Oskar J. Rojewski, Mette Birkedal Bruun

THE PRIVACY OF A COURT PAINTER: MICHEL SITTOW AND HIS JOURNEYS TO THE COURTS OF ISABELLA OF CASTILE, CHRISTIAN II OF DENMARK, AND MARGARET OF AUSTRIA

For several periods of his life, the painter Michel Sittow (c. 1469–1525), born in Tallinn (Reval), worked at the courts of Castile, Denmark, and the Habsburg Low Countries. A careful examination of various sources allows us to identify details regarding his movements, material conditions, and engagements with his courtly patrons. Tracing such details enables us to use the case of Sittow as an analytical lens for gaining insights into material and immaterial boundaries, as well as different forms of regulations of access at Early Modern courts.[1] The article thus contributes a case of courtly

instances and absences of privacy to current research on privacy at court in the Early Modern period.[2]

MICHEL SITTOW'S PERIOD OF EMPLOYMENT IN CASTILE

The circumstances surrounding the arrival of the painter Michel Sittow at the Castilian court are practically unknown due to a lack of evidence. However, scholars have proposed some indications. Jāzeps Trizna assumed that Sittow reached the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, having briefly served at the French court, where his future patron, Margaret of Austria, was being educated.[3] However, this theory cannot be corroborated. As another possibility, it is worth noting that in Bruges, the painter most probably studied with Hans Memling,[4] who undertook commissions for a number of aristocrats of Iberian origin. It is also possible that he had become aware of the wish of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon to hire an artist from his master's workshop. Possibly, Memling had painted the portrait of a member of the Rojas family (Fig. 1), and from 1491 until 1496, Francisco de Rojas y Escobar was ambassador of the Catholic Monarchs to the Habsburgs.[5] However,

2   For other studies on privacy at Early Modern European courts, see Oskar J. Rojewski and Mette Birkedal Bruun, 'Early Modern Privacy at the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Courts', *The Court Historian*, 28, 2 (2023), 97–100; Dustin M. Neighbors, 'Reassessing the Public/Private Nature of European Court Cultures: An Introduction', *Notions of Privacy at Early Modern European Courts: Reassessing the Public/Private Divide, 1400–1800*, ed. by Dustin M. Neighbors, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Elena Woodacre (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 13–52.

3   Jāzeps Trizna, *Michel Sittow: Peintre revalais de l'école brugeoise (1468–1525/1526)* (Bruxelles: Centre national de recherches Primitifs Flamands, 1976), 17. Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón analysing inventories of Margaret of Austria from 1516 and 1523/1524 dated Michel Sittow's arrival to Castile in 1481, but this statement can no longer be supported according to the new state of the art. Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, 'El retablo de la Reina Católica', *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, 6, 17 (1930), 18–19.

4   Even if there is no documental evidence that Michel Sittow studied with Memling, the comparison of their artworks shows a clear dependency between both painters. Dirk de Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator Paribas y Ludion Press, 1994), 46–47; Matthias Weniger, 'Bynnen Brugge in Flandern: The Apprenticeships of Michel Sittow and Juan de Flandes', *Memling Studies. Proceedings of the International Colloquim (Bruges, 10–12 November 1994)*, ed. by Hélène Verougstraete, Rogier Van Schoute, and Maurits Smeyers (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 115–131; Matthias Weniger, *Sittow, Morros, Juan de Flandes: Drei Maler aus dem Norden am Hof Isabellas von Kastilien* (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2011), 65–67; Susan Urbach, *Early Netherlandish Paitings*. Old Masters' Gallery Catalogues Szépmüvészeti Múzeum Budapest (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 237–244.

5   Jesús Félix Pascual Molina and Irune Fiz Fuentes, 'Don Francisco de Rojas, Embajador de los Reyes Católicos y sus empresas artísticas, a propósito de una traza de Juan de Borgoña y Antonio de Comontes', *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología: BSAA*, 81 (2015), 67–68; Antonio Rodríguez Villa, 'D. Francisco de Rojas, Embajador de los Reyes Católicos', *Boletín de La Real Academia de la Historia*, 28 (1896), 180–202; Elena Vázquez Dueñas, 'Francisco de Rojas (1446–1523): Embajador y Mecenas en la Corte de Flandes', *El Legado de las obras de arte: tapices, pinturas, esculturas... Sus viajes a través de la historia*, ed. by Miguel Ángel Zalama, María José Martínez Ruiz, and Jesús Félix Pascual Molina (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2017), 102–104.
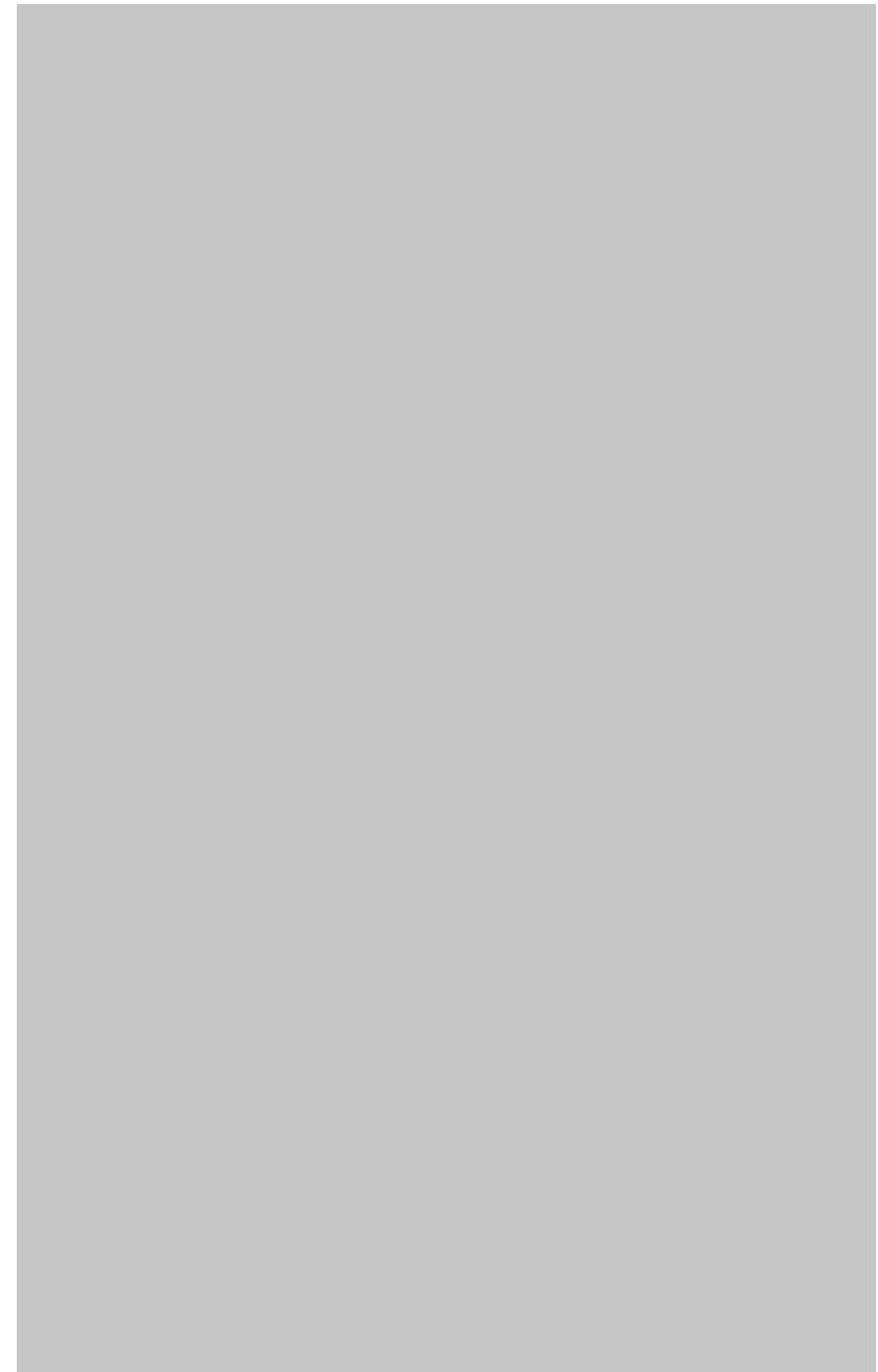

