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Chimney Friezes in Late-Medieval Utrecht

by H. Defoer

During the medieval period, Utrecht as the only episcopal see was not just the ecclesiastical but also the cultural centre of the northern Netherlands. The arts flourished and artistic production was extensive and of high quality. Sculpture, both in stone and wood, is particularly prominent. In addition, there was a mass-production of the well-known pipeclay figurines. Though much has been lost in the course of time, a number of remarkable sculptured stone chimney friezes survive, albeit often in

fragmentary form.

Most of these Utrecht friezes were carved between c. 1475 and c. 1575, a period when almost every town house would have boasted at least one fireplace. In large rooms such fireplaces could be of monumental proportions. The chimney hood would have had a frieze supported by two consoles reaching down to the floor. Elsewhere in the country such friezes were generally plain, but in Utrecht they tended to have sculptural decoration. The most impressive example can be found in the House St. Hieronymus on the Maliesingel; the fireplace in this house originally came from the Zoudenbalch. House on Donkerstraat which had been built between 1467 and 1468 by one of the canons of the Dom, Evert Zoudenbalch. The Centraal Museum in Utrecht houses two reconstructed fireplaces, in addition to a large number of dismantled chimney friezes and fragments. The Catharijneconvent Museum in Utrecht also possesses some chimney friezes, and there is one other in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede and two complete and two fragmentary examples in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

As early as 1948, Bouvy distinguished a link between the remarkable fact that this particular type of chimney frieze with sculptural decoration seems to have been unique to Utrecht, and the building work at the Dom.4 The period between 1460 and 1520 witnessed a pronounced increase in building activity; the transepts of the church were completed, as was the nave and its side chapels. This building campaign largely coincided with David of Burgundy's episcopate (1456-96). Jacob van der Borch and Cornelis de Wael were, successively, in charge of the building work. The style in which the new parts of the church were constructed was flamboyant, with special emphasis on decorative and figurative sculpture, Unfortunately, most of the figurative sculpture of the Dom was lost, due to the outburst of iconoclasm in 1566, the subsequent purge, and the tornado which hit Utrecht in 1674 and which swept away the nave. Little sculpture now remains in situ, and most of that consists of consoles, spandrels and roof bosses.6 Some sculpture from the Dom is now in the Cathedraal Museum in Utrecht,7 and recently four roof bosses carved with the evangelist symbols in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London were identified as once belonging to the Dom. Building activity at the Dom must have stimulated the rise of sculptors' workshops, and clearly these cannot have been solely occupied by the work at the Dom. Indeed, the workshops seem to have supplied sculpture to a number of other churches and convents in and around Utrecht, Many remains can still be found in the Centraal Museum. Sculpture was not commissioned solely for church purposes, by chapters, church-wardens and monastic orders, by guilds and religious communities; there were also private secular

^{*}Translated from the Dutch by S. Oostenwyk

H. DEFOER 237

patrons, who in particular commissioned memorial tablets to be hung above their tombs as a reminder to relatives to pray for the salvation of their souls. Elsewhere in the country, such memorial tablets take the form of panel paintings, particularly triptychs, now often incorrectly referred to as altar-pieces. Some memorial tablets were made of brass although very few of this kind have survived. Utrecht possesses a large number of memorial tablets carved in stone, some preserved almost intact in spite of the outbreak of iconoclasm which preceded the reformation; among them those salvaged during the demolition of the Mariakerk in the last century and now housed in the Centraal Museum. Most of the memorial tablets discovered during restoration work in churches at Utrecht since the late nineteenth century tend to be rather damaged, like the one for Anthonis Pot in the Van Arkel chapel in the Dom; dating from the early sixteenth century, it served a dual function both as a memorial tablet and an altar-

