Holbein’s Portraits of the Steelyard Merchants: An Investigation

THOMAS S. HOLMAN
Curator of Collections, Norton Gallery & School of Art

Hans Holbein the Younger arrived in London for the second time in 1532, probably sometime after May 16, when his friend and former patron Sir Thomas More resigned from office. No longer able to rely upon More’s influence to obtain commissions, Holbein found employment from his fellow countrymen, members of the Steelyard, the German business community in London. Through these individual commissions, he was able to reestablish his reputation, and in 1536 he was appointed court painter to Henry VIII. The eight certain portraits of the Steelyard Merchants are those of Georg Gisze, Hans of Antwerp, and Hermann Wedigh (III), painted in 1532; a Member of the Wedigh Family (“Hermann Hillebrandt Wedigh”), Dirk Tybis, Cyriacus Kale, and Derich Born, painted in 1533; and Derick Berck, 1536.1 Inscriptions, dates, coats of arms, and merchant marks incorporated by Holbein in the portraits allow us to identify his sitters with some degree of assurance, and this information, correlated with surviving records, may increase our understanding of their significance.

At the time these portraits were painted, the German merchants in London, many of them resident representatives, if not actual members, of the Hanseatic League, enjoyed trade privileges and political power far in excess of their English counterparts. Like the other Hanseatic merchants throughout Europe, they often functioned as a communications link between cities and heads of state. Their residence and place of business, a walled area on the north bank of the Thames just south of London Bridge, was in effect a separate community, independent of the city of London and governed by its own strict code of laws, which were enforced by the merchants’ native cities. It was called the Steelyard, in German the Stahlhof, either in reference to the great steel beam used for weighing goods, or to the courtyard where goods were bought and sold from stalls.2

For all the importance of the Steelyard, documentation of its activity and membership is scarce. It was closed temporarily by royal decree in 1598, and its guildhall was looted and vandalized. The hall, with its contents, suffered such extensive damage in the identification of Ganz no. 148 is based on research by Habich, see below, note 8. As for Ganz nos. 77, 101, and 115, their classification as “merchant” portraits seems to have been based on the similarity of dress of the sitters.

FIGURE 1
Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/98–1543), Georg Gisze, 1532. Tempera and oil on wood, 37 13/16 × 33 3/4 in. (96.3 × 85.7 cm.). West Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz (photo: Gemäldegalerie, Jörg P. Anders)
Great Fire of 1666 that it had to be rebuilt. Investigation into the background of Holbein's sitters has therefore to be pursued through often obscure and sketchy records of merchants’ correspondence and bills of sale, old publications, and unpublished archives.

The portrait of Georg Gisze of Danzig (Figure 1), painted in 1532, has traditionally been regarded as Holbein’s first commission upon his return to England. This detail-laden composition may have been intended as a show piece to elicit further Steelyard commissions, just as The Ambassadors in 1533 would have attracted royal attention. Holbein may also have been influenced by the Flemish artist Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse. In the early 1530s, Mabuse painted the portrait of a banker, thought to be Jerome Sandelin of Zeeland (Figure 2), and Holbein could in fact have seen this on his way to England. His portrait of Gisze is similar in its diagonal composition, the treatment of costume and office paraphernalia, the precise brushwork, and the serious, outward-directed stare of the sitter.

Holbein’s sitter is identified in the inscriptions, which contain various spellings of his family name (Appendix 1–7, Figures 11–15). Since the Hanseatic community received correspondence from people speaking a variety of languages and dialects, the practice of spelling phonetically was not unusual. The letter Gisze holds, sent by a brother (Appendix 3), is written in the sixteenth-century German of the north country, in a dialect in use from 1520 to 1550. Georg Gisze, the twelfth of thirteen children, is recorded as a member of a Danzig merchant family, the son of town-councillor Albert Giese. The family had emigrated in 1430 from Unna, near Giesen, northeast of Cologne. Such a Rhenish origin may explain the derivation of the surname, Giese or Gisze.

3. Chamberlain, p. 3.
As an additional means of identification, the armorial ring lying on the table depicts arms which were granted by King Sigismund of Poland to one of the Danzig Giszes, and which were also used by Georg's brother Tiedemann, who was a canon of Kulm (now Chelmno, Poland) at the time the picture was painted. Tiedemann's bishop, Johannes von Höfen, alias Dantiscus or Danziger, was an admirer of Erasmus and tried in 1531 to obtain a version of Holbein's portrait of the humanist. Holbein may have been traveling in northern Germany at the time, between Basel (where he arrived in 1532), most probably via Cologne. Tiedemann, Gisze, perhaps aware of Holbein's journey to England, could have advised his brother Georg of the painter's impending arrival. This may account for the letter from a brother that Gisze is holding in the portrait.