FIG. 1. HANS MEMLING (ATTRIBUTED), *PORTRAIT OF THE ROJAS FAMILY MEMBER*, C. 1480. MUSEA BRUGGE, BRUGES. PHOTO: OSKAR J. ROJEWSKI.

there is no documentary evidence to confirm this hypothesis; the only testimony might be the portrait of the member of the Rojas family attributed to Hans Memling.[6]

No matter what brought Michel Sittow to the Iberian Peninsula, from 1492 to 1502, he was registered at the court of Isabella of Castile in three types of court documents. Firstly, insight into his economic conditions is provided by *libros de cuentas* (or *nóminas*), account books that stipulated the amount each servant should be paid annually.[7] Financially speaking, the painter was the sovereign's fifth-highest-valued servant of the chamber, receiving 50,000 *maravedís*, almost until the end of his service.[8] The second type of source are *cuentas de la contaduría*, records of single payments issued to him for his regular service as a courtier. They contain very limited information, and as *nóminas*, provide no indication of the tasks undertaken by the artist. Besides the variety of designations used to refer to Michel Sittow in *cuentas* (the artist is recorded as *Miguel pintor*, *Miguel Alemán pintor*, *Michel Alemán*, and *Melchior Alemán*), these documents reveal a number of irregularities concerning the payments issued for his annual salary, above all their infrequency.[9] Further, the third form of evidence are the *cédulas reales* (letters patents), which ordered the royal treasury to pay the outstanding money owed to the painter. As a result, the payments of the *cuentas* concur with a number of the *cédulas reales*, apart from those issued for extraordinary payments and money to cover the painter's everyday expenses as a member of the court hierarchy, as well as occasional gratuities, such as garments.[10]

Only one of the *cédulas reales* signed by Isabella of Castile in 1496 provides a deeper insight into the artist's daily life at the court.[11] In this document, the queen ordered her treasurer, Gonzalo de Baeza,

to review the payments that had been remitted to the painter since his arrival and pay him whatever money was outstanding. If we contrast this salary commitment to the 1496 *céduala real*, and then subtract the payments he received according to the *cuentas*, we see that the royal court owed the painter at least 132,000 *maravedís*. In other words, he was owed the equivalent of nearly three years' salary and more than half of the total sum he would be paid for five years of service to the Castilian monarch. As we see, he was still owed money when he left Castile. Given that the court documents drawn up between 1497 and 1502 reveal no further irregularities, we may deduce that the royal treasury paid off the debt owed.

The year 1498 stands out in Michel Sittow's period of employment in Castile. At that time, the painter's status was documented not only as forming part of the court but also as residing in the city of Zaragoza.[12] It was there, on the 15th of October, that Michel Sittow was documented with a number of other painters in a house leased by an innkeeper, Juan Archet.[13] The court artist was present in the city to provide his services during the negotiations between Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, and the Habsburgs concerning the future inheritance of Iberian kingdoms. Jaime Lana, a local painter, testified the document, confirming that Michel Sittow would be able to pay for the stay. This information might suggest that they oversaw work on commissions, such as the portraits of the monarchs that once adorned the Royal Monastery of Santa Engracia in Zaragoza (destroyed in 1808).[14] Subsequent documents mention now lost royal portraits, which may have been painted during painter's visit in the city. It is possible that Michel Sittow painted portraits of the Queen and King that later became models for multiple other royal effigies (Fig. 2 and 3). A study of the surviving portraits reveals

6   Thanks to the comparison between other works of Memling from c. 1480 the portrait was dated in the early activity of the painter. De Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works*, 78–79; *The Age of Van Eyck. The Mediterraenean World and Early Netherlandish Paiting 1430–1530*, ed. by Till-Holger Borchert (Ghent: Ludion, 2002), 242; *Memling. Rinascimento Fiamingho*, ed. by Till-Holger Borchert (Rome: Skira, 2014), 170–172; Anna Koopstra, *Hans Memling in Bruges* (Veurne: Hannibal, 2023), 190–197.

7   Archivo General de Simancas [AGS], Casa y Sitios Reales [CSR], leg. 43, fol. 24, 49, 72, 75, 89, 95, 104, 112, 121, 135.

8   Antonio de la Torre, *La Casa de Isabel La Católica* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1954), 8–12.

9   Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 13–16; Weniger, *Sittow, Morros, Juan de Flandes*, 49–50.

10   AGS, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas [CMC], leg. 15, fol. 265v.

11   AGS, CMC, leg. 15, fol. 199v.

12   Carmen Morte García, 'Artistas de la corte de los Reyes Católicos en Zaragoza', *Archivo Español de Arte* 70, 280 (1997), 426–430; María del Carmen Lacarra Ducay and Pedro Luis Hernando Sebastián, 'Hallazgo de una pintura de Miguel Sittow en la ciudad de Teruel', *Aragonia Sacra*, 26 (2022), 117.

13   Archivo Histórico de Protocolo Notarial de Zaragoza [AHPZ], Juan Abat, 1498, ff. 142v–143r; Oskar J. Rojewski, 'The debts owed by the Castilian court to an emigrant painter: Michel Sittow's sojourns in Castile (1492–1502/1504)', *Oud Holland*, 135, 4 (2022), 161–162.

14   Morte García, 'Artistas de la corte de los Reyes Católicos en Zaragoza', 429; Carmen Morte García, 'El monasterio jerónimo de Santa Engracia de Zaragoza en el mecenazgo real', *Santa Engracia. Nuevas aportaciones para la visoria del monasterio y bastica* (Zaragoza: Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, 2002), 102–178; Carmen Morte García, 'El Real Monasterio de Santa Engracia de Zaragoza y Fernando II de Aragón, el Rey Católico', *Cantorales de la Orden de San Jerónimo en la catedral de Huesca: estudio interdisciplinar*, ed. by Carmen Morte García (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2017), 47–68.

FIG. 2. UNKNOWN ARTISTS, *PORTRAIT OF ISABELLA OF CASTILE*, C. 1500. WINDSOR CASTLE, ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023.
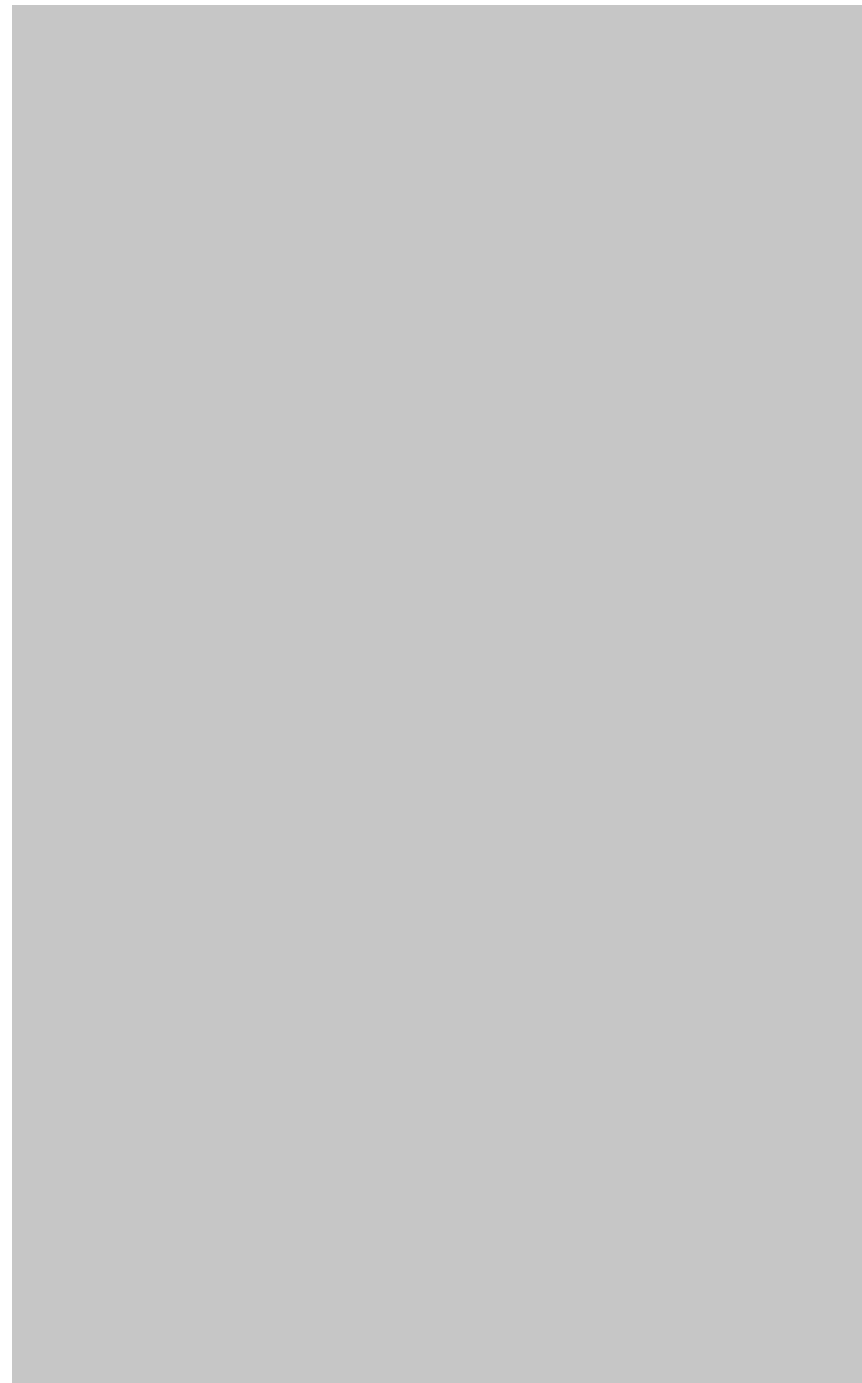

