

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



The BRUGES MASTER OF 1482

The Assault on the Chastel de Saint Forget

Illuminated manuscript in tempera on paper, with extensive heightening in gold and a fictive border in black and gold leaf; a miniature cut from a *Chronicle of the Hundred Years War* in French.

The verso with two columns of fifteen lines of French text in a bâtarde script (beginning '*taillart. Quant ces...*' and ending '*occupoient que ce-*') in brown ink, and with paragraph marks in red and blue ink.

Numbered 11 in black chalk and inscribed with Bruce Ferrini's inventory / stock number VM 6523 on the verso.

98 x 170 mm. (3 7/8 x 6 3/4 in.)

Datable to the 1480s, this is one of thirteen cuttings from an illuminated manuscript of the *Chroniques de Jehan Froissart*, a prose account of the Hundred Years' War written in medieval French by the 14th century author, poet and court historian Jean Froissart (c.1337-c.1405). (The text of the *Chroniques*, which established Froissart's fame, is preserved in over a hundred illuminated manuscripts.) The subjects of the dozen other extant miniatures from this particular manuscript of the *Chroniques* are mainly scenes from English and French history.

The author of this miniature of *The Assault on the Chastel de Saint Forget* is the anonymous Flemish illuminator known as The Master of Bruges or The Master of 1482, who was active at the court in Bruges in the 1480s and 1490s. As Sandra Hindman has noted of the present sheet, '*Variously attributed to the Flemish Master of 1482, who worked in Bruges, and the French Mamerot Master, who worked in Bourges, this miniature comes from a chronicle of the Hundred Year's War. In our opinion, the palette, the figures, and the composition support an attribution to the Master of 1482. One of the most striking features of this miniature is the bold palette with splashes of bright red paint, said to be a hallmark of the Master of 1482. Of the thirteen miniatures that come from the same manuscript and were originally bound into the Burckhardt-Wildt album, this one is among the finest; the delicate modelling of the faces, the sketchy treatment of the surface of the water, and the sophisticated organization of the composition point to a gifted artist.*'

The subject of this sheet, an assault on the Castle of Saint-Forget in 1384-1385, as described in the text on the verso of this sheet, is taken from Book III of Froissart's *Chroniques*: '*Because of the actions of such marauding and thieving people, who in the marches of Toulouse and Rouergue were carrying*

on the English war, Sir Gautier de Passac was sent with a large number of men-at-arms and Genevans to Toulouse to deliver the country from its enemies. And he came to Toulouse; and there he commanded the knights and squires of the surrounding area, and wrote to Sir Roger of Spain, the seneschal of Carcassonne, who came to serve him; for Sir Gautier had general authority over all the officers of Languedoc; so that those who were summoned and commanded came with as many men as they had. So the aforementioned Sir Roger came with sixty lances and a hundred pavise [shields], and the seneschal of Rouergue with as many, and Sir Hugues de Froideville with as many or more. When all these men-at-arms were gathered together, they numbered about four hundred lances and a full thousand pavise-bearers... They left Toulouse one day and came before Saint-Forget, where they were halted; it was held by a man-at-arms from Bern, a great pillager, who was called Bourg de Taillard. When these lords and their companies had come before Saint-Forget, they encamped. And soon they went on the attack, and the Genevans began to bombard so fiercely and so strongly that hardly any of the defenders dared to show themselves on the walls of the town and the fort; but the French did not take it on that first day, despite their assault. When evening came, they returned to their camp and spent the night in comfort; they had plenty to eat. The next morning, after drinking, they armed themselves, for the trumpets sounded the assault; the lords set themselves into order to attack, and advanced at full pace right up to the foot of the moats... The assault on the castle of Saint-Forget lasted so long, and was so fierce and determined, that those who were at the base of the wall to hew and pick at it brought down a great section. Then those inside were astonished and wished to surrender with their lives spared, but no heed was paid to this, for they had fallen into such determined hands that Sir Gautier commanded that they all be killed. After that order no one was granted mercy, but all were killed; not one escaped. Thus, the barons and knights of France who had come there took the castle of Saint-Forget at the first attempt... After the capture of the castle of Saint-Forget, and after Sir Gautier had returned it to the knight to whom it belonged, who had it repaired, which was necessary because the French had greatly damaged it during the assault and capture, those lords departed...'

The first recorded owner of the present sheet, as well as the other twelve miniatures by the Bruges Master of 1482 from the same manuscript of the *Chroniques* of Froissart, was the Swiss landscape painter and occasional art dealer Peter Birmann (1758-1844). All thirteen cuttings were acquired from Birmann by the collector Daniel Burckhardt-Wildt (1752-1819), a wealthy Basel silk-ribbon manufacturer who assembled a collection of antiquities, paintings and illuminated manuscripts and miniatures. The thirteen *Chroniques* miniatures remained together with Burckhardt-Wildt's descendants until 1983, when they were dispersed at auction. Five of these – one of which is similar in composition to the present sheet – are today in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, while a further two have recently reappeared at auction.

Exhibitions

Akron, Bruce Ferrini Rare Books, and London, Sam Fogg Rare Books and Manuscripts, at London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox Ltd. and Tokyo and Nagoya, Maruzen Co. Ltd., *Medieval and Renaissance Miniature Painting*, 1988-1989, no.37.

Literature:

New York, H. P. Kraus, *Catalogue 172. Illuminations: Examples of the art of illumination from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century in manuscripts and single miniatures*, 1985, pp.82-83, no.23 (as by a 'Follower of Jean Fouquet. France (possibly Bourges) c.1485'); Sandra Hindman, *Medieval and Renaissance Miniature Painting*, exhibition catalogue, London, Tokyo and Nagoya, 1988-1989, pp.78-79, no.37 and p.139, no.37 (as by The Master of 1482).

Artist description:

The anonymous Flemish illuminator known as The Master of Bruges or The Master of 1482 was active at the court in Bruges in the 1480s and 1490s. He is named for his frontispiece illustration in a

manuscript of Bartholomeus Anglicus's *Livre de la propriété des choses*, written in Bruges in 1482 and today in the British Library. As Georges Dogaer has noted of the Bruges Master, 'His hallmark is a colourful palette, most fully deployed in the costumes of his figures. One might say he consciously pursued the greatest possible variety in them.' The Bruges Master of 1482 is known to have contributed illustrations to some ten different manuscripts, including at least four produced for the Flemish nobleman, courtier and noted bibliophile Louis de Bruges, Lord of Gruuthuse (c.1427-1492), who was one of the most significant patrons of illuminated manuscripts from Flemish workshops in the second half of the 15th century. The Bruges Master seems to have worked for courtly patrons on secular manuscripts, on such subjects as hunting and chivalry, for the most part written in French rather than Latin. As other scholars have observed of the Bruges Master, 'This artist specialized in scenes of courtly ceremony, rendering complex interiors and group scenes, as well as panoramic landscapes, in a distinctive linear style animated by bright, saturated colors.'