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## Chapter 1

# Manuscript Acquisition by the Burgundian Court and the Market for Books in the Fifteenth-Century Netherlands

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The collection of manuscripts of the Valois dukes of Burgundy belonged to the largest collections of the fifteenth century. Of the 867 manuscripts mentioned in the inventory drawn up after Duke Philip the Good's death in 1467, some 600 had been acquired by himself, since the inventory of his father's collection from 1420 numbered around 250 manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half the total inventoried in 1467 still exist, the larger part, 247, being preserved in the Brussels Royal Library. These have been described in an extensive catalogue which is limited, however, to the illuminated manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Around a hundred of the remaining manuscripts are to be found in another Brussels catalogue.<sup>3</sup>

Quite understandably, exhibition catalogues tend to over-represent the lavishly illuminated books.<sup>4</sup> The analysis of libraries therefore has to take account of the bias of most catalogues of collections and exhibitions to exclude or underrepresent books which were not illuminated, although these made up a considerable share of medieval libraries. Most present-day collectors and librarians have focused on illuminated manuscripts. The study of manuscripts has mainly been a speciality of art historians, particularly interested in making attributions on stylistic grounds.<sup>5</sup>

The distinction our present-day catalogues make between illuminated and other books cuts right through historical collections. A closer look in the Burgundian library shows that even there the famous lavishly illuminated large manuscripts are merely a spectacular minority, while lots of other books had a rather modest appearance. The choices of present-day librarians thus hamper in some respects our insight in the basis of historical collecting: the purchaser's preference. A correct understanding of the functions books had for their owner and of the ways by which he acquired them, thus requires the consideration of complete collections.

In this essay, I will investigate the production and distribution of books on two levels: first that of the manuscripts commissioned by Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy, representing the absolute summit in patronage and purchasing power for books in his own day, then I will confront these findings with a totally different research method focusing on all preserved books in Dutch and Latin produced in the Low Countries. This confrontation will hopefully throw some light on the functioning of the market for books in the fifteenth-century Low Countries.

During the last twenty years of his reign, from 1445 onwards, Duke Philip the Good certainly was the most active manuscript collector of his dynasty and perhaps of his time. Production might have been concentrated at his court and carried out by artists held on his payroll. His grandfather and father thus employed famous artists as their *valet de chambre*. Among them were the painter Melchior Broederlam, the woodcarver Jacob de Baerze, and most notably the celebrated sculptors Klaas Sluter and Klaas van der Werve. The latter worked at the mausoleum in Champmol near Dijon from 1385 to 1439. Philip the Good himself attracted Jan van Eyck as his *valet de chambre* from 1425 until his death in 1441.<sup>6</sup> In 1453, he bestowed the same dignity upon his main master goldsmith Willem van Vleuten. This did not imply, however, that Philip would stop his purchases and commissions, with nearly 180 different goldsmiths established as masters in various cities.<sup>7</sup>

Although the duke engaged on a permanent basis the miniature painter Dreux Jehan from 1448 until 1455 and again in 1464,<sup>8</sup> and the copier Jean Wauquelin from 1447 to his death in 1452,<sup>9</sup> these 'officials' certainly were not the sole producers of the books in his collection. The ways by which Philip acquired his books can be studied from three types of sources. First, inventories were drawn up of the library at dramatic moments for the dynasty, such as in 1420, 1467 and 1487. These inventories have been used intensively by specialists. Second, the court accounts reveal payments for salaries as well as for particular commissioned works. Third, the preserved books can provide information in their colophon or prologue, while the formal aspects such as the format, materials and the characteristics of the handwriting and illumination enable codicologists and art historians to distinguish producers. Such data have to be related to the content.

Studies of illuminators have shown that even the most famous among them held private workshops in different cities such as Valenciennes, Mons, Hesdin, Ghent, Bruges and Brussels. Most of them, however, were not permanently in the duke's service.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, copiers worked for some periods intensively for the court, at such a high speed that they necessarily must have been helped by colleagues, then they received no salary or commission for some years after which they again were employed on a more than full-time basis. This was, for example, the case with David Aubert, originating from Valenciennes in Hainault, who was very busy in Duke Philip's service in Brussels from 1458 to 1465. He reappeared working for his son Anthony in 1468 and 1469, to fade away until