FIG. 3. UNKNOWN ARTISTS, *PORTRAIT OF FERDINAND OF ARAGON*, C. 1500. WINDSOR CASTLE, ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST / © HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 2023.

their poor pictorial quality and the traces of a drawing copied from an original composition that has not survived.[15]

Between 1498 and the final year of the artist's service at the Castilian court, 1502, documents provide no further information on Michel Sittow's employment, nor do they yield any insight into his artistic activity. However, the painter could portray several members of the royal family, preparing works known from later sources such as a portrait of Isabella and Ferdinand's eldest daughter, Isabella, princess of Portugal, or a portrait of Isabella of Castile aged thirty, and a double portrait of John, Prince of Asturias and his wife, Margaret of Austria, who are shown kneeling before an image of the Virgin and Child.[16] The production of these works suggests that the court artist had direct contact with his sitters, or at least had the possibility of meeting them in order to be able to depict their appearance truthfully.

Sources dating after the artist's stay in Castile reveal Michel Sittow's interactions with other court painters. Two of the forty-seven panels from the enigmatic set of devotional images known as the *Polyptych of Isabella the Catholic* have also been described as his works.[17] Most of the panels were identified with the hand of Juan de Flandes (court painter to Isabella of Castile between 1496 and 1504),[18] but a 1516 description of two of the panels cites *Michiel* as their author; one of these panels is identified as the *Assumption of the Virgin*, today in the National Gallery, Washington (Fig. 4).[19] It should be noted that collaboration between court painters is considered to have been a common practice.[20] Indeed, studies by Matthias Weniger have demonstrated another possible collaboration between the two court artists in the *Altarpiece of Saint John the Baptist* for the Chartreuse of Miraflores (Fig. 5): the under-drawing of St. John's cloak in the central panel suggests Michel Sittow's intervention.[21]

The painter is recorded as a member of the court of Isabella of Castile until 1502, when he was assigned a salary for the last time, on this occasion 20,000 *maravedís*.[22] The seeming reduction of his salary may indicate that his departure from the court was to some extent planned, and the court's outstanding debts to the artist, which had increased over time, may have prompted him to leave the kingdom.[23] In a later document drawn up in 1507 during a trial held in Lübeck, which is signed by the artist himself. Michel Sittow declared that in 1502 he had served the archduke Philip the Fair, son-in-law of Isabella of Castile, in Toledo.[24] The following year, the Habsburg returned to the Low Countries; he did not return to the Iberian Peninsula until 1506. Whether the painter travelled with his patron or stayed

15   There are four versions of the portrait of Queen Isabella, and all of them are considered copies of a Flemish origin master: two portraits in the Royal Spanish Collections, one in the Museo del Prado, and one in the Windsor Castle. While five portraits of King Ferdinand portraits are preserved in public collections in Poitiers, Vienna, Berlin, Windsor, and London. Weniger, *Sittow, Morros, Juan de Flandes*, 139–146, 150–151; Carmen Morte García, 'El reconocimiento de Fernando II de Aragón como monarca universal', *Fernando II de Aragón, el rey que imaginó España y la abrió a Europa*, ed. by Carmen Morte García and José Ángel Sesma Muñoz (Zaragoza: Gobierno de Aragón, 2015), 21–27; Carmen García Frías Checa, 'Perpetuating the image of the queen: portraits of Isabella I of Castille', *La copia y sus usos en la pintura tardogótica. Tiempo, memoria e identidad*, ed. by Olga Pérez Monzón, Matilde Miquel Juan, Miriam Bueso Manzanas, and Víctor López Lorente (Madrid: Ergástula, 2023), 65–80.

16   Those four paintings are mentioned in the inventory of Margaret of Austria in Mechelen from 1516, and they might have been painted while Michel Sittow stayed at the Castilian court. Dagmar Eichberger, 'Devotional Objects in Book Format: Diptychs in the Collection of Margaret of Austria and her Family', *The Art of the Book: its Place in Medieval Worship*, ed. by Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 301–302; *Los inventarios de Carlos V y la familia imperial/The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family*, ed. by Fernando Checa Cremades, vol. 3 (Madrid: Fernando Villaverde Ediciones, 2010), 2395–2399.

17   Sánchez Cantón, 'El retablo de la Reina Católica', 1914.

18   Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Les Anciens Peintres Flamands, Leur Vie et Leurs Oeuvres*, vol. 2 (Bruxelles: F. Heussner, 1865), 62–63; Carl Justi, *Miscellaneen aus drei Jahrhunderten Spanischen Kunstlebens* (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1908), 316–321; Sánchez Cantón, 'El retablo de la Reina Católica', 109; Elisa Bermejo Martínez, *Juan de Flandes* (Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1962), 8; Ignace Vandevivere, *Juan de Flandes* (Bruges: Vandevivere, 1985), 17–19; Chiyo Ishikawa, *The Retablo de Isabel la Católica by Juan de Flandes and Michel Sittow* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 45–56; Pilar Silva Maroto, *Juan de Flandes* (Salamanca: Caja Duero, 2006), 129–134; Miguel Ángel Zalama, 'La infructuosa venta en almoneda de las pinturas de Isabel la Católica', *BSAA Arte*, 74 (2008), 59.

19   Chiyo Ishikawa, 'The Retablo de Isabel la Católica', 67.

20   Oskar J. Rojewski, 'Dos tablas relacionadas con el Políptico de Isabel la Católica: el Cristo sobre la piedra fría del Museo del Prado y el Camino del Calvario del Museo Pushkin de Moscú', *Philostrato: Revista de Historia y Arte*, 12 (2022), 27–31.

21   Weniger, *Sittow, Morros, Juan de Flandes*, 201–209; Matthias Weniger, 'Michel Sittow, a la luz del Retablo de los Luna', *Retórica artística en el tardogótico castellano. La Capilla fúnebre de Álvaro de Luna en contexto*, ed. by Olga Pérez Monzón, Matilde Miquel Juan, and María Martín Gil (Madrid: Sílex, 2018), 488. The commission of the altarpiece is mentioned in 1496, and it indicates the authorship of Juan de Flandes. There are no more notions about how long it took to conclude the work. For additional information on the altarpiece and primary sources, see Juan Arias de Miranda, *Apuntes históricos sobre la Cartuja de Miraflores de Burgos* (Burgos: Imprenta de Pascual Polo, 1834), 79; Camilo María Abad Puente, 'Documentos inéditos acerca de algunos cuadros flamencos de la Cartuja de Miraflores (Conclusión)', *Razón y Fé*, 37 (1913), 83–89; Silva Maroto, 'Juan de Flandes', 475; Ronda Kasl, *The Making of Hispano-Flemish Style* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 112–113; Jessica Weiss, 'Castilian Legacy and Juan de Flandes's Miraflores Copy', *Copies of Flemish Masters in the Hispanic World*, ed. by Eduardo Lamas and David García Cueto (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 29–42.

22   AGS, CMC, leg. 15, fol. 445v.

23   Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 49–51.

