



Miniatures for England

In 1479 the King of England, Edward IV, paid a merchant called Philip Maisertuell *'for certaine boks by the said Philip to be provided to the kyngs use in the partees beyond the see'*. The King's commission had been for the purchase of manuscripts in Flanders. His interest stemmed from a long tradition, for one of the striking aspects of Flemish miniature painting in the late Middle Ages was the connection with England – to the extent that a thorough survey could be written just using those codices which were sent there or which were produced as a result of commissions from England.

This interest can be explained by the many dynastic, political and economic links between the two. Since the twelfth century English wool had played a central role in the economy of Flanders, and this led Flemish weavers to press for good relations with England. Later, the Flemish representatives in London of the Hanseatic League organised trade with both England and Scotland; and in 1344 the Merchant Adventurers set up their headquarters in Bruges. Edward III married Philippa of Hainault in 1328 and in 1339 was supported by Flanders in the Hundred Years' War. He was often at his headquarters at Antwerp and Ghent, where Philippa had her court. And it was during this period too that people from Flanders built up the cloth industry in England. In 1335, for example, a colony of Flemish weavers was established in Norwich with the King's support.

Despite the interruption in the export of English wool during the second half of the fourteenth century, economic links remained; although it needed a fair amount of negotiation to keep these going. Well known in this connection was the pro-English position of James van Artevelde. In 1382 his son Philip went to England to conduct negotiations accompanied by two artists.

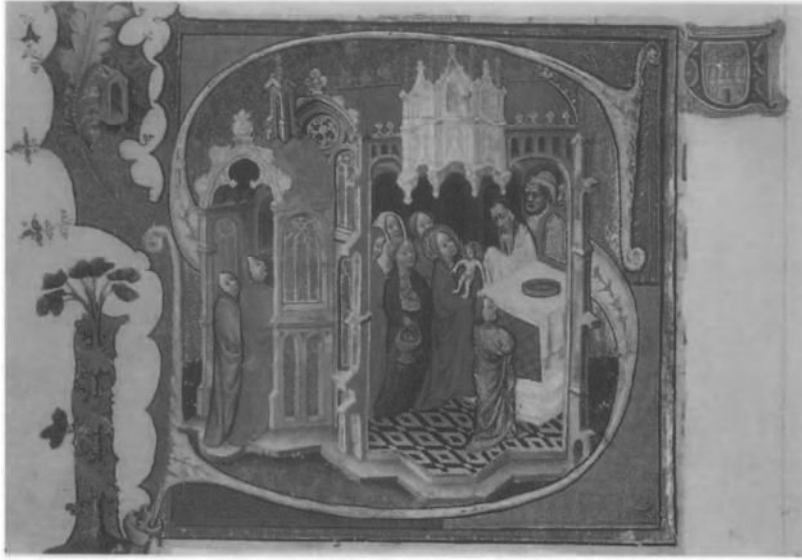
Religious links also existed. The Abbey of Eeckhout at Bruges, for example, was in contact with religious houses overseas. And there were cultural links too: the city accounts of Bruges contain a number of entries for musicians and singers from England who had appeared at ceremonies in the city.

The roots of realism: pre-Eyckian miniature painting (c.1350 – c.1430)

The oldest reference to the presence of Flemish artists overseas is to the painter Giles le Fleming from Bruges, who was working in Norwich between 1286 and 1298. But it was above all from the second half of the fourteenth century that East Anglia and London began to attract many different kinds of art and artists. Monumental brasses, pottery and paintings were all imported from Bruges. Where the art of the miniature is concerned the first traces of Flemish influence can be found shortly before 1350; in, for example, a Psalter of around 1350-1360, now in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 765), which was made for a member of the Fitzwarin family from Somerset, and a number of manuscripts made between 1361 and 1399 for the Bohun family, one of the most prominent in England. From 1337 William de Bohun spent a good deal of time in Flanders as a counsellor to Edward III. Even more specifically Flemish are the codices made for Humphrey de Bohun, seventh Earl of Hereford and Essex, who died in 1372, and for his two daughters. It is clear that a Flemish illuminator, whose work bears strong similarities to books made on the continent, played an increasing part in the Bohun workshop at Pleshey Castle, which worked exclusively for the family. The broad architectural designs which frame the pictures are a particular characteristic of these manuscripts.

