

Wine Barrels, Bonfires, and Battling Beggars: The November 11 Feast of St. Martin in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art

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ABSTRACT

Among the many scenes of seasonal festivity by Netherlandish artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are a number that portray Martinmas, the November 11 feast of St. Martin of Tours, a late harvest festival and something of a mini carnival before the penitential season of Advent. These scenes are usually marked by the inclusion of the “Charity of St. Martin,” the venerable icon of a young soldier slicing his mantle in two with a sword to share it with a naked beggar, an image that is variously manipulated and often compromised. This article catalogs these artworks in various media (paintings, drawings, engravings, and tapestries) and attempts to ascertain the degree of documentary evidence (“genre interest”), as opposed to satiric/moralistic appropriation, that can be gleaned from the various festive motifs presented.

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1. Stephen Graham Hitchens summarizes well the situation in *Art as History, History as Art: Jheronimus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder; Assembling Knowledge Not Setting Puzzles* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 99: All masters made copies, and some were relentlessly copied. Copying by an apprentice was a part of every painter's training, making use of tracing, stenciling and squaring up. Then there were copies made as a developmental stage in composition, and copies made to commission or for sale on the open market—clients ordering copies of well-known paintings: a fact we may find hard to understand today. Hence we can see exact copies, free copies, replicas, and pastiches.

Model books were used as aide-mémoires. Underdrawings and independent drawings were made as part of the process of producing a painting in a workshop.... Specialized collaborators were employed to ensure the master's profitability was maintained. None of this was considered fraudulent. Of course, there must have been unlicensed borrowing, but drawings were exchanged and shared and considered common property. It was another world to what we would expect today. The sheer volume, quality and importance of the copies are commensurate with the importance of the artist.

2. Stanisław Predora and Marijke Mooijaart, eds., *Reyer Gheurtz' Adagia: Hs. Gent, Universiteitbibliotheek, Res.5242*. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2009), nos. 1655, 1592. All translations by author unless otherwise noted.

Nor shall men pervert the celebration of the saints and the visitation of relics, into revelings and drunkenness; as if festivals are celebrated to the honor of the saints by luxury and wantonness. Let so great care and diligence be used by bishops touching these matters, as that there appear nothing disorderly, or unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing profane, nothing indecorous.

—Council of Trent, Decree of December 3, 1563

This article is an attempt to ascertain the documentary value of a group of artworks, including paintings, drawings, engravings, and tapestries, that have often been labeled the *Feast* or *Festival of St. Martin* and that emanate from the workshops or from the more distant imitators of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder. It is an almost impenetrable thicket, this tangle of clones, knockoff artists, and more serious followers, that surrounds these two great painters.¹ There is also the possibility that some of the compositions here considered may derive directly from lost originals of the masters. I make no claim to art historical expertise in the attribution or dating of these works but would like, as a student of carnivalesque festivity, to interrogate them for what they may or may not say about actual festival practice in the Netherlands of the sixteenth through early seventeenth centuries and how the image of St. Martin is therein manipulated.

The secular importance of St. Martin's feast day for the Netherlands can be gauged by the early sixteenth-century proverb: "Tis altijd gheen s. martens avont" (It isn't always Martinmas Eve), which was also said of *vastenavont* or Shrovetide.² The broaching of the new wine and the slaughtering of livestock for winter provisions were two seasonal activities that converged at Martinmas and gave rise to various communal expressions—feasting, donations of wine, bonfires, etc.—in a kind of little carnival before the penitential season of Advent. In an almanac of 1606, St. Martin's is referred to as "een Bacchus-feest omdat men dan meer den duivel dan God dient" (a Bacchus feast wherein one more serves the devil than God).³ William of Orange gives some idea of the pervasive drunkenness associated, ironically, with the feast day of this great ascetic saint. In a 1563 letter, William writes: "Nous avons tenu la S. Martin fort joieux, car il y a avoit bonne compaigne. Monsr. de Brederode at este ung jour que pensois certes qu'il devoit mourir, mais il se porte mieulx" (We celebrated St. Martin's [at Breda] very jovially, for there was good company. For a day Mons. de Brederode seemed certain to die but he is better now).⁴ The presiding figure in this celebration, the shadow image of the saint as it were, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, was the beggarman, a persona inspiring pity, fear, or loathing but also carnivalesque release.

At the time of our sampling, the icon of the "Charity of St. Martin," the young saint slicing his mantle in two to share it with a distressed beggar, was nearly a thousand years old. From straightforward exemplum of *Caritas*, the configuration had by the late medieval period become somewhat more problematic. The single beggar of the original *vita* began to multiply, and these beggars were now not simply "naked" as in the original account of Martin's biographer, Sulpicius Severus, but also blind and severely crippled; suffering from ergotism, leprosy, or other hideous

3. G. D. J. Schotel, ed.,
*Vaderlandsche Volksboeken en
Volkssprookjes* (Haarlem: A. C.
Kruseman, 1873), 43.

4. Groen van Prinsterer, ed.,
*Archives ou correspondance
inedité de la Maison d'Orange-
Nassau* (Leiden: S. & J.
Luchtmans, 1835), 1:121.

5. For background on the secular
appropriations of the Charity of
St. Martin icon, see especially
Martin W. Walsh, "Martin of
Tours: A Patron Saint of Medieval
Comedy," in *Saints: Studies in
Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca
(Binghamton, NY: Medieval and
Renaissance Texts Society, 1996),
283–315.

diseases; and representing both genders and all age groups. Far from being passive recipients of Martin's largesse, they are frequently pictured violently grabbing at the saint's cloak or fighting each other for access to him. "Too many beggars, not enough Martins," these images seem to say.⁵ The icon thus became ironically tinged, one might even say compromised. It became a barometer of the establishment's anxieties over the proliferation of the diseased, deformed, and destitute in the early modern period. It was still available, of course, for perfectly straightforward devotional images in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—witness the major paintings of El Greco, Anthony van Dyck, Jacob van Aelst, Pieter Coecke van Oost, Caspar de Crayer, or Caravaggio's *Seven Works of Mercy*—but serious slippage had also occurred, detaching the icon for other, more ambiguous purposes, comic or satiric. A conspicuous example is the frontispiece of a popular 1654 Amsterdam jestbook, *De Gaven van de milde St. Marten* (The gifts of the liberal St. Martin), in which the saint enacts his mantle splitting on a stage before an appreciative audience of men and women with evidently a Jew in a fur hat, while his beggarman is transformed into a naked Bacchus or satyr figure flogging the publication. Wine and roast goose, the traditional Martinmas fare, are also conspicuously "on stage."



Figure 1. Frontispiece of Dutch jestbook, *De Gaven van de milde St. Marten* (1654.)
Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren.

6. Rudolf M. Dekker, *Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 33–34, 40; and Regina Steensma, *Langs de oude Friese kerken* (Baarin, NL: Bosch & Keuning, n.d.), 140.

7. Martin Schook, *Exercitationes variae de diversis materii* (1663), no. 17, 205–7.

8. Martin W. Walsh, “St. Martin in the City: The Lord Mayor’s Show of 1702,” in *Medievalism in England*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 70–78.

In the late medieval roof vault paintings of St. Maartinskerk, Kollum (Friesland), for another example, the Charity of St. Martin is juxtaposed to an obese figure making a grotesque face by pulling out the corners of his mouth with his index fingers, a large wine bottle under one arm and a goose under the other. Above this embodiment of gluttony is an upside-down bishop’s miter.⁶ The icon of the Charity of St. Martin could therefore serve as a simple marker for the secular celebration of Martinmas or might even be pulled into its carnivalesque orbit.

The majority of the works here studied were produced in the Spanish Netherlands at a time of great confessional struggle, the Eighty Years’ War. A few later examples come from the Dutch Republic, which still retained a Catholic minority. It is hard to find, however, any specific confessional slant to these works since Martin, like George, Nicholas, and a handful of other non-biblical saints, retained a certain degree of popularity in Protestant areas, not as objects of veneration but as patrons of festivals loath to be discarded. Thus Protestant academic Martin Schoock of Utrecht could pose an “exercise” in 1663 in *Qua quaeritur a liceat Martinalibus anserem comedere?*, questioning whether it was lawful to consume roast goose on Martinmas, given the prevalence of “goose markets” during that season. He answered somewhat equivocally. If eating fish on Friday does not make one a Papist, consuming a Martinmas goose could likewise pass if one avoided any commemoration of the saint (*indirecta idololatria*).⁷ Moreover, the Charity, the predominant image of the saint, was to a large extent a secular icon, an exemplum of Caritas easily detachable from the ecclesiastical figure of the Bishop of Tours. With regard to Martin’s portrayal, then, the works in question evince neither harsh Protestant satire nor ecstatic Counter-Reformation piety. They essentially employ a traditional, universally agreed upon popular image of the saint, like George with his dragon or Nicholas with his bags of gold.