Georg Gisze's name first occurs in England in a protection order, an assurance of safe passage between England and France, dated June 26, 1522, granted by the king of France. It is further recorded that, during the absence of Steyward representatives to Francis I, "George Guyse" and "Th. Crumwell of London, gent." (whose portrait Holbein was to paint in 1534) were given power of attorney. Eleven years later, in 1533, a letter refers to "Geo. Gyes" as the Alderman's Deputy of the London Steyward, an important position which may have led to the commission of this portrait.

The inscriptions, the cartellino, and the vase of flowers in Gisze's portrait remind us of the transitory nature of this world. The inscription on the cartellino translates in part as follows: "This picture of Georg that you see records his features / Such lively eyes, such cheeks has he / In the year of his age 34 / In the year of the Lord 1532" (Appendix 1). Georg Gisze was born on April 2, 1497 and died in February 1562. Holbein records Gisze's age as thirty-four, despite the fact that he would almost certainly have been thirty-five years old at the time. This discrepancy is explained by the German custom according to which only the number of years fully completed (Lebensjahre vollendete) are recorded, rather than the actual age of the sitter.

Londoners, Georg Gisze among them, were threatened by bubonic plague, which was especially prevalent around the Steelyard. In 1532, when this portrait was painted, "the pattern of bubonic plague [had become] manifest in England... The epidemic disease had a seasonal incidence in the summer and early autumn months... London with its great port was its chief focus and principal disseminating centre." The prevalence of the disease caused Henry VIII to flee London in 1531 and 1532, and by October 1532, according to Venetian dispatches, the plague had reached epidemic proportions and was creating panic in the city.

Gisze's personal motto is written on the office wall: "Nulla sine merore voluptas" or "No joy without sorrow," a reference either to the transitory nature of his current situation or to the general uncertainty of fortune (Appendix 2). It may have been adapted from Metamorphoses, Book VII, lines 453–454, where Ovid interrupts the account of Theseus' reunion with his father Aegeus with the words "Nulla est sincera voluptas; / (Sollicitique aliquid laetis intervenit)," or "No joy is unmixed; (Some care always comes to mar our joys)." Perhaps Georg Gisze was thinking of his own safe return and reunion with his family.

In the foreground of the portrait is a vase filled partly with water and containing various plants: three carnations, sprigs of rosemary and basil, and a wallflower. Since the carnation is a traditional symbol of...
betrothal, and since the interpretation of carnations and rosemary has been linked with an amorous Swabian folksong, it has generally been thought that this commission was intended to demonstrate Gisze's intention to marry. In fact, he married Christine Krüger of Danzig three years later, in 1535.

All the plants, on the other hand, may also be regarded as medicinal herbs. In John Gerard's Herbal (London, 1597), the author says of the carnation "that the roote is commended against infection of the plague [and] . . . the falling sickness." Carnations were also used both as tokens of remembrance and as a means of protection against disease, a custom more commonly associated with rosemary. Rosemary became the symbol of remembrance because of its lingering scent, and Sir Thomas More wrote, "I let it run all over my garden wall . . . because it is the herb sacred to remembrance, and therefore of friendship," and "a sprig of it hath a dumb language that maketh it the chosen emblem at our funeral wakes in our burial ground." In the funeral scene in William Hogarth's A Harlot's Progress (1732), it is noted that "sprigs of rosemary were . . . given to each of the mourners. . . . This custom might probably originate at a time when the plague depopulated the metropolis, and rosemary was deemed antidote against contagion." Basil, an aromatic herb of the mint family, used both in cookery and medicine, derives its name from the basilisk, a legendary serpent against which it was thought to provide protection. As for the wallflower, a member of the mustard family, it was also commonly used in cookery and for medicinal purposes. Near the vase is a table clock, which, like the hourglass accompanying the figure of Death in Holbein's Dance of Death (1526), reminds the living of Death's presence and the passage of time.

