

**20-1** Jan van Eyck, *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*, 1434. Oil on wood, 2' 9"  $\times$  1'  $10\frac{1}{2}$ ". National Gallery, London.

Van Eyck played a major role in popularizing oil painting and in establishing portraiture as an important art form. In this portrait of an Italian financier and his wife, he also portrayed himself in the mirror.

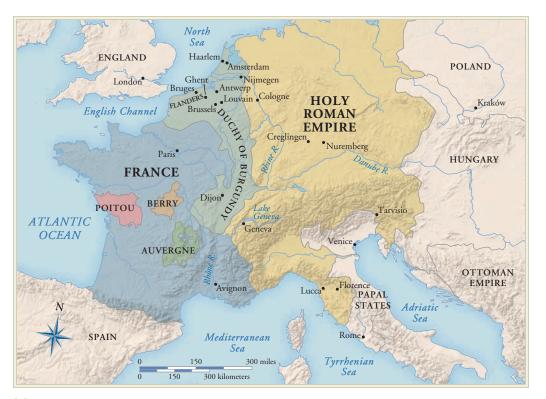
# NORTHERN EUROPE, 1400 TO 1500

As the 15th century opened, two competing popes still resided in Rome and Avignon during the Great Schism (1378–1417), and France and England still fought each other in the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453). Social turmoil accompanied dying *feudalism* as the widespread European movement toward centralized royal governments, begun in the 12th century, continued apace. But out of conflict and turmoil also emerged a new economic system—the early stage of European capitalism. In response to the financial requirements of trade, new credit and exchange systems created an economic network of enterprising European cities. Trade in money accompanied trade in commodities, and the former financed industry. Both were in the hands of international trading companies such as those of Jacques Coeur in Bourges (see Chapter 18) and the Medici in Florence (see Chapter 21). In 1460 the Flemish established the first international commercial stock exchange in Antwerp. In fact, the French word for stock market (*bourse*) comes from the name of the van der Beurse family of Bruges, the wealthiest city in 15th-century Flanders—a region corresponding to what is today Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and part of northern France (MAP 20-1).

Art also thrived in Northern Europe during this time under royal, ducal, church, and private patronage. Two developments in particular were of special significance: the adoption of oil-based pigment as the leading medium for painting and the blossoming of printmaking as a major art form, which followed the invention of movable type. These new media had a dramatic impact on artistic production worldwide.

#### BURGUNDY AND FLANDERS

In the 15th century, Flanders was not an independent state but a region under the control of the duke of Burgundy, the ruler of the fertile east-central region of France still famous for its wines. Duke Philip the Bold (r. 1363–1404) was one of four sons of King John II (r. 1350–1364) of France. In 1369, Philip married Margaret of Male, the daughter of the count of Flanders, and acquired territory in the Netherlands. Thereafter, the major source of Burgundian wealth was Bruges, the city that made Burgundy a dangerous rival of France, which then, as in the Gothic age, was a smaller kingdom geographically than the modern nation-state. Bruges initially derived its wealth from the wool trade and soon expanded into banking, becoming the financial clearinghouse for all of Northern Europe. Indeed, Bruges so dominated Flanders that the duke of Burgundy eventually chose to make the city his capital and moved his court there from Dijon in the early 15th century.



MAP 20-1 France, the duchy of Burgundy, and the Holy Roman Empire in 1477.

Due to the expanded territory and the prosperity of the duchy of Burgundy, Philip the Bold and his successors were probably the most powerful rulers in Northern Europe during the first three-quarters of the 15th century. Although members of the French royal family, they usually supported England (on which they relied for the raw materials used in their wool industry) during the Hundred Years' War and, at times, controlled much of northern France, including Paris, the seat of the French monarchy. At the height of Burgundian power, the reigning duke's lands stretched from the Rhône River to the North Sea.

#### Chartreuse de Champmol

The dukes of Burgundy were major patrons of the arts and understood how art could support their dynastic and political goals as well as adorn their castles and town houses. Philip the Bold's grandest artistic enterprise was the building of the Chartreuse de Champmol, near Dijon. A chartreuse ("charter house" in English) is a Carthusian monastery. The Carthusian order, founded by Saint Bruno in the late 11th century at Chartreuse, near Grenoble in southeastern France, consisted of monks who devoted their lives to solitary living and prayer. Unlike monastic orders that earned income from farming and other work, the Carthusians generated no revenues. Philip's generous endowment at Champmol was therefore the sole funding for an ambitious artistic program. Inspired by Saint-Denis, the royal abbey of France and burial site of the French kings (see Chapter 18), Philip intended the Dijon chartreuse to become a ducal mausoleum and serve both as a means of securing salvation in perpetuity for the Burgundian dukes (the monks prayed continuously for the souls of the ducal family) and as a dynastic symbol of Burgundian power.

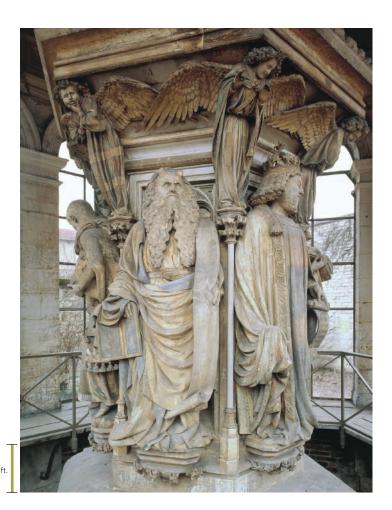
**CLAUS SLUTER** In 1389, Philip the Bold placed the Haarlem (Netherlands) sculptor Claus Sluter (active ca. 1380–1406) in charge of the sculptural program for the Chartreuse de Champmol. For the cloister of the Carthusian monastery, Sluter designed a large sculptural fountain located in a well. The well served as a water source for the monastery. It seems improbable, however, that the fountain actually

spouted water, because the Carthusian commitment to silence and prayer would have precluded anything that produced sound. Although the sculptor died before completing the entire fountain, he did finish Well of Moses (FIG. 20-2). Moses and five other prophets (David, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zachariah) surround a base that once supported a 25-foot-tall group of Christ on the Cross, the Virgin Mary, John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene. The Well of Moses is a modern name. The Carthusians called it a fons vitae, a fountain of everlasting life. The blood of the crucified Christ symbolically flowed down over the grieving angels and Old Testament prophets, spilling into the well below, washing over Christ's prophetic predecessors and redeeming anyone who would drink water from the well. The inspiration for the well may have come in part from contemporaneous mystery plays in which actors portraying prophets frequently delivered commentaries on events in Christ's life.

Although the six figures recall the jamb statues (FIGS. 18-17 and 18-24) of Gothic portals, they are much more realistically rendered, and the prophets have almost portraitlike features and distinct individual personalities and costumes. David is an elegantly garbed Gothic king, Moses an elderly horned prophet (compare FIG. 17-36) with a waist-length beard. Sluter's intense observation of natural appearance provided him with the information necessary to sculpt the figures in minute detail. Heavy draperies with voluminous folds swathe the lifesize figures. The artist succeeded in making their difficult, complex surfaces seem remarkably naturalistic. He enhanced this effect by skillfully differentiating textures, from coarse drapery to smooth flesh and silky hair. Originally, paint, much of which has flaked off, further augmented the naturalism of the figures. (The painter was Jean Malouel [ca. 1365–1415], another Netherlandish master.) This fascination with the specific and tangible in the visible world became one of the chief characteristics of 15th-century Flemish art.

**MELCHIOR BROEDERLAM** Philip the Bold also commissioned a major altarpiece for the main altar in the chapel of the Chartreuse. A collaborative project between two Flemish artists, this altarpiece consisted of a large sculptured shrine by Jacques de Baerze (active ca. 1384–1399) and a pair of exterior panels painted by MELCHIOR BROEDERLAM (active ca. 1387–1409).

Altarpieces were a major art form north of the Alps in the late 14th and 15th centuries. From their position behind the altar, they served as backdrops for the Mass. The Mass represents a ritual celebration of the Holy *Eucharist*. At the Last Supper, Christ commanded that his act of giving to his apostles his body to eat and his blood to drink be repeated in memory of him. This act serves as the nucleus of the Mass. The ritual of the Mass involves prayer, contemplation of the Word of God, and the reenactment of the Eucharistic sacrament. Because the Mass involves not only a memorial rite but complex Christian doctrinal tenets as well, art has traditionally played an important role in giving visual form to these often intricate theological concepts for the Christian faithful. Like sculpted



**20-2** Claus Sluter, *Well of Moses*, Chartreuse de Champmol, Dijon, France, 1395–1406. Limestone with traces of paint, Moses 6' high.

The Well of Moses, a symbolic fountain of life made for the duke of Burgundy, originally supported a Crucifixion group. Sluter's figures recall the jamb statues of French Gothic portals but are far more realistic.

medieval church portals, these altarpieces had a didactic role, especially for the illiterate. They also reinforced Church doctrines for viewers and stimulated devotion.

Given their function as backdrops to the Mass, it is not surprising that many altarpieces depict scenes directly related to Christ's sacrifice. The Champmol altarpiece, or retable, for example, features sculpted Passion scenes on the interior. These public altarpieces most often took the form of polyptychs (hinged multipaneled paintings) or carved relief panels. The hinges allowed the clergy to close the polyptych's side wings over the central panel(s). Artists decorated both the exterior and interior of the altarpieces. This multi-image format provided artists the opportunity to construct narratives through a sequence of images, somewhat as in manuscript illustration. Although scholars do not have concrete information about when the clergy opened and closed these altarpieces, evidence suggests they remained closed on regular days and were opened on Sundays and feast days. This schedule would have allowed viewers to see both the interior and exterior—diverse imagery at various times according to the liturgical calendar. Over time, however, differing Protestant conceptions of the Eucharist (see Chapter 23) ultimately led to a decline of the altarpiece as a dominant art form in Northern Europe.