While the Charity of St. Martin is an “obligatory scene” in all dramatic versions of the saint’s vita that survive—four in French, two in Italian, and one in Spanish—enactment of the scene was not initially part of the secular celebration of Martinmas. The earliest dramatic scene of Martin’s Charity detached from sacred drama that I have found was staged not specifically for Martinmas, although it nearly coincided, but for the London Lord Mayor’s show of November 9, 1702. This was poet laureate Elkanah Settle’s pageant for the Vintners’ Company, Martin being their patron saint.⁸ Today, on the other hand, such street enactments are quite common on the eve of the saint’s day, November 10. Beginning in the Rhineland, and particularly Düsseldorf, in the 1830s, evening enactments of the Charity with an accompanying children’s lantern procession spread to other parts of Germany, the Low Countries, many parts of eastern Europe, and even North America. But this is another story. In the works at hand, the Charity of St. Martin serves as a festival marker and/or as an example of the slippage discussed above. This article will attempt to tease out and distinguish these differences.

It will be my operating assumption that lesser artists, the clones, tend to produce more realistically accurate (read: less strikingly creative) versions of contemporary festival practice. It would be a mistake to elevate this into a general principle, but I feel that for this particular sampling, this seems to be the case. In examining festival practice through early artworks, we can perhaps distinguish three basic categories:

9. Lot 640: "16th–18th Century Paintings," September 25, 2014, Unsold, Hampel Fine Art Auctions, Munich.

- A. Those that portray festival activity more or less for its own sake, for its "genre" interest, allowing for a certain amount of "artistic license" or selectivity.
- B. Those that appropriate specific festival content for satirical or didactic purposes and so are at one remove from the festival itself.
- C. Those that only reference in a very general way festival practices for the same satirical or didactic purposes and so are of little use for the purposes of historical documentation.

	WORK	ARTIST	DATE	MEDIUM (NO.)
A	<i>Fires of St. Martin</i>	Maarten van Cleve	ca. 1570–80	paintings (3)
	<i>Battle with Pilgrims</i>	Maarten van Cleve	ca. 1570–80	paintings (2)
	<i>Fires of St. Martin</i>	Sebastian Vrancx	ca. 1620–30	painting (1)
	<i>Allegory of Autumn</i>	Sebastian Vrancx	ca. 1620–30	paintings (2)
	<i>Hampel St. Martin</i>	possibly from studio of Pieter Brueghel the Younger	ca. 1620–30	painting (1)
B	<i>Wine of St. Martin</i>	Pieter Baltens	1560/65	paintings (2)
	<i>Wine of St. Martin</i>	Pieter Bruegel and sons	1566/67 1580/95 1600/23 1670–90	paintings and fragments engraving (1) drawing (1)
	<i>Saint Leaves the City</i>	possibly from lost Bosch original	ca. 1545 ca. 1555	tapestries (2)
C	<i>St. Martin in Boat/Harbor</i>	possibly from lost Bosch original/ possible involvement of Pieter Bruegel	ca. 1560–68	engravings (2) drawings (2)
	<i>St. Martin's Charity</i>	Michael Herr	1618	drawing (1)

Table 1. An Inventory of Images (according to the above categories)

Let us begin this examination with an unpublished work from the early seventeenth century, which I would place between categories A and B.

The Hampel Feast of St. Martin

This oil-on-wood panel from a private collection in France was auctioned by Hampel Fine Art Auctions, Munich, in September 2014. It went unsold and has been returned to its anonymous owner.⁹ The piece displays multiple Martinmas motifs, a compendium of them in fact. Most of the works of the above inventory are referenced in this panel. The auction house attributed the



Figure 2. Anonymous, Feast of St. Martin, panel, early seventeenth century. Private Collection. ©Hampel Fine Art Auctions.

work to Peeter Baltens (1527–84) or Marten van Cleve (1524–81), which is clearly wrong. The saint's costume belongs to the early seventeenth century, not the mid-sixteenth. His soft lace collar, broad-brimmed felt hat with plumes, and cavalry armor bespeaks the era of the Thirty Years' War. Updating an earlier Baltens or van Cleve subject might have occurred; there is no way to tell. A more likely attribution would be the prolific workshops of Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564/65–1637/38) or Pieter Brueghel III (1589–1638/39), which churned out multiple versions of popular genre subjects through the early decades of the seventeenth century. What is clear is that the anonymous painter clearly wished to encompass all the popular Flemish Martinmas motifs of the previous hundred years in a single encyclopedic panel.

The early Boschian engraving of St. Martin "in a boat," or "in a harbor," discussed below, is recalled in the left third of the composition with its high dark gateway filled with beggars and by the particular way Martin's cloak is passed off to them. The waters of a broad river behind Martin also harken back to the harbor scene, although Martin is mounted on rather than standing beside his horse. On the far right of the painting is a distribution of the "wine of St. Martin," perhaps recalling Bruegel's Prado painting or Baltens's two versions, but on a much more modest and realistic scale: a city magistrate doles out the new wine to the clamoring poor from a medium-sized barrel on a cart. A bonfire in the middle distance with a pennant waving beside it recalls van Cleve's November festival scene, the row of wine barrels in front of the townhouse, right, being another compositional echo of his *Fires of St. Martin*. And prominently in the center of the composition are two battling mendicants, raised begging bowl against crutch, much in the manner of Dutch genre painter Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot for whom battling peasants and beggars seemed *de rigueur* in any portrayal of the Charity of St. Martin. An array of five leg-crippled beggars occupying the foreground presents more evidence of the Bosch/Bruegel legacy,

10. René van Bastelaer and Georges H. de Loo, *Peter Bruegel l'Ancien: Son oeuvre et son temps* (Brussels: G. Van Oest, 1907), 1:152.

11. Timothy Riggs and Larry Silver, *Graven Images: The Rise of Professional Printmakers in Antwerp and Haarlem, 1540–1640* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1993), 127, plate 160.

while other wine barrels anchor the two lower corners of the composition. A small figure in the middle distance defecating into the river, three figures wrestling and evidently “debagging” a fourth, and what appears to be some sort of combat dance in front of three distant farmhouses add to the energetic carnivalesque effect of the panel as a whole. It is a good example, I would argue, of a lesser artist achieving a better record of actual festive practice than his more accomplished contemporaries. With this painting as a rough guide, let us examine the works listed in the inventory moving from bottom to top.



Figure 3. Unknown, *St. Martin in a Boat*, Boschian engraving, mid-sixteenth century. British Museum, London.

School of Bosch: An Engraving and a Tapestry

St. Martin in a Boat or St. Martin in a Harbor

The engraving variously titled *St. Martin in a Boat* or *St. Martin in a Harbor* represents one of the more unusual appropriations of the Charity of St. Martin. Like many such fantastical scenes designed for mass consumption, it was assigned to Bosch as inventor. This is no guarantee of authorship, of course, Boschian “knockoffs” being quite common in the sixteenth century. This was how the young Brueghel began his career, and some earlier art historians have in fact attributed this Martin engraving to him. (Bruegel’s *Hope* engraving from his series on the Virtues bears many compositional similarities with the Martin harbor scene.)¹⁰ The piece is now assigned to the print shop of Johannes and/or Lucas van Doetecum, circa 1560–70.¹¹ Clearly it has Boschian elements. Although there are no human-animal-plant hybrids or demonic chimeras among the figures that surround the saint, there are plenty of grotesque and crippled beggars, battling each other, some of them in danger of drowning. Many have musical instruments (harps, lutes, gitterns), mendicancy-cum-minstrelsy being a typical Boschian symbol for culpable folly. The crazed mendicants range from perfectly realistic portrayals to the surreal fantasies Bosch

12. This is an inaccurate observation; Martin and his horse are on the same ferry in the print. C. Justi, "Die Werke des Hieronymus Bosch in Spanien," *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 10 (1889): 143. Giorgio Vasari described the print in his 1568 edition: "a Ieronimo Bos un carta di S. Martino con una barca piena di diavoli in bizzarrissime forme" (from Hieronymus Bosch a print of St. Martin with boat full of devils in bizarre shapes). See Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite dei piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, ed. Carlo L. Ragghianti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1942), 2:550. Vasari's book was originally published in 1550.

13. The German and Netherlandish antecedents to Brant's allegorical ship are enumerated by Edwin H. Zeydel in his translation of *The Ship of Fools* (New York: Dover Books, 1962), 8–15. Brant's book was originally published in 1494.

