In the first decade of the fifteenth century, somewhere in the South Netherlands, the Apocalypse (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, néerlandais 3) was written in Dutch (dietsche) and illuminated. No one knows with any certainty exactly where this happened. Erwin Panofsky in his famous Early Netherlandish Painting (1953) argued convincingly for Liège, later Maurits Smeyers (1993) claimed it for Bruges (and did so again in his standard work Vlaamse Miniaturen (1998)). The manuscript cannot possibly have been written and illuminated in Liège, nor is it certain that it comes from Bruges (as convincingly demonstrated by De Hommel-Steenbakkers, 2001). Based on a detailed analysis of the language and traces of dialect in the Dutch text of the Apocalypse, Nelly de Hommel-Steenbakkers concluded that the manuscript originated in Flanders, or perhaps in Brabant. It might well have come from Bruges though, a flourishing town in the field of commerce and culture, but other places, such as Ghent, Ypres, Tournai and maybe Brussels, cannot be ruled out; other possible candidates are the intellectual and cultural centres in the larger abbeys.

In the Apocalypse manuscript the accent is firmly on the complicated and high-quality page-sized miniatures. The manuscript may definitely be characterized as a luxury item — a highly representative luxury item. The person who ordered it was surely a member of the wealthy South-Netherlandish élite which on the one hand wanted a complex iconographic pictorial account, and on the other hand wanted to read the Apocalypse in its native tongue, the Flemish vernacular. The figures depicted at the bottom left in the foreground of f. 4 are probably the principal actors in this splendid manuscript: a married couple kneeling in prayer, a second couple close behind them, and opposite them a man kneeling in devout prayer. The foremost couple is clad in opulent, fashionable attire: the man in a brown waisted jacket with extremely wide sleeves, close-fitting red hose and — the height of fashion — matching pointed-toe shoes. A thickly gilded belt accentuates his hips. The woman's vivid red cloak is folded back to reveal a blue-grey dress, a white cloth is draped over her head. The second couple is only partly visible and appears to be dressed entirely in dull red. The older man at the front is also well-dressed in a wide-skirted garment and a dark blue cape with white piping and a dull red lining, the same colour as his hood, his sleeves are bright red. This group of noteworthy persons calls a variety of scenarios to mind. The foremost couple, advised by the somewhat older figure as their (spiritual?) leader and mentor, could perhaps have commissioned the manuscript. An alternative possibility is that the elder man commissioned the manuscript and that the couples kneeling opposite him are his children, married or otherwise. More scenarios are conceivable, but this is all pure conjecture. The only thing we can be certain of is that this is an extremely valuable South Netherlandish manuscript with a well-planned iconographic programme that was almost certainly written in Flanders and illuminated for a wealthy patron from what was probably an urban background. There is no indication that it was commissioned by a man of the church, nor is there any allusion to — or accent on — an aristocratic environment. Stylistically the miniature cycle is consistent with what is known as International Gothic, the highly fashionable late Gothic style of around 1400.

Let us first dwell briefly on the artistic situation in the South Netherlands in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the direct context of the Flemish Apocalypse. This is followed by a general survey of mediaeval painting in the Netherlands, for which we have created four time-blocks: the period prior to ca. 1300, the years 1300 – 1375 and 1375 – 1425 for "full" Gothic, ending with the period spanning the years from 1425 to the beginning of the sixteenth century for the heyday of late Gothic and the transition to the Renaissance. Each of these four time-blocks is introduced by a brief historical setting, followed by a discussion of early Dutch painting and ends with a brief look at the tradition of Apocalypse representations and depictions of John on Patmos in Dutch painting. Throughout all this, and from both a historical and an art-historical point of view, the special accent is on Flanders. Flanders, after all, was the most prosper-
ous region of north-west Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, by which token it also set the political and cultural tone. The heyday of illuminated manuscripts, miniature painting and also the panels of the 'Flemish Primitives' dates back to the fifteenth century. The Flemish Apocalypse marks the beginning of this artistic flowering at the highest level.

THE ARTISTIC SITUATION IN THE NETHERLANDS AROUND 1400

The Flemish Apocalypse was written and illuminated in the western region of the South Netherlands at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The relatively small number of surviving works of art impedes a distinct impression of the artistic context in which this occurred. In the six hundred years that have elapsed since then, much has been lost: objects have gone astray, buildings with sculpture and paintings were constantly modified and restored, archives were destroyed. For one reason or another, most of the works of art have disappeared. Nevertheless, extant examples of Dutch art from around 1400 can aid our attempts to form a picture of surviving art from the Netherlands. Of course the Netherlands were not isolated from the rest of Europe, as becomes immediately apparent when we take a look at the rulers of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Albrecht of Bavaria (Munich 1336 – The Hague 1404), a son of the emperor Louis IV of Bavaria and Margaretha II of Hainault, was Count of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault (1389 – 1404). He was succeeded by his son William VI, who was Count from 1404 to 1417 as well as being the Duke of Bavaria. In 1385 this William married Margaretha of Burgundy, daughter of Duke Philip the Bold. In 1415 their daughter, Jacoba of Bavaria, married the French crown prince, who died however before acceding to the throne. In 1415 Jacoba remarried; her new husband was Duke Jean IV of Brabant. In Flanders Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy and the king of France's brother, had assumed power in 1384 as the consort of the Flemish hereditary ruler, Margaretha of Burgundy. Philip the Bold (Pontoise 1342 – Halle (Brabant) 1404) was succeeded by John the Fearless (Dijon 1371 – Montrealeau 1419), who reinforced Burgundy's power before he himself was murdered. His successor was his son, the renowned Philip the Good (Dijon 1396 – Bruges 1467), who is regarded as the founder of the present-day Dutch and Belgian

Map of the Netherlands
state. Johanna, Duchess of Brabant (Brussels 1342 – 1406), who had enjoyed the support of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy since the death in 1383 of her second husband Wenceslas of Luxemburg. In 1404 she ceded the control of Limburg to his son, Anton of Burgundy (1384 – Agincourt 1415), who in turn succeeded Johanna in Brabant in 1406.

Most churches in the northern Netherlands belonged to the diocese of Utrecht, whose bishop also possessed considerable secular power. In the decades around 1400 this diocese was governed by Frederic III van Blankenheim (1393 – 1423), former bishop of Strasbourg. Brabant belonged to the diocese of Liège, and Flanders to Tournai. From 1389 to 1418 the bishop of Liège was Jean VI of Bavaria (Le Quesnoy – 1425 The Hague), son of the aforementioned Count Albrecht of Holland and Zeeland. He wielded his authority in Liège with the support of William VI of Holland and Jean the Fearless of Burgundy. After William VI's death, the bishop of Liège resigned, married Elisabeth of Görlitz, Duchess of Luxemburg, and governed the county of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault where, after his death by poisoning, his authority passed to Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy.

In the fourteenth century the Flemish town of Bruges was Europe's major commercial centre, at any rate outside the Mediterranean maritime region, where its counterpart was in Venice. Merchandise from all over the western, Christian world found its way to Bruges: goods which were primarily intended for the relatively densely populated and prosperous Netherlands, but which of course were sold all over the world. In the fifteenth century Bruges lost its monopoly in certain fields, as well as being politically discredited; nevertheless, it continued to thrive. At the same time, as an almost natural consequence of flourishing trade and great prosperity, Bruges had become one of Europe's leading cultural and artistic centres. Other important centres in the South Netherlands were Ghent, Ypres, Louvain, Malines, Brussels, Maastricht, Bergen op Zoom, Bois-le-Duc, Tournai and Bergen (Hainault).

The arts flourished, notably in the courts of the rulers and in particular among the Burgundians' various residences, in the larger cities with their collegiate churches and secular buildings, for the wealthier abbeys, for prosperous merchants and for the nobility. Examples of prestigious and richly embellished architecture of around 1400 are the town hall of Bruges, 1376 – 1421 and the east side of 1380 – ca. 1425 of the church of Saint John in Bois-le-Duc. Silversmiths and goldsmiths thrived in the centres of all of the more prosperous towns: precious metal objects were a safe investment, not only in terms of ostentation and prestige but because they were literally convertible into cash in an emergency. This was true of both secular and religious objects, and accounts for the dearth of surviving examples of the gold- and silversmith's art of around 1400. Brass and bronze work were of high quality in the Meuse region and in other areas of the South Netherlands, where all kinds of religious and profane objects were produced, ranging from candlesticks, decanters and chandeliers to gravestones, baptismal fonts and chiming bells. In the course of the fifteenth century, bronze-casting was to assume greater importance for the development of
military ordnance pieces. Larger and smaller cannons were needed by the various armies, particularly the army of the expansionist Burgundian empire. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when vast quantities of wood-carving were produced and exported throughout the western world, regional styles began to develop in about 1400. Illuminated manuscripts usually came from monastery scriptoria, but were also made in urban workshops, which often makes it possible to group the manuscripts stylistically and assign them to individual production places. Such was certainly the case with panel painting, whose development began in the late thirteenth century on. A fine example is Philip the Bold's reconstructed travelling altar, which was kept in the Chartreuse of Champmol in Dijon until the late eighteenth century, when it collapsed. It had probably been painted in the South Netherlands or in one of the Burgundian court's ducal castles, the painter may have come from Guelders. Certainly as valuable and status-enhancing were the woven tapestries that adorned churches and convents, castles and army tents. In many Flemish and Brabant towns, late-Gothic and Renaissance weaving was of an extremely high standard. The earliest examples date back to around 1400. Little more is known about more popular culture, of which only a few material examples survive. Basically, one might say that the lower echelons of society saw themselves in terms of elite culture, at the same time upholding their own traditions.
The historical situation up to about 1300

We use the terms "the Low Countries" and/or "the Netherlands" to describe a region around the lower reaches of the big rivers: Scheldt, Maas and Rhine, or in other words the mainly flat delta region that extends from the river Somme in the south-west to the Eems in the north-east. It was not until after the Middle Ages that this chain of regions came to be seen as a more or less closely-knit cultural entity. Around 1540 the spoken and written dialects of this region were described for the first time by the umbrella terms "Nederduytscb" or "Nederlantsche Tale". It was not until the sixteenth century that the region was referred to by the term "Nederland" (singular) or "Nederlanten" (plural), with "Belgium" and "Belgica" as Latin equivalents and "Pays-Bas" in French.

In the Middle Ages there was often little historical cohesion among these regions. Shortly before the Christian era the Romans pushed forward into the Netherlands and for a number of decades even the Frisians were under Roman rule. Nevertheless, the Rhine was designated as the border, the lines. To the south of the border formed by the Rhine, in the province of Germania Inferior, "romanisation" was succeeded by conversion to Christianity, and trading contacts with the more northern areas were established. From 260 A.D. on, the Germans occupied Roman territory, and by 402 A.D. all the legions north of the Alps had pulled back. The German Franconians advanced southwards to the Seine, where they became romanized to a considerable extent. The Saxons and Frisians settled further north. To this day the borderline between the Roman and German influences established at that time is still reflected by the Dutch-French language border in Belgium.

In the seventh and eighth centuries the Franconians expanded their strength northwards, thereby regaining their former territory. Christianity could now be practised again, although it would last until about 1000 A.D. before the Low Countries were converted in their entirety. This was not due to the Franconians, but largely to Anglo-Saxon preachers. Under Charlemagne, in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the Netherlands were among the most thriving regions of the empire, albeit in a remote corner. The governmental system was soon accepted, vassalism was not, or barely: the watery region was suitable for trading, but not for land-ownership. The aristocracy remained relatively weak, the peasants retained their freedom. After the Treaty of Verdun (843 A.D.) this area, with the exception of Flanders west of the Scheldt, was assigned to the Middle Reich and later (in 925 A.D.) to the German Reich. The growing power of the regional vassals resulted in important power groups such as the counties of Holland, Flanders and Hainault, the dukedoms of Guelders and Brabant, the regions of Croningen, Frisia and Drenthe, and the diocese of Utrecht. The largely agricultural society of the seventh century to the eleventh was followed by a vigorous growth in commerce. In addition to the old towns, which continued to exist as religious and domanial administrative centres, new trading towns were established, and notably in Flanders and Holland these towns thrived. The guilds began to appear as early as the eleventh century; these local associations of craftsmen and merchants enjoyed monopoly status. Nearly everywhere the merchants' guilds are the oldest, in most towns the artists did not emerge independently until after the Middle Ages.

