

THE UNICORN TAPESTRIES

MARGARET B. FREEMAN



THE UNICORN TAPESTRIES



THE UNICORN TAPESTRIES

MARGARET B. FREEMAN

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART • NEW YORK

E.P. DUTTON, INC. • NEW YORK

Printed in Lausanne, Switzerland,
by Imprimeries Réunies, S.A.
Production supervision
by Helvetica Press Incorporated, New York
Design by Peter Oldenburg
Composition by Finn Typographic Service
Color photography by Malcolm Varon, New York
First Printing 1976
Second Printing 1983

Verses on pages 229–230 from *The Unicorn and Other Poems*, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Copyright ©1956 by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. Reprinted by permission of Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, Inc.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

New York (City). Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Cloisters.
The unicorn tapestries.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Hunt of the unicorn tapestries. 2. Tapestry, Gothic—France. 3. Tapestry—France. 4. New York (City). Metropolitan Museum of Art. Cloisters. I. Freeman, Margaret Beam, 1899-1980 II. Title.
NK3049 U5N43 1976 746.3'94 76-2466
ISBN 0-8709-147-7 (Metropolitan)
ISBN 0-525-22643-5 (Dutton)

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	7
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	8
1 The Unicorn in Ancient and Medieval Texts	11
2 The Unicorn in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art	33
3 The Birds and the Beasts of the Tapestries	67
4 The Hunt	91
5 The Groves of Trees, the Flowery Fields, and the Gardens	109
6 The AE the FR and Other Problems Relating to the Original Ownership of the Tapestries	155
7 The Making of the Tapestries	175
8 The Tapestries in the Inventories, Their Treatment During the French Revolution, and Their History in Later Years	219
Envoi	229
<i>Notes</i>	232
<i>Index</i>	241

FOREWORD

Of all the late Gothic treasures at The Cloisters, none are more resplendent than the set of tapestries depicting the Hunt of the Unicorn. Indeed, of all the surviving late fifteenth-century tapestries, this magical series stands among the very best and is equal in quality to the famous *Lady with the Unicorn* set in the Musée de Cluny. Complex in meaning, intricate in iconography, richly endowed in formal values, brilliant in technical virtues, the Unicorn Tapestries have been studied in their various parts and categories in a number of articles and essays but, curiously, they have never been afforded a deep examination into all of their facets through all aspects of art-historical scholarship. With this penetrating and balanced analysis, Margaret B. Freeman, in whose devoted curatorial hands these magnificent works of art have particularly flourished over the past three and a half decades, has achieved a fundamental index of scholarship, one that will be the bench mark for all future learned interpretations.

Those of us fortunate to have been involved at The Cloisters over the years can tell of any number of visitors to that special museum requesting, sometimes demanding, the classic book on the Hunt of the Unicorn, which they were convinced already existed. With this sensitive and poetic study, that classic now can be said unequivocally to exist.

THOMAS HOVING, Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Of the many individuals who helped me in the making of this book, one of the most enthusiastic was the Marquis de Amodio, O.B.E., whose wife, née Anne de La Rochefoucauld, is the present owner of the château of Verteuil. It was the Marquis who informed the Museum of the monogram FR sewn onto the modern border of a sixteenth-century tapestry at Verteuil, provided details of the monogram's measurements and materials, and gave us the photograph of it that I reproduce (223). In correspondence with the Marquis, and eventually during a memorable visit with him and his wife in the château, I learned a great deal about the La Rochefoucauld family that was relevant to my account of the Unicorn Tapestries, and much also about the later history of the tapestries. Along with my debt of gratitude to the Marquis and the Marquise, I owe thanks to Dr. Jean Lacombe, who arranged for a photographer to visit the château and make photographs of the family portraits, one of which appears in Chapter Eight (298).

Another kind gentleman, the late Jean Paul Asselberghs, curator of the Musée Cinquantenaire in Brussels, went far beyond ordinary courtesies when he enabled me to study some of his museum's Brussels tapestries in detail at a time when they were off exhibition while the galleries were being repainted. It was Dr. Asselberghs who informed me of the work being done on dye analysis at the Institut Royal de Patrimoine Artistique. At the Institut, later, forty-seven minuscule samples taken from the backs of the Unicorn Tapestries were analyzed; the findings are summarized in Chapter Seven.

Several people helped me by checking on manuscript illustrations. Ursula Hoff of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, examined the page in the Wharnccliffe Book of Hours and determined that the lady with the unicorn is indeed holding a mirror, and she confirmed the identity of the lovers in the vignette above (56). Charles von Steiger, curator of manuscripts in the Burgerbibliothek, Berne, sent me a color transparency of the unicorn in his ninth-century *Physiologus*, enabling me to speak with some authority of its coloring. Gerhard Schütze, Dompfarrer of the cathedral of Erfurt, sketched in color the flowers that I could not identify in my monochrome photograph of the cathedral's painting (52). Berta Maracchi Biagiarelli, director of the Laurentian Library, Florence, described for me the color of the unicorn in the eleventh-century manuscript of Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*, and she pointed me to other early illustrations of unicorns, one of which I reproduce (34).

Many scholars in Europe gave generously of their time. In Antwerp, Sophie Schneeberg-Perelman spent the better part of a day sharing with me the results of her researches

on Brussels tapestries. In Paris my good friend Eleanor Spencer, who seems to know most of the fifteenth-century manuscripts in a good many libraries, made valuable suggestions concerning my discussions of several of them. It was she who introduced me to the Coëtivy Master. Francis Salet and Geneviève Souchal of the Cluny Museum and Hubert Landais of the Louvre were helpful on a number of points. Pierre Verlet, also of the Louvre, tried repeatedly to gain me a visit to the privately owned Perseus tapestry, a hope that has not yet been realized. Dr. Renate Jacques of the Gewebesammlung in Crefeld provided a detailed account of the restorations in the Gelnhausen tapestry (51) as well as photographs of the extant fragments of the Italian textile with the unicorn and pomegranate tree.

On the slim chance that somewhere in the region of Verteuil there might exist bits and pieces of the Unicorn Tapestries, perhaps hidden in a trunk or converted into a pillow cover, I asked René Crozet of the Faculté des Lettres of Poitiers to alert his colleagues to this possibility. A notice was duly published in the bulletin of the Société Archeologique et Historique de la Charente, and for some time we hoped and waited. Nothing turned up.

On the other hand, my search for the jetton of Philip the Fair with the tied initials was successful. The existence of this jetton was known from a publication in the American Numismatic Society. The Society suggested that an example of it might be found in The Hague. And there it was, in the Koninklijk Penningkabinet, whose Dr. H. Enno van Gelder kindly supplied me with a photograph of it (215).

As for my discovery in the Archives Nationales, Paris, of Duke François VI de La Rochefoucauld's unpublished inventory of 1680, I am indebted to Madame Jurgens, the curator, both for producing the document and for copying out the text in plain French, since for me the seventeenth-century script was difficult to read with precision.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say that I am indebted to many European museums and libraries for photographs and information that appear in this book. While all the sources are acknowledged in the captions to the illustrations, I should like to add here a special word of appreciation for these marvelous institutions and their ever courteous personnel.

American libraries that contributed greatly to my material, and have my thanks and admiration, include the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Library of Columbia University, the library of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, and the library of the Metropolitan Museum. The Library of Congress kindly lent us their copy of an important work, the *De Animalibus* of Albertus Magnus.

Dr. Richard G. Van Gelder, curator of the Department of Mammology in the Museum of Natural History, New York, identified the beasts in the second tapestry. Regarding some, he was cautious, saying, for instance, that the small animal with its head turned is "most likely a genet," and that the animal in the right corner is "most likely a striped hyena." He wrote in conclusion, "These identifications are educated guesses on the basis of what it surely isn't as well as what it might be." I have disregarded all of Dr. Van Gelder's "most likely's," firmly believing that he himself is "most likely" to be correct. Richard Zweifil, also of the Museum of Natural History, told us that the small creature in the lower right corner of the seventh tapestry, "though quite schematic, looks more froggy than toady," and that we could safely call it a frog.

In 1961 a group at the Museum of Natural History studied the birds in the tapestries and was impressed with their realistic rendering. All the birds except the nightingale in the second tapestry were identified without hesitation, and there were only slight doubts about the nightingale. The report of this study appeared in *Natural History* for December, 1961.

The work of the New York Botanical Garden on the flora of the tapestries is fully acknowledged in Chapter Five. A recent letter from Carole Woodward states that she has nothing to add or to change in the identifications made in 1941.

One of the first scholars I interviewed when my work began on this book was the late Guido Schoenberger, who for many years had studied and loved the tapestries. He discussed some of the problems with me and lent me many of his notes and photographs. I regret that he never completed the monograph that he planned on the subject of the unicorn dipping his horn to purify the waters.

Kurt Weitzmann made a splendid contribution to Chapter Two when he gave me the photograph of the maiden and the unicorn from the now destroyed Greek *Physiologus* (37). I am most grateful for his interest.

I have received help from a good many people in the Metropolitan Museum. Thomas Hoving has never failed in his support and his enthusiasm for the project. Another colleague, William H. Forsyth, now Curator Emeritus of Medieval Art, encouraged me from the outset to undertake a truly comprehensive study of the tapestries. He has read it all in manuscript, made a few helpful suggestions, and seems pleased with the result.

Carmen Gómez-Moreno, the Museum's present Curator of Medieval Art, read the manuscript and made useful comments. Vera K. Ostoia, Curatorial Consultant, reviewed the first three chapters and drew my attention to photographs of unicorns that I had been unaware of before. Edith A. Standen, Curatorial Consultant in the Department of Western European Arts, read the manuscript, was ever ready for a chat on one or another of my problems, and pointed out books, articles, and illustrations that I might otherwise have missed. Margaretta Salinger, Curator Emeritus, European Paintings, discussed with me the style of the Paris prints in relation to the tapestries, and was amazed at the similarities

I showed her. Our discussion took place, I should add, before Geneviève Souchal recently published much of the same material. Helmut Nickel, Curator of Arms and Armor, whose knowledge and interests cover many fields, checked my readings of coats of arms, contributed important examples to my study of tied letters, and helped me greatly with his translations of medieval Flemish poems and old German inscriptions on tapestries and Minnekästchen. Janet Byrne, Curator, Department of Prints and Photographs, and Hyatt Mayor, Curator Emeritus, have my thanks for answering many questions about the French prints in the Museum's collection as well as prints from other collections that appear in this book.

Nobuko Kajitani, Associate Conservator, the Textile Conservation Laboratory of the Museum, and her assistant Nancy Haller removed parts of the linings and strippings of the tapestries so that we could snip off bits of loose weft threads from the backs for the dye analysis mentioned above. Miss Kajitani also examined the backs of the tapestries with me and confirmed the presence of dovetailing and interlocking. The drawings illustrating these and the other weaving techniques (279, 282–284) are the work of Ayako Murao, Assistant Restorer, Textile Conservation. For their cheerful work in handling the heavy tapestries when we needed to examine them, my thanks go to the late Jack Woodmansey of The Cloisters' staff, and to Leo Hazebroek and John Manning, also of the staff.

Pieter Meyers of the Museum's Research Laboratory analyzed several of the metal threads in the tapestries. William F. Pons, manager of the Museum's Photograph Studio, supplied not only my considerable routine needs but made several special shots for the book. My late friend Lillian Green, the retired head of the Museum's Department of Public Relations, typed the first five chapters of the book, sent out the many requests for photographs and permissions to reproduce them, and encouraged me greatly with her reaction to the text as it developed. Louise Halsey carried on, after Lillian's death, with both the typing and the encouragement.

Because I wanted the reaction of a "non-Museum" person to my first draft, I asked my good friend Emily Nichols Loeb to read the first five chapters. She did this with care, and her comments and criticisms were valuable to me.

Finally, there is Ian McGee. Some years back, Thomas Hoving suggested that I obtain a research assistant to do, as he said, some of the legwork. Ian has not only done a lot of the legwork but a great deal of the brainwork as well. He checked my notes and references. He checked most of the translations of the Latin texts and many of the old French texts as well. He contributed several discoveries, such as the tied QV on the jetton of Philip the Fair and the RG adopted by Jacques Coeur of Bruges. He investigated several manuscripts abroad when I was unable to do this myself. In general, except for the actual writing, Ian and I worked hand in hand on all of the problems, and I have thoroughly enjoyed having the assistance of this sympathetic and scholarly collaborator.

MBF

1

THE UNICORN IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL TEXTS

I stood in the Maytime meadows
By roses circled round
Where many a fragile blossom
Was bright upon the ground;
And as though the roses called them
And their wild hearts understood,
The little birds were singing
In the shadows of the wood.
The nightingale among them
Sang sweet and loud and long,
Until a greater voice than hers
Rang out above her song.
For suddenly between the crags,
Along a narrow vale
The echoes of a hunting horn
Came clear along the gale.
The hunter stood beside me
Who blew that mighty horn,
I saw that he was hunting
The noble unicorn. . . .

The unicorn is noble;
He keeps him safe and high
Upon a narrow path and steep
Climbing to the sky;
And there no man can take him;
He scorns the hunter's dart
And only a virgin's magic power
Shall tame his haughty heart.
What would be now the state of us
But for this unicorn
And what would be the fate of us,
Poor sinners, lost, forlorn?
Oh may He lead us on and up,
Unworthy though we be,
Into His Father's kingdom
To dwell eternally.

Medieval German folk song¹

Of all the fabulous creatures, from the amphisbaena to the zytiron, that existed in the minds of medieval people, the one that still lives on in this modern world is the unicorn. He is glorified in many a present-day poem and he is the hero of several contemporary fairy tales for adults as well as children. In one of James Thurber's "Fables for Our Time" a character who does not believe in unicorns is treated with ridicule and contempt and fetches up in the "booby hatch." The unicorn appears today on jewels, textiles, in statuettes, as decorations for pottery, and in cartoons. To be sure, reports of his actual appearances in the twentieth century are rare, but this is not surprising, for the unicorn was always a rare creature, one of the marvels of the world.

If the set of tapestries at The Cloisters had represented an ordinary medieval hunt of a bear, a stag, or a boar, they would be admired for their technical brilliance, monumental compositions, brilliant coloring, and delightful detail, but they would probably never so completely entrance the modern viewer as does the Hunt of the Unicorn. Conversely, it may be said that the tapestries at The Cloisters, as well as the renowned set of the Lady with the Unicorn in the Cluny Museum in Paris, have helped considerably to keep the unicorn image alive to the present day. Both these sets of tapestries were designed and woven about 1500, in the late Middle Ages.

The story of the beautiful one-horned milk-white animal of the tapestries is long, complicated, sometimes contradictory, and often obscure. The earliest description of such an animal may be dated about 400 B.C. The tapestries, made about nineteen hundred years later, show the unicorn, after centuries of accumulated lore, at the height of his prestige and glory. And then, less than a century after the tapestries were woven, a character in Shakespeare's *Tempest* remarked, following a mysterious happening (act 3, scene 3), "Now I will believe that there are unicorns." When the tapestries were woven,

everyone believed in unicorns. If some did not believe, they certainly left no evidence of their doubt.

So far as is known, the seven tapestries at The Cloisters represent the most completely realized hunt of the unicorn that the Middle Ages produced. In the first (1), gaily dressed huntsmen with feathers in their hats, spears in their hands, and their dogs on leash, pause for a moment at the edge of a forest while a scout beckons to them, indicating that the quarry has been sighted. In the second (2), the huntsmen come upon the unicorn in a clearing where a fountain plays and beasts are assembled by a quiet stream; they wait while the unicorn dips his horn into the water to purify it of poison so that the lions, the stag, the panther, and the other animals may safely drink. In the third (3), the hunt is in full cry. Dogs are unleashed and spears are thrust, but the unicorn nimbly leaps the stream and eludes the hunters. In the fourth (4), the unicorn fights back; he gores a dog with his horn and kicks out at a huntsman with his hooves. Of the fifth tapestry only two fragments remain (5), but there is enough to show that the huntsmen, having given up attempts to capture the unicorn by force, resort to a ruse, the taming of the unicorn by a maiden. Enclosed by a rose-covered fence, the unicorn, with only a suggestion of wildness in his eye, is fondled by the maiden, whose delicate hand rests on his mane. The maiden's pert companion signals to the horn-blowing hunter that the unicorn may now be captured. In the sixth tapestry (6) he is killed by the hunters and brought, beautiful even in death, on the back of a palfrey to the lord and lady of the castle. In the last tapestry (7) he is shown alive again, indestructible and quite happy in an enclosure, tied to a tree bearing pomegranates.

Though it is possible to understand in part the meaning of these tapestries by a study of the written sources, a complete understanding of all the symbolism in them may always remain elusive.

The first person to write of a one-horned animal was Ctesias, a Greek physician to the Persian court of Artaxerxes and Darius II, around 400 B.C. In his book *Indica* he says:

There are in India certain wild asses which are as large as horses and even larger. Their bodies are white, their heads dark red, and their eyes dark blue. They have a horn in the middle of the forehead that is one cubit [about a foot and a half] in length; the base of this horn is pure white . . . the upper part is sharp and of a vivid crimson, and the middle portion is black. Those who drink from these horns, made into drinking vessels, are not subject, they say, either to convulsions or to the falling sickness. Indeed they are immune even to poisons if, either before or after swallowing such, they drink wine, water, or anything else from these beakers.

Other asses, tame or wild . . . do not have an ankle-bone . . . but these do have an ankle-bone . . . the most beautiful that I have ever seen. . . . This animal is exceedingly swift and powerful, so that no creature, neither the horse nor any other, can overtake it. . . .

There is no other way to capture them in the hunt than this: when they conduct their young to pasture, if they are surrounded by many horsemen, they refuse to flee, thus forsaking their offspring. They fight with thrusts of horn; they kick, bite, and strike with wounding force both horses and hunters; but they perish under the blows of arrows and javelins, for they cannot be taken alive. The flesh of this animal is so bitter that it is not edible; it is hunted for its horn and its ankle-bone.²

Different though this animal of Ctesias may be from the unicorn of the tapestries, in many essential characteristics he is the same. In the first place, he has only one horn and he uses it as a weapon, he kicks his opponents with his hooves, he is fleet and fighting-fierce, and he can be captured only by what may be termed unfair methods. As for his appearance, the unicorn in the tapestries is perhaps not so large as the horse to which Ctesias compares the wild ass, but he is not an insignificant animal; his body is white as in Ctesias, but, happily, his head is white too, instead of dark red, and his horn also is white and not parti-colored as in Ctesias; his eyes are gray, not dark blue. Finally, both the horn of the wild ass of Ctesias and the horn of the unicorn in the tapestries have the magic quality of repelling poison.

The account of Ctesias has survived to the present only by means of a copy of his work made by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who lived in the ninth century A.D. Ctesias' book, however, was known to Aristotle, about a hundred years after it was written. Aristotle discounted many of its more preposterous observations, even though Ctesias claimed that he had set down nothing that he had not either seen himself

or heard from the mouths of credible witnesses. It is fortunate for the story of the unicorn that the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who, in the Middle Ages, was considered an authority never to be questioned, did not deny once and for all the existence of the one-horned creature of Ctesias. Aristotle's reference is brief but unequivocal: "There are . . . some animals that have one horn only, for example, the oryx, whose hoof is cloven, and the Indian ass, whose hoof is solid. These creatures have their horn in the middle of their head."³

Another great man of ancient times, Julius Caesar, records the existence of a one-horned animal, reporting this of the Hercynian forest in Germany: "There is no man . . . we know who can say that he has reached the edge of that forest, though he may have gone forward a sixty days' journey. . . . It is known that many kinds of wild beasts not seen in other places breed therein, of which the following are those that differ most from the rest of the animal world and appear worthy of record. There is an ox ["bos"] shaped like a stag, from the middle of whose forehead, between the ears, stands forth a single horn, taller and straighter than the horns we know."⁴

The Roman writer Pliny the Elder (about A.D. 23-79), whose prolific works in the field of natural history were, like Aristotle's, accepted as infallible in the Middle Ages, mentions several one-horned animals and gives the name *monoceros* (Greek for unicorn) to one of them. Thus the unicorn received a name of his own and was no longer a one-horned wild ass. Pliny says that the Orsaean Indians hunt many wild beasts, the fiercest of which is "the monocerous, with a body like a horse, head like a stag, feet like an elephant, and tail like a boar; it makes a deep bellow, and one black horn two cubits long projects from the middle of its forehead. This animal cannot be taken alive."⁵

The unicorn in the tapestries is rather like a horse, as in Pliny, but it cannot be said that his feet are like an elephant's or that his flowing tail is like that of a boar. Neither is his horn black, although it is very nearly two cubits (about three feet) in length—twice as long as in Ctesias' report.

Another Roman writer on the natures of animals, Aelian (about 170-235), called "honey-tongued," speaks in detail about the one-horned beasts of India, adding several items of importance to the legend:

In certain regions of India . . . they say that there are impassable mountains full of wild life. . . . And in these same regions there is said to exist a one-horned beast. . . . It is the size of a full grown horse, with reddish hair, and is very

swift of foot. . . . Between its eyebrows it has a horn growing out; it is not smooth but has spirals of quite natural growth, and it is black in color. This horn is also said to be exceedingly sharp. . . . When other animals approach, it does not object but is gentle; with its own kind however it is inclined to fight. . . . It likes lonely grazing grounds where it roams in solitude, but at the mating season when it associates with the female, it becomes gentle and the two even graze side by side. . . . They say that the foals when quite young are taken to the King of the Prasü and exhibit their strength one against the other in public shows, but nobody remembers a full-grown animal having been captured.⁶

In another passage Aelian describes the one-horned ass as does Ctesias: an animal with a white body, dark red head, and crimson-black-white horn. He adds:

From these variegated horns, I am told, the Indians drink, but not all, only the most eminent Indians, and round them at intervals they lay rings of gold, as though they were decorating the beautiful arm of a statue with bracelets. And they say that a man who has drunk from this horn . . . is free from incurable diseases; he will never be seized with convulsions . . . nor be destroyed by poisons. . . . And these animals are far swifter than any ass or even than any horse or deer. . . . To pursue them is, in the language of poetry, to chase the unattainable. . . . A full-grown ass one would never capture alive, and when dead the Indians strip them of their horns, which as I have said, they decorate.⁷

The horn of the unicorn in the tapestries has spirals like that of the unicorn of Aelian. Moreover, the dead unicorn, in the sixth tapestry, its precious horn garlanded with leaves, is brought to the lord and lady of the castle, the "eminent" people who, according to Aelian, had the sole privilege of benefiting from the horn's miraculous properties.

As in Aelian, the unicorn dipping its horn in the stream is gentle and kind with other animals and becomes quite tame, in certain circumstances, under female influence.

None of the writers quoted so far claimed to have seen a unicorn. However, Apollonius of Tyana, a traveler and philosopher of the first century after Christ, is reported by his biographer to have seen the single-horned wild asses of India. He was told that cups made from the horns were used by the kings of India in the belief that they were free that day from sickness and poison. When one of Apollonius' companions asked him what he thought of this story, he said: "I should have believed it if I had found that the kings of this country were immortal."⁸

Although few in this pagan era claimed to have seen the unicorn itself, possibly several had truly seen the drinking cups allegedly made from its horn. These were

probably made of the horn of the rhinoceros. Long before Ctesias, people of the Orient believed that the horn of the Indian rhinoceros repelled certain diseases and poisons—and many continue to believe this to the present day. Known to be a powerful beast, it has a single horn on its nose; undoubtedly this real animal helped to create the image of the unreal unicorn as described by Ctesias, Pliny, Aelian, and the other early writers.

A group of Hebrew scholars living in Alexandria were also familiar with the unicorn and were responsible, in effect, for putting him into the Bible. These scholars—tradition says they numbered seventy-two—translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek in about the third to second centuries B.C. In this translation, the Septuagint, the beast called in Hebrew *re êm* became *monoceros*, that is, unicorn. Modern scholars have pointed out that the *re êm* should be identified as the wild ox, but it has remained the unicorn for many centuries. Like the original books of the Old Testament, the Septuagint was considered to be divinely inspired, hence it appeared obvious that the unicorn was authenticated by God himself. In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible made by Saint Jerome in the fourth century, *re êm* in several instances became *rhinoceros*, remaining *unicornus* in others. The King James translation of the Bible mentions the unicorn thus:

God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn (Numbers 23:22).

His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth (Deuteronomy 33:17).

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? Or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? (Job 39:9-11).

But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil (Psalm 92:10, Vulgate Psalm 91).

In the Book of Daniel, written about 165 B.C., a one-horned animal is called a goat, rather than a unicorn:

Behold, an he-goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. And he came to the ram that had two horns . . . and ran unto him in the fury of his power. . . . And . . . smote the ram, and brake his two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him. . . . And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king (8:5-7, 21).

There is power, majesty, and exaltation in the unicorn of the Old Testament. It would seem that the unicorn of the tapestries is his worthy descendant.



Throughout the Middle Ages, passages from the Bible such as those just quoted were cited by theologians, encyclopedists, and tellers of popular animal tales as references concerning the unicorn. At least as early as the third century the unicorn was adopted by the Christian world, not merely as a remarkable animal that had been described by pagan writers and endorsed by the Bible, but as a symbol of Christ. The pagan philosopher and legal expert Tertullian, who became a Christian about 193, quotes the passage from Deuteronomy, "his horns are like the horns of unicorns," and explains that "Christ is meant by this [animal], and the horn denotes Christ's cross."⁹ Saint Ambrose (about 340–397), bishop of Milan and one of the great theologians of the Western Church, writes in his commentary on the Psalms: "Who then is this unicorn but the only begotten Son of God?"¹⁰ Saint Basil (about 330–379), one of the great fathers of the Eastern Church, develops the symbolism at length. He says in part that Christ "will be called the Son of unicorns, for as we have learned in Job, the unicorn is irresistible in might and unsubjected to man." He notes that the horn is frequently used in the Scriptures to denote glory and power and salvation, and adds: "Christ is the power of God, therefore he is called the unicorn on the ground that He has one horn, that is, one common power with the Father."¹¹

By interpreting the unicorn as a Christian symbol, the early theologians made possible the acceptance of him by learned Christians. However, an anonymous writer who collected and recorded a group of animal legends sometime between the second and fourth centuries brought the unicorn an even greater and more universal popularity. The book, originally written in Greek, probably in Alexandria, was known as the *Physiologus*, since in each chapter "Physiologus" ("the scientist") is cited as the source. The text consists of descriptions, many of them fanciful, of real animals, birds, and fish, and even more fanciful descriptions of unreal creatures such as the autolops, caladrius, unicorn, and upupa. Each account concludes with the lesson to be learned by Christians from the supposed habits and characteristics of the animal described.

