

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

Third Temptation of Christ (c. 96 x 57 mm.)

France, Loire Valley?, c. 1545

This miniature is a companion piece to the previous one illustrating the Second Temptation of Christ. A distant panorama of high mountains and the kingdoms of the world illustrates Matthew 4: 8-11: "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me. Jesus said to him, Get thee hence, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Thus, after three trials and three failures by the devil, Christ dismisses the tempter; and it is Satan, instead of Christ, who tumbles from the craggy cliff.

The present miniature can be assigned, according to Myra Orth, to the "Bellemare Group." It bears 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, Niccolo dell'Abbate or Jean Cousin (cf. Chantilly, 2001, no. 13, pp. 58-63). The rich palette of the artist, the finely modeled figures (especially Christ), and the expansive and beautiful landscape are characteristic of the artist's works. The miniature is exquisitely painted with a subtle balance of naturalistically modeled volumes and seemingly endless detail, especially in the sensitively delineated landscape.

Both "Temptation" miniatures must have formed part of the same page. Judging from the cut-away corner of its shape and the remnant of what was probably the last line of writing on that page, the present fragment would have occupied the lower left corner of a border. The "Second Temptation" may have been placed in the margin above the preceding miniature whose top width it matches exactly. Since there is no text on the verso of either miniature, this would support the conclusion that these were marginal scenes. Perhaps a third fragment once illustrated the "First Temptation." It must have been a magnificent manuscript to have had such lavish marginal paintings.

Provenance: William Horatio Crawford of Lakelands, sale, London, Sotheby's, 16 March 1891; Mortimer Brandt, no. 1298-7 (catalogue Bober, 1966, no. 10a, 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 [forthcoming]