

Medieval Mastery

Book Illumination from Charlemagne
to Charles the Bold | 800-1475



Prologue de clerc qui a fait grossier ce livre
 et autres trois afin qu'il en soit perpétuelle mémoire.

Es hautes nobles et vertueuses gens des
 anciens doit len voulerentier oyr lire et
 lire diligemment fetement pour le bien et
 prouffit que len p peult acquerir tant
 en proesse et cheualerie come autrement
 Et pour ce que paroles sont tost passees et escriptures
 demeurent parmanentes par lesquelles len peult sauoir
 les merueilleux fais iadis aduenus ce que pas ne feust
 se par ce deuant les clercs et orateurs ne se feussent tres



At the Court as in the City: the Miniature in the Burgundian Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century

Dominique Vanwijnsberghe

In the fifteenth century, the art of illumination in the Southern Netherlands developed prodigiously, following a fallow period in the fourteenth century. The manuscripts illustrated in the course of this glorious century have come to us in great number, often marvellously undamaged. They number in the thousands, so much so that the hope of ever having a complete inventory would seem utopian. The extraordinary profusion of their illustration is an additional cause for wonder. Gaudy and packed margins, scored with labyrinthine scrolling acanthus through which the gaze wanders with pleasure, go together with a strictly hierarchical system of illuminated initials and illustrations, which serve the reader as identifying marks. Receptive to the naturalist achievements in easel painting, historiated representations increasingly evolved towards the real, paving the way for 'Ghent-Bruges' illusionism. In the third quarter of the fifteenth century the 'Flemish' illuminators, fed by a long tradition, gained perfect mastery of a technique that allowed them to produce a classic attractive and balanced art.

Two geopolitical factors explain this development: in the final years of the reign of Charles VI (d. 1422), Paris, undermined by the consequences of the Hundred Years War and internal struggles, loses its position as an international centre for manuscript production.¹ At the same time a powerful and status-hungry Burgun-

dian state is founded in the Low Countries under the rule of bibliophile sovereigns. This sudden development is not confined to the book trade, however, for painters, sculptors, tapissers and architects also prosper in the same period. An excellent index of the resplendent health of the professions of the book, and illumination, is that many important towns reserve a place in their corporate structure for illuminators, often affiliated, in fact or in law, to the painters' guild.² In Bruges, the illuminators occupy a position of such strength that they long manage to escape the grasp of the painters and booksellers and maintain a relative degree of independence.

Current study of the illumination of the Burgundian Netherlands has largely been conditioned by the penetrating views of Léon Delaissé, developed, for instance, in the imposing exhibition catalogue *La miniature flamande* (1959).³ Focused on the Library of Burgundy, this exhibition sought to emphasize the specific role of the different urban centres of the dukes' territories—Mons, Valenciennes, Hesdin, Lille, Oudenaarde, Bruges, Brussels and Ghent—and their contribution to the creation of a 'Burgundian' style. Undoubtedly influenced in this by the ideas of Johan Huizinga,⁴ Delaissé accentuated the importance of ducal patronage by distinguishing a period of low creation, called 'pre-Burgundian', corresponding to the first years of the reign of Philip the Good (1419-

1. Loyset Liédet, Philip the Good visiting David Aubert, miniature, David Aubert, *Histoires de Charles Martel et ses successeurs*, Bruges, ca. 1467-1472. - Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 6, fol. 9r.

1445), and a 'Burgundian' period proper, a real golden age stimulated by the appetite of the book-loving dukes of the House of Valois. By working in this way he contributed, in spite of himself, to forging an 'aristocratic' image of Flemish illumination, to which we will return.⁵

Numerous new approaches have been explored since then and they are the result of a remarkable collective effort. In the paragraphs below I will outline only two directions which I believe stand out from forty years of intensive research. These lines of research are essential, because they allow us to grasp the entire significance and importance of the Flemish 'Golden Age' of the fifteenth century in the perspective of this exhibition, which seeks, let us bear in mind, to underline the visual impact of the works and the importance of local traditions in the formulation of a stylistic *lingua franca* particular to the Southern Netherlands.