The *Physiologus* was so admired and enjoyed in the Middle Ages that it exists today in countless versions, not only in Greek but also in Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, and Ethiopic, in Latin, old high German, old French, Provençal, Icelandic, Italian, and Anglo-Saxon. As time went on, many creatures were added to the *Physiologus* of the early centuries, and by the twelfth century, the

1 *The Start of the Hunt*

12 FT. 1 IN. X 10 FT. 4 IN.





enlarged versions were generally known in western Europe as bestiaries.¹²

According to a ninth-century Latin *Physiologus* in Berne:

There is an animal that is called a monoceros in Greek and in Latin truly a unicorn. Physiologus says that the unicorn has this nature. He is a small animal, like a kid, but exceedingly fierce, with one horn in the middle of his head; and no hunter is able to capture him. Yet he may be taken in this manner: men lead a virgin maiden to the place where he most resorts and they leave her in the forest alone. As soon as the unicorn sees her he springs into her lap and embraces her. Thus he is taken captive and exhibited in the palace of the king.

In this way Our Lord Jesus Christ, the spiritual unicorn, descended into the womb of the Virgin and through her took on human flesh. He was captured by the Jews and condemned to die on the cross. Concerning him David . . . says 'But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn.' And Zacharias says 'He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David' [Luke 1:69]. . . . Moreover the one horn that he has on his head signifies the words of the Saviour: 'I and my Father are one' [John 10:30]. . . . They say that he is exceedingly fierce, and this means that neither Principalities nor Powers nor Thrones . . . not the most subtle devil nor Hell could hold [him] against his will. Moreover they say that he is a small animal and this is because of the humility [of Christ] in his incarnation; concerning this he said, 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart' [Matthew 11:29]. . . . Only by the wish of the Father did he descend into the womb of the Virgin Mary for our salvation.¹³

The unicorn of the *Physiologus* is startlingly different from the magnificent animal of Ctesias, Pliny, and Aelian. He is no longer likened to a horse or an ass larger than a horse. He is not even the powerful he-goat of Daniel, but only a small goat, a kid. Small as he is, however, he is "exceedingly fierce" and cannot be taken by the force of hunters. Thus he exemplifies both the humility of Christ, the Son of God, who became a human being for the sake of mankind, and also the invincibility of Christ, who could not be held against his will by the powers of heaven or hell.

One is glad to see, for esthetic if not theological reasons, that the unicorn of the tapestries retains the horse-like appearance of the unicorn of Pliny. However, he has as well the beard and cloven hooves of the goat, following the description in the *Physiologus*. The visual result of this combination is satisfying, even superb.

As in the *Physiologus*, too, the unicorn of the tapestries fights the hunters fiercely and is finally captured only by means of the taming influence of a maiden. In the larger fragment of the tapestry that once depicted the capture scene, a bit of the maiden's arm is shown,

2 *The Unicorn Dips His Horn into the Stream to Rid It of Poison*

12 FT. 1 IN. X 12 FT. 5 IN.





and her fingers caressing the unicorn's mane. However, she is not "alone" as in the *Physiologus* but is accompanied by at least one handmaiden. Then the unicorn of the tapestries is killed in a violent, tragic scene, not merely taken captive as in the *Physiologus*; however, he is brought, a precious prize, to the lord of the castle, or, in the words of the *Physiologus*, to "the palace of the king."

Details differ in the many versions of the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries derived from it. In the bestiary by Philippe de Thaun, a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poet who dedicated his work to Adelaide, the queen of Henry I of England, the capture of the unicorn is thus described:

When a man intends to hunt it, and to take it and ensnare it, he goes to the forest where is its repair, there he places a virgin, with her breast uncovered, and by its scent the unicorn perceives it; then it comes to the virgin and kisses her breast, falls asleep on her lap and so comes to its death. The man arrives immediately and kills it in its sleep . . . or takes it alive.¹⁴

A certain Pierre, writing his French (Picard) bestiary for Philippe de Dreux, bishop of Beauvais (1175–1217), says for the first time, so far as is known, that the unicorn is very beautiful ("moult bèle"), and his horn is four feet long, straight, and sharp. Following Pliny and not the *Physiologus*, Pierre states that the unicorn has the body of a horse with the head of a stag, but he adds that he is "not a very large beast." The virgin maiden is also beautiful, and moreover she is well dressed ("bien parée").¹⁵

All versions of the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries agree on the essential significance of the unicorn story for the people of the Christian faith. The unicorn is Christ. As the unicorn surrendered his fierceness and became tame by means of a virgin maiden, so Christ, by the will of the Father, apparently surrendered his divine nature and became a human being by means of the Virgin Mary, for the salvation of mankind.

It seems not to have occurred to any of the writers that the role of the maiden who tricked the unicorn was far from admirable and thus not the best possible symbol for the Virgin Mary, who cannot be imagined as tricking her Son. Yet not only the popular writers of animal tales but also several preachers and theologians adopted the virgin-capture theme as an allegory of the Incarnation. Honorius of Autun (active 1106–35) makes use of the story in his sermon "On the Nativity of Our Lord." "The unicorn," he says, "is a very fierce beast with only one horn. To capture it a virgin maid is

3 The Unicorn Leaps the Stream

12 FT. 1 IN. X 14 FT.





placed in the field. The unicorn approaches her, and resting in her lap, is so taken. By the beast Christ is figured, by the horn his insuperable strength. Resting in the womb of a virgin, he was taken by the hunters, that is, he was found in human form by those who loved him."¹⁶ Pseudo-Hugo of Saint Victor (1096–1141) quotes almost word for word the description of the unicorn and the symbols as given in the ninth-century *Physiologus*. He adds that the virgin maid is beautiful and that she uncovers her breast.¹⁷

Almost all the authorities specify or imply that the maiden should be left alone; however, the abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) suggests that to capture a unicorn several maidens are better than one. She says: "On the day of the hunt, men, women, and girls pursue the unicorn. Then the girls separate from the others and play among the flowers." The girls should be "well born, not rustics," and neither too young nor too old. "The unicorn . . . on seeing the girls . . . stops at once . . . crouches on his hind legs and inspects them for a long time. . . . He falls in love with them, for he perceives that they are enticing and delightful."¹⁸ And thus he is undone.

Hildegard's version of the story is unusual, if not unique, but it provides a precedent for the presence of the second female figure in the virgin-capture tapestry at The Cloisters. The lady there may not fulfill all of Hildegard's requirements, but she is in truth rather "enticing and delightful."

Hildegard does not give symbolic meaning to her story, nor do several of the great medieval encyclopedists who describe the mode of the capture, notably Isidore of Seville (about 560–636),¹⁹ Albertus Magnus (1200–80),²⁰ and Bartholomaeus Anglicus (active 1231–50).²¹ Vincent of Beauvais (about 1190–1264) does not even mention the maiden.²² The story and the symbolism of the virgin capture continued in vogue, however, and in the thirteenth century the allegory of the Incarnation was developed further to denote specifically the Annunciation. The hunter became the messenger of God, the angel Gabriel. The Minnesänger Konrad von Würzburg (died 1287) calls him the "heavenly hunter" (Himeljeger).²³ An old, undated German folk song describes how the "hunter who hunts the beautiful unicorn" came "from the throne on high."²⁴

One of the hunters in the fourth tapestry (130), where the unicorn is fighting fiercely, undoubtedly represents the angel Gabriel, for the scabbard of his sword bears the inscription "Ave Regina C[aelorum]" ("Hail, Queen of the Heavens"). The angel of the Annuncia-

4 The Unicorn Defends Himself

12 FT. 1 IN. X 13 FT. 2 IN.



tion, to be sure, greeted the Virgin Mary with the words "Ave Maria, gratia plena" ("Hail Mary, full of grace"); however, the "Ave Regina Coelorum" was a popular hymn to the Virgin in the Middle Ages and it could well have been considered an appropriate substitute for the "Ave Maria," and a more regal salutation.

If one of the huntsmen in the tapestries represents the angel Gabriel, the question arises: Who are the others? Since some of them, although elegantly clothed, have the faces of villains or at least of totally insensitive men, they may represent the enemies of Christ who pursued him, captured him, and condemned him to die on the cross. The text of the ninth-century *Physiologus* quoted earlier suggests this interpretation. The thirteenth-century bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc makes the symbolism more explicit:

This wonderful beast,
Which has one horn on its head,
Signifies our lord
Jesus Christ, our saviour.
He is the spiritual unicorn,
Who took up in the virgin his abode
Who is so especially worthy
In her he assumed his human form
In which he appeared to the world.
His people of the Jews
Believed him not, but spied on him
And then took him and bound him
Before Pilate they led him
And there condemned him to death.²⁵

The fourteenth-century *Buch der Natur* by Konrad von Megenberg also states that Christ, like the unicorn, "was captured by the wicked hunters . . . and by them shamefully put to death."²⁶ Konrad, furthermore, gives additional meaning to the statement in the ninth-century *Physiologus* that the unicorn was "exhibited in the palace of the king"; he says of the unicorn, symbolizing Christ, "Thereupon he rose again and went heavenward to the palace of the heavenly King, where he accorded to the community of all the saints and all the angels a sight sweet to see." Thus the story of the unicorn, in the texts and in the tapestries, may be interpreted as an allegory of the whole divine plan for the redemption of sinful man: the Incarnation of Christ, the pursuit of him by his enemies, his condemnation and death on the cross, and his resurrection "to the palace of the heavenly king." The last tapestry, in which the unicorn rests in a garden of flowers, may symbolize the resurrected Christ as he shows himself to the saints and angels of heaven. He is indeed, here, a "sight sweet to see."

The medieval writers were slow in recognizing the

5 *The Unicorn Is Tamed by the Maiden*

LEFT, 68½ X 25½ IN.

RIGHT, 76½ X 26 IN.





value of the unicorn's horn in repelling poison. The abbess Hildegard recommends the use of various parts of the unicorn's body for medicinal purposes but does not mention the horn. According to her, an unguent made of the powdered liver mixed with egg yolks will cure leprosy "unless the leper in question happens to be one whom death is determined to have or else one whom God does not wish to be cured." And further: "If a belt is made of the unicorn's hide and worn around the waist over the skin, it will preserve one from the dangers of pestilence and of fevers."²⁷ Leprosy and the plague are serious diseases, and if the unicorn's liver and hide could cure or prevent them, this was miraculous indeed. But the efficacy of the unicorn's horn against poison was apparently unknown to Hildegard.

In a late Greek *Physiologus*, on the other hand, the value of the unicorn's horn in absorbing poison is specifically described. Following the usual paragraph about the characteristics of the unicorn, its capture by the maiden "who is clothed," and the unicorn's meaning as a symbol of Christ, there is mention of "a great lake" where "the animals gather . . . to drink":

But before they are assembled the serpent comes and casts its poison into the water. Now the animals mark well the poison and do not dare to drink and they wait for the unicorn. It comes and immediately goes into the lake and making with his horn the sign of the cross renders the power of the poison harmless. And all the other animals drink as well.²⁸

The text does not enlighten us as to the significance of this incident, but the symbolism is implicit. The serpent is the devil, who brought the poison of sin into the world, and the unicorn, of course, is Christ, who redeemed the world from sin by the power of his horn, "the horn of salvation." Scholars have not determined the date for this *Physiologus* manuscript; it may be as early as the twelfth century or as late as the fifteenth; in any case it explains the second tapestry where the unicorn dips his horn into the water while the animals wait until it is safe to drink.

Another description of the purification of the water is given by a priest of Utrecht, Johannes of Hese, who claims that he visited the Holy Land in 1389. He writes:

Near the field of Helyon, there is a river called Marah, the water of which is very bitter, into which Moses struck his staff and made the water sweet so that the Children of Israel might drink. And even in our times, it is said, venomous animals poison that water after the setting of the sun, so that the good animals cannot drink of it; but in the morning, after the sunrise, comes the unicorn and dips his horn into the

6 *The Unicorn Is Killed and Brought to the Castle*

12 FT. 1 IN. X 12 FT. 9 IN.



stream, driving the poison from it so that the good animals can drink there during the day. This I have seen myself.²⁹

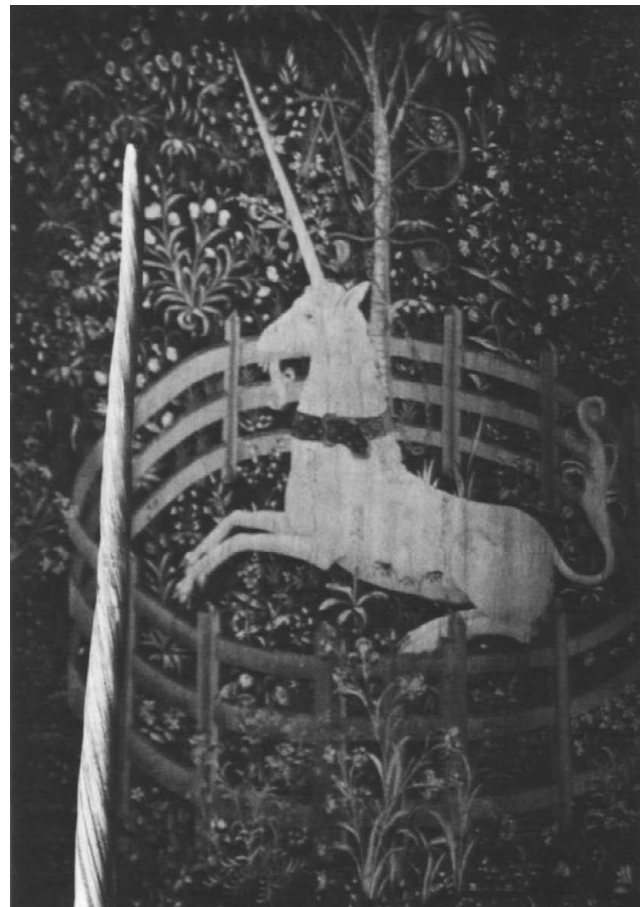
From the fourteenth century on, the nobility, like the “eminent Indians” of Aelian, owned beakers of unicorn’s horn or beakers with a bit of the horn incorporated in them, or simply a fragment of the horn called an “espreuve,” a test for poison. The French royal accounts for 1388 mention an espreuve of unicorn’s horn mounted on a chain of gilded silver.³⁰ An inventory of Duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy for the year 1408 lists “a piece of unicorn for testing, its tip of silver.”³¹ In 1472 King Henry of England gave Louis, Lord of Gruuthouse, Bruges, “a cup of gold garnished with pearl. In the midst of the cup is a great piece of unicorn’s horn . . . [of] seven inches compass. And on the cover is a great sapphire.”³² The dukes of Burgundy possessed at least two goblets entirely of unicorn’s horn, one of them enameled with pansies.³³ At the marriage of Princess Margaret of York to Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy in 1468 the cupboard in the great hall had “on every corner great unicorns’ horns, very large and very beautiful.”³⁴

At the time that these and many other unicorns’ horns for testing were noted in the account books and inventories, the actual horn was that of the narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*), the small arctic whale rarely found south of Greenland. This “horn” is a single tusk, long, spiraled, and ivory white (8). In the Middle Ages it sold for several times its weight in gold and was considered among the greatest treasures for a cathedral, monastery, or palace. In the Victoria and Albert Museum is a narwhal tusk that was elaborately carved, probably as early as the twelfth century, perhaps for use as part of a scepter or ceremonial staff (9). A sword with pommel and scabbard of narwhal ivory that belonged to Charles the Bold of Burgundy is one of the treasures of the Schatzkammer in Vienna (10). It is mounted in gold and silver gilt and is enriched with a ruby, pearls, and an enameled gold medallion. Medieval drinking cups of narwhal tusk apparently have not survived, but a fine seventeenth-century covered beaker on loan at The Cloisters (11) may resemble the beakers listed in medieval inventories. It is the narwhal horn, not the parti-colored horn of Ctesias or the black horn of Pliny, that the unicorn of the tapestries bears in the middle of his forehead.

The unicorn with its magic horn and its interest in virgin maidens was taken over, in the thirteenth century, by poets and writers of romantic tales as a symbol of the lover beguiled by his beloved. This is not sur-

7 The Unicorn in Captivity

12 FT. 1 IN. X 8 FT. 3 IN.



8

Narwhal tusk

The Cloisters Collection (photo: William F. Pons)

prising, for the erotic aspects of the unicorn story are present in several of the texts that have been quoted here. The trouvère Thibaut, Count of Champagne (1201–53), composed this song to his lady:

The unicorn and I are one:
He also pauses in amaze
Before some maiden's magic gaze,
And while he wonders, is undone.
On some dear breast he slumbers deep
And Treason slays him in that sleep.
Just so have ended my life's days;
So Love and my Lady lay me low.
My heart will not survive this blow.³⁵

One of the so-called "wandering scholars" of the thirteenth century eulogizes his Phyllis thus:

Sweet above all sweets that are
'Tis to play with Phyllis,
For her thoughts are white as snow,
In her heart no ill is;
And the kisses that she gives
Sweeter are than lilies.

Love leads after him the gods
Bound in pliant traces;
Harsh and stubborn hearts he bends,
Breaks with blows of maces;
Nay, the unicorn is tamed
By a girl's embraces.³⁶

In the thirteenth century, also, Richard de Fournival wrote a *Bestiaire d'Amour* addressed to his "beautiful very sweet beloved." He says in his chapter on the unicorn:

I have been drawn to you by your sweet odor . . . as the unicorn falls asleep under the influence of a maiden's fragrance. For this is the nature of the unicorn, that no other beast is so hard to capture, and he has one horn in the middle of his forehead which no armor can withstand, so that no one dares to go forth against him except a virgin girl. And as soon as he is made aware of her presence by the scent of her, he kneels humbly before her and humiliates himself as though to signify that he would serve her. Therefore wise huntsmen who know his nature set a virgin in his way; he falls asleep in her lap; and while he sleeps the hunters who would not dare to approach him while awake, come up and kill him. Even so has Love dealt cruelly with me; in my pride, I thought never to see the woman whom I should care to possess. . . . But Love, the skillful huntsman, has set in my path a maiden in the odor of whose sweetness I have fallen asleep, and I die the death to which I was doomed.³⁷

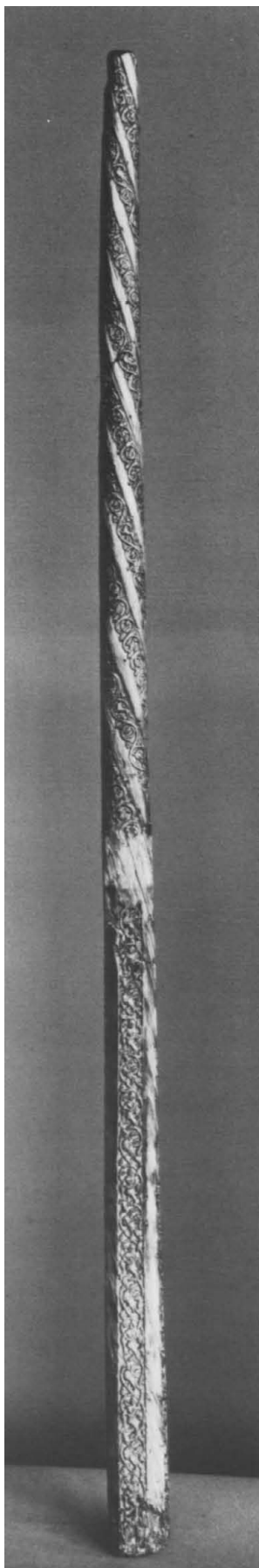
The religious symbolism of the unicorn in the tapestries has been pointed out; the secular symbolism is somewhat less easy to explain. Certainly there is an

atmosphere of wordliness throughout the series, and at least one of the tapestries may be interpreted as an allegory of true love. This is the last, where the unicorn is collared, chained to a tree, and surrounded by a fence. The thirteenth-century poet Burkart von Hohenfels describes the lover, that is, the unicorn, in a similar situation. He, like the unicorn, "roamed about in all lands searching for pleasure," and he was drawn to a lady "with shining eyes." She "chained him with her womanly charm" and he "fell into the trap" from which he could "never escape."³⁸ The chain was frequently used by poets of the Middle Ages as a symbol of the lover's devotion to his lady and his complete subjection to her will. In the fourteenth-century *Romans de la Dame a la Lycorne et du Biau Chevalier au Lyon*, the knight, on parting from his mistress, sends her a poem over two hundred lines long on *La Cheene d'Amours*, the chain of love that bound their two hearts together, and was "stronger than steel," yet could be stretched without breaking.³⁹ The unicorn in the tapestry, as lover or mate, though enchained and entrapped, is entirely content with his lot.

It may seem strange to modern observers that the same tapestry is intended to convey both religious and secular significance, to symbolize the risen Christ and also the lover held captive. But people of the late Middle Ages delighted in this type of juxtaposition; for them the God of Heaven and the God of Love were not incompatible.

Another instance of the combining of the secular and the religious is perhaps to be found in the sixth tapestry, where the unicorn is slain and brought to the lord and lady of the castle. The dead unicorn is garlanded with a wreath of oak leaves that grow unnaturally on thorny branches. The thorns may refer to Christ's crown of thorns, the oak leaves to the constancy of the lover. In a medieval German folk song praising the oak, the leaves of the tree "betoken steadfastness," and "whoever wears them at the command of his true love is expected to remain faithful."⁴⁰ The unicorn himself, according to Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzifal*, was a symbol of loyalty. The lady speaks: "My greatly desired one was like the unicorn in faithfulness; he is the animal whom the maidens should lament for he was slain through purity."⁴¹

There is a tradition that the unicorn tapestries were designed and woven to celebrate a marriage. If this be so, the secular symbolism would be entirely appropriate and, in a way, more eloquent than words.



9

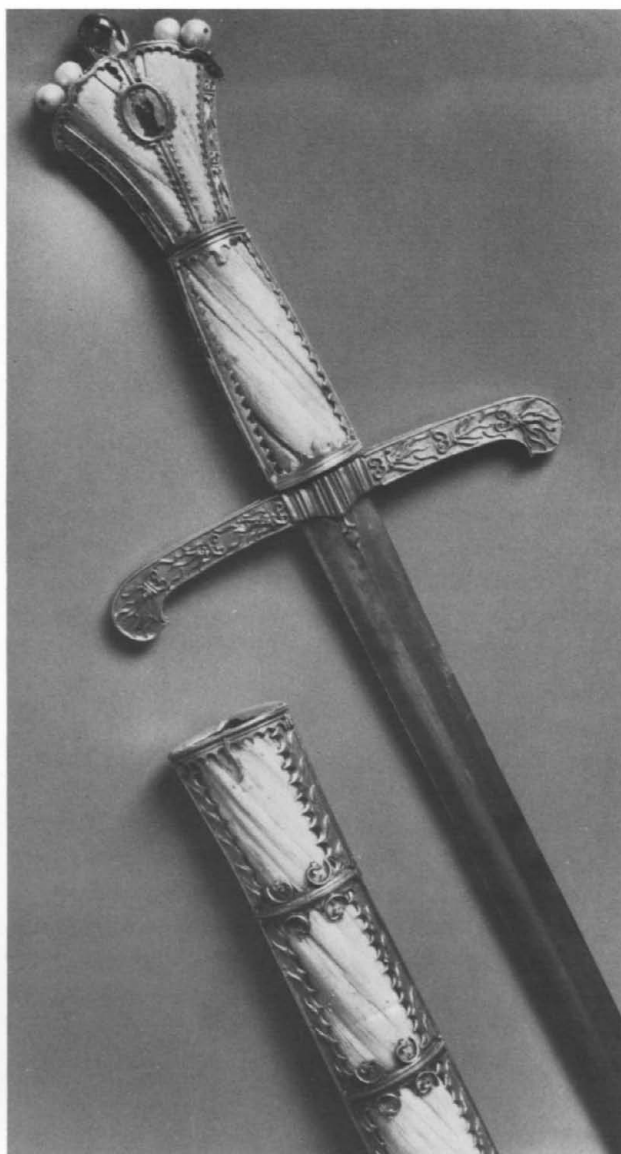
Carved narwhal tusk. 12th c.

Victoria and Albert Museum

10

Sword hilt and scabbard of narwhal ivory. Burgundian, collection of Charles the Bold (1433–77)

Vienna, Schatzkammer, Kunsthistorisches Museum



11

Beaker of narwhal tusk. 17th c.

Lent by the Guennol Collection to The Cloisters



2

THE UNICORN IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY RENAISSANCE ART

All people by nature wish to have knowledge. . . . And for that reason God . . . has given to Man a kind of power called Memory. This Memory has two portals, Seeing and Hearing, and to each one of these portals there is a way by which one can go: by Paintings and by Words. . . .

And now, my beautiful sweet beloved, I will show you how this [bestiary] is written with paintings and with words. . . . For it is in the nature of beasts and birds that they are better understood painted than described.

RICHARD DE FOURNIVAL

Bestiaire d'Amour, 13th century¹



The designers and weavers of the Cloisters' tapestries, with apparently full knowledge of the accumulated lore and a goodly amount of imagination and skill in addition, produced a well-nigh perfect image of the fabulous animal that is the unicorn. They show him as proud, noble, powerful, fiercely courageous, and also gentle, beneficent to his fellow creatures, and, at the end, happily serene. They have made him physically handsome, milk white from the tip of his spiraled horn to his exquisitely plumed tail. Moreover, they have made him believable.

The unicorn of the Cluny Museum's set of tapestries (75–80) is similar in appearance but less fierce and wild. Except for one instance, he is employed in these tapestries simply as a heraldic animal, supporting armorial standards and bearing shields with coats of arms.

Even more tame is the unicorn that stands guard, along with a monkey, a lion, a stag, and a porcupine, over the body of the martyred Saint Stephen (12) in another set of tapestries in the Cluny Museum. This unicorn, though watchful, has his tail between his hind legs, and his forelegs are poorly articulated.

However, all of these unicorns are closely related, compared to unicorns in several Swiss and German

tapestries of about the same date. The unicorn on the lap of a pretty "wild woman" in a tapestry in Basle (13) is brown with pale spots. He is alert, and could spring away at any moment on his coltish legs. He has the straight, spiraled horn derived from the narwhal tusk. A slightly earlier and highly decorative unicorn (14) has a gracefully curving horn with the upper edge scalloped. He is spotted all over, his mane is a ruff of feathers, his ears are big and pointed, he wears a jeweled collar, and his expression is mischievously leering.

