



## Poor Little Rich Girl(?): Margaret of Austria and the Arnolfini Portrait

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*For Rachel, whose concern for “different visions” in the work we do has provided a place for writing that looks beyond what has already been thought, wherever that may lead and however far it may fall from goal posts others have established.*

Early in the Covid-19 pause I read a short piece by the art critic Peter Schjeldahl in which he recounted how a recent visit to the Prado Museum had made him see *Las Meninas* in a way he hadn't before.[1] (Fig. 1) “There would never be another moment in the Spanish court so radiant – or a painting, anywhere, so good,” he wrote. The King's artist was at the end of his career; the beautiful, blonde Infanta Margarita Theresa grew up to be staunchly anti-Semitic and died at twenty-one; her brother, Charles II, not yet born when the painting was made, suffered from poor health and would become Spain's last Habsburg ruler. “Velázquez couldn't have known [it] at the time but ... somehow, subliminally, he wove [this] into his vision,” Schjeldahl wrote.[2]

The exhilaration Schjeldahl had once found in Velázquez's greatest painting turned into sadness when he viewed its subjects in hindsight, the reverse glance exposing a less glorious image.[3] What might I learn, I wondered, if I were to approach Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (Fig. 2) from the perspective of its immediate afterlife, inquiring directly into what can be known about the panel's primary subject in the

decades after the painting was made, instead of proceeding, as is usually done, by rehearsing scholarly claims?



**Figure 1.** Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*. 1656. Museo Nacional del Prado. © Photographic Archive Museo Nacional del Prado.

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**Figure 2.** Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Giovanni (?) Arnolfini and his Wife. 1434. The National Gallery London.  
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Ever since publication of Erwin Panofsky's study of the painting, scholars have addressed the distinguished scholar's assertion that Jan's couple, long thought to be Giovanni d'Arrigo Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenami, are exchanging vows in a private marriage ceremony, with the date 1434, painted between the artist's name and the mirror, identifying the year the event occurred as well as the one in which the panel was painted.[4] Over the years, alternative explanations of the panel's imagery have emerged. Some time ago, Edwin Hall and I independently suggested that Jan had depicted a betrothal rather than a marriage, a common event in medieval and early modern times in which individuals were pledged at young ages to one another for economic and dynastic reasons, the official ceremony of union, involving blessing in or at the church, taking place when both parties were old enough to give legal consent.[5] An accidental discovery, nearly three decades ago, of a document long buried in the archives indicated that Giovanni d'Arrigo Arnolfini's marriage did not occur until 1447, when the Duke made a gift to him of some silver pots.[6] The text lends credence to the suggestion Hall and I made that Jan's painting portrays the much earlier betrothal, the thirteen year delay between events attesting to a plausible disparity between the subjects' ages.

The National Gallery London, keeper of the panel, interpreted the new information differently, arguing, in the entry for the painting in its catalogue, that the top-hatted individual Jan portrayed could not have been Giovanni d'Arrigo. Instead, one of his cousins, Giovanni di Nicolao, who had come to Bruges from Lucca by 1419, "would have had every opportunity to become acquainted with Jan van Eyck well before 1434"; accordingly, he should be regarded as the subject of Jan's scrutiny.[7] Since this individual's first wife, Costanza Trenta, was no longer alive in 1434, the woman in Jan's painting is tentatively identified in the museum's catalogue as "his putative second wife," but the notion that the painting incorporates some sort of marriage narrative is vigorously denied.

It is short-sighted to remove Giovanni d'Arrigo from consideration as the panel's remembered subject. Jacques Paviot, the historian who discovered the document regarding the date of Arnolfini's marriage, maintained that he remained the painting's likely subject in view of his singular prominence in Burgundian political circles in the decades after the portrait was made; Paviot did not comment on who the woman might be. It is also hard to accept the catalogue's insistence that Jan's painting is just a portrait, a likeness lacking further meaning, given the numerous references to domestic ceremonies that the image contains.[8] Indeed, traces of Panofsky's argument inform discussion of the painting's imagery even when the alternative identity of its subject is accepted.[9] Both issues – the identity of the

subject(s) and the significance of the painting – are at play in what follows but are not the reason that I have written this essay. Rather, Schjeldahl's observations about *Las Meninas* made me want to think more about what became of various Arnolfinis in the aftermath of the painting's production. While most of the facts regarding members of the family are set out in the National Gallery's catalogue, there is, I discovered, more to be said. A fuller picture of Giovanni d'Arrigo's life expands understanding of how memory of him may have resonated years after the painting was made, affecting the ways in which the panel would have been valued and viewed and altering the manner in which I have come to see it too.

The first known mention of the painting dates to 1516, when it was included in an inventory of the collection of Margaret of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands.<sup>[10]</sup> Scholars do not doubt that the painting described in one of the entries as a *large picture called Arnoult Fin [shown] with his wife in a chamber ... made by the painter Johannes ... [and] given to Madame by don Diego* is the double portrait by Jan van Eyck that was bought by London's National Gallery in 1842. I often wondered how the gift to *Madame* had come about but I had never taken the time or trouble to ask. After reading Schjeldahl's piece, I wanted to know more about the Spanish grandee who gave it to her; how he might have obtained the painting; and in what circumstances he had passed it on. I was also interested in ascertaining what she could have admired or appreciated in a portrait of someone who had died a few years before she was born.