piece.11

While these private commissions were still destined for use in churches, the many chimney friezes carved in Utrecht during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries served a distinctly mundane purpose though they often featured religious iconography; for example, one frieze in the Centraal Museum is decorated with three medallions showing Christ as the Man of Sorrows flanked by angels bearing the instruments of Christ's Passion (Pl. XXXIVA).12 More commonly, the central medallion contains an image of a saint while the two outer medallions show coats of arms either carried by fantastically dressed attendants or suspended from a hook by a belt. 13 The Virgin and Child is the most popular image (Pl. XXXIVB),14 often accompanied by St Anne (Pl. XXXIVc.15 Other saints found on chimney friezes are St Martin, the patron saint of Utrecht, 16 and St Antony Abbot who occurs on two surviving friezes: one fragment in the Centraal Museum is carved with a medallion containing a half-length image of the saint, 17 while a larger piece in the Catharijneconvent Museum features a shallow niche with a scene of the Temptation of St Antony. This niche would originally have been in the middle of the frieze; on the right of the fragment is a carved image of a wildwose and his wife holding a coat of arms, and there would presumably have been a matching pair on the left (Pl. XXXVA).18

The depictions of saints on chimney friezes do not merely have a simple devotional purpose; they served as exemplars, exhorting the viewer to a virtuous life. This was certainly true in the case of St Anne who was particularly popular amongst the rising middle classes; she was above all the patron saint of marriage, family and kinship, and her name would have been invoked against infertility and by women eager to bear children. It is therefore not surprising to find so many examples of St Anne above the fireplace where the housewife would prepare the daily meals and thus have been

continually reminded of St Anne's virtuous life as wife and mother. 19

The motive behind the representations of St Antony would also have been more than simply devotional. St Antony was born in Egypt in AD 215; he is generally regarded as the founder of Christian monasticism, though it is not so relevant here. In the west, the veneration of St Antony started to develop under the influence of the order of the Antonites founded in 1095 by a French nobleman whose son had been cured by the saint from a disease known as St Antony's fire. The Antonites concerned themselves above all with caring for the sick, and St Antony himself was regarded as a protector against the plague and other contagious diseases. This explains the frequent occurrence in churches and houses of images of St Antony and other saints such as St Sebastian and St Roch, who were believed to offer effective protection against the plague and other contagious diseases.

On the other hand, pictures of St Antony also served to remind the viewer of the saint's exemplary life of abstinence and steadfastness against the devices of the devil. He spent most of his long life as a hermit in the desert where he is said to have been frequently tempted by devils who harassed and tortured him in various ways. They often appeared to him in the likeness of an attractive woman but Antony was not to be deceived and he continued to live piously and ascetically. There are countless representations of the Temptation of St Antony, which became a particularly popular subject in the later Middle Ages.20 The familiar image of St Antony on chimney friezes would no doubt have served a dual purpose, both as a protection from contagious diseases and as a warning against lust and fornication. This second aspect is especially prominent in the Catharijneconvent fragment which, in addition to the scene of the saint's Temptation, shows a wildman and his wife holding a tankard. The wildwose couple serve as a contrast to the hermit: to the medieval imagination the figures would have appeared as primitive wild creatures of unbridled lust living an almost animal-like existence. 21 Like St Anne, St Antony was an example to the emancipated middle classes who valued modesty and chastity greatly, as virtues conducive to stability and security. Order and tranquillity were beneficial to trade and industry, and clearly defined family ties were important when it came to negotiating a marriage or settling an inheritance.

The sixteenth century saw the gradual disappearance of the type of chimney frieze showing an image of a saint flanked by coats of arms, often carried by attendants. Instead one finds renaissance ornaments with satyrs and garlands inspired by classical art. New exemplars were chosen in accordance with the spirit of the times; images of the Judgement of Solomon and the chaste Susanna were preferred to the previously popular saints who began to occur less and less frequently. However, two examples of chimney friezes featuring images of saints are known to have come from the Catharijneconvent in Utrecht, which was at one time a convent of the Order of the Knights of St John before the Reformation: one shows the severed head of St John the Baptist on a salver amidst cartouches in the renaissance style, while the other is carved with images of St John the Baptist and St Catherine, the patron saints of the Order.

