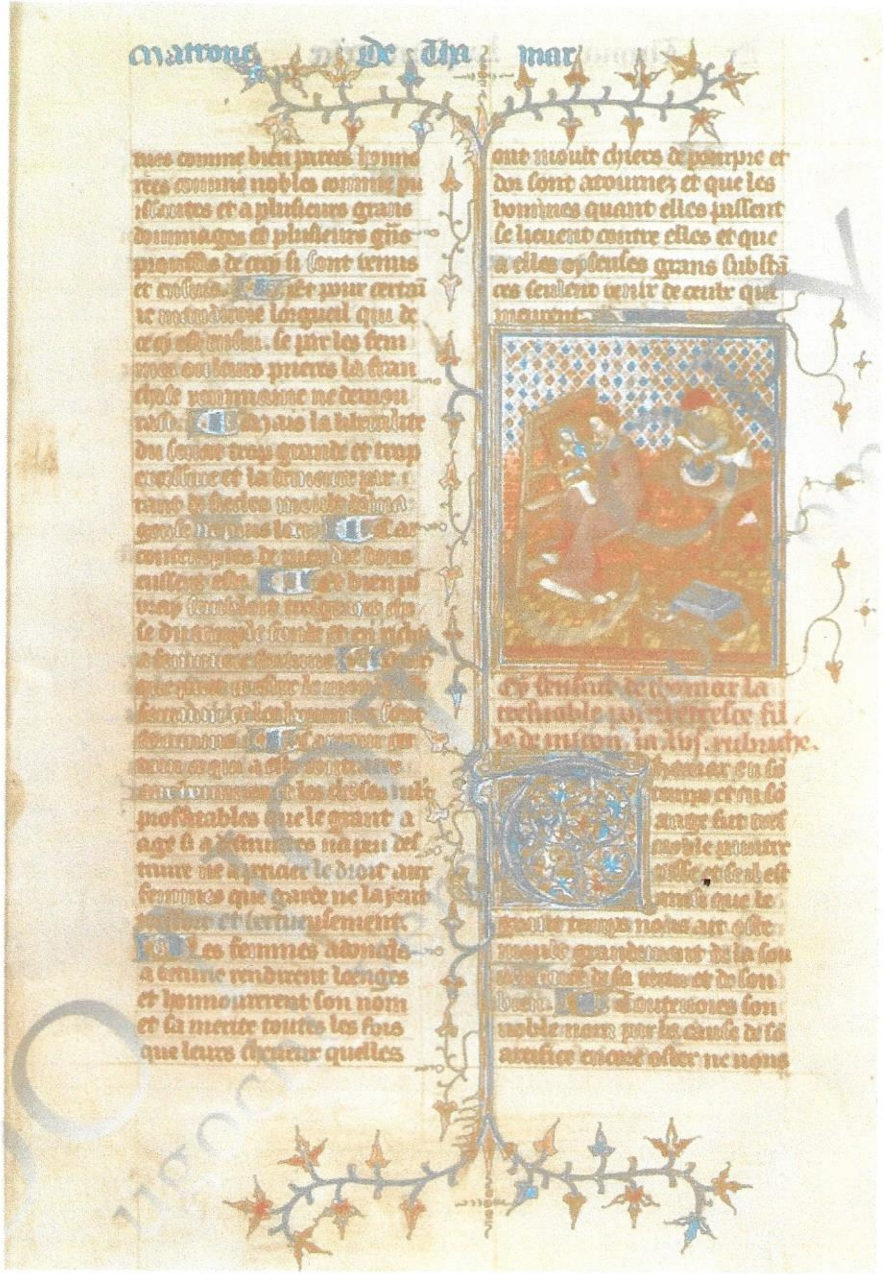


From Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* (*Concerning Famous Women*). 1402. Ink and tempera on vellum, 14 × 9½″ (35.5 × 24 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
This page from a French edition of a work by the Italian author Boccaccio entitled *Concerning Famous Women* includes a picture of Thamyris, an artist of antiquity, at work in her studio. She appears in fifteenth-century dress, painting an image of the Virgin and Child. At the right, an assistant grinds and mixes her colors. In the foreground, her brushes and paints are laid out neatly and conveniently on a table.

Credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France

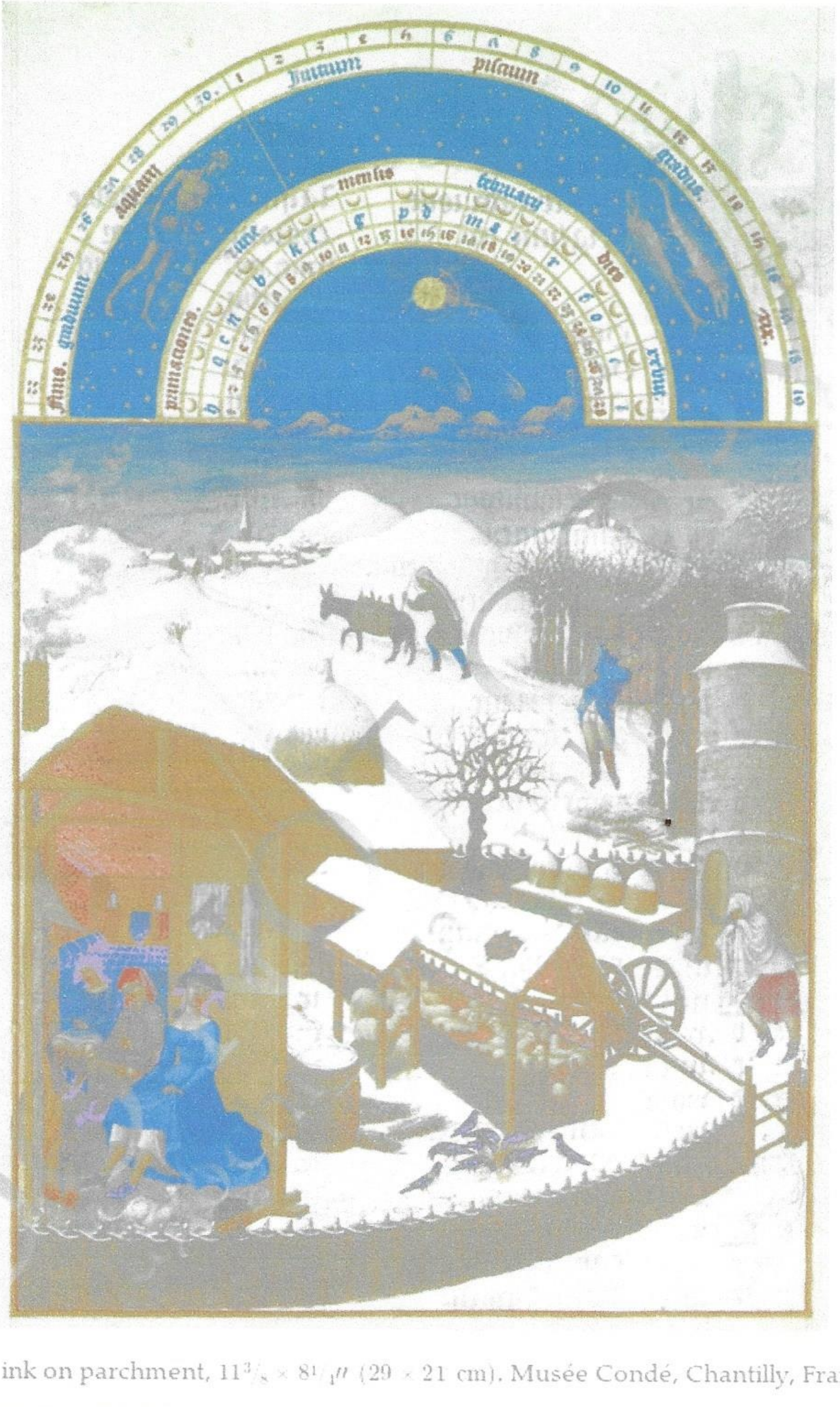
The Limbourg Brothers

Among the finest Netherlandish painters at the beginning of the century were three brothers—Paul, Herman, and Jean Limbourg—their "last" name referring to their home region. At this time people generally did not have family names in the modern sense, but were known instead by their first names, often followed by a reference to their place of origin, parentage, or occupation.