DUCAL 'PATRONAGE': AN ARISTOCRATIC VISION OF 'BURGUNDIAN' MINIATURES

Following Delaissé, many researchers have continued to explore the question of ducal 'patronage', in both its artistic and symbolic aspects. These studies are not limited to illuminated books, but have tried to throw light on the role played by artistic disciplines such as painting, tapestry or, in a wider sense, the organization of public festivities—weddings, banquets, joyous entries—in the creation of a 'Burgundian' political ideology.⁶ The crusading projects of Philip the Good, his concern for legitimizing a composite state in the process of formation, the creation of the Order of the Golden Fleece and its significance, the image of the literate prince, that of the ideal sovereign, the theme of 'good government', all these aspects have been dealt with in depth, through the prism of the library of one of the greatest book lovers of his time. Up until the most recent synthesis by Maurits Smeyers, the prevailing image has been that of 'patron' dukes supervising the production of their books from translation to binding, the dukes who supposedly single-handedly shaped the face of illumination in the territories under their control.⁷ It is true that some frontispieces show the sovereigns visiting the copyist's workshop (fig. 1), but should we take these images at face value and consider them a record of personal involvement? As Cyriel Stroo has stressed, it is more about a vivid way of representing them as official sponsors of books and of thus affirming a form of identification with the content.⁸

A careful examination of the surviving books of the Library of Burgundy has indicated that the image of 'patron dukes' is reductive. In a short but decisive article, Wim Blockmans has brought many disturbing facts to light.⁹ Firstly, that the historiography, conditioned in large part by research in art history, has overestimated the importance of the most richly illuminated manuscripts of the ducal library. These books, constantly exhibited and analysed, constitute only the visible tip of the iceberg and obscure the existence of a great number of productions of more modest appearance, often lacking miniatures. If, of the 243 codices from Philip the Good's library preserved in Brussels,¹⁰ one excludes from consideration gifts and inheritances, only 41 illuminated manuscripts remain that were the result of the active patronage of the Duke, and of these only 31 have ten or more miniatures.¹¹ Another 'sobering' reality concerns the relationships between the dukes and the craftsmen who made the books, which were without a doubt also over-idealized. Although it is likely that the sovereigns had—in varying degrees—contacts with scribes and translators such as Jean Wauquelin, David Aubert (fig. 1) or Jean Miélot, one also sees that the share of books ordered 'to measure' is vastly reduced. The ducal library predominantly contains a great number of standard manuscripts, available in stock, purchased anonymously, of simply the sort that made up the ordinary libraries of the burghers. In addition, a close examination of the 'hands' shows that although the dukes had some illuminators in their service—Jean Pestivien, Dreux Jehan (fig. 2), Philippe de Mazeroles, Jean Hennecart (cat. 85)—they usually called upon artisans well-established in the different cities under their rule, artisans who consequently worked for them on specific commissions and very irregularly, having first and foremost an urban clientele to satisfy. This takes us very far from the usual image of structured patronage.

But what, then, of the driving role of the dukes in the development of so-called Burgundian illumination? Should their influence be considered negligible? Undoubtedly that would be going too far. In a certain number of cases, for their big 'editorial' projects—books at the core of their political project—Philip the Good and Charles the Bold called upon progressive personalities of the stature of Jean Tavernier (p. 16), Simon Marmion (cat. 88), Liévin van Lathem or especially the Master of Girart de Roussillon, also known as Dreux Jehan. The encounter between the dukes and these exceptional artists is at the root of the most beautiful achievements of the Burgundian period, whether this be the *Chroniques et Conquestes de Charlemaine* and the *Fleur des Histoires* of Brussels,