The painted wings of the *Retable de Champmol* (FIG. **20-3**) depict the *Annunciation* and *Visitation* on the left panel and the



**20-3** MELCHIOR BROEDERLAM, *Retable de Champmol*, from the chapel of the Chartreuse de Champmol, Dijon, France, installed 1399. Oil on wood, each wing 5'  $5\frac{3}{4}'' \times 4'$   $1\frac{1}{4}''$ . Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.

This early example of oil painting reveals an attempt to represent the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface, but the gold background and flat halos recall medieval pictorial conventions.

Presentation in the Temple and Flight into Egypt on the right panel (see "The Life of Jesus in Art," Chapter 11, pages 296-297, or xxvi-xxvii in Volume II). Broederlam's painted images on the altarpiece's exterior deal with Christ's birth and infancy and set the stage for de Baerze's interior sculpted Passion scenes (not illustrated). The exterior panels are an unusual amalgam of different styles, locales, and religious symbolism. The two paintings include both landscape and interior scenes. The style of the buildings Broederlam depicted varies from Romanesque to Gothic (see Chapters 17 and 18). Scholars have suggested that the juxtaposition of different architectural styles in the left panel is symbolic. The rotunda (round building, usually with a dome) refers to the Old Testament, whereas the Gothic porch relates to the New Testament. In the right panel, a statue of a pagan god falls from the top of a column as the Holy Family approaches. These and other details symbolically announce the coming of the new order under Christ. Stylistically, Broederlam's representation of parts of the landscape and architecture reveals an attempt to render the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface. Yet the gold background and the flat halos of the figures, regardless of the positions of their heads, recall medieval pictorial conventions. Despite this interplay of various styles and diverse imagery, the altarpiece was a precursor of many of the artistic developments (such as the illusionistic depiction of three-dimensional objects and the representation of landscape) that preoccupied European artists throughout the 15th century.

## Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, and Rogier van der Weyden

Melchior Broederlam's Champmol retable also foreshadowed another significant development in 15th-century art—the widespread adoption of oil paints. Oil paints facilitated the exactitude in rendering details so characteristic of Northern European painting. Although the Italian biographer Giorgio Vasari and other 16thcentury commentators credited Jan van Eyck with the invention of oil painting, recent evidence has revealed that oil paints had been known for some time, well before Melchior Broederlam used oils in his work for Philip the Bold. Flemish painters built up their pictures by superimposing translucent paint layers on a layer of underpainting, which in turn had been built up from a carefully planned drawing made on a panel prepared with a white ground. With the oil medium, artists created richer colors than previously had been possible, giving their paintings an intense tonality, the illusion of glowing light, and enamel-like surfaces. These traits differed significantly from the high-keyed color, sharp light, and rather matte (dull) surface of tempera (see "Tempera and Oil Painting," page 523). The brilliant and versatile oil medium suited perfectly the formal intentions of the generation of Flemish painters after Broederlam, including Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, and Rogier van der Weyden, who aimed for sharply focused clarity of detail in their representation of thousands of objects ranging in scale from large to almost invisible.

ROBERT CAMPIN One of the earliest masters of oil painting was the artist known as the "Master of Flémalle," who scholars generally agree was ROBERT CAMPIN (ca. 1378–1444), the leading painter of the city of Tournai. His most famous work is the *Mérode Altarpiece* (FIG. 20-4). Similar in format to, but much smaller than, the Champmol retable, the *Mérode Altarpiece* was a private commission for household prayer. It was not unusual in that respect. Based on an accounting of extant Flemish religious paintings, lay patrons outnumbered clerical patrons by a ratio of two to one. At the time, various reform movements advocated personal devotion, and in the

years leading up to the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century, private devotional exercises and prayer grew in popularity. One of the more prominent features of these images commissioned for private use is the integration of religious and secular concerns. For example, artists often presented biblical scenes as taking place in a Flemish house. Although this might seem inappropriate or even sacrilegious today, religion was such an integral part of Flemish life that separating the sacred from the secular became virtually impossible. Moreover, the presentation in religious art of familiar settings and objects no doubt strengthened the direct bond the patron or viewer felt with biblical figures.

The popular Annunciation theme, as prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, occupies the Mérode triptych's central panel. The archangel Gabriel approaches Mary, who sits reading. The artist depicted a well-kept middle-class Flemish home as the site of the event. The carefully rendered architectural scene in the background of the right wing confirms this identification of the locale. The depicted accessories, furniture, and utensils contribute to the identification of the setting as Flemish. However, the objects represented are not merely decorative. They also function as religious symbols. The book, extinguished candle, and lilies on the table, the copper basin in the corner niche, the towels, fire screen, and bench all symbolize, in different ways, the Virgin's purity and her divine mission. In the right panel, Joseph has made a mousetrap, symbolic of the theological tradition that Christ is bait set in the trap of the world to catch the Devil. Campin completely inventoried a carpenter's shop. The ax, saw, and rod in the foreground not only are tools of the carpenter's trade but also are mentioned in Isaiah 10:15.

In the left panel, the closed garden is symbolic of Mary's purity, and the flowers depicted all relate to Mary's virtues, especially humility. The altarpiece's donor, Peter Inghelbrecht, a wealthy merchant, and his wife kneel in the garden and witness the momentous event through an open door. *Donor portraits*—portraits of the individual(s) who commissioned (or "donated") the work—became very popular in the 15th century. In this instance, in addition to asking to be represented in their altarpiece, the Inghelbrechts probably specified the subject. Inghelbrecht means "angel bringer," a reference to the *Annunciation* theme of the central panel. The wife's name, Scrynmakers, means "cabinet- or shrine-makers," referring to the workshop scene in the right panel.

JAN VAN EYCK The first Netherlandish painter to achieve international fame was JAN VAN EYCK (ca. 1390-1441), who in 1425 became the court painter of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy (r. 1419-1467). The artist moved his studio to Bruges, where the duke maintained his official residence, in 1432, the year he completed the Ghent Altarpiece (FIGS. 20-5 and 20-6). This retable is one of the largest (nearly 12 feet tall) of the 15th century. Jodocus Vyd, diplomat-retainer of Philip the Good, and his wife Isabel Borluut commissioned this polyptych as the centerpiece of the chapel Vyd built in the church originally dedicated to Saint John the Baptist (since 1540 Saint Bavo Cathedral). Vyd's largesse and the political and social connections that the Ghent Altarpiece revealed to its audience contributed to Vyd's appointment as burgomeister (chief magistrate) of Ghent shortly after the unveiling of the work. Two of the exterior panels (FIG. 20-5) depict the donors. The husband and wife, painted in illusionistically rendered niches, kneel with their hands clasped in prayer. They gaze piously at illusionistic stone sculptures of Ghent's patron saints, Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist (who was probably also Vyd's patron saint). An Annunciation scene appears on the upper register, with a careful representation of a Flemish town outside the painted window of the center

#### **Tempera and Oil Painting**

The generic words "paint" and "pigment" encompass a wide range of substances artists have used over the years. Fresco aside (see "Fresco Painting," Chapter 19, page 504), during the 14th century, egg *tempera* was the material of choice for most painters, both in Italy and Northern Europe.

Tempera consists of egg combined with a wet paste of ground pigment. In his influential guidebook *Il libro dell'arte* (*The Artist's Handbook*, 1437), Cennino Cennini mentioned that artists mixed only the egg yolk with the ground pigment, but analyses of paintings from this period have revealed that some artists used the whole egg. Images painted with tempera have a velvety sheen. Artists usually applied tempera to the painting surface with a light touch because thick application of the pigment mixture results in premature cracking and flaking.

Scholars have discovered that artists used oil paints as far back as the 8th century, but not until the early 15th century did oil painting become widespread. Flemish artists such as Melchior Broederlam (FIG. 20-3) were among the first to employ oils extensively (often mixing them with tempera), and Italian painters quickly followed suit. The discovery of better drying components in the early 15th century enhanced the setting capabilities of oils. Rather than apply these oils in the light, flecked brushstrokes that tempera encouraged, artists laid the oils down in transparent layers, or *glazes*, over opaque

or semiopaque underlayers. In this manner, painters could build up deep tones through repeated glazing. Unlike tempera, whose surface dries quickly due to water evaporation, oils dry more uniformly and slowly, providing the artist time to rework areas. This flexibility must have been particularly appealing to artists who worked very deliberately, such as Robert Campin (FIG. 20-4), Jan van Eyck (FIGS. 20-1, 20-5 to 20-7), and other Flemish masters discussed in this chapter and the Italian Leonardo da Vinci (see Chapter 22). Leonardo also preferred oil paint because its gradual drying process and consistency permitted him to blend the pigments, thereby creating the impressive *sfumato* (smoky effect) that contributed to his fame.

Both tempera and oils can be applied to various surfaces. Through the early 16th century, wooden panels served as the foundation for most paintings. Italians painted on poplar. Northern European artists used oak, lime, beech, chestnut, cherry, pine, and silver fir. Availability of these timbers determined the choice of wood. Linen canvas became increasingly popular in the late 16th century. Although evidence suggests that artists did not intend permanency for their early images on canvas, the material proved particularly useful in areas such as Venice where high humidity warped wood panels and made fresco unfeasible. Further, until artists began to use wooden bars to stretch the canvas to form a taut surface, canvas paintings were more portable than wood panels.



**20-4** ROBERT CAMPIN (MASTER OF FLÉMALLE), *Mérode Altarpiece* (open), ca. 1425–1428. Oil on wood, center panel 2'  $1\frac{3}{8}'' \times 2' \frac{7}{8}''$ , each wing 2'  $1\frac{3}{8}'' \times 10\frac{7}{8}''$ . Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (The Cloisters Collection, 1956).