Attached to the sitter's office wall are letters bearing identical symbols, known as merchant marks (Appendix 4, 6, 7). The attribution of these merchant marks to Georg Gisze is based on a document of the Danzig Assembly, dated October 30, 1535, which identified goods marked with the same symbol as belonging to "Jorg Gisze." The same mark, in reverse, appears within a shield on the seal lying on the table (Appendix 10). Little is known of the origin of merchant marks, but the emblems were linked to the runic alphabet, and were later combined with varieties of crosses, with geometric forms resembling the mast and yards of a merchant ship, and even with the initials of the mark's owner. Within the Hanseatic community, the merchant mark functioned as a symbol of identification, ownership, or workmanship in

taxonomist of Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois, in 1977 identified the four plants for this investigation, independently of Wolffhardt's article. From color photographs, he described the plants as Dianthus Caryophyllus, Rosmarinus officinalis, Ocinum basilicum, and Cheiranthus cheiri, or carnation, rosemary, sweet basil, and wallflower, which agrees with Wolffhardt's identification. Staatliche Museen Berlin, Katalog, p. 204, identified the plants as carnation, rosemary, hyssop, and a member of the mustard family (which the wallflower is); Dr. Wilhelm H. Köhler of the Berlin Museum, in a conversation in 1977, felt that the identification of basil, rather than of hyssop, was probably valid. Deborah Markow, "Hans Holbein's Steelyard Portraits, Reconsidered," Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch 40 (1978) p. 43, identifies the last two plants as Chenopodium bonus henricus (Good King Henry) and Arabidopsis thaliana (thale-cress), but these plants are not botanically related to those painted by Holbein with such evident care. Markow further connects thale-cress with the German coin Thaler, origin of the word dollar, as a reference to the merchant profession; in fact, thale-cress was named after the German physician and botanist Johann Thale (1542–85).

Wolffhardt, "Pflanzensymbolik," p. 193. Ganz, Holbein, p. 223, no. 23, notes that Anna, the burgomaster's daughter in Holbein's Darmstadt Madonna (1528–30), is wearing a bridal wreath; Ganz cites Burckhardt who could only trace back such a custom to the seventeenth century. From a detail of a color photograph, the wreath appears to be made of carnation and rosemary. The wreath may indeed refer to betrothal, or perhaps to some form of protection, since the Meyer family is kneeling before the Madonna.

26. Geoffrey Grigson, A Dictionary of English Plant Names (London, 1974) p. 20; Vernon Quin, Leaves: Their Place in Life and Legend (New York, 1937) p. 89. Hyssop, like basil, was used to prevent contagion from the plague, as noted in the Hortus Sanitatis of 1485.
the form of a family, house, property, or trade mark. Underlying the original merchant mark was an element of mystery or magic, which had the purpose of invoking protection, success, or prosperity, like lucky signs or amulets. The Latin cross, a symbol of protection, is incorporated in the merchant marks of Georg Gisze and the other sitters (Appendix 21, 22, 24, 27), and the use of Gisze's own mark on letters sent to him by Hans Stolten and Georg of Basel (Appendix 4, 6) was intended to ensure their delivery from abroad.

The portrait generally thought to have followed that of Georg Gisze is of the Hanseatic merchant and goldsmith Hans or John of Antwerp (Figure 3), which is dated July 26, 1532 (Appendix 11, 12). Hans of Antwerp resided in London from as early as 1515 to as late as 1547, and was married to an Englishwoman by whom he had children. He collaborated with Holbein in fine metalwork projects, was witness and administrator of Holbein's will, and was employed as both jeweler and court courier by Sir Thomas Cromwell. As Holbein noted, the sitter was associated with the London Steelyard (Appendix 11). In fact, he may have combined the activities of goldsmith and merchant, as is perhaps indicated by the duke of Suffolk's employment of "John Van Andwerp" to search for a gold mine, in June 1534. The letter W within the seal lying on the table is clearly not the initial of the sitter, who is noted in parish records as "John Vander Gow, alicias John Andwerp"; it appears also in the portrait of Hermann Wedigh discussed below, and may symbolize association with the merchant guild of Cologne.

Since Hans of Antwerp spent most of his life in London, it seems unlikely that this portrait was sent abroad, which may account for its early entry into the Royal Collection. (It was perhaps through Holbein's payment of 20 shillings for the painting of a silver Adam and Eve in 1534."

