper's mouth (Fig. 4). Furthermore, the German word *Rosenkrenzelin* means "a rose garland" or "wreath," and the word *chaplet* means both a floral crown and a string of prayer beads.[34] As the legend established, reciting the rosary was akin to crowning and bedecking the Virgin with flowers, and a series of fifty Hail Marys created a mystical *rosarium* or "rose garden" in which both Mary and her Child grew as roses.[35] In fact, rosaries were sometimes strung on green thread, like a vine from which roses bloom in devotion to Mary.

The allusions to roses in the *Mérode Triptych* make clear the symbolic associations between the rosary and the fruit of Mary's womb. Though only her husband seems aware of the Annunciation taking place through the door before them, Margarete Scrynmakers verbally witnesses the Angel's news with each Hail Mary prayer she recites in unison with Gabriel. Through her meditative prayer she transforms and personalizes the Annunciation narrative into the narrative she desires for herself: to bear a child.

The Hail Mary prayer popularized by the rosary is scripturally and devotionally centered in the maternal qualities of Mary. The opening part of the prayer, "Hail Mary full of grace, Our Lord is with thee," contains the Angel Gabriel's first words to Mary, announcing she is with child. The second half of the prayer, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of

[33] As-Vijvers, 52; Winston-Allen, 101–103.
[34] Miller, 3.
[35] Lisa Cucciniello, "Rose to Rosary: The Flower of Venus in Catholicism," in *Rose Lore: Essays in Cultural History and Semiotics,* ed. Frankie Hutton, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 67.

thy womb," are the first words Elizabeth exclaims in honor of Mary's pregnancy. It is significant that worshipers meditated on all the mysteries of the rosary—the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious—while ceaselessly rehearsing the salutations of Gabriel and Elizabeth to the expecting mother about her child. Accordingly, all the events of Mary's life, from the Annunciation to the Crucifixion, to her Coronation in heaven, can be understood in terms of her pregnancy and childbirth. Moreover, the sorrowful mysteries have a doctrinal connection to childbirth: theologians taught that Mary was exempt from the torments of childbirth until she witnessed the death of her son, and then, as the New Eve, she gave birth to mankind's salvation.[36] In meditating on the sorrowful mysteries of the Virgin, rosary reciters also mystically meditated on the Virgin's parturition. For laywomen who had experienced the full rigor of childbirth, contemplating the sorrowful mysteries allowed them to better imitate and understand the pain and suffering of Mary, who of course ultimately imitates the pain and suffering of Christ.

Laywomen and the Virgin

Indeed, laywomen looked and prayed to the Virgin Mary to help with the female concerns of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. The relationship between women and the Virgin, however, is fraught with scholarly warfare. Many feminists argue that the cult of the Virgin Mary imposed a misogynistic, unattainable role model upon women.[37] Contrariwise, historians like Klaus Arnold have claimed that the domestic images of the Holy Kinship and Holy Family indicate the affinity German citizens felt toward the marriage and motherhood of the Madonna.[38] But it is Klaus Schreiner who promotes the most strident view, that "medieval women

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[36] See Amy Neff, "The Pain of Compassio: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1998): 254–273.

[37] For example, see Margaret Miles' work on fourteenth-century images of the Virgin in her book, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 87.

[38] Klaus Arnold, "Die Heilige Familie: Bilder und Verehrung der Heiligen Anna, Maria, Joseph, und des Jesuskindes in Kunst, Literatur, und Frömmogkeit um 1500," in *Maria in der Welt: Marienverehrung im Kontext der Sozialgeschichte, 10.–18. Jahrhundert,* ed. Claudia Opitz and others, (Zurich: Chronos-Verlag, 1993), 156.

experienced Mary not as unreachable superhuman, but as woman, to whom the dangers and sufferings of the female sex happened: pregnancy, delivery, poverty, isolation."[39] In navigating this polarizing conversation, I align myself most closely with Bridget Heal, who wisely situates herself on middle ground: to an extent, the Virgin's childbirth and experience as a woman makes her relatable to women, but her dissimilar life also distances her from sin-stained daughters of Eve.[40] The rosary provides an example of how these seemingly opposite reactions to the Virgin can exist simultaneously.

An iconographical type of Mary that often occurs in association with the rosary is the "Schutzmantel-Madonna," or the Virgin of Mercy (Fig. 5). Framed by a rosary containing narrative paternoster beads, an enlarged Mary protects her followers beneath her sheltering cloak. The Madonna functions as a mother-protectress in shielding her worshipers and as the great Co-Redemptrix in interceding for humanity. Heal argues that this protective nature of Mary, celebrated in the late Middle Ages, actually held more in common with an essential characteristic of fathers—"the power to protect dependents."[41] Of course the scale of the Madonna's guardianship for humanity is inconceivable in relation to a parent's protection of a child (except in the sense of the infinite worth of one). Thus, this example illustrates one of the Virgin's unobtainable maternal personas.

Another aspect of the Virgin's impossible maternal nature is celebrated in the legend of St. Dominic and the rosary. After appearing to him with an entourage of fifty maidens, the Madonna presents him with the rosary to help convert the Albigenses, and then feeds him with

[39] Klaus Schreiner, Maria, Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin, (Munich: C. Hanser, 1994), 500. Quote translated by Bridget Heal in her book, The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500–1648 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 268.

[40] Heal, 262–303.

[41] Ibid., 269.

her own breast milk.[42] Mary's milk has long been a signifier for the Incarnation, and in the context of a rosary legend, it also represents her mercy for those who recite the rosary, an intercessory power she shares with Christ.[43] In her commentary on the legend, Sarah Jane Boss suggests a symbolic relationship between the rosary and Mary's milk: as devotees recite the rosary, the prayers of the beads become drops of milk, nourishing "the life of Christ" within the worshiper.[44] Suckling a multitude of Christs with milk of the Incarnation, the Virgin Mary's role as mother is profoundly different from the mundane (but so vitally important) nursing experience of women. Boss's imagery suggests that reciters carry Christ within them as an infant, almost as though they, too, are mystically pregnant with Christ, feeding him through a recitation with each bead. Still there is a nuanced connection between pregnant women and this legend: in the context of a woman praying for a child, like Scrynmakers, the milk of the Virgin literally nurses and coaxes to life the unborn child she hopes to conceive. Thus, fueled by a desire for children, laywomen superimpose themselves into the maternal narrative of the Virgin's life.

To an extent, then, rosary devotion propagated the unattainable maternal qualities of the Madonna. But as I have expressed in my own middle-ground theoretical position, the role and character of the Virgin Mary also encompassed a more relatable mother, who had given birth and raised a son. Indeed, analyzing further devotional practices of the rosary reveals how women did use the object in ways that suggested their personal connection to an understandable and relatable Mother. In this context, the rosary raised the status of motherhood generally, imbuing it with new importance, and thereby also elevated the women who were mothers in society. In the next section, I will address how women applied the prayers of the rosary in the context of marriage, fertility, and motherhood.

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[42] Wilkins, 37–38.
[43] Boss, 388.
[44] Ibid., 389.

Marriage and Childbirth

Rosaries were a common possession of Northern women of the early modern period, in part because of their associations with matrimony, mother-daughter relations, and childbirth. Many of these correlations can be observed in paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, providing evidence of the more specialized meanings the rosary accrued in relation to women.

Mothers bequeathed prayer beads to their daughters, indicating the rosary's ties to a female experience of devotion.[45] For example, in a 1536 will from Nuremburg, a mother leaves her amber rosary to her daughter, describing the gift "as a sign of my maternal love for her that remains undiminished."[46] Grooms also presented rosaries to their new brides, and prayer beads often played an important part in wedding ceremonies.[47] On a much grander scale, in 1561 the Duke of Mantua showered his new wife with more than forty rosaries.[48] In the context of matrimony, Carol Purtle has further argued that the beads symbolized a man's "esteem and trust" for his new wife.[49] Beyond tokens of trustworthiness, the beads also suggested the activities of a model new wife—endlessly occupied in prayerful devotion. Furthermore, as symbols of roses, the beads foreshadowed the fruitfulness of the marriage.

This is best seen by again turning to an iconic work, Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) (Fig. 6). Here van Eyck has painstakingly depicted a partially transparent string of crystal or amber prayer beads with a green tassel tacked to the wall beside the mirror (Fig. 7). It is unclear whether the beads are paternosters or Hail Marys, yet they are likely Giovanni

[45] Heal, 279.
[46] Quoted and cited in Heal, 279, note 74.
[47] Wilkins, 53.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 162.

Arnolfini's wedding gift to his wife to promote her piety and chastity.[50] The beads are further associated with the woman because they are nearby several objects related to domestic space or the realm of the woman. To the left of the beads a dusting brush hangs from the bedpost—a symbol of the household duties of the wife.[51] The woman's slippers are depicted on the ground, not far from the rosary beads. The bedstead statue, thought to be St. Margaret, patron saint of childbirth, alludes to safe birth.[52] With the additional symbols of the birthing bed behind the wife and the fruit on the windowsill, the beads might also function as a sign of the couple's hopefulness for children. Thus, although prayer beads are primarily a devotional object, in this portrait they also are a domestic object, aligned with the woman and her expected role in bearing children and remaining a pious and dutiful wife.