1474-75, when he wrote a series of books for Duchess Margaret of York<sup>11</sup> The court payrolls show that apart from the miniature painter Dreux Jehan and the painter Jean Hennequart, most book producers did not belong to the duke's court personnel This does not exclude other ways of regular payment on other receipts, but it shows the greater distance to the patron Jean Miélot, a canon at Saint Peter's at Lille, who became a ducal secretary in 1449 and who was in charge of translations of devotional Latin texts into French,<sup>12</sup> and the official chroniclers such as Jean Froissart and Georges Chastellain, do not appear in the court payrolls<sup>13</sup> These findings urge us to reconsider the modes of production and acquisition of manuscripts by Duke Philip the Good

Recent studies of the production and distribution of manuscripts in Flanders have convincingly shown that well before 1400, private lay workshops produced books for an anonymous market, especially books of hours, prayer books and psalters Liturgical manuscripts, saint's lives, devotional and moralistic works belonged to the common sphere of production, as well as a few astrological and classical books Those, however, were mostly produced on commission The former were sold to local and foreign burghers and found their way to all regions commercially linked with Flanders Southeastern England, the Rhineland, Westphalia and Lubeck, the Vistula basin, the Po valley, Northern France, Burgundy and the Rhône valley, Catalonia and Navarre<sup>14</sup> In Bruges, specialised production came to be organised during the fourteenth century in the craft of the painters and in the fifteenth also in that of the *librarians* This led to typical conflicts of competence between the two with regard to miniature painting It is important to note that the scale of book production allowed, just as in the textile industry, for standardisation and specialisation Miniatures were painted in specialised workshops, sometimes even in another city, on separate leaves in a more or less fixed iconography These sheets were bound together with the text under the supervision of the *librarians* who tended to monopolise the negotiation with the customers and to develop into entrepreneurs working with sub-contractors The Bruges city magistrate, however, issued in 1427 an ordinance protecting the independence of the illuminators<sup>15</sup> Parchment makers, copyists, illuminators and bookbinders all worked and lived in small workshops normally located in the same neighbourhood This facilitated their collaboration as independent artisans<sup>16</sup>

Against this knowledge of the existing tradition in Flanders, we can shed new light on the issue of the court's commissions themselves How sure are we about the duke's personal involvement with the books in his library? We can be pretty certain only in rather few cases, those in which payment could be traced in the ducal accounts, or where the manuscript's prologue, colophon or a presentation miniature, heraldic or emblematic features demonstrate the identity of the initiator Manuscripts bought at a workshop do not display such features but do represent a decision of the owner<sup>17</sup> Less obvious is the relation with manuscripts offered as gifts by either a relation or the artist himself Similarly, it has recently

become clear that among the 386 books owned by governess Margaret of Austria at the moment of her death in 1530, large sections had not been commissioned by her but received as gifts, inherited or bought in a whole package such as the seventy-eight manuscripts bought from Charles de Croy's library<sup>18</sup> A close search is thus required in order to establish a prince's personal patronage and the way it was effected

An approach from the viewpoint of a social and economic historian implies an attempt to quantify our observations which is facilitated by the relatively significant numbers Newly designed formats of the same text, for example the *minutes*,<sup>19</sup> were given special attention since they may throw light on the procedures of commissioning and various uses of the books Various *versions*, for example translations made by different persons, or copies in different formats, were counted separately Further I have tried to isolate the manuscripts produced following the explicit will of Duke Philip, which excluded many books produced well before 1420 and a number of those dated from his reign but not visibly or arguably made on his request

In application of these rules, only forty-two of the 247 works in the Brussels Royal Library could be found in the Gaspar, Lyna and Van Den Bergen-Pantens catalogue as being identifiable as Philip's explicit commissions Moreover, the Dogaer and Debae exhibition catalogue contains a considerable number of books not featuring in the Gaspard, Lyna and Van den Bergen-Pantens volumes for the simple reason they are not illuminated No less than fifty-eight books can thus be added to the corpus of those dating from between 1420 and 1467, of which eighteen have been produced on Duke Philip's commission So we end up with sixty commissioned books from a total of 243,<sup>20</sup> the others either being older or acquired in another way Among the 227 works listed by Dogaer and Debae, 115 dated from before around 1420, which implies that nearly half of Duke Philip's library must have consisted of inherited or otherwise acquired existing books Roughly speaking, only one quarter of his preserved collection was thus produced under his active patronage This fact has been overlooked by most scholars who concentrated on the extraordinary manuscript production launched around 1445

I shall now focus on the characteristics of the sixty books produced on Duke Philip's commission These will be contrasted with a number of the c. 400 copies contained in the Burgundian library up to 1477<sup>21</sup> First, the types of texts will be identified then the formats and the possible relations between the two