14. Matthijs IJlinsk, *Bosch en Bruegel als Bosch: Kunst over kunst bij Pieter Bruegel (c. 1528–1569) en Jheronimus Bosch (c. 1450–1516)* (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2009), 240–42, plate 117. The harbor Charity is designated by IJlinsk as *Sint Maarten in een boot* (ca. 1560–70), plate 117. See also Paul Vandenbroeck, *Jheronimus Bosch: De verlossing van de wereld* (Ghent: Ludion, 2002), 58–61.

15. Johannes Hartau, "A Newly Discovered Triptych by Hieronymus Bosch," in *Jérôme Bosch et son entourage et autres études*, ed. Helene Verougstraete and Roger van Schonte (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2003), 33–38.

was famous for—a naked female harpist with two children on her back, for example, who strokes along in the sea like a water bug by means of long emaciated legs sprouting out of a great cauldron. We can also locate some of Bosch's favorite symbolic animals, an owl and a spoonbill.

Secondhand though it may be, the Martin engraving has some claim to being descended from Bosch himself, and not an independent invention. The 1598 inventory of the artworks belonging to Philip II mentions three Bosch paintings, all now lost, having to do with the saint of Tours, one of which featured Martin "quando va pasando una barca y el cavallo en otra" (in which a boat goes by and the horse in another).¹² The lost painting and the van Doetecum engraving, then, are more than likely linked, although the Spanish catalog entry indicates separate boats for Martin and his horse. With other boats being represented in the print, the error is perhaps understandable.

The harbor setting remains something of a puzzle. The Charity incident occurred at the city gate of Amiens according to Martin's fourth-century biographer, Sulpicius. It cannot be that the historical site was here mistaken for a seaport; every Fleming would know that Amiens, capital city of neighboring Picardy, was an inland town. The engraving might simply reflect the great popularity of Sebastian Brant's *Das Narrenschiff*, in the sixteenth century, Martin's abused Charity being presented as yet another chapter in *The Ship of Fools*.¹³ The theme of "Folly Afloat" in the Netherlands goes back even further, to the *Gesta abbatum Tordonensium* (Deeds of the Abbots of Sint-Triuden) account of a deranged festival ship float that "sailed" from Aachen to Sint Triuden in the 1130s and Jacob van Ostvoorne's carnival monologue, *Het gilde van de Blauwe Schuit* (Guild of the blue barge), circa 1450, with numerous examples of nautical folly in Bosch's work as well. Other compositions of the Bosch "school," such as his contemporary Alart Duhomeel's *St. Christopher Bearing the Christ Child*, are also set on a grotesque, demon-infested seacoast. Another van Doetecum engraving, the *Temptation of St. Anthony* (1561), of approximately the same size and date as the Martin subject, presents a similarly odd setting of a traditional hagiographic theme. Far from the remote Egyptian desert, the engraving shows a seaside dominated by a giant marine grotesque with wrecked and burning ships and boats, several human figures struggling in the water, and various dead sea creatures beached on the shore.¹⁴ To launch St. Martin into a nautical, nightmarish travesty of his festival seems a quintessentially Boschian strategy.

Actual Martinmas festival elements are referenced but only as part of an essentially fantasy world. A great bonfire blazes on the quayside at the top of the composition, for example. Referencing the *Bacchus-feest* (Bacchic festival), alongside Martin's barge floats a festival craft, a veritable *bateau ivre*, a drunken boat loaded with wine barrels and an improvised banquet table with three hooded fools. It is accompanied by various naked swimmers, again a very Boschian hallmark. Perched on the ship's great barrels are a horn blower, a bagpiper, and a naked peg-leg standing on his hands, his X-shaped pose echoing the design of crossed crutches emblazoned on the ship's banner (a guild of beggars?). We have here a pastiche of elements from Bosch's *Allegory of Gluttony and Lust* (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT) and the *Ship of Fools* (Louvre, Paris), now considered together as parts of the left wing of a lost triptych. To the left of this fantasia in the engraving, on the other hand, is a somewhat more realistically portrayed water joust in fantasy armor with spectators crowding the seawall. This latter can hardly represent an activity of the chilly November festival of St. Martin, however.¹⁵

16. Riggs and Silver, *Graven Images*, 127.

17. D. C. Browning, *The Everyman Dictionary of Quotations and Proverbs* (London: J. Dent & Sons, 1951), 410. Variations can be found in Dutch, German, English, Latin, Spanish, and Romanian, the milder versions concluding with, "doesn't trot but gallops," "rides the horse to death," or "rides to the gallows." See also P. J. Harrebomée, *Spreekwoordenboek der nederlandsche taal* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1858), 1:36.

The purpose of the *St. Martin in a Harbor* engraving is certainly morally didactic and satirical. Martin's famous act of charity is compromised, overwhelmed by the press of cantankerous beggars. The saint appears to be fleeing the city given the orientation of the typical Netherlandish ferry that he and his horse are on, while the more fantastically realized ship of drunkards is clearly inbound. The act of charity itself is also very oddly conceived. We are stopped in the moment before the actual cloak sundering and sharing. The saint ports his sword in the crook of his left arm and extends his open right hand toward the shore, his long garment draped over his arm and uniting him with the creatures that spill out of the gate. The single naked beggar of the Martin vita is replaced by a triple-decker monstrosity: a bald hulk of a man with deeply shadowed eye sockets dressed in a paenula, and on his shoulders a dwarfish figure in a wimple, with the ubiquitous Boschian owl topping the pile. The human figures perhaps recall the crippled man piggybacking on a blind man from the grotesquely comic, posthumous Martin miracle, most notably dramatized by Andrieu de la Vigne in 1496. Is Martin offering his cloak to these figures, or is the cloak being drawn out of his hands into the grotesque world of the beggars? The saint's expression is ambiguous. He is frozen in the moment before commitment to his act of charity, perhaps in a moment of alienation or doubt. His sword is at rest, the famous iconic event held in suspense. Like St. Anthony, Martin is beset by grotesque, somewhat threatening demons here in the form of crippled beggars, but also, like Hamlet, he seems to "lose the name of action." The Flemish inscription at the bottom edge of the engraving clearly drives home the point:

De geode sinte Marten is hier gesteldt,

Onder al dit grue vuyl arm gespuis;

Haer deylende synen mantele, in de stede van geld;

Nou vechten om de proeye dit quaet gedruis.

(The good St. Martin is here represented

Among this foul, impoverished brood.

He divided his mantle in lieu of ready money

And so, this wicked sort fought each other for the windfall.)¹⁶

Martin's ferry is intercepted by a rowboat full of beggars, which serves as a bridge between the barge and the shore. The object of this piratical raid seems to be Martin's long-suffering horse, not his cloak. The crippled beggars are scrambling and scuffling under and around the animal in much the same way as thirsty peasants surge about the great tun in the *Wine of St. Martin's Day*. One of them, with a walking stick in his right hand and a lute slung at his buttocks, has succeeded in sprawling himself over the saddle and has seized the right stirrup. He occupies the exact center of the composition and quite likely enacts the widespread early proverb, "Set a beggar on horseback and he'll ride to the Devil," which perfectly fits the satirical situation.¹⁷ An added irony is that this ferry-bound horse cannot move. But the overall message is clear:

18. Martin W. Walsh, "The Satirical Charity of Saint Martin from Bosch to the German Baroque: A Drawing by Michael Herr," Source: *Notes in the History of Art* 33 (2014): 21–30.

19. P. Junquera de Vega and C. Herrero Carretero, *Catálogo de Tapices del Patrimonio Nacional, vol. 1, Siglo XVI* (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 1986), plate 113. A recent discussion of the St. Martin tapestry can be found in Eleanor Yuri Dumouchel, "Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle's *Haywain Tapestry: From Reformation to World Renunciation*" (master's thesis, Concordia University, 2015), 33–35.

Martin's world is going to hell and no single charitable act is going to save it. Martin's Charity can offer very little toward ameliorating the essential brutishness of the mendicant world and, by extension, of fallen humanity as a whole.

I will mention only in passing here a 1617 drawing by the Swabian artist Michael Herr.¹⁸ It is an equally radical treatment of the Charity of St. Martin with definite quotations from the harbor engraving in the lower-left corner. Its most unusual feature is a composite putto and goose, a kind of "hobby-bird," who pirouettes on top of Martin's horse scattering coins from a large purse as *Schlaraffenland's* (Land of Cockaigne's) already-roasted geese fly down on the swarm of crippled beggars. This is more a baroque theatrical fantasy than a truly Boschian monstrosity. Festival elements, again, are only referenced in this fantasy scene, but unlike the harbor engraving, the saint appears particularly nonchalant amid the mendicant chaos.



Figure 4. Michael Herr, *St. Martin among the Beggars*, drawing, 1618. Inv.-Nr. Hz5186, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg.