An Italian unicorn as interpreted by Pisanello on a medal for Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua (15) is more like the goat of the *Physiologus*. Besides the cloven hooves and goatlike beard, he has a complete coat of shaggy hair. His horn is straight and spiraled. In contrast, another Italian unicorn, in a fifteenth-century manuscript (16), is not very different from the unicorn of the Cloisters' tapestries.

As one can see, there seems to have been no univer-

12

Tapestry (detail), Legend of St. Stephen. About 1500
Paris, Musée de Cluny



13

Tapestry, Wild Woman with Unicorn. Strassburg, about 1500

Basle, Historisches Museum



14

Tapestry (detail). Swiss, 1420–40

Basle, Historisches Museum



15

Medal for Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua. By Pisanello (c. 1395–1455)

Victoria and Albert Museum



16

Miniature in *Life of St. Benedict*. Italian, 15th c.

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 184, fol. 14

sally or even nationally accepted formula for depicting the unicorn in the late Middle Ages when the Cloisters' tapestries were woven. The descriptions in the texts were not specific enough to evoke a complete and precise image. Also, as has been noted, the texts were often contradictory; therefore much was left to the imagination and choice of the artist.

The unicorn portrayed in books of travel

About the year 550 a writer known as Cosmas Indicopleustes drew a picture of the unicorn to illustrate his book *Christian Topography*. Cosmas, a native of Egypt, was a merchant who traveled extensively in Ceylon, the Sinai, and Ethiopia. Included in his book are these statements:

This animal is called the unicorn, but I cannot say that I have seen him. But I have seen four brazen figures of him set up on the four-towered palace of the king of Ethiopia. From these figures I have been able to draw him as you see. They speak of him as a terrible beast and quite invincible, and say that all his strength lies in his horn.²

Cosmas was an honest man, admitting that he saw only statues of unicorns, yet it would be fascinating to have his drawing of a bronze unicorn that in the sixth century stood atop the palace of an Ethiopian king. Unfortunately, his original manuscript is lost. However, the sketch in an eleventh-century manuscript of his book (17) may well be a copy, more or less exact, of the original drawing. It shows a proud animal, in contour not unlike the Cloisters' unicorn; he is bearded and his horn is piercing straight; he is large, compared to the hunter at the left, and he is formidable. But his tail is minuscule, his feet are clawlike, and his hide is the color of polished bronze.

Another travel book that illustrates unicorns is an early fifteenth-century *Livre des Merveilles* that includes the work of Marco Polo (about 1254–1324), the most renowned of medieval travelers. Marco says of the kingdom of Basma (in Sumatra):

There are wild elephants in the country, and numerous unicorns which are very nearly as big. They have hair like that of a buffalo, feet like those of an elephant, and a horn in the middle of the forehead, which is black and very thick. . . . The head resembles that of a wild boar, and they carry it ever bent towards the ground. They delight much to abide in mire and mud. 'Tis a passing ugly beast to look upon, and is not in the least like that which our stories tell us of, as being caught in the lap of a virgin; in fact it is altogether different from what we fancied.³

Marco's unicorn is undoubtedly the Indian rhinoceros.



17

Miniature in Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*. 11th c.

Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. Plut. IX, cod. 28, fol. 268

18, 19

Miniatures in *Livre des Merveilles*. Early 15th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 2810, fols. 59, 85



The fifteenth-century illustrator, however, either did not read the text (as frequently happened in the Middle Ages) or he chose to ignore it. The unicorns he pictures (18, 19) are not by any standards “ugly to look upon”; in fact they are rather beautiful in their wild rocky habitat. They are probably more in accordance with what Marco “fancied” than with what he saw. But assuredly one of them is “very nearly as big” as an elephant.

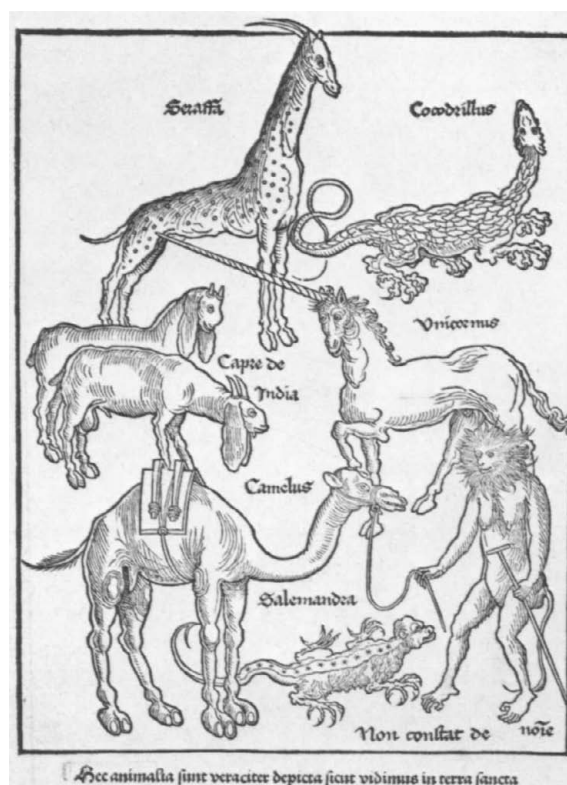
In 1483 a canon of the cathedral of Mainz, Bernhard von Breydenbach, went with a large retinue on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and in 1486 he published his *Itinerary*, illustrated with skillful, handsome woodcuts. Bernhard had taken with him an expert painter named Erhard Reuwich, who later “carried out the printing [of the book] in his own house.”⁴ A page is devoted to likenesses of beasts that the pilgrims encountered on their travels. Here, along with a giraffe, a crocodile, a camel, and others, is a unicorn with a sharp, straight, spiraled horn (20). At the foot of the page is the statement: “These animals are truthfully depicted as we saw them in the Holy Land.”

The friar Felix Fabri, another member of Bernhard’s retinue, wrote his own story of the pilgrimage and described the unicorn. He says that on the twentieth of September he and the company saw, standing on a hill near Mount Sinai, a large animal gazing toward them. At first they took it for a camel, but their guide told them it was a unicorn and pointed out the great single horn on its brow.⁵

The “Unicornus” of Breydenbach’s *Itinerary*, “truthfully depicted” by those who saw him, is very like the unicorn of the Cloisters’ tapestries.

The unicorn in illustrations of the Bible stories

Illustrations of the unicorn in books of travel are rare. They appear more frequently in manuscripts of the Bible, and especially in the Psalter, the arrangement of the Psalms for liturgical use. In an early Psalter in Stuttgart, dated about 820, the unicorn is featured in two illustrations. Psalm 22 (in the Vulgate, 21), a song of lament that was interpreted as prophetic of Christ’s Passion, is illustrated with a Crucifixion attended by a unicorn and a lion (21). The unusual presence of these beasts is explained in verse 21: “Save me from the lion’s mouth . . . [and] from the horns of the unicorns.” The unicorn is whitish with blue gray shadows, cloven hoofed, and his horn is curved and patterned. In ac-



20 Woodcut by Erhard Reuwich in *Peregrinationes in Montem Syon*, by Bernhard von Breydenbach. Mainz, 1486

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund

21 Miniature in Stuttgart Psalter. About 820

Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. bibl. 2° 23, fol. 27 (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)





22

Miniature in Stuttgart Psalter. About 820

Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek,
Cod. bibl. 2° 23, fol. 108^v (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)

cordance with the text he is rather menacing. A more peaceful unicorn is represented in the miniature accompanying Psalm 92 (Vulgate 91). Here the hand of God emerges from an aureole, the psalmist sits on a hillside, and the unicorn stands isolated between two rocks, eyes and ears alert, his horn piercing the border of the picture (22). This scene illustrates verse 10, often quoted in the *Physiologus*: "But my horn thou shalt exalt like the horn of an unicorn."

In the famed Utrecht Psalter, also of the early ninth century, the unicorn appears four times, though in each case he is only a tiny part of a large composition that encompasses almost the whole psalm, not merely a verse or two. He is prominent in the miniature for Psalm 77 of the Vulgate (though not mentioned in the King James version), the text of which reads: "The Lord . . . chose the tribe of Judah, the mount of Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary as of unicorns on the land which he founded forever. And he chose his servant David, and took him from the flocks of sheep." Like the other unicorns in the Utrecht Psalter, this one (23) is shaggy-coated and bearded, like a goat, and his backward-curving horn seems to spring from his nose, as does the horn of the Indian rhinoceros. He is larger than David's sheep but not as large as a horse.

A tenth-century Catalan Bible illustrates Daniel's vision of the "he-goat" that "touched not the ground" and "had a notable horn between his eyes" (24). This he-goat is a powerful beast with a single large curved horn. The text (Daniel 8:6-7) says that he "came to the ram that had two horns . . . and ran unto him in the fury of his power . . . and smote the ram, and brake his two horns." It must be admitted that the notable horn here is almost too strongly curved to be an effective weapon.

A miniature in a twelfth-century Bible from Floreffe (25) relates the Nativity of Christ to a verse in the Book of Job: "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?" (39:9). The text, inscribed on the scroll thrust forth by the hand of God, uses the word "rhinoceros" for "unicorn" in accordance with the Vulgate. The small unicorn embraced by the maiden has a horn on his nose like that of the Indian rhinoceros. The figure on the right is Job and that on the left is Matthew, holding a medallion with his symbol, an angel. All the figures are serious and thoughtful, especially the maiden with the unicorn, symbol of the Virgin, and the Virgin Mary herself, who stretches out her arm toward her newborn Son but turns her head away almost in sorrow. Both women seem to look into the future and see tragedy there, the one for the unicorn, the other for the Child in the crib.

23

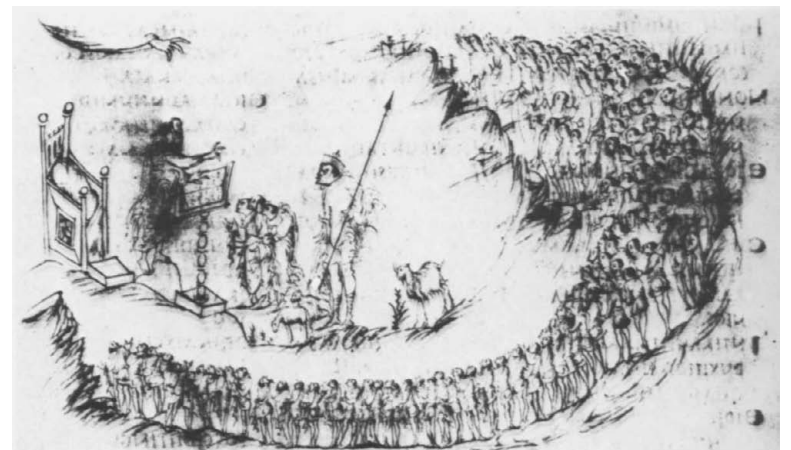
Miniature in Utrecht Psalter. 9th c.

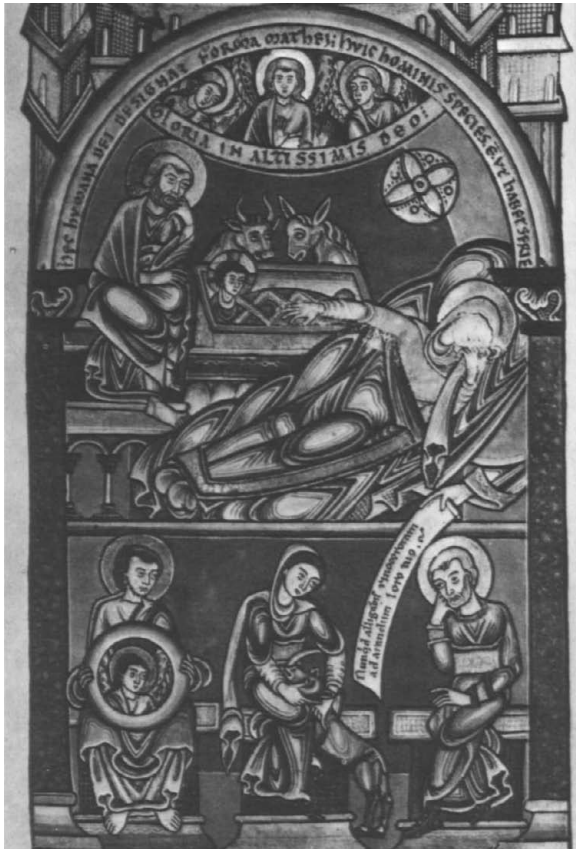
Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Ms. 484, fol. 45^r

24

Miniature (detail) in Bible from Sant Pere de Roda.
10th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 6, vol. 3, fol. 66^v





25

Miniature in Bible from Floreffe. 12th c.

British Museum, Ms. Add. 17738, fol. 168 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

26, 27

Miniatures in Queen Mary's Psalter. Early 14th c.

British Museum, Royal ms. 2B vii, fols. 2, 6^v (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

The unicorn is frequently shown with other animals in Old Testament scenes, although the texts do not specifically mention him. It is taken for granted, for instance, that when God created the birds in the sky and the beasts on the land, he of course created the unicorn. In a creation scene in Queen Mary's Psalter of the early fourteenth century (26), the unicorn appears with the other animals, and he is placed close to the throne of God. This unicorn has a horn in the middle of his forehead, and it is straight, spiraled, and sharp, like that of the unicorn in the tapestries. On another page of this manuscript Noah carries one of his sons into the ark while the birds, the unicorn, and other beasts await their turn to go aboard (27). It is fortunate that all the animals are small, for the ark is not very large.



In a miniature prefacing the first chapter of an early fifteenth-century manuscript of the encyclopedist Bartholomaeus Anglicus, the unicorn is among the creatures privileged to witness the joining together of Adam and Eve by God the Father in the Garden of Eden (28). The white unicorn is placed prominently in front of a group of earth-colored, quiescent animals. He is built like a horse but with the cloven hooves of a goat; his horn has a forward curve and is the color of gold. He alone is restive as he paws the ground and lowers his head, ready to thrust with his horn. This unreal animal seems more alive and more believable than the real lion standing behind him. In spirit he is very like the unicorn of the Cloisters' tapestries.

The unicorn is the most important animal in an Old Testament scene in a Dutch Bible of about 1400 (29). Here Adam, with a ceremonious gesture, is giving names to the animals that God has created, and he has chosen the unicorn to be first. Eve stands beside him, her hands in an attitude of prayer, for the occasion is solemn, holy, ordained by God.

In a printed *Bible historiée* published by Antoine

28

Miniature in *Propriétés des Choses*, by Bartholomaeus Anglicus. Early 15th c.

Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Ms. 251, fol. 16 (reproduced by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum)



29

Illustration in Dutch Bible, Adam Naming the Animals. About 1440

British Museum, Add ms. 38.122 fol. 12 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

Vérard in Paris about 1500, the unicorn is present in the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve, tempted by the "subtle" serpent, are about to eat the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (246). God had said, "Ye shall not eat of it." By disobeying, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, and through that sin they lost for themselves and all mankind for generations to come the chance to achieve eternal life in Paradise. As a symbol of Christ, the unicorn in this illustration may be intended to convey the message that there is yet hope, for after many centuries Christ came into the world to redeem it from the sin of Adam and Eve. The unicorn and many other details of the composition of this Garden of Eden are strikingly similar in style to the Cloisters' tapestries; the relationship of the print to the tapestries will be discussed later.

The fierceness of the unicorn

The wildness and fierceness of the unicorn are described by all the writers on unicorns from Ctesias, the Greek physician, to Vincent of Beauvais, the thirteenth-century encyclopedist, yet these important characteristics were not often exploited by medieval artists. In fact, the most magnificent portrayals of the fleeing and fighting unicorn are in the third and fourth Cloisters' tapestries.

30

Drawing in Queen Mary's Psalter

British Museum, Royal ms. 2B vii, fol. 100 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



31

Miniature (detail) in *De Nobilitatibus Sapientius et Prudentius Regnum*. 14th c.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. EII, fol. 46^v



In the third he leaps a stream, pursued by dogs and hunters; in the fourth he gores a hound and kicks out with his hooves.

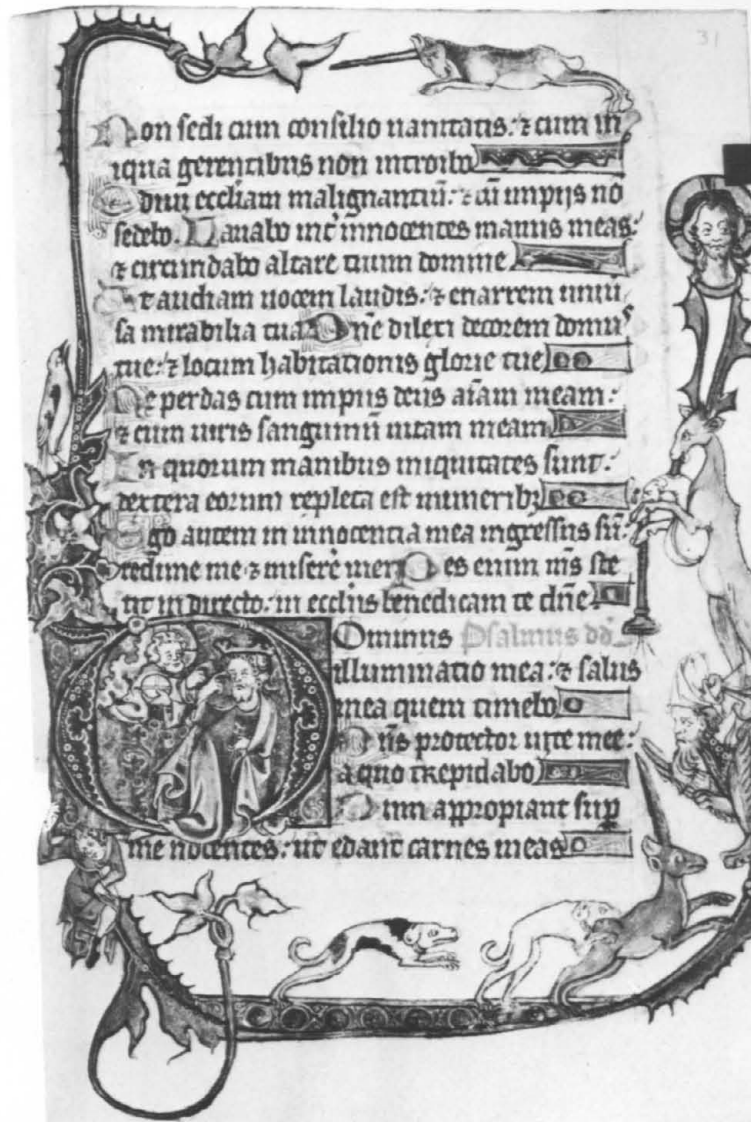
Besides the menacing unicorn in the Stuttgart Psalter and the fighting unicorn in the Roda Bible (21, 24), a unicorn lunging at an elephant is found in Queen Mary's Psalter (30). Several writers on beasts mention this special prowess of the unicorn, including Guillaume le Clerc:

This beast is so daring,
So pugnacious and so bold,
That it picks quarrels with the elephant.
It is the fiercest beast in the world,
Of all those that are in it.
It fights with the elephant and it wins.⁶

There is no doubt that the unicorn in the drawing will be the victor. He is appreciably larger than his opponent, his weapon is sharper, with longer reach, and he is endowed with greater fighting spirit.

The unicorn attacks a lion in a border illumination of a fourteenth-century English manuscript (31). This lion is not very brave, and the unicorn, though elegant, has the weapon, the skill, and the forcefulness to defeat him.

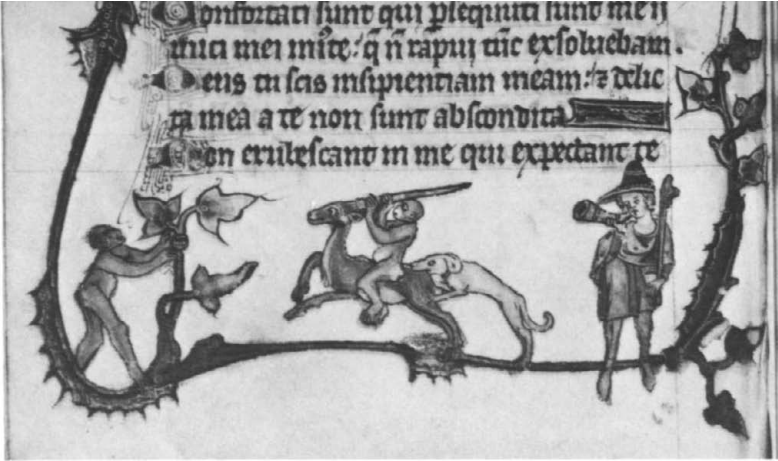
Butting and swift-running unicorns are occasionally depicted with humor in marginal decorations, especially in books of hours, which were produced for the lay worshiper. One is thus treated in a fourteenth-century Flemish manuscript (32). Above, he charges furiously at his opponent, an ivy leaf. Below, chased by one dog and attacked by another, he leaps toward a hybrid



32

Page in Flemish Psalter and book of hours. 14th c.

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 82, fol. 31



33

Marginal decoration in Flemish Psalter and book of hours. 14th c.

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 82, fol. 62v

bishop. A parodied scene of a unicorn hunt fills the lower margin of another page in this manuscript (33). Here a youthful huntsman, armed with a bludgeon, blows his horn; the unicorn leaps away but is bitten by a dog and ridden by an ape who clings to his pulled-back horn; another ape, hiding behind an ivy tree, waits to waylay him if he evades his pursuers. The unicorn appears surprised.

There is nothing at all humorous about the fierce unicorn in a fourteenth-century *Life of Saint Anthony Abbot* (34). As the story is told by Jacobus da Voragine, the hermit Anthony, grievously tempted and tormented by the devil, hid in a cave but "he found there a great multitude of devils that . . . beat him," and then other

34

Miniature in *Life of St. Anthony Abbot*. 14th c.

Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. laur. Med. Palat. 143



devils appeared "in the form of divers beasts wild and savage" and assailed him with "horns" and "claws."⁷ The text does not name the beasts, but the illustrator obviously believed that the unicorn would qualify as one "wild and savage."

In the early fifteenth-century *Livre des Merveilles* (Figure 19) the high-spirited unicorn bounds up a mountainside with force and speed. The other inhabitants of this wild country, a boar, a bear, a fox, a lion, and two swans, are unconcerned about his presence and are certainly unafraid of his horn. Only the camel, following closely on the unicorn's heels, seems to object. If hunters should intrude on this scene with intent to capture the unicorn, one can well believe, as the accounts say, that they would not be able to take him with conventional weapons but only by guile.



35

Miniature in *Physiologus*. 9th c.

Berne, Burgerbibliothek, Codex 318, fol. 16v

The unicorn and the maiden

The capture of the unicorn by means of a virgin girl, as told in the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries, is by far the best-loved unicorn theme of the Middle Ages. Since only fragments of this important scene remain in the Cloisters' set of tapestries, it is impossible to reconstruct the complete composition. Of the maiden who tamed the unicorn, only a bit of her sleeved arm and her hand on the unicorn's mane exist today. The seductive female who appears full length, with her knowing, come-hither glance directed toward the horn-blowing hunter, is surely not the type of woman who attracted unicorns, according to all the bestiary accounts. Her presence at this symbolic event is unusual.

There are other unusual aspects in the Cloisters' tapestry of the capture. The following survey of the several variations on the theme and its symbolism through the centuries may help to determine in what ways the unicorn lore of the tapestries follows the trend and in what ways it is unique.

The earliest-known representation of the virgin capture is in the ninth-century *Physiologus* in Berne, introduced in Chapter One. In a rocky landscape with stylized trees, the virgin, swathed head to toe in classical garments, holds the unicorn by his muzzle (35). He is neither as small as a kid nor as large as a horse. He is dark bluish gray and spotted. His horn has a backward curve and his eye is bright. This is the only known instance in a *Physiologus* or bestiary where the maiden is standing while enticing the unicorn. There are no hunters present to disturb the tranquility of the moment. The accompanying text states that after the unicorn becomes tame the maiden "leads him in haste to the dwelling place of the king."

A rare representation of the unicorn being led to a king occurs in a tenth-century *Physiologus* in Brussels (36). The story is told in two scenes. Below, a seated maiden, elegantly coiffed and garmented, caresses an eagerly compliant unicorn. In the upper scene she gently persuades him to follow her to the imperious monarch, who sits grandly on his throne. A servitor grasps

36

Illustration in *Physiologus*. 10th c.

Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Ms. 10066-67, fol. 147



37

Miniature in Greek *Physiologus*. About 1100

(Photo: courtesy Kurt Weitzmann)

the maiden's wrist as if to prevent her, perhaps, from changing her mind. In the Cloisters' tapestries, too, the unicorn is "brought to the dwelling place of the king," not alive, but dead on the back of a horse. The unicorn of the manuscript is blunt-nosed and cloven-hoofed, with a small tail and a horn gracefully curved. In the lower scene a beardless Christ with cruciform nimbus addresses two followers, presumably disciples. His words, often quoted in the *Physiologus*, are inscribed in the background: "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew, 11:29). This is one of the rare instances of a visual identification of the unicorn with Christ. As in the Berne *Physiologus*, no hunters are present.

Hunters are also absent from the capture scene in the earliest-known illustrated Greek *Physiologus*, dating to about 1100, formerly in Izmir, Turkey, now destroyed.⁸ In this Byzantine miniature (37) the lady, clad in white, with an elaborate headdress trimmed in red and gold, sits like a queen on her cushioned throne and blesses the unicorn, who stands with one foot on her knee. The rather formidable unicorn, with a magnificent horn shaped like that of an Asiatic antelope, has a collar around his neck that is probably intended to indicate that he is now tamed. Such a collar is worn



38

Miniature in Theodore Psalter. Byzantine, 1066

British Museum, Ms. Add. 19352, fol. 124v (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

by the unicorn in the last of the Cloisters' tapestries. On the next page of this Greek *Physiologus* there was a miniature of the Annunciation; thus, the taming of the unicorn by a virgin is related in pictures as well as in words to the coming of Christ to earth by being born of the Virgin Mary.