Ibid., p. 79.
friendship and association with Hans of Antwerp that the artist obtained additional commissions in England.) Unlike the other Steelyard portraits, the sitter is painted in a state of detached contemplation, the embodiment of Erasmus's *vita solitaria.*

The portrait of the Cologne merchant Hermann Wedigh dated 1532 (Figure 4) probably directly preceded that of the following year of a Member of the Wedigh Family (Figure 6). Identification of the earlier sitter is based both on the design of his armorial family arms and on the inscription on the fore-edge of the book in the lower left corner: *HER [w within a shield] WID,* an abbreviation of his name. The coat of arms, a chevron surrounded by three willow leaves, was granted by the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian to a "Rheinlander" called Heinrich von Wedig (1440–1513), on July 18, 1503. Hermann Wedigh, the third of that name and a great-grandson of Heinrich von Wedig, married Sophia Hörners and fathered eight children, the first of whom was born in 1539. At the end of a letter to the Cologne Assembly, dated November 12, 1553, concerning three Cologne ambassadors who remained in London to mediate the reform of the Steelyard, greetings are sent to Hermann Wedigh. On October 11, 1554, it is further recorded that Hermann Wedigh and Dietrich Hörner[5], his brother-in-law, were requested to make an interest payment of 20 thalers to the London Steelyard on a loan of 400 thalers. By 1557 Wedigh was judge of Niederich, and he was also alderman of the Cologne Assembly at the time of his death on December 28, 1560.

The device separating *HER* and *WID* on the fore-edge of the book (Appendix 15, Figure 16) most probably stands for the name of Wedigh, but a W within just such a shield was also the symbol of the Windeck, a professional and political organization for members of the Cologne Merchant (Kaufleute) Guild, which elected representatives to the Cologne Assembly.

That the letter W occurs in a seal in the Hans of Antwerp portrait, where it is unrelated to the initials of the sitter, suggests that a professional connection may have been intended in both paintings. Between the pages of Wedigh's book is a slip of paper with a Latin inscription from Terence's *Andria,* line 68, which translates as "Truth breeds hatred" (Appendix 16); the words were taken up by Cicero, who in chapter 24 of his *De amicitia* reasons that, contrary to Terence's statement, the bearer of truth should not be hated but admired and valued in friendship. Holbein's reference to truth may be the painter's comment on the exact likeness of the sitter captured on panel. The meaning of the quotation in this context, however, has not as yet been satisfactorily explained.

Holbein's portrait of Hermann Wedigh seems almost certainly to have influenced a portrait by the Cologne painter Barthel Bruyn, *A Young Man* of 1539 (Figure 5). The position of the hand and arms, and the treatment of the silk sleeve, the ring, and the leather gloves are almost identical, though Bruyn's portrait differs in size, format, and in the color of the background. Bruyn apparently borrowed from Holbein the Latin inscription giving the date and the age of the sitter, a device he had not previously employed. Thus, the portrait of Hermann Wedigh must have been in Cologne by 1539, presumably in the possession of the Wedigh family.

Another member of the Wedigh family, identified


40. Ibid., p. 73, nos. 1021–1024.

41. Geelen, p. 179.


43. "Truth breeds hatred" may be a reference to the religious and political climate of the period, truth in regard to the Reformation, and hatred to the turmoil and dissension that followed. Alfred Woltmann, *Holbein and His Time* (London, 1872) pp. 355–359, suggests that the inscription refers to the book as one of the Protestant texts brought secretly into England. See also Chamberlain, p. 16.


45. Ibid., p. 187.
traits are related only in size and color, and the different poses make it unlikely that they were intended as pendants, despite the fact that they were recorded together in the same Vienna collection as early as 1746.

Holbein's next commission may have been that of Dirk Tybis of Duisburg (Figure 7), whose portrait is dated March 1533 (Appendix 21). The sitter's identity and location in the Steelyard (Windgoose Alley) are given by inscriptions within the portrait (Appendix 19, 21, Figure 17). Perhaps both as an invocation for protection and as a convention of correspondence, the more prominent inscription is headed with the name of Jesus, which, with a Latin cross on either side, may be intended also as a reference to the Trinity. Emphasis is placed on the passage of time: "When I was 33 years old, I, Dirk Tybis at London / had this appearance and marked this portrait with my device / in my own hand / . . . by me Dirk [merchant mark] Tybis from Duisburg" (Appendix 21). The sitter's merchant mark, in reverse and combined with his initials, is also to be seen on the seal lying on the table. As in the Gisze portrait, the mark contains a Latin cross within its configuration (Appendix 22).