Similar connotations can be observed in a copy after the 1478 painting, *Portrait of Wolter Rotkirchen* (1624) (Fig. 8), where the sitter displays a rare depiction of a matrimonial rosary. The Cologne Mayor holds a chaplet with two wedding rings replacing one set of Hail Mary beads. Linked together, the rings either symbolize marriage or betrothal, and certainly the piety of the couple. With rings as beads, this unique rosary allows couples to meditate on their own marriage, and it sanctifies their union through the blessings of the Madonna. Although the flowers in Rotkirchen's left hand symbolize on the most fundamental level the Passion, with engagement rings in his right hand they also suggest blooming, birth, and fertility.[53]

In regards to fertility, women looked to the Virgin for aid in childbirth. Female laity

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[50] Craig Harbison, "Sexuality and Social Standing in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Double Portrait," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 284–285, Wilkins 53. While there is debate over the identity of the couple, I agree with the mainstream view that the male figure is Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini. For a summation of the various theories regarding his identity, see Lorne Campbell, *The Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 192–198.

[51] Harbison, 285.

[52] Ibid. For the possibility of the statue representing Saint Martha, patroness of housewives, see Martin Davies, *Early Netherlandish School,* 3rd ed. (London: National Gallery, 1968), 50, 51, and note 3.

[53] For a brief bibliography on the painting, see Küffner, 134.

frequently made pilgrimages to Marian shrines for "familial concerns": assistance in conception, postpartum suffering, and the rearing of children.[54] The rosary's association with childbirth is particularly evident in the traditional use of beads during labor.[55] In the early modern period, midwives sometimes draped rosaries on the beds of parturient women to call upon the Virgin Mary for assistance.[56] Functioning as an amulet,[57] the rosary assuaged the grief and pain of the birthing process. In this context of childbirth, the Hail Mary prayer became relevant in a new way, as the recitation of Christ's Incarnation ensured the safe birth of another child. As in the *Mérode Triptych,* these laywomen may have engaged in a particularly literal way with the narratives of the Annunciation and Nativity as they, too, brought forth a child. Of course St. Margaret was the venerated saint of childbirth, but the Virgin, with her literal experience as a mother, also became an intercessor for pregnant women. Moreover, there is precedent for reciting the rosary while in pain. In her study of rosary devotion in the *Isenheim Altarpiece,* Karen Barbara Roberts claims that bead recitation ameliorated and soothed sufferers of Saint Anthony's Fire, through the "hypnotic, tranquillizing" effect of the rosary.[58] Although evidence is speculative, the rosary could have had a similar sedating effect on laboring women.[59]

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[54] Margaret Schaus, "pilgrims and pilgrimage" in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, 2006.

[55] Wearing coral was also thought to prevent sterility. See Marie-Christine Autin Graz, *Jewels in Painting* (Milan: Skira Editore, 1999), 48.

[56] Schreiner, 57–60, quoted in Heal 276. John Cherry writes that pregnant women often wore a girdle, prayer roll, or Agnus Dei for protection. See John Cherry, "Healing Through Faith: The Continuation of Medieval Attitudes to Jewellery into the Renaissance," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 157.

[57] For a full discussion of the apotropaic qualities of the rosary, see John R. Decker, "'Practical Devotion': Apotropaism and the Protection of the Soul," in *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400–1700,* ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl A. E. Enenkel, and Walter S. Melion (Boston: Brill, 2009), 357–384.

[58] Roberts, 22.

[59] A recent scientific study showed that subjects who recited the rosary had reduced anxiety in comparison to subjects that watched a "religiously oriented" video. Matthew W. Anastasi and Andrew B. Newberg, "A Preliminary Study of the Acute Effects of Religious Ritual on Anxiety," *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 14.2 (2008): 163–65. Another scientific study suggests that rosary recitation increases cardiovascular rhythms and baroreflex sensitivity. Luciano Bernardi and others, "Effect of Rosary Prayer and Yoga Mantras on Autonomic Cardiovascular Rhythms: Comparative Study," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 323, no. 7327 (December 2001): 1446–1449.

Furthermore, rosary imagery pervaded a popular sixteenth-century obstetrical text for midwives, *Der Swangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosengarten* or *The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives.* First published in German in 1513, and a few years later translated into Dutch, the text is divided into sections instructing midwives in how to assist in and promote successful and safe childbirth. The title of the text and the ending of the admonition use rose garden imagery to refer to unborn children:

> And so the name of this book is / The pregnant woman's Garden of Roses / In which you dig and pluck the herbs / Which have body, life / and soul on earth / Such roses which your hands do take / Will come in time before God's face / Therefore you should take special care / have high regard and be aware / That the roses you select / Are the ones that please God best.[60]

On the most obvious level, the rose garden signifies the midwives' remedy-containing herb garden. After all, the book contains a table of the apotropaic qualities of a variety of items such as rose petals, pigeon dung, yellow amber, and pike-lavender oil.[61] But the admonition also implies that the roses belong to pregnant women and that the blooms have life and soul and will eventually come "before God's face." The plantings in the garden, then, are metaphorically unborn children that the midwife must pluck, or deliver from the soil. In using rose garden imagery to describe pregnancy and childbirth, this obstetrical text substantiates the common associations between roses, fertility, and birth—relationships also manifested in the vine-blooming rosary.[62]

Childbearing imagery also appears in a copy after Geertgen tot Sint Jans' painting of *The Institution of the Rosary,* commissioned by the Haarlem rosary confraternity (c 1500–1550) (Fig.

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[60] Eucharius Rösslin, When Midwifery Became the Male Physician's Province: The Sixteenth Century Handbook The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives, trans. Wendy Arons, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1994), 36–37.

[61] Ibid., 121–127.

[62] Early Netherlandish devotional books share similar titles. For instance, in the fifteenth century Jacobus van Gruitrode wrote a rosary tract entitled, *Rosarium Jesu et Mariae,* which in 1445 was shortened and translated into Middle Dutch, *Die roesenghaert Jhesu ende Marie* or *The Rose Garden of Jesus and Mary*.

9).[63] The Virgin and Child offer St. Dominic a rosary, who in turn presents the prayer beads to Queen Blanche of Castile. In his legends of the rosary, Alanus de Rupe relates how the barren queen of France requested that St. Dominic pray for her to conceive a child. Dominic recommended she recite the rosary, and taking his advice she later gave birth to a son, St. Louis.[64] As Mary gave birth to Christ, the King of Kings, so does a royal Blanche of Castile give birth to the sainted king of France. Once again, the narrative evoked by the Hail Mary prayer, in which a righteous woman gives birth to a holy Son, becomes the method by which the queen's petition for a child is expressed. With images like Geertgen's commissioned by rosary confraternities, women would have become familiarized with the story of the queen and may have been inspired to pray the rosary as an aid in their own pregnancies.

St. Anne

It is significant that the rosary became associated in this period with another important mother, St. Anne. A print of St. Anne with Christ and Mary can be found in *Croon Onser Liever Vrouwen* (1490) or *The Crown of Our Dear Lady,* a rosary text printed in Delft to aid worshipers in their recitations to the Virgin (Fig. 10). The family group appears in a genealogical-like image with Christ sitting on Mary's lap, who sits on St. Anne's lap. Jacob Sprenger, a great promoter of the rosary and founder of the brotherhood of Cologne, saw many similarities between worship of St. Anne and rosary recitation, and as a result urged worshipers to combine their devotion to the Virgin with devotion to her mother.[65] In a number of instances, sections from St. Anne devotional texts were incorporated into rosary tracts, and parts of rosary manuals were included

[63] See James Snyder, "The Early Haarlem School of Painting II: Geertgen tot Sint Jans," *The Art Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (1960): 131.

[64] Story cited in Broekhuijsen, 220–224, notes 8–9.

[65] Depstele, 32.

in St. Anne devotional writings.[66]

The presence of St. Anne in rosary manuals engenders bead devotion with affectionate, familial features. Where the Madonna was extolled for her virginity, St. Anne was praised for being the consummate mother. Known as the Virgin's educator, St. Anne provided a model for raising children, specifically daughters.[67] Consequently laywomen, with their responsibility to teach their daughters and sons the Our Father and Hail Mary prayers, found much in common with St. Anne.[68] As Alison Stones argues, the images of Mary's birth in prayer books spoke to the female patron or devotee's "interest in themes of motherhood."[69] Furthermore, for laywomen who felt an impasse in their ability to comprehend and associate themselves with the Virgin, St. Anne offered female devotees an example of an understandable mother in the context of the rosary.

The emphasis on Mary's mother in bead devotion creates an interesting echo in terms of the rosary's associations with childbirth, generational bestowing of beads to daughters, and the gifting of beads to brides. The allusions crystallize the rosary in its mystical meaning as a fertile rose garden. For early modern viewers, the blooming rosary might have brought to mind representations of the lineage of Christ, where Mary and St. Anne bloom from a vine of heritage.