About 1404, the Limbourg brothers entered the service of avid book-lover Duke Jean of Berry (1340–1416), for whom they produced their most impressive surviving work, the so-called TRÈS RICHES HEURES ("Very Sumptuous Book of Hours"), between 1411 and 1416. A Book of Hours, in addition to containing prayers and readings used in daily devotion, also included a calendar of holy days. The Limbourgs created full-page illustrations for the calendar in the *Très Riches Heures*. For each month, subjects including both peasant labors and aristocratic pleasures appeared in a framed lower field, while elaborate calendar devices, with the chariot of the sun and the zodiac symbols, filled a semicircular area on the upper part of the page. Like most European artists of the time, the Limbourgs showed the working class in a light acceptable to aristocrats—that is, either happily working for the nobles' benefit or displaying an uncouth lifestyle for aristocratic amusement. At times, however, the peasants seem to be enjoying the pleasures of their leisure moments.

In the February page (**FIG. 19–5**), farm folks relax before a fire. Although many country people at this time lived in hovels, this farm looks comfortable and well maintained, with timber-framed buildings, a row of beehives, a sheepfold, and tidy woven-wattle fences. In the distance are a village and church. Within this scene, although all are much lower in social standing than the duke, there is still a hierarchy of class. Largest in scale and most elegantly dressed is the woman closest to us, perhaps the owner of the farm, who carefully lifts her overgarment with both hands as she warms herself. She shares her fire with a couple, smaller because they are farther away, who wear more modest clothing and are considerably less well behaved, especially the man, who exposes himself as he lifts his clothing to take advantage of the fire's warmth.

19–5 **Paul, Herman, and Jean Limbourg** FEBRUARY: LIFE IN THE COUNTRY, TRÈS RICHES HEURES



1411–1416. Colors and ink on parchment, $11^{3}/_{8} \times 8^{1}/_{4}''$ (29 × 21 cm). Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

Credit: Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/René-Gabriel Ojéda

One of the most remarkable aspects of this painting is the way it conveys the feeling of cold winter weather: the heavy sky and bare trees, the soft snow and huddled sheep, the steamy breath of the worker blowing on his hands, and the comforting smoke curling from the farmhouse chimney. The artists employ several International Gothic conventions: the high placement of the horizon line, the small size of trees and buildings in relation to people, and the cutaway view of the house showing both interior and exterior. The muted palette is sparked with touches of yellowish-orange, blue, and bright red, including the man's turban at the lower left. Scale relationships seem consistent with our experience in the natural world since as the landscape recedes, the size of figures and buildings diminishes progressively from foreground to background.

In contrast, the illustration for the other winter month—January—depicts an aristocratic household (**FIG. 19–6**). The duke of Berry himself sits behind a table laden with food and expensive tableware, presiding over his New Year's feast and surrounded by servants and allies. His chamberlain invites smartly dressed courtiers to greet the duke (the words written overhead say "approach"),