24   Paul Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow. Hofmaler der Königin Isabella von Kastilien und Bürger von Reval', *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 61 (1940), 3; Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 37; Anu Mänd, 'Michel Sittow and Reval (Tallinn): A New Look at Records in the Tallinn City Archives', *Michel Sittow 1496–1525: The Artists Connecting Estonia with the Southern Netherlands*, ed. by Tiina Abel (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2001), 4.

FIG. 4. MICHEL SITTOW, *ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN*, C. 1500. WASHINGTON D.C., NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART. COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON.

FIG. 5. JUAN DE FLANDES AND MICHEL SITTOW (?), *ALTARPIECE OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST*, AFTER 1496, RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ALTARPIECE, PANELS ARE DIVIDED BETWEEN A PRIVATE COLLECTION, MUSEUM MAYER VAN DEN BERGH, MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY IN GENEVE, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SERBIA, AND CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART. OPEN ACCESS PHOTOGRAPH MERGE BY OSKAR J. ROJEWSKI FOLLOWING: SUSAN URBACH, 'AN ECCE AGNUS DEI ATTRIBUTED TO JUAN DE FLANDES: A LOST PANEL FROM A HYPOTHETICAL ALTARPIECE', *JAARBOECK KONINKLIJK MUSEUM VOOR SCHONE KUNSTEN* ANTWERP (2001), 206.

in Castile cannot be confirmed. However, there are a number of documentary references to Michel Sittow being linked to Isabella of Castile's court up until her death in 1504, which further complicates any effort to trace his movements.[25] However, this evidence for the conditions of a court artist suggests that we should consider a non-linear interpretation and that Isabella of Castile must be viewed as

a patron of his work. Likewise, the painter could have served two people simultaneously while remaining on the Iberian Peninsula.

Alternatively, the 1502 declaration was intended to state that from that year, his official patron was the queen of Castile's son-in-law. However, financial documents relating to the kingdom explained that Michel Sittow continued to serve the monarch. It could be in a covert manner in order to become acquainted with this new member of the royal family. Thus, the painter declared that he had served Philip the Fair,[26] even though he could continue to represent the

25   AGS, CSR, leg. 3, fol. 497v.

26   Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow', 4. 'Vorder ersamen heren, alsze denne myne zalige moder in got vorstoruen is in den jaren dusent viffhundert unde eyn, an deme dage sunte Katherinen, do was ik by der hochgeborenen konyngynne, der gnedigsten fruwen van Spannyen, in erem denste in der stadt Toleten, unde alse ik noch vor eynen schamelen denstknecht mynem hochgeborenen forsten unde heren, hertoch Philippus...'.

20   Oskar J. Rojewski, Mette Birkedal Bruun

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interests of Queen Isabella. It therefore seems that Michel Sittow took care to preserve a degree of secrecy around his simultaneous attachment to two branches of the court hierarchy, and that his circumstances enabled a degree of privacy regarding this patronage and attachments. A similar practice appears during other phases of his career, discussed below.

PORTRAYING A DANISH KING

The painter was recorded back in Tallinn in the winter of 1506.[27] He returned to his hometown to claim the inheritance his mother had left him, which resulted in a conflict with his stepfather. In the absence of an amicable resolution, a lawsuit began in Tallinn and was then transferred to the supreme court in Lübeck, which ruled in favour of Michel Sittow.[28] It is highly likely that this family matter prompted him to return to his homeland rather than anything related to his career as a court painter. After leaving the Castilian royal court, he settled in Tallinn, and from 1507, he was documented as a master painter of the guild of St. Canute, working on local commissions until 1513–1514.[29]

On the 1st of June 1514, customs officer Hans Pedersen (or Paderson) sent a letter to his sovereign Christian II of Denmark from the port of Elsinore, north of Copenhagen, stating that the Master painter from Tallinn *Mechil* had landed and was on his way to the royal residence.[30] This document is the only written statement testifying to the painter's presence in the Danish kingdom. However, this source can be related to a portrait of the king (Fig. 6). Although the painting appears to be unfinished in some areas (or damaged with time), such as the king's hand, it is highly realistic and reveals traits identified with Michel Sittow's style.[31] Comparative analysis of this

royal portrait with other allegedly anonymous panels has led to further attributions: the possible picture of Diego de Guevara, which was a part of a devotional diptych (Fig. 8); a panel identified as the portrait of a nobleman (also called *A Man with the pearl*) (Fig. 9);[32] and a fragment with the face of St. Olaf (Fig. 10) in the *Altarpiece of the Holy Kinship* from the parish church in Bollnäs, a work related to the late activity of the artist and his workshop in Tallinn.[33] Michel Sittow's meticulously detailed treatment of the physiognomy in the paintings suggests that the painter held sittings with them so as to observe the sitter in person but also so as to be able to reproduce the same model on more than one occasion.

Another aspect of the portrait of Christian II, which was revealed by technical studies, is that there is an earlier painting beneath the paintwork (Fig. 7).[34] Although it is not possible to identify the person portrayed on the panel, this composition can be related to the exemplary effigies of Habsburgs, painted in the first decade of the sixteenth century (Fig. 11 and 12). This earlier painting raises many questions about the artist's career while also lending weight to two hypotheses. Firstly, he served the Habsburgs,[35] and secondly, the artist moved between the royal courts in an unofficial way. On the one hand, the obscured portrait overpainted with the effigy of Christian II could be of Philip the Fair, and may have been executed between 1502 and 1505. On the other hand, before sailing to Elsinore, the painter may have visited the court of Mechelen, where he could have obtained or painted a portrait of the young Charles V on a panel, over which he painted Christian II following a commission from the Habsburgs. It should be noted that in the summer of 1515, Isabella of

27   Mänd, 'Michel Sittow and Reval (Tallinn)', 4.

28   Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow', 2–3.

29   Mänd, 'Michel Sittow and Reval (Tallinn)', 8.

30   Gustaf Falck, 'Mester Michiel og Kunstmuseets Portræt af Christiern II', *Kunstmuseets Aarsskrift*, 13–15 (1926/1928), 134–135; Else Kai Sass, *Studier i Christiern II's Ikonografi* (København: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri A/S, 1970), 50–52: 'Kaere naaduge herre verdis eders naade ath vide, ath jegh sender nw til eders naade then malere som eders naade screff migh til om j dagh, mester Mechil'.

31   Falck, 'Mester Michiel', 135–136; Else Kai Sass, 'A Portrait of King Christian II as a Young Prince', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 51, 2 (1971), 294–295; Sass, *Studier i Christiern II's Ikonografi*, 57; Hanne Kolind Poulsen, *Magt og afmagt: Christian II's billedpolitik* (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2017), 14–19.

32   *El Retrato en las Colecciones Reales*, ed. by Carmen García-Frías Checa and Javier Jordán de Urríes y de la Colina (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2014), 141–142. In the 17th century, following the model of the portrait, a full-length picture of Udet de Foix, comte de Cominges was painted, currently in the collection of Palacio del Senado in Madrid.

33   For more on the Bollnäs altarpiece and Michel Sittow, see Inga Björkman-Berglund, 'Det stora altarskåpet i Bollnäs – ett verk av Michel Sittow?', *Konsthistorisk tidskrift*, 50, 3 (1981), 105–118; Merike Kurisoo, 'Bollnäs Holy Kinship Altarpiece', *Michel Sittow in the North? Altarpieces in Dialogue*, ed. by Merike Kurisoo and Greta Koppel (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2023), 24–28.

34   At the top of the arch, the painting is dated in 1515. The date was painted over the layer of varnish, so it should be considered as a later addition. Sass, *Studier i Christiern II's Ikonografi*, 57; Poulsen, *Magt og afmagt*, 15–16.

35   Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow', 13–14; Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 35–36; Weniger, *Sittow, Morros, Juan de Flandes*, 41; Rojewski, 'The debts owed by the Castilian court', 162–163.

FIG. 6. MICHEL SITTOW, *PORTRAIT OF CHRISTIAN II OF DENMARK*, 1514. COPENHAGEN, NATIONAL GALLERY OF DENMARK. COURTESY SMK – NATIONAL GALLERY OF DENMARK.

FIG. 7. IR-RECORDING OF A *PORTRAIT OF CHRISTIAN II OF DENMARK*. COURTESY SMK – NATIONAL GALLERY OF DENMARK.

