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Mystery over Bosch's piper

Dutch artist's famous painting, *The Haywain*, shows musician playing bagpipe incorrectly. Could he be based on a previous print?

by [MARTIN BAILEY](#) | 1 July 2016



Hieronymus Bosch's, *The Haywain* triptych (around 1516) recently went on show in the Prado

With the spotlight on Hieronymus Bosch in the year of the 500th anniversary of his death, a Dutch specialist has raised an intriguing puzzle.

Why is the prominent bagpipe player in the foreground of *The Haywain* holding his instrument incorrectly? The piper is the figure in blue, just to the right of the centre. He is seducing the nun with a sausage dangling on a string. *The Haywain* is now one of the key works in the Prado's current retrospective.



Hieronymus Bosch's, *The Haywain triptych* (around 1556) (Image courtesy of Museo Nacional del Prado)

Jos Koldewey, a curator of the exhibition held earlier this year in 's-Hertogenbosch (and professor at Radboud University Nijmegen), points out that the musician is playing as if he was left-handed. But if he was left-handed, then the position of the two hands should be reversed when holding the pipe.

Koldewey believes the most likely explanation is that Hieronymus Bosch has "taken the figure from a print", which might well show the image in reverse. The question is: what prints with bagpipe players might have been accessible to Bosch in around 1515, when *The Haywain* was painted.

• *Bosch: the Fifth Centenary Exhibition is at the Prado, Madrid, until 11 September*