The duke showed a marked preference for religious, moralistic and historical books fifty one of the sixty commissioned works clearly belonged to these three categories Twenty-three of these titles were even represented by 2, 3 or 4 different copies in the library as a whole His explicit interest in theological, philosophical and literary works was modest Comparing this breakdown with that of all catalogued books relating to the Burgundian court, as shown in Table 1 1, it

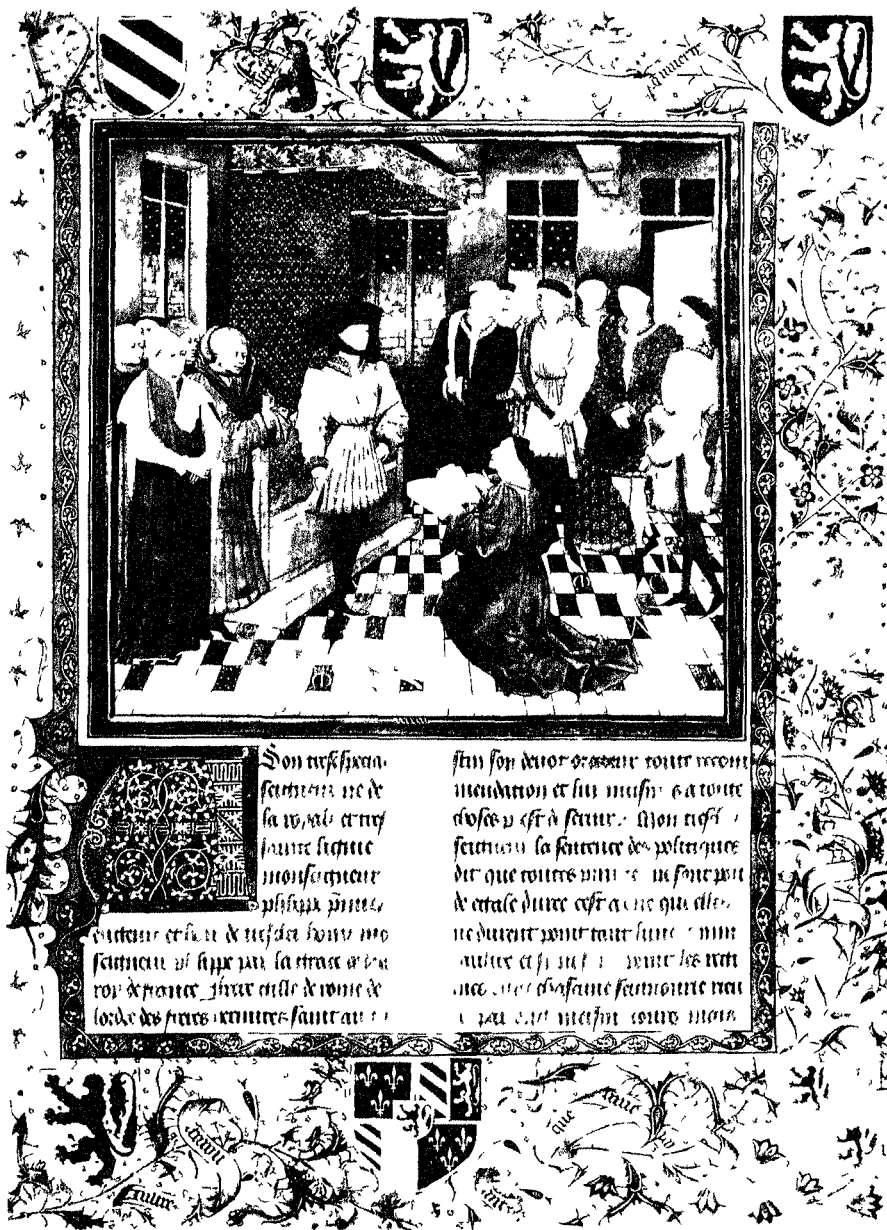


Fig 11 Aegidius Romanus, *De regimine principum*, translated and copied in 1450 by Jean Wauquelin. This opening miniature has been attributed to the Master of the Ghent Privileges, all the other are by Jacquemart Pilavaine (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België [KBvB], ms 9043 f° 2 r)



Fig 1 2 *Debat de honneur* and other didactic works translated around 1450 by Jean Mielot on commission by Duke Philip the Good (KBvB ms 9278-80 f° 1 r)