Inclusion of *Arnoult Fin's* name in the inventory entry suggests that it still held significance in the early sixteenth century. We know from a variety of documents that the Arnolfini family of Italian merchants, several of whom are mentioned in various civic records, sought its fortune in the Lowlands starting around 1420, dealing with Duke Philip the Good, whose painter Jan became in 1425. Whereas I had previously been interested in their activities around the time of the panel's execution, believed to be 1434 –the date painted on the panel's surface, I was now more curious about what one or another Arnolfini had done in the years after the painting was made; this, I hoped, might help me understand the long-lasting renown of the family's name.

Information about specific Arnolfinis and their involvements comes from a variety of sources and is subject to varied interpretations since given names were sometimes recorded in different forms. In 1432, *Jehan Arnolfini*, working with a member of the Rapondi family, sold textiles to the Burgundian Court; towards the end of September 1435, he was paid handsomely for the delivery of luxury fabrics to Duke Philip the

Good. *Jehan* is one of the names by which Giovanni d'Arrigo was known throughout his life. Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini had begun making loans in Bruges and selling cloth and tapestries to Philip the Good, among others, more than a decade earlier. It is not clear if he or his cousin is the Giovanni Arnolfini who served as Giusfredo Rapondi's agent in 1436 or worked, in the same year, with another Lucchese merchant. What we do know is that Giovanni di Nicolao, who was referred to in the diminutive as *Giannino* or *Jehannin*, was infrequently mentioned between 1428 and 1442. He became a burgher of Bruges in the latter year, taking advantage of special terms offered by the Duke and promising never to engage in trade. In 1449 and 1452, he is recorded as having participated in the arbitration of two disputes, the first of which was a family matter involving Giovanni d'Arrigo.[11]

During this time, his cousin's prominence grew.[12] Between 1444 and 1446, Giovanni d'Arrigo received significant remuneration from the Duke's *recette générale*. In 1447, Philip reimbursed a metalsmith for two silver pots presented *as a gift to Jehan Arnoulfin a merchant residing in the city of Bruges the day of his marriage*. In 1448, he is documented as the mediator of disputes between other Italian merchants working in Bruges. In 1449, Philip paid him a great deal for the cloth he supplied for the wedding garments of Mary of Guelders, Philip's great-niece, as well as for material for the robes of the couriers who would accompany her to Scotland for her marriage.[13] In the same year, the Duke granted (this) Giovanni rights for five years to the tolls on goods passing through Gravelines, a port between Calais and Dunkirk, in exchange for a fee. The lucrative arrangement was renewed in 1456; at some point, Giovanni granted Tommaso Portinari the right to use the custom station.[14] By 1454, Giovanni d'Arrigo had been made a member of Philip's governing council and in 1457 he served as the Duke's mediator in an issue involving some members of Bruges' Medici bank.

In 1455, Giovanni Arnolfini visited Louis, the French dauphin, who was sheltering in a castle at Genappe, not far from Brussels, during a political dispute with his father, King Charles VII. When Charles died in 1461, Louis inherited the crown as Louis XI, naming Arnolfini Governor of Finances for Normandy. A long letter Giovanni wrote to Louis, dated 28 November 1461, identified the carrier of the letter, Martin Cenami, as "my cousin who will speak to Jacques Cenami, his cousin," concerning silk, wool, and other merchandise of interest. Giovanni was referring to his wife Jeanne's family, prosperous traders and money lenders in Paris, where a grandfather had settled in the late fourteenth century establishing a successful bank. Giovanni's letter to the French king was signed *Jehan Arnolfini* and closed with the words "*I have no other master than you.*"[15]

In 1464, Giovanni Arnolfini became a French citizen. In August of the following year, he paid Pierre Jobert, the King's Receiver General of Finance, half of what he owed as restitution for some goods he had apparently confiscated.[16] He had lost his position with the French government when relations between France and Burgundy grew contentious, returning to the Lowlands to pursue affairs there. Philip the Good reinstated him to his inner circle and Charles the Bold, who became Duke in 1467, renewed that appointment in 1469. In June of that year, *Jan Arnolphin, ruddere* [knight], was listed as one of only two foreign born signers of a contract concerning the obligations of Bruges's Confraternity of the Dry Tree, to which members of the ducal family, courtiers, aristocrats, and many foreign merchants also belonged. Antoine, Bastard of Burgundy, the natural son of Philip the Good, was among them; so was Tommaso Portinari; there were Spanish members as well.[17] In 1470, Giovanni Arnolfini was taken to court by a woman (not his wife) who sought to regain jewelry and other property he had given her, including several houses, which he had promised her in writing in 1458. Notwithstanding his behavior, the record of the complaint's hearing before the Duke's Council referred to him as "faithful *chevalier*".[18] When Giovanni died two years later, on 11 September 1472, he left money for elaborate masses to be said in his remembrance in Lucca's cathedral as well as in Bruges's church of Rich Clares where he was buried, assuring that his memory would continue to circulate within the community in which he had lived after he was gone.

