Grotesque Heads, Beardies, and Dog Heads

North Holland book decoration from Third Order monasteries affiliated with the Chapter of Utrecht (c.1430-c.1480)

Margriet Hülsmann
Free University Amsterdam, December 17, 2009

This investigation focuses on stylistic patterns in decorative penwork found in a group of 55 manuscripts from the North Holland region (the northwestern part of the Northern Netherlands, the actual province of North Holland). These manuscripts were most likely produced by tertiaries of male communities affiliated with the Chapter of Utrecht, a congregation of religious houses following the Third Rule of St Francis. The decorative style investigated is characterized by roundels with grotesque profile heads and termed *tronie*-penwork in Dutch. By studying this specific style, including the precursory and later variants, and by tracing its spread over the region I came to the conclusion that the book production and book decoration originated mainly in the above mentioned male communities, especially in St Paul in Amsterdam and St Anthonius Boomgaard in Haarlem around 1440-1470. The administrative contacts most likely also led to exchanges in the field of book production.

The 55 manuscripts investigated could only be grouped together on the basis of a large-scale inventory of Northern Netherlandish decorated manuscripts (compiled by the Byvanck Foundation), from which I selected 370 items which, on the basis of their decoration, originated in the region of North Holland. Within my investigation I combined a qualitative analysis of the 55 manuscripts and additional material with a quantitative analysis of some specific features found in a corpus of about 200 Books of Hours. By following up the historical context of the Chapter of Utrecht, conclusions regarding the localization of the book production and book decoration could be drawn.

The results of this investigation offer a clearer insight into how book production functioned in this circle of the Third Order of St Francis. For instance, as far as the evidence is available, the scribes were male, but quite a few of these books ended up in the libraries of female communities of the Third Order. Priests who lived as confessors in female communities, or their assistants, must also have played a role in the spread of the style, as can be seen from evidence found in two manuscripts written by Petrus Zwaninc in the Old Convent in Weesp. Therefore, by combining in this interdisciplinary study stylistic and codicological analyses with the historical context, a more concrete picture of the process of book production in this religious circle emerged.
Chapter 1 Introduction

The starting point for my investigation was the codicological description of a Dutch version of the *Legenda aurea*, kept at the Royal Library in The Hague (Ms. 73 D 9). This manuscript shows splendid decorative *trontie*-penwork. From the manuscript’s colophon we learn that the book was written by brother Peter, priest at the monastery of St Paul in Amsterdam – a religious house of brothers tertiaries following the Third Rule of St Francis –, and that the work was finished on 20 August 1450. Unfortunately, the book gives no information about the place of origin of the penwork. It does not necessarily follow that a manuscript was copied and illuminated at the same site and at the same time. The decorative penwork might have been executed at the monastery of St Paul as well, but there is no evidence which enables us to take this for granted. More is the pity that the other manuscripts containing similar penwork do not offer any further clues. Because of this lack of primary evidence, I was forced to search for other information that might provide an answer to the question of localizing this specific style of pen-flourishing.

I took as a premise that the question of localizing the decorative penwork could possibly be clarified if one gains an insight into the book production process and the relationship between scribe and illuminator. Realizing that the investigation needed to begin with a quantitative study of textual elements, I decided to single out codicological features which might indicate production in a particular workshop where the text had been copied. It is, after all, the copied text that provides – in some cases – a clue for the localization of the manuscripts.

The quantitative research focused on the relatively large group of Books of Hours in Dutch, containing texts which are not identical but comparable. Some two hundred items from all over the Northern Netherlands were analysed, looking for characteristic codicological features and their distinctive patterns which could point to particular scribal workshops. The first feature investigated concerned the full ‘Utrecht’ calendar and its distinctive patterns in the listing of saints’ names. The second feature I identified consisted of the different patterns in the positioning of the major initials which mark the eight separate Hours (Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline) in the Hours of the Eternal Wisdom and the Long Hours of the Cross. In these two Hours the major initial occurs either at the introductory versicle or at the second (= psalm) verse. Manuscripts could be grouped together according to different patterns of positioning the initials.

I expanded my investigation by adding to these textual features an analysis of some codicological features of the manuscripts involved, such as ruling by rake, an identifiable Haarlem scribe active between 1455 and 1465, the page layout in Books of Hours, and the book binding.