Another Steelyard commission of 1533 is the portrait of Cyriacus Kale (Figure 8), whose name and

Figure 4
Holbein, Hermann Wedigh, 1532. Tempera and oil on wood, 15 3/4 x 12 3/4 in. (42.2 x 32.4 cm.), incl. 1/2 in. (1.3 cm.) strip at bottom. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Edward S. Harkness, 1940, 50.135.4

by his armorial ring, was painted by Holbein in 1533 (Figure 6, Appendix 18). The sitter, who may be an undocumented brother or cousin of Hermann Wedigh, is traditionally called "Hermann Hillebrandt Wedigh," but only his family name and age can be established. Hermann Wedigh's father, Hermann II, had, so far as we know, no other sons and no brothers, and although his sister Clara, Hermann III's aunt, married first Philip Aberlinck and then Johannes Hillebrandt, no children are recorded from either marriage. The identification of this member of the family as "Hermann Hillebrandt Wedigh" thus remains open to question. The two Wedigh por-

46. Geelen, pp. 182, 194, questions the name and relationship of the sitter, but tentatively places him as a cousin of Hermann Wedigh (III). Fahne, Geschichte der Künischen ... Urkunden, p. 112, does not record a son of Clara Wedigh Aberlinck/Hillebrandt; nor is one recorded by the Cologne archives. In the present absence of any documentary evidence of his existence, the name of "Hermann Hillebrandt Wedigh" seems to have been composed of parts borrowed from the main Wedigh family and a collateral branch.

47. Although Holbein may have stayed briefly in Cologne on his journey to London via Antwerp in 1532, and could there have painted Hermann Wedigh, the similarity of the two portraits in size and color suggests that they were both painted in London.

48. W. Bürger, Gazette des Beaux-Arts 1 (1869) p. 16; see also Chamberlain, p. 15.

49. Chamberlain, p. 21, reads "toe Dardr" as London and "wae/ hy yss" as "wi/dgyss" or Windyss, in reference to a passageway of the Steelyard called Windgoose Alley (ibid., p. 3).


51. In a conversation (1977), Dr. Köhler of the Berlin Museum suggested this interpretation, based on similar merchant correspondence during this period.

52. Kuhlicke, "Merchant Marks," p. 64.
London association are given in the inscriptions of two letters (Appendix 24, 25). His merchant mark, a long arrow with a Latin cross and an X,53 is placed on one of the letters to ensure its delivery (Appendix 24). Although his name is not recorded in the local archives,54 it is believed that Cyriacus Kale was a member of the Kales or Kalles of Brunswick, a merchant family which resided at 640 Heinestrasse, and that he was probably the son of Gerloff Kale (1446–1523), mayor of Brunswick in 1521, and elder brother of Hermann Kale (1516–64). Along with the notation of year and age, there is a German inscription, which translates as “Be patient in all things” (Appendix 23), and which perhaps served as a simple motto or as a reassurance to his family of his eventual return. The portrait may indeed have been sent home to Kale’s family, as it was recorded in the collection of Duke Anton Ulrich as early as 1737, and remains today in the museum of that name in Brunswick.

In the portrait of Derich Born (Figure 9), also painted in 1533, the sitter’s name is inscribed in Latin on the stone parapet in the foreground (Appendix

---

53. Elmhirst, Merchant Marks, p. 9, l. 2, no. 577.
54. Sophie Reidemeister, Genealogien Braunschweiger Patrizier- und Ratsgeschlechter aus der Zeit der Selbständigkeit der Stadt vor 1671 (Brunswick, 1948) p. 88; See also Herman Riegel, Beschreibendes und Kritisches Verzeichnis der Gemälde-Sammlung (Brunswick, 1900) pp. 12–13.
This inscription translates in part: "If you were to add a voice this would be Derich his very self / and you would doubt whether a painter or a parent had produced him." It emphasizes that the sitter is alive and, at the same time, provides Holbein with the opportunity to draw attention to the lifelike quality of his work. A further reference to the sitter's vitality, in contrast to the menace of death, is perhaps seen in the vinelike fig prominent in the background, a plant traditionally associated with protection against disease. The Hortus Sanitatis of 1485 records that boiled figs are good against pestilence and epilepsy.

---

55. Floyd Swink independently identified the plant in 1977, but noted that the tendrils seem to be an elaboration on the part of the artist. The fig tree has been associated with the cult of St. Sebastian, protector of the sick, e.g., Andrea Mantegna’s Martyrdom of St. Sebastian of 1480 (Louvre), and most importantly in Hans Holbein the Elder’s Martyrdom of St. Sebastian of 1515 (Alte Pinakothek); and with other saints committed to the healing of the sick, e.g., St. Cyriacus (Städel) and St. Elizabeth of Thuringen (Donaueschingen). Matthias Grünewald’s side panels (1509) for Albrecht Dürer’s Heller Altar. See also Markow, “Holbein’s Steelyard Portraits,” p. 45; Lottlisa Behling, Matthias Grünewald (Freiburg, 1969) pp. 10–14, 33–35.

and the fig branch, perhaps symbolizing protection against disease, appears in earlier portraits and other works by Holbein.57 In the same year, Holbein referred to the transience of life and the instability of fortune in a pair of allegories called *The Triumph of Riches* and *The Triumph of Poverty*, painted for the Steelyard guildhall, and now known only from a drawing by Holbein and from copies. A Latin inscription in a copy of *The Triumph of Poverty* contains the reflection: “He who is rich . . . fears hourly that the inconstant wheel of fortune may turn,” verses often attributed to Sir Thomas More.

