

Saligers Bemühen, mit solchen Beschreibungen sein großes Vorbild Otto Pächt zu imitieren oder noch zu übertreffen, ist offensichtlich, es führt aber, wie gezeigt, bisweilen ins Absurde und wirkt eher befremdlich, weil es das hochgesteckte Ziel natürlich nicht erreicht. So ist nur bedauernd festzustellen, daß einer der wichtigsten Bilderzyklen der Wiener Spätgotik eine Bearbeitung erfahren hat, mit der weder Fachleute noch interessierte Laien viel Freude haben werden.

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Rob Dückers & Pieter Roelofs (eds.): De gebroeders van Limburg. Nijmeegse meesters aan het Franse hof 1400–1416; [Exhibition Catalogue Museum het Valkhof Nijmegen 28 August – 20 November 2005]; Gent: Ludion 2005; 368 pp. and 432 illustrations; ISBN 90-5544-576-2 (paperback edition); € 34,90; ISBN 90-5544-593-2 (luxury edition); ISBN 90-5544-596-7 (hardback edition in English); € 49,90

Probably the most celebrated manuscript ever made was the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (Chantilly, Musée Condée, Ms. 65), a beautiful book indeed, illuminated as it is with full-page miniatures in a refined French court style. As is well known, the illuminators of the manuscript were Herman, Paul and Johan van Limburg. In spite of their name, the three brothers did not come from Limburg, but from the duchy of Gelre. From various contemporary documents we learn that their parents were the woodcarver Arnold van Limburg and his wife Metta van Maelwael, who lived on the corner of the Burchtstraat and the Stockumstraat in Nijmegen. Although specialists in the field of illuminated manuscripts were acquainted with these facts, in Nijmegen itself the awareness that the Limburg brothers came from Nijmegen is only very recent. This is why, in the late summer and autumn of 2005, an exhibition was launched in Nijmegen, as a tribute to these three long-forgotten and newly-discovered sons of the city. An important incentive was the fact that another manuscript made by the Van Limburg brothers, the *Belles Heures du Duc de Berry* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection acc. No. 54.1.1.) had to undergo restoration and was therefore taken out of its binding. This circumstance presented the Nijmegen Valkhof Museum with the once in a lifetime opportunity to exhibit 16 miniatures from this precious manuscript in the hometown of the three artists.

Although the brothers were born in Nijmegen and grew up there, Herman and Johan left their hometown already at a very young age (the eldest being 13, the youngest 10) to continue their training in Paris in the workshop of the goldsmith Alebret de Bolure. In 1399 they were sent back to Nijmegen, because the plague was then spreading over Paris. On their way back they were taken prisoner by the duke of Brabant in whose custody they remained from November 1399 until May 1400, when they were set free thanks to the munificence of Philip the Bold, who had decided to pay the ransom necessary for their release, in return for the good services their uncle, the

painter Johan Maelwael, had rendered him over the years. Two years later we find the three Van Limburg brothers in Paris, working on a beautifully illuminated bible for Philip the Bold, which they were to complete in four years time, working exclusively for the duke. When Philip died in 1404 they found a new patron in his brother, Jean de Berry, who was an avid collector of illuminated manuscripts. In 1405 he commissioned the manuscript that was to be known as the *Belles Heures du Jean de Berry*, which the brothers completed in 1408 or 1409. Other manuscripts and miniatures followed. Jean must have been very pleased with the work as from the documents it is clear that the brothers lived at court in some state and were often rewarded with jewels and other presents. Jean de Berry was so eager to have Paul in his service that he kept a kidnapped nine-year old girl to whom the painter wanted to be married at his court until he was forced to return her to her parents. In 1411, when the girl reached the age of twelve, Paul eventually did marry her. In Bourges the couple inhabited one of the largest and most spacious houses available, another of Jean de Berry's gifts. In the meantime the brothers returned to their hometown on various occasions, for business, and for family visits no doubt. In 1416, probably due to the plague that also killed Jean de Berry, the three brothers died. At the time Herman, the eldest, was barely 30.

From the wealth of factual information contained in contemporary documents it is possible to reconstruct the lives of the three brothers in broad outlines, but for all that, the documents unfortunately tell us very little about the works themselves. It is impossible to distinguish three individual hands in the work of the Van Limburg brothers, who therefore merge into one artistic personality, whereas in real life they probably set themselves very individual tasks.

