

Decoding Old Masters

DECODING OLD MASTERS

Patrons, Princes and Enigmatic Paintings of the 15th Century

by

Abolala Soudavar

With a foreword by Bertrand Schnerb

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*For Nasrin, whose unfailing eyes
have been a constant source of
discovery and guidance*

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	ix
Genealogical tables, Coats of arms, Maps	xii
Preface.....	xix
Introduction.....	1
Preliminary methodological remarks	4
Painting A : The <i>Ducal Lamentation</i>	7
A.1 - Philip the Good of Burgundy	9
A.2 - The flaming flint-stone	11
A.3 - Frederic III of Habsburg	13
A.4 - Charles the Bold	18
A.5 - The Duchess Isabella of Portugal	20
A.6 - Simon Marmion	20
A.7 - The Oath of the Pheasant	26
A.8 - Guillaume Fillastre: In defense of Philip	28
A.9 - The dendrochronological analysis	31
A.10 - Replicas versus the original	32
A.11 - Marmion's legacy and the Van der Goes syndrome	35
Painting B : The <i>Procession of the Magi</i>	39
B.1 - Melchior	40
B.2 - The unjustified glorification of Lorenzo	43
B.3 - The architectural suggestions	44
B.4 - From Constance to Florence	49
B.5 - Caspar portrayed as Charles the Bold	54
Painting C : The <i>Medici Virgin</i>	59
C.1 - The Bruges charter	60
C.2 - The precedent	66
C.3 - Angelo Tani and Memling	66
Painting D : The <i>Lamentation</i> of Jean d'Auxy	69
D.1 - Jean IV d'Auxy	70
D.2 - The Getty's <i>History of Alexander the Great</i> manuscript	72
Painting E : <i>St Jerome and a Donor</i>	91

E.1 - The donor	91
E.2 - The year 1473	92
Painting F : The <i>Fountain of Grace</i>	95
F.1 - The technical data	96
F.2 - Historical background	97
F.3 - The crusader kings of the Ghent altarpiece	99
F.4 - The proponents of peace	101
F.5 - Vanquishing heresy	106
F.6 - Historical document	107
Painting G : The <i>Adoration of the Magi</i>	111
G.1 - Manuel II Palaeologos	111
G.2 - Palla Strozzi and the revival of Constantinople	117
G.3 - The Gentile enigma	118
G.4 - From Rahova to Constantinople	120
G.5 - Gentile's sources of portraiture	124
G.6 - Nicopolis and the Italian financial web	127
Epilogue	128
Appendix I – IRR images.....	133
Appendix II – Marmion's style	137
Bibliography.....	141
List of Illustrations	146
Index.....	151

Foreword

By *Bertrand Schnerb*

The court of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy has been, and continues to be, the subject of passionate and, at times, fascinating studies for many a historian. Johann Huizinga, for instance, had chosen it to explore the prevailing mentalities of that era and to define the characteristics of a period that he designated as *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (the autumn of the Middle Ages). In so doing, he had demonstrated how it had given rise to some of the great paradoxes of all times: how at that court, knightly ideals coexisted with pragmatic politics, refined manners with brutal behavior, piety with sensuality, and the sacred with the profane. This paradoxical state of affairs was the result of the double-faceted nature of the court of Burgundy, which as the seat of ducal power was an instrument of government as well as an essential tool for enhancing the political prestige of the prince.

The prestige of the court of Burgundy was mainly due to the brilliance of its cultural and artistic activities. The Dukes of Burgundy, who were members of the Royal House of France, had by the same token inherited its tradition of patronage. In following that tradition, the Dukes extended their patronage to all aspects of artistic and cultural activities. Thus, the ducal commissions to sculptors, jewelers, and tapestry makers stimulated a luxurious production of unprecedented quality and quantity. Music too, whether religious or courtly, blossomed at the court of Burgundy, and the choir group of the ducal chapel had the reputation of being one of Europe's finest. As a matter of fact, Gilles Binchois (d. 1461) and Antoine Busnois (d. 1492)—two important figures for the history of music—had both been ducal chaplains.

Literature was also much appreciated at the court of Burgundy. The Dukes favored all literary genres and commissioned a variety of works with religious, historical, didactic, and recreational themes, as well as translations of Latin works and new versions of older texts. Concurrently, they built up a remarkable collection of manuscripts. The ducal library kept growing with time: While Philip the Bold (duke 1363-1404) owned only two hundred manuscripts when he died, his grandson, Philip the Good (duke 1419-67), had nearly nine hundred. This impressive quantity of manuscripts, in conjunction with the high quality of the works, brought enormous prestige to the ducal library and by extension to the Dukes. Many of these manuscripts were prized items, not only because of their sumptuous bindings but also because of the high quality of their illuminations and paintings. These beautifully illustrated manuscripts were the works of talented artists such as Loyset Liédet, Guillaume Vrelant, and Simon Marmion. The latter, whose name is

frequently mentioned in this book, was both a manuscript illustrator and a panel painter.

The dukes Philip the Bold and John the Fearless (duke 1404-19) commissioned painted panels to painters such as Melchior Broederlam, Jean Malouel, and Henri Bellechose. These artists were also asked to adorn, among others, the Chartreuse of Champmol near Dijon, which was the high place of ducal piety and the site of their dynastic tombs. We know that, later on, Philip the Good employed Jan van Eyck, both as a painter and as a manservant. Philip also put to work other painters such as Roger Van der Weyden. One must also note that, following an oft repeated pattern, dignitaries of the court emulated the Dukes in their artistic patronage. The case of the chancellor of Philip the Good, Nicolas Rolin, who commissioned two highly important works of art, *The Last Judgment* of the Hotel-Dieu in Beaune painted by Roger Van der Weyden, and the *Roland Virgin* executed by Jan Van Eyck, is well known. But Rolin's case is by no means an isolated one. Other high dignitaries of the Burgundian court like Jean Chevrot and Guillaume Fillastre, who were both ducal counselors and were appointed, one after the other, to the bishopric of Tournai, were also distinguished patrons of the art.

The name of Guillaume Fillastre is often associated with that of Simon Marmion, and it comes as no surprise to find these two, once again linked together, in the stimulating and innovative study that Abolala Soudavar has presented us with. The latter who is an art lover and a remarkable connoisseur of Persian miniatures, had been intrigued by a beautiful Lamentation scene painted on wood panels, in which Christ, whose body has been brought down from the cross, is surrounded by Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, St John, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. His careful study of the characteristics of this work has now led him to attribute its painting to Simon Marmion and its commissioning to Guillaume Fillastre. He has also formulated a hypothesis according to which two layers of meaning are embedded in this work: the primary layer, which is votive and purely religious, is immediately recognizable, but its secondary layer, which is allegorical and political, and refers to the crusading enterprises of Philippe the Good, necessitates an imaginative interpretation. In order to buttress his arguments and situate the *Lamentation* that he attributes to Marmion in the context of allegorical and multifaceted pictorial art, Soudavar has used a comparative approach by seeking in six other contemporary paintings the signs of a similar desire to embed two different messages.

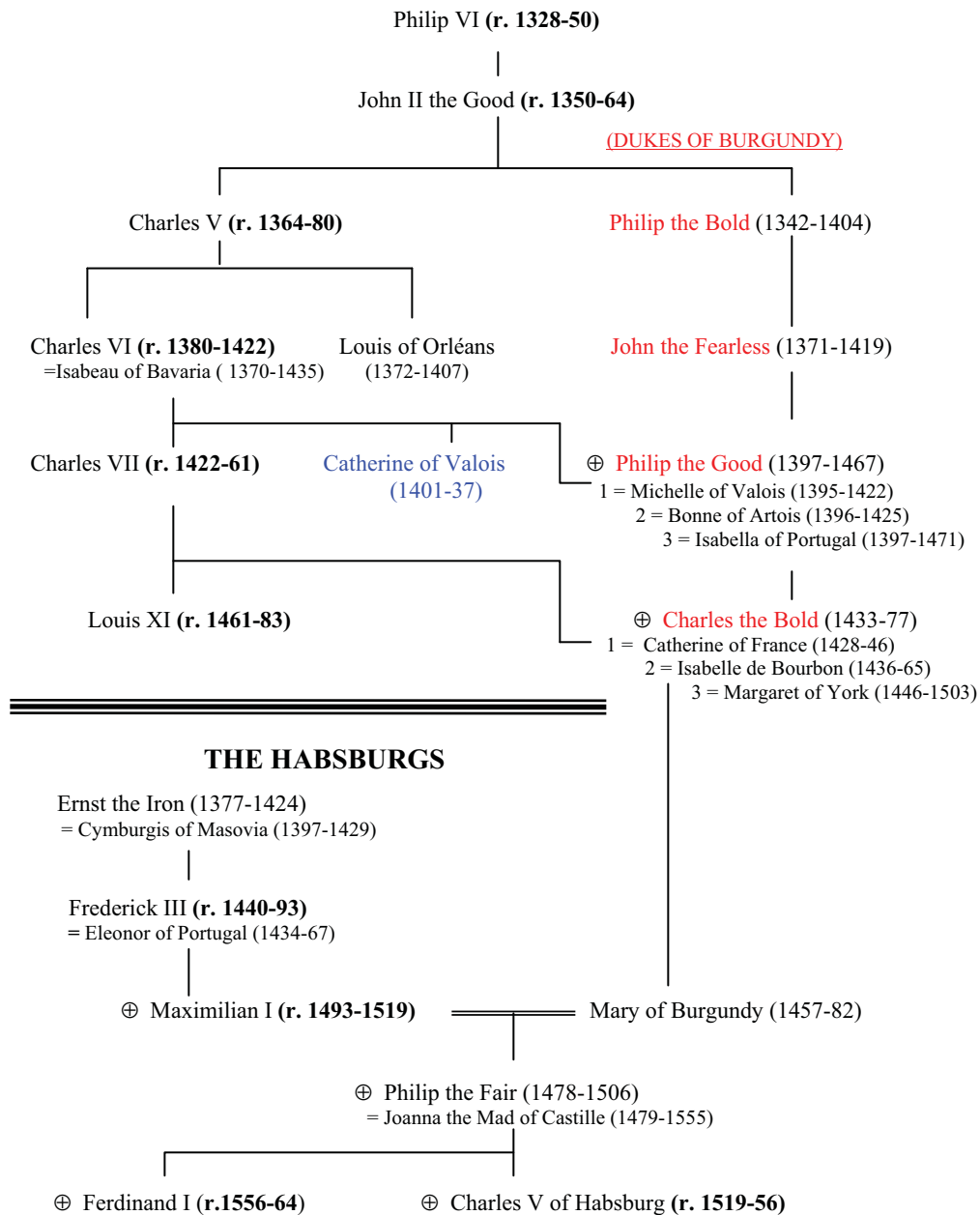
An underlying idea of Soudavar's study is that by depicting religious or heroic figures in the image of perfectly identifiable personalities of the 15th century, painters added a message of contemporary significance to the timeless religious one emanating from the main theme of the painting. And in this superposition of messages, especially when political considerations were adjoined to mystical

representations, the aspirations of the commissioner of the work of art played a decisive role.

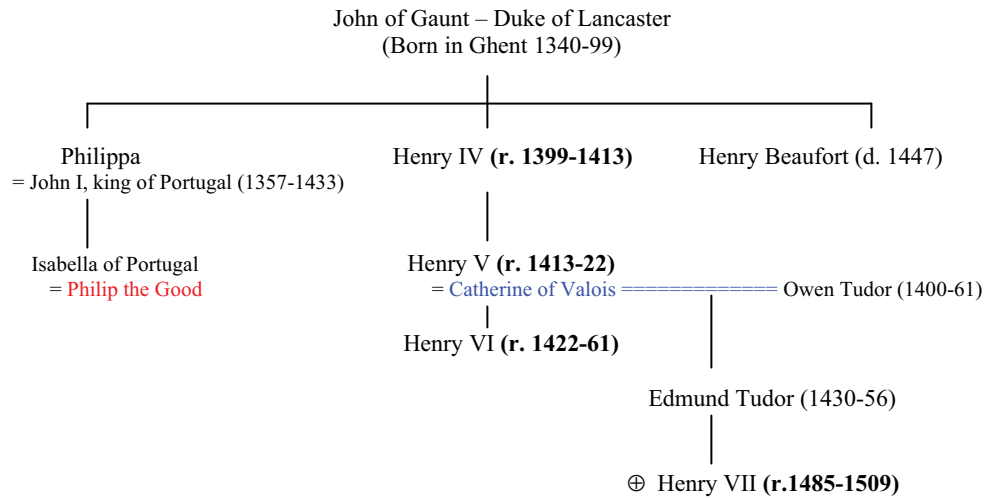
It is an undeniable fact that, in certain religious paintings of that period, some figures were depicted in the image of an illustrious contemporary person, and other examples can indeed be added to the list proposed by the author. For instance, on a side panel of the *Miracles of Christ* of the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, which was painted in Flanders circa 1500 and represents the *Marriages in Cana*, one can recognize, among the people seated around a table, Philip the Good and his three successive wives (Michelle of Valois, Bonne of Artois and Isabella of Portugal), Margaret of York, Charles the Bold, Mary of Burgundy, Maximilian I of Habsburg and Philip the Fair. A panel so loaded with dynastic figures certainly evoked the matrimonial alliances between the Houses of Burgundy and Habsburg (a subject that one can easily relate to the *Marriages in Cana*), and emphasized the genealogy of the Archduke Philip the Fair by tracing it back to his great grandfather after whom he was named. The association of a religious theme with a political one can also be found in the celebrated *Rolin Virgin*, a work in which it has been possible to detect allusions to the murder of John the Fearless and to the Treaty of Arras of September 1435.

The conclusions of Abolala Soudavar are based on solid historical facts as well as on a very interesting comparative study. In any event, his study invites us to adopt a new approach in regard to works of art produced under Burgundian patronage and to seek meanings other than those which readily jump to the eye; it also reminds us that at the court of Burgundy, as Huizinga had once noted, allegories were commonly used in both literature and works of art.

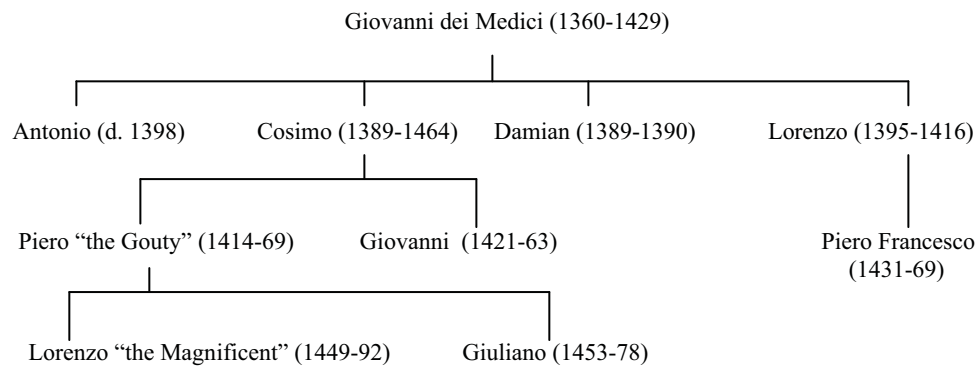
THE VALOIS OF FRANCE



THE LANCASTERS AND TUDORS OF ENGLAND



THE MEDICI



Legend: regnal years = (**bold**), lifetime = (regular), ⊕ = Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece

Spelling conventions: Duke with a capital “D” refers to one of the Dukes of Burgundy, King with a capital “K” refers to a king of France, and Emperor with a capital “E” refers to a Germanic Emperor.

Coats of Arms

The cut glass panels from the Chapel of Holy Blood in Bruges,^{*} illustrate the fusion of the dynasties of the Dukes of Burgundy with those of the Habsburg and Castille. After each marriage, the coats of arms of the bride and the groom are combined, half and half, to create a new and more complex shield.

Isabelle de
Bourbon

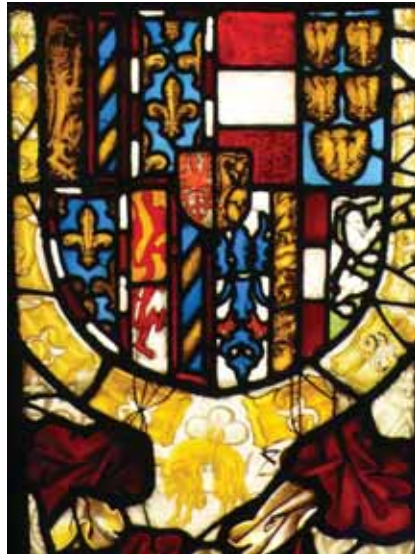


Charles the
Bold of
Burgundy

The combined coat of arms of Isabelle de Bourbon and Charles the Bold which as inherited by their unique child Mary of Burgundy.

^{*} The 15th-century glass panels are all from the Chapel of Holy Blood in Bruges but are presently kept at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, C444.1918 (Photos by A. Soudavar)

Mary of
Burgundy



Maximilian I of
Habsburg

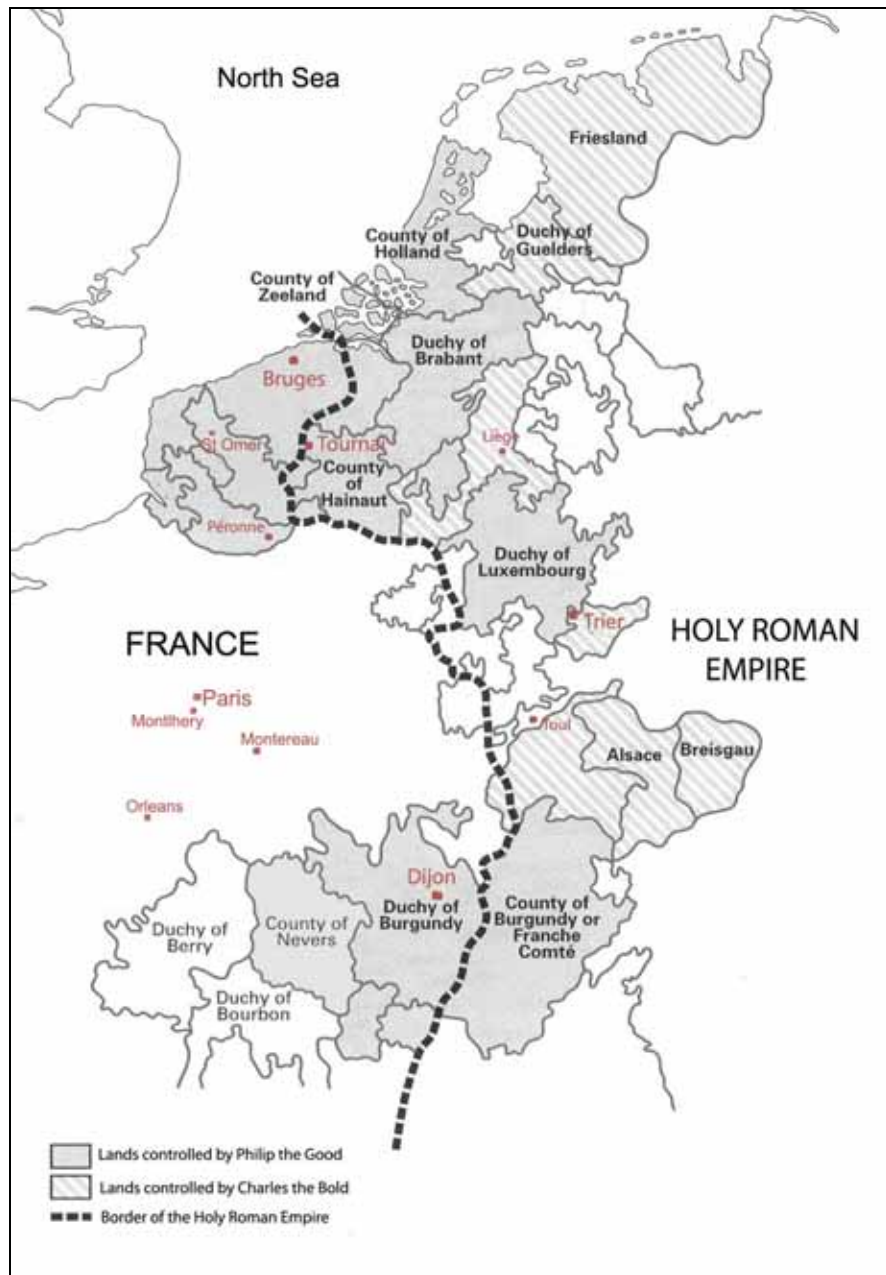
Combined coats of arms of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian surrounded by the necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece, as inherited by their son Philip.

Philip the Fair
of Habsburg



Joanna the Mad
of Castille

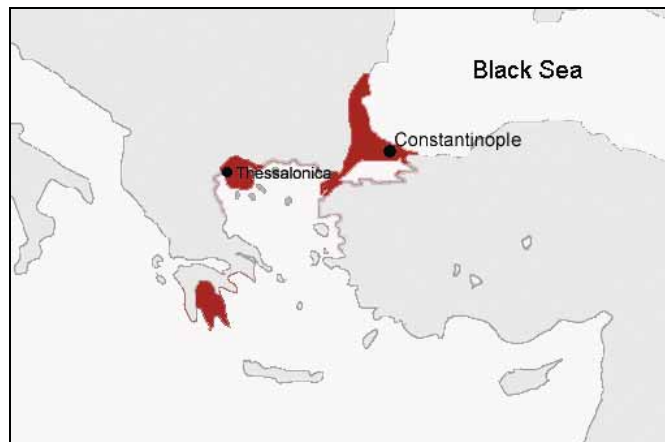
Combined coats of arms of Philip the Fair and Joanna of Castille as inherited by their son, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Habsburg.



Map 1 - Domains of the Dukes of Burgundy straddling the French and German Empires, cities mentioned in this study are written in red



Map 2 - Europe, c. 1435



Map 3 - The revival of Constantinople, c. 1405

Preface

A year and half ago, I couldn't even dream of writing a book on 15th-century paintings. If I have written one today, it is because it was thrust upon me by a series of fortuitous events, triggered by the purchase of a painting (Painting A) in London's secondary art market. Considering the high quality of its portraiture, I was almost certain that what had been labeled as yet another copy of a "lost original by Van der Goes" was, nevertheless, by the hand of a great master. But little did I know how historically important it would turn out to be, and how it would lead me to one discovery after another, each a "Da Vinci Code" of its own. Archeologists often dream of unearthing fabulous treasures in distant lands; in my case, I had discovered treasures buried in plain sight. The pleasure, though, was equal if not more than an archeological find, for each further discovery allowed me to have a better understanding of a period of history at the center of which stood the colorful Dukes of Burgundy. It was a period marked by unprecedented courtly opulence and affected by an atmosphere of Shakespearean drama, with murders and vendettas, wars and crusades, intrigues and treachery, chivalry and spectacular feasts, which all contributed to the production of magnificent works of art.

My educational process in this field obviously went through many ups and downs. When I was looking for extant portraits of the Dukes of Burgundy, I stumbled, through Wikipedia, on the image of a statue of Philip the Good behind the Palace of the Dukes in Dijon. Such was my ignorance then that I thought of it as a near contemporary effigy of Philip. To my surprise, when I called Sophie Jugie, the director of the Musée des Beaux Arts in Dijon, she informed me that it was in fact a 20th-century production by the sculptor Bouchard. Not to discourage me, though, she gently remarked that Bouchard must have consulted the available documentation on the matter, and that the statue was perhaps a good starting point for my research, but not the conclusive proof that I needed. Luckily, the idea of visiting Dijon to see the statue had put me in touch with a person who, later on, graciously made available to me several research files that she had on the portraits of the Dukes, and more importantly, encouraged me to get in contact with Bertrand Schnerb, a historian whose main interest was Burgundy. Through the latter, I met Jacques Paviot, who had written several volumes about the Dukes of Burgundy and their efforts toward organizing a crusade against the Turks. Schnerb and Paviot

kindly gave me a copy of their most recent work, for which I thank them; their books provided me with an information backbone that guided me through the rest of my project. They also helped me out with numerous enquiries and questions about the Dukes of Burgundy.

The crusading activities of the Dukes had somehow brought to my mind the crushing defeat that Timur (Tamerlane) had inflicted upon the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid in 1402, and how his intervention had pushed back the fall of Constantinople for half a century. Timur's victory had made him a virtual ally of Burgundy. As a result, I gradually began to nurture the idea of an exhibition that would somehow bring together the worlds of the Timurids and the Dukes of Burgundy, especially since both houses were renowned for their patronage of artistic activities and their love of illustrated manuscripts, and both seemed to have favored the production of enigmatic paintings with several layers of meaning.

My first thought was to take the exhibition idea to the Getty, where the new director was Michael Brand, a specialist in the arts of the Mughal dynasty (i.e., the descendents of Timur who ruled in India), and where Thomas Kren had previously organized several conferences and exhibitions on Medieval paintings, as well as manuscript illuminations. On the night before my meeting in Los Angeles, as I was sifting my downloaded images to prepare a guideline for the exhibition that I wanted to propose, I rediscovered on my computer the link to a visual presentation of the Gozzoli fresco of the *Procession of the Magi* at the Medici Palace in Florence. It suddenly dawned on me that the young Magus of that procession, which Italian researchers recognize as representing Lorenzo the Magnificent, was meant to portray Duke Charles the Bold as a young boy. I immediately sent an e-mail to Schnerb and Paviot, asking them whether Charles had been to Florence or not. And I went on to my meeting at the Getty without having the answer to my enquiry. It came back two days later, and it was negative: Charles the Bold had never been to Florence! And yet, I was sure that the young Magus could only represent him. It took me a couple of months of further research to understand what the procession was about, and how Charles the Bold had been transposed on it despite the fact that he had not been to Florence.

In the meantime, Brand and Kren had listened to my overenthusiastic and premature presentation with interest, but clearly felt that my ideas needed much more verification and investigation, especially about the Burgundian presence in the Medici fresco. They encouraged me, nevertheless, to pursue my research and kindly answered my many requests, including the request for a partial photocopy of the Getty's *History of Alexander the Great* manuscript for which I am most grateful.

The large number of paintings under investigation and the variety of problems that I had to tackle inevitably required the help of many individuals to whom I am forever indebted and sincerely thankful:

In Austria: Michael Alram of the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna; in Belgium: Bart Lambert of the University of Ghent, and my philologist friend, Xavier Tremblay, who lives in Tournai but teaches at the University of Cologne; in France: Sophie Jugie of the Musée des Beaux Arts of Dijon, Jacques Paviot of the University of Paris, and Bertrand Schnerb of the University of Lille, and master restaurer Véronique Stedman; in Germany: Peter Klein of the University of Hamburg (whose dendrochronological data provided invaluable information for my research), Rainald Grosshans of the Gemäldegalerie of Berlin, Malte Prietzel of the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin, and Jochen Sander of the Städel Museum in Frankfurt; in Italy: Cristina Acidini Luchinat, the Director of the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino; in the UK: Elaine Campbell and Deborah Swallow of the Courtauld Institute, and Richard J. Walsh from the University of Hull; in the USA: Maryan Ainsworth of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Michael Brand and Thomas Kren of the Getty Museum, Mathew Canepa of the College of Charleston, Geoffrey Herman of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and Lloyd de Witt of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. My special thanks go to Mahrukh Tarapor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who encouraged me to write down the fruit of my research as a necessary step for any future exhibition on the subject.

Finally, it looks rather odd for a researcher whose primary interest has hitherto been the field of Persian miniatures to venture into the domain of Italian and Northern Renaissance paintings and challenge accepted views on so many well-known masterpieces. But even if half of the points argued in this study are accepted as correct, it does not bode well for the field of late Medieval art history. It may be that coming from a culture in which innuendoes and the multilayering of imagery—poetic as well as manuscript illustration—are the norm rather the exception, I had a predisposition to detect enigmatic paintings and their layered meanings. It may also be that in the age of Google and Wikipedia, research is now faster and easier. The main problem though, as I see it, is lack of attention to the historical context. One cannot understand complex paintings without knowing the history of the period in which they were produced. If there is one lesson to be learned from this book, it is the importance of the historical background to the understanding of a work of art. None of my discoveries could have been achieved without a minimum amount of knowledge about their historical settings.

Houston – May 2007

Introduction

The 15th century was undoubtedly an age of princely sophistication. From the Dukes of Burgundy to the Medici of Florence, or the Timurids of Iran,¹ princes and aspiring rulers who lacked kingly legitimacy tried to dazzle their constituencies by combining opulence with sophisticated manners and by emphasizing the patronage of artists as well as intellectuals and *littérateurs*. At the center of this activity was the written word, which, on the one hand, had to educate the prince and, on the other, by its translation into manuscripts, constituted proof of erudition. Thus manuscripts were written, illustrated, and embellished to advertise a high level of princely sophistication.

Manuscript illustration often required painters to combine several sequences of the same story in one illustration. Simon Marmion (1425-89), for instance, represented in one painting (fig. 1) several stages of the *Story of Roland*: Charlemagne receiving the gifts of Marcile of Saragossa brought by Ganelon, in the bottom left; above it, the battle of Roncevaux; further up, the duel between Marcile and Roland; under the tree, Roland dying with his horn besides him; while further to the right, Charlemagne is dissuaded by Ganelon to come to Roland's assistance; top right corner, Ganelon being drawn and quartered by four horses; bottom right and top, the vision of Turpin, Bishop of Reims, in which the

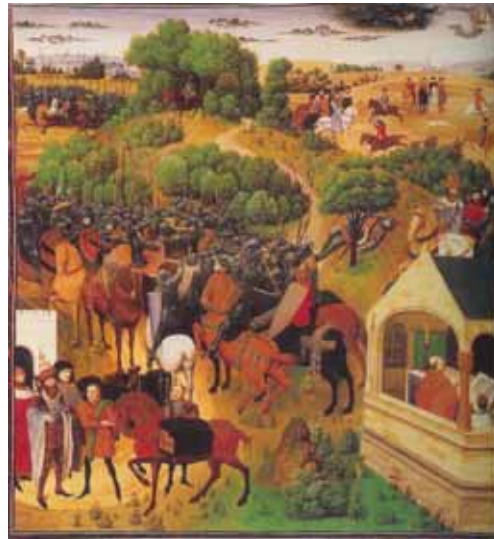


Fig. 1 - Multiple episodes of the *Story of Roland* depicted in one painting by Marmion

¹ The Timurids were the descendants of the conqueror Timur (r. 1370-1405). In the 15th century, they ruled over present-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan; for more on Timur, or Tamerlane as he was to be known in the West, see section G.2 and note 222 *infra*.

Archangel Michael carries Roland's soul to Heaven, while those of the Saracens burn in Hell.²

The passage from a multistage representation to a multilayered one was a further step in the same direction, and naturally led to the production of complex illustrations with several layers of meaning embedded in allegorical representations and innuendos. Thus, when a courtier of Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy wanted to flatter his prince, he commissioned (as we shall see in D.2) the production of an illustrated copy of the *History of Alexander the Great* in which every painting was chosen to juxtapose a feat of Alexander with that of Charles the Bold and convey the impression that the latter was destined to conquer the world as Alexander did. At the same time, it was meant to educate the Duke in the virtues of good government and justice.

The production of such a purposeful manuscript with double-layered illustrations was not restricted to Western courts alone. Similar conditions in both East and West would naturally generate the same type of sophisticated material. Thus, when Amir Alishir Navai (1441-1501), the vizier and chief counsel of the Timurid ruler of the eastern Iranian world, Sultan Hosayn Bayqara (r. 1470-1506), had grievances about another vizier, he would couch his complaint in a double-layered illustration of the *Rose Garden* of the Persian poet Sa'di (fig. 2) to allude to the perfidy and disloyalty of his rival.³ While the composition reflected Sa'di's story of the *Two Wrestlers*, the figures were actually painted in the image of the Timurid



Fig. 2 - The allegorical use of the story of the *Two Wrestlers* (from the *Rose Garden* of Sa'di) by one vizier to accuse another of perfidy and deceit, c. 1486

² Voronova and Sterligov 2003, p. 124.

³ Soudavar 1992, pp. 101-05. In essence, the story of the *Two Wrestlers* is about an ungrateful younger wrestler trying to claim the position of his master. It was used to remind the Sultan how a newcomer (the white-bearded vizier) was trying to usurp the position of the Sultan's childhood friend and chief counsel (depicted closest to the ruler and on his right).

ruler, sitting in the presence of his viziers and courtiers.

And when manuscript illustrators such as Marmion or Jean Fouquet (1420-81) painted full-size panels, it was only natural for them to embed allegorical layers into their paintings as well. Thus, in the *Melun Diptych* that Fouquet painted for the Treasurer of France, Etienne Chevalier (1420-74), the Virgin Mary appears in the image of the voluptuous Agnes Sorel (1421-50), the mistress of Charles VII, whose premature death in 1450 was a source of great sorrow for the King (fig. 3). While Chevalier is portrayed praying in the left panel under the protection of his patron saint, St Etienne (St Stephen in English), his prayer is in reality directed toward Agnes Sorel, his protector in real life.⁴ Fouquet had no qualms on superimposing the face of a living person on the sacred image of the Virgin. Sophisticated patrons expected to see intricate images, and artists responded by producing them.



Figs. 3a, b - The *Melun Diptych*: Etienne Chevalier and his patron-saint on the left, and the Virgin Mary in the image of Agnes Sorel on the right.

In what follows I shall try to explain a number of enigmatic and multilayered paintings by artists who had practiced, in varying degrees, the art of manuscript illustration as well as panel painting:

⁴ Etienne Chevalier's relationship with the king's favorite was such that he was even appointed to be the executor of her testament; Avril 2003, pp. 128-30.

- A) A large *Lamentation* scene, attributed here to Simon Marmion (fig. 4) and painted circa 1465, in the possession of this author.
- B) The *Procession of the Magi* fresco at the Medici Palazzo in Florence (figs. 71, 78, 88, 89), conceived circa 1459 and painted by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497).
- C) The *Medici Virgin* in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt, painted by Roger Van der Weyden (1400-64) and dated here to circa 1461 (fig. 95).
- D) The small *Lamentation* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, attributed to Simon Marmion (fig. 109) and dated here to 1468.
- E) The Philadelphia Museum of Art painting of *St Jerome and a Donor* attributed to Marmion (fig. 127) and dated here to 1473.
- F) The *Fountain of Grace* of the Prado in Madrid (fig. 131), tentatively attributed here to Hubert Van Eyck (c. 1366-1426) and dated to circa 1420-22.
- G) The *Adoration of the Magi* of the Uffizi in Florence (fig. 153), painted by Gentile da Fabriano in 1423.

The above mentioned paintings are well-known masterpieces of the Renaissance period, yet no satisfactory explanation has ever been presented about the purpose of their composition and the hidden messages that they contain. They speak in riddles and allegories, and as such, they are enigmas that need to be solved. The explanations that I provide in this study, try to solve them by placing each painting in its right historical context, and by giving life to the characters represented in it. I suggest that all seven paintings pertain to the Dukes of Burgundy and their courtiers, or their rivals and neighbors, in a period when the assault of the Turks on European lands was causing much distress for Christianity and there was a desire to bring unity within the Church. In addition, the study of the magnificent *History of Alexander the Great* manuscript of the Getty, in support of my findings about Painting D, provides not only a better insight into the level of sophistication of the court of Burgundy but also how parallel situations, in both East and West, gave rise to the same type of enigmatic illustrated manuscripts and paintings. If looked upon individually, each painting sheds a new light on events of the 15th century, but if looked upon as a whole, this work can be construed as a short illustrated history of the Dukes of Burgundy.

Preliminary methodological remarks

Essential to solving enigmas in complex paintings is the detection of oddities, since they often point to a layered and allegorical meaning. Once an oddity is detected, one has the duty to explain it with a plausible scenario rather than sweep it under the rug. The more this scenario is correlated by other indicators, the more valid it becomes.

In the task of explaining oddities, pointers and signs play a pivotal role. Because it was difficult for miniature painters to create a realistic portrait in small size, they often used characteristic signs to identify the main personas. As we shall see, in most of the above-mentioned paintings, the painters carried this practice from miniature to panel painting, and they used identifying signs for the main figures, especially when a figure was supposed to have a double personality.

Equally important for this task is the identification of portraits through establishing likenesses with other paintings or works of art. Yet, many art historians shy away from it. A prominent art historian even warned me that one should not propose such identification unless “one is one hundred percent sure about it.” But when we encounter a person who has features similar to those of a high-school friend that we haven’t seen for a long time, we don’t ask for his ID card before saying hello. The choice between being impolite and wrong strongly favors the former. The same is true in art history. The merits of a *plausible* identification outweigh silence on the subject. Uncertainty exists in all scientific endeavors but mathematics. After all, even nuclear physicists construe and propose theories that only subsequent experiments can support, or discredit. In the same vein, many of my identifications here rest on previous tentative proposals by others, without which I could not have approached the subject; those tentative proposals are in turn strengthened by the added information generated in this study. The objective in art history should be to reach a step-by-step conclusion by the preponderance of the evidence at hand, and not to insist on a conclusion that is above all doubts.

Stating the obvious, when a patron is commissioning a work of art, it is primarily to enhance his own glory, or project a political message to justify his actions or political stance. The more sophisticated the patron, the more one should expect to find a complex but well-constructed allegory embedded in a painting. The paintings that I intend to analyze here are prime examples of such complex and enigmatic imagery. They are historical documents with much information to reveal. Scholars tend to believe that text provides documentary proof while the interpretation of imagery is speculative. I believe that the reading of text often needs interpretation, and is speculative as well. Like any other historical document, images may reveal the truth, exaggerate a situation, or even alter facts. Interpreting them should be subject to the same cautionary approach applicable to the reading of a text.

Finally, since the study of our first painting (A) covers features that are shared with the rest, the rather lengthy explanations of its various aspects shall also serve as background for the study of the remaining ones. More generally, the paintings under investigation are not introduced in chronological order but are presented in a sequence that allows the reader to get gradually more acquainted with historical events of the 15th century and the roles of various players in each.