Analysing these aspects step by step, I was able to arrive at various groupings of the above mentioned 55 manuscripts and additional material.
Chapter 2  The *Legenda aurea* of 1450. Its decorative penwork and what it tells us about its first user

The *Legenda aurea* of 1450 is a Southern-Netherlandish translation of the collection of saints’ lives that follows the liturgical year, compiled by the Dominican friar Jacobus de Voragine in Northern Italy between 1262 and 1272. The manuscript contains only the second part of the whole text, from the Birth of John the Baptist (24 June) to the end of November, the end of the liturgical year. The lives of the saints Lebuin, Willibrord, Gregory, and Frederick, who were especially venerated in the diocese of Utrecht, complete the text. A second scribe added the life of St Jeroen, a saint venerated in the coastal region of Holland.

The text is written in double columns, with two- to eight-line initials used to introduce the various saints’ lives. Some pages show abundantly decorated and finished borders with gold in addition to penwork in red, violet, and blue, washed with green and yellow, while others are sparingly decorated with only ornamented vertical lines at the left of the column, curving to the left, and showing simple decorative motifs at the upper and lower ends. These differences in elaboration correspond with the heights of the major and minor initials and the importance of the various lives. Of the 103 lives recounted, 44 contain a preliminary text that explains the meaning of the saint’s name. In these instances each life shows two initials, one introducing the preliminary text and the other the saint’s life.

Apart from the opening leaf, the Birth of John the Baptist, the most copiously decorated lives are those of St Margaret and St Francis. At the openings of these two texts we see two-colour initials in blue and red or blue and gold together with a J-border in alternating red, blue and gold, which emphasizes each text opening on the left of the column of text (gold only illuminates the life of St Margaret). Other saints’ lives are decorated less copiously and do not show a J-border. The emphasis placed on the lives of St Margaret and St Francis suggests their significance for the first owner or user of the book, who would have been a member of a convent dedicated to St Margaret and affiliated with the Chapter of Utrecht. An entry in the calendar, which was used as an index to the saints’ lives, notes on 25 November the death of ‘my brother Grebber Dircz’ in 1466. A man of this name was an alderman in Amsterdam at various times in the period. In 1461 the mother superior of the convent of St Margaret in Amsterdam was a Machtelt Dirxdr; she may have been his sister, since, as their names indicate, both had a father named Dirx. The note makes it likely that the book, written at St Paul’s, was intended for use in the community of St Margaret in Amsterdam, and it may have been brought there in the dowry of Machtelt Dirxdr. The historian I.H. van Eeghen suggested that Peter Dircxz, who was the father superior (minister) of St Paul’s in 1474, might be the same person as the scribe ‘brother Peter’, and, if so, he wrote the book for his sister.

A detailed description of the pen-flourishing makes us familiar with the various characteristic features of this ornamental style. Apart from the grotesque profile heads in roundels, occurring all over the penwork, profile beardies and dog heads are striking motifs
at the upper and lower ends of the decoration. Other features are the curved endings of lines stitched together with other short curved lines, the horizontal groups of parallel lines marking the initials, and the small green leaves that surround the penwork. A closer look revealed that the decorative penwork had been supplied by two illuminators: hand A and hand B, hand A (the master?) being more skilful than hand B (an apprentice?).

The tronie-penwork of the Legenda aurea served as a starting point for further stylistic analysis, which resulted in various penwork groups.

Chapter 3 Other manuscripts containing tronie-penwork: the main group and the second, closely related group

The penwork concentrated around the Legenda aurea was subdivided into two groups: (1) the main group, comprising penwork which is almost identical to the decoration in the Legenda aurea; and (2) the second group, comprising closely related penwork, or almost identical penwork of a lower hierarchical level, marking two-line initials and typified by a few characteristics only. Penwork of the main group occurs in fifteen manuscripts, including the penwork by hand A in the Legenda aurea; penwork of the second group occurs in nineteen manuscripts, including the penwork by hand B in the Legenda aurea.