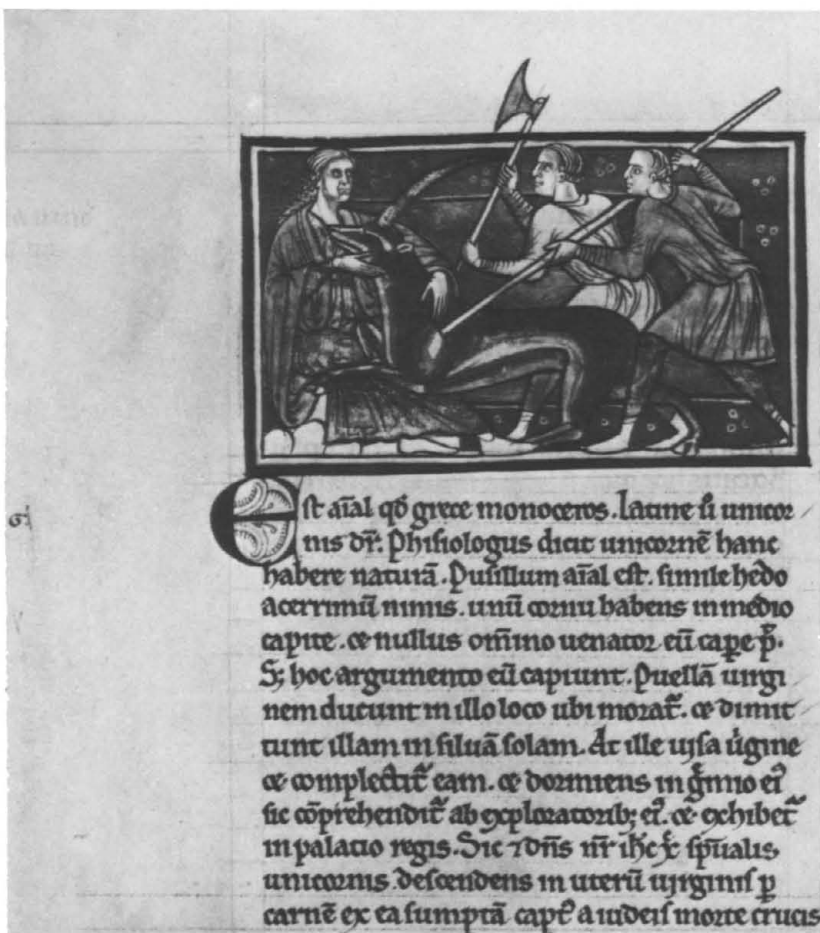
The Incarnation symbolism of the unicorn capture is expressed in a single composition in a Byzantine Psalter illustrated by the monk-priest Theodore in 1066. A straight-backed, elegantly clad lady blesses an alert unicorn with a high, curved horn, sharp ears, and pointed beard (38). To this group the artist has added a jewellike medallion of the Virgin Mary holding the Child, thus visually equating the unicorn story with the Incarnation. The nimbed figure below, in priestly garments, is Saint John Chrysostom, one of the most famous of the Greek Fathers of the Church, born in Antioch about 345. He is identified by the inscription: "Chrysostom spoke concerning the unicorn." It was believed by certain people, one of them evidently the illuminator of this manuscript, that John Chrysostom was the author of the *Physiologus*.

In these early representations of the unicorn's capture there is no suggestion of force; there are no hunters with weapons ready to wound or kill. In the twelfth century, in western Europe, a huntsman or two regularly appears to apprehend the unicorn, rendered docile by the maiden. A miniature in an English bestiary in the Pierpont Morgan Library, dated about 1170, shows two rather fierce men, one striking the unicorn with his spear, the other brandishing a battle ax over his head (39). The unicorn does not stand in dignity as in the earlier manuscripts; he crouches, his forefeet on the virgin's lap, his head on her bosom. He appears unaware of the spear thrust in his flank, so entranced is he with the maiden, whose countenance, it must be admitted, is somewhat severe. The unicorn is blue; his horn, sweeping backward in a great curve, is green. While "sleeping in her lap," the text says, "he is apprehended by the searchers and exhibited in the palace of the king."

39

Miniature in English bestiary. About 1170

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 81, fol. 12v





40

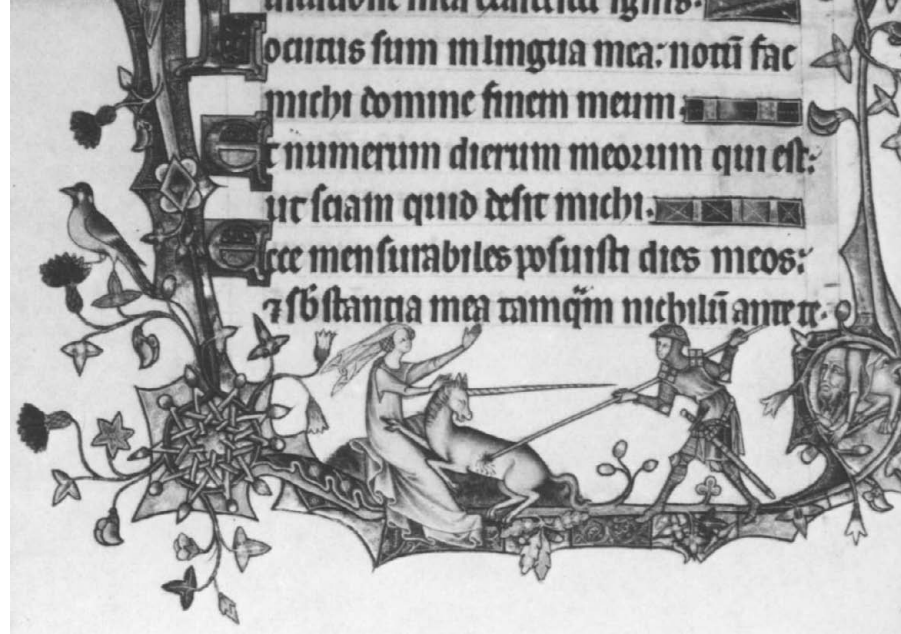
Miniature in *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*. 13th c.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 24428, fol. 63^v

The hunter in a thirteenth-century illustration for the *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc* (40) is a sweetly gentle little man, and the enemies of Christ who conduct Him before Pilate are not villainous persecutors. This rather unsophisticated miniature is a rare example of the story of the unicorn combined with two symbolic meanings, the Incarnation and the Passion.

There is again violence in the capture pictured in the Ormesby Psalter of the early fourteenth century, but there is beauty, courtliness, and nobility too (41). The hunter, in chain mail, is a well-born knight; the maiden, with her netted hair, flying veil, and soft garments, is a lady to her fingertips; the unicorn, sleek of hide, with well-groomed mane and tail, is the “moult bèle” animal of the bestiary written for the Bishop of Beauvais. His horn, exceedingly long and spiraled, is sharper than a knight’s sword. He is very like the Cloisters’ unicorn, and almost as noble, spirited, and fierce.

A further variation on the theme occurs in an English bestiary dating from the thirteenth century (42). Here the maiden is nude, and she appears to invite the hunter to draw near. He is a warrior in chain mail, carrying a buckler, thus attesting to the dangerous fierceness of the unicorn as related in the texts. At this moment, however, the unicorn may be safely approached, for he is blissfully bewitched and rendered harmless by the maiden. His horn is like the narwhal’s tusk, straight, sharp, and spiraled. The worldly implications of the scene are obvious.

Less suggestive of earthly love, surprisingly enough, is the illustration of the virgin capture in an early fourteenth-century manuscript of Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’Amour* (43). According to the text the hunter in this bestiary symbolizes Love, the lady, the loved one, the



41

Marginal decoration, Ormesby Psalter. East Anglia, early 14th c.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 366, fol. 55^v

42

Miniature in English bestiary. 13th c.

British Museum, Roy. 12 F. XIII, fol. 10^v (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

43

Miniature in *Bestiaire d’Amour*, by Richard de Fournival. Early 14th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 25566, fol. 88^v





44

Ivory coffret (end). French, 14th c.

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery

unicorn, the lover who was beguiled. The lady is fully clothed and pretty, the hunter gentle, the unicorn surprised and somewhat annoyed as, wounded, he turns to face "Love, the skillful huntsman," who had set such a sweet maiden in his path.

From the fourteenth century on, the love symbolism of the maiden and the unicorn becomes increasingly important. Several ivory jewel boxes, carved in France in the fourteenth century, include the capture of the unicorn along with scenes of love and romance, of Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, Sir Galahad, and others. On the lid of one of the finest of these, setting the theme, knights are making an assault on the Castle of Love with roses as ammunition. On the left end, the unicorn capture is paired with the tryst of Tristan and Iseult, the lovers perceiving the reflection of King Mark in a pool and being warned thereby to speak of uncompromising things (44).⁹ Since the principal theme of the casket is worldly love, it may be assumed that the symbolism of the unicorn is that of Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amour*, where the unicorn is the lover and the damsel his "beautiful sweet beloved." The lady of the ivory is fair indeed, with delicate features and curling locks. She gently caresses the unicorn and holds what is evidently a mirror. The "mirror without blemish" was one



45

Enamel. French, 14th c.

Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum



46, 47

Minnekästchen (left end and back).

Swiss, 15th c. Upper Rhine or

Zurich, Landesmuseum



of the symbols of the Virgin Mary; it was also a symbol of fidelity in human love. In *Le Romans de la Dame a la Lycone et du Biau Chevalier au Lyon* the poet-knight likens his beloved to a "mirror . . . clear, shining, unsullied," in which he could see himself and also the love of his lady.¹⁰ The huntsman on the jewel box, symbolizing Love, drives his spear completely through the body of the unicorn-lover, thus dispatching him, in the words of Fournival, "to the death to which [he] was doomed."

The juxtaposition on this box and others of the Tristan and Iseult scene and that of the unicorn capture may have been intended to put in opposition unlawful love and lawful love for a chaste maiden, or it may have been intended simply to show two aspects of the power of woman. Since these exquisite coffrets were probably made as gifts to betrothed maidens or to wives, they were undoubtedly designed to please and flatter the ladies.

A French enamel of the fourteenth century also interprets the unicorn-capture as an allegory of love (45). Here, in accordance with Fournival's text, the unicorn-lover "kneels humbly" before the "sweet virgin girl." She holds a mirror in one hand and touches the magic horn with the other. A description of this enamel (or a similar one) in the inventory (about 1379–80) of Louis I of Anjou leaves no doubt about the mirror: "a silver cup gilded . . . and inside the cover a round enamel . . . on which is a woman holding a mirror and a unicorn before her, and in a tree . . . a man who kills the said unicorn." The hunter is in a tree probably not because he fears for his safety, but because he is supposed to represent the God of Love, who, in fourteenth-century ivories and manuscripts, regularly shoots his darts on lovers from trees or turrets. This same silver cup, it is worth noting, had at the bottom, in blue enamel, a scene of Tristan and Iseult.¹¹

In the fifteenth century dogs were added to the unicorn capture, introducing a more realistic aspect to the theme of the hunt. Such a scene is carved on two sides of a Swiss Minnekästchen, or love casket (46, 47). The huntsman, with a spear over his shoulder and a baying dog on leash, pursues his quarry. Two of his hounds have outstripped him, and one has already reached the unicorn, who is tamed by a full-bosomed maid. Here are all of the elements and much of the excitement of an actual medieval hunt, such as was realized a few decades later in the Cloisters' tapestries. Since this unicorn hunt was selected as a subject for a love casket, it may be assumed that it was meant to convey a message of love. However, it is difficult to tell whether it is the unicorn who symbolizes the lover, as in Fournival and



48, 49

Minnekästchen (back and front). Middle Rhenish, 15th c.

Paris, Musée de Cluny

in fourteenth-century French ivories and enamels, or whether it is the hunter who plays this role.

A Middle Rhenish Minnekästchen helps to clarify this new love symbolism. On the back of this coffret a stylishly hatted and gowned hunter blows his horn while his hounds chase a unicorn into the woods (48). A banderole issuing from the hunter bears the words "ich jaghe in trouwen" ("I hunt in faithfulness"). The unicorn turns his head to say "dat en sal u. nit rouwen" ("that you shall not rue"). The hunter reappears on the lid of the box, this time as the lover with his lady, who pointedly holds up a ring. The pair are shown again on the front (49). Here the maiden is binding her lover



50

Tapestry. Swiss,
end of 15th c.

Zurich, Landesmuseum

with a chain and hammering the fastening bolt into a heavy block. On this *Minnekästchen* the hunter is indeed the lover. In hunting the unicorn he apparently signifies that he will be faithful; in permitting himself to be securely chained, he indicates his willingness to submit to a permanent attachment. Like the ivory box (44), this *Minnekästchen* was designed to please a lady. A chain is also important in the last of the Cloisters' tapestries, where it is the unicorn who is the lover.

In a late medieval Swiss tapestry in Zurich the theme of the hunt is further developed (50). Here the huntsman-lover, coiffured and costumed like a dandy, pauses on one side of a narrow stream and faces a plump-cheeked, big-eyed maiden, comfortably seated among flowers on the other side, a unicorn at her feet. Two other hunters, less elegantly clad, hide behind rocks and watch their leader apprehensively. The dogs seem reluctant to leap the stream and encounter the unicorn, who is small but fierce. The inscriptions are difficult to decipher but the lady seems to say, as she points an admonishing finger: "He who hunts for sensual pleasure will find grief for himself and his path." But the huntsman insists: "I hunt for faithfulness; if I should find it I would never have a better time in all my life." The

inscription above the two cowardly companions indicates that this hunt is dangerous: "Here we risk our lives that God . . . has given us."

It is possible that one of the hunters in the Cloisters' tapestries is also intended to be the lover or bridegroom. In the first tapestry it may be the gentleman in the center of the group of three who appears to direct the proceedings. He wears a hat with a single ostrich feather, as does the young lord in the group to the right of the fountain in the second tapestry. This hunter, with his upraised hand, seems to order the hunt to stop until after the unicorn has purified the stream with his horn. In the third tapestry the suitor may be the scornful youth with plumed turban who gestures in an expansive, overdramatic manner, or he may be the more pleasant gentleman in the upper left who quietly but commandingly extends his left arm toward the action. If this be the huntsman-lover, it is a pity that the weavers neglected to put a feather in his hat. In the fourth tapestry a hunter with a plumed hat again appears. Standing apart, he seems to gaze in sorrow at the violent scene before him.

All of these suggestions are of course conjectures only. If the fifth tapestry, which once pictured the key

scene of the unicorn in the lap of the maiden, were complete, it might be possible to understand the whole scheme more clearly. As it is, the two fragments are not enough.

In the sixth tapestry it appears that the huntsman-suitor does not participate in the killing of the unicorn; he and the maiden seem to be the lord with his lady, receiving the dead unicorn at the entrance to the castle. It will be noted that the dress worn by the lady is of similar brocaded material and of the same color as the bit of sleeve still to be seen on the arm of the maiden who embraces the unicorn in the fragment of the fifth tapestry.

If one of the hunters in the Cloisters' set is indeed the suitor, as in the Zurich tapestry, then he has the benefit of consultation with two or three of his peers, and the assistance of a number of more active, less timorous hirelings. It must be admitted that if the suitor is personified by the hunter, the role of the unicorn is not entirely clear, especially since, in the last tapestry, the unicorn himself is the bridegroom entrapped and chained to a tree. Perhaps in the hunting scenes, as in the Minnekästchen and the Zurich tapestry, the unicorn symbolizes fidelity in marriage. In any case, it is

apparent that the designer of the tapestries, and presumably the nobleman who commissioned them, cared little about consistency of ideas as long as there were numerous ideas present to beguile the observer, and fascinating details to delight the eye. Such a mixture of themes was not unusual in the Middle Ages, as those who have studied the period well know.

It was pointed out in the first chapter that another one of the ideas pictorially expressed in the tapestries is the centuries-old belief that the coming of the unicorn to the maiden is an allegory of the coming of Christ to the Virgin Mary. This theme received its ultimate interpretation in works of art in the late Middle Ages. Typical of the new development in the religious sphere is the scene on a fifteenth-century tapestry altar frontal in Gelnhausen (51). Here the hunter, with spear, horn, and hounds, personifies the angel Gabriel, greeting the Virgin Mary with the words, "Hail, Mary, full

51

Tapestry altar frontal (detail). Middle Rhenish, about 1500. The faces have been retouched. Part of the Nativity scene is at the right

Gelnhausen, Marienkirche



52

Allegory of the Annunciation. German, about 1420
Erfurt, Cathedral

of grace, the Lord is with thee." The Virgin sits in her hortus conclusus, or "garden enclosed," of the Song of Songs. The unicorn, symbol of Christ, comes to her eagerly, with devotion in his eyes, and she grasps his horn, "the horn of salvation." This mystic hunt is the first in a series of scenes of the life of Christ in the Gelnhausen tapestry, and it replaces the traditional representation of the Annunciation. It has already been noted that one of the huntsmen in the fourth Cloisters' tapestry represents the angel Gabriel. He has no wings, but as he blows his horn his attitude is conspicuously like that of the Gabriel in the Gelnhausen tapestry and in many other tapestries, paintings, prints, and miniatures of the period. Another parallel exists between the Virgin of the Gelnhausen tapestry and the maiden of the Cloisters' fragment: both are seated in gardens enclosed.

A German painting in the cathedral of Erfurt, dated about 1420, presents an elaborate interpretation of the unicorn capture as an allegory of the Annunciation (52). Here again the hunter blowing his horn is the



angel Gabriel, and he is so labeled in Gothic letters on his cloak. One of his dogs is named "Fides Spes," the other "Caritas"; thus the two stand for Faith, Hope, and Charity, the three theological virtues described by Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 13). The richly clothed Ma-



donna, with a large halo, sits in her garden enclosed, holding the unicorn in her lap. He is a most fantastic but resplendent being, fashioned entirely of shining gold, with mane and tail like darting flames. The artist who interpreted him thus probably intended, in a naïve way, to suggest the glory and mystery of the Incarnation. The sacred event takes place before an audience of admiring saints, with an orchestra and choir of angels providing the music. Worldly figures, probably donors, in the lower corners of the painting are privileged witnesses to the mystery. The lady kneeling in the right corner carries a banderole bearing the inscription "Ave Regina C[on]celorum," the words that appear on the scabbard of the Gabriel-huntsman of the fourth Cloisters' tapestry. The unicorn wears a collar, as he does in the Cloisters' Unicorn in Captivity.

The religious symbolism of the unicorn hunt is developed still further in a Swiss tapestry altar frontal of about 1480 (53). Here, along with the familiar figures, are Adam and Eve. It is Adam who pierces the unicorn, saying, "But he is wounded because of our sins." Eve catches the blood in a chalice, saying, "And by his blood we are saved." The hunt in this tapestry thus expresses in allegory the whole drama of the fall of man and his redemption by the coming of Christ to earth and his suffering on the cross. The names of Gabriel's hounds, "Truth," "Justice," "Peace," and "Mercy,"

probably derive from the thirteenth-century *Meditations* of Pseudo-Bonaventura and from medieval mystery plays in which, as a prelude to the Annunciation, these four virtues, personified, search for a sinless man who is willing to die to save mankind; when they have no success, Christ offers to be that man. The tapestry is crowded with symbols and attributes of the Virgin Mary, such as Gideon's fleece, the burning bush, the garden enclosed, the fountain sealed, and the flowering rod of Aaron. There are also two symbols of the Resurrection: the pelican reviving her young and the lion roaring at his cubs to bring them to life. As noted in Chapter One, the Cloisters' tapestries in their religious aspect may also be interpreted as an allegory of the Redemption.

During the fifteenth century many representations of the unicorn with the maiden omitted all details of the hunt that are so important in the examples just discussed. In this way they recall the illustrations in early manuscripts of the *Physiologus*, but they frequently have more varied meanings.

53

Tapestry altar frontal. Swiss, about 1480
Zurich, Landesmuseum





54

Painting on cassone. Florentine, 15th c.

Formerly in Paris (photo: van Marle, *Iconographie de l'Art Profane*, II [The Hague, 1932], p. 443, fig. 474)

There is marriage symbolism in a painted panel that once adorned an Italian marriage chest, or cassone (54). The lady, in a rich gown with brocaded sleeves and a jeweled headdress, sits on the ground outside a dwelling and gently combs the mane of an enraptured unicorn. The cord knotted around his neck and tied to a tree indicates that he is indeed caught and tamed.

A Florentine print of about 1465–80 also interprets the scene in terms of a marriage (55). Here a lovely Italian maiden, “Marietta,” while caressing a handsome Italian unicorn, is preparing to fasten a buckled collar about his neck. To the collar is attached a chain that, in turn, is tied to a tree. The unicorn, already in a state of blissful submission, will soon be tethered like the unicorn in the last of the Cloisters’ tapestries.

A different meaning is apparent on Pisanello’s medal for Cecilia Gonzaga (15). In a desolate, boulder-strewn landscape, the maiden, partially nude, gazes pensively into the distance, paying little heed to the unicorn except to touch his horn. The goatlike unicorn is meditative also. In the night sky above, the crescent moon of Diana, the chaste goddess, presides over this quiet scene. On the obverse of the medal is a profile portrait of Cecilia and an inscription that begins with the words *CICILIA VIRGO*. Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua took the veil

in 1444 when she was very young; her medal thus commemorates her permanent virginity. Pisanello has interpreted her renunciation as beautiful and rather sad.

Still another meaning is suggested in the unicorn’s association with a “wild woman” (13). More or less the equivalent of the satyr in the classic era, the wild man of medieval literature generally symbolized the more bestial human qualities, yet at times he is described as leading an idyllic life in the forest, free from civilization’s “cunning and unfaithfulness,” finding “company and pleasure . . . in the wild animals of the woods.”¹² In many Swiss and German prints, tapestries, and Minnekästchen wild men and women are on such good terms with unicorns that they ride on their backs as if they were ordinary steeds. The relationship in certain respects seems natural, for unicorns are also wild and live in the deep woods. In the Basle tapestry the lady’s golden hair is long and luxuriant, and her curvaceous body is covered with indigo fur except for her breasts, hands, and feet. Although the composition is modeled after the familiar one of the capture of the unicorn by the virgin, the usual symbolic significance does not seem applicable, for the lady says: “I have spent my time in a worldly way, now I must live in misery here.” If the tapestry were complete, the meaning might be clearer. In any case it is of interest that the unicorn does

55

Engraving, “Marietta.” Florentine, about 1465–80

British Museum (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)





56

Border miniatures in Wharncliffe Book of Hours, by Maître François, about 1470

Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, Ms. 1062

not disdain being fondled by a lady who has spent her time "in a worldly way."

The taming of the unicorn by the maiden is represented, along with related scenes, in the border of the Wharncliffe Book of Hours, a French manuscript dated about 1470. Here the damsel holds a mirror as in the fourteenth-century ivories and enamels, but no hunter is present to kill (56). The unicorn, very much alive, gazes at himself in the mirror with apparent interest. Above, on the same leaf, a vignette of lovers charmingly echoes the unicorn composition. These are not nameless lovers, however, but Samson in the lap of Delilah, who grasps Samson's long hair and is about to shear it off. The two scenes were paralleled more than once in the Middle Ages, sometimes accompanied by Aristotle and Campaspe, and by other couples whose stories demonstrate the power of beautiful women over men whom they have enraptured. To the right of the unicorn and maiden two couples dance to the music of a fool, who, like the God of Love, is perched in a tree. It may be noted that the maiden's arm and her hand on the unicorn's mane are placed in a position similar to the arm and hand of the maiden who once graced the fifth Cloisters' tapestry.

One of the unicorn tapestries in the Cluny Museum (75) may give an idea of the original composition of the group now lost from the Cloisters' set. As in the Wharncliffe Hours, the position of the arm and hand is like that of the maiden in the Cloisters' fragment. The

dress in both tapestries is elegantly brocaded, and the angle of the unicorn's head and his horn is about the same. The Cluny tapestry illustrates the sense of Sight, and this is the main reason why the lady holds a mirror before the unicorn, who regards his reflection with obvious pleasure. But as noted earlier, the "mirror without blemish" was a symbol of the Virgin Mary, and in the words of the poet of *Le Romans de la Dame a la Lycorne*, a "clear, shining, unsullied" mirror symbolized the fidelity of his loved one. In all probability this tapestry was intended to have a wider meaning than the simple expression of the sense of Sight.

The power of the unicorn to absorb poison with his horn was emphasized in a tapestry woven for Charles de Bourbon, cardinal and archbishop of Lyons, who died in 1488. The tapestry no longer exists, but its design is preserved in a water-color drawing made of it for Roger de Gaignières, who wished to record for the future the important monuments of France. Here the lady, wearing a richly brocaded gown and a hennin, fondles a small white unicorn and, significantly, touches his horn (57). Three scrolls are inscribed *Venera pello*

57

Drawing made for Roger de Gaignières (1642–1715) of tapestry woven for Charles de Bourbon

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Pc. 18, fol. 15





58

Woodcut in book of hours. Lyons, 1499

Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund

59

Minnekästchen. German or Swiss, 15th c.

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund



("I drive out poisons"). The many-flowered ground and the circular enclosure recall the fenced-in garden of the captive unicorn in the seventh Cloisters' tapestry. There is no suggestion of a hunt here: the little dog resting on his cushion is merely the lady's pet.

The unicorn purifies the water

The theme of the unicorn dipping his horn into a stream to rid it of poison, so magnificently illustrated in the second Cloisters' tapestry, does not appear in art until the late Middle Ages, and even then not often. The miniature in the fifteenth-century *Life of Saint Benedict* (16) shows the unicorn purifying a turbulent river in a desert landscape. Only wild beasts are present, including, as in the Cloisters' tapestry, a lion, a leopard, and a stag; they all watch and wait until the unicorn has performed his magic deed. The fierce dragon-serpent who

had poisoned the waters hides in a hole in the ground.

Two incidents are told of attempts to take the life of Saint Benedict by poison. Once, according to Voragine, his enemies "gave him venom meddled with wine for to drink, but Saint Benedict made the sign of the cross over it and blessed it, and anon the vessel brake in pieces." On another occasion a priest who envied Saint Benedict "sent him a loaf of bread envenomed," but the saint gave the bread to his pet raven and "commanded him to bear it unto such a place that no man should find it."¹³ These incidents involving poison may have been reason enough for the illuminator of the manuscript to illustrate the poison-repelling power of the unicorn. It may also be noted that the manuscript was produced in a monastery dedicated to the chaste Saint Justina, whose attribute was a unicorn.

A tiny woodcut illustration of the water purification appears in the border decoration of a book of hours printed in Lyons in 1499 (58). Here, too, only animals are gathered at the stream, but humans are not far

away, for castles crown the hills. As the unicorn dips his horn and the beasts prepare to drink, a snake in the foreground scuttles away, his venom rendered harmless. The printer of this book apparently admired the motif greatly, for he repeated this cut more than a dozen times, in each case with religious scenes adjoining it.