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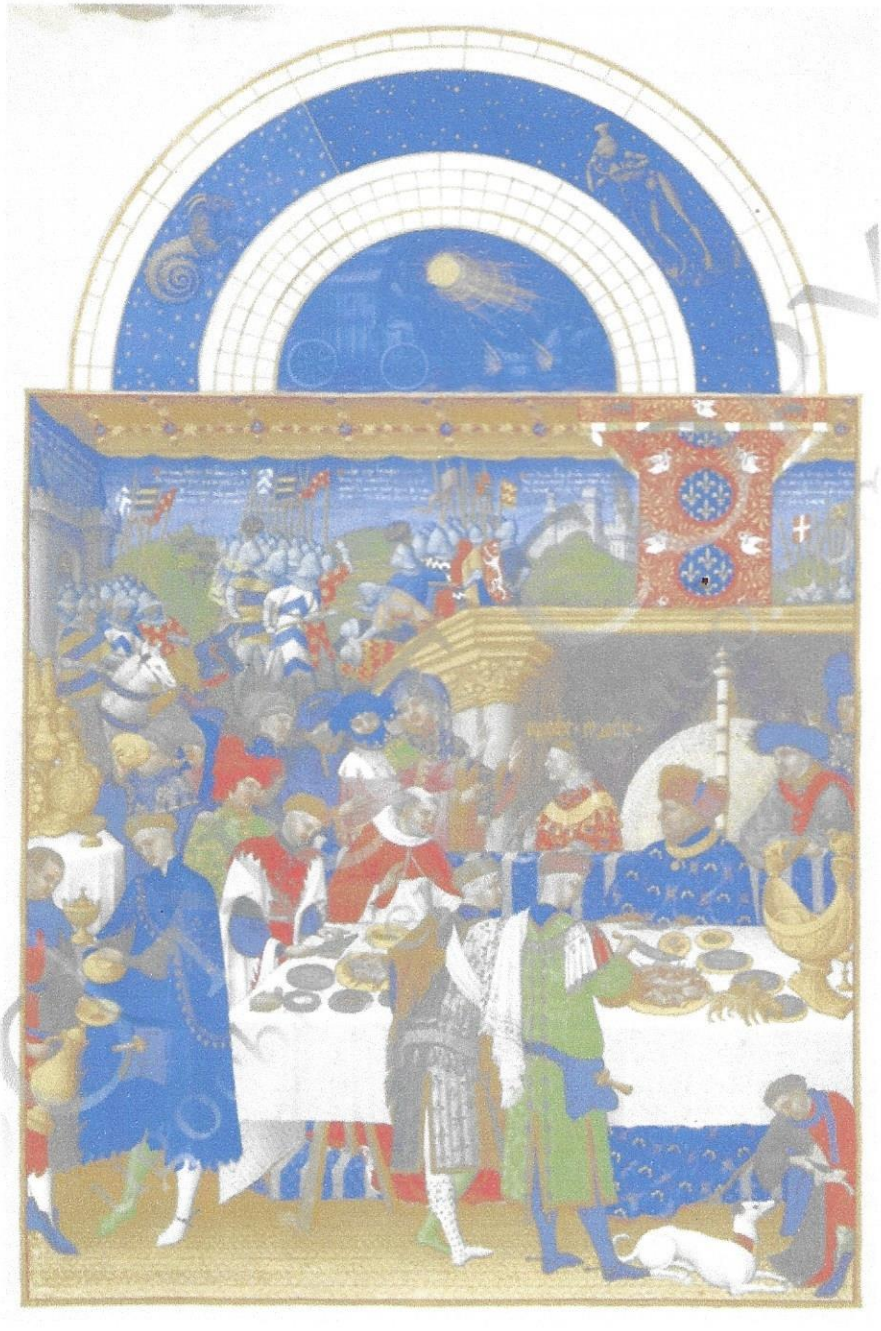
who is singled out visually by the red cloth of honor with his heraldic arms—swans and the lilies of France—hanging over him and by a large fire screen that circles his head like a secular halo. Tapestries with battle scenes cover the walls. Such luxury objects attest to the wealth of this great patron of the arts, a striking contrast to the farm life depicted in February, encountered when turning to the next page of the book.