It was during this period that pre-Eyckian miniature painting blossomed. It is characterised by a concern for the accurate portrayal of the individual, materiality and the incidental in man and his surroundings. Paintings were of plastically modelled figures with naturalistic faces, solid bodies, and expressions suitable to the subject matter. Landscapes and interiors gave a good impression of space. Realistic details received particular attention. Considerable imagination was used to enrich and bring up to date traditional biblical themes with anecdotal, 'apocryphal' details. This art was different from the High Gothic as it was found in France and elsewhere, which was characterised by courtly and idealised forms, by mannered poses and flowing draperies. That Flemish art developed differently was without doubt because it arose from, and was destined for, a world that was of an essentially urban nature; a world of rich merchants, bankers, high officials and bourgeois patricians. They were all men who had experienced reality in a quite different way from kings, princes and courtiers who had never had to provide for their own needs. In order to be able to survive at the political, economic and social level, citizens and merchants had to take into account the smallest details of everyday reality. This trend in art was a forerunner of the work of the Flemish Primitives and of Jan van Eyck in particular. He was to bring this realistic composition to its highest form, which is why this particular period in Flemish art is described as pre-Eyckian realism.

The English art of miniature painting underwent a revival at the end of the fourteenth century as a result of the presence in England of manuscripts and illuminators from Flanders. A key manuscript is without doubt the Carmelite Missal, made in 1391-1398, probably for the Whitefriars Church in Fleet Street in London (London, British Library, Add. Ms. 29704-5, 44892), of which only a few cut out illustrated initials now survive. A number of miniature-painters collaborated on this missal; the work of some of them displays all the characteristics of pre-Eyckian realism, such as naturalism, narrative



Presentation in the Temple, illustrated initial from the Carmelite Missal, Bruges Master in London, end fourteenth century. London, British Library, Add. Ms. 29704-5, 44892, f. 93.

structure and emotional expressionism. They worked together under the leadership of an artist from Bruges, and indeed these miniatures show a clear connection with other manuscripts produced at Bruges. Another example is the Lapworth Missal, a large and richly decorated work of 1398 (Oxford, Corpus Christi College, Ms. 394), in which the Calvary is ascribed to the Brugian Master of the Carmelite Missal. This group of Flemish artists later obtained commissions from the House of Lancaster, as is apparent from the *Great Cowchers*, a book of 1402-1407, with copies of the official possessions of Henry IV (London, Public Record Office, DL 42 1/2). The same artist can be met again in Henry's *Big Bible*, of about 1412, which got its name from its huge format (62 x 42,5 cm) (London, British Library, Ms. Royal 1.E.ix)

In this milieu there appeared Herman Scheerre at the beginning of the fifteenth century. He worked both with the miniaturists at the Court school at Westminster and with those on the continent. Scheerre lived in London in Paternoster Row close to St Paul's, where a number of booksellers lived. His work displays certain Flemish characteristics, though the origin of these is a matter of dispute among scholars. According to some he can be identified with a certain Herman of Cologne, who in 1402 was involved in the decoration of the Moses well in the Carthusian monastery at Champmol. He is thought at this point to have come in contact with the work of the painter Melchior Broederlam from Ypres; or he might have got to know Broederlam's work in Ypres before he himself emigrated to England. Others assert that there are good grounds for considering him of Flemish origin. The name Scheerre (= 'lakenscheerder' or cloth shearer) seems to indicate that he came from a region where cloth was manufactured. The work of this illuminator is not so distinctly naturalistic as that of his Flemish contemporaries. It is marked by a delicate use of colour and by doll-like faces. He often embellishes the background of a painting or clothing with inscriptions to which he sometimes adds his name. In other places he puts his motto: '*Omnia levia sunt amanti. Si quis amat non laborat*' ('All is easy for one who loves; he who loves toils not').



St George Slaying the Dragon, illuminated page from a Book of Hours and Psalter, Bruges, 1401-1415. London, British Library, Ms. Royal 2.A.xviii, f. 5v.

Both the Flemish masters of the Carmelite Missal and Herman Scheerre were responsible for the changes in style in England at the beginning of the fifteenth century and their influence was to remain noticeable for a long time.