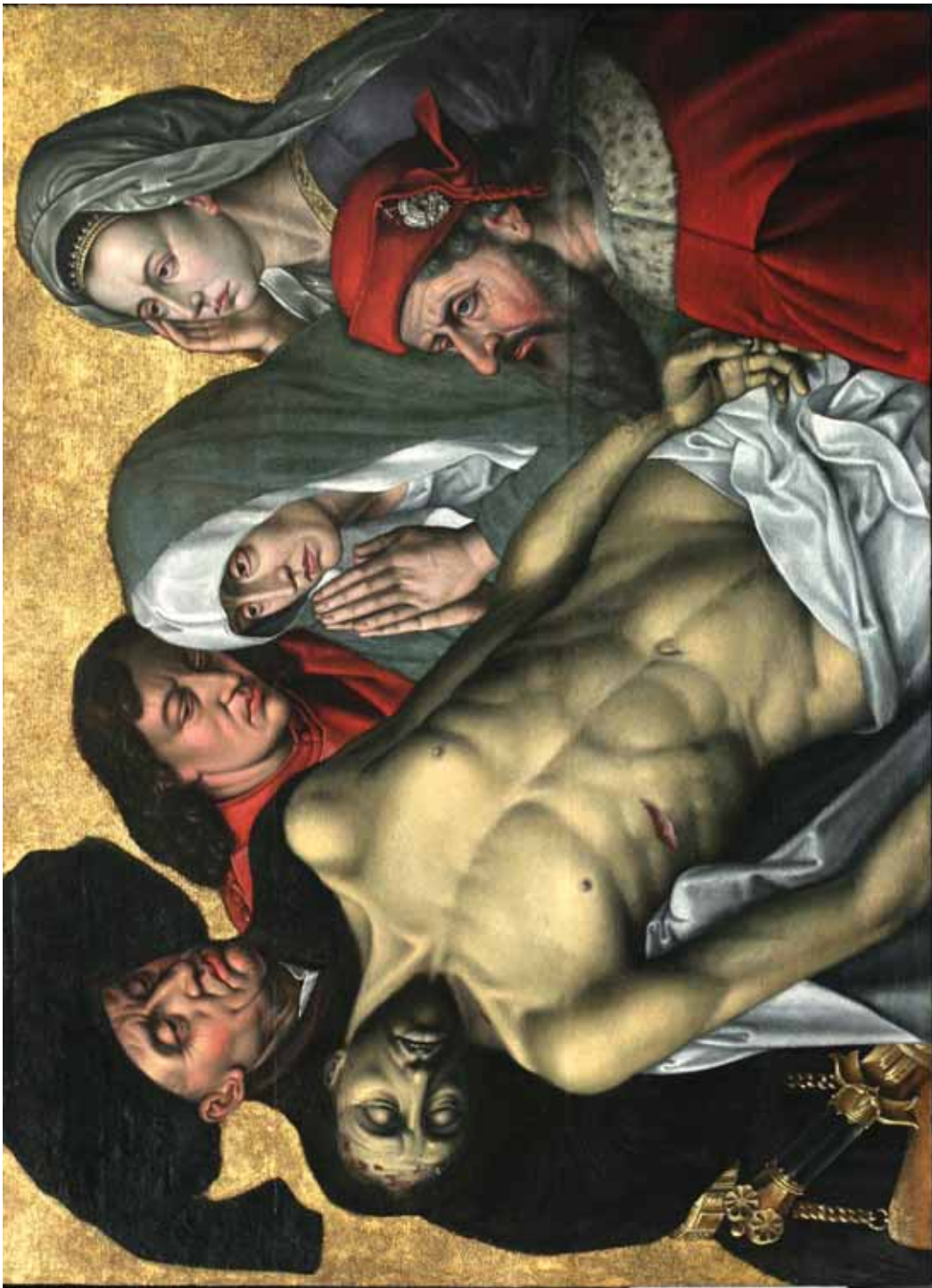


Fig.4 - The Ducal Lamentation

Painting A : The *Ducal Lamentation*

This rather large-sized oil painting from the ex-collection of the Marquesa Vida del Valle, Madrid, was recently sold by Sotheby's in London. It is on a panel that measures 86 by 117.5 cm, and quoting Bermejo Martínez, the catalog entry described it as “the best of the known versions in Spain based on Van der Goes' famous lost original, which is known through a number of period copies.”⁵ The most famous painting of this group is the one in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples (fig. 5), of which a series of direct and faithful copies exist (e.g., fig. 62).⁶



Fig. 5 - The *Lamentation* copy of the Capodimonte Museum in Naples

⁵ Bermejo Martínez 1982, pp. 70-71, no. 8, reproduced p. 204, fig. 7; Sotheby's 2005, p. 42.

⁶ Friedlander 1969, vol. IV, pp. 72-73, cat. no. 23, reproduced plates 36-37.

In her latest study of the works of Hugo van der Goes, Elisabeth Dhanens traced back the theory of the Van der Goes “original prototype” to a publication by Firmenich-Richartz in 1897; and after noticing that most versions of this painting are affected by 16th century Mannerism and Romanism, she concluded that the fragment at Christ Church in Oxford (fig. 60) may well be by the hand of Van der Goes himself, because of its “meticulous composition and a remarkable depth in expression of emotions.”⁷

I shall discuss this fragment and some other copies later on, but a quick look at the figures in our painting clearly reveals a stronger portraiture in which the faces seem to depict real people with much psychological insight into their characters. They are radically different from the Capodimonte series and far more alive than those depicted by Van der Goes in his paintings. Moreover, while its composition revolves around the body of Christ, the focal point of our painting is the interaction between its two most prominent figures: a man in black, who seems to solicit, with a pointed look, the help of the bearded man in red, while the latter shies away from this solicitation by turning his eyes upward and away. Furthermore, with a few exceptions—such as the famous *Deposition* of Van der Weyden in the Prado—the background of Netherlandish paintings is generally filled with a meticulously painted landscape that invites the viewer to delve into never-ending details, at the expense of the main characters (see, for instance, fig. 61). By contrast, the plain gold background here is clearly designed to enhance the importance of the large-sized figures depicted in the foreground.

Finally, besides the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St John, the two most portrayed characters in *Deposition* or *Lamentation* scenes are Joseph of Arimathea—the wealthy Jewish man who arranged the burial of Jesus—and his companion Nicodemus. Joseph is usually clad with rich garments and occasionally depicted holding Jesus. In this painting however, it is not clear which figure represents Joseph of Arimathea and which one portrays Nicodemus, because the one who holds Jesus bears a golden belt and sword while the bearded man wears jewelry on his hat.

As I shall argue, this *Lamentation* allegorically represents Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy who is dressed in black and trying to lift Christianity after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Duke is soliciting the help of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III, as his son Charles the Bold, depicted as St John, is looking on, along with his wife Isabella of Portugal, depicted as Mary Magdalene, who is in mourning. It was painted by Simon Marmion, the most celebrated illuminator of his age, and by the order of Bishop Guillaume Fillastre (1400-73), who was the most

⁷ Dhanens 1998, pp. 176-83.

ardent supporter of Philip in his oath—pronounced at the famous Feast of the Pheasant—to recapture Constantinople. While the composition obviously depicts a Lamentation scene, its underlying theme—and main purpose—was to blame Philip’s aborted crusading efforts on the noncooperation of Emperor Frederick III.

A.1 - Philip the Good of Burgundy

There are numerous portraits of Philip, many of them copies of lost originals, of which the most reproduced are the two generally attributed to Van der Weyden (figs. 6, 7).⁸ They seem to depict him in his 40s or early 50s. As Lorne Campbell has remarked “the Netherlanders expected paintings to be credibly naturalistic but that veracity was not their ultimate or dominant aim.”⁹ Van der Weyden for instance, had a tendency to elongate his figures,¹⁰ a tendency most visible in a manuscript illustration where Philip is drawn with a skeletal silhouette while receiving a copy of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* (fig. 8). Van der Weyden portraits may thus look thinner than other presumed portraits of Philip, such as the drawing from the *Recueil d’Arras* (fig. 10). The latter, which seems to be after an artist’s original preparatory sketch for a painting, depicts Philip in his mid-50s and offers a close parallel to the man in black of Painting A.¹¹



Fig. 6 - Duke Philip the Good at age 40



Fig. 7 - Duke Philip the Good at age 50



Fig. 8 - Duke Philip with a skeletal silhouette in a manuscript illustration by Van der Weyden

⁸ Jugie 1997, pp. 57-60. Jugie notes, however, that our fig. 7 has been recently attributed to Van Eyck.

⁹ Campbell 1998, p. 19.

¹⁰ Van der Kemperdick remarked that because of Van der Weyden tendency to elongate faces, that of Philip the Good and his chancellor, Nicolas Rolin, look very similar; Van der Kemperdick 1999, pp. 69, 98.

¹¹ On the same drawing, his son Charles (fig. 34) is about age 18 which makes his father 55 years old.

Perhaps, heavy drinking had taken a toll on Philip and caused his face to swell rather than shrink with old age,¹² or perhaps the difference in facial fullness was due to different stylistic preferences, or perhaps Marmion deliberately beefed up Philip's appearance to show him fit to embark on a crusading adventure despite his old age.¹³ Whatever the case may be, one can detect features common to all of these portraits: a pronounced double chin that translates into a double cheek higher up, bulging eyes set in large eye sockets, and a hefty lower lip.

Moreover, the thick eyebrows of our portrait agree with the description of Philip provided by the chronicler Chastellain (1415-75), who described them as thick and with "their hairs rising like maddened horns."¹⁴ It is also interesting to note that for his statue of Philip the Good in Dijon, the 20th-century French sculptor, Louis-Henry Bouchard, who extensively studied available documentations, did not opt for a triangular and elongated face but for one much closer to that of the man in black here (fig. 11). Perhaps his experience as sculptor did not allow him to accept the Van der Weyden stylized figures as realistic for a tridimensional model.



Fig. 9 - Philip in Painting A, with marked facial features and a heavy lower lip

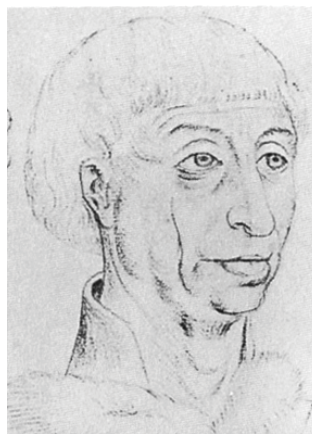


Fig. 10 - Preparatory sketch of Philip's portrait at age 55



Fig. 11 - Modern statue of Philip by Bouchard

The tragic assassination of his father, John the Fearless, on the bridge of Montereau in 1419 (see section F.2), plunged Philip into a state of grief that marked him for the

¹² With 30 mistresses and 17 bastards, Philip had a pronounced liking for debauchery and drinking bouts; Calmette 1949, p. 179. Bourassin 1963 (p. 47) mentions only 24 mistresses and 16 bastards.

¹³ As per Véronique Stedman, the painter has used reddish tint for the youthful face of St John/Charles to show vigorous blood circulation, a milder tone for Philip, and porcelaine white for the Duchesse.

¹⁴ Quoted in Calmette 1949, p. 178: « dont les crins se dressaient comme cornes en son ire ».

rest of his life as he—almost exclusively—wore black from then on.¹⁵ He also had an imposing stature that earned him the epithet *Le géant* (The Giant) or *Le grand lion* (The Big Lion).¹⁶ Therefore, an imposing Burgundian figure—with the traditional oversized headgear and fur-trimmed coat—clad in black would have probably evoked Philip at first sight. However, as many of his courtiers emulated Philip by also wearing black,¹⁷ our painter had to add a distinctive sign to unequivocally identify his man in black.

A.2 - The flaming flint-stone

The personal sign of John the Fearless was a planer spouting out curly slices of wood (fig. 12). In 1421, Philip chose instead the sign of the *fusil*—a flint-stone that sparked flames—which was then integrated into a fire-steel with a B-shaped metal handle (somehow similar in shape to the planer) nowadays called a *briquet* (lighter). It was meant to symbolize the Duke's personal motto, *Ante ferit quam flamma micet* (It strikes before it sparks flames), and in due course became the “perpetual emblem” of the house of Burgundy.¹⁸ It already adorned standards and carpets as early as 1424.¹⁹ And by 1430, when Philip instituted the chivalry Order of the Golden Fleece, he incorporated it into the gold necklace that he gave to each of the first twenty-four knights of the Order, a necklace that they had to wear constantly and return to the Sovereign (i.e., Master) of the Order upon death or expulsion.²⁰ One such a necklace (fig. 13) has survived from the 15th century and shows a golden fleece as a pendant hanging from a chain of *briquet*-pairs, holding a round sparking flint-stone (*fusil*) in between.

In keeping with the word *flamma* in Philip's motto, the emerging sparks from the round flint-stones were flames, whether thinly drawn as in fig. 7, or radiating ones as on Burgundian crowns and tapestries (figs. 14, 17), or as a simple three-flame symbol visible on a replica of the Golden Fleece necklace of Emperor

¹⁵ An important exception to this choice of color seems to be the red paraphernalia of Philip as Sovereign of the Order of the Golden Fleece (fig. 58).

¹⁶ For instance, in a drawing of the tombs of Philip and family members, his (which is the largest) is referred to as that of “Philippe le Géant, dit le Bon”; see Antoine et al. 2004, p. 181; Brion 2006, p. 31.

¹⁷ For instance, the donor of the Middelburg altarpiece (c. 1445) by Van der Weyden is also wearing black; he may or may not be Pieter Bladelin, Philip's minister of finance and treasurer of the Order of Golden Fleece; see Grosshans et al. 1998, pp. 126-27, and Van der Kemperdick 1999, p. 61, for two different opinions on the subject.

¹⁸ Paviot 2000, p. xix; Pastoureau 1996, p. 104.

¹⁹ Lemaire 1996, p. 84.

²⁰ Paviot 2000, p. xxii.

Maximilian II (1527-76) carved on his armor (fig. 16).²¹ It is in fact such a symbol, i.e., three flames emerging from a round flint-stone, that our painter chose to depict on the golden hilt of the man-in-black's sword to identify him as Philip of Burgundy (fig. 15). The question then is: Why didn't the artist choose the necklace itself, so prominently worn by Philip in all other images of him?



Fig. 12 - John the Fearless with his planer emblem in gold



Fig. 13 - Original gold necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece



Fig. 14 - Flame and round Flintstone on a Burgundian crown



Fig. 15 - Flint-stone and three flames on the sword of Philip



Fig. 16 - Three flames coming out of the necklace carved on Maximilian I's armor



Fig. 17 - *Briquet*, flint-stone and flames, on a ducal tapestry

The reason for adopting the golden fleece name for the Order that Philip created is not described in its statutes.²² Whatever his inspiration for choosing it, the mythical

²¹ A flaming flint-stone can already been seen on a 15th-century crown from the Musée des Beaux Arts in Dijon, see Antoine et al. 2004, p. 237; , Vienna, no A 817, c. 1560; Fillitz 1987, pp. 72-73.

²² Paviot 2000, p. xviii.

story of Jason and the Argonauts, pursuing the golden fleece—of a ram—in the distant land of Colchis, was undeniably well suited to an Order of chivalry pursuing high ideals and faraway goals. The problem, though, was that the Order of the Golden Fleece purported to be the guardian of the Christian faith, with its main seat located at the Sainte Chapelle (Holy Chapel) of Dijon,²³ and with a chancellor who had to be an ecclesiastic by statute. It is therefore not surprising that as early as 1431, its first chancellor, the bishop Jean Germain (d. 1460), who saw a contradiction in representing a Christian order with a pagan emblem, sought to find a biblical interpretation for the “golden fleece” by advocating that it actually related to the fleece of Gideon (Judges, 4:36-40). Later on, Bishop Guillaume Fillastre, who succeeded him as chancellor, added four more biblical interpretations but had to keep the original one as well, since none of the fleeces in the biblical stories was golden nor did any relate to a ram.²⁴ The Golden Fleece pendant thus remained a pagan symbol that our painter could not have placed on Philip’s chest in the vicinity of or under Jesus’ head. It was safer to identify the Duke with the sign of the flaming flint-stone only. It was a symbol that regularly adorned the ducal arms and armors, as it can be seen on the scabbard of the dagger of Charles the Bold, now in the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 18), and on another one in the Dijon Museum (fig. 19), and therefore suitable for identifying Philip.



Fig. 18 - Scabbard of the so called dagger of Charles the Bold with the sign of a *briquet*, at the Metropolitan Museum



Fig. 19 - *Briquet* detail of the scabbard of a ducal knife at the Dijon Museum

A.3 - Frederic III of Habsburg

A clear pointer to the high statute of the man in red is the black-dotted white ermine that he wears around his collar; Marmion, for instance, only used it to identify kings

²³ Garnier and Gauthier 1905, p.48.

²⁴ Fillastre attached a virtue to each interpretation: Jason’s fleece stood for magnanimity; that of Jacob for justice; that of Gideon, for prudence; that of Mesa, for fidelity; that of Job for patience; and that of David for clemency; Beltran and Prietzel 1996, p. 124; Lemaire 1996, pp. 87-88.

and emperors in the St Petersburg *Chroniques de France*.²⁵ In combination with his red Germanic hat, the medallion on it, and facial similarities with known portraits, it clearly identifies him as Frederick III of Habsburg, the last Holy Roman Emperor to be crowned in Rome. Indeed, variants of the multilapped red hats were not only worn by contemporary German princes (fig. 20),²⁶ but also by Frederick's son, Maximilian I (r. 1508-19)—who also wears a black-dotted ermine around his collar—and his grandson, Philip the Fair (1478-1506) (figs. 21 and 22).



Fig. 20 -Count Palatine Philip the Warlike, with red hat, c. 1517



Fig. 21 - Effigy of Maximilian I with red hat and ermine collar



Fig. 22 - Portrait of Philip the Fair with a red hat

We do not have a portrait of Frederick with this particular red hat, but the medallion on it is a six-petal rosette adorned with the three pearls of wisdom (fig. 23), and one that his predecessor, Emperor Sigismund (1368-1437) wore on his hat (fig. 25), albeit in a slightly different configuration.²⁷ Frederick may have subsequently preferred to transform the six-petal rosette to a cinquefoil, similar to the one stamped on a posthumous memorial *jeton* next to his effigy (fig. 24).²⁸ Nevertheless, both the cinquefoil and the six-petal rosette remained royal symbols since they appear, for instance, individually on the coinage of the Habsburg

²⁵ Voronova and Sterligov, 2003, pp. 120-33.

²⁶ Other red hats can be seen in Grosshans et al. 1998: *Count Ludwig Lowenstein* by Hans Baldung (1513), pp. 80-81, the *Queen of Sheba Before Solomon* by Konrad Witz (c. 1435-37), pp. 58-59; and *David and Bathsheba* by Lucas Cranach the Elder (c.1526), pp. 88-89.

²⁷ The pearls on Sigismund's medallion are symmetrically arranged around the center, while Frederick's are regrouped in the lower portion, completely covering two of the petals. The six-petal rosette also appears on some of Sigismund's coinage.

²⁸ I am indebted to Michael Alram of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna for providing me an illustration of this *jeton*.

Emperor Ferdinand II (r. 1620-1637) as well as the latter's uncle, Archduke Ferdinand II (d. 1595), and simultaneously on the coinage of Emperor Ferdinand I, son of Maximilian I, who became king of the Romans in 1531 (figs. 25, 26, 27). The medallion also incorporates a gem-encrusted triangle at its center, symbol of the Holy Trinity. As Christian royal symbols, the elements of this rosette were appropriate neither for Joseph of Arimathea nor for Nicodemus.



Fig. 23 - Rosette medallion on Frederick's hat with three pearls of wisdom and Holy Trinity triangle in the center



Fig. 24 - Posthumous *jeton* of Frederick III with his effigy and a cinquefoil rosette



Fig. 25 - Sigismund's medallion (detail of fig. 66)



Fig. 26 - Six-petal rosette on coin of Archduke Ferdinand



Fig. 27 - Six-petal rosette on coin of Ferdinand II



Fig. 28 - Five- and six-petal rosettes on the obverse and reverse of a coin of Ferdinand I, c. 1540

Early in his reign, Frederick had decided to take under his wings Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-64), whom he nominated as his laureate poet and then helped to become a cardinal and eventually Pope Pius II (p. 1458-64). In 1450, he sent Piccolomini as ambassador to negotiate his marriage with Eleonore of Portugal (the niece of the Duchess Isabella), whom he wed two years later in Rome. The

marriage was officiated by Piccolomini, then Bishop of Siena, and was elaborately depicted by Pinturicchio (1454-1513) on the frescoes of the Piccolomini Library of the Cathedral of Siena, some fifty years later (fig. 29). Whether Pinturicchio was working off some sketches established by painters present at the ceremonies or by descriptions conveyed to him, it is clear that the fashion then—as in the time of Sigismund—was for the German Emperor to wear a beard. Thus, Frederick, as well as his German retinue, is depicted with a beard. Later portraits of Frederick, however, show him beardless (fig. 30), a fashion that his progeny also followed.



Fig. 29 - Marriage of Frederick III, officiated by Cardinal Piccolomini



Fig. 30 - Portrait of Frederick III

Frederick's most important feature, as visible on his *jeton* (fig. 24) and other paintings, is a prominent nose, a feature inherited from his mother, Cymburgis of Masovia, which reached catastrophic proportions in the case of his son Maximilian (fig. 21) and later Habsburgs. Frederick's nose here is rather subdued. One may think that the painter tried to create a more flattering image of the Emperor. The infra-red reflectography (IRR) image, however, shows that it was done for opposite reasons. Indeed, the initial underdrawing reveals a portrait with a bumpy nose, similar to fig. 24, and eyes that are—anatomically—positioned correctly and look straight ahead (fig. 32). But since one of the main objectives of the composition was to show the indifference of Frederick to the solicitation from Philip, the painter decided, perhaps as an afterthought, to accentuate Frederick's state of disinterest by turning his eyes upwards. To do so he had to show more white below the pupils. A number of modifications are thus visible from the underdrawing to the final painting. For the right eye, the upper lid is pulled higher, and the lower lid slightly lower, while the pupil is turned upward. The modifications for the left eye were more substantial because very little of it was visible in the initial sketch: First, the plane of that eye was rotated in a Picasso-like fashion toward the nose to show more of it and then the eyelids were expanded to expose more white. The bump on

Frederick's nose still covered a good portion of the right eye and had to be trimmed; thus disappeared the Cymburgian bump of Frederick's nose! While the changes are minute, the result is very successful and a tribute to Marmion's dexterity in the effective use of eye orientations in his paintings (see section A.6).

These changes gave Frederick not only an uninterested look but also an almost idiotic and disheveled one, heightened by the loose-hanging ribbon of his headgear. Generally, historians didn't recognize in him many qualities, with the exception perhaps of his tenacity and his preference for diplomacy rather than wars of uncertain outcome.²⁹ On the other hand, most accounts emphasize his "vulgar" manners and physical defects, some self-inflicted, as for instance, a crooked foot resulting from the habit of opening doors with a foot-kick. The French ambassadors who dealt with him in 1458 described him as "a sleepy man, coward, with an air of melancholy, stingy, scared, temperamental, hypocrite ... and one who merits to be described with bad adjectives only."³⁰ It should therefore come as no surprise to see Marmion depict the Emperor with such unflattering traits.



Fig. 31 - Final appearance with wider eyes looking up and out of the painting, and shaved nose



Fig. 32 - Underdrawing as seen through IRR, with eyes looking straight ahead and bumpy nose

²⁹ Bérenger 1990, pp. 110-11.

³⁰ Brion 2006, p. 182.

A.4 - Charles the Bold

The known portraits of Charles the Bold—again mostly later copies of lost originals—can be divided into three general categories.³¹ The first, as exemplified by the portrait in the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse in Lille and the drawing from the *Recueil d'Arras* (figs. 33-34), depicts him as a young boy in his teens. In the second, we have a portrait attributed to Van der Weyden, which represents him in his early twenties (fig. 35). For the third, we have a series of copies based on a lost original, which shows him in his thirties and praying (fig. 37). The sheer multiplicity of the copies of the latter type (Versailles, Vienna, Nancy, Cincinnati, etc.) vouches for the original to have represented an official and accepted image of Charles.³² Since Marmion reputedly made a portrait of him sometime before 1465,³³ he is certainly a good candidate for having painted this original.



Fig. 33 - Charles at age 15-16



Fig. 34 - Charles at age 17-18



Fig. 35 - Charles at age 20-25

Of interest to us here is the striking similarity of the facial features of this portrait with those of St John in our painting, whose likeness corresponds so well to Chastellain's description of Charles: "not as tall as the father, but corpulent, well built, with strong arms and backbones; same mouth as his father's, rather large and pinkish; hefty nose (*le nez tractif*) ... black thick and curly hair ... and looking down when walking."³⁴ The latter characteristic seems to relate to Charles' generally described melancholic and introverted character, one admirably captured by

³¹ Jugie 1997, pp. 60-63.

³² Jugie 1997, p. 61. Fig. 37, for instance, is clearly a posthumous copy as it bears the inscription: "Charles, Duke of Burgundy, who was killed before Nancy."

³³ Kren 1992, p. 21.

³⁴ Brion, 2006, p. 45.

Marmion in this painting. As we shall see, the pronounced wrinkle at the beginning of Charles' eyebrow is a characteristic of Marmion's paintings. One should also note the similarity between the mouths of father and son (with a bulging lower lip), as pointed out by Chastellain.

Even though the likeness of St John's features with those of Charles the Bold would have been quite obvious to the viewer of those days, Marmion perhaps wanted to add one more identifying index. In contemporary paintings of the same subject, the only buttoned clothing item that St John wears is a red cape covering both shoulders, with a few buttons in the middle and below the neck. In here though, he not only wears a red cape but also a cardinal-type robe with one button emerging from under the cape (fig. 36). The latter is similar to the red capes of the Order of Golden Fleece, which were open on the right side to allow the knights to reach for their swords (fig. 116). These capes were therefore buttoned on the right shoulder as in here. Because Charles was the 31st member of the Order, the special red cape of the St John figure may have served as a subtle pointer to his second identity.³⁵



Fig. 36 - Charles at age 32

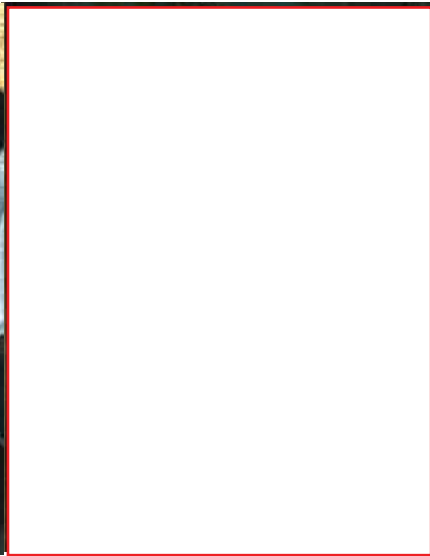


Fig. 37 - Charles in his mid-thirties

³⁵ To my knowledge, the only prior painting that showed a red cape over a red robe and buttoned on the right shoulder is Van der Weyden's *Crucifixion* in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; see, for instance, Van der Kemperdick 1999, p. 50. St John's robe, however, is not an ecclesiastic robe but a standard Roman one. The same is true for Van der Goes's *Lamentation*, in the same museum, and datable to 1467-68.

A.5 - The Duchess Isabella of Portugal

In line with the three previous figures, the image of Mary Magdalene (fig. 40) displays an oddity that can only be interpreted as a pointer to a second personality: She is wearing a pearl diadem, proper only for queens or princesses.³⁶ It also displays a close affinity with two portraits of Isabella of Portugal: as an older woman in the Getty Museum (fig. 39) and as a middle-aged one at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts (fig. 38). More importantly, all three display a certain cranium anomaly in the form of a marked line on her temple, caused as it seems by a slightly bulging frontal bone intersecting with the sphenoid bone. Clearly, Mary Magdalene was made in the image of Isabella. Since the Duchess was a main supporter of the various crusading efforts of her husband and much involved in them, especially for the procurement of ships,³⁷ it made sense to include her in this allegory.



Fig. 38 - Middle aged Isabella



Fig. 39 - Isabella in old age



Fig. 40 - Isabella by Marmion

True to his style, Marmion's portrait is more fleshy than the other two, but all three display a wrinkle on the temple

A.6 - Simon Marmion

No signed work by Marmion is known to exist. Only fortuitous accounting entries from the years 1457-59 for the altarpiece of the Abbey of St Bertin commissioned by Fillastre, and a passing reference in an 18th-century history of that abbey, have

³⁶ Even though Mary Magdalene is often depicted wearing a courtesan-like, sumptuous dress, a diadem cannot be deemed to be part of such an outfit.

³⁷ Paviot 2003, p. 84.

allowed the attribution of the remaining four panels of the altarpiece to Marmion.³⁸ On that basis, a corpus of other works has gradually been attributed to him, mostly manuscript illustrations and a few paintings, two of which I will further discuss as Paintings D and E. This small group of paintings has not allowed, as yet, the full appreciation of the skills of an artist whose contemporaries, such as Jean Lemaire de Belges (1473-1525), not only praised him as the “prince of illumination” but also compared his panel painting skills to those of Fouquet and Jan Van Eyck (c.1385-1441).³⁹ Even historians of distant lands, such as Gucciardini (1483-1540), who was close to the Medici and the author of the *History of Italy* (a pioneering work in modern historiography), extolled him as “an excellent painter and a man of letters.”⁴⁰

In a versified epitaph for Marmion, Jean Molinet (d. 1507) described the range of his activities and the nature of his clientele:

For the emperors, kings, counts and marquises,
He decorated by his art and through *innate talent*,
Books, paintings, chapels and altars,
In ways not ever seen before.⁴¹

One should note that the task of identifying a painter is generally easier for high-quality paintings, because the possible candidates at the very top are but a few, and a process of elimination can quickly reveal the artist’s identity. Given the high quality of portraiture in our painting and the praise bestowed on Marmion by a 16th-century historian that “he painted personages after life so well that they only lacked a soul and living breath,”⁴² not many other choices but Marmion remain. Fortunately, this identification by elimination can also be substantiated through a detailed stylistic analysis.

First and foremost of Marmion’s painting characteristics is his ability to make use of the eyes to animate his compositions, best exemplified in the *Presentation in the Temple* from the Huntington Library’s *Book of Hours*. In a detail, approximately 6 cm wide and reproduced here as fig. 41, twelve people are aligned across the illustration, vividly interacting with their eyes. Some watch the High Priest, some throw a glance at the infant Jesus, and others are in conversation with their neighbors. It takes a precision of more than 1/10th of millimeter in the positioning of

³⁸ Kren 1992, p. 21. The Abbey of St Bertin is situated in the city of St Omer (see map 1).

³⁹ Ainsworth 1992, p. 343.

⁴⁰ Kren 1992, p. 21.

⁴¹ Molinet 1489.

⁴² Kren 1992, p. 21; Ainsworth 1992, p. 243.

the pupils to achieve such an effect; a precision that is perhaps due less to dexterity and more to what Molinet described as “innate talent”; the same talent that enabled him to put a solicitous look in the eyes of Philip, a shy look in the eyes of his reclusive son, and an uninterested and disheveled one in Frederick’s.



Fig. 41 - Eye interaction depicted by Marmion in a miniature painting



Fig. 42 - Horned eyebrow



Fig. 43 - Final aspect of Isabella’s portrait



Fig. 44 - Underdrawing in IRR with horned eyebrow

Second, we can spot in the eyebrows of the High Priest of the *Temple* illustration, Marmion’s tendency to accentuate them with ascending frowns and wrinkles in the middle (fig. 41). The same tendency is visible on the forehead of the man with a cape in Painting D (fig. 42), and on that of Philip and Charles in Painting A. As the IRR image of Mary Magdalene reveals (fig. 44), Marmion could not refrain from

sketching a heavy frontal wrinkle even on a woman. It probably looked awkward, and he therefore toned it down in the final painting (fig. 43).



Fig. 45 - *Pieta* drawing by Marmion



Fig. 46 - *The Virgin and the Man of Sorrow* by Marmion



Fig. 47 - *Pieta* illustration by Marmion in a manuscript



Fig. 48 - Comparing Christ's head in Painting A (center) with those from figs. 45 and 46

Third is the head of Jesus. It seems to be in the standard format of the Marmion atelier, since we see the same head used in a Harvard drawing (fig. 45) as well as a diptych presently in Bruges (fig. 46). As a tool of their trade, Netherlandish ateliers kept “patterns,” i.e., cartons and stencils for repetitive figures. The patterns were first set on the panel and the remaining compositions were then drawn freehand around them.⁴³ Certain round white spots, visible in the IRR image of Jesus’ head (fig. 192), may indicate the use of a pouncing technique through a pattern in Painting A. In this technique, the dots are usually black and due to carbon powder. It is not clear, however, what was used here to generate the white dots. A more interesting point is the subtle variation applied to this standardized head of Jesus

⁴³ Dijkstra 2005, p. 314; Campbell 1998, p. 25.

according to its position. When the head is vertical and leaning forward against the chin, the mouth is almost closed, and when it is in a horizontal position as in our painting, the mouth opens up (fig. 48).

Fourth, we can cite a series of details common to many of Marmion paintings: The red striated cheeks of Philip and Frederick can also be seen in his miniature paintings (fig. 41) or on the face of St Bertin and an assistant monk (fig. 50); male figures of large panels such as Paintings A, D, and E (figs. 9, 23, 42, 127) have multilayered eye pockets with pronounced wrinkles on the edges of the eyes; and as noticed by Maryan Ainsworth, they all have a matte, chalky look, similar to Painting A. Marmion was also fond of short, striated patterns for gold brocade with a few perpendicular strokes that sometimes led to swastika-like motifs; we can see it here around Isabella of Portugal's neck, as well as on another painting by him presently in the Louvre, *The Miracle of the True Cross* (fig. 49).⁴⁴



Fig. 49 - Gold brocade pattern



Fig. 50 - Striated cheeks in red



Fig. 51 - Gold brocade of Isabella

Fifth is Marmion's penchant for golden backgrounds, both in miniature painting (such as fig. 47) and panel painting (e.g., fig. 46).

Finally, the IRR underdrawing reveals a peculiar practice of Marmion in defining shaded areas. While most painters use hatching—strait or crossed—to define them, Marmion seems to favor a series of parallel gray-wash marks applied with a quick brush, marks that are nonlinear and in the shape of an elongated tear drop (fig. 56). And whereas they are dark under dark areas, they are lighter under the light colored areas, perhaps to avoid the marks' resurgence through the paint.⁴⁵ Of all Marmion's

⁴⁴ For more on this painting, see Appendix II. For another brocade depiction by Marmion, see Ainsworth 1992, p. 247, fig. 240.

⁴⁵ Van der Weyden also seems to have used the gray wash in his under-drawings, but not in the short and repetitive pattern that Marmion used to mark the shaded area; see, for instance, Djikstra 2005, p. 308.

known works, the one that is most comparable, especially in size, to our painting is Painting E. In comparing the under chin preparation of Philip's portrait with that of the donor in Painting E (later identified as Johann II von Baden), we can readily see the same type of markings in both (figs. 52, 53).⁴⁶ It is interesting that crosshatching has also been used for Painting E. But a close look reveals that, for instance on the cheek of the donor, the teardrop marks were applied first and the hatched lines later and over the former (fig. 54). The quick and sparse teardrop marks perhaps sufficed for the master himself to complete his painting, but when an assistant was to complete it, he may have needed more precise guidelines through crosshatching.

Even though smaller in size, the IRR underdrawing of the drapery on *The Virgin Annunciate* of the St Bertin altarpiece also shows the marking of shaded areas in the same manner, albeit on a smaller scale (fig. 55).⁴⁷



Fig. 52 - Shading indicators in the IRR image of the donor's chin in Painting E

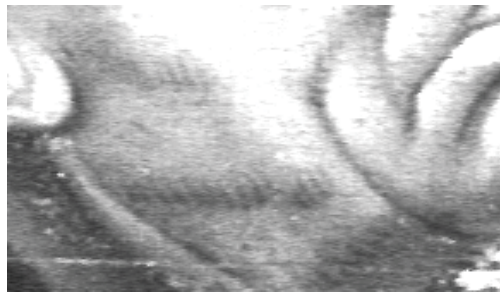


Fig. 53 - Shading indicators in the IRR image of Philip's chin in Painting A

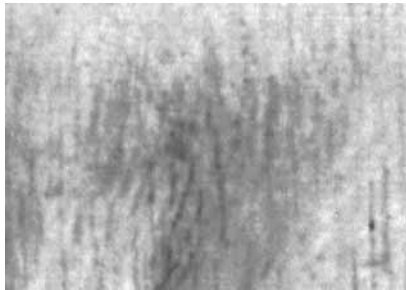


Fig. 54 - IRR image of the shading marks covered by cross hatchings on the cheek of the donor in Painting E



Fig. 55 - Shading marks in the IRR of a St Bertin panel

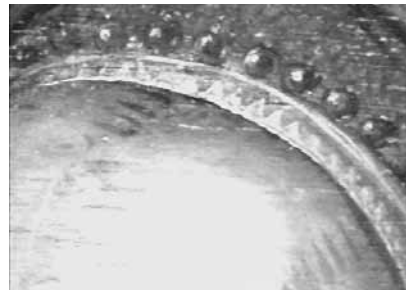


Fig. 56 - IRR image of the shading indicators on the forehead of the Duchesse Isabella in Painting A

⁴⁶ I am most grateful to Lloyd DeWitt from the Philadelphia Museum of Art for providing me with copies of the IRR images of Painting E. The IRR image I have used was taken in 1938.

⁴⁷ I am indebted to Rainald Grosshans for providing me a copy of this IRR image.

A.7 - The Oath of the Pheasant

In 1396, John the Fearless led a coalition of Christian forces against the Ottoman Turks with disastrous results. Not only were his troops decimated at Nicopolis but also he, along with ten of his companions and a few Hungarian noblemen, became a prisoner of the Ottoman Sultan and only freed against a heavy ransom of 200000 florins (equivalent to 710 kgs of gold).⁴⁸ This ignominious defeat, which undoubtedly left its mark on the House of Burgundy, was perhaps at the root of Philip's lifelong preoccupation with the idea of a new crusade.

