

# The Twelve Ages of Man

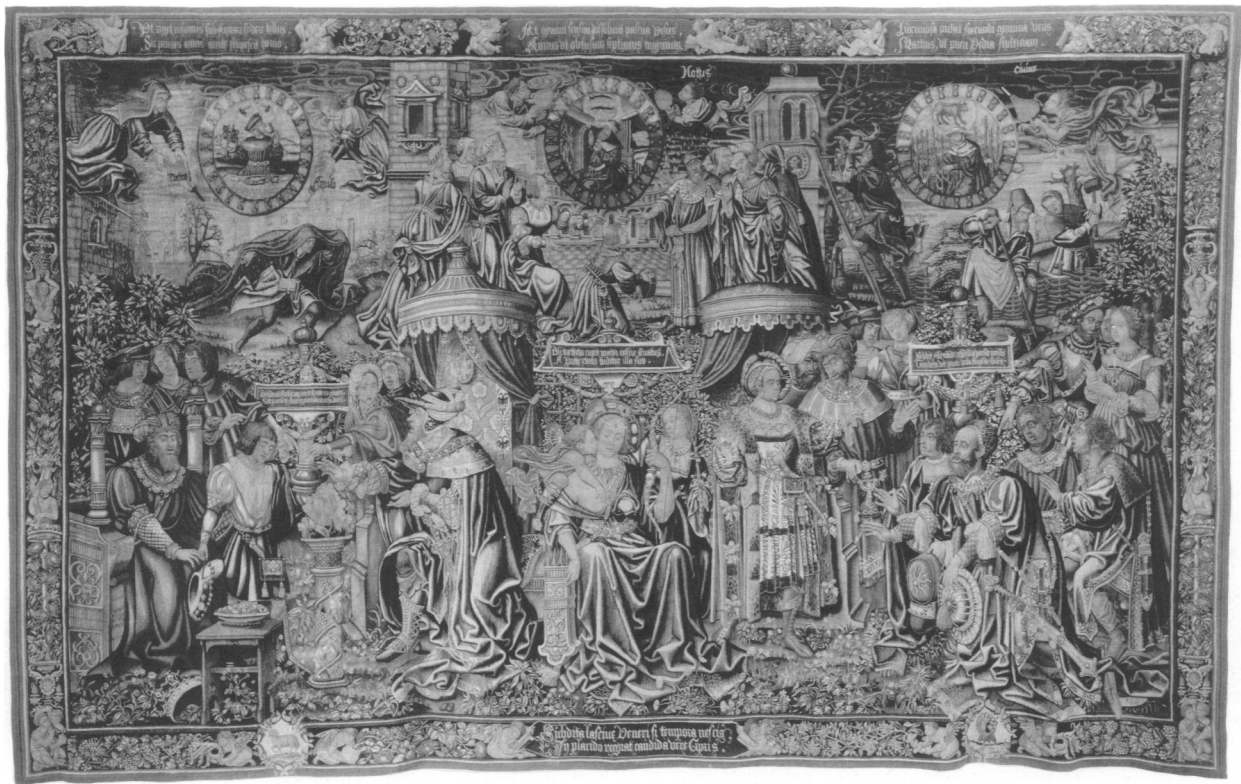
## A Further Study of a Set of Early Sixteenth-Century Flemish Tapestries

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FIGURE 1

The Twelve Ages of Man: Spring. Wool and silk tapestry, Flemish (Brussels), about 1520. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift (with tapestries in Figures 2, 3, 4) of the Hearst Foundation, in memory of William Randolph Hearst, 53.221.1



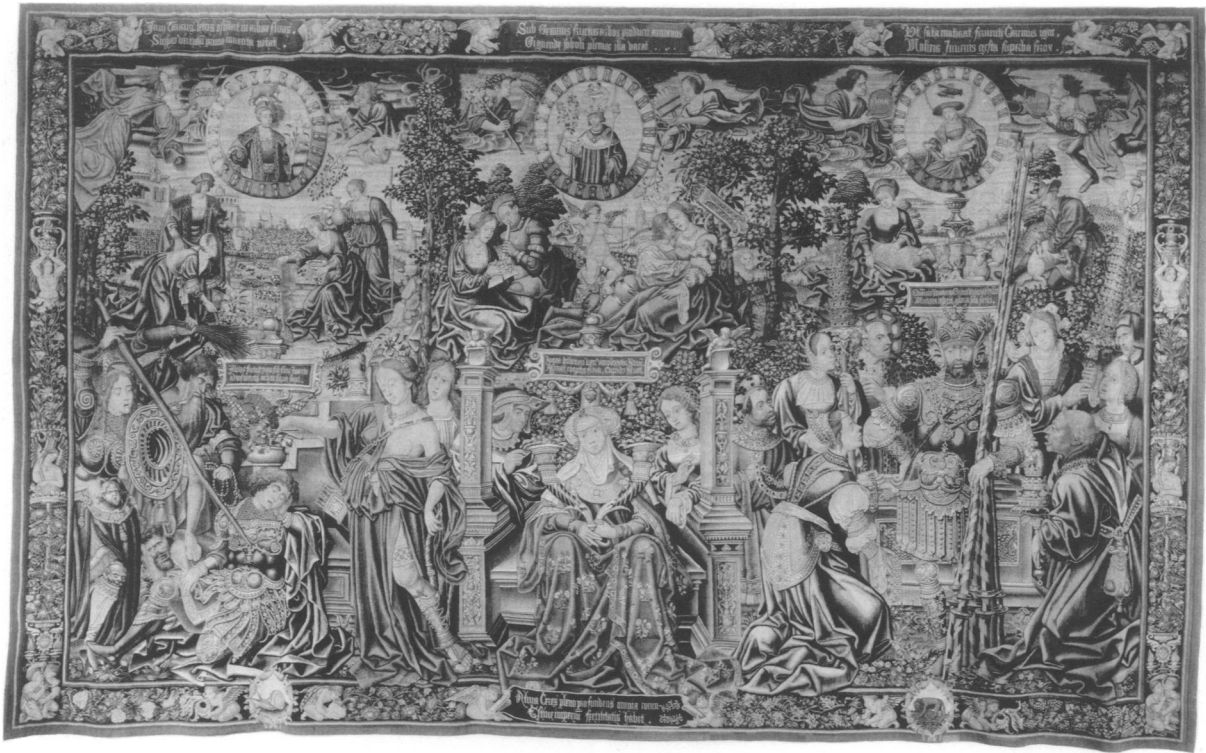


FIGURE 2 The Twelve Ages of Man: Summer. 53.221.2

IN 1953 the Hearst Foundation gave the Metropolitan Museum, in memory of William Randolph Hearst, a set of four large early sixteenth-century Flemish tapestries (Figures 1–4). Their fine quality indicates that they were made in Brussels, but nothing is known of their history until they were acquired by Mr. Hearst, probably before 1930.<sup>1</sup> The set was given the name of the Twelve Ages of Man, and a brief description was published in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*.<sup>2</sup> Further study has shown that the iconographical complexity of the set can be connected with humanist learning in the Netherlands in the early sixteenth century; it has also brought out the unusual position the set holds in the history of Flemish tapestry.

It has long been a commonplace that the sets of large tapestries made in France and Flanders in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are the equivalent of the frescoes that cover the walls of great halls in Italy; they are the monumental pictorial art of the north. Large tapestries were not usually commissioned as individual hangings, but as “chambers,” complete coverings for the walls of a room.<sup>3</sup> This often enormous square footage gave the same scope to storytelling, allegory, and symbolism as did the walls of churches or great rooms in the south, and the “author” of a tapestry set could develop his ideas in the same expansive way as his counterpart in Italy. The “chambers” that have survived as wholes from the late fifteenth and early six-

1. They are recorded in the Marillier File in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, as sold by P. W. French & Co. to Mr. Hearst, two of them having previously belonged to Lionel Harris. Mr. Harris was the agent for French in Spain, and the tapestries were almost certainly acquired there. (This information was kindly provided by Mr. Milton Samuels.)

2. Edith A. Standen, “The Twelve Ages of Man,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 12 (1954) pp. 241–248.

3. Jan Grauls, “Een caemer tapisserie. Een kleine bijdrage tot de studie der terminologie van de Vlaamse tapijtkunst,” *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* 18 (1958) pp. 177–191. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives *chambering* as the earlier English word, with a quotation from 1480: “Chambering of tapicery white and greene.” *Chamber*, in the sense of “the hangings or furniture of a chamber,” is not recorded before 1612: “To unfold this tapestry, and to hang up the whole chamber of it.”

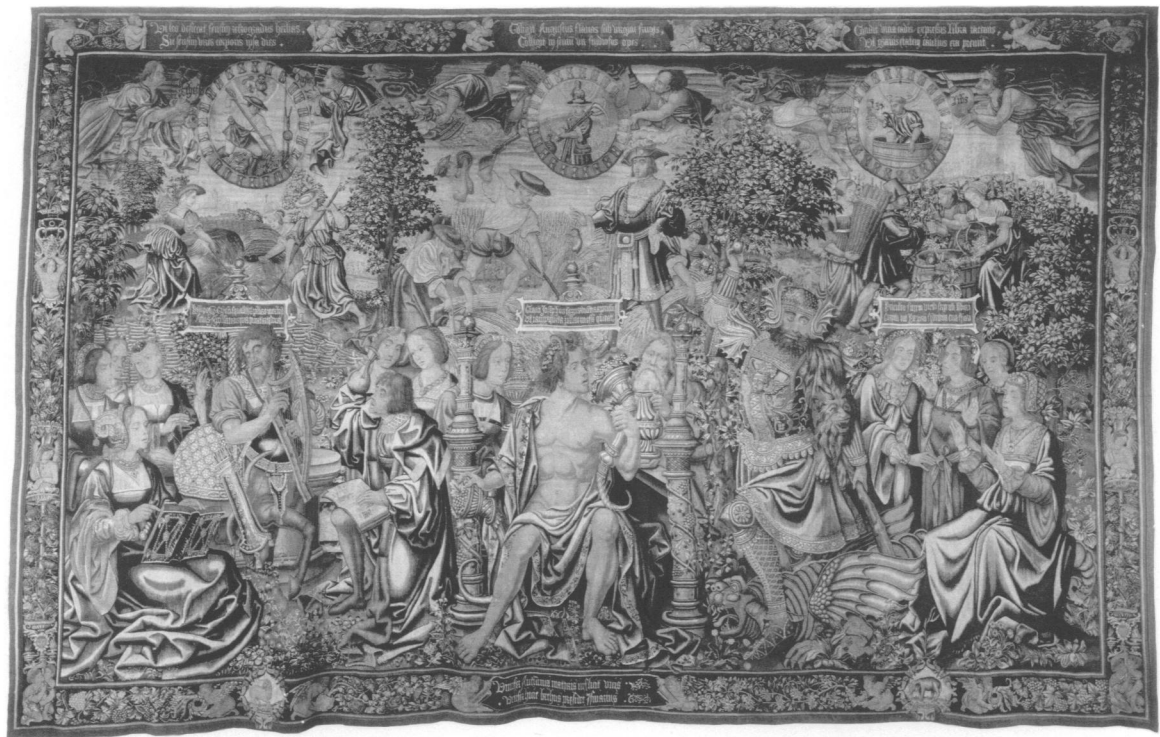
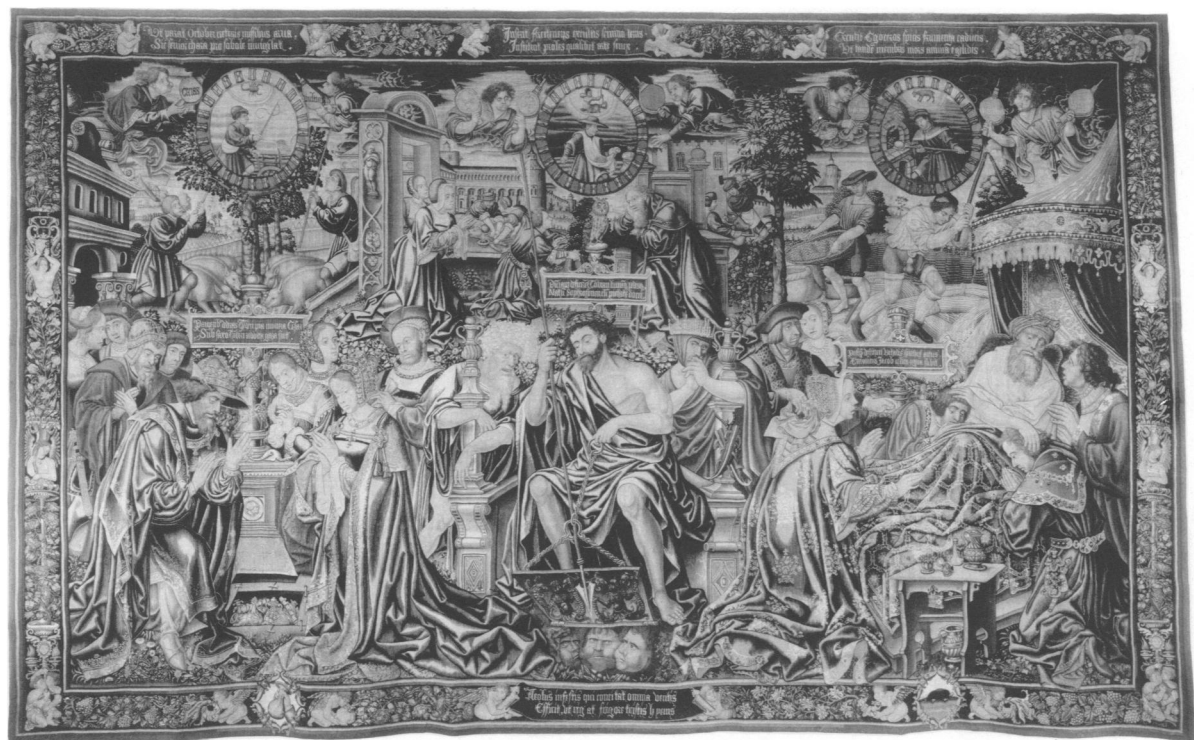


FIGURE 3 The Twelve Ages of Man: Autumn. 53.221.3

FIGURE 4 The Twelve Ages of Man: Winter. 53.221.4



teenth centuries are mostly still medieval in subject matter. Their stories are either Christian or romances; if classical, they are the fairy-tale versions of the Middle Ages. Even sets of Triumphs, derived from Petrarch, end with the triumph of Eternity, or of the Church. But the Twelve Ages set is, as will be shown, almost totally lacking in references to Christianity, and its ethos is quite unchristian. Some of its classical stories are not the medieval versions but have been taken from the original sources. In these respects, it is an extremely unusual work of art.