The same can be said of the anonymous Master of the Beaufort Saints. He was called this because of the very detailed representations of saints in a Book of Hours commissioned by an unknown English patron. Later on it was apparently owned by a member of the Beaufort family and about 1460 it came into the hands of the English royal family. This Psalter, now at Rennes (Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 22) was made in London and illustrated by Scheerre or someone in his circle, although the full page miniatures of the *memoriae*, or prayers to the saints, are attributed to the Beaufort Master. Even before the end of the fifteenth century most of these had been removed from this manuscript and added to a Psalter and Book of Hours, produced in London in 1440 (London, British Library, Ms. Royal 2.A.xviii). We do not know why this was done or on whose instructions. The miniatures in the *memoriae* were created between 1401 and 1415 and represent saints. They are large bold figures in interiors or landscapes, placed under canopies which strengthen the feeling of space. The male figures have expressive faces with accentuated eyebrows and cheekbones. The faces of the female figures are more refined. In concept, colour and iconography these paintings have a distinct Bruges character about them. Until recently it was thought that the Beaufort master had worked with Scheerre in London. The discovery that all the illustrations in this Book of Hours had been stuck into places reserved for them and only later given English margins makes plausible the theory that they were actually made in Bruges and from there sent to London – particularly as other manuscripts prove that this master and his collaborators were indeed active in Flanders itself.

Around 1400 the growing tendency to private devotions led to the increased use of illuminated Books of Hours. Recent research has shown that the export of Books of Hours from Flanders and more specifically from Bruges, which had by this time developed into a major centre of book manufacture, had reached far greater proportions than had previously been thought. This large scale export trade was the result of the direct trading links between Flanders and England. The manuscripts followed the same routes along which other luxury goods were exported. In these Books of Hours the content is more or less fixed, adapted to the English liturgy which first developed in the diocese of Salisbury (Sarum) and then spread widely throughout England. The calendar contained typical saints such as Edmund, Dunstan, Oswald, Magnus, Hugo of Lincoln and Etheldreda. After the calendar follow the *memoriae*, in which Thomas Becket is usually included as well as prayers to the Trinity and the true face of Christ. A typical feature is that the shortened version of the Hours of the Cross is inserted into the Hours of the Virgin. Equally characteristic is the presence of certain special prayers, such as a paraphrase of the *Salve Regina*, a meditation on the Wounds of Christ, on the Instruments of the Passion and on the Seven Words of the Cross. The iconography was adapted to take into account the fact that they were intended for England. Thus the Hours of the Virgin are usually illustrated with a Passion cycle, whereas on the continent the preference was for scenes from the life of Mary. The representation of angels



The Murder of St Thomas Becket, illuminated page from a Book of Hours, Bruges, c.1390-1400. London, Sotheby's, 2-9 March 1937, f. 23v.

raising the souls of the departed to God the Father in a sheet in the prayer for the *Commendatio animarum*, as well as the presence of the portrait of Thomas Becket in the *memoriae*, point specifically in this context to the English destination. However, the name and depiction of this saint were often deleted or mutilated after 1538 when Henry VIII struck him off the calendar. These full-page miniatures were painted on individual sheets so that they could be prepared in advance, perhaps even in quantity, and were only added at the binding stage.

These export manuscripts show many signs of use. Prayers and personal marks of ownership in English were often added shortly after their arrival in England. And later, even centuries on, owners would insert texts or personal notes. Some of the Hours were intended for English soldiers, who occupied large areas of Northern France after the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

Colophons confirm that these books originated in Bruges. A Book of Hours now at Ushaw College in Durham (Ms. 10) contains the information that the transcription was completed at Bruges on 21 January 1408 by Johannes Heineman. The oldest of these codices date back to the end of the fourteenth century and are outstanding testimony to pre-Eyckian realism. The export of this kind of book continued to the end of the fifteenth century. So far, more than two hundred examples have been catalogued, and it is more than likely that many more were lost with the rise of Anglicanism.

The exploration of reality: the rule of the dukes of Burgundy (c.1430 – c.1475)

Philip the Good personally commissioned hundreds of fine manuscripts, which even today compel our admiration. They were made in a number of well organised workshops in Flanders. The illuminators were among the very best artists in Europe and were, therefore, on a par with the Flemish Primitives. The books they created were not just ornamental treasures; they provided moral models which the prince could use to support his political aspirations and to justify his activities. Many members of Philip's retinue followed his example in their love of books, among them Antoon and Karel van Croy, Lodewijk van Gruuthuse, Nicolas Rolin and Jean Chevrot. The illuminators refined further the trends which had developed during the period of pre-Eyckian realism. Although the personages are often portrayed in a mannerist fashion, they are nonetheless individualised and events are rendered in a naturalistic way. The landscapes are deep and often poetic in character. The scrupulously detailed representation of clothing, objects and decor makes these pictures an accurate reflection of the daily milieu and lifestyle of the period. The high standard was maintained under Philip's successor Charles the Bold and his third wife Margaret of York.