An example is Gerard David's painting, *The Lineage of St. Anne* (c. 1500) (Fig. 11), which depicts a scene similar in composition and subject matter to the St. Anne image found in

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[66] See Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 68.

[67] Jennifer Lynn Welsh, "Mother, Matron, Matriarch: Sanctity and Social Change in the Cult of St. Anne, 1450–1750," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2009), 67.

[68] Kathryn M. Rudy, "An Illustrated Mid-Fifteenth-Century Primer for a Flemish Girl: British Library, Harley MS 3828," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69 (2006): 51.

[69] See Alison Stones, "Nipples, Entrails, Severed Heads, and Skin: Devotional Images of Madame Marie," in *Image and Belief: Studies in Celebration of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art,* ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art and Princeton University Press, 1999), 50, quoted in Elizabeth L'Estrange, *Holy Motherhood: Gender, Dynasty, and Visual Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 12.

the *Croon Onser Liever Vrouwen* rosary text. In the painting St. Anne is enthroned with the Madonna and Christ Child at her feet. Christ holds a rosary, and a trailing plant grows from behind St. Anne's throne, bursting into ancestral blooms and curving in burgeoning vines. Like the rosary between Christ's fingers, the vines of lineage contain figures, sprouting as literal blossoms from the plant.[70] They are the fruit of the vine, just as Christ is the fruit of Mary—all strung together in a generational super-rosary. Indeed, fifteen figures sprout from the vine, a conscious connection, I believe, to the fifteen mysteries of the rosary. Thus, David's work underscores the association between St. Anne, the rosary, and fertile flowering plants.

A precedent for the iconography of the fifteen mysteries can be seen in Petrus Christus's more somber painting, *Madonna of the Dry Tree* (1462) (Fig. 12). In this solemn scene, Mary and Christ bud from a leafless crown of thorns. Fifteen letter *A*'s, a reference to the fifteen Hail Marys of the sorrowful mysteries of the Virgin, hang from the tree's bare branches.[71] While Christus's painting is devoid of the familial mood of David's image, both paintings are unique in visually representing the rosary as a large-scale, metaphorical plant.

Before ending the discussion of St. Anne, it is worthwhile to consider one last painting that shows the intersection of rosary devotion, childbirth, and maternity in a scene from the life of St. Anne: the sixteenth-century Netherlandish painting *Birth of the Virgin* (c. 1500–1549) (Fig. 13), by an anonymous artist. The triptych's center panel presents Mary's mother recovering from the pains of childbirth, surrounded by an abundance of women caring for the Virgin and attending to their prayers. Ornate rosaries hang from the girdles of five women in contemporary dress, who seem to be meditating in a trans-historic way on the life of Mary, who has just been

[70] For identification of all the figures, see Eberhard Freiherr von Bodenhausen, *Gerard David und seine Schule* (New York: Collectors Editions, 1971), 106–107.

[71] James Snyder, Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575 (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2005), 145.

born behind them (Figs. 14–17). A tau cross and St. Anthony bell dangle from the end of one woman's rosary, and a medal with the head of John the Baptist hangs from another woman's beads. While the laywomen's identities are unknown, it has been suggested that the females are members of a brotherhood or have an allegorical purpose in the painting.[72] Unfortunately there is not enough evidence to suggest whether the women are members of a rosary confraternity. Nevertheless, the rosaries still function as amulets in the painting. As mentioned earlier, the tau cross and St. Anthony bell were thought to be protective symbols against the painful disease St. Anthony's fire.[73] In the context of a birthing scene, the emblems serve as protective symbols for childbirth. Beyond their apotropaic power, however, the presence of rosaries in the birthing scene of Mary contributes to the parallels between St. Anne, royal lineage, mothers, budding wombs, childbirth, and the rosary.

Donors

My paper up to this point has expressed ways in which laywomen understood the rosary as a tool for conception, a symbol of fruitful marriage, and an amulet to ensure a safe birth. Northern paintings of female donors holding rosaries throughout the rest of the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth century should be read with these meanings in mind. From my survey of Netherlandish and Germanic art of the late medieval period, I have noticed that women are more likely to be shown with the rosary than men, but by no means do they have an exclusive right to the beads. Still, in many paintings where male and female donors are portrayed in the same

[72] Dirk de Vos, Stedelijke Musea Brugge: Catalogus Schilderijen 15de en 16de Eeuw (Brugge: Stedelijke Musea Brugge, 1979), 66–67.

[73] Cherry, 163.

work of art, only women perform rosary devotion.[74] I will address one such work of art to elucidate the types of gendered meanings conveyed in a painting where the rosary is circumscribed to a female devotional space.

Painted between 1502 and 1510, Gerard David's triptych *The Baptism of Christ* represents larger trends in Northern art and showcases how the rosary may have been interpreted as symbolic of the fruitfulness of marriages and the ideal characteristics of women's spirituality (Fig. 18). The center of the altarpiece portrays the baptism of Christ, and the donors are depicted on the right and left panels (Fig. 19). Jean Trompes, the treasurer of the city of Bruges, commissioned the altarpiece at the time he was married to his first wife, Elizabeth van der Meersk, and she appears on the right panel with their four daughters. Soon after he was widowed, Trompes had his second wife, Magdalena Cordier, with their four-year-old daughter, painted on the exterior panel (Fig. 20). Trompes appears in the left panel with his son, finely dressed but without the accessories of a rosary or a prayer book. Following the standard iconography of Northern altarpieces, the donors are separated according to gender. It has been assumed that Trompes intended the altarpiece to be displayed in the Church of Saint Basil, where his piety and his wife's devotions could be easily observed. With the death of his first wife, however, the altarpiece also functioned as a memorial.[75]

It is striking that only the women in this altarpiece carry rosaries, dangling from their belts. Their rosaries are the standardized type: ten Hail Mary beads punctuated by an Our Father bead. Elizabeth is holding a book of hours in her hands, staring ahead in a posture of devotion.

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[74] There are numerous examples of this image type: Adriaen Isenbrant's left donor panel, *Joris van de Velde and His Family,* from the diptych of the *Seven Sorrows of the Virgin* (1521); Maerten van Heemskerck's *Diptych: Portrait of Donor and Portrait of Donatrix* (c. 1560); the Master of the Holy Blood's donor panels from *Madonna with the Saints Catherine and Barbara* (c. 1500–1520); Pieter Pourbus's *Petronella Heve and Her Three Daughters* (1565–1570); and the donors in Jan Mostaert's *Triptych of the Deposition from the Cross* (c. 1520).

[75] See Jean C. Wilson, *Painting in Bruges at the Close of the Middle Ages: Studies in Society and Visual Culture* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 74.

The daughters of the interior panel are replicas of their mother, with the same dark dress, head covering, and collar. Unlike his sisters, the brother is mostly obscured behind his father, but he, too, is dressed in the same fashion as his parent. Because of the gendered exclusivity of the rosary in the triptych, the painting establishes that this form of devotion is a practice for women. In Judith Butler's terminology, rosary devotion is part of the performance of being female: pious, quiet, and chaste, in trying to become like the idealized Mother of God. Though in the right panel Elizabeth and her daughters are not praying the rosary, it hangs from their clothes as though it is part of their dress and way of life, a tool they use continuously in occupying their minds with prayers and meditations. The men, on the other hand, do not need the rosary to perform masculine acts of piety.

The triptych, however, should not just be read as visual didacticism for gendered religious roles, for it also can be considered as an example of how Elizabeth and Magdalena utilized the rosary. It could be that Elizabeth displays herself in the painting as a woman whose recitations of the beads has blessed her with a large progeny. The rosary hanging from her belt reminds the viewer of the many prayers she has offered, and now in return the Virgin Mary has blessed her with fruitfulness and safe childbirth. That her daughters, too, pray the rosary suggests that they also are in Mary's care, and it also references the tradition of Flemish women handing down their rosaries to their daughters. More abstractly, as discussed above, the beads on the rosary are symbols for literal roses. Dangling from the belt of a mother surrounded by her children, the rosary becomes a metaphor of the blooming and budding of her womb: the children are metaphorically the roses from their mother's rosary.

Images of Christ Playing with the Rosary

Circa 1450, a new type of rosary image became popular in the art market of Northern

Europe—portrayals of Christ playing with the rosary on the Virgin's lap. These paintings underscore a naturalistic, maternal element of rosary devotion. Indeed, from the vantage point of laywomen the works of art become exemplars of tender motherly conduct, directly tying the rosary to affectionate mother and child scenes.