By 1437, Philip had already ordered ships made for a new crusade⁴⁹ and even envisaged acquiring Genoa to use as a launch base for related expeditions.⁵⁰ But none of his efforts gathered momentum. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 however, came as a shock to Europe in general and to the Duke in particular. Immediately afterwards, he summoned his knights to the Feast of the Pheasant, a ceremony to be held in Lille on February 17, 1454. At the end of this feast, Dame Église—a masked woman impersonating the Church—lamented in a theatrical performance the sad state of Christianity and the loss of its holy places, and then asked the knights of the Golden Fleece to come to her aid.⁵¹ One by one, they rose and took an oath to free Constantinople from the Turks. Philip's own oath, though, was conditional: "Should My Lord, the King (of France) undertake a crusade ... and provided I am in full possession of my physical abilities, I shall follow him in person and serve him with all the might at my disposal, and should he chose to send a prince of his own blood in his stead, I shall follow him as if it were he,..., and if the Grand Turk would not flee, I would challenge him to a single combat."⁵²

By this time of course, the meaning of "crusade" had changed: It no longer meant capturing Jerusalem but freeing Constantinople from the Turks.⁵³ And the rise in popular fervor for the latter task was such that the political leaders of the day could not sit idle. Thus, Emperor Frederick also summoned an Imperial Diet in Ratisbon (present day Regensburg) in April 1454 to prepare for a crusade.

Philip's domains straddled French and German territories (see map 1). He was the Duke of Burgundy as well as a "Marquis of the Holy Empire"; therefore, besides being a vassal to the King of France, he was also a vassal to Emperor Frederick.

⁴⁸ Schnerb 2005, p. 93.

⁴⁹ Paviot, 2003, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Calmette 1949, p. 222.

⁵¹ Paviot 2003, pp. 309-12.

⁵² Bourassin 1983, p. 283; Vaughan 2004, pp. 144-45.

⁵³ Paviot 2003, p. 294.

Even though he was far richer and more powerful than either of them, he still had the duty to abide by their summons. But if he did so for the Ratisbon Diet, it was more by necessity than a sense of duty; for the alliance and participation of German princes were vital to the success of any crusading enterprise.

Philip arrived in great pomp at Ratisbon only to find that Frederick was not there and had delegated Piccolomini to the Diet in his stead. No other prince had come either. Nevertheless, a second Diet was scheduled for September, and while Fillastre arduously went to work with Piccolomini to prepare the groundwork for raising an army the following year, Philip amended his initial oath to include a vow to follow the Emperor, or the king of Hungary and Bohemia, in crusade; and if neither of the two would go personally, he would then send a prince of his own blood.⁵⁴

Because Pope Nicholas V died in 1455 and was replaced by Calixtus III (p. 1455-58), the departure had to be rescheduled for the following year. But commitments were slow to come and nothing concrete materialized, until the advent of Pius II, who relentlessly pursued every king and prince for a new crusade. Obviously, the only one who had the means to initiate such an enterprise was Philip. He was willing to go, but not alone. In the end, as Pius II avows in his own diaries, he decided to force the Duke's hand by personally leading the expedition. His reasoning was this: "When the Vicar of Christ, who is greater than the King (of France) and the Emperor, goes to war, the Duke, to whom *I shall remind his sermon*, cannot stay at home and forfeit his honor."⁵⁵ As we shall see, time and again Philip's oath came to haunt him and his family.

By the end of 1463, the conditions were finally favorable for Philip to fulfill his oath. His domains had been pacified and his son Charles was to govern while he was away. Another son and member of the Order of the Golden Fleece, the illegitimate Antoine, known as Le Grand Bâtard (The Great Bastard), was sent out with the fleet from Flanders to Marseille to gather additional armaments and troops.⁵⁶ Philip was about to join the Pope when the latter, upon his arrival to Ancona, passed away on August 15, 1464. As a result, Antoine was called back and the whole enterprise was aborted despite all the costs and preparations already undertaken.

⁵⁴ Paviot 2003, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Bourassin 1983, p. 293 ; Paviot 2003, p. 165.

⁵⁶ Paviot 2003, p. 175.

A.8 - Guillaume Fillastre: In defense of Philip

Guillaume Fillastre (the Younger) was the illegitimate son of a Benedictine nun and the humanist Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre (d. 1428), after whom he was named. He was raised and educated in the ecclesiastical channel but eventually joined the services of the Dukes of Burgundy. Devoted, on the one hand, to the pope and on the other, to Philip, he achieved high status with both. He became counselor to Philip in 1440 and quickly rose to prominence thanks to his erudition and diplomatic skills. The Duke admired in him “his good senses, and his prudence, loyalty, science and assiduousness,” and appointed him as the head of his counsel in 1457 and chancellor of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1461. Successive popes nominated him bishop of Toul in 1449 and of Tournai in 1460. As chief promoter of the crusade against the Turks at the court of Burgundy, Pope Nicholas V designated him as legate *a latere* at that court, a position subsequently confirmed by Calixtus III and Pius II.⁵⁷ His friendship with the latter, and the mutual respect that the two had for each other, was probably one of the reasons that the crusade was finally set into motion. But the crusade attracted the ire of the courtiers, who saw it as an adventurous undertaking and too arduous a journey for their old days.⁵⁸

With the advent of Pope Paul II (p. 1464-71), however, the situation drastically changed. Philip was tired, old, and no more able to embark on a crusading expedition. Nevertheless, the new Pope, who had neither the conviction of his predecessor nor the willingness to commit himself personally, was still pressing for one. Politically, it was the viable thing to do, even though there were no chances for success. He thus put pressure on Philip by arguing that he had made a vow to take the Cross and had to honor it. Conveniently, he chose to ignore that Philip’s oath was conditional, as he knew—as politicians of today also know—that half a truth can be damaging if repeated often.⁵⁹ In response, Fillastre wrote in 1465 a long and detailed letter to Paul II, exonerating his prince from allegations and trying to explain what he had done in respect to his oath and why it was not binding anymore.⁶⁰

First, he noted that Philip was never forced to take an oath but did it of his own volition and only because of the “ardent desire” to serve God and Christianity, and

⁵⁷ Beltran and Prietzel 1996, pp. 119-21.

⁵⁸ Paviot 1996, p. 73.

⁵⁹ The same tactic was later on used by Pope Sixtus IV, who told Charles the Bold in 1476, to either go to the crusade himself or send somebody of his own blood, or pay up a large sum to buy back the vow of his father; Paviot 2003, p. 193.

⁶⁰ Prietzel 2003, pp. 235-53.

that his offer at the Diet of Frankfurt and the Congress of Mantua (1459), to provide foot soldiers and cavalry, was voluntary as well.

Second, he mentioned that a *conditional* oath is not obligatory unless all conditions are satisfied. In this case, Philip had stipulated “if I am alive and able.” When he was able, he did everything in his power, from committing troops and equipping ships to sending a vanguard expedition, which all cost him more than 200,000 florins for the fulfillment of his oath.

Third, as he knew that he could not undertake a crusading expedition on his own, his oath was linked to the participation of other kings and princes. Having emphasized twice before in his letter the lack of interest and commitment of Frederick and other princes for a crusade, Fillastre concludes that Philip could not be faulted for the failure of this holy enterprise because, despite much effort and solicitation, none of the other kings or princes had committed to this noble cause. And when Pius II himself stepped forward, the Duke followed suit, but the untimely death of the Pope put an end to it. He then surmised, perhaps God did not think that “we merited the great glory of saving Christianity from further ruin.”⁶¹

Fourth, by way of advice, Fillastre observed that maritime crusading routes had proven to be dangerous and it was advisable to take the land route in the future.⁶² In an oblique way, he was reemphasizing the importance of the commitment of Frederick and other princes through whose lands passed the road to Constantinople.

Fifth, because Philip was getting exceedingly old and suffering from different diseases, he would never again be able to withstand the hardships of such a perilous journey. Fillastre then demanded the Pope to absolve Philip and his relatives from their oaths.

The scope of the papal attacks on Philip must have been substantial since, on the one hand, Fillastre asked the Pope to not listen to malevolent advice and, on the other, he tried to deflect the accusation that Philip had misused ecclesiastical taxes levied in preparation for the crusades, accusations to which Fillastre replied: Although much money was gathered, even more was spent, and he was ready to give a detailed accounting of it; but should it ever be proven that there was a surplus of money, he was sure that the Duke would give it back.⁶³ It is probably in conjunction with this letter, and to counter the negative political propaganda aimed

⁶¹ Prietzel 2003, pp. 249-51.

⁶² Prietzel 2003, p. 252.

⁶³ Prietzel 2003, p. 253. The “malevolent advice” alluded to by Fillastre was possibly instigated by King Louis XI of France, who, as part of his strategy to isolate Burgundy, gave to the Medici, in that same year, the right to include the Fleur de Lys on their coat of arms.

at the Duke, that he decided to illustrate his main argument in a more vivid way: The Duke had indeed tried to “lift” Christianity and had solicited the help of the Emperor and his princes, but to no avail; if blame there was, it was on Frederick and not on Philip. Thus, a painting in which Frederick was avoiding the solicitations of Philip would indeed complement Fillastre’s written arguments.

Throughout his career, the erudite Fillastre had written many treatises to enhance the glory of the Dukes of Burgundy and had patronized works of art to that effect. The *Chroniques de France* manuscript, for instance, which he presented in 1457 to Philip, was modified to include passages of the *History of Flanders* to justify the Duke’s aspirations to rule over a revived Lotharingian Empire (figs. 1, 58).⁶⁴ The illustrator of this magnificently grand manuscript was Marmion who also made the famous altar of St Bertin for Fillastre (originally set in a glorious gold frame and finished in 1459). He was, therefore, the artist of choice to produce the politically charged painting that Fillastre wished to make.



Fig. 57 - Right panel of Guillaume Fillastre’s St Bertin’s altarpiece by Simon Marmion who depicted the donor as a bishop on the far left

In regard to the linkage between a Lamentation scene and crusading efforts, the idea perhaps went back to the Feast of the Pheasant and the poem presented there by Guillaume Dufay (1397-1474) to the Duke. As Rima Devereaux explained, in this poem, the “Church of Constantinople is mystically identified with the Mother of God, who by virtue of her status as both Mother of Christ and Mother of mankind, intercedes on behalf of the Body of Christ (an implicit reference to Byzantine

⁶⁴ Paviot 2003, p.120. For Lotharingia, see section E.2.

Constantinople), which is suffering as Christ did.”⁶⁵ Marmion, who had contributed to the Feast of the Pheasant,⁶⁶ and/or Fillastre, probably remembered Dufay’s poem and its allusion to the Virgin Mary as protector of Constantinople (see also section G.4). Thus, the lifting of the Body of Christ projected Philip’s effort to rescue Constantinople and its church, and allowed the embedding of the political message that Fillastre wished to convey in this painting.

For a new interpretation of the purpose of this painting see the French text: it was probably by taken by Fillastre as a gift to Pope Paul II to Rome.
it must have been discarded after the demise of the Dukes of Burgundy and the advent of the Habsburgs



Fig. 58 - Fillastre giving his *Grandes Chroniques de France* to Philip

A.9 - The dendrochronological analysis

Peter Klein measured the age of the four wooden planks in Painting A with the following results:

Board I	182 growth rings covering the years:	1439 - 1258
Board II	144 growth rings covering the years:	1439 - 1296
Board III	92 growth rings covering the years:	1423 - 1332
Board IV	109 growth rings covering the years:	1427 - 1319

He concluded that they originated from the Baltic region with a “creation” date as early as 1456.⁶⁷ Although the ring measure of the planks yields an accurate figure, the creation date of the work suffers from two uncertainties because it is obtained from the addition of two other figures to the highest growth-ring figure: (a) the

⁶⁵ Deveraux 2005, p. 301. The same interpretation is done by Ronchey for a fresco of Piero della Francesca, in which she equates the Body of Christ being flagellated with Constantinople (as the “second Jerusalem”); Ronchey 2006, pp. 273-74.

⁶⁶ Marmion worked for the Dukes of Burgundy on several occasions; Kren 1992, p.21.

⁶⁷ Klein report dated May 30, 2006.

sapwood number, and (b) the drying time (the time bracket from the felling of the tree to its utilization for painting). The sapwood consists of the surface rings below the bark, that is the part of the tree discarded and not used for planks. The drying time can vary depending on the circumstances. It is true that the dendrochronological analysis provides only a *terminus post quem* creation date, because theoretically the wood may remain in storage for a long time. In reality however, and in most instances, it can suggest a fairly accurate creation date. Painting D, for instance, provides an interesting point of reference. As I shall argue in section D, it was probably painted in 1468. Klein determined its last growth ring to be 1442, i.e., 3 years more than Painting A, with its wood originating from the same Baltic region.⁶⁸ Given that Baltic wood was brought in through a steady commercial channel, we may assume that the total of “a+b” dates for both paintings is similar and equivalent to 16 years. This would suggest a creation date of 1465 for Painting A, which ties in perfectly with the date I suggested in the previous section. Moreover, Klein estimated that statistically, the median age of the Baltic sapwood is 15 years, plus 10 years for drying time, for a total of 25.⁶⁹ In other words, my suggested date of 1465 includes an “a+b” figure that is just one year more than the median value for this type of painting, and is therefore acceptable statistically.

A.10 - Replicas versus the original

In 1477, Duke Charles the Bold was killed in battle before the city of Nancy with no male heir to succeed him. His only child, Mary of Burgundy, had to marry Frederick's son, Maximilian, to save her duchy from disintegration. By the time Maximilian was succeeded by his grandson, Emperor Charles V, the Habsburgs dominated most of Europe. It seems self-evident then that because of its derogatory portrayal of the Habsburg patriarch, if Painting A were to be copied after 1477, it should have been stripped of its offensive content.

Among all replicas, the one closest to Painting A is the Oxford fragment, which depicts only Mary and St John (fig. 60). It is painted on a linen cloth that was subsequently glued over a wood panel. Although Dhanens seemed to believe that the linen was added for protective reasons,⁷⁰ the juxtaposition of the fragment on Painting A shows a perfect match (fig. 59) and suggests that it was used for direct copying (without a pounced pattern). A close look at the Oxford painting shows a lack of facial details, perhaps because the linen would not allow fine line drawings

⁶⁸ Klein report dated May 13, 1997.

⁶⁹ Klein 1996, pp. 78, 83.

⁷⁰ Dhanens 1998, p. 181.

and paint strokes. This may be the only copy predating 1477. It was reduced in size perhaps to cut out all the remaining signs of the Burgundy-Habsburg rivalry.

In the post-1477 replicas (figs. 5, 61, 62), the compromising details have all disappeared: Frederick's ermine collar has been scratched, the six-petal rosette transformed into a square-shaped medallion or completely suppressed, the triangular sign of the Holy Trinity and the flaming flint-stone modified or eliminated, the pearl diadem removed, and the faces of St John and Mary Magdalene are iconic and no more individualized. Also, Frederick's face seems to have been slightly modified to conform to the physiognomy associated then with a Shylock-type moneylender, in this case Nicodemus. As for the man in black, presumably Joseph of Arimathea, his figure was later used to portray a different donor, one who was a *condottiere* or a man of arms with a sword hanging from his belt.



Fig. 59 - Superimposition of the Christ Church fragment on Painting A



Fig. 60 - *Lamentation* fragment at Christ Church, Oxford

In contrast to all the previously mentioned replicas, our painting is the only one to display offensive characteristics toward the Habsburgs. The very fact that only the head of Jesus was produced from a preexisting "pattern," and the rest of the composition was created freehand and partially modified in the final painting, indicates that this was a novel composition for which no other pattern existed. The stylistic attribution to Marmion and the dendrochronological analysis both point to an original work created circa 1465. As Molinet suggested, dazzled by Marmion's

paintings, other painters had “patterned” their works on his.⁷¹ The original of this powerful and oft repeated composition is, therefore, neither lost, nor by Van der Goes, but it is this very painting (A) by Simon Marmion.

Curiously, in another section of her book, Dhanens devotes considerable space to the practice of the “cleerscrivers,” the Netherlandish artists that specialized in reproducing paintings on cloth, often in serial quantities.⁷² It seems that these cloth paintings were used then much as stencil reproductions and posters are today, i.e., a cheaper mode of wall-covering in lieu of painting or tapestry. They were probably not meant to be of durable use, but just as some present-day posters may end up being laid down on cardboard, some cloth paintings—such as the Oxford fragment—may have been laid down on wood panels for a more lasting display.



Fig. 61 - *Lamentation* copy with Netherlandish background painting, Bruges



Fig. 62 - *Lamentation* copy of the Capodimonte version

Reunions of the knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece, or *chapitres* as they were called, were generally held in a place other than Dijon. At each reunion, the seat of each knight was marked by a panel—adorned with his coat of arms—placed above it. While new panels were made for each reunion, the originals were kept at the Sainte Chapelle of Dijon, and constantly updated to reflect the latest compositions and ranks of the knights.⁷³ By the same token, we may assume that linen copies of Painting A were made and sent to post-1965 reunions, while the original remained in Dijon. Two *chapitres* were held before the demise of the

⁷¹ « Autres, voyant mon trait et mon limage, Ont après moi [Marmion] leur œuvre patronné » ; Molinet 1489.

⁷² Dhanens 1998, pp. 164-66.

⁷³ Van den Bergen-Pantens 1996b, p. 223.

House of Burgundy: the eleventh on May 8, 1468, in Bruges and the twelfth in Valenciennes on May 2, 1473. Fillastre participated in both as Chancellor of the Order. The Oxford linen copy could have been made for either of these meetings.

A.11 - Marmion's legacy and the Van der Goes syndrome

For years, the works of Robert Campin (c.1375-1444) were wrongly attributed to Van der Weyden,⁷⁴ and the “rediscovery” of other renowned 15th-century Netherlandish painters such as Petrus Christus (c. 1410-73) was achieved only through a trial-and-error process and one step at a time.⁷⁵

Hugo Van der Goes was certainly praised by his contemporaries, but not more than Simon Marmion. Yet, since the corpus of works attributed to Van der Goes is sizable, his fame nowadays overshadows the landscape of late 15th-century Netherlandish painting. As a result, not only did the Firmenich-Richartz myth—attributing the original of our *Lamentation* composition to Van der Goes—remain unchallenged but other myths were even added to it to buttress the supremacy of Van der Goes in that period. It is thus that the elaborate facial details and hand gestures of Marmion's Painting E have been judged by Maryan Ainsworth to bear the influence of Van der Goes, in support of which a theory was developed to place Marmion and Van der Goes in Ghent between 1475-78 and push the painting's creation date to circa 1480.⁷⁶ The historical facts though, as we shall subsequently see, clearly suggest a dating of 1473 (see section E.1); moreover one wonders why Marmion who was a miniaturist by training and a master of expressionist details, would have to travel to Ghent in his old age to emulate a much younger painter.

When I first presented my theories about Painting A to Rainald Grosshans, he was unimpressed by the identity-pointers in the painting and proposed a date of circa 1480 in order to position it in a post-Van der Goes period; similarly, upon reviewing the evidence, Maryan Ainsworth opined that it was a 16th-century copy, primarily because of the highly developed body of Christ, a stylistic feature that she believed to have appeared only in that century.⁷⁷ It is true that the anatomical studies of Dürer (1471-1528) and Michelangelo (1475-1564) in the 16th century led to the incorporation of highly developed naked bodies in painting compositions, but it is equally true that beginning with Robert Campin, the body of Christ in Netherlandish paintings had become more and more elaborate. A Marmion so bent

⁷⁴ Foister 1996, pp. 1-8.

⁷⁵ Upton 1995, p. 53.

⁷⁶ Ainsworth's entry in Kren and McKendrick 2003, pp. 203-05.

⁷⁷ Personal communications. I am indebted to both Maryan Ainsworth and Rainald Grosshans for taking time to convey their opinions to me, even though they go against my conclusions.

on depicting facial details and wrinkles in small-size paintings, as observed by Ainsworth herself,⁷⁸ was bound to incorporate the same type of details in a rather large body of Christ. But unlike Michelangelo's bodies, Marmion's Christ is not anatomically perfect, and certain muscles, such as those on his right ribs, are unrealistic. Marmion only sought to dramatize his composition; muscular correctness was not his first priority.

More importantly, an *Entombment* scene attributed to the Master of the *Mansi Magdalene* (fig. 63),⁷⁹ clearly demonstrates that by the end of the 15th century the body of Christ in Netherlandish paintings was far more developed and dramatic than in contemporary Italian or German ones. Indeed, the dendro-chronological analysis of the *Mansi Magdalene* in the Gemäldegalerie of Berlin suggests a creation date of circa 1500,⁸⁰ which confirms—on stylistic grounds—a similar dating for this *Entombment* scene. Furthermore, a comparison of the head of Christ in the latter scene with the one in Painting A and fig. 48 clearly suggests that the same pattern and model as the one from the Marmion atelier were used in its composition. In other words, the *Entombment* scene was produced by the inheritor of his atelier or his successor, perhaps by his presumed daughter Marie Marmionne.⁸¹ Finally, the jewel-like execution of this *Entombment* scene attests to the fact that the legacy of Marmion's style survived long after his demise.



Fig. 63 - *Entombment* by the Master of the *Mansi Magdalene*, c. 1500

⁷⁸ Ainsworth 1992, p. 248.

⁷⁹ See Christie's 2004, p. 30.

⁸⁰ Peter Klein's report of March 2, 2007, personal communication.

⁸¹ Kren 1992, p. 22.



Fig. 64 - The cavalcade of the Medici and their retinue by Benozzo Gozzoli, c. 1459

Painting B : The *Procession of the Magi*

The enchanting fresco of the Chapel of the Magi created in 1459 for Cosimo dei Medici (1389-1464) for his Palazzo in Florence has been the subject of many interpretations. The most accepted one contends that it owed its symbolism to three separate occasions:

First, the celebrations connected with the Council of Florence 1439-42, when the Patriarch of Constantinople, the basileus and many picturesque representatives of the Eastern Church could be seen around the city. Secondly, the celebrations for the 'feast of Magi' characteristic of the Florentine Epiphany, of which the Medici were both patrons and protagonists (up and until 1459, the year when Benozzo started on the fresco and when Lorenzo personified the youngest Magus). Finally, the festivities—1459 again, in the spring—which Florence dedicated to Galeazzo Maria, son of Francisco Sforza, Duke of Milan, who as his father's ambassador had paid the Florentine allies a visit.⁸²

As for the three Magi, the elder, Melchior, was first identified with the Byzantine Patriarch Joseph (d. 1439); the middle-aged one, Balthazar, with the basileus John VIII Palaeologos (r. 1425-48); and the young one, Caspar, with Lorenzo Medici (1449-92). While there is consensus on the identity of Balthazar based on the sketches and medallions of John VIII Palaeologos by Pisanello (fig. 65), the identity of Melchior has remained controversial after Marco Bussagli designated him as Emperor Sigismund, based on his portrait in Vienna (fig. 67)⁸³ and a fresco of circa 1451 by Piero della Francesca that portrays the Emperor as the patron saint of Sigismondo Malatesta (1417-68) in Rimini (fig. 69). But the latter identification has now been challenged by Silvia Ronchey.⁸⁴

⁸² Cardini 2001, pp. 33-34.

⁸³ This painting was previously attributed to Pisanello. This attribution, however, has been recently put to doubt; see Takács 2006, p. 153.

⁸⁴ Ronchey 2006, pp. 105-16 and 463.



Fig. 65 - Medallion of John VIII Palaeologos



Fig. 66 - Balthazar in the image of John VIII



Fig. 67a - Oil painting of Sigismund, Vienna



Fig. 67b - Pisanello's sketch of Sigismund



Fig. 68 - Melchior in the image of Sigismund



Fig. 69 - Sigismondo Malatesta before St Sigismund depicted in the image of Emperor Sigismund



Fig. 70 - Sigismondo Malatesta

Because I agree with Bussagli's interpretations for the two elder Magi and disagree on the last one, I shall first try to refute Ronchey's objections, then point out the problems of the Lorenzo identification as well as the previously mentioned tripartite composition, and last, present a more comprehensive theory, which I believe better explains the role of each of the main figures.

B.1 - Melchior

Ronchey believes that since Melchior is riding a mule (fig. 71), and because it is demeaning for the Emperor to have such a mount in lieu of a horse, he cannot represent Sigismund. By this argument, it would be demeaning also for Cosimo to ride a mule while his sons, Piero and Giovanni, as well as his guests, are riding a horse next to him (fig. 64)! The fact is that, unlike the Eastern context in which the

mule can be indeed a pointer to inferior rank,⁸⁵ in the Western context the mule is used in deference to old age.⁸⁶ Thus, the sexagenarians Sigismund and Cosimo are both riding a mule, but in accordance with their high status, their mounts are caparisoned with the most ornate paraphernalia.⁸⁷



Fig. 71 - Melchior riding a mule, on the West wall of the chapel

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Soudavar 1996, pp. 98-101.

⁸⁶ Acidini also argued that “rather than symbolizing humility... the mule was regarded as the most suitable mount for old and important riders, such as abbots and popes, on account of its deliberate, dignified pace”; Acidini 1994, p. 40.

⁸⁷ The same is true for the figure of Patriarch Joseph, who is riding a mule (with no ornate trappings) because of old age, in a Louvre drawing by Jacopo Bellini; Ronchey 2006, pp. 462-63, pl. 62.

Ronchey also seems to believe that Melchior's hat, rather than being representative of Emperor Sigismund's, follows a "Slavic" prototype as does the one St Sigismund is wearing in fig. 69, and which must be of Eastern origin because the saint is wearing a long "bifurcated oriental" beard, similar to the one worn by the Byzantine Patriarch on a fresco above his tomb at Santa Maria Novella, in Florence (fig. 73).⁸⁸ One must argue, however, that the bifurcated beard is not necessarily oriental since we see it in the retinue of Frederick III in fig. 29 and also worn by James I of Scotland in the same series of frescoes by Pinturicchio (fig. 74).



Fig. 72a, b - Magi as Mithraic priests, on a sarcophagus in San Vitale and mosaics from San Apollinare, 5th-century, Ravenna



Fig. 73 - Patriarch Joseph



Fig. 74 - James I of Scotland

As for St Sigismund, it is true that he was a king before being a martyr, but he was the king of Burgundy (in the 6th century) and not of a Slavic region. And as a saint, one would think he would be represented in the attire of his later years, i.e., as a hermit rather than a king. But the fact is that even if the fresco was meant to depict him in the image of a king, he was a Merovingian kinglet who could not pretend to have an orb in his hand. The orb is the prerogative of an emperor (or Christ as *Kosmokrator*). Hence, in a triple play on the name of Sigismondo Malatesta, the latter is kneeling before St Sigismund portrayed as Emperor Sigismund. Moreover, Melchior's hat is similar not only to Emperor Sigismund's in old age (figs. 67a, b) but also to one he is wearing in the famous Ghent altarpiece, the *Mystical Lamb* of Van Eyck (fig. 133), where he is drawn with a black beard. Furthermore, the portrait of Patriarch Joseph shows him with a bald head and narrowly close eyes, while Melchior (fig. 68) has hair over his forehead and eyes far apart and as lively as in the portraits of the Emperor (figs. 67a, b). Even though *magus* derives from an Iranian word that designated Iranian priests, and although originally the Magi were represented as Mithraic priests (fig. 72a, b), in the Christian lore of the 15th

⁸⁸ Ronchey, pp. 105 and 477, pls. 66 and 138.

century, the word unambiguously referred to temporal rulers and not ecclesiastic ones.⁸⁹ Thus, Melchior is in the image of Emperor Sigismund and not the Patriarch.

B.2 - The unjustified glorification of Lorenzo

The identification of Caspar (fig. 77) as Lorenzo has been made in spite of the presence of another portrait of him, with his characteristic concave nose (fig. 76), within the rider group of the Medici clan in the low-left corner of the East wall (fig. 64). The assumption was that the representation of Caspar as Lorenzo projected for the latter the image of an idealized prince. The question then is: Why must an idealized prince have totally different features and not an embellished version of the original? Both figures of Gozzoli in this fresco, for instance, have similar faces (figs. 75a, b) despite the fact that they portray him in different places and different time frames (see section B.3).



Fig. 75a - Gozzoli in 1459



Fig. 75b - Gozzoli in 1439



Fig. 76 - Lorenzo in 1439 with distinctly crooked nose



Fig. 77 - Caspar in the Gozzoli fresco

It has been argued that the laurel bush around Caspar's head forms a glorious aureole, *Laurentius a loro*, as a pun on Lorenzo's name and a pointer to his second identity.⁹⁰ Personally, I don't see these bushes as an aureole, but a mere device to make the whitish face of the young Magus stand out against a darker background. If these laurel bushes were a distinctive sign of Lorenzo, we would then have a multitude of Lorenzos along the winding roads of the procession as these plants

⁸⁹ It has been argued that the Magi legend, and their original representation with Mithraic red hats and bonnets, was an attempt to Christianize Mithraicism. The Magi giving homage to the newborn Jesus implied, in fact, the victory of Christ over the Iranian god Mithra; Félix 2000, pp. 15, 25.

⁹⁰ Cardini 2001, pp. 32; Ricciardi 2000, 65-93, p. 77.

appear all along that road. More importantly, when the fresco was planned, Lorenzo was only 10 years old and not the statesman he would be twenty years later. There was no reason to glorify him in 1459 when his future was unknown. As for his appearance in the parade of 1459 in the role of Caspar,⁹¹ one should perhaps consider the reverse possibility: Because the fresco was planned to have a boyish Caspar, Lorenzo was chosen to play that role in a parade emulating the composition of the fresco. In any event, a child's appearance in a parade is not a good enough reason to immortalize him on the walls of his grandfather's magnificent chapel. Furthermore, the Magi were rulers from a distant land, and Sigismund and John Palaeologos were both *foreign* rulers, too.⁹² To accept Caspar as represented by the nonforeign Lorenzo would lead to a major inconsistency in the thematic planning of a chapel so symmetrically organized.

B.3 - The architectural suggestions

As a matter of fact, the architectural organization of the fresco provides a clear map to its understanding. For, unlike all other Adoration of the Magi compositions, the Magi here are neither visiting the newborn Jesus nor even proceeding toward him. The Nativity scene was painted by Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-69) on a separate altarpiece erected on a free standing pedestal at the end of a recessed apse,⁹³ the *scarsella*, and surrounded by angels celebrating Jesus' birth but totally dissociated from the Magi procession (fig. 79). The latter is spread over three walls, each featuring one of the Magi. The procession starts from the top of left corner of the East wall, goes down and away from the apse, across the South wall, turns back on the West wall, but as it approaches the *scarsella*, it moves up and away from it (fig. 78).⁹⁴ In other words, in lieu of celebrating the birth of Jesus, the Magi are transposed in a procession to celebrate another event in Christianity, an event somehow deemed to be as important as the Nativity itself and related to the Medici, which happened in three stages, as suggested by the tripartite division of the walls. That event was the ecumenical council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, which started in Basel in 1431, then moved on to Ferrara and subsequently, to Florence, where it technically lasted until 1442 and where the unity of the Western and Eastern Churches was proclaimed. I shall refer to it as the Reunification Council.

⁹¹ See quotation on page 39.

⁹² An account of the Epiphany processions of 1428 for instance, also stressed the foreignness of the Magi kings; Christiansen 2006, p. 36.

⁹³ The original altar piece by Lippi is now in the Gemaldegalerie of Berlin.

⁹⁴ In fig. 78, I have restored in the west wall, the part that the later Ricciardi modifications of the chapel had displaced to allow the construction of the staircase behind it.

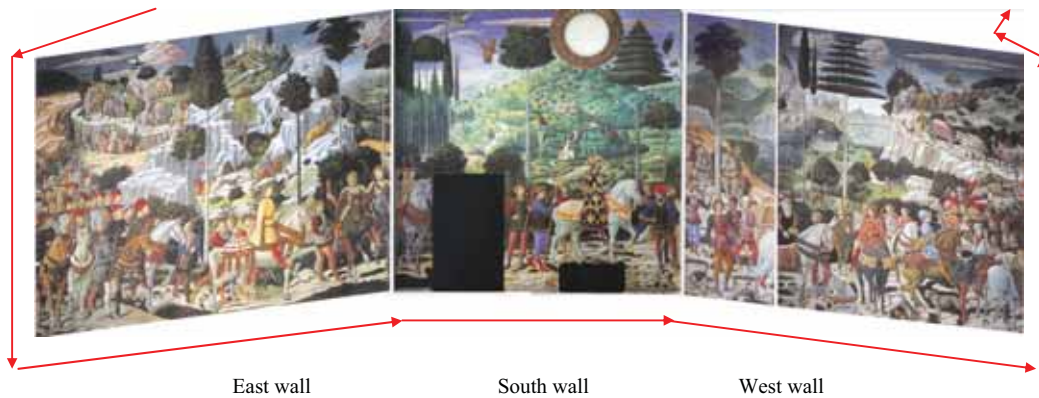


Fig. 78 - Magi procession starting high up on the East wall, then moving toward the South wall and opposite the Nativity scene in the north *scarcella*, then to the West wall and again moving up and away from the Nativity scene.

While the processions pertain to the 1431-42 period, the clan of the Medici that is regrouped in the left-bottom corner of the East wall is situated in the present (i.e., in 1459 when the chapel was conceived) and looks back at the events that took place two decades before (see fig. 86). This is why Benozzo

Gozzoli has portrayed himself twice: once as an onlooker behind the Medici, with the inscription "*opus Benotii*" (work of Benozzo) to indicate that—time-wise—this group is situated within the chapel decoration time frame (figs. 63, 74), and once more on the West wall, as an eyewitness to the last leg of the procession which took place in Florence (figs. 75, 83). Next to Gozzoli on the West wall is depicted Neri di Gino Capponi (1388-1457), who according to Machiavelli (1467-1527) was among "the citizens of highest reputation in the government" and for "whose influence Cosimo dei Medici had more apprehension than any other; for to the great authority which he possessed in the city was added his influence with the soldiery."⁹⁵ He has been recognized,⁹⁶ thanks to a relief roundel on his sarcophagus at the church of Santa Spirito in Florence (fig. 81),⁹⁷ a portrait by Ghirlandaio (fig. 82), and a bust in the Bargello.⁹⁸ Neri di Gino Capponi was dead by 1459 and

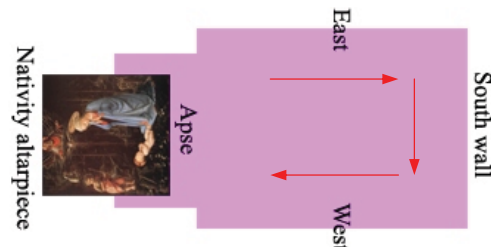


Fig. 79 – Chapel plan

⁹⁵ Machiavelli 1901.

⁹⁶ Acidini 1994, pp. 367-68.

⁹⁷ Acidini et al. 1996, p. 317.

⁹⁸ Borsook and Offerhaus 1981, p. 40. The most important element for the identification of Neri di Gino Capponi is his eagle-beak nose, which pops out after a pronounced curve in between deep eye

therefore his image must relate to the past. Interestingly, with his right hand he is making a sign that projects the number 50. The origins of this numerical sign language date back to Achaemenid Persia.⁹⁹ It must have been in use in Medieval Europe and well known within the community of painters because Albrecht Dürer reproduces a few of these signs in one of his practice sheets (fig. 80).¹⁰⁰ Since Neri was born on July 3, 1388, the Florence part of the Reunification Council would have been conducted when he was 50. Hence, Gozzoli assigns to Neri the 50 hand gesture in order to situate him into the Florentine time frame of the Magi procession (fig. 83).



Fig. 80 - Practice sheet by Dürer



Fig. 81 - Effigy of Neri di Gino Capponi



Fig. 82 - Portrait of Neri in Santa Trinita



Fig. 83 - Neri di Gino Capponi projecting the number 50 next to Gozzoli

The composition of the Medici cavalcade on the lower-left corner confirms the dichotomy in time between the two groups in procession. In the forefront of this group, we have the two prominent visitors to Florence in 1459, the young Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1444-76) and Sigismondo Malatesta, who exhibits the same youthful characteristics as his portrait by Piero della Francesca made in 1451 (fig. 69). But more important for our purpose are the portraits of the Greek scholars Theodore of Gaza (c.1400-78) and his rival George of Trebizond (1396-1484), who had accompanied John VIII Palaeologos to Italy as part of the team in charge of

sockets. I agree with Borsook and Offerhaus that the Bargello bust represents Neri di Gino Capponi and not Niccolo da Uzzano.

⁹⁹ It is unfortunate that Cristina Acidini, who had guessed the hand gesture to be a sign of number, fell on a Greek text that described it as the number 5,000 (personal communication and Acidini 1994, p. 370). A more reliable description, however, is offered in a dictionary gathered by order of the Mughal Emperor Akbar for the purpose of describing ancient Persian customs and idioms; Inju-ye Shirāzi 1980, pp. 61-65; Soudavar 2003, pp. 59-61. One must note, however, that Gozzoli's face is painted over an existing one, and was added, along with Neri's hand, as an afterthought.

¹⁰⁰ The signs represent (from top left clockwise): 10000, 20 and 3 if depicted on the right hand, but in copying them, Dürer has wrongly transposed them to the left hand; Inju-ye Shirāzi 1980, pp. 61-65.

defending Byzantine theology. Unlike the dissident Mark of Ephesus (d. 1459), who returned to Constantinople after the proclamation of the union between the Western and Eastern Churches, these two scholars chose to remain in Florence. As Greek philosophers speaking the tongue of Plato and Aristotle, they were much admired in Renaissance Italy and “treated with a respect almost amounting to worship.”¹⁰¹ They were prominent citizens of Florence and two whom the Medici were proud to depict as part of their retinue.

Sylvia Ronchey has identified two portraits of Theodore of Gaza, one with a white beard among the Medici retinue (fig. 84a) and the other with a black beard in a Botticelli painting at the Uffizi (fig. 84b).¹⁰² Considering that Theodore was in his late 30s when he attended the Florence Council, we can only surmise that the portrait with a white beard did indeed depict him in the same city but some twenty years after the Council, i.e., in 1459.