The four hangings that make up the Twelve Ages are a complete "chamber," though a comparatively small one. Each piece is 14 feet 6–7 inches high, and the widths vary from 23 feet 6 inches to 24 feet. It is probable that this is not the *editio princeps*; there is no metal thread, and some left-handed actions<sup>4</sup> suggest that the cartoons were originally prepared for the *haute-lisse* loom and inadequately redrawn for *basse-lisse* weaving, which reverses the design. The color scheme, typical of Brussels weaving at this time, is dominated by the strong blues, reds, and greens used for the robes of the principal figures, with conspicuous highlights of white on blue, pink on red, and yellow on green. The ground of the borders is dark blue; the scrolls red, with white lettering, except for those in the lower borders, which are blue. The outer border is red and has no city or maker's marks. The weave is quite fine, with 16–18 warps to an inch (6–8 to a centimeter).

Each tapestry illustrates a single season of three months as well as three ages in the life of man. In the center is a classical deity, with two attendants, who is identified and related to the season in a Latin elegiac distich written on a scroll in the lower border. A bird perches above each deity. The remainder of the tapestry consists of three vertical sections, each illustrating

a month of the year and an age in the life of man. Inscriptions in the upper borders connect the months with the ages. Each section has at the top a roundel framed with twenty-four hourglasses, containing a sign of the zodiac and a figure symbolizing a month, flanked by winds. Below the two outer roundels on each tapestry (and, on the fourth tapestry, also below the center roundel) is a representation of an occupation of the month. Below each occupation, as well as between the central roundel and the deity, is a story that illustrates the age of man with which the section is concerned; an inscription gives a clue, more or less cryptic, to the story and its connection with the age. The only so-far unexplained items are the two medallions in the lower border of each tapestry that show an animal, a bird, or, in one instance, an object, though they may each echo a quality of the scene above, such as the peacock reflecting Alexander's splendor or the snail, Hercules's torpor.

The inscriptions make it clear that the main subject of the set is the life of man, correlated with the months; life is taken to consist of twelve ages, each six years long, the first being the equivalent of January. But the set also represents the seasons, starting with spring; the inscriptions describing the deity who rules each season are not concerned with the life of man. The resulting disconcerting lack of consistency between the season and the months of which it is apparently composed could have been avoided if the year and the spring had been depicted as beginning in March.<sup>5</sup> In Brabant at this time the new year was dated from Easter.<sup>6</sup> January may have been chosen for the first month on the tapestries because it opens the ecclesiastical year and so appears at the beginning of the calendar in Books of Hours and other religious works, but perhaps the knowledge that it came first in ancient Rome had some influence on the "author." No attempt has been made to harmonize this idea with the contradictory one that spring is the first season of the year.<sup>7</sup>

## THE DEITIES OF THE SEASONS

Spring (Figure 5) is represented by Venus. The inscription states:

Subdita lascive Veneri si tempora nescis,

In placido regnat candida vere Cypris.

(If thou knowest not the season ruled by wanton Venus, the radiant Cyprian reigns in tranquil spring.)

4. Moses, Pharaoh's daughter, Alexander, and several laborers in the first tapestry. This carelessness was apparently noticed and corrected in the other three.

5. Spring in the church calendar began in March on the Festival of the Chair of St. Peter. William H. Hinkle, "The Cosmic and Terrestrial Cycles on the Virgin Portal of Notre Dame," *Art Bulletin* 49 (1967) p. 287, note 7.

6. A. Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia, e Calendario Perpetuo* (Milan, 1930) p. 17.

7. Another instance of this anomaly is a Florentine miniature of 1293 in the Biblioteca Laurenziana showing Primavera as January, February, and March; Estas as April, May, and June; etc. Raimond van Marle, *Iconographie de l'Art profane*, II (The Hague, 1932) p. 314, fig. 361.





FIGURE 5 The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Spring. Venus

The goddess is accompanied by Cupid and a young woman holding a leafy branch, who may be Voluptas.<sup>8</sup> Spring has been the season of Venus since antiquity.<sup>9</sup> Except that she has what are apparently a bow and quiver of her own (Cupid has a small quiver and her bow would be too big for him), her appearance has nothing unusual about it. The bird perched on the frame of the inscription above her is probably intended to be a swallow, a symbol of the season when it reappears in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Ceres (Figure 10) is the usual deity of summer.<sup>11</sup> Her verse reads:

Alma Ceres pleno profundens omnia cornu  
Estive imperiū fertilitatis habet.

(Fostering Ceres, pouring out all things from her full horn, holds dominion over summer fertility.)

The man and the young woman on either side of the goddess cannot be identified as mythological figures, nor is the green parrot perched above connected with her or with the season of summer.<sup>12</sup> The flowers scattered so conspicuously over her dress (no other figure wears a costume decorated with what are presumably embroidered motifs like these) are pansies, English daisies, and, probably, forget-me-nots, rather than the poppies, cornflowers, and ears of wheat proper to Ceres.<sup>13</sup>

An explication for these anomalies is suggested by the pearls on the hem of the dress: Ceres here stands for

Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands from 1507 to 1530.<sup>14</sup> Pearls (*margaritae*) and daisies (*marguerites*) were naturally her symbols, and pansies (*pensées*) also decorated objects she owned.<sup>15</sup> The pansies and, perhaps, the forget-me-nots (Dutch: *vergeet-mij-nietjen*) are tokens of her undying devotion to her dead husband.<sup>16</sup> She owned a green parrot celebrated in verse by her “secrétaire, indiciare et historiographe,” Jean Lemaire de Belges, as “l’Amant vert.”<sup>17</sup> Ceres in the tapestry is not a portrait of Margaret, though the regent was always portrayed, in her later years, with her neck and shoulders entirely concealed and with a head covering passing under the chin. But the man beside the goddess certainly resembles Jean II Carondelet (1469–1544), a member of the regent’s Privy Council at Malines (Figure 11).<sup>18</sup> Possibly the shields held by the winged putti on the uprights of the throne, which are not found with the other deities, were intended to bear Margaret’s arms.

Bacchus (Figure 14) is again the normal deity for autumn.<sup>19</sup> His inscription reads:

Vinifer Autūnus maturis influit uvis.

Vnifer [for Vinifer] huic Iachus presidet  
Ismarius.

(Autumn, the wine-bringer, abounds in ripe grapes. Ismarian Iachus, the wine-bringer, presides over it.)

To call Bacchus “Ismarian Iachus” is in accordance

8. Jean Lemaire de Belges, the contemporary Flemish poet, described Venus in his *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye*, Book I, Chapter XXII, as accompanied by “Son filz Cupido . . . et Volupté sa fille.” *Oeuvres*, ed. J. Stecher, I (Louvain, 1882) p. 242.

9. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 316, s.v. “Quatre person-nages.”

10. Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et Emblematum Centuria Quatuor*, III (Mainz, 1668 [first ed. 1595]) no. LXXXVI.

11. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 316.

12. The parrot was associated with the Virgin in the Middle Ages and with eloquence in the Renaissance. E. K. J. Reznick, “De reconstructie van ‘t’Altaer van S. Lucas’ van Marten van Heemskerck,” *Oud Holland* 70 (1955) pp. 239–242.

13. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 300, s.v. “Pavot.”

14. This identification was suggested by Dr. Jane de Iongh.

15. Among these were “une petite salière fete en manière de panier, semé de feulaige et pensées”; “une autre mestier de bois noir, garniz de XIII fermiletz d’argent doré, où est sur ung chacun une marguerite, avec quatre soleiz et sur iceulx une marguerite”; “ung reloge [horloge] rond, de leton doré, le cadrant d’esmail bleu, au milieu d’icelluy une marguerite de de [sic] coste une pensée esmailée.” H. Michelant, *Inventaire des Vaisselles, Joyaux,*

*Tapisseries, Peintures, Livres et Manuscrits de Marguerite d’Autriche* (Brussels, 1870) pp. 96, 100, 101.

16. A painting by Hans von Kulmbach in the Metropolitan Museum, acc. no. 17.190.21, shows a young man on one side and a girl making a wreath of forget-me-nots on the other, with the inscription, “Ich pint mit vergis mein nit” (“I bind with forget-me-nots”). Claus Virch, *The Artist and the Animal*, exhibition catalogue, Knoedler, New York, 1968, no. 20.

17. The chief figure in the May miniature of the Grimani Breviary in the San Marco Library, Venice, has been identified as Margaret; a woman in her suite carries a green parrot. The unusually large number of pansies, daisies, and pearls in the borders of this manuscript has been taken to indicate that the book was made for her. Maria Gräfin Lanckoronska, *Die christlich-humanistische Symbolsprache und deren Bedeutung in zwei Gebetbüchern des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts* (Baden-Baden, 1958) pp. 94, 98.

18. This identification was suggested by Professor H. L. C. Jaffé. Carondelet is said to appear in the January miniature of the Grimani Breviary. Lanckoronska, *Symbolsprache*, p. 93.

19. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 316; I, col. 120, s.v. “Corne d’Abondance,” for Bacchus as god of autumn and the cornucopia as an attribute of autumn.

with classical usage; *Iaccus* was employed by Virgil and other writers as a synonym for Bacchus and “Ismarian” to mean Thracian.<sup>20</sup> The god is shown as he is described in the *De deorum imaginibus libellus*, except that he is not riding on a tiger.<sup>21</sup> This work is a compilation of earlier texts made about 1400,<sup>22</sup> which served as an iconographical manual for the late Middle Ages and the early humanists.<sup>23</sup> To a modern eye, the only unusual feature in the tapestry is the pair of ram’s horns that Bacchus wears, but he is described as horned by several classical authors, including Ovid,<sup>24</sup> and specifically as having ram’s horns by Diodorus Siculus.<sup>25</sup> His attendants are presumably a Bacchante and Silenus, though both seem completely sober.

The usual deity for winter is Boreas,<sup>26</sup> but, perhaps because he appears as a wind in the December section of this tapestry, he is here replaced by Aeolus (Figure 21).<sup>27</sup> The inscription reads:

Aeolus infestis qui concitat omnia ventis  
Efficit, ut rig[e]at frigore tristis hyems.  
(Aeolus, who shakes everything with his hostile  
winds, causes dismal winter to freeze with cold.)

The two figures on either side of the god seem to be personifications, which are rare in these tapestries; the old man with the mass of white hair could represent Snow, the other, crowned with icicles and with skates hanging beside him, Frost. Aeolus holds a fantastic feathered javelin,<sup>28</sup> which might symbolize the speed of

the winds, three of whom puff their cheeks in a cave below. The owl above the god stands for death or sleep, both appropriate to the season.<sup>29</sup>

The verses describing the deities are, like the others on the tapestries, good imitations of classical Latin poetry. The basic idea of briefly characterizing the four seasons in verse goes back to Ovid,<sup>30</sup> though his seasons are personifications, not deities, but it is possible that the sixteenth-century writer had a more recent model. The relationship between the tapestry verses and the following lines seems too close to be accidental:

Vere Venus gaudet florentibus aurea sertis.  
Flava Ceres aestatis habet sua tempore regna.  
Uvifero autumno summa est tibi, Bacche, potestas.  
Imperium saevis hiberno frigore ventis.

This quatrain is one of a set written by the “Twelve Scholastic Poets” about 1200 on the theme of the seasons as described by Ovid; the author of these lines was known as Euphorbus.<sup>31</sup> One manuscript reads *vinifer* as the first word of the third line, bringing it even closer to the tapestry verse.

## THE WINDS

Sixteen of the twenty-three figures at the top of the tapestries who carry bellows or fans are named. January has Trasecas and Aquilo; February, Notus; March, Circius; April, Subsolanus and Zephyrus;

20. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s.v. “Iakchos,” “Ismaros.”

21. “De Baccho . . . Erat enim imago sua facie muliebri, pectore nudo, capite cornuto, vitibusque coronato, qui super tigride equitabat.” Albricus Philosophus, “De deorum imaginibus libellus,” in *Auctores Mythographi Latini*, ed. Augustinus van Staveren (Leyden and Amsterdam, 1742) pp. 926, 927, no. xix.

22. Hans Liebeschütz, “Fulgentius Metaforalis, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter,” *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg* (1926) pp. 58–64, 123.

23. Jean Seznac, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York, 1953) p. 179.

24. *Artis Amatoria*, III, 348: “Insignis cornu Bacche.”

25. Diodorus of Sicily, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge and London, 1935) pp. 325, 326, Book III, 73. Diodorus distinguishes three gods called Dionysus; the second, the son of Ammon and Amaltheia, had ram’s horns like his father.

26. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 316.

27. There are later instances of Aeolus in this role. Ripa gives Vulcan as the deity of winter, but says that the scene can also be represented by Aeolus with the winds. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603 [first ed. 1593]) s.v. “Stagioni.” An engraving after

Martin de Vos (1532–1603) shows him as *Hyems*, holding the bridle with which he restrained the winds. A. J. B. Wace. *The Sheldon Tapestry Weavers and their Work* (Oxford, 1928) pl. LX.

28. It appears in a shortened form as the weapon directed by the female centaur ridden by Venus at the winged woman on a unicorn in the first tapestry of the *Moralidades* set in the Spanish National Collection (Bordeaux exhibition, no. 14) and is frequently found in sixteenth-century Tournai tapestries. J. P. Asselberghs, *La Tapisserie tournaisienne au XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Tournai, 1968) nos. 3, 5, 6, 13.

29. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, I, cols. 96, 97, s.v. “Chouette.”

30. Verque novum stabat cinctum florente corona,  
stabat nuda Aestas et spicea sarta gerebat,  
stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uvis,  
et glacialis Hiems canos hirsuta capillos.

*Metamorphoses*, II, 27–30.