Campin set the *Annunciation* in a Flemish merchant's home in which the everyday objects represented have symbolic significance. Oil paints permitted Campin to depict all the details with loving fidelity.

ı

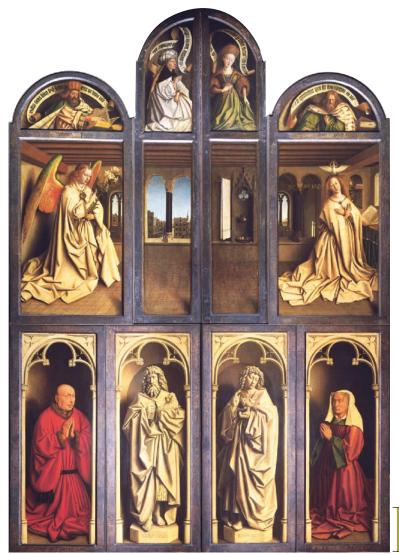
panel. In the uppermost arched panels, van Eyck depicted images of the Old Testament prophets Zachariah and Micah, along with *sibyls*, Greco-Roman mythological prophetesses whose writings the Christian Church interpreted as prophecies of Christ.

When opened (FIG. 20-6), the altarpiece reveals a sumptuous, superbly colored painting of humanity's redemption through Christ. In the upper register, God the Father-wearing the pope's triple tiara, with a worldly crown at his feet, and resplendent in a deep-scarlet mantle—presides in majesty. To God's right is the Virgin, represented, as in the Gothic age, as the Queen of Heaven, with a crown of 12 stars upon her head. Saint John the Baptist sits to God's left. To either side is a choir of angels, with an angel playing an organ on the right. Adam and Eve appear in the far panels. The inscriptions in the arches above Mary and Saint John extol the Virgin's virtue and purity and Saint John's greatness as the forerunner of Christ. The inscription above the Lord's head translates as "This is God, allpowerful in his divine majesty; of all the best, by the gentleness of his goodness; the most liberal giver, because of his infinite generosity." The step behind the crown at the Lord's feet bears the inscription "On his head, life without death. On his brow, youth without age. On his right, joy without sadness. On his left, security without fear." The entire altarpiece amplifies the central theme of salvation. Even though humans, symbolized by Adam and Eve, are sinful, they will be saved because God, in his infinite love, will sacrifice his own son for this purpose.

The panels of the lower register extend the symbolism of the upper. In the central panel, the community of saints comes from the four corners of the earth through an opulent, flowerspangled landscape. They proceed toward the altar of the Lamb and the octagonal fountain of life (compare FIG. 20-2). The Revelation passage recounting the Adoration of the Lamb is the main reading on All Saints' Day (November 1). The Lamb symbolizes the sacrificed Son of God, whose heart bleeds into a chalice, while into the fountain spills the "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). On the right, the 12 apostles and a group of martyrs in red robes advance. On the left appear prophets. In the right background come the virgin martyrs, and in the left background the holy confessors approach. On the lower wings, hermits, pilgrims, knights, and judges approach from left and right. They symbolize the four cardinal virtues: Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude, and Justice, respectively. The altarpiece celebrates the whole Christian cycle from the Fall to the Redemption, presenting the Church triumphant in heavenly Jerusalem.

Van Eyck used oil paints to render the entire altarpiece in a shimmering splendor of color that defies reproduction. No small detail escaped the painter. With pristine specificity, he revealed the beauty of the most insignificant object as if it were a work of piety as much as a work of art. He captured the soft texture of hair, the glitter of gold in the heavy brocades, the luster of pearls, and the flashing of gems, all with loving fidelity to appearance. This kind of meticulous attention to recording the exact surface appearance of humans, animals, objects, and landscapes, already evident in the *Mérode Altarpiece* (FIG. **20-4**), became the hallmark of Flemish panel painting in the 15th century.

GIOVANNI ARNOLFINI Emerging capitalism led to an urban prosperity that fueled the growing bourgeois market for art objects, particularly in Bruges, Antwerp, and, later, Amsterdam. This prosperity contributed to a growing interest in secular art in addition to



**20-5** Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* (closed), Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium, completed 1432. Oil on wood, 11' 5"  $\times$  7' 6".

Monumental painted altarpieces were popular in 15th-century Flemish churches. Artists decorated both the interiors and exteriors of these hinged polyptychs, which often, as here, included donor portraits.

religious artworks. Both the *Mérode Altarpiece* and the *Ghent Altarpiece* include painted portraits of their donors. These paintings marked a significant revival of portraiture, a genre that had languished since antiquity.

A purely secular portrait, but one with religious overtones, is Jan van Eyck's oil painting Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride (FIG. 20-1). Van Eyck depicted the Lucca financier (who had established himself in Bruges as an agent of the Medici family) and his betrothed in a Flemish bedchamber that is simultaneously mundane and charged with the spiritual. As in the Mérode Altarpiece, almost every object portrayed conveys the sanctity of the event, specifically, the holiness of matrimony. Arnolfini and his bride, Giovanna Cenami, hand in hand, take the marriage vows. The cast-aside clogs indicate that this event is taking place on holy ground. The little dog symbolizes fidelity (the common canine name Fido originated from the Latin fido, "to trust"). Behind the pair, the curtains of the marriage bed have been opened. The bedpost's finial (crowning ornament) is a tiny statue of Saint Margaret, patron saint of childbirth. (Giovanna is not yet pregnant, although the fashionable costume she wears makes her appear so.) From the finial hangs a whisk broom, symbolic of domestic care. The oranges on the chest below the window may refer to fertility. The single



**20-6** Jan van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece* (open), Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium, completed 1432. Oil on wood, 11′ 5″ × 15′ 1″.

In this sumptuous painting of salvation from the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, God the Father presides in majesty. Van Eyck rendered every figure, garment, and object with loving fidelity to appearance.

candle burning in the left rear holder of the ornate chandelier and the mirror, in which the viewer sees the entire room reflected, symbolize the all-seeing eye of God. The small medallions set into the mirror frame show tiny scenes from the Passion of Christ and represent God's promise of salvation for the figures reflected on the mirror's convex surface. Flemish viewers would have been familiar with many of the objects included in the painting because of traditional Flemish customs. Husbands traditionally presented brides with clogs, and the solitary lit candle in the chandelier was part of Flemish marriage practices. Van Eyck's placement of the two figures suggests conventional gender roles—the woman stands near the bed and well into the room, whereas the man stands near the open window, symbolic of the outside world.

Van Eyck enhanced the documentary nature of this scene by exquisitely painting each object. He carefully distinguished textures and depicted the light from the window on the left reflecting off various surfaces. He augmented the scene's credibility by including the convex mirror (complete with its spatial distortion, brilliantly recorded), because viewers can see not only the principals, Arnolfini and his wife, but also two persons who look into the room through the door. (Arnolfini's raised right hand may be a gesture of greeting to the two men.) One of these must be the artist himself, as the florid inscription above the mirror, "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic" (Jan van Eyck was here),

announces he was present. The picture's purpose, then, seems to have been to record and sanctify this marriage. However, some scholars have taken issue with this traditional reading of the painting, suggesting instead that Arnolfini is conferring legal privileges on his wife to conduct business in his absence. In either case, the artist functions as a witness. The self-portrait of van Eyck in the mirror also underscores the painter's self-consciousness as a professional artist whose role deserves to be recorded and remembered. (Compare the 12th-century monk Eadwine's self-portrait as "prince of scribes" [FIG. 17-37], a very early instance of an artist engaging in "self-promotion.")

MAN IN A RED TURBAN In 15th-century Flanders, artists also painted secular portraits without the layer of religious interpretation present in the Arnolfini double portrait. These private commissions began to multiply as both artists and patrons became interested in the reality (both physical and psychological) that portraits could reveal. For various reasons, great patrons embraced the opportunity to have their likenesses painted. They wanted to memorialize themselves in their dynastic lines and to establish their identities, ranks, and stations with images far more concrete than heraldic coats of arms. Portraits also served to represent state officials at events they could not attend. Sometimes, royalty, nobility, and the very rich would send artists to

#### MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

#### Framed Paintings

ntil recent decades, when painters began to be content with simply affixing canvas to wooden stretcher bars to provide a taut painting surface devoid of any ornamentation, artists considered the frame an integral part of the painting. Frames served a number of functions, some visual, others conceptual. For paintings such as large-scale altarpieces that were part of a larger environment, frames often served to integrate the painting with its surroundings. Frames could also be used to reinforce the illusionistic nature of the painted image. For example, the

20-7 Jan van Eyck, Man in a Red Turban, 1433. Oil on wood, 1'  $1\frac{1}{8}" \times 10\frac{1}{4}"$ . National Gallery, London.

Man in a Red Turban seems to be the first Western painted portrait in a thousand years in which the sitter looks directly at the viewer. The inscribed frame suggests it is a selfportrait of Jan van Eyck.

Italian painter Giovanni Bellini duplicated the carved pilasters of the architectural frame in his San Zaccaria Altarpiece (FIG. 22-33) in the painting itself, thereby enhancing the illusion of space and giving the painted figures an enhanced physical presence. In Jan van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece, the frame seems to cast shadows on the floor between the angel and Mary in the Annunciation scene (FIG. 20-5, top.) More commonly, artists used frames specifically to distance the viewer from the (often otherworldly) scene by calling attention to the separation of the image from the viewer's space.

Most 15th- and 16th-century paintings included elaborate frames that the artists themselves helped design and construct. Frequently, the artists painted or gilded the frames, adding to the expense. Surviving contracts reveal that the frame accounted for as much as half the cost of an altarpiece. For small works, artists sometimes affixed the frames to the panels before painting, creating an insistent visual presence as they worked. Occasionally, a single piece of wood served as both panel and frame, and the artist carved the painting surface from the wood, leaving the edges as a frame. Larger images with elaborate frames, such as altarpieces, required the services of a woodcarver or stonemason. The painter worked closely with the individual constructing the frame to ensure its appropriateness for the image(s) produced.