Like all other medieval sculpture in Utrecht, the chimney friezes were never signed and rarely dated. Only by stylistic analysis is it occasionally possible to date a piece or link it to work by a known master. Obviously, stone carving offers the best comparison but it is also useful to include wood sculpture in the analysis as sculptors commissioned by the Utrecht Guild of Saddlers are known to have worked both in stone and wood.²⁵

However, it is not easy to obtain a clear insight into the range of sculpture produced in Utrecht in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; evidence is simply too fragmentary. The names of many sculptors are known to us through archival research, but the iconoclastic destruction and the stripping of the altars following the reformation make it very hard to link these names to any of the surviving pieces. Attempts have been made to recover the names of artists responsible for sculpture known to have come from the Dom or still in situ there, but these are not always successful. Nor has it been possible to compile a clear and coherent book of work for any sculptor known by name, with the exception of Adriaen van Wesel (c. 1420–90). The core of this artist's oeuvre consisted of the statues originating from or stylistically connected with the figures from the altarpiece of the Brotherhood of Our Lady at Bois-le-Duc, which was completed by Van Wesel in 1477. Part of the sculpture from this altar has survived and is now for the most part in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Pl. XXXVB). Van Wesel's figures are recognizable on account of their typically tranquil modest expressions; his saints are gentle rather than harshly ascetic. The lower eyelids are often quite

H. DEFOER 239

pronounced and their straight, wavy or curly hair often resembles a wig. Van Wesel clearly preferred complicated drapery with shallow folds falling across each other in flat bundles; the folds have soft curves and edges, which rather suggests that the figures are wearing garments made of wool. Besides wood carvings, there are also a number of stone statues which can stylistically be associated with Van Wesel's work although as a group these are less coherent in style and quality. It is often unclear whether these works in stone were actually produced by his own workshop or merely influenced by his style.

We do not know the name of the second sculptor in Utrecht of whose ocuvre we now have a more or less complete picture; he is simply referred to as the Master of the Utrechtse Stenen Vrouwenkop, after the upper part of a figure of the Virgin which originally formed part of a large Annunciation group (Pl. XXXVc.28 The compilation of this Master's ocuvre, for which J. Leeuwenberg has been largely responsible, evolved from the stone bust, now in the Catharijneconvent Museum.29 The Master, who was active in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, appears to have inherited Adriaen van Wesel's workshop. He was clearly open to renaissance influences as can be observed in his female figures with their egg-shaped heads, which are rather wide and somewhat bulging at the top and which taper downwards to a pronounced chin. The eyes are pinched and the upper cyclids often arched. The figures regularly displayed quite intricate hairstyles with fashionable head-gear and elaborately enriched clothes. The Master's workshop must have been accomplished and rather specialized in order to produce sculptures of such distinct quality.

A number of chimney friezes can actually be ascribed to Adriaen van Wesel's workshop and to that of the Master of the Utrechtse Stenen Vrouwenkop. The former was probably responsible for the chimney frieze showing the Man of Sorrows with two angels in the Centraal Museum (Pl. XXXIVA) and the fragment with the Temptation of St Antony in the Catharijneconvent Museum (Pl. XXXVA). Both the shallow folds with their soft curves and the faces of the angels and the wildwose's wife with their small almond-shaped eyes are very reminiscent of Van Wesel's other known work; the hair of the wildwose, too, is very similar to that of some of the male figures from the Bois-le-Duc altar.

The Master of the Utrechtse Stenen Vrouwenkop is likely to have been responsible for a chimney frieze from a house that was subsequently incorporated into the city hall. The frieze, which is now in the Centraal Museum (Pl. XXXIVB), shows a central medallion of the Virgin and Child flanked by two attendants in elaborate dress carrying the coats of arms of the Van Asch and Van Gruenenborch families on the left and those of the Van Vianen and Gerstman families on the right. The half-length figure of the Virgin is virtually identical to that on a memorial tablet from the Mariakerk which has been ascribed to the same Master. However, the workmanship on the chimney frieze is much more delicate and detailed, which serves to illustrate the differences in quality within the workshop of this most prolific sculptor.

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- Catalogus van het Historisch Museum der Stad (Utrecht 1928), nos 348, 624, 630, 633, 634, 635, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 657, 658, 1241, 1261, 1384, 1535, 3221, 3248. Not included in this catalogue are nos 11177 (frieze with three medallions, the middle

one showing St Martin dividing his cloak and the other two featuring two angels with Philip of Burgundy's coat of arms) and 14748 (frieze showing St Anne with the Virgin and Child).