Primary and circumstancial evidence emerging from these manuscripts demonstrate that the books of both groups were produced between 1445 and 1460. Three books, out of 33 in total, were copied by a male scribe. Two ownership inscriptions and the prominent place of St Martin – first of the confessors in the litany – and St Mary Magdalen – first of the virgins and widows – in quite a few manuscripts indicate that these books were intended for use in religious houses of the Third Order of St Francis. St Nicholas, the patron saint of the city of Amsterdam, appears prominent in the litany of saints in three Books of Hours, or has a special prayer in two other Books of Hours, both features pointing to Amsterdam. All in all, most of the manuscripts appear to have been intended for use in a religious house in Amsterdam or for a private owner in that city. On the other hand, some ownership inscriptions or other circumstancial evidence indicate where the books were used: in the cities of Haarlem, Utrecht, or Weesp, or in the West-Frisian region.
Chapter 4  Precursory styles. The Chapter of Utrecht

Six manuscripts contain what I identified as precursory penwork, datable to the period 1430-1445. The manuscripts confirm the conclusion that most of the books were intended for use in religious houses following the Third Rule of St Francis. These books probably originated in St Paul’s. One manuscript in Latin contains a ritual with the rites for taking the habit in houses of the Third Order. A second manuscript, a psalter in Dutch, was written by a man. Three other manuscripts in Dutch came into the libraries of sisters tertiarys in Amsterdam, namely St Barbara, St Caecilia, and St Lucia. One last manuscript, with the Latin text De consolatione theologiae, was copied by Johannes Doevonis de Scoerl in St Paul’s in Amsterdam in 1434 and became part of its library. This is the second book we know of that was copied in St Paul’s and therefore it appeared important to investigate the historical background of this monastery.

St Paul in Amsterdam occupied a prominent position in the Chapter of Utrecht. Most of the general chapter meetings took place in this house, during which events the Minister General, the representatives of the affiliated male houses and the father confessors of the affiliated female houses met. At least two general chapter meetings took place in St Anthonius Boomgaard in Haarlem, a house of brothers tertiaries, to be discussed below.

Chapter 5  Less closely related decorative penwork: the Haarlem group.

St Anthonius Boomgaard (St Anthony’s Orchard)

A Book of Hours in Dutch, kept in the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence (Rhode Island), contains pen-flourishing in four different styles. One of these styles occurs on most of the opening pages of the various text sections and is characterized as a so-called combination style, combining a variant of ‘thorn-and-stitch’ penwork, drawn in the left margin below the initial, with penwork in the style of the Missal of the Haarlem Canons Regular, drawn from the initial upwards, or in the upper margin to the right. Its structure shows the influence of tronic-penwork, a phenomenon which led to the conclusion that this influence resulted from the interactions between St Paul’s in Amsterdam and St Anthonius Boomgaard in Haarlem.

This Haarlem group comprises eleven manuscripts of which seven show a combination style. Examples of such combination styles are quite often found together with circumstantial evidence pointing to Haarlem as the place of origin. Putting all the evidence together, it seems very likely that these combination styles originated in St Anthonius Boomgaard, as probably did the written texts.
Summary

Chapter 6  The full Utrecht Calendar
Within the framework of the quantitative analysis I studied the complete listing of saints’ names in the Utrecht Calendar. In order to localize books, studies of calendars focus traditionally on the liturgical feasts of a specific diocese or monastic order. In fifteenth-century Dutch Books of Hours a great variety of full calendars are found – which include a complete listing of feasts and saints’ names. A liturgical calendar often has many blank lines, whereas the full calendar is completely filled, often arbitrarily.

A comparative study of some two hundred manuscripts that have a full calendar written for use in the diocese of Utrecht revealed a diversity in the choice of feasts that filled out the blank lines. Some of the variations, characterised by a specific combination of names, seem to have been copied locally. This implies that in various instances, particular variants in a manuscript with a full calendar may point to its originating in a specific town, and even in a particular workshop. Moreover, striking errors are found: for example the misreading ‘Restoris’ instead of ‘Nestoris’ on 27 February (only found in Books of Hours with Haarlem decoration); or the name of St Panthaleon entered on 30 July, correcting the error of skipping the name on 28 July (found in Books of Hours from the Groningen region).

By correlating some of the local calendar variants with the book decoration and other circumstantial evidence of the manuscripts investigated we gain a clearer insight into the relationship between scribe and illuminator which provides further evidence that the tronie-penwork in the Legenda aurea most likely originated in St Paul’s in Amsterdam.

An interesting finding were the seventeen saints highlighted in red, especially venerated in the West-Frisian region, with Hoorn as its most important city.