Romanesque and early Gothic painting

Pre-Gothic painting is very rare in the Netherlands. Although the occasional illuminated book survived in the South Netherlands, and although a few wall-paintings which may be identified as Romanesque have been handed down, hardly any stained glass still exists, and only a few panels survive. Although in the case of illuminated manuscripts it is possible to distinguish characteristics of writers, illuminators and scriptoria, only a fraction of the original manuscript production survives. In the case of the other pictorial forms, such distinctions are virtually or entirely impossible: the older monuments of painting, due to their scarcity, have become incidental examples. It is however often possible to arrive at a classification or characterization on the basis of the better-known book illuminations.
There are rare reports in the ninth and tenth centuries of paintings in churches, abbeys and occasionally palaces. In a few cases we know some personal details about outstanding artists from this period, some of whom appear at the same time to have been miniaturists, painters or stained-glass artists, in a few cases even sculptors. Be that as it may, no actual work of any kind remains, and documentation is extremely brief: in many cases not even the basic iconographic information is known. The oldest preserved monumental painting in the North Netherlands is in St. Peter's church in Utrecht. It is a badly damaged representation of a Majestas Domini dating from the middle of the eleventh century. Not until the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries do we find more remnants of painted walls and vaulting, notably in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Tournai, Saint Bavo's Abbey in Ghent and the Bergkerk (St. Nicholas Church) in Deventer. In Roermond and the Frisian villages Bozum and Eilsum, thirteenth-century examples of a Majestas Domini were found. A spectacular find in 1992 revealed the wall-paintings in St. Laurence's Church at Ename (Oudenaarde, Flanders), where the considerable remains of an eleventh or twelfth-century Majestas Domini came to light. A separate category consists of paintings of graves, mostly representations of the Crucifixion and of the Virgin and Child; the oldest date from the thirteenth century and this type of grave remained in use up and into the sixteenth. Paintings such as these have been found chiefly in and around Bruges and Ghent, and also further south, in places such as Courtrai and Valenciennes, as well as in the North Netherlands, for example Dordrecht, Middelburg and Utrecht. The earliest extant stained glass from the Netherlands was found during excavations (Eime, 11th century, Stavelot 12th century, Ghent, the Dominican monastery, ca. 1300). Small fragments of thirteenth-century glass remained in Saint Gudule's cathedral in Brussels and in the Cistercian Ter Duinen abbey in Koksijde, Flanders. Archive reports of stained-glass windows and glass painters in the Netherlands go back to the eleventh century. One of the earliest surviving commissions was for glass decorated with gryphons in foliate and strapwork, it was made between 1060 and 1070 by a master Roger of Reims for the church at Saint Hubert's abbey near Ansly in the Ardennes.

In the course of the thirteenth century a flourishing urban culture led to a flourishing of the arts in general and painting in particular. The lines in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parsifal, written before 1215, are famous, the gist being that the fame of painters from Maastricht had spread as far as the Wartburg in Thuringia. We do not really know what their work looked like, not even from the recent analysis of remnants of late twelfth-century painted vaulting in the choir.

Painted grave, Saint Salvator Cathedral
of Saint Servatius' Minster in Maastricht. Illuminated books dating from the pre-Romanesque period and whose origin should be sought in the Netherlands were only occasionally preserved, and should be placed in a very wide Western context. Not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries were scriptoria installed in the large abbeys of the Netherlands, notably in the south. They enable us to identify the production of, for instance, Liège, Stavelot, Saint-Amand and Marchiennes. From the first half of the thirteenth century onwards, the Gothic advance was slow but unstoppable, beginning with the illuminated manuscripts emerging from the monastery at that time. In Bruges, for instance, from about 1240 on, psalters were being produced for the well-off middle classes, and illuminators are documented there from 1291.

Little is known about artists’ identities prior to 1300 or thereabouts. Reports are almost always incidental, or based on snippets of information. Now and then an individual artist comes to life, such as Master Johannes of the late tenth century and first half of the eleventh. With this master – none of whose work survives and who illustrates perfectly how "undutch" the arts were in the Low Countries in the period preceding the late Middle Ages – we end this brief early historical survey.

Master Johannes was an Italian priest who worked as a painter in Liège at the court of Bishop Notker (972 – 1008) and Notker's successor, Bishop Balderik II (1008 – 1018), who commissioned Johannes to decorate the choir of St. Jacob's Benedictine abbey in Liège, where he is buried. According to Liège sources, Emperor Otto III had sent for him from Aix to paint the decorations of his palace and perhaps also of the Palatinate Chapel. Not only did Johannes come from outside the Low Countries – he also visited highly placed patrons in other places.

1330 – 1375 EMERGING GOTHIC

The historical situation from 1300 to 1375

By the last quarter of the thirteenth century the power of the German emperor in the Netherlands had dwindled considerably. In 1300, by which time the line of the Dutch counts had expired, the German Emperor Albrecht of Hapsburg made an attempt to exert his influence on its successors. As a reaction to a summons to attend a Reichstag in Nimwegen, Jan II, who had installed himself as Count of Holland, appeared with an army, and the emperor departed. The German emperors had lost almost all their influence on the Netherlands, which indeed denied any fiefship to the German Reich. Links with England and France were stronger. During the Hundred Years' War that broke out in 1337, England received the support of a number of Dutch nobles and a considerable amount of trading went on between the Netherlands and England. The king of France attempted to impose his domination on Flanders, which was in any case formally his territory. It was with this in mind that he collaborated with the dukes of Guelders and the counts of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault.

Flanders' struggle for freedom in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries resulted – thanks to the collaboration of Flemish townsfolk with their count Gwijde of Dampierre – in independence from France (the "battle of the golden spurs", 1302, from which the Flemings emerged as victors), despite which Flanders continued to be divided by the contrasts between France and England. The Counts of Flanders sided with the King of France, whereas the peasantry and townsfolk were clearly oriented towards England for economic reasons. Things went so far that in 1340 Edward III of England was ceremoniously installed as king of France in Ghent after the count of Flanders had left the country. The major Flemish towns – Ypres, Bruges, Ghent – determined policy, catering largely to their own interests. The English king then shifted his attention to battlefields further south, and Louis II of Male succeeded in regaining his authority as Count of Flanders (1346 – 1384). This involved the extremely severe treatment of the craftsmen's guilds in the major towns, notably in Ghent. Louis II of Male's links with France were fewer than his father's (Louis I of Nevers), and by the time his father-in-law Duke Jean III of Brabant died, Louis had succeeded in recruiting Malines and Antwerp. Bruges was the most thriving metropolis of the north, where trade was dominated by foreigners: Italians and Spaniards, French and English and, first and foremost, the Hanseatic League (North Germany, the Baltic, the North Netherlands). Nevertheless, due to the silting up of the
river Zwin, which flowed into the North Sea, the seafaring ships grew progressively larger, and the protectionist policy of the Bruges guilds eventually weakened Bruges' status as a port and trading centre.

In 1369 Louis of Male married off his daughter Margaretha to Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. This union had vital consequences for the entire Netherlands. The fact that Margaretha would inherit the County of Flanders rekindled the French king's hopes of controlling that thriving region. From France, Philip the Bold did indeed support the Flemish count in his efforts to establish his dominance in the towns. In 1384 Louis of Male died, Philip and his wife Margaretha became count and countess of Flanders, and peace was restored.

The policy of Duke Jean of Brabant (1312 – 1355) was also aimed at steering a middle course between the interests of France and England, whose influence he endeavoured to expand towards the north and east, at the same time he strove for unity within the dukedom. His influence is appropriately reflected by his daughters' marriages: Margaretha wed the count of Flanders, Maria married the duke of Guelders, and Johanna of Brabant and Limburg became the wife of the count of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault and subsequently of Wenceslas, Count of Luxemburg. After Wenceslas' death in 1383 countess Johanna pursued a strongly Burgundy-oriented policy and was duly succeeded at her death in 1406 by the second son of Philip the Bold and Margaretha, Anton of Burgundy, who became the Duke of Brabant, Limburg and the Lands of Overmaze.

After the murder of Floris V, count of Holland, in 1296, it took only a few years for power over Holland to pass into the hands of the House of Hainault. In 1304 William III became count of Holland and Zeeland. He was related in direct lineage to the king of France, the German emperor, the king of England, and to the Count of Gulik. His son, William IV, married Johanna of Brabant. In the French-English conflict William III sided with Edward III of England and promoted the English cause among the other Dutch rulers. William subsequently became known by his byname "the Good" because of his policy of peace and quiet, which brought prosperity to his region. On the other hand his son William IV, count of Holland (1337 – 1345), took part in campaigns during the Hundred Years' War, he fought against Utrecht and the diocese of Utrecht before being killed on a military expedition against the Frisians. Through his eldest daughter Margaretha, who was married to the emperor Louis of Bavaria, the House of Bavaria now assumed power in Holland and Zeeland, and subsequently in Hainault too. Under Albrecht of Bavaria, political differences in Holland and Zeeland were resolved with England thwarted, as did the textile industry in Leiden, Hanseatic merchants brought prosperity to towns such as Dordrecht and Amsterdam. Relations with Burgundy were cemented by the celebration of a double wedding in 1385: the Dutch heir to the throne, William VI, married one of Philip the Bold's daughters, and Philip's son John the Fearless of Burgundy married Margaretha of Holland, Albrecht's daughter.

Utrecht, until around 1300 the most important mercantile town in the North Netherlands, lost ground to other towns and to changes in the watercourses. The power of the craftsmen's guilds increased, leaving Utrecht to lapse into a more regional centre. From a religious point of view it did of course remain a bishopric and as such the centre of a large diocese. Bishops were often directly involved in a variety of political and family issues and frequently relegated their spiritual tasks to others. In the first half of the fourteenth century the Dutch influence predominated. Things went so far that by 1331 Guelders and Holland
were sharing their influence in the diocese of Utrecht, while the bishops looked on helplessly. Stronger-minded bishops and especially the affiliated towns, nobility and chapters in the diocese began to put an end to this situation in the mid-fourteenth century—in a positive sense: by restoring the political power of the bishop.

In the spiritual field the Modern Devotion movement which began in the North Netherlands gained immense importance in North-Western Europe. In Brussels and subsequently in Groenendaal, just outside the monastery he founded on the outskirts of Brussels, Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293 – 1381) contrasted the life and suffering of Christ with our worldly, materialistic view of life with the Brabant brand of mysticism. He wrote his ideas in everyday language instead of traditional, elitist church Latin. The internationally schooled preacher and mystic Geert Groote (1340 – 1384), who was influenced partly by Ruysbroeck and was born and died in Deventer, is regarded as the founder of Devotio Moderna, a successful religious movement which was characterised by a practical, inward-looking and christocentric spirituality. The focus was on every Christian’s personal experience of his faith. As well as translating work by Ruysbroeck into Latin, Geert Groote wrote many Latin texts himself, one of which was a Latin horarium on which he based a ghetidenboec or book of hours in Middle-Netherlands for readers who had no Latin. Laymen could use this book of hours to plan their whole day, dominated by prayer—not collectively like monks, but individually, rooted in personal devotional conviction. This fifteenth-century collection of prayers was the most frequently read book in the Netherlands and a tangible example of the part played by Modern Devotion in Dutch faith.

Painting, 1300 – 1375

Prior to 1300, painting in the Netherlands did not have a distinctive personal character but was characterized by relatively diverse elements. In the course of the 14th century, however, a specifically Dutch form of painting began to emerge: artists selected specific stylistic and iconographic elements from the West-European movements to be gradually developed into a highly symbolic realism. International Gothic, from 1350 until the early fifteenth century a popular and indeed highly fashionable and sophisticated movement, plays an important role here. In the urban centres of the Low Countries, master-painters worked for the aristocracy, the clergy, the middle classes and local authorities. Archive sources, albeit sparse, have yielded all sorts of information about fourteenth-century painters and their work, little of which survives, however. On the basis of that work and on various reports from a number of chiefly South Netherlands towns, an overall impression of the period from 1300 to 1375 follows here.

The town of Valenciennes, Valencijn in Dutch nomenclature, was important from the start. As early as 1328 – 1329 a certain Jean Sevrin painted a panel with a Madonna for the Count of Hainault. This same Sevrin crops up in 1348 and 1354 in the municipal accounts as the purveyor of hundreds of flags and streamers. In the third quarter of the century a few renowned painters were working in Valenciennes, where painters were not organized in a guild of their own but worked in a collective guild along with woodcarvers, embroiderers, saddlers, goldsmiths and glaziers. In 1354 Jean de Beaumetz, Philip the Bold’s later court painter, who probably hailed from Atrecht, worked on the decoration of the town hall in Valenciennes, where he was granted citizenship in 1361. André Beauneveu, a sculptor/painter/miniaturist, was perhaps born there. Between 1363 and 1385 Beauneveu worked mainly in Valenciennes, to which he returned briefly in 1394. He was active from 1360 until his death in 1402 and extremely well known as a versatile artist in his own day. He worked as a sculptor in Paris for King Charles V of France and also received commissions in Tournai, Malines and Ypres from the English court and from the Flemish count Louis of Male. Towards the end of his life he moved to the court of Duke Jean de Berry, for whom he had worked back in 1384. Up to 1437 André Beauneveu’s name was still to be found in various Valenciennes documents pertaining to his estate. A Master Louis, Leys le peintre of Mons (Bergen) and perhaps the same as “Louis le Grand” who in 1366 worked in his native town of Cambrai, decorated the castle at Valenciennes with heraldic paintings and with allegorical and anecdotal representations. Only two illuminators have been found in fourteenth-century archives: in 1342 a certain Robert de Valenciennes illuminated books of songs.
for the chapter of Sainte-Waudru in Bergen (Mons), and a Nakefaire was paid by the town in 1367 for writing and decorating an ordonnance.