31. *Anthologia Veterum Latinorum Epigrammatum et Poematum*, I, ed. P. Burmannus and H. Meyerus (Leipzig, 1835) pp. xxxvi, 150, 181, no. 496. For the “proto-humanism” of the twelfth century, of which these poems are part, see Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960) pp. 68–81.

June, Flora and Eurys; July, Ethesias and Auster; September, Corus and Libs; October, Cecias and Volturnus; December, Boreas and Ornithias. The figures for May, August, and November are not named. All of these except Flora are forms of Greek or Latin names of the winds, which, with two exceptions, are found in Isidore of Seville's *De Natura Rerum*; <sup>32</sup> his nomenclature was usually adopted in the Middle Ages. <sup>33</sup> The others, the Ethesian, July winds, and Ornithias, a December wind, are mentioned by Pliny; he says the Ethesian are the northeast winds that blow for thirty days after the rise of the Dog Star on July 17, and Ornithias is a midwinter wind. <sup>34</sup> Winds that Pliny names as prevalent in certain seasons are placed in suitable months on the tapestries, namely, Zephyrus, a spring wind, in April; Auster, a summer wind, in July; Corus, an autumn wind, in September; and Aquilo, a winter wind, in January.

The only unexpected name is Flora, given to a masculine June wind. This is presumably a mistake made by the tapestry designer or weaver. The name should probably have been placed beside the female figure with a fan on the right of the May roundel, who extends a flowering branch toward Venus and Adonis below; the verse describing this couple includes the words "Aspirat coeptis Flora." Her comrade wind should perhaps have been Zephir, her husband, <sup>35</sup> but

his name is given to one of the April winds. The combination of signs of the zodiac and winds had been made by the third century A.D.; <sup>36</sup> Pliny wrote that the winds were perhaps caused "by the continuous motion of the world and the impact of the stars traveling in the opposite direction." <sup>37</sup>

## THE MONTHS

In almost every instance, the small figures in the roundels, or the occupations of the months below them, or both, are in agreement with the Latin inscription in the border above them that links the month with an age in the life of man. They are almost always of standard type and, like the figures used for the signs of the zodiac, find their closest parallels in early sixteenth-century calendar illustrations of the Ghent-Bruges school of manuscript illumination. <sup>38</sup> Many of these, most notably the Grimani Breviary, have been associated with Gerard Horenbout and Simon Bening. <sup>39</sup> The tapestry figures are also like the woodcuts of the *Kalendrier des Bergiers*, <sup>40</sup> the book that, as will be discussed later, may have suggested the basic plan of the tapestries. The December illustration of the *Kalendrier* (Figure 17) shows the occupations of knocking down acorns for swine and killing a pig very much as they appear on the October and November sections of the last tapestry in the set (Figures 16, 21). <sup>41</sup>

32. Ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXXXIII (Paris, 1850) cols. 1006–1008.

33. Arthur Kingsley Porter, *Lombard Architecture*, I (New York, 1917) p. 368.

34. *Naturalis Historia*, Book II, XLVII, 124, 125, 133, 134. These two winds are not included in Dürer's armillary sphere of 1525, which gives twenty-four names of winds, all (except Hellespontius) in Isidore of Seville; none of Pliny's winds not in Isidore of Seville are given by Dürer. Willi Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer* (New York, 1946) p. 333.

35. Ovid, *Fasti*, V, 195–206. Flora, properly feminine and holding a leafy branch, is seen on one side of the figure marked PHOEDVS (*sic*) in the Fortune tapestry of the *Honores* set in the Spanish National Collection; on the other side is a flying male figure, wearing a wreath and holding a bellows marked ZEPHIJRVS. The group occupies the upper corner of the dexter, or fortunate, side of the tapestry. Bordeaux exhibition, no. 12.

36. *Isis* 23 (1935) p. 253.

37. *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, I (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1938) p. 257.

38. Published examples of these calendars include the *Hortulus Animae* in the Austrian National Library (Cod. Bibl. Pal. Vindob. 2706) and a Book of Hours by the same hand in the Bavarian State Library (Cod. lat. 28345). These show many resemblances to the

tapestries, both in the scenes illustrated and in the actual figures. Other related calendar illustrations in Books of Hours in Munich (Cod. lat. 23250, 23637, 28346) have been reproduced in the series *Alte Kalenderbilder in farbiger Wiedergabe*, ed. Georg Leidinger (Munich). Morgan Library manuscripts M52, 307, 399, 451, and 813 can also be compared.

39. Friedrich Winkler, *Die flämische Buchmalerei des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1925) pp. 119–132, 139–149; J. Duverger, "Gerard Horenbout, 1465?–1540, Hofschilder van Margareta van Oosterrijk," *Kunst* 1 (1930) p. 82; Friedrich Winkler, "Neuentdeckte Altniederländer II: Gerard Horenbout," *Pantheon* 31 (1943) pp. 55–64; Paul Wescher, "Sanders and Simon Bening and Gerard Horenbout," *Art Quarterly* 9 (1946) pp. 190–210.

40. *Le Grand Calendrier des Bergiers von Jean Belot, Genf 1497* (Berne, 1920). This facsimile of an exact copy of a Paris edition of 1496 includes the calendar illustrations, which do not appear in all editions, and so proves that they were available when the tapestries were designed.

41. The rows of trees and of pigs are remarkably alike. It is not, however, suggested that one work must have been copied from the other, as such scenes are extremely standardized. It will be noticed that the *Kalendrier* illustration is lettered "Decembre" but bears the zodiac signs for October and November.



January (Figure 6) is unusual; Janus feasting in the roundel is normal, but a man running in a drenching rain, which pours from a waterspout, has not been found elsewhere. The storm is not in accordance with the verse for the month, which speaks of the earth as frozen, and, though it suits the sign of the zodiac Aquarius, it would here be more appropriate in February, where the inscription mentions a thaw. Rain is, in fact, falling on the right side of the February roundel (Figure 7). March (Figure 8), by an out-and-out mistake, has a bull instead of a ram as its sign of the zodiac, but the man on a ladder pruning a tree fits the statement in the verse that "March prunes the rank sprouts." This activity, as well as the man in the roundel, a knife between his teeth, tying up vines, are found in the manuscripts,<sup>42</sup> but the fence-maker is a less usual figure. Gardening in April (Figure 9) suits the "abundant flowers" mentioned in the verse, and the music-making couple of May (Figure 10) are related both to the Venus and Adonis of the story and to the "leisure to beget offspring" of the inscription. The man in the May roundel has the crown and scepter of a king, recalling the *Kalendrier* lines, "Je suis le franc roy de l'année, Je suis le may. . . ." Sheep are sheared in June (Figure 12), when the weather turns warm "with burning heat," and hay is made in July (Figure 13), when the Lion "dries up the grass." In August (Figure 14), grain is reaped, the "golden fruits" gathered under the Virgin, and the vintage scenes of September (Figure 15) show the "crushed grapes" of the verse. The man in the October roundel (Figure 16) is guiding a

plow, an activity more often found in September, but agreeing here with the words, "October prepares the fields for future crops." In November (Figure 21), the roundel figure "sows seed," as the Archer is said to do, but, most extraordinarily, threshing and winnowing are being carried on outdoors in December (Figure 22). These tasks are never shown being performed in the open so late in the year,<sup>43</sup> and it will be noticed that the landscape is still summery, with trees in full leaf. The activity was needed to harmonize with the story of the last age of man; the inscription says that the grain is shaken from the ears just as life is finally driven out of the body.

The tapestry designer was clearly quite at home with the winds and the months and took some pains to select from the copious repertoire available to him the motifs that would accord with the verses he had been told to include. The situation was very different when he turned to the stories that were to illustrate not the months, but the ages of man.

## THE STORIES

The twelve Latin distichs in the upper borders relate each month to six years in the life of man; those in the centers of the tapestries each give an instance of the characteristic quality or achievement of an age, which is illustrated by an appropriate story. It is these stories that constitute the originality of the set, and they will therefore be examined in more detail than the, on the whole, conventional scenes used for the months.

42. Munich Cod. lat. 28346 and 23250. Also in the Breviary of the Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Antwerp.

43. Threshing is being done inside a barn in November in Morgan M52 and M307.

FIGURE 6

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Spring. January, the Test of Moses

*January (Figure 6)*

Upper border inscription:

Ut riget informis sub Aquari sydere tellus,  
Sic primis annis mente stupescit homo.  
(As the formless earth freezes under the constellation of the Water-bearer, so man is benumbed in mind in his first years.)

Center inscription:

Disciderat Moses raptam de fronte coronam.  
Sed puerū insontem prunula morsa docet.  
(Moses had broken the crown stolen from [Pharaoh's] brow, but the bite of a burning coal shows the boy innocent.)

The story of the Test of Moses, chosen to illustrate the lack of intelligence in children under seven, is found in many early Hebrew and Arabic sources. The version shown here is that in which the child Moses, having taken Pharaoh's crown, threw it on the floor and broke it. The crown, with two finials missing, leans against an upright of the table in the foreground. To find out

whether his act was one of malice or of mere playfulness, Moses was offered two bowls, one containing jewels, the other, burning coals; he took a coal, demonstrating his babyish irresponsibility, and was pardoned. This is a Jewish version of the twelfth century or earlier, also found in Herman de Valenciennes's biblical poem written in 1190, but it is not the one most widely known in the Christian world. The usual story omits the bowl of jewels; it was used by Petrus Comestor, quoting Josephus, in his *Scholastica Historia super Novum Testamentum* (written before 1176),<sup>44</sup> and taken into the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* in the fourteenth century as one of the Old Dispensation parallels to the Flight into Egypt.<sup>45</sup> The Giorgionesque painting in the Uffizi illustrates the version with two bowls,<sup>46</sup> and correctly shows Moses as still a baby. He is a tiny child on a late medieval tapestry of the subject in the Metropolitan Museum.<sup>47</sup> The designer of the Twelve Ages has made him a sturdy lad, far too old for such a piece of stupidity, and much of an age with the hero of the February story, who is between six and twelve.

44. Ed. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CXC VIII (Paris, 1855) col. 1144.

45. Edgar Breitenbach, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Strasbourg, 1930) pp. 144, 145; G. L. Hamilton, "La source d'une épisode de Baudouin de Sebourc," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 36 (1912) pp. 129–159, giving all versions of the story.

46. Lionello Venturi, *Giorgione e il Giorgionismo* (Milan, 1913) pp. 249–251, pl. LXII. Two pieces of majolica showing the same version are known. Guy de Tervarent, "Enquête sur le sujet des

majoliques," *Kunstmuseets Årsskrift* 37 (1951) pp. 37–41. A mid-sixteenth century painting of the subject in a Belgian private collection is said to show rubies and burning coals together in one bowl. Simone Bergmans, "Episodes de la vie de Moïse, attribués à Hans Eworth," *Revue belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art* 26 (1957) p. 202.

47. Acc. no. 53.59.1. George Leland Hunter, *The Practical Book of Tapestries* (Philadelphia and London, 1925) p. 63, as "Joseph spurning Pharaoh's crown," in the Thomas W. Lamont collection.

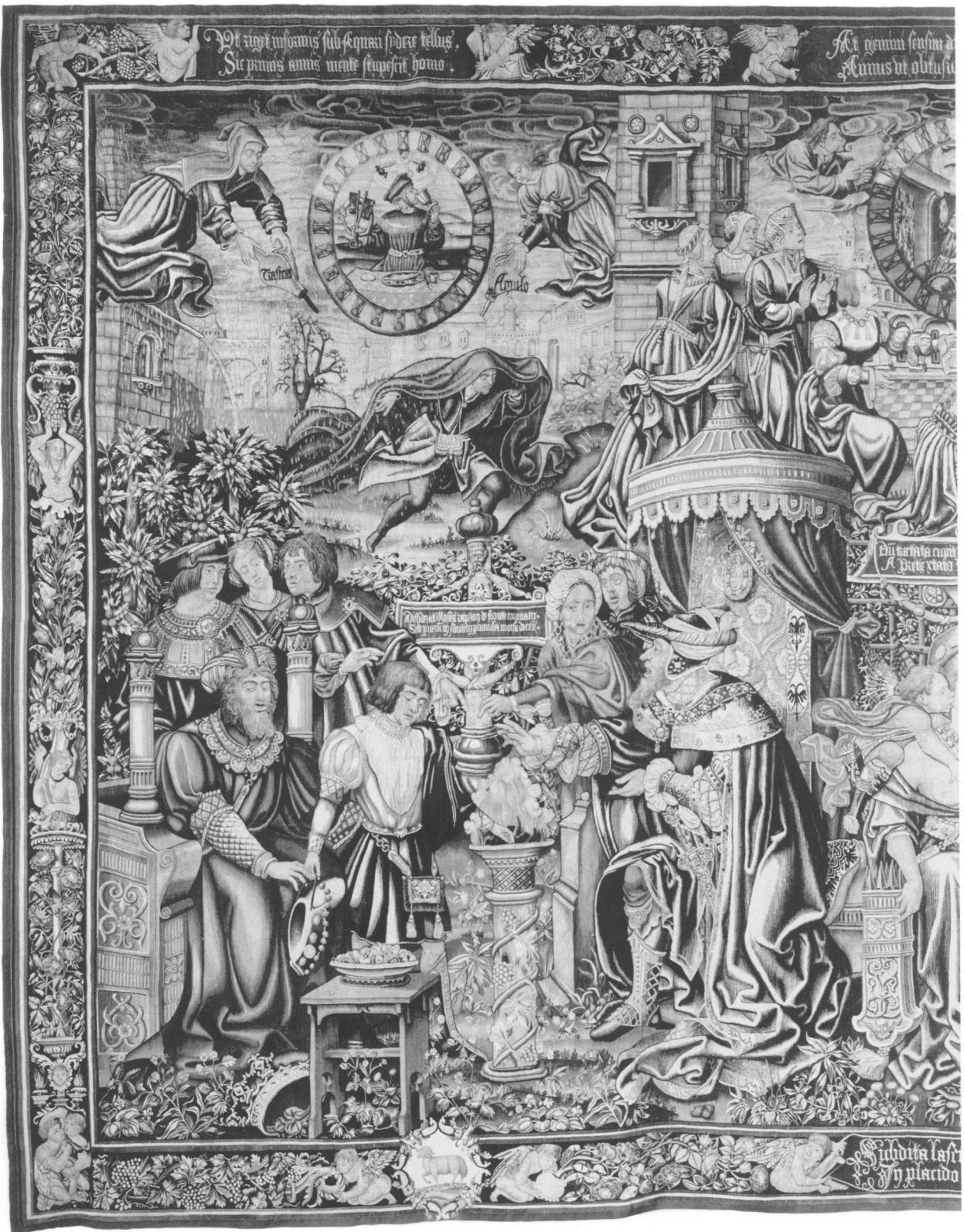


FIGURE 7

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Spring. February, the Story of Papirius, Venus

*February (Figure 7)*

Upper border inscription:

At gemini sensim dissolunt [dissolvunt] pascua  
Pisces,

Annus ut obtusum septimus ingenium.