Unfortunately, over time, many frames have been removed from their paintings. For instance, in 1566 church officials dismantled the Ghent Altarpiece and detached its elaborately carved frame in order to protect the sacred work from Protestant iconoclasts (see "Protes-



tantism and Iconoclasm," Chapter 23, page 632). As ill luck would have it, when the panels were reinstalled in 1587, no one could find the frame. Sadly, the absence of many of the original frames of old paintings deprives viewers today of the complete artistic vision of the artists. Conversely, when the original frames exist, they sometimes provide essential information, such as the subject, name of the painter, and date. For example, the inscriptions on the frame of Jan van Eyck's Man in a Red Turban (FIG. 20-7) state that he painted it on October 21, 1433, and the inclusion of "As I can" and the omission of the sitter's name suggest that the painting is a self-portrait.

paint the likeness of a prospective bride or groom. When young King Charles VI (r. 1380-1422) of France sought a bride, a painter journeyed to three different royal courts to make portraits of the candidates for the king to use in making his choice.

In Man in a Red Turban (FIG. 20-7), the man van Eyck portrayed looks directly at the viewer. This seems to be the first Western painted portrait in a thousand years where the sitter does so. The level, composed gaze, directed from a true three-quarter head pose, must have impressed observers deeply. The painter created the illusion that from whatever angle a viewer observes the face, the eyes return that gaze. Van Eyck, with his considerable observational skill and controlled painting style, injected a heightened sense of speci-

ficity into this portrait by including beard stubble, veins in the bloodshot left eye, and weathered and aged skin. Although a definitive identification of the sitter has yet to be made, most scholars consider Man in a Red Turban to be a self-portrait, which van Eyck painted by looking at his image in a mirror (as he depicted himself in the mirror in the Arnolfinis' bedroom). The inscriptions on the frame (see "Framed Paintings," above) reinforce this identification. Across the top, van Eyck wrote "As I can" in Flemish using Greek letters, and across the bottom in Latin appears the statement "Jan van Eyck made me" and the date. The use of both Greek and Latin suggests the artist's view of himself as a successor to the fabled painters of antiquity.



**20-8** Rogier van der Weyden, *Deposition*, center panel of a triptych from Notre-Dame hors-les-murs, Louvain, Belgium, ca. 1435. Oil on wood,  $57' 2\frac{5}{8}'' \times 8' 7\frac{1}{8}''$ . Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Deposition resembles a relief carving in which the biblical figures act out a drama of passionate sorrow as if on a shallow theatrical stage. The emotional impact of the painting is unforgettable.

ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN When Jan van Eyck received the commission for the *Ghent Altarpiece*, ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN (ca. 1400–1464) was an assistant in the workshop of Robert Campin, but the younger painter's fame eventually rivaled van Eyck's. Rogier soon became renowned for his dynamic compositions stressing human action and drama. He concentrated on Christian themes such as the Crucifixion and the *Pietà* (the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of her son), moving observers emotionally by relating the sufferings of Christ.

An early masterwork is his 1435 Deposition (FIG. 20-8), the center panel of a triptych the Archers Guild of Louvain commissioned for the church of Notre-Dame hors-les-murs (Notre-Dame "outside the [town] walls") in Louvain. Rogier acknowledged the patrons of this large painting by incorporating the crossbow (the guild's symbol) into the decorative tracery in the corners. Instead of creating a deep landscape setting, as van Eyck might have, Rogier compressed the figures and action onto a shallow stage, imitating the large sculptured shrines so popular in the 15th century, especially in

the Holy Roman Empire (FIGS. 20-18 and 20-19). The device admirably served his purpose of expressing maximum action within a limited space. The painting, with the artist's crisp drawing and precise modeling of forms, resembles a stratified relief carving. A series of lateral undulating movements gives the group a compositional unity, a formal cohesion the artist strengthened by depicting the desolating anguish that many of the figures share. The similar poses of Christ and the Virgin Mary further unify the composition.

Few painters have equaled Rogier van der Weyden in the rendering of passionate sorrow as it vibrates through a figure or distorts a tearstained face. His depiction of the agony of loss is among the most authentic in religious art. The emotional impact on the viewer is immediate and unforgettable. It was probably Rogier van der Weyden that Michelangelo had in mind when, according to the Portuguese painter Francisco de Hollanda (1517–1584), the Italian master observed that "Flemish painting [will] please the devout better than any painting of Italy, which will never cause him to shed a tear, whereas that of Flanders will cause him to shed many."

#### ART AND SOCIETY

#### The Artist's Profession in Flanders

s in Italy (see "Artistic Training," Chapter 19, page 510), guilds controlled the Flemish artist's profession. To pursue a craft, individuals had to belong to the guild controlling that craft. Painters, for example, sought admission to the Guild of Saint Luke, the patron saint of painters (FIG. 20-9), as well as saddlers, glassworkers, and mirror-workers. The path to eventual membership in the guild began, for men, at an early age, when the father apprenticed his son in boyhood to a master, with whom the young aspiring painter lived. The master taught the fundamentals of his craft—how to make implements, prepare panels with gesso (plaster mixed with a binding material), and mix colors, oils, and varnishes. Once the youth mastered these procedures and learned to work in the master's traditional manner, he usually spent several years working as a journeyman in various cities, observing and absorbing ideas from other masters. He then was eligible to become a master and to apply for admission to the guild. Through the guild, he obtained commissions. The guild inspected his paintings to ensure that he used quality materials and to evaluate workmanship. It also secured him adequate payment for his labor. As a result of this quality control, Flemish artists soon gained a favorable reputation for their solid artisanship.

Women clearly had many fewer opportunities than men to train as artists, in large part because of social and moral constraints that would have forbidden women's apprenticeship in the homes of male masters. Moreover, from the 16th century, when academic training courses supplemented and then replaced guild training, until the 20th century, women would not as a rule expect or be permitted instruction in figure painting, insofar as it involved dissection of cadavers and study of the nude male model. Flemish women interested in pursuing art as a career, for example, Caterina van Hemessen (FIG. 23-17),

most often received tutoring from fathers and husbands who were professionals and whom the women assisted in all the technical procedures of the craft. Despite these obstacles, membership records of the art guilds of cities such as Bruges reveal that a substantial number of



**20-9** ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN, Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin, ca. 1435–1440. Oil and tempera on wood, 4'  $6\frac{1}{8}$ "  $\times$  3'  $7\frac{5}{8}$ ". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lee Higginson)

Probably commissioned by the painters guild in Brussels, this panel honors the first Christian artist and the profession of painting. Saint Luke may be a self-portrait of Rogier van der Weyden.

Flemish women in the 15th century were able to establish themselves as artists. That they succeeded in negotiating the difficult path to acceptance as professionals is a testament to both their tenacity and their artistic skill.

**SAINT LUKE** Slightly later in date is Rogier's *Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin* (FIG. **20-9**), probably painted for the Guild of Saint Luke, the artists guild in Brussels. The panel depicts the patron saint of painters drawing the Virgin Mary using a *silverpoint* (a sharp *stylus* that creates a fine line). The theme paid tribute to the profession of painting in Flanders (see "The Artist's Profession in Flanders," above) by drawing attention to the venerable history of the painter's craft. Many scholars believe that Rogier's *Saint Luke* is a self-portrait, iden-

tifying the Flemish painter with the first Christian artist and underscoring the holy nature of painting. Here, Rogier shares with Jan van Eyck the aim of recording every detail of the scene with loving fidelity to optical appearance, from the rich fabrics to the floor pattern to the landscape seen through the window. And, like Campin and van Eyck, Rogier imbued much of the representation with symbolic significance. At the right, the ox identifies the figure recording the Virgin's features as Saint Luke (see "The Four Evangelists," Chapter 16,

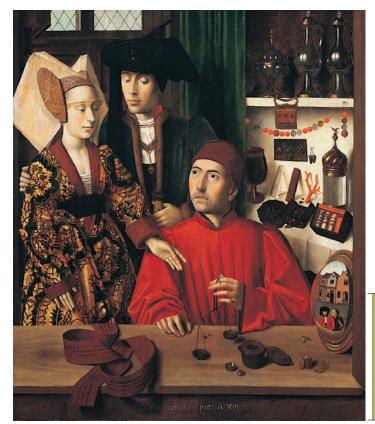


**20-10** ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN, *Portrait of a Lady*, ca. 1460. Oil on panel, 1'  $1\frac{3}{8}$ "  $\times$  10  $\frac{1}{16}$ ". National Gallery, Washington, D.C. (Andrew W. Mellon Collection).

Rogier van der Weyden won renown for his penetrating portrayals of character. The lowered eyes, tightly locked thin fingers, and fragile physique convey this unnamed lady's reserved demeanor.

page 412). The carved armrest of the Virgin's bench depicts Adam, Eve, and the serpent, reminding the viewer that Mary is the new Eve and Christ the new Adam who will redeem humanity from the Original Sin.

PORTRAIT OF A LADY Rogier, like van Eyck, also painted private portraits. The identity of the young woman he portrayed in FIG. 20-10 is unknown. Her dress and bearing imply noble rank. The portrait also reveals the lady's individual character. Her lowered eyes, tightly locked thin fingers, and fragile physique bespeak a reserved and pious demeanor. This style contrasted with the formal Italian approach (FIG. 21-25), derived from the profiles common to coins and medallions, which was sterner and conveyed little of the sitter's personality. Rogier was perhaps chief among the Flemish in his penetrating readings of his subjects. As a great pictorial composer, he made beautiful use here of flat, sharply pointed angular shapes that so powerfully suggest this subject's composure. In this portrait, unlike in his Saint Luke, the artist placed little emphasis on minute description of surface detail. Instead, he defined large, simple planes and volumes and focused on capturing the woman's dignity and elegance.