Prologue du premier liure du Recueil des  
 histories de troies compile par Raoul le  
 feure pbre au commandement de t'snoble  
 et tres vertueux prince Philippe par la  
 grace de dieu Duc de bourg<sup>ne</sup> en l'v<sup>e</sup> de ce no

**Q**uant je regarde et congnois les  
 opprimons des hommes nourris  
 en aucunes singulieres histories  
 de troies Et voy et regarde ossi que d'uel  
 les faire un recueil se indigne au Recueil le  
 commandement de tres noble et tres ver  
 tueux prince · phelipe par la grace du fai  
 seur de toute grace · Duc de Bourgoigne  
 de lotier<sup>e</sup> de brabant et de lembour<sup>g</sup>

Fig 1 3 Raoul Lefevre Recueil des histoires de Troie vol 1 copied in 1464 on commission by Duke Philip the Good The twenty two miniatures have been executed between 1467 and 1487 by the Loyset Liedet workshop (KBvB ms 9261 f° 1 r)

**Table 1.1**  
**Distribution by subject themes of Philip's personal commissions, as compared to the total extant court library**

|                       | Philip's books |    | total catalogued collection % |
|-----------------------|----------------|----|-------------------------------|
|                       | N              | %  |                               |
| religion              | 20             | 33 | 41                            |
| moral treatises       | 17             | 28 | 17                            |
| history               | 14             | 23 | 25                            |
| theology / philosophy | 4              | 7  | 10                            |
| literature            | 5              | 8  | 8                             |

appears that the duke's personal commissions were over-represented in the categories of moralistic works. Among the latter, we find a good deal of 'prince's mirrors' and conduct books for noblemen and ladies. On the other hand, his involvement with religious works was significantly lower than their average share. Looking in closer detail at these findings, it appears that the religious works he did commission included his breviaries and the lives of saints he particularly revered (*Miracles de Notre-Dame*, *Miracles de Saint Hubert*, *Miracles de Saint Josse*, *Histoire de Saint Helaine*, *Vie de Sainte Catherine*, *Vie de soeur Colette*).

Among the moralistic works, a good deal was translated or compiled by the duke's secretary, Jean Mielot. Prayer books, books of hours, compilations from the Bible and the fathers were currently produced and could easily be bought on the market. Every late medieval prince would have owned a number of such religious books for liturgical use and for private devotion. The number of twenty commissions was therefore nothing exceptional. Most notable is the duke's concern with historical works. This is especially evident when we consider the format and illumination of these books.

**Table 1.2**  
**Distribution by subject themes of the richly illuminated and large manuscripts commissioned by Philip**

|                 | large | rich | both | total |
|-----------------|-------|------|------|-------|
| religion        | 4     | 9    | 6    | 19    |
| moral treatises | 4     | 2    | 2    | 8     |
| history         | 2     | 2    | 9    | 13    |
| philosophy      | -     | 1    | -    | 1     |
| totals          | 10    | 14   | 17   | 41    |

The first observation to be made is that of all works commissioned by Duke Philip, only two-thirds were lavishly illuminated and/or of a large size. The

illumination was often limited to one, two or at most three miniatures, often presentation scenes, arms and marginal decoration. The religious and moralistic books, especially, were often not decorated at all or only soberly. Not all large-sized books (approximately 40 x 30 cm, which in most cases numbered more than one hundred folios and sometimes up to four volumes) were richly illustrated, nor were large numbers of miniatures only to be found in great formats. Both features nevertheless were conspicuous in their time, as their combination was consciously introduced at court after 1445.<sup>22</sup> This was the case for seventeen of the forty-one commissioned lavish books. If we take the number of ten miniatures as the minimum for a distinctive category of illumination, it will be apparent that some manuscripts counted dozens of them. Even the proportion with the number of folios is striking, since in a few cases the number of miniatures tends to equal or even surpass the number of folios.<sup>23</sup>

Table 1.2 clearly shows that it was especially the historical books explicitly commissioned by Duke Philip which were both very large and highly illuminated. They were the main trend setters of the 'new wave' in manuscript production for the Burgundian court from 1445 onwards. Religious works could also contain large numbers of miniatures, especially the personal books of hours and breviaries, further the lives of particularly revered saints and Jean Mielot's *Miroir de la Salvation Humaine* were produced in a format very close to that of the historical works. Several versions were made for the duke and his immediate environment, some also in a sober format on paper, of works they were clearly concerned with: the French version of Guido de Columna's *History of the destruction of Troy*, Raoul Lefevre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troie*, Jean Wauquelin's French version of Jacques de Guise's *Chroniques de Hainault* and Pierre de Vaux's *Vie de soeur Colette*. Philip's historiographical commissions obviously sought to legitimise his political claims to an ancient descent and a sovereign position as the heir to the Lotharingian kings rather than to those of Germany or France. In this respect, their extraordinary format and lavish illumination served a clear purpose.<sup>24</sup>

