

Jean Colombe, workshop of (Bourges, active c. 1460-65, d. between 1493 and 1498)

***Coronation of the Virgin* (155 x 105 mm.)**

France, Bourges, c. 1480

Enthroned next to God the Father, the Virgin appears against a liquid gold backdrop with a row of seraphim along the upper border. Two winged putti uphold a trompe l'oeil banderole of text introduced by a camaïeu d'or initial with the opening words of the text for Compline of the Hours of the Virgin: "Converte nos deus" (Convert us O God). The ample folds of the figures, the close cross-hatching used for the modeling, and the initial (a technique he borrowed from his near-contemporary Jean Fouquet) are characteristic of Colombe. The patterning on the columns and the throne, executed in gold on liquid gold, is especially striking creating a kind of *horror vacui*.

Jean Colombe was one of the most prolific French illuminators of the later half of the fifteenth century. The beginning of his activity may be situated around 1460-65. Working at first for the local elite of Bourges he soon attracted the attention of Charlotte of Savoy, queen to Louis XI, and received commissions for manuscripts from various members of the court. It was probably Queen Charlotte who introduced Colombe to her nephew, Charles I, duke of Savoy, for whom he completed the illumination of two outstanding manuscripts, the famous *Très Riches Heures* of Jean de Berry and the splendid Apocalypse by Jean Bapteur and *Péronet* Lamy (Madrid, Escorial MS E. Vit. 5). In 1486 Colombe was appointed official illuminator to the court of Savoy, a position he retained up to 1488, when he moved back to Bourges, where he died between 1493 and 1498.

The style of the present illumination compares closely with that of a Book of Hours by Colombe in Paris (BnF, MS n. a. l. 3181). The setting, as well as the figures of the Virgin and God the Father, are directly modeled on those in this manuscript (e.g., f. 92v), although the colors of their robes are changed. Small details are changed: the clothed angels in the Paris manuscript are transformed into naked putti in our leaf, and the face in the initial and the disposition of the banderole are slightly altered. Colombe painted the Paris manuscript in the middle of his career, c. 1480, before his move to Savoy, and so the present miniature—perhaps by a close Associate from within the workshop—must date around the same time.

Literature: Avril and Reynaud, 1993, 334-335; Ribault, 1999, pp. 13-26.