Figs. 84 a, b - Theodore Gaza, c. 1459 and c. 1438

Figs. 85 a, b - George of Trebizond in 1459, and c. 1440

Ronchey has also suggested that the other Greek-looking persona, with a prominent white beard and in the same row as Theodore, was his teacher, the famous Greek philosopher Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355-1452). The problem, though, is that Plethon was already 85 years old when he reached Florence and dead in 1459. Based on one of the portraits of George of Trebizond (fig. 85b), the identification of the very alert bearded man with piercing eyes (fig. 85a) with this younger philosopher seems more reasonable. The latter was Theodore of Gaza's bitter rival and that is perhaps the reason for not depicting them side by side. Otherwise, as master and pupil, Plethon and Theodore would have been normally depicted together. Georges' white beard clearly situates him in 1459 and not in the late 1430s.

¹⁰¹ Villari 1888.

¹⁰² Ronchey 2006, pls. 50, 51.

Furthermore, a careful look at the East wall reveals that Gozzoli painstakingly tried to distinguish the Medici cavalcade from the Magi procession. Indeed, the latter proceeds along a narrow road, while the former is placed on a wider one next to it and is separated by a stretch of grass. For lack of space, Piero's horse has been pushed off the wide road and into the grass turf. If it were to be depicted as merely standing, its left hoof would have intruded on the narrow road. To prevent this, Gozzoli has masterfully lifted its left hoof to avoid any physical linkage between the two time-differentiated procession paths (figs. 64, 87).



Fig. 86 - The time divide of the Magi Procession fresco



Fig. 87 - Lifting the hoof of Piero's horse

The three stages of the Reunification Council involved three foreign rulers—Emperor Sigismund, Basileus John VIII Palaeologos, and Duke Philip of Burgundy—who intervened either personally or through their ambassadors. Each played an important role without which the Council would have never come to a conclusion. Thus, the tripartite division of the procession-walls allowed, on the one hand, to represent three different landscapes (the East wall with castles perched on top of a mountainous countryside representing Basel, the South wall displaying the countryside around Ferrara, and the West one, the hills around Florence) and, on the other, to represent the three powers involved with the Council. But whereas the choice of the old German Emperor in lieu of Melchior, and the middle-aged Basileus in lieu of Balthazar, seemed natural, the representation of the Burgundian faction was not obvious because age-wise, Philip of Burgundy was between the other two. The solution was to depict instead his son Charles, who was the Count of Charolais, i.e., a young prince but nevertheless the nominal ruler of a fiefdom situated outside Italy. This is why Caspar was portrayed as a young boy instead of the customary young man. But to better understand this, some historical background is necessary.

B.4 - From Constance to Florence

At the beginning of the 15th century, the Church was in disarray as a number of popes and anti-popes vied for legitimacy and supremacy. It was the Council of Constance—convened under the aegis of Emperor Sigismund in 1414—which was finally able to end the Papal Schism by deposing all pretenders, or forcing them to abdicate, and clear the way for the election of Martin V (p. 1417-31) as the unique legitimate Pope of the Catholic Church. Two resolutions of this council had important consequences for subsequent councils. First was the *Haec sancta* decree, which stipulated that the council “has power immediately from Christ; and that everyone of whatever state or dignity, even papal, is bound to obey it in those matters which pertain to the faith, the eradication of the said schism and the general reform of the said church of God in head and members.”¹⁰³ Second was the decision to reconvene periodical councils thereafter. It is in respect to the latter that Martin V initially convened the Council of Pavia in 1423, which was subsequently moved to Siena (because of plague) and finally dissolved in the following year with the provision to reconvene in Basel.

The Basel Council finally convened in 1431 under the presidency of Cardinal Cesarini who was appointed by Martin V. But meanwhile, the Pope had died and was replaced by Eugene IV, a strong advocate of papal supremacy and opponent of the *Haec sancta* doctrine. His first act was to instruct Cesarini to dissolve the Council, but the cardinal stepped down from the presidency without revoking it, and the Council immediately appointed a new president and confirmed one more time the *Haec sancta* decree. In effect, it reasserted the doctrine that a general synod held its power directly from Christ and was vested with an authority higher than the Pope’s.¹⁰⁴ Eugene IV was forced to retreat, and in 1434 he temporarily reaffirmed the authority of the Basel Council, waiting for a more opportune time to regain control of the council process. By September 1437, when Emperor Sigismund was lying on his death bed, the Pope issued a bull for the transfer of the Basel Council to Ferrara. The Council members defied him once again by refusing the transfer and presented him with a 60-day ultimatum to accept their ruling or be deposed.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, both parties decided to pursue, on their own, the goal of unifying the Church. Thus, the Pope and the Council members each sent ambassadors to Constantinople, inviting the Byzantines to a council on reunion.

¹⁰³ This decree was subsequently rejected by the Catholic Church, which argued that it was approved in a session convened by the “anti-Pope” John XXIII and not the Vatican Pope Gregory XII, even though both were subsequently removed and the same Council members continued from one Pope to another.

¹⁰⁴ Stieber 1991, p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ Harvey 1991, p. 204.

For a time it seemed that the Pope's renewed attempt to undermine the authority of the Basel Council was bound to fail, as most of the Western princes supported the latter. However, two decisions, one by John VIII Palaeologos and the other by the Duke of Burgundy, tipped the balance in favor of the Pope.

In 1437, Philip the Good was already engaged in the construction of a fleet for the recovery of the Holy Lands and was very much aware that the union of the Latin and Greek churches would facilitate the "passage" to Jerusalem.¹⁰⁶ Even though the Basel Council had been successful in finding a compromise with the Hussites (see F.2 and F.5) and could certainly well handle the discussions with the Greeks, after much deliberation, Philip decided to throw his lot with the Pope in the belief that his authority would be needed for any future crusading expeditions. He thus decided to withdraw his support from the Basel Council, and on August 18, 1438, he dispatched a top-rank delegation to Ferrara. Meanwhile, the basileus had come to a similar conclusion: The Basel Council was perhaps more receptive to the Greeks' theological arguments, but no union would be effective without the seal of approval of the Pope and only he could summon the badly needed military help.¹⁰⁷ The arrival of the basileus, followed by the delegates of the Duke to Ferrara, provided the newly transferred Council with a recognition and legitimacy, which the old Basel Council could not claim anymore. Even though the latter went on to appoint a new Pope in 1440,¹⁰⁸ it gradually became irrelevant and self-dissolved in 1449.

After a delay of four months, requested by the basileus, and some inconclusive theological skirmishes, Ferrara was hit by the plague, and the council had to be transferred to another city. In the meantime, the expenses of the 700 delegates were taking a toll on the papal treasury, which was already suffering from a loss of ecclesiastic taxes that were being diverted to the rival Basel Council. Thus, the intervention of Cosimo dei Medici, to not only host the Council in Florence but to also underwrite the expenses of all the Greeks, came as a saving grace for that enterprise.

The theological problems were finally tackled in Florence. The main issue was the *filioque*: whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from "the Father," as the Greeks maintained, or "from the Father and the Son," as the Latins believed. The former argued that the Third Ecumenical Council prohibited any change or addition to the Nicene Creed and that the Latin interpretation was an illegal addition because it implicitly created *two sources* for the Holy Spirit. The Latins replied that their position was not an addition to the Creed but a mere clarification of a sentence

¹⁰⁶ Paviot 2003, pp. 84-86.

¹⁰⁷ Lanne 1991, p. 357.

¹⁰⁸ The Council of Basel elected Duke Amadeus VIII of Savoy as Pope Felix V (pope 1440-49).

which read that the Holy Spirit proceeded “from the Father through the Son.” Mark of Ephesus then countered that the Latins were using corrupted manuscripts.¹⁰⁹ At the end, over the objections of Mark of Ephesus, the Council of Florence simply decreed that the two positions were equivalent and that “through the Son” also meant “from the Father and Son”!

Such a compromise on an important dogmatic issue was indicative of the fact that the main agenda—for both parties—was in reality political and not theological. The Greeks were there to seek help to defend their city, and the Pope wanted to reaffirm papal supremacy. The Greeks were weak and ready to compromise; the Pope had the upper hand and extracted one concession after another. The seating arrangement at the Council well illustrates the strength of the Latin side and the humiliation inflicted upon the Byzantines. After much negotiation, the cathedral hall reserved for the Council was divided in two. On the Latin side, the papal throne was placed higher than all others, including an empty throne for the late Emperor Sigismund. On the Latin side, the basileus throne was placed opposite and on the same level as the Emperor’s throne, i.e., lower than the Pope’s, while that of Byzantine Patriarch Joseph was lowered to the level of a mere cardinal! And when it came to the issuance of the final decree, the basileus insisted that since the time of Constantine the Great (r. 306-37), the convocation of ecumenical councils had been an imperial prerogative and that this decree should mention his name first. But it was to no avail. In the final document, even though he stipulates “with the assent of our most dear son John Palaeologos, the illustrious emperor of the Romans,” it is clearly the Pope who proclaims to have summoned the Council.¹¹⁰

The Latin Church got every concession it had asked for and gave nothing in return. Papal supremacy was established,¹¹¹ and unity between the Latin and Greek churches was achieved (at least theoretically) and officially proclaimed on July 6, 1439, through a magnificent mass celebrated at Santa Maria del Fiore. It was a moment of pride for the Latin Church and for Florence as well, and one that the Medici would surely try to exploit, especially since the accord with the Greeks facilitated similar ones with other factions of the Oriental Church. A decree for the Armenians was published in Florence on November 22, 1439 and another for the

¹⁰⁹ Geanakoplos 1991, pp. 331-41.

¹¹⁰ Geanakoplos 1991, p. 348.

¹¹¹ The final decree asserted the supremacy of the Pope as the true Vicar of Christ and the head of the entire Church, the Father and teacher of all Christians; but to satisfy the Greeks, the document oddly acknowledged that all the rights and privileges of the Oriental patriarchs were to be maintained unimpaired.

Jacobites, on February 4, 1442.¹¹² Such a sweeping series of accords with the major splinter groups of Christianity could indeed be viewed as the rebirth of the Christian Church or a *second Nativity*.

In recognition of the crucial role that Philip had played, a richly illuminated copy of the decree of the union with the Greeks (decorated with ducal arms) was sent to him by Eugene IV. The Pope also explained in a separate bull how Philip “had made peace in France and had helped to win over the Greeks,” and he bestowed on Philip many favors, including permission to keep 1/10th of all clerical levies in ducal lands.¹¹³



Fig. 88 - East wall of the *Procession of the Magi*

¹¹² Technically, the Council continued and was moved to the Laterans in Rome, where a decree for the Syrians was published in September 1444, and those for the Chaldeans (Nestorians) and the Maronites (Monothelites) were published at the last session of the Council on August 7, 1445.

¹¹³ The Pope needed the Duke's support against the defiant Council of Basel, and Philip responded by prohibiting the circulation of all decrees from Basel in his lands; Vaughan 2004, p. 213.

In 1459, Pius II had come to Florence to ask the Medici to join the crusading campaign he wished to launch. But Cosimo saw it as a futile exercise and avoided direct confrontation with the Pope by staying home and feigning a gout attack. In a political climate in which Pius II was pressuring all the princes of Europe to “follow the example of Philip (of Burgundy)” in supporting his crusading expedition,¹¹⁴ perhaps it made sense for Cosimo to have a reminder within his palace—and for all important visitors to see—of the services he had rendered to the Church and the crucial role he had played in bringing to term the Reunification Council.



Fig. 89 - South wall of the *Procession of the Magi*

¹¹⁴ Prietzel 2003, p.181.

It would also reflect positively on him to emphasize the role of the three important rulers of Christianity who were involved with the Reunification Council, especially the Duke of Burgundy, who was at the time the wealthiest of all European princes and monarchs.¹¹⁵

B.5 - Caspar portrayed as Charles the Bold

To portray Melchior and Balthazar, Gozzoli could rely on a reliable documentation left by Pisanello. Indeed, Pisanello had sketched Sigismund's portraits (figs. 67, 177) on the occasion of his coronation visit to Rome in 1432 and had made a number of medals of John VIII Palaeologos during the Council of Florence (fig. 64). But most probably, he had neither seen Charles nor any portraits of him. Thus, for Charles' portrait, he had to rely on secondhand sketches, or perhaps votive statuettes (such as fig. 92) that depicted him with curly golden hair.¹¹⁶



Fig. 90 - Duke Philip with Burgundian headgear



Figs. 91 a, b - Burgundian torque-headgears from tapestries



Fig. 92 - Votive statuette of Charles the Bold

Nevertheless, since most visitors to the chapel would have not met the real personas behind the Magi or seen their portraits, it was important to make the figures recognizable by distinctive characteristics, such as headgear and clothing. One can

¹¹⁵ In 1459, the crownprince of France, the future Louis XI, took refuge with Philip and was at his mercy; Philip placed him on the throne of France two years later.

¹¹⁶ Practically all portraits of Charles the Bold represent him with curly hair, especially in his youth. It is not beyond the realm of possibilities that his hair was actually blond when he was a child.

readily see that each Magus' headgear is different and surmounted with a golden crown in order to mark him as a king. As already mentioned, Melchior's hat is clearly the one worn by Sigismund in his Vienna portrait and in the Ghent altarpiece (figs. 67a, 133). Ronchey contends that Balthazar's hat was "the fruit of fantasy."¹¹⁷ In reality, though, it was an emblematic Byzantine crown, such as the one depicted on the Vatican seal of John VIII Palaeologos that was originally affixed on one of the Reunification documents ratified in July 1439 (fig. 93), and which I shall subsequently explain further (see G.1). As for Caspar's headgear, it is clearly 15th-century Burgundian, replicas of which we see not only in manuscript paintings (fig. 90) but also among the meticulous sketches of historical clothing by Braun and Schneider, which were prepared between 1861 and 1890 (figs. 91 a, b). They are the only ones of this shape in that extensive survey.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Caspar's three-quarter length fur-trimmed coat, with slits starting above the elbow, is not Florentine but Burgundian, or at least Northern.¹¹⁹

But more importantly, Caspar's coat has an unusual feature: On its chest it has a row of red stones surrounded by embroidered golden rays and flames (fig. 94), which imitate the series of *fusil* signs on the Golden Fleece necklace and follow the same pattern. Like in Painting A, the pagan emblem of the Golden Fleece has been eliminated.

Philip had bestowed the Golden Fleece knighthood on Charles at the age of one, an honor that no other princely child could claim. And the red and beaming sign of the *fusil* on Caspar's coat unequivocally identified him as the young Charles in the capacity of the Count of Charolais. It is true that Charles never visited Ferrara or Florence, but neither did Sigismund. As previously mentioned, the latter was represented only by an empty throne at the Council. What mattered in the painting was a powerful symbolism with a modicum of reality. The portrayal of Caspar as a Burgundian prince involved with the Reunification Council (which technically lasted until 1442 when Charles was nine years old) was indeed an ingenious way to bring symmetrical harmony to the procession of the Magi and conform to the parameters set by the Medici for this allegorical representation. These parameters—essentially three foreign kings involved with an event of Christianity that could be equated with a second Nativity—very much echoed those of the *Adoration of the*

¹¹⁷ Ronchey 2006, p. 104.

¹¹⁸ Braun and Schneider 1975, pls. 28c, 29c. These headgear pieces are based on Burgundian tapestries looted by the Swiss in the battle of Nancy and presently preserved in the Bern Museum.

¹¹⁹ See, for instance, Albert II's robe in Painting F. The possibility exists though, that the same fashion had trickled down to Italy, because by this time, Italian princes frequented or even stayed at the court of Burgundy. But given the warmer climate of Florence, the use of fur-lined attire there seems unlikely.

Magi of Gentile Fabriano (see Painting G) commissioned circa 1423 by Palla Strozzi (1373-1462), whom Cosimo exiled to Pavia in 1436. The Gozzoli fresco was meant to surpass the painting made for the rival of the Medici not only in magnificence but also in the complexity of its allegorical themes.



Fig. 93 - Seal of John Palaeologos with a feathered crown



Fig. 94 - Encrusted gems on Caspar's tunic simulating the Golden Fleece necklace

In a recent essay, Bussagli argued that the hunt was the dominating theme of the Gozzoli fresco, which he saw as evoking Jupiter and referring—through an oblique reasoning—to the adoration of Jesus.¹²⁰ As I shall explain in section G.1, the elements of the hunt in this fresco were part of the regal paraphernalia of Byzantine and oriental kings, and their incorporation was to glamorize the procession. The connectivity to Jupiter, if perceived at all, was at best a secondary theme and/or a “bonus” interpretation to the main theme that I have explained.

¹²⁰ Bussagli 1999, pp. 121, 133.



Fig. 95 - The *Medici Virgin*

Painting C : The *Medici Virgin*

Since it was acquired for the Städel Museum in 1833 from the writer and collector Giovanni Rosini in Pisa, the Van der Wyden *Medici Virgin* has always been considered as a work commissioned for a member of the Medici family in Florence.¹²¹ There are of course many reasons for such an assumption: its Italian provenance, the fact that Van der Weyden had gone to Rome in 1450, its symmetrical composition supposedly inspired by the Italian *sacra conversazione* model, the Florentine lily depicted on the shield at the bottom of the painting, and the perceived connection of the depicted saints to the Medici family. It has been argued that the saints on the left are Peter and John the Baptist, who refer to Cosimo's sons, Piero and Giovanni, and those on the right are the twin-brother Syrians, Cosmas and Damian, who are the patron saints of physicians and allude to the Medici, for the latter's name literally meant *physicians* (*medici*) in Italian.¹²²

The problem, though, is that this painting has never been recorded in any Medici inventory.¹²³ Also, Margaret Koster has challenged the point of view that the *sacra conversazione* model—in which the Virgin Mary is symmetrically flanked by saints—was a Florentine composition, for the simple reason that the famous painting of Van Eyck in Bruges, the *Madonna and Canon Van der Paerle*, had already adopted such a configuration by 1436.¹²⁴ More importantly, no explanation has hitherto been provided as to why the saints on the left are wearing antique robes, while those on the right are not. If the twin Syrian saints were simply to allude to the Medici, they could have very well been represented in Roman- or Eastern-type robes.¹²⁵ As martyred saints, both of them should have worn a red

¹²¹ Nutall 2004, pp. 85-88, and n. 80 p. 275. According to a 19th-century source, it might have come from the Gucciardini family, *idem*.

¹²² Nutall 2004, p. 85; Van der Kemperdick 1999, p. 116. One may also add that the twin-brother saints Cosmas and Damian were associated with the Medici because Cosimo had reportedly a twin brother named Damian who died shortly after birth (see page xvii).

¹²³ Nutall 2004, p. 88, n. 80 p. 275.

¹²⁴ Koster 2002, p. 80.

¹²⁵ The twin Syrian saints were previously depicted in two of Fra Angelico's altarpieces but dressed with traditional Eastern clothes; see Pope-Hennessy 2002, pp. 48-51.

cloak, but here, the haloed saint next to the Virgin Mary has only a red shawl on his shoulders to allow the full display of his dark purple robe, which designates him as a bishop. One senses that the painter treated his appearance with great deference. As for the second haloed saint to the far right, he is wearing a 15th century Flemish black hat, as in fig. 96 (see also 144), and the shoes and socks of bankers and rich merchants. The image of St Peter is also problematic: on the one hand, he is barefoot, and on the other, he wears rich garments.

I suggest that in lieu of a Medici family member, this painting was commissioned by their bank manager in Bruges, Angelo Tani (1415-1492), in conjunction with a charitable donation under the aegis of Bishop Guillaume Fillastre (the Younger), both of whom are represented therein.



Fig. 96 - Detail of a manuscript page made for Philip the Good



Fig. 97 - St Peter pulling out a leather belt in imitation of St Francis, Painting C



Fig. 98 - John the Baptist with a scroll and cross next to the Virgin

C.1 - The Bruges charter

A most revealing document in this respect is the text of the charter of the Bruges branch of the Medici bank, drafted as a contract between its principal shareholders and dated 1455. Prior to that, the investment of the Medici family members in the Bruges branch of their bank was through the Medici holding company in Florence; but the death of a senior partner, Giovanni di Benchi, in the previous year prompted a reorganization that resulted in the Medici family members becoming shareholders

individually.¹²⁶ The new setup in Bruges, which was named “Piero di Cosimo dei Medici and Gierozzo dei Pigli and Co.,” had a total of 3,000 groats in capital allocated in the following way: The cousins Piero, Giovanni, and Piero Francesco Medici together held 1,900 groats, Pigli had 600, and Tani, 500.¹²⁷ I believe that one goal of this composition was to acknowledge the main shareholders of the company, because its charter stipulated that Tani could not engage in any philanthropic activity or make donations from the funds of the company without the consent of one of the four main shareholders.¹²⁸ Interestingly, the two saintly personas on the left are each an amalgam of two saints and thus allude to four people:

The first on the left holds a key with his left hand; it is the sign of St Peter, and refers to Piero, as noted by many. Yet, he also represents St Francis as his head is shaved in the Franciscan manner and he pushes out a leather belt with his right hand (fig. 97), to recall St Francis’ gesture in discarding his leather belt and replacing it with a cord. To draw attention to these signs, the eyes of John the Baptist are riveted on the hand gestures of his neighbor. One should also note that if as an apostle Peter is drawn barefoot, he should wear a simple robe to go with it. If he is wearing cloths that are richly brocaded in gold, it is to conform to his St Francis persona before he exchanged his rich cloths for plain ones. As such, this double-saint also alludes to Piero’s cousin, Piero Francesco.¹²⁹

The image of the second saint is as convoluted as the first one, for on the one hand, he wears under his red cloak the skin of a furry animal—a defining sign of John the Baptist—and on the other, he holds a book, the sign of John the Evangelist. John the Baptist’s usual attributes are the lamb, the cross, and the scroll, which quotes his words as per John 1:29: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” There are no references in the New Testament linking him directly to a book.¹³⁰ He was in fact the last prophet of the pre-Christ era, and if he was to be represented as the Precursor or the Enunciator of Jesus, his message would have been displayed in the form of a scroll as in fig. 98, because the book format, or

¹²⁶ Previously, the shareholders were listed as follows: the Medici Holding 2160, Pigli 540, and Tani 300 groats, for a total of 3,000 groats; De Roover 1999, p. 67.

¹²⁷ Vaughan 2004, p. 246; Grunzweig 1931, pp. 53-55. Despite the difference in capital contributions, Tani and Pigli were the equal of the Medici in respect to the distribution of profits, i.e., each would receive 1/5th.

¹²⁸ Vaughan 2004, p. 246; Grunzweig 1931, p. 54.

¹²⁹ Piero Francesco was the son of Lorenzo Medici, the brother of Cosimo.

¹³⁰ Wikipedia.

codice, came into being only in the late 1st century AD and, prior to that, religious texts were written on scrolls.¹³¹

When he is depicted holding a book (as in fig. 99), there is invariably a lamb in the scenery—or an allusion to it—accompanied with a hand gesture by which John the Baptist is pointing to the future Gospel that will relate his announcement.¹³² But there are no references to a lamb here; he is primarily concerned with the hand gesture of Peter and not even looking at Jesus. Even though—technically speaking—John the Baptist was not a Christian, he is sometimes depicted with the red cloak of Christian martyrs. What he is wearing here, however, is not a martyr's cloak but a front-buttoned red cape, which is worn by John the Evangelist in other paintings of Van der Weyden (fig. 100).¹³³

It therefore seems that the second saint from the left also had a double personality, each one referring to a contemporary person. As John the Evangelist wearing a red cape and holding a book, he would refer to his namesake, Giovanni; and as John the Baptist clad in a furry skin, he would allude to Gierozzo dei Pigli, whose surname was the Florentine version (*pigli*) of the modern Italian *pel* the plural of *pelo*, which means body hair or fur and derives from the Latin *pilus* which has given us the English word *pile* (as in a rug).¹³⁴

The identification of the two haloed persons on the right of the Medici Virgin as Cosmas and Damian has been hitherto based on the



Fig. 99 - St Louis and John the Baptist with a lamb and a book



Fig. 100 - Typical St John by Van der Weyden

¹³¹ Gamble 2006, pp. 22-23. See also Painting F in which the Jewish High Priest is holding the scriptures in roll form.

¹³² For other examples, see Borchert 2002, p. 72; Giorgi 2003, p. 191. In the Ghent altarpiece, John the Baptist is holding a book in a painting focusing on the Mystical Lamb. But there is an added twist in the representation of this book, because it is opened up to show the epistle of *Consolamini*, which makes it an instrument of the liturgy to sing the praise of the Mystical Lamb. the Virgin Mary and the rest of the figures therein, browse over a total of 18 similar books; Van de Peere 1996, p. 82.

¹³³ In the Ghent altarpiece, St John the Baptist is not wearing a red cloak. The triptych by Gerard David in the Groeninge Museum, Bruges, in which John the Baptist is wearing a red cloak-cape combination may have been directly influenced by Van der Weyden's prototype in the *Medici Virgin*.

¹³⁴ I am indebted to Xavier Tremblay, who confirmed my hunch that *pigli* is the same as *pile* in English and explained that the presence of the "g" was a particularity of the Toscan dialect of that period (personal communication).

observation that one held a urinal in his right hand and the other a spatula, which were medicinal symbols and referred to their profession.¹³⁵ But they each hold another emblem with their left hands which has remained unexplained. These two symbols will be better understood if we first establish that the personas the two figures were meant to evoke are Guillaume Fillastre and Angelo Tani.



Fig. 101 - Fillastre by Marmion in *Chroniques de France*



Fig. 102 - Portrait of Fillastre by Van der Weyden, c. 1450



Fig. 103 - Detail of Painting C; Fillastre as St Damian, c. 1460

Simon Marmion has left us two portraits of Fillastre both in small size: one in watercolor and on paper (fig. 101) and the other as an oil painting on a wood panel (fig. 57). Based on these two, a large-size portrait of an ecclesiastic man from the Courtauld Institute of London has been tentatively recognized also as a portrait of Fillastre.¹³⁶ I concur with this identification not only because of the overall similitude of these portraits but also because of a peculiarity of the lips: in the Marmion painting, Fillastre has clearly a very narrow upper lip in combination with a protruding lower one, which is also the main characteristic of the Courtauld portrait. In addition, one should note that most of the bishops of that period looked rather well-fed and plump,¹³⁷ but, by ecclesiastic standards, Fillastre's face is rather

¹³⁵ Cosmas and Damian are patron saints of physicians and pharmacists, they are invoked in the Canon of the Mass, and their feast day is Sept. 26; <http://www.catholicherald.com>

¹³⁶ Kemperdick 1999, p. 100.

¹³⁷ See, for instance, the image of Jean Chevrot, Fillastre's predecessor at the Bishopric of Tournai (Antoine et al. 2004, p. 276) and that of Martin Porée in Painting F.

thin and elongated. He too is wearing a bishop's robe in purple, the color of which has darkened with age. The Courtauld portrait, in turn, provides such a close resemblance with that of the bishop next to the Virgin that it cannot be but Fillastre.

As for Angelo Tani, a comparison between his portrait in *The Last Judgment* triptych by Hans Memling (c.1435-94) with that of the saint on the far right quickly reveals that they both represent the same person, although painted by different artists (figs. 104, 105). Maria Gräfin Lanckoronska, who first proposed this identification, also suggested that the angel above Tani was to recall his name Angelo.¹³⁸ In trying to depict the two saints as twins, Van der Weyden has deliberately tried to position their faces in an angle that would make them look alike and perhaps has modified some of their facial features for this purpose as well.¹³⁹ One should note, however, that certain details differentiate the two saints; for instance, while Fillastre's eyebrows are flat or slightly rounded (figs. 101-103), Tani's eyebrows have an angular shape in both of his portraits (figs. 104-105).



Fig. 104 - Angelo Tani by Memling



Fig. 105 - Angelo Tani by Van der Weyden



Fig. 106 - Blue irises and white lilies in Painting C

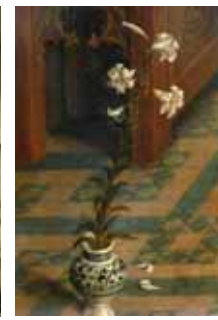


Fig. 107 - White lilies in the *Annunciation Triptych*

The pertinent question here is: What did Fillastre and Tani have in common with Cosmas and Damian to allow such juxtaposition? The answer can be related only to the fact that the twin Syrian saints were physicians who treated the ill but accepted no pay for their services.¹⁴⁰ Presumably, Tani had contributed to a charitable hospital under the jurisdiction of Fillastre, which took care of the poor free of charge. Such a presumption is implied by Tani's right hand reaching into his purse

¹³⁸ Lanckoronska 1969, p. 28. I am indebted to Xavier Tremblay and Jochen Sander for referring me to this article.

¹³⁹ The thicker upper lip of Fillastre in this painting may be attributable to this exercise.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.catholicherald.com>.

and Fillastre's right hand putting forward a written instruction or receipt.¹⁴¹ The presence of the saints on the opposite side, alluding to the Medici shareholders, is to confirm that this charitable disbursement was done with their knowledge and approval, in accordance with the charter of the company.

Most unfortunately, the documents of the Bruges branch of the Medici bank from between 1456 and 1464 are missing.¹⁴² We have, however, proof of other philanthropic activities of Tani in that period,¹⁴³ and know of his close association with Fillastre. Indeed, it is Tani who arranged the shipment of Fillastre's funerary stele from Florence to Saint-Omer; and a priest named as Angel Thanis—perhaps his son or nephew—was a close associate of Fillastre.¹⁴⁴ Like many politically motivated charitable contributors of today, Tani probably tried to be in the good graces of Fillastre after the latter became all powerful in 1461, when he was appointed Bishop of Tournai and Chancellor of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Van der Weyden has included one more pointer for the division of the saintly persons according to the geographical residence of the figures they were meant to evoke, and that is the brass pitcher at the bottom of the painting with two sprays of flowers: blue irises leaning to the left and white lilies leaning to the right. Traditionally, white lilies symbolized the innocence of the Virgin Mary, and as a matter of fact, unlike the more popular model in which they are offered by the angel Gabriel to Mary, in the central panel of the *Annunciation Triptych* of Van der Weyden (which is at the Louvre), they also appear in a vase but unaccompanied by any other type of flower (fig. 107).¹⁴⁵ While the white lilies may have a religious connotation in Painting C, the blue irises do not. In a first reading, the latter can be thought of as part of a bouquet presentation of the traditional white lilies related to Mary. However, in a more subtle reading, the blue irises placed above a shield that displays a blue Florentine Lily (which is essentially a stylized iris), point to the personas evoked on the left, who are the Florentine shareholders of the Bruges company. In contrast, the white lilies, which are named *lis* in French, were to recall—through punning—the Lis River that embraces the city of Bruges. By leaning to the right, they are drawing attention to Angelo Tani and his activities in

¹⁴¹ Lanckoronska suggests that the plants at the bottom of the painting are all medicinal plants (Lanckoronska 1969, p. 38) which, in conjunction with the white tent, seem to point to a hospital.

¹⁴² Grunzweig 1931, pp. xv-xvi.

¹⁴³ De Roover 1999, p. 143

¹⁴⁴ Prietzel 2001, p. 402 n. 91, and p. 448 n. 70. I am indebted to Malte Prietzel for communicating this information to me.

¹⁴⁵ The white lilies in a vase symbolize a post-annunciation scenario in which Gabriel has brought the flowers, which are then put in a vase on a table, like flowers brought by a visiting guest to one's household (e.g., see Robert Campin's *Annunciation* at the Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels).

Bruges and along the Lis River. This may explain why the two lateral shields at the bottom are blank. As Jochen Sander reported on this painting, they were never painted and have no underdrawings.¹⁴⁶ It may be that Van der Weyden had initially thought of decorating them with the coat of arms of the Medici to the left and Tani to the right but found a more subtle pointer through the flower arrangement of the brass vase placed above the Florentine shield.

C.2 - The precedent

It is interesting to note that in Van der Weyden's *Braque Triptych* (fig. 108) of the Louvre, John the Baptist is similarly represented with a St John-type cape and a book without the lamb; his exclamation, though, about the Lamb of God is written on the panel next to his mouth. By analyzing the script and its positioning within each panel of this triptych, Alfred Acres has shown the different visual effects that Van der Weyden used in relation to each person therein. For instance, contrary to John the Baptist's words flowing out of his mouth, the text for Mary Magdalene, which is not spoken by her but is written *about* her, is presented in the typeset format of books and in a straight line above her head.¹⁴⁷ With such attention to details, the buttoned cape of John the Baptist and the book in his hand must also have a special meaning. As the words of John 1:29 come out of his mouth, he is pointing to the related passage, in the Bible that he holds. He is in fact mimicking what John the Evangelist would write down in his Gospel, and is, therefore, impersonating him as well.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, unlike in all other Van der Weyden paintings, John the Evangelist is not wearing his red cape here; it was perhaps meant to point out that the one John the Baptist is wearing was in fact borrowed from him. This earlier double personality for John the Baptist probably gave Van der Weyden the idea to use it again in the *Medici Virgin*.

C.3 - Angelo Tani and Memling

Finally, the foregoing explanation also sheds light on the reasons that prompted Tani—after his departure from Bruges in 1464 and subsequent removal as bank manager—to entrust the painting of the very imposing *Last Judgment* triptych of Gdansk¹⁴⁹ to the rather young and relatively unknown Memling (c. 1465).¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁶ In contrast to the central shield, there is no surface preparation for the lateral ones (personal communication by Jochen Sander; also Sander 1993, p. 328).

¹⁴⁷ Acres 2000, pp. 87-89.

¹⁴⁸ The written word may be considered here to be in lieu of the traditional lamb depicted in conjunction with the book held by John the Baptist.

¹⁴⁹ The middle part of the triptych measures 241 x 180.8 cm, and each wing, 242 x 90 cm.

painting was meant to be placed at a church in Florence,¹⁵¹ and if Tani chose a painter from afar rather than a Florentine one, he must have held him in high esteem and wanted to dazzle his compatriots with the jewel-like quality of northern painting. Since Memling was a pupil of Van der Weyden,¹⁵² Tani must have met him in the latter's atelier when the young painter was helping his master to finish the *Medici Virgin*. After the death of Van der Weyden in 1464, Tani simply chose the master's talented assistant whose work he had previously come to appreciate.



Fig. 108 - The Braque Triptych

¹⁵⁰ As Barbara Lane has convincingly argued, Tani must have ordered the painting circa 1465 on the occasion of an undocumented, but highly probable, quick return to Bruges to wrap up unfinished business and hand out the Medici Bank branch office to his successor, Tommaso Portinari; Lane 1991, pp. 626-27.

¹⁵¹ Lane argued that judging by its composition, the painting was probably destined for a funerary chapel in a Florentine church. It was shipped from Bruges in 1473 by Portinari (who in the meantime may have appropriated the painting for himself) but was stolen by pirates and never reached its destination; Lane 1991, pp. 631-39. It is now in Gdansk.

¹⁵² Lane challenged the traditional view that Memling was a pupil of Van der Weyden because he had to pay money to acquire his citizenship from Bruges on Jan. 30, 1465, whereas those who had stayed longer than a year could do it for free; Lane 1991, pp. 625-26. I am not sure whether the one-year stay requirement was a continuous one or not, for if it was, one can very well imagine a situation in which Memling had not been a permanent resident but had traveled back and forth to Bruges and worked there only as a journeyman, which did not require registration in the painter's guild, especially since he seems to have continued that practice after he became a citizen; *idem*. Furthermore, if he was an unknown figure in Bruges before, Tani would have not trusted him to paint his altarpiece after only a short stay there.



Fig. 109 - The *Lamentation* of Jean d'Auxy

Painting D : The *Lamentation* of Jean d'Auxy

This *Lamentation* scene (fig. 109), generally accepted to be by the hand of Simon Marmion,¹⁵³ bears on its reverse four sets of the intertwined initials “C&M” of Charles the Bold and his third bride, Margaret of York (1446-1503), whom he married in 1468 (fig. 111). Although Maryan Ainsworth acknowledged the possibility of an execution date between 1468 and 1473, she favoured the latter because of the visit on that date of Charles and Margaret to Valenciennes, where Marmion was residing.¹⁵⁴ But one can hardly imagine a circumstance in that visit which could have prompted the commissioning of such a painting, however. The ducal couple need not be in Valenciennes to commission a painting. Marmion and fellow painters of his day were mere artisans in the services of their princes, ready to rush for a commission to wherever they were summoned.

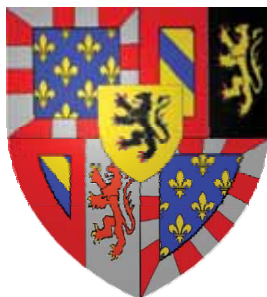


Fig. 110 - Coat of arms of Charles the Bold



Fig. 111 - Intertwined initials and coat of arms on back of Painting D



Fig. 112 - The York coat of arms

¹⁵³ For the most recent sets of arguments, see Ainsworth 1992, pp. 246-51; Kren and McKendrick 2003, pp. 108-89.

¹⁵⁴ Ainsworth 1992, p. 246 ; see also Ainsworth's entry on this painting in Kren and McKendrick 2003, p. 107.

Nevertheless, the elaborate designs on the back of the panel, where the intertwined initials of Charles and Margaret surround a coat of arms that combines the young Duke's in the left half with that of his new wife—which incorporates the Plantagenet set of three lions—on the right (figs.110-12), vouch that it was made on the occasion of the union of the princely couple in 1468. And since in this painting Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are clearly painted after real persons, one can presume that the donors portrayed themselves in a gift through which they were trying to stress their continued devotion to the ducal couple.

D.1 - Jean IV d'Auxy

So the question is: Who are these two donors? The most visible clue is the red cape of the elderly donor. It cannot be interpreted as the red cape of a martyr, for Joseph of Arimathea was not one. However, in combination with the red hat that this donor is wearing, it clearly designates him as a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece. One should also note that the original underdrawing of Marmion, visible in the IRR image of the painting (fig. 115), depicted a larger hat more similar to the one the knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece are wearing in fig. 116. But since it was obstructing the image of the two Marys above Joseph of Arimathea, Marmion subsequently flattened it out.