(But the twin Fishes gradually thaw out the meadows, as does the seventh year the dull mind.)

This is the verse that shows each age to be six years long, adding up to seventy-two—reasonably close to the biblical threescore and ten.

Center inscription:

Dū tractata cupit mater rescire senatus.

A Pretextato luditur illa suo.

(When the mother wishes to know what has been discussed in the Senate, her boy, in his youthful *toga praetextata*, deludes her.)

The story, illustrating growing intelligence in a boy between six and twelve, is found in Aulus Gellius,<sup>48</sup> from whom it was taken by Macrobius.<sup>49</sup> Papirius, while still young enough to be wearing the purple-

bordered toga of a youth, went with his father to hear an important debate in the Senate. Later, his mother insisted on knowing what had been discussed, which, of course, was not something he could reveal to a woman. Accordingly he told her that the matter under consideration had been whether it would be better for the state to allow two wives to one husband or two husbands to one wife. The excited mother gathered her friends and went with them to the Senate to beg that they might have two husbands apiece rather than share their husbands with others. The senators were dumbfounded by this request until Papirius explained what he had done. He was then greatly praised for his loyalty and ingenuity. The moment of explanation is seen on the tapestry.

This story was known in the Middle Ages, being included in the fourteenth-century *Gesta Romanorum*, where it is said to have been taken from Macrobius; it is given an allegorical meaning, the boy representing someone of pure life, his father a prelate, and his mother the world.<sup>50</sup> No other instances of its use in art have been located.

48. *Noctes Atticae*, I, xxiii, said to have been taken from Marcus Cato's speech to the soldiers against Galba. This story was identified by Dr. Phyllis Ackerman.

49. *Saturnalia*, I, vi, 18–26.

50. *Gesta Romanorum*, trans. Charles Swan (London, n.d.) pp. 271, 272, Tale CXXVI. J. Th. Welter, *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1927) pp. 369–374.





FIGURE 8

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Spring.  
March, Alexander and the Persian Envoys

*March (Figure 8)*

Upper border inscription:

Luxuriosa putat foecundi germina veris  
Martius, ut pueri Pedia stulticiam.

(March prunes the rank sprouts of fecund spring,  
as Education does the foolishness of a boy.)

Center inscription:

Reddit Alexāder respōsū a perside missis  
Tam docte, ut pueri verba stupēda forēt.

(Alexander replied so skillfully to the Persian envoys that they were astounded by the words of the boy.)

The story of Alexander's intelligent conversation with the Persian envoys, which has been chosen to illustrate the advantages of education to a youth between twelve and eighteen, is taken from Plutarch's *Lives*. Here it is related that Alexander

once entertained the envoys from the Persian king who came during Philip's absence, and associated with them freely. He won upon them by his friendliness, and by asking no childish or trivial questions, but by enquiring about the length of the roads and the character of the journey into the interior, about the king himself, what sort of a warrior he was, and what the prowess and might of the Persians. The envoys were therefore astonished and regarded the much-talked-of ability of Philip as nothing compared with his son's eager disposition to do great things.<sup>51</sup>

The incident is accepted as historical,<sup>52</sup> but it does not occur in other ancient authors, and the related story in Pseudo-Callisthenes<sup>53</sup> and the medieval Alexander

romance tells how Alexander, during the lifetime of his father, refused to pay tribute to some satraps of Darius. It is not known to have been used in works of art.

The bearded man in a turban standing beside Alexander may represent his tutor, Aristotle; he appears, apparently advising Alexander, in the late Gothic tapestries of the Triumph of Fame in the Metropolitan Museum, the Austrian National Collection, and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> He would be appropriate here, as the verse implies that it was Alexander's education, rather than his natural ability, that enabled him to impress the envoys. On the hem of "Aristotle's" robe are the letters AOEM, the only inscription of its type to be found on the tapestries. The interpretation of such inscriptions as weavers' or designers' signatures is often extremely doubtful, and it is at least possible that these letters represent a garbled form of the name Aristotle; they could also refer to the artist Jan van Roome or to Michel, called de Moer, thought to be a weaver.<sup>55</sup> The representation of the envoys kneeling, as if in supplication, shows that the designer did not in the least understand the story or its pertinence.

The fact that the anecdote is found only in Plutarch is of importance in assessing the learning of the "author" of the tapestry scheme; the *Lives* were not known in Western Europe until the fifteenth century, when translations into Latin were made in Italy. The first printed edition was not published until 1517. Plutarch was greatly admired by humanists in both southern and northern countries, Erasmus being particularly devoted to him.<sup>56</sup>

51. Loeb Classical Library ed., trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) p. 235.

52. W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 1948) p. 1.

53. *The Life of Alexander of Macedon*, trans. Elizabeth Hazelton Haight (New York, 1955) p. 29.

54. Acc. no. 41.167.2. J. J. Rorimer, "The Triumphs of Fame and Time," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 35 (1940) p. 242, fig. 1; Ludwig Baldass, *Die Wiener Gobelinsammlung* (Vienna, 1920) p. 2, pl. 4.

55. The letters MOER appear twice on the border of a man's robe in a David and Bathsheba tapestry in the Spanish National

Collection and have been associated with Michel de Moer, who became a citizen of Brussels in 1501. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, *Les Tapisseries de l'Hôtel de Ville de Bruxelles* (Antwerp, 1944) no. 1. It has been suggested that the very individual-looking person bearing the name could be a portrait, "soit le peintre qui a traité le carton, soit le licier." Bordeaux exhibition, no. 1. It is in the first tapestry of the Twelve Ages that most of the left-handed gestures appear, suggesting an imperfectly reversed cartoon; MEOA, or Meor, is thus as likely as AOEM, or Roem.

56. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s.v. "Plutarchos."



FIGURE 9

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Summer.  
April, the Choice of Hercules

*April (Figure 9)*

Upper border inscription:

Jam Taurus letos ostētat in arbore flores.

Sic spes virtutū prima iuventa notat.

(Now the Bull displays abundant flowers on the tree. So early youth shows hopes of virtues.)

Center inscription:

Alcides statuit prime sub flore Juvente

Dure virtutis inclyta signa sequi.

(Alcides in the flower of his early youth decided to follow the glorious standards of hard Virtue.)

This inscription has been distorted by repairs to the tapestry; the reading of the later version in Paris has been used.

Nature having thawed the frozen understanding of the child and education pruned it into intelligence, the young man between eighteen and twenty-four himself decides to follow Virtue. The famous story of the Choice of Hercules is used as an illustration. Hercules, apparently in a dream, is called to choose between Minerva, who strikes him with her long, blunt spear, and Venus, who holds a circlet and a rose-branch over his head. Behind him, a hideous satyr is bound and chastised by a bearded man, the group symbolizing the conquest of luxury by discipline and indicating what Hercules's choice will be. A very similar pair are central figures in the Vice panel of the *Honores* tapestry

set in the Spanish National Collection,<sup>57</sup> where the satyr is marked VICIŪ and his punisher VRTS; the head of the satyr, with his long curved horns and huge ears, is very similar in both tapestries.

Classical representations of the story have been claimed;<sup>58</sup> it was related in the fourth century A.D. by St. Basil<sup>59</sup> and known to Petrarch.<sup>60</sup> But it was not illustrated in Western Europe until the second half of the fifteenth century. The classical story did not say that Hercules was asleep when he made his choice between *virtus* and *voluptas*; this detail was added by the Italian humanists, especially Enea Silvio Piccolomini, and was used in an illustration to Sebastian Brant's *Stultifera Navis* (Basel, 1497).<sup>61</sup> The Latin *argumentum* of Brant's book calls Hercules "Alcides," as does the tapestry inscription, though the German poem has "hercles."<sup>62</sup> The embodiment of Vice and Virtue as the goddesses Venus and Minerva came later and was possibly influenced by the story of the Judgment of Paris; Venus is Vice in a play on the subject by Martin van Dorp of Louvain, written between 1509 and 1514, and both deities appear in another by Benedict Schwalbe (Chelidonius), given in Vienna in 1515.<sup>63</sup> No pictorial version of the story showing both goddesses has been found, however, of an earlier date than the tapestry. The flowers held by Venus are standard symbols of *voluptas* or *luxuria*,<sup>64</sup> and the fact that they are roses reminds us that there are thorns among the leaves and blossoms.<sup>65</sup>

57. Viusto de Valencia de Don Juan, *Tapices de la Corona de España* (Madrid, 1903) pl. 39. Another example in Glasgow also shows the satyr with the inscription VICIŪ. "New Burrell acquisitions," *Scottish Art Review* 7 (1959) p. 2.

58. Ch. Picard, "Nouvelles remarques sur l'Apologue de Prodicos: Héraclès entre le Vice et la Vertu," *Revue archéologique* 42 (1953) pp. 10–41.

59. In his sermon, "To adolescents, how they can benefit from pagan books." Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, XXXI, col. 574; Welter, *L'Exemplum*, p. 12, note 4; Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch and the story of the Choice of Hercules," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953) p. 188.

60. Mommsen, "Petrarch," pp. 171–192.

61. Dieter Wuttke, *Die Histori Herculis des Nürnberger Humanisten und Freundes der Gebrüder Vischer, Pangratz Bernhaubt gen. Schwenter* (Cologne, 1964) pp. 120–125.

62. Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheidewege* (Berlin, 1930) pp. 41, 53, 59.

63. Panofsky, *Hercules*, p. 85.

64. Julius S. Held, "Flora, Goddess and Courtesan," *De Artibus Opuscula XL, Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (New York, 1961) p. 202.

65. De Tervarent, *Attributs*, II, col. 324, s.v. "Rose."





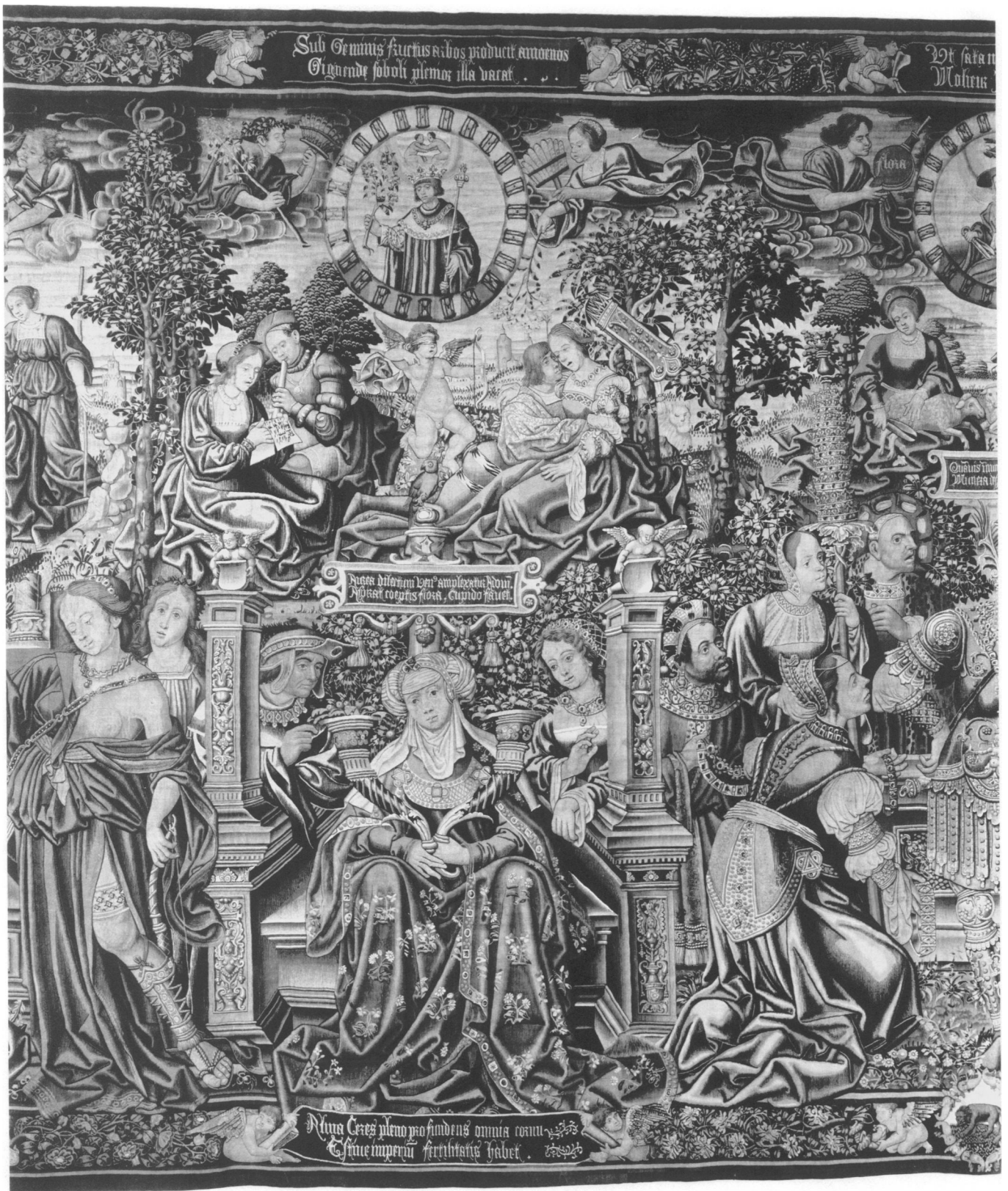


FIGURE 10

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Summer.  
May, Venus and Adonis, Ceres

*May (Figure 10)*

Upper border inscription:

Sub Geminis fructus arbor producit amoenos  
Gignende soboli plenior illa vacat.  
(Under the Twins the tree produces pleasant fruit.  
Riper youth has leisure to beget offspring.)