Wall-paintings from Saint Quentin's church in Tournai still exist. For all its primitive rendering, the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, probably dating from the latter half of the fourteenth century, evokes associations with Italian frescos and more particularly with Giotto's cycle in Padua, as well as with the mural of the Last Supper in Ghent from the middle of the fourteenth century.

Ypres already had a municipal painter in 1311, Henri Mannin. In Bergen (Mons) a certain Jehan de Marchiennes delivered to the aforementioned chapter of 'sainte Wautrut' a stained-glass window which was billed to Jeanne de Valois, the wife of count William III of Holland and Hainault.

The names of a considerable number of 14th-century painters are known in Bruges. Shortly after the middle of the century the saddlers, goldsmiths and glaziers worked alongside the painters in an association which already possessed certain guild privileges. Book illuminators were barred from this "artists' guild", though. In 1369 Margaretha van Male married the Burgundian duke Philip the Bold. The celebrations gave rise to splendid festive decorations in which many painters and sculptors were involved. A century later, Bruges reacted similarly when the marriage of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York was celebrated with impressive decorations in whose production Hugo van der Goes, among others, played a part.

The Church of Our Lady in Bruges was, according to a fifteenth-century description, covered entirely with murals; a few fragments survive, one of which shows an almost lifesize male saint who is traditionally identified as Saint Louis. This decoration from 1340 or thereabouts is of high quality and emphatical-
ly French in character. In Saint James' church at Bruges there are more decorations which were painted in the first half of the fourteenth century. Far more graphic in style, they may be compared with the large figures of apostles at Bijloke abbey in Ghent. Painted graves are encountered in more than fifteen Bruges churches and chapels, the majority date from the fourteenth century. This distinctive aforementioned phenomenon, which is encountered chiefly in the diocese of Tournai, probably originated in Bruges.

In Ghent, a separate "Neerijnhe van den schilders" (painting trade) is mentioned as early as 1377, a guild structure which admitted sculptors and glass-painters. From archive records we learn that the painter Jan van der Asselt, who was already working for Louis van Male in 1364, became court painter to the count a year later. This brought him an annual stipend, coupled with the restriction that he was not permitted to paint for anyone else without the count's explicit permission. In 1365 he painted a series of portraits of the counts and countesses of Flanders for the royal chapel in Ghent and in 1372 for the chapel in Courtrai. A few figures from the latter series still exist, most of them spoiled by restoration. Jan van der Asselt probably designed the funerary monument for the chapel which was consigned to the chapel at Courtrai and for which he travelled to Courtrai from Ghent in 1374 while the sculptor and painter André Beauneveu travelled from Valenciennes to Courtrai. Van der Asselt did not work for Louis van Male after 1382, by which time he had probably been replaced as court painter by Melchior Broederlam. He did however supply paintings in Ghent in 1386 and 1389 – 1390 to Philip the Bold, Louis' son-in-law and successor.

In the first half of the fourteenth century the chapel of a charitable institution in Ghent, the Hospice of Saint John and Saint Paul, was completely redecorated with wall-paintings which in the nineteenth century were rediscovered, described and copied, and of which the last neglected remains disappeared completely when the building was demolished in 1911. These murals were important not only because of their early dating and their relatively good condition when they were found, a major factor was that a large iconographic ensemble of chapel wall-paintings with exceptional elements had been found. Louis I of Nevers and his son Louis II of Male were depicted here with the latter's wife, Margaretha of Brabant, under the Tree of Jesse, perhaps as donors. Various scenes from the New Testament were also recognized, the hospice's two patron saints (John and Paul), and a cycle of sixteen scenes associated with life, death and miracles performed by John the apostle and evangelist. But the most spectacular discovery was a procession of civic militiamen – some of them armed groups of craftsmen's guilds, others specific marksmen's guilds – depicted on the side-walls of the chapel and making their way towards the altar.

In Ghent a few monumental murals dating from about 1350 remained in the refectory of the former abbey at Bijloke. The Last Supper is depicted over the entire width of the hall (31 x 10 m). High up above it is a representation of Christ Blessing Mary, the two figures seated side by side on a celestial throne. The two gigantic saints on the west wall are Christopher and John the Baptist. Italian influences have been suggested, but Dutch characteristics can also be observed, for example the stylistic elements in later
fourteenth-century painting, like those seen in the work of André Beauneveu, Jaquemart de Hesdin and Jean Boudolf. In 1915 a fourteenth-century Last Supper was found in the refectory of the Dominican monastery at Ghent, so was an equally appropriate Dominic's Miracle of the Bread. These have faded almost completely. Judging by the surviving fragments, the chapel of the water fortress of Laarne, near Ghent, was completely decorated in the course of the fourteenth century; above the traditional curtain painting were the twelve apostles, numerous saints, a Last Judgement, scenes from the New and Old Testaments, etc. Elsewhere in Ghent, more fourteenth-century murals were discovered in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, little remains of them except for reports and after-drawings. All this makes it clear that wall-painting was of a high standard and frequently practised in fourteenth-century Ghent. Ghent should not be seen as an exception here, but rather as a clear indication of the situation in the prosperous towns of the South Netherlands.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Brussels and Louvain both functioned as administrative centres and residences for the Dukes of Brabant. Wenceslas and Johanna stayed in the Brussels palace on Koudenberg at regular intervals, after Wenceslas died in 1383, Duchess Johanna chose Brussels as her permanent residence. The ducal court naturally functioned as patrons. In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, for example, a certain Jan van Wouluwe painted repeatedly for the duchess, as well as for Duke Philip the Bold. This Jan van Wouluwe was a priest; as a painter he bears witness to the wide context within which that art-form should be regarded. For Johanna of Brabant he illuminated manuscripts (1380, 1381), painted a clock in 1384 and that same year a diptych for her oratorium; in 1386 he decorated the corridor to the chapel in the palace on Koudenberg. In 1400 Jan van Wouluwe became a member of the Brotherhood of Saint James in Brussels. In the Brotherhood of Saint James of Compostela a few practitioners of the various art forms came together in Brussels in 1357, including four glass-painters. In 1387 the first extant statutes were formulated for the Brussels guild of painters, which had existed for some time by then and in which book illuminators, goldsmiths and glaziers were united.

In the Meuse region, Maastricht and Liège were centres with both religious and urban traditions dating back to the Romanesque period. Predictably, almost no names or works have been handed down to us from the fourteenth century. In a twelfth- or thirteenth-century village church in Genk (Belgian Limburg) Saint Hubert is depicted on horseback in a niche in front of a red background. He is accompanied by dogs and has a hunting horn. This work was probably put in place shortly after the church was built, making it one of the oldest representations of St. Hubert during the hunt. A cycle of early fourteenth-century decorations, including scenes from the life of Saint Hubert, can still be seen in the village church in Sint-Hubrechts-Hern in Limburg. These paintings possess stylistically international features which reflect Byzantine, Italian and especially French influences. In about 1300 the little village church in Limbricht was presented with an attractive decorative ensemble which resembles the remnants of murals in the nearby village of Aldeneik and which may be regarded as a simplified reflection of examples in Cologne. The Church of the Beguines at Saint Truiden is interesting for a series of murals dating from ca. 1300, ca. 1490-1510, ca. 1550-1575 and ca. 1600 respectively, the earliest examples of which are a woman with the Vera Icon (the True Face of Christ), a few apostles, and fragments from a Last Judgement and a Coronation of the Virgin. A large wall-painting in the Dominican church at Maastricht bears the foundation text and the year, 1337. The scenes include the Benediction of the Virgin, scenes from the life of the Ten Thousand Martyrs of Armenia, and episodes from the life of Thomas Aquinas, who had been canonized in 1323. Originally, the much-faded surface must have been richly embellished with colour and gold.

In Utrecht there are still a few early fourteenth-century wall-paintings to be seen. In St. Peter's church there is not only a grave similar to those found in Bruges around 1300, but also an early fourteenth-century Calvary with the mourning Mary, John and Peter on one of the crossing pillars. This mural, which dates from about 1310, displays Cologne influences. In the remains of the chapel of a former canon's house in the cathedral chapter there is a wall-painting dating from 1320-1330 and in exceptionally good condition. On the back wall of the piscina – the double wash-basin beside the altar in a wall-niche of the chapel – a priest washing his hands during Mass is depicted at an altar mensa; an acolyte is pouring water over the priest's outstretched hands. Stylistically, the painting is highly consistent with a few Cologne panels, demonstrating that Utrecht could produce work of an equally high standard. There was ample collabora-
tion between Cologne and Utrecht, and the cultural climate in fourteenth-century Utrecht will have been a blend of Flemish and French, Westphalian and Cologne elements. The commemorative table of the Lords of Montfoort, probably painted in Utrecht in 1380, is largely indebted to French and South-Netherlandish miniatures, while Hendrik van Rijn’s epitaph of 1363 is associated with both contemporary Cologne and Bohemian painting. Utrecht manuscripts were already being illuminated in the first half of the fourteenth century. In 1322 a new citizen of Utrecht was registered as "Michiel van der Borch verlichter" [illuminator]. In 1332 this miniaturist completed a richly illuminated copy of the "Rijmbijbel" (rhyming bible) by the writer Jacob van Maerlant, who was born in about 1230 near Bruges. Stylistically, later North Netherlandish book illuminations can be associated with this "Rijmbijbel", at the same time also displaying correspondences with Flemish painting.

Glass painting often had a strongly representative character. In the later Middle Ages the authorities were fond of showing themselves as presenters of stained glass as a means of enhancing their status and power. A few examples of noble patronage have already been cited here. A nice one is the commission issued by Louis van Male in 1357, in his capacity as count of Flanders in 1357, for monumental windows bearing his own portrait and likenesses of members of his family to be placed in the large churches over which he had recently gained authority – Malines and Antwerp. Hardly any examples of stained glass pre-dating the end of the fourteenth century still exist. A few fragments of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century painted glass from the cathedral and the cloth-makers’ hall in Tournai were destroyed between 1940 and 1945. A fragment from 1305 is kept in the Groot Begijnhof in Louvain, rendered in a somewhat archaic style, it represents Mary and the Infant Jesus.

Illuminated fourteenth-century manuscripts from the Netherlands are few and far between, most of them having been produced in the most highly developed urban centres, Flanders and Brabant. Stylistically, fourteenth-century Dutch book illumination shows the steady influence of courtly French art, in which Italian elements also play a part. Around 1320 the miniaturist Jean Pucelle was an important figure in Paris. He combined French, Italian and even Dutch elements, as well as playing an important role in developments in the North. Decorative borders became increasingly important and architectural frameworks disappeared. The margins were often surprisingly realistic, with humorous scenes from contemporary life. The popularity of these drôleries was in keeping with a general tendency towards less abstract and more realistic, even individual representation. The species of flowers and plants gradually became deter-
The dedication page made by Jean Boudolf of Bruges, or Hennequin de Bruges, in 1371 in Paris is a more complex affair. On folio lv we see Councillor Jean de Vaudetar presenting a costly bible to Charles V (“the Wise”) of France. De Vaudetar’s pious, law-abiding gesture is immortalized not only for the sake of his earthly and supernal salvation: it is also a subtle reminder to the king of his devotions while he regards the Majestas Domini in his bible: Christ in judgement, surrounded by the four human creatures from the Apocalypse. The earliest painted portraits of patrons with a more public character are those found on epitaphs or memorial tablets. Not only does this representation commemorate the deceased and refer to his salvation in a continued tradition of funerary monuments, he is also portrayed as the patron. In the Calvary depiction, the memorial tablet of canon Hendrik van Rijn, who died in Utrecht in 1363, is the oldest surviving example of this type of patron’s portrait. The devotional ‘group portrait’ of the Lords of Montfoort, painted in Utrecht between 1375 and 1380, is an early example of a family memorial tablet.

Oddly enough, very few foreign painters came to work in the Low Countries, although a growing number of Dutch artists emigrated, chiefly to Paris, to work for the dukes of Burgundy. Prior to 1320 a Pierre de Bruxelles was active as a painter in Paris, working for the countess Mahaut d’Artois in the castle at Conflans, whose walls he decorated with a naval battle and other episodes from the life of the late count. Jehan de Gand, another resident of Paris, supplied the countess with painted panels, “three large paintings and a small round one”, a remarkably early report of this kind of painting. One of the many Dutch painters who worked in Paris in the second half of the fourteenth century was Jean de St. Omer, who collaborated on the work on the grave of Jeanne d’Evreux, and Girard de Hainaut, who painted for the dukes of Burgundy in 1375. Of considerable significance is the aforementioned Flemish painter Jean Boudolf alias Hennequin of Bruges, recorded in Paris from 1368 to 1381. He was court painter to Charles V, but also worked for the prince’s relatives and for courtiers. For Louis d’Anjou, a brother of Charles V and Jean de Berry, this Boudolf designed the famous set of Apocalypse tapestries, which were woven in Paris in the last quarter of
the fourteenth century by Nicolas Bataille and of which a remnant is kept in the cathedral at Angers. Boudolf was the first important miniaturist to work in what is known as the Franco-Flemish manner, a hybrid style based on Dutch and French elements and strongly influenced by the Dutch artists who emigrated from the Low Countries to France.