Fig. 113 - Margaret of York



Fig. 114 - The Virgin Mary in Painting D



Fig. 115 - Initial hat design in IRR image



Fig. 116 - Red hat and red cape worn at a Golden Fleece session

We must then try to find a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece who was perhaps in his late sixties and present at the marriage ceremonies of 1468. The most suitable candidate is the 45th member of the Order, i.e., Jean IV d'Auxy (c. 1400-74),

who was the First Chamberlain of Charles the Bold and very much involved in the marriage of the Duke and his English bride. He was a man of considerable wealth, a characteristic confirmed by the rich and elaborate outfit of Joseph of Arimathea under his cape. He had been Charles' early preceptor for physical education and sportsmanship and known to have given him gifts, such as a canon marked with his own coat of arms. He had two bastard sons, Antoine and Georges, who both participated in the tournaments held during the marriage ceremonies of 1468. The elder, Antoine, was a man of arms and later became head of the personal archers of Emperor Maximilian.¹⁵⁵ Because Nicodemus on the right, wears a short sword and a type of outfit with boots similar to that of Joseph of Arimathea, and has a similar but younger profile, we may assume that he was depicted as Antoine. Thus father and son are shown here lifting the body of Christ, which may indicate, as in Painting A, that they either had participated in the aborted crusading expedition of 1464, or were ready to embark on a new one under the command of Charles. In either case, the scene was meant to be a reminder of their loyalty to the Duke.

The panel is of modest size (51.8 x 32.7 cm) and was certainly not destined to be hung in a public space as was Painting A. It was probably meant to be a traveling votive piece for the Duke or his wife. Considering the fine traits of the very young looking the Virgin Mary in this *Lamentation*, and her resemblance to the portrait of Margaret of York in the Louvre (fig. 113), it is not inconceivable that Marmion deliberately portrayed the Virgin Mary in the image of the young bride. After all, a jeweled crown inscribed with the name of Margaret of York occasionally sat on the head of the Madonna in Aachen.¹⁵⁶

When I first suggested this interpretation to Bernard Schnerb, he asked a pertinent question: Why is it that this presumed Jean d'Auxy and his son are bearded, while Burgundian men seemed to be beardless in secular manuscripts and paintings? It is in seeking to answer his question that I discovered the grandly illustrated Getty manuscript of the *History of Alexander the Great*, which not only portrays our two bearded characters and confirms their identity but also sheds much light on the intellectual interaction between the Duke and his childhood preceptor.

¹⁵⁵ Piérard 2000, pp. 106-107.

¹⁵⁶ Van der Velden 2000, pp. 215-17. Van der Velden argues that this crown was not made to be worn by Margaret of York but was always intended for the Madonna in Aachen. His argument is based on the small size of the crown, 12.5 cm in diameter, which is presumably too small to be placed on the head of a real person. However, one can imagine that in the manner of figs. 65, 68, 77, this crown was not placed on the head but fitted into the Burgundian headgear, or perhaps it simply sat on Margaret's knotted hair on the top of her head. Whatever the case might be, the placing of an inscribed crown on the head of the Aachen Madonna associated her image with that of the duchesse.

D.2 - The Getty's *History of Alexander the Great* manuscript

One of the most popular texts to be copied at the court of Burgundy was the French translation of Quintus Curtius Rufus' *History of Alexander* by Vasco da Lucena, known as the *Faits et gestes d'Alexandre* and completed circa 1468.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps as many as 40 manuscripts were produced in the remaining part of the 15th century, of which 34 have survived.¹⁵⁸ Charles the Bold had always been fascinated by the feats of Alexander the Great (son of Philip of Macedon), and courtiers naturally flattered him by predicting that he, as the son of another Philip, was destined to become a conqueror as great as Alexander.¹⁵⁹ However, in opting for Curtius' account versus other more picturesque and romantic stories of Alexander, Vasco da Lucena was not only vying for historical exactitude but also for a text that could serve as a Mirror for Princes, to temper the rashness and excessive reactions of Charles.¹⁶⁰ Curtius' account (datable to the 1st century AD) had precisely those qualities, for it mixed the narration of Alexander's campaigns with criticism of his excesses in debauchery and gradual loss of judgment as the young conqueror accumulated victory and good fortune. Since Curtius' text was incomplete, Vasco da Lucena tried to fill its lacunae from other available historical sources, especially for the missing Book 1 and Book 2.

At least one manuscript was copied for Charles the Bold himself. Accounting records show that it was finished in 1470.¹⁶¹ In commissioning copies of this text, the Burgundian nobility was clearly emulating a royal prince renowned for his bibliophilic activities.¹⁶² Thus, most of these manuscripts incorporate a frontispiece showing Vasco da Lucena offering his work to the prince. The discrepancies between the manuscripts, however, have hitherto bewildered the experts. In regard to the Getty manuscript, for instance, the discrepancies in the text have been attributed to scribal error,¹⁶³ and variances in illustrations with other manuscripts have been attributed to a "rudimentary and superficial" knowledge of the text.¹⁶⁴ While scribal mistakes and painter misinterpretation remain as possibilities, I believe that most of the deviations in this manuscript are purposeful and deliberate, because its paintings were not mere decorative elements but were carefully designed to simultaneously reflect a story of the *History of Alexander* and events in the life of Charles the Bold. In addition, the

¹⁵⁷ McKendrick 1996, pp. 27 and 34.

¹⁵⁸ Another one was made for Charles' half brother, Antoine; McKendrick 1996, pp. 18-24.

¹⁵⁹ Brion 2006, p. 43.

¹⁶⁰ Blondeau 2005, p. 185; McKendrick 1996, p. 25.

¹⁶¹ Blondeau 2005, p. 186.

¹⁶² Blondeau 2005, p. 202.

¹⁶³ McKendrick 1996, p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ Blondeau 2005, p. 198 ; Kern and McKendrick 2003, p. 251.

frequent and prominent appearance of Jean d'Auxy and his son in them points toward him as the patron who commissioned the manuscript, probably as a gift to his former pupil.

Through the example of fig. 2 in my Introduction, I insinuated that a similar tradition of superimposing current or historical political events onto the illustrations of a narrative text had existed in the Persian world. As I shall briefly discuss in the Epilogue, this tradition goes back to the early 14th century when, under Mongol rule, the first royal-illustrated manuscript of the famous Persian epic the *Shāhnāma* (Book of kings) was produced in such a way that each illustration reflected both a story of the *Shāhnāma* as well as an event in Mongol history.¹⁶⁵ Now, imagine the scribe, the painter, and more generally, the team in charge of such a production, trying to find a linkage between historical events and epical stories in order to produce a layered illustration. Naturally, some of the links would be strong and some would be weak. To reinforce the latter or to create a link where it did not explicitly exist before, the team had to be inventive, which meant that, occasionally, “minor cheating,” i.e., a slight modification or addition of text, was necessary. That is what happened in the Persian case, and that is what happened in the case of the Getty’s manuscript as demonstrated by the following examples.

Folio 123 - *Alexander and the Niece of Artaxerxes* - In Quintus Curtius’ original text (6.2.8-9), Alexander spots among the Persian captives brought to his banquet a shy noble-looking woman who turns out to be the granddaughter of the Achaemenid king Ochus (r. 359-338 BC). He orders the captive to be released and her belongings returned.¹⁶⁶ Curtius further specifies that the princess was the daughter of Ochus’ son. In the translated text of the manuscript, though, this princess is designated as the niece of Ochus, with a subsequent caveat that she may have been “procreated by his son.”¹⁶⁷ This has misled modern commentators to refer to her as the niece of Artaxerxes, perhaps because Ochus’ reign name was Artaxerxes III.¹⁶⁸ Even so, since Ochus was succeeded by his son Artaxerxes IV (r. 338-336 BC), she could have indeed been the niece of an Artaxerxes, not III but IV. But the fact is that Lucena also uses the name Ochus and not Artaxerxes. So the question is: Why was a niece squeezed into this translation?

¹⁶⁵ Soudavar 1996.

¹⁶⁶ Quintus Curtius 2004, p. 120.

¹⁶⁷ “Icelle dame doncques interroguee de son estre respōdr estoit niepce de Ocus qui avoit regne en Perse un pou devant Si estoit procee de son fils et femme de.. » ; I am indebted to Thomas Kren for providing me with photocopies of this section of the manuscript (fol. 127r).

¹⁶⁸ McKendrick 1996, p. 180.

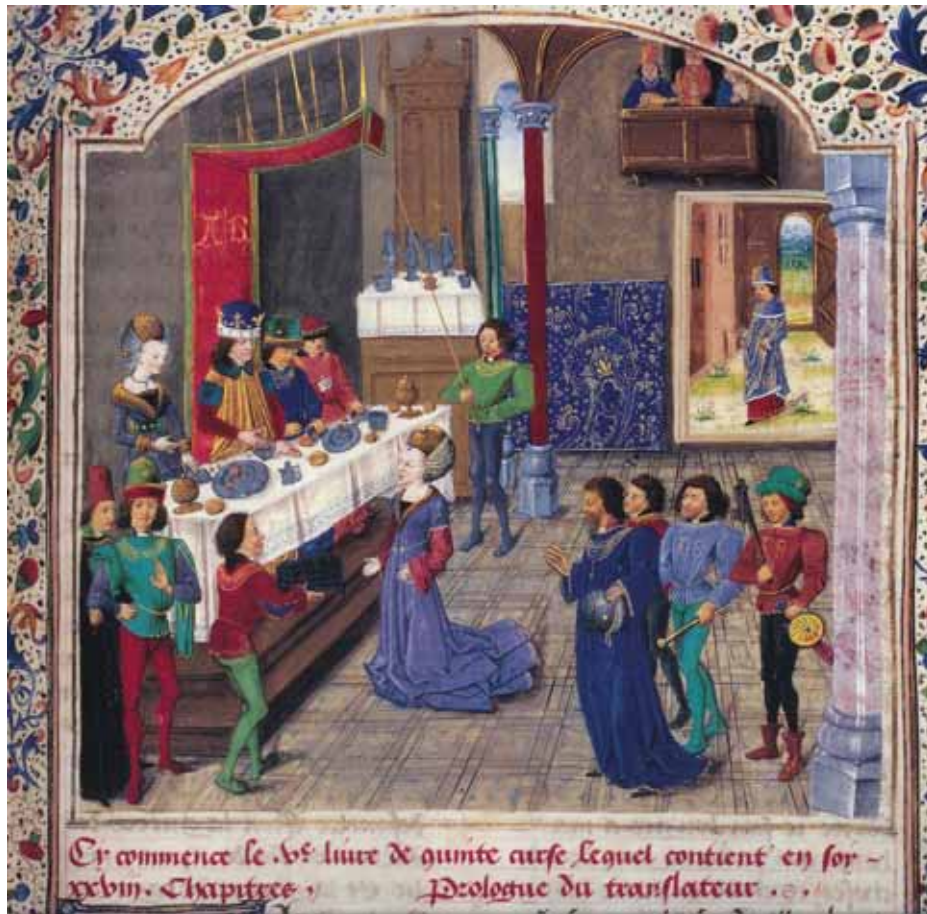


Fig. 117 - *Alexander and the Niece of Artaxerxes*

The word *niece* was obviously introduced to create a better linkage between this Achaemenid princess, and Margaret of York, who was a niece of Edward IV of England (r. 1461-83). Charles the Bold must have bestowed lavish gifts on Margaret on their wedding night, which event is equated here with Alexander returning the princesses' belongings to her. Moreover, there are two intertwined initials on the royal canopy: "A&R." They may of course refer to *Alexandre Roy* (or *Rex*) as suggested by many. I believe however, that they had a more important meaning in this context, because next to another canopy, in a scene from a manuscript in which Charles is honoring his military commanders, we see the initials C&M prominently displayed along with other signs of Burgundian sovereignty, such as the *briquet* (fig. 118). Because the name of Alexander's wife was Roxanne, the emblematic A&R sign here is in lieu of the C&M symbol that heralded the union of the Duke with Margaret of

York (as observed in fig. 111) and is meant to associate the illustrated scene with Charles' wedding banquet.¹⁶⁹



Fig. 118 - C&M initials and *briquet* signs on the wall behind Charles the Bold's throne



Fig. 119 - Necklace of Philippe de Croy

Before marrying his second wife Isabelle de Bourbon (1437-65), who was not an immediate descendant of a king but mothered his only child, Mary, Charles was betrothed at age 7 to Catherine of France (1428-46); she was the granddaughter of Charles VI through his son (see page xvi). The change of Curtius' text, qualifying the princess as a niece of a king rather than the granddaughter of one, seems to emphasize that the banquet depicted in the main hall relates to Charles' third marriage. In contrast, the child in the doorway looking from a distance at the banquet portrays Charles in a distant past. It evokes his first marriage and reflects the caveat in the translation that the princess was perhaps the granddaughter of a king.

¹⁶⁹ For another example of the two initials of husband and wife being integrated into an emblematic document, see the J&K sign on the epitaph of Joos van der Burch, whose wife was Katheline van der Mersch; Hand et al. 2006, pp. 264 and 268.

Next to Alexander is a very young woman welcoming Margaret. She represents the young Mary, whom Margaret affectionately took under her wing and for whom she acted as a mother from then on. The chronicler Olivier de la Marche specifically mentioned that Charles' mother, Duchess Isabella of Portugal, was not present at the dinner banquet even though she had greeted Margaret (in the company of Mary) when the bride first arrived at the port of Écluse.¹⁷⁰

Behind Margaret is the First Chamberlain, Jean d'Auxy, in charge of introducing the new bride to the banquet. He is bearded but is not wearing his boots and leggings, the reason being that for these ceremonies, all important functionaries had to wear long velvet robes and "heavy necklaces in gold."¹⁷¹ A sample of these gold necklaces is depicted by Van der Wyden in the portrait of another Burgundian nobleman, Philippe de Croy (fig. 119). That of Jean d'Auxy, however, has a little pendant hanging from it, which seems to mimic the pendant hanging from the real necklaces of the Order of the Golden Fleece.¹⁷²

In the context of the Alexander story, the Chamberlain Jean d'Auxy represents the king's close friend, Hephaestion whom Alexander asks to present all captured Persians of noble lineage to him. He is followed here by another bearded man, most probably Antoine who, though a bastard, was from his own lineage. Antoine, and perhaps his other brother Georges, next to him, wear the initials A&R on their chest. As I shall explain, initials on chests were used with yet another meaning for these two letters: as pointers to the identity of the clan of Jean d'Auxy.

Folio 99 - *The Isthmian Games* - This illustration was previously entitled *The Competition in Sittacene and the Placating of Sisigambis* and thought to represent two different events described in Book 5 of Quintus Curtius.¹⁷³ However, as evidenced in our previous example, in this manuscript, when an illustration sits on top of the opening sentence of one of its Books, it pertains to a story from that same Book. This illustration must therefore pertain to a story in Book 4 as it is placed at its very beginning.¹⁷⁴ It is about the Isthmian Games (Quintus Curtius 4.5.11): In ancient Greece, a festival of athletic and musical competitions was held in the spring of the second and fourth years of each Olympiad at Poseidon's sanctuary on the Isthmus of Corinth. It was open to all Greeks. After Rhodes had surrendered and while Alexander was heading toward Gaza, the Greeks dedicated the Isthmian Games of that season to

¹⁷⁰ De la Marche 1885, vol. 3, p.121; Brion 2006, p. 123.

¹⁷¹ De la Marche vol. 3, p.122 ; Brion 2006, p. 124.

¹⁷² Philippe de Croy's portrait by Van der Weyden was done prior to 1461 but he did not become a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece until 1473; Hand et al. 2006, p. 252.

¹⁷³ McKendrick 1996, p. 78.

¹⁷⁴ The opening sentence reads: « *Cy commence le quart livre de Quinte Curse...* »

him (hence his name on the gateway of fig. 120), and decided to send him a *golden* crown in recognition of his victories.¹⁷⁵



Fig. 120 - The Isthmian Games

Figure 120 also refers to the tournament of the Golden Tree (*Arbre d'or*) held in conjunction with the wedding ceremonies of 1468, in which the sons of Jean d'Auxy participated. Charles and Margaret are positioned to the right as spectators. Next to them is an elderly bearded man whose silhouette strikingly resembles Painting D's Nicodemus, whom I identified as Antoine. However, his face is similar to the

¹⁷⁵ Quintus Curtius 2004, p. 62.

older Joseph of Arimathea, and he wears the same type of expensive and sumptuous clothing. He is Jean d'Auxy, who is now wearing the pointed cap assorted with the "outfit with boots" and not the red cap of the Order of the Golden Fleece. To the left is a group of spectators and performers who all have the A&R initials on their chests. Like in the Isthmian Games, troops from all over the Dukes' domains had come to participate in the Golden Tree tournament. The initials here identify this group as coming from the twin cities of Audenarde and Rupelmonde, which were officially under the military command of Jean d'Auxy. In reality though, the military affairs of these fortresses were delegated to a lieutenant, possibly his son Antoine in this case.¹⁷⁶ He is probably one of the two bearded men among the spectators wearing the A&R sign. As the "Capitaine d'Audenarde et Rupelmonde," Jean d'Auxy is the only one among the spectators on the right to attentively watch the performance and behavior of his troops.

Folio 133v - *Bagoas Pleads on Behalf of Nabarzanes; Thalestris and the Amazons Visit Alexander* - This painting incorporates two stories of Alexander into one illustration (fig. 121). At the center is the story of Alexander pardoning Nabarzanes, one of the regional governors (*satrap*) of the Achaemenid king Darius III who had betrayed his own master and caused his demise (Curtius 6.5.22-23). Frightened to meet Alexander in battle, he surrenders to him, and is pardoned through the intervention of the King's lover, the eunuque Bagoas. To the right is the story of Thalestris, the Queen of the Amazons, who comes from the Caucasus with the aim to have a child by Alexander (Curtius 6.5.29-30). The latter obliges, and Thalestris departs a short time later.

These two sequentially close stories from Curtius' text are used here to illustrate two important Burgundian events that happened within a short period of time. But first some historical background:

When the ever-conniving Louis XI ascended to the throne of France in 1461, his primary goal was to curtail the power of the feudal lords of the realm and to fend off the growing ambitions of the Duke of Burgundy, despite the fact that it was actually Philip who put the crown on his head. As crown prince, Louis had escaped the wrath of his own father by taking refuge at the court of Burgundy. Upon hearing the news, his father pitied Duke Philip for harboring "a fox" in his henhouse.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the time Louis spent there allowed him to get acquainted with the weaknesses of Philip and his son; and no sooner was he King than he tried to embroil the relationship between the two. But Philip got wind of Louis' malevolent intent and finally was reconciled with

¹⁷⁶ I am indebted to Bertrand Schnerb for his explanations of the responsibilities Jean d'Auxy as Capitaine of Audenarde and Rupelmonde.

¹⁷⁷ Brion 2006, p. 53.

his son. It was precisely at this moment that Louis' antagonized vassals plotted against him, and instigated a war, loftily referred to as the War of Public Welfare (Guerre du Bien Public). In reality, it was not for public welfare but to reestablish the lost privileges of the French barons. As Philip was old, it was Charles who joined the league of the rebellious barons and spearheaded the military attack on Paris. Surprisingly, the Parisians sided with their King and repelled the attackers. A second battle near Montlhéry also proved to be inconclusive. Nevertheless, Louis decided to sue for peace and yielded to the demands of his enemies, knowing very well that he would renege on his promises, and would find more opportunities to sow the seeds of discord among his opponents.



Fig. 121 - *Bagoas Pleads on Behalf of Nabarzanes; Thalestris and the Amazons Visit Alexander*

As part of his strategy to counter the Burgundian threat, Louis had concluded an alliance with the wealthy and independent city of Liège and had encouraged its people to harass the Burgundian troops, which they did as soon as Charles headed for Paris in the course of the War of Public Welfare. But the concessions wrought by Charles from Louis at the conclusion of this war clearly projected him as the real victor and

enhanced his prestige. To maintain that prestige, he had to deal firmly with any affront. Dreading Charles' wrath, the citizens of Liège asked for a pardon. There was, of course, a price to pay. Charles demanded that the prominent citizens of Liège should crawl before him bareheaded and on their knees, avow that they had maliciously engaged in warfare against him, and beg his forgiveness. They also had to pay 530'000 florins to Duke Philip and his son and forego the construction of fortifications along their common borders. These were all incorporated into a peace treaty signed on January 26, 1466.

The center part of the illustration, which depicts Nabarzanes bareheaded and crawling before Alexander on his knees to implore forgiveness, thus refers to the pardon ceremony imposed on the citizens of Liège.

To the right, the depiction of the Amazon Queen refers to the early death of Charles' second wife, Isabelle de Bourbon, on September 24, 1465, during the Liège uprising. Like Thalestris, Isabelle had come and borne a child for Charles, and then departed shortly after. In this image, the Amazons in the retinue of Thalestris are depicted in Burgundian dress but in the manner described by Quintus Curtius: "The dress of Amazons does not entirely cover the body: the left side is bare to the breast but clothed beyond that, while the skirt of the garment, which is gathered into a knot, stops above the knee."¹⁷⁸ More interesting is the bottom left corner (next to the throne) where stands a figure that I identified as Jean d'Auxy in the previous illustration: He is bearded and wears the same outfit with boots and pointed cap, but in addition, he wears the multichained necklace with a pendant that was meant to evoke the necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece worn on official occasions.

Chances are that the transformation of Bagoas into a *young woman* was also made to accommodate a historical fact. One of the main causes of the Liège rebellion was the unpopularity of Bishop Louis de Bourbon (bish. 1456-82), whom Duke Philip had thrust upon Liège. Being Louis' sister,¹⁷⁹ Isabelle may well have interceded on behalf of the citizens of Liège before her death. This would have been added reason to include the Thalestris story in the same illustration, as both stories relate to Isabelle. The gold color of her conical hat also conforms to the princely status of the so-called Bagoas turned into a woman.

Folio 204 - *Alexander is Wounded While Fighting in the Town of Sudracae.*

Leading his reluctant troops over the ramparts of the fortress of Sudracae, Alexander finds himself fighting alone against Indian troops. After eliminating several of his enemies, he is gravely wounded by an arrow but continues to fight nevertheless. Help

¹⁷⁸ Quintus Curtius 2004, p. 128.

¹⁷⁹ I am indebted to Bertrand Schnerb for pointing out to me Isabelle and Louis' relationship.

arrives in extremis as he is about to go down: first Peucestes and finally the rest of the Macedonian army.¹⁸⁰



Fig. 122 - Alexander is Wounded While Fighting in the Town of Sudracae

Most remarkably, Alexander's Sudracae episode provides a close parallel for one of Charles' adventures during the War of Public Welfare. After a first setback before Paris, Charles went back to the borough of St Denis to regroup. While his lieutenants were pressing him to quit and regain Burgundy, he vowed to cross back the Seine River, alone if necessary, and to continue fighting. In the meantime, Louis had gathered new forces and was marching toward Paris. It was too late for Charles to

¹⁸⁰ Quintus Curtius 2004, p. 128.

regain Burgundy; after crossing the Seine one more time, he engaged the French forces near Montlhéry. During a most heroic combat, he was wounded at the neck but continued fighting. Exhausted and overwhelmed, he was about to succumb to the enemy when his half-brother, Antoine, saved him from death. The valiant stances of both Alexander and Charles after being wounded and encircled by their respective enemies, and their in extremis escape from death, obviously offered a strong linkage between the two episodes.

Folio 149- *The Execution of Philotas and his Father*- This is the most important painting of this series as it refers to an event that marked the apogee of Charles' power and prestige and humiliated Louis XI almost beyond repair.



Fig. 123 - *The Execution of Philotas and his Father*

After being pardoned by Charles, the citizens of Liège again threatened the bishop appointed by his father, and a group of dissidents referred to as the Green Tent (*Verte*

Tente) advocated resistance against Burgundian hegemony. They were named as such because they regularly took refuge in the nearby forests, which was deemed to be their tent. They soon provoked a crisis that led to a breach of the treaty that had been imposed on them and to the nonpayment of the heavy fines stipulated therein. After declaring war, Charles marched toward Liège and Louis XI tried to intercede on behalf of his allies, but to no avail. Charles continued his campaign, crushed the Liège army, and set more stringent terms on the city than before. Calm was restored, but not for long.

In the meantime, Duke Philip died in 1467 and Charles succeeded him to the Duchy of Burgundy. A year later, in a most audacious gamble, Louis XI proposed to come to Charles, unaccompanied by his troops, in order to iron out their differences. Charles received him in the city of Péronne after taking an oath that guaranteed the safe return of the King. Soon after the arrival of Louis, the citizens of Liège rebelled again. Charles was enraged because he sensed treachery, and the hand of Louis behind the rebellion. He decided to act immediately. With the King at his mercy, he marched against the rebels. The Green Tent agitators fled to their refuge and left the rest of the citizens to sue for an unconditional surrender. But Charles was merciless. He ordered the massacre of male inhabitants of the city while Louis, fully clad in armor and trying to keep a smiling face, was being insulted by his former allies who were about to die. When Charles asked Louis what should be done with the city, the King coldly advised him to have it leveled! His only wish was for Charles to allow him to regain his kingdom. The Duke's advisors, though, counseled him against the release of the King with the argument that by engaging in treachery, Louis had annulled the underlying conditions of Charles' oath, and besides, if it was he who had taken the oath, he would have certainly reneged on it. But Charles, who was imbued with a spirit of chivalry, valued his oath more than Machiavellian politics. Louis was released and left his cousin, never to see him again.¹⁸¹ The French king, whom history would describe as the Universal Arachnid, was now free to spread a web of intrigue and political manipulation that ultimately entrapped Charles and led to his death.

The painting here (fig. 123) was to evoke the Liège massacre and Louis XI's betrayal of his allies. It illustrates the last episode of the story of Alexander's close friend, Philotas, who was accused of conspiracy against Alexander, because he knew about a plot to assassinate his king but neglected to reveal it. Alexander had him "stoned to death in the Macedonian manner" (Curtius 6.8.20-1140). Philotas' father, Parmenion, was also killed later on, not through stoning but by a sword driven into his side and a stab at his throat (Curtius 7.2.27).

¹⁸¹ Brion 2006, pp. 88-144.

Unlike in the Alexander story, this illustration shows the younger Philotas beheaded while his father is awaiting execution. Also, there were no cities involved in Curtius' story; Philotas was tried and killed in Alexander's camp, somewhere in Drangae (Curtius 6.6.35). Their beheading near a city surrounded by a moat, and before which are stationed the royal tents, is to recall the beheading of the Liège male inhabitants. Philotas' betrayal was to recall Louis' double-crossing of his allies. The King is depicted in golden armor behind Charles (alias Alexander) with a naked sword to evoke his ignominious entry into Liège behind his cousin, brandishing a sword and shouting "Vive Bourgogne" as his horse was stepping on the bodies of his unfortunate allies.¹⁸² In the upper left of the illustration, we have a green forest to recall the Green Tent rebels, and watching in the front row of the troops to the right is Jean d'Auxy with his distinctly bearded face and pointed hat.

Fol. 226 - *Orsines Presents a Gift to Alexander; The Execution of Orsines.* This painting illustrates two episodes of the story of Orsines, a noble and wealthy Persian who had taken over the *satrapy* of Pasargadae, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire and who, upon the arrival of Alexander, bestowed lavish gifts on him and his attendants. He neglected, however, Darius' eunuque Bagoas, who in the meantime had become Alexander's lover. Upon being advised not to neglect Bagoas, his reply was that he had "paid his respects to the king's friends, and not his whores" (Curtius 10.1.26). But Bagoas got his revenge by turning Alexander against Orsines with false accusations, and Orsines was then executed in the presence of Bagoas.

In between the second uprising of Liège and its final crushing, Charles had to deal with the city of Dinant. During the War of Public Welfare, its inhabitants had insulted Charles' mother who was accused of having an illicit affair and being a whore, in the same way that Orsines had insulted Bagoas. When Charles arrived with his army, a conciliatory faction came and surrendered the keys of the city, but Charles showed no mercy; he burned down the city and massacred its inhabitants. Orsines giving gifts on the left side is illustrating the presentation of the city's keys to Alexander. And his execution on the right side is to recall the massacre at Dinant despite the surrender of the city keys. Next to Charles (as Alexander) stands his mother as Bagoas, who, unlike in fig. 121, has been transfigured into an *elderly* woman. Moreover, the affront at Dinant was caused by an unruly faction, which like the Green Tent of Liège took flight and went into the woods, as Charles arrived. Thus the savage beasts that are aligned in front of a green forest in the upper-right corner refer to this unruly faction that escaped the massacre of Dinant. McKendric suggested that these fantastic beasts must have been inspired by the Romance tales of Alexander, especially since Vasco

¹⁸² Brion 2006, p. 144.

obtained a Romance manuscript from the spoils of the looting of Dinant.¹⁸³ This may be partially true. But because the beasts are of golden color, they also recall the elaborate automata and mechanical animals created for various ducal feasts, including those for the marriage of 1468, in which a huge—singing—golden lion was the sensation of the evening; the lion was followed by an automata-camel; and at the Feast of the Pheasant, there was a deer with golden horns as well as a flying dragon.¹⁸⁴

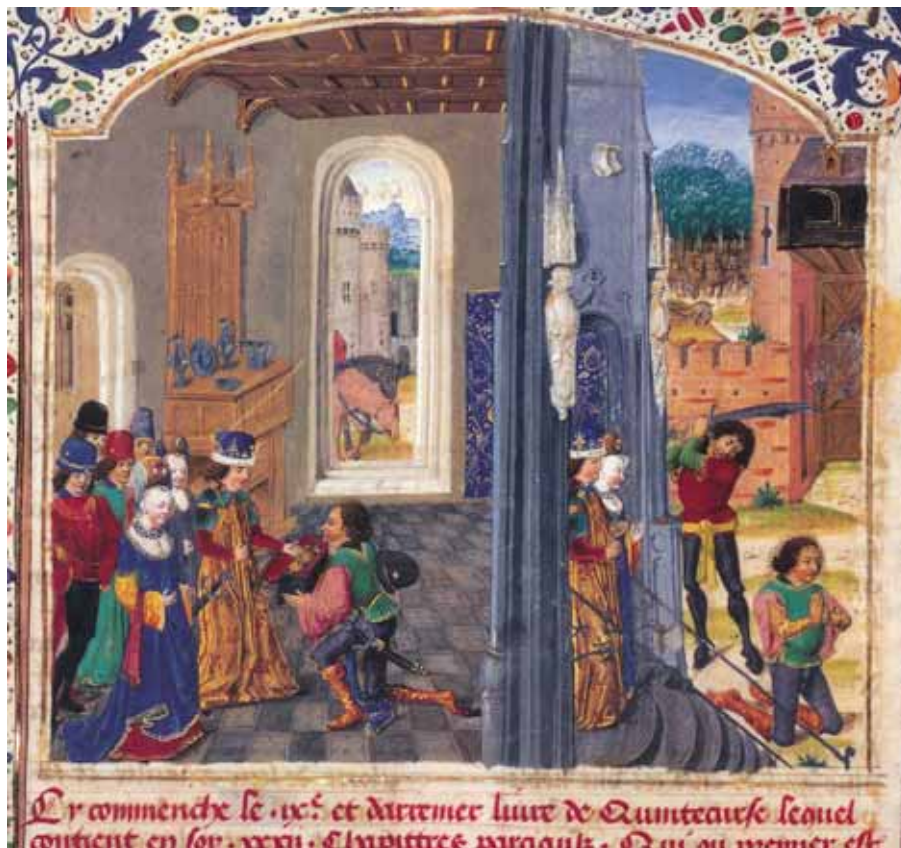


Fig. 124 - Orsines Presents a Gift to Alexander; The Execution of Orsines

Folio 175 - *Alexander Kills Clitus; Alexander Fights with a Lion.* The two stories illustrated here are consecutive entries from the beginning of Book 8 (8.1.12-1.52).

¹⁸³ McKendrick 1996, p. 16.

¹⁸⁴ Brion 2006, p. 127; De la Marche, vol. 2, p. 358-60.

The first takes place in the woods near Bazaira from which springs out a lion of unusual size; as it rushes toward Alexander, he disposes of it with one stroke. The second happens near Maracanda when, after a drinking bout, Alexander is disparaged by his trusted general Clitus, who had once saved his life. Clitus reproaches Alexander for belittling the heroism of his Macedonian officers and appropriating for himself all the glories. Alexander is so enraged by his comments that he takes a lance from a guard and tries to kill Clitus but is stopped by some of his companions. He then rushes out into the vestibule, grabs another lance, and kills Clitus as he walks out.



Fig. 125a – *Alexander Kills Clitus; Alexander Fights with a Lion*

In combination, the two illustrations refer to the feuds between Charles and his father. The tone is set by the image on the right, in which Charles is allegorically fighting

with a giant lion that evoked Philip, who was referred to as “*Le grand lion*” (the big lion) by Chastellain. A similar lion was also struck on his coins (fig. 125b).

The image on the left side of fig. 125a, refers to an incident that occurred between father and son over the interference of Philip’s advisors, the two princely brothers Jehan and Antoine de Croy.¹⁸⁵ When Phillip asks Charles to employ a son of Jehan in his household, Charles appoints someone else instead. Summoned before Philip, Charles criticizes his father for his reliance on the Croys and refuses a second nomination by his father for the aforementioned position, at which point Philip takes a dagger and rushes toward him. Charles manages to disarm him and dashes out of the door.¹⁸⁶ The illustration is obviously a mix of the two stories. Both involve the verbal disparaging of one protagonist against another, and in both, one is incensed and wants to kill the other. But whereas Clitus is killed outside the banquet room, here he is killed inside, and whereas Alexander uses a lance in Curtius’ story, here he wields a dagger, in conformity with the action undertaken by Duke Philip against his son.



Fig. 125b – Gold coin of Philip the Good with a lion

Folio 41 - *Alexander’s Illness at the Cyndus River; Death of Sisines.* This painting illustrates two consecutive stories from Book 3 (3.5.1- 3.7.15) that allude to the sequel of the previously mentioned incident between the Duke and his son.

The clear waters of the Cyndus River running through Cilicia induced Alexander to take a bath by taking off his cloth. But as his overheated body hits the cold water, his limbs shivers, he goes pale and falls ill. He is taken to his tent to be treated by his Physician, an Arcanian by the name of Philip. While being treated by Philip, he receives a letter from Parmenion accusing the physician of being a spy in the service of Darius and plotting to poison him. When Philip is about to administer a special potion to his patient, Alexander shows him Parmenion’s letter but drinks it nevertheless. Although the drink initially aggravates Alexander’s health, three days later, it brings him back to good health.

This story is then followed by that of Sisines, a Persian who had once served Alexander’s father and subsequently became a trusted associate of his son. A letter sent by Nabarzanes to Sisines, asking him to betray his master for the sake of Darius,

¹⁸⁵ As his closest advisor, Antoine Croy is portrayed in a gray robe and black headgear next to Philip in fig. 58. His portrait is depicted with a nose similar to his son’s in fig. 119.

¹⁸⁶ Brion 2006, p. 50.

falls into the hands of Alexander who, to test his associate, has it sealed again and delivered to him. Sisines, who sees Alexander busy with his campaign, fails to reveal the letter's content to Alexander. He is then accused of treachery, apprehended, and later killed even though Curtius affirms his innocence.



Fig. 126 - Alexander's Illness at the Cyndus River; Death of Sisines

After pulling a dagger on his son, Philip falls into such a state of fury that he runs away, deep into the woods and into the night under a cold rain.¹⁸⁷ He is found two days later in a disheveled state but calmed down. At this stage, Charles is urged by his entourage to leave the court and be away from his father. The presence of a physician by the name of Philip is obviously a good pointer for associating this illustration with

¹⁸⁷ Chastellain 1863-66, pp. 245-77.

the Duke. Thus, the naked king walking out of the woods refers to the return of the disheveled Philip from the woods. Parminion's letter accusing the physician of treachery can be equated with Charles' accusation of treachery against the Croys. And the whisking out of Alexander by his companion in the middle of the painting refers to Charles' departure into exile.

Chastellain's account of Philip's adventure in the woods is similarly followed by the story of one Gouffier, who had achieved fame and fortune in the services of King Charles VII. He was, however, accused of embezzlement and imprisoned, but freed after three months for lack of proof. Upon being freed, he gave a letter to the captain of the guards to be remitted to the King. He said: "I come out of this prison with no money, but such is my talent and destiny that I shall obtain whatever I wish to have and whenever I want it." Upon seeing the letter, the King surmised that Gouffier must be hiding "some things." He put him back into prison and had him tortured until he confessed to his previous embezzlements.¹⁸⁸ The common denominator between this story and that of Sisines is that in both, a close associate of the King is doomed by a letter that is handed to the King. While Sisines is killed, Gouffier seems to have languished in prison until his death. The illustration, however, depicts the killing of Sisines (behind Alexander's tent) rather than the imprisonment of Gouffier.

It is remarkable how the team in charge of the production of this manuscript could find a parallel between two *consecutive* stories from Curtius' *History* and two *consecutive* episodes of Chastellain's chronicles.¹⁸⁹ Considering the modifications brought into the translation of the text by Vasco da Lucena (as we saw it in the case of fig. 117, *Alexander and the Niece of Artaxerxes*), the translator was certainly among those who configured this manuscript for Jean d'Auxy. The elaborate schemes incorporated into this work are a testimony to the high degree of sophistication at the court of Burgundy, as well as that of the team in charge of its production.

¹⁸⁸ Chastellain 1863-66, vol. 3, pp. 294-97.

¹⁸⁹ In the case of the previously mentioned illustrated Mongol *Shāhnāma*, the juxtaposition of two stories in one illustration was initially based on finding a correspondence between the text of the *Shāhnāma* and the *Universal History* (*Jāme'ot-tavārikh*), written by the vizier Rashid-od-din (d. 1319). Similarly, in the present manuscript, the illustrations seem to have been primarily chosen when a linkage between Curtius' text and Chastellain's chronicles (*Oeuvres*) could be found.