FIG. 8. MICHEL SITTOW (ATTRIBUTED), *PORTRAIT OF THE KNIGHT OF CALATRAVA (DIEGO DE GUEVARA?)*, C. 1515. WASHINGTON D.C., NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART. COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON.
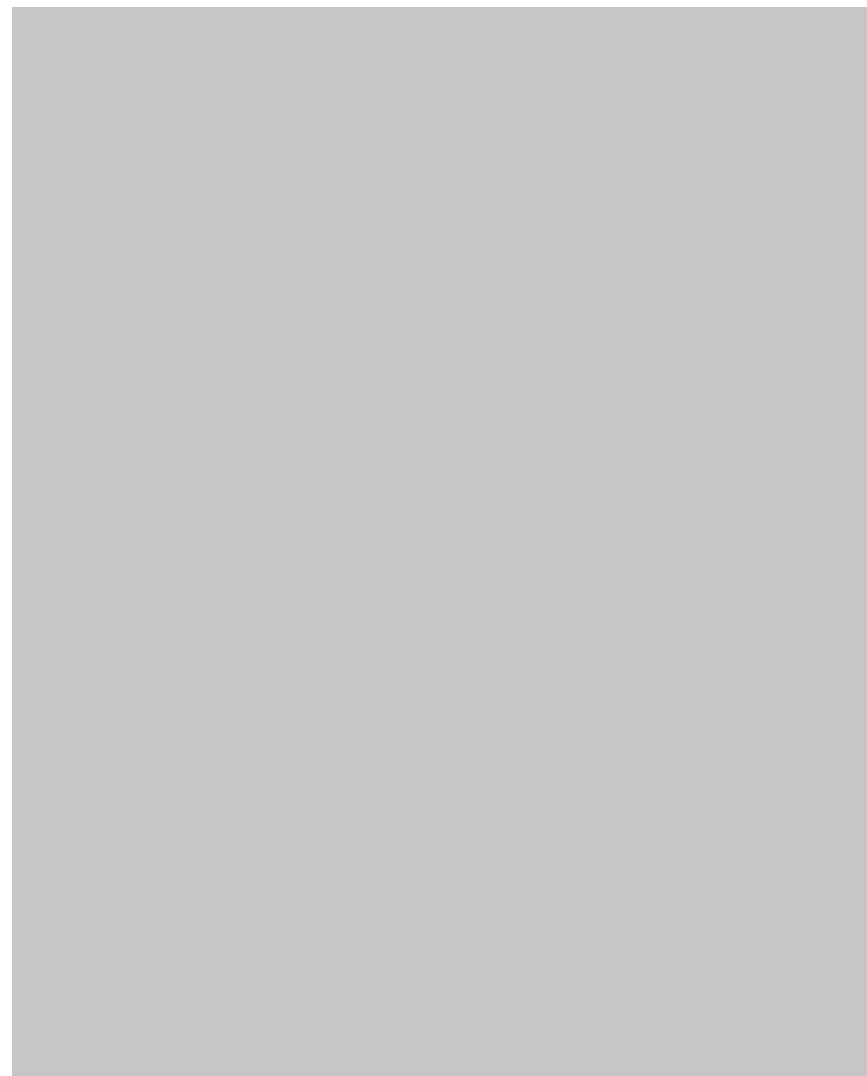

FIG. 9. MICHEL SITTOW (ATTRIBUTED), *A MAN WITH A PEARL (PORTRAIT OF UDET DE FOIX?)*, C. 1515. MADRID, MUSEO DE LAS COLECCIONES REALES. COURTESY PATRIMONIO NACIONAL, SPAIN.

FIG. 10. MICHEL SITTOW AND WORKSHOP, FRAGMENT OF THE *ALTARPIECE OF THE HOLY KINSHIP*, C. 1520. BOLLNÄS, PARISH CHURCH. PHOTO: STANISLAV STEPASHKO.

Austria, Charles V's sister, landed in Denmark to marry Christian II.[36] It is possible that the portrait of the king was intended to form part of the portrait gallery created at Mechelen, which comprised effigies of the Habsburgs and their political allies.[37] The only known version of Michel Sittow's depiction of Christian II is in the National Gallery of Denmark, and no direct copies of this panel have been identified. Still, the composition undoubtedly established the iconography of the king's power.[38]

Only two sources corroborate Michel Sittow's presence at the Danish court, one document and one artwork, and these do not permit us to draw any firm conclusions regarding his reception, behaviour, network of contacts, or income. However, it appears that the painter had a dual courtly affiliation once again. On the one hand, the artist belonged to the group of servants with direct access to the sovereign Christian II, which would have enabled him to establish a relationship with the monarch. On the other hand, the concealed painting beneath the king's portrait signals a possible relationship with the Habsburgs that dates back to before 1514 and was documented just once in 1502. Although the artist's biography does not document any links to the court of Habsburgs, his relationship with patrons should not be considered as having been entirely severed. In this case, Michel Sittow's potential attachment is undisclosed, but it may have involved serving in two courts. Again, this practice is related to his possible role in secret missions, espionage, or reporting on the court of one monarch to another. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that we know nothing more about the painter's presence in Denmark nor any possible date for his departure to a subsequent destination.

PAINTER AND SPY TO MARGARET OF AUSTRIA?

None of the known documents related to Michel Sittow can confirm that he resided at the court of Margaret of Austria in Mechelen. The only source associated with her court that mentioned him is a

36   Lars Bisgaard, *Christian 2.: En biografi* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 2019), 159–162.

37   Dagmar Eichberger and Lisa Beaven, 'Family Members and Political Allies: The Portrait Collection of Margaret of Austria', *The Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), 225–248; Dagmar Eichberger, 'Margaret of Austria's portrait collection: female patronage in the light of dynastic ambitions and artistic quality', *Renaissance Studies*, 10, 2 (1996), 266–267.

38   Sass, *Studier i Christiern II's Ikonografi*, 98–99; Poulsen, *Magt og afmagt*, 14.

FIG. 11. AFTER BERNARD VAN ORLEY, *PORTRAIT OF CHARLES V*, C. 1515. BOURG-EN-BRESSE, MUSÉE MUNICIPAL. PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN.
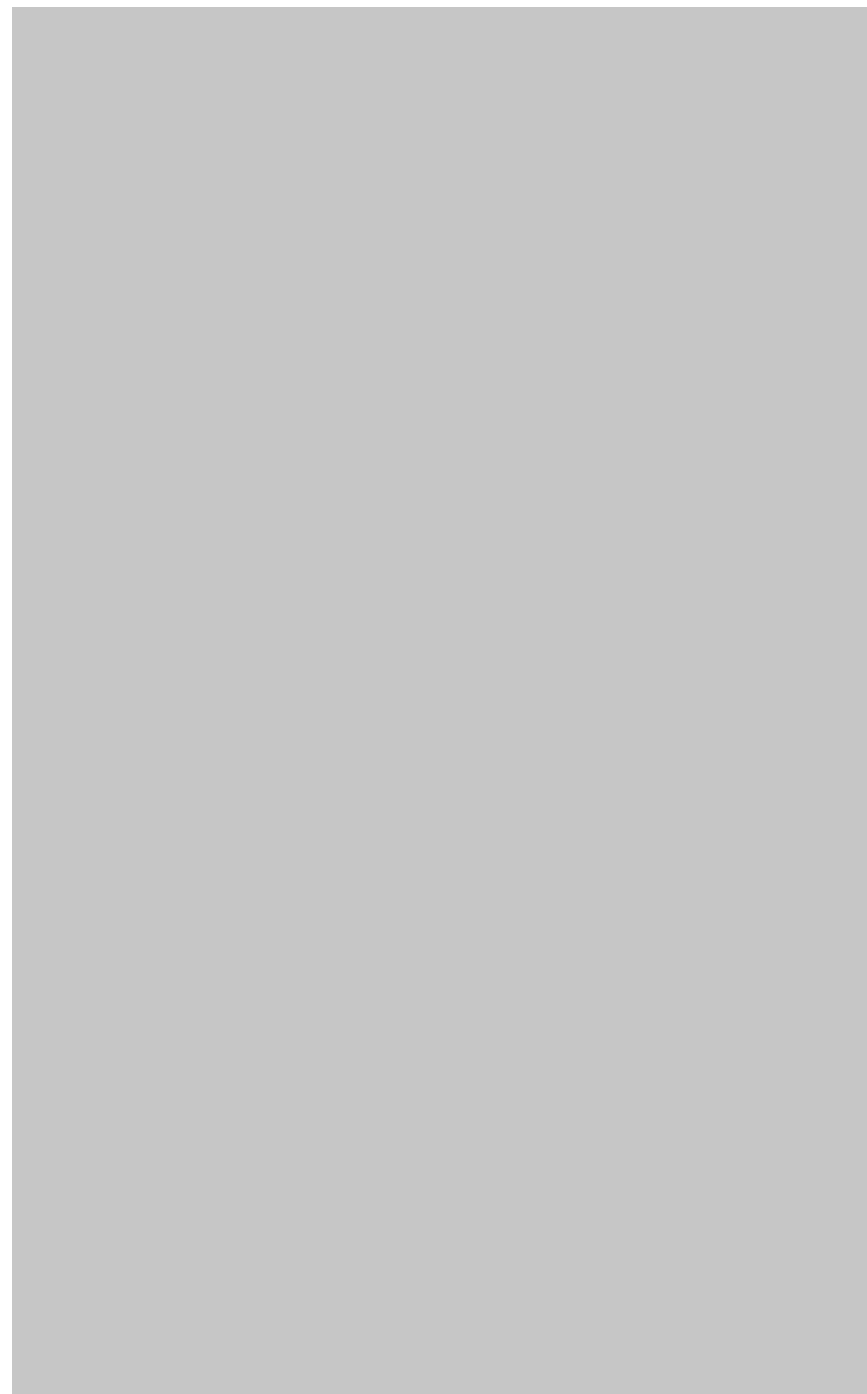
FIG. 12. UNKNOWN ARTISTS, *PORTRAIT OF PHILIP THE FAIR*, C. 1500. VIENNA, KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM. PHOTO: KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM.