Chapter 7  The spread of the tronie-penwork style to Hoorn, Weesp and Utrecht
In 1457 brothers from St Paul’s in Amsterdam founded a new monastery for brothers tertaries in Hoorn, St Pietersdal (Vallis Sancti Petri). One of the Books of Hours with tronie-penwork from the main group (Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, StCC h1) was written for use in the West-Frisian region on the basis of the seventeen saints in red in the calendar, especially venerated in this region. The listing of saints and the highlighting of the seventeen ‘West-Frisian’ saints correspond with the calendars in six other Books of Hours, forming part of my Hoorn group of decorated manuscripts. Circumstantial evidence in some of these books points to Hoorn as the place of destination. Although in 1462 St Pietersdal went over to the Order of the Crutched Friars, following the more severe Rule of St Augustine, it seems likely that several related pen-flourishing variants, datable to the period c 1465-c.1480, originated in this monastery.

Another clue in localizing related pen-flourishing is found in two manuscripts written by Petrus Zwaninc, priest and socius of the father confessor in the Old Convent (Oude Convent) in Weesp, dedicated to St John the Evangelist, a house of sisters tertaries.
Two manuscripts copied by Petrus Zwaninc show some simple pen-flourishing related to *trontie*-penwork. The memorial book of this convent (The Hague, Royal Library, Ms. 73 G 1) tells us that the convent was governed by tertiaries who lived in St Paul’s in Amsterdam. It seems likely that Petrus Zwaninc was trained in Amsterdam and sent out to Weesp, some time after his ordination.

Although we do not have any evidence, by analogy it is also likely that priests from Amsterdam decorated books in the city of Utrecht. Some manuscripts with related pen-flourishing also show Utrecht influences. There were several convents of sisters tertiaries in the city of Utrecht, and without doubt priests were present to carry out their tasks, such as hear confession. Together with other circumstantial evidence, four manuscripts show this mixture of pen-flourishing styles, on the basis of which they can be localized in Utrecht. These form the Utrecht group.

Chapter 8  Technical aspects of the codex

Chapter 8.1  Ruling by rake

One of the additional codicological features studied was ‘ruling by rake’. In my study of the *Legenda aurea* mentioned above I noted that in the right margin of most rectos seven pricked holes, or prickings, could be found equidistant from each other, top to bottom. I concluded that these prickings must have been used as a guide for the ruler when the forty-three horizontal lines for the text were drawn. The prickings are found by lines 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, and 43, each corresponding to the ruling of a group of six lines. The fact that the six lines were ruled at the same time was proved when I noted places where the horizontal ruling extended across the vertical bounding lines on the right. This showed that whoever prepared the parchment for writing used a special instrument with six pens or teeth, a *rostrum* or ‘rake’, which left a distance of about one line between the lower line in the group and the corresponding pricking, probably owing to the width of the instrument. If so, this explains why the first pricking is found by line 7. The last line on the page was ruled separately as a continuous line through the last pricking (a so called ‘through line’).

Two other manuscripts with rake ruling are a lay breviary (The Hague, Royal Library, Ms. 74 G 6) and a psalter (Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit, Univ. Libr., Ms. xv.05507.-), both in Dutch. In both books, a rake of eleven teeth was used, twice per page, so that twenty-two lines were drawn in all. A close study of the distance between the lines, using a loupe (magnifying 10x and with a built-in 0.1 mm scale division) revealed that the ruling shows the same irregularity in both manuscripts: the greatest distance between two lines is about 5.2 mm and the least 4.3 mm. Clearly, the same rake was used to rule both books.
Summary

Both books are decorated alike, by the same style of pen-flourishing found in the *Legenda aurea* mentioned above. It would seem, then, that the production of the two books followed the same sequence, from preparing the parchment for writing, to supplying the ornament; the identical script of both books makes it likely they were written and decorated in a continuous process in the same workshop.

Chapter 8.2 An identifiable Haarlem scribe active c.1455-c.1465

A second codicological feature provided supplementary information for the localization of a group of manuscripts. Eight closely related Books of Hours in Dutch show striking similarities between both the general aspect of the script and the idiosyncratic features of the individual handwriting. The eight books are all written in a compressed Gothic *textualis* with a slight forward slant. Common peculiarities suggest that the books were written by one and the same scribe. He probably worked in Haarlem around 1455-1465. The time and place can be deduced from the pen-flourished and painted border decorations, all of which demonstrate decorative styles of supposed Haarlem origin, datable to that period.

One of these manuscripts is a Book of Hours (kept in the John Hay Library, Providence), which on the basis of its pen-flourishing has already been discussed above as part of the Haarlem group (see Ch. 5). This book establishes a direct link between the Haarlem group and these eight manuscripts. Most of these manuscripts contain *fountain* penwork, or a later variant, and the Providence manuscript has one page decorated in this style.