An unusual representation of the water purification is carved on a Minnekästchen at The Cloisters (59). On this love casket it is a maiden who watches as the unicorn dips his horn. She holds before him, not a mirror,

but what appears to be a circlet of flowers. The stream being purified flows from a troughlike fountain, as does the stream from a much more elaborate fountain in the second Cloisters' tapestry. It may be surmised that the scene on the Minnekästchen is intended to point out the need for purity and fidelity in love.

The unicorn plays a small but possibly significant role in a print, probably Burgundian, of about 1450 (60). The scene is a Garden of Love. A man offers his lady a goblet of wine, other young couples play cards, make music, or discreetly caress. Through the landscape of woods, meadows, and fairy-tale castles, a pleasant brook winds its way; bottles of wine are cooling in the water, and, at the far right, a unicorn dips his horn. Whether or not the designer of this print intended the unicorn to have symbolic meaning, he at least evidently believed that the unicorn purifying the

60

Engraving, Garden of Love. Probably Burgundian, 15th c.

(Photo: Max Lehrs, *Geschichte und Katalog des Kupferstichs im XV Jahrhundert*, I [Vienna, 1908], p. 324, no. 102, pl. 40)





61

Border decoration, book of hours. Norman French, 15th c.

Aix-en-Provence, Bibliothèque Mejanès, Ms. 22, fol. 329

stream was an appropriate motif for a Garden of Love.

In the border of a Norman-French book of hours of the fifteenth century the unicorn is strangely associated with the classic myth of the Judgment of Paris (61). While Paris sleeps on the ground and three almost nude goddesses approach, a unicorn dips his horn into a pool beside an ornate fountain. The juxtaposition is unusual but not unique. A bronze medallion formerly in the Spitzer collection¹⁴ shows on one side the Judgment of Paris and on the other the hunt of the unicorn, with the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel. The intention may have been to place in opposition pagan and Christian love.

The unicorn dips his horn into a quiet pond on the left wing of an early sixteenth-century altarpiece by Jerome Bosch. The setting is the Garden of Eden. God the Father is presenting Eve to Adam, who gazes in awe at the beauty of his golden-haired mate (62). Above them a fantastic salmon pink fountain spouts thin streams of water into a sky blue pool. A white unicorn purifies the water at the left; at the right, poisonous, evil creatures scurry out of the pool rendered harmless by the unicorn's action.

The Cloisters' tapestry of the water purification has certain elements in common with the examples discussed here, and it may also have similar religious and secular symbolism. What makes it different is mainly the crowd of hunters who, in search of the unicorn, have suddenly come upon their quarry in this act of compassion, in a scene of quiet beauty. Happily, the hunters do not take advantage of the kneeling unicorn; instead, they wait apart until he has finished dipping his horn. Perhaps one of them will later say, as did Johannes of Hese, "This I have seen myself."



62

Altarpiece by Jerome Bosch (detail, left wing). Early 16th c.

Madrid, Museo del Prado



63

Tapestry (detail), Chastity versus Lust. German, 15th c.
Regensburg, Rathaus



64

Painting, Chastity, probably from a cassone. Italian, 15th c.

Mainz, Mittelrheinisches Landesmuseum

The unicorn and chastity

The virtue named Chastity is frequently shown with a unicorn as one of her emblems. In a fifteenth-century German tapestry illustrating the war between the Virtues and the Vices, Chastity bears on her banner the device of a unicorn in the lap of a maiden (63). She appears rather formidable as she confronts her adversary, Lust, an even more formidable woman, mounted on a bear.

The Chastity of a small Italian tondo of the fifteenth century (64) is enthroned with the pagan goddess Diana, the chaste huntress, at her side. Close by, a maiden guards a noble white unicorn with luxuriant mane, grasping the magic horn possessively. This painting probably once decorated a cassone or marriage chest.

In representations of the Triumph of Chastity, unicorns regularly draw the victory chariot. The theme, very popular in the late Middle Ages, was inspired by Francesco Petrarch's *Trionfi*, an allegorical work treating in turn of the Triumph of Love, then of Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and finally, Divinity. The first two Triumphs were written about 1340–44 as a two-part poem, complete in itself, to honor the chaste Laura, whom the poet loved from afar. In a fifteenth-century

Florentine miniature illustrating the poem, Chastity, a charming lass, stands proudly in her triumphal chariot, pulled forward slowly and steadily by a matched team of docile unicorns (65).

65

Miniature in *Trionfi* of Petrarch, the Triumph of Chastity. Florentine, mid-15th c.

Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Fonds Strozzi Ms. 174, fol. 28b





66

Cassone painting, the Triumph of Chastity (detail).
Attributed to Pesellino (1422–57)

Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

In a painting that once adorned a cassone (66), Chastity, palm branch in hand, seems to fulfill Petrarch's description of her:

Her weapons [were] none save purity of heart,
Beauty of countenance and modest thought,
And converse ever virtuous and wise.¹⁵

She is comfortably seated, and her chariot is drawn toward the observer by two handsome brown unicorns with lionlike manes.

In a fifteenth-century Italian manuscript of the *Trionfi* the role of the unicorn in relation to Chastity is greatly expanded (67). A team of unicorns not only draws her chariot but, as she passes by, another unicorn dips his horn into a stream to purify it, and on a hillside a fourth unicorn, pursued by hounds, is tamed by a virgin maid. In the background the goddess Venus rides a dolphin, her sail billowing in the wind.

Piero della Francesca borrowed the theme of the Triumph of Chastity to extol the virtues of a real person, Battista Sforza, Duchess of Urbino. On the reverse of her portrait he painted the duchess seated on a chariot drawn by two stalwart, purposeful unicorns, marching in perfect step (68). Two ladies occupy the forefront of the chariot; the one with cross and chalice probably symbolizes Faith; the other, holding a pelican that

pecks her breast so that the blood will revive her young, probably signifies the duchess' charity. A cupid perched on a pedestal resembling a horn of plenty symbolizes Love; he is directing the team of unicorns who, of course, testify to Battista Sforza's chastity.

The association of the unicorn with chastity was close, and so, when a damsel is accompanied by a unicorn, as on a German Minnekästchen of the early fifteenth century (69), it probably indicates that she is chaste; the lion near the lover at the other end of the garden enclosed suggests that he is brave.

Unicorn and lion again appear with a young couple on the back of a French marriage coffret of silver, partially gilded (70). The man and his lady clasp hands while a unicorn observes them with interest and a

67

Miniature in *Trionfi* of Petrarch, the Triumph of Chastity. Italian, 15th c.

Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Ms. It. 103, fol. 22^v

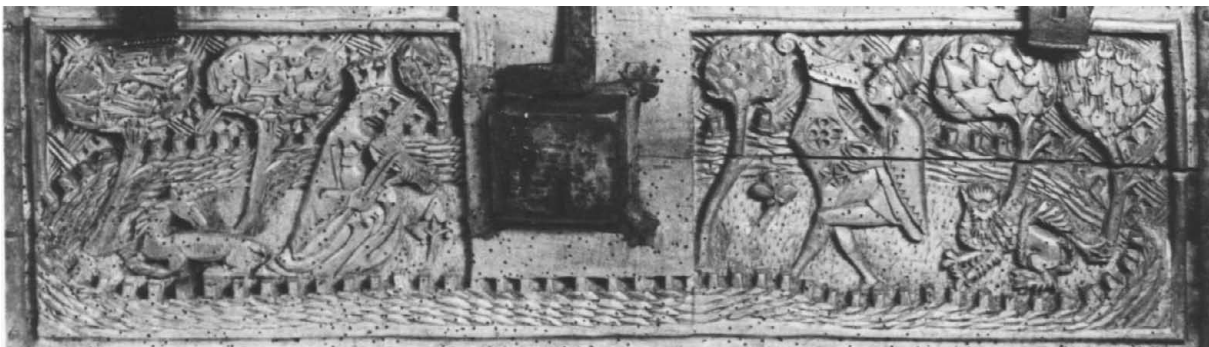




68

The Triumph of the Duchess of Urbino (detail). By
Piero della Francesca (1410/20–92)

Florence, Uffizi Gallery



69

Minnekästchen (front). German, first third of 15th c.

Villingen, Städtische Sammlung

70

Marriage coffret. French, 15th c.

Brittany, Church of St. Avé (Archives Photographiques, Paris)





71

Border illumination, Bible of Borso d'Este.
Italian, 1455–62

Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Cod. cl. II, N. 132, fol. 233^v

crowned lion appears pleased. On one end of the coffret the man offers the lady his heart, on the other she offers him a coronet. The device “Amys” is engraved on the cover. On the front of the coffret is an Annunciation scene, indicating the hope of the bride and groom for progeny.¹⁶

In a set of tapestries intended for a marriage, as the Cloisters’ tapestries may have been, the unicorn as an emblem of chastity would have been an obviously appropriate subject. If the tapestries were made for an anniversary to celebrate the years of matrimonial fidelity, the emblem would have been equally appropriate.

The unicorn in heraldry

The unicorn as an emblem of chastity is usually associated with ladies. As a heraldic device he is sometimes adopted by gentlemen, for he possessed the qualities of an ideal medieval knight. He could fight fiercely and courageously against his foes, and win; he could show compassion toward his fellow creatures; and he could submit completely to his lady as was required by the laws of courtly love. Borso d’Este (1413–71), duke of Modena, Reggio, and Ferrara, chose as his device the

72

Border miniature, *La Guerre Judaïque*.
French, last quarter of 15th c.

Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. fr. 1061, fol. 155 (photo: Giraudon)



73

King James in Prayer, Book of Hours of King James IV of Scotland. Flemish, about 1505

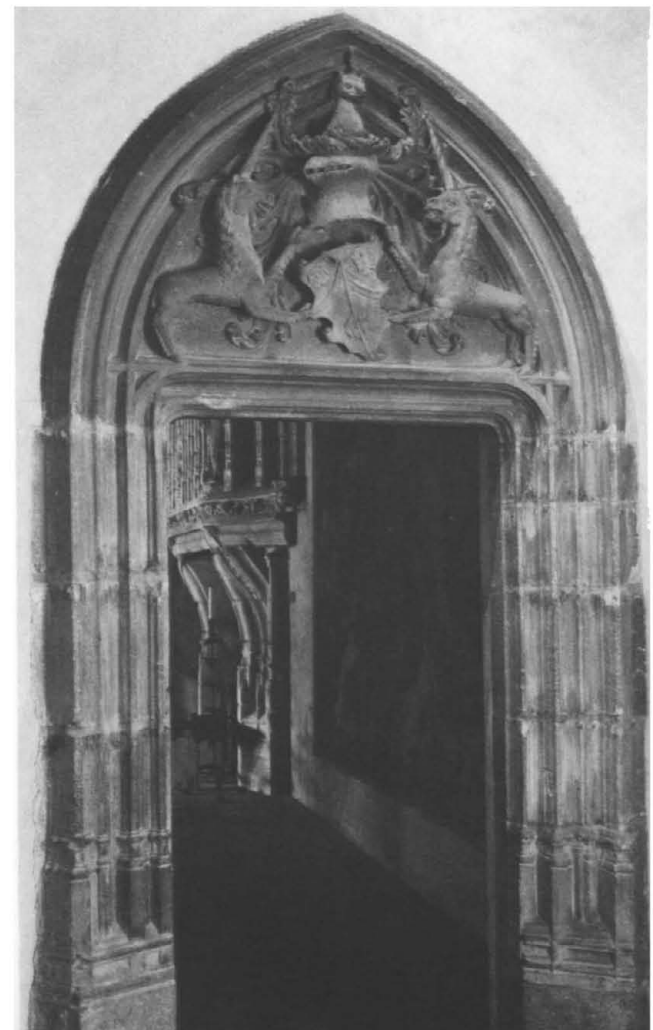
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 1897, fol. 24^v

unicorn dipping his horn to purify the waters. It may have been that the poison-repelling ability of the unicorn presented a special appeal to this duke of Italy, where poisoning was a fine art and a prevalent danger. The device appears on Borso's medal and on several of the manuscripts executed for him, notably a Bible illuminated by Taddeo Crivelli. In this, the Este coat of arms is represented with a winged sea leopard and a rather angry white unicorn forcefully thrusting his horn into a flowing stream (71).

A more tranquil unicorn appears as the emblem of Antoine de Chources in a late fifteenth-century manuscript of *La Guerre Judaïque* in Chantilly. Conspicuously placed in the lower margin, a truly aristocratic unicorn rests atop a grassy hillock (72). About his neck he wears a princely crown. The coat of arms and the intertwined initials are for Antoine and his wife, Katherine de Coëtivy, the granddaughter of King Charles VII of France and his mistress Agnes Sorel. At least four other manuscripts in Chantilly and one in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal in Paris include a similar unicorn along with the arms of Katherine and Antoine.

The unicorn is the sole supporter of the coat of arms on gold coins of James III of Scotland, about 1480. On these the unicorn is represented with a crown around his neck to which a chain is attached; the Latin motto, borrowed from a liturgical text, may be translated as: "God rises up and enemies are dispersed." A Flemish book of hours made for James IV about 1505 shows on one of its pages two unicorns supporting the royal arms. They appear to be embroidered on the altar frontal in the chapel where the king kneels in prayer (73). The motto in English above their heads reads "In my defense." The unicorn was taken over as one of the supporters of the royal arms of England when the Scottish king James VI became the English king James I in 1603.

Three unicorns are carved on an early sixteenth-century French doorway from Montferrand at The Cloisters. Two of them support an unidentified coat of arms, the third forms the crest of the great helm (74). The



74

Doorway from Montferrand
French, early 16th c.

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund



75 Sight

Tapestries: The Lady with the Unicorn.
About 1500
Paris, Musée de Cluny



76 Hearing

dwelling from which this doorway came was known to the citizens of the town as the House of the Unicorns.

The most famous of heraldic unicorns are those in the Cluny Museum's *Lady with the Unicorn* tapestries. In all of these except the one representing Sight (75) the unicorn's role is to support the banner or shield of the Le Viste family, for whom, presumably the set was woven. A lion is similarly employed opposite the unicorn. Between the beasts is a richly garbed lady, sometimes accompanied by her handmaiden. Five of the tapestries are believed to be allegories of the senses. In the one representing Hearing (76), the lady plays a

portable organ, and the unicorn, while grasping the staff of a pennant bearing the coat of arms, turns rather awkwardly to regard the lady and her companion. Atop the organ as ornaments are a golden lion and unicorn.

In the tapestry illustrating Taste (77), the unicorn supports the banner and also wears a flying cape embroidered with the coat of arms; powerful and proud, he turns his head with grace. The enchanting lady, with a parakeet on her fist, is about to sample sweetmeats offered by her servant. In the background to the left of the lady is a small animal that might be a young unicorn before his horn has developed.

77 Taste

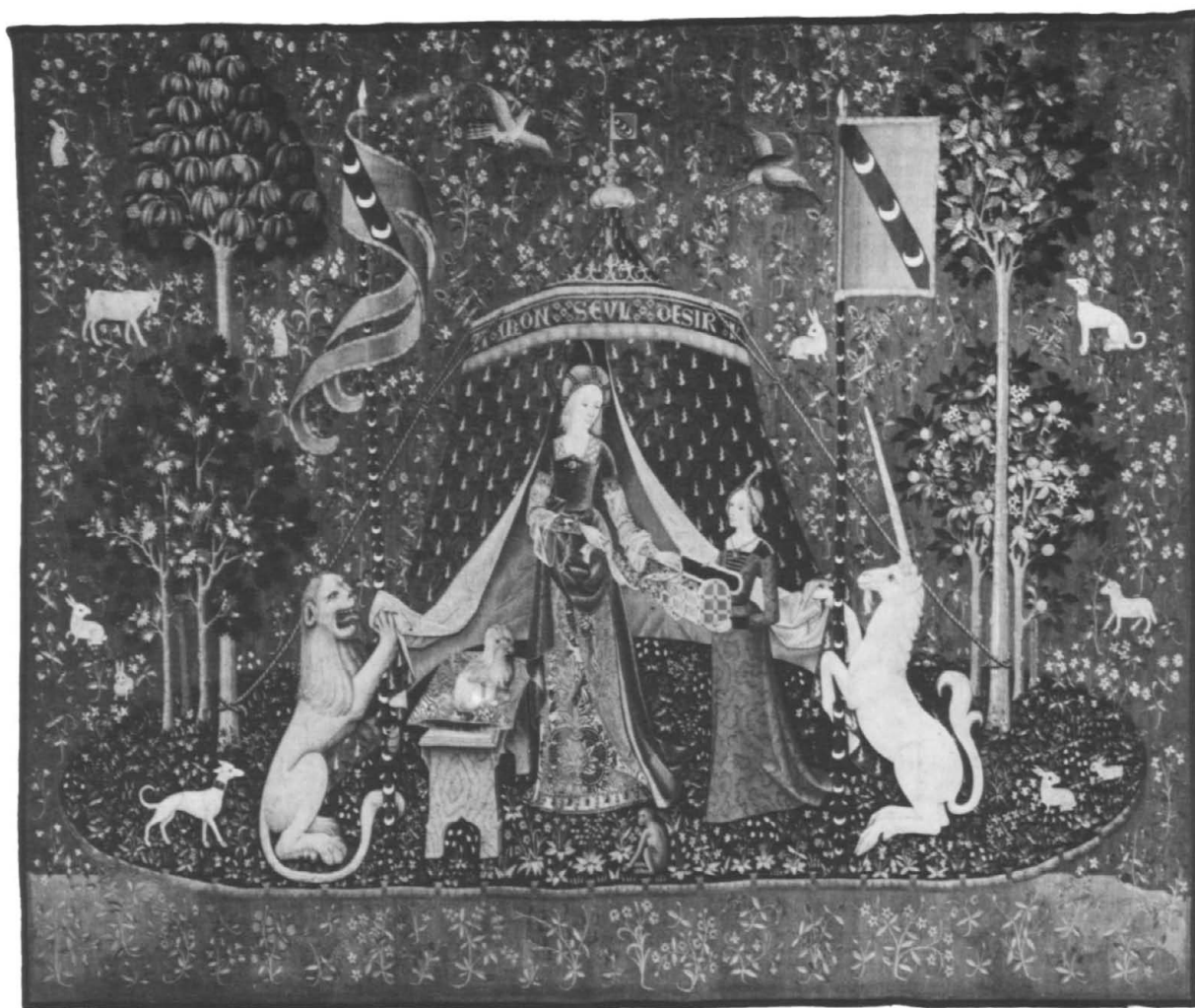




78 Smell

79 Touch





80 "A Mon Seul Desir"

The tapestry representing Smell (78) shows the unicorn in handsome profile, again supporting the banner and wearing a shield with the coat of arms strapped about his neck. The lady is making a fillet of carnations, those flowers so sweet and spicy to smell.

In the tapestry of Touch (79) the lady herself supports the banner while she touches the unicorn's horn. This unicorn, who again bears the shield, is a rather meek animal with no mane but with strange growths of hair.

In the tapestry inscribed "A Mon Seul Desir" (80) the unicorn and lion, supporting the banner and pennant with the Le Viste arms, draw aside the rich fabric

of a tent to disclose the lady inspecting her jewels. The meaning of this tapestry in relation to the others has not yet been satisfactorily explained. It may be that the set was commissioned for a marriage.¹⁷ The jewel box with its contents in this tapestry is perhaps a wedding present from the bridegroom to his bride, and the inscription an expression of his desire for the lady of his choice.

The lion and the unicorn as a pair have already been seen on a German Minnekästchen (69) and a French marriage coffret (70), the lion symbolizing the strength and courage of the man and the unicorn the chastity of the lady.

3

THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS OF THE TAPESTRIES

But he [Guillaume] betakes himself to speak aloud,
For in this book he teaches us
The natures of beasts and their ways,
Not of all but of a good many,
In which will be much moral teaching
And a good share of theology.
By this may a man example take
To do well and to learn well.

Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc, 13th century¹

The unicorn is the hero of the Cloisters' tapestries, but other animals and birds play significant roles in the story and the symbolism of this hunt. All of them, unlike the unicorn, are real, though obviously not all were familiar to the artist who designed the tapestries. Many of them are included in the bestiaries, where their habits are described with little regard for the true facts but a great deal of concern for "much moral teaching."

In the second tapestry

Gathered at the stream where the unicorn dips his horn are a lion and lioness (81), stag, panther, genet, and hyena. A rabbit sits near the fountain, and another, perhaps tired of waiting for the stream to be purified, retreats into its hiding place. A pair of pheasants perch on the fountain's rim, the male observing his reflection in the water. Two European goldfinches have flown to the edge of the fountain, and what is a probably a nightingale rests on a bush nearby. All of these creatures had symbolic meanings to the medieval mind.

The lion

The poet Philippe de Thaun wrote in his bestiary (about 1121): "The lion in many ways rules over many beasts, therefore is the lion king. . . . The lion signifies the son of St. Mary; he is king of all the people."²

The bestiaries further note three "natures" of the lion that make him a symbol of Christ. According to Bishop Theobald (probably eleventh century) and his medieval commentator:

The first characteristic is that he dwells in the highest mountains . . . and however long the way may be for him, he descends . . . to the valley, and if by chance he should perceive a hunter, at once with his tail he rubs out the marks of his feet lest by them, the hunter should find his den. . . . As the lion dwells on the high mountain, so Christ, the spiritual lion dwells in the highest heaven. . . . And as the lion when he comes down from the mountain wipes out with his tail

the marks of his feet . . . so Christ when He descended from heaven into the womb of the glorious Virgin Mary in order that He might redeem the human race by his Incarnation, hid himself so that not one of the Demons knew Christ to be the Son of God. . . .

The second characteristic of the lion is that he produces his offspring without life . . . until the third day of its birth, and then the father of the young thing . . . sends forth a great roar . . . and thus arouses it as if from sleep. . . . This second characteristic of the lion is thus compared to Christ . . . [who] himself lay dead in the sepulcher until the third day, and on the third day God the Father aroused him by such a voice as this: "Awake up my glory, awake lute and harp."³

The lion bringing to life his cubs, born dead, was a popular allegory of the Resurrection. Even some theologians accepted this strange "nature" of the lion as true. Honorius of Autun, in the twelfth century, made use of it in his sermon for Easter Sunday,⁴ and the great Peter Abelard (1079–1142) writes: "As the young of the lion, so Our Lord is risen . . . on the third day."⁵

The third characteristic of the lion, according to Bishop Theobald, is that "whenever he sleeps his eyelids never are closed." Theobald's commentator explains:

The lion is thus compared to Christ . . . for Christ never closes the eyes of his tender mercy, but always guards us as a watchful shepherd, lest the . . . Devil should carry off any one from His flock. The Psalmist saith . . . "Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."⁶

Guillaume le Clerc gives further meaning to this nature of the lion, saying that when Christ "was set upon the Cross . . . his human self suffered death . . . but then his divinity was awake. . . . Man can wound the human form without harming the divine nature."⁷

All three characteristics of the lion are pictured in the ninth-century *Physiologus* in Berne. One of these miniatures shows the lion crouching cozily in his snug

81

Second tapestry: the lion and lioness. Pimpernels blossom against the lioness' paws and at the lion's heels





82

Miniature in *Physiologus*. 9th c.

Berne, Burgerbibliothek, Codex 318, fol. 8

83

Page from *Physiologus*. 10th c.

Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Ms. 10066-77, fol. 140^v



84

Miniature in bestiary. English, about 1170

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 81, fol. 8



den, obviously asleep with his eyes wide open (82). The other two natures are illustrated on a leaf of the tenth-century *Physiologus* in Brussels (83). At the top left a mounted hunter, blowing his horn, gallops across the page while below him, the lion, looking pleased, nonchalantly wipes out the marks of his feet with his tail. The inscriptions leave no doubt about the interpretation of the scenes. One reads "hunter," the other, "the lion is covering his tracks with his tail." At the lower left, with his tail flying, the lion roars at his cub, who is successfully brought to life; a meek lioness watches the transformation with interest. At the upper right Jacob blesses his son Judah, whom he designated "a lion's whelp" (Genesis 49:9).

In the Morgan Library's English bestiary of about 1170 two powerful lions are energetically bringing their cubs to life, not by roaring at them, but by breathing on them and licking them (84). This method is described in a few of the books on beasts, and judging by the miniature it is highly effective.

The three natures are more naturalistically portrayed in a later manuscript, Queen Mary's Psalter of the early fourteenth century. In one scene the lion, completely relaxed, slumbers with his eyes open (85). In another (86) he bounds away from a hunter who has approached so closely that it seems pointless to disguise his presence by sweeping away his prints. In a third scene (87) the lion roars at his supine cub to bring him to life.

A page in the twelfth-century Bible from Floreffe gives visual expression to the Christian symbolism of the lion (88). At the top, the three Marys visit Christ's tomb, which is empty and guarded by angels; below, the three Marys meet the risen Christ; and at the bottom, the lion, wearing a halo, gazes at his whelps, whom he has wakened from the dead.