payment from the 23rd of March, 1515, prepared in Ghent which does not specify where he resided.[39] This document orders that Michel Sittow should be paid for duties that the governor of Flanders did not wish to declare to her chancellery (*pour aucunes causes dont ne voulons icy ni aillieurs aultre ne plus ample declaration en estre faicte*). At a first glance this last enigmatic reference provides no information. Yet, it should be noted that the language used in this source was akin to that applied in court documents concerning what might be considered dishonourable or politically sensitive services, such as espionage.[40] The payment may have been intended to compensate for Sittow's journey to Denmark to visit the court of Christian II. Another more likely possibility is that it was intended to pay for the journey Michel Sittow made to Castile just a few months before the death of Ferdinand of Aragon for the purpose of reporting on the political situation and court dynamics in the Iberian Peninsula, revolving at that time, around Margaret of Austria, who was the protector of Philip the Fair's children.

Michel Sittow's biographers and the political context of his life and works indicate possible in-person meetings between the painter and the governor of Habsburg's Low Countries before 1515. The early studies devoted to the artist pointed to a possible relationship between them at the French court.[41] Although the painter emulated the style of Hans Memling, some authors drew a conclusion that he was noted for his "French manner" of creating portraits.[42] According to this theory, if Michel Sittow had attended the Valois court before 1492, he could have met Margaret of Austria when she was a young girl at the court of Amboise. No documentary sources confirm this hypothesis. Later, from 1496, Michel Sittow and Margaret of Austria resided at the Castilian court together since she was the wife of Prince Juan of Asturias, who died in 1497. Still, she did not leave the Iberian Peninsula until 1499. The third possible circumstance for a meeting could be Philip the Fair's return from the journey to the Kingdom of Castille and Aragon in 1503. Philip resided for some weeks at the court of Savoy on his way back, where he met his sister.[43] It is not certain that Michel Sittow travelled with him at that time. Finally, in August 1505, Doctor Puebla, a Spanish ambassador at the Tudor court, mentioned in his letter to Ferdinand of Aragon that diplomats from the Holy Roman Empire arrived in England, and they brought two portraits of Margaret of Austria as a gift for Henry VII, painted by Michel.[44] This notion confirms that Michel Sittow portrayed Margaret before that date.

The only sources for Michel Sittow's works are the inventories Margaret of Austria had drawn up for her residence in Mechelen in 1516,[45] and they mention at least six of his paintings. Thanks to the analysis of the register of artworks owned by the governor of Flanders, it may be deduced that some of painter's works were produced on the Iberian Peninsula, as mentioned before.[46] The 1516 inventory also indicates other works that he may have painted in an unknown location, such as the Virgin, referred to as the *Mignonne*, the favourite painting of Margaret of Austria, and the portrait of Charles Ourssin, the Habsburg courtier. The latter work, a portrayal of a trusted servant of the Governor of Flanders, indicates that the painter did indeed spend time in Mechelen.[47]

39   Archives du Département du Nord à Lille [ADN], *Registre des mandements des finances de 1513 à 1515*, B.2230, fol. 103.

40   To not declare details of the servant's task in the financial document at the Burgundian court appears often during the 15th century. In some cases, the bill describes issue more precisely: 'À Collin Villocquart, varlet de chambre de mondit seigneur, la somme de 11 £ 14 s. dudit pris pour, du commandement et ordonnance d'icellui seigneur et de sa ville de Hesdin, le 10e jour de mars l'an 1468, estre alé devers le roy nostre sire à Amboise pour aucunes matieres secretes dont mondit seigneur ne veult plus ample declaracion icy estre faicte'. Sébastian Hamel, 'Quelques pistes pour exploiter efficacement les sources des hôtel princiers de Bourgogne', *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe: le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel*, ed. by Werner Paravicini, Torsten Hiltmann, and Frank Viltart (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2013), 36–41; Oskar J. Rojewski, *Los valets de chambre de los duques de Borgoña (1419–1477)* (Castellón de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I, 2021), 39. In the case of the court painters, this expression was used while paying Jan van Eyck for his journey to the Iberian Peninsula between 1428 and 1429. To his journey some pre-marriage portraits are related as the one of Isabella of Portugal. Ibid., 60–61; Leon de Labord, *Les ducs de Bourgogne Études sur les lettres, les arts et l'industrie pendant le XVe siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon Frères, 1849), 741; Till-Holger Borchert, 'The Mobility of Artists. Aspects of Cultural Transfer in Renaissance Europe', *The Age of Van Eyck: The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430–1530*, ed. Till-Holger Borchert (Ghent-Amsterdam: Luidon, 2002), 42–43; Bart Fransen, 'Jan van Eyck y España. Un viaje y una obra', *Anales de Historia del Arte*, 22, 39–58 (2012), 39–59.

41   Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow', 12.

42   Ludwig Baldass, 'The portraiture of Master Michiel', *Burlington Magazine*, 67, 389 (1935), 78; Johansen, 'Meister Michel Sittow', 12; Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 9.

43   Jean-Marie Cauchies, *Philippe le Beau. Le dernier duc de Bourgogne* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 148–149.

44   AGS, Patronato Real [PTR], leg. 54, fol. 18.

45   'Los inventarios de Carlos V y la familia imperial', 2395–2399.

46   Ibid., 2395–2399; Weniger, 'Michel Sittow, a la luz del Retablo de los Luna', 484–488; Miguel Ángel Zalama 'La infructuosa venta en almoneda de las pinturas de Isabel la Católica', 55–60.

47   Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst: Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 380.

An analysis of the painter's life and the possible dates of his residence and service at the Habsburg courts indicates four possible periods: 1502–1505, 1513–1514, 1514–1515, and 1515–1516. All except the first lasted no more than one year. The artist may have served Margaret's brother Philip the Fair between 1502 and 1505. Although his service to the sovereign is undocumented, it cannot be ruled out that Michel Sittow travelled with his patron to the Netherlands, thereby temporarily leaving Castile. The second possible period of service from 1513 to 1514 relates to the portrait of Christian II; the artist was recorded at Tallinn in June 1513, and then, following a year during which his presence went undocumented, he is recorded as disembarking at Elsinore. However, it is possible that before reaching the Danish court, he was summoned by Margaret of Austria, from where the panel depicting a Habsburg (visible in the recumbent drawing of the portrait of Christian II) was taken. Then, having painted the portrait of the Danish sovereign, he could move from Denmark to Mechelen between 1514 and 1515. Both assumptions are hypothetical. The dates for the painter's final possible sojourn at the court of Margaret of Austria, between 1515 and 1516, would have followed Michel Sittow's brief visit to the Iberian Peninsula, where the artist arrived in the Autumn of 1515. The purpose of this journey was to collect the money owed to him by the treasury of the Castilian court. In October, he assigned the Argüello brothers, who were linked to the royal treasury, as his legal representatives. Then he left Valladolid, most probably in December of that same year.[48] However, those legal certificates define him as a 'painter and servant of Madame Princess Margaret'.[49] Once more, his name vanished from the extant documentation until the following year, when he returned definitively to Tallinn, where in 1518, he married and continued to work as a member of the St. Canute's guild and, in 1523, became its alderman. He died in December 1525.[50]

The last document, known until this moment, to cite Michel Sittow out of his birthplace is the *cédula real*, dated 17th of July 1516, and issued by Charles V.[51] The document provides valuable insights regarding the artist's patrons. The future emperor declared that

Michel Sittow had served him and continued to serve him.[52] Indeed, this is the only evidence testifying to the painter having worked for Charles V, and in the absence of further data, it is impossible to shed further light on their relationship, or the precise nature of it.