Very few panels painted prior to 1375-1380 are still to be found in the Netherlands. A remarkable example is a altarpiece wing acquired privately by the Royal Museums of Fine Art in Brussels in 1973 and presumed to be of fourteenth-century and South Netherlandish provenance. On the outside is a full-length representation of Saint Dominic, two zones on the back represent a Calvary and a Resurrection respectively. The frontal portrayal of the order’s founder on the outer panel is somewhat stiff, with bold contours; the inside, more important and refined, is unmistakably Gothic in character. The original frame is decorated with a few coats of arms. In the upper half we see the crucified Christ mourned by the three Marys and John and flanked by prophets. The sun and moon can be seen above the cross in the sky. The painted moulding between the two scenes is inscribed “SUREXIT: DMS’ DE SEPULCHRO”, “The Lord ascending from the grave” as a caption for the scene below: Christ stepping out of the sarcophagus, flanked by two angels, a quartet of sleeping soldiers sitting in front of the sarcophagus. The depicted patron involuntarily calls to mind two other rarely documented fourteenth-century Dominican decorations: the large mural of 1337 in the Dominican monastery at Maastricht, and the frescos in the refectory of the erstwhile Dominican monastery in Ghent, a Last Supper and a Meal, showing the founder of the order amidst his monks.

Nor does much North-Netherlandish material survive on a panel from the first half of the fourteenth century. Hendrik van Rijn’s aforementioned Utrecht memorial tablet dates from the third quarter of the fourteenth century. The memorial tablet of the Lords of Montfoort, also referred to above, dates from 1375-80. However, it is not until the last quarter of the fourteenth century that we have sufficient examples to enable us to perceive a clearer context, to identify shared characteristics and to distinguish relationships with neighbouring regions.
1375 – 1425, the historical situation

1384 was a year of decisive significance for the Netherlands. The Count of Flanders, Louis II of Male, died and was succeeded by Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. Philip owed his new status to his marriage in 1369 to Louis' daughter Margaretha. In the past he had helped his father-in-law to suppress the revolt of the Flemish towns (1379-1385). This revolt had a twofold character – political, the independent towns opposing the count's policy of centralization – and markedly social: serious unemployment in the textile industry and the slump in trade were blamed on the count's French-oriented policy. After Louis' death the duchy of Burgundy and the county of Flanders, plus their fellow regions, became one large empire which the new duke Philip governed from Paris most of the time. He did not speak Dutch, he rarely visited Flanders, and the Flemish towns – Ghent first and foremost – protested, also by force of arms, at his authority and his reorganization of the justice system and financial policy. The neighbouring Brabant was governed by the childless duchess Johanna, who had been widowed in 1383. Louis' testament had granted Philip the Bold certain rights to Brabant and Limburg, but Johanna wanted her niece, Margaret of Flanders, to succeed her. Nevertheless, after a campaign waged against Guelders with French assistance, Philip had virtually conquered Limburg and the Lands of Overmaze by 1388, and in 1390 Johanna granted him the usufruct of Brabant. The powerful States of Brabant opposed this move, and it was finally agreed that Anton of Burgundy, Philip's second son, would succeed him as Duke of Brabant with restored authority over Limburg and Antwerp, plus the condition that Philip's elder son, John the Fearless, would get the other Burgundian lands. And so when Johanna died in 1406, Anton of Burgundy became the new Duke of Brabant.

The Burgundian Duke Philip the Bold owned a number of regions extending from central France to the Zeeland delta. His aim was to enlarge this territory, but he had no intention of abandoning the French throne. On the contrary, he was constantly trying to get King Charles V of France under his tutelage. In 1404 John the Fearless inherited Flanders, Artesia and Burgundy, and in 1405 he signed a treaty under the terms of which he, his brother Anton, Duke of Brabant, and his brother-in-law William VI of Holland and Hainault would help each other. John the Fearless thus gained a great deal of influence in the Netherlands. Furthermore, he reinforced his power by rendering military assistance to the bishop as far as the diocese of Liège and, because of his daughter's marriage, as far afield as Kleve. Nevertheless, his French orientation remained strong, although he opposed the war with England because of its dire effects on the economic interests of his Flemish subjects. In 1415 both his brothers, Philip and Anton, were killed in the Battle of Agincourt, that French-English trial of strength from which John the Fearless had kept aloof. Eventually though, in 1419, he too, was murdered at Montereau in the French struggle for power.

He was succeeded by Philip the Good (Dijon 1396 – Bruges 1467), who in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) sided with England with the intention of finding a solution for France as well. Led by Joan of Arc, the French had their own successes. Philip suffered several setbacks and decided to pull out of the war. He embarked on a major political change of course: at first he had endeavoured to concentrate as much political power as he could in the kingdom of France, but soon devoted his efforts to an individual Burgundian state. His ideal seems to have been the Carolingian "central empire", independent of French and German authority and possessing its own status as a monarchy. However, opposition from the German Kaisers barred him from the title of king. Philip the Good may be seen as the founder of the Dutch and Belgian state, but his power extended much further. In 1419 he succeeded the duke and count in Burgundy, Flanders, Artesia and Franche-Comté; in 1429 he acquired the county of Namur, followed by Brabant and Limburg in 1430, Holland, Zeeland and Hainault in 1433, Auxerre, Bar and Mâcon in 1435, Luxemburg in 1451, he also attempted to establish his power in Guelders and Frisia, invested his nephew Louis as bishop of Liège in 1455 and his bastard son Philip as bishop of Utrecht in 1456.

This explosive growth of power in the House of Burgundy was coupled with a rising standard of court patronage and a keener interest in "the arts". This example was followed by secular and clerical fac-
tions, town magistrates and well-off citizens. In the towns society was shaped by developments in the field of commerce, industry and culture. The Flemish towns led the way: Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, Tournai, Oudenaarde and many more. Then came the towns of Brabant: Brussels, Louvain, Malines, Antwerp and a number of smaller places. Eventually new centres appeared in Zeeland, Holland and Utrecht, where the old cathedral city had lost its relative importance but still played a central role. The bond established by the Burgundian central authority between a growing number of Dutch regions promoted the development of urban culture in that trade and traffic – and with them mutual influence – became easier and more frequent.

In the course of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the so-called 'third class', the citizenry, acquired increasing importance on all fronts due to the boom in trade and industry. Craftsmen and merchants organized themselves more and more in guilds, bodies whose rules deterred competition among themselves and guaranteed quality by controlling products and training. The guilds also took social and religious responsibilities upon themselves, such as help for the sick, assistance for widows and orphans, money for a guild altar or a chapel in which ceremonies could be held on their own festive occasions, participation in bigger church manifestations, spiritual aid and church services in the case of death and burial. The guilds did not act solely for the purpose of combining their efforts or promoting the interests of their own members, the citizenry: this structure was also encouraged by regional or municipal instances for economical, governmental and semi-military motives. As head of state, Philip the Good vigorously encouraged further developments in the gold- and silversmiths' guilds by imposing stricter, central quality controls of the precious metals – minted or not – with which they worked. This policy was essential for a commercial economy based on monetary transactions. The blacksmiths' and ironworkers' guilds benefited from government support and were subsequently assessed with regard to their crucial military importance for the war machine, national defence and the maintenance of power. Organized craftsmen had profound consequences for the arts as well. The concept of bourgeois art was promoted by this organization in the literal sense, art production being increasingly in the hands of laymen, the clergy being almost entirely eliminated from the process. Artists had close attachments to the towns in which they had acquired their skills, where their workshops were situated and which offered a protected - albeit limited - market. And finally, artistic work was directly influenced by the actual production, due to the imposition of quality controls on the used materials and the finished work.

Within the urban society of the Netherlands the craftsmen's guilds formed corporations of citizens who – irrespective of their professions – enjoyed both military and electoral power. It was this young class which staked a claim on the arts on which it had such a powerful influence. It took place in public and private and on both a worldly and a religious plane in which not only the nobility but also members of the middle classes held leading positions. The old nobility had forfeited its leading position or participated in the new structure, and a new kind of art – emerging from the middle class, was given a chance. This development began in the South Netherlands, and churches, town halls, trading halls, weigh-houses and guild-halls appeared in Flanders and Brabant. The North followed this example, albeit on a more modest scale, because that region was less prosperous and because there was less competition prestige wise. In terms of culture, the South Netherlands outstripped the North.

Under the Burgundians Philip the Bold (Duke from 1363-1404) and John the Fearless (Duke from 1404 to 1419), Dijon was the most important residence. Under Philip the Good (Duke from 1419 to 1467) the Burgundian court was moved to various places in the South Netherlands. Court culture was less important in the North, whereas the South still had its 'grand' nobility and the lines to France and Burgundy were more direct. In the latter half of the fourteenth century the residence of the Dutch counts was moved from Hainault to The Hague, where in about 1400 a small, thriving court acted both as an administrative and artistic centre under the leadership of Albrecht of Bavaria, count of Holland from 1389 to 1404.

The last quarter of the fourteenth century saw an increase in mystical movements which sought to obtain a direct vision of the Divine through meditation. Modern Devotion continued to respond confidently to what had chiefly been a passive and negative approach to religion in everyday life. This movement
had begun among scholars and clergy who were drawn to silent devotion and to a purely spiritual life, and who had a considerable following in bourgeois circles. The founder of this religious movement was the aforementioned Geert Groote (1340-1384), in whose house in Deventer the Brethren of the Common Life foregathered. The Brethren did not swear a pledge, but solemnly resolved to lead a simple life of abstinence and spirituality. Spiritual aid and a contribution to education were among the tasks they set themselves. Their way of life is ideally formulated in *De Imitatione Christi*, attributed to Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471), the mystic from the East Netherlands. In his *Imitation*, allegedly the most-read book in world literature after the Bible, the faithful are called upon to lead a life of self-effacing personal devotion, duty and self-denial. Couched in the traditional late-medieval word and imagery, the movement's mentality still makes a deep impression of great emotional faith.

**Painting. 1375 – 1425**

In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, European fine arts were dominated by what we call "International Gothic" because of the close and important stylistic relationship between the arts of France, with Paris as the largest, leading city in the west, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Bohemia and centres in Spain and Italy. This style has two contradictory characteristics, one of which is marked by an elegance and refinement which are in keeping with an idealized courtly life and with the luxury of similar circles (courtly, graceful, mannerist) and at the same time a tendency towards a realistic but also "painterly" rendering of figures and of space. This "international style", or "court style" is sometimes referred to by the German "weicher Stil", the "soft style" which characterizes the supple, gently flowing contours, linearity, folds, attitudes, the almost "week" harmonious forms which appeared on the international scene but first and foremost in South Germany and Bohemia. These latter features are offset by simultaneously cultivated characteristics such as the meticulous rendering of a keenly observed reality and dramatic, often exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. A very fine example of this international style is the *Martyrologium Usuardi*, originated in Prague, ca. 1400. From International Gothic emerges a visualized emotionality whose extremes are a charming, sweet and courtly sentimentality on the one hand, and on the other a fascination for merciless suffering, affliction and death. The inescapable extremes of society and of everyone’s personal life are taken to extremes and represented chiefly in

![Martyrologium Usuardi, f.81r](image-url)
religious art and not, as was the case previously and afterwards, rendered abstract as aloof formulas and pictorial types. An intensely grieving Mary with her dead and martyred Son in her lap, Christ suffering His agonies on the cross, the rotting corpse fallen victim to macabre vermin, contrasted with an endearing Virgin and Child, angelic choirs or courtly love.

All this is encountered in Netherlandish painting, and in illuminated books too. The innovations did not establish themselves immediately or completely. In the more conventional compositions we often see new elements as decorative lines, slender, elegant personages and details which bear witness to a nascent realism. But although there was no court to set the tone, and although these regions did not play a central role in Europe, the Netherlands did play an important part in International Gothic. As we have seen, the course of the fourteenth century saw the inception of a development during which many Dutch artists left the country. After all, the Netherlands lacked a really wealthy nobility and spent less money on art. Artists with various talents emigrated to the German states, to Spain, northern Italy and in particular to France, where they worked in abbeyes, towns, castles and for the aristocracy. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century prominent artists from the Low Countries had connections with the great French courts in Paris and elsewhere, and with those of the dukes of Burgundy: the sculptors Claus Sluter and Claus de Werve of Haarlem, the painter Jean Malouel and the miniaturists Jan, Paul and Herman of Limburg from Nimwegen, the miniaturists Jean Boudoll and Jacob Coene from Bruges and Jacquemart de Hesdin from Artesia, the sculptor/painter-miniaturist André Beauneveu from Valenciennes, the sculptor Jacob de Baerze from Dendermonde, the goldsmith Willem Scerpswert from Utrecht, and many more.

