



ANGLO-NETHERLANDISH SCHOOL

Isabella of Austria (1501-1526), Queen of Denmark, Norway and Sweden

c. 1515-1526

Oil on oak panel
39.7 x 28.3 cm (including the integral frame)

The frame inscribed: '+ LA + ROINE + DENEMARQVE +'

PROVENANCE

Private collection, UK, acquired in the 1960s-70s;

JS Fine Art, 27 September 2025, lot 1372 (as 'Flemish School, 'La Boine Denemarque', a portrait of a Tudor lady'), sold by the above;

Philip Mould & Company, acquired from the above.

PHILIP MOULD
—
& COMPANY



The present portrait, previously unknown to scholars, is an early example of panel painting in England and a significant early manifestation of portraiture used to express allegiance and political loyalty to foreign powers. It was likely painted sometime after Isabella became queen in 1515 and prior to her visit to England in 1523, when her exiled family were welcomed by Henry VIII and his court.

Queen of three kingdoms, sister to an emperor and niece to Queen Catherine of Aragon, Isabella of Austria (or Elizabeth, as she was born) belonged to the highest echelon of European society and occupied a pivotal position within the dynastic web that shaped the early sixteenth century. A daughter of Philip the Handsome (1478-1506) and Joanna of Castile (1479-1555), and sister of the future Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500-1558), Isabella belonged to the formidable Habsburg dynasty at the precise moment it emerged as the dominant political force in Europe. Through birth alone, she was connected to the courts of Spain, Burgundy, the Holy Roman Empire and England, and her life reveals the extraordinary reach of Renaissance dynastic politics.

Raised at the sophisticated Mechelen court under the supervision of her aunt, Margaret of Austria (1480-1530), Isabella received a humanist education exceptional even among royal women. She was taught by leading scholars, including Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540) and Adrian of Utrecht (1459-1523), developing the refinement and political intelligence expected of a Habsburg princess. The Burgundian-Habsburg court in which she matured was closely observed by England, which consciously looked to the Low Countries for artistic and diplomatic models. Indeed, the wider Tudor court remained deeply indebted to Netherlandish culture throughout the reign of Henry VIII, particularly in portraiture, court ceremony and diplomacy.

In 1515, Isabella married Christian II (1481-1559), thereby becoming Queen of Denmark and Norway and later Queen of Sweden under the Kalmar Union.

The inscription on the present work – LA ROINE DENEMARQVE (“The Queen of Denmark”) indicates that it was painted following the marriage. The union represented a major diplomatic alliance between Scandinavia and the Habsburg world. At only fourteen years old, Isabella entered a politically volatile northern court where tensions between Denmark and Sweden threatened the stability of the union itself. Although the marriage was initially troubled by Christian’s attachment to his mistress, Dyveke Sigbritsdatter (1490-1517), Isabella gradually established herself as a respected political figure and trusted adviser. By 1520, she served as regent in Denmark during her husband’s absences, demonstrating the administrative authority expected of a Renaissance queen.

Her significance extended far beyond Scandinavia. As the sister of Charles V, Isabella stood at the centre of the rivalry between the Habsburg Empire and France that dominated European politics during the reign of Henry VIII. England watched these developments closely. The Tudor court under Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530) attempted repeatedly to balance relations between France and the Habsburgs, while marriages among Europe’s ruling houses remained critical diplomatic instruments. Isabella’s own family network connected her directly to England’s greatest dynastic alliances. Her aunt was Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536), Henry VIII’s (1491-1547) first wife, whose marriage symbolised the Anglo-Spanish alliance at the opening of the Tudor age. Through Catherine, Isabella was linked to the English royal household and the intensely international politics of Henry VIII’s early reign.

Following the deposition of Christian II in 1523, Isabella entered a dramatic period of exile that brought her even closer to England. Accompanied by her husband and children, she travelled through Germany, the Low Countries and England seeking support for Christian’s restoration. The exiled Danish court spent time in England under Henry VIII, where their presence formed part of the wider diplomatic theatre surrounding relations between England, the Empire



Fig 1 | Philip of Cleves
Oil on panel
31.5 x 19.5 cm
Society of Antiquaries, London

and the Scandinavian kingdoms. For the Tudor court, Isabella's arrival represented not merely the visit of a dispossessed queen, but the appearance of a Habsburg princess intimately connected to Charles V himself.

Even in adversity, Isabella retained considerable political importance. She campaigned energetically on behalf of her husband at the Imperial Diet of Nuremberg in 1524, appealing directly to princes and diplomats across the Empire. Her movements across Europe also exposed her to emerging religious reform, and later writers noted her sympathy towards certain Protestant ideas, though the Habsburg court maintained that she died a devout Catholic. Isabella died in Ghent in 1526 at only twenty-four years of age, yet her brief life encapsulated the international nature of Renaissance monarchy.