Several bestiaries mention other characteristics of the lion that are not specifically interpreted as symbolic of Christ. Lions are compassionate, according to a twelfth-century English bestiary in Cambridge, "for they spare the prostrate" and "allow such captives as

85, 86, 87

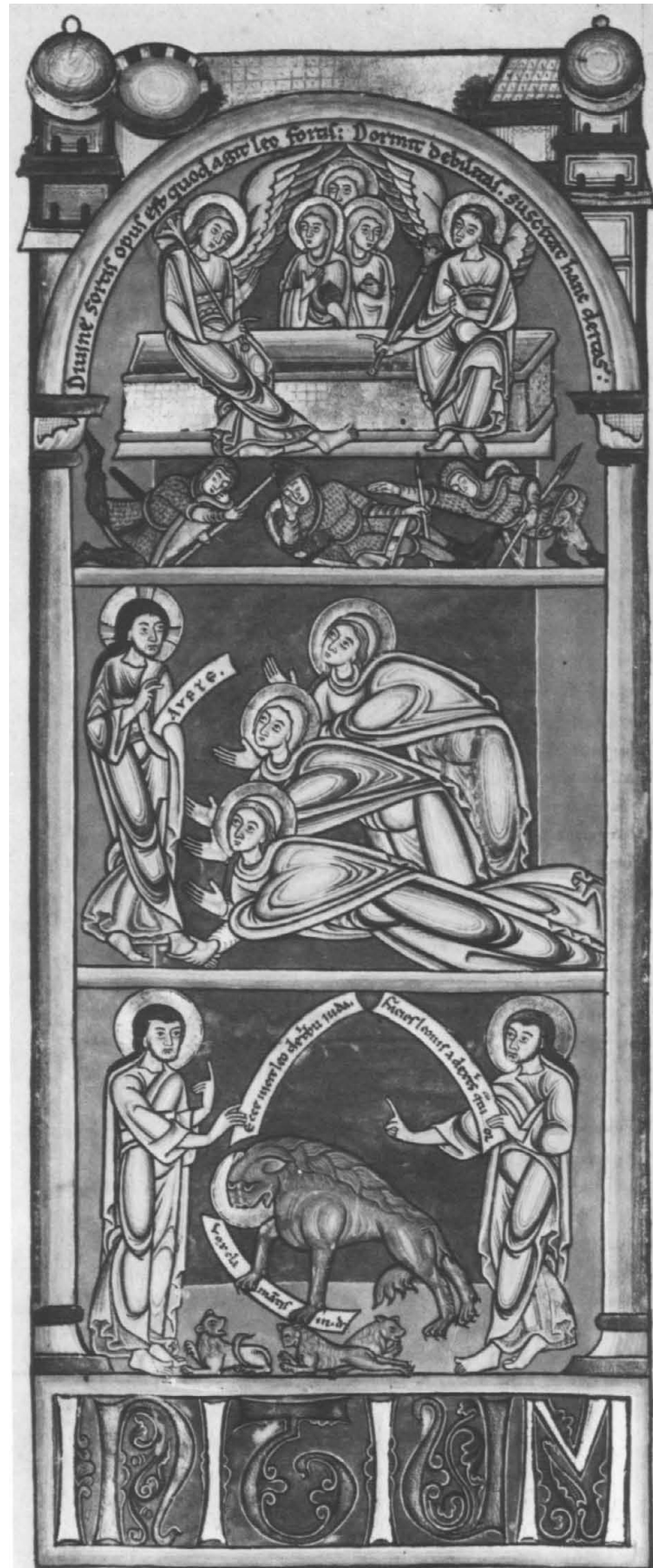
Drawings in Queen Mary's Psalter

British Museum, Royal Ms. 2B vii, fols. 86, 85^v, 86^v
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

88

Miniature in Bible from Floreffe. 12th c.

British Museum, Ms. Add. 17738, fol. 179^v (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)





89

Miniature (detail) in bestiary. English, 12th c.
Cambridge, University Library, Ms. li 4.26, fol. 12

they come across to go back to their own country.”⁸ The manuscript illustrates this admirable trait (89). Two men lie flat on the ground, one of them in supplication, while the lion regards them merely with interest. Released prisoners, with their meager possessions slung on staves, pass by unnoticed by the lion. This same bestiary and others note that the lion, though very brave, fears “the hunter’s spear,” “the creaking of

90

Miniature in Richard de Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’Amour*.
Early 14th c.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 25566, fol. 90^v



wheels,” and “the white cock.”⁹ And in the illustration the lion cowers, tail between his legs, before a supremely arrogant cock. Guillaume le Clerc admits he is astonished that the lion, “who is so bold, . . . is so afraid of a white cock.”¹⁰

Another characteristic of the lion is that, though he is monarch of all beasts, he is “harassed by the tiny sting of a scorpion, and snake poison kills him.”¹¹ Thus, there is good reason for the lion and lioness of the Cloisters’ tapestry to wait by the stream until the unicorn has rid it of poisons injected by the serpent.

It is also written in the Cambridge bestiary that the lions’ “courage is seated in their hearts, while their constancy is in their heads.” And it is further stated that the lion, “like the king he is, disdains to have a lot of different wives.”¹² It may not be by chance that the lion in the tapestry has his mate beside him. If it is true that the tapestries were woven for a marriage, the inclusion of the lioness may be intended to indicate that the bridegroom, like the lion, did not care to have “a lot of different wives.”

The lion is included in Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’Amour*. “It is well known,” says the author to his beloved, “that the lion revives his cubs, and it is well known how. For the lion is born dead, and the father roars over him for three days, and thus he comes back to life. And so it seems to me that if you want to recall me to your love you could easily revive me from such a death as one has died from love.”¹³ In the early fourteenth-century Fournival manuscript the lion “roars” gently at the cub who has “died from love” (90).

Konrad von Megenberg, in his fourteenth-century *Buch der Natur*, characterized the lion as an “animal that has nothing of infidelity about him or false cunning.”¹⁴

The lion was used by poets in other ways than as a symbol of love. Wolfram von Eschenbach (late twelfth to thirteenth century), in his *Parzival*, likens his hero and half-brother to two lion’s whelps because they were roused to life and activity by the roar of battle.¹⁵ And a wandering scholar in the thirteenth century admonished the rulers of church and state to take example from the lion, for

Lo, the lion, king of beasts,
Spare the meek and lowly;
Toward submissive creatures he
Tames his anger wholly.
Do the like, ye powers of earth,
Temporal and holy!
Bitterness is more than’s right
When ’tis bitter solely.¹⁶

The lion is indeed an animal worthy to associate with the unicorn. He too is a symbol of Christ; he too is courageous and merciful; he too stands for fidelity in love. Several of the illustrations in Chapter Two show him as a pendant to the unicorn (69, 70, 75–80). The lion is included in almost every group of animals being created by God or named by Adam (26, 29) or waiting to go aboard Noah's ark (27). Further, he appears without accompanying animals in countless medieval representations, for he was a favorite medieval beast.

The stag

According to the twelfth-century bestiary of Philippe de Thauin:

The stag has that nature . . . that he goes seeking a hole where there is a serpent lying. When he has found a serpent, he takes water in his mouth and throws it in and then blows. He blows there . . . so long that he draws [the serpent] out with great labor. The stag is angry and kills it with his feet. . . . By this stag we rightly understand Jesus Christ. The water is wisdom which is in his mouth; . . . holy inspiration is understood by his blowing, and by the serpent, the Devil.¹⁷

The bestiary of Bishop Theobald says that the stag, instead of stomping on the serpents, devours them, and "soon by the strength of their poison is heated." He "hastens then to the spring, knowing its waters are cool. Here he greedily drinks, and the poison is quenched by the water." By this means, too, "he makes himself young, at which time he casts off his horns." Thus men, when they gather poisons from the serpent, such as "luxury, hatred, anger . . . [or] lusts of the heart . . . should run with all haste to Christ who is our living water, who when he cleanses our souls, drives all poison

away. Now, if our sins are thus cleansed, we are once again youthful and happy."¹⁸

A second characteristic of the stag as told in the Cambridge bestiary is

that when they change their feeding grounds for love of a foreign pasture . . . if by any chance they have to cross huge rivers or seas, each rests his head on the haunches of the one in front, and, since the one behind does the same thing for him in turn, they suffer no trouble from the weight. And . . . they hurry across with the greatest possible speed for fear of getting befouled. [Thus] when Christians leave their pasture, i.e. this world, for the love of heavenly pastures, they support each other, i.e. the more perfect carry along and sustain the weight of the less perfect by their example and good works. And if they come across some occasion for sin they hurry over it at once.¹⁹

These characteristics are occasionally illustrated, as in a twelfth-century English bestiary where a lithe stag appears twice in the same miniature (91). First, at the right, he stoops to devour the serpent, and then, at the left, to drink from a stream conveniently nearby. A drawing in Queen Mary's Psalter shows a stag sucking up a wriggling snake into his mouth (92), and another in the same manuscript (93) depicts a group of stags crossing a river in close formation—though not head to haunch—in search of better pastures.

Other traits and habits of stags that are not fitted laboriously with morals are described in several of the bestiaries. According to the Cambridge manuscript,

92, 93

Drawings in Queen Mary's Psalter

British Museum, Royal Ms. 2B vii, fols. 166, 165^v
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



91

Miniature in bestiary. English, 12th c.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Bodl. 764, fol. 17^v





94

Minnekästchen. Swiss, about 1400

Rathaus, Lucerne (photo: Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* [Berlin, 1928], pl. 53)

95

Tapestry fragment. Alsatian, late 15th c.

Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum, Burrell Collection

they "listen admiringly to the music of rustic pipes," which they hear well when their ears are up, though when their ears are lowered they hear nothing at all.²⁰ In the mating season "the males . . . bell with the fury of concupiscence." The females "do not conceive until the time of the star Arcturus. Nor do they bring forth their babies just anywhere, but they hide them with tender care, and, having tucked them up in some deep shrubbery . . . they admonish them with a stamp of the foot to keep hidden."

When stags hear the cry of hounds, they "place themselves with a following wind, so that their scent may blow away. . . . All stand stock still, for which reason they make themselves an easier mark for archers." But "they can shake off any arrows which they may have received" if they partake of the herb called dittany.

The horns of the stag are of value to man. "The one . . . which is on the right of the head is the more useful . . . for healing things. To keep snakes away, you can burn either of them." Also, "It is known that stags never get feverish, so, for this reason, ointments made from their marrow will settle heats in sick men." And "many people who have been accustomed to eat venison from their early days have been immortal, and immune to fevers, but it fails them in the end if they happen to get killed by a single wound."

In certain love caskets and tapestries, the hunt of the stag, like the hunt of the unicorn, becomes an allegory of the search for faithfulness in love. Pursuing a stag, the huntsman-lover on the lid of a Minnekästchen of about 1400 (94) urges on his hounds with the words: "Run with all speed, for Faithfulness will go into the forest." Between the antlers of the stag are two clasped hands, symbol of trust and fidelity.

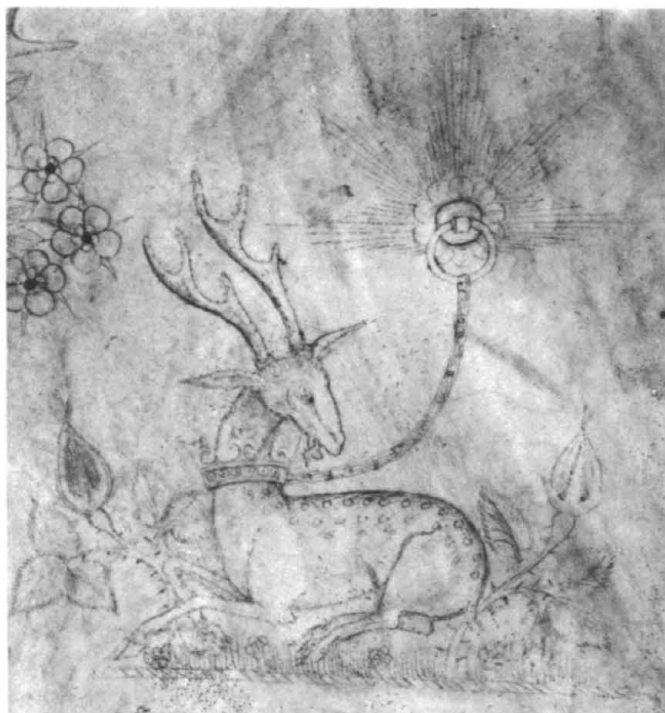
In a fragment of an Alsatian tapestry (95) the stag is chased by a huntsman, his lady beside him, mounted on a dappled horse. Here there is no danger of the stag escaping into the forest, for he is about to be trapped in a net of rope. The inscription makes clear that the quarry is "Treue," that is, Fidelity.

A fifteenth-century Italian drawing (97) depicts an exquisite stag, collared with a princely crown and chained to a tethering ring that emits rays. On either

96

Second tapestry: the stag, the rabbits, and the hyena. Among the flora are the sage (growing against the fountain), Chinese lantern plant (beyond the nearer rabbit), marigold (beneath the hyena's neck), and orange tree





side of him grow rosebuds, symbols of young love awakening. This drawing recalls the last of the Cloisters' tapestries, where the unicorn is also collared and held fast by a chain.

On the front of another Minnekästchen two deer are collared and roped to miniature trees (98). On the back of this box two confronting unicorns wear collars also, with rings for attaching leashes or chains (99). It is regrettable that there are no scrolls with inscriptions here, as there are on many Minnekästchen. Although the inscriptions are frequently difficult to decipher and translate, the words at least give clues to the meaning of the scenes. In any case, it seems evident that a parallel is intended here between the unicorns and the deer. It also seems evident that the noble stag of the Cloisters' tapestry is present at the water-purification scene because

97

Drawing (detail). Lombard school, 15th c.

Cambridge, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, acc. no. 1932.291

98, 99

Minnekästchen. Swiss, end of 15th c.

Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum

he was a familiar beast of the forest and a favorite animal of the chase and also because he symbolized by his "natures" some of the finest qualities of man.

The panther

The modern zoologist says that the spotted animal in the foreground of the second tapestry (100) should be termed a leopard, and the modern encyclopedist states that the panther is in truth a leopard, but the modern medievalist prefers to call him a panther, since, in medieval literature, he is usually referred to as a *pantera* (Latin) or a *panthère* (French).

According to the bestiaries, the panther is exceedingly beautiful. Bishop Theobald describes him as "having a coat which is white but sprinkled with numberless round spots."²¹ Another source says that he is "many-colored like the coat of Joseph . . . and adorned like a queen."²² Guillaume le Clerc is specific about the many colors: he is "white and light blue and dark, and yellow and green and russet-brown."²³ Moreover, the panther is good-tempered, gentle, and intelligent; and he is loved by all the animals except the dragon alone.





100

Second tapestry: the panther and the genet,
a Chinese lantern plant between them

He has "this nature: . . . when he has eaten and is filled, he sleeps in his den. And the third day he arises from sleep, crying out with a loud voice. And the animals that are nigh and that are afar off hear his voice. From his voice there streams all the fragrance of spices. And the animals follow the fragrance of the panther's smell, running up to it."²⁴ Only the dragon flees.

The panther, as might be expected, is interpreted in the bestiaries as another symbol of Christ. He is beautiful, and so is Christ. He is many colored; and Christ also is "manifold . . . since he is virginity, temperance, compassionateness, faith, virtue, patience, concord, peace." And "when Christ was roused on the third day and rose from the dead, all fragrance came to us, both the peaceable ones that are nigh and those that are afar off." As Guillaume le Clerc wrote:

Of the beast which is so sweet
We have again a lesson ready;
For sweetness is an attribute of God. . . .
More sweet are his commandments
Than sweet spices and ointments.
If we do his commandments

Rich will be the reward.
God will set us in his palace
In the beautiful city of peace,
In the heavenly Jerusalem,
On the high hill, where it is so good to be,
Where no one will be sad.²⁵

An illustration in the Morgan Library's bestiary shows a blue panther blowing his sweet-scented breath in the form of red rays toward three animals, one of whom appears to be sniffing (101). A larger group of beasts "follow the fragrance of the panther's smell, running up to it." The evil dragon cowers in his cave, avoiding the panther and all the perfume-loving beasts.

101

Miniature in bestiary. English, about 1170

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 81, fol. 21



Est animal quod dicitur panthera uariū quidē colore
et speciosū ualde. et nimis mansuetum.
Philologus dicit de eo quod inimicū solū draco
nē hēt. Cum gō comedit et satiātū fuit recon-



102

Drawing in Queen Mary's Psalter

British Museum, Royal Ms. 2B vii, fol. 109 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

The panther in Queen Mary's Psalter (102) looks more like a braying donkey than a panther, but he has the coat of many colors described by Guillaume le Clerc. Among the animals on whom he bestows his fragrance are a sleepy lion, an alert stag, and an open-mouthed goat.

It is not surprising that the panther, because of his beauty, his good temper, and his sweetness, was taken over by the troubadours and other romantic writers as a symbol of the beloved. Richard de Fournival tells his beloved that, captivated by her sweetness, he has abandoned his own wishes to follow hers, "just as the animals, after they have once scented the sweet odor of the panther, never afterward will they leave her, but follow her until death."²⁶ Fournival's panther, as in

103

Miniature in Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amour*. Early 14th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 25566, fol. 88v



other love allegories, is appropriately of the feminine gender. A miniature in the early fourteenth-century manuscript of Fournival's *Bestiaire* (103) pictures a panther with a striped coat followed closely by a stag and other beasts appreciative of her fragrance.

The love allegory is developed at greater length in the poem *La Panthère d'Amours*, written by Nicole de Margival at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century. Here again the beloved, to whom Nicole addresses his work, is symbolized by the panther. The poet dreams that he is carried off to a forest where he sees lions, stags, "unicorns and other beasts with horns." There he is struck by the beauty of one beast that all the animals love except the dragon only. While he watches in admiration the beautiful animal disappears. Then the God of Love arrives to the sound of music, and, together, the poet and the god go in search of the marvelous creature. Finally he perceives her at some distance hidden in a hollow at the foot of a valley surrounded by a hedge of blackberries and thistles. The god explains the hidden sense of what he has just seen: ". . . the beast that is so beautiful and so noble" is the panther, and it signifies the lady toward whom the poet directs all his thoughts and his wishes for love. The many colors of the beast symbolize the abundance of virtues and graces that the lady possesses. The good sweet breath of the panther cures all ills, and that is why the animals follow her; the lady, like the panther, heals all vices such as "pride" and "outrage" in those who surround her "in her own country." The dragon represents the envious and the covetous. The valley to which the panther has retired "signifies humility," the blackberries and thistles represent "amorous thoughts," but the thorns symbolize the "cruel attacks of slanderers."²⁷

The poem is too long and involved to summarize here, but this much may be said for the reader who wishes to know how the story ends. After great adversity, a long period of time, and about two thousand lines of poetry, the author finally gains the object of his desire. Then, alas! he is wakened from his dream by the watchman's horn, announcing the break of day.

It is fortunate that the panther of the Cloisters' tapestry is more accurately represented than, for instance, the panther in Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amours*; otherwise, without accompanying text for guidance, the animal in the manuscript could not have been identified. And this would have been a pity, for the panther, by the richness of its symbolism, both religious and secular, adds considerably to the meaningful group of animals assembled by the stream with the unicorn.

The genet, weasel, and ermine

To the right of the panther is a genet (100), an animal not often found in the bestiaries. It may be that the artist who designed the tapestry liked the genet, delighting in its long, lithe body and elegantly ringed tail, and perhaps assigned to it some of the symbolism of the *Mustela*, or weasel, an animal that, to the unscientific eye, resembles the genet and figures importantly in the books of beasts.



104, 105

Drawings in Queen Mary's Psalter

British Museum, Royal Ms. 2B vii, fols. 112^v, 113 (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



The "great marvel" of the weasel, according to Guillaume le Clerc and others, is that "she receives by mouth the seed whereby she conceives," and "by the ear brings forth" her young.²⁸ "Some say," however, that weasels "conceive through the ear and give birth through the mouth." After the weasel "has had her babies . . . she moves [them] from place to place with subtle cunning . . . and always lies at night in a different lair."²⁹ According to a French herbal printed about 1500, the *Ortus Sanitatis*, the weasel is "so skilled in medicine that if she should find her babies dead, she can make them come alive again with a certain herb that she knows."³⁰

Weasels hunt mice and snakes, and, according to Bartholomaeus Anglicus, the basilisk; this "king of serpents," in whose "sight no fowl nor bird passeth harmless . . . is overcome by the weasel. . . . For the Father and Maker of everything left nothing without a reme-

dy."³¹ The weasel is "small in body . . . but large in subtlety, and in courage."³² The moral teaching to be learned from the weasel, according to the bestiaries, is derived from the "great marvel" that impregnation is effected through one orifice while birth takes place through another. In the words of the Cambridge bestiary: "These creatures signify not a few of you fellows, who willingly accept by ear the seed of God's word, but who, shackled by the love of earthly things, put it away in the wrong place and dissimulate what you hear."³³

A drawing in Queen Mary's Psalter (104) illustrates two weasels mating by mouth, and the female giving birth by ear. In appearance they are not unlike the genet of the tapestry. Another drawing in the same Psalter (105) shows the mother weasel transporting her young from one place to another in order to keep them safe from discovery and possible harm.

A species of *Mustela* that turns white in winter is the ermine. Because of its whiteness, no doubt, it was a popular symbol of chastity. In the triumphal procession of Chastity, as described by Petrarch, "the banner of victory displayed an ermine, white upon a field of green, wearing a chain of topaz and of gold."³⁴ Such banners are depicted in some of the illustrations of the Triumph of Chastity (66, 67). In the Marietta print (55), where the maiden is about to enchain a unicorn, a collared ermine at the feet of the lady bears witness to her purity. It may be noted that Charlotte of Savoy, the queen of Louis XI of France, owned an enameled necklace with figures of "ermine, white and reddish," combined with genets;³⁵ the association suggests a symbolic affinity between these beasts.

An animal very like the genet of the tapestry, but with more spots, stands in the foreground of the Paris woodcut of the Temptation of Adam and Eve (246); as in the tapestry, the animal is associated with the unicorn. It appears again with the unicorn in the marginal painting in the manuscript of *La Guerre Judaïque* (72) and also in the Cluny Museum's tapestry representing Sight (75).

If indeed the Cloisters' genet is intended to be equated with the weasel, possessing the weasel's virtues as explained in the books of beasts, it is in the company of its peers. It has great courage, as has the lion. It is solicitous of its young, as are the lion and the deer. It is the enemy of serpents, as are the stag, panther, and unicorn. If, after all, the designer considered the animal only as a genet, it is at least an attractive addition to the group of beasts at the stream. It turns its head in surprise at the ugly creature who has joined the company. This creature is the hyena (96).

The hyena

There is little to be said in favor of the hyena. According to the bestiaries it lives in the sepulchers of the dead and devours their bodies. It imitates the voices of shepherds, and by this ruse calls out men and dogs at night to their harm. "Its nature is that at one moment it is masculine and at another feminine, and hence it is a dirty brute."³⁶

The moral lessons to be learned from the changeable nature of the hyena are explained by Guillaume le Clerc:

This beast, doubt it not,
Denotes the children of Israel,
Who at first firmly believed
In the true Father omnipotent
And held to him loyally
But afterwards became as females.
When they partook of delicate foods
And gave themselves to pleasures,
To the flesh and to luxury
No more did they regard the lord God,
But forsook him and were so foolish
That they worshiped idols. . . .
Many are the folk, it seemeth to me,
Who are like to this beast . . .
Double-minded and weak and lying,
Nor in any way are they stable.
Of these is the word of Solomon
Who made the book of sermons:
A double-minded man, false and dissembling,
Who at no time is constant
In anything which he does or says,
His is a very evil life.³⁷

The least unpleasant characteristic of the hyena is that it has in its eye a precious gem, and:

Whoever under his tongue should keep it
They say that he should foretell
Things which are to happen
In the events of this world.

The French *Ortus Sanitatis* states that the hyena can even be of physical benefit to man: "The spleen of this animal restores clearness to the eyes, the dung heals infected wounds, and the hair from its head cures the headache."³⁸

The presence of the hyena in the tapestry along with the "good" animals is not as strange as it may seem, for medieval artists frequently depicted creatures that symbolized the Devil and wickedness in man adjacent to those that symbolized God and man's better natures. They apparently enjoyed the contrast that resulted. Guillaume le Clerc rationalizes the inclusion of the hyena in his bestiary thus:

. . . it teaches
In what form evil still exists
And the way which he should go
Who wills to return to God.³⁹

The rabbits

The French *Ortus Sanitatis* states that rabbits "give birth many times a year," have "little ones without number," and "multiply marvelously."⁴⁰ This not obscure characteristic is sufficient reason to include rabbits (96) in a set of tapestries supposedly woven for a marriage. In the Middle Ages, when the uniting of two people in wedlock was expected to produce heirs who would carry on the family name and administer the estates, fertility was as important as chastity.

Rabbits are conspicuous in all six of the Lady with the Unicorn tapestries in the Cluny Museum, which, as noted, may also have been designed to celebrate a wedding. They appear also in many other medieval works of art, not necessarily because of their significance but because of their undeniable charm.

The dogs

Dogs appear in six of the Unicorn Tapestries as essentials of the hunt. As hunting animals, they are discussed in Chapter Four. Here it will not be out of place to pay tribute to them, as do the books of beasts, for their intelligence and their devotion to their masters. Says the writer of the Cambridge bestiary:

Now none is more sagacious than the Dog, for he has more perception than other animals and he alone recognizes his own name. He esteems his Master highly. There are numerous breeds of dogs. Some track down the wild creatures of the woods. . . . Others guard the flocks of sheep vigilantly against infestations of wolves. Others, the house-dogs, look after the palisade of their masters, lest it should be robbed in the night by thieves, and these will stand up for their owners to the death.⁴¹

In the Middle Ages the dog, more than any other animal, symbolized fidelity.

The pheasant

The pheasant observing his reflection in the mirrorlike surface of the fountain with his mate beside him (106) is indeed, as the French *Ortus Sanitatis* says, "a very beautiful bird." His "plumage is resplendent in the manner of fire . . . blue and green and shining bright with feathers of a red color." Moreover he is "courageous and bold," but "he is sad when it rains." The male



and female "live together only in times of love, and at all other times they are separated."⁴²

The *Livre de chasse du roy Modus* (before 1377) describes how the pheasant may be trapped by placing a large mirror in a cage. When he sees himself in the mirror and thinks that it is another bird, he strikes against the mirror and is thus caught. It seems that "the pheasant cannot abide another male pheasant near him . . . for he is never without his mate and he is jealous of his own reflection . . . believing that he is seeing a rival."⁴³

Whether the male and female are together always, as in the *Livre de chasse*, or only "in times of love," as in the *Ortus Sanitatis*, their presence together in the tapestry may well be intended to symbolize human love and marriage.

It is possible that the exquisitely woven reflection of the pheasant in the fountain was suggested by the account in the *Livre de chasse* of the pheasant beholding

himself in a mirror. In any case, the reflection probably recalls the symbolic "unblemished mirror" of secular and religious symbolism. In the *Romance of the Rose*, that great medieval love allegory, the mirror in which the lover sees his beloved rose is in the fountain of the Garden of Delight.