After his death, loans and obligations he had contracted in his lifetime were being litigated by his wife and members of her family.[19] Around 1473, Arnolfini's widow, *Jehanne Cenasme*, obtained from King Louis XI the return of floodgates in Richebourg. She also pursued repayment of a loan her husband had made to Antoine, the half-brother of Duke Charles the Bold. An act of 26 July 1490, named her nephew Giovanni di Marco Cenami, *curateur* (administrator) for his son Jehan Cenasme, a student in Paris who was the recipient of 900 gold *scudis* Antoine owed the deceased Arnolfini. The transaction attests to *Jehanne's* rights to her husband's property even after her death in October 1480. From the perspective of my interests, it demonstrates that memory of Giovanni d'Arrigo, trusted associate at various times of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold, as well as King Louis XI of France, had not been erased.[20]

Don Diego Guevara, who gave the *Arnolfini Portrait* to Margaret of Austria, was nearly two decades older, and may have had direct contact with Arnolfini through his involvement with members of Margaret's family. We know from documents, some of which were written after his death in 1520, that he was attached to the Burgundian

court in various capacities for more than forty years.[21] A sixteenth-century hyperbolized account of his life reports that he had thrown himself over Charles the Bold's body when the Duke (Margaret's grandfather) died in battle in 1477. Booty captured afterwards revealed that Charles traveled with cartloads of treasure, including metalwork, manuscripts, and military insignia.[22] While we do not know how or when Guevara acquired Jan's painting, his links to the Duke and his family placed him in proximity to the wealth they had amassed. He could have salvaged, claimed, or been rewarded with objects belonging to them during this period of political chaos.[23] After Charles's untimely passing, Guevara became a squire in the service of the Duke's daughter, Mary of Burgundy, and was in her employ when she died in 1482. By the end of the fifteenth and into the early sixteenth century, he was at work as *maître d'hôtel* for Mary's son, Philip, and his wife, Juana of Castille (Margaret of Austria's brother and sister-in-law). Later Guevara was employed by their son Charles V in Brussels, achieving more elevated status and recognition in the later years of his life.[24]

Well-placed courtiers like Guevara were in the habit of giving presents to those they served at auspicious moments or critical junctures, as an expression of loyalty and a way of remaining in a noble's good graces; movement between places was one of the occasions when lavish offerings were made.[25] Given this custom, it is possible that Guevara's presentation of Jan's painting to Margaret of Austria occurred when she was moving between courts. For an understanding of the circumstances of her peripatetic existence, we need to turn to her story, most of which is well known although its distinct parts are seldom taken in together.

Margaret was born in Brussels in 1480 to Mary of Burgundy (daughter and only child of Charles the Bold) and Maximilian, Archduke of Austria (son of Frederick III, Holy Roman Emperor). Her parents had been married in 1477, not long after the death of Mary's father, the last Burgundian Duke. Their union, planned in 1473 when they were sixteen and fourteen years of age respectively, was part of an effort to protect Mary's rights to the Lowlands.[26] As an only child, Mary was prevented by Salic law from succeeding her father. This provoked France's King, Louis XI, to resuscitate a long-standing familial claim to certain Burgundian counties.[27] Dispute over possession of these territories erupted into a serious challenge when Mary died in a riding accident in 1482. Her widowed husband Maximilian claimed oversight in the name of their not quite four-year old son Philip (called the Handsome or the Fair). As part of a pact with King Louis XI, he sent his daughter, two-year old Margaret, to the French court the following year to be raised there as the future wife of the dauphin Charles, who was then thirteen. She brought contested lands with her as her dowry.

When Louis XI died a few months later, his teenage son was crowned Charles VIII. Just as he was about to come of age and rule on his own, the agreement that he and Margaret would marry was terminated; a more strategic match had been found for him in the slightly older Anne of Brittany. A portrait, made around 1490, shortly before the repudiation, shows a richly clad Margaret at about age ten. (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** Jean Hey (Master of Moulins), Margaret of Austria. Ca. 1490. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975.

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Margaret lingered at the French court, returning to the house of her father when she was thirteen. As she journeyed through France on the way home, cities in the counties belonging to the Burgundian empire presented her with gifts, among them a quantity of silver goblets, cups, and vessels, along with items of jewelry. Her father Maximilian, occupied with problems in the rebellious Lowlands, had just succeeded his father, Frederick III, as ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, and was seeking politically beneficial marriages for himself as well as his children. In 1496, he betrothed the latter to the sibling heirs of the combined crowns of Aragon and Castille, establishing Habsburg claims in the Iberian peninsula for centuries thereafter. Margaret's marriage to Juan, Prince of Asturias and heir to his parents' realms, took place in Spain when she was seventeen. It ended with Juan's sudden death a few months later; the child Margaret was carrying died shortly thereafter. Once again, Margaret lingered at a foreign court, this time in Isabella of Castille's milieu, leaving it only in 1499; on her journey back to her homeland, she was showered with tapestries and clothing in addition to pieces of metalwork and magnificent jewels. Her brother Philip's union with Juana, which had been celebrated in the Lowlands in 1496, produced several children, foremost among them the future Emperor Charles V, who was born in 1500. Margaret returned home in time to act as her nephew's godmother.