It is the fragrant and floral imagery of the rosary that should be brought to mind when examining the devotional images of Christ with prayer beads. These paintings can be classified as *Andachtsbilder,* or devotional images meant to aid in meditation and the spiritual merging of artwork and spectator; the images were intended for a lay and religious audience pursuing a closer relationship with the Madonna and Child. Little is known about the specific patronage of these works, but the sensory and spiritual purpose of the paintings is evident. In his book on mysticism and the imagery of love in these Flemish Madonna and Child paintings, Reindert Falkenburg notes that many of the images contain a table in the foreground spread with fruit and flowers, as seen in works by Joos van Cleve, a follower of the Master of Frankfurt, Gerard David, and many other artists (Figs. 21–25) (c. 1500).[76] Observing that the table is always positioned between the viewer and the Mother and Child, Falkenburg contends that spectators are invited to partake of the fruit and all that it symbolizes: grapes and walnuts as reminders of the Eucharist; cherries signifying the delights of Paradise; pears, quince, and apples suggesting Christ as the new Adam and Mary as the New Eve; and lemons and oranges as reminders of the Virgin's purity.[77] In viewing these images as a mystical feast, "contemplation is nourishment" and "eating fruit is . . . meditation."[78]

The spiritual meal is only heightened by the presence of the Christ Child's rosary, which

[76] See Falkenburg, Fruit of Devotion.

[77] John Oliver Hand, *Joos van Cleve: The Complete Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 88 and note 16.

[78] Falkenburg, Fruit of Devotion, 87.

operates on several sensory levels. As a garland of roses, the beads evoke floral perfumes, bringing to mind the sweetness of Christ's Passion, vividly described in Adolf of Essen's *Die rose onse here*: Christ's wounds taste "honey-sweet" to worshipers.[79] Around 1500, devotees began attaching pomanders filled with penetrating perfumes to their rosary chains or even had beads containing an aromatic resin which would produce scent from the motions of fingering.[80]

Christ is portrayed in many of the paintings fingering the rosary, thus perfuming the paintings with scents of roses to correspond with and magnify the fragrance of the fruit. Smelling like roses, the beads suggest on a theological level the two mystical roses of the painting: Christ and the Virgin Mary. The beads, many of them blood-red coral, also evoke the Passion and Christ's "honey-sweet" spilled blood. Indeed, a late fifteenth-century rosary manual, *Unser lieben Frauwen Psalter* or *The Psalter of Our Dear Lady,* describes Christ's wounds as roses: "the fifteen *Paters* [are] to be said to the wounds and to the blood and to the pains of Christ; these [are] red roses."[81] Therefore, in these *Andachtsbilder* the Christ Child holds a fragranced representation of himself—the rose-fruit from his mother's womb and a symbol of his Passion.

Yet the powerful scents and serious religious iconography of the paintings is overshadowed by the realism and naturalism of the scenes. In Joos van Cleve's image, Christ joyfully grasps the strings like a baby fascinated by objects and textures. A more pensive Christ Child appears in a painting by a follower of Hugo van der Goes, where the rosary draped around his neck dwarfs his small body (Fig. 25).[82] The naturalism is corroborated by contemporary

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[79] Quoted and cited in Ibid., 41–42 and note 174.

[80] Ibid., 86, notes 329–332. See also Edmund Launert, *Perfume and Pomanders: Scent and Scent Bottles From the Schwarzkopf Collection and European Museums* (North Yorkshire: Potterton Books, 1987), 16–24.

[81] Quoted and cited in Thurston, "Our Popular Devotions: II. The Rosary," 624.

[82] Wearing the rosary in the manner of a baldric was not unknown: Margaret of Burgundy requested a string of paternosters to be designed especially for such a style. See Lightbrown, 351.

sources that claim coral was regularly used as an infant teether because of its "medicinal and apotropaic properties."[83] While the Madonna in both images appears melancholic in contemplating the gravity of her son's eventual pain and death, she is captured as a relatable mother in a tender moment with her son.

The Master of the View of St. Gudele's *Virgin and Child Adored by a Female Donor, Accompanied by Mary Magdalene* (c. 1475) (Fig. 26) depicts a more rare *Andachtsbild* type, where Christ plays with the rosary of a female donor. Unlike the fragrant and floral *Andachtsbilder* previously examined, there is no fruit in the painting, and now an actual female donor takes part in the scene of the Virgin and Christ Child. Kneeling at her prie-dieu, the woman prays her long, coral rosary with various pendants and pomanders strung between the beads. Across from her, the Madonna holds back an infant Christ, who strains forward to play with the donatrix's rosary. The rosary functions as a literal and metaphorical conduit for the female donor to access the vision of Mary with Christ.[84] By reciting her Hail Mary and Our Father prayers, the woman is permitted to spiritually witness the loving moment between a believable infant Christ with his mother.

Just as Mary holds the fruit of her womb, so does the donatrix handle her blossoming rosary beads as another iteration of Christ. The image suggests that if the female donor continues to pray her rosary, pulling the beads towards herself, she will eventually reach the body of the infant Christ and touch him. For in her mystical vision she desires to hold and mother Christ just as the Virgin touches and presents her son. Dressed in a similar dark dress and portrayed with the same wide-spaced eyes and slight smile, the donatrix imitates the Virgin,

[83] Peter Parshall, ed., *The Woodcut in Fifteenth-Century Europe* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 158.

[84] Bernadette Kramer's article examines how in this painting the tangible object of the rosary "bridges" the materialistic and spiritual world.

further suggesting her attempt to take on the motherly traits of the Madonna. Because of the mode of her devotion, the female donor is witness to a maternal scene of tremendous symbolism and naturalism, one in which she more intimately interacts with Christ than previous depictions of donors with mystical visions.

As noted by several art historians, the composition and subject of the painting holds much in common with Jan van Eyck's *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (Fig. 27) (1435) and Rogier van der Weyden's *St. Luke Drawing the Virgin* (Fig. 28) (c. 1435–1440): inside a room that opens to a small garden and balcony, a devotee kneels before a vision of Christ and Mary.[85] Specifically in Jan van Eyck's painting, the powerful Nicolas Rolin is shown praying alone before the Madonna and Christ. His wealth and social prestige has afforded him a personalized and private vision of the Virgin and Child. Originally, van Eyck had even included a gold-trimmed purse hanging from his belt, to explicitly call attention to the Chancellor's monetary success.[86] Contemporary sources corroborate that Rolin was not a spiritual man, leading scholars to argue that this scene of spiritual contemplation is contrived—a ploy to help counteract his negative reputation at the Burgundian court.[87] Whether kneeling in true piety or not, van Eyck's image promotes Rolin as a privileged and important worshiper. It is significant, then, that in his painting, the Master of the View of St. Gudele replaces the Nicolas Rolin figure with a laywoman. In so doing, the artist imbues the female donor with the same spiritual prestige, and even worldly power, as Nicolas Rolin. Furthermore, the Chancellor's vision is portrayed as internal and intangible, with a noticeable boundary between the earthly sphere and

[85] Kramer, 140–146; Lorne Campbell and Jan Van der Stock, *Rogier van der Weyden, 1400–1464: Master of Passions* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2009), 413–415.

[86] Laura D. Gelfand and Walter S. Gibson, "Surrogate Selves: The 'Rolin Madonna' and the Late-Medieval Devotional Portrait," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 29, no. 3/4 (2002): 119.

[87] John Huizinga first argued this in his book, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages,* trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 317. Since then, many have reiterated the argument. For a concise historiography of the painting, see Gelfand, especially 119.

the heavenly vision.[88] In contrast, the female donor actually participates in a physical transaction with the Christ Child, blurring the lines between earthly and heavenly spheres. The female patron, therefore, has a more literal and direct access to the Madonna and Child than Nicolas Rolin. Moreover, the painting portrays rosary devotion as one of the highest forms of piety, and at the same time suggests the spiritual capabilities and prestige of women rosary reciters.

With the rise of family portraiture in Northern Europe, I argue that artists modeled their depictions of mothers with their children after these *Andachtsbilder* of the Virgin and Child with prayer beads. For many years scholars have noted the similarities between Madonna and Child imagery and representations of lay mothers with their children; however, no one has ever specifically tied early portraiture scenes to "rosary" *Andachtsbilder.*[89] In the next section I will argue that the rosary functions in family portraiture as a woman's means to advertise her piety and fertility, as well as to imitate the Virgin Mary.

Early Family Portraiture

In 1532 Maerten van Heemskerck painted *Family of Pieter Jan Foppesz,* a portrait that recalls the rosary paintings of the Virgin and her playful Child. Considered the first family portrait in the Netherlands,[90] the painting is innovative in subject matter but draws style and content from devotional portraits (Fig. 29). The Haarlem couple, Jan Foppesz and Alijdt Mathijsdr van Beresteyn, are shown with their three children. At first glance, the painting seems to portray a domestic genre scene of a family sitting around a table enjoying a meal. But the father's prominent glass of wine, as well as the bread and fruit on the table, remind the viewer of

[88] Brett Rothstein, "On Devotion as Social Ornament in Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin*," *Dutch Crossing* 24 (2000): 96–132.

[89] See Herbert Malecki, Die Familie des Pieter Jan Foppesz: Genese und Bedeutung des Kasseler Familienbildes des Maerten van Heemskerck (Kassel: Gesamthochschule, Kassel, Fachbereich, Kunst, 1983) and Victoria B. Greep, Een beeld van het gezin: Functie en betekenis van het vroegmoderne gezinsportret in de Nederlanden (Hiversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1996).