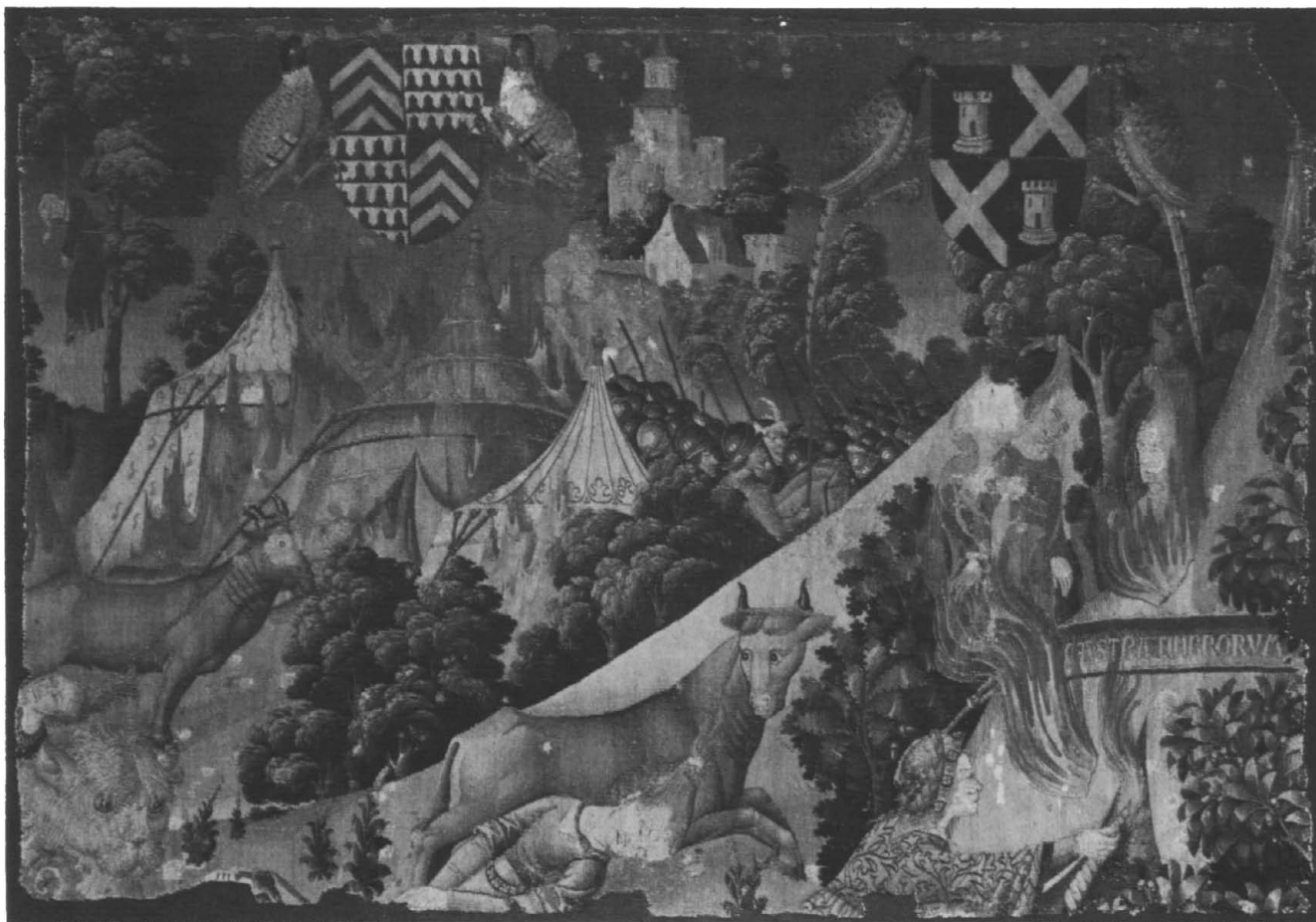
In the Middle Ages the pheasant, a noble bird, was associated with the nobility. Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy held a sumptuous feast at Lille in 1454, on which occasion a live pheasant with a jeweled collar was brought before him. In the presence of all his courtiers, the duke swore "before God . . . the Glorious Virgin Mary . . . and the Pheasant" that, unless illness prevented, he would follow the king of France to free the Holy Land.⁴⁴ The feast has since been known as the Feast of the Pheasant.

Noble pheasants serve as supporters for a coat of arms in a fragment of tapestry (107) that was part of a set entitled *Stories of Virtuous Women*, made for Cardinal Ferry de Clugny about 1480. Pheasants appear in several other tapestries of the period, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs, sometimes perched on a garden wall, at other times merely browsing among the flowers.

107

Tapestry fragment: The Destruction of the Cimbri Camp. From the *Virtuous Women* tapestries. Flemish, about 1480

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Maria Antoinette Evans Fund



The European goldfinch

Two European goldfinches are placed conspicuously in the center of the second tapestry, an adult bird standing motionless on the rim of the fountain, a fledgling fluttering its wings beside it (108).

The goldfinch “feeds on thorns and thistles,” according to Isidore of Seville⁴⁵ and others. Albertus Magnus says, more sensibly, that it “eats the seeds of thorns and thistles.”⁴⁶ In the Middle Ages almost any prickly plant could be identified with Christ’s crown of thorns and so could be considered holy. Accordingly, through its association with thistles and thorns, the goldfinch is related to Christ’s Passion and man’s redemption. Konrad von Megenbourg writes:

It is a great wonder that the bird sings so beautifully although it feeds on the sharp spines of the thistle. It is thus a symbol of the good preacher on earth who has to endure greatly, yet even among the thorns of this world joyfully serves God. O, God . . . thou art well acquainted with meals of thorns; yet Thou too hast sung on earth unto the bitter death.⁴⁷

Besides the goldfinches on the fountain, another perches at the left on a small medlar, a thorny tree related to the rose. In the third tapestry, and also in the fourth, a goldfinch flies into the sky from a clump of trees in which the holly is conspicuous. In the sixth tapestry two goldfinches appear in a spiny hawthorn immediately behind the dead unicorn as he is brought to the lord and lady of the castle.

A great many devotional paintings depict the goldfinch, most often held by the Christ Child, as in a painting by Carlo Crivelli, about 1480, in the Metropolitan Museum (109). Even if the goldfinch had lacked symbolic significance, the designer of the tapestries might have included it among the fauna of the forest, for it was (and is) an elegant little bird with its black hood, ruby red throat, and wings streaked with brilliant yellow. It was well loved throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, whether flying free or living in a cage as a household pet.



It is perhaps significant that an adult bird is accompanied by a young one in the second tapestry. According to Pliny, the goldfinch, though a small bird, produces a dozen little ones, whereas large animals like the elephant, camel, and horse, produce but one.⁴⁸ The goldfinch thus became another symbol of fecundity, and would be appropriate in a set of tapestries designed for a marriage.

The nightingale

The inconspicuous bird poised on a bush above the fountain at the left (232) is probably a nightingale. The eighth-century scholar Alcuin, in a poem for his lost nightingale, writes:

So brown and dim that little body was,
But none could scorn thy singing. In that throat,
That tiny throat, what depth of harmony,
And all night long ringing thy changing note.
What marvel if the cherubim in heaven
Continually do praise Him, when to thee,
O small and happy, such a grace was given?⁴⁹

The Cambridge bestiary says that the nightingale is

accustomed to herald the dawn of a new day with her song. . . . She is an ever-watchful guardian, too, for she warms her eggs with a certain hollow of the body and with her breast. She tempers the sleepless labour of her long night's work by the sweetness of her song. . . . In imitation of this bird, the poor but honest working woman, as she toils . . . so that a subsistence of bread may not be lacking for her babies, yet lightens the burden of poverty by her nightly song, and, however unable she may be to imitate the lovely measures of the nightingale, yet she does imitate it nevertheless by the diligence of her devotion.⁵⁰

The moral teaching to be derived from the nightingale is reason enough for including this bird in the tapestries. However, the nightingale's long association with springtime, the burgeoning earth, and lovers seems even more pertinent—and more delightful. The French *Ortus Sanitatis* explains that the name Filomena for nightingale originated in two Greek words meaning "sweet" and "love."⁵¹ Medieval poets over and over again introduce the nightingale into their love lyrics, as did a wandering scholar of the thirteenth century:

O Nightingale, be still
For an hour,
Till the heart sings:
With the love of a maid
Aflower,
With the love of a maid
Afire,
New love, new love,
Dying of desire.⁵²

It may be concluded that the birds and beasts assembled near the fountain were in large part chosen because they had meaning, both religious and secular, even as the unicorn who dips his horn. Only the woodcock in the stream below the unicorn's hooves and the ducks swimming away at the left seem to have no relevant lessons to teach.

In the third tapestry

Here, where the unicorn leaps the rushing brook, a mallard duck flies toward the water, a domestic white duck settles upon it, and a rusty-breasted bittern swims peacefully along. As far as can be determined, these birds are not symbolic. It is possible, however, that the pair of bright-eyed partridges partially hidden by blossoming plants at the water's edge (110) were intended to convey some particular message.

The partridge

The books of beasts have much to say concerning this game bird, notably that it is often a thief. According to Philippe de Thaun, "When it sees the eggs of another, if it can it will steal them, it will put them in its own nest, then it will sit on them, and will breed them until they can eat well, fly, and produce eggs." But then if the chicks hear the voice of their true father or mother, "they will desert those who have bred them" and go to their real kin, "therefore nature is more powerful than breeding." The "signification" is that the "partridge which is wicked . . . is the Devil . . . who takes from the Holy Church that which it had baptized." But "when these Christian people . . . hear the voice of God and of the Holy Church, they desert the Devil . . . who then looks upon himself as disgraced."⁵³ It may be noted in defense of partridges that apparently not all of them steal eggs and thus not all are evil.

The bestiaries say further that the partridge is very astute. In the words of the Cambridge bestiary:

if a man comes near the place where a partridge is brooding, the mother . . . shows herself of her own accord, and feigning feebleness of foot and wing as if she might be caught at any moment, invents all sorts of ways to hasten slowly away. By this stratagem she entices and deludes the passer-by until he

110

Third tapestry: the partridges. A marigold at left, clary at right





111

Fourth tapestry: the heron. At right, a peach tree.
Between the heron's feet, a plantain. Growing in the
stream, cattails

is coaxed away from the nest. . . . So you see that they are not
slow in employing zeal to guard their babies.

Also:

Partridges secure protective coloration by clever camouflage.
They cover their setts with thorny shrubs, so that animals
which might attack them are kept off by the sharpness of the
twigs. Dust is used as a covering for the eggs, and the birds
return to the nest circuitously. . . . When partridges notice
that they have been spied out, they turn over on their backs,
lift clods of earth with their feet, and spread these so skill-
fully to cover themselves that they lie hidden from detec-
tion.⁵⁴

According to the bestiaries, partridges are by nature
"lustful" and have "great desire to cohabit," the cocks
fight furiously for their hens, and so fertile is the female
that "even if a wind blows toward them from the males
they become pregnant."⁵⁵

The designer of the tapestries may or may not have
had in mind any of these characteristics of the partridge
when he included a pair of them, plump-breasted and
quietly watchful, in the tapestry where the hunters give
full chase to the fleeing unicorn.

In the fourth tapestry

In the tumultuous fourth tapestry where huntsmen
thrust their spears, the unicorn gores a hound, and
woodcocks and mallards flutter about, one creature
alone seems unperturbed. This is the heron at the lower
right (111), standing on one leg near a peach tree,
stately, oblivious to the fray, and magnificently serene.
The designer undoubtedly placed him here for contrast,
but also possibly for purposes of moral teaching.

The heron

The heron is noted for its lofty flight. According to
Isidore of Seville and others, it "fears the rainstorms
and so it flies above the clouds in order to avoid the
tempests. Thus when it soars to great heights it is a sign
of bad weather."⁵⁶

Hrabanus Maurus (about 776–856) explains that
"this bird signifies the souls of the elect," who, fearing
the "tempests of persecutions instigated by the devil,
fly above all frightening temporary events to the seren-

ity of heaven where they may behold forever the coun-
tenance of God."⁵⁷

Pseudo-Hugo of St. Victor says that the "heron seeks
its food in the water, but it builds its nest in the high
trees." They defend their young fiercely with their beaks
lest they be carried from their nests by other birds.⁵⁸

The heron was one of the "noble birds" on which
medieval knights ceremoniously took their vows to em-
bark on dangerous and noble ventures.⁵⁹

In the sixth tapestry

Here a turreted castle is featured, complete with dove-
cot and a moat in which swans are swimming (112).
It is probable that the doves and the swans were in-
cluded chiefly because, in the Middle Ages, they were
a normal part of castle life. However, it may be that the
designer also had in mind some of the observations on
these birds in the books of beasts.

The swan

The Cambridge bestiary says that the swan "pours out
a sweetness of music with melodious notes" and "the
reason why this bird sings so beautifully is because it
has a long, curved neck" and the rich music "goes round
and round through the lengthy bend." It also says that

112

Sixth tapestry: dovecot and swans





113

Sixth tapestry: the squirrel in the hazelnut tree

in northern parts of the world, when "the lute players have tuned up, a great many swans are invited in, and they play a concert together in strict measure." The swan, says this same book, "is a fowl most cheerful in auguries," and sailors "quite rightly say that this bird brings good luck."⁶⁰

Bartholomaeus Anglicus adds: "When the swan is in love he seeketh the female, and pleaseth her with be-clipping of the neck, and draweth her to him . . . and he joineth his neck to the female's neck, as it were binding the necks together."⁶¹

The dove

"The Dove is a simple fowl and free from gall, and it asks for love with its eye," according to the Cambridge bestiary.⁶² "Among all the other birds, the dove is a courtly and pretty one and has good meaning," writes Guillaume le Clerc. "The Holy Spirit in the likeness of it descended at the baptizing of Jesus Christ. And . . . many a time it has happened that in its likeness, has come the Holy Spirit for to comfort those whom man is wont to persecute."⁶³

Philippe de Thaun, quoting Isidore of Seville, says: "There is a dove that makes others come to its dove-cote; and when they are assembled, they all have their wishes; of various colors are the doves that go there. . . . The dove signifies Jesus the Son of Mary, and we are his doves."⁶⁴

The kind of dove known as turtur or turtledove has this characteristic: it will mate but once in its life. In the words of the Cambridge bestiary: "It is truly believed that when a turtle-dove is widowed by the loss of her spouse, she takes a dread against the marriage bed and against the very name of matrimony." She does not "break the bonds of chastity or forget the rights of her wedded husband. She keeps her love for him alone, for him she guards the name of wife."⁶⁵

The squirrel

In a hazelnut tree in the lower left corner of this tapestry sits a red squirrel with sharp tufted ears, beady eyes, and bushy tail curved over his back. He seems intent on smelling one of the tree's blossoms (113).

Vincent of Beauvais describes the squirrel as a "small animal larger than a weasel . . . elegant and beautiful to see . . . It lives in trees and has its young there. . . . Men and women take pride in ornamenting their garments with skins [of squirrels]; but the little animal itself does not glory in its own fur nor in that of others."⁶⁶

The French *Ortus Sanitatis* adds that it has a "marvelous lightness" and when it "jumps from tree to tree it sometimes uses its tail for wings." And if it needs to "pass over a body of water in the woods in a sort of small boat" it raises its tail as if it were a sail and the wind blows it across. "It gathers its food in the summer and lives on it in the winter."⁶⁷

An unidentified source, probably medieval, says that "when the squirrel is hunted she cannot be driven to the ground unless extremity of faintness causes her to do so . . . for such is the stately mind of this little beast that while her limbs and strength lasteth, she . . . saveth her-

self in the tops of tall trees . . . knowing, indeed, her greatest danger rests below amongst the dogs and busy hunters. From whence may be gathered a perfect pattern for us, to be secured from all the evils and hungry chasings of the treacherous devil; namely that we keep above in the lofty palaces of heavenly meditations, for there is small security in things on earth."⁶⁸

An early thirteenth-century bestiary illustrates two squirrels (114), one sailing on a raft laden with nuts, his tail raised to catch the wind (as in the French *Ortus Sanitatis*), the other sitting atop a tall tree, secure from the dangers of "dogs and busy hunters" below.

The squirrel of the tapestry may be intended to be symbolic, or it may be present merely to call attention to the tree in which it sits. The symbolism of this tree and the vine entwining it is discussed in Chapter Five.

The horse

A splendid horse appears in this tapestry, bearing the beautiful dead unicorn on his back to the lord and lady of the castle. In the Middle Ages horses were essential for knightly existence, and excellent ones were often valued above all other possessions, even wives. According to the Cambridge bestiary, a fine horse should have a powerful body, small head, "short and lively" ears, erect neck, dense mane and tail, and an "audacious" spirit. It should be "swift of foot and trembling in its limbs. The latter is an indication of courage. . . . God himself gives courage to the horse and unharnesses fear from his neck—so that he leaps about on the plains and is pleasing to kings as he gallops."⁶⁹

In the seventh tapestry

In this tapestry three winged insects are conspicuous among the flowers: a butterfly hovers over the carnation that grows in front of the unicorn's enclosure (179), a dragonfly inspects the blue iris nearby, and another dragonfly touches the Madonna lily (186). A small frog lies motionless, almost hidden among violets, above the A of the monogram in the tapestry's lower right-hand corner.

The butterfly

The butterfly is believed to signify love and fertility.⁷⁰ Also, since it evolved from a lowly caterpillar to an exquisite winged creature, it may be intended to symbolize the resurrection of Christ and of man as well. So

far, these interpretations have not been documented by medieval texts. Aristotle calls the butterfly the "psyche," meaning the soul.⁷¹

The frog

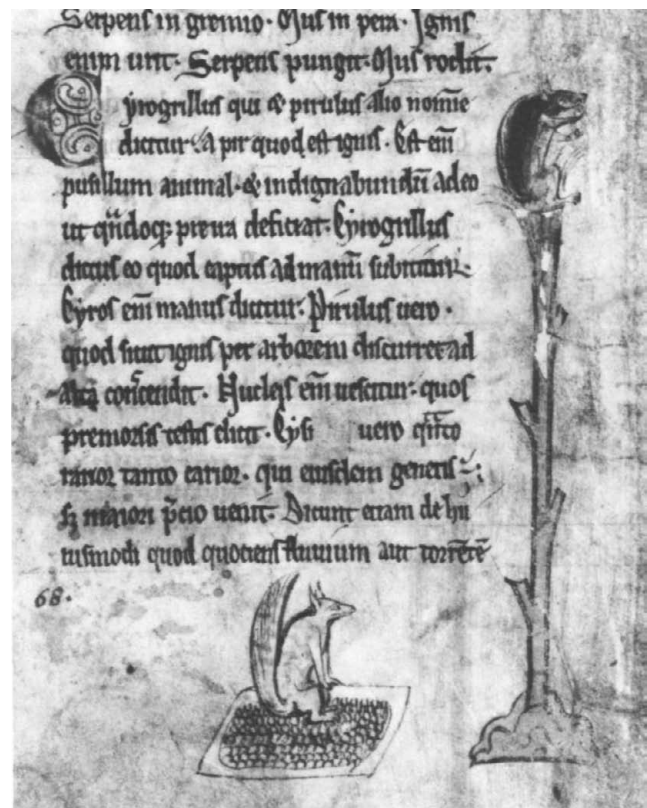
Aelian and Bartholomaeus Anglicus write of the wooing and mating of the frog. According to Aelian, "the frog, as a signal that he wishes to mate, emits a certain cry to the female, like a lover singing a serenade, and this cry is called its croak, so they say."⁷²

Pliny claims that a bone from the left side of the frog, worn as an amulet, serves as an aphrodisiac.⁷³ Aelian notes that the frog "abhors and greatly fears the water-snake. Accordingly, in return it tries to terrify and scare the water-snake by its loud croaking."⁷⁴ According to several writers, Hildegard von Bingen among them, the frog may be used to heal cases of poisoning: "If a person has poison anywhere in his body, except the head, and is weakened, let him take a frog and strangle it over a small herb . . . and immediately place a warm bandage over the part of the body where the poison is raging,

114

Illustration in bestiary. English, early 13th c.

Cambridge, University Library, Ms. Kk. 4.25, fol. 75



and at once place the dying frog on this bandage for just an hour, and the poisoning in that place will cease for a year or a year and a half.”⁷⁵

Of these birds and beasts, the ones that were familiar to the designer and the weavers of the tapestries are remarkably lifelike. The birds fly freely or dip into the streams, not in the least entrapped by the warp and weft of the fabric. The pheasant is as resplendent as a pheasant should be. The squirrel could jump from twig to twig at any moment, and its fur seems softer than the wool of which it is woven.

The more exotic beasts—the lions and the panther—are less convincing. They were apparently not drawn from observation of the actual animals but instead from “pattern books” or manuscripts or paintings or prints available in the workshop. It is remarkable that the unicorn, the most exotic of them all, is truly the most full of life and the most reassuringly real.

These birds and beasts may be enjoyed today for their own sake, though medieval accounts of their “natures” and ways give them added dimension. The “teachings” derived therefrom, both religious and secular, give richer meaning to the tapestries.

4

THE HUNT

Hunters live in this world more joyfully than any other men. For when the hunter rises in the morning, he sees a sweet and fair morn . . . and he hears the song of small birds, that sing so sweetly with great melody and full of love. . . . And when the sun is risen, he sees fresh dew upon the small twigs and grasses, and the sun by its virtue makes them shine. And that is great joy and liking to the hunter's heart.

When he departs on his quest, and comes upon a large stag soon, without much seeking . . . it is great joy and pleasure to the hunter. And when he returns to the assembly of hunters and reports to his lord . . . that which he has seen . . . and every man says: "Lo, here is a great stag. . . . Let us give chase" . . . the hunter has great joy. And when he begins the hunt and he hears or sees the stag start before him and knows well that it is the right one, and when he sees the hounds run well, then the hunter has great joy and pleasure . . . and shall hue and blow his horn as loud as he wishes. Then when the stag is overcome and at bay . . . and is taken, the hunter rewards the hounds and thus he has great pleasure. And when he returns home he returns joyfully. . . .

Afterward, in the evening of the night he takes the air because of the great heat that he has had and then he goes and drinks and lies down in his bed in fresh linen and sleeps well . . . all night long without any evil thoughts. . . . Wherefore I say that hunters go to Paradise when they die and live in this world more joyfully than any other men.

The designer of the Unicorn Tapestries, called upon to portray a unicorn hunt on a more extensive scale than had probably ever been done before, drew upon the medieval stag hunt for much of the action and many of the details. Several medieval writers give explicit information on the procedures of the chase, notably Gaston III, Count of Foix, surnamed Phoebus. Gaston not only describes the joys of hunting but also discusses the training of hunters, the qualities of good hounds and their care, the way to signal by means of hallooing and blowing the horn, and the “natures” of the quarry to be hunted.

The first tapestry: The Start of the Hunt

According to Gaston, the hounds used in stag hunting are the *levriers* (greyhounds) and the *chiens courants* (running hounds).² A pair of greyhounds in the foreground and a pair of running hounds beyond are coupled in readiness (115). A single greyhound is held on leash at the side of his master.

Greyhounds chased by sight, running hounds mainly by scent. A good greyhound, Gaston says, “should have



a long head, somewhat large, in the form of a pike, good teeth with a good crunch. . . . His eyes should be red or black like a sparrow hawk's, his ears small and upright like a serpent's, his neck . . . long and bowed like a swan's . . . his chest large . . . like a lion's, shoulders high like a roe deer. His forelegs should be straight and long enough but not too tall . . . his feet . . . round like a cat's with large claws, and his tail like a rat's making a little ring at the tip and not too high."³

A page in an early fifteenth-century manuscript of Gaston's *La Chasse* (116) illustrates a group of greyhounds in a variety of poses, exhibiting all the characteristics of good *levriers*. The greyhounds in the tapestry are not as long-nosed as these, but they are similar in other respects, and at least one of them has sharper claws.

The chief requirement of a good greyhound, according to Gaston, is that he "should go so fast that, if he is well slipped [unleashed], he should overtake any beast and there where he overtakes it he should seize it as fast as he can without baying or bargaining." The central hound in the manuscript and the baying furry one at the left suggest the lithe swiftness of these *chiens de chasse*.

As for the blunt-nosed running hound who hunted by scent, Gaston writes that a "good one should have large nostrils and open . . . great lips well hanging down, large eyes red or black, a big head with a broad forehead and broad pendant ears, hanging well down, close to the head." He should have "a large neck, breast, and shoulders, great strong legs, not too long, with large round feet." His tail should be "large and high and not crooked over his back. . . . Some hounds have feathered tails and they are very good."

Of the running hounds, "one sort hunts by scenting the air, the other, with his nose to the ground. Those who hunt by the air are of more value in woods or coverts where the [hunted] beast touches everything with his body. . . . They also serve better to beat the waters, for they always hunt [with their noses] in the air. The hound who hunts with his muzzle to the ground keeps better to the tracks . . . and is a better recoverer [of a lost scent]. And when the beast flees the countryside or the paths, the one who puts his nose to the ground . . . will pick up a scent where the one who hunts by air will not have any news."

"The best sport that man can have is with running hounds," writes Gaston, "for with greyhounds and

other kinds of hounds . . . the sport lasts not, for a good greyhound either takes or fails to take a beast . . . but running hounds must hunt all the day, questing and making great melody in their language and saying great villainy and scolding the beasts that they chase. And therefore I prefer them to all other kinds of hounds, for they have more virtue, it seems to me than any other animal."

116, 117

Greyhounds and running hounds. Miniatures in *Livre de la Chasse* of Gaston III, Count of Foix. Early 15th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 616, fols. 46^v, 47^v





Running hounds, pictured according to Gaston's description, appear in the same manuscript of *La Chasse* (117). Of the two in the tapestry, one is sniffing the ground, the other scenting the air. Thus, with the greyhounds ready to run "as swift as fowl in flight,"⁴ all the dogs needed for a well-planned, successful hunt are present. Gaston Phoebus, Count of Foix, would have approved.

The greyhounds in the tapestry wear decorative collars such as appear frequently in inventories of the rich and noble. Several *coliers de chiens* are listed in the inventory of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, dated 1420. One is a "*colier à levrier* of crimson velvet embroidered with two shields bearing the coat of arms of the late duke . . . and written below in many small pearls, *Y me tarde*," the duke's motto.⁵ Marguerite of Flanders, in 1405, had "three greyhound collars of black and white silk garnished with silver gilt and the device of the Duke of Brittany," another "*colier de levrier* with the device of Monseigneur de Berry," another "with the device P and M," and still another "of blue cloth with the device Y garnished with silver gilt."⁶

On the collar of one of the greyhounds in the tapestry are three shields with coats of arms and the letter A. On the collar of the hound coupled to him are the letters A and E. The possible interpretations of these insignia are discussed in Chapter Six. The greyhounds and the running hounds are coupled by a short rope and then held by a liam or leash. Gaston writes that couples "should be made of a horse's or a mare's tail, for they are the best and they last longer than if they were made of hemp or wool. And the length of the couples between the hounds should be a foot." The leash attached to the couple "should be made of leather of a horse skin well tanned . . . three fathoms and a half [about seven yards] long; if the huntsman be ever so wise . . . it suffices."⁷ Dog collars with such long leashes, neatly coiled, appear in the margin of a manuscript illustration of an allegorical hunt (209).