Leaving the City Tapestry

A set of five tapestries on Boschian themes was owned by King François I, one of them being *Saint Martin environne de plusieurs mendians*. The fact that two of the tapestry subjects match surviving, authenticated works of Bosch, *The Haywain* and *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, suggests that the subject of *Martin Leaving the City* also existed as a major painting, if not directly by Bosch, then by an artist or artists very close to him, and that the tapestry was considered an authentic Bosch composition at the time of the weaving. Before 1560, Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle commissioned, from the Brussels workshop of Willem Perrenot, copies of four of these Boschian tapestries, which eventually became the property of the Spanish royal family. The St. Martin tapestry now exhibited in El Escorial in Spain is evidently from this set.¹⁹ The tapestry set was somewhat controversial. Granvelle, writing from Antwerp to Garcia de Toledo, viceroy of Catalonia, in May 1560, advised the viceroy against commissioning a similar series of Boschian

20. Granvelle quoted in Almudena Pérez de Tudela, "Las relaciones artísticas de Antonio Perrenot con la ciudad Nápole," in *Dimore signorili a Napoli: Palazzo Zevallos Stigliano e il mecenatismo aristocratico dal XVI al XX secolo*, ed. Antonio Ernesto Dunzio (Turin: Intesa Sanpolo prisma, 2013), 328.

tapestries for himself: "In Spain, works by Bosch, like the ones you have mentioned, the hay cart, and the paradise and hell, and Saint Martin, have been defended before the Inquisition." Granvelle called his Boschian subjects *disparates* (absurdities/follies), the same word Francisco Goya used for a nightmarish suite of prints, and they had evidently attracted the unwanted attention of the Inquisition.²⁰

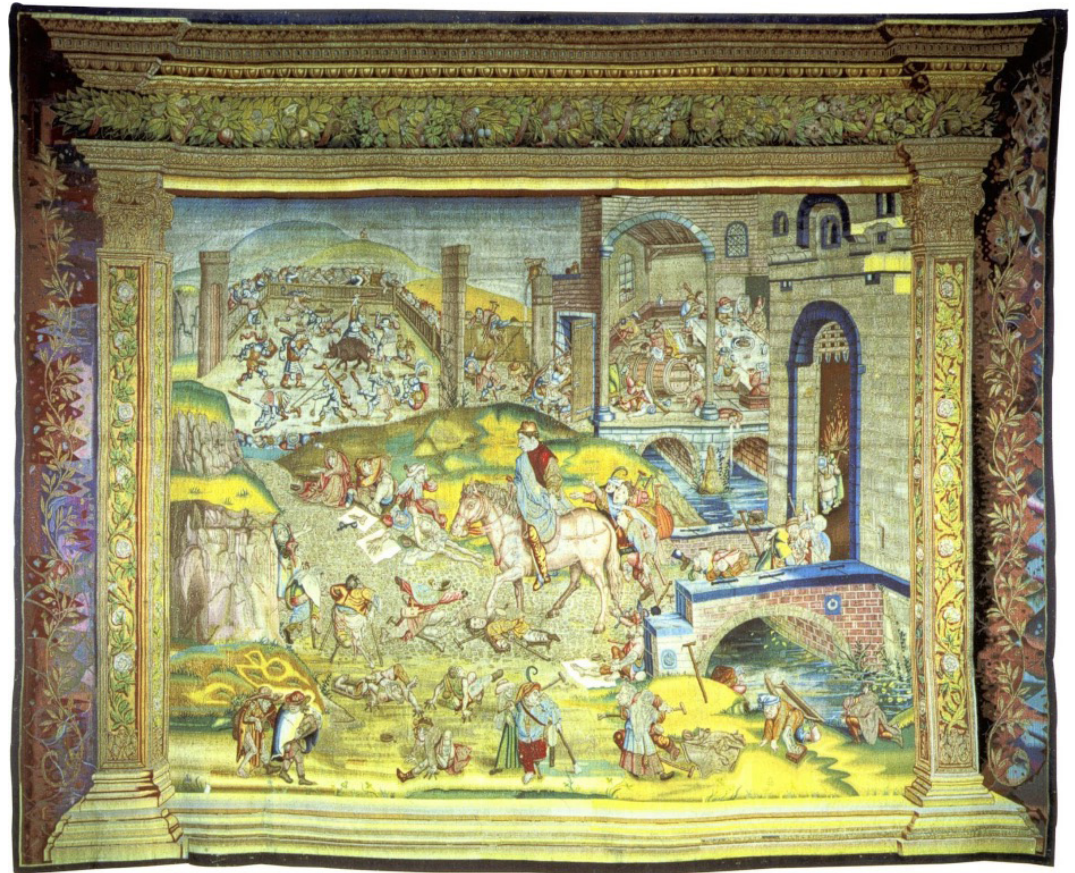


Figure 5. Attributed to Hieronymus Bosch, St. Martin Leaving the City, tapestry, circa 1560. El Escorial. This [image](#) is identified as being open domain.

The young saint has left the city gate. Crippled mendicants are arrayed on each side of the road in anticipation of Martin's passage, the saint indeed running a gauntlet of misery. One unfortunate has thrown himself in front of Martin's horse and is now trying to avoid a descending hoof. Among the *miserables* are three who display a diseased or malformed hand or foot on a square of white cloth, the better to enhance their display of suffering. One indeed has lost his foot entirely. It lies on its cloth completely detached from its owner's right leg; his left leg is also unnaturally swollen. A leg manacle lies nearby, probably representing a contributing factor for the need to amputate. This same detached foot motif can be found on the closed right wing of the *Last Judgment* altar by Bosch portraying a youthful saint usually identified as Bavo, patron saint of Ghent. A detached foot also hangs from the crossed crutches banner in the harbor engraving. The foreground of the tapestry is likewise occupied by beggars and beggarwomen, most with musical instruments—harp, hurdy-gurdy, snare drum. These crippled beggars appear a lot more cartoonish than those in the engraving previously discussed, rendering the extreme physical deformities, perhaps, somewhat more "entertaining."

Martin's roadway leads to a connected set of festival scenes in the top third of the composition.

21. Dirk Bax, "Als de Blende tzwijn sloughen," *Tijdschrift voor nederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde* 63 (1944): 82–86.

See also L. Brand Philip, "The Peddler by Hieronymus Bosch: A Study in Detection," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 9 (1958): 55–66, especially the J. Verbeek drawing *The Hitting of the Hog*; and Edward Wheatley, "The Blind Beating the Blind: An Unidentified 'Game' in a Marginal Illumination of *The Romance of Alexander*, MS. Bodley 264," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (2006): 213–17.

22. Bourgeois of Paris, *A Parisian Journal, 1405–1449*. Translated from the Anonymous *Journal d'un Bourgeois de Paris*, trans. Janet Shirley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 205–6. Hans Sachs celebrated in doggerel verse a similar event staged for Emperor Maximilian in Augsburg, in Hans Sachs, *Der blinden kampf mit der säw*, *Werke*, ed. Adelbert von Keller and Edmund Goetze (Heidesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), 17:343–48. As spectacle, hog bashing by contestants in blind helmets continued up to the end of the seventeenth century. See Giuseppe Maria Mitelli's drawing *Festa della Porchetta dal titolo Giostra detta la caccia dei porci* for St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24) in Bologna in 1697 (Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna).

23. Johannes Böhm (Johannes Boemus Aubanus), *The Manners, Laws and Customs of All Nations Collected Out of the Best Writers by Ioannes Boemvs Avbanvs, a Dutch-man*, trans. Edward Aston (London: George Eld, 1611), 284–85. For Böhm's original Latin,

From left to right we have a corral for a combat sport, a press of beggars clamoring for entrance to a banqueting hall, and the interior of the hall with, we may presume, a Martinmas revel in progress. In the corral, a game of boar bashing is being staged before an enthusiastic crowd. This carnivalesque entertainment, amply documented by the Dutch art historian Dirk Bax, involved blind men in ridiculous armor (the crests on the tapestry's helmets are probably meant to be parodies), or sighted contestants in blind helmets, attempting to club to death a staked-down boar and mauling each other in the process.²¹ A detailed description of the practice can be found in a publication by the anonymous chronicler known as the "Bourgeois of Paris." For the last Sunday in August 1425, on or about St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24), he described an entertainment given at Hôtel d'Armagnac on Rue St. Honoré:

Four blind men wearing armour and each carrying a club were put into an enclosure in which there was also a strong pig. This they were to have if they could kill it. They fought this very odd battle, giving each other tremendous blows with the clubs—whenever they tried to get a good blow in at the pig, they would hit each other, so that if they had not been wearing armour they would certainly have killed each other. On the Saturday before this Sunday the blind men were led through Paris wearing their armour, with a great banner in front of them with a picture of a pig on it. In front of this went a man beating a drum.²²

The association of such blood sports with the autumnal slaughtering season of Martinmas would seem a natural development. Johannes Böhm, known as Boemus Aubanus, reported for late fifteenth-century Franconia, his home province, in a 1611 translation:

There is not one throughout all the whole country be he neuer so needy, or neuer so niggard but vpon Saint Martins day hee will haue some roste meate, or boiled meat, and it be but Hogs intrailles, or Calues intrailles, & glut them-selves with wine, for then they tast of their new wines from which till that time they haue abstained; and all their households drinke wine with them: and vpon this day in Herbipolis [Würzburg] and in diuerse other places besides, is much wine giuen to the poor for charity: then haue they their publicke shews and pastimes, as to haue two or three Boares put into a place together, and to behold them fight and teare one another with their tuskes till their guttes traile about their heeles, deuiding the flesh when the Boares be dead, some to the common people and some to the Magistrates.²³

A goose-decapitation game, as we shall see, was also popular in the Netherlands during this season. A Martinmas bull running, slaughter, and communal meal persisted in Stamford, Lincolnshire, up to the early nineteenth century.