5. For the Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, see D. P. R. A. Bouvy, Beeldbouwkunst Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum Utrecht (The Hague/Leiden 1962), nos 258 and 263. Also inv. no. BMH bs. 1114, an unpublished fragment featuring a medallion of the Virgin Mary. For the frieze in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede, see Bouvy (1948), 93. For the friezes in Amsterdam, see J. Leeuwenberg and W. Halsema-Kubes, Beeldbouwkunst in the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam/The Hague 1973), nos 32, 33, 34, 35.

4. Bouvy (1948), 78.

E. J. Haslinghuis and C. J. A. C. Pecters, De Dom van Utrecht (The Hagne 1965), 341–44. See W. H. Vroom in this volume for the financing of the construction of the Dom in the late Middle Ages. Also W. H. Vroom, De financiering van de kathedraalbouw in de middeleeuwen; in het bijzonder van de Dom van Utrecht, Maarssen (1981), 359–60, diagram 2 and 3.

6. Bouvy (1948), fols 94-95, 124, 140-44, 148. Haslinghuis and Peeters 1965, profiles 158-67, 189-91,

354-60.

Catalogus 1928, 1265, 1271, 1273, 1496, 1497.

 P. Williamson, 'Roof bosses from Utrecht and Jan van Schayk, Beeldensmider', Oud Holland CV (1991), 140–51

9. A fine example from c. 1500 is the memorial tablet of Henrick van Elverick (d. 1456) and his wife Yda Greve (d. 1446) in the Andreaskerk in Zevenaar. See E. H. Ter Kuile, De Nederlandse monumenten van geschiedenis en kunst, vol. III, De Provincie Gelderland, 2de stuk, het Kwartier van Zutpen (The Hague 1958), 186-87. The Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent possesses a memorial tablet for Joost van Amstel van Mijnden (d. 1553) and his posthumously born son. See J. Belonje and F. A. Greenhill, 'Some Brasses in Germany and the Low Countries (III)', Monumental Brass Society Transactions vn (1960), 379-82. Also F. H. C. Weytens, 'De zwerftocht van een koperen plaat', Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht (1965), 57-63 and Catharimebrief II (1983), 1-4.

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The relief has been ascribed to the Master of the Utrecht Stone Female Head; see Bouvy (1948), 142–43;
 J. Leeuwenberg, Een nieuw facet aan de Utrechtse beeldhouwkunst Γ, Ond Holland, LXX (1955), 82–95;

Haslinghuis and Peeters (1965), 354-58.

 Catalogue (1928), no. 3248; Bouvy (1948), 93–94; Middeleeuwse kunst der Noordelijke Nederlanden, exhibition catalogue, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Amsterdam (1958), no. 308; W. Halsema-Kubes, G. Lemmens, G. de Werd, Adriaen van Wesel, een Utrechts beeldbouwer uit de late middeleleeuwen, exhibition catalogue, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (The Hague 1980), no. 50.

 Catalogus (1928), nos 633, 634, 639, 641, 644, 647, 648, 652, 657; D. P. R. A. Bouvy, Beeldhouwkunst Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum Utrecht (The Hague/Leiden 1962), no. 258; Leeuwenberg and Halsema

(1973), nos 32, 33, 34

14. Catalogus (1928), nos 630, 633, 634, 655, 638, 641, 644; Bouvy (1962), 258; Lecuwenberg and Halsema (1973), nos 32, 33, 35. The Catharijneconvent has two stone tondi of the Virgin, which were once believed to be fragments of chimney friezes (inv. nos ABM bs.603a and 603b; Bouvy (1962) nos 244-45). It is much more likely, however, that these are actually roof bosses, as Williamson already showed for inv. no. ABM bs.603b; see Williamson (1991), esp. 114.