Center inscription:

Aurea dilectum Ven' amplexatur Adoni.  
Aspirat coeptis flora, Cupido favet.  
(Golden Venus embraces the beloved Adonis.  
Flora assists the undertaking, Cupid is favorable.)

The couple on the right are Venus and Adonis; the female above with a fan who reaches down to them with a leafy bough is presumably Flora, and blindfold Cupid aims an arrow at them.<sup>66</sup> The bow and arrows hung on a tree are very like those held by Venus in the first tapestry and in the Choice of Hercules scene; on the far side of the tree, the head of a wild beast, perhaps a lion, is just visible, though it certainly does not resemble the boar that killed Adonis.

66. A similar blindfold Cupid has shot an arrow into the breast of the woman riding on a unicorn in the first tapestry of the *Moralidades* set in the Spanish National Collection. Bordeaux exhibition, no. 14.

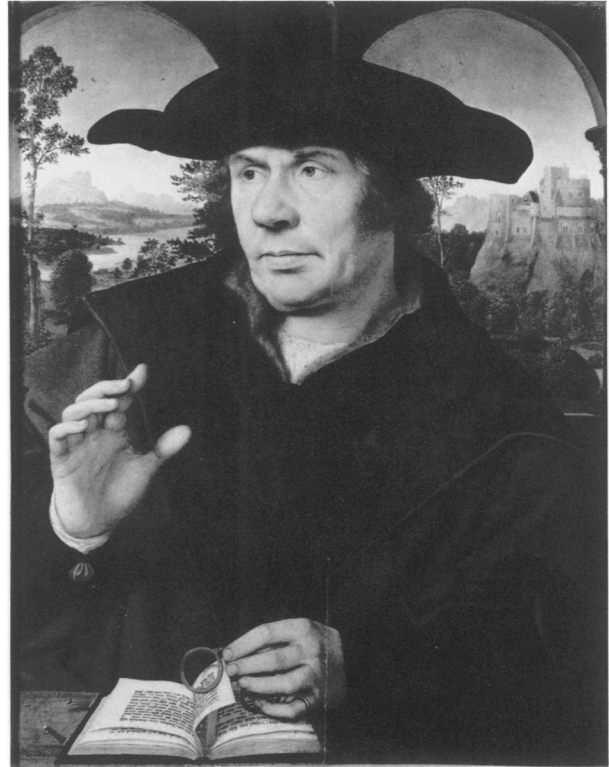


FIGURE 11

Portrait of a Man, believed to be Jean Carondelet,  
by Quentin Massys. Oil on panel. Städelsches  
Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

FIGURE 12

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Summer.  
June, Curius Dentatus and the Samnites

*June (Figure 12)*

Upper border inscription:

Ut sata maturat ferventi Carcinus igne,  
Molie[t]ur Juvenis gesta superba ferox.  
(As the Crab ripens the crops with burning heat,  
the wild youth will undertake proud deeds.)

The connection between the two lines is not clear; it probably is based on a pun between *ferventi* and *ferox*.<sup>67</sup>

Center inscription:

Quāvis innumeras Curius devicerat Urbes  
Munera despexit. gloria sola satis.  
(Although Curius had conquered innumerable  
cities, he disdained gifts. Glory alone was enough.)

The anecdote illustrating the high-mindedness of Marcus Curius Dentatus is told by many classical authors. All of them describe him as cooking turnips

on his hearth at the moment when he was accosted by the Samnite ambassadors and proceeded to refuse their bribes with contempt.<sup>68</sup> The designer of the tapestry had clearly not the slightest knowledge of the story he was to illustrate beyond the fact that a victorious hero was to be shown refusing rich gifts. It seems unlikely that he even understood the Latin; the lances held by Curius, some broken, may represent the enemies he had conquered, but they are hardly appropriate symbols for cities, and the Samnite delegation would scarcely have included women. A contemporaneous representation of the subject by Holbein, a wall painting formerly in the Great Council chamber of the Basel town hall and known from a nineteenth-century copy, shows Curius kneeling by a hearth with the turnips lying on it; the scheme for the paintings in this room is believed to have been devised by the Basel humanist Beatus Rhenanus, who evidently gave more detailed instructions, or had, in Holbein, a better-educated artist.<sup>69</sup>

67. This connection was pointed out by Miss M. J. Milne.

68. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s.v. "Curius."

69. Paul Ganz, *The Paintings of Hans Holbein* (New York, 1950) p. 276, no. 171, fig. 50.



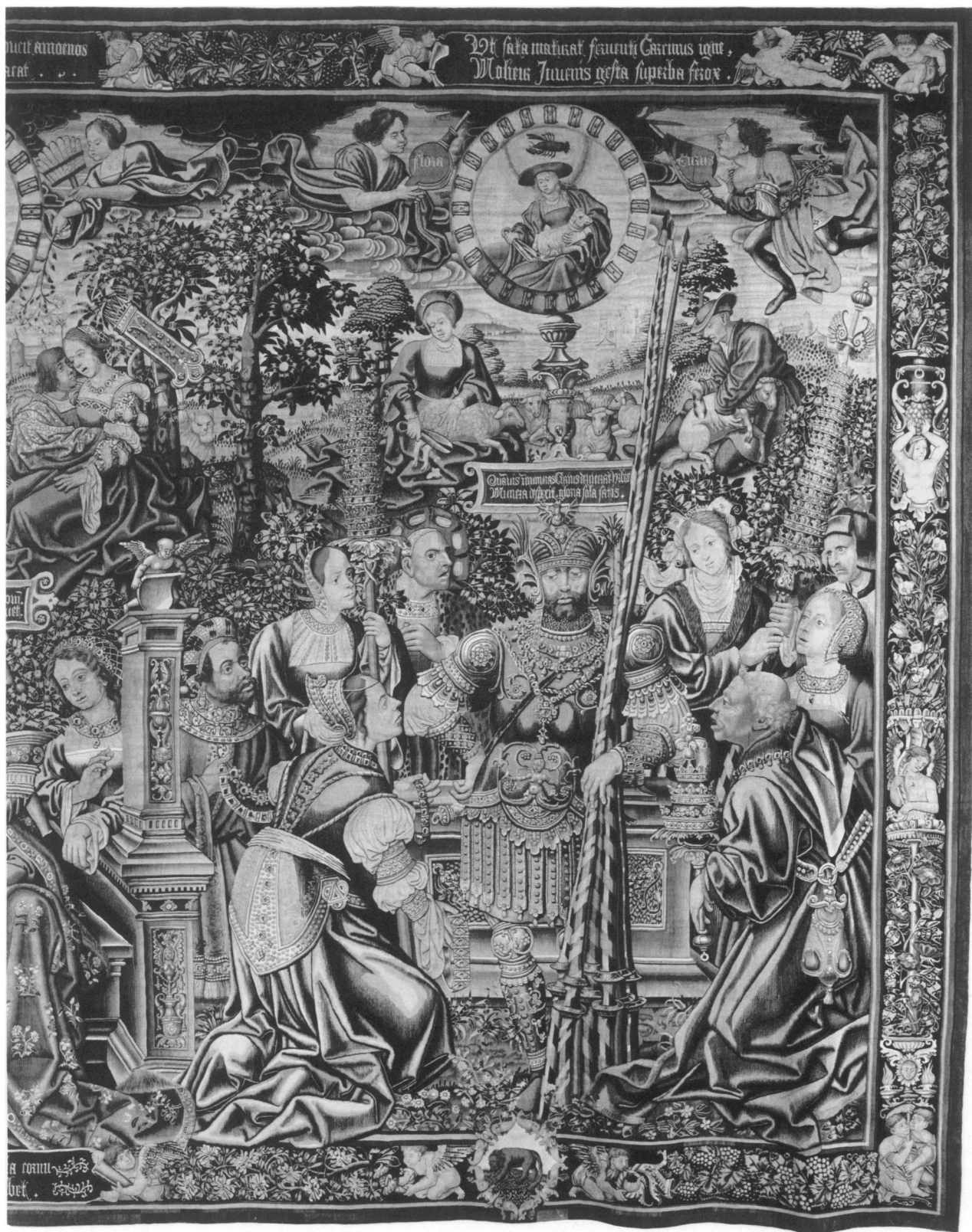


FIGURE 13

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Autumn. July,  
the Education of Aesculapius

*July (Figure 13)*

Upper border inscription:

Ut Leo desiccat sensim retrogradus herbas,  
Sic sensim vires corporis ipsa dies.  
(As the Lion, retrograding, gradually dries the  
grass, so does time itself gradually diminish bodily  
strength.)

Center inscription:

Herbipotēs Chirō. squalētes pellere morbos  
Natus Apollineus quaque arte docet.  
(Chiron, skilled in herbs, teaches the art by which  
the son of Apollo can drive out squalid diseases.)

This inscription has been distorted by repairs; the reading has been taken from the later version of the tapestry in Saragossa.

Man, at thirty-six, is now halfway through his life. The story chosen to illustrate the years between thirty-six and forty-two is found in Ovid<sup>70</sup> and various Greek authors. Aesculapius, son of Apollo and Coronis, was

taken from his mother's womb by his father after the god had killed her for her infidelity. Apollo gave the child to the centaur Chiron to be educated. The women in the scene may be meant to be Chiron's wife and daughters, though he is not recorded as having had more than three.<sup>71</sup> His quiver and small Gothic harp<sup>72</sup> refer to his fame as an archer and musician. The urinal held by Aesculapius is his usual attribute,<sup>73</sup> indicating the knowledge of medicine that he learned from Chiron. Apollo handing over the baby Aesculapius to the centaur is the subject of an Ovid illustration (1589/1590) by Hendrik Goltzius,<sup>74</sup> but no representation of Aesculapius as a youth, learning his craft, has been identified.

The clue to the problem of why this story was chosen may lie in the word *retrogradus*, describing the apparent movement of the zodiacal sign during the month. The ascending ages of man are over; the journey from now on is downhill. Illness becomes a normal part of life, unless driven out by a doctor, who knows his herbal remedies; *herbas* in the first verse is echoed in the adjective applied to Chiron, *herbipotentēs*.

70. *Metamorphoses*, II, 542–675.

71. Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s.v. "Chiron."

72. An identical harp is played by Arion in the Fortune tapestry of the *Honores* set in the Spanish National Collection. Bordeaux exhibition, no. 12.

73. Fritz Saxl and Hans Meier, *Verzeichnis astrologischer und mythologischer illustrierter Handschriften des lateinischen Mittelalters. III. Handschriften in englischen Bibliotheken*, I (London, 1953) p. 180.

74. Eugène Dutuit, *Manuel de l'Amateur d'Estampes*, IV (Paris, 1884) p. 466, no. 15 (65).



FIGURE 14

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Autumn.  
August, Joseph Overseeing the Harvest, Bacchus

*August (Figure 14)*

Upper border inscription:

Coligit [for colligit] Augustus flavas sub virgine  
fruges,

Colligit in seniū vir studiosus opes.  
(August gathers golden fruits under the Virgin;  
the diligent man gathers riches for his old age.)

Center inscription:

Curat Josephus famis advētura pericla  
Ut jam prelecta pellere messe queat.  
(Joseph sees to it that he may be able to rout the  
coming perils of famine with already selected  
crops.)

Like the May story of Venus and Adonis, the scene showing Joseph as overseer of the harvest serves both as an occupation of the month and as an illustration of the activity that should prevail in the years between forty-

two and forty-eight. Joseph wears the gold chain that Pharaoh gave him before he put him in charge of storing a fifth part of the seven years' good harvests against the seven lean years that were to follow.<sup>75</sup> No representations of this scene have been located, though Joseph supervising the storage of the grain has been illustrated.<sup>76</sup>

The method of reaping grain shown on the tapestry is one that was used in the Low Countries. The cutting implement is a scythe, which shears, rather than a sickle, which cuts, and the large end plate acts as a counterweight.<sup>77</sup> The tool in the reaper's left hand, here looking like a short stick, has in reality a curved blade at right angles to the handle. It is clearly pictured in a tapestry in the Chicago Art Institute and in the July miniature of the Grimani Breviary.<sup>78</sup> The August miniatures of the Ghent-Bruges manuscripts also usually show this method of reaping.

75. *Genesis* 41: 42, 46–49.

76. Meyer Schapiro, "The Joseph scenes on the Maximianus Throne in Ravenna," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 40 (1952) pp. 27–38, fig. 2.

77. Axel Steensberg, *Ancient Harvesting Implements* (Copenhagen, 1943) pp. 205, 206, 213.

78. Scato de Vries and Sal. Morpurgo, *Il Breviario Grimani*, I (Leiden and New York, 1904) pl. 13.







FIGURE 15

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Autumn.  
September, Hercules Gathering the Apples of the  
Hesperides

*September (Figure 15)*

Upper border inscription:

Condit vina cadis expressis Libra racemis,  
Ut gravis etatem cautius era premit.  
(The Scales store wine in jars after the grapes have  
been crushed, as a man burdened with years more  
carefully hoards his money.)