Charles V, King of France (1337-1380) recruited artists (painters, miniaturists, sculptors, goldsmiths, embroiderers) from the North to Paris. After his death several of them continued to work in their Paris studios or entered the service of Charles’ art-loving brothers, Jean Duc de Berry (1340-1416) and Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (1363-1404). Both dukes were innovatory patrons of the visual arts. Jean de Berry invested in his library at the very highest standard, ordering religious and profane texts to be copied and sumptuously illuminated. Philip the Bold amassed a magnificent collection of manuscripts, presented works of art to churches and monasteries; his most important feat was however the foundation of a Carthusian monastery near Dijon, the Chartreuse de Champmol. The monastery church was intended as a mausoleum for his lineage, where the monks would devote their prayers to the Burgundian dynasty for all eternity. Many pilgrims would also play their part in the dukes’ salvation, disturbing the Carthusians at their devotions. Besides issuing commissions to the aforementioned sculptors and painters (Sluter, De Werve and Malouel), Philip purchased work from artists who are no longer known by name, or whose work can no longer be traced. The glaziers Hendrik ‘de glazemaker’ of Malines and Gosuwijn of Bois-le-Duc worked in Champmol. Along with other Dutch artists, for example Jean le Thiois and Hennequin Ymgrave, they received commissions for windows for the ducal residences in various Burgundian centres. The Chartreuse of Champmol was supplied with costly altarpieces, sculpture and further items. Philip the Bold’s court painter Jean de Beaumetz, who also hailed from the north, was commissioned in 1395 to paint twenty-six panels with devotional representations for the monks’ cells. Two of these panels have been recovered, both depicting the Calvary with a Carthusian kneeling in prayer (Musée du Louvre, The Cleveland Museum of Art). From his studio, where nineteen painters were at work in 1388, De Beaumetz supplied the Chartreuse with a large amount of work ranging from wall-paintings and a triptych to flags and banners, and was also recruited for the decoration and furnishing of diverse Burgundian residences and their chapels.

Against this background of artists who were leaving the Netherlands, the painter Melchior Broederlam is a remarkable exception: he worked from at least 1381 to 1409 in his native town of Ypres as court painter to the count of Flanders, Louis van Male, and subsequently for his successor, Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy. Despite his position as ‘valet de chambre’ and a remarkably high salary, he did not move to or visit the Burgundy or Paris courts, with the exception of a few excursions (Paris 1390, 1395, Dijon 1389, 1399, 1403). Broederlam’s house and studio were in the thriving town of Ypres, where he worked with his servants and apprentices and where Philip the Bold visited him in 1392. Monumental work could obviously only be carried out on location, which is why Broederlam worked from 1386 to 1392 in Hesdin castle in northern Artesia and in 1407 in the Church of Our Lady in Courtrai. A prestigious commission for the polychrome work on two sculpted altarpieces and the painting of two altarpiece wings for Champmol were
executed out in Ypres. The sculpture was the work of Jacob de Baerze in Dendermonde, the retables were transported to the Chartreuse in 1391 and subsequently back to Ypres in 1393 to be completed by Broederlam and delivered to Champmol in 1399.

Melchior Broederlam and Jacob de Baerze worked on these prestigious commissions in their own studios. In the Netherlands, particularly in the more prosperous Flanders, Hainault and Brabant, towns were gradually developing into centres where craftsmanship could acquire a place of its own. The urban climate offered native patrons a wider market, while international trading in money and goods held out unprecedented prospects for artists. This development continued in the later fifteenth century. Towns became artistic centres, some of which profited from the nobility and the court. The flourishing periods, standards and scope varied considerably and often had direct links with individual masters, as Broederlam was one of the first painters to demonstrate. Valenciennes, Ypres, Tournai, Bruges, Ghent and Brussels exemplify such early centres; Maastricht and Liège played their part in the Meuse region, just as Utrecht did further north. How difficult it is to demarcate stylistic borders in this period is demonstrated by the celebrated, so-called "Huidenvetters" retable with its Crucifixion scene dating from around 1400 or the beginning of the fifteenth century, which was kept in Bruges as old guild property and is now in the Groeningemuseum at Bruges. It is traditionally thought to have come from Bruges, but there have been plausible suggestions that it was made in Brabant, and it is scarcely possible to make any pronouncement on it.

Of great importance for painting and sculpture of a later period was the rapid rise of the triptych in the late fourteenth century. There had been hinged altars in Spain since the twelfth century and in the German realm since the thirteenth, culminating in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in both the painted and the sculpted retable. The prestigious commissions for triptychs in the Chartreuse of Champmol marked an important step in their development, chiefly because this type of altarpiece had now been chosen by one
of the most influential patrons for an extremely important place. In 1390 Jean de Beaumetz received an order for a triptych which has not survived, but whose principal theme was a Coronation of Mary and, on the wings, an Annunciation and a Visitation. In 1392 Melchior Broederlam accepted the ducal commission to polychrome in his Ypres studio the two sculpted triptychs by Jacob de Baerze and to paint the outsides of the wings. This commission was followed in 1394 by a third retable which has not survived. These triptychs are all the more interesting because exceptional detailed archive material pertaining to the commission, its realization and its payment is still extant. Triptychs made it possible to illustrate the hierarchy of the church calendar: on ordinary days and days without important ceremonies the altarpieces could be kept closed, important days being marked by opening them. The resulting polyptychs made it possible to refine this liturgical function by opening the various sections, or first the outermost and later also the innermost section. Another aspect of the triptych or the polypych was that they left space for the portraits of patrons. Patrons – church, nobility, citizenry – enjoyed having themselves depicted on the works of art which they presented as gifts commemorating themselves and guaranteeing their salvation, but also frequently for the sake of worldly fame. Their images were immortalized close to the central representation, to be joined in due course by their patron and guardian saints. Grisailles are often encountered on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century triptychs as a means of accentuating the gravity of, and contrast with, the colourful principal scenes. Grisailles, literally ‘paintings in grey’, but often mixed with a light shade of colour, were already known. The earliest and at the same time highly abstract grisailles are the Cistercians’ twelfth-century stained-glass windows.

Figurative grisailles were used from the fourteenth century on for representations which were supposed to accentuate such expressions of gravity and sorrow, for example during Lent or at funerals. A fine example is the so-called "Parement de Narbonne" painted in shades of grey for Charles V of France around 1375 on fine silk by a presumably Parisian painter (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 77.5 x 286 cm). This austere antependium (a covering for the front of an altar) was probably made for the funeral of Queen Jeanne de Bourbon in 1378. The grisaille as a separate genre dates back to the late fourteenth century. Drawn up in 1402, the inventory of Duke Jean le Berry's collections lists a panel as ‘in black and in white’: a 'Christ de Pitié' and a 'Vierge à l'Enfant'. In International Gothic book-painting the grisaille is shown to its perfect advantage, anticipated here at the highest level by the Paris miniaturist Jean Pucelle (d. 1334). Pucelle's grisailles and other miniatures had a powerful influence on the later – notably Dutch – painters who came to work at the French and Burgundian courts. André Beauneveu is another illustrious representative of this tradition, followed by such names as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weijden and Dirk Bouts. André Beauneveu's illuminations for Jean de Berry mark the peak of the grisaille in miniature painting, but also herald its temporary end: the future now belonged to lavish colour and to realism, led by, among others, Jacquemart de Hesdin and other northern artists at the Paris court. Around 1400 the grisaille also appears in Flemish book illumination, in a more sketchy and above all didactic conception, drawn in minute detail and heightened here and there with soft colours. A valuable and refined example is a copy dating from ca. 1415 of the Somme le Roi or Le Livre des vices et des vertus, written in 1280 by the Dominican Laurent du Bois for Philip III of France. This High Gothic copy of the book later came into the possession of Duke Philip the Good and was kept in the Burgundian library. The text of this moral treatise, which included the Ten Commandments, The Twelve Articles of Faith, the Common and the Special Virtues and the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, were intended for personal soul-searching. To the text itself Laurent du Bois added the description of fifteen illustrations which became the standard cycle in the series of handwritten copies of the book, and therefore place a strong accent on the key moments indicated by the author himself. The presumably Bruges manuscript of 1415 also contains these fifteen, here full-page, miniatures, while the descriptions were omitted.

Monumental decorations are found in religious buildings such as churches, monasteries and chapels, and in profane buildings such as castles and houses, town halls and guildhalls.

Unlike illuminated books, panels or glass-painting, we do not have to make do with specimens which have been preserved more or less by chance, but almost always with the traces of overpainted representations which, as a form of ‘overground’ archeology, have been rediscovered and have had to be brought to light from under overpaintings. Old paint was sometimes overpainted in favour of a more contemporary
subject. A spectacular example of this continuous process is found in the small Romanesque church at Vossem (Brabant, arr. Louvain), where the operation was performed at least four times, in the Romanesque period and in the Gothic period, in the Renaissance and yet again in the Baroque. The impression of monumental painting is far more fragmentary than in other pictorial forms of expression. Inside the buildings there were layers of plaster and decoration over the somewhat coarse structure. In the pilgrim church at Halle, precisely on the Brabant border, the tattered remains of what had once been a sumptuous and rich complex of decorations were found, some of them dating from around 1400. In a similar complex at Louvain there remained two qualitatively remarkable scenes from the legend of the sacred Quint in the eponymous Church of Saint Quintin, some of them dating from around 1400. In the northern — now Dutch — part of Brabant, Gothic decorations are kept in two large collegiate churches: The Great Church or Church of Our Lady in Breda, and St. John’s Cathedral in Bois-le-Duc. As research has established in the case of the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp, the interiors of the Gothic Brabant churches were painted a monochrome white or near-white, with vivid accents of colour on architectural elements such as their ribbed vaulting and keystones, a monochrome impression that was interrupted by a variety of ornamental and figurative representations spread all over the walls and vaulting. The earliest surviving painted element in St. John’s at Bois-le-Duc is the almost eight-metre high decoration showing the Tree of Jesse on the north aisle of the choir gallery, where it was painted between 1407 and 1422. Various memorial decorations, decorative patterns, apostles and saints in the church date from the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The grisaille continued to play its role in glass painting, a monochrome or near-monochrome decorative technique that was eminently suited to stained glass, to which André Beauneveu’s workshop probably made an important contribution. The glass grisailles in the Sainte-Chapelle at Bourges probably date from towards the end of the fourteenth century in Beauneveu’s versatile workshop which also, as already stated, produced sculptures, illuminated books and panel and wallpaintings. Examples of glass painting in this Franco-Flemish tradition also survive in Germany, an example being the west window in the cathedral in Altenberg, which dates from 1410 or thereabouts. On the basis of the grisailles it has been demonstrated that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century glass painting still had direct links with miniature and panel painting; this is also true of polychrome stained glass of course. In the chapel presented to Bourges Cathedral by Simon Aligret, physician at the court of Jean de Berry, there are windows with representations of the Aligret family and patron saints, these windows came from the workshop of Jacquemart de Hesdin himself or were made by someone who worked in
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close proximity to him. Between 1390 and 1400 these same artists made three figurative stained-glass windows for the Rosary chapel at Evreux. The third example of highly qualified glass artists who worked in, or were closely associated with, a large painting studio is a workshop in Bruges. The glass artist Jan de Rynghel is mentioned in Bruges archives, and the angels in the town hall at Bruges, which may very likely be attributed to him, suggest that he had his own studio. In the early fifteenth century this studio must have achieved a considerable reputation, for it produced stained glass for prominent customers from all over Europe: in addition to a few single panels (Lucerne, Galerie Fischer, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) there are examples of this oeuvre in Bruges itself, as well as in Cologne, Ulm and Bourges. The Cologne piece is the ‘Throne of Mercy-Seat window’ dating from around 1410, in the Church of Corpus Christi (Herrenleichenkirche, now the north transept of Cologne Cathedral), presented by a wealthy merchant. Bourges is represented by two small vases from the Sainte-Chapelle (now in the cathedral) dating from 1404 to 1410, each with two angels as shield-bearers with the arms of no less a distinguished patron than Jean Duc de Berry. Most of a spectacular ensemble dating from about 1415 is kept in the cathedral in Ulm, south Germany. It consists of thirty-two panels from a series of originally forty scenes from the Bible from the very beginning to the Ascension of Mary. There is also a smaller panel with a representation of Saint George and the Dragon which, directly preceding the Old and New Testament glasses, was very likely made for the man who ordered the cycle, a merchant and patrician citizen of Ulm, Jörg (=George) Besserer, as evidence of the maker’s skill. The Bruges glass artists who were responsible for the oeuvre listed here probably worked in larger and more versatile studios in which the above-mentioned Jan de Ryngehele worked not only as a glass painter but also as a miniaturist, along with the highly talented Jacob Coene or the Master of Boucicaut. In the choir of the church of Saint Eustace in Zichem is a window made in 1387-1398, a Calvary showing the crucified Christ between Mary and John, and bearing the arms of the aristocratic donor, Renier II of Schoonvorst, lord of Zichem. Many stained-glass windows in churches were donated by noblemen or royalty who frequently had themselves portrayed, not only with an eye to their salvation but also to as a means of ensuring their personal representation in the church in question. For example, when Johanna of Brabant and Wenceslas relinquished domains to Louis, count of Flanders, in 1357, the latter had windows with his own portrait and that of his family placed in Saint Rombout’s cathedral at Malines and the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp. In the church of Saint Gudule in Brussels seven traditional noble houses joined forces to order a window.