Of all Holbein’s Steelyard merchants, Derich Born of Cologne is the most extensively documented. On October 6, 1533, Johannes Born, the sitter’s elder brother, sent goods from Lübeck on a ship registered in Antwerp and bound for England, most probably to his brother Derich,58 who, as “Dyryck Borne, merchant of the Steelyard,” is recorded in the *State Papers* in 1536 as having received payment “for various bundles of harness.”59 As further recorded in the Cologne archives, between August 13, 1540 and February 12, 1543, the Born brothers, along with Derick Berck (see Figure 10), had bought £600 of lead from the duke of Suffolk, but had failed to fulfill payment and were threatened with a fine by Sir Thomas Cromwell.60 In retaliation, on January 30, 1541, the duke of Suffolk confiscated a ship full of cloth which belonged to the Born brothers.61 Because they endangered the privileges of all merchants in England from Cologne, that city intervened on May 20, 1541, and the Born brothers were expelled from the London Steelyard.62 By December 9, 1542, they were reported to be in Antwerp.63 There in the following year, according to the Antwerp archives, between November 6 and November 11, Derich Born was petitioned for payment of bills by a notary representing merchants Jacob van Maeseeyck and Jan van Caster.64


61. *Kölner Inventar*, p. 16, no. 214, recorded on February 11, 1541.

62. Ibid., p. 17, no. 218, and p. 18, no. 239.

63. Ibid., p. 20, no. 260.

In response to this suit, Born repeatedly claimed that he had no money to fulfill payment. By 1549, he had sent goods from Antwerp to England insured for £550. On November 17, 1550, an “English Priest of Canterbury” tried through Jan Lens of Antwerp to recover the sum of £32, which had been borrowed by Born. The last record concerning Derich Born in the Cologne archives is dated July 11, 1549, when he made a formal complaint to the Steelyard about his earlier expulsion. Since Holbein’s portrait of Born is thought to have entered the Royal Collection early in the seventeenth century, it may have remained in England after he and his brother were expelled.

The last of the Steelyard commissions is the portrait of Derick Berck of Cologne, painted in 1536 (Figure 10). The sitter’s identity, age, and association with the Steelyard are recorded in the portrait (Appendix 27, 28). Although Berck is thought to have been born in the city of Duisburg, fifty miles north of Cologne, and lived on “Oberstrasse,” he may in fact have become a citizen of Cologne, since he is referred to as from Cologne in that city’s archives. On February 12, 1543, the city of Cologne, in response to earlier correspondence from King Henry VIII, indicated that the matter involving the duke of Suffolk and “Kolner in England”—specifically the Born brothers and Derick Berck—had been correctly handled. On December 31, 1545, Derick Berck of Cologne sought to rent a room in the London Steelyard, previously rented to Joachim Gevertz of Hamburg for £7, which suggests that Berck had not been expelled from the Steelyard with the Borns.

Within the letter identifying the sitter is Derick Berck’s merchant mark and a German inscription traditionally translated as “Consider the end” (Appendix 27, Figure 18). This statement, unlikely to be Berck’s personal motto, was perhaps borrowed by Holbein from his former friend and patron Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose personal motto, written in Greek, was “Contemplate the end of a long life,” and who regarded such Greek or Latin inscriptions as verses pronounced by Death himself. A Latin inscription, facing the viewer, was taken from Virgil’s Aeneid, book I, line 203: “Someday it will be pleasant to remember” (Appendix 29, Figure 18). In the Aeneid, this famous quotation was intended as a statement of encouragement, as greater misfortunes still awaited Aeneas and his comrades before reaching their new home. Berck may have wished to be remembered with pleasure after death, or he may have intended to suggest that he would recall with pleasure his days in the London Steelyard only after his safe return to Germany. If Berck’s portrait was in fact sent back to his family, this quotation could have been a message of encouragement against his eventual homecoming.