19–6 PAUL, HERMAN, AND JEAN LIMBOURG JANUARY: THE DUKE OF BERRY AT TABLE, TRÈS RICHES HEURES



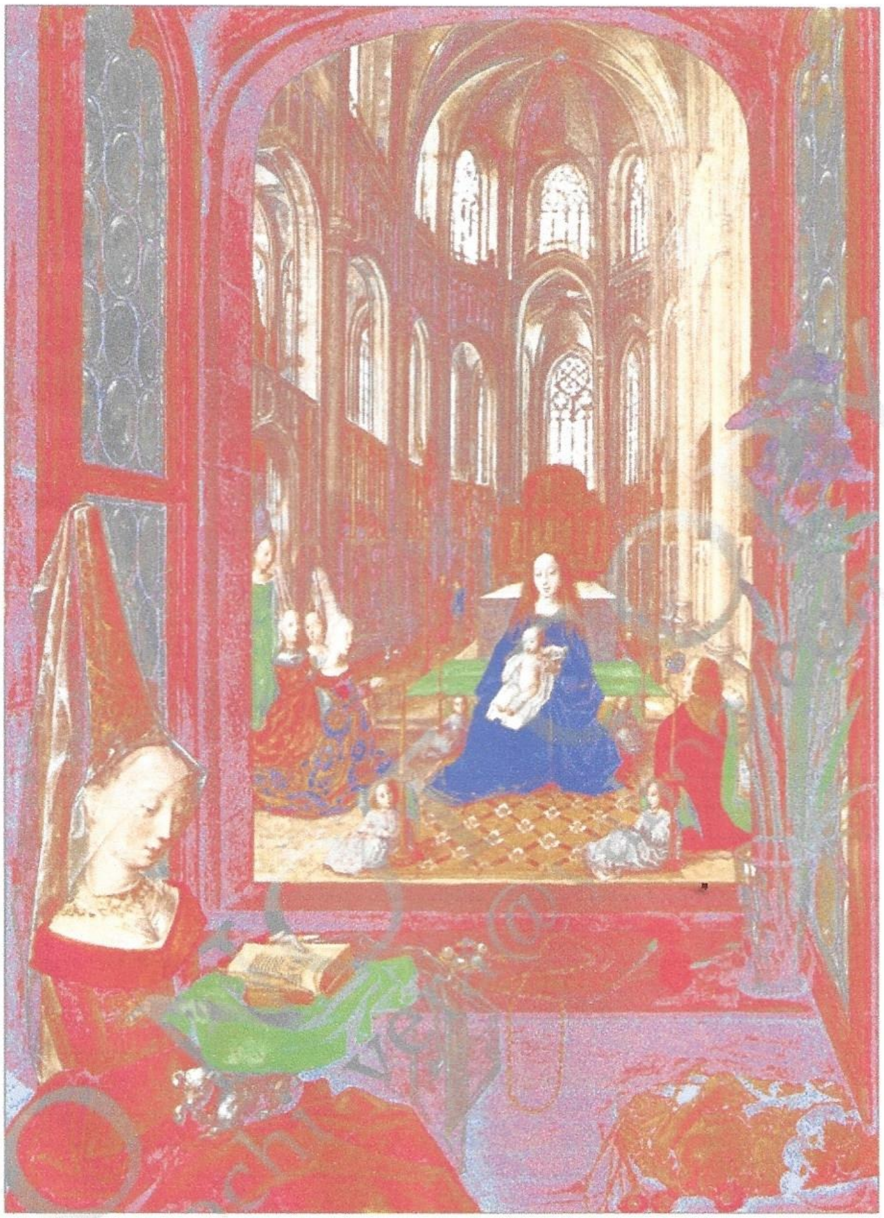
1411–1416. Colors and ink on parchment, 11$^{3}/_{8}$ × 8$^{1}/_{4}$″ (29 × 21 cm). Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