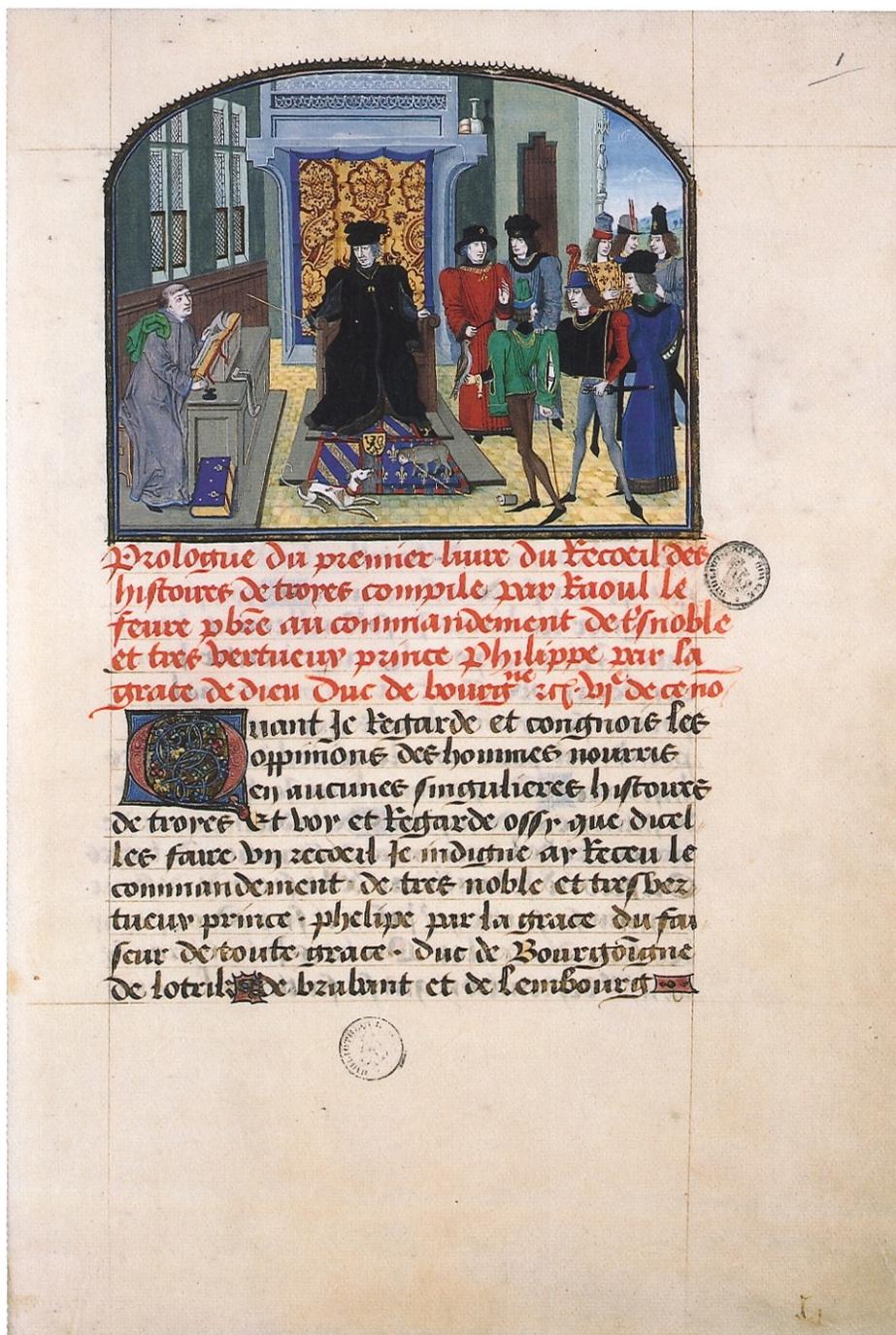
the *Grandes Chroniques de France* or the *Légende de Girart de Roussillon* (fig. 2).¹² However, it has been shown that these cases remain relatively exceptional. If the personal intervention of sovereigns should be put in perspective, they certainly contribute, by their policy and their example, to the creation of a propitious climate for the flourishing of the artistic guilds. Their reign is marked by glorious years, particularly between 1440 and 1475.¹³ This prosperity, the fruit of their *bon gouvernement*, was the basis of economic growth and expansion. In the frontispiece of the *Chroniques et Conquestes de Charlemaine*, Jean Tavernier gives a superb visual interpretation of this period of plenty, favourable to commerce and the art market. In these prosperous years, Bruges, for example, drew in 230 to 240 new artisans each year, attracted by the numerous openings and high wages available in the city.¹⁴ It can also be said that the dukes set an example and encouraged behaviour which was first to be imitated by the circle of those close to them and their courtiers by commissioning manuscripts from illuminators settled in the four corners of their territories—but especially in Bruges. This form of ‘artistic snobbery’,¹⁵ that sees investment in symbolic values



as a means of social climbing, would later spread among the higher reaches of the urban bourgeoisie, benefiting numerous local workshops. In this regard, there can be no doubt that the existence of a very active group in Hainaut throughout the fifteenth century—and well beyond it—owes much to the repercussions of ducal commissions. Jean Wauquelin, above all else a very active entrepreneur, works in the direct service of Philip the Good: he undertakes translations for him and bears the responsibility of making the fair copies. Even if these texts are then sent to Bruges for illumination,¹⁶ Wauquelin remains at the centre of a local book trade, which includes

2. Dreux Jehan, *Girart de Roussillon* and his wife Berte with the hermit, miniature, Jean Wauquelin, *Légende de Girart de Roussillon*, Brussels?, after 1448. - Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2549, fol. 64r.

3. Illuminator of the Pilavaine group, Pompeus defeated at the battle of Pharsalus, miniature, *Chronicle of Baudouin d'Avesnes*, Mons, ca. 1450-1475. - Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9069, fol. 252v.