Margaret of York was the daughter of Richard, Duke of York, and Cicely Neville. In 1461 her brother had deposed Henry VI and assumed the crown as Edward IV. Her marriage to Charles the Bold in 1468 brought Margaret into the glittering world of Burgundy. Between 1468 and 1477, the year in which her husband died, Margaret built up a personal library. She was indeed the most important female patron of the arts among the Burgundians of this period. She acquired for herself mainly books of devotion and religious treatises suitable for the devotions of a woman of her status. What is



particularly noticeable is the attention she paid to her own portrait. She is portrayed at prayer or performing good works. Pictures like this have a political purpose in that they show her moral responsibility as Duchess and so display her authority.

At least eight manuscripts were produced as a result of her commissions. A number of the illuminators who worked on them had already previously worked for Philip the Good. Nicolas Finet, a canon at Cambrai, was commissioned by her to translate the treatise *Benois seront les miséricordieux* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 9296). This was illustrated by the Master of Girart de Roussillon, who was active in Brussels from about 1450 and has sometimes been identified with Dreux Jehan whose name is mentioned in documents of Philip the Good. This artist was primarily a sensitive colourist. He paints charming landscapes in pastel shades with a strongly atmospheric perspective. In the manuscript in question he illustrated two pages. In the first, Margaret kneels in a landscape with the church of St Gudule and the Town Hall of Brussels. She is supported by her patroness, St Margaret, and surrounded by four Fathers of the Church. This is one of the first pictures to portray recognisable buildings. In the second miniature Margaret, supported by Christ, is herself performing the Seven Acts of Mercy. In several places a coat of arms draws attention to the direct connection between the princess and this book. The same artist provided the illustration for another text by Finet, *Le dialogue de la duchesse de Bourgogne à Jésus-Christ* (London, British Library, Add. Ms. 7970). In this the risen Christ appears to Margaret, a composition inspired by Christ's appearance to His mother after the Resurrection.

Margaret of York and the Seven Acts of Mercy, illuminated page from *Benois seront les miséricordieux*, Master of Girart de Roussillon, c.1468-1477. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 9296, f. 1.



St Anne Appears to St Colette, illuminated page from the *Vie de Sainte Colette*, Bruges circle of the Master of Margaret of York, c.1468-1477. Ghent, Arne Klaren, Ms. 8, f. 40v.

Acheron Swallowing the Avaricious, miniature from *Les visions du chevalier Tondal*, Simon Marmion, c.1475. Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum, Ms. 31, f. 17.

A series of manuscripts can be grouped round a codex of Margaret containing works by the chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Ms. 9305-06). The illuminator was given the name of the Master of Margaret of York in view of the fact that she commissioned this codex. He was active in Bruges between 1470 and 1480. The quick drawing is striking. The layers of paint are transparent. The perspective is inaccurate, his figures are rather stiff and marionette-like and his clothing modelled with vigorous hatching. This artist is easily recognisable by his treatment of buildings. He leaves the fronts open, while the interiors are supported by glass-looking pillars. The grey walls are embellished with blue and red gold-brocaded tapestries.

A richly decorated life of St Colette, written shortly after her death in 1447 by her confessor Pierre de Vaux, was commissioned by the Duchess at Bruges and presented by her to the Poor Clares at Ghent (Ghent, Arne Klaren, Ms. 8). The book contains thirty-one pictures. Since there was no earlier illustrated example, the artists had to create their own originals; the style is very similar to that of the Master of Margaret of York. In the picture of the appearance of St Anne to Colette, Charles the Bold and his wife appear as witnesses.