To the right of the boar-bashing melee, there is a concerted assault by more crippled beggars upon a dining hall. One is springing over the wall; a trio is hopping mad as some liquid, presumably foul, is poured on them from above. There is a great press at the entranceway. Inside we have a large wine barrel with one peasant drinking directly from a new bunghole, a motif that can also be found in the *bateau ivre* of the harbor scene. Other countrymen sit at a table, a platter with a boar's head thereon, more than likely sourced from the combat scene. A pair of musicians entertain the room. At the head of the table sit three figures, another peasant, a lady, and a mitered figure. Given the carnivalesque nature of the scene, these might well be "characters" in some enactment, the mitered figure perhaps representing some sort of mock "Martin Bishop" as lord of the feast.²⁴ A final festival element in the tapestry is the Martinmas bonfire represented just inside the city gate. Unlike the water joust in the harbor engraving, the tapestry's frieze of festival activities, though farcically conceived, reflects actual practices of the Martinmas season.

see *Mores, leges, et ritvs omnivm gentivm* (Paris: Hieronymus de Marnef, 1561).

24. There is some evidence that Martin, like his calendar neighbor Nicholas, was a patron of the "Boy Bishop" rituals of hierarchic reversal. Such ceremonies, with their lead token coinage, are recorded for nine Martinian foundations in nearby Picardy. Alfred Danicourt, "Enseignes et médailles d'étain ou de plomb trouvées en Picardie," *Revue numismatique* 3rd ser., 5 (1887): 49–62. Bishops Martin and Nicholas were also impersonated by the reveling students of Ave Maria College in fourteenth-century Paris. Astrik L. Gabriel, *Student Life in Ave Maria College, Mediaeval Paris* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1955), 181–84. Martin Bishops are the celebrants of the "Baptism of the New Wine" in contemporary Zagreb wine country, a parodic ritual that probably dates back to the end of the Ottoman occupation of Croatia (fieldwork, November 2007).

25. Pilar Silva Maroto and Manfred Sellink, "The Rediscovery of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 'Wine of St. Martin's Day,' acquired for the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid," *Burlington Magazine* 153 (2011): 784–93. All of the known *Wine of St. Martin's Day* versions are discussed in this major article.



Figure 6. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Wine of St. Martin's Day*, painting, ca. 1566/67. The Prado, Madrid.

The Wine of St. Martin's Day: Bruegel and Baltens

Itaque nihil est in terris es die vinosius, nihil petulantius.

(There is nothing on earth more wine-soaked, nothing more wanton.)

—Giovanni Gioviano Pontano on Martinmas

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

—Proverbs 31:6–7

In omnibus eius operibus intelligitur plus semper quam pingitur.

(In all his works he often gives something beyond what he paints.)

—Abraham Ortelius on Peter Bruegel the Elder

In September 2010, the Prado Museum announced the rediscovery of a long "lost" painting of Pieter Bruegel the Elder.²⁵ Executed in the delicate *Tüchlein* technique (tempera on linen), this was the *Wine of St. Martin's Day*, a festival scene known previously from a fragment (a portion of the right half of a panel with most of the St. Martin figure) now in Vienna, at various times attributed both to Jan Bruegel the Elder and Pieter Brueghel the Younger, as well as by the complete scene in reverse values in a 1670 engraving from the Roman print shop of Nicolas

Guérard commissioned by Abraham Brueghel (1630/31–90), the master's great-grandson. There is an early seventeenth-century copy of the painting, possibly from the workshop of Breughel the Younger, as well as an ink-and-wash drawing of the scene contemporaneous with the engraving. Van Dyck had made copies of some of the Bruegel figures from one or the other of these later versions. There is also a small anonymous painting (ca. 1700, Private Collection) with reversed values that is likely derived from the Abraham Brueghel engraving.

Relegated to a dark corridor in a private residence for generations, the original Bruegel was not in pristine condition but has been painstakingly restored by the Prado and now can take its place among Bruegel's mature works, circa 1566/67. Unlike the famous *Battle of Carnival and Lent* or Bruegel's many kermis scenes, this panel does not present a crowded field of various festival activities from a highly elevated visual position. Rather, it focuses on a single event, the evidently free distribution of the new wine traditionally broached on St. Martin's Day. The Charity of St. Martin is present as a clear festival marker, but the saint is quite literally sidelined by the artist, his back turned on the viewer and on the mayhem around the large red barrel on its high scaffold. He is astride an all-white horse and sports a somewhat incongruous curl of a white plume in his hat, but his signature mantle, in a muted antique rose, is hardly distinguishable from the dominant earth tones of the scene. The saint's patronage, his effect on the festival, seems compromised, impotent. The chaotic scene around the barrel seems beyond his control—or beneath his interest.

This is certainly a scene of festivity, this Martinmas dole of new wine to the hard-pressed country folk, but beyond Bruegel's celebrated realism there is a larger artistic purpose with perhaps as well an underlying moral agenda. If a scene of festivity, where are the donors of this largesse, where are the agents of control to see the event to an orderly conclusion? There are none. This appears to be a quite deliberate choice on Bruegel's part. The glowing wine barrel, a magical little piece of *Luilekkerland* (Land of Pleasure), stands isolated at the edge of a village entirely exposed to the peasant mob who strenuously vie for access to the wine with receptacles of all sorts—mugs and pitchers in various states of repair, swallow bowls, even a hat and a shoe. Every figure in the composition is of the peasant class, men, women, and children, some fairly well off, some clearly destitute. A similar strategy is found in *Children's Games*, where a sizable town is inhabited only by dozens of children, no adults. Only around the mounted saint do we find contorted beggarmen harkening back to the icon of the Charity and its concern for the handicapped and marginalized. There is a blind traveler (a pilgrim?) tucked into the crowd at the left of the composition, but otherwise, the figures in the painting are fairly fit, quite lively, and totally self-absorbed, giving no heed to the patron of the feast.

As with all great Bruegel works, the details seem endlessly intriguing. Front and center in the crowd below the barrel is a young pickpocket, a monastic postulate it would seem by his robe and tonsure, who is taking advantage of a mother's momentary indulgence in a dish of new wine. She holds a plump infant before her on her hip, as an older child stands clamoring at her apron for his share of the dole. Interestingly, she wears a leaden pilgrim badge. This may be an indirect comment on the Roman church's exploitation of the peasantry (compare to Lucas van Leiden's engraving *Beggars* [1520] where a boy in a monk-like cowl with an owl on his shoulder possibly represents a satire on the mendicant orders, with his bagpiper father sporting pilgrim badges). At the far-left edge of the painting, just outside a circular arrangement of serious drunkards, spewing and fighting, is another young mother, her infant in a kind of "snuggly." She is feeding the

26. The proportions of Bosch/Brant moralizing versus Rabelaisian amusement in Bruegel's mature works, *The Wine of St. Martin's Day* included, are still being worked out by art historians. Bruegel's affinity with and affection for the peasantry also remains subject to debate.

This article generally follows Margaret A. Sullivan regarding the painter's class biases in *Bruegel's Peasants: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Walter S. Gibson for his comedic sense in *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008). Given the painting's size, one of Bruegel's largest, and its bacchic festival subject, it would most likely have served as a conversation piece in a privileged Antwerp dining room. See especially Claudia Goldstein, *Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), chap. 3, "The Dinner Party as Performance."