Center inscription:

Herculeo finem victo serpente labori  
Carpta dat Hesperii splendida cura chori.  
(The serpent having been vanquished, the splen-  
did charge of the Hesperian chorus is plucked, and  
puts an end to the labors of Hercules.)<sup>79</sup>

The years from forty-eight to fifty-four are regarded as the last in which achievements are possible. There are several versions of the Labor of Hercules that consisted of his obtaining some of the golden apples of the Hesperides; the tapestry shows him plucking the apples himself, after having overcome the dragon that guarded the tree, while four Hesperides look on. It is highly significant that the Labor is described as the last. Even in antiquity it was not always in this position, and the Middle Ages did not distinguish between the twelve tasks Hercules performed for Eurystheus and his other heroic deeds; the obtaining of the golden apples could be placed anywhere among them. A euhemeristic version was given by Raoul Lefèvre in his *Recueil des*

*Hystoires de Troie*, written in 1464, in which the apples have become sheep.<sup>80</sup> A tapestry of 1476–1488, probably made in Tournai, is inscribed: “Comment Hercules alla par mer en Esperie et comment il conquist l’isle aux motons, vainqui Philotes et occist son compaignon.” It shows Hercules and Theseus in a boat, Hercules killing Philoctetes, a giant, and Atlas’s two daughters weeping.<sup>81</sup> But modern scholars consider that originally the apples were the fruit of the tree of life and gave immortality to those who ate them; plucking them therefore was a fitting climax to Hercules’s life on earth and a prelude to his deification.<sup>82</sup> It is probable that the tapestry “author” was following Diodorus Siculus’s fourth book, of which a Latin translation was published in Bologna in 1472:

The last Labour which Hercules undertook was the bringing back of the golden apples of the Hesperides. . . . With regard to these apples there is disagreement among the writers of myths, and some say that there were golden apples in certain gardens of the Hesperides in Libya, where they were guarded without ceasing by a most formidable dragon, whereas others assert that the Hesperides possessed flocks of sheep which excelled in beauty and were therefore called for their beauty, as the poets might do, “golden apples” [a pun on the Greek words for *sheep* and *apple*]. . . . At any rate, Hercules slew the guardian of the apples, and after he had duly brought them to Eurystheus and had in this wise finished his Labours he waited to receive the gift of immortality, even as Apollo had prophesied to him.<sup>83</sup>

79. This translation was kindly provided by Dr. Erwin Panofsky.

80. Marc René Jung, *Hercule dans la Littérature française du XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Geneva, 1966) pp. 11–19.

81. Jacques Bacri, “L’Histoire d’Hercule, tapisserie du Musée des Gobelins,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 12 (1934) pp. 204–211, fig. 3 (in the Bacri Collection). The life of Hercules was one of the most popular subjects for medieval tapestries. The fourteenth-century French poet, Eustache Deschamps, describing the preparations

Alcmene made for her husband’s return, says that she hung the walls with “Draps faiz de l’histoire de Troye, Mainte bataille et mainte proye Des faiz d’Erculès et Jason.” *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1893) p. 214. Her tapestries thus showed the deeds of the son who was to be conceived that night.

82. Panofsky, *Hercules*, pp. 145–147; Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, s.v. “Hesperiden.”

83. Diodorus of Sicily, trans. C. H. Oldfather (Cambridge, 1935) p. 427, Book IV, 26.





FIGURE 16

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Winter.  
October, Tiberius II Discovering a Treasure

*October (Figure 16)*

Upper border inscription:

Ut parat October creturis messibus arva,  
Sic senior chara pro sobole invigilat.

(As October prepares the fields for future crops,  
so the older man is vigilant on behalf of his be-  
loved offspring.)

Center inscription:

Pauperib' dederas Tyberi pia munera Cesar  
Sub saxo Tyberi reddita gaza fuit.

(Thou, Tiberius Caesar, hadst given charitable  
gifts to the poor: a treasure under a stone was  
given [thee] in return, Tiberius.)

The connection between the verses is hard to discern,  
especially as Tiberius gave the treasure he uncovered  
to the poor, instead of keeping it for his offspring. Pos-  
sibly the link is that the earth is dug up by the plow and  
the treasure was found underground.

The story of the emperor Tiberius II (578–582) dis-  
covering a treasure is told by Gregory of Tours.<sup>84</sup> The  
emperor gave large sums to the poor from the riches  
amassed by his predecessor, Justin, and for this he was  
rewarded:

For while walking through the palace he saw in the  
pavement of the building a marble slab on which the  
cross of the Lord was carved, and said "With Thy cross,  
Lord, we protect our forehead and our breast, and lo!  
we are treading the cross under foot." And forthwith  
he ordered it removed.

84. *Historia Francorum*, V, 19. The identification of the story and  
the location of the relevant passage were made by Miss M. J.  
Milne, who also supplied the translation. The book exists in many  
manuscripts, including several now in Brussels and Leyden, but it  
was not printed until 1522 in Paris. Gabriel Monod, *Etudes  
critiques sur les Sources de l'Histoire mérovingienne*, Bibliothèque de  
l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, VIII (Paris, 1872) pp. 49–51, 55.



FIGURE 17

Labors of a Month. Woodcut from the *Kalendrier  
des Bergiers*. Reprint, 1925, after edition of N. Le  
Rouge, Troyes, 1529 (?)

FIGURE 18

Portrait of an Emperor. Woodcut from *The  
Nuremberg Chronicle*, 1493. The Metropolitan Mu-  
seum of Art, Rogers Fund, 21.36.145









FIGURE 19

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Winter. The Empress of Byzantium

Two other slabs with crosses were found under the first one, but when the last was taken up,

they found a great treasure, consisting of more than a hundred thousand pounds of gold. With the gold that was taken out he supplied the poor even more liberally than he had been accustomed to; nor did the Lord make him lack anything because of his good will.

No other representations of this story have been found.

Now that the age of sixty has been reached, the “author” has taken a story from Christian history; the cross on the stone that concealed the treasure and those on the emperor’s crown and the empress’ necklace are the only unmistakable Christian symbols in the entire set of tapestries. The presence of the empress, presumably either Tiberius’s wife or the consort of Justin (Figure 19), is not indicated in the text. She bears a strong resemblance to Margaret of Austria (Figure 20) and, like Ceres in the Summer panel, wears a robe decorated with pearls. The head of Tiberius is derived eventually from Pisanello’s medal of John VIII Palaeologus, emperor of Byzantium, who came to Italy in 1438. The tall hat, turned up at the back, with a huge peak (also turned up on the medal) appears on both medal and tapestry, but the imperial crown worn over it was not recorded by Pisanello. It is, however, seen on a later version of his medal in the Louvre<sup>85</sup> and in a woodcut in the Nürnberg Chronicle of 1493 (Figure 18).<sup>86</sup> This is called Mahomet, the Turkish Emperor, but is clearly taken from the Pisanello medal. The tiny dragons on the borders of Tiberius’s robe in the tapestry appear on Policrates’s garment in the Fortune panel of the *Honores* set in the Spanish National Collection.<sup>87</sup>

85. Aloïs Heiss, *Les Médailleurs de la Renaissance*, I (Paris, 1881) p. 10; Roberto Weiss, *Pisanello’s Medallion of the Emperor John VIII Palaeologus* (London, 1966) p. 19.

86. F. Lippman, “Unbeschriebene Blätter des XV. bis XVI. Jahrhunderts in Kuperferstichkabinet, 2. Männliches Bildniss: ‘El Gran Turco,’” *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 2 (1881), pp. 217, 218.

87. Bordeaux exhibition, no. 12.



FIGURE 20

Margaret of Austria as Mary Magdalen, attributed to Bernard van Orley. Oil on panel. Bayer. Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich

FIGURE 21

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Winter. November, Tobit Instructing Tobias, Aeolus

*November (Figure 21)*

Upper border inscription:

Insertit Arcitenens excultis semina terris.

Instituit proles [perhaps for prolem]<sup>88</sup>  
qualibet arte senex.

(The Archer sows seed in the cultivated earth:  
the old man instructs his offspring in all arts.)

Center inscription:

Dū iam deficerēt Tobian lumēq. pedesq,

Natū Sophrosynen cū pietate docet.

(When his eyesight and his feet had failed Tobias  
[i.e., Tobit], he taught his son prudence and duti-  
fulness.)

The author shows his knowledge of Greek in the form *Tobian* (Latin *Tobiam*) and the word *Sophrosynen* for prudence.

The book of Tobit in the *Apocrypha* describes how he was blinded by sparrows' dung falling into his eyes, and though it is less clear that he was also lame, he is de-

scribed on one occasion as stumbling. In the scene shown, he is giving good advice to his son Tobias before sending him to Medea.<sup>89</sup> There is no indication in the Bible that Tobit's wife, Anna, was present. The choice of this episode in the story of Tobit is so unusual (it has not been found elsewhere) that it is not surprising that the later version of the tapestry in Saragossa shows a quite different one: Tobias and the angel approaching the blind Tobit. This, of course, makes nonsense of the inscription. The slaughtering scenes in the background are occupations of the month. The artist has repeated the figure of Papirius in the February scene for Tobias, which is hardly reasonable, as Papirius should be a boy under twelve, whereas Tobias was a young man of marriageable age.

88. Miss Milne has suggested that the plural *proles* may possibly have been used because it occurs in Columella, *Res Rustica*, X, 163, where transplanted plants are spoken of as earth's "stepchildren," *privignas proles* (accusative plural).

89. *Tobit* 2:10; 11:10; 4:3–19.



FIGURE 22

The Twelve Ages of Man: detail of Winter. December, Jacob Blessing Joseph's sons

*December (Figure 22)*

Upper border inscription:

Excudit Egoceros spicis frumenta caducis.

Ut tandē membris mors animā e gelidis.

(The Goat shakes the grain from the fallen ears:  
so does death at last drive life from cold limbs.)

The Greek *Egoceros* has been used for the Latin *Capricornus*.

Center inscription:

Postq̄ destituit Vitalis spiritus artus,

Emoriens Jacob celica regna subit.

(When the breath of life left his limbs, dying  
Jacob ascended to the heavenly kingdom.)

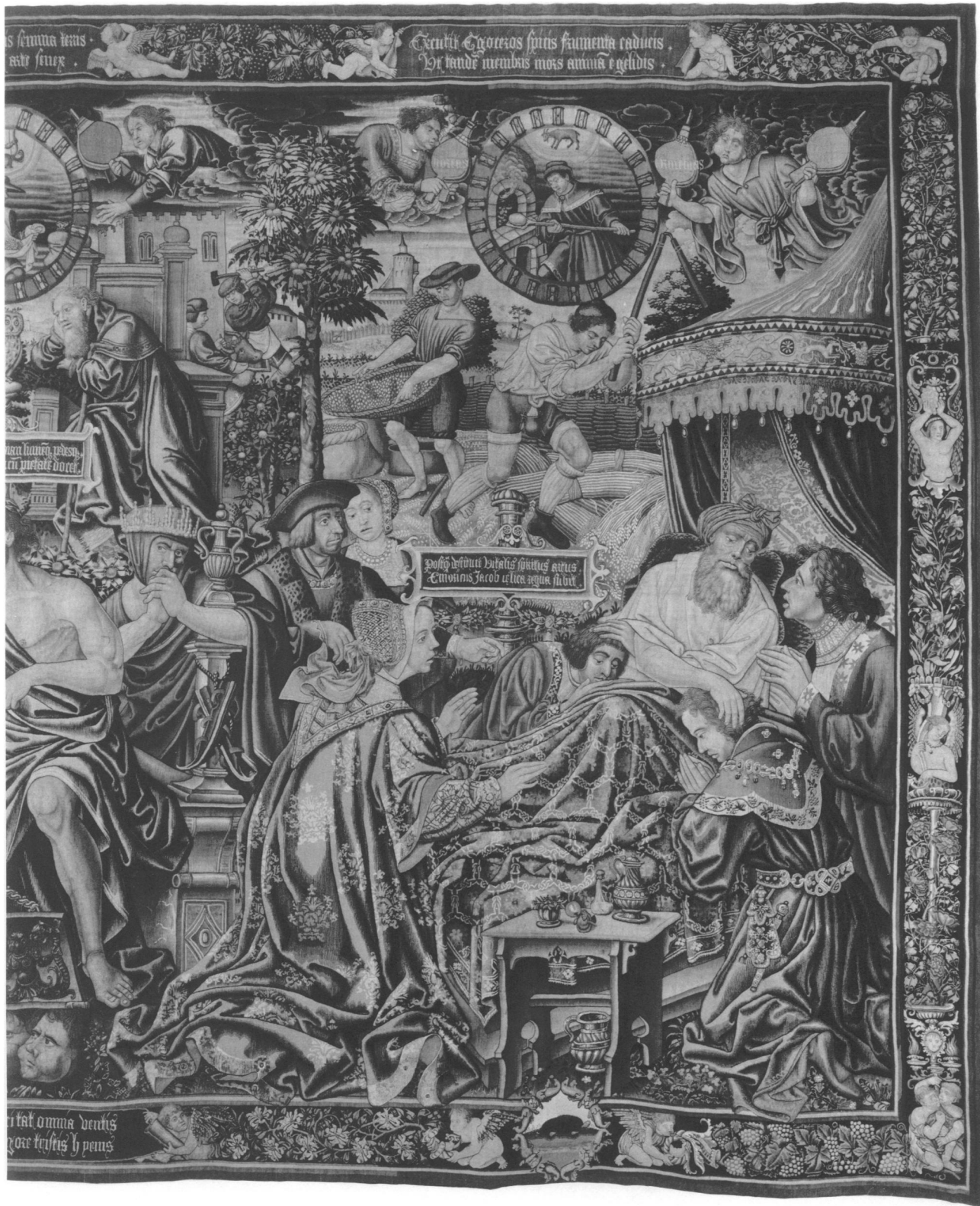
Jacob is shown on his deathbed, blessing the sons of Joseph; the woman kneeling at the foot of the bed is presumably Asenath, Joseph's wife. From an early date, Manasseh, the older son, was identified with the Old Covenant, Ephraim with the New, and Jacob was shown with crossed arms, as here, though not specifically so described in the Bible; the gesture was taken as a symbol of the Crucifixion.<sup>90</sup> Such an interpretation of

the scene on the tapestry is hardly possible, given the lack of Christian ideas in the whole set, but a reminiscence of it may be the grapevine ornament on Ephraim's cape. The pomegranate on the table is the only clear instance of "disguised symbolism" in the tapestries; an indication of immortality in antiquity, it was used from the later Middle Ages as a symbol of hope in the Resurrection or of the Resurrection of Christ.<sup>91</sup> The statement in the inscription, however, that Jacob went to heaven directly from his deathbed is scarcely orthodox, as the patriarchs were believed to have been in hell until rescued by Christ in the period between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

At seventy-two years of age, the life of man is over. He was born foolish, acquired intelligence, was educated, chose virtue, begat offspring, preferred glory to riches, cared for his health, accumulated wealth for his old age and his children, educated them, and died. Similarly, in the course of a year, the earth has been frozen, thawed out, and cultivated; has given birth, first to flowers, then to crops and fruit; its riches have been gathered and processed; and new seeds have been planted. The two parallel cycles are complete.