[90] Greep, 18.

the blood and body of Christ. The mother sits on the right side holding her baby, who fingers the crucifix on her large, coral rosary. While the portrait is moving toward a more secularized domestic scene, it still deeply relies upon standards of earlier donor portraiture, where figures openly express their piety.

For many years scholars have noted that the iconography of the mother and her baby stems from images of the Virgin and Child or Holy Family, but I contend that the painting is inspired more specifically by Virgin and Child images with the rosary. In the same naturalistic form as the Gerard David and Joos van Cleve images, the Foppesz child touches the rosary while believably pulling at its mother's breast to be fed. The mother casts her eyes down in a devotional pose similar to the Madonna. In her study of the painting, Victoria B. Greep claims that the infant is actually a representation of Christ, whose presence solidifies the Eucharistic symbols on the table and elevates the religious status of the family.[91] With little if any precedent for Christ appearing as an honorary family member, I disagree with Greep's analysis. But it is clear that the Foppesz infant is *modeled* on the figure of Christ, particularly in the way that he clutches the rosary. Bowed in quiet piety, his mother is meant to be a Madonna type. In touching the prayer beads, the infant's pose formulates many of the same meanings as Christ's playful fingering of the rosary; specifically, the coral color of the beads represents the spilled blood of Christ, and the beads signify the fruit of Mary's womb. But in the context of this family portrait scene, the beads also refer to the fruit of Alijdt Mathijsdr's womb. Like Christ, then, the infant touches and holds a representation of himself.

Furthermore, the cut apple on the table is reminiscent of the tables spread with fruit in Virgin and Child images with the rosary. Beyond recalling the role of Christ and his mother as the New Adam and the New Eve, the fruit signifies that the baby and his siblings are the fruits of

[91] Ibid., 24.

the marriage. Additionally, the prayer beads in the infant's hand make a conscious link between the rosary and the fertility of the couple, heightening simultaneously the domestic and devotional aspects of the painting.

Heemskerck's painting is not unique in its use of rosary imagery for a family portraiture scene. One may examine, for instance, the painting *Hieronymus Francken and His Family,* attributed to Frans Pourbus II (c. 1590) (Fig. 30), where the centrally situated mother prominently displays her ornate rosary in her right hand, while presenting her young daughter with her left.[92] Still, better than other examples, the Heemskerck family portrait elucidates many of the meanings I have culled regarding women's encounter with the rosary—a symbol of marriage, fruitfulness, and women's desire to emulate the Virgin Mary—and thereby acts as a concise summation of the great significance the rosary provided laywomen during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Jewelry

As discussed above with the Master of the View of St. Gudele's *Virgin and Child Adored by a Female Donor,* the signification of the rosary does not end with an exploration of the private, meditational meanings the rosary held for laywomen: the multitude of images portraying women publicly wearing noticeable rosaries begs questions about the type of social status rosaries afforded women and how prayer beads enabled women to practice devotion in a public way. This concluding section of my paper will explore questions of the advantages of wearing religious jewelry and how the rosary permitted laywomen to navigate Northern European boundaries of gendered devotion.

In analyzing rosaries as jewelry, it is useful to first frame the discussion with theories of

[92] For the only published source on this painting, see Natasja Peeters, "Brothers in Art: Hieronymus and Frans Francken I and their Family," *Dutch Crossing* 23 (1999): 80–102.

adornment. The father of jewelry studies, Georg Simmel, wrote in the late nineteenth century that wearing jewelry is "an act which exclusively serves to emphasize and increase the importance" of the wearer.[93] Later theorists like Grahame Clark and Marcia Pointon have mainly repeated Simmel's arguments, claiming that jewels are markers of social status, identity, and wealth.[94] Art historian Adrian Randolph extends the adornment analysis further by claiming that jewelry's social roles and its production of social relationships should be analyzed.[95] Taking my cue from Simmel and Randolph, I will further explore in a few case studies how rosaries signaled societal prestige and constructed the identity of the wearer.[96]

From a cursory look at Northern depictions of prayer beads, one of the most obvious differences between male and female rosaries is that women's beads tended to be longer, more ornate, gaudy, and lavish. Bead makers were an important part of commerce throughout Europe, specializing in bone, horn, coral, mussel shell, amber, pearl, jet, polished coal, and many other materials.[97] In consideration of gender, Winston-Allen argues that bead making would have been a "viable trade for women," though she has no records to prove females' involvement in the industry.[98] Nevertheless the possibility of female bead makers exists, and without doubt women actively participated as buyers and consumers of beads, enabling them to construct their

[93] Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel,* trans. Kurt H. Wolff, (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950), 339.

[94] Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Marcia Pointon,"Women and their Jewels," in *Women and Material Culture, 1660–1830,* ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11–30.

[95] Adrian W.B. Randolph, "Performing the Bridal Body in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Art History* 21, no. 2 (June 1998): 182–200.

[96] For articles on social status and Northern Renaissance art, see Wim Blockmans and Antheun Janse, eds., *Showing Status: Representations of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

[97] Winston-Allen, 112. She also cites the account books of Ulm merchant, Ott Ruland from 1446–1462.

[98] Quoted in Ibid.

devotional identity.[99]

An example of rosary commerce can be seen in Petrus Christus's painting, *A Goldsmith in His Shop, Possibly Saint Eligius* (1449) (Fig. 31). Similar in subject matter to van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait,* an engaged, aristocratic couple buys a wedding ring from a goldsmith, who might also be the patron saint of goldsmiths, Saint Eligius. The betrothal girdle, noticeably lying on the counter, alludes to the couple's upcoming marriage. Tacked to the back shelf, a string of red, gray, and blue beads are for sale in the shop. Though not a complete rosary, the beads probably were intended to be bought and strung into an actual rosary or a necklace. The beads' proximity to the male references the wedding custom of grooms presenting beads to brides. The golden, lavish dress of the woman indicates that the couple is wealthy and can therefore afford luxurious items like rosaries made of precious materials.

But uneasiness permeated some cities where women publicly wore elaborate and expensive rosaries. Sumptuary laws in fifteenth-century Nuremberg required that "no married or unmarried woman shall any longer wear a Pater Noster which is valued at more than twenty Rhenish guelders" or else she would be fined "the amount by which the Pater Noster exceeds the value of twenty guelders."[100] Apparently, only *women* wearing expensive rosaries caused fear in the minds of Nuremberg citizens. The law suggests that more females wore sumptuous rosaries than males, and the law further implies that the spiritual benefits afforded by rosaries could be counteracted by extravagant display. But why was it deemed unfitting for a woman to wear

[99] For other scholars who have made the similar argument that consumption is a means of agency for constructing social identity, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice, (London: Routledge, 2010); Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

[100] Winston-Allen, 112–116.

ostentatious prayer beads? Might the law also insinuate that rosary-clad women garnered too much public notice or that the rosary functioned in the public space in a way that drew too much attention to the quiet and private sex?

A look at the restrictions that shaped women's devotion provides an answer. In her treatment of gendered devotion in the Lowlands, Andrea G. Pearson embraces a simple binary: male piety was promoted in the public realm, whereas female devotion was encouraged to be clandestine and private. Using hagiographic texts as her main evidence, Pearson argues that the standards for piety were different for male and female saints. Male saints' holy acts were performed in public places, whereas female saints' exemplified "private piety"— the practice of solitary devotion in secluded spaces.[101] Pearson claims that the laity "loosely" modeled their spiritual practices according to such gendered divisions, though she does argue that men and women were by no means fully limited to these male or female codes of devotion.[102]

In fact, there were numerous ways in which women publically expressed piety. Most generally, the very acts of attending mass, praying with a congregation, and receiving the Eucharist were public expressions of devotion that women performed. Furthermore, women went on pilgrimage to fulfill spiritual quests, and had the opportunity to belong to communities dedicated to Saint Anne or rosary devotion, where they participated in public processions.[103]

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[101] Andrea G. Pearson, "Personal Worship, Gender, and the Devotional Portrait Diptych," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 114. See pg. 104 for Pearson's definition of "private piety," "personal piety," and "public piety."

[102] For her work on ways in which men and woman negotiated the gendered nature of Netherlandish devotion, see her more recent publication, *Performing Gender in the Burgundian Netherlands.* Her analysis is consistent with more general studies of Netherlandish women's position in society: for laywomen "the housewife was the ideal of theoretical and didactic literature, and maternity, child-rearing and household daily management were considered proper to women." Although appearing in public was not banned or regarded as socially inappropriate, women could only participate in activities related to housewifery or work as "auxiliaries or substitutes to men." For quotes, see Eric Bousmar, "Neither Equality Nor Radical Oppression: The Elasticity of Women's Roles in the Late Medieval Low Countries," in *The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries,* ed. Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 119. Also note that Bousmar examines ways in which women subverted these societal rules.

[103] Winston-Allen, 118.