27. Stephen J. Kostyshyn, "Door tsoecken men vindt": A Reintroduction to the Life and Work of Pieter Baltens alias Custodio of Antwerp (1527–1583)," 3 vols. (PhD diss., Case Western University, 1994).

infant its first sip of alcohol. Tussling, shoving, outright brawling, vomiting, and passing out are thus not the only foibles the painter holds up to the viewer for negative examples and/or comic forgiveness. Dubious parenting is included. But Bruegel's scene is not simply one of gluttonous wrangling for there are several examples of cooperation on the part of the crowd helping each other to get at the wine. As so often in Bruegel, larger questions lurk beneath the festival scene. Is wine man's chief comfort or constant bane?—this realistic and yet deeply ambivalent work seems to be asking. And what can St. Martin take credit (or take the blame) for in this, his festival world? Bruegel in late career here is midway between the moral-allegorical landscapes of Bosch and the straightforward "genre" scene.²⁶



Figure 7. Peeter Baltens, *Wine of St. Martin's Day*, painting, circa 1556. Catharijneconvent Museum, Utrecht.

Baltens also painted the *Wine of St. Martin's Day*, in two versions, one now in Antwerp, the other in Utrecht. It was customary earlier to dismiss Baltens as an inferior imitator of Bruegel. His reputation has been somewhat rehabilitated, however, by a substantial dissertation by Stephen J. Kostyshyn.²⁷ It is now clear that one can no longer assume that Baltens's versions are simply uninspired later copies. They may well be contemporaneous with or even anterior to Bruegel's 1566/67 painting. While exhibiting the same general arrangement of elements, they show multiple variations in detail. The barrel head has a distinctive red-and-white quartering, for example. An empty barrel can be seen; we are evidently on the second round of distribution. Mounted on the barrel is a banner displaying the device of crossed crutches (as in the harbor engraving), which flies from a fresh green sapling topped by a small bush, all of which are totally absent in Bruegel. The Utrecht version clearly has the words "Sint Marten" emblazoned on its green flag. The ensemble of characters around the barrel is markedly different as well. These are no mechanical copies of Bruegel but variations on a theme.



Figure 8. Peeter Baltens, *Wine of St. Martin's Day*, painting, circa 1566. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

A most important distinction in the two artists' renditions is in the matter of control of the event. Up on the barrel, Baltens includes a vintner figure, evidently with some assistants. He is in his shirtsleeves in the Utrecht example with what looks like a sash about his torso; in the Antwerp version, he wears a vest and an apron. In both versions, he has a chaplet of vine leaves on his head. In the Utrecht version, the two assistant figures are in white open shirts with red vests, matching the colors of the barrel head (as well as being Utrecht's city colors). The assistant atop the barrel seems to be filling jugs for others from the upper of two bungholes drilled in the barrel. There are two presumably empty jugs immediately below him and there is a group of five jugs and a bowl under the barrel waiting on the right. The Utrecht vintner figure leans on the shoulder of the second assistant below him as if giving instructions. This gesture is less clear in the Antwerp version where the vintner may be restraining a peasant from climbing up onto the platform. In the Utrecht version especially, the scene atop the barrel seems to be one of a reasonably under-control distribution of wine by the vintner and his people. They seem to be in charge. Nothing like this occurs in Bruegel's version.

Baltens, unlike Bruegel, also includes bourgeois observers at the far left of the composition, including a couple and a white-bearded man with a youth. The middle-aged figure between these two groups might be a self-portrait. Could these be, in some sense, the sponsors of the event? There is also a military figure bearing off his portion of wine in his helmet. Unlike Bruegel, Baltens seems intent on presenting a broader cross-section of society in his *Wine of St. Martin's Day*. Baltens moreover turns his mounted St. Martin some 45 degrees back toward the viewer, creating a much more standard image of the Charity. Martin's red mantle also stands out far more than in Bruegel, the saint affording a much less ambiguous marker for the festival. No commentator, to my knowledge, has located historical documentation for such large barrels

28. Floris Prims, *Inventaris op het Archief Gilden en Ambachten* (Antwerp: Stadsarchief Antwerpen/Bokhandel Veritas, 1925).

29. Gerard Rooijackers, *Rituele repertoires: Volkscultuur in oostelijk Noord-Brabant* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1994), 633.

30. Evelyn also relates the miracle legend that St. Martin was able to fill the Marmoutier tun with a single bunch of grapes. John Evelyn, *Diary and Correspondence*, ed. William Bray, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882), chap. 5.

on high scaffolds for holiday distribution of new wine. One might do well to search the archives of the Compagnie der Wijnverkoopers and the St. Martensgilde der Taverniers in Antwerp.²⁸ Historian Gerard Rooijackers records “trakteert op de dagen van Sint Maarten” (treats of drink on the St. Martin holidays) in the Noord-Brabant town of Geldorp for 1630 but with no details for the barrels.²⁹ Gigantic wine tuns certainly did exist but were more a prestige item than for practical storage. The first of four successive great tuns in Heidelberg Castle, the *Johann-Casimer-Fass*, dates from 1591, and English diarist John Evelyn notes for June 6, 1644, that the Abbey of Marmoutier outside Tours had one of a similar size.³⁰ But there is no reason for such an object to be standing isolated on the outskirts of a village as in the Bruegel/Baltens paintings. Recall the Hampel Martinmas scene above where the free distribution of wine to the poor was managed by a robed figure from a modest barrel on a cart. It seems clear, however, that the two versions of the *Wine of St. Martin’s Day* have somewhat different agendas. Baltens’s work looks and feels closer to reportage, while Bruegel’s is a full artistic transformation of realistic components.

An engraving commissioned by Rome-based Abraham Brueghel from Nicholas Guérard in 1670 was fulsomely dedicated to Don Gaspare Altieri, nephew to the new pope, Clement X, who as *Generale di Santa Chiesa* was in charge of the papal military forces (thus the soldier-saint Martin as subject). It was an obvious bid for patronage that probably did not succeed since Abraham soon after relocated to Naples. The later cabinet painting was evidently based on the engraving since it has its reversed values and similar dimensions as well as a color scheme diverging from the original painting. It is possible that it emanated from the circle of the Bentvueghels (Birds of a Feather), the benevolent society/festival fraternity of Dutch and Flemish artists in Rome. Abraham was an active member with the “bent” name of Rjingraaf (Count of the Rhine). The work was possibly an homage to him and his ancestors and/or a festival offering, bringing interest in the “wine of St. Martin” motif up to the eighteenth century.



Figure 9. The *Wine of Saint Martin’s Day*, engraving after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1670. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.



Figure 10. Anonymous painting after Abraham Breughel engraving, late seventeenth/early eighteenth century. Private Collection.



Figure 11. Follower of Cleve, Maarten van (painter), Peter Paul Rubens, *The Feast of Saint Martin*, RH.S.219, Collection City of Antwerp, Rubenshuis photo: Bart Huysmans & Michel Wuyts.

31. Klaus Ertz and Christa Nitzert, *Marten van Cleve 1524–1581: Kritischer Katalog der Gemälde und Zeichnungen* (Lingen, DE: Lucas Verlag, 2014), 28–29. See also Giorgio T. Faggin, “De genreschilder Marten van Cleef,” *Oud Holland* 80 (1965): 34–46.

The Fires of St. Martin: Marten van Cleve and Sebastian Vrancx

Op Sint Martijn/Vuur en warme wijn.

(On St. Martin's/fire and warm wine.)

—traditional proverb

An exact Antwerp contemporary of the elder Bruegel, van Cleve also belonged to an extended family of painters and, like Bruegel, was a member of St. Luke's Guild. He had moderate success as a genre painter in what has been designated his middle period, sharing *Peasant Wedding*, *Children's Games*, *Blind Leading the Blind*, and *Massacre of the Innocents* subjects with his greater contemporary.³¹ Van Cleve's *Het St. Maartensvuur* (*The Fires of St. Martin's Day*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dunkirk, with another version in a private Belgian collection and a copy by Peter Paul Rubens in the Rubenshuis, Antwerp) is rare among early Netherlandish genre subjects in directly portraying the November 11 festival. It constitutes a major document for the celebration of Martinmas in mid-sixteenth-century Flanders.

In the central middle ground of this crowded street scene, in what one would assume to be a modest bourgeois neighborhood of Antwerp, is a bonfire of vertical logs, half surrounded by a crowd composed mainly of youths and children, several of whom are holding their hands out to warm themselves. A relief of St. Martin's Charity can be made out over the door of the dark building on the far left, possibly a chapel or oratory (no major Martinian foundations are found in Antwerp). The circle of figures directly below the bonfire presents vignettes of quotidian violence: on the left a middle-aged woman thrashes a boy, while opposite, four lads are fiercely contending for a white pennant on a long thin pole. A sketch of Martin's Charity can be made out on this improvised holiday flag.