Fig. 127 - St Jerome and Johan II von Baden

Painting E : *St Jerome and a Donor*

E.1 - The donor

While the attribution of this powerful painting, from the Johnson Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to Simon Marmion is by now well accepted, the identity of the donor praying next to St Jerome has not been established. As previously noted, by its sheer size (65.1 x 49 cm) and because of the prominence of the figures in its composition, this painting offers a close parallel to our Painting A. And as in it, Marmion has incorporated some clues for the identification of the donor.

On the back window, the coat of arms with a black cardinal-type hat on top and tassels on the sides is the emblem of an archbishop and not of a cardinal as Ainsworth has surmised.¹⁹⁰ It is true that in most cases and especially on coins, the number of tassels is set at ten, but there are many exceptions to this rule, such as the coat of arms of Archbishop de Carette of Reims (d. 1514) in fig. 128.¹⁹¹ The designer of a coat of arms would naturally have a tendency to increase the number of tassels to project greater power for important bishoprics.

To identify the donor or archbishop of this painting, Marmion had set his initials “JB” in a small roundel on the right bottom of the window. They refer to Johann II von Baden, the archbishop and ruler of Trier (r. 1456-1502), which is situated on the eastside of the Duchy of Luxembourg. He was born in 1429 and the donor here looks very much like a man in his mid 40s. Trier was also the city that St Jerome visited after Rome, probably circa AD 360. It was famous for its schools, and St Jerome’s theological studies had begun there.

This painting was most probably painted on the occasion of the inauguration of a new university, in 1473, that the reform-minded Johann von Baden had created. Hence, the presence of St Jerome—one of the most learned fathers of the Western Church—behind the donor.

¹⁹⁰ At the same time, Ainsworth believes that there are too many tassels for a cardinal (see her entry in Kren and McKendrick 2003, p. 205).

¹⁹¹ See, for instance, www.premiumorange.com/armoiries-de-france/Arch-Eveches/TOURS-Archeveche.pdf

While an exact replica of the coat of arms depicted on the back window is yet to be found, its three cinquefoils reappear on a 1599 coin from Trier (fig. 130) during the reign of Archbishop Lothar von Metternich (1599-1623). This further confirms the Trier connection of the painting.



Fig. 128 - Coat of arms of Archbishop de Carette



Fig. 129 - Detail of Painting E



Fig. 130 - Coin of Lothar von Metternich, Trier

E.2 - The year 1473

In the year 1473, two important incidents happened that may or may not have had a bearing on this painting. The first is the death of Guillaume Fillastre on August 21. He was Marmion's foremost patron and an ecclesiastic as well. His death probably made Marmion more available to patrons such as Johann II von Baden, who must have had an eye on posterity because of the university he had created.

The second is the meeting of Charles the Bold and Emperor Frederick III hosted by Johann von Baden in Trier, at the end of that year. Valiant and noble, learned and brave, rich and powerful, Charles felt superior to the King Louis XI of France and to Emperor Frederick III, both of whom were his overlords. Ambitious as he was, Charles aspired to rule over an independent kingdom that would eclipse those of his overlords. His initial dream was to revive Lotharingia, the Empire forged by Charlemagne's great-grandson Lothar II (r. 855-69), in between the French

territories to the west and the German territories to the east. But he soon found a more expedient way to fame when Frederick, who was poor but had title, agreed to a rapprochement between the two, sealed by the marriage of Mary of Burgundy to his son Maximilian. In this, Charles saw an opportunity to gamble for higher stakes. Following a stratagem once pursued by Henry V of England, who by marrying the daughter of the King of France succeeded in naming himself as heir to the throne of France, Charles was now vying to be named general vicar of the Roman Empire with the hope of succeeding Frederick III after his death. There was of course, the stipulation that after him, the throne would revert back to his would-be son-in-law, Maximilian.

The Roman Emperor, as the Emperor of the Germans was called, had to be elected by seven electors, one of which was the Archbishop of Trier. Charles could count on the vote of two electors;¹⁹² the others, though, did not welcome the nomination of an outsider as their Emperor. Johann von Baden was perhaps the elector who opposed him most, and argued with Frederick that Charles was not a German and could not understand the German mentality. After two months of negotiations, as Charles was pressing for more and more concessions, on the night of November 24 and on the eve of Charles' planned coronation, a scared Frederick suddenly left Trier, and the whole process was aborted.¹⁹³

Johann von Baden's decision to employ a painter who had worked for the Dukes of Burgundy may have been prompted by the sight of the dazzling opulence that Charles put on display when he arrived at Trier. The Dukes of Burgundy had been trendsetters in courtly fashion, and the choice of an artist from that court was a normal one for a painting that the Archbishop would leave for posterity.

¹⁹² The two supporters were the Archduke Sigismund of Austria (r. 1446-1490), who had originally conceived the marriage plan between Maximilian and Mary, and the second one was the King of Bohemia, Podiebrad (r. 1458-1471); Brion 2006, pp. 177-84.

¹⁹³ Brion 2006, pp. 181-85.

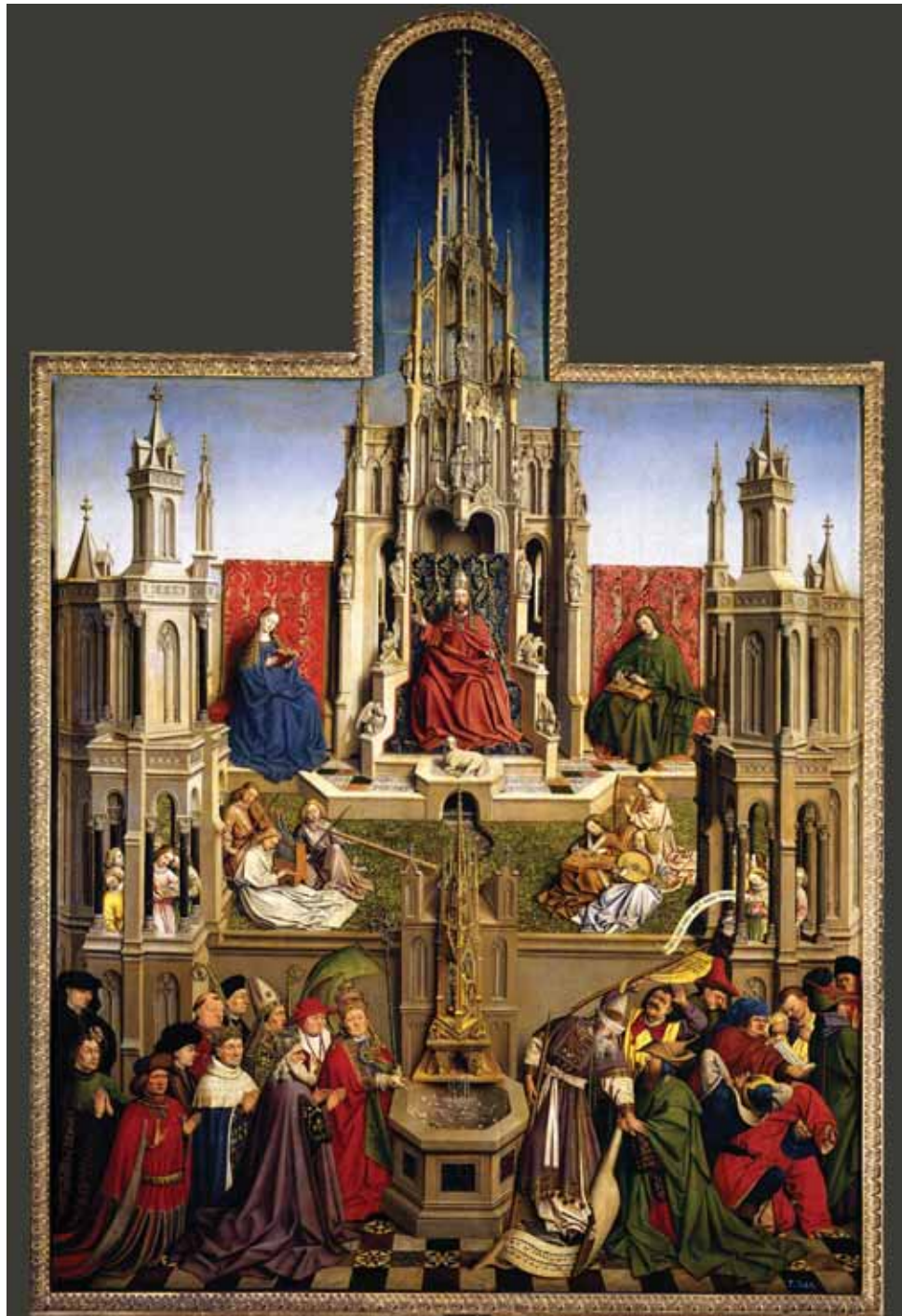


Fig. 131 - The *Fountain of Grace*, c. 1420-22

Painting F : The *Fountain of Grace*

The magnificent painting of the Prado, known as the *Fountain of Grace* (fig. 131) has always been compared with the *Mystical Lamb* altarpiece of Ghent. The latter bears on its frame an inscription in the form of a quatrain that attributes it to Jan Van Eyck and his elder brother, Hubert. Yet, it has been considered by many to be the work of Jan alone.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, because of its many similarities with the *Mystical Lamb*, both thematic and iconographical, the *Fountain of Grace* has been attributed to a collaborator or follower of Jan. These similarities have been further substantiated by Sue Jones, who through a superimposition of the images of the ground-floor tiles of Painting F on those of Jan Van Eyck's famous *Rolin Virgin* of the Louvre, has established that they both follow the same pattern. She also perceived a similar pattern analogy between the tiles of the upper zone of Painting F and those from another Jan Van Eyck painting, *The Virgin and Child With Sts Barbara and Elisabeth*, and *Jan Vos* from the Frick Collection in New York—a work generally considered to have been completed after Jan's death—and concluded that the painter of the *Fountain of Grace* had copied the works of Jan's atelier, probably through the use of patterns, and sometime after 1441. Relying on a suggestion by Margaret Scott, she then advanced the theory that the “firmly shaped bourrelet of the hood worn by the man standing in black on the left became fashionable only after circa 1445.”¹⁹⁵ Painting F was thereafter dated to circa 1445-50.¹⁹⁶

As we can clearly see from the red headgear of the Burgundian rider on the right side of Painting G (figs. 153, 180), a prototype of the so-called hood “bourrelet” was already present in 1423. But the more obvious question is: Rather than Painting F being patterned after Jan Van Eyck's works, couldn't it be the other way around? And aren't the above presumptions suffering from a Jan-van-Eyckian syndrome in the same way that the Van der Goes syndrome affected the understanding of Marmion paintings? The answer is yes, and I shall give two sets of

¹⁹⁴ Ridderbos 2005, pp. 52-59.

¹⁹⁵ Jones 2000, pp. 201-202.

¹⁹⁶ Borchert 2002, p. 237

reasons, one technical and based on dendrochronology and IRR and the other historical and based on the identification of the personalities therein.

F.1 - The technical data

The dendrochronological analysis for the wood panels by Peter Klein has yielded the following information:¹⁹⁷

board I	147 growth rings covering the years:	1403 - 1257
board II	278 growth rings covering the years:	1392 - 1115
board III	140 growth rings covering the years:	1403 - 1264
board IV	147 growth rings covering the years:	1391 - 1245

Because the youngest ring is dated as 1403, and the wood is from the Baltic region, Klein's conclusions are that with a minimum count of 9 rings of sapwood and 2 years of seasoning, the earliest production date would be 1414, and if a median of 15 sapwood rings and 10 years of seasoning are considered, the production date would be 1428. Included in the seasoning number is of course the storage time at the wood mill or at the painting atelier before production.

I suggest however that common sense dictates that the larger the panel, the shorter is the time of wood storage and the smaller is the number of sapwood rings. And for obvious reasons, neither the wood merchant nor the painting atelier could afford to leave a costly plank of wood unused, especially if it was destined for a large panel such as Painting F, which measures 183 x 117 cm. By industrial practices of today, one can very well

imagine that large planks of wood had to be special-ordered and used upon arrival. Also, the panel maker naturally tried to incorporate the widest possible planks, i.e., those with less damaged sapwood. Therefore, the assumption that the wood panels of Painting F remained unused for thirty years seems unlikely; in all probability, the production date lies somewhere in between 1414 and 1428. In fact, as the historical data will suggest, it would be right in the middle, i.e., circa 1420-22.



Fig. 132 - IRR underdrawing of bottom left part of Painting F

¹⁹⁷ I am once again indebted to Peter Klein for this data.

Furthermore, the single IRR image that was supplied to me by the Prado (fig. 132) shows changes in the underlying drawings, especially for the face of the man in black, which is usually a sign of original work and not a copy.

F.2 - Historical background

Because the thematic scheme of the painting reflects the political developments in Europe in the first quarter of the 15th century, a brief historical account of that period is necessary for its understanding. In the year 1392, the King of France Charles VI was seized by a frenzy attack that impaired him intermittently for the rest of his life and earned him the epithet “The Mad.” Thereafter, two princes vied for the governance of France through the Royal Council: Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, and the king’s brother Louis, who was the duke of Orleans. On November 23, 1407, the new Duke of Burgundy, John the Fearless, eliminated his rival Louis by instigating his assassination. Four days later, he avowed before the Royal Council to have been the instigator of the crime. But to justify his act, he solicited the help of a group of theologians and jurists headed by a doctor from the University of Paris, Jean Petit (c. 1360-1411), who produced a *Justification* treatise in 1408, essentially condoning assassination for the greater good of crown and country.¹⁹⁸ In essence, it was a religious manifesto in favor of political killings.

The assassination of the duke of Orleans polarized France into two rival factions: the Armagnacs, who became partisans of the assassinated Duke’s son, and the Bourguignons, who backed John the Fearless. Their bitter feud plunged the country into a state of civil war. Meanwhile, despite the *Justification* treatise and an initial exoneration of John the Fearless by the Royal Council, his enemies mobilized the theologians Jean Gerson (1363-1429) and his mentor Pierre d’Ailly (1350-1420), the ex-rector of the University of Paris, to refute the *Justification* treatise and have the Duke tried for murder. Despite an initial condemnation of the *Justification* treatise by an inquisition court presided by the Bishop of Paris in 1414, and to make it universally acceptable, Jean Gerson and Pierre d’Ailly planned to prosecute Jean Petit and John the Fearless before the Council of Constance. The Council’s main objective was to end the Papal Schism, but it had also undertaken to deal with “heretical” doctrines, such as those advocated by the Englishman John Wycliffe (1320-84) and his Bohemian follower, Jan Huss (1370-1415), doctrines that eventually led to the Lutheran reformations. The issue of the *Justification* theory was thus presented to the Council as yet another unacceptable doctrine.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Schnerb 2005, pp. 214-15, 247-49.

¹⁹⁹ Initially, Gerson wielded much power at the Council. He directed, among other things, the process against Jan Huss.

To counter that threat, John the Fearless who was now banned from the court, managed to send to the Council his own group of theologians and jurists, headed by Martin Porée (d. 1426) and Pierre Cauchon (1371-1442). Porée, who was a doctor in theology, had been the Duke's first confessor and became Bishop of Arras in 1407 with the latter's support.²⁰⁰ Pierre Cauchon, whose name history has infamously recorded for trying Joan of Arc (1412-31) and condemning her to be burned at the stake, was primarily a jurist but had also studied theology. In 1403, he had been elected as rector of the University of Paris. Shortly after, he had decided to tie his lot with that of the Duke of Burgundy; and from then on, his fortunes flowed and ebbed with those of his Burgundian protectors.

Despite the prominent position of Jean Gerson at the Council of Constance, Martin Porée and Pierre Cauchon were not only able to thwart his efforts for a confirmation of the 1414 condemnation by the Bishop of Paris but also had the Council declare this decree as "null and void, obliterated, annihilated and cancelled."²⁰¹

In the meantime, after the Armagnacs had managed to oust their Burgundian rivals from power, Henry V of England crushed the French forces in Agincourt in 1415. With the Duke of Burgundy secluded in his domain, Henry was advancing toward Paris unopposed; it was a favorable situation that he wished to prolong. He thus organized in 1416 a meeting in Calais with Emperor Sigismund and John the Fearless to conclude a peace treaty and lure the latter into an alliance against France. But the Duke, who primarily saw himself as a Frenchman and aspired to become once more the protector of the kingdom, rejected Henry's proposition. The Calais meeting, however, did provide an opportunity for Sigismund and the Duke to put behind them the bitter memories of Nicopolis (see section G.2) and agree to a partial treaty in 1417.²⁰²

One of the first acts of Martin V after his election by the Council of Constance was to send in 1418 two legates—Cardinal Giordano Orsini (d. 1438), and Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre (the Elder), who was at that time the Archbishop of Aix—to mediate between the Armagnacs and Bourguignons. They visited first John the Fearless in Burgundy and then went to Montereau, where the ambassadors of the two factions had already started preliminary discussions. Pierre Cauchon and

²⁰⁰ Schnerb 2005, p. 604.

²⁰¹ Schnerb 2005, p. 611. The Duke's multifaceted campaign against his detractors had resulted in two preliminary victories: First, in a moment of sanity, Charles VI realized how much he needed the support of his cousin, and pardoned him with a formal edict; second, the faculty of Paris formally disavowed the 1414 condemnation. At the Council of Constance, Petit's *Justification* was declared to be only a moral and philosophical opinion, not of faith.

²⁰² Schnerb 2005, p. 632.

Martin Porée were there to negotiate on behalf of Burgundy. The intervention of the two papal legates resulted in a peace treaty concluded on the May 26, 1418.²⁰³

The Armagnac faction refused to ratify the treaty, but the question became moot when the Bourguignons staged a coup and captured Paris three days later. John the Fearless entered once again triumphantly into Paris, and shortly after, he started a reconciliation effort that aimed to woo the crownprince (the future Charles VII), around whom the Armagnacs had converged. Fearless as he was, he accepted to meet the crownprince unaccompanied by a military escort; but he walked into a trap set up by the crownprince and was assassinated on the bridge of Montereau on September 10, 1419. He was succeeded by his son, Philip the Good.

With the English marching toward Paris, and deprived of Burgundian support, the only solution left for Charles VI was to come to term with the enemy. With the support of his queen, Isabeau of Bavaria, the crownprince was accused of lese-majesty and was disinherited, as rumors spread that he was a bastard and the son of the king's brother with whom Isabeau reputedly had an affair. His repudiation was also to attract the support of the Duke Philip who saw him as the assassin of his father. Negotiations with the English started with the participation of both Cauchon and Porée; but the main force behind the overture to England was the Bishop of Tournai and the former preceptor of Philip, Jehan de Thoisy (1350-1433), who had now become his chancellor. On May 21, 1420, at the city of Troyes, a treaty was ratified by which the daughter of Charles VI, Catherine of Valois, was betrothed to Henry V of England, with the stipulation that he and his future sons would succeed Charles VI to the throne of France. Henry V, however, died unexpectedly on August 31, 1422, and Charles VI followed him in death two months later.

As I shall argue, this painting was meant to illustrate, on the left, the peace process initiated by Pope Martin V in the realm of Charlemagne, which ultimately led to the Treaty of Troyes and put an end—theoretically—to the long hostilities between France and England. Simultaneously, it was meant to illustrate, on the right, the condemnation of the heretical movements by the Council of Constance and Martin V's order of a crusade against the Hussites. It was probably commissioned by Jehan de Thoisy, a fervent proponent of the Anglo-Burgundian alliance.

F.3 - The crusader kings of the Ghent altarpiece

Regardless of who copied whom, because the Ghent altarpiece has many traits in common with Painting F, the identification of some of the figures in a panel of the former (fig. 133) might offer a clue for the personas depicted in the latter.

²⁰³ Schnerb 2005, p. 665.



Fig. 133 - Crusader-kings of the Ghent altarpiece



Fig. 134 - Sigismund



Fig. 135 - St Louis by El Greco



Fig. 136 - St Louis in the 15th century



Fig. 137- Albert II of Habsburg



Fig. 138- Albert II as Roman Emperor

The second panel from the left of the Ghent altarpiece, entitled *Christi Milities* and usually referred to as the *Knights of the Christ*, depicts behind a row of armored knights a group of kings who must have fought for the cause of the Church. Margaret Scott has identified two of them. She recognized the figure with the closed crown to be Charlemagne, and suggested that he was included among the Knights for having defeated the Saxons in 777 and for paving the way for their conversion to Christianity, a feat that was “invoked by Pope Urban II for the First Crusade in 1095.”²⁰⁴ However, as the identification of the remaining *milities* will show, they were “crusader” kings who had participated in battles against Saracens and Turks. Charlemagne’s inclusion may have been justified through the epic of Roland of Roncevaux, which, by the 13th century, had turned the combined attack

²⁰⁴ Scott 2000, pp. 138-39.

of Basque and Muslim forces on the rearguard of Charlemagne's army in Northern Spain, into a battle with Saracens *only* in which perished Roland. The new version of the story gained such acceptability that it was even incorporated in the *Chroniques de France* and illustrated for the manuscript commissioned by Bishop Guillaume Fillastre (fig. 1).

Scott also recognized Emperor Sigismund, with his traditional Germanic fur-hat, next to Charlemagne. The similitude of his portrait with the Pisanello sketches and the Vienna portrait of Sigismund (fig. 134) fully confirms this identification. But, as I shall argue for Painting G, Van Eyck's depiction of the Emperor was probably based on a medal or coin that did not indicate the real color of his beard, because the contemporary drawing that Pisanello sketched live on the occasion of Sigismund's visit to Italy in 1432-33 shows him with a grayish beard (fig. 178).

To Sigismund's left is another king with a Germanic fur hat and a moustache. He is Albert II of Habsburg (r. 1437-39), Sigismund's future son-in-law and successor as Roman Emperor, who at the time of creation of this altarpiece was the Archduke of Austria. His rounded nose and moustache can be seen on two other portraits of him (figs. 137-38) but more importantly, as Archduke of Austria he was at the forefront of the defense line against the Ottoman Turks, which justifies his presence alongside Sigismund. These two are the only contemporary princes; they are surrounded by "crusader" kings from the past, one of whom is Charlemagne. Behind them is a King wearing a French crown. He cannot be but Louis IX of France (St Louis, r. 1227-70), who undertook two crusading expeditions and finally perished of plague or cholera near Tunis. Two later paintings portray him with the same crown and features such as a forwardly elongated nose (figs. 135-36); it seems that at one point in time, a prototype portrait of him was established and then reproduced over and over again.

Finally, diametrically opposed to Charlemagne and below Louis IX is the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (r. 1155-1190), who in 1489 had led an army of 100,000 men to join the Third Crusade, in which participated Philip Augustus of France (r. 1180-1223) and Richard the Lionhearted of England (r. 1189-99). He drowned while crossing a river in Cilicia.

F.4 - The proponents of peace

The composition of the lower left of Painting G displays a two-tier grouping of figures. On the upper level we see a number of people who are mostly ecclesiastics and led by a Pope. By his gesture, the Pope is inviting the kneeling and praying high dignitaries on the lower level toward the *Fountain of Grace*, which stands for peace and salvation emanating from the teachings of Christ. The latter group seems to be mostly composed of monarchs and rulers, positioned behind a bearded figure

with a closed crown, which is emblematic of Charlemagne. One can therefore guess that the composition reflects peace efforts within a domain that was once the empire of Charlemagne, in which a Pope and a number of ecclesiastics played an important role. As in Painting A, most of the portraits are so strong and so individualized that they must represent real people. To identify each figure I shall rely on likenesses when available, and on circumstantial evidence for the rest.



Fig. 138 - Pope Martin V leading cardinals Orsini and Fillastre, followed by Pierre Cauchon and Martin Porée

Based on the events during the Council of Constance and its immediate aftermath, I suggest that the Pope is Martin V, behind whom stand the two legates he sent to initiate the peace process among the protagonists of the civil war in France, namely the cardinals Orsini and Fillastre. For Martin V, we are lucky to have an effigy by a

contemporary sculptor, Jacopino da Tradate (a. 1401-1440), at the Duomo in Milan (fig. 140). It clearly has the same face as the Pope in this painting (fig. 139). As for the two behind him, the painter has made a point to depict the first one in a cardinal outfit, presumably Orsini, and the second one as an archbishop, presumably Cardinal Fillastre, who was the archbishop of Aix from 1413 to 1421 (fig. 141). Not surprisingly, his solemn profile displays a high degree of similarity with the portrait of his son, Bishop Guillaume Fillastre the Younger (fig. 142), especially in regard to the narrow upper lip and the flatly aligned forehead and nose.

As we shall see further below (page 105), Painting F was produced under the aegis of a pro-Burgundian patron, which would entail that the two standing behind Fillastre are Pierre Cauchon and Martin Porée, who had participated in the Council of Constance along with the two papal legates and, as the representatives of Burgundy, had also been their interlocutors in the ensuing peace negotiations at Montereau. Cauchon, who was a jurist and a university rector, is shown with the appropriate black hat and gown; and Porée, who was the Bishop of Arras, is wearing the purple tunic of a bishop and holds a crosier in his hand.



Fig. 139 - Martin V in Painting F



Fig. 140 - Statue of Martin V



Fig. 141 - Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre



Fig. 142 - Bishop Guillaume Fillastre

Below and on a diagonal line behind Charlemagne, we have two rulers, the most prominent of which is wearing a French crown and a cape in lapis blue—a color favored by artists for the depiction of French royalty. I recognize him as Charles VI of France for two reasons. First, by a process of elimination: In the 1400-55 period there were only two French kings, namely Charles VI and Charles VII. It cannot be the latter, since we have a portrait of Charles VII by Fouquet (fig. 147), which displays radically different features, especially the narrowed eyes and the bottom-heavy nose. Second, his portrait in a manuscript illustration (fig. 144) displays the same type of crown (with triangular crenellations) and similar facial features,

especially a wide mouth that also marks Charles VI's effigy on his sarcophagus at St Denis. In addition, the high collar that wraps around his neck was fashionable in Charles VI's times and is also visible on his St Denis sarcophagus.²⁰⁵

Next to Charles VI is a ruler with a Germanic fur hat. Together, these two rulers were supposed to be the heirs to the empire of Charlemagne at the time of the painting. If Charles VI ruled over the western part of Charlemagne's empire, Germanic kings ruled over its eastern parts. To obtain full coverage of the empire, the natural choice for a Germanic ruler, next to Charles VI, would have been Sigismund. But, because he was the Roman Emperor then, protocol dictated that he should be depicted in a more prominent position than the King of France. To avoid this, the painter has depicted instead Archduke Albert, who was the ruler of Austria, i.e., the easternmost domain of Charlemagne's empire and diametrically opposed to France. By 1420, Sigismund had inherited Hungary and Bohemia from his elder brother, and there were no other prominent German rulers left but him and Albert. With Sigismund outranking the King of France, Albert was the default choice. Even though he has no moustache here, Albert wears the same type of necklace as in the Ghent altarpiece (fig. 133). As I shall argue in section F.5, his presence on the left of the Fountain also serves as a link with the figures represented on the right side.



Fig. 143 - Charles VI in Painting F



Fig. 144 - Charles VI in miniature painting



Fig. 145 - Duke Philip after his father's death

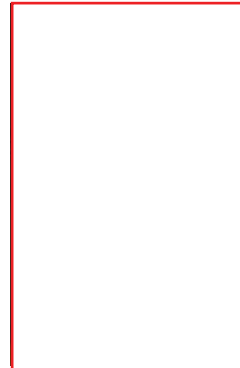


Fig. 146 - John the Fearless

Behind Albert, kneels down Henry V of England, with his unmistakable narrow and elongated face and nose, very similar to two other portraits in which he wears a tunic with a similar fur-trimmed round collar (figs. 149-50). Even though he had scored major victories against France, his position in this painting reflects the facts

²⁰⁵ See Tabure-Delahaye 2004, p.360.

that: (a) His kingdom was never part of Charlemagne's empire and therefore could not be placed on the first diagonal row behind him, and (b) by the Treaty of Troyes, Henry was heir to Charles VI and was therefore placed behind the King in a waiting position. Interestingly, the one closest to Charles VI in the second diagonal row is a young man, with a fur hat that I previously identified as Flemish (figs. 96, 105). He is Philip the Good, who was 24 years old in 1420 and who had—at this stage of his life—features very similar to his father's (fig. 145). He is wearing black in remembrance of the assassination of John the Fearless at Montereau. His close position behind Charles was to portray him as the protector of France in lieu of his deceased father and as a party to the Treaty of Troyes.



Fig. 147 - Charles VII by Fouquet



Fig. 148 - Henry V in Painting F



Fig. 149 - Drawing of Henry V



Fig. 150 - Painting portrait of Henry V

Finally at the extreme left, we have the ecclesiastic man in black, whose eyes are directed at Philip and who I believe to be Jehan de Thoisy. In a context in which Henry V is not vilified but positioned as successor to Charles VI, and where the young Philip is portrayed as the protector of France, it is logical to have the latter's new chancellor portrayed as well, especially since he was the most ardent supporter of the alliance with England. His position, far from those who had participated at the Council of Constance but next to the king of England, also conforms to his absence in Constance and his prominent role in regard to the Treaty of Troyes.²⁰⁶

Porée and Cauchon were both active in the negotiations with England, and the latter was even rewarded with the bishopric of Beauvais for his services. It therefore seems that any one of the threesome—Porée, Cauchon, and de Thoisy—could have commissioned this painting. The patron, however, is generally portrayed in an

²⁰⁶ De Thoisy had accompanied the Duke to Troyes; Chastellain 1863-66, vol. 1, p. 135.

active role. In this painting, Porée and Cauchon both have a statuesque stance, while de Thoisy is making a gesture with his left hand. The context and the active gesture of de Thoisy thus designate him as the one who commissioned the painting. But the question is: Why did he do this? I believe his main goal was to justify the controversial treaty with England which lacked popular support. The Treaty of Troyes had divided France one more time into two warring factions, and its opponents had rallied around the repudiated crownprince (who eventually regained the throne of France with the help of Joan of Arc and reigned as Charles VII). By depicting the Treaty as the continuation of the peace process initiated by Pope Martin V, this painting was projecting it as one more step in the unification process that began with the Council of Constance and led to the termination of the Papal Schism and the condemnation of heretical movements. While de Thoisy was alive, he remained a fervent proponent of the Anglo-Burgundian alliance. It was only after his death that Philip broke his alliance with England and was reconciled with Charles VII by the Treaty of Arras in 1435.

F.5 - Vanquishing heresy

Next to the Papal Schism, the main concern of the Council of Constance was the threat of “heretical” doctrines. To combat these, Jan Huss was summoned to the Council. He was tried and executed in 1415 despite a guarantee of safe-conduct by Emperor Sigismund. As a result, his followers staged an armed rebellion, especially against Sigismund, who had betrayed Huss by not honoring his grant of safe-conduct. To quell this rebellion and to assist Sigismund in this task, Martin V declared a crusade against the Hussites. The only prince to join Sigismund in this crusade was Archduke Albert.

Thus to the right of the Fountain and opposite Pope Martin V, we see the opponents of Christianity led by the archtypical “heretics,” i.e., Jewish high priests, whose eardrums are being shattered by the truthful teachings of Christ and whose erroneous doctrines, held up in scrolls and banners, are being broken and thrown to the ground.²⁰⁷ By depicting Albert on the left, with his eyes starring at the “heretics” whom he had fought, the painter is projecting the left and right configurations as representing two processes emanating from the same summit, namely the Council of Constance.

²⁰⁷ As per Geoffrey Herman, the scrolls display a string of Hebrew-like letters but no real text.

F.6 - Historical document

In the *Fountain of Grace* we have a historical document that reflects the turbulent political movements of the first quarter of the 15th century. As Bishop of Tournai, de Thoisy naturally chose a religious theme. Yet, the imaginative structure of this painting, in which the teachings of Christ are sung from his heavenly kingdom and flow on earth through a fountain, is quite remarkable. The former is used to shatter heresy and the latter to bring peace among feuding Christian princes. The ecclesiastic vehicle for amplifying the effect of both was supposedly the Council of Constance. Thus, in a very subtle way, de Thoisy is justifying the ratification of the Treaty of Troyes as a last and necessary step in the implementation of peace on earth, as mandated by the teachings of Jesus. In the process, we have a gallery of portraits of political men of that period, unobserved with such accuracy elsewhere. The portraits of Charles VI, Porée, Cauchon and de Thoisy, are not only unique but also painted from live, probably shortly after 1420, the date of the Treaty of Troyes, and before 1422, the year of Henry V and Charles VI's death.



Fig. 151 - Martin V and Cardinal Fillastre depicted among the Confessors in Paradise of the *Mystical Lamb*



Fig. 152 - Probable portraits of Charles VI and de Thoisy in the remake of the Just Judges panel

Interestingly, two of the personalities from this painting reappear in the north left corner of the main panel of the Ghent altarpiece, among a group known as the Confessors, i.e., the ecclesiastics who worked and suffered through their lives in the service of the Church without becoming martyrs. These two are Pope Martin V and Cardinal Guillaume Fillastre, whose facial features are exact copies of those in Painting G, albeit in a smaller scale. Since both men had died before this altarpiece was finally installed in 1432, they are portrayed among the people in Paradise converging toward the Mystical Lamb. As such, they offer one more proof that the *Fountain of Grace* preceded the *Mystical Lamb*. It then seems logical to attribute

Painting F to Jan Van Eyck's elder brother, Hubert, and consider it as an inspiration source for the work of the younger Jan rather than vice versa.

It is a pity that the leftmost panel of the altarpiece, that of the *Justi Judities* (Just Judges), was lost and replaced with a copy which does not seem to depict the portraits as accurately as do the other panels. My guess is that at its center we have Charles VI with an ermine collar next to de Thoisy in black (fig. 152). In 1432, de Thoisy was still alive, and Burgundy was an ally of England and in conflict with Charles VII. It made sense then for its Burgundian donor, Joos Vijd, to have depicted among the proponents of justice an ally (Charles VI) and not an enemy (Charles VII) of Burgundy, as well as the powerful chancellor de Thoisy.



Fig. 153 - The *Adoration of the Magi* by Gentile da Fabriano

Painting G : The *Adoration of the Magi*

Gentile Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* is a masterpiece of Renaissance art that has been hailed for its richness in novel elements: in terms of both exotic personas and decorative elements. And as Ronchey and others have pointed out, it must have served as a source of inspiration for Gozzoli's design of the *Procession of the Magi* at the Medici Palazzo (Painting B), especially in respect to the middle-aged Magus' headgear.²⁰⁸ The similarity in headgear, though, is not restricted to that of Balthazar alone: The three Magi in both paintings are wearing similar hats. One is then led to ask whether these three Magi were also drawn in the image of a princely trio similar to Gozzoli's, i.e., whether here too we have a Burgundian prince, a Byzantine basileus, and a Germanic king? As I shall argue, that is indeed the case.

G.1 - Manuel II Palaeologos

I shall begin with Balthazar, who is depicted as Manuel II Palaeologos (r. 1391-1425). He is the father of our aforementioned John VIII, who was cast as the middle-aged Magus in the Gozzoli fresco. When Manuel was an honorary hostage at the court of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid to guarantee the peace treaty between his father and the Sultan, the latter remarked: "If anyone did not know that he was an Emperor, they would certainly have deduced it from his appearance."²⁰⁹ Indeed, a Byzantine miniature portrait of Manuel II (fig. 154), attests to his aristocratic face and noble traits, which were clearly inherited by his son (fig. 155) and are similar to those of Balthazar here (fig. 156). Moreover, the motifs on his robe and his feathered headgear are not products of "fantasy" but reflect Byzantine royal motifs that can actually be traced back to a Persian origin. They were probably chosen because they are so unlike any other western regal paraphernalia that they immediately conveyed the Byzantine identity of the Magus.

For centuries, Byzantium had fought the Sasanian Empire of Persia to the east while losing territories in the west, until Justinian I (r. 527-65) accepted to become a

²⁰⁸ The influence of the Gentile painting on that of Gozzoli's has long been recognized and is emphasized again, among others, in Acidini 1994.

²⁰⁹ Ostrogorsky 1999, p. 549.

tributary to the Sasanian king Chosroes I (r. 531-79), in order to regain and consolidate its western territories. This new Persian supremacy, however, suffered a setback when Chosroes II (r. 591-628) fled before a usurper and took refuge with the emperor Maurice (r. 582-602), who helped him to regain his throne and gave him his daughter in marriage.²¹⁰ But when Maurice in turn was deposed and assassinated by another usurper, Chosroes II used the dethronement of his father-in-law as a pretext to invade Byzantine territories, all the way to Egypt. The True Cross was even captured and brought back as a trophy to the Sasanian capital. By the time Heraclius (r. 610-41) recaptured the lost territories, both empires were so tired by warfare that they succumbed one after the other to the assaults of a relatively small group of underequipped Arab Bedouins who wielded their swords in the name of a new religion, Islam. Although Persia was completely subjugated by the Arabs, Byzantium survived, albeit in a much smaller territory.



Fig. 154 - Manuel II Palaeologos



Fig. 155 - Balthazar as Manuel II



Fig. 156 - John VIII Palaeologos

Prior to that, the Sasanians had created a glittering court that dazzled many a visitor. And its rich array of regal motifs became an iconographical source for neighboring people, including the Byzantines, who through all the years of warfare and their love-hate relationship with the Sasanians kept borrowing regal motifs and courtly customs from them, a process that continued even after the demise of the Sasanians.

²¹⁰ The result of this marriage was a daughter who was, later on, elevated to the throne of Iran as Queen Burān (r. 630-631). It is she who returned the True Cross captured by her father to Byzantium; Soudavar 2006a, pp.177-81.