Their most prominent works, indeed, the only works that are known today, were all produced in France. However, young though they may have been, in order to be sent to Paris for their artistic training, they must already have shown considerable talent and ingeniousness before their departure in 1398 and it is obvious that they learnt the basics of the trade in their native Nijmegen. The Nijmegen exhibition therefore aimed at recapturing the artistic background which nurtured the Van Limburg brothers, in addition to showing works by the brothers themselves, such as 16 illuminated pages from the *Belles Heures du Jean de Berry*. The beautifully illustrated full-colour catalogue to this exhibition has an introductory section with essays written by various specialists (pp. 12–235) and a catalogue section (pp. 237–421). In addition to works by the Van Limburg brothers the catalogue section deals with several of the original documents pertaining to the Limburg brothers. Many of the works in the catalogue are from Gelre and the surrounding regions. Some of these pieces are rather provincial, some are interesting. Together they form a disparate lot and at first sight there seems to be precious little there that might have provided the Van Limburg brothers with the cultural background that brought them to the most art-loving courts of contemporary France. No doubt wars and the iconoclasm of the 16th century are responsible for this sad state of the arts.

The first three introductory essays in the catalogue are devoted to the formative years of the Van Limburg brothers and to their biography. In the first essay, written by

Willy Miessen, Pieter Roelofs and Mieke van Veen-Liefrink, the documentary sources concerning the Van Limburg brothers are assembled, providing the reader with an overview of everything that is known for fact concerning the three brothers. Gerard Lemmens subsequently discusses what Nijmegen was like in the period between 1380 and 1400, the period in which the Van Limburg brothers received their initial training. Following this, Pieter Roelofs assesses the background and career of their uncle, Johan of Maelwael (Jean Malouel), who was a painter at the courts of Gelre and Burgundy, where he was held in high esteem. In 1397 he was even appointed as overseer of the decorative projects for the famous Chartreuse de Champmol. In spite of this, the only work that can without any doubt be attributed to him is his signature at the bottom of a document dating to 10 October 1403. However, a portable large round Pieta, with the duke Jean sans Peur's heraldic device on the backside, which is now in the Louvre in Paris, is dated circa 1400 and may well be by his hand. Johan's father and uncle were noted painters of heraldry and Johan is likely to have been trained as a heraldic painter too. The Christ-figure from the tondo was later copied by the Van Limburg brothers in their miniature showing the Lamentation in the *Belles Heures* (fol 149v). Another piece that could have been painted by Johan Maelwael, at least in part, is a panel in the Louvre showing the crucified Christ and the martyrdom of St Denis. Other pieces that may be related to him are a Madonna with child in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (inv. nr. 87.1) and a now-lost portrait of the duke that is known from a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Burgundy Collection XX, fol. 308). Again we can conclude that, although the documents tell us a great deal about this once so important painter, the vicissitudes of time have made it almost impossible to connect the painter to his works. Very little is known for certain. This having been said, it should be noted that more is known about Johan van Maelwael and the Van Limburg brothers than of most painters, as they were celebrated artists in their own time who worked for notorious patrons, for which reason there are even contemporary descriptions of their works.

The uncertainties pertaining to medieval art, its provenance, dating and authorship make it quite a formidable task to recreate the cultural background of the duchy of Gelre in the time that the Van Limburg brothers grew up there. This task is attempted by Harry Tummers, who deals with the sculpture in the duchy of Gelre in the period from 1380 to 1430, and by Rob Dückers, who discusses manuscript production in the northern Netherlands in about the same period, in order to find out what the Van Limburg brothers owed to their native background and what they gave back in return.

As for the sculpture, very little seems to be left from the period under consideration. What there is, was, in Tummers' view, mainly imported from the surrounding regions, and so a substantial part of his article is devoted to the contemporary centres of medieval sculpture in Europe and in the regions around Gelre. As a consequence we learn very little about the state of the art in Gelre itself. It is somewhat surprising to find that there is no mention of various sculptures from Nijmegen, although some sculpture from here is illustrated in other articles in the volume, i. e. a keystone depict-

ing Christ the Saviour from the northern porch of the church of St Stephen in Nijmegen that is illustrated on p. 30 and a beautiful keystone with an angel bearing the heraldic device of the lords of Heumen from the church of the Dominican friars in Nijmegen (cat. nr. 19). With regards Nijmegen, Tummers only mentions a wooden madonna in the church of Heumen, which in his view may have been made in Nijmegen, as after all, this was the only large city in the vicinity of Heumen. For the rest, the article concentrates on grouping the few surviving works. Tummers distinguishes four groups, i.e. from the Lower Rhine region, Cleves, Gelre and Upper Gelre, not on the basis of stylistic criteria, but on the basis of provenance. What emerges is a rather disparate corpus of sculpture that seems to have very little to do with the Van Limburg brothers.