A year later, Margaret was married to Philibert, Duke of Savoy, a childhood friend. During the years she had spent at the French court as the intended bride of the dauphin Charles, Margaret had been educated alongside Philibert and his sister Louise, Charles's cousins. When Philibert died in 1504 following a brief illness, Margaret refused the next match her father sought to secure for her with the English crown, choosing to spend the rest of her years constructing a monument to her deceased husband's memory at Brou, near Bourg-en-Bresse, and nurturing her brother Philip's children, particularly in the years after his death in 1506. Philip's demise had left his son, the barely six-year-old Charles, in the hands of quarreling advisors. The situation contributed to Margaret's appointment, in 1507, as Regent of the Lowlands, resident *Gouvernante* of the upstart Netherlandish territories. Continuing disputes between French and Imperial factions advising the underage Charles caused the termination of her appointment in 1515; the first inventory of her collection of paintings was made the following year during this interruption of her governance. As Charles approached his majority in 1519, he reappointed his aunt to the post from which she had been relieved four years before; this was also the year in which Charles succeeded his grandfather Maximilian as Emperor.

The palace in Mechelen in which Margaret lived had formerly been the home of Margaret of York, the widow of Charles the Bold, Margaret's step-grandmother. A second inventory of her collection, made in 1523/4, likely coincided with completion of the residence's extensions and renovations; it provides information regarding the location of specific works.[28] The walls of the first large room in the residence gave an important place to her mother's ancestors, the Dukes of Burgundy. Featured in this personal pictorial family tree were images of John the Fearless who had died in 1419; his oldest son, Philip the Good, wearing the necklace of the Golden Fleece; and his third wife Isabella of Portugal, dressed in green satin who outlived her husband by four years, dying in 1471. Their son, Charles the Bold, was also there. His death without a male heir in 1477 had brought an end to the dynasty's rule. The portraits depicted the individuals that had made the Duchy of Burgundy a dominant political and economic force in fifteenth-century Europe. They paid homage to Margaret's heritage while presenting visitors with proof of the source of power she wielded as overseer of the Netherlands.

Added to these images was a who's who of political alliances. Portraits of four of her brother Philip's six children, by then well situated in European courts, also appeared on the walls of her residence's first room; Charles V was shown twice. Seven portraits of members of the Tudor family were on display, evoking what had been a negotiated but unrealized marriage for Margaret after Philibert's death. Three portraits of her father Maximilian were distributed throughout the palace; a small one by Joos van Cleve was in one of her private rooms. Perhaps Margaret had felt there were sufficient images of him when, in 1521, she rejected the portrait Albrecht Dürer had made of Maximilian, as the artist reported in the diary he kept.[29] There were also five portraits of Spanish royalty, two of her former father-in-law Ferdinand, one of Queen Isabella, and one of each of two of their daughters.

The library, to which official visitors such as Dürer and Erasmus were allowed entry, contained a variety of objects, both printed books and manuscripts along with ethnographic material from the Americas and portraits of other family members; three of them were of her deceased husband Philibert. There was also a portrait of the French King Louis XII and one of his daughter Claude, along with considerable literature related to the French court. In addition to a genealogy of French kings, Margaret had a manuscript about Claude, the reigning queen consort of Francis I whose mother, Louise of Savoy, had been one of Margaret's childhood acquaintances during her stay at Louis XI's court.

Margaret's bedroom and the adjacent private study, the walls of which were covered in green taffeta, were where a variety of small and precious things were kept, amidst portraits of Margaret and devotional panels; Eichberger suggested that these had commemorative rather than dynastic significance. There was a diptych of Charles the Bold with his mother Isabella of Portugal, and one of Margaret and Philip as children, probably commissioned in the years when their marriages with the heirs to the Spanish kingdoms were being negotiated. (Fig. 4) A painting of Margaret and Juan of Asturias by Michel Sittow showed the couple in the guise of their patron saints, John the Evangelist and Margaret. In addition, there was a painting of a member of Margaret's privy council, another of an inspector of expenses and *maître d'hôtel* at the Mechelen palace, and two of Italian merchants dressed in purple robes. This is also where the *fort exquis* (Arnolfini) panel by *Johannes* was kept.[30]



**Figure 4.** Pieter van Coninxloo, Diptych of Philip the Handsome and Margaret of Austria. Ca. 1493-95. The National Gallery London. © The National Gallery, London.

As I was considering the disposition of Margaret's paintings in the palace in Mechelen, my attention chanced to fall on a tiny painting of the *Marriage Feast at*

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*Cana* in the reinstalled Old Master galleries of the Metropolitan Museum. (Fig. 5) According to well-kept records, its painter was Juan de Flandes, whose name indicates where he was thought to have come from when he entered the employ of Isabella of Castille in 1496. The painting was one of many he and Michel Sittow created at the Spanish Court for a multi-paneled, large retablo that seems never to have been assembled. When Isabella died in 1504, forty-seven small panels with scenes of the life of Christ were put up for sale to pay off her debts; thirty-two of them (including the one now in New York) were purchased for Margaret of Austria's collection by an agent.[31] Dürer admired them during his visit to Mechelen in 1521, noting in his diary that he had seen about forty small oil pictures among Margaret's beautiful things, the likes of which "for precision and excellence" he had never before beheld.[32]



**Figure 5.** Juan de Flandes, *The Marriage Feast at Cana*. Ca. 1500-1504. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982.

