

Early Northern Renaissance Art

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

There were many cultural components related to the development of art in northern France and Flanders. In this lesson, you will learn about:

1. [Period and Location: Early Northern Renaissance](#)
2. [Two Philips](#)
3. [Very Rich Hours](#)

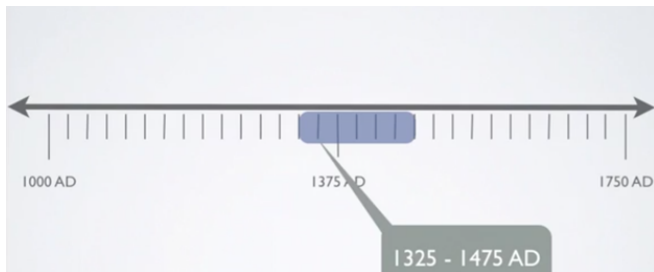


BIG IDEA

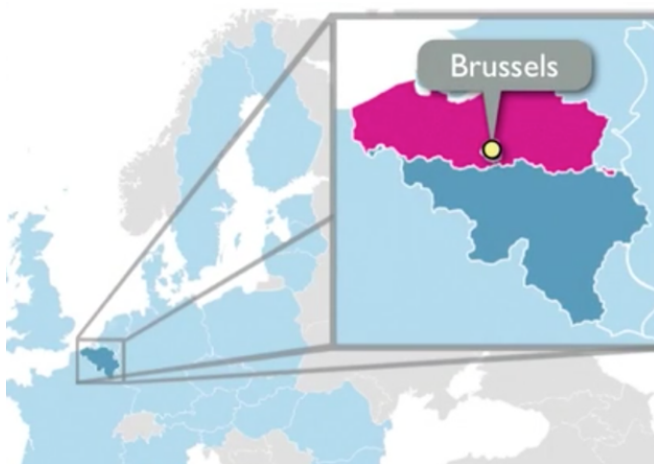
The *Very Rich Hours* is a major change in manuscript illumination, in which the images began dominating the text.

1. Period and Location: Early Northern Renaissance

This lesson covers art and culture from about 1325 to 1475, as highlighted in the timeline below. This covers the lifespan of two Dukes of Burgundy, Philip the Bold and Philip the Good. The art studied in this lesson is from Flanders, an area of modern-day Belgium previously under the control of the kingdom of France. It is now part of Belgium.



This map shows the modern-day border of Flanders, as well as the city of Brussels for reference.



TERM TO KNOW

Northern Renaissance

An age of artistic and cultural discovery and Christian humanism that took place in Germany, the Netherlands, and France.

2. Two Philips

A number of cultural aspects relate to the development of the art in northern France and Flanders during this time. First is the rise of the Burgundian dukes: Philip the Bold, followed by Philip the Good. Both functioned almost independently of the kingdom of France and spent a great deal of their time expanding their territory and enjoying very extravagant lifestyles. Their patronage of the arts was extremely important to its proliferation in this area during this time.

The other development was more of a natural consequence of one of the worst pandemics in human history, that of the bubonic plague, or Black Death. This plague is thought to have originated in Asia and been spread by fleas on rats. Regardless of how it started or spread, it decimated the European population, killing anywhere from one- to two-thirds of the population of Europe over the centuries. It's hard to tell because there are few good records from that time.

DID YOU KNOW

There was a bit of a silver lining for those that did survive. There was plenty of work, and plenty of money to pay those that could still work. Serfs, who were indentured servants tied to a piece of property until they paid their debt, were able to earn money relatively quickly and buy their freedom. This rise in the freedom of serfs contributed to the rise of the middle class, which in turn created a new, large pool of patrons to the arts, called **burghers**, and also to the origins of **capitalism**.

TERMS TO KNOW

Burgher

A middle-class citizen of a borough or town.

Capitalism

An economic system in which means of production (capital) is privately owned.

3. Very Rich Hours

The *Very Rich Hours* of the Duke of Berry is one of the most famous and lavishly illustrated examples of a **book of hours**, which is a book containing prayers to be prayed throughout the day at different hours. The Duke of Berry was the third son of the king of France and a very wealthy patron. The pages depicting the labors of the year are the most famous of this book. They portray the duke's nobles and peasants, and sometimes the duke himself, performing different tasks throughout the year: planting fields, harvesting grapes, feasting, and exchanging gifts. The duke's castles are in the background of many of the scenes. Across the top of every image is a hemispherical chart with a sun chariot in the middle, the signs of the zodiac, and the position of the stars in the sky at that time of year.

The month of April, shown below, depicts a scene of nobles collecting flowers with the castle of Dourdan in the background, which was one of the duke's holdings. There also appears to be a betrothal scene occurring to the right of the main group of nobles, who might be relatives of the young couple exchanging rings.

This book of hours was created by the Limbourg brothers, who were of aristocratic origin. The Duke of Berry took them in when their family members died in a wave of plague. Sadly, the three brothers themselves are thought to also have died of the plague in 1416, before they turned 30.



The Limbourg Brothers

The month of April, from the *Very Rich Hours* of the Duke of Berry

1413–1416

A book of hours was a devotional book used by Christians. This example is also interesting in that the emphasis is clearly on the illustration rather than the text. This marks a major change in **manuscript illumination**. Before this, the emphasis was on the text, and the images were supplementary. Here we see a reversal, where the emphasis is beginning to shift to the illustrations. This book of hours is considered one of the most expensive illuminated manuscripts ever produced because the illustrations are much larger than the text.



TERMS TO KNOW

Book of Hours

A popular devotional book used by Christians during the Middle Ages.

Manuscript Illumination

Decorating and illustrating a manuscript and embellishing it with gold or silver.



SUMMARY

The development of art in northern France and Flanders had several influential actors. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of the Early Northern Renaissance**.

Two Philips, or the Burgundian dukes Philip the Bold and Philip the Good, functioned almost independently of the kingdom of France, and spent a great deal of their time expanding their territory and enjoying very extravagant lifestyles. Their patronage of the arts was extremely important during this time.

Finally, you learned about the **Very Rich Hours**. A book of hours was a devotional book used by Christians. This example is also interesting in that the emphasis is clearly on the illustration rather than the text, marking a major change in manuscript illumination.



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