The foreground figures consist of, on the left, an elderly burgher in a red mantle with a fur lining and carrying a conspicuous purse. He appears to be accosted by a little beggar girl holding up a dish in her right hand. Rather than dropping a coin in the dish (as representations of Bishop Martin frequently show), the old man points admonishingly toward the right and the scene of the tussling youths. He likely registers some class and/or generational disapproval of the raucous festival, since he is positioned next to the woman trashing the boy and evidently dragging him away from the bonfire. In the center foreground, a neatly dressed country woman with her toddler has set up shop. She sits on an overturned basket, her small wheelbarrow behind her, with baskets full of apples and chestnuts to peddle. A fashionably dressed youth is amused by the monkey he has on a long chain that has gotten into the apples behind the woman's back. The farm woman oblivious to this activity is filling with her chestnuts the cap of a boy in a neat black jacket. He looks nervously over his shoulder, responding either to a barking dog and the tussle over the Martin banner or to the strange figure in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. This is a somewhat wizened, undersized figure, not a child, who wears a long white apron and sports a chaplet of vine leaves on his head. He carries a small square flag of yellow, red, and white horizontal stripes and appears to be singing or yowling. Is he the town idiot celebrating, or the vintner's man crying up the new wine, or both? A boy in a fool costume bears the identical banner as he invades the territory of Lent in Bruegel's well-known *Battle of Carnival and Lent* (1559). As we have seen, a vine-leaf crowned figure is also found atop the great tun in Baltens's versions of

32. Hinke van Kampen, Herman Pleij, and Bob Stumpel, eds., *Het zal koud zijn in 't water als 't vriest: Zestiende-eeuwse parodieën op gedrukte jaarvoorspellingen* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 80.

33. Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten, eds., *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genre Prints in the Netherlands 1550–1700* (Ghent: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam/Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1997), 353–56.

34. Lot 1219, Auction 995: "Old Masters and 19th Century Paintings," December 5, 2012, Kunsthaus Lempertz 1845, Cologne.

Wine of St. Martin's Day. The figure serves no doubt as an important holiday marker, what later folklore would dub the *Martensman*, the bacchic inebriate of St. Martin's Eve.

In the far background of van Cleve's canvas, other Martinmas activities are depicted: on the right, garlanded wine barrels are lined up with some figures drawing wine from them. Some children are begging at a doorway in an apparent queue. As with the German-language tradition, *Martensliede* (Martinmas songs) have been part of the Netherlandish celebrations of the saint's day up to the present time. To the left, there is another bonfire at the corner of a house. Two covered wagons are also in evidence in the center distance, part of a fair perhaps, with some running figures who may represent a contest of some sort. All in all, van Cleve's painting presents a lively if somewhat contentious holiday scene. Given the number of young people and children represented it would seem that St. Martin's feast had already, by the mid-sixteenth century, become something of a youth-dominated if not a youth-oriented festival, at least in the public streets. In the autumn section (*Vom den herfft*) of the comical prognostication *Knollebol* (Turnip bulb) of 1561, exactly contemporaneous with the painting, *Sinte-Martensavont* is noted as the time when children make merry building fires. It even records their chanted cries of "Stoock vier, maeck vier" (Stoke a fire, make a fire) in gathering, by begging or stealing, the wood and turf for their bonfires.³² A woodcut vignette for November in a suite of the "Twelve Months" by Dirk de Braij and Christoffel van Sichem (ca. 1660) shows a troupe of a dozen children, boys and girls of various ages, with uniform paper lanterns atop long poles.³³ By the mid-seventeenth century, Martinmas had become a children's festival not greatly different from that practiced today.

Apart from the figure in the lower-right corner, our *Martensman*, there is surprisingly little reference to the "wine of St. Martin's Day." No doubt, a more extensive sampling of the new wine went on at some length indoors among the adult population. The Bruegel/Baltens compositions can be read as humorous allegories, coupled as they are with the "sidelined" icon of the Charity, combinations of realism and fantasy. The peasantry having untrammelled access to such a wine source is a fantasy out of *Luilekkerland*, and the ensuing chaos around the great barrel is only to be expected, given the privileged classes' view of peasant boorishness. Van Cleve's *Fires of St. Martin*, by comparison, offers more realistic reportage, a genre scene not overly dominated by moralizing and thus affording a glimpse of the evening celebrations of *Martensavont* in the streets.

A generation after van Cleve, the subject of the Martin fires was still current. In late 2012, the Kunsthaus Lempertz auctioned an oil-on-canvas, *St. Martin's Feast in Antwerp*, which they attributed to two artists, Sebastian Vrancx (1573–1647) for the figures, with Frans de Momper (ca. 1605–60) supplying the cityscape.³⁴ The painting shows the *Meir*, a well-known square in Antwerp where the famous *Ommegang* with its elaborate floats and giants was staged at the Feast of the Assumption (August 15). One can see the tower of the Cathedral of Our Lady in the distance. In the center of the square, next to a public well, is a great bonfire with an enormous plume of smoke arising from it. A group of young people is focused on the fire, but the principal activity seems to be festival combat. Youths with wicker shields, evidently the bottoms of ruined baskets, fight with staves some four to five feet long. In the lower-right corner is a lad with a large square white banner on which is a sketch of St. Martin's Charity, paralleling the improvised flag in the van Cleve painting. On the left side of the square, a mother is pulling her daughter inside the house out of harm's way. On the left side, an elderly man with a little girl by the hand may be engaged in the same activity. A boy is picking up stones from the street. Another pisses against

35. Ben Parsons and Bas Jongenelen, *Comic Drama in the Low Countries, c. 1450–1560: A Critical Anthology* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 210; and Herman Pleij, "Eind juli 1551," in *Een theatregeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, ed. Rob L. Erenstein (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 112–19.

36. Georges Marlier, *Pierre Brueghel le Jeune* (Brussels: Robert Finck, 1969), 293, fig. 304.

the churchyard wall. In the lower-left corner, bourgeois figures, all in black, gesticulate negatively at the ongoing battle. Unlike van Cleve's work, no wine barrels are in evidence on the square. From a short distance, this composition with its great smoke plume and fighting figures could be mistaken for a battle scene, one of Vrancx's specialties.



Figure 12. Sebastian Vrancx and Frans de Momper, *St. Martin's Feast in Antwerp*, ca. 1640, painting. Private Collection. Kunsthaus Lempertz / Photo: Saša Fuis Photographie, Cologne.

What we have here is evidence, I would venture, of impromptu carnivalesque gangs probably based on neighborhoods or parishes, each with its Martinmas banner to be risked in the field and each with its festival weaponry. The phenomenon of ritualized festival street fighting is quite common in pre-Lenten celebrations. I will instance only the stone-throwing battles over neighborhood bonfires, the *cappannucci*, in Quattrocento Florence, or the "Indian" tribes in New Orleans Mardi Gras and the whip-wielding Jab Jabs of Trinidad Carnival as early twentieth-century examples. The tussle over the Martin pennant in the van Cleve scene now becomes clear. Herman Pleij and other cultural historians have made the point that Netherlandish cities in the sixteenth century had an unusually large population of servants and apprentices, leading to legislative attempts in Mechelen, Brussels, Ghent, Utrecht, and elsewhere to suppress festivals and seasonal games for fear of youth violence.³⁵

Another painting by Vrancx adds further detail.³⁶ His *Allegory of Autumn*, now in a Belgian private collection, displays the fruits and fowls of the season in the foreground. The central figure, sitting beside a potted marigold and a basket of apples, I would take to be one of the youthful celebrants of secular Martinmas. He wears a vine-leaf chaplet on his hat and carries the same little square tricolor festival banner that we find in van Cleve's *Fires* and in Bruegel's *Battle of Carnival and Lent*. He has a red nose and a somewhat "zoned out" expression. Perhaps he is singing; evidently, he is drunk. His hose is in disarray, and he has skinned his right knee. His right hand rests on a stick on the ground, roughly the same length as those employed in the *Fires of St. Martin* combat. This is a portrait of a Martinmas stick fighter, which the painter has selected to represent the

37. Natalie M. Orenstein, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Drawings and Prints* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 293–94, Cat. no. 139. See also Alfred Harou, "Notes sur les traditions de la Province de Liège," *Revue des traditions populaires* 18 (1903): 155. The major folkloric study is Edgar Havolk, "Strangulation Anserum: Meinungen und Materialien zu einen volkstümliche Wettkampsspiel," *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* (1978/79): 95–101. Yanking the goose's head off while passing beneath it on horseback or over water in a punt or rowboat are other variations of the sport, practiced in several European folk cultures. The mounted variation can be seen in the background of David Vinckboons's autumnal *Village Fair with Blind Hurdy-gurdy Man*, circa 1610, in the Städel, Frankfurt (Inv. Nr. 1102).

autumnal season—no wine-bearing Bacchus or another allegorical figure but a completely quotidian personage, the festival rowdy.