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The painting turned my attention from scrutiny of documentation regarding Margaret's collection to examination of visual evidence. Against the wall in the center of Juan de Flandes's little panel is a bull's eye mirror with a precisely rendered reflection; it is suspended in front of a shimmering, gold-bordered hanging. The freshly unfolded green cloth recalls the luxurious fabrics that serve as backdrops for the Virgin in Jan's paintings in Frankfurt and Antwerp; the mirror is, of course, an indisputable sign of Jan's practice. A few artists had incorporated similarly shaped mirrors into their works in previous decades, using the reference to Jan's panel to demonstrate their connection to him. The device plays an important role in paintings by Robert Campin (1438), Petrus Christus (1449), and Hans Memling (1487), capturing, in each instance, an imagined viewer's perspective in its reflection.[33]

It also appears prominently in a miniature of a scribe at work painted by Loyset Liédet for a historical manuscript written in the mid 1460s for Philip the Good, but not illuminated until the early 1470s when Charles the Bold was Duke.[34] (Fig. 6) Scholars have suggested that the workshop in which the manuscript was illuminated had access to Jan's painting, since various references to it appear in several miniatures believed to have been made in the shop.[35] The miniature of the scribe's studio had its own fame with elements of it reappearing in Juan de Flandes's little work. In addition to the bull's eye mirror on the rear wall, there is on the left side of the miniature (as there is on the panel) a colonnade with a hint of the world outside that includes a prominent standing figure; the dog in the foreground of the illumination can be seen in the panel's under-drawing, a potted plant taking its place in the finished painting.

There is no analogue, however, in Liédet's miniature for the seated couple at the center of Juan de Flandes's work. Details of these figures indicate that they are presented as a specific pair. The woman's fair complexion, along with the decoration of daisies (*marguerites*) on her robe and crown, suggest that she was meant to be recognized as Margaret, wife of the Spanish prince.[36] Their marriage took place early in 1497, not long after the panel's painter had come into the Queen's service. The figure seated next to Margaret, his fingers poised as though to offer a now lost ring, would thus be Juan, Prince of Asturias. When the panel was put up for sale after Isabella's demise, it was identified as *St. John Evangelist's wedding*, tacit acknowledgement of the connection between Jesus's first miracle in John's Gospel (2:1-11) and the historical union of Isabella's son, who is presented in the guise of his patron saint. The date of the painting, determined by what is known of Juan de Flandes's artistic development, post-dates Juan de Asturias's death, indicating that

the tiny work, planned as part of a multi-paneled devotional altarpiece, was conceived as a commemorative representation.



**Figure 6.** Loyset Liédet, *The Scribe's Workshop*. 1470-72. Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, ms. 8, fol. 7r. (History of Charles Martel, Vol. 3). © KBR – Manuscripts – Ms 8.

Pictorial connections between Juan's and Jan's paintings, complemented by knowledge of the works' simultaneous presence in Margaret of Austria's collection, made me suspect that more was at stake in the tiny one's multiple pictorial references than either recognition of a model or identification of a workshop. The links between Juan de Flandes's panel and Liédet's illumination invoke Margaret of Austria's ties to the Lowlands through her mother, Mary of Burgundy, the daughter of Charles the Bold, commissioner of the illumination. Painted into Juan's picture, they documented for Isabella of Castille her new daughter-in-law's ancestry, a critical aspect of Margaret's significance for her union with the Queen's son. The relationship between the works also bears on the matter of the *Arnolfini Portrait's* disposition. Although Juan de Flandes may have seen a drawing of it in a miniaturist's studio in the Lowlands before arriving at the Spanish court, he would have encountered it "in person" once he got there. Diego de Guevara, who was serving in Philip's entourage and moving between the Lowlands and Spain in these same years, was likely in possession of Jan's painting by the 1490s.

Eichberger suggested that the *Arnolfini Portrait* was valued in the sixteenth century for its references to Margaret's Burgundian heritage; what I have found thus far reinforces her point. Its painter was the Netherland's most esteemed artist; its owner, don Diego, had served as a loyal attendant at Margaret's mother's and brother's courts. And its (likely) subject, Giovanni d'Arrigo Arnolfini, a faithful *chevalier* of Charles the Bold, represented another link to Margaret's legacy at a moment when the Burgundian duchy had ceased to exist. As testimony to those connections, Jan's painting could have been given by Guevara to Margaret on the occasion of her marriage to Juan; it also may have been a nostalgic parting offering as she prepared to return to the Lowlands after his death.

Once Margaret was back home, other associations would have complicated the painting's meaning for her. Giovanni d'Arrigo had spent several years in the service of Louis XI, the French king whose claim to Burgundian territory precipitated the arrangement that had brought her at the age of three to the French court. The betrothal agreement was abrogated, we recall, although Margaret managed to meet a future husband (Philibert) while living there. While France had been Burgundy's intermittent antagonist in the fifteenth century, it had become the outright enemy of both the Holy Roman Empire (which had absorbed portions of Burgundy) and Savoy by the sixteenth. In Mechelen, no portraits of French royalty were displayed in the first large room of Margaret's residence. Material relating to France was situated in Margaret's private chambers where the *Arnolfini Portrait* was also kept. Had it become politically insensitive to display imagery redolent of connections with France

during these years of open hostility? And could that have had anything to do with the lock that was placed on the cover of Jan's painting, as reported in a marginal note in the inventory of 1516?