**20-11** Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in His Shop*, 1449. Oil on wood, 3'  $3'' \times 2'$  10''. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Robert Lehman Collection, 1975).

Once thought to depict Eligius, the patron saint of goldsmiths, Christus's painting, made for the Bruges goldsmiths' guild chapel, is more likely a generic scene of a couple shopping for a wedding ring.

#### Later Flemish Panel Painters

Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, and Rogier van der Weyden were the leading figures of the first generation of "Northern Renaissance" painters. (Art historians usually transfer to Northern Europe, with less validity than in its original usage, the term "Renaissance," coined to describe the conscious revival of classical art in Italy.) The second generation of Flemish masters, active during the latter half of the 15th century, shared many of the concerns of their illustrious predecessors, especially the use of oil paints to create naturalistic representations, often, although not always, of traditional Christian subjects for installation in churches.

PETRUS CHRISTUS One work of uncertain Christian content is A Goldsmith in His Shop (FIG. 20-11) by Petrus Christus (ca. 1410-1472), who settled in Bruges in 1444. According to the traditional interpretation, A Goldsmith in His Shop portrays Saint Eligius (who was initially a master goldsmith before committing his life to God) sitting in his stall, showing an elegantly attired couple a selection of rings. The bride's betrothal girdle lies on the table as a symbol of chastity, and the woman reaches for the ring the goldsmith weighs. The artist's inclusion of a crystal container for Eucharistic wafers (on the lower shelf to the right of Saint Eligius) and the scales (a reference to the Last Judgment) supports a religious interpretation of this painting and continues the Flemish habit of imbuing everyday objects with symbolic significance. A halo once circled the goldsmith's head, seemingly confirming the religious nature of this scene, but when scientific analysis revealed that the halo was a later addition by an artist other than Christus, restorers removed it.



**20-12** DIRK BOUTS, *Last Supper*, center panel of the *Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament*, Saint Peter's, Louvain, Belgium, 1464–1468. Oil on wood,  $6' \times 5'$ .

One of the earliest Northern European paintings to employ singlevanishing-point perspective, this *Last Supper* includes four servants in Flemish attire, probably portraits of the altarpiece's patrons.

More recent scholarship has argued that this painting, although not devoid of religious content, should be seen in the context of the tradition of vocational paintings produced for installation in guild chapels. Although the couple's presence suggests a marriage portrait, most scholars now believe that the goldsmiths' guild in Bruges commissioned this painting. Saint Eligius was the patron saint of gold- and silversmiths, blacksmiths, and metalworkers, all of whom shared a chapel in a building adjacent to their meetinghouse. The reconsecration of this chapel took place in 1449, the same date as this painting. Therefore, it seems probable that Christus painted *A Goldsmith in His Shop*, which depicts an economic transaction and focuses on the goldsmith's profession, specifically for the guild chapel.

Christus went to great lengths to produce a historically credible image. For example, the variety of objects depicted in the painting serves as advertisement for the goldsmiths guild. Included are the profession's raw materials—precious stones, beads, crystal, coral, and seed pearls—scattered among finished products—rings, buckles, and brooches. The pewter vessels on the upper shelves are donation pitchers, which town leaders gave to distinguished guests. All these meticulously painted objects attest to the centrality and importance of the goldsmiths to both the secular and sacred communities as well as enhance the naturalism of the painting. The convex mirror in the foreground showing another couple and a street with houses serves to extend the painting's space into the viewer's space, further creating the illusion of reality.

**DIRK BOUTS** A different means of suggesting spatial recession is evident in *Last Supper* (FIG. **20-12**) by DIRK BOUTS (ca. 1415–1475), who became the official painter of Louvain in 1468. The painting is the central panel of *Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament*, which the Louvain Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament commissioned in 1464. It is one of the earliest Northern European paintings to demonstrate the use of a single *vanishing point* (see "Renaissance Perspectival Systems," Chapter 21, page 547) for creating *perspective*. All of the central room's *orthogonals* (converging diagonal lines imagined to be behind and perpendicular to the picture plane) lead to a single vanishing point in the center of the mantelpiece above Christ's head. However, the small side room has its own vanishing point, and neither it nor the vanishing point of the main room falls on the horizon of the landscape seen through the windows, as in Italian Renaissance paintings.

In Last Supper, Bouts did not focus on the biblical narrative itself but instead presented Christ in the role of a priest performing a ritual from the liturgy of the Christian Church—the consecration of the Eucharistic wafer. This contrasts strongly with other Last Supper depictions, which often focused on Judas's betrayal or on Christ's comforting of John. Bouts also added to the complexity of this image by including four servants (two in the pass-through window and two standing), all dressed in Flemish attire. These servants are most likely portraits of the confraternity's members responsible for commissioning the altarpiece, continuing the Flemish tradition of inserting into biblical representations portraits of the painting's patrons, first noted in the Mérode Altarpiece (FIG. 20-4).

HUGO VAN DER GOES By the mid-15th century, Flemish art had achieved renown throughout Europe. The Portinari Altarpiece (FIG. 20-13), for example, is a large-scale Flemish work in a family chapel in Florence, Italy. The artist who received the commission was Hugo VAN DER GOES (ca. 1440–1482), the dean of the painters guild of Ghent from 1468 to 1475. Hugo painted the triptych for Tommaso Portinari, an Italian shipowner and agent for the powerful Medici family of Florence. Portinari appears on the wings of the altarpiece with his family and their patron saints. The central panel depicts the Adoration of the Shepherds. On this large surface, Hugo displayed a scene of solemn grandeur, muting the high drama of the joyous occasion. The Virgin, Joseph, and the angels seem to brood on the suffering to come rather than to meditate on the Nativity miracle. Mary kneels, somber and monumental, on a tilted ground that has the expressive function of centering the main actors. The composition may also reflect the tilted stage floors of contemporary mystery plays. From the right rear enter three shepherds, represented with powerful realism in attitudes of wonder, piety, and gaping curiosity. Their lined faces, work-worn hands, and uncouth dress and manner seem immediately familiar.

The symbolic architecture and a continuous wintry northern landscape unify the three panels. Symbols surface throughout the altarpiece. Iris and columbine flowers symbolize the Sorrows of the Virgin. The 15 angels represent the Fifteen Joys of Mary. A sheaf of wheat stands for Bethlehem (the "house of bread" in Hebrew), a reference to the Eucharist. The harp of David, emblazoned over the building's portal in the middle distance (just to the right of the Virgin's head), signifies the ancestry of Christ. To stress the meaning and significance of the depicted event, Hugo revived medieval pictorial devices. Small scenes shown in the background of the altarpiece represent (from left to right) the flight into Egypt, the annunciation to the shepherds, and the arrival of the magi. Hugo's variation in the scale of his figures to differentiate them by their importance to the central event also reflects older traditions. Still, he put a vigorous, penetrating realism to work in a new direction, characterizing human beings according to their social level while showing their common humanity.







1 ft.

**20-13** Hugo van der Goes, *Portinari Altarpiece* (open), from Sant'Egidio, Florence, Italy, ca. 1476. Tempera and oil on wood, center panel 8'  $3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 10'$ , each wing 8'  $3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4'$   $7\frac{1}{2}''$ . Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

This altarpiece is a rare instance of the awarding of a major commission in Florence to a Flemish painter. The Italians admired the incredibly realistic details and Hugo's brilliant portrayal of human character.

After Portinari placed his altarpiece in the family chapel in the Florentine church of Sant'Egidio, it created a considerable stir among Italian artists. Although the painting as a whole may have seemed unstructured to them, Hugo's masterful technique and what the Florentines regarded as extraordinary realism in representing drapery, flowers, animals, and, above all, human character and emotion made a deep impression on them. At least one Florentine artist, Domenico Ghirlandaio (see Chapter 21), paid tribute to the Northern European master by using Hugo's most striking motif, the adoring shepherds, in one of his own Nativity paintings.

HANS MEMLING A contemporary of Hugo van der Goes was HANS MEMLING (ca. 1430–1494), who became a citizen of Bruges in 1465 and received numerous commissions from the city's wealthy merchants, Flemish and foreign alike. Memling specialized in portraits and images of the Madonna. The many that survive depict young, slight, pretty princesses, each holding a doll-like infant Christ. The center panel of the *Saint John Altarpiece* depicts the *Virgin with Saints and Angels* (FIG. **20-14**). The patrons of this altarpiece—two brothers and two sisters of the order of the Hospital of Saint John in Bruges—appear on the exterior side panels (not illustrated). In the central panel, two



**20-14** Hans Memling, *Virgin with Saints and Angels*, center panel of the *Saint John Altarpiece*, Hospitaal Sint Jan, Bruges, Belgium, 1479. Oil on wood,  $5'7\frac{3}{4}'' \times 5'7\frac{3}{4}''$  (center panel),  $5'7\frac{3}{4}'' \times 2'7\frac{1}{8}''$  (each wing).

Memling specialized in images of the Madonna. His *Saint John Altarpiece* exudes an opulence that results from the sparkling and luminous colors and the realistic depiction of rich tapestries and brocades.

angels, one playing a musical instrument and the other holding a book, flank the Virgin. To the sides of Mary's throne stand Saint John the Baptist on the left and Saint John the Evangelist on the right, and seated in the foreground are Saints Catherine and Barbara. This gathering celebrates the mystic marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, one of many virgin saints who were believed to have entered into a special spiritual marriage with Christ. As one of the most revered virgins of Christ, Saint Catherine provided a model of devotion especially resonant with women viewers (particularly nuns). The altarpiece exudes an opulence that results from the rich colors, carefully depicted tapestries and brocades, and the serenity of the figures. The composition is balanced and serene, the color sparkling and luminous, and the execution of the highest technical quality-all characteristics of 15th-century Flemish painting in general.