Women, then, did not remain sequestered in private devotional spaces, and wearing the rosary allowed them to further engage in public devotional spaces.

Indeed, the rosary was not a spiritual tool for exclusive private use. As discussed throughout my thesis, wearing beads also provided devotees protection. When worn in public, usually dangling from a belt, draped around the arm, or even as a necklace, the rosary had the additional function of advertising the piety of the wearer. For a woman, then, wearing a rosary was an effective way of showcasing and bringing *public* attention to her *private* devotion: a public pronouncement of her private piety. In other words, the rosary allowed women to move beyond the private, detached world of prayer books into the more, to use Pearson's terminology, "male," public devotional sphere. The development of rosary confraternities even forced women to publicly announce their devotion to the Virgin on a membership role. The fact that Nuremburg enacted a law against the public wearing of showy rosaries, suggests that women were taking advantage of public piety with their prayer beads. One of the best ways to examine women's rosaries in a public light is by looking to altarpieces, where female patrons' rosaries drew much public attention.

A lavish rosary is worn by a female patron in the panel *Saint Paul and a Donatrix* (1510), painted in Ghent by a follower of Gerard David (Figs. 32–33). While a rosary confraternity did exist in Ghent, it is impossible to know whether the female patron was a member because the official membership list has been lost.[104] Furthermore, the identity of the donatrix and her husband are unknown. Lorne Campbell claims that the couple are dressed as high-ranking Ghent citizens. Specifically, they hold much in common with the portraits of Livina van Steelandt and

[104] According to Paul Trio, De Jonghe, a cloister historian, preserved fifteen names from the Ghent confraternity—all men with titles—suggesting he wanted to promote and even exaggerate the prestige of the confraternity. Paul Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving: De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1993), 55.

her husband, Lieven van Pottelsberghe, who served as the Receiver General of Flanders and councilor to Charles V.[105] In the painting the female donor is portrayed as a wealthy and prominent member of society, primarily through her rosary. Sixty red coral beads separated by golden paternoster beads are strung on a green thread so long the bottom skims the ground. The redness of the beads stands out markedly against her black costume, bringing visual attention to her piety. The unusually long length of her rosary showcases the many prayers she has recited. Additionally, the beads are so beautifully detailed that a viewer could recite the rosary by just looking at the painting.

The precious gold paternosters and lustrous coral beads[106] signal her status as a wealthy woman. Functioning as a piece of jewelry, the rosary references the images of royal women festooned with similarly ornate prayer beads and jewels. Though the materials of the rosary are different from the beads held by the princess in Jean Hey's *Portrait of Margaret of Austria* (c. 1490) (Fig. 34), the donatrix takes on a similar royal significance in holding and showcasing her beads. In Hey's image, the rosary can almost be mistaken as a pearl bracelet to match the quality of Margaret's ruby necklace and fashionable court clothes.[107] Other powerful Northern females were known for owning numerous strands of beads: Marguerite of Flanders had seventy sets of coral beads.[108] As Andrea G. Pearson and many others have argued, the Northern wealthy urban bourgeoisie continually imitated the aristocracy by commissioning devotional diptychs, emulating court fashion, or, as shown in the *Saint Paul and a Donatrix* painting, by buying and

[105] Campbell, *The Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Schools*, 167. The original location of the paintings is also unknown, though it can be presumed they were displayed in some type of public space.

[106] See Lightbrown, 346–347, for a history of coral jewelry.

[107] The portrait was probably sent to King Charles VIII, her espoused husband. Philippe Lorentz, "Children's Portraits: Between Politics and Family Memories," in *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria,* ed. Dagmar Eichberger (Davidsfonds: Brepols, 2005), 116.

[108] Lightbrown, 346. Note also that Margaret of Austria commissioned a number of works of art that portray her in devotional poses.

portraying themselves with expensive rosaries.[109]

Though rare, there are some images of women wearing rosaries as necklaces, truly conflating jewelry with the devotional tool. In the Flemish image *Magdalene Weeping,* painted by the workshop of the Master of the Magdalene Legend during the mid 1520s, Mary Magdalene holds her covered pot filled with ointment and dabs her eyes as she presumably observes the Pietà (Figs. 35–36).[110] A rosary is clasped around her neck made of coral beads, separated by clear glass paternosters strung on a brown string. A jeweled pendant hangs from the rosary down the front of her neck, consisting of purple, green, and blue precious stones. The ornament has no significance to prayers of the rosary; rather, it is merely a decorative piece of jewelry. The fine dividing line between rosary and secular jewelry is blurred in this image, allowing the rosary to become a signifier of wealth, social status, devotion, and piety.

Although the female patron's rosary is not portrayed as a necklace in the *Donatrix* image, it does function in a similar way by obscuring the boundaries between devotional object and jewelry. As a wealthy member of Ghent society, the female patron uses the rosary in the image as her primary means of suggesting her wealth and desire to emulate those of greater political and social power.

Rosary manuals, distributed in all rosary confraternities, propagated stories of men and women who prayed their rosaries and received the type of social status and recognition desired by the donatrix. The stories are often idiosyncratic, yet they show how women's social status could be dramatically raised from reciting the rosary. Many of Alanus de Rupe's stories center on wealthy, fashionable, and educated practitioners of the rosary, appealing to the bourgeoisie

[109] Andrea G. Pearson, "Margaret of Austria's Devotional Portrait Diptychs," *Woman's Art Journal* 22, no. 2 (Autumn 2001–Winter 2002), 19.

[110] Campbell, 340.

laity eager for social elevation.[111]

One story which was copied out in full and included in many confraternity manuals relates the tale of Benedicta, a woman of tremendous beauty, wit, and athleticism, born to a count. Despite her accomplishments and birthright, Benedicta becomes a courtesan. Because of her evil ways, she is punished first with the curse of leprosy, then blindness, then disfigurement. Finally, worms attack her flesh. Upon hearing of Benedicta and her woes, St. Dominic gives her the rosary and urges her to use it. After praying, Benedicta is miraculously healed from her terrible diseases and is restored to her once attractive self. Furthermore, the king of Castile marries her and together they promote the rosary throughout their kingdom.[112] This outlandish story promised to devotees, especially women, that praying the rosary could lead to royal life and fantastical healing processes.

A similar story also included in rosary handbooks relates the tale of the charcoaler's daughter, a thin young girl constantly covered in black dust, who prays her rosary every day. Because of her piety, the dauphin notices her and begs her to be his wife. She accepts, and they wed and bring prosperity and peace to their kingdom.[113] Though these inconceivable rags-to-riches tales might not have been fully believed by all confraternity members,[114] they nonetheless represent how for women, the rosary could be their conduit to advantageous marriage and raised social status. More specifically, the stories suggest that continually praying a rosary attracts male attention, in the same way that a bedazzling string of beads attracts the eye. As Benedicta and the charcoaler's daughter pray their rosaries, they become more beautiful. For laywomen, then, wearing strands of lavish beads enhanced their own attractiveness in a similar spiritual and

[111] Winston-Allen, 124.
[112] Full story cited in Ibid., 125, note 66.
[113] Full story cited in Ibid., 124, note 63, and 155–158.
[114] Ibid., 124.

physical way.

With these stories in mind, the social function of the rosary can be understood in images like the *Donatrix With Saint Paul.* To spectators, the donatrix's rosary suggests she obtained her wealth and position from praying Hail Marys and Our Fathers. Yet the rosary also indicates her probable future as a royal or elite member of society. Thus, the rosary constitutes the female patron's identity, proving her a valuable member of Ghent with monetary and social position. Additionally, the rosary has allowed women to navigate into the "male" public sphere of devotion.

Therefore, the rosary has a social role in elevating members of society and bringing them good fortune. And as consumers of rosaries, the donatrix and other women display their power as buyers of devotional tools. Of course many rosaries were given to women as bridal gifts, but females also purchased prayer beads on their own. When they did, they exerted power as consumers who buy to construct their identity. Moreover, there is a similar relationship between the buying of rosaries and the "buying" of salvation profited by rosary devotion. As women accumulated ornate beads, they also accumulated salvific capital. Thus, when rosaries are read as both secular and sacred adornments, they reveal underlying currents of desire for social elevation, spiritual blessings, and public attention.

Conclusion

It is a daunting task to survey the relationship between laywomen and the rosary at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. My study has been broad and has covered a number of representations spanning decades, in order to make specific correlations and a conclusion about the meaning of gender and rosary devotion. Furthermore, I have only considered a narrow group of females: laywomen with a desire for children and social status.

For this select category, the rosary intersected with a variety of female experiences: childbirth, childrearing, being a pure and virtuous wife, and emulating the Virgin. In the visual representations I have considered, I have found evidence that women perceived the rosary as a symbol of fruitfulness and as a tool for ensuring safe births. On a more nuanced level, many of the depictions of women with prayer beads seem to engage with the rosary in a particular form of meditative prayer, in which the mother projects herself into the narrative of the pregnant Virgin in order to bear a child as Mary bore Christ.

