

Jean Bourdichon (Tours, 1457-1521)

***Presentation in the Temple* (115 x 90 mm.)**

France, Tours, c. 1490s

This miniature is by the celebrated Jean Bourdichon, who succeeded Jean Fouquet as *peintre du roi* in the early 1480s. Active for nearly forty years, Bourdichon served as official court painter to four successive French kings: Louis XI, Charles VIII, Louis XII, and François I. Documented as an illuminator, painter, and designer for decorative arts, he is known today primarily through his work on illuminated manuscripts. Perhaps most famous is his richly illuminated *Grandes Heures* of Anne of Brittany, for which a record of payment gives its date of completion in 1508 (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 9474).

This *Presentation in the Temple* comes from a Book of Hours, where it probably illustrated None of the Hours of the Virgin (the opening “Deus in adiutorium meum intende” is inscribed on the frame). Although the Book of Hours remains unidentified (and the miniature is glued to board on the reverse), the accomplished style and unique iconography evoke the illumination of the same subject in Bourdichon’s *Grandes Heures* of Anne of Brittany (f. 74). The miniature portrays the moment when, forty days after the birth of Christ, Mary and Joseph visit the temple to offer their Child to God along with a gift of two turtledoves held in a basket by Joseph. The representation of the High Priest Simeon on a throne, instead of standing at the altar, is highly unusual, as is the inclusion of a figure holding a book. Included in the *Grandes Heures*, but absent here, is the candle (an allusion to Candlemas, another name for the feast) and the cloth held by the Virgin (used to hand over the child to Simeon).

Many other subtle differences exist between the composition in the *Grandes Heures* and the present one, which render the scene more intimate. The Virgin is here portrayed as a young girl, kneeling in prayer; the throne of the High Priest is on the same level as the Virgin; the room is smaller, more accessible. Comparison with a set of fragments published by Avril suggests that our miniature may date early in Bourdichon’s career (Avril, 2006, pp. 45-57). Two leaves in Lisbon (Gulbenkian Foundation, M. 2A-B) from the Hours of Charles de Martigny, bishop of Elne, which cannot date after 1494, are tantalizingly close.

Provenance: France, Collection Baron Joseph Vitta (1860-1942)

Literature: Avril and Reynaud, Paris, 1992; pp. 293-305; Avril, 2006, pp. 45-58; MacGibbon, 1933; [facsimile], 2008.