PRIVACY AT COURT SEEN THROUGH THE CASE OF MICHEL SITTOW

This article has outlined Sittow's association with the courts of Isabella of Castile (1492–1504), Christian II of Denmark (1514), and the Habsburgs (c. 1502/4–1516). The primary sources related to these employments help us to trace the painter's movements within the courts and achieve a glimpse of some of the courtly boundaries that were upheld and traversed. This analytical work may be supported by a set of heuristic zones that could be considered integral to Early Modern society.[53] In all three cases, Michel Sittow crosses the threshold that segregates the court from the wider society. In doing so, he enters the composite community that constitutes the court. This community is the first zone to consider. The court is shielded from the wider society by its architectural framework, augmented by guards and gates.[54] The painter not simply arrived at the fringes of that community, but made it into its core, entering the Castilian court – and in a prominent position at that. He did, however, cross other boundaries too. The familial portraits that he produced in Castile, and possibly in Denmark, and the Low Countries testify to his access to the next, and slightly more intimate, courtly zone: that of the royal household. The painter had access to his models and was able to study their appearance. This is still a somewhat stylised look, particularly in the portraits, and in general we should not confuse this physical proximity with his models with intimacy and familiarity, just as the degree of spatial privacy should be

48   AGS, CSR, leg. 3, fol. 498v.

49   AGS, CSR, leg. 3, fol. 496v. 'Michel Sitium, pintor criado de madama la princesa doña Margarita'

50   Mänd, 'Michel Sittow and Reval (Tallinn)', 9.

51   AGS, CSR, leg. 3, fol. 495v.

52   Trizna, *Michel Sittow*, 72.

53   For these heuristic zones, see Mette Birkedal Bruun, 'Towards an Approach to Early Modern Privacy: The Retirement of the Great Condé', *Early Modern Privacy: Sources and Approaches*, ed. by Michaël Green, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Mette Birkedal Bruun (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 23.

54   Dries Raeymaekers, 'The Monarch Exposed. Privacy in Practice at the Early Modern Court', *Notions of Privacy at Early Modern European Court. Reassessing the Public/Private Divide within European Courts, 1400–1800*, ed. by Dustin M. Neighbors, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Ellie Woodacre (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024), 95–117.

considered within the strict delineations that characterised the public and representative nature of the Early Modern court.[55]

The ruler's physical appearance is a whole scholarly domain in its own right. If we approach it through the double lens of Michel Sittow's life and work on the one hand, and the heuristic zones of privacy, on the other, we are reminded of the court painter's access to the model. The veracity might be determined by the purpose of the portraits; in Castile, he was working to prepare the state portrait demonstrating the magnificence of commissioners. In Denmark, he prepared the pre-marriage portrait of the king, possibly under Habsburg commission, to introduce the new member of the dynasty to the portrait gallery.[56] Finally, some of his works might have been brought from the Iberian Peninsula to the Low Countries by Margaret of Austria. Michel Sittow's role at Margaret of Austria's court constitutes a particular case. Was he in her political confidence? This would indicate yet another form of threshold crossed: the ruler's trust. Speaking in spatial terms, we may associate this trust with the 'political chamber', be it a real or imagined space, a form of reliance that would allow Michel Sittow into a communicative space that was available only to the few.

The portraits pretend, however, that Michel Sittow had or feigned access not only to the sitters' physical appearance, but even to their soul. The portrait of Isabella of Castile shows the Queen with what we may assume is a prayer book, such as a book of hours. The portrait thus displays the Queen's devotional inclination on her own behalf and that of her realm.[57] The prayer book is in and of itself a token of religiously tinged privacy.[58] The devotion privileged isolation from the world, be that the permanent cloistered isolation or the temporary and ephemeral isolation in prayer.[59] The devotional life of the monarchs' private chambers was enhanced by music and prayerbooks, and the, quite conventional, presence of the prayerbook in the portrait alludes to these shielded practices.[60] The queen's devotion was also a part of the image of power, and the aim is not only to display an exclusive piece of property such as the book of hours, but also to reinforce the ideal of the sovereign, promoted in the official rhetoric of works such as the Chronicle of Hernando de Pulgar.[61] The court painter was perfectly able to follow the official idea of the monarch in his official representation of her, showing qualities such as devotion, piety, and spirituality.

Insights concerning privacy based on works related to Michel Sittow and Juan de Flandes can also be gleaned from the *Altarpiece of St. John the Baptist* prepared for the Chartreuse of Miraflores. This complex of five panels, today divided into different collections, was executed between 1496 and 1499.[62] Except for formal qualities and iconographical

55   Dustin M. Neighbors, 'Privacy and the Private within European Court Culture', *The Court Historian*, 28, 1 (2023), 14–17; Miguel Ángel Zalama, 'Juana I en las imágenes, las imágenes de la reina', *Juana I en Tordesillas: su mundo, su entorno*, ed. by Miguel Ángel Zalama (Valladolid: Ayuntamiento de Tordesillas, 2010), 16–20.

56   Eichberger, 'Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst', 153–166.

57   Elisa Ruiz García, 'Los Libros de Horas en los inventarios de Isabel la Católica', *El libro antiguo español: De libros, librerías, imprentas y lectores*, ed. by Pedro M. Cátedra, María Luisa López-Vidriero, and Pablo Andrés Escapa, vol. 6 (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2002), 389–419.

58   Mette Birkedal Bruun and Lars Cyril Nørgaard, 'Au Milieu d'une Cour Superbe & Tumultueuse. Devotional privacy at the Court of Versailles', *Notions of Privacy at Early Modern European Courts. Reassessing the Public/Private Divide within European Courts, 1400–1800*, ed. by Dustin M. Neighbors, Lars Cyril Nørgaard, and Ellie Woodacre (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 215–240.

59   Mette Birkedal Bruun, 'A Solitude of Permeable Boundaries: The Abbey of La Trappe between Isolation and Engagement', *Solitudo: Spaces, Places, and Times of Solitude in Late Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*, ed. by Karl A.E. Enenkel and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 451–479; Mette Birkedal Bruun, 'Prayer, Meditation, and Retreat', *The Oxford Handbook of the Baroque*, ed. John D. Lyons (Oxford: Oxford University Press online, 2018).

60   For more information on women's libraries and prayer books, see Anne-Marie Legaré, 'La librairye de Madame. Two Princesses and their Libraries', *Women of Distinction. Margaret of York and Margaret of Austria*, ed. by Dagmar Eichberger (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 207–220.

61   Hernando de Pulgar, *Crónica de los Señores Reyes Católicos Don Fernando y Doña Isabel de Castilla y de Aragón* (Valencia: Benito Monfort, 1780). 'Era católica y devota; hacía limosnas secretas en lugares debidos; honraba las casas de oración; visitaba con voluntad los monasterios y casas de religión, en especial aquellas donde conocía que guardaban vida honesta; las dotaba magníficamente. [...] Le placía la conversación de personas religiosas y de vida honesta, con las cuales muchas veces había sus consejos particulares' Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, 'Isabel la Católica vista por sus contemporáneos', *En la España medieval*, 29 (2006), 225–286. For more information on devotion and portraits of Isabella of Castile, see Melania Soler Moratón, 'Retratos de piedad, retratos de poder: las representaciones devocionales de Isabel de Castilla y de su heredera Juana I, y su simbología pública', *Potestas. Estudios del Mundo Clásico e Historia del Arte*, 20 (2022), 31–33.