**Prologue du premier liure du Recueil des
histoires de troies compile par Raoul le
fevre p^b au commandement de t^hs noble
et tres vertueux prince Philippe par la
grace de dieu Duc de bourg^ois et de ce no**

Quant je regarde et congnois les
opinions des hommes nourris
en aucunes singulieres histoires
de troies Et voy et regarde ossi que d'uel
les faire un recueil se indigne au t^hs
commandement de tres noble et tres ver-
teux prince phelipe par la grace du fa-
seur de toute grace Duc de Bourgogne
de brabant et de l'embour^g

many scribes and illuminators. One of them, Jacquemart Pilavaine, will be the pivot of a group of quite active artisans, who will work simultaneously for both the local bourgeoisie and the foremost Burgundian courtiers: Jean and Philippe de Croy (fig. 3).¹⁷ That these intimates of the duke, connected to Hainaut, favoured the work of local artisans, less polished and well-organized work than that of the big Flemish centres, seems indicative of their desire to imitate the behaviour of their sovereign on their own lands and with the resources available. Jean V of Créquy acted in the same way by having the main illuminators of Artois and Picardy working in his service.¹⁸ In both cases, these great lords called upon the services of scribes, illuminators and binders based in one region, indeed one town, working outside the Flemish 'mainstream' and whose work methods and style are clearly distinct from one another (cat. 77).

The contribution of ducal 'patronage' is also marked in a new type of manuscript, to be created and promoted with the help of the sovereigns. These books *de grand luxe* are very different from those produced for urban customers. Their characteristic feature—which they share with the great houses of the lords or with the cathedrals—is the extremely prodigal use of space in the layout of the page. Unlike the prayer books meant for the new urban middle classes, books where luxury bursts out in the profusion of decoration, the splendid manuscripts commissioned by the Duke of Burgundy (fig. 4) are often characterized by the amount of space left bare on the page: the giant format reminiscent of the size of certain liturgical books, the large *bâtarde* script, very legible, with fewer abbreviations and thus taking up lots of space, the spacious layout, with very short lines, outrageously wide borders devoid of any decorative artifice. These manuscripts, intended to be read aloud during public gatherings,¹⁹ are written to fit the rhythm of the reciter's respiration. They give him the breathing space necessary to accomplish his performance, without obliging him to plunge breathlessly into a text of such dense presentation that it would certainly result in suffocation. Paradoxically, luxury is expressed here in the least ostentatious manner possible, by aesthetics of 'lost space'. Wim Blockmans has shown that these books *de grand luxe* make up a very marginal percentage of the ducal library and that they are often historical books. This way of 'staging' history, encased in monumental books, precious jewel caskets meant to be seen by all, is certainly explicable by the constant concern of the dukes to legitimize their sovereignty over recently conquered territories.²⁰

As for the style of these productions, there has been

4. Circle of Loyset Liédet, Philip the Good commissioning Raoul Lefèvre to write his work, miniature, Raoul Lefèvre, *Recueil des histoires de Troie*, Bruges, after 1467. - Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9261, fol. 1r.

much talk of 'Burgundian mannerism'.²¹ It is true that until around 1475, illumination lacks sensitivity to the pictorial revolution that is raging around it and especially to the realist onslaught made by the great Flemish Primitives. After the advances of the period known as the 'pre-Eyckian', the art of illumination seems to return to conventional representation, largely modelled on the affected etiquette of the court, which often accords it an artificial character. This palace art is well embodied in the production of Loyset Liédet, who will illuminate many books for the duke, books of a historical or didactic nature (fig. 1 and 4; cat. 81). With Liédet, concern for detail is strongly present and his miniatures are limitless sources of *realia*, giving many details of the daily life of the court. On the other hand, integration of these morsels of reality in space, and the rendering of their materiality—two major attainments of the painting of the great Primitives—are largely lacking.²² In the manner of the extravagant fashion of the period, Liédet's characters present physical hypertrophies that show them ill at ease. Filiform, dressed in tight-fitting clothes or in heavy, starched robes, awkward and stiff, they participate with a certain indifference in the social events of the court. Sharing the same spirit, the illuminator's penchant for decoration and ornament excludes him from pursuing a coherent quest for the third dimension. The same 'mannerisms', albeit subdued, are found with Willem Vrelant (cat. 84), the exact contemporary of Liédet, who also worked at Bruges—and occasionally for the duke—but whose production comprised a major proportion of the prayer books made for courtiers, members of the local higher bourgeoisie or for rich foreign merchants settled in the Flemish town.²³ Vrelant's influence will be enormous, to such an extent that he, more than Liédet, represents the Bruges style of the 1460's. His manner, already stereotyped, and the models that he sets up will be repeated *ad nauseam* and will degenerate, among his imitators, into a commercial art, as insipid as it is plethoric.

Whether we consider Liédet or Vrelant, or even progressive personalities such as Marmion, Van Lathem or Tavernier, all these illuminators, occasionally engaged in working for the dukes, were first and foremost in the service of a varied clientele, largely outside the margins of the ducal court. Anchored in local traditions, they worked mainly for an urban elite. We may then wonder whether, instead of starting with an examination of the highest circles of the Burgundian elite, we should not primarily be interested in the urban societies to which they owe their training and their emergence.

CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL CENTRES

Taking the town as a paradigm is not new. Léon Delaissé was far from neglecting the local dimension, as we have seen. But for him, it remained subordinate to the problem of the ducal library and he took much less account of manuscripts produced for the urban elite. His vision was centralized, oriented on the central—but far from exclusive—importance of the court.

Since then, there has been markedly more interest in giving the priority of study, independently of ducal commissions, to the milieus in which the illuminators to the sovereigns were schooled. Particularly significant are two memorable exhibitions of 1993, one in Leuven, the other in Paris. *Medieval Magic. Flemish Miniatures Before Van Eyck*, the exhibition in Leuven,²⁴ emphasizes the existence of an impressive corpus of 'proto-Burgundian' manuscripts, for the most part originating in Bruges, which from 1380 to 1420 constituted a fascinating prologue and a surprising background to the 'affected' court art of the years 1440-1470 (cat. 83). By the sheer abundance of the exhibited material, *Medieval Magic* showed that 'pre-Burgundian' illumination, generally deprecated for its archaism and its lack of imagination, had followed a particularly inventive period, both in iconography and in its coarse style, marked by a certain form of 'realism' that gained it, indubitably somewhat abusively, the qualifier of 'pre-Eyckian' (being understood that it announced the art of the Van Eyck family). The exhibition also made it abundantly clear that this group of manuscripts was not painted for the sovereigns, but in large part for rich bourgeois or for local prelates. What the 'pre-Eyckian' group also showed well was that the nature of 'patronage' directly influenced the type and quality of books: one did not illuminate a prayer book destined for a bourgeois from Ghent in the same manner as a collection of orations for Duke John the Fearless, or a treatise on astrology commissioned by an influential abbey in Bruges for the Duc de Berry (cat. 68). Notice was also taken of the existence of 'fashions', that is, of qualitative variations linked to the context of use, corresponding to a complex stratification of society and to the social position of the sponsors. This aspect had previously been generally ignored, by an excessive focus of study on productions *de grand luxe*, linked to what was considered a form of princely patronage.

The other revelation of late 1993 came from the exhibition *Quand la peinture était dans les livres* ("When Painting was in Books"), organized in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.²⁵ This brought to light

the importance of illumination from the territories of Hainaut, from Artois to the Somme, and its decisive contribution to the 'Burgundian' style. On this occasion too, a small mental revolution has taken place. In place of the model of Delaissé, who recognized without further specifying the contribution of Lille, Hesdin and Valenciennes, was substituted a dynamic presentation bringing into focus the artistic identity of a region, the North of France (cat. 77). While in Delaissé's conception, the 'North' was basically only important as the birthplace of talents that would go on to realize their potential through contact with the ducal court, François Avril and Nicole Reynaud show the very distinctive characteristics of the area from which the art of the essential protagonists of the Burgundian style, such as Simon Marmion and Loyset Liédet, was drawn. The Paris exhibition was arranged by regions. I think that on this occasion, the specialists in 'Burgundian' illumination have wholly measured the interest that there would be in basing themselves on the specific contribution of the different towns and political entities that make up the *Pays de par-deçà*. It is true that this tendency to deconstruct the Flemish constellation started a little earlier, but the Paris exhibition forcefully contributed to crystallizing formerly latent energies.

It is obvious at present that any major advance in our understanding of what illumination was in this region will depend on a patient reconstruction of the networks of influences that moulded it. It has become clearly apparent that by focusing excessively on the ducal library, we have, in some ways, put the cart before the horse. Now that the habits of the dukes with regard to commissioning books have been defined with greater precision, and that the role played by certain illuminators in the formation of their libraries is known, it seems logical to refocus research on the urban and regional centres from which the sovereigns recruited exceptional artists. When he affirms that "the summit can only be perceived clearly by beginning at the foot", Paul Vandembroeck accurately summarizes how biased our point of view has been.²⁶

Now, the town is one of the most pregnant realities of social life in the old Low Countries of the fifteenth century.²⁷ In this part of the world, one of the most urbanized in medieval Europe, close to a third of the population lives in an agglomeration. The town is at the centre of the construction of a collective identity, which expresses itself monumentally through architecture, but also in a subtler manner, in all the other forms of art: it is, for example, clearly evident in the

landscapes of numerous easel paintings. Each town, enclosed *intra muros*, has its own identity. It cultivates its difference.

To circumscribe local production, to determine its specificity, presupposes first and foremost a 'return to the sources', an in-depth study of all the documents, published or otherwise, likely to provide precise information about the production of illuminated books and about their context of use.