Dealing with manuscript production the northern Netherlands Rob Dücker is more successful in defining the relationship between the Van Limburg brothers and contemporary painting in the duchy of Gelre.

The following articles are devoted to the works by the Van Limburg brothers. Rob Dücker first discusses the *Bible Moralisée* in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Ms. fr. 166), which according to him indeed contains work produced by the three brothers, but which cannot, in his view, be identified as the *Bible Moralisée* commissioned by Philip the Bold, which they worked on in the years 1402–1404 (as is held by some authors in the present volume). He has good reasons to speak out against this identification. The most important of these is the fact that the Van Limburg brothers only illuminated three sections of the book and may have been responsible for the under-drawing of a fourth, whereas the book was to contain some 40 sections. Considering that the commission was well-paid for, that the contract stipulates they were not allowed to take on any other commissions during the four-year period on which they were supposed to work on the book, and that the duke was well pleased by the results, it seems unlikely we are dealing with the same book. The *Bible Moralisée* made for the duke must therefore be considered as lost, while the specimen in the Bibliothèque Nationale presents us with a work on which there is no contemporary documentation.

The volume further contains an essay on the *Belles Heures de Jean de Berry* (Timothy B. Husband) and another on the *Très Riches Heures* (Patricia Stirnemann) in which it is suggested – for historical and heraldic reasons – that the book was intended to commemorate the third wedding of Jean de Berry's favourite daughter Marie in 1400. Roger S. Wieck deals with Jean de Berry's bibliophile passion; Anne S. Korteweg with the layout and form of the Books of Hours made for Jean de Berry; Margaret Lawson with the materials and techniques used by the Van Limburg brothers; Jean-Pierre van Rijen focuses on the contemporary goldsmiths' work and the splendour of Jean de Berry's court and brings to the fore the few surviving examples of such work still in existence today; and Boudewijn Bakker describes the Van Limburg brothers as painters of landscapes.

It is intriguing to see that the compositions of the Van Limburg brothers found at least some resonance elsewhere, even as far away as their home region. For one, the

brothers worked mainly for private patrons who desired and could afford the very best and who, no doubt, wanted their books to remain exclusive. Access to the books, once finished, would have been restricted. So how then and by what means were compositions by the Van Limburg brothers transferred to other artists? Did artists travel to see each other's works? Did they use model books? Did they make drawings of their work which they sold to other artists? Such questions are of some pertinence as the same problem arises with regards the Italian parallels that the work of the brothers themselves shows up. Did they travel to Italy, or did they get their information from sketches and drawings that had found their way over the Alps? Questions such as these are addressed by Victor M. Schmidt and Gregory T. Clark. How difficult it is to resolve them is apparent from their rather different views on the nature of the Italian influence in the work of the Van Limburg brothers. Whereas Schmidt can find no evidence that the painters went to Italy and harbours serious doubts as to whether the brothers actually travelled across the Alps, Clark considers such a journey highly likely.

All in all, although a great deal is known about the Van Limburg brothers and other artists of the period around 1400, much concerning the art-works remains conjectural and no consensus has been reached on even some of the most basic issues.

The present volume thus presents the reader with an overall view of the work made by the Van Limburg brothers and with a reasonable idea of the 'status quaestionis', even though, to my mind, the issues at stake, and the problems in solving them, could sometimes have been presented more clearly. After all, an exhibition catalogue is intended not only for the specialist but for a more general public also.

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Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Hrsg.): King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry (*Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies*, 3); Woodbridge, Suffolk u. Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press 2005; IX u. 202 S. u. Abb.; ISBN 1-84383-124-4; £ 45.– bzw. \$ 90.–

Diese Aufsatzsammlung geht auf Vorträge zurück, die im April 2002 im *Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies* gehalten wurden, ergänzt durch einen Beitrag von Sarah Larrat Keefer und eine Einführung von Herbert Edward John Cowdrey. Vier Aufsätze sind König Harold (Teil 1) und sieben dem Teppich von Bayeux (Teil 2) gewidmet. Die Verbindung zwischen diesen beiden Themenkomplexen ist dadurch gegeben, daß Harold einer der Hauptakteure des Bayeuxteppichs ist. Sein Name erscheint in den lateinischen Beischriften des Stickereierwerks 21-, der Wilhelms des Eroberers 19mal. Die beiden Teile dieses Tagungsbandes stehen dennoch disparat nebeneinander.

Cowdrey benutzt die Gelegenheit seiner „kritischen Einführung“ vor allem dazu, die 1988 in seinen Aufsätzen ‚Towards an interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry‘