All the while that Margaret, as Governor of the Lowlands, was developing her painting collection at Mechelen, she was nurturing construction of an exceptional memorial to her husband Philibert and his mother, Margaret of Bourbon, at a monastery in Brou, the capital city of Savoy. Margaret of Bourbon was one of Philip the Good's nieces; her sister, Isabelle of Bourbon, Charles the Bold's second wife, was Mary of Burgundy's mother. Margaret of Austria was thus multiply connected through the Bourbon line of descent to Savoy through her grandmother and great-aunt/mother-in-law, ultimately choosing Brou for her final resting place. Her involvement with the project there, usually examined apart from the rest of her life, engaged her with the maternal aspects of her lineage when her Burgundian ties had been absorbed into Habsburg ones. During these years, different issues may have altered her appreciation of the *Arnolfini Portrait*. In the privacy of her living quarters at Mechelen, where she would have been able to see Jan's painting alongside Juan de Flandes's panel and in the company of paintings of France's reigning royalty, the thrice betrothed and twice widowed Margaret may have recognized herself in the figure of the woman at Arnolfini's side. Their stories shared similarities of juvenile betrothal, childlessness, and an active widowhood, not to mention close contacts with the French court.

After Philip the Handsome's death, Margaret acted as guardian, tutor, even foster mother to her brother's six children. The second to the youngest, named Mary, was born in 1505, the year before Philip's untimely passing. Her grandfather, Maximilian, in another one of his acts of marital gamesmanship, promised her soon after birth to the eldest son of the King of Hungary. At the age of eight, she was betrothed to the seven-year-old Louis II; the marriage was finalized when she was sixteen; at twenty-one, she was widowed when Louis died in battle against the Ottoman army. Mary became Governor of the Lowlands after Margaret's death in 1530, inheriting the extensive collection of paintings and objects her aunt had amassed earlier in the century and taking many, but not all of them, to Spain when she went there in retirement in 1556. Among the treasures traveling with her was the *Arnolfini Portrait*. As I thought about the work through the lens of her life as well as her aunt's, I was convinced more than I had been before of the ways that Jan's celebrated work testifies to the lives of women like them. Both had been bartered in exchanges among powerful men, pledged in marriage while still children only to advance quickly into well-positioned, motherless widowhood. However forceful and

authoritative Margaret and Mary may have been as wealthy and powerful administrators, in their personal lives they were, from my point of view, *poor little rich girls*.

Consideration of the circumstances of Margaret of Austria's life deepened my appreciation of Burgundy's fractured legacy in the last decades of the fifteenth century and made me rethink the story of Netherlandish painting that continues to be told, with its focus on Maximilian and Imperial glory. Heightened familiarity with Margaret's life has reminded me that paintings provide enduring and frequently fascinating evidence of otherwise unthought of relationships—between people, places, and other paintings. These connections enrich us in innumerable ways, helping us better understand not only the paintings, but what also draws us to them. Some of the things I imagined about the *Arnolfini Portrait* when I wrote about it from the perspective of the moment it was made have changed, but conclusions I came to then remain in place. I continue to see the figure at Giovanni d'Arrigo's side as a *prospective* representation of Jeanne Cenami at a marriageable age, appreciating her more compellingly than I did before as an avatar of higher-born women like Margaret of Austria and her niece Mary of Hungary. All of their fates were determined by the needs of men, a circumstance that is rarely explored from the perspective of what that meant for them.<sup>[37]</sup> Except for Jan. To paraphrase Schjeldahl's remarks on *Las Meninas*, in the *Arnolfini Portrait*, Jan "couldn't have known [it] at the time but ... somehow, subliminally, he wove [their lives] into his vision."

### **Note From the Author**

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## References

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- 1 "Out of Time: Mortality and the Old Masters," *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2020, pp. 70-72.
- 2 His comments complement Byron Ellsworth Hamann's remarks regarding the painting's connection with deteriorating economic and commercial conditions at the Spanish Court. ("Interventions. The Mirrors of Las Meninas: Cochineal, Silver, and Clay," *Art Bulletin* 92 no. 1/2 [2010], pp. 6-35). Hamann cites J.H. Elliott's observation, made nearly a half century before, that "Velázquez caught in his paintings ... the sudden emptiness of the imperial splendor" (p. 7 and n.15). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2010.10786133>
- 3 We are all indebted to Michel Foucault's exploration of the network of relationships that exists among the painting's subjects and spectators as the artist "stands back" from his canvas, something John Ricco reminded me recently not to forget (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1970/2002], Part I, chapter 1, Las Meninas, pp. 3-18).
- 4 Erwin Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine* 64, No. 372 (Mar., 1934), pp. 117-127.
- 5 Edwin Hall provided substantial visual and textual evidence of the tradition (*The Arnolfini Betrothal; Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck's Double Portrait* [Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: 1994]); my own work additionally reflected on the important role dowries played in betrothals and suggested that the painting, like the woman, was a promissory object in a future exchange (Linda Seidel, "'Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait': Business as Usual?" *Critical Inquiry* 16 [Autumn 1989], pp. 55-86 and *Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait: Stories of an Icon* [Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York: 1993], pp. 19-74). In a very short paper, Anna Eörsi identified the hand gesture of the woman, with its open palm, as signifying an oath of allegiance as in a betrothal ("Giovanni Arnolfini's *Impalmamento*," *Oud Holland* 110-3/4 (1996), pp. 113-116). <https://doi.org/10.1086/448526>
- 6 Jacques Paviot, "Le Double Portrait Arnolfini de Jan van Eyck," *Revue belge de l'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art* 66 (1997), pp. 19-33, especially pp. 21-22 and 33).
- 7 Lorne Campbell, *The Fifteenth-century Netherlandish Schools*. National Gallery Catalogues (London: National Gallery Publications (1998), pp. 174-211. Several members of the Arnolfini family who had contacts in Bruges are discussed on pp. 192-198, with Giovanni di Nicolao's life summarized on pp. 197-198.