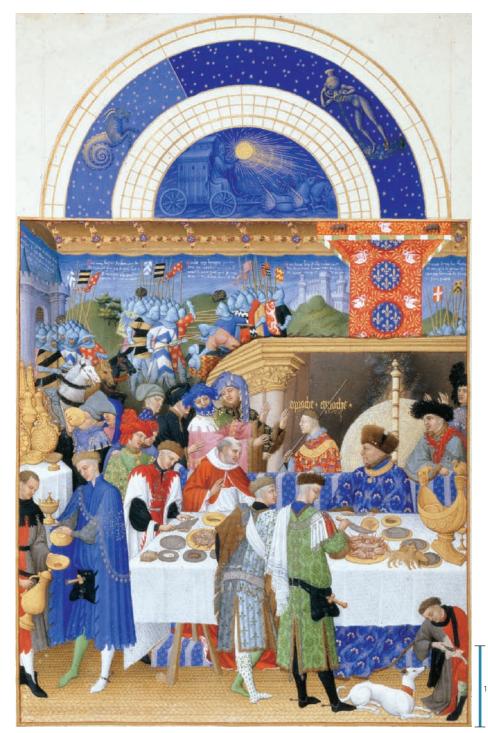
#### **FRANCE**

In contrast to the prosperity and peace Flanders enjoyed during the 15th century, in France the Hundred Years' War crippled economic enterprise and brought political instability. The anarchy of war and the weakness of the kings gave rise to a group of duchies, each with significant power. The strongest and wealthiest of these was the duchy of Burgundy, which controlled Flanders and where artists prospered. But the dukes of Berry, Bourbon, and Nemours, as well as members of the French royal court, were also major art patrons.

#### Manuscript Painting

During the 15th century, French artists built on the achievements of Gothic painters (see Chapter 18) and produced exquisitely refined *illuminated manuscripts*. Among the most significant developments in French manuscript painting was a new conception and presentation of space. Paintings in manuscripts took on more pronounced characteristics as illusionistic scenes. Increased contact with Italy, where Renaissance artists had revived the pictorial principles of classical antiquity, may have influenced French painters' interest in illusionism.

LIMBOURG BROTHERS Among the early-15th-century artists who furthered the maturation of manuscript painting were the three LIMBOURG BROTHERS—POL, HERMAN, and JEAN—from Nijmegen in the Netherlands. They were nephews of Jean Malouel, the court artist of Philip the Bold. Following in the footsteps of earlier illustrators such as Jean Pucelle (FIG. 18-36), the Limbourg brothers expanded the illusionistic capabilities of illumination. Trained in the Netherlands, the brothers moved to Paris no later than 1402, and between 1405 and their death in 1416, probably from the plague, they worked in Paris and Bourges for Jean, duke of Berry (r. 1360–1416)



**20-15** Limbourg Brothers (Pol, Jean, Herman), *January*, from *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, 1413–1416. Ink on vellum,  $8\frac{7}{8}$ ". Musée Condé, Chantilly.

The sumptuous pictures in *Les Très Riches Heures* depict characteristic activities of each month and give unusual prominence to genre subjects, reflecting the increasing integration of religious and secular art.

and brother of King Charles V (r. 1364–1380) of France and of Philip the Bold of Burgundy. The duke ruled the western French regions of Berry, Poitou, and Auvergne. He was an avid art patron and focused much of his collecting energy on manuscripts, jewels, and rare artifacts. An inventory of the duke's libraries revealed that he owned more than 300 manuscripts, including Pucelle's *Belleville Breviary* (FIG. 18-36) and the *Hours of Jeanne d'Évreux*. For Jean, the Limbourg brothers produced a gorgeously illustrated Book of Hours, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (*The Very Sumptuous* 



**20-16** Limbourg Brothers (Pol, Jean, Herman), October, from Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1413–1416. Ink on vellum,  $8\frac{7}{8}$ "  $\times 5\frac{3}{8}$ ". Musée Condé, Chantilly.

The Limbourg brothers expanded the illusionistic capabilities of manuscript painting with their care in rendering architectural detail and convincing depiction of shadows cast by people and objects.

Hours of the Duke of Berry). A Book of Hours, like a breviary, was a book used for reciting prayers (see "Medieval Books," Chapter 16, page 411). As prayer books, they replaced the traditional psalters (book of Psalms), which were the only liturgical books in private hands until the mid-13th century. The centerpiece of a Book of Hours was the "Office [prayer] of the Blessed Virgin," which contained liturgical passages to be read privately at set times during the day, from matins (dawn prayers) to compline (the last of the prayers recited daily). An illustrated calendar listing local religious feast

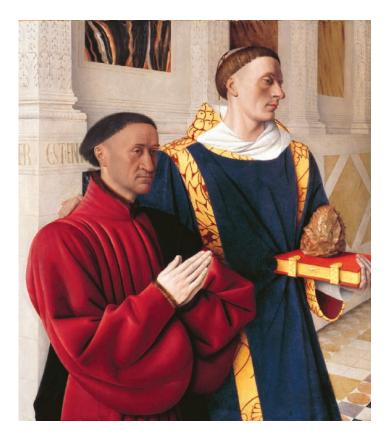
days usually preceded the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Penitential Psalms, devotional prayers, litanies to the saints, and other prayers, including those of the dead and of the Holy Cross, followed the centerpiece. Such books became favorite possessions of the Northern European aristocracy during the 14th and 15th centuries. They eventually became available to affluent burghers and contributed to the decentralization of religious practice that was one factor in the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century (see Chapter 23).

The calendar pictures of Les Très Riches Heures are perhaps the most famous in the history of manuscript illumination. They represent the 12 months in terms of the associated seasonal tasks, alternating scenes of nobility and peasantry. Above each picture is a lunette (semicircular frame) in which the Limbourgs depicted the chariot of the sun as it makes its yearly cycle through the 12 months and zodiac signs. Beyond its function as a religious book, Les Très Riches Heures also visually captures the power of the duke and his relationship to the peasants. The colorful calendar picture for January (FIG. 20-15) depicts a New Year's reception at court. The duke appears as magnanimous host, his head circled by the fire screen, almost halolike, behind him. His chamberlain stands next to him, urging the guests forward with the words "aproche, aproche." The lavish spread of food on the table and the large tapestry on the back wall augment the richness and extravagance of the setting and the occasion.

In contrast, the illustration for October (FIG. 20-16) focuses on the peasantry. Here, the Limbourg brothers depicted a sower, a harrower on horseback, and washerwomen, along with city dwellers, who promenade in front of the Louvre (the French king's residence at the time, now one of the world's great art museums). The peasants do not appear particularly disgruntled as they go about their tasks. Surely, this imagery flattered the duke's sense of himself as a compassionate master. The growing artistic interest in naturalism is evident here in the careful way the brothers recorded the architectural details of the Louvre and in their convincing depiction of the shadows of the people and objects (such as the archer scarecrow and the horse) in the scene.

As a whole, *Les Très Riches Heures* reinforced the image of the duke of Berry as a devout man, cultured bibliophile, sophisticated art patron, and powerful and magnanimous leader. Further, the expanded range of subject matter, especially the prominence of *genre* subjects in a religious book, reflected the in-

creasing integration of religious and secular concerns in both art and life at the time. Although all three Limbourg brothers worked on *Les Très Riches Heures*, art historians have never been able to ascertain definitively which brother painted which images. Given the common practice of collaboration on artistic projects at this time, this determination of specific authorship is not very important. The Limbourg brothers died before completing this Book of Hours, and another court illustrator finished the manuscript about 70 years later.





**20-17** Jean Fouquet, *Melun Diptych. Étienne Chevalier and Saint Stephen* (left wing), ca. 1450. Oil on wood,  $3' \frac{1}{2}'' \times 2' 9\frac{1}{2}''$ . Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. *Virgin and Child* (right wing), ca. 1451. Oil on wood,  $3' 1\frac{1}{4}'' \times 2' 9\frac{1}{2}''$ . Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

Fouquet's meticulous representation of a pious kneeling donor with a standing patron saint recalls Flemish painting, as do the three-quarter stances and the sharp focus of the portraits.

#### Panel Painting

Images for private devotional use were popular in France, as in Flanders, and the preferred medium was oil paint on wooden panels.

JEAN FOUQUET Among the French artists whose paintings were in demand was Jean Fouquet (ca. 1420-1481), who worked for King Charles VII (r. 1422-1461, the patron and client of Jacques Coeur; FIG. 18-30) and for the duke of Nemours. Fouquet painted a diptych (two-paneled painting; FIG. 20-17) for Étienne Chevalier, who, despite his lowly origins, became Charles VII's treasurer in 1452. In the left panel, Chevalier appears with his patron saint, Saint Stephen (Étienne in French). Appropriately, Fouquet's donor portrait of Chevalier depicts his prominent patron as devout—kneeling, with hands clasped in prayer. The representation of the pious donor with his standing saint recalls Flemish art, as do the three-quarter stances and the sharp, clear focus of the portraits. The artist depicted Saint Stephen holding the stone of his martyrdom (death by stoning) atop a volume of the Scriptures, thereby ensuring that viewers properly identify the saint. Fouquet rendered the entire image in meticulous detail and included a highly ornamented architectural setting.