The year of the Berck portrait, 1536, was also the year of Holbein’s official appointment as painter to the court of Henry VIII. Thereafter, he devoted most of his time to royal commissions. The Steelyard Merchants, as private citizens trading overseas in what was for them a foreign country, are necessarily more obscure. But the care with which Holbein recorded information about them in their portraits, taken with the surviving documents, allows us to glimpse something of their way of life and their personal concerns. The uncertainties of the time, the hardships as well as the fortunes of a merchant’s career, the ever-present menace of the plague in London—from which the artist himself was to die in 1543—all seem to be reflected in these significant and masterly paintings.

65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., p. 245, no. 443
67. Ibid., p. 260, no. 487.
68. Kölner Inventar, p. 342.
71. Kölner Inventar, p. 20, no. 268; Wescher, Grosskaufleute, p. 150, calls the sitter “Dirk Bergh aus Köln.”
72. Kölner Inventar, p. 27, no. 362.
73. Elmhirst, Merchant Marks, p. 9, l. 11, no. 98.
75. Holbein was commissioned by the Steelyard to design a triumphal arch as its contribution to the coronation pageant of Anne Boleyn on May 31, 1533. His drawing of the project survives (Berlin). Chamberlain, pp. 30–33, and Colvin, Germans in England, pp. 151–152, discuss the supposedly intentional insult directed toward the new queen in this project.
FIGURE 10
Holbein, Derick Berck, 1536. Tempera and oil on canvas, transferred from wood, 21 1/4 in. (53.3 x 42.6 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules Bache Collection, 49.7.29

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This article is derived from research undertaken as part of an internship at the Metropolitan Museum in 1976, under the auspices of the Departments of Public Education and of European Paintings, and in part from my master's thesis at the University of Chicago (1977). I am indebted to Katharine Baetjer, Associate Curator of European Paintings, and to Helmut Nickel, Curator of Arms and Armor, for their advice and guidance. In addition, generous assistance was received from Wilhelm H. Köhler of the Staatliche Museum, Berlin, Joachim Deeters of the Cologne City Archives, Sir Oliver Millar, Keeper of the Royal Collection, Windsor, Sabine Jacob of the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick, Karl Schütz of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, the staff of the Brunswick City Archives, Floyd Swink of the Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois, and John Hand of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

FREQUENTLY CITED SOURCES
Chamberlain—Arthur B. Chamberlain, Hans Holbein the Younger (New York, 1913) vol. II
Appendix

INSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANT MARKS IN HOLBEIN'S PORTRAITS OF THE STEELYARD MERCHANTS

Georg Gisze (Figures 1, 11–15)

1. Top

Δωρεύω ἐν Ιμαγε Περίφημης Ἰστεῖος, ἐπί τῆς προσώπου, ὅπως θεωρεῖς, Ἰμάγο Γεώργι

Sic oculos vius, sic habet ille genas

Anno ætatis sue xxiiij

Anno domi 1532

The distich on the picture of Georg Gisze

This picture of Georg that you see records his features

Such lively eyes, such cheeks has he

In the year of his age 34

In the year of the Lord 1532

2. Upper left

Nulla sine merore voluptas

G. Gisze:—

No joy without sorrow

G. Gisze

3. Letter in sitter's hands

Dem Erszamen

Jorgen gisze to lünden

in engelant mynem

broder to handen

To the honorable

Georg Gisze at London

in England my

brother to give

4. Right, upper letter i

Dem Ersamē Jürgen

ghyszin to lund in

engelant kame dyszer

breff

To the honorable Georg

Gisze at London in

England comes this letter

In Hans

Stolten

[merchant mark]

In lund anno 1528

7 . . .

In Hans

Stolten

[in London in the year 1528]

[?Johannes or In Hans]
FIGURES 11-15
Holbein, Georg Gisze, details of inscriptions (photos: Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Jörg P. Anders)

**FIGURE 11** (Appendix 1)

**FIGURE 12** (Appendix 2)

**FIGURE 13** (Appendix 3)

**FIGURE 14** (Appendix 4, 5)
5. **Right, upper letter 2 (inscription upside down)**

DEm Ers[amen]
vorsichtige J[urgen]
ghyszen to l[unden]
engel
K[ome]

In tomas
Bandz

To the honorable
prudent Georg
Gisze at London
England
[comes this letter]

6. **Right, lower letter 1**

DEm Erszamen
vorsichtigē Jurē gyssze
to lund in engelant
kome dysszer breff

In Jurge . . .
zuBasel 1531

To the honorable
prudent Georg Gisze
at London in England
comes this letter

In Georg . . .
of Basel 1531

[merchant mark]