Credit: Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/René-Gabriel Ojéda

The Mary of Burgundy Painter

One of the finest painters of Books of Hours later in the century was an artist known as the Mary of Burgundy Painter—so called because he painted a Book of Hours for Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482), the only child of Charles the Bold. Within a full-page miniature in a book only 7½ by 5¼ inches, earthly reality and a religious vision have been rendered equally tangible (FIG. 19–7). The painter conjures up a complex pictorial space. We look not only through the "window" of the illustration's frame, but also through an actual window in the wall of the room depicted in the foreground of the painting. The artist shows considerable virtuosity in representing these worlds. Spatial recession leads the viewer into the far reaches of the church interior, past the Virgin and the gilded altarpiece in the sanctuary to two people conversing in the far distance. The filmy veil covering Mary of Burgundy's steeple headdress is exquisitely described, as is the transparency of the glass vase, and the distinctive bull's-eye glass (circular panes whose center "lump" was formed by the glassblower's pontil) filling the foreshortened, open window.

19–7 Mary of Burgundy Painter MARY AT HER DEVOTIONS, HOURS OF MARY OF BURGUNDY



Before 1482. Colors and ink on parchment, size of image 7½ × 5¼″ (19.1 × 13.3 cm). Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

Credit: © 2016. DeAgostini Picture Libary/Scala, Florence

Mary of Burgundy appears twice. She is seated in the foreground by a window reading from, or contemplating a picture within, her Book of Hours, held carefully and protected by a lush green cloth, perhaps from the small dog cuddled into her lap. She appears again in the background, within the representation of the personal vision inspired by her private meditations. A glorious Gothic church may form the setting for her vision, but it does not result from attendance at Mass or the direction of a priest. She experiences it in private, a reward for her personal faith. Christians were encouraged in this period to imagine themselves participating in biblical stories and sacred events so they could personally feel the experiences of the protagonists. Secluded in her private space and surrounded by devotional aids on the window ledge—book, rosary, and symbolic flowers (carnations symbolized the nails of the Crucifixion, the irises Mary's sorrow)—it seems that Mary of Burgundy is doing just that. In her vision, she kneels with attendants and angels in front of a gracefully human Virgin and Child.

Textiles

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the best European tapestries came from Flanders. Major weaving centers at Brussels, Tournai, and Arras produced intricately woven wall hangings for royal and aristocratic patrons across Europe, important church officials including the pope, and even town councils. Among the most common subjects were foliage and flower patterns, scenes from the lives of the saints, and themes from Classical mythology and history, such as the Battle of Troy seen hanging on the walls of Duke Jean of Berry's reception room (SEE FIG. 19–6). Tapestries provided both insulation and decoration for the stone walls of castle halls, churches, and municipal buildings, and because they were much more expensive than wall or panel paintings, they also showed off the owners' wealth. They were also portable, a valuable quality as courts moved from residence to residence.

The price of a tapestry depended on the artists involved, the work required, and the materials used. Rarely was a fine, commissioned series woven only with wool; instead, tapestry producers enhanced the weaving with silk, and with silver and gold threads that must have glittered on the walls, especially at night, illuminated by flickering lamps or candles. Because silver and gold threads were made of silk wrapped with real silver and gold, people later burned many tapestries to retrieve the precious materials. As a result, few royal tapestries in France survived the French Revolution. If a greater percentage had survived, these luxurious and monumental textile wall paintings would surely figure more prominently in the history of art.

The Unicorn Tapestry

Tapestries were often produced in series. One of the best known is the 1495–1505 "Hunt of the Unicorn" series. Four of the seven surviving hangings present scenes of people and animals set against a dense field of trees and flowers, with a distant view of a castle, as in the UNICORN IS FOUND AT THE FOUNTAIN (FIG. 19–8). The unusually fine condition of the tapestry allows us to appreciate its rich colors, the subtlety in modeling the faces, the tonal variations in the animals' fur, and even the depiction of reflections in the water. The technical skill of its weavers is astonishing.

19–8 UNICORN IS FOUND AT THE FOUNTAIN