Tree of Jesse, Saint John’s Cathedral, ’s Hertogenbosch

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portraying the archangel Michael, the church's second patron, and Saint Gudule, surrounded by shields bearing their family arms. Like other artists who worked beyond the Dutch borders, Brabant glass painters were active in other towns: Jan van Brabant, for example, in Valenciennes from 1361 to 1371; Hendrik ("the Glassmaker") from Malines and Gosuwijn from Bois-le-Duc made glasses for the Chartreuse at Champmol and for castles belonging to the Duke of Burgundy.

Two large windows in the choir of Saint Martin's in Halle demonstrate how here, too, examples of international developments appeared. The earliest was a present from William IV of Bavaria, count of Hainault-Holland, in 1406-1408: under long baldachins we see Christ and Mary enthroned as the king and queen of heaven, beside and below them a row of six saints and an archangel. Opposite them, in a similar architectonic structure is, among others, a Resurrection; this window was presented in about 1460 by the Dauphin, later Louis XI of France, and his wife Charlotte of Savoy, who lived in exile in the nearby Genappe from 1456 to 1461. A large number of highly-placed people presented glass to the pilgrim church at Halle; remnants of this glass survive.

Stained-glass windows, Jan de Rynghel, Bruges
Historical situation from 1425 to the beginning of the sixteenth century

On January 7th 1430 Philip the Good married Isabella of Portugal in Bruges. In the course of the ensuing festivities Philip informed his guests that he had founded his own knightly order, the Order of the Golden Fleece. The members of this most eminent nobility of the Burgundian empire were to be united in this order. At regular intervals and in a different town each time, the Duke would confer with the knights of the Golden Fleece on how to promote unity in the largest region of the Dukes of Burgundy. The idea of this order was not new, it had been formulated in the late fourteenth century by Duke Philip the Bold with a view to uniting the Christian West against the advance of the Turks. Nothing came of that knightly order, and the expedition led by John the Fearless in 1396 suffered a crushing defeat near Nicopolis. Philip the Good implemented the old plan with a more limited scope and an essentially Burgundian ideal, but at the same time with the idea of avenging his father's defeat at Nicopolis and rescuing Christianity from the Turkish threat. When the Hundred Years' War came to an end in 1453 and Constantinople fell into Turkish hands, the plan for a crusade became topical again. In 1454, with great ceremony, Philip the Good travelled to the Diet of Regensburg to finalize plans for the crusade. Internal vicissitudes in his home country frustrated these plans, and must have been more disappointing for Philip than other blows: the crusade ideal was anything but mere politics, being inextricably bound up with the Christian knightly ideals of the dukes of Burgundy.

As already described, Philip the Good succeeded in steadily expanding his empire and it is obvious that one of his greatest problems was how to mould his far-flung territories into one realm. In 1435 he made peace with France and in 1439 with England, opening up the road towards a thriving, independent Burgundian empire. He began to adopt an independent stance towards the king of France and the German emperor, at the same time pursuing a policy aimed at achieving both peace and stability in his empire and expanding his radius of power. The Burgundian provinces retained their own administrative structure and relative independence, which remained unbreached until Charles the Bold. The duke was advised by a court council consisting of a legal section, a secret council for general affairs and a financial department. The Burgundian chancellor had the most important say, indeed, his position was the most important of the whole system. Under Philip the Good's administration Nicolas Rolin held this function from 1422 to 1457. Philip became too old for government, in 1465 he transferred military affairs to his son, Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy from 1467 to 1477. Charles succeeded in regaining the towns which had been lost to the French on the Somme, subjugated Liège and Dinant and signed a contract with his brother-in-law, King Edward IV of England, to conquer France, with the intention of adding the entire north to the Burgundian empire. But when Edward invaded France, Charles the Bold was so immersed in German affairs that he was unable to provide support, and the entire plan was a flop. In his own empire he pursued a vigorous course of centralization, chiefly in order to generate high incomes as a means of financing his ambitious desire for expansion. This led to problems with the towns and regional administration, but Charles was undeterred. After his death in 1477 many of the measures he had adopted were rescinded. He waged several expensive wars, and even if they did have an unfavourable effect on trade, the economic situation was not so bad for the Netherlands under his regime. While the Flemish coast was blocked by the French and traffic with Italy by sea was difficult, Antwerp, Holland and Zeeland profited from the good relations with England; moreover, traffic with the Baltic thrived. Charles acquired the south of Alsatia and the dukedoms of Lorraine and Bar, enabling a link to be forged between the Burgundian and Netherlandish possessions. In 1473 Charles the Bold conquered the dukedom of Guelders, and in Trier he was very nearly crowned King of Rome. However, the German Kaiser, Frederik III, left before any coronation could take place, probably at the instigation of the Germans, who were averse to interference from rich Burgundians in their country. This disappointment marked a change of fortune in Charles' successful career. He was defeated in a party quarrel in the diocese of Cologne (the vain siege of Neuss, 1474-1475), the Swiss declared war on him, the French attacked him, Lorraine was annexed but revolted again. In 1476 he was defeated at Granson and Mürten by the Swiss. On January 5 1477 he was killed near Nancy during a vain attempt to suppress the Lorraine uprising.
Maria of Burgundy, Charles' daughter, succeeded him as duchess (1477-1482). On hearing of Charles' death, Louis XI had immediately ordered his troops to occupy the dukedom of Burgundy. In order to receive support in the Netherlands, Maria submitted to all kinds of demands from the towns and regions. Many of Charles de Bold's centralistic politics were rescinded. Maria married neither the Dauphin nor the duke of Guelders; instead, she wed Maximilian of Austria, a Habsburger. He came to the Netherlands as early as August 1477. The couple succeeded in establishing their authority in the Netherlands. It was a short-lived stability, for when Maria died in 1482 - due to a fatal fall from her horse - problems arose again. Maximilian became their three-year-old son's guardian, and there was a brief period of peace with France. In 1485 Maximilian was crowned King of the Holy Roman Empire and, following in Charles the Bold's footsteps, he introduced an anti-French power policy. Internal problems with the rich Flemish towns, especially Ghent, sparked off bitter quarrels, but these were solved. In 1493 peace with France was declared again, the Habsburgs relinquishing the old dukedom of Burgundy. In 1494 the Netherlands were handed over by Maximilian, in his capacity of regent in a stable situation, to the lawful heir, Philip, the son of his marriage to Maria of Burgundy. As Duke of Burgundy Philip governed the Netherlands from 1494 until his premature death in 1506. He spurned a number of the achievements of the regions and towns in 1477 in favour of a more centralist administration. At times even Dutch interests led to disagreements with his father Maximilian. Philip's foreign policy again waivered between the preservation of peace with France and the economic interests of the towns, which were strongly oriented towards England. In 1496 Philip married the Spanish infanta Johanna, a transaction brokered by Maximilian in the field of super-politics. Due to a coincidental series of deaths, Johanna unexpectedly became the heiress to the united royal Spanish crowns. The Dutch again became involved in an international game of politics, the consequences of which were to extend over several centuries. Philip died on one of his visits to Spain, and Johanna lost her mind. Maximilian, who had become emperor in the meantime, again became the regent of the Netherlands, this time for the oldest son of Philip and Johanna, the later emperor Charles V, born in Ghent in 1500. Maximilian had his hands full coping with the Austrian hereditary lands, his battle against the Turks and Italian affairs, and appointed his daughter Margaretha governor of the Netherlands. She installed herself in Malines where Charles junior was brought up. Margaretha was primarily concerned with the Habsburg interests, but her policy was certainly not disadvantageous for the Netherlands: relations with England were good, the war with France was simmering on a low flame and in 1513 Margaretha made peace with the duke of Guelders, who since 1492 had opposed Burgundian authority and in the early sixteenth century increased his power in the north to a dangerous extent. In 1515 Maximilian declared that his grandson Charles had come of age, and for the second time the Habsburger declined to govern the Netherlands.

**Late-Gothic painting**

Since the increase of writings on art and the history of art in the nineteenth century, Dutch fifteenth-century culture has been approached from two different viewpoints. On the one hand this period of an undeniable magnificent flowering is regarded as Late Gothic and as a splendid culmination of mediaeval
traditions. On the other hand it is spoken of as the Northern Renaissance. It then becomes clear that this flowering occurred on the borderline between the Middle Ages and a new era. This cultural revival took place in a highly urbanized society and is the northern counterpart of the Italian Renaissance. The innumerable commercial contacts and by that token also cultural relations between the Flemish and the North-Italian towns in the fifteenth century indicate without further ado that the spectacular changes that took place in these two most prosperous regions are not isolated from one another. Nevertheless, developments in Italy were of an entirely different nature, being much more of a "revival" of, or a reversion to, Antiquity. In the north, the tendency towards International Gothic prevails, although the vocabulary of forms becomes less modish and more realistic with regard to the rendering of landscape, space and figures, and details, in combination with what is often a theme charged with emotion. Court and nobility, church and citizenry became the patrons of the new, successful language of forms which – particularly in the Burgundian sphere of influence – flourished, and which we refer to as Old or Early Netherlandish painting, North and South-Netherlandish Primitives or, more often, 'Flemish Primitives'. This realistic art was anything but primitive in the denigrating sense of the word: technique and command of material, iconography, vocabulary of forms and symbolism, a sense of reality if that is what was sought, and devotional content were in fact extremely cultivated and developed to a high level. And even if we also speak of "German" or "French Primitives" to denote the more or less simultaneous stylistic developments in the neighbouring countries, it is interesting to see the extent to which this 'new' art led to a typically Netherlandish style with a strong tendency towards naturalism and realism. This individual style was born in the South – Flanders, Hainault and Brabant – and followed by the North, i.e. Holland.

Fifteenth-century Dutch painting can be classified in three, more or less successive generations. The first of these, whose trend-setting painters are the Van Eyck brothers, Robert Campin and Rogier van der Weyden, retrospectively make the largest contribution to that distinctive Early Netherlandish style. Against the background of International Gothic, these painters laid the foundations for the subsequent heyday that lasted for about three-quarters of a century and is characterized by high quality in terms of both technique and content, and by a firm but certainly not static stylistic unity. There was always an idealised realism with a strongly religious background and roots in a bourgeois urban culture – and not in an aristocratic or traditionally clerical culture. An absolute and almost impossible to overestimate key role is played here by the oeuvre of Jan van Eyck, although we should not isolate his brilliant work from its previous history and context. From 1422 to 1424 "meyster Ian den macht" (master Jan the painter) worked at the count's court at The Hague. After Jan of Bavaria's death by poison van Eyck entered the service of Philip the Good of Burgundy and settled in Lille. His position with the duke of Burgundy was one of trust: in addition to his post as court painter he was a counsellor and diplomat. He was frequently sent abroad, as in 1428-1429, with the delegation that was to negotiate with King Juan of Portugal about the marriage of that monarch's daughter to Duke Philip. Jan van Eyck painted a portrait of Isabella of Portugal, who was married to Philip the Good on January 7th 1430 in Bruges. He spent more
than a year in Portugal and Spain on this mission. Among the places he visited were Santiago de Compostela and Granada. In about 1430 Van Eyck settled in Bruges, where he bought the house in which he was to live until his death in the summer of 1441. As court painter the ducal commissions he received took precedence, but in Bruges he also worked for the royal household, the municipality, the nobility and the citizenry. None of his work for the duke has survived. Isabella's portrait and a highly praised map of the world are documented by archive records, the only surviving portraits of the duke are mediocre copies. The
wall-paintings, decorated flags and banners, escutcheons, festive decorations and polychrome sculpture for which he and Henri Bellechose received commissions from the Duke— all are lost. He seems to have been active as both a miniaturist and a panel painter. His representations of reality are of truly superb quality, as is his technique. In order to obtain the painterly finesse they strove for, South-Netherlandish painters of the early fifteenth century searched for a new kind of binding agent that would enable them to superimpose layers of transparent paint, thereby obtaining extremely fine nuances and the utmost brilliance. Van Eyck succeeded in developing such an oil-based mixture with the requisite short drying time and painted his earliest surviving panel with that new medium. The theological structure and content of this extremely large work are of the highest quality. Dated in 1432, the enormous Adoration of the Lamb is kept in the Cathedral of Saint Bavo in Ghent. Other key works in Van Eyck’s oeuvre are the Madonna and Chancellor Rolin, the double portrait of Arnolfini and his wife (1434, London, National Gallery), the Madonna and Canon Van der Paele (1436, Bruges, Groeninge Museum) and the panel with a drawing of Saint Barbara (1437, Antwerp, Museum of Fine Arts).