62   This possible collaboration was indicated by Friedrich Winkler, 'Neue Werke des Meister Michiel', *Pantheon*, IV (1931), 175–178; *Les primitifs flamands et leur temps*, ed. by Brigitte de Patoul and Roger van Schoute (Louvain-la-Neuve: La Renaissance du Livre, 1994), 573; María del Carmen Garrido, 'Le processus créatif chez Juan de Flandes', *Le Dessin sous-jacent dans la peinture: Colloque X, 5–7 Septembre*, ed. by Hélène Verougstraete and Roger van Schoute (Louvain-la-Neuve: Collège Erasme, 1995), 21–29; Weniger, 'Michel Sittow, a la luz del Retablo de los Luna', 481–500. And refused by: Nicole Reynaud, 'La Couronnement de la Vierge de Michel Sittow', *Revue du Louvre*, XVII (1967), 345–352; Ann Tzeutschler Lurie, 'Birth and naming of St. John the Baptist attributed to Juan de Flandes: A newly discovered panel from a hypothetical Altarpiece', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, LXIII, 5 (1975), 118–135; Susan Urbach, 'An Ecce Agnus Dei attributed to Juan de Flandes: a lost panel from a hypothetical altarpiece', *Jaarboeck Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerp* (2001), 189–207; Didier Martens, 'Identificación del 'Cuadro flamenco de la Adoración de los Reyes, antiguamente en la Cartuja de Miraflores', *Actas del Congreso Intenracional sobre Gil de Siloe y la escultura de su época* (Burgos: Centro Cultural "Casa del Cordón", 1999), 71–90; Silva Maroto, *Juan de Flandes*, 144. Since this artwork is not the only possible joint piece of both painters, this study considered it as the altarpiece that Michel Sittow definitely knew, if not planned its composition. For more on collaborations between Michel Sittow and Juan de Flandes, see Rojewski, 'Dos tablas relacionadas con el Políptico de Isabel la Católica', 5–31.

message, two lateral panels of the altarpiece provide the view of the domestic interior visible in the *Nativity of St. John the Baptist* and the *Feast of Herod*. Compositions of Flemish primitives such as Jan van Eyck or Rogier van der Weyden strongly inspired the first scene that illustrates the Apocrypha about the silence of Zechariah and St. John the Baptist as a voice clamouring in the wilderness. Zechariah holds a scroll and writes *Johannes erit nomen eius*, a quote from the Gospel of Luke 1.63.[63] The scene takes place in a room with a bed, mirror, cupboard, clock, and brazier. Interiors in Flemish paintings usually depicted bourgeois houses, but these few details might refer to everyday palace life. Regarding the people depicted in the composition, the foreground focuses on Zechariah and Mary holding the newborn. In the background, a maid with a tray approaches Elisabeth on the bed. The maid's face was identified as a crypto-portrait of Isabella of Castile.[64] Even if this identification might be hypothetical, it is plausible that the composition's author depicted an interior that would be recognisable to people at the court of Castile.[65]

The second image shedding light on what we may term domestic privacy is the panel with the *Feast of Herod*. In this case, the author divided the room into two spaces and used a strong foreshortening applying the perspective that can be traced on the table's line and the decorative pavement. In the foreground, Herod and Herodias are placed on the right side of the picture, and behind them, a rich decorative textile hang. In front of them, Salome presents the head of the Prophet, placing it on the crystal rock table covered with a white cloth. The scenery in the background is separated by three columns, two with Corinthian capitals and one with the relief bass of the Cain killing Abel, a possible Old Testament transfiguration of the Feast of Herod. Under the door's arch, two servants are taking the insignia of Herod, but they do not access the room. The composition thus underlines the spatial division and demonstrates the limited access

to the biblical sovereign, possibly mirroring a plausible practice at the Castilian court.

CONCLUSION

The chronology of Michel Sittow's life as revealed by the extant documentary evidence shows how, with the exception of a few periods, his career is well documented for his time in Castile and Tallinn as well as for his travel to Denmark in 1514. Regarding his residence in the Low Countries, the documents do not permit the identification of a precise period. If he came back there from Castile, on the first occasion it was probably not earlier than in 1503 together with Philip the Fair. Regarding another visit to Mechelen, this would have happened either after July 1513, prior to his journey to Denmark, or the following year on his return from the court of Christian II. On the basis of his paintings and documentation, it seems most likely that he visited Mechelen briefly between December 1515 and late 1516, before returning to his homeland in 1518.

The only testimony to the painter's artistic activity in Mechelen are the inventories of Margaret of Austria which were drawn up in 1516. Nevertheless, a comparison of the paintings and other documentary references to him suggest that his work as a court painter was above all focused on royal portraits, in addition to which he painted some devotional works that are listed in Margaret's collections.[66]

The analysis of the artist's journeys as an indication of courtly thresholds of privacy, identified on the basis of a set of heuristic zones, opens up a space to reflect on the other task he fulfilled as a court painter. His belonging to the courtly circle (generally the courtly "community" or even what we may see as the more limited "household") determined the knowledge he acquired regarding state affairs, which in turn enabled him to represent the interests of the court he served in, as opposed to that of another monarch. Contact with privileged communities, such as the courts of Isabella of Castile and the Habsburgs, gave the painter access to relationships with other sovereigns, which an ordinary craftsman would not have been able to achieve. Likewise,

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63　Silva Maroto, 'Juan de Flandes', 69.

64　Lurie, 'Birth and naming of St. John the Baptist', 118–135.

65　It is worthwhile bearing in mind Reindert Falkenburg's suggestion that the daily objects and furnishing in the Annunciation scene of Campin's *Merode Triptych* (1425–28) allude to spiritual tropes rather than domestic materiality; Reindert Falkenburg 'The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the Merode Triptych', *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: A Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. by Maryan W. Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 2–17. While also the objects in Michel Sittow's interiors may hold spiritual references, their exact appearance likely has some degree of realism.

66　Greta Koppel, 'The Riddle of Michel Sittow's Art', *Michel Sittow: Estonian Painter at the Courts of Renaissance Europe*, ed. by John Oliver Hand and Greta Koppel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 6–8.

the definition of his role in the documentary evidence as court painter or servant defines his standing in the royal household and the position, title, or obligations and privileges that accompanied his duties. Furthermore, the case of Michel Sittow demonstrates an Early Modern practice of self-identification with two courtly communities, which is a condition observed solely in the written sources, yet it is reinforced by the paintings he produced. The courtier undoubtedly acted as an emissary of Margaret of Austria on several occasions, and his activity was not restricted to the creation of artworks. It is highly probable that his secret duties were engaged at royal courts on other occasions as well, and this can be deduced from his status: as a servant of Isabella of Castile and Philip the Fair, as a portraitist of Christian II, who may also have represented Habsburg interests, and finally as a courtier of Charles V and Margaret of Austria, he had a range of guises to conceal the secret missions.

The religious elements in his portraits as well as his altarpieces refer to the soul as a domain which, as far as royalty is concerned, is private in the sense interior and individual, but at the same time wholly public, guaranteeing regal piety as a support of the well-being of the realm. This part of Michel Sittow's *oeuvre* reminds us that religious privacy at court is not in contrast to the ubiquitous public ceremonial, but rather a dimension of it and therefore requires a form of state portraiture that underlines rather than disturbs privacy. Finally, Michel Sittow's case hints at the ever-looming threat of privacy disruption through reporting or even espionage. The painter's access to his models gave him a good position to serve as an agent, using his eyes and ears in one court in the service of another. The painter might partake of the relative intimacy of that household while at the same time breaking privacy in an act of surveillance.

The indications are scarce, and we should be careful with any too rigid assumptions and conclusions. Scattered references in sources allow us to trace Michel Sittow's whereabouts as he moved through different European courts. This tracing does, however, also allow us to add dimensions to ongoing research into the elusive forms of courtly privacy. This case demonstrates the existence of some form of privacy which was marked by boundaries that could be traversed by some courtly agents, but

not by others. It shows that Michel Sittow was allowed to move across such boundaries to the extent that he might study his models for the sake of portraiture, but also that he may have taken advantage of this access for more secretive purposes.

SUMMARY

The painter Michel Sittow worked for at least three courts: Castile, Denmark, and the Habsburg's Low Countries. His presence and, to some extent, his status and activities are documented in scattered indications in financial sources and inventories. Examining those primary sources, this article pursues two lines of inquiry. Firstly, we trace Sittow's trajectory and the connection of his artworks to these three periods of his life. Secondly, we deploy the painter's case to ponder material and immaterial courtly boundaries that would have constituted different degrees and forms of privacy at court. Finally, this dual examination shows that he may indeed have posed a threat to the privacy of some of his royal employers.

CV

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