Still, an exploration of the relationship between laywomen and the rosary demands more general questions about gender: was the rosary a strict and repressive form of worship, or did women gain greater independence through utilizing this form of devotion? My research has shown that the answer is complex. Yes, the rosary was fundamentally a tool for solitary religious activity, but it also allowed women to cross over into a public world of devotion where they raised their social status by showcasing their beads as symbols of righteous devotion and as beautifying adornments. My study of the rosary is unique in its exclusive consideration of women and rosary practices. In suggesting that the rosary was perceived by women as a blossoming vine, as a piece of religious jewelry, and as an aid in childbirth, I hope to have opened new avenues of interest for other scholars in their quest to understand this profoundly multivalent devotional tool.

FIGURES

Figure 1 Robert Campin. *Mérode Triptych.* 1425. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Cloisters Collection.

Figure 2 Robert Campin. *Female Donor's Prayer Beads* from *Mérode Triptych* (see Fig. 1).

Figure 3 Robert Campin. *Male Donor* from *Mérode Triptych* (see Fig. 1).

Figure 4 *Illustration of the Legend of the Monk and the Robbers* ("Aves Seen as Roses"). In *Der Spiegel hochloblicher Bruderschafft des Rosenkrantz Marie* (Leipzig, 1515), fol. 36v. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Figure 5 Anonymous, Bamberg. *The Madonna della Misericordia in a Rosary.* c. 1500. Staatsbibliothek Bamberg, Bamberg.

Figure 6 Jan van Eyck. *Arnolfini Portrait.* 1432. National Gallery, London.

Figure 7 Jan van Eyck. *Prayer Beads* from *Arnolfini Portrait* (see Fig. 6).

Figure 8 Godtfridus von Wedig. Copy after *Portrait of Wolter Rotkirchen* (1479). 1624. Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

Figure 9 Anonymous. Copy after Geertgen tot Sint Jans' *The Institution of the Rosary.* c. 1500–1550. Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig.

Figure 10 *Croon Onser Liever Vrouwen.* Delft: Christiaen Snellaert, 29 March, 1490. Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag.

Figure 11 Gerard David. *The Lineage of St. Anne.* c. 1500. Musée des Beaux Arts de Lyon, Lyon.

Figure 12 Petrus Christus. *Madonna of the Dry Tree.* 1462. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

Figure 13 Anonymous. *Birth of the Virgin.* c. 1500–1549. Groeningemuseum, Brugge.

Figure 14 Anonymous. *Rosary* from *Birth of the Virgin* (see Fig. 13).

Figure 15 Anonymous. *Rosary* from *Birth of the Virgin* (see Fig.13).

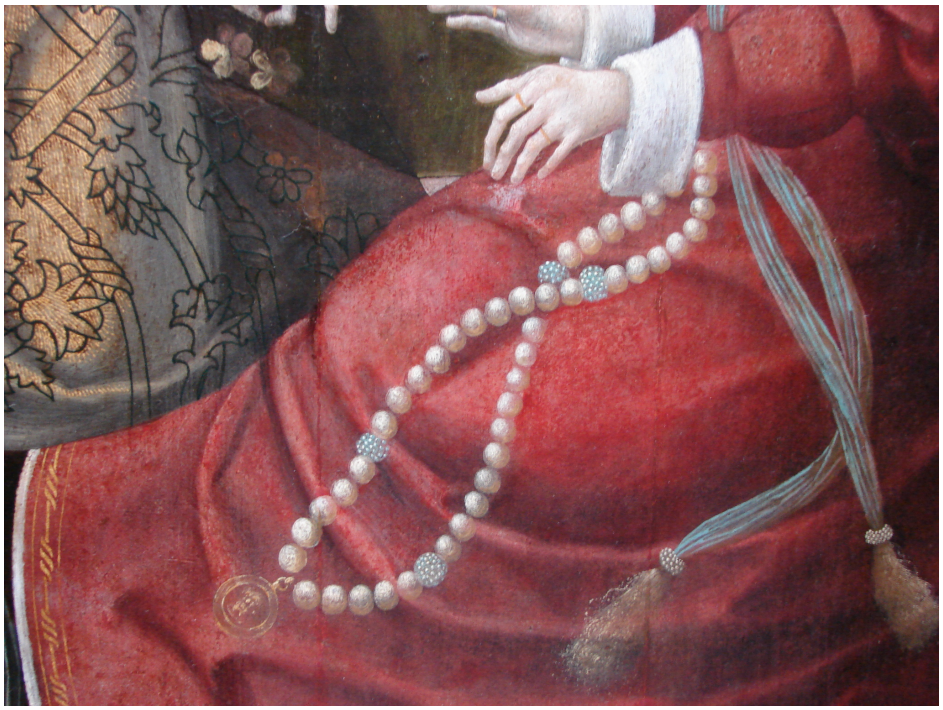

Figure 16. Anonymous. *Rosary* from *Birth of the Virgin* (see Fig. 13).

Figure 17. Anonymous. *Rosary* from *Birth of the Virgin* (see Fig. 13).

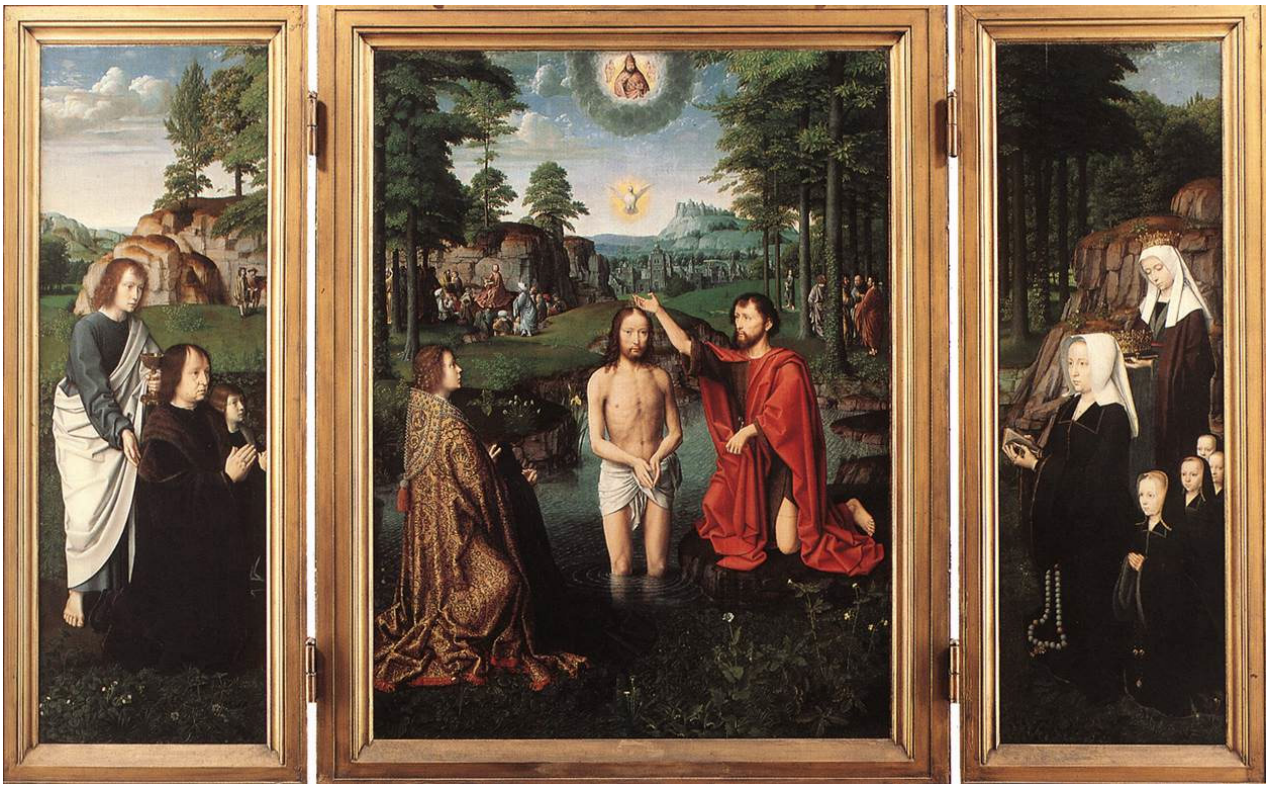

Figure 18 Gerard David. *The Baptism of Christ.* 1502–1510. Groeningemuseum, Brugge.