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- 8 Herman Th. Colenbrander's discussion of the painting's imagery as a display of nuptial gift exchange challenges the catalogue's claim about the panel's (lack of) meaning ("'In Promises Anyone Can Be Rich!' Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Double Portrait: A 'Morgengave'," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 68 No. 3 [2005], pp. 413-24).
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- 9 Margaret L. Koster, accepting the identification of Jan's subject as Giovanni di Nicolao, used the iconography of marital domesticity to make the case that he is shown in the company of his recently deceased wife ("The Arnolfini Double Portrait: A Simple Solution," *Apollo* 158, #499 [2003], pp. 3-14.) Her interpretation of the couple was cited in passing by Caroline A. Jones ("The Artist Function and Posthumous Art History," *Art Journal* 76-1 [2017], pp. 139-49 @ 146-147), and has been taken up more directly by Till-Holger Borchert (*Van Eyck* [Cologne: Taschen, 2020], pp. 50-52).
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- 10 For this inventory, as well as a second one made in 1523/4, see Dagmar Eichberger and Lisa Beaven, "Family Members and Political Allies" The Portrait Collection of Margaret of Austria, *Art Bulletin* 77-2 (1995), pp.225-48 and Dagmar Eichberger, "Margaret of Austria's Portrait Collection: Female Patronage in the Light of Dynastic Ambitions and Artistic Quality," *Renaissance Studies* 10-2 (1996), pp. 259-279, with references to the nineteenth-century publications of the inventories. I am admiring and appreciative of Eichberger's careful probing of the relevant texts and am indebted to her observations here and further on. She provided her own summary of this material on various occasions. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-4658.00207>; see, for example, "The Habsburgs and the Cultural Heritage of Burgundy," *The Age of Van Eyck: The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430-1530*, ed. Till-Holger Borchert (Ludion: Ghent-Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 184-194, esp. pp. 187-192.
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- 11 Campbell, *The Fifteenth-century Netherlandish Schools*, pp. 194-195 and nn. 185 and 186.
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- 12 In addition to what is related about this Arnolfini in the catalogue (*Ibid.*, pp. 195-196), see Umberto Dorini, "Le carte della famiglia Arnolfini acquistate dal Archivio di Stato de Lucca," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 82 [ser. 7, vol.2 (1924), pp. 255-271, and Léon Mirot and Eugenio Lazzareschi, "Un mercante de Lucca in Fiandra: Giovanni Arnolfini," *Bollettino Storico Lucchese* XII (1940-41), pp. 81-105. Margaret Carroll also reviewed Giovanni Arnolfini's activities ("'In the Name of God and Profit,' Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Representations* 44 (1993), pp. 96-132).
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- 13 Hugo van der Velden, "Defrocking St-Eloy: Petrus Christus's 'Vocational Portrait of a Goldsmith'," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 26-4 (1998), pp. 242-276. The payment record notes that Mme. the Duchess of
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Burgundy had advised her husband on the purchase.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/3780846>

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- 14** Susanne Franke noted this in "Between status and spiritual salvation: *The Portinari Triptych* and Tommaso Portinari's concern for his *memoria*," *Simiolus: Netherlandish Quarterly for the History of Art* 33-3 (2007/2008), pp. 123-44, @ p.127
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- 15** Mirot/Lazzareschi, "Un mercante," p.95.
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- 16** J. Vaesen, "Catalogue du fonds Bourré à la Bibliothèque Nationale (suite)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 44 (1883), p.312.
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- 17** Maximilian P.J. Martens, "A Cultural Biography," in Maryan W. Ainsworth, *Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), pp. 15-23 and pp. 200-203.
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- 18** Carroll, "In the Name of God and Profit," p.104.
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- 19** For the Cenamis, see Léon Mirot, "Études Lucquoises," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 91 (1930), pp. 100-168. <https://doi.org/10.3406/bec.1930.448897>
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- 20** During this same time, Marc and Jacques, the brothers of Arnolfini's widow Jeanne, were engaged in a protracted dispute of their own over property going back sixty years. Settlement was achieved in 1484 after King Louis XI intervened. Other family litigation, largely over property in France, continued well into the sixteenth century. On the decadence and pretended nobility of the family in the seventeenth century, see Claude Delong, "Mazarin et les Frères Cenami," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 144-2 (1986), pp. 299-354. <https://doi.org/10.3406/bec.1986.450419>
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- 21** For Guevara, the likely subject of a portrait by Michel Sittow in Washington, see John Oliver Hand and Martha Wolff, *Early Netherlandish Painting*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogues (Washington D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 232-35 (also online at [nga.gov](http://nga.gov)), as well as Campbell's catalogue, *The Fifteenth-century Netherlandish Schools*, pp.192-93.
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- 22** The work of Florens Deuchler (*Die Burgunderbeute. Inventar der Beutestücke aus den Schlachten von Grandson, Murten und Nancy 1476/77* (Berne, 1963) is cited by both Jeffrey Chipps Smith ("The Practical Logistics of Art: Thoughts on the Commissioning, Displaying and Storing of Art at the Burgundian Court," *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson*, ed. Laurinda S. Dixon, [Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998], pp. 27-48, esp.p.33) and
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Michael Jucker ("The Swiss Confederates and their Burgundian Booty," *Splendour of the Burgundian Court: Charles the Bold (1433-1477)* ed. Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert, and Gabriele Keck (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2009), p.332.