What makes this panel particularly intriguing is that it can be linked to three other portraits of European rulers and

noblemen thought to have been recorded in England by the mid-16th century. These works, depicting Philip of Cleves (1456-1528) (fig.1), Engelbert II, Count of Nassau-Dillenburg and Vianden, Baron of Breda (1451-1504) (fig. 2) and Isabella's husband, King Christian II (fig. 3), are preserved in the collection at the Society of Antiquities in London, as part of a larger collection of arch-topped portraits bequeathed by the antiquary Thomas Kerrich (1748-1828). They are evidently by the same hand or workshop as the present work and share obvious similarities, specifically comparable dimensions, similar styles of inscription, and the same design of the integral frames. Crucially, dendrochronological analysis (tree-ring dating) has also revealed that the panel on which Isabella was painted was cut from the same tree as the panels depicting Christian II and Englebert. [1] A further interesting point, strengthening the argument that it was painted in England, is that Isabella's likeness clearly derives from a portrait known to have been in the Royal Collection by 1542 (fig.4). [2] The artist of the present work must have had access to the original, as it carefully replicates the face type and hand positioning. The patron, therefore, must have been sufficiently well-connected to have gained access to the royal pictures and must have had the means to commission a set of portraits by an accomplished hand.

One of the earliest references to groups of portraits in house inventories is in 1546 at Kenninghall, the Norfolk seat of Thomas Howard, 3rd Duke of Norfolk (1473-1554). In his long gallery were listed twenty-eight 'vysenamies of divers noble persons', with a second inventory taken later in 1578, listing twenty-five portraits. [3] Ten of these portraits are listed only as 'smale pcyctures of diverse p[er]sonages', however, the sitters in the other fifteen are stated. [4] The group consisted of portraits of foreign rulers and other noblemen active in the early 16th century, during the 3rd Duke's lifetime. Some of these portraits are undoubtedly identical to those now in the collection at the Society of Antiquaries. As observed by the scholar Catherine Daunt, with the exception of Englebert II and Philip of Cleves, all the other sitters included in the Society of Antiquaries group were represented in portraits at Whitehall in the



Fig 2 | Engelbert II
Oil on panel
31.5 x 19.5 cm
Society of Antiquaries, London

1542 and 1547 inventories. [5] It is tempting to assume, therefore, that the portraits of Englebert, Philip of Cleves, and Christian II also derived from now-lost prototypes formerly in the King's possession. As one of the most influential and prominent figures at court, Norfolk would certainly have enjoyed the privilege of access to the royal collection for the copying of works for his own collection.

[1] See Ian Tyers, *Dendrochronological Consultancy Report* 1662, October 2025 (available on request)

[2] Attributed to the workshop of Pieter van Coninxloo (active 1479-1513), Isabella of Austria (1501-1526) c.1510-15, RCIN 403466. The portrait was recorded in the collection of Henry VIII at Whitehall in 1542 (no. 692); in the Privy Gallery in 1639 (no. 41). It was probably one of the '31 pictures of Kings and princes' sold for £20 to de la Mare on 28 June 1650 from St James's Palace (no 218); recovered at the Restoration

[3] TNA LR 2/115, fols. 1-66. See C. Daunt, *Portrait sets in Tudor and Jacobean England*, unpublished thesis, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 19-20.



Fig 3 | Christian II, King of Denmark
Oil on panel
31.5 x 19.5 cm
Society of Antiquaries, London

[4] The sitters were: Francis I of France, Charlemagne (c.747-c.814); Mary of Austria (1505-1558); the Duke of Bourbon (likely Charles III, Duke of Bourbon (1490-1527); the Count of Nassau (probably Englebert II (1451-1504), the Lord of Raveston (probably Philip of Cleves, Lord of Ravenstein (1456-1528); Ferdinand of Aragon; Louis XII of France (1462-1515), 'Kynge Charles' (probably Charles VIII (1470-1498) or Charles IX of France (1550-1574); Jaquelyn, Countesse of Maynar'.

[5] *The Inventory of King Henry VIII: Vol. I*, pp. 237-39, nos. 10576 (Francis I), 10644 (Louis XII), 10682 (Charlemagne), 10703 (Ferdinand of Aragon) (all at Whitehall in 1542 and 1547) and p. 38, no. 15366 (Christian II) (at St James's in 1549/50). In C. Daunt, *Portrait sets in Tudor and Jacobean England*, unpublished thesis, 2015, vol. 1, p. 21

Fig 4 | Attributed to the workshop of Pieter van
Coninxloo
Isabella of Austria, c.1510-15
Oil on panel
36.2 x 24 cm
Royal Collection Trust