On the production side, elaborate documentary researches should allow the reconstruction of the biography of the artisans of the book—be they illuminators, scribes, parchment makers, booksellers or binders—and the evaluation of the importance of their crafts within the corporative structure. The number of documented artists and the finely tuned mechanisms of the craft guild already give valuable indications of the importance of a production centre. The fact that more than a hundred artisans could be documented at Tournai in the fifteenth century and that the illuminators were affiliated to the crafts of painting and glazing, leads us to suppose *a priori* the existence of a market of a respectable size.²⁸ At Namur, on the other hand, no illuminator is recorded, and there was no separate craft of illuminators among the guilds: if books were illustrated in this town, it was without doubt by occasional artisans, probably amateurs. One would wager a fair sum on the clientele of Namur buying in the better-organized neighbouring centres, such as Hainaut, Liège or Brussels.²⁹

The method of producing books, as revealed to us by codicology, also reveals much of the importance of different urban centres: at Bruges, a metropolis of international trade, commercial production dominates, with procedures of rational division of labour,³⁰ which often leads to standard results, of good quality, but whose originality is not defining for the age. Tournai, on the other hand, is a less open town, due to its status as a French enclave in the Burgundian territories. In the first half of the fifteenth century, it still produces books marked with the Parisian imprint. Unlike Bruges, these manuscripts are generally produced individually, without a doubt even on demand, according to the specifications of the commissioning patron. A documented artisan such as Jean Semont³¹ has a local reputation, which hardly goes beyond the regional sphere. His style is marked by an outdated charm, foreign to the production of Bruges in the same period.

Particular importance should also be given to local patrons and to their libraries, whether members of the

high bourgeoisie and local aristocracy or the numerous socio-economic associations to which they belong: fraternities, hospitals, guilds, chambers of rhetoric, etc. To refocus the issue on towns is also to take into account a factor that has so far been largely ignored: the great momentum given by an urban clientele which was avid for signs of social recognition and for whom the illuminated book was a real symbol of prestige. In this regard it would be interesting to study the manner in which the new bourgeoisie positioned themselves in comparison to the aesthetic options taken by the court: the subject still largely remains to be studied, but one can already indicate that the idea of luxury as it appears in the ducal milieus seems radically opposed to that resulting from an examination of the production intended for urban elites. While, as we have said, the splendid manuscripts made for the sovereigns set themselves apart by their aesthetic of 'lost space', the books of the bourgeoisie are distinguished by a frank *horror vacui*; particularly accentuated here is the category of works which generally formed the basis (and often the only book) of their 'library', the book of hours. Very early in the fifteenth century, the traditional vignettes running elegantly along the margins were to grow sinuous offshoots, which invade the blank spaces of the margins. Towards 1420 the acanthus motif appears. Provisionally fitted into the angles or the main axes of the page towards the middle of the century, it ends by colonizing the entire margin, reducing the stem of the ancient vignettes to simple filigrees traced in ink. Motifs of flowerets and fruits, sometimes grotesques, invade the last empty spaces. The result: extremely heavy and gaudy margins of extraordinary decorative effect. At times superb, at times flashy, these borders surround the historiated pages. Sometimes they even invade the pages of the text. In the most richly illustrated manuscripts, they can surround every folio. Their ostentatious character corresponds exactly to the needs of a clientele for whom the illuminated manuscript was a means of social assertion.

In the evaluation of the local production, we should also take account of the intense contacts that could have taken place between the different urban centres. There are numerous examples of artisans following their apprenticeship in one town and becoming master in another. Countless, too, are the itinerant illuminators, or those who are registered for mastership in several production centres. One category of artisan in particular, that of the journeymen, the *vrije knapen*, must have been especially mobile: these were craftsmen who, having reached the end of their apprenticeship, did not acquire a mastership. They could work in all the 'goodly towns', after paying a reduced registra-

tion fee to the local corporation. Sometimes relocation brings about a stylistic evolution: with Loyset Liédet, the contact with Bruges corresponds to a very clear change from the works completed in his native Hesdin. The circulation of these artisans between the towns of the old Low Countries undoubtedly contributed to the creation of a dense network, based on personal relationships, and which explains the emergence of 'family similarities'³² amidst a great diversity of styles.

