

Noël Bellemare (Antwerp-Paris, active 1512-1546)

*Second Temptation of Christ* (c. 96 x 57 mm.)

France, Loire Valley?, c. 1545

This and a companion miniature from the Mortimer Brandt Collection illustrate successive episodes of the three temptations of Christ. Depicted here is the moment in which Satan challenges Christ to prove his divinity by a practical test: "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Matthew 4: 5-6). Christ and Satan stand together "on the highest point of the temple" in Jerusalem, which is portrayed as a fortified French town with mighty fortress walls, crenellated towers, bridges, and houses.

Harry Bober attributed this miniature and the companion piece to the Master of the Hours of Henry II (named after Paris, BnF, MS lat. 1429), a painter who, according to the late Myra Orth, continued the style of the "Bellemare Group" through the decade of the 1550s into the reign of King Henry II (see Leproux, 2001, pp. 137 and 164; and [Orth] in Ecoen, 1993, pp. 10 and nos. 84, 91, and 92). He dated the two fragments c. 1550. The present miniatures, however, can be assigned instead, according to Myra Orth, to the "Bellemare Group" itself. They bear close comparison with the late works by this workshop, such as the Hours of Anne de Montmorency (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 1476, compare esp. f. 62v), on which Bellemare worked at the end of his career with the next generation of Renaissance artists, Niccolò dell'Abbate or Jean Cousin (cf. Chantilly, 2001, no. 13, pp. 58-63).

The artist's command of the illusion of space, his use of delicate atmospheric effects, and his refined treatment of the figures are masterful. Especially skillful is the portrayal of the crowded cityscape, the pale shades of stone set against the pastel rooftops and the verdant landscape. The unusual cut of the Temptation of Christ, which is blank on its verso, suggests it may have once been border decoration in a grand liturgical manuscript, such as an Antiphonal or a Gradual.

**Provenance:** William Horatio Crawford of Lakelands, sale, London, Sotheby's, 16 March 1891; Mortimer Brandt, no. 1298-7b (catalogue Bober, 1966, no. 10b, pp. 24-26).

**Literature:** Chantilly, Musée Condé, 2001; Ecoen, Musée national, 1993; Leproux, 1999, p. 125-154; Leproux, 2001, esp. pp. 111-140, p. 137; Orth, 2010.