Figure 13. Sebastian Vrancx, *Allegory of Autumn*, ca. 1610, painting. Private Collection. This [image](#) is identified as being open domain.

The right edge of the composition is taken up by a structure of stacked wood and broken baskets, the makings of a Martinmas bonfire. There is a broken-out basket bottom, the evident source for the stick fighters' "shields." A young lad is bringing more wood to the pile. It was common folk practice to beg or steal such materials. Out of the stack of combustibles flies a triangular white pennant, again with a sketch of Martin's Charity in the lower right corner. On the ground between the central figure and the boy with the wood there lies a cowhide complete with tail, ears, and horns. It might be too much to suggest, lacking documentation, that this was also a festival prop of some sort, perhaps for a masquerade, but it remains a curious detail.

The background of the painting shows more traditional labors of the season, to the right, bringing in the herds from summer pasturage, and to the left, the sowing of winter wheat. The upper left of the composition, however, is devoted again to holiday sport. A goose is suspended by its neck in the fork of a dead tree and a peasant is hurling a sharp-edged stick at it as others look on from in front of a farmhouse. This goose-decapitation game occurs elsewhere, in the foreground of a drawing circa 1555–60, by the so-called Master of the Small Landscapes, once attributed to Bruegel, and in the distant background of Bruegel's *Harvesters* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) as well.³⁷

A variant of this practice still takes place on St. Martin's Day in the Swiss town of Sursee, which I witnessed in 2015. A dead goose is suspended from a wire stretched across a large

38. Michael Blatter, "Alt, verändert und lebendig—Tradition für Menschen vor Ort: 'Gansabhauet' in Sursee," in *Reiseziel: Immaterielles Kulturerbe; Ein interdisziplinärer Dialog*, ed. Marc-Antoine Camp, Sabine Eggmann, and Barbara Taufer (Zurich: Chronos, 2015), 157–66. I would like to thank Herr Blatter, the Sursee city archivist, for his abundant hospitality during Gansabhauet 2015.

scaffold. To the accompaniment of ominous drum rolls, a blindfolded contestant tricked out in a very theatrical red robe and golden sun mask approaches the wire and attempts to decapitate the goose in a single stroke with a dull militia saber. If he succeeds, he wins the goose for his traditional *Martinsschmaus* (Martinmas banquet). The event is under the auspices of the local carnival society named for a historic court fool and Sursee resident, Heini von Uri.³⁸ The November event conveys a very carnivalesque atmosphere in which clowning, blood sport, and public execution raucously mix signals.



Figure 14. Sebastian Vrancx, *November*, ca. 1620, painting, Lowet de Wortrenghe Gallery, Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp.

Another seasonal allegory by Vrancx, *November*, also features a Martinmas fire. In a large town swept by a squall left and blessed by a rainbow center, a tall slender pole, some dozen meters high, has been erected in the square and piled about with wood and what looks to be broken baskets. Several of the youths assembling the bonfire carry sticks over their shoulders, possibly for later street fighting. A pennant flies from the pole, but no sketch of the Charity is discernable in the reproduction. The animals far down the street left and the prominent cow right indicate that this is a cattle market as well. The central figure, a countryman, seems well prepared for November, the "slaughter month" (*slachtmaand*). He carries a mallet over his shoulder from which hangs a sturdy sledge, evidently for hauling meat. He also carries a length of rope and sports a set of carving knives at his belt. The lad who precedes him carries over his shoulder a large meat axe.

A panel attributed to the circle of Baltens (late sixteenth century) recently auctioned by Bonham's (July 4, 2018) presents an autumnal and specifically a November scene in *Busy Market Scene* given its multiple references to the Martinmas micro-season. These include a small bonfire, the moving of household effects (changes in tenancy), bringing cattle to market, selling winter squashes and heads of cabbage, and especially three wine-related scenes: a rack of wine barrels in the upper right, an aproned vintner proffering a soldier a dish of wine in the lower-left corner,

39. Ertz and Nitze-Ertz, *Marten van Cleve*, 175. Two other versions of the subject were auctioned by Christie's London in July 2011 and June 2022, the latter originally from the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels.

and, again, the vine-wreathed "wine-crier" figure with his little tricolor festival flag holding a dish of wine near the center of the composition. The disabled man appealing to the young market woman in the lower-right corner provides an additional reference to Martinmastide.



Figure 15. Circle of Peeter Baltens, *Busy Market Scene*, painting, late sixteenth century. Private Collection.

By way of conclusion, we might mention another van Cleve, the *Battle of Peasants and Pilgrims* (ca. 1565), which exists in at least four versions: the original, it would seem, in Wrocław, another in the new Museum het Zotte Kunstkabinet in Mechelen, and two recently auctioned examples.³⁹ The figures in the right middle distance have been interpreted, plausibly, as a Charity of St. Martin. Several peasants, including a lame man, are gathering about a mounted figure in cavalry armor with a drawn sword and red mantle visible. The season is clearly winter, with frost or snow evident, and could represent Martinmas, but there are no festival activities depicted, the focus instead being on a massive brawl between local peasants and some pilgrims taking place in front of a walled churchyard and under a large stone cross.

The distancing and thus the partial obscuring of Martin's Charity is of a piece with the Bruegelian strategy employed in such biblical and mythological works as *The Way of the Cross*, *The Census at Bethlehem*, *The Conversion of St. Paul*, or *The Fall of Icarus*. One only finds the Charity icon after moving through the foreground mayhem of peasants and pilgrims. But this is not a simple contrast between peasant brawling and the distant virtue of Charity, for there is a sectarian theme apparently at work here as well. The pilgrims are evidently a Catholic husband and wife, identified by their multiple pilgrim badges, but there are two other victims of the angry knot of male and female farmers. The reading would seem to be: fired-up evangelical peasants are taking on intrusive "Popish" pilgrims and their local supporters or relatives.



Figure 16. Marten van Cleve, *Battle of Peasants and Pilgrims*, painting, circa 1565. Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, Wrocław. This [image](#) is identified as being open domain.



Figure 17. Detail of *St. Martin's Charity* in Marten van Cleve, *Battle of Peasants and Pilgrims*, painting, circa 1565. Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, Wrocław.

40. Joaneath A. Spicer and Lynn Federle Orr, *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 225–27.

Thought worthy of being copied several times, the work might possibly refer to some locally notorious altercation that had transpired around Martinmas or, to speculate further, perhaps an event in the wake of the *Beeldenstorm*, the iconoclastic fury that swept through the Netherlands in the late summer of 1566. The relationship between the pilgrim couple and St. Martin however remains unclear. Could they be returning from Tours or some other important Martinian foundation, such as Utrecht or Ypres? Pilgrim badges displaying Martin's Charity have been found in the Netherlands but are by no means common. This curious scene must await the discovery of further documentation. It anticipates, nevertheless, the "fighting peasants" motif that was frequently part of the representation of the Charity of St. Martin when placed in village settings by later genre artists. Utrecht master Droochsloot and his followers employed this motif in five separate compositions from the early to the mid-seventeenth century. The most accomplished Droochsloot, now in the Rijksmuseum, is dated 1623.⁴⁰ It would seem that the festival energies of Martinmas in these later works had devolved into a scrum of wrangling peasants behind the saint's back. The brawl now equals the festival of St. Martin.



Figure 18. Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot, *Charity of St. Martin*, painting, 1623. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Conclusion

The sequence of Netherlandish works here arranged, in time from roughly the death of Bosch to the Thirty Years' War, shows the moralizing quotient and a certain amount of "drollery" inventiveness gradually draining away to be replaced by genre interest and greater realism with regard to the major festival bearing the saint's name. At the same time, there appears to be a consensus among the later generations of painters, and particularly those of the Dutch Republic, that Martinmas, signified by the Charity of St. Martin, was a particular occasion for drunken disorder and mayhem in the peasantry, the more congenial aspects of the traditional festival having been left behind.

The range of images examined here, from a masterpiece by a major artist to routine journeyman work, demonstrates the interdependence of a particular festival and a venerable icon of Western sacred art. They can be employed to extract some documentary information, particularly in the area of material culture, but they also illustrate a larger phenomenon. The Charity of St. Martin deeply informed the saint's November festival season, the last harvest festival-cum-first winter revel, the little carnival before Advent, but it was also greatly shaped by it in turn. It affords a prime example, one might argue, of the symbiosis of elite and popular cultures in the early modern period. Like king and fool, charitable Martin and his cavorting, drunken beggarman are among the great archetypal pairs of Western European art.

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