

Follower of Jean Pichore (Paris fl. c. 1500-1520)  
*Assumption of the Virgin* (leaf 270 x 190 mm., miniature 95 x 75 mm.)  
France, probably Paris, c. 1515-20 (after 1514)

This elegant leaf from a Missal displays a miniature of the Assumption of the Virgin prefacing the Introit of her feast, celebrated on August 15. Four angels raise the Virgin, dressed in a blue mantle over a gray habit, upward to heaven. Surrounded by blue-winged cherubim, God the father awaits her. The mandorla of golden rays depicts her as the Virgin "clothed with the sun" after the image described in Revelations. A graceful bâtarde script, red rubrics, and stylish line endings and initials contribute to the harmonious overall design.

The style of the miniature places it in the orbit of the entrepreneur Jean Pichore and his workshop. Pichore managed a large family enterprise that was responsible for the illumination of a great number of classical, secular, and theological texts. He played an important role as well in the market for printed books and even tried his hand as a printer. A number of distinct hands (the Master of Morgan 85, the Master of Petrarch's Triumphs) have recently been merged with the Pichore Workshop, which must have been large and active. The voluminous drapery, composed of thick folds, and the vibrant colors, especially evident in the angels, are among the stylistic features that point toward this workshop.

Two other details of the miniature are especially noteworthy, for they help situate the original manuscript in a context of patronage: the initial with the crowned heart and the gray robe of the Virgin. The crowned heart is most likely a reference to the famous heart reliquary of Anne of Brittany. After Anne's death in 1514, in accordance with her wishes during her lifetime, her heart was eviscerated and ceremoniously transported to the convent of the Carmelites in Nantes. A special gold reliquary was made to contain the heart, and numerous drawings and illuminations of it survive, including in the many manuscript copies of her Obsequies by Pierre Choque (see Nantes, 2007, pp. 94-95 for a list). The fact that the Virgin is atypically dressed in gray, the color of the Carmelite habit, confirms the association of Anne of Brittany and the Missal, which must celebrate her memory and may thus have been commissioned as a gift to a mendicant convent by a member of the royal circle.

Literature: Avril and Reynaud, 1993; Nantes, 2007; Zöhl, 2004.