

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

Agony in the Garden (78 x 50 mm.)

France, Paris or Tours, c. 1525-30

This is an extraordinarily sophisticated night scene from the same Book of Hours as the preceding miniature by the gifted and multi-talented Franco-Flemish artist, Noël Bellemare. Before a night sky, Christ kneels on a grassy mound as a tiny angel appears in the upper right-hand corner of the miniature, the apostles asleep in the foreground, huddled in the night, with the rich colors of their robes muted. Dawn is just rising on the distant horizon, and the stars are still visible in the lightening sky. In the tiniest of detail, hardly visible except under magnification, Judas and the soldiers approach through the gate at the upper left.

The miniature is related to a group of works associated with Noël Bellemare. It has an almost exact parallel with the miniature illustrating the Passion Sequence in the Hours of Claude de Guise (Paris, Bibl. de l'Arsenal, MS 654), and in a Book of Hours from the Rothschild bequest in the British Library (Add. MS 35318; Orth, in Kren, ed. 1983, p. 189, pl. 32). Interestingly, these works also compare with a Retable of the Passion attributed by Leproux to Bellemare and his workshop and now in Paris in the Church of St.-Gervais-St.-Protais, as well as a related stained glass in Triel in the Church of St.-Martin (Leproux, 2001, pp. 122-25, figs. 139, 143). All these compositions have a common source that harks back to Bellemare's artistic origins in his city of birth: a panel by Bernard Orley who died in Antwerp in 1541 presents a reversed version of the same subject (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Leproux, 2001, fig. 141). Other panels this subject are current among the so-called Antwerp mannerists mostly from the 1520s.

The Agony in the Garden is one of four miniatures exhibited by Richard Day in 1983; subsequently the imperfect volume from which the cuttings come appeared in Fogg, Cat. 14 (1991), no. 39. All four excised miniatures are ascribed by Myra Orth to the Doheny Master (Orth, 1988, p. 58, Appendix A, as "New York, Private Collection"). Three of the four miniatures from the set are in the Louvre (RF 52172-3, 52526; Scaillierez, 2002).

Literature: Kren, 1983, p.189; London, 1988; London, 1990; Leproux, 2001; Orth, 1988; Scaillièrez, 2002; for a reproduction of one of the Louvre miniatures, <http://arts-graphiques.louvre.fr/fo/visite?srv=mfc&idFicheOeuvre=508882>