

La Fête Champêtre à la cour

de Bourgogne

“A Fête Champêtre at the Burgundian Court”



A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE AT THE COURT OF PHILIPPE LE BON, oil on canvas,

DIJON, MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS, © MBA DIJON, PHOTO: J. M. ROUTHIE (permanent loan, Musée National du Château de Versailles) inv. 3981. Restored in 1998 with funds from the Caisse d'Épargne de Bourgogne.

IN A MEADOW DOTTED WITH LITTLE TREES a group of noblemen and ladies, in two tiers, dressed elegantly in white and accompanied by their servants and dogs, have congregated to enjoy the delights of hunting, music and the dance at a country fête. Behind lies a river in the middle of which stands a peculiar house on wooden pilings. Farther still a strange rock formation divides the landscape, on the right is a hunting scene and on the left, in a village, tiny silhouettes move about on foot or on horseback. Heraldic emblems are displayed on the banner suspended from the trumpet and over the door of the chateau.

A FÊTE AT THE COURT OF PHILIPPE LE BON?

At first this may appear as a scene from daily life at the Burgundian Court. But in fact, it could refer to a specific event: the marriage of Isabelle of Portugal with Philippe le Bon at Sluys, port of Bruges, in January 1430, or the marriage of two courtiers: Jacqueline de la Tremoille and André Toulangeon, in June 1431 at the Chateau Hesdin in Artois which had a “water cottage” on stilts in its riverside park. Bottom right, the figure

dressed in red corresponds to the “fool of the good Duke Philippe de Bourgogne” identified in a collection of sixteenth century portraits at Arras (*fig. 1*). Duke Philippe of Burgundy is then presumably the man seated at the table and the Duchess (either his second wife, Bonne d’Artois or his third, Isabelle de Portugal) the lady with her hand on the shoulder of a younger woman or that woman herself.

OR A GARDEN OF LOVE IN 1410 TO 1415?

The painting you are looking at is actually a seventeenth century copy of an original that was most likely made in the early fifteenth century. Another copy, made in the sixteenth



“THE FOOL OF THE GOOD DUKE PHILIPPE”, collection of portraits, sixteenth century
ARRAS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE MUNICIPALE
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century, is in the Museum of the Chateau of Versailles. The painting is a pastiche portraying fifteenth century dress, prior to the reign of Philippe le Bon which began in 1419: bowl-shaped haircuts, short doublets, gowns and cloaks, elaborate headdresses and coifs, long sleeves slashed at the sides and wide neck chains. The heraldic emblems are those of Philippe’s court, posterior to October 4, 1430, when he inherited Brabant and Limburg, but the absence of the Order of the Golden Fleece here suggests a date prior to December 3, 1431 when to wear the Order became obligatory. The landscape in the upper part of the painting is in the Dutch sixteenth century style, explicit in the rock formations and the village at the upper left. If the landscape was altered when the painting was copied at that time, the armorial bearings could also have been added or modified then, and therefore do not affect the dating of the whole work. Also, it is unlikely that white would have been used for a wedding. In the Middle Ages no specific dress or colour would have been designated for this ceremony.



FIFTEENTH CENTURY,
*The Great Garden
 of Love*, BERLIN,
 KUPPERTSTICHKABINETT
 © BPK, BERLIN DIST
 RMN/PHOTO:
 JÖRG R. ANDERS

It is particularly useful to compare this scene with calendar pictures and scenes of courtly love from the early fifteenth century, as in the frescoes of the months at the Chateau of La Torre d'Aquila near Trento (fig. 2) and in the engraving from Berlin, *The Great Garden of Love* (fig. 3). The Country Fête could then be an image of this type, with details added in the sixteenth century to represent the Duke of Burgundy's Court.

DYNASTIC CELEBRATIONS IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES



MASTER OF THE CITÉ DES DAMES,
*The Procession to Calais and England after the
 Marriage of Richard II of England and of Isabelle
 of France, Pierre Salmon, The Dialogues of
 Salmon and Charles VI, 1409-1413*
 PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE,
 DÉPARTEMENT DE MANUSCRITS, FR 23 379, FOL. 54r.
 © CLICHE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, PARIS

Possible explanations for this pastiche include a theory that it was altered more than a century after its creation to support the dynastic ambitions of the Habsburg Emperors. Documentation for the composition can be found in the sixteenth century. A 1582 description from the Chateau of Pardo near Madrid, built from 1543 to 1549 by Emperor Charles V, mentions "a painted wood panel with the effigy of Charles, the Grand Duke of Burgundy at the hunt with his Duchess, their ladies and knights all dressed in white, adorned with strange costumes and ornaments in the style of those countries." That panel probably disappeared in the fire that ravaged the chateau in 1604. Emperor Charles V, married to another Isabelle of Portugal, may have intended this work for a display of his lineage by evoking his ancestors the Burgundian Dukes Philippe or Charles, each of whom had married an Isabelle. Identifiable portraits of either of these dukes or their duchesses cannot however be distinguished in the faces here.



THE LIMBURG BROTHERS, C. 1410-1416,
The month of May, Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry

Painted representations celebrating the ruling prince and noteworthy events of his reign are frequent in the sixteenth century, whereas this practise may not yet have been popular at the end of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the contemporary princes are represented rather in illuminated manuscripts (figs. 4 and 5). This is how Jan van Eyck drew John of Bavaria, Count of Holland in *A Prince in Prayer by the Seaside* in the *Hours of Milan-Turin* (fig. 6). A drawing in the Louvre, *The Fishing Party* (fig. 7), also represents the Bavarian dynasty. It would have been common to represent the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy and their court in small format during the fifteenth century. A large composition such as this, or a tapestry, mural painting or decoration for a festival cannot be excluded, but nothing of the sort has yet come to light.



JAN VAN EYCK, C. 1422-1424, *A Prince in Prayer at the Seaside, The Milan-Turin Hours*
 Engraving destroyed in 1904
 © MDA DIJON, DOCUMENTATION



AFTER VAN EYCK? OR NETHERLANDS ARTIST
 (HOLLAND OR GUELDERLAND?) C. 1415, *The Fishing Party*
 PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DÉPARTEMENT DES ARTS GRAPHIQUES.
 © PHOTO RMN/J. G. BERIZZI

THE AUTHOR OF THE LOST ORIGINAL

Due solely to the date 1430-31 and the proposed identification of Philippe le Bon, an attribution has been suggested to Jan van Eyck (1390-1441), official painter to the Duke in 1425, who had previously been attached to the court of John of Bavaria, Count of Holland, from 1422 to 1424. The painting may be seen as an echo of the lost mural paintings from The Hague, Hesdin or another of Philippe le Bon's residences. Even supposing that Van Eyck provided the model for its translation to a tapestry or a mural, this painting totally lacks van Eyck's mastery of perspective and insertion of figures in space. In fact the treatment here from a bird's-eye view with high horizon, incoherent proportions, juxtaposition and superposition of these same trees and figures, suggest an artist working before the great pictorial revolution effected in 1420 to 1430 by Jan van Eyck and Robert Campin. The artist seems closer to the Parisian illuminators such as the Master of the Cité des Dames (fig. 4) or the Master of Boucicaut, from whom he takes the invention of truncated trees to open the foreground, than to the Limburg brothers, celebrated for their illuminations of 1410-16, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (fig. 5).