Persian regal iconography was centered on one main theme, the *Farr*, an Auspicious Glory that was essential to authority and kingship.²¹¹ The king had to be perceived as bestowed with this Auspicious Glory in order to rule. And therefore, as time went by, and to project a higher degree of Glory, more and more symbols of *Farr* were created. As early as the reign of the Achaemenid Darius I (r. 521-485BC), the *Farr*—which was referred to as *khvarenah* in the Old Persian language—had acquired a solar attribute that was projected as triangular rays and solar disks.²¹² It is the latter symbol that was eventually integrated into Buddhist and Byzantine iconography as the nimbus. This was, however, a borrowing of form and not of substance, for in the Persian context, the *Farr* was not a permanent trait (i.e., it could be increased, decreased, or even lost by its possessor), while for the borrowers, it came to symbolize a permanent saintly quality. A hunting scene from northwest Iran, and from the time of Chosroes II, best exemplifies this (fig. 157). The scene depicts the hunt of ferocious animals (wild boars in this case) which in the Eastern world was used as a metaphor to show a king's warrior-like qualities. The narration begins from the left, where the king is preparing to shoot the wild boars, and ends to the right, where by virtue of a successful hunt he acquires the Auspicious Glory or *Farr*, visualized as a nimbus behind his head. By the same token, the *Farr* that could be acquired through a successful hunt, or victory in battle, could also be lost after a defeat or dethronement.



Fig. 157 - Chosroes II acquiring the Auspicious Glory as a nimbus after a successful hunt



Figs. 158 a, b - Sasanian *farr* motifs on stucco and Manuel's robe

²¹¹ For a comprehensive list of *Farr* symbolism, see Soudavar 2003.

²¹² Soudavar 2006a, p. 176; Soudavar 2007.

As I have argued elsewhere, other symbols of the *Farr* included the flying ribbon, a pair of wings, and the pomegranate, which were often combined together (as in fig. 158a) to enhance the projection of this Auspicious Glory.²¹³ It is precisely the stylized version of such a combination that appears on the robe of Balthazar in this painting (fig. 158b) as yet another example of the Byzantines' borrowing of Sasanian motifs for their textiles.²¹⁴



Fig. 159 - Coin of Justinian with *toupha*



Fig. 160 - Sketch of the statue of Justinian



Fig. 161 - Effigy of Chosroes with winged crown



Fig. 162 - Chosroes II-type coin from the Islamic era



Fig. 163 - Armenian cross with stylized wings



Fig. 164 - Angel with feathered crown



Fig. 165 - Seal of Despot Thomas with feathered crown



Fig. 166 - Sasanian hunting plate

Furthermore, as previously noted, the feathered headgear of Balthazar here is the same as on the Gozzoli fresco and similar to the one worn by John VIII Palaeologos on his seal (fig. 93). It is probably a continuation of the Byzantine *toupha*, the feathered tiara that appears on Justinian's coinage (fig. 159) and on a colossal statue of his, of which only a 15th-century drawing survives (fig. 160).²¹⁵ But while the

²¹³ Soudavar 2003, pp. 68 and 161.

²¹⁴ Because the pomegranate had been adopted as the symbol of resurrection in Christian paintings, there was perhaps an added incentive to use this particular robe among the many that Manuel had brought with him.

²¹⁵ I am indebted to Mathew Canepa on the significance of the *toupha* in the context of Byzantium.

feathers of the Justinian *toupha* point upward, those of the Palaeologos roll down and sideways.

It is my guess that this change of feather display in the *toupha* was also due to a borrowing from neighboring Persia. Because in Persian mythology, the loss of *Farr* was due to its flying away on the wings of a mythical bird, the Veraghna, therefore, in order to show that the *Farr* still resided with the king, a pair of wings was added as ornament to his crown, especially for kings such as Chosroes II who had lost their throne once and had to recapture it. The pair of wings thus became synonymous with the possession of the Auspicious Glory. The iconography of the coinage of Chosroes II—in which the wings figured prominently (fig. 161)—gained wider currency after the demise of the Sasanians, since most Arab governors of Iranian provinces adopted that prototype for their coinage (see, for instance, fig. 162) and these coins were frequently used in East-West transactions.

More to the point is the integration of the pair of wings into the Christian iconography of Armenia, the first state—before Rome—to officially embrace Christianity. The Armenians depict their Holy Cross with a pair of stylized wings underneath (fig. 163) and refer to it as *P'ark' Khāch'* (“Glorious Cross”). Because *p'ark'* is the Armenian equivalent of the Persian *Farr* and derives from a common root,²¹⁶ we can only conclude that the wings were added to the cross as a substitute for the word *Glorious*.²¹⁷ Since the Armenian kingdom was an offshoot of the Parthian's, its regal iconography generally mirrored the Persian one. Thus, in a 12th century wooden door from the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia (fig. 167b), we not only see the Cross with its pair of stylized winged underneath but also a hunting scene in which the king, as in Sasanian rock reliefs and silver plates (figs. 157, 166), is confronting



Fig. 167a - The emperor Akbar of India hunting with leopards, c. 1590

²¹⁶ The Armenian language is from the family of Indo-Iranian languages.

²¹⁷ Soudavar 2003, pp. 22-23.

a ferocious animal (a bear in this case) depicted twice: initially alive and then shot at. Moreover, on the back of the king's horse sits a leopard. The leopard as well as the falcon were prized accessories of royal hunts in the Eastern kingdoms (e.g., fig. 167a) and, therefore, symbolized regal status. Hence, their presence in Paintings B and F stand as pointers to the presence of a Byzantine emperor.

Whether we agree that the inversion of the feathers on the *toupha* was the result of a borrowing from Sasanian iconography or simply a change in fashion, the fact is that a tiara with downward feathers existed in the Byzantine world at least since early 14th century. Indeed, on a gold seal of Thomas, Despot of Epirus, at a time when Epirus and Byzantium were moving toward open conflict, and in an act of defiance (c. 1313-18), Thomas is not only usurping the imperial prerogative to use a gold seal but also portrays himself in full imperial regalia, including a tiara with feathers flowing from under it (fig. 165).²¹⁸ Such a colorful feathered tiara undoubtedly left a lasting impression in the region, for we can even detect its presence in the shape of feathered crowns of winged angels in later Persian and Ottoman miniatures (fig. 164).²¹⁹

Be that as it may, the feathered tiara of Balthazar, the motifs on his robe, the presence of the leopard, and the depiction of this Magus in the traits of Manuel II



Fig. 167b - Detail of Armenian wooden door with cross and stylized wings, and a royal hunt scene with a leopard behind the king (12th century)

²¹⁸ Talbot 2004, pp. 35-36.

²¹⁹ For another angel wearing the same feathered crown amid a multitude of angels each wearing a different crown, see for instance Welch 1976, p. 96.

are clear indication that Gentile was layering his painting with double meaning. The question is: For whom and for what purpose did he do this?

G.2 - Palla Strozzi and the revival of Constantinople

The *Adoration of the Magi* was commissioned in 1423 by Palla Strozzi, a scion of one of the richest banking families of Florence and a rival of the Medici. Strozzi was a main supporter for the renewed interest in Greek culture and had financed the chair of the Greek philosopher Manuel Chrysoloras at the University of Florence.²²⁰ Chrysoloras, who was yet another disciple of Gemistos Plethon, had led in 1390 an embassy to Venice—that was sent by Manuel II Palaeologos to implore the aid of the Christian princes against the Ottomans. He returned to Florence in 1397 to reside there and teach, but kept his contact with Manuel II, who entrusted him with a new ambassadorial mission—this time to Paris—in 1408. He was to represent the Byzantine Church at the Council of Constance but died en route to that city. Through Chrysoloras, Strozzi acquired many Greek books for his library,²²¹ and his close relationship with this Greek philosopher undoubtedly developed in him a keen awareness for Constantinople as the repository of ancient Greek culture.

In 1394, the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid had started to besiege Constantinople itself. Five years later, in desperation, Manuel II entrusted the city to his nephew and embarked on a long trip to personally seek assistance from the Western courts. No ruler offered any help, but as the Ottomans were poised to capture Constantinople, a miracle happened. The Turkic conqueror Timur, or Tamerlane as he was to be known in the West,²²² defeated and imprisoned Bayezid at the battle of Ankara in 1402. Timur, who had dreamed of reviving the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan (r. 1206-27) could not tolerate the presence of a rival conqueror on his western frontier. As a result, and contrary to Persian and Arabic sources that portrayed him as a brutal conqueror, in the West, Timur acquired the image of a savior for Christianity. This image was further propagated by the Italian Archbishop of the city of Sultaniyeh in Iran, Monsignor John, who arrived in Paris shortly after the battle of Ankara and through a forged letter from Timur—that supposedly appointed him as his goodwill ambassador—endeared himself to the Western courts while aggrandizing the Turkic conqueror (fig. 168).²²³ The enduring fame of Timur

²²⁰ Christiansen 2006, p. 3.

²²¹ Diller 1961, p. 313.

²²² The name Tamerlane, rendered famous as Tamburlaine by the English playwright Christopher Marlowe, derives from the derogative Persian appellation of this conqueror as *Teymur-e lang* (Timur the lame), due to a leg injury he had suffered in his early battles.

²²³ Soudavar 1999, pp. 256-60.

even resulted in the production of operas such as Haendel's *Tamerlano* in the 18th century.

After their defeat, the Ottomans fell into disarray, and Manuel returned to a jubilant Constantinople in 1403. For the next quarter of century, the city prospered again, and Byzantium actually regained some lost territories beyond Constantinople and its immediate vicinity (map 3). Many saw in this outcome "new proofs of the protection of the city by the Mother of God."²²⁴ For a philhellenic such as Strozzi, the renewed prosperity of Constantinople following the Tamerlano miracle constituted a rebirth of that city, an event worth celebrating and memorializing through a painting. As I shall argue, similar to the Gozzoli fresco, the Gentile painting incorporated, as a second layer, the Magi's journey toward a second Nativity, i.e., the rebirth of Constantinople under the protection of the Virgin Mary, even though at the very same time that Strozzi had commissioned this painting, the Ottomans had regrouped and were beginning to threaten the Byzantines again. If in retrospect the 1402 defeat of the Ottomans proved only to be a temporary relief, from the Italian perspective of 1423, it was still viewed as a miracle.



Fig. 168 - Forged letter of Timur produced by Monsignor John

G.3 - The Gentile enigma

The general consensus for reading the three top lunettes in the Gentile painting has hitherto been that they illustrate three sections of the Magi's journey (from left to right): (a) the spotting of a bright star in the sky, (b) which leads them to Jerusalem, (c) and then to Bethlehem. This seems to be the "obvious" or primary reading of the narrative sequence on the top, based on the way they are presented. But if we look closely, many inconsistencies appear in this interpretation. For instance, the Magi were inland kings, and they did not come to the sea together as in the first lunette.²²⁵ It also raises many questions such as: Why are some soldiers massacring others in

²²⁴ Baum 2002.

²²⁵ The Magi were initially Persians and, according to Matthew 2:9, "The star which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was." If they came from the East, they were not passing by a sea.

the first lunette? More importantly, if the city in the middle lunette is supposed to be Jerusalem, why does it not display the Dome of the Rock? It was almost standard practice in those days to identify cities in paintings by some of their most well-known buildings to the extent that they were often specified in the contracts with the painter.²²⁶ Thus, in an illustration of Jerusalem inserted in a manuscript prepared for Duke Philip of Burgundy about the Holy Lands,²²⁷ we can clearly see the Dome of the Rock and the Church of Holy Sepulcher (fig. 170).



Fig. 169 - The tripartite *pradella* of the *Adoration of the Magi*



Fig. 170 - Dome of the Rock depicted in a manuscript made for Duke Philip the Good



Fig. 171 a, b - No octagonal building visible in the top lunette, but one is depicted in the Jerusalem of the central *pradella* panel

²²⁶ For instance in a contract for a painting of the *Coronation of the Virgin* commissioned in 1453, it was not only specified to have the cities of Rome and Jerusalem in the two bottom corners but also the building details representing each city; Harbison 1995, p. 24.

²²⁷ The manuscript narrates Bertrandon de la Broquière's reconnaissance trip to the Holy Lands.

Furthermore, in the lower *pradella*, there are three panels that represent (from left to right) the *Nativity*, the *Return From Egypt*, and the *Presentation in the Temple* (fig. 169). Although the second panel has been usually titled the *Flight to Egypt*,²²⁸ the sequence of the panels and the direction of Joseph's travel toward the third panel, which illustrates the Temple within Jerusalem, point to the return journey in accord with Matthew 2:20: "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." Thus, Joseph travels through the "land of Israel," passing by several cities and aiming for the most important one, Jerusalem, which is adjacent to the *Temple* scene in the next panel. Clearly, in this second panel, Jerusalem is marked by the octagonal-shaped Dome of the Rock and a church (fig. 171b). By contrast, the supposed Jerusalem of the second lunette has no octagonal building, nor does it display any church (fig. 171a).

G.4 - From Rahova to Constantinople

What the three lunettes (figs. 172, 173, 176) are actually illustrating are the efforts of three Christian princes who sought to liberate Constantinople from the threat of the Turks, beginning with the Nicopolis crusade.



Fig. 172 - The first lunette alludes to the massacre in Rahova by the French crusaders, while the three Magi turn their backs to the carnage there and stare at the *Stella Maris*.

²²⁸ See, for instance, Christiansen 2006, p. 36; Nutall 2004, p.12.

The three princes involved are Manuel II Palaeologos, Sigismund of Luxembourg (who was then the king of Hungary and became Holy Roman Emperor in 1433), and John the Fearless of Burgundy, who was at that time the Count of Nevers. The last two had led the crusading expedition that was defeated in Nicopolis in 1396. The highest-ranked prince and the nominal head of the expedition was Sigismund, whose country was also the most exposed to Ottoman attack. But since military might resided with the French cavalry, battle initiative was in the hands of John the Fearless.²²⁹ On the way to Nicopolis, the French crusaders captured Rahova (presentday Oryahovo in Bulgaria) and massacred its inhabitants. The execution of soldiers in the lower left of the first lunette alludes to the carnage at this citadel, situated on one of the widest sections of the Danube (fig. 172). The three Magi are portrayed with their backs turned toward the massacre scene, as if they were unaware of the atrocities being committed in the name of Christ. The star over the sea represents *Stella Maris*, the Star of the Sea and a symbol of the Virgin Mary, the protector of Constantinople.²³⁰ By showing all three gazing at the star, the painter emphasized their common goal of liberating Constantinople.

The second lunette shows the Magi processing toward a citadel defended by soldiers who are actually barring their further advance (fig. 173). The citadel represents Nicopolis, and the scene alludes—without any elaboration—to the defeat of the crusaders. A comparison with both an Ottoman illustration of the battle of Nicopolis (fig. 174) and a French version of it is instructive (fig. 175). In the first, the defenders are dressed in Ottoman uniforms and are battering the crusaders before a citadel located on a mountaintop; in the second, the defenders of the citadel are dressed, as in this lunette, in western armor and stand behind the stakes that would inflict substantial losses on the French cavalry. In both paintings, the citadel is perched high on a mountain. Interestingly, the French miniature displays to the right of the citadel a second rock formation, similar in shape to the one in the second lunette and on top of which is an extension of the citadel. The two rock formations border a small canyon, at the bottom of which flows a stream (as in the Ottoman miniature). The stream turns clockwise and reappears under the hoofs of the rider holding a falcon. There is even a small wooden bridge to emphasize that waterway (marked by an arrow). Hence, the bridge complex in the second lunette extending over the canyon, which connects the citadel to its extension to the right.

²²⁹ Because of his previous—successful—battles against the Ottomans, the King of Wallachia, Mircea the Elder (r. 1386-1418), was the most experienced military leader of the expedition. He proposed to attack first from the right with his light cavalry; a tactic that was refused by John the Fearless. However, John's strategy to head with his heavy cavalry into the stakes planted by the Ottomans would prove wrong and lead to his defeat and capture.

²³⁰ One may also recall Dufay's poem, cited in sec. A.8, and footnote 224 supra.

A citadel on a high plateau with a waterway and a bridge over a rocky canyon are surely not appropriate symbols for the flatter landscape of Jerusalem. On the contrary, they perfectly fit the descriptions of Nicopolis.



Fig. 173 - The second lunette alludes to Nicopolis, and the waterway flowing around it



Fig. 174 - Nicopolis in an Ottoman manuscript



Fig. 175 - Nicopolis in a French manuscript



Fig. 176 - The third lunette, alluding to the deliverance of Constantinople

Finally in the third lunette (fig. 176), the star has become so luminous that the Magi and their followers are casting shadows on the ground next to them. Similar to the large bright star over the newborn Jesus in Gentile's main Nativity scene (fig. 153), the bright star of the third lunette celebrates the rebirth of Constantinople. And, as in so many other allegorical paintings analyzed in this study, an additional sign has been provided to better define the citadel of the third lunette as Constantinople: From a hidden door to the right of it, a horse marked by a coat of arms is slipping out. It alludes to the escape of Sigismund, who unlike John the Fearless, did not become a prisoner but fled the battlefield on a Venetian vessel. He reached Constantinople by sea and from there regained Europe. The escape through the Dardanelles, which, as one historian has described it, was "to the sound of the piteous cries of the Christian captives whom the Sultan had ordered to be lined up on both sides of the shores of the strait in order to humiliate the defeated king,"²³¹ is

²³¹ Ostrogorsky 1999, p. 552.

alluded to by the symbol of a horse-looking camel²³² carrying a hidden load wrapped in a cover with a modified Luxembourg coat of arms (fig. 176, 181a). Indeed, in addition to the blue and white striped background and its golden crown, the Luxembourg coat of arms has a golden lion (fig. 181b). In Gentile's painting, the lion has been suppressed (fig. 181a). With a touch of humor, the painter is insinuating that in the process of his inglorious escape, and slipping in and out of Constantinople, Sigismund lost his lion (or lionhood)!

G.5 - Gentile's sources of portraiture

Gentile da Fabriano was a native of Fabriano in the Marches but gravitated around Venice. Documents place him there by 1408, but he seems to have come to Venice and stayed there intermittently, at least after 1402,²³³ at a time when Manuel II was still there and about to return to Constantinople. Manuel's portrait in the main Nativity scene, his elaborate paraphernalia, and the hunting menagerie depicted therein must have been based on visual observations and are probably accurate.



Fig. 177 - Sigismund seated in the middle and depicted with a white beard at Nicopolis

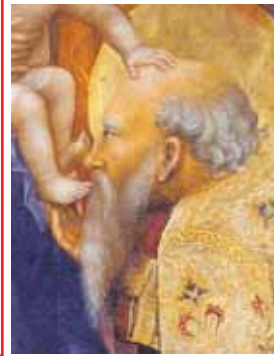


Fig. 178 - Sigismund by Pisanello

Fig. 179 - Melchior as Sigismund by Gentile

In the case of Sigismund, as already observed by Kéry,²³⁴ the similarity between the face of the elder Magus and the Emperor's profile by Pisanello in the Louvre (fig. 178) is so striking that it can represent only him. In addition, his Germanic fur hat on the ground next to him is of the type that he wears in the second Louvre painting

²³² In Italian paintings, the Magi were usually accompanied by camels, but because the mount here was supposed to represent Sigismund's, it was painted as a hybrid camel-horse.

²³³ Christiansen 2006, p. 25.

²³⁴ Takács 2006, p. 141.

(fig. 67) and also in the Ghent altarpiece. There are, however, two problems with this identification: He is depicted as bald and with a white beard, whereas in the Louvre paintings of circa 1432 he is not bald; and since he was born in 1468, he may not yet have had a grey beard. There are two possible explanations for these discrepancies. First, Gentile's portrait of Sigismund was probably based on a coin, or sketch, that showed him in profile and with a hat that did not reveal whether he was bald or not. Second, the Magi story necessitated an elder, and because Sigismund had a long beard and was the leader of the Nicopolis expedition, he was the best choice for Melchior. It also seems that in the popular imagination, the Germanic king had always had a white beard, for in a miniature painting from a circa 1470 copy of the *Chroniques* of Jean Froissart, he is also depicted with a white beard at Nicopolis (fig. 177).



Fig. 180 - John the Fearless, as Caspar, in his new Ottomanesque attire with an Anatolian groom behind him

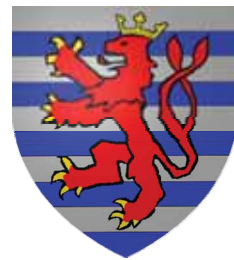


Fig. 181a, b - Coat of arms of Sigismund, with and without a lion

As for John the Fearless, his passage through Venice after his release from captivity in 1397, probably didn't provide Gentile with an opportunity to observe him firsthand.²³⁵ Venice, though, had participated in the Nicopolis expedition, and Venetian merchants had played an important role in securing the financing for the ransom that was paid to Bayezid for the release of John the Fearless, to the extent that the latter had vowed to stay in Venice until his creditors were fully repaid. And that is what he did.

In the meantime, the lavish outlays of the Burgundian prince to revamp his household equipment must have left a lasting impression on the Venetians. The Burgundian court was renowned for its opulence, and John the Fearless had to live up to that image, even at the expense of borrowing additional money; as one chronicler complained, the extravagant expenditures of the young prince in post-captivity were almost equivalent to the ransom paid to Bayezid.²³⁶ Because he had to refurbish everything from scratch, the availability of rich Ottoman and Venetian fabrics may have induced him to create a new fashion, the most visible element of it being a bulky headgear, half Ottoman (in shape) and half Venetian (in fabric) (fig. 180). The same type of headgear was occasionally worn by the Burgundians (as in figs. 90, 91) and therefore used by Gozzoli in his fresco. The prince's liking for Ottoman items was such that he imported not only vessels and some "étrangères choses" for his own castle but also an Ottoman outfit for his young son, the future Duke Philip. He also brought back a variety of Ottoman arms and a few Anatolian servants.²³⁷ It is perhaps to evoke these people that Gentile has depicted as his groom, a Negroid boy with a diagonal sash inscribed with a stylized pseudo-Koranic calligraphy. Another servant of the young prince is putting his spurs on, as to emphasize that only upon his return to Italy would John the Fearless be reinstated as a prince, and could ride again as a knight. There are at least two other Burgundians in the retinue of the Magi: the rider with the red hat on the right, and the one next to him who is wearing a headgear similar to John the Fearless'.

The three Magi of the Gentile painting had each passed through Venetian territory at one point in time. Manuel II used Venice as his port of entry for his European visits and returned home from there. John the Fearless landed there after his captivity. As for Sigismund, on his way to the Council of Constance, he came to Trieste and traveled through Venetian territory.²³⁸ At the Council of Constance, Manuel Chrysoloras was supposed to discuss the modalities of the meeting between

²³⁵ He stayed in Venice from October 1397 to January 1398.

²³⁶ Schnerb 2001, p. 98.

²³⁷ Schnerb 2001, pp. 105-106.

²³⁸ Takács 2006, p. 54.

the Latin and the Greek Churches for the purpose of reunification, but he died en route to the Council. Thus, ideas such as the concept of a second Nativity, the visit of foreign rulers, or the desire for reunification were already embedded in the Gentile painting and undoubtedly influenced the composition of the Gozzoli fresco.

G.6 - Nicopolis and the Italian financial web

When John the Fearless was taken prisoner, the first priority was to find intermediaries to negotiate his ransom amount with the Ottomans, and the second was to find financial partners to raise the ransom money and deliver it to the Sultan. The Italian banker Dino Rapondi (c. 1335-1415), who on behalf of his family's bank was stationed at Bruges, proved to be of great help to the Duke of Burgundy, both as a counselor and as an intermediary. His reaction to the panic that the prince's captivity had instigated in Burgundy was that "there is no such a thing that cannot be eased or bought by gold and silver."²³⁹ He devised a strategy for the liberation of John the Fearless, and was also active in the refinancing of the Burgundian debt when the prince was in Venice and awaiting repayment to his Venetian creditors in order to regain his homeland. The vast sums of money required for the ransom, as well as the refinancing in Venice, had many Italian bankers involved in the process. Palla Strozzi may or may not have participated monetarily,²⁴⁰ but as a banker, he was fully aware of the mobilization of the banking industry for this enterprise. Thus, his interest in the layering of this painting stemmed from two sources: his love of Greek culture and the involvement of the Italian banking industry in the aftermath of Nicopolis. In commissioning this painting, he was immortalizing in a glittering composition, and under the veil of religiosity, a story that Italian bankers well understood and remembered. No wonder then that, in response, his powerful rival, Cosimo dei Medici, commissioned the *Procession of the Magi* along the same pattern, but for an event that he would finance personally.

²³⁹ Schnerb 2001, p. 91.

²⁴⁰ My guess was that Strozzi was financially involved, but a specialist on that matter, Bart Lambert, to whom I am thankful, asserted that at present no known document reveals such a possibility (personal communication).

Epilogue

Since the very inception of their dynasty, the Songs of China (r. 960-1297) were constantly exposed to the attacks of nomadic tribes from beyond their northern borders, until they finally lost their capital to the Jurchen Chin of Manchuria in 1125. Shortly before that, the emperor-artist Huizong (r. 1100-25) had abdicated in favor of his son Qinzong (r. 1125-27) so that he could organize the defense against the Chin but to no avail. Father and son were both captured by the enemy, and along with three hundred members of the imperial family, academicians, artists, and men of letters, they were sent north as prisoners to the Chin. Only the ninth son of Huizong, Prince Zhao Gou, managed to escape. He eventually succeeded in containing the invasion and proclaimed himself emperor after establishing a government south of the Yangtze River (he ruled as Gaozong 1127-62). But because the last emperor was still alive—even though in prison—Prince Zhao Gou's claim to the imperial throne was rejected by many, and he faced numerous mutinies from his generals. To bolster his legitimacy, he had to be imperial, i.e., follow the example of his father as a *littérateur*, connoisseur, and patron of the fine arts. Not only did he reestablish the National University in southern Song territory but also reinstated the calligraphy and painting academies as courtly institutions.²⁴¹ A display of erudition and sophisticated taste was always of help for ambitious rulers suffering from a lack of legitimacy, whether in East or West.

Two centuries later, after the Mongols had taken northern China from the Chin, and southern China from the Song, and when they had pushed their conquests to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, their empire began to disintegrate as various Mongol princes vied to carve independent kingdoms within their fiefdoms. Like the Dukes of Burgundy who were French but ruled over Netherlandish and Germanic territories, these Mongol princes ruled in foreign lands while remaining entrenched in their own nomadic culture. In Iran, however, the process of acculturation of the ruling Mongol dynasty had begun early on, and it reached a culminating point with the reign of Abu-Sa'id Bahādor Khan (r. 1317-35), who was a noted *littérateur*, a calligrapher, and a patron of fine arts.

²⁴¹ Fong 1992, pp. 104-95.



Fig. 182 – Detail of mutilated page from the *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* manuscript that alludes to Genghis Khan's first son as being a bastard

A major element in the education process of the young Abu-Sa'id was the production of an illustrated copy of the great Persian epic compendium, the *Shāhnāma* or Book of Kings, in which every painting was meant to illustrate both a story of the *Shāhnāma* and an event of Mongol history. It was nicknamed *Abu-Sa'id-nāma*, literally meaning the Book of Abu-Sa'id, which implicitly placed Abu-Sa'id among the epic kings of Iran.²⁴² Interestingly, the *Shāhnāma* incorporated a large section of the history of Alexander, not the one based on Quintus Curtius' text but the more picturesque version attributed to the pseudo-Callisthenes author. The fantastic stories of Alexander were useful elements in the task of attracting the young Mongol prince's attention toward Persian poetry, and at the same time, like the *History of Alexander the Great* that was translated for Charles the Bold by Vasco da Lucena, it was of the Mirror-for-Princes genre and could educate him in the virtues of justice and good government. It also served to poke fun at rival cousins and settle scores with them. Whereas *The Execution of Philotas* (fig. 123) was a reminder of Louis XI's treachery toward Charles the Bold and the Liège inhabitants, a scene from the *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* was used to denigrate Abu-Sa'id's cousins, the Khans of the Golden Horde who ruled in Russia, by reminding them that, as descendants of Genghis' first "son" Jochi (1185–1226), who had been conceived while Genghis' wife had been abducted by a rival tribe (fig. 182), they were not real progenies of Genghis but descendants of a bastard.²⁴³ The Khans of

²⁴² Soudavar 1996. The *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* is generally referred to as the Demotte *Shāhnāma* in Western publications, with Demotte being the Parisian dealer most responsible for the dispersal of the pages of this once complete manuscript.

²⁴³ In the right section of this badly mutilated illustration, the young hero Fereydun, who was destined to rule the world but was hidden at birth from the wrath of a tyrant, questions his mother about the

the Golden Horde had always considered the kingdom of Iran as part of their fiefdom and Abu-Sa'id and his forefathers as usurpers. To counter that claim, Abu-Sa'id used this illustration of his *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* to publicize a family secret (that Jochi was a bastard), which official Mongol histories of Iran and China had suppressed. Had it not been for the fortuitous survival of a unique copy of the *Secret History of the Mongols* written in the Mongolian language but in Chinese characters, this illustration would have been our only pointer to the problematic genealogy of the Golden Horde.

In the same vein, some of the paintings analyzed in this study point to events not reflected in the existing historical accounts of Medieval times. For instance, Isabelle de Bourbon's intervention on behalf of the citizens of Liège, as suggested by fig. 121, is otherwise unrecorded. Similarly, there are no documents to prove that Palla Strozzi was involved with the financing of John the Fearless' ransom or subsequent expenditures. Yet, iconographically, the young prince's prominent position at the center of Gentile's painting (fig. 153), and the spurs that are being fitted to his feet, suggest that Palla Strozzi commissioned this work in order to emphasize his role in putting the prince back on his feet.

To enhance their legitimacy or prestige, the commissioners of works of art often tried to improve upon or surpass existing masterpieces. Thus, to outshine the exquisite Korans that had been produced for his Mongol predecessors, Timur had a magnificently grand Koran copied, with pages that measured 210 x 140 cm and a total weight of approximately



Fig. 183 – A page from the Bāysonghor *Shāhnāma*

identity of his father. This questioning is then equated on the left part with the brawl that occurred between Genghis' sons, when the latter was about to name his successor. They questioned Jochi's right to rule because he was not Genghis' true son. At the end, Genghis nominates his third son as his successor and asks the others to swear allegiance to him, an act that is illustrated on the right as his remaining sons put their fists on their hearts.

one ton.²⁴⁴ His grandson Bāysonqor (1397-1434), however, tried to surpass the *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* by ordering his own version of a grandly illustrated and complex *Shāhnāma* (fig. 183).²⁴⁵ Similarly, we saw that in ordering the fresco of his chapel in Florence, Cosimo dei Medici was not only inspired by the themes embedded in the *Adoration of the Magi* commissioned by his rival, Palla Strozzi, but also sought to surpass them in both complexity and magnificence.



Fig. 184 – The Farnese Bowl



Fig. 185 – Timurid sketch of the Farnese Bowl

Merchants such as Marco Polo (1254-1324) traveled back and forth between West and East in Medieval times, and with them traveled ideas and procedures such as the number signs explained in section B.3. Works of art such as the Farnese Bowl, a 2nd century BC Roman bowl that was once in the Timurid treasuries and came back in the possession of Lorenzo Medici (fig. 184), also traveled from one court to the other and left an impression here and there (like the drawing of the Farnese Bowl made by a Timurid artist in fig. 185).²⁴⁶ Yet, the similarities that we have discovered between the enigmatic works of art produced in both East and West are not so much due to mutual interaction as to similar circumstances that produce the same reactions in human beings, wherever they are and whatever century they are

²⁴⁴ Soudavar 1992, pp. 59-62.

²⁴⁵ A statistical analysis of the image distribution of the Baysonghor *Shāhnāma* (presently preserved at the Golestan Palace in Tehran) by Farhad Mehran suggests that like those of the *Abu-Sa'id-nāma*, the illustrations of this manuscript also reflect historical events in addition to the stories of the text; Mehran 1999.

²⁴⁶ Roxburgh 2005, pp. 2-3.

in. When Pope Eugene IV proclaimed with great fanfare in Florence the reconciliation of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, he was making a political statement for local consumption—like President Bush declaring “Mission accomplished” on the deck of the carrier USS Lincoln—without taking into account the reality of the situation in Constantinople. Reconciliation was of course never achieved, and six centuries later, when visiting Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), Pope Benedict XVI was still trying to bring about the reconciliation that Eugene IV had already proclaimed as accomplished (fig. 186).²⁴⁷



Fig. 186 - Pope Benedict XVI with Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul

Despite cultural and religious differences, sophisticated and rich patrons in both East and West strove within their own cultural spheres to produce enigmatic works of art without much input from one sphere to the other. The structure of the enigmas, though, and the visual conventions and tricks used in both spheres are fairly similar. Thus, the study of the enigmas in each may facilitate the understanding of those in the other. In either case, the level of sophistication seems to go hand in hand with the level of artistic excellence. Enigmatic paintings are not only a joy to look at but a delight to decipher and understand. They also remind us that political gimmickry and the reinterpretation of religious precepts are not a modern phenomenon but existed throughout the course of history.

²⁴⁷ Fisher and Tavenise 2006.

Appendix I – IRR images

The remarkable state of preservation of Painting A and lack of paint buildup over it has allowed us to obtain excellent IRR images that reveal some of the hidden working habits of Marmion.

IRR images can help us to determine whether the composition is an original one, or was copied from existing one. That is, if changes appear between the underdrawing and the final painting, they tend to show a painter's adjustments to his own composition. We have already seen how Marmion subsequently changed the eye orientation in Frederick's portrait (figs. 31-32) and how he toned down the exaggerated frown on Duchess Isabella's forehead (figs. 43-44). In what follows, we can see additional changes, such as the two bent flame-like wings on the hilt of Philip's sword, which were originally drawn smaller (figs. 187-88).

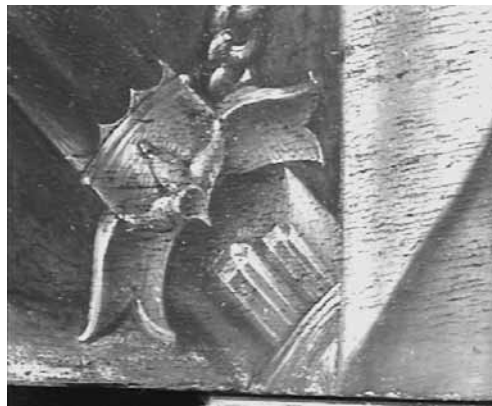


Fig. 187 - Hilt of sword

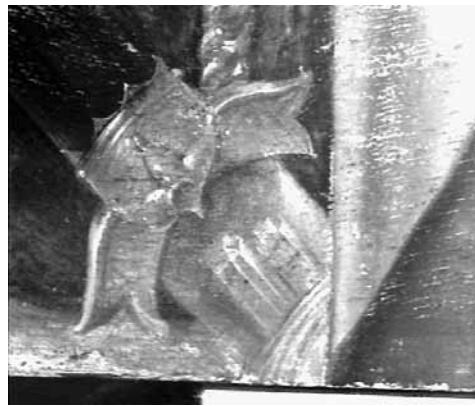


Fig. 188 - IRR image of fig. 187

A cross mark that appears in the IRR image of a miniature from a *Book of Hours* by Marmion (see Ainsworth 1992, p. 244, fig. 232) is also visible on the hood of the Virgin Mary in the IRR of Painting A, but its significance is not understood at this juncture (fig. 190). What we also detect is a more elaborate underdrawing than the

actual painting (e.g., fingers of Mary) and sometimes a more accurate one (e.g., left cheek of St John has been enlarged in the final painting, fig. 189).



Fig. 189 - The Virgin Mary



Fig. 190 - Cross mark on the hood of Mary in IRR

Despite the appearance of some white dots on the contours of Jesus' face, which may be interpreted as pouncing or pin marks, and an indicator for the use of a pattern, one can clearly see a very elaborate and more dramatic face in the underdrawing, including the horned frown at the beginning of his left eyebrow, than in the actual painting (figs. 191-92).



Fig. 191 - Head of Jesus



Fig. 192 - Elaborate (IRR) underdrawing for Jesus' face
(white spots marked with ↑)

In contrast, the muscles of the torso are more developed in the final drawing than in the IRR image (figs. 193-94)



Fig. 193 - Jesus' torso



Fig. 194 - Jesus' torso in IRR

On the forearm of Jesus and on the hands of Mary, we can see traces of the previously noted tear-drop-shaped gray-washed parallel markings for the shaded areas (fig. 196).



Fig. 195 - The hands of Mary



Fig. 196 - The IRR image of Mary's hands

Finally, in comparing his underdrawings with those of his predecessors, we see that Marmion shares common stylistic characteristics with the great master of the early 15th century, Robert Campin, especially in the markings for the shaded areas.²⁴⁸ The similarity in the treatment of the faces in Painting A with Campin's figures also vouches for an affiliation between the two painters (e.g., the surviving panel of his *Crucifixion Triptych* in the Städel Museum, see fig. 197). This affiliation that was perhaps due to the fact that Campin was a native of Valenciennes, where Marmion lived. Rather than being a follower of the younger Van der Goes, Marmion seems to have been a follower of the previous generation's master, Robert Campin, who was Van der Weyden's teacher.



Fig. 197 - Faces by Robert Campin

²⁴⁸ See, for instance, Campbell 1998, p. 77.

Appendix II – Marmion's style

In this appendix, I have included two more paintings attributable to Marmion for the better understanding of his style, which was primarily developed in miniature painting and subsequently extended to panel painting.

The first is *The Miracle of the True Cross*, a medium-sized (68 x 60 cm) oil painting on wood panels that the Louvre has labeled as the work of Marmion's "entourage," although I believe it to be by the master himself.



Fig. 198 - *The Miracle of the True Cross*, attributable to Marmion



Fig. 199 – *Jesus Crucified Between Two Thieves*, attributed here to Marmion

The second is a sizeable scene (181.5 x 153.5cm) painted on linen (subsequently applied onto a panel) that depicts Jesus crucified between the two thieves. It

belongs to the Musée Royal des Beaux Arts in Brussels, which has labeled it to be by Derek Bouts (fig. 199). Because of the precarious state of the paint, it has many lacunas that show the elaborate under drawings and vouch for an original work by Marmion himself. Unlike the Christ Church fragment (fig. 60), in which the linen was probably used for the duplication of another painting, the objective here seems to have been the production of a foldable (or rollable) wall hanging for the decoration of ceremonies held on the road by a Burgundian court constantly moving from one city to another. The thin layer of paint vouches for a temporary use and probably a quick production.