It may be possible to reconstruct the network of influences by which the ideas, fashions, recipes and styles that gave body to the 'Burgundian' style were communicated by systematically considering the contribution of the different production centres. In this context I would like to use a meteorological image and consider this network as a sort of 'pressure map', in perpetual movement and constant evolution: one town setting the tone during some years can rapidly be replaced by a more active, neighbouring centre, and become a zone of depression. This is what seems to happen at Mons after the arrival of Simon Marmion at Valenciennes. Other towns manage to maintain a very high rate of activity and continue to produce come rain or shine, unaffected by the turbulence around them. Naturally Bruges springs to mind here. This metaphor also illustrates that artistic languages are created and destroyed, not in a linear manner, but originally from disseminated sites, in constant interaction. The court style seems to be the result of a concerted selection among the best artisans of the time. Mobile and itinerant themselves, the dukes did not seek to gather artisans in one particular place so that they would have gratified by a sort of a 'patronage'.³³ Mostly, and with an acute sense of political strategy, they preferred to approach the best workers active in the various towns that formed their new territories. Certain books, such as the famous book of hours of Philip the Good preserved at Paris,³⁴ a veritable portfolio of the most progressive styles of the period—one finds the hands of Liévin van Lathem, Dreux Jehan and Simon Marmion in it—testify to this desire for federation.

To conclude, I would like once again to plead the case for constructing systematic biographies of artisans, which will enable us, by cross-referencing, to trace the careers of the most mobile of individuals (these were often the most gifted) and to 'map out' these individual trajectories. In due course, some strong points should emerge, which will give a precise picture of these 'artistic influences' often invoked by the experts on the sole basis of a stylistic analysis. One example will suffice: one notes a great mobility along

the natural axis constituted by the River Scheldt between Valenciennes and Ghent: cases of documented artists, such as Jean Tavernier (cat. 79), or of anonymous ones—the Master of the Privileges of Ghent and of Flanders, for example—who without doubt contributed to the constitution of a specifically ‘Scaldian’ idiom, superimpose themselves on artistic influences.

TOWARDS A COMPLEX PROGRESSIVE MODEL

As and when the knowledge of local centres progresses, the concept of *flämische Buchmalerei* put in place by Winkler around a limited number of artists, for the most part anonymous, is going to give way to a more concrete and more complex view—because it is modelled on reality—of the manner in which this stylistic conglomerate is constituted gradually and in surges. This new history will, let us hope, be marked by some solid points of reference, comprised by individual biographies of artisans, and of well localized books, even documented, which would permit us to delimit the exact place taken by the different local centres in ‘Burgundian’ illumination as a whole. It will necessarily remain hypothetical, so great are the gaps in the documentation. But it will contribute to removing the illuminated codex from the isolation in which the archaeology of the book has enclosed it—too exclusively centred on the manuscript as an object in itself—by situating it henceforth in a wider and richer historical context.

This process of deconstruction will operate on a geographic axis as well as on a temporal one. The study of biographies of artisans and of local production will certainly highlight the astonishing mobility of book producers, of books themselves and of their patrons. Certain illuminators, attracted by new opportunities, leave their *Heimat*. They take their *savoir-faire* with them and are sometimes imitated elsewhere. Others base themselves in a town and create waves locally. Still others work in many places at the same time, contributing to the dissemination of styles and to a certain uniformity. The books also travel, and some of them exert an enduring fascination. Here, think particularly of the Eyckian miniatures in the famous Turin-Milan Book of Hours (Turin, Museo Civico d’Arte Antica, Inv. Nr. 47).³⁵ Such compositions are imitated. From copy to copy, they spread to all production centres of any importance. As for the commissioning patrons, a section of the local elite, settled within its walls, looks exclusively to local artisans. But another type of ‘patronage’, much more mobile, evolves in higher circles: it seeks talent in various

places, depending on its own movement, and can also have its books completed in stages, in different locations. Certain books carry the traces of such an ‘itinerant’ completion, which, step by step, follows the journeys of a commissioning patron.³⁶

In parallel, the study of the ‘small masters’ should show (if it is still necessary) how arbitrary the categorization into great periods is. It should highlight, on the other hand, that the evolution of forms follows a relatively continuous flow, punctuated by jumps and backward steps. Thus, the ‘pre-Eyckian’ current of the beginning of the century remains in a large measure an offshoot of the aesthetic of the international Gothic, which exists in the pure form in the Flemish towns, next to the ‘naturalist’ current. In the same manner, the passage from the ‘pre-Eyckian’ style to ‘pre-Burgundian’ mannerism is almost unconscious, because of the strong ‘courtly’ component in the former. During this entire progressive process, the French influence remains perceptible and it comes back in force towards 1420, with the ascendance of the progressive artists settled in Paris, such as the Master of Boucicaut. Towards 1440, ‘Flemish’ illumination once again emerges for the conquest of the real, doubtless inspired, with a certain delay, by the new aesthetic norms put in place by the early Primitives, Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden. But the influence is limited in the first place to a revival of compositions: the art of illumination remains faithful for a long time to the surface and it will take some time before the suggestion of space becomes a real preoccupation. It first appears in the deluxe productions, painted by artists of exceptional temperament, like the Master of Girart de Roussillon.