15. The Centraal Museum possesses three examples of friezes showing St Anne with the Virgin and Child; besides inv. nos 647, 657 listed in Catalogus (1928), there is a third one which has not been listed, viz. inv. no. 14748. The Rijksmuseum Her Catharijneconvent also has a fragment with the figure of St Anne.

with the Virgin and Child; see Bouvy (1962), no. 263.

 Two examples with St Martin can be found in the Centraal Museum; see Catalogus (1928), no. 642, and inv. no. 11177 which was not included in the catalogue.

 Catalogus (1928), no. 3221; H. L. M. Defoer, 'Een laat-middeleeuws schoorsteenfries uit Utrecht met de bekoring van Antonius', Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 1994, vol. 45, Zwolle (1994), 306.

- t8. Defoer, ibid., passim. This fragment was found broken in two by two city dustmen in 1991; it had been thrown into a rubbish container on the Oudegracht in Utrecht as building waste during the conversion of the medieval cellar of the former Leeuwenberg House (Oudegracht 147), which was demolished in the nineteenth century. Fortunately, the finders realized the potential importance of these two pieces and took them to the Archeologisch and Bouwhistorisch Centrum of the city of Utrecht, which in its turn contacted the Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent where the relief was restored and included in the collection.
- T. Brandenbarg, 'St. Anna en haar familie. De Annaverering in verband met opvattingen over huwelijk en gezin in de vroeg-moderne tijd', Tussen beks en heilige, exhibition catalogue, Commanderie van St Jan

Nijmegen (1985), 101-27; T. Brandenbarg, 'Heilig familieleven in de late middeleeuwen', Helse en hemelse vrouwen, exhibition catalogue, Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent (Utrecht 1988), 52-64; T. Brandenbarg, Heilig familieleven, Nijmegen (1990), 140-44; T. Brandenbarg, Heilige Anna, grote moeder, exhibition catalogue, Museum voor Religieuze Kunst Uden, Nijmegen (1992), 32.

20. For the iconography of St Antony [the Great], see a.o. Louis Réau, Iconographie de l'art chrétien, III, Paris (1958), 101-15; also Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, v, W. Braunfels ed. (Rome/Freiburg/Basle/Vienna 1973), 205-17. For the Temptation of St Antony and its moralistic significance in the late Middle Ages, see L. Dressen-Coenders, 'De heks als duivelsboel. Over het ontstaan van de angst voor heksen en de bescherming tegen beheksing', Tussen heks en heilige, 59-82; B. J. C. Ettes, 'De vleescelike becoringhe van Antonius de kluizenaar', Helse en hemelse vrouwen, 21-39.

 R. Bernheimer, Wildman in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology (Cambridge, Mass. 1952), 47–48; J. P. Filedt Kok et al., 's Levens felbeid: de Meester van het Amsterdamse Kabinet of de Hausbuch-meester, exhibition catalogue (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Maarssen (1985), 144–45.

22. Catalogus (1928), nos 624, 640, 643, 646.

23. Ibid. nos 348, 630, 1261, 1384.

24. The fragment with St John the Baptist's head on a salver originally came from the former house of the last 'balijer' [bailiff], Hendrick Barck (1561-1602) and is now in the Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent. The second frieze, now in the Centraal Museum, was found in a house on the Hamburgerstraat but must originally have come from the nearby Catharijneconvent. See Paul Dirkse, 'Nieuw beeldmateriaal over Hendrick Barck, Balijer van het Utrechtse Catharijneconvent', Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht (1986), 78-921 Defoer, 308-9.

25. This sometimes caused conflicts between the saddlers' and the stone-masons' guilds; see 'De gilden van Utrecht tot 1328. Verzameling van Rechtsbronnen uitgegeven door Mrs J.C. Overvoorde en J.G.Ch. Joosting I', Werken der vereeniging tot uitgave der bronnen van het oude vaderlandsche recht, gevestigd te Utrecht, first series, XIX (The Hague, 1897), 312-14. For the regulations within the saddlers' guild in the sixteenth century, see 'Schildersvereeningingen te Utrecht. Bescheiden uit het Gemeentearchief' in De

Utrechtse archieven II, ed. S. Muller Fz (Utrecht 1880), 44-49.