90. Wolfgang Stechow, "Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 23 (1943) pp. 193–208.

91. Hans Aurenhammer, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* (Vienna, 1961) s.v. "Apfel."





## OTHER VERSIONS

With such a complicated scenario, it is not surprising that comparatively few other versions of the designs are known. But the master weaver, having on hand an expensive set of cartoons, would certainly have wanted to make something of them.<sup>92</sup> One set that has survived is in the Museo de Tapices del Cabildo Metropolitano in Saragossa. It consists of twelve pieces, each with the same, or a very similar, story, connected with the same month, and having a Latin distich, in Roman script, which is generally the same as the central distich on the Metropolitan Museum tapestries. As the upper border inscription for each month is missing, the connection of the sign of the zodiac and the occupation of the month with the main action, the illustration of an age in the life of man, is tenuous indeed, and sometimes nonexistent. The designs have been remade in a later style, and the Brussels mark B.B. indicates a date after 1528. The set was given to the Cathedral of Saragossa by Archbishop Don Andrés Santos.<sup>93</sup>

Other individual tapestries have been recorded, all later in date than the Metropolitan Museum set. A fragment showing Alexander and the Persian envoys was in a Bourgeois Frères sale in Cologne, October 19–27, 1904, no. 1374, and reappeared in a Frederick Müller Sale in Amsterdam in 1916. No. 1375 in the Cologne sale was another fragment, showing part of the Aesculapius scene, almost the entire figure of Bacchus (fully clothed), and the inscription of the Joseph scene. Another two pieces were owned by Lionel Harris in 1930; two mutilated fragments in his possession are said to have been “completed and made good” and “sold to Randolph Hearst.”<sup>94</sup> Part of the

March and April sections are seen on a tapestry in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, in a much altered version.<sup>95</sup> The Curius Dentatus cartoon is the basis of a horizontal tapestry in the Milwaukee Art Institute.<sup>96</sup> It has the Brussels mark. A tapestry with adaptations of the November and December sections was in the Henry Symons sale, Clarke’s Art Rooms, New York, February 8, 1922; all five inscriptions are present. In 1933 it was owned by P. W. French and Co.;<sup>97</sup> it was sold at the Galerie Moderne, Brussels, May 6–7, 1963, no. 1191.

A very curious adaptation of some of the scenes and forms of the Twelve Ages is seen in two Tournai tapestries in the Dijon museum.<sup>98</sup> One has Bacchus in the center, flanked by Marcus Curius and Hercules and the dragon; the apple tree has disappeared, so that Hercules is holding up a stone instead of plucking a fruit. In the other, the central deity has acquired a snake and a mirror, the attributes of Prudence.<sup>99</sup> The scenes at the sides are a much-altered version of the Test of Moses, transformed into Joseph interpreting Pharaoh’s dream, and a rather close rendering of Tiberius discovering a treasure. Various occupations of the months, usually not the ones that accord with the stories, are illustrated in the upper parts of the tapestries. There are inscriptions in French, and many of the characters have names. Certainly neither the original cartoons nor the scenario can have been available to the designer and weaver of these tapestries. One receives the impression that they must have been based on rough notes and sketches made from a set of the Twelve Ages, some details (such as the crowns *en broche* offered to Marcus Curius) being carefully recorded, others entirely omitted.

92. It has been suggested that an *editio princeps* may have preceded the set under discussion. Since 1476, Brussels weavers had been legally obligated to obtain their cartoons from members of the painters’ guild when anything more than fabrics, trees, animals, ships, and plants were needed. Alphonse Wauters, *Les Tapisseries bruxelloises* (Brussels, 1878) p. 48.

93. Eduard Estella, *Museo de Tapices del Cabildo Metropolitano* (Saragossa, 1948) nos. 65–67 (January, October, and August described); José María Monserrat and Manuel Abizanda, *Los Tapices de Zaragoza* (Saragossa, 1917) p. 47, no. 36 (July); Francisco Abbad Ríos, *Catálogo monumental de España, Zaragoza, II* (Madrid, 1957) pls. 214–225 (February–July, September–December). The tapestries are horizontal and thus figures have had to be added on either side, but the main actors in each scene are for the most part very similar to those on the Metropolitan Museum set. A mark resembling a pair of spectacles, or two cherries on a stalk, may be a

version of the town mark of Oudenaarde. Heinrich Göbel, *Wandteppiche, I. Teil, Die Niederlande, I* (Leipzig, 1923) p. 18 of reproductions of marks.

94. Information from the Marillier File.

95. *Le XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècle européen*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 1966, no. 21, ill.

96. Ex-Barbarini, Ffoulke, Hearst Collections. Charles M. Ffoulke, *The Ffoulke Collection of Tapestries* (New York, 1913) p. 44, ill.

97. “Tapestries lent by French and Company,” *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 22 (1933) p. 139.

98. Asselberghs, *Tapiserie tournaisienne*, nos. 14, 15. The empress in the Tiberius scene is given the name Placella, though Tiberius’s wife was actually called Anastasia.

99. De Tervarent, *Attributs* II, col. 272, s.v. “Miroir,” cols. 340–342, s.v. “Serpent.”

PATRON, "AUTHOR,"  
DESIGNER, WEAVER

Only internal evidence is available to indicate who may have commissioned, "devised," designed, and woven the tapestries, which, apart from the enigmatic letters on "Aristotle's" robe, bear no identifying marks or signatures. The compliments to Margaret of Austria in both the Ceres figure and the empress of Byzantium in the Tiberius story, and the double-headed eagles on the hangings of Pharaoh's throne, suggest a connection with the regent's court at Malines. The prominent place given to women when they are not essential to the action (the Samnite envoys, Chiron's companions, Tiberius's empress, Asenath) might also be a compliment to Margaret, though the Papirius story seems most inappropriate. It is highly unlikely that Margaret herself commissioned the *editio princeps*; lists exist of the tapestries she owned, and there is nothing like the Twelve Ages among them.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps some important member of her court, such as Carondelet, was the patron.

Rather more can be said about the "author," or, as he would have been called in English at the time, the "devisor." Such a person can be presumed to have been called on to provide ideas and, when needed, inscriptions for any elaborate work of art of the period. Thus Dirk Bouts painted his Justice pictures for the Rathaus at Louvain after Jan van Haeght, doctor of theology, had worked out the "materien en personagien van den Tafelen."<sup>101</sup> Alexander Barclay, the poet and scholar, was asked "to devise histories and convenient raisons to florishe the buildings" about to be erected at the Field of the Cloth of Gold.<sup>102</sup> The patron could, of course, be his own deviser; Thomas More, in his youth,

devised in his father's house in London, a goodly hanging of fine painted cloth, with nine pageants, and verses over every of those pageants: which verses expressed and declared, what the images in those pageants represented: and also in those pageants were painted, the things that the verses over them did (in effect) declare [spelling modernized].

The "pageants" represented a curious amalgamation of the Ages of Man and Petrarch's Triumphs; Manhood triumphed over Childhood, Love over Manhood, Age over Love, Death over Age, Fame over Death, Time over Fame, and Eternity over Time. The verses were in English, except for the ninth and last "pageant," which showed "a Poet sitting in a chayre," with a long inscription in Latin.<sup>103</sup>

A deviser must have existed for every complicated set of tapestries. He is presumably the figure marked AVTHOR who wields his pen in his untidy library, his dog at his feet, in one corner of the *Infamia* panel of the *Honores* set in the Spanish National Collection.<sup>104</sup> In this instance, he has been identified as Jean Lemaire de Belges,<sup>105</sup> already mentioned as a poet and an official at the court of Margaret of Austria. Could the Twelve Ages also be his work? It does not seem possible, since the *Honores*, though more Renaissance in style, are far more medieval in spirit, with allegorical personifications of each Virtue, and other abstractions, instead of, for the most part, what, to a contemporary, would have been straightforward historical anecdotes, "convenient," or appropriate, to the Twelve Ages. The four mythical stories (two of Hercules, Venus and Adonis, Aesculapius) are as much illustrations as allegories. Though still today an admired poet in French, Jean Lemaire was not a scholar of profound learning, and he relied on late medieval compilations.<sup>106</sup> The Latin verses of the Twelve Ages and the variety of the sources for the stories would have been beyond his

100. André Ghislain Le Glay, *Correspondance de l'Empereur Maximilian Ier et de Marguerite d'Autriche* (Paris, 1839) p. 485.

101. Anna Maria Cetto, *Der Berner Traian-und Herkinbald Teppich* (Bern, 1966) p. 21; Wolfgang Schöne, *Dieric Bouts und seine Schule* (Berlin, 1938) pp. 243, 244 (quoting the Louvain city accounts for 1471).

102. Letter from Sir Nicholas Vaux to Cardinal Wolsey, April 10, 1520, quoted in Geoffrey Webb, "The Office of Devisor," *Fritz Saxl, 1890-1948. A Volume of Memorial Essays from his Friends in England* (London, 1957) p. 300.

103. *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, I (London, 1931) pp. 332-335.

104. Valencia de Don Juan, *Tapices*, p. 24.

105. Elias Tormo Monzo and Francisco J. Sanchez Cantón, *Los Tapices de la Casa del Rey N. S.* (Madrid, 1919) p. 54.

106. "Son labeur s'est limité à des enquêtes dans la bibliothèque des encyclopédies, des sommes, où les 'references' s'offraient à lui, abondantes et diverses, avec (à l'occasion) des tables détaillées, des index pour le diriger." Georges Doutrepoint, "Jean Lemaire de Belges et la Renaissance," *Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques, Mémoires* 32 (1934) p. 245.

grasp.<sup>107</sup> A detail that illustrates the gap between him and the unknown “author” is their different attitudes toward Hercules. In the tapestries, he is a hero, choosing Virtue rather than Vice and crowning a glorious career by plucking the apples of the Hesperides, but Lemaire, in his *Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye*, followed the late fifteenth-century writer Annius de Viterbo in distinguishing three men called Hercules, and the Greek one to him was nothing but a “pyrate, larron et escumeur de mer, homme de tresmauvaise vie, et qui mourut meschamment.”<sup>108</sup>

Thus, it seems probable that the “author” of the Twelve Ages must be looked for among the truly learned humanists of the Low Countries, and a candidate presents himself in the person of Jerome van Busleyden, or Hieronymus Buslidius (c. 1470–1517), of Malines, an ecclesiastical member of the regent’s Grand Council. Erasmus called him “omnium librorum emacissimus” and “utrius linguae callentissimus.”<sup>109</sup> He wrote Latin distichs that Thomas More compared to Virgil;<sup>110</sup> one, to Margaret of Austria, is close in style and spirit to those of the tapestries:

Inter vernantes flores gemmasque nitentes  
Margaris Augusti, gloria prima micat.<sup>111</sup>

The windows in his house, which was completed in

1507/1508, showed the Triumphs, and a room was painted with stories from classical myth and history (Tantalus, Phaeton, Damocles, Mucius Scaevola) and from the Old Testament (Feast of Belshazzar). For these he wrote Latin verses.<sup>112</sup> His library contained Latin, Greek, and Hebrew books, including codices of Livy, Prudentius, Lucan,<sup>113</sup> and Aulus Gellius.<sup>114</sup> He owned a silver cup with a figure of Bacchus, a picture of “the Turk,”<sup>115</sup> and tapestries showing Jeremiah, Alexander and Darius, Moses, the Annunciation, wild beasts, and verdure. One set is described in the inventory made after his death as representing Hercules;<sup>116</sup> it would be agreeable to connect this with the Twelve Ages, but unfortunately it is described as measuring 30 ells (presumably running ells) and even scarcely 28¾ ells when it was sold at auction; as the Brabant ell was only .70 meter, either measurement is incompatible with four tapestries, each 24 feet wide. On the other hand, it is quite probable that this tapestry showed the Choice of Hercules; among Busleyden’s manuscripts were distichs entitled: “Hercules ambigentem qualem vivendi viam ingrederetur, virtus et voluptas compellant.”<sup>117</sup> He wrote in 1514 to Martin Dorpius about the latter’s prose dialogue, “in quo Venus et Cupido omnes adhibent versutias; ut Herculem animi ancipitem in suam militiam invita Virtute perpellant.”<sup>118</sup>

107. The evidence already presented to show that the “author” was a widely-read scholar can be recapitulated here. He used a classical synonym for Bacchus (pp. 132–133); an obscure poem of about 1200 inspired his verses on the seasons (p. 133); he provided two names of winds found in Pliny, but not in the usual medieval reference books (p. 134); he used a less common version of the Test of Moses story (p. 136); he took his Alexander anecdote from Plutarch’s *Lives*, a work not known to the medieval compilers (p. 140); the Choice of Hercules was fashionable among humanists, and showing Minerva and Venus as Virtue and Vice was very up-to-date (p. 142); he knew that gathering the apples of the Hesperides was Hercules’s final labor (p. 152); he used Greek words in his Latin verses (pp. 158, 160), which, except for misprints, are correct imitations of classical originals.

108. Jung, *Hercule*, pp. 52, 53.

109. John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, II (Cambridge, 1908) p. 212.

110. Henry de Vocht, *Jerome van Busleyden* (Turnhout, 1950) p. 64.

111. Felix Nève, *La Renaissance des Lettres et l’Essor de l’Erudition ancienne en Belgique* (Louvain, 1890) p. 108.

112. J. Bruyn, *Over het Voortleven der Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam, 1961) pp. 5–9; J. Bruyn, “De Gedaanteverwisselingen van Damocles,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 15 (1964) pp. 53–56. The author states that the story of Damocles, though given in

Macrobius and Boethius, was not illustrated in the Middle Ages, though a distorted version, in which Damocles is described as the king’s brother, is found in the *Gesta Romanorum* and was used by Lucas van Leyden and other artists. Certain details of the mural paintings, which still exist, though in very poor condition, are comparable to the tapestries, notably the nude Venus with a large quiver in the Tantalus panel and the clothed flying figure with a bow, quiver, and huge arrows. Belshazzar wears a tall peaked hat with a crown around it, not unlike that worn by Tiberius.

113. De Vocht, *Busleyden*, pp. 62, 63.

114. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, Loeb ed. (London and New York, 1927) intro., p. xx.

