

Chapter 1 On Earth as it is in Heaven



Figure 4) Calendar miniature of July in *Les Très Riches Heures*, by the Limbourg Brothers. c. 1411-1416. Illumination on vellum, 22.5 by 13.6 cm. (Chantilly, Musée Condé Ms 65, fol.7v).

It is possible to read this article as a popular scientific essay but also as a (pre)scientific analysis with accompanying notes and appendices. Readers with some knowledge of astrological horoscope calculations (star divination), as well as readers with some (astronomical) background, will be able to get to the heart of this analysis more easily

It is generally accepted that, between 1411 and 1416, three illuminators Paul, Herman, Johan collectively known as the Limbourg brothers, created for their patron Jean de France, Duke of Berry (1340-1416), a book of hours that has not seen its equal since.¹ This manuscript, known as *Les Très Riches Heures* (Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 65) is among the most

¹ It has been accepted that from 1416 to 1489, at least the hands of 2 more painters, Barthélemy d'Eyck (Master of the Shadows) and Jean Colombe (see appendix A) have been involved in the painting of the miniatures.

intensively studied manuscripts ever.² The reason for this is its breath-taking illumination in the International Gothic Style which the Limbourg Brothers added to illustrate the liturgical calendar.³

The book opens with twelve seasonal calendars in full page illuminations with scenes and landscapes near castles owned by the duke or with which he was familiar. These finely executed tableaux are connected with their heavens to a unique semi-circular tympanum, appropriate signs of the zodiac and written astrological and calendric information for each seasonal month (Fig. 4,9,12). Before the Très Riches Heures, such calendars – when illustrated at all – were usually adorned with smaller vignettes showing the appropriate sign of the zodiac for a given month and depictions of agricultural occupations or typical pastimes for each month. The creation of the calendars of the Très Riches Heures started about 1411, but as it happened, for the Limbourg Brothers the commission was too ambitious to be finished in their lifetimes, for both the illuminators and their patron died in 1416. From then on the manuscript was in the hands several noble families. After the Book of Hours had been finished by Jean Colombe (commissioned by Charles 1 of Savoy between 1485-1489), it became part of the inventory of Margaretha of Austria (1530) and shortly after it was lost to sight for about three centuries.

After its rediscovery in 1856 by the duc d’Aumale, the manuscript was brought to attention of a wider audience when reproductions of it were exhibited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1904. From then, the miniatures became known. While art historians and general readers have marvelled at the sense of elegance of the manuscript they also have raised questions the work, notably about the calendar miniatures. First, there was the question of which illuminator debated, second, concerns the identification of the personages represented in some of these calendar-scenes (H Haasse). A third, even more intriguing

² Delisle published his discovery in an article entitled ‘Les Livres d’Heures du Duc de Berry’, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xxix (1884), pp. 97-110; for the Duke’s inventory, see Dückers and Roelofs 2005, p. 378. In regards to scholarship on the Très Riches Heures, standard works are the monographs published by Durrieu and Meiss: Paul Durrieu, *Les Très Riches Heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, Chantilly 1904, and Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry. The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries* (two vols.), New York 1973. Recent studies include those by Dückers and Roelofs 2005 (the exhibition catalogue for the 2005 exhibition on the work of the Limbourgs in Nijmegen), especially pp. 113-119, and an excellent study by Patricia Stirnemann, ‘Combien de copistes et d’artistes ont contribué aux Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry?’ in: É. Taburet-Delahaye (ed.), *La création artistique en France autour de 1400*, Paris 2006, pp. 365-80, and finally *The Limbourg Brothers. Reflections on the Origins and the Legacy of Three Illuminators from Nijmegen*, Leiden 2009. Recent bibliography on the Très Riches Heures can be found in these publications

³ An accessible general introduction on the contents and illustration of books of hours is given by Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: the Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, New York 1988 (second edition 2001). For the specific texts and illustration of the Très Riches Heures, see Meiss 1973, pp. 308-324.