7. **Right, lower letter 2**

. . . nder[?]
gysszę
. . . nt

in lund, anno 1531
17 [. . .] may

. . .
Gisze
. . . [Engla]nd

in London, in the year 1531
17 [. . .] of May

[lower half of Gisze's merchant mark]
8. Right, suspended string container

   [EN HEER EN]

   [derived from Herren]

9. Folded letter, left of scale, illegible

10. Seal

   [merchant mark reversed within a shield]

Hans of Antwerp (Figure 3)

11. Letter in sitter's hands

   Dem Ersamen H
   . . . An. . . werpen
   Stallhof zu

   [Below to the left, unknown markings]

To the honorable H[ans of]
   An[werp]
   [at the] Steelyard to [give]
   [The legibility of the inscription is open to question, but the
   sitter's identity has been universally accepted.]

12. Paper on table

   Anno Dns 1532 auf 26 July
   Aetatis suae 33[?]

   In the year of the Lord 1532 on 26 July
   at the age of 33[?]

13. Seal

   W

   W

Hermann Wedigh (Figures 4, 16)

14. Background inscription

   ANNO . 1532. AETATIS . SVAE . 29.

   In the year 1532 at the age of 29

15. Fore-edge of book

   HER [W within a shield] WID

   HER[MANN] W WID[DIG]

   [FIGURE 16
   (Appendix 15-17)
   Holbein, Hermann Wedigh, detail of inscriptions]
16. *Loose sheet in book*

Veritas odiū[m] parit:—

Truth breeds hatred

17. *Cover of book*

· H · H ·

H[ans] H[olbein]

18. *Background inscription*

ANNO 1533  AETATIS . SVAE 39

In the year 1533 at the age of 39

19. *Letter in sitter's hands*

Dem ersamen Deryck
Tybys van Duysborch
alwyl toe Dardr [Londn?] off wae
hy yss myn lyffen bro
der ff.

To the honorable Dirk
Tybis of Duisburg
... [at London] of Wi
ndgoose my dear bro
ther...

[See note 49]

20. *Letter in foreground illegible*

21. *Paper at left*

† Jesus †
Da ick was 33 jar was ick Deryck Tybis to London
dyser gestalt en hab dyser gelicken den mael
ges[shrieben]
myt myner eigener hant en was halffs mert anno
per my Deryck Tybis fan Dus

† Jesus †
When I was 33 years old, I, Dirk Tybis at London
had this appearance and marked this portrait with
my device
in my own hand and it was the middle of March in
the year 1533
by me Dirk [merchant mark] Tybis from Du[i]s[burg]

22. *Seal*

[merchant mark reversed]

**Figure 17** (Appendix 19–22)
Holbein, *Dirk Tybis*, detail of inscriptions (photo: Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum)
Cyriacus Kale (Figure 8)

23. Background inscription

IN ALS GEDOLTIG  SIS ALTERS · 32
   ANNO       · 1533 ·

Be patient in all things  His age 32
In the year  1533

24. Letter 1 in sitter’s hands

Dem Ersame Syryacuss
Kalenn in lu[n]den up Stalhoff
sy disse br[e]ff

In hys  d[a]

25. Letter 2 in sitter’s hands

Dem Ersamenn Sylliakes
Kalenn to Lund[en]
stalhoff by duch
ang

To the honorable Cyriacus
Kale in London of the Steelyard
...this letter

[merchant mark]

In his  ...  

Derich Born (Figure 9)

26. Parapet inscription

DERICHVS SI VOCEM ADDAS IPSISSIMVS HIC SIT
   HVNC DVBITES PICTOR FECERIT AN GENITOR
   DER BORN ETATIS SVÆ · 23 · ANNO 1533

If you were to add a voice this would be Derich his
very self
and you would doubt whether a painter or a
parent had produced him
Der[ich] Born at the age of 23 in the year 1533
Derick Berck (Figures 10, 18)

27. Letter in sitter's hands

Dem Ersamen und
fromen[?] Derick Berck
lvnden vpt Staelhoff [8?]
besad de end

To the honorable and
pious[?] Derick Berck
London... Steelyard [8?]

Consider the end
[This is the traditional reading of the German, which is probably still valid, despite some lack of clarity.]
[merchant mark]

28. Table surface, right

AN 1536 ΕΤΑ: 30.

In the year 1536 age 30

29. Paper at left

Olim meminisse iuvabit

Someday it will be pleasant to remember

Figure 18 (Appendix 27, 29)
Holbein, Derick Berck, detail of inscriptions