Margaret was also interested in visionary literature. As well as an Apocalypse and a Purgatory of St Patrick she owned copies of *La Vision de l'âme de Guy de Thurno* and of *Les visions du chevalier Tondal* (Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum, Mss. 31 and 30 respectively). The first is the story of a rich

burgher of Verona, whose spirit comes to visit his wife after his death. The second text, written c.1149 at Regensburg by an Irish monk, tells the story of a knight called Tondalus who falls sick and dies. His soul journeys through Hell to Purgatory and then to Heaven. There are more than 200 known copies of this text, in fifteen different languages, but Margaret's copy is the only one which is illustrated. According to a colophon the text was copied at Ghent in 1475 by David Aubert, formerly court scribe to Philip the Good, who was given a number of other commissions by Margaret. This masterpiece is ascribed to Simon Marmion, one of the best known illuminators of the second half of the fifteenth century. He too had received a number of commissions from Philip the Good. From 1458 until his death in 1489 he worked at Valenciennes. His work shows what a good narrator he was with his brush, able to portray with power the psychology of a situation. He achieved brilliant atmospheric effects with his use of particularly delicate colouring. At the same time he succeeded in reproducing the innate texture of materials. The *Visions* offered him a marvellous opportunity to use the play of light and shade to evoke the atmosphere of Hell. The way in which he does this anticipates the work of Hieronymus Bosch and he led the way into the final phase of Flemish miniature painting.

Reality surpassed: the Ghent-Bruges School (c.1475 – c.1520)

Around 1470-1480, Flemish illuminators underwent a final period of radical innovation. Illusionistic effects were used to break through the flat plane of each decorated page of vellum. The illuminators were able to create in their landscapes much more sense of depth than previously, and to give complex structures to their interiors. The studied handling of light and shadow enabled them to portray depth. Each scene was viewed as if through a window. Through the new strong narrative interpretation of traditional themes and through various artistic tricks they succeeded in strengthening the impact of the representation on the viewer. But the most striking innovation is the use of *trompe l'œil* in the marginal decoration. Highly realistic motifs, such as flowers, insects and objects, throw shadows on the coloured surface of the vellum. This innovation was first introduced in workshops in Bruges and Ghent, hence the term 'Ghent-Bruges School'. It was the anonymous Master of Mary of Burgundy who played the pioneering role here. The new style contained such qualities that it was copied almost immediately throughout Western Europe and foreign kings, nobles and prelates turned to the Flemish workshops for their most precious manuscripts. Among them were, for example, Isabella of Castille, Joanna the Mad, James IV of Scotland, Maximilian of Austria, Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg, and the Infante Dom Fernando of Portugal.

Among these manuscripts in the new style, one of the first is a breviary of Margaret of York produced around 1476 (Cambridge, St John's College, Ms. 215). Margaret's brother Edward IV also acquired many Flemish manuscripts. These were to form the basis of the English Old Royal Library. In 1470-1471 Edward lived as an exile in Bruges at the house of Lodewijk van Gruuthuse and he was to have contacts again later on with this prominent bibliophile. Edward was so taken with Burgundian court ceremonial

that he asked Olivier de la Marche, the Duke's master of ceremonies, to prepare a description for him of the Duke's household. His purchase of illuminated manuscripts in Bruges dates from about 1479-1480. He bought among others from Philip Maisertuell, who is mentioned in the opening sentence of this article. He was particularly interested in French historical texts with a narrative and moralising content, which he probably intended for the education of his sons. The text and the illustrations are similar to those made for Lodewijk van Gruuthuse himself. It seems probable, therefore, that he acted as intermediary in their acquisition.

The Master of Edward IV, who was working in Bruges around 1470-1490, takes his name from a 1479 *Bible historiale* made for the King (London, British Library, Ms. Royal 14 D.i., 18 D ix-x). The miniaturist is distinguished by his broad compositions full of variety, his wide range of representations of clothing and head-gear and pleasing use of colour. An artist in the circle of this Master produced a copy of the second part of the anonymous translation of Flavius Josephus' *Antiquités et Guerre des Juifs*. This was begun for Gruuthuse. On folio 140, however, Gruuthuse's coat of arms is overpainted with that of Edward IV (London, Sir John Soane's Museum, Ms. 1.). Each chapter is introduced by a large picture. Particularly striking is the exaggerated rising perspective as a background for the figures which adopt a wide variety of poses and make pronounced gestures. Under the influence of the School of Ghent and Bruges, the white background on which flowers and leaves were depicted, was overpainted with gold. It seems probable that Gruuthuse either sold or presented this book to the King.