Although commerce was waning, Bruges became an important cultural centre, with Petrus Christus as the only true successor to Van Eyck, but with a painterly tradition and heyday that lasted until the end of the fifteenth century. Up to about 1440 Tournai played a crucial role, with the master-painters Robert Campin and Rogier van der Weyden. Campin (1375-1379 – 1444) was born in Tournai, his family probably came from Kempen (Brabant), as his name suggests; in 1410 he was granted citizenship in Tournai. It appears that Campin should be held responsible for the oeuvre of the anonymous Master of Flemalle. This Robert Campin / Master of Flemalle was probably the teacher of Rogier van der Weyden (1399-1400 – 1464), who was born in Tournai as Rogelet de la Pature and became a citizen of Brussels before 1435, where he became town painter in 1436. Rogier had a flourishing studio of international repute in Brussels, he worked for the town, for the region, and also for Spanish and Italian patrons. However, not a single work can be assigned to him with certainty, even though three well-documented altarpieces are usually attributed to him: the “Miraflores Altarpiece” belonging to the Miraflores Carthusians near Burgos (Berlin, Staatliche Museen), the “Deposition”, which was originally the central panel of a triptych belonging to the Louvain guild of crossbow archers (Madrid, Prado), and the “Crucifixion”, or rather Calvary, showing the crucified Christ with a mourning Mary and John, from the Scheut Carthusian monastery near Brussels and formerly the Hérinnes order to whom the painter himself had probably presented it (Escorial, Royal Palace and Lazarus order). A Rogier van der Weyden oeuvre has been constructed around these three key-works and his Brussels studio. The splendid Last Judgment altarpiece in the hospital at Beaune was made under Rogier van der Weyden’s supervision in his Brussels studio. The master’s hand can be discerned in a number of details and in the underdrawings, although his collaborators did most of the work, following his instructions.

The leading painters of the second generation are Hans Memling, Dieric Bouts and Hugo van der Goes. It is interesting to note that two of these masters came from outside Flanders: Bouts to Louvain from Haarlem in North-Holland, and Memling to Bruges from Seligenstadt in Germany. Van der Goes was born and bred in Ghent. In the latter half of the fifteenth century Albert van Ouwater and Geertgen tot Sint Jans were both working in Haarlem. In 1450 or thereabouts, Hieronymus Bosch was born in Bois-le-Duc; after his training in the South-Netherlandish tradition he developed into a highly distinctive and, oddly

Crucifixion, Rogier van der Weyden
enough, highly rated master who became famous for his bizarre representations. In 1504 even Philip the Fair ordered a Last Judgment triptych from him in Bois-le-Duc; it must have borne a resemblance to Bosch's vision of the end of time in Vienna.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century and especially in the early sixteenth, the third generation of 'Netherlandish Primitives' adopted the attainments in style, form and themes of the Italian Renaissance. Although the Netherlands had visited Italy before, or were acquainted with Italy from drawings and prints, in the North they clung to their own tradition. All this changed with the advent of masters like Gerard David – from Oudewater in Holland – and Quinten Metsijs, in Bruges and Antwerp, and Jan Mostaert, Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen and Cornelis Engebrechtz in Holland. The Italian Renaissance caught on in the Netherlands, hesitantly at first in the case of the aforementioned artists, but definitively by their younger contemporaries such as Jan Gossaert of Maubeuge and Lucas van Leyden. Early on in the century, Bruges and Brussels were overshadowed by Antwerp, the commercial metropolis which boasted an exceptional art market. Prior to the arrival from Louvain of Quinten Metsijs, who became a master painter in Antwerp in 1491, the town had not played a role of any importance in art. This situation now underwent a radical change; painters immigrated from north and south, and the also for sculpture very characteristic 'Antwerp Mannerism' flourished as never before, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Dirck Bouts the Younger (ca. 1448-1449 – 1491) and Albrecht Bouts (1451-1455 – 1549) worked in Louvain, but the town reverted to a regional level. Under Margaret of Austria, Malines became an early centre of Renaissance in the Netherlands, with Bernard van Orley as court painter and, on a less formal level, artists such as Jan Gossaert and Jan Mostaert, who received commissions from the archduchess. This activity was confined to the court. In nearby Brussels, though, there was an unprecedentedly lively art market in which numerous masters and studios collaborated on a regular basis. Rogier van der Weyden was succeeded by Vranck van der Stockt (ca. 1420 – after 1489), probably also formally as town painter. Besides and after Vranck van der Stockt came other painters known by name and oeuvre, such as Jan Hayne, Pieter van der Weyden, Colijn de Coter and Goossen van der Weyden, who in 1492 came from his father Pieter's Brussels workshop to Lier and thence to Antwerp. Various anonymous oeuvres were also situated in Brussels, such as that of the Master of Saint Gudule, the Master of Embroidered Foliage, the Master with Gold Brocade, the Master of the Royal Portraits, or the Master of the Magdalene Legend. It is sometimes possible to identify these anonymous artists with painters listed in archives and to discover cooperative links. The Master of the Legend of Saint Catherine can thus be identified as Rogier van der Weyden's son Pieter van der Weyden (1437 – 1510).

In 1520, in his Antwerp home, Quinten Metsijs received Albrecht Dürer, who was travelling through the Netherlands. Metsijs left several great religious and secular works, most of them painted for Antwerp and Louvain. These works mark the end of the style and period that is traditionally named after the Flemish Primitives. In his splendid double portrait of Erasmus and Pieter Gillis, the Antwerp municipal secretary, Metsijs depicted the true end of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the New Era. This was not only completed until the man to whom the two Dutchmen had given it, Thomas More in England, stood face to face with his friends in front of the diptych, so that it really became a triptych.

At first the stylistic developments in illuminated books in the Netherlands did not keep in step with the radical innovations which had been taking place in panel painting since around 1425, marking the rise of a more pronounced realism. The miniaturists were not seeking a naturalistic effect of space or depth, but adhered to what tended to be decorative backgrounds. Landscapes were constructed like the wings of a stage, and the size of human figures is often totally out of proportion with their smaller – because less important – surroundings. Faces and facial expression remained stereotypes; there is hardly any individualism, or none at all. Few miniaturists working between ca. 1400 to 1440 are known by name, and the majority of surviving illuminated books from the later fifteenth century had out of sheer necessity to be classified in groups, 'schools' and masters with provisional names. But painterly innovations have been found in
illuminated books too, for instance in the famous Turin/Milanese Book of Hours whose miniatures may perhaps have been painted by Jan van Eyck in 1422 – 1425 during his sojourn in the Dutch court at The Hague or in its direct surroundings and possibly a little later (ca. 1430 – 1440). Other illuminators introduced innovations in their decorations of the many sumptuous prayer-books commissioned by wealthy citizens or clerics or semi-clerics and members of the aristocracy for their private devotions. In the North Netherlands Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves is a truly amazing highlight. The extraordinarily inventive miniatures and decorated borders of this manuscript were probably made in Utrecht; they display the influence of both Southern and Northern panel and book paintings. The rapidly growing demand for prayer-books, notably north of the big rivers, led to groups with distinctive characteristics in such towns as Delft or Haarlem, or more scattered regions such as Guelders, the East Netherlands and suchlike. In the South Netherlands the Burgundian court played an extremely important role in the production of illuminated books of the period from 1440-45 to 1475. The Dukes of Burgundy had residences in several different towns, and under their own patronage and influence there was a considerable uniformity in manuscript production. Long secular and religious texts were popular, often yielding manuscripts with several tomes. Philip the Good set an example here; there were 900 volumes in his library when he died, a score unsurpassed by his grandfather Philip the Bold or his brothers, the art-loving King Charles V of France, Duke Jean de Berry and Louis I, Duke of Anjou. Bruges, surrounded by other prosperous South-Netherlandish towns with their own scriptoria, became an important centre with a strong attraction. Many talented miniaturists moved to Bruges, where they worked as independent guild-members. A few examples: Dreux Jean of Paris worked in both Bruges and Brussels for Philip the Good between 1448 and 1466, Willem Vrelant of Utrecht from 1454 until his death in 1481, Loyset Liédet of Hesdin and the Frenchman Philippe de Mazerolles from
1469 until their deaths in 1479. A remarkable manuscript by this Philippe de Mazerolles deserves special mention: it is a book of hours on black parchment with gold and silver writing. It was presented to Charles the Bold by the municipality of Bruges on February 24th 1467 to mark his investiture as duke. De Mazerolles was commissioned to complete the unfinished manuscript. Documented in the archives, this black book of hours could perhaps be identical with the manuscript now in Vienna (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1856). This would mean that Philippe de Mazerolles was the miniaturist who painted this spectacular manuscript, which is one of a group of very small, extremely valuable and sophisticated manuscripts from Burgundian court circles. A total of seven such books of hours survive, all of them from Bruges and dating from the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century and at the beginning of the sixteenth there was a lively market for illuminated books of hours, also in the South. On the one hand the court and house of Burgundy were no longer major patrons, and on the other hand there was a marked increase in privately commissioned manuscripts intended for private devotions. The character of South Netherlandish illuminated books changed because of this, the two major centres now being henceforth referred to as the "Ghent-Bruges School". Although smaller, books continued to be richly illuminated. Decorative text borders became more important and were occasionally enriched with architectural elements, historicized scenes and, more importantly, strewn with painstakingly accurate renderings of items such as flowers, shells, pilgrims' badges or jewels. Miniatures underwent a change too, coming more under the influence of panel painting. The upshot of this development can be seen in illustrations whose function could be that of a small-format painting in a book, or equally well on the wall. Few artists' names from this last period of manuscript production are known, and the work of only a few illuminators is securely identified. On the other
hand the oeuvres of many miniaturists were reconstructed on stylistic grounds and their makers were given provisional names. Among the greatest masters of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century are the anonymous Master of Maria of Burgundy, named after the patroness for whom he illuminated a few magnificent manuscripts, the Ghent miniaturists Alexander Bening and Gerard Horenbout, the latter of whom spent the last period of his career, from 1520 until his death in 1540, at the court of the English king Henry VIII. Simon Bening, son of Alexander Bening, established himself in Brussels, where he died in 1561. His truly miniature paintings bear witness to the high standard he had attained by the end of the Netherlandish tradition of illuminated books. By this time the art of printing was more than a hundred years old, having definitively ousted the handwritten, illuminated book.

**Representations of the Apocalypse in the Netherlands**

Although series representing the Apocalypse are relatively rare, their tradition goes back to at least the sixth century. In other words, since the early Christian period the cycle of visionary representations as described by John, the Apostle and Evangelist, has incited visualizations. In addition to the series, apocalyptic themes such as "The Lamb with the Four Living Creatures", "The Twenty-Four Elders" and "the Book with Seven Seals" have been depicted separately. The absolute peak in the tradition of early Dutch art predating the *Flemish Apocalypse* is the aforementioned set of tapestries woven in about 1375 – 1380 in Paris by Nicolas Bataille. The design and the cartoons for the tapestries were made by Jean Boudolf of Bruges. The tapestries were intended for Louis d'Anjou (1339 – 1384), a brother of Philip the Bold of Burgundy, Jean de Berry and King Charles V of France. None of the rooms in Louis d'Anjou's castle at Angers was large enough to hang the entire series. Bearing in mind that the castle chapel's prede-
cessor was not much larger than it is today, we may perhaps presume that the tapestries were hung up in
the open air for religious celebrations and processions. Jean Boudolf's design was inspired by, among other sources, an illuminated manuscript owned by Charles V. The Apocalypse was listed in the 1373 inventory (now Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 403, England or France, beginning of the thirteenth century) and when the Louvre's library was inventoried after the king’s death in 1380, the work it was not there: "Le roy la baillée à mons. D'anjou pour faire son beau tap-pis" (the king has given it to the lord of Anjou to make his fine tapestry). Art-historical research has however revealed that Boudolf's source was not only this manuscript but other illuminated Apocalypse manuscripts as well. The monumental set of tapestries probably consisted originally of 98 representations on seven large tapestries with a total height of ca. 5.15 metres and a total length of 144 metres. Each of them had the following structure: at the bottom left, under a Gothic canopy, stands a male figure, reading (John, h. 5.15 m), followed on his right, from top to bottom, by a row of music-making angels (h. 0.50 m), a first row with seven scenes (h. 1.80 m), a text border (h. 0.40 m), a second row with seven scenes (h. 1.80 m), a text border (h. 0.40 m), a lower border with plants and animals (h. 0.25 m).