In its original diptych form (the two panels are now in different museums), the viewer would follow the gaze of Chevalier and Saint Stephen over to the right panel, which depicts the Virgin Mary and Christ Child. The juxtaposition of these two images allowed the patron to bear witness to the sacred. The integration of sacred and secular (especially the political or personal) prevalent in other Northern European artworks also emerges here, complicating the reading of this diptych. Agnès Sorel, the mistress of King Charles VII, was Fouquet's model for the Virgin Mary. Sorel was a pious individual,

and according to an inscription, Chevalier commissioned this painting to fulfill a vow he made after Sorel's death in 1450. Thus, in addition to the religious interpretation of this diptych, there is surely a personal narrative here as well.

#### HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Because the Holy Roman Empire (whose core was Germany) did not participate in the long, drawn-out saga of the Hundred Years' War, its economy remained stable and prosperous. Without a dominant court culture to commission artworks, wealthy merchants and clergy became the primary German patrons during the 15th century.

#### Sculpture

The art of the early "Northern Renaissance" in the Holy Roman Empire displays a pronounced stylistic diversity. Although some artists followed developments in Flemish painting, the works of artists who specialized in carving large wooden retables reveal most forcefully the power of the lingering Late Gothic style.

**VEIT STOSS** The sculptor VEIT STOSS (1447–1533) trained in the Upper Rhine region but settled in Kraków (in present-day Poland) in 1477. In that year, he began work on a great altarpiece (FIG. **20-18**) for the church of Saint Mary in Kraków. In the central boxlike shrine, huge carved and painted figures, some nine feet high, represent *Death and Assumption of the Virgin*. On the wings, Stoss portrayed scenes from the lives of Christ and Mary. The altar expresses the intense piety of Gothic culture in its late phase, when artists used every figural and ornamental design resource from the vocabulary of Gothic art to heighten the emotion and to glorify the



20-18 VEIT STOSS, Death and Assumption of the Virgin (wings open), altar of the Virgin Mary, church of Saint Mary, Kraków, Poland, 1477–1489. Painted and gilded wood, central panel 23' 9" high.

In this huge sculptured and painted altarpiece, Veit Stoss used every figural and ornamental element from the vocabulary of Gothic art to heighten the emotion and to glorify the sacred event.

10 ft.

sacred event. In the Kraków altarpiece, the disciples of Christ congregate around the Virgin, who sinks down in death. One of them supports her, while another, just above her, wrings his hands in grief. Stoss posed others in attitudes of woe and psychic shock, striving for realism in every minute detail. Moreover, he engulfed the figures in restless, twisting, and curving swaths of drapery whose broken and writhing lines unite the whole tableau in a vision of agitated emotion. The artist's massing of sharp, broken, and pierced forms that dart flamelike through the composition—at once unifying and animating it—recalls the design principles of Late Gothic architecture (FIG. 18-27). Indeed, in the Kraków altarpiece, Stoss merged sculpture and architecture, enhancing their union with paint and gilding.

TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER The Virgin's Assumption also appears in the center panel (FIG. 20-19) of the *Creglingen Altarpiece*, created by TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER (ca. 1460–1531) of Würzburg for a parish church in Creglingen, Germany. He also incorporated intricate Gothic forms, especially in the altarpiece's elaborate canopy, but unlike Stoss, he did not paint the figures or the background. By employing an endless and restless line that runs through the garments of the figures, Riemenschneider succeeded in setting the whole design into fluid motion, and no individual element functions without the rest. The draperies float and flow around bodies lost within them, serving not as descriptions but as design elements that tie the figures to one another and to the framework. A look of psychic strain, a facial expression common in Riemenschneider's work, heightens the spirituality of the figures, immaterial and weightless as they appear.

**20-19** TILMAN RIEMENSCHNEIDER, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, center panel of the *Creglingen Altarpiece*, Herrgottskirche, Creglingen, Germany, ca. 1495–1499. Lindenwood, 6' 1" wide.

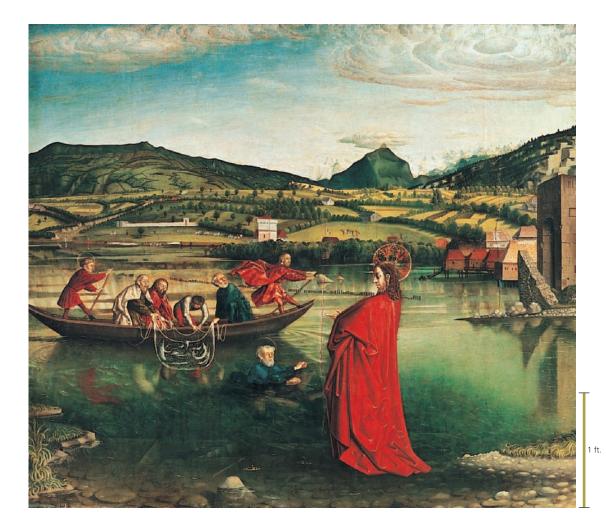
Tilman Riemenschneider specialized in carving large wooden retables. His works feature intricate Gothic tracery and religious figures whose bodies are almost lost within their swirling garments.



1 ft

**20-20** Konrad Witz, *Miraculous Draught of Fish*, from the *Altarpiece of Saint Peter*, from the Chapel of Notre-Dame des Maccabées, Cathedral of Saint Peter, Geneva, Switzerland, 1444. Oil on wood, 4′ 3″ × 5′ 1″. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva.

Konrad Witz set this Gospel episode on Lake Geneva. The painting is one of the first 15th-century works depicting a specific landscape and is noteworthy for the painter's skill in rendering water effects.



#### Panel Painting

As in Flanders, large-scale altarpieces featuring naturalistically painted biblical themes were familiar sights in the Holy Roman Empire.

KONRAD WITZ Among the most notable 15th-century German altarpieces is the Altarpiece of Saint Peter, painted in 1444 for the chapel of Notre-Dame des Maccabées in the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Geneva, Switzerland. Konrad Witz (ca. 1400–1446), whose studio was in Basel, painted one exterior wing of this triptych with a representation of the Miraculous Draught of Fish (FIG. 20-20). The other exterior wing (not illustrated) depicts the release of Saint Peter from prison. The central panel is lost. On the interior wings, Witz painted scenes of the adoration of the magi and of Saint Peter's presentation of the donor (Bishop François de Mies) to the Virgin and Child. Miraculous Draught of Fish shows Peter, the first pope, unsuccessfully trying to emulate Christ walking on water. Some scholars think the detail is a subtle commentary on the limited power of the pope in Rome on the part of the Swiss cardinal who commissioned the work. The painting is particularly significant because of the landscape's prominence. Witz showed precocious skill in the study of water effects—the sky glaze on the slowly moving lake surface, the mirrored reflections of the figures in the boat, and the transparency of the shallow water in the foreground. He observed and depicted the landscape so carefully that art historians have determined the exact location shown. Witz presented a view of the shores of Lake Geneva, with the town of Geneva on the right and Le Môle Mountain in the distance behind Christ's head. This painting is one of the first 15th-century works depicting a specific site.

#### Graphic Arts

A new age blossomed in the 15th century with a sudden technological advance that had widespread effects—the invention by Johannes Gutenberg (ca. 1400-1468) of movable type around 1450 and the development of the printing press. Printing had been known in China centuries before but had never fostered, as it did in 15th-century Europe, a revolution in written communication and in the generation and management of information. Printing provided new and challenging media for artists, and the earliest form was the woodcut (see "Woodcuts, Engravings, and Etchings," page 537). Using a gouging instrument, artists remove sections of wood blocks, sawing along the grain. They ink the ridges that carry the designs, and the hollows remain dry of ink and do not print. Artists produced woodcuts well before the development of movable-type printing. But when a rise in literacy and the improved economy necessitated production of illustrated books on a grand scale, artists met the challenge of bringing the woodcut picture onto the same page as the letterpress.

MICHEL WOLGEMUT The so-called *Nuremberg Chronicle*, a history of the world produced in Nuremberg by Anton Koberger (ca. 1445–1513) with more than 650 illustrations by the workshop of MICHEL WOLGEMUT (1434–1519), documents this achievement. The hand-colored page illustrated here (FIG. **20-21**) represents Tarvisium (modern Tarvisio), a town in the extreme northeast of Italy, as it was in the "fourth age of the world" according to the Latin inscription at the top. The blunt, simple lines of the woodcut technique give a detailed perspective of Tarvisium, its harbor and shipping, its walls and towers, its churches and municipal buildings, and the baronial

#### **Woodcuts, Engravings, and Etchings**

ith the invention of movable type in the 15th century and the new widespread availability of paper from commercial mills, the art of printmaking developed rapidly in Europe. A *print* is an artwork on paper, usually produced in multiple impressions. The set of prints an artist creates from a single print surface is called an *edition*. (The same term is used to describe a single printed version of a book. This is the 13th edition of *Art through the Ages*.) As with books manufactured on a press, the printmaking process involves the transfer of ink from a printing surface to paper. This can be accomplished in several ways. During the 15th and 16th centuries, artists most commonly used the *relief* and *intaglio* methods of printmaking.

Artists produce relief prints, the oldest and simplest of the printing methods, by carving into a surface, usually wood. Relief printing requires artists to conceptualize their images negatively—that is, they remove the surface areas around the images. Thus, when the printmaker inks the surface, the carved-out areas remain clean, and a positive image results when the artist presses the printing block against paper. Because artists produce *woodcuts* through a subtractive process (removing parts of the material), it is difficult to create very thin, fluid, and closely spaced lines. As a result, woodcut prints (for example, FIG. 20-21) tend to exhibit stark contrasts and sharp edges.

In contrast to the production of relief prints, the intaglio method involves a positive process. The artist incises (cuts) an image on a metal plate, often copper. The image can be created on the plate manually (engraving or drypoint; for example, FIG. 20-22) using a tool (a burin or stylus) or chemically (etching; for example, FIG. 25-16). In the latter process, an acid bath eats into the exposed parts of the plate where the artist has drawn through an acid-resistant coating. When the artist inks the surface of the intaglio plate and wipes it clean, the ink is forced into the incisions. Then the artist runs the plate and paper through a roller press, and the paper absorbs the remaining ink, creating the print. Because the artist "draws" the image onto the plate, intaglio prints differ in character from relief prints. Engravings, drypoints, and etchings generally present a wider variety of linear effects. They also often reveal to a greater extent evidence of the artist's touch, the result of the hand's changing pressure and shifting directions.