The stylistic analysis of the illumination and handwriting, combined with the mentions of payments in the court accounts, leaves no doubt about the conditions of this gigantic book production. Workshops established in a number of cities received commissions for specialised craftsmanship. Jean Wauquelin is a good example of this. Established in Mons probably since just before 1440, his first great commission was the translation into French of Jacques de Guise's *Chronicle of Hainault* for governor Antoine de Croy, in 1445. One year later, a councillor made Duke Philip commission another copy of this chronicle, after which followed Girart de Rousillon's *Vie de Sainte Helaine* and, in 1451, a translation of Gilles de Rome's *Le Gouvernement des Princes*. From 1447 onwards, the duke paid him a yearly salary, above which he received many other payments for his multiple services. These included writing, illuminating, gilding, binding and heraldry. Wauquelin was called a *maistre*, which can point to his

position as an independent craftsman. He employed a *clerk* and servants. After his death in 1452, his widow was paid for the achievement of a third volume of the *Chroniques de Hainault* and a third of Froissart's chronicle.<sup>25</sup> In the tradition of the craft, a widow was entitled to continue her husband's workshop.

A man like Wauquelin thus appears to be a small entrepreneur whose personal activity may have been limited originally to the calligraphy of translations. Commissions by noblemen, high clergymen and especially by the duke himself created such a high demand, that he soon could employ various other people in his workshop or even outside it. The collaboration for different specialised activities on the same book, even among artisans working in different cities, could find its rationale not only in artistic preferences, but also in the possibility of escaping guild restrictions on the number of journeymen per master craftsman. Another reason was the irregularity of demand from the court. David Aubert spent years without any commission from court before he received another series around 1475.<sup>26</sup> Since calligraphy, illumination and other stages of book production were considered as artisanal specialisations like so many others, we have every reason to be aware of the structure and regulation of the labour market while trying to understand the mechanism of the market for manuscripts. It should be very clear that the dukes of Burgundy mainly relied on the workshops rather than on their own, very limited personnel. Workshops in various cities received commissions and they themselves also moved, depending on the life cycle of masters and ambitious journeymen alike.

The presence in the cities of the Southern Low Countries of numerous workshops of highly skilled craftsmen allowed the dukes to rely on them for their commissions. At the same time, this system allowed for the flexibility in the demand of each particular patron and it explains why, even in the duke's library, dozens of books were obviously bought on the market.

This vision can be confirmed by the application of an entirely different searching method. All preserved manuscripts in Dutch or produced in the Low Countries have been catalogued in the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta*, originally a card system at the manuscripts' department of Leiden University Library, now also available by electronic means.<sup>27</sup> This system contains some 11,000 manuscript descriptions which can be selected by date, author, title, owner etc. As a consequence of its original selection criteria, this catalogue contains mostly books in Dutch and Latin, with relatively few in other languages. A sample of nearly one-third of this catalogue has been searched for fifteenth-century manuscripts commissioned by fifteenth-century persons, or those of which the first owner lived in that time. In this way, 658 manuscripts originating in the Netherlands and their owners could be identified and compared to the Duke's collection.<sup>28</sup>

These owners comprised only eighty-eight lay persons, and 221 if we include the non-identified persons, all the others being clerics or religious communities. For half of the books, no illumination at all is mentioned, eighty-five had several

miniatures, of which twenty-eight contained more than seven Formats of more than 33 cm height occurred in 52 items, mostly the liturgical books In so far as this sample can be considered as a cross-section of libraries in the Low Countries, it becomes apparent that the lavishly illuminated large-sized historical books Duke Philip commissioned from 1445 onwards, were comparable in his day only with liturgical manuscripts This implies that he consciously propagated a sacralised history of his territories and their glorious dynastic roots