115. “Een aensicht vanden turck.” De Vocht, *Busleyden*, pp. 66, 67, 106.

116. The entry reads: “Een van 30 ellen pronkte met het beeld van Hercules; op de vendutie kwam even wel uit dat het slechts van 28 ¾ ellen groot was en het werd voor 6 lb. II sc. 1 1/2 d. aan een liefhebber toegewezen.” Elza Foncke, “Aantekeningen betreffende Hieronymus van Busleyden,” *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis* 5 (1938) pp. 197, 198.

117. D. Roggen and E. Dhanens, “De Humanist Busleyden en de oorsprong van het Italianisme in de Nederlandse Kunst,” *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis* 13 (1951) p. 147.

118. Nève, *Renaissance*, pp. 179, 182.

Curiously enough, the fact that Busleyden died in 1517, about the time or even just before the tapestries probably were designed, is actually an argument in favor of his authorship, for it can be confidently stated that there was no close and continuing cooperation between the "devisor" and the artist; no one who understood the Latin verses could have approved of the way in which some of the stories, such as that of Curius Dentatus, were pictured.

The basic idea of the tapestry set, the correlation of the months and the ages of man, must, however, have been suggested by a nonclassical source. Four ages, corresponding with the seasons, are found in Ovid,<sup>119</sup> and could be linked with the four elements, four humors, four winds, and other tetrads.<sup>120</sup> But the standard number of ages during the Middle Ages was six, as listed by Isidore of Seville; they are therefore seldom represented in early medieval art, as no parallels could be drawn between them and other qualities.<sup>121</sup> But, in the mid-fourteenth century, a French poem, *Les douze mois figurez*, made the comparison between ages and months.<sup>122</sup> This poem was absorbed into the *Kalendrier des Bergiers*, a compendium of useful knowledge of the late fifteenth century, of which many editions were printed. At much the same time, a shorter version of the poem was being used in some French manuscript and printed Books of Hours (Paris, Thielman Kerver), combined with miniatures or woodcuts illustrating the ages of man, quite literally and factually, from childhood play to a deathbed scene.<sup>123</sup> The idea does not seem to have been often used in art; the only other early instance that has been found is represented by two Flemish early sixteenth-century

glass roundels (from a set of twelve) in the Brussels Royal Museum.<sup>124</sup>

The *Kalendrier*, however, was extremely popular (Margaret of Austria owned a copy),<sup>125</sup> and it seems probable that it, rather than a Book of Hours, provided the basic scheme for the tapestries. Generally speaking, the idea in each verse of the French poem has been picked up in the corresponding section of the tapestry and a story chosen to fit it; January "n'a ne force ne vertu" and the child of six "est sans nul bien savoir Ne force ne vertu avoir," corresponding to the Test of Moses; in June "Tous hommes sont de chaleur plains"; in July "se commence a passer La beaulté d'une creature"; in August "se doit adviser Combien qu'il a peu amassé Pour avoir repos en vieillesse"; in September, "Si l'homme n'a riens en sa grange Quant il y a cinquante quatre ans Jamais il n'y viendra a temps." The Latin verses on the tapestries are original (none of the others mentions the signs of the zodiac), but they and the stories chosen to illustrate them are sometimes closer to the *Kalendrier* poems than they are to the shorter versions in the Books of Hours. Thus, in April, the *Kalendrier* says, "L'herbe croist et l'arbre florit . . . a vingt et quatre ans Devient l'homme fort vertueux"; the Twelve Ages equivalent is "Jam Taurus letos ostentat in arbore flores,/Sic spes virtutum prima juvenia notat," and the story is Hercules choosing to follow Virtue; whereas the Hours poem says only "soubz cest aage est gay et joly l'homme/Plaisant aux dames courtois et amoureux," without mentioning flowers or virtue.<sup>126</sup> As has been mentioned, the occupations of the months are related to the *Kalendrier* illustrations, whereas the woodcuts of the Books of

119. *Metamorphoses*, XV, 199-213.

120. S. K. Heninger, Jr., "Some Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad," *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961) pp. 7-33.

121. Hinkle, "Cycles," p. 287.

122. J. Morawski, "Les Douze Mois Figurez," *Archivum Romanicum* 10 (1926) pp. 351-363.

123. Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1925) pp. 303-306. An example of the manuscripts is a Book of Hours of Bourges use in the Morgan Library (M813). The activities of the twelve ages in the Kerver Books of Hours are January, playing; February, in school; March, hunting; April, lovemaking; May, riding with a sweetheart; June, marriage; July, having children; August, paying harvesters; September, begging; October, riches; November, sickness; December, death. The Morgan Library manuscript has similar subjects, including, for September,

an improvident man with an empty barn and barrels. The complete text of the poem is given in E. H. Langlois, *Essai sur la Calligraphie des Manuscrits* (Paris, 1841) pp. 132-143, together with Latin verses that provide advice about how to keep healthy in each month.

124. Jean Helbig, "L'introduction du style renaissance dans nos vitraux à l'époque austro-espagnole," *Bulletin des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire* 9 (1937) p. 57. A nineteenth-century instance is *The Life of Man, symbolised by the months of the year in a series of illustrations by John Leighton, F.S.A.* (London, 1866).

125. Michelant, *Inventaire*, p. 57.

126. Hours quotations from Curt F. Bühler, "At thy golg first eut of the hous vlyse the saynge thus," *Studies in the Renaissance* 6 (1959) pp. 233, 234; *Kalendrier* quotations from reprint of 1493 ed., *The Kalendar and Compost of Shepherds* (London, 1931).



FIGURE 23

Design for a stained-glass roundel, attributed to Aerdt Ortkens. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. By courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum

Hours have no resemblance to the tapestries, except that they show the life of man divided into twelve ages of six years each.

It is merely a fanciful conjecture, but one can imagine a humanist, sitting in a well-stocked library, deciding, first, that there should be four tapestries, each showing the deity of a season; then, inspired perhaps by a copy of the *Kalendrier*, determining that each tapestry should illustrate three months and eighteen years; finally,

with much thought and consultation of books, settling on the stories that should illustrate each age.

Attributions of tapestry designs to individual artists and weavers, when no evidence, such as inscriptions, documents, or drawings, exists, are extremely uncertain. In the great mass of tapestries made between 1510 and 1520 in Brussels, there are three fixed points. One is the Legend of Herkenbald in the Brussels Royal Museum, documented as after a design by Jan van



Roome, with the full-scale cartoon by a Brussels painter called Philippe, woven by a Brussels weaver called Léon or Lyon, and finished in 1513. The second is a set of four tapestries, the Legend of Notre-Dame du Sablon, now in various locations, either begun or finished in 1518, and authoritatively attributed to Bernard van Orley.<sup>127</sup> In the third place, by 1516 some at least of Raphael's cartoons for the *Acts of the Apostles* had probably arrived in Brussels, and seven of the tapestries were in Rome by December 1519.<sup>128</sup> The Twelve Ages show no trace of the influence of the Raphael cartoons, and they are closer in style to Notre-Dame du Sablon than to Herkenbald. Bernard van Orley may well, indeed, have designed the Twelve Ages. He was a friend of Gilles van Busleyden, Jerome's brother, who came to the party Van Orley gave for Albrecht Dürer in 1520.<sup>129</sup> He is usually credited with the *Honores* and *Moralidades* sets in the Spanish National Collection;<sup>130</sup> details in both these sets have already been compared with passages in the Twelve Ages, and the white Gothic lettering on red scrolls is very similar in all three sets. The design of the Twelve Ages can be dated about 1516–1520; the set in the Metropolitan Museum was presumably woven before 1528, when it became obligatory to place the Brussels city mark on all large tapestries made there.

The most closely related set, however, is the Dido and Aeneas series at Hampton Court.<sup>131</sup> Though the borders have classical ornamentation, similar in style to those of the Notre-Dame du Sablon set, the seated winged putti who hold the tablets with the inscriptions

are very like those on the Twelve Ages. Sergestus and Cloanthus, who kneel before Dido in the first tapestry of the series, are like the two foremost envoys in the Alexander scene, and Venus meeting Aeneas resembles Venus tempting Hercules. The designer of this set is not known, but it has been associated with the artist known as the Master of the Leipzig Cabinet, or Aerdts Ortkens, or, most recently, Adrian van den Houde.<sup>132</sup> To this artistic personality have been attributed a group of drawings for stained glass and one, in the British Museum, for a tapestry showing the Rape of Helen and other scenes from the story of Troy; on the strength of this drawing, the Hampton Court tapestries have been associated with him.<sup>133</sup> The drawing shows the division into three vertical sections, with smaller scenes above and larger ones below, that is found on many Flemish tapestries of this period; the divisions between the upper scenes are marked by trees, as in the Summer and Autumn panels of the Twelve Ages. A detail of a bow and quiver hung on a tree in another drawing attributed to this artist, the Shepherd with a Nymph in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Figure 23),<sup>134</sup> is a reversed version (with the addition of a harp) of the bow and quiver in the Venus and Adonis scene (Figure 10). Adrian van den Houde has been considered to be "the original designer, though not the cartoonist," of the Nobility panel in the *Honores* tapestry set;<sup>135</sup> a number of resemblances between the Twelve Ages and this set have been mentioned.

It is not possible to attribute the Twelve Ages to this artist on the strength of a single detail, but tapestry

127. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, *Catalogue des tapisseries, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles* (n.d. [1960]) nos. 12, 15, with extensive bibliographies.

128. John White and John Shearman, "Raphael's tapestries and their cartoons," *Art Bulletin* 40 (1958) p. 194.

129. De Vocht, *Busleyden*, p. 20.

130. Dora Heinz, *Europäische Wandteppiche*, I (Brunswick, 1963) p. 183. The uncertainty of this attribution, however, is stressed by J. K. Steppe, "Vlaams tapijtwerk van de 16e eeuw in Spaans bezit," *Miscellanea Jozef Duverger*, II (Ghent, 1968) p. 734.

131. H. C. Marillier, *The Tapestries at Hampton Court*, revised ed. (London, 1962) pp. 24, 25, pls. 22–26.

132. Hilary Wayment, "A Rediscovered Master: Adrian van den Houde (c. 1459–1521) and the Malines/Brussels School. I. A Solution to the 'Ortkens' Problem," *Oud Holland* 82 (1967) pp. 172–202, with bibliography.

133. A. E. Popham, *Catalogue of Drawings by Dutch and Flemish Artists . . . in the British Museum. V. Dutch and Flemish Drawings of the*

*XV and XVI Centuries* (London, 1932) p. 37, no. 1. "The series of the Aeneid at Hampton Court is perhaps from Ortkens' designs and may possibly have formed a complementary set [to a Troy series]." The drawing in Berlin, Callisto and Arcus before Jupiter's Throne, is much less certainly related to a tapestry. Elfried Bock and Jakob Rosenberg, *Die niederländischen Meister* (Frankfurt am Main, 1931) p. 46, pl. 40, no. 2323.

134. K. T. Parker, *Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum*, I (Oxford, 1938) p. 27, no. 66, "Design for a roundel of stained glass." The author says that the subject is probably drawn from Virgil and describes another drawing as illustrating the second Eclogue; he mentions the Hampton Court tapestries as possible further evidence of the artist's treatment of Virgilian subjects. Wayment, "Adrian van den Houde," p. 180. The author attributes this drawing to a follower, whom he proposes to call Pseudo-Ortkens D.

135. Wayment, "Adrian van den Houde," p. 188.

specialists would be happy if another Flemish workshop producing tapestry designs in the early sixteenth century could be authenticated. Bernard van Orley's, though certainly substantial, would have been hard-pressed to have turned out, single-handed, the many enormous tapestry sets of the greatest intricacy and highest quality that were produced in Brussels in this period.

The visual impression given by the Twelve Ages is one of great confusion of styles, of an artist who, though he knew enough about drawing the nude to produce a very creditable Bacchus, had no idea how to cope with Venus and Adonis, and whose attempts to provide armor *all'antica* for Hercules and Marcus Curius are ludicrous. But as an historical document, an expression of the Renaissance spirit, the tapestries are remarkable. For here is Man the Hero, standing alone, the center of things, acquiring *virtus*, and therefore *gloria*, by his own free choice and by noble deeds, and finally ascending to the heavenly kingdom unaided. He is bound only to do the right thing at each stage in his life, and Venus and Adonis are held up as examples to him in his youth. Tiberius, it is true, is rewarded for an act of Christian reverence as well as for charity, but the spectator would not learn this from the Latin text or its illustration. There is no Christian thought in these tapestries. The contrast with another set, the Fall and Redemption of Man,<sup>136</sup> could not be more striking; in this set, perhaps little more than a decade earlier, Homo, or Everyman, is doomed by Adam's fall, attacked by Sins, helped (though ineffectively) by Virtues, and finally redeemed by the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. He is acted on throughout by named personifications; his free will cannot save him without Christ. The action is timeless; it is part of the whole Christian epic that runs from the Creation to the Last Judgment, but it takes place at any moment, in any human soul. The Twelve Ages show a life, not of Everyman, but of a hero, sharply divided into precise eras, each posing a challenge; though only in the Choice of Hercules are both right and wrong decisions indicated, almost every episode implies that another way, that of the man without *virtus*, would be possible. But man

can choose, and there is no indication that either God or Fortune can influence the consequences.

Perhaps even more unusual than the absence of Christian thought in the Twelve Ages is the lack of astrological allusions. Though the signs of the zodiac identify each month and their names are often used as synonyms for the months themselves, there is no indication that they have influence over anything except the temperature and the weather. The planets, so often all-powerful, each ruling his "children," do not appear at all. Man is indeed master of his fate. Even death, the inevitable end, is not pictured as horrifying; *celica regna* await the hero.

It is hard to think of another instance in the Netherlands of such an uncompromisingly humanistic and rational point of view in either literature or pictorial art. It is as far from Erasmus's position as from Luther's. In fact, the ethical climate in which such a statement could be made did not last long; the battle lines were about to be drawn and neither side would be able to tolerate freethinking. It was fortunate for the tapestries that their ideas were expressed obscurely and interpreted ineptly; when men would soon be so easily burned at the stake, wool and silk could hardly expect to be spared, unless their impieties were so thoroughly concealed as to be innocuous.

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