Another person who was well acquainted with Burgundian culture and art was William, Lord Hastings (c.1430-1483). He had a significant part to play in some of the moments of drama in the English royal house, which is why Shakespeare gave him a role in his play *Richard III*. Hastings was friend and counsellor to Edward IV and headed the Burgundian party at the English court, and had also played a part in the negotiations concerning the marriage of Margaret of York. His sister Elizabeth and her husband, Sir John Donne, commissioned a retable from Hans Memling in Bruges (see *The Low Countries* 1994-95: 85). Donne also owned some Flemish manuscripts, among them a copy of *Les Faits d'Alexandre le Grand* by Quintus Curtius (London, British Library, Ms. Royal 15 D.iv), which he had probably obtained from Margaret of York. About 1480 Donne had two Books of Hours made in Flanders (London, British Library Add. Ms. 54782 and Madrid, Museo Lázaro-Galdiano, Ms. 15503). These are masterpieces of the early Ghent-Bruges school, ascribed to the Master of the Older Prayerbook of the Emperor Maximilian, who probably worked in Ghent. He refined still further the innovations of his predecessor, the Master of Mary of Burgundy. This is why the patronage of Hastings was so important for the evolution of the Ghent-Bruges style. The perspective is wonderfully done and the landscapes extremely realistic.

Flemish Books of Hours and breviaries were still being sent to England around 1500. Their export even reached a new highpoint. One fine example is a Book of Hours according to the Use of Sarum in the Ghent-Bruges style (Stonyhurst College, Ms. 60). Above the miniature of the raising of Lazarus is written: 'Pray for the soules of Dame Cattrayn Bray and of Ion Colett den

Herod's Soldiers Drowning
Aristobulus, illuminated
 page from Flavius
 Josephus, *Antiquités et*



Guerre des Juifs, Bruges,
 c.1470-80. London, Sir John
 Soane's Museum. Ms. 1,
 f. 1.



St Elizabeth of Hungary,
 illuminated page from the
 Book of Hours of William,
 Lord Hastings, Ghent,
 the Master of the Older
 Prayerbook of Maximilian,
 c.1480. London, British
 Library, Add. Ms. 54782,
 f. 64v.

of Paules'. The reference is to Katherine Bray (died 1507), the wife of Sir Reynold Bray, Knight of the Order of the Garter and Treasurer to Henry VII. The second name is that of John Colet, the friend of Thomas More and of Erasmus: in 1509 he was Dean of St Paul's London. It seems probable that Katherine presented the book to Colet and he wanted to keep the memory of both of them alive by the request for a prayer.

A noteworthy offshoot of this export of paraliturgical manuscripts is the fact that the first printed Sarum breviary appeared at Leuven in 1499 and the first Sarum missal at Antwerp in 1527. Throughout the whole of the sixteenth century many printers, binders and booksellers in Flanders worked for the English market or actually went to settle there. In this context we should note William Caxton, who went to live in Bruges around 1444 as a cloth merchant. In 1462 he was head of the English community and a diplomatic representative of the King of England. His interest in literature brought him into contact with workshops producing manuscripts. In 1471, encouraged by Margaret of York, he translated into English Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des histoires de Troye*, which had originally been made for Philip the Good. During a stay in Cologne in 1471-1472 Caxton learned the art of printing. In 1473 he returned to England and set up his own publishing and printing business at Westminster. His *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* was the first book to be printed in English. He dedicated it to Margaret; the frontispiece of the book depicts the scene.

One of the last important artists of the Ghent-Bruges school was Gerard Horenbout, a master at Ghent from 1487. In 1515 he became court painter to Margaret of Austria, Regent of the Netherlands. Both his son Lucas and his daughter Suzanna were also illuminators. In 1522, when he was about 60, he and his family moved to England, where he worked for Henry VIII; later he returned to Ghent, where he died in about 1540. The charm of his work lies in his rich palette, in his masterful handling of detail and in his narrative structure. At a time when the printing of books was expanding rapidly and therefore becoming a formidable competitor for the manuscript, his contribution was to ensure that the art of the miniature enjoyed a brilliant swansong.

In view of these facts, Horenbout's sojourn in England is hardly surprising. He probably understood that the English public showed a lively interest in Flemish manuscripts and that Flemish miniaturists were appreciated in that country. In fact he was perpetuating a tradition which had existed for more than 150 years.

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Translated by Michael Shaw.

FURTHER READING

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