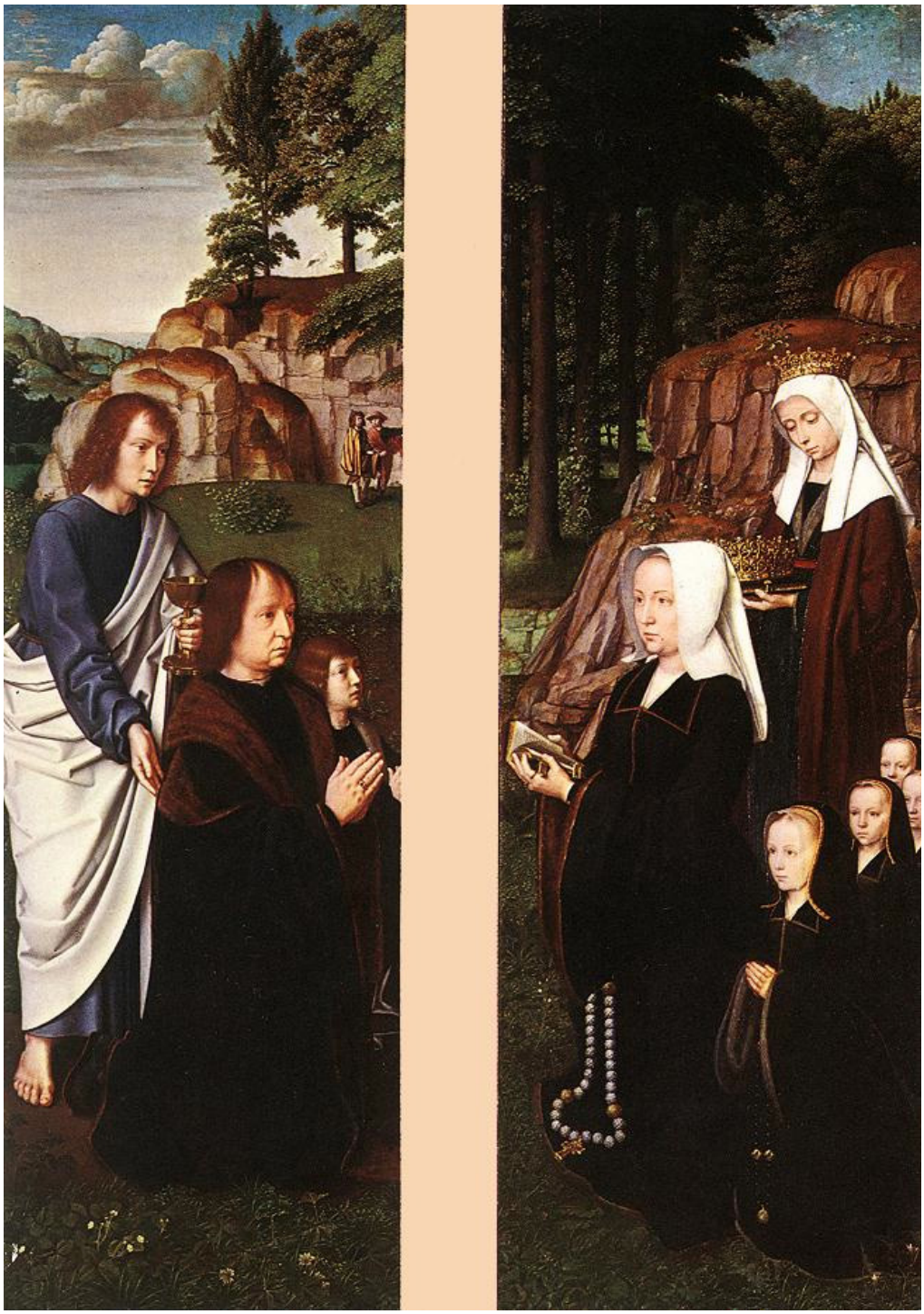

Figure 19 Gerard David. *Male and Female Donors* from *Baptism of Christ* (see Fig. 18).

Figure 20 Gerard David. *Exterior Panel* from *Baptism of Christ* (see Fig. 18).

Figure 21 Joos van Cleve. *Holy Family.* c. 1500. The Currier Museum of Art, New Hampshire.

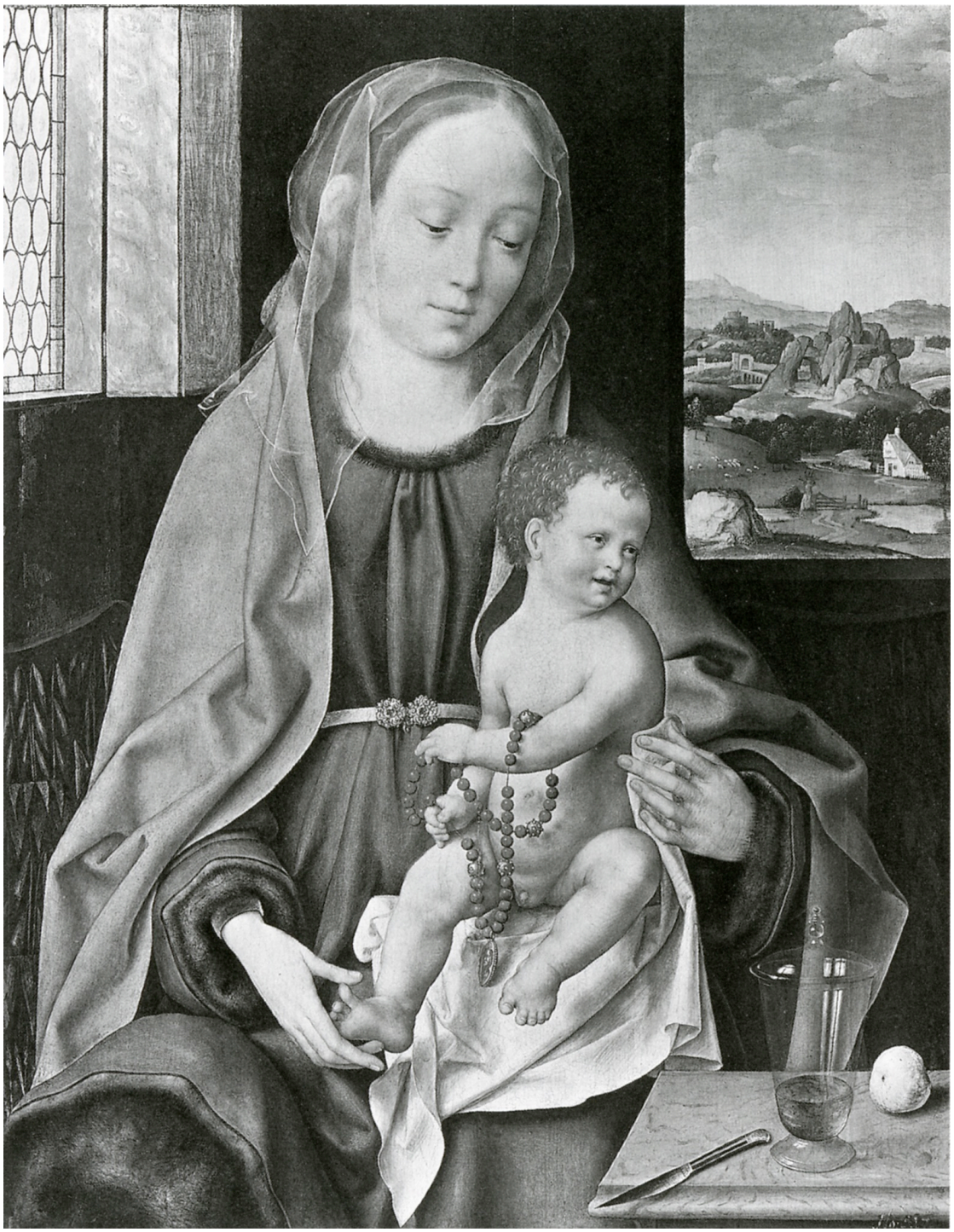

Figure 22 Joos van Cleve. *Madonna and Child.* c. 1525. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 23 Gerard David. *Virgin and Child.* c. 1500. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Figure 24 Follower of the Master of Frankfurt. *Virgin and Child.* c. 1500. Location Unknown.

Figure 25 Follower of Hugo van der Goes. *Triptych with Virgin and Child and Prayer Texts*. c. 1500. National Gallery, London.

Figure 26 Master of the View of St. Gudule. *Virgin and Child Adored by a Female Donor, Accompanied by Mary Magdalene.* c. 1475. Le Grand Curtius, Liège.

Figure 27 Jan van Eyck. *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin.* 1435. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 28 Rogier van der Weyden. *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin.* c. 1435–1440. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Figure 29 Maerten van Heemskerck. *Family of Pieter Jan Foppesz.* 1532. Staatliche Museen, Kassel.

Figure 30 Frans Pourbus II (?). *Hieronymus Francken and His Family.* c. 1590. Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Figure 31 Petrus Christus. *A Goldsmith in His Shop, Possibly St. Eligius.* 1449. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Figure 32 Follower of Gerard David. *Saint Paul and a Donatrix.* c. 1510. Beaucousin Collection, Paris.

Figure 33 Follower of Gerard David. *Saint Peter and a Donor.* c. 1510. Beaucousin Collection, Paris.

Figure 34 Jean Hey. *Portrait of Margaret of Austria.* c. 1490. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

Figure 35 Workshop of the Master of the Magdalene Legend. *Magdalene Weeping*. c. 1520. National Gallery, London.

Figure 36 Workshop of the Master of the Magdalene Legend. *Rosary Necklace* from *Magdalene Weeping* (see Fig. 35).

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