As to the types of texts, one-third of the 221 books owned by lay people were books of hours, one fourth theological and devotional works from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Only thirty-seven books (16.7 per cent) were not of a religious nature, mostly scientific and juridical texts As such, proportionally more religious works are to be found among the preserved books from the Netherlands than in the duke's library Even if we account for a possibly higher degree of losses of privately owned books of a modest quality, historiographical texts clearly make a big difference In the sample of 658 books, a commissioner could be traced only in forty-seven cases, half of which belonged to the aristocracy or high clergy This implies that ordinary middle-class owners could, just as well as the elite, commission books and show this in their copies However, the great majority either did not display as conspicuously as the princes their role as patrons, or acquisition happened normally on anonymous markets

As a consequence of the commercialisation of manuscripts, printed books were distributed very soon, together with other merchandise A striking feature of this situation is offered by the accounts of the river tolls levied in the cities of Schoonhoven and Geervliet in Holland, preserved for the years around 1480 They show us tolls levied on books, described as printed, and packed in barrels, baskets and parcels <sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, the confrontation of Duke Philip's personal commissions with a sample of preserved books from the Netherlands point to the prominent activity of an anonymous market for books The standard texts, books of hours, prayer books, bibles, and, much less frequently, devotional, theological, philosophical and scientific works were available within the sphere of market production Private patronage occurred merely in 6 per cent of the cases in general, and for one-fourth of the duke's books He targeted his commissions in a clearly formulated way, shaped according to his personal views Apart from his personal devotion, his active patronage for books reflected the clear aim of supporting his political claims on sovereignty Therefore, he chose to use the format of liturgical books and the exceptional splendour of magnificent illumination to underpin his ambitions with historical arguments

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dogaer and Debae (1967), pp 3-7, Doutrepoint (1911)
- <sup>2</sup> Gaspar and Lyna (1937-45)
- <sup>3</sup> We reconstructed this figure by comparison with Dogaer and Debae (1967), pp 160-161
- <sup>4</sup> Further to Dogaer and Debae, see for example Delaisse (1959), Cockshaw, Lemaire et al (1977), Thoss (1987), Pantens (1989), Arnould and Massing (1993), Smeyers and Van der Stock (1996)
- <sup>5</sup> Dogaer (1987)
- <sup>6</sup> Prevenier and Blockmans (1985), p 314
- <sup>7</sup> Van der Velden (1997), p 9-14, on the basis of de Laborde (1849), vol 1, pp 532-534
- <sup>8</sup> Dogaer (1987), p 83
- <sup>9</sup> Delaisse (1959), pp 49-51
- <sup>10</sup> Delaisse (1959), pp 49-164, Dogaer (1987), Legare (1996)
- <sup>11</sup> Straub (1995), pp 144-161
- <sup>12</sup> Dogaer (1987), p 87
- <sup>13</sup> Kruse (1996), pp 312-326 no mentions in the court pay rolls of for example David Aubert, Dreux Jehan, Loyset Liedet, Simon Marmion, Jean Mielot, Jean Wauquelin
- <sup>14</sup> Smeyers and Cardon (1993), pp 67-69, 124
- <sup>15</sup> Smeyers and Cardon (1993), pp 80-94
- <sup>16</sup> Klein (1995), pp 7-9
- <sup>17</sup> As an example Dogaer and Debae (1967), no 135, Gaspar and Lyna (1937-45), no 271
- <sup>18</sup> Debae (1995)
- <sup>19</sup> Delaisse (1959), no 40-41
- <sup>20</sup> In contrast to exhibition catalogues, I counted multi-volume works as one item each
- <sup>21</sup> Based on the combination of books mentioned in the catalogues by Delaisse, Dogaer and Debae as well as Cockshaw
- <sup>22</sup> Delaisse (1959), no 45
- <sup>23</sup> Extremes 182, respectively 192 miniatures for 112 folios in Mielots *Muoir de la salvation humaine*, 165 miniatures on 347 folios in his Book of Hours, 105 on 258 in *Livre du Roi Florimond*, 102 on 106 in Christine de Pisan's *Livre d Othee* Delaisse (1959) no 80, 239, 92, 72, Gaspar and Lyna (1984), III, no 268
- <sup>24</sup> Stein (1996), pp 33-48, Van Buuren-Hagiopan (1996), pp 49-69
- <sup>25</sup> Delaisse (1959), pp 49-50
- <sup>26</sup> Straub (1995), pp 144-161
- <sup>27</sup> Biemans (1987), pp 47-67
- <sup>28</sup> Van den Berg and Lekkerkerk (manuscript)
- <sup>29</sup> Smits (1997), pp 127, 129, 136, 139, 143, 161, 229