

# **Medieval Mastery**

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

BREPOLS

Dauidsfonds/Leuven



**G**ememore de nre dame qui  
 salutte son enfant ihucrist  
 Abuel angelus locutus est  
 marie dicens. Ave gratia ple  
 na dominus tecum. benedicta tu in mu  
 lieribus. *W: set* Ave maria gratia



## 79 Book of Hours for the Use of Paris, called the 'Book of Hours of Philip the Good'

Jean Tavernier and collaborators, Oudenaarde, around 1450-1460; Southern Netherlands, after 1485.—The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 76 F 2.

**MANUSCRIPT** Parchment; 341 fol.; 268 x 187 mm; 165 miniatures in grisaille; cursive script.

**BINDING** Sixteenth-century binding, signed Antonius de Gavere.

**PROVENANCE** Created for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy; collection G.J. Gérard (purchased in Mons, during the auction of the goods of Mdm de Montfort, Canoness of St Waudru of Mons); acquired in 1832.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** The Hague 1980: 112-113 (no. 45); On the grisaille: Bousmanne and Voelke 2001: 32-46.

fol. 245r:

### The Virgin nursing the Child.

This book of hours, which belonged to Philip the Good, is probably the one for which Jean Tavernier, "historian and illuminator, residing in our town of Oudenaarde", created a *Calvary* and a *Virgin and Child*, as well as 230 miniatures "in white and black", or in other words grisailles. A receipt from Philip the Good, dated April 1455, orders payment for it and other works. In its present condition the book, which has been thoroughly redrafted, contains no more than 165 miniatures, of which 39 were subsequently added, undoubtedly after 1485.

Jean Tavernier is one of the historical figures of 'Burgundian' illumination around the middle of the fifteenth century. He contributed to many large editorial projects for the duke, among others, the impressive creation of the *Chroniques et Conquestes de Charlemaine* (Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9066-68). Probably originally from Oudenaarde, he became a free master of the profession of illumination in Tournai in 1434 and seems to have developed parallel activities in Ghent. In any event, it was in this town, in 1436 and 1441-42 that he entered into litigation with the local guild. Tavernier is later recorded in Oudenaarde from 1454 to 1460, a period during which he realized his most beautiful manuscripts for the duke.

If it remains difficult to assess the impact on the local artistry of the presence of such a talented painter in Tournai, it is undoubtedly the case that the art of Tournai between 1420-1430 made a lasting impres-

sion on Tavernier. It should be remembered that it is precisely during these years that Tournai painter Robert Campin, also known as the Master of Flémalle emerged, with Jan van Eyck, one of the initiators of the Flemish *ars nova*. The *Nursing Virgin* in the The Hague book of hours is a direct echo of the Campinian style. Mary is clothed in a dress with numerous drapes, which is falling to the ground and forms a carpet of broken folds in a superbly decorative effect. The hollows and contours of the folds are also accentuated by a violent lighting, providing deep shadows while emphasizing the peaks. This results in splendid monumentality, which finds an ideal means of expression in the grisaille technique, with reference to the sculpture that it implicitly contains. One cannot fail to notice the typological similarity in this regard with many miniatures from the The Hague book of hours with the production of votive paintings of Tournai, which peaked in the first half of the fifteenth century. In some cases, like the *Trinity* of fol. 244, the painted group is placed in a less deep space, enclosed by a backdrop, a spatial concept typical of three-dimensional art; the edge of the miniature simulates a border pierced with rosettes, a frequent formula in Tournai *ex-voto*.

The *Nursing Virgin* is situated in a more elaborated space, close to Campinian art in its studies concept: the figures are represented in three quarter profile, in a cubical chamber, constructed according to an empirical perception of space, open to the outside through two windows sunk into the back wall. Some objects give an informal touch to the whole: a three-legged table with a vase, in which a lily stem can be seen, a symbol of virginity. In this way the miniature could be considered a 'digest' of the Merode *Annunciation* (New York, Cloisters) and the *Virgin at the Chimney* of St Petersburg (Hermitage Museum). In addition, as François Avril has noted, the Virgin and the face of the suckling child observing the spectator from the corner of his eye are directly inspired by the panel in Frankfurt (Städelsches Museum) depicting the same theme. Again, the extreme delicacy of the execution and the great technical mastery of the artist can be noted. The depiction of the transparency of the halo is magisterial in this regard.

Where does Tavernier's liking for grisaille come from? This is a difficult question to answer. The fact that this technique is in perfect chromatic accord with the colour of the parchment support and the text is undoubtedly only part of the explanation. It may also relate to an artistic option on the part of the illuminator or a choice imposed by the patron. It has often been stated that black was well liked at the Burgundian court, as evinced by the fashion in clothing, for example.

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