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Provençal Painter

Christ as Salvator Mundi and the Virgin Mary (150 x 205 mm.)
 Southern France, Avignon, Aix or Marseille?, c. 1480-90

From a Book of Hours, this extraordinary pair of miniatures, depicting Christ as Salvator Mundi on the left and the Virgin Mary on the right, resembles a small-scale devotional diptych. The subject is well-known. The image of the Virgin is virtually identical to that in the Paris Hours of René d'Anjou (BnF, MS lat. 17332 cf. f. 15v), which François Avril argued must copy a devotional painting for which King René had a special veneration (Avril and Reynaud, 1993, p. 233-34). However, the image in René's Hours can no longer be considered a unicum. Marie-Claude Leonelli calls attention to the same image of the Virgin set in a reliquary and painted in a manuscript by Georges Trubert in the J. Paul Getty Museum (MS 48; Angers, 2009, pp. 261-2). She further suggests that, working in Provence, Trubert may have had access to the painting in its original frame owned by King René and perhaps bought by the King at the port of Marseilles. To these, we can add another manuscript attributed to Trubert that includes a similar image, though without the frame (Moulins, Bib. Mun, MS 89, f. 18v).

The present pair of images suggests that there may have been a diptych that provided the source for our artist, not a single devotional painting of the Virgin, thus confirming Leonelli's idea that multiple sources lie behind these painted representations. In this regard, Leonelli reminds us of a drawing by Gaignères showing a diptych from the mid-fourteenth century. By an Italian artist working in Avignon this diptych represented the Virgin on the right seen from the same angle as in the miniature and turned toward a second wing on the left depicting a frontal view of Christ.

Tantalizing are these connections with the south of France, especially because certain textual and ornamental features of the original Book of Hours from which these miniatures come point to this region (see Sam Fogg, *Medieval Manuscripts*, Catalogue 14, no. 20, and Les Enluminures, *Catalogue 6* [1997], no. 13, for descriptions of the complete manuscript). There was the rare Hours of Mary Magdalene, whose cult was centered in Aix and Marseille; and the unusual Psalter of the Virgin, composed in the seventh century by the Spanish archbishop, Ildephonso Tolentano. The script and ornament suggest Italianate or even Spanish influence. Around 1500, southern France played host to artists from across Europe, accounting for a fusion of various styles.

Literature: Angers, 2009, pp. 260-265, citing these miniatures, p. 261; Avril and Reynaud, 1993, pp. 233-244.