

GUILLEMETS

Disentangling the Masters of Guillebert de Mets: An Interdisciplinary Approach

DURATION
 01/10/2013 - 31/12/2015

BUDGET
 74.907 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The most important group of Flemish book painters of the first half of the 15th-century, the Masters of Guillebert de Mets, is paradoxically one of the most elusive of its time. Up to now, it has proved impossible to locate their activity and the identity of the main illuminator is shrouded in mystery. This is all the more frustrating since this group contributed to such seminal manuscripts as the *Decamerone* of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris or Gui Guilbaut's *Cité de Dieu* (Brussels, Royal Library). They also worked for eminent bibliophiles like Philip the Good.

Based on a substantial body of documents, some of them important and unpublished, the first section of this project will reassess the fascinating personality of Guillebert de Mets, the eponymous scribe who copied at least two manuscripts illuminated by the group. Guillebert was not only a scribe, but also a prominent member of the city council in the Flemish city of Geraardsbergen and the keeper of an inn, which hosted members of the Duke's entourage passing through Geraardsbergen. This inn was a real hub, a gathering place where contracts for the copying and illuminating of manuscripts were negotiated. The project will also seek to identify the principal painter of the group as Jan Ramont, an illuminator possibly trained in Flanders and in Paris, based in Ghent but also active in Tournai.

A second aspect of the research is an attempt to reconstruct the artistic and cultural network in which Ramont was imbedded. This will call for a detailed analysis of all the clues present in the documents and manuscripts of the group, in order to identify the social, cultural and intellectual profile of both scribe and illuminators, whose style was clearly modelled to the tastes of clients for whom Parisian art constituted a reference. This approach will require a thorough analysis of micro-environments such as the University of Paris and the proto-humanist circles of the same city, the entourage of the ducal court in Paris and in the Netherlands, the *Cour amoureuse* of Charles VI (a literary society, connected both to the king and the duke of Burgundy), as well as the world of *devotio moderna* with its stronghold in the north. One of the major challenges of this research will be to determine how Jan Ramont's work fits and functions in this dense maze of intersecting networks. At this early stage of research, the Burgundian court seems to be an important connecting thread.



It is clear that the historical density of objects as complex as illuminated manuscripts requires a multidisciplinary approach. The project will therefore call on a very wide range of specialties from palaeography and codicology to economic, social and political history, including literary history, linguistics, liturgy, heraldry, genealogy, history of collections, to name only the main ones. A wide network of scholars will be brought in along the way to answer specialist questions and test the hypotheses to be advanced.



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A third and last part of the project will try to establish if and how the most recent laboratory methods can contribute to issues of connoisseurship by a non-invasive analysis of inks, pigments and painting techniques. X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF), the technique that will be implemented offers a multitude of advantages: it is a non-destructive technique with a very small spot size of only 70 µm, which is important when analysing small features in a miniature; the technique offers the possibility to analyse simultaneously multiple chemical elements, and it is also fast: each measurement takes only 120 seconds. The exact location of the measuring spot can be followed (or changed) via the computer screen, with the focusing of the measuring head to the desired position done also via the computer. The equipment is completely mobile so that the analyses can be performed *in situ*. The technique can be used both for the study of illuminations (inorganic pigments, metal leafs or paint) and for the investigation of iron-gall inks.

Combining these varied methods should allow us to shed light on the work and activity of an extremely creative group of Flemish illuminators, a crucial link between the Parisian tradition and the South Netherlandish book painting. The project also aims to highlight some of the most precious manuscripts preserved in the Royal Library of Belgium.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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LINKS

http://www.kikirpa.be/uploads/files/projects/display_project.php?id=149&lang=en