- 23** For an account of the painting's displacement in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, see Carola Hicks, *Girl in a Green Gown: The History and Mystery of the Arnolfini Portrait* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011).
- 24** Guevara 's illegitimate son Felipe (ca. 1500-1563) is the source for some of what is known about him. See Alejandra Giménez-Berger, "Ethics and Economies of Art in Renaissance Spain: Felipe de Guevara's *Comentario de la pintura y pinturas antigas*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67-1 (2014), pp. 79-112.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/676153>
- 25** See Dagmar Eichberger, "The Culture of Gifts; A Courtly Phenomenon from a Female Perspective," *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York/Margaret of Austria*, ed. Dagmar Eichberger with Yvonne Bleyerveld et al, (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005), pp. 287-95. For more on the topic of gifting in the preceding century, see Brigitte Buettner, "Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400," *Art Bulletin* 83-4 (2001), pp. 598-625.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3177225>
- 26** Three documents confirm the arrangement, including one from Mary thanking Maximilian for the jewelry he gave her. They are reproduced and discussed in *Splendour of the Burgundian Court*, pp. 346-48. For a detailed account of the political machinations involved in the story, see Ann M. Roberts, "The Chronology and Political Significance of the Tomb of Mary of Burgundy," *Art Bulletin* 71 No. 3 (1989), pp. 376-400 (@390-393). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.1989.10788513>
- 27** For the background to Louis's claim, and detailed analysis of different positions regarding its merit, see Paul Saenger, "Burgundy and the Inalienability of Appanages in the Reign of Louis XI," *French Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1977), pp. 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/286114>
- 28** For what follows, see Eichberger's papers cited in note 10 above.
- 29** *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. and ed. Buy William Martin Conway (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), pp. 121 and 123. The painter noted that Margaret disliked the painting and failed to pay him for what he had made and presented to her.
- 30** Eichberger, "Margaret of Austria's Portrait Collection," pp. 263-268, for the contents of Margaret's bedroom and study.

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- 31** Juan de Flandes worked for Isabella from 1496 until 1504. For the most detailed account of the painting and the ensemble to which it belonged, see Chiyo Ishikawa, *The Retablo de Isabel la Católica by Juan de Flandes and Michel Sittow* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp. 5-15, 46-47, and 90-94. For additional commentary, see Maryan W. Ainsworth's 2012 essay on the painting (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436801>). Till-Holger Borchert, *The Age of Van Eyck. The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430-1530* (Chent-Amsterdam: Ludion, 2002), pp. 266-67; and Jessica Weiss, "Juan de Flandes and His Financial Success in Castille," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 11 No. 1 (Winter 2019) DOI: 10.5092/jhna.2019.11.1.2.
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- 32** *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, p.121.
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- 33** The works are well known: Robert Campin's panel with Heinrich von Werl is in the Prado; Petrus Christus's painting of an aristocratic couple visiting a goldsmith's shop is part of the Metropolitan Museum's Lehman Collection; and Hans Memling's diptych of Maarten von Nieuwenhove is in the Sint-Janshospitaal in Bruges.
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- 34** For the miniature, which Charles the Bold had Liédet add between 1470 and 1472 to David Aubert's unfinished *Histoire de Charles Martel* (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, ms. 8, f.7r) see *Splendour of the Burgundian Court*, p.314, where the manuscript's volumes are described as propaganda disparaging the king of France and extolling warfare in justification of territorial expansion. (See <https://uurl.kbr.be/1751418> to download the entire manuscript, with the illumination on f. 7r.
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- 35** Campbell's catalogue notes that the illuminator Liédet seems to have "owned a copy" of the *Arnolfini Portrait*, perhaps a drawing of it, since reference to it occurs so often in miniatures made in his workshop (*The Fifteenth-century Netherlandish Schools*, pp. 178-180).
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- 36** Ainsworth follows Ishikawa in suggesting this; for the references, see above n. 31. Marie Madeleine Fontaine remarked that Jean Lemaire, who entered Margaret's service in 1504 and wrote a chronicle of her reign, drew a daisy in the margin when he wrote her name ("Olivier de la Marche and Jean Lemaire de Belges: The Author and his Female Patron," in *Women of Distinction*, p.225).
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- 37** For Maximilian's role in arranging marriages for family members, see Mia J. Rodríguez-Salgado, "Charles V and the Dynasty," in *Charles V, 1500-1558, and his time*, ed. Hugo Soly (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999), pp. 27-112, especially pp. 40-55.