In the second half of the fourteenth century, ca. 1360 – 1370, and likewise based on thirteenth-century Apocalypse manuscripts, the Manchester manuscript (John Rylands Library, Ms 19) was made. This manuscript of the Apocalypse with the Berengaudus commentary in Latin is elaborated into 96 scenes, arranged vertically in twos to a page. In about 1400 the Apocalypse manuscript now in the British Library, London (Ms. Add. 38121), was written and illuminated. It is again the Latin Apocalypse text with the Berengaudus commentary, this time illustrated by four page-size miniatures, followed by the series of 96 scenes. Unlike the aforementioned manuscript, and departing from most of the illustrated Apocalypse manuscripts, a lot of gold went into its making, for which a considerable amount of paint with a strong masking power was used.

A beautiful late example of a lavishly illuminated Flemish Apocalypse was written between 1475 and 1479 in Ghent by the famous David Aubert for Margaret of York, the second wife of Charles the Bold (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 484). This French translation of Saint John's glossed Book of Revelations appears to be based on the aforementioned Anglo-Normandian text in the collection of Charles V of France, which had previously been loaned in order to make the Angers tapestries (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 403). Aubert's copy was accompanied by a large number of miniatures, some of which are based on the traditional series of Apocalypse illustrations, others coming straight from that specific translation. Completely original, for example, is the treatment of the Last Judgment on f. 103 by the anonymous miniaturist known as the "Master of the Moral Treatises". John's pronouncement that he had seen Christ in Judgment on a great white throne is followed on this page by the following passage "Et les livres sont ouvert(s). Et un autre livre est ouvert qui est appelé le livre de véu ..." (And the books were opened. And yet another book was opened, that is called the book of life ...) (Rev. 20, 12). The text goes on to tell us that the dead will be judged according to their deeds, as described in the books. The miniaturist painted four men kneeling beside the jaws of Hell, whose fire is scorching five figures. On his throne high up above them sits the judge, surrounded by a yellowish-golden mandorla from which a bright
white light emanates. On either side of God hover five large, opened codices in which the deeds of the dead are recorded.

In 1448 in Flanders, probably in Ghent, one of many copies were made of the *Liber Floridus*, an encyclopaedic book written between 1090 and 1120 by Lambert, canon of St. Omer and abbot of the Benedictine abbey of St. Bertin in Flanders. The Apocalyptic cycle was removed from the original manuscript (Universiteitsbibliotheek, Ghent, ms. 92), but is still to be found in copies of the *Liber Floridus*. In this unusually late, richly illustrated Flemish copy (Chantilly, Musée Condée ms 724, olim 1596) a miniature has been added at the beginning of the Apocalypse. It depicts John on Patmos, followed by the visionary images in 30 full-page miniatures.

Only a little later, in 1460, a copy of the *Liber Floridus* (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, hs. 72 A 23) was made in Lille and Ninove in Flanders for a councillor of Duke Philip the Good, again illuminated with about a hundred drawings, including one of John on Patmos (f. 10v), followed by a small, select series from the Apocalypse. What is probably the most recent copy of this typically mediaeval book was made in 1512 in Edingen (Enghien, on the border between Brabant and Hainault) in a French translation entitled *Le livre Fleurissant en Fleurs*, made for Philip van Kleef, a courtier at the Burgundian court. This manuscript contains some 125 pen-and-ink drawings, a good 30 of which depict the Apocalyptic visions (f. 22v-29v) revealed to John on Patmos.

The late-fifteenth century illuminated South-Netherlandish manuscripts discussed here as examples of Apocalypse illustrations represent both the peak and the glorious heyday and final phase of miniature painting in the South Netherlands. At the same time an Apocalypse in what was still the primitive form of the newly developing medium of printed books appeared. Around 1440 – 1450 a "blokboek" (a wood block edition) appeared in the Netherlands and possibly in the town of Louvain in Brabant in which the story of the Apocalypse is narrated in words and images (Manchester, John Rylands Library, 3103). This Netherlandish Apocalypse incunabulum contains 48 pages with a total of 92 scenes. The wooden blocks with which this "block book" was printed contained illustrations as well as Latin text, the printed pages were later coloured by hand. This is the earliest of six editions, the first two of which are very similar and which were printed using the same blocks; the third edition is a copy which was probably likewise printed in the Netherlands and presumably completed within only a few decades. The other three block-book editions are German and date back to the 1460s and 1470s.
The image of Saint John the Evangelist recording what was revealed to him on the island of Patmos appears in all the series depicting the life of John the apostle and evangelist. This scene occurs in all the series of Apocalypse illustrations of course. As in the Flemish Apocalypse, the first full-page miniature is dedicated to the life of John and how he sailed in a boat to Patmos, where he arrives on folio 2. The cycle of Apocalypse block-books also begins with the life of John, which ended with his banishment. In the Liber Floridus copy of 1448 the series of Apocalypse illustrations is preceded by one of John on Patmos, John writing on the island is depicted in the Angers set of tapestries too. In the Early Netherlandish illuminated manuscripts and also in panel paintings, the image of the evangelist in his Patmos exile is a more or less autonomous subject. The Très Riches Heures, the extremely precious and lavishly illustrated book of hours of Jean de Berry dating from 1409 to 1415, conjures up a magnificent and original image. Here the Van Limburg brothers who came from Guelders and worked in French court circles, notably for the frequently mentioned Duc de Berry, painted at the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John a full-page illumination in which they combined traditional iconographic elements in a particularly innovative manner. The boatswain rowing away has left John behind on what appears to be a very small island. He is writing in an open book, assisted by his eagle with a penholder and an inkpot in its beak. John gazes up ecstatically at the Lamb on the Throne, surrounded by the Twenty-Four Elders. Wearing crowns on their heads and enveloped in white togas and crowns, these greybeards are seated on either side of God on two long choir stalls, each with twelve seats and rendered in pronounced perspective. Three angels painted in blue camayeu inspire John from the sky with the sound of their golden trumpets.

A panel painting of John on Patmos, the work of an anonymous artist from the circle of Dirk Bouts (Haarlem ca. 1415 – Louvain 1475), dates from around 1465 and belongs to the collection of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. John sits on a on a fertile spot on which a variety of flowers grow on a rocky island, on a sheet of paper or parchment he is writing the opening words of his Gospel (In principio erat verbum etc.). Familiar worldwide, the opening passage of the Gospel of Saint John is meant to identify the writer. The entire situation and the small devil flying behind him who has stolen John's penholder and inkpot so as to prevent him from writing, indicate that this is the banished apostle and evangelist who is about to write his Revelations. There is no sign of his visions of the end of time yet. Under
the cloudy sky we see a peaceful landscape. Two men on horseback seem to be making their way to the castle or to the walled town further back. The atmosphere evokes a calm before the storm. An ominous light glows on the horizon. Are the men on horseback the first two of the four knights of the Apocalypse,
Hieronymus Bosch (Bois-le-Duc ca. 1450 – 1516) painted his John on Patmos not much later, in 1488/1489, as a shutter for the large altarpiece of the Brotherhood of Our Lady in Bois-le-Duc. John is dressed in red again, this time writing in an already bound book. His text, in brown ink with red initials, is illegible but the subject can be guessed: John looking up to see a pale-blue angel pointing at the Virgin in the sun, the moon under her feet, a crown on her head, her son in her lap. Far away in the background, in the calm water of the apparently peaceful landscape, a ship is already on fire. At John's feet sits an eagle, the Evangelist's permanent attribute and symbol, on the stony ground in front of him are a penholder and an inkpot, eyed by a small devil.

Saint John on Patmos, Hieronymous Bosch

who are known to have ridden a white horse and a fiery red one? The format of the panel was never any larger: it is complete as it is. It was however once part of a large whole, probably in the form of the right-hand shutter of a diptych or of a larger altarpiece; Saint Agnes is depicted on the back in grisaille.

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In 1479 Hans Memling (Seligenstadt ca. 1440 – Bruges 1494) completed the large Saint John retable for Saint John’s Hospital in Bruges. The central figure on this entirely painted retable is Mary, centrally depicted on the middle panel. She is enthroned under a canopy; on her lap is the infant Jesus; she is flanked by Saints Barbara and Catharine and also by two angels, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist stand near the throne. Again, the apostle and evangelist John is the real patron saint here, which is why John the Baptist is venerated too. Scenes from the lives of the two Johns are depicted on the retable, close by the figures: in the background landscape and on the capitals of the room in the palace in which the holy company is portrayed. On the left-hand shutter a few events of the Baptist’s life are enacted on the middle panel, ending with his dramatic beheading as the principle scene. The right-hand shutter is devoted exclusively to John and his Apocalyptic visions. Again attired in red, he is portrayed on the rocky island of Patmos in the Aegean sea, the place of his banishment. On his lap is a bound book, in which he will write his Revelations; in his left hand is a penknife, in his right hand are a pen and an inkpot. He is staring up into the sky. In the sky and background all the visionary scenes which John described as a successive chain of events in his Apocalypse are shown here, transformed into a single, magnificent spectacle. With this new development, Hans Memling brings the ancient medieval narrative tradition to a close. High up in the sky, encircled by a bright rainbow, God appears on his throne under a stone canopy, illuminated in a greenish glow (Rev. 4: 2-3). Seated round the throne and surrounded by a second rainbow are the twenty-four elders, thirteen of whom are visible (Rev. 4:4). They are
attired in white raiment, have crowns on their heads and are playing musical instruments (Rev. 5:9). Seven oil-lamps are burning in front of the throne, the ‘seven Spirits of God’ according to Revelation 4:5. In front of the throne are the four living creatures: a winged lion, a calf, a man and an eagle (Rev. 4:6-9). God’s right hand rests on the book with seven seals (Rev. 5:1) and a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6-7). Directly in front of the throne is an angel, who points at the book and, according to Rev. 5:2, calls in a loud voice ‘Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?’ The answer comes from the singing and music-making elders, and the seals are broken. When the first four seals were opened, four riders appeared, whom Memling placed in the middle of the panel, the white horse with rider straining backwards (Rev. 6:1-2), the fiery red horse and its harnessed rider and his drawn sword (Rev. 6:3-4), the black horse whose rider wears a tabard and operates a pair of balances (Rev. 6:5), and lastly a pale horse ridden by Death and pursued by a flaming monster, Hades (Rev. 6:7-9). Memling does not show us what happened when the fifth seal was opened. When the sixth seal is loosened there is an eclipse of the sun, the moon turns red as blood, the stars fall down from heaven, islands and mountains move, people of all walks in life hide in the caves (Rev. 6:12-17). When the seventh and last seal is opened, seven trumpets are given to seven angels, which Memling painted on the top rim the outermost rainbow (Rev. 8:2). At the foot of the rainbow circle, an angel swings a censer of burning incense in God’s honour, hurling the fiery coals down to earth, where they cause thunder and earthquakes (Rev. 8:3-5). The last of these spectacles is depicted on the angel’s cope. One by one the seven trumpets inspire him, each with a dramatic effect which Memling moves further and further towards the background. Hail and fire, mixed with blood, fall down to earth: trees, earth and grass are burned (Rev. 8:7-8). A burning mountain is hurled on them, a ship sinks (Rev. 8:8-9). A star falls down to earth and poisons the wells (Rev. 8:10-11). A shrieking eagle flies over and augurs even more misery (Rev. 8:13). Then smoke rises and fearsome figures resembling equine creatures appear (Rev. 9:1-12). Four harnessed angels stand on the bank and attack them (Rev. 9:13-20). A gigantic angel then descends from Heaven: his legs like columns of fire, his body enveloped in a cloud, a face like the sun and a rainbow above his head. He places his right foot in the sea and his left foot on earth. In his left hand is a small open book and he raises his right hand to heaven, shouting “there shall be no more delay” (Rev. 10:1-10). Finally, there is a great wonder in the sky: a pregnant woman, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet. Opposite her appears a second sign: a huge fiery dragon with seven heads. This dreadful dragon’s tail immediately sweeps some of the stars out of the sky and throws them down to earth (Rev. 12:1-6). The woman gives birth to a son, who is immediately rescued and brought before God on his throne. On the far right Memling added the final scene: his vision of the end of time. The ensuing battle is waged by Michael and his angels against the dragon and the devils ... a battle that was obviously won by Michael (Rev. 12:7-12). Down on earth he pursues the Woman (Mary), who has grown wings (Rev. 12:13-14), and on the distant horizon the dragon surrenders to a seven-headed monster rising up from the sea (Rev. 13:1-4).

In 1400, on the occasion of the royal marriage of Duke Louis II of Anjou to the queen of Sicily, Jolanda of Aragon, the Angers Apocalypse tapestries were hung in the archbishop’s palace at Arles. They were admired by a burgher of Arles, Bertrand Boysset, who wrote: “Non e s' horns cu e le procures escriure ni racontar la valor, la beuat, la noblesa d'aquesles draps” (There is no-one who can express the value, the beauty and the noblesse of these tapestries in written or spoken words). This eulogy extends further than the tapestries, though: it is the eloquence of John’s Apocalypse that again and again led to artistic climaxes – and not least to those of the Low Country miniaturists who within the tradition of Netherlandish painting produced the twenty-three large miniatures of the Flemish Apocalypse.

Saint John on Patmos (right inside), Hans Memling