A minute study of the local centres of production will allow us to situate these in this scheme of development, to measure their degree of ‘advance’ and, definitely, to delimit with precision the sites of innovation. It is not sure *a priori* that the most active centres—Bruges, to name but one—were the most innovative. More modest towns, such as Hesdin, were also capable of training illuminators who played a decisive role in the development of ‘Burgundian’ illumination.

The work remaining to be done is considerable: centres of primary importance, such as Brussels or Liège, are practically *terra incognita*, although they cannot have played negligible roles in the definition and shaping of the ‘Burgundian’ style. For other towns, such as Ghent, entire sections of the history of illumination are still to be written. It is to be hoped that courageous ploughs will dare to turn this virgin soil.³⁷

We come back to the problem from which we started: the mysterious emergence of an art that fascinates both by its prolixity and its refinement. It is clear that the impetus provided by ducal 'patronage' will no longer suffice to account for the importance of this breakthrough. We have, without any doubt, too greatly underestimated the role of towns and the emergence of a class keen on signs of recognition, ready to invest in symbolic values. That the duke also

benefited from the production structures in place, well integrated and producing excellent artisans, that he stimulated by his own example a certain 'snobbery' in the higher strata of the population, is commonly accepted. But his main preoccupations when commissioning prestige books were quite different from those of his 'good subjects'. The extremely sober presentation of the great volumes produced by his active patronage speaks for itself.

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- 1 Rouse and Rouse 2000, 1: 285-286.
- 2 For a comparative study of many towns of the former Southern Netherlands, see Vanwijnsberghe 2001a: 102-110.
- 3 Brussels 1959.
- 4 Huizinga 1975.
- 5 In his review of *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Delaissé criticises the 'aristocratic' approach of Erwin Panofsky. But he himself fell into the same 'error'. See Delaissé 1957: 116-118.
- 6 Numerous bibliographical references in Smith 1979 and Brussels 1996.
- 7 Smeyers 1998b.
- 8 Stroo 1992: 291, 294.
- 9 Blockmans 1988.
- 10 All the manuscripts of the Library of Burgundy preserved in Brussels are currently in the process of being published on CD-Rom: see Bousmanne and Van Hoorebeeck 2000. One should mention, incidentally, that the results of the researches of Wim Blockmans, limited to the Library of Brussels, should be measured against a more complete corpus of the manuscripts of the Library of Burgundy. It goes without saying that taking other important collections into account, such as Paris or, especially, Vienna, could modify these conclusions.
- 11 Blockmans 1998: 14-15.
- 12 Respectively: Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9066-9068 and Ms. 9231-9232; St Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Ms. Erm. Fr. 88; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2549.
- 13 Blockmans 1995: 16.
- 14 *Ibidem*.
- 15 On this delightfully anachronistic expression, see Prevenier

- 1998: 158.
- 16 Van Buren 1983; Van Buren 2000.
- 17 Anke Esch (K.U. Leuven) is preparing a doctoral thesis on this illuminator.
- 18 Gil 1998.
- 19 Coleman 1996.
- 20 Blockmans 1998.
- 21 Recently Smeyers 1998b: 287 ff.
- 22 One should take into account in this regard the technical limitations imposed by the use, in illumination, of a covering colour, whereas a great portion of the fascination of the Primitives' painting comes from the mastery of oil painting and from the effects of glazing that it allows.
- 23 Bousmanne 1997.
- 24 Leuven 1993.
- 25 Paris 1993.
- 26 Antwerp 1998, thesis no. 1.
- 27 Prevenier and Blockmans 1983: 30-34; Brussels 1991; Prevenier 1998: 233-234.
- 28 On Tournai, see Vanwijnsberghe 2001a.
- 29 Vanwijnsberghe, 2001b.
- 30 Smeyers 1993; Vertongen & Smeyers 1993.
- 31 Vanwijnsberghe 2001a: 312-313.
- 32 This beautiful expression is borrowed from Nicole Reynaud. See Paris 1993: 71.
- 33 Even if, ultimately, towns like Bruges and Ghent ended up drawing the best artisans away.
- 34 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. fr. 16428. On this exceptional book, see Thomas 1976.
- 35 On the impact of these compositions in Bruges, see Cardon 2002.
- 36 Van Buren 1973; Reynaud 1975.
- 37 Dominique Deneffe (K.U. Leuven) is working on a doctoral thesis on miniatures in Brussels in the fifteenth century; Sophie Denoël (Université de Liège) is examining certain aspects of Liège illumination in the first half of the sixteenth century, in the same framework.