26. For example, the five stone figures from the Dom, which are now in the Centraal Museum, have often been attributed to Jan Nude, Bude, Uude or Vude who, according to documents in the Dom archives, supplied five statues for the tabernacle (not the rood-loft) in 1450; see Haslinghuis and Peeters (1965), 360–62 and Halsema et al., 22. However, this attribution has been challenged, quite rightly in my opinion, J. van Cauteren, Utrecht een benel op aarde, no. 72. Also A. de Groot, 'Beelden in de Dom van Utrecht in dezestiende eeuw', Nederlands Kunsthistorische Jaarboek, 1994, vol. 45, Zwolle (1994), 48–51. Convincing is P. Williamson's attribution (1991) to Jan van Schayck of eight roof bosses featuring four church-fathers and the four evangelist symbols, of which the former are now in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht and the latter in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Also plausible is P. van Vlijmen's attribution of the Holy Sepulchre in the Dom and the Holy Sepulchre in the Petruskerk in Woerden to Gherit Splintersz.; see P. van Vlijmen, De graflegging te Woerden, Woerden (1982), typescript p. 45.

27. The name of the artist responsible for the altar from Bois-le-Duc was not known initially until Swillens revealed his identity in 1948. Previously, the then anonymous sculptor had been generally referred to as the Master of the Musical Angels. See W. Vogelsang, 'Noord-Nederlandsche beeldhouwwerken', Oudheidkundig Jaarboek, v (1925), 185–200; Bouvy (1948), 72–75; J. Leeuwenberg, 'Het werk van de Meester der Musicerende Engelen en het vraagstuk van Jacob van der Borch opmieuw beschouwd', Oud Holland, LXIII (1948), 164–79; P. T. A. Swillens, 'De Utrechtse beeldhouwer Adriaen van Wesel, ca 1420–(na 1489)', Oud Holland 1XIII (1948), 149–63; P. T. A. Swillens, 'De Utrechtse beeldhouwer Adriaen van Wesel. Enige aanvullende mededelingen', Oud Holland, LXVI (1951), 218–33; Halsema et al.; In Buscoducis, exhibition catalogue, Noordbrabants Museum's-Hertogenbosch (Maarssen 1990), 29 and

nos 134-38.

18. Inv. no. ABM bs. 604; Bouvy (1961), no. 168.

29. For the main literature on the ocuvre of this sculptor see Bouvy (1948), 143–45; Leeuwenberg (1955), 82–95; J. Leeuwenberg, 'Een nieuw facet aan de Utrechtse beeldhouwkunst II', Oud Holland, LXXII (1957), 56–58; Middeleeuwse Kunst der Noordelijke Nederlanden 210–15; J. Leeuwenberg, 'Een nieuw facet aan de Utrechtse beeldhouwkunst III', Oud Holland LXXIV (1959), 79–102; J. Leeuwenberg, 'Een nieuw facet aan de Utrechtse beeldhouwkunst IV', Oud Holland LXXV (1960), 195–204; J. Leeuwenberg, 'Een nieuw facet aan de Utrechtse beeldhouwkunst V', Oud Holland, LXXVII (1962), 79–99; Bouvy (1962) nos 109, 257, 267, 268.

Catalogus 1928, no. 644; Bouvy (1948), 145; Lecuwenberg (1957), 58.

31. Catalogus 1928, no. 1389; Bouvy (1948), 145; Lecuwenberg (1955), 91-92; Van Vlierden, no. 86.



XXXIVA. Chimney frieze with Christ as Man of Sorrows, Utrecht, Centraal Museum

Centraal Museum



XXXIVs. Chimney frieze with Virgin with Child, Utrecht, Centraal Museum

Centraal Museum



XXXIVc. Chimney frieze with Virgin with Child and St Anne, Utrecht, Centraal Museum

Centraal Museum



XXXVa. Chimney frieze with the temptation of St Antony, Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent

Catharijneconvent



XXXVs. Adriaen van Wesel, Altar of the Brotherhood of our Lady at Bois-le-Duc, detail, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Rijksmuseum



XXXVc. Master of the Utrechse Stenen Vrouwenkop, Head of the Virgin, Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent Catharijneconvent