The calendars in these books provide additional fascinating evidence. One of the irregularities found in the spelling of names in six calendars is a writing error on 26 February. Instead of ‘Nestoris’ the entry reads ‘Restoris’ or ‘Restores’. Another peculiarity is the scribal practice of beginning the entries with a minuscule, instead of a majuscule, a practice found in books of Haarlem origin produced in the second and third quarters of the fifteenth century. This distinctive scribal practice may point to a specific Haarlem workshop with an established scribal tradition (St Anthonius Boomgaard?; see Ch. 5).

Chapter 8.3 Page layout in Books of Hours

Another feature which establishes further relationships among a number of Books of Hours in Dutch, is the page layout and in particular the choice of initial to mark the major text divisions.

The Hours of the Virgin, the main text of a Book of Hours, usually shows a major initial to mark Matins, and a smaller but still relatively large initial at the beginning of the seven subsequent devotions, said at its specific hour of the day: Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The same structure characterizes the Hours of the Eternal Wisdom. However, a closer look reveals that each Hour opens with an additional introductory versicle ‘Salicheit der sielen’, preceding the opening psalm verse taken from the
Hours of the Virgin. A parallel is found in the Long Hours of the Holy Cross, where every Hour opens with the line ‘Wi aenbeden di criste’, or ‘Here ihesu criste wi aenbeden di’.

These introductory versicles created new possibilities for the page layout because the beginning of each major text section could be moved from the traditional introductory psalm verse to the additional introductory versicle.

In many instances the scribe left a blank space for the major initial at the beginning of the introductory versicle, and for the minor initial at the beginning of the following psalm verse. In other cases the traditional model of the Hours of the Virgin is still so dominant, that the scribe left a blank space for the major initial at the beginning of the psalm verse, and a smaller blank space for the minor initial at the beginning of the introductory versicle.

Three Books of Hours, probably written by the same Haarlem scribe (see Ch. 8.2), show a remarkable pattern in the Long Hours of the Holy Cross, the ‘H’ (‘Here ihesu criste’) and the ‘W’ (‘Wi aenbeden di’) alternating systematically: ‘H’ at the beginning of Matins, ‘W’ at the start of Lauds, ‘H’ at Prime, ‘W’ at Terce, et cetera. The decoration of these manuscripts varies, which suggests that various illuminators participated working side by side in one workshop, or closely together in some other way.

Chapter 8.4 Book bindings with ‘Lamb-and-Flag’ panel stamps from the North Holland region

The book binding represents the last stage in the book production process. Since the binding of the book can be executed at a later date and at another place, it is not considered so useful as a clue for localization. My research material, however, contains interesting similarities in the book bindings, especially those which show one or more panel stamps with the depiction of the ‘Lamb-and-Flag’. Some of the bindings point to a Haarlem origin, others to Hoorn or its surroundings, resulting in some further grouping of a number of manuscripts.

A first group, with a horizontal ‘Lamb-and-Flag’ panel stamp localized in Haarlem, comprises four manuscripts, two of which are part of the second, closely related tronie-penwork group (see Ch. 3), one is part of the Haarlem group (see Ch. 5), and one of the Haarlem scribe group (see Ch. 8.2).

A second group, with a horizontal ‘Lamb-and-Flag’ panel stamp localized in Hoorn or its surroundings, comprises two manuscripts, one of which is part of the main group with tronie-penwork (see Ch. 3, and Ch. 7), the other is part of the Hoorn group and datable to around 1465 (see Ch. 7).

A third group, with a vertical ‘Lamb-and-Flag’ panel stamp localized in Hoorn or its surroundings, comprises four manuscripts, one of which is, as far as the pen-flourishing is concerned, part of the Hoorn group and datable to around 1480 (see Ch. 7). The other three are part of additional material studied. They not only have the same binding, but also show the same calendar listing of saints’ names, including the highlighted seventeen ‘West-Frisian’ saints. Their pen-flourishing is datable to 1480-1490.
Chapter 9  Conclusion

In conclusion it can be observed that the study of decorative penwork together with additional codicological features shows a network of relationships among the manuscripts, which is complicated to follow up, but which provides definite clues as to the provenance of the penwork and its place within the book production process as a whole. As far as our case study of the *Legenda aurea* is concerned, which launched this present investigation, it can now be stated with some certainty that its *tronie*-penwork originated at the same place as the text, namely in St Paul’s in Amsterdam.