By virtue of the small scale of their illustrations, miniature painters such as Marmion did not have the possibility to depict realistic portraits. And as they had to fill certain scenes with multiple figures, they usually developed a tendency to recreate certain characters over and over again. By adding longer or shorter beards in black or white and through changing their characters' paraphernalia, artists could produce a large variety of individuals based on the same generic prototype. With practice and repetition, these prototypes became etched in the painter's mind and came out through an almost automatic gesture of hand, without much intervention or contribution of the painter's eyes. In lieu of pounced cartons used by painting ateliers, the pattern of a miniaturist was embedded in this coordinated mind-hand system.



Fig. 200 - Bearded figures in Marmion's miniature painting



Fig. 201 - Detail of fig. 197



Fig. 202 - Bearded figures by Marmion in a miniature

Thus in miniature painting, one of the easiest ways to recognize the hand of an artist is through the study of generic figures. In the case of Marmion, it seems that he extended the same practice to his panel paintings, especially in a quick mode or when his composition required him to fill it with a large number of people. Thus, the same bearded characters, with hefty noses and heavy lidded eyes appear in a variety of Marmion's works, whether miniature painting in manuscripts, panel painting, or works on linen.



Fig. 203 - Detail of fig. 199



Fig. 204 - Detail of fig. 198



Fig. 205 - Detail of fig. 199

We can also notice Marmion's dexterity in depicting elaborate headgear for women with intricate fold patterns and transparent veils, as well as a tendency to crowd his scenes with people in diagonal rows (figs. 206-207).



Fig. 206 - Detail of fig. 199



Fig. 207 - Detail of fig. 198

Marmion's penchant for deep eye sockets with pronounced wrinkles underneath, and dramatic cheek lines, reappears as soon as the size of a figure permits. In fig. 208, the head of the bearded figure is less than 5 cm high but has features as dramatic as those of St Jerome in fig. 209, which is five times larger.



Fig. 208 - Detail of fig. 199



Fig. 209 - Detail of fig. 127

In comparing Marmion's style with Van der Goes', one can detect two differences. First, while Marmion's characters aim their glances, Van der Goes' seem to stare aimlessly (fig. 211). Second, the gold brocades of Van der Goes are meticulously drawn (fig. 210), while Marmion's are symptomatic of a quick brush (figs. 49-51).



Fig. 210 – Gold brocade by Van der Goes



Fig. 211 – Aimless stare by Van der Goes

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List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1 The *Story of Roland* from the *Chroniques de France manuscript*, painted by Marmion, c. 1457, St Petersburg (Er .fr.88, fol. 154v).
- Fig. 2 The *Two Wrestlers* from the *Rose Garden* manuscript, painted by Shah Mozaffar, c. 1486, Art and History Collection, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC LTS1995.2.31, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 3 The *Melun Diptych* (left panel): Etienne Chevalier and his patron-saint St Stephan, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (inv. 1617) (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 3b The *Melun Diptych* (right panel): Virgin with a Child, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (inv. 132), image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 4 The *Ducal Lamentation*, by Simon Marmion, c. 1465, oil on panel, 86 x 117.5 cm, private collection (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 5 The *Lamentation* of the Capodimonte Museum, Naples, image: Friedlander 1924, pl. 37 (repr. 1969).
- Fig. 6 *Philip the Good*, Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 7 *Philip the Good*, after Van der Weyden, Koninklijk Museum, Antwerp, inv. 397, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 8 Duke Philip being presented a copy of the *Chroniques de Hainaut* by Van der Weyden, Royal Library, Brussels (ms 9242, fol. 1).
- Fig. 9 Philip the Good as Joseph of Arimathea, detail of fig. 4.
- Fig. 10 Preparatory sketch of Philip the Good's portrait, detail from the *Recueil d'Arras*, Bibliothèque d'Arras.
- Fig. 11 Modern statue of Philip the Good by Bouchard, Dijon (Photo A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 12 *John the Fearless*, Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon CA506, © Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon.
- Fig. 13 Gold necklace of the Golden Fleece Order, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 14 Detail of a 15th-century Burgundian crown at Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon (Photo A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 15 Flint-stone and 3 flames on the sword of Philip, detail of fig. 4.
- Fig. 16 Detail of Maximilian I's armor, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. A817.
- Fig. 17 *Briquet*, flint-stone and flames on a Burgundian tapestry, Chateau de Gruyère, Gruyère.
- Fig. 18 Scabbard of the so called dagger of Charles the Bold, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1950 (50.119a-c).
- Fig. 19 Detail of the scabbard of a ducal knife at the Musée des Beaux Arts, Dijon (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 20 Detail of the portrait of Count Palatine Philip the Warlike, by Hans Baldung, c.1517, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv. 683, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 21 Bronze medal of Maximilian I (64mm), by Giovanni Maria Pomedello, 1516-19, in Cabinet de Médailles, Brussels (Hill, G.F. 1930, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance Before Cellini*, 2 vols. London, no. 601, pl. 108).
- Fig. 22 *Philip the Fair*, Louvre Museum, Paris, inv. 2088 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 23 Medallion on Frederick's hat, detail of fig. 4.
- Fig. 24 Posthumous jeton of Frederick III, dated 1512, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Photo courtesy of Michael Alram).
- Fig. 25 Hat medallion of Sigismund (detail of fig. 66).
- Fig. 26 Coin of Archduke Ferdinand, Austria, private collection.
- Fig. 27 Coin of Emperor Ferdinand II, c.1624 (Dr. Busso Peus Nachf, sales catalog of Apr. 2001, no. 2515).
- Fig. 28 Coin of Ferdinand I, c. 1535-41, Bohemia, (Dr. Busso Peus Nachf, sales catalog of Nov. 2006, no. 3061).
- Fig. 29 Marriage of Frederick III officiated by Cardinal Piccolomini by Pinturicchio, 1502-08, Piccolomini Library Siena (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 30 A portrait of Frederick III, image: Wikipedia.
- Figs. 31, 32 Black & white and IRR details of fig. 4 (Photos by Alain Roche).

- Fig. 33 *Charles the Bold*, at age 15-16, Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse in Lille, Inv.P.1173, Photo RMN, ©Jacques Quecq d'Henripret.
- Fig. 34 Charles the Bold at age 17-18, ink on paper, from the *Recueil d'Arras*, Bibliothèque d'Arras.
- Fig. 35 *Charles the Bold*, at age 20-25, oil painting by Roger Van der Weyden c. 1455, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 36 Charles the Bold as St John by Marmion, detail of fig. 4 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 37 Charles the Bold in his mid thirties, oil painting after original by Marmion, c. 1500, Châteaux de Versailles, MV4018, (Photo RMN - ©Franck Raux).
- Fig. 38 *Isabella of Portugal* in middle age, oil on panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Mary Stillman Harkness, 1950.145.15.
- Fig. 39 Detail of *Isabella of Portugal*, oil on panel, workshop of Rogier van der Weyden, c. 1460, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 78.PB.3, unframed size: 47.3 x 36.2 cm (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 40 Isabella of Portugal as Mary Magdalene by Marmion, detail of fig. 4, (Photo by A. Soudavar)
- Fig. 41 Detail of the *Presentation in the Temple* by Marmion from a *Book of Hours*, reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California (HM 1173, fol. 53).
- Fig. 42 Portrait of Jean IV d'Auxy as Joseph of Arimathea, detail of fig.109, (Photo A. Soudavar).
- Figs. 43, 44 IRR and b&w details of fig. 4, photos by Alain Roche.
- Fig. 45 *Pieta* drawing by Marmion, Harvard University, Fogg Art Museum, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund, Alpheus Hyatt Fund and William M. Prichard Fund, 1941.343.
- Fig. 46 *The Virgin and the Man of Sorrow* by Marmion, Groeninge Museum, Bruges (inv. 0201-202).
- Fig. 47 *Pieta* by Marmion, Tempera on vellum on panel, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917.
- Fig. 48 Composite image of three heads of Christ by Marmion from figs. 4, 45 and 46.
- Fig. 49 Gold brocade detail from fig. 198 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 50 Detail of the St Bertin Altarpiece, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 51 Gold brocade, detail of fig. 4, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 52 IRR image of the Donor's chin in Painting E, Courtesy of Lloyd Dewitt, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Fig. 53 Detail of the IRR image of Philip's chin in Painting A (Photo by Alain Roche).
- Fig. 54 IRR detail of the shading marks covered by cross hatchings on the cheek of the Donor in Painting E, Courtesy of Lloyd Dewitt, Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Fig. 55 Shading marks in the IRR of St Bertin panel, Courtesy of Rainald Grosshans Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
- Fig. 56 IRR detail of the shading indicators on the forehead of the Duchesse Isabella in Painting A.
- Fig. 57 Right Panel of Guillaume Fillastre's St Bertin's altarpiece by Simon Marmion, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
- Fig. 58 Fillastre giving the *Grandes Chroniques de France* to Philip, St Petersburg (Er .fr.88, fol. 1r).
- Fig. 59 Composite image of the Christ Church fragment and Painting A.
- Fig. 60 *Lamentation* fragment, oil on cloth, Christ Church, Oxford, UK.
- Fig. 61 *Lamentation* copy with Netherlandish background painting, 16th century, Groeninge Museum, Bruges, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 62 *Lamentation* copy, 16th century, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, image: Friedlander 1924, pl. 37 (repr. 1969).
- Fig. 63 *Lamentation* by the Master of the *Mansi Magdalene*, c. 1500, Private Collection (Photo courtesy of Christie's).
- Fig. 64 The cavalcade of the Medici by Benozzo Gozzoli, c. 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 65 Medallion of John VIII Palaeologos by Pisanello, (Dr. Busso Peus Nachf., sales catalog 391 of April 2007, no. 977).
- Fig. 66 Balthazar in the image of John VIII, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 67a Oil painting of Emperor Sigismund, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, GG2630, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 67b Pisanello's sketch of Sigismund, Louvre Museum, Paris, Graphics and Print dept. no. 2339, Photo RMN - ©Jean-Gilles Berizzi.
- Fig. 68 Melchior in the image of Sigismund, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 69 Sigismondo Malatesta before St Sigismund depicted in the image of Emperor Sigismund, by Piero della Francesca, c. 1451, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 70 Sigismondo Malatesta, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 71 Melchior riding a mule on the west wall of the chapel, (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 72a Magi as Mithraic priests, 5th-century sarcophagus, San Vitale, Ravenna, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 72b Detail of the mosaics of San Apollinare Nuovo, 5th-century, Ravenna, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 73 Patriarch Joseph, c. 1439, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

- Fig. 74 James I of Scotland, by Pinturicchio, Piccolomini Library, Siena (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 75a Gozzoli in 1459, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 75b Gozzoli in 1439 Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 76 Lorenzo in 1439 with distinct crooked nose, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 77 The young Magi Caspar, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 78 Composite image of the *Procession of the Magi*, by A. Soudavar.
- Fig. 79 Medici Chapel plan, by A. Soudavar.
- Fig. 80 Practice sheet by Dürer, Albertina Museum, Vienna, inv. 26327 recto.
- Fig. 81 Effigy of Neri di Gino Capponi on his tomb, Santo Spirito, Florence.
- Fig. 82 Portrait of Neri Gino Capponi at Santa Trinita by Domenico Ghirlandaio (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 83 Neri di Gino Capponi projecting the number 50 next to Gozzoli (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 84a Theodore of Gaza in the year 1459 as part of the Medici retinue, (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 84b Theodore of Gaza, detail of *The Adoration of the Magi* by Botticelli, c. 1475, Uffizi, Florence.
- Figs. 85a George of Trebizonde in 1459, by Gozzoli, Medici Palace, Florence (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Figs. 85b George of Trebizonde in the 1440s, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 86 Schematics of the time divide in the Gozzoli Procession of the Magi, by A. Soudavar.
- Fig. 87 Detail of fig. 64.
- Fig. 88 South wall of the *Procession of the Magi*, (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 89 West wall of the *Procession of the Magi*, (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 90 Duke Philip with Burgundian headgear, detail of folio 349v of the *Privileges of Ghent and Flanders* manuscript, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, ms. 2583.
- Figs. 91a,b Sketches of Burgundian torque-headgears, by Braun & Schneider 1861-1890.
- Fig. 92 Detail of a Votive statuette of Charles the Bold, from the Treasury of the Cathedral of Liège, imageo KIK-IRPA, Brussels.
- Fig. 93 Detail of the seal of John Palaeologos, <http://asv.vatican.va/en/visit/sig/giovanniVIII.htm>.
- Fig. 94 Detail of fig. 88 (Photo courtesy of A. Quattrone).
- Fig. 95 The *Medici Virgin*, Städel Museum, Frankfurt (Photo: by Ursula Edelmann, courtesy of Artothek).
- Fig. 96 Hat specimen from Ghent, detail of folio 36v, of the *Privileges of Ghent and Flanders* manuscript, c.1458, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, ms. 2583.
- Fig. 97 Detail of fig. 95.
- Fig. 98 John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, by Fra Angelico, c. 1437, Galleria Nazionale dell Umbria, Perugia, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 99 St Louis and John the Baptist, detail of the *Crucifixion* of the Parliament of Paris, Louvre Museum, Ref. 2065, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 100 St John the Evangelist, detail of the *Sforza Triptych*, by Van der Wyden, Musée Royal des Beaux Arts, Brussels, inv 2407, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 101 Fillastre by Marmion, detail of fig. 58.
- Fig. 102 Portrait of Fillastre by Van der Weyden, c. 1450, Courtauld Institute, London.
- Fig. 103 Fillastre as St Damian, c. 1460, detail of fig. 95.
- Fig. 104 Angelo Tani, by Memling, detail of *The Last Judgment* triptych, Muzeum Narodowe, Gdansk.
- Fig. 105 Angelo Tani by Van der Weyden, detail of fig. 95.
- Fig. 106 Blue irises and white lilies, detail of fig. 95.
- Fig. 107 Detail of the central panel of the *Annunciation Triptych* by Van der Weyden, Louvre Museum, Paris, inv. 1982 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 108 *The Braque Triptych*, Louvre Museum, Ref. 2063, (Composite photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 109 *The Lamentation* of Jean d'Auxy (recto), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection (1975.1.128).
- Fig. 110 Coat of arms of Charles the Bold, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 111 *The Lamentation* of Jean d'Auxy (verso), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection (1975.1.128).
- Fig. 112 The York coat of arms, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 113 Portrait of Margaret of York, Louvre Museum, Ref. 1938-17, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 115 Detail of underdrawing of fig. 109 in IRR Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Fig. 116 Detail of folio 6v of the *Livre de la Toison d'or*, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, ms 9028.
- Fig. 117 *Alexander and the Niece of Artaxerxes*, detail of fol. 123 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.123, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm.
- Fig. 118 Detail of fol. 5 of the *Ordinances of Charles the Bold* manuscript, British Library (Add. 36619).

- Fig. 119 Detail of the portrait of Philippe de Croy, by Van der Weyden, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 120 *The Isthmian Games*, detail of fol. 99 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.99, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 121 *Bagoas Pleads on Behalf of Nabarzanes; Thalestris and the Amazons Visit Alexander*, detail of fol. 133v of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.133, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 122 *Alexander is Wounded While Fighting in the Town of Sudracae*, detail of fol. 204 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.204, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 123 *The Execution of Philotas and his Father*, detail of fol. 149 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.149, leaf: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 124 *Orsines Presents a Gift to Alexander; The Execution of Orsines*, detail of fol. 226 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.226, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 125a *Alexander Kills Clitus; Alexander Fights With a Lion*, detail of fol. 175 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.175, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 125b Gold coin of Philip the Good, Bruges 1454-60. Dr. Busso Peus Nachf, catalog of Apr. 2007, lot. 154.
- Fig. 126 *Alexander's Illness at the Cyndus River; Death of Sisinne*, detail of fol. 41 of the *History of Alexander the Great*, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 83.MR.178.123, leaf size: 43.2 x 33 cm, image: courtesy of the Getty.
- Fig. 127 St Jerome and Johan II von Baden, oil on panel by Simon Marmion, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Johnson Collection, inv. 1329, image: courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- Fig. 128 Coat of arms of the Archbishop de Carette, image: www.premiumorange.com/armoiries-de-france/Arch-Eveches/TOURS-Archeveche.pdf
- Fig. 129 Detail of fig. 127.
- Fig. 130 Coin of Lothar von Metternich, 1599, Trier, private collection.
- Fig. 131 *The Fountain of Grace*, attributable to Hubert van Eyck c. 1420, oil on panel, Prado Museum, Madrid, image: courtesy of the Prado.
- Fig. 132 IRR underdrawing of bottom left part of fig. 131, image: courtesy of the Prado.
- Fig. 133 Detail of the *Just Judges* panel of the Ghent altarpiece, c. 1430 by Jan Van Eyck, St Bavon Cathedral, Ghent, image courtesy of Reproductiefonds.
- Fig. 134 Detail of fig. 66.
- Fig. 135 *St Louis*, by El Greco, Louvre Museum, RF 1507 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 136 Albert II of Habsburg, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 137 Albert II as Roman Emperor, image: Wikipedia.
- Figs. 138, 141, 143, 145, 148, are details of fig. 131.
- Fig. 139 Martin V, detail of fig. 131.
- Fig. 140 Detail of the statue of Martin V, by Jacopino da Tradate, 1419-21, Duomo Cathedral, Milan, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 142 Bishop Guillaume Fillastre, detail of fig. 58.
- Fig. 144 Pierre Salmon presenting his book to Charles VI, by the Boucicaud Master, dated 1409, ms. fr. 23279, fol. 53, Cliché BnF, Paris.
- Fig. 146 John the Fearless, detail of fig. 12.
- Fig. 147 - Detail of the portrait of Charles VII by Jean Fouquet, oil on panel, Louvre Museum, inv. 9106 (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 149 Drawing of Henry V, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 150 Painting portrait of Henry V, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 151 Detail of the Confessors panel Ghent altarpiece, image: courtesy of Reproductiefonds.
- Fig. 152 Detail of the Just Judges panel of the Ghent altarpiece, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 153 *The Adoration of the Magi* by Gentile da Fabriano, c. 1423, Uffizi, Florence, image: courtesy of Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino.
- Fig. 154 Manuel II Palaeologos (detail of manuscript illustration), Louvre Museum, Paris, MR 416 (Photo RMN - ©Daniel Arnaudet).
- Fig. 155 Balthazar as Manuel II, detail of fig. 153.
- Fig. 156 John VIII Palaeologos, detail of fig. 88.

- Fig. 157 Chosroes II hunting, rock-relief at Taq-Bostan, Iran, 7th century, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 158a Sasanian *farr* motifs on stucco, Kesh Palace stucco panel. 5th century, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago (228832).
- Fig. 158b Sasanian *farr* motifs on Manuel's robe, detail of fig. 153.
- Fig. 159 Coin of Justinian with *toupha*, (stolen in 1831 from the Cabinet des médailles, Paris).
- Fig. 160 Sketch of the statue of Justinian, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 161 Gold coin of Khosrow II, 611AD. (Dr. Busso Peus Nachf., sales catalog of April 2001, no. 399).
- Fig. 162 Chosroes II type coin of 'Obaydollāh b. Ziyād, Basra 680AD, private collection, (Photo A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 163 Armenian cross with stylized wings, from the Church of the Holy Cross. Aghtl'amar, Turkey.
- Fig. 164 Angel with feathered crown, detail of a drawing on paper, c. 1580, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, inv. 33.6
- Fig. 165 Detail of the seal of Despot Thomas, Epirus, 1313-18, British Museum, London (M&LA 62.7-29.1).
- Fig. 166 Plate with king hunting rams, Sasanian period; A.D. 5th-6th century, Iran, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1934 (34.33).
- Fig. 167a Akbar hunting a black buck with a leopard, detail of a page from the 1590-95 *Akbarnama* manuscript, Victoria Albert Museum, London, IS 2 92 1896 (Photo by A. Soudavar)
- Fig. 167b Detail of Armenian wooden door, probably from Cilicia, 13th century, Courtesy of Sam Fogg, London.
- Fig. 168 Forged letter of Timur, ink on paper, 16 x 17.3 cm, Archives Nationales, Paris, AE/III/204.
- Fig. 169 The tripartite *Pradella* of the *Adoration of the Magi*, detail of fig. 152.
- Fig. 170 A page from the *Avis pour le passage d'Outre-Mer* of Bertrandon de la Broquière, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. Fr. 9087, fol. 85v, Cliché BnF.
- Figs. 171 a, b Details of the top lunette, and of the central *Pradella* of fig. 153.
- Figs. 172, 173, 176, 180 - are details of fig. 153.
- Fig. 174 *Battle of Nicopolis*, watercolor on paper, a page from the Topkapi, *Hunernama of Loqman* manuscript dated 1584, Worcester Art Museum, Jerome Wheelock Fund, 1935.13.
- Fig. 175 *Battle of Nicopolis*, by Jean Colombe, c. 1474, detail of fol. 263v, ms. fr. 5594, Cliché BnF.
- Fig. 177 Sigismund at Nicopolis, in *Froissart's Chronicles* (Vol. IV, part 2, fol. 84), 1470-75, BL Harley 4380.
- Fig. 178 Pisanello's sketch of Sigismund with Germanic hat, Louvre Museum, Graphics and Print dept. no. 2479, (Photo RMN - ©Jean-Gilles Berizzi).
- Fig. 179 Melchior as Sigismund by Gentile da Fabriano, detail of fig. 153.
- Fig. 181a Coat of arms of Sigismund without a lion on a horse cover, detail of fig. 153.
- Fig. 181b Official coat of arms of Sigismund, image: Wikipedia.
- Fig. 182 A page from the *Abu-Sa'id-nāma* manuscript, Art and History Collection, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC LTS1995.2.13 (Photo by A. Soudavar)
- Fig. 183 Folio 413 of the Baysonghor *Shāhnāma*, c. 1429, Golestan Palace Library, Tehran.
- Fig. 184 Pope Benedict XVI with the Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul, Photo New York Times.
- Fig. 185 The *Farnese Bowl*, Chalcedony, Museo Archeologico, Naples (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 186 Timurid drawing of the Farnese Bowl by Mohammad-e Khayyām, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (ms. Diez A, fol 72, p.3, no.2).
- Figs. 187, 189, 191, 193, 195 - are details of fig. 4.
- Figs. 188, 190, 192, 194, 196 - are IRR details of Painting A (Photos by Alain Roche).
- Fig. 197 Detail of *The Crucified Thief*, by Robert Campin, c. 1410, Städel Museum, Frankfurt, image: Web Gallery of Art.
- Fig. 198 *The Miracle of the True Cross* attributable to Simon Marmion, oil on panel, Louvre Museum, Paris, RF 1490, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 199 *Jesus Crucified Between Two Thieves*, oil on cloth, attributable to Simon Marmion, Musée Royal des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Calvaire 8181, (Photo by A. Soudavar).
- Fig. 200 Detail of fig. 41.
- Figs. 201, 203, 205, 206, 208 - are details of fig. 199.
- Fig. 200 Detail of *The Raising of Lazarus* by Marmion from a *Book of Hours*, reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California (HM 1173, fol. 84).
- Figs. 204, 207 - are details of fig. 198.
- Fig. 209 Detail of fig. 127.
- Figs. 210, 211 Details of the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, by Van der Geos, c. 1480, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, (Photo by A. Soudavar)

Index

- Aachen 71
 Abu-Sa'id 128
Abu-Sa'id-nāma 128, 130
 Agnès Sorel 3
 Akbar (Mughal Emperor) 46, 114, 149
 Albert II of Habsburg .. 55, 100, 101, 104, 106, 148, 149
 Alexander .. xx, 2, 4, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 128, 147, 148
 Amir Alishir Navai 2
 Angelo Tani 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 147
 Ankara 116
 Antoine (Le Grand Bâtard) 27, 82
 Antoine (son of Jean IV) 71, 76, 77, 78
 Antoine Busnois ix
 Antoine de Croy 87
 Archduke Ferdinand II 15
 Aristotle 47
 Armagnacs 97, 98, 99
 Armenian Holly Cross 114
 Arras 98, 103, 145, 146
 Treaty of xi, 106
 Artaxerxes III (Ochus) 73
 Artaxerxes IV 73
 Audenarde 78
 Bagoas 78, 79, 80, 84, 148
 Balthazar 39, 40, 48, 54, 55, 110, 111, 113, 115, 146, 148
 Baltic 31, 96
 Basel 48, 49, 50, 52
 Bayezid (Sultan) xx, 26, 110, 116, 122, 125
 Benedict XVI (Pope) 131
 Benozzo Gozzoli .. xx, 4, 38, 39, 43, 45, 46, 48, 54, 55, 56, 110, 113, 117, 125, 126, 146, 147
 Bohemia 27, 93, 104, 145
 Bonne of Artois xi
 Botticelli 47, 147
 Bouchard xix, 10, 145
 Bourguignons 97, 98, 99
briquet 11, 74, 75
 Bruges. 23, 34, 35, 59, 60, 62, 65, 66, 67, 126, 146
 Calais 98
 Calixtus III 27, 28
 Campin (Robert) 35, 65, 135, 149
 Caspar 39, 43, 48, 54, 55, 56, 124, 147
 Catherine of France xii, 75
 Catherine of Valois xii, xiii, 93, 99
 Cesarini 49
 Charlemagne 1, 93, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104
 Charles the Bold ... xi, xii, xiv, xx, 2, 8, 13, 18, 19, 28, 32, 54, 55, 69, 71, 72, 74, 75, 92, 128, 145, 146, 147, 148
 Charles V xii
 Charles V of Habsburg xii, xv, 32
 Charles VI ... xii, 75, 97, 98, 99, 103, 104, 105, 107, 148
 Charles VII . xii, 3, 89, 99, 103, 105, 106, 107, 148
 Chartreuse of Champmol x
 Chastellain (Georges) ... 10, 18, 19, 87, 88, 89, 105
 Chosroes I 111
 Chosroes II 111, 112, 113, 114, 149
 Christus (Petrus) 35
Chroniques de France 14, 30, 31, 63, 101, 145, 146
Chroniques de Hainaut 9, 145
Chroniques of Jean Froissart 124
 Cilicia 87, 101, 114, 149
 Clitus 86, 87, 148
 Constantine the Great 51
 Constantinople .. xvii, xx, 8, 26, 29, 30, 39, 47, 49, 116, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123, 131
 Cosimo dei Medici . xiii, 39, 40, 41, 45, 50, 53, 56, 59, 61, 126, 130
 Council of Basel 44, 49, 50

- Council of Constance 49, 97, 98, 99, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 116, 125
 Council of Florence 51
 Council of Pavia 49
 Count of Charolais
 Charles the Bold 55
 Cymburgis of Masovia xii, 16
 Damian dei Medici xiii, 59
 Dardanelles 122
 Darius III 78, 88
 De Carette (Archbishop) 91
 Dijon xix, xxi, 10, 12, 13, 31, 34, 145
 Dinant 84
 Dino Rapondi 126
 Dufay (Guillaume) 30, 31, 120
 Dukes of Burgundy ix, xii, xiv, xvi, xix, xx, 1, 4, 28, 30, 31, 93, 127
 Dürer 35, 46, 147
 Écluse (Port of) 76
 Edward IV 74
 Eleanor of Portugal xii
 Etienne Chevalier 3, 145
 Eugene IV (Pope) 49, 51, 52
Farr (Auspicious Glory) 112, 113, 114
 Feast of the Pheasant 9, 26, 30, 85
 Ferdinand I xii, 15
 Ferdinand II 15
 Ferrara 44, 48, 49, 50, 55
 Florence xx, 1, 4, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 59, 61, 65, 67, 116, 130, 131, 146, 147, 148
 Fouquet 3, 21, 103, 105, 148
 Francisco Sforza 39
 Frederick Barbarossa 101
 Frederick III of Habsburg .xii, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 42, 92, 93, 132, 145
fusil 11, 55
 Galaezzo Maria Sforza 39, 46
 Ganelon 1
 Gemistos Plethon 47, 116
 Genghis Khan 116, 128
 Gentile da Fabriano 4, 56, 109, 110, 115, 117, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 129, 148, 149
 George of Trebizond 46, 47
 Georges (son of Jean IV) 71
 Ghent xiii, xxi, 35, 42, 55, 62, 99, 100, 104, 107, 124, 147, 148
 Gherezzo dei Pighi 62
 Gilles Binchois ix
 Giovanni dei Medici xiii, 40, 59, 61, 62, 145
 Giovanni Rosini 59
 Golden Tree games 77, 78
 Gouffier 89
 Green Tent 83, 84
 Gregory XII (Pope) 49
 Gucciardini 21, 59
 Guillaume Fillastre (Bishop, the Younger) ...x, 8, 13, 20, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 60, 63, 64, 65, 92, 101, 103, 146, 148
 Guillaume Fillastre (Cardinal) 28, 98, 103, 107
 Guillaume Vrelant ix
 HABSBURGS (The) xii, xiv, 16, 32, 33
Haec sancta (Doctrine) 49
 Henri Bellechose x
 Henry V xiii, 93, 98, 99, 104, 105, 107, 148
 Henry VI xiii
 Heraclius 111
History of Alexander the Greatxx, 2, 4, 71, 72, 128, 147, 148
History of Flanders 30
History of Italy 21
 Hubert Van Eyck 4, 95, 107
 Huizong 127
 Hungary 27, 104, 120
 Isabeau of Bavaria xii, 99
 Isabella of Portugal.. xi, xii, xiii, 8, 20, 24, 76, 84, 146
 Isabelle de Bourbon xii, xiv, 75, 80, 129
 Isthmus of Corinth 76
 Jacopino da Tradate 103
 Jan Huss 97, 106
 Jan Van Eyck x, 21, 42, 59, 95, 107
 Jean Chevrot x, 64
 Jean Gerson 97, 98
 Jean IV d'Auxy . 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 76, 77, 78, 80, 84, 89, 146, 147
 Jean Lemaire de Belges 21
 Jean Malouel x
 Jean Molinet 21, 22, 33, 34
 Jean Petit 97, 98
 Jehan de Croy 87
 Jehan de Thoisy 99, 105, 106, 107, 108
 Jerusalem 26, 31, 50, 117, 118, 119, 121
 Joanna the Mad of Castille xii, xv
 Jochi 128, 129
 Johann II von Baden 25, 91, 92
 John II the Good xii
 John of Gaunt xiii

- John of Sultaniyeh 116, 117
 John the Baptist.....59, 60, 61, 62, 66, 147
 John the Fearless. x, xi, xii, 10, 11, 12, 26, 97,
 98, 99, 104, 105, 120, 122, 124, 125, 126,
 129, 145, 148
 Count of Nevers 120
 John VIII Palaeologos...39, 40, 46, 48, 50, 54,
 55, 110, 111, 113, 146, 149
 John Wycliffe..... 97
 John XXIII (Pope) 49
 Joos Vijd..... 107
 Joseph of Arimathea ...x, 8, 15, 33, 70, 71, 78,
 145, 146
 Joseph of Nazareth..... 119
Justification treatise 97, 98
 Justinian 111, 113, 149
 LANCASTERS (The)..... xiii
 Liège 79, 80, 83, 84, 128, 129, 147
 Lis River 66
 Lorenzo (brother of Cosimo dei Medici) ..xiii,
 61
 Lorenzo the Magnificent... xiii, xx, 39, 40, 43,
 44, 130, 147
 Lothar II 93
 Lothar von Metternich 92
 Lotharingia..... 30, 93
 Louis de Bourbon..... 80
 Louis IX (St Louis)..... 101
 Louis of Orléans..... xii, 97
 Louis XI.....xii, 54, 78, 82, 83, 92, 128
 Loyset Liédet ix
 Machiavelli 45
 Manuel Chrysoloras 116, 125
 Manuel II Palaeologos 110, 111, 115, 116,
 120, 123, 125, 148
 Marcile..... 1
 Marco Polo..... 130
 Margaret of York xi, xii, 69, 70, 71, 74, 76,
 147
 Marie Marmionne 36
 Mark of Ephesus 47, 51
 Marmion . 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,
 22, 23, 24, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 63, 69,
 70, 71, 91, 92, 95, 132, 135, 136, 137, 138,
 139, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149
 Marquesa Vida del Valle 7
Marriages in Cana..... xi
 Martin Porée 64, 98, 99, 102, 103, 105, 107
 Martin V (Pope).....49, 98, 99, 102, 103, 106,
 107, 148
 Mary Magdalene..... x, 8, 20, 22, 33, 66, 146
 Mary of Burgundy ..xi, xii, xiv, xv, 32, 75, 76,
 93
 Master of the Mansi Magdalene 36
 Maurice.....111
 Maximilian ..xi, xii, xv, 12, 14, 15, 16, 32, 71,
 93, 145
 Medici xiii, xx, 1, 4, 21, 38, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46,
 47, 48, 51, 53, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65,
 66, 67, 110, 116, 126, 130, 146, 147
 Melchior . 39, 40, 41, 42, 48, 54, 55, 123, 124,
 146, 149
 Melchior Broederlam..... x
 Memling (Hans).....64, 66, 67, 147
 Michelangelo 35
 Michelle of France..... xi, xii
 Middelburg altarpiece 11
Miracles of Christ xi
 Mircea the Elder120
 Montereau..... 10, 98, 99, 103, 105
 Monthléry79, 82
 Mughal.....xx, 46
 Nabarzanes 78, 79, 80, 88, 148
 Neri di Gino Capponi45, 46, 147
 Niccolo da Uzzano..... 46
 Nicene Creed 50
 Nicholas V27, 28
 Nicodemus..... x, 8, 15, 33, 70, 71, 77
 Nicolas Rolin.....x, xi, 9, 95
 Nicopolis 26, 98, 119, 120, 121, 123, 124,
 125, 126, 149
 Ochus (Artaxerxes III)..... 73
 Order of Golden Fleece 19
 Order of the Golden Fleece.xv, 11, 13, 27, 28,
 31, 34, 55, 65, 70, 76, 78, 80
 Orsines.....84, 85, 148
 Orsini (Cardinal).....98, 102, 103
 Ottomans xx, 26, 101, 110, 115, 116, 120,
 121, 125
 Palla Strozzi..... 56, 116, 117, 126, 129, 130
 Papal Schism49, 97, 106
 Paris..... xxi, 79, 81, 97, 98, 99, 116
 Parmenion.....84, 87
 Patriarch Joseph.....39, 41, 42, 51, 147
 Paul II (Pope)..... 28
 Péronne..... 83
 Peucestes 81
 Philip Augustus101
 Philip the Bold ix, xii, 97, 126
 Philip the Fair ix, xi, xii, 14, 145

- Philip the Good... ix, xii, xiii, xix, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 48, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 60, 72, 78, 79, 80, 83, 87, 88, 89, 99, 104, 105, 106, 118, 125, 132, 145, 146, 147
- Le grand lion* 11, 87
- Philip the Warlike (Count Palatine)..... 14
- Philip VI xii
- Philippe de Croy 76
- Philotas 82, 83, 84, 128, 148
- Piccolomini (Enea Silvio), Pope Pius II 15, 16, 27, 145, 147
- Piero dei Medici... xiii, 39, 40, 48, 59, 61, 146
- Piero della Francesca 31, 46
- Piero Francesco dei Medici..... xiii
- Pierre Cauchon 98, 99, 102, 103, 105, 107
- Pierre d'Ailly 97
- Pieter Bladelin 11
- Pinturicchio..... 16, 42, 145
- Pisanello 39, 40, 54, 101, 123, 146, 149
- Pius II (see also Piccolomini) ... 15, 27, 28, 29, 53
- Plato..... 47
- Qinzong 127
- Quintus Curtius..... 72, 75, 89
- Ratisbon (Regensburg) 26, 27
- Recueil d'Arras* 9, 18, 145, 146
- Reims..... 2, 91
- Reunification Council..... 44, 46, 53, 54, 55
- Richard the Lionhearted 101
- Rimini..... 39
- Roland 1, 100
- Rolin Virgin* xi
- Roncevaux 1, 100
- Roxanne..... 74
- Rupelmonde..... 78
- Sainte Chapelle (Dijon) 13, 31, 34
- Santa Maria del Fiore..... 51
- Santa Maria Novella 42, 147
- Secret History of the Mongols* 129
- Seine River 82
- Shāhnāma* 73, 89, 128, 129, 130, 149
- Sigismondo Malatesta..... 39, 40, 42, 46, 146
- Sigismund (Holy Roman Emperor) 14, 15, 16, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, 51, 54, 55, 93, 98, 100, 101, 104, 106, 120, 122, 123, 124, 125, 145, 146, 149
- Sisines 87, 88, 89
- Sixtus IV (Pope) 28
- St Bertin 24
- St Bertin (Abbey of) 20, 21, 25, 30
- St Cosmas..... 59, 63, 64
- St Damian..... 59, 63, 64, 147
- St Denis (burrough of)..... 81
- St Jerome 4, 90, 91, 92, 139, 148
- St John the Evangelist x, 8, 18, 19, 32, 33, 62, 66, 133, 146, 147
- St Peter 36, 59, 60, 61, 62, 96
- St Sigismund 42
- Stella Maris* 119, 120
- Story of Roland*..... 1
- Sultan Hosayn Bayqara 2
- Thalestris (Queen of the Amazons) 78, 79, 80, 148
- The Last Judgment*..... x, 64, 147
- Theodore of Gaza 46, 47, 147
- Thomas (Despot of Epirus) 115
- Timur..... xx, 1, 116, 117, 130, 149
- Tournai x, xxi, 28, 64, 65, 99, 106
- Treaty of Troyes 99, 104, 105, 106, 107
- Trier..... 91, 92, 93, 148
- TUDORS (The)..... xiii
- Turpin..... 2
- Urban II (Pope)..... 100
- Valenciennes 35, 69, 135
- VALOIS (The) ix, xii
- Van der Goes..... xix, 7, 8, 19, 34, 35, 95, 135, 139
- Van der Weyden. x, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 24, 35, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 76, 135, 145, 146, 147, 148
- Vasco da Lucena 72, 73, 89, 128
- Venice 116, 123, 125, 126
- Vienna xxi, 12, 14, 18, 19, 39, 42, 55, 101, 145, 146, 147
- War of Public Welfare..... 79, 81, 84
- Zhao Gou (Gaozong)..... 127