The paper and inks artists use also affect the finished look of the printed image. During the 15th and 16th centuries, European printmakers used papers produced from cotton and linen rags that papermakers mashed with water into a pulp. The papermakers then applied a thin layer of this pulp to a wire screen and allowed it to dry to create the paper. As contact with Asia increased, printmakers made greater use of what was called Japan paper (of mulberry fibers) and China paper. Artists, then as now, could select from a wide variety of inks. The type and proportion of the ink ingredients affect the consistency, color, and oiliness of inks, which various



Arufiu ipfius abarchie Tarufane cui tas : et ipfa per bee tempora (vr Sicardo Eremonefi epifcopo placs) a quibuf dam troy anis fundata fuit. Abbutur antes imo ponius biniditur Silo flunto qui er ipfius pro pinquionibus montho erijt. Alifig vberrinus aquis in ea quali featurientibus irrigatur, ac filus in mediterrancis Tarinfium vrbem binidit Linus nomen prior inter veturlos babet plinui ns. per tempora vere obtrogotbotum biginitate indoaffe videf qua nüe babet. Lo qi Tonle pi rer ibide fede regin fibi coftituit. Tin onle a potkea quim suit obtrogotbotur ret a deciditati arufii nato educantiq eft. Pottea longobardou reginimicio quom albomo ret eè gettis primo ytalia effet ingreffius. Alqleianog quisi tine erat et ceteras regionis vrbes p wedino nem cepiffet. Zarufin qi eò incole vedatos tari dinficule obtulifetut. Pottare ac biruere coftitie rat mit felir ipfo vrbis epis (vr Bregorio feribu) Un trimorat rancina oriundo regis barbarce fua peudeita z preci inflanta celimifet. Por matag fuit ea cuitas altero prefilite eco bermo lao barbaro. Dui ficut vecet epim pplo masi, p

ceffe admitch of Gpreeffe. Do aut ab bac wibe smueria regio Lamifana marchia tenomiciur factii creto a miori nomia abimdutate vi bec ap pellatio marchie Lamifane in fipa măferiteum cai megione fini amplifime cuntates Gerona artg. Patauti. Due femp e dignitate artg pote tatu necio e opuleita Lamifo anteierinti Lon gobardi cinii ca ytalic parte martine qua obti nebant regiones babucrunt quattito a duebe adminulvatase, in quibus mullum fucceffionis tus filiper neportbus competebat, beneuetana fipoletanami taurinenfem e foccultienfem; buaf gopulentiar amplitudine fuperiorabus pares Aucontamam atg. tarunfanam effe volucirut. Ea affectas legis conditione, vi qui reguin aut gentis longobardorum concili pmiffiche e vo ceto impetraffet, cas filips atg. agnatis fucceff one poffidendas relinquendi ins facultateneg baberet. Homenog bune figuificans perpetus magnfratum in longobarda, barbarie marchio natus eft appellatum. Dec ettam vrbs ecclini e Alberti e e germant te rumano (ficut paranus) tyrannice non caruit. Aquibus impumeras gruite calanitates.

1 in

## **20-21** MICHEL WOLGEMUT and shop, *Tarvisium*, page from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, 1493. Woodcut, 1' $2'' \times 9''$ . Printed by Anton Koberger.

The *Nuremberg Chronicle* is an early example of woodcut illustrations in printed books. The more than 650 pictures include detailed views of towns, but they are generic rather than specific portrayals.

papers absorb differently. Paper is lightweight, and the portability of prints has appealed to artists over the years. The opportunity to produce multiple impressions from the same print surface also made printmaking attractive to 15th- and 16th-century artists. In addition, prints can be sold at cheaper prices than paintings or sculptures. Consequently, prints can reach a much wider audience than one-of-a-kind artworks can. The number and quality of existing 15th- and 16th-century European prints attest to the importance of the new print medium.

**20-22** Martin Schongauer, *Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons*, ca. 1480–1490. Engraving,  $1'\frac{1}{4}'' \times 9''$ . Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Corte di Mamiano.

Martin Schongauer was the most skilled of the early masters of metal engraving. By using a burin to incise lines in a copper plate, he was able to create a marvelous variety of tonal values and textures.



1 i

castle on the hill. Despite the numerous architectural structures, historians cannot determine whether this illustration represents the artist's accurate depiction of the city or his fanciful imagination. Artists often reprinted the same image as illustrations of different cities, and this depiction of Tarvisium is very likely a generic view. Regardless, the work is a monument to a new craft, which expanded in concert with the art of the printed book.

MARTIN SCHONGAUER The woodcut medium hardly had matured when the technique of *engraving* (inscribing on a hard surface), begun in the 1430s and well developed by 1450, proved much more flexible. Predictably, in the second half of the century, engraving began to replace the woodcut process, for making both book illustrations and widely popular single prints. Metal engraving produces an *intaglio* (incised) surface for printing. The incised lines (hollows) of the design, rather than the ridges, take the ink. It is the reverse of the woodcut technique.

Martin Schongauer (ca. 1430–1491) was the most skilled and subtle Northern European master of metal engraving. His *Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons* (FIG. **20-22**) shows both the versatility of the medium and the artist's mastery of it. The stoic saint is caught in a revolving thornbush of spiky demons, who claw and tear at him

furiously. With unsurpassed skill and subtlety, Schongauer created marvelous distinctions of tonal values and textures—from smooth skin to rough cloth, from the furry and feathery to the hairy and scaly. The use of *cross-hatching* to describe forms, which Schongauer probably developed, became standard among German graphic artists. The Italians preferred *parallel hatching* (FIG. 21-29) and rarely adopted cross-hatching, which, in keeping with the general Northern European approach to art, tends to describe the surfaces of things rather than their underlying structures.

Schongauer probably engraved *Saint Anthony* between 1480 and 1490. By then, the political geography of Europe had changed dramatically. Charles the Bold, who had assumed the title of duke of Burgundy in 1467, died in 1477, bringing to an end the Burgundian dream of forming a strong middle kingdom between France and the Holy Roman Empire. After Charles's death at the battle of Nancy, the French monarchy reabsorbed the southern Burgundian lands, and the Netherlands passed to the Holy Roman Empire by virtue of the dynastic marriage of Charles's daughter, Mary of Burgundy, to Maximilian of Habsburg. Thus was inaugurated a new political and artistic era in Northern Europe (see Chapter 23). The next two chapters, however, explore Italian developments in painting, sculpture, and architecture during the 15th and 16th centuries.

#### THE BIG PICTURE

### NORTHERN EUROPE, 1400 TO 1500

#### **BURGUNDY AND FLANDERS**

- The most powerful rulers north of the Alps during the first three-quarters of the 15th century were the dukes of Burgundy. They controlled Flanders, which derived its wealth from wool and banking.
- Duke Philip the Bold (r. 1363–1404) was the great patron of the Carthusian monastery at Champmol, near Dijon. He employed Claus Sluter, whose Well of Moses features innovative statues of prophets with portraitlike features and realistic costumes.
- Flemish painters popularized the use of oil paints on wooden panels. By superimposing translucent glazes, they created richer colors than possible using tempera or fresco. One of the earliest examples of oil paintng is Melchior Broederlam's *Retable de Champmol* (1399).
- A major art form in churches and private homes alike was the altarpiece with folding wings. Robert Campin's Mérode Altarpiece is an early example painted in oils, in which the Annunciation takes place in a Flemish home. The work's donors are present as witnesses to the sacred event. Typical of "Northern Renaissance" painting, the everyday objects depicted often have symbolic significance.
- Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, and others established portraiture as an important art form in 15th-century Flanders. Van Eyck's self-portrait, Man in a Red Turban, and Rogier's Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin reveal the growing self-awareness of Renaissance artists.
- Among the other major Flemish painters were Petrus Christus, Dirk Bouts, Hans Memling, and Hugo van der Goes. Hugo achieved such renown that he won a commission to paint an altarpiece for a church in Florence. The Italians marveled at the Flemish painter's masterful technique and extraordinary realism.



Sluter, Well of Moses, 1395–1406



Campin, *Mérode Altarpiece*, ca. 1425–1428



van Eyck, *Man in a Red Turban,* 1433

#### FRANCE

- During the 15th century, the Hundred Years' War crippled the French economy, but dukes and members of the royal court still commissioned some notable artworks.
- The Limbourg brothers expanded the illusionistic capabilities of manuscript illumination in the Book of Hours they produced for Jean, duke of Berry (r. 1360–1416) and brother of King Charles V (r. 1364–1380). Their full-page calendar pictures alternately represent the nobility and the peasantry, always in naturalistic settings with realistically painted figures.
- French court art—for example, Jean Fouquet's *Melun Diptych*—owes a large debt to Flemish painting in style and technique as well as in the integration of sacred and secular themes.



Limbourg brothers, Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1413–1416

#### **HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE**

- The Late Gothic style remained popular in 15th-century Germany for large carved wooden retables featuring highly emotive figures amid Gothic tracery.
- The major German innovation of the 15th century was the development of the printing press, which soon was used to produce books with woodcut illustrations. Woodcuts are relief prints in which the artist carves out the areas around the printed lines, a method that requires the images to be conceptualized negatively.
- German artists such as Martin Schongauer were also the earliest masters of engraving. This intaglio technique allows for a wider variety of linear effects because the artist incises the image directly onto a metal plate.



Schongauer, Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons, ca. 1480–1490