Those who usually took part in the chase were the seigneur, or lord, his chief huntsman, one or more

118

First tapestry: the seigneur of the hunt (center?) and companions. The hair style of the center figure is unusual. English daisies are plentiful: for example, beneath the right hand of the center gentleman and at the toe of his right foot. A periwinkle, with blue flowers and hooked stems, grows behind the man at the left, and a daffodil appears beyond the tip of his spear.



119

First tapestry: a hunter signals from behind a walnut tree

lymerers who quested for the game, the keeper of the hounds, grooms, pages, and other assistants. In the tapestry are three sumptuously garbed noblemen with feathered hats (118), one of whom is the seigneur, the other two probably his guests. Their costumes seem unsuitable for pursuing game through fields and forests and possibly streams, but they undeniably add richness and color to the tapestry. According to Gaston, "the hunter should have leggings of stout hide, against the thorns, brambles, and woods, and he should be dressed in green in the summer for [hunting] deer. . . . He should have his hunting horn around his neck, his sword girded at his side, and a knife for the undoing [of the quarry]." Furthermore, hunters should "be mounted on good horses."⁸ The gentlemen hunters in the tapestry are on foot, they have no leggings, and they do not wear green, but they have swords at their sides and the central figure, probably the seigneur, has a horn strapped over his shoulder. His companions carry hunting spears, probably indicating that the beast to be hunted is dangerous.

The keeper of the running hounds also carries a spear; both he and the keeper of the greyhounds are equipped with hunting horns. They hold their coupled hounds on leash awaiting the signal to start the chase. In the background, a huntsman half-hidden in a grove of trees, signals that the game has been traced to its lair (119).



120

Second tapestry: the lord of the hunt

*The second tapestry:
The Unicorn Dips His Horn
into the Stream*

Here the designer has combined a scene from a typical large-scale medieval stag hunt with the purification of the stream by the unicorn; thus he has added another dimension to a subject already rich in medieval lore. This interpretation, so far as is known, is unique.

The hunting party, with weapons, horns, and hounds, has tracked the unicorn, as if it were a stag, to its lair

in a forest clearing. Now all of the company pause a while, not only because they are witnessing a marvelous and noble act, but also because, in terms of the hunt, they must wait until the beast is "unharbored" and starts to run before they proceed to give chase. It is the chase itself that is the greatest challenge and hence the greatest sport and joy to the hunter.

The lord of the hunt is the gentleman in the upper right with upraised finger and a plume in his hat (120). In the left foreground is the lymere, who has done the questing for the game; he holds his specially trained lymere, or scenting dog, on leash and points with an authoritative gesture to the unicorn that he has tracked (121).

Gaston Phoebus and other writers on the chase give instructions to the lymerers on how to judge a "chaseable" stag from such evidence as the hoofprints, the fewmets, or droppings, and the height of the tree scrapings where the animal has rubbed his antlers. Usually several lymerers were sent out by the lord or the master huntsman, each one being responsible for a specific district, and no one being permitted to intrude on the territory of another. Gaston recommends that the lymere start his search the night before the hunt, but in any case, on the morning of the hunt he "should rise at break of day, and then go to see if he can catch sight of anything to his liking. . . . Always he should take care to place himself downwind, and he should be able to climb a tree so that the deer can receive less of his scent, and he can see better from a greater distance." When he has located a stag "to his liking" and watched him go to his lair, he returns with his report to his lord and to the "assembly" gathered "on a beautiful green meadow with fine trees somewhat far apart and a clear fountain or brook nearby." All the lymerers who have been questing bring samples of the droppings of the stags they have harbored, and the "lord, with the counsel of the company, decides which stag is worthy to be chased."⁹ In the thirteenth-century *La Chace dou Serf*, a pupil of the hunt asks: "I pray you what shall I do with the fewmets if I find them?" And the answer is: "Thou shalt put them inside thy hunting horn and stuff grass over them."¹⁰

Several of the miniatures in the manuscript of Gaston's *La Chasse* show the lymere in action. With his scenting hound before him, he quests through the forests and the fields; he finds and evaluates the stag's hoofprints, his fewmets, and his fraying posts; he climbs a tree to observe two large deer at pasture; he tosses fewmets from his hunting horn on the table before his lord, who is partaking of refreshment in the

"beautiful green meadow"; and he leads the way for a pack of running hounds to the stag's lair.

The lymerer in the tapestry has already successfully quested with his scenting hound, has reported to the assembly (presumably having carried the fewmets in his horn), and he has led the whole party to the unicorn's lair. He wears leggings, as recommended by Gaston "against the thorns, brambles, and the woods," and he has a noticeable stubble of beard on his chin, perhaps indicating that he rose at "break of day" and went immediately on his quest without stopping to shave.

Two couples of greyhounds and a single one have been unleashed by their keepers and are attentively waiting, ready to give chase as soon as the unicorn has been "started." Four running hounds are on leash, to be released later.

In a stag hunt it was the privilege and the duty of the lord to decide which hounds and huntsmen were to be present at the "starting" and which were to be posted along the probable route of the stag to act as relays. Gaston advises that the relays be assigned in consultation with those who know the country, and that the "best and wisest" hounds be uncoupled first.¹¹ Relay hunters and hounds appear in the third tapestry.

The third tapestry:

The Unicorn Leaps the Stream

Here the chase is in full progress, and it is treated almost as if it were an ordinary medieval stag hunt. Gaston says that deer are the "swiftest of beasts and strongest and of marvelous great cunning," and that when a stag being chased is "weary and hot he goes to refresh himself in some large river. . . . And this he does for two reasons: one, to cool himself from the great heat that he has, and the other, so that the hounds and the hunters . . . may not see his tracks on the water as they do on land. And if in all the country there are no large rivers, then he goes to a little one."¹² In the tapestry the unicorn has found a small river and perhaps "refreshed himself," but he has not eluded the dogs or

121

Second tapestry: the lymerer. Beyond his pointing hand is a medlar tree. A pansy blooms behind his foot, a wallflower beyond his left thigh





122

Third tapestry: the unicorn pursued by running hounds

123

Third tapestry: greyhounds released and being slipped. Two holly trees grow at the far left, a pomegranate appears next on the near side of the stream, and a hazelnut bush grows beyond the central figure. A primrose blooms beyond the boot top of the man at the left

the hunters by his ruse. Three *chiens courants* pursue him by water (122), two of them avidly, the other apparently with some reluctance, as if he disapproved of hunting unicorns. A brace of unleashed greyhounds that may have started the chase or been released earlier as relays seem untiring; nevertheless, a fresh pair is being uncoupled and slipped simultaneously to join the pack (123).

Most writers on the chase agree that "the more dogs there are, the better the hunt . . . if at the same time the dogs are good."¹³ A large part of the pleasure was in the *bruit*, the sound of the baying dogs. Gace de la Buigne, chaplain of three kings of France in the fourteenth century, claims that "when the hounds give tongue, never has man heard melody to equal this. No Alleluia sung in the chapel of the king is so beautiful . . . as the music of hunting hounds." He says that the "large ones sing tenor and the others countertenor" as if in a "motet."¹⁴

None of the hounds in the tapestry is baying, but two of the huntsmen are blowing their horns. It was the duty of everyone engaged in the hunt to know the right signals, which differed from place to place, and it was a good thing if all could sound the correct long and short notes. A miniature in Gaston's *La Chasse* shows the count giving instructions in horn blowing and in the hues and cries of the hunt. In another illustration in the same manuscript (124) two huntsmen on horseback and another on foot are perhaps blowing the *apelle*, or signal that the stag is unharbored, or the *parfet*, the signal that the hounds are running on the line of the right stag. In this miniature two hounds are baying, thus adding to the "melody."



124

Miniature in *Livre de la Chasse* of Gaston III

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 616, fol. 68





Le Trésor de Vènerie, by Hardouin, Seigneur of Fontaines-Guerin, written in 1394, contains a detailed treatise on hunting calls as practiced in his “country” of Anjou. A manuscript of this work illustrates the notes to be sounded at different stages of the chase. In one of the miniatures the huntsman is blowing the *cornure de l’eau*, or warning that the stag has taken to the river (125). The notes, indicated by black and white squares in two lines, may be interpreted as, first line: four short notes, stop, one short note and two longs, repeated three times; second line, same as the first. It may be that the attractive young huntsmen in the tapestry are sounding this call on their slender decorated horns.

To his translation of Gaston’s *La Chasse*, about 1406–13, Edward, Duke of York, added a few details of his own, including the recommendation that a “good hunter’s horn be . . . two spans in length . . . and not too crooked or too straight . . . and that it be well waxed thicker or thinner as the hunter thinks it will sound the best.”¹⁵

So far as is known, the incident of the unicorn in a “small river” as portrayed in the tapestry is unique in medieval art and in the unicorn literature of ancient

and medieval times. It may be concluded that the scene was inspired by a typical medieval stag hunt; however, it would seem that no stag, in a situation like this, could escape the hunters’ spears; only a unicorn could do that.

The fourth tapestry: The Unicorn Defends Himself

The literature on the unicorn describes how he will defend himself with thrusts of his sharp horn and with kicks of wounding force against his attackers. The hunted stag too will fight back, often dangerously, when the hounds and hunters close in upon him and he is at bay. Gaston Phoebus says that “he has great strength in his head and his body” and he can strike “a blow like that of a crossbow bolt.” He is especially ferocious when he is “in love, that is to say, in rut.” Then he will kill “dogs and horses and men. . . . A man is in great peril if he is wounded by a stag; and for that reason there is the saying: ‘After the boar, the doctor, and after the stag, the bier.’”¹⁶



125

The *cornure de l’eau*. Miniature in *Le Trésor de Vènerie* of Hardouin. Late 14th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 855, fol. 17^v

126

Fourth tapestry: the unicorn at bay. Perhaps through an oversight on the part of the designer or the weaver, the unicorn has no ears



127

The *cornure à l’aide*. Miniature in *Le Trésor de Vènerie*

Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 855, fol. 19^v

A miniature in Hardouin’s *Trésor de Vènerie* (127) shows a stag at bay goring a dog, while the hunter on horseback sounds the *cornure à l’aide*, or call for help.

In the tapestry the unicorn may be said to be at bay; he grievously wounds a greyhound with his piercing horn and very nearly lands a crushing blow on a hunter

with a kick from both hind legs. There is no more heroically fierce unicorn, so far as is known, in all medieval art.

Unlike the dogs in the miniature, the dogs in the tapestry are staunch and do not run away (126, 128). Several of them close in on their quarry, and the others leap toward the unicorn or crouch ready to spring. Only one elegant, long-nosed greyhound with jeweled collar is unwillingly restrained by a concerned huntsman who, quite understandably, does not want him hurt (129). He is probably the seigneur's favorite hound. The sei-



128

Fourth tapestry: a running hound. A hawthorn at left, holly at right, medlar below

129

Fourth tapestry: the seigneur of the hunt. Behind him, a strawberry tree (right) and a walnut (left)

(photo: Malcolm Varon)

130

Fourth tapestry: the angel Gabriel as hunter and dog with collar inscribed OFANCRE. In the left corner, hazelnut trees and a forget-me-not. To the right, beyond the head of the duck in the stream, a feverfew. Above the dog's muzzle, a Chinese lantern plant

gneur, in his plumed hat, observes the scene of violence with quiet interest and apparently approves the actions of his huntsmen; his spear is at rest and his directing arm is relaxed.

The hunters, with thrusting spears, close in for the kill as if they believe that their game is an ordinary stag. Of course they should know full well that the unicorn cannot be taken by force but only by guile. As it is written and was accepted as truth in the Middle Ages, this animal can be captured only after he has been tamed and rendered harmless by a virgin maid. One man alone, the imposing hunter sounding his horn (130), comprehends the difference between a stag hunt and a unicorn hunt. He is present in this scene to remind observers that the unicorn is a symbol of Christ, and his coming to the lap of the maiden is an allegory of the Annunciation and the Incarnation. As has been explained, this hunter represents the angel Gabriel; he bears on his scabbard the words of a hymn in praise of the Queen of Heaven, and he is not sounding the *cornure à l'aide*, as does the hunter in the manuscript, but is announcing to the world the coming of the Saviour. In all other known instances where the hunter is





**131**

Fourth tapestry: the rustics. The woodsman has just felled a beech tree

interpreted as the messenger of God, he is shown approaching the unicorn, already in the lap of the maiden, and not participating in the melee of the hunt. Thus, the imagery in this tapestry appears to be unique.

Two rustics standing apart in the upper left are engaged in subsidiary activities of the hunt (131). The older one carries a flask and a bundle wrapped in cloth on a staff over his bent shoulder. He is probably bringing refreshment for a huntsman to enjoy at the conclusion of the strenuous chase. Then, says Hardouin, "there are many who long to drink, and that is no great wonder. . . . Hence, if there is wine in bottles and bread and cheese . . . everyone can take a morsel and have a good drink."¹⁷ The second rustic, ax in hand, is pointing the way. He has just felled a beech tree, and it may be that he is preparing firewood as a reward for the huntsman who successfully quested for the quarry and

tracked it to its lair. Gace de la Buigne, in describing a royal hunt, supplies information concerning this practice: "The king asks which one of you harbored [the stag] and the master huntsman replies: 'A man who is most valuable for sport, and one who served your predecessors well, he requires an arpent of wood,' and the king says, 'Give him three.'"¹⁸

The fifth tapestry:

The Unicorn Is Tamed by the Maiden

The subject here is the familiar one in the unicorn story, his taming and capture by means of a virgin maid. Since only the two fragments remain, it is impossible to know how many realistic details of a stag hunt may have been introduced into this scene, so distinctly belonging to the unicorn and to no other beast. At least the grey-

132

Fifth tapestry: a greyhound, a running hound, and the maiden's hand and brocaded sleeve



hounds and running hounds used to chase the quarry are present (132), and the youthful huntsman sounding his horn (133) could be a participant in any ordinary hunt, since he bears no resemblance to the angelic Gabriel of the fourth tapestry.

*The sixth tapestry:
The Unicorn Is Killed and
Brought to the Castle*

In medieval art, when the unicorn is wounded or killed, the action takes place while he is entranced and tamed in the lap of the virgin. The killing of the unicorn in the tapestry occurs in a separate scene, however, well out of sight of the lady, and it was undoubtedly inspired by the *mort* of the hunted stag.

133

Fifth tapestry: the hunter and greyhound, the hound's collar inscribed CHS



134

The *cornure de prise*. Miniature in *Le Trésor de Vènerie* of Hardouin

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 855, fol. 21



Gaston Phoebus writes that the stag should be held at bay "not so long that the hounds are put in too much danger, but just long enough for the relay hunters from afar to come up with their hounds that they may be present at the death." Then one of the hunters, careful that the stag does not catch sight of him, should go and "pierce the stag from the rear with his sword."¹⁹

Another miniature in the *Trésor de Vènerie* illustrates the killing of the deer with a spear thrust from the rear while the *prise* or *mort* is sounded on the horn (134). Gace de Buigne claims that "no man who hears such melody would wish for any other paradise."²⁰

In the tapestry a young lord is about to give the death blow to the unicorn with his knightly sword, while two huntsmen wound him in the throat and shoulder with their savage spears (135). The death agony of the beautiful beast is portrayed realistically and magnificently.

The hunter blowing the *prise* forms a transition between the scene of the killing and that of the procession bringing the body of the unicorn to the castle gate. In an actual medieval hunt the stag was generally dismem-



135

Sixth tapestry: the killing of the unicorn

bered where he was slain. Portions were allotted to the lymerer and the other hunters according to recognized rules, and choice morsels were given to the hounds as their reward or *curée*. This, as Gaston says, was a "great pleasure" to the hunter. In a fifteenth-century hunt described by Jacques de Brézé, however, the deer was brought to the castle intact and the *curée* took place there.²¹

An illustration in a French book of hours of 1504 shows a dead stag being carried home intact on the back of a horse (136), as is the unicorn in the tapestry. In the tapestry one of the returning huntsmen grasps the unicorn's horn and points to the man and woman standing at the front of the crowd as if saying: "This horn is the prize of the hunt, and it belongs to the lord and lady of the castle."

*The seventh tapestry:
The Unicorn in Captivity*

This scene cannot be interpreted in terms of an actual hunt, but rather as the finale of an allegorical hunt such as those set forth by poets and writers of romance. In Fournival's *Bestiaire d'Amour*, it will be recalled, the "skillful huntsman" is Love, and the quarry is the unicorn-lover who is captured. Aicart de Hesdin developed the theme further in his *Prise Amoureuse*, a poem of over 1900 verses written in 1332. Here again the "wise hunter" is Love, and his game forest is Youth. According to Aicart, Love often enjoys the chase, and on a certain day "in April, in the season of Gaiety" he pursues the poet-lover. He has the help of huntsmen who are skilled at questing and harboring. His hounds are many. Among them are Beauty, Kindness, Intelligence, Courtesy, Largess, Gentleness, Sincerity. His *chiens courants* are coupled, Renown with Glory, Good Manners with Courtesy, Outward Appearance with Hope, and so on. Love unleashes his hound Beauty first and lets him run foremost after the game, the poet-lover. Throughout the chase, the hounds create a melody with their baying, and Love gives the appropriate hunting cries and blows his hunting horn. At the end, when the poet-lover is driven by hunters and hounds into the net of Desire, Love sounds the *prise* over him.²²

In the seventh tapestry, the climax of the hunt, the quarry is not caught in a net but is entrapped within a

fence and held captive by a *chaîne d'amour* fixed to a tree. It is possible that even in the preceding tapestries, where the activities of an actual hunt are combined with incidents of the unicorn story, there are reflections of such an allegorical love-hunt as described in the *Prise Amoureuse*.

Although the captured unicorn appears to be bleeding from wounds inflicted on him by the hunters, the "wounds" are actually pomegranate seeds dripping their blood-red juices on his milk-white body. The significance of this is discussed in the next chapter.



136

Page in book of hours published by Thielman Kerver.
Paris, 1504

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund

5

THE GROVES OF TREES, THE FLOWERY FIELDS, AND THE GARDENS

And I wish that all times were April and May and every month renew all fruits again and every day fleurs-de-lis and gillyflower and violets and roses wherever one goes, and woods in leaf and meadows green, and every lover should have his lass, and they to love each other with a sure heart and true, and to everyone his pleasure and a gay heart.

“A Wish” appended to the
Vocabulary of Guillaume le Breton
(about 1160–about 1225)¹



Medieval poets, over and over again, put into words the ecstasy felt by the whole world at the coming of spring. And medieval tapestry makers wove into their hangings blossoms and leafy trees to express their delight in nature's loveliness and to bring gladness to the hearts of castle-dwellers during the months of wintry bleakness.

The Unicorn Tapestries are rich in flora: more than a hundred different plants are represented in them, eighty-five of which are so accurately depicted that they have been identified by a team of enthusiastic botanists from the New York Botanical Garden, E. J. Alexander and Carol Woodward.² The desire for accuracy on the part of the designers and weavers has not gone so far, however, as to restrict the showing of flowers and fruits to a particular season of the year: for instance, in the first tapestry a tree bears ripe cherries at the same time that daffodils blossom, and in the third tapestry a holly bush has already produced berries while a hawthorn blooms. Thus, each plant is represented in its prime, and all together produce a delightful ensemble that nature has never yet offered to man. And that, of course, is one of the advantages of art over nature.

In five of the tapestries the plants are shown growing naturally at the edge of a stream or in an orchard, in the middle of a field or along a garden fence. In the first and last tapestries, however, they are strewn over the entire background, suggesting the flowery meadow that the people of the Middle Ages liked so much. Boccaccio, in his *Decameron*, describes a castle garden. In the middle of this garden, "what seemed more delightful than anything else, was a plot of ground like a meadow; the grass of a deep green, spangled with a thousand different flowers."³ An unknown poet of a faiblau of the twelfth or thirteenth century writes:

I found me placed in a
delightful mede,
Where . . . [a] thousand flowers,
blue, yellow, white and red,
The dark-green tapestry
in profusion spread,
The violet, the lily of the vale,
The purple radiance interlaced
with pale.⁴

137

First tapestry: the cherry tree. To the right of the E is an English daisy, then a strawberry plant and a stock-gilliflower, with a sweet violet below

Many a medieval painting, manuscript illumination, and tapestry depicts such a "delightful mede." The tapestries are called today *millefleurs*, that is, "with a thousand flowers."

A large number of the plants in the Cloisters' tapestries were undoubtedly chosen because of their symbolic significance; but almost all, to the medieval observer, would have been meaningful as well as beautiful. A plant might mean, among other things, that it would cure "worms in the belly" (plantain) or "chaps that are in the seat" (wallflower), "withdraw spots and pimples from the face" (primrose) or "cause the hair to grow in used-up places" (lily); it might make a good salad or be flavorful in a pudding (primrose, violet, rose), be a seasoning for "chickens in hocchee" (sage), or an ingredient in a "green pickle for preserving fish" (clary). However, such observations, interesting and amusing though they may be, are not included in the following study since they do not contribute to the main themes, both religious and secular, of the Hunt of the Unicorn.

Research into the secular meanings of many of the plants has been difficult, for much of the popular thinking about them exists mainly in folklore, handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and not recorded in medieval times for the benefit of modern investigators. In the case of several of the plants on which the medieval texts are meager, paintings, tapestries, love caskets, and other works of art give helpful indications of the symbolic meanings, compensating somewhat for the paucity of the written word.

Forty-four trees, shrubs, and flowers have been selected for discussion here; others have been omitted because they are less important in the tapestry designs or do not add appreciably to the tapestries' major themes.

In the first tapestry

Cherry (*Prunus avium* or *P. Cerasus*)

A tree is planted in the center of the composition—as it is in the third, fourth, and seventh tapestries. Here, it is a cherry, and its prominent place behind the hunters (137) suggests that it is symbolic. More may be gleaned about the religious and secular symbolism of the cherry from the paintings than from the writings of the Middle Ages.

A carefully depicted cherry tree grows along with blossoming plants associated with the Virgin Mary in an enchanting Garden of Paradise by an Upper Rhenish master of the early fifteenth century (138), a painting that will be cited many times in this chapter. The artist has given special attention to the cherry tree and its fruits, for one of the saints, probably Dorothea, is gathering the cherries and depositing them in a basket. It has been suggested that the cherry may be interpreted

138

Garden of Paradise. Upper Rhenish, about 1410

Frankfurt/M, Städelches Kunstinstitut

not only as a tree of Paradise but also, because of the abundance of its fruits, as a tree of everlasting life.

Cherries are occasionally introduced in devotional paintings of the Virgin and Child. In a panel from the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio (139) cherries as well as a pink rose are depicted on a ledge close beside the standing Child. Cherries along with apples are presented to the Child in a painting by Baldassare Carrari (140).

According to medieval legend, when Joseph and Mary were on their way to Bethlehem before the birth of Christ, a cherry tree miraculously blossomed and immediately bore fruit in the freezing cold of winter-time. The story is dramatized in a fifteenth-century "mystery" play:



MARY:
Ah, my sweet husband, what do I see?
What tree is standing upon that hill?

JOSEPH:
Why, Mary, that is a cherry tree;
At one time of year, you might eat your fill.

MARY:
Look again, husband, more carefully;
Its blossoms are brighter than ever I saw.

JOSEPH:
Mary, come to the city speedily
Or we shall suffer the hand of the law.

MARY:
Now, my husband, look once again.
How lovely cherries cling to the tree,

And though I would not cause you pain,
I wish you would pick a few for me.

JOSEPH:
I shall try to do what you desire
(*He tries awkwardly to reach a branch but fails.*)

Oh, to pick these cherries, I won't be beguiled,
The tree is so high and I easily tire:
Let *Him* pluck your cherries who got you with child!

MARY:
Now, good Lord, grant this boon to me,
To have these cherries, if such is your will.
(*The tree bows.*)

Now I thank Thee, God; Thou hast bowed the tree
And I may gather and eat my fill.⁵



139

Madonna and Child, workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1470)

Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Benjamin Altman



140

Holy Family with Angel, by Baldassare Carrari (active by 1489)

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery



Because of this miracle, Joseph is convinced that Mary indeed “bears the Son of the King of Bliss.”

The worldly symbolism of the cherry tree and its fruit is disclosed in secular paintings. In a fifteenth-century German painting of an unknown betrothed couple (141) a cherry tree in flower is placed behind the man, a blossoming rose tree behind the lady, and the branches of the two are intertwined. On the reverse of an Italian marriage salver of the fifteenth century a plump winged amorino holds in each hand a horn of plenty filled to the brim with cherries on their leafy twigs (142). In the erotic *Garden of Delights* by Jerome Bosch cherries abound: naked youths are entangled in branches bearing cherries, seductive nude women wear monster cherries atop their heads (143), and even a unicorn in the cavalcade of animals circling the Fountain of Youth carries cherries on the tip of his horn (144).

It seems inescapable that the cherry tree of the tapes-

141

A Betrothed Couple. South German, about 1470

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Delia E. and L. E. Holden Funds, 1932

142

Marriage salver: Cupid with cornucopias filled with cherries. 15th c.

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mrs. Walter Scott Fritz



try is intended to be symbolic either of celestial rewards or earthly delights, or probably both. A cherry tree also appears in the second and third tapestries.

The grove of trees in the upper right of the first tapestry is the sort of *verger* recommended by Petrus Crescencius, a thirteenth-century Italian. His *Liber ruralium commodorum*, a practical treatise on the planning and cultivation of a country estate, was very popular in the fifteenth century. He advises that the trees be planted away from the area of the grassy plot, “so that the air shall be healthier, and also that spiders’ webs stretched from one branch to another should not irritate those passing underneath.” For the vergers of “kings and of other nobles who are powerful and rich,” it would be “pleasant and delectable . . . to plant a woods of various kinds of trees where wild animals could take refuge.”⁶

The trees in the tapestry include a walnut, a linden,

an oak, an aspen, and probably a blue plum. These may have been chosen for their significance or simply for the variety and decorative patterning of their leaves.

Walnut (*Juglans regia*) (119)

According to Hrabanus Maurus, “a tree of nuts signifies the Church.” He quotes the verse in the Song of Solomon (6: 11) where the bridegroom speaks: “I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley.” “And thus,” writes Hrabanus, “holy Church, through its sainted doctors, descended to see who was producing good fruits.”⁷

For Adam of Saint Victor (about 1110–80), the nut is the symbol of Christ: the outer sheath of the nut represents Christ’s human flesh, the shell is the cross on which that flesh suffered, and the kernel of the nut is his hidden divinity.⁸

In popular belief, nuts with their protective covering and their precious kernels within, have been symbolic of fruitfulness from ancient times.⁹

The walnut tree also offered durability. The practical Petrus Crescentius says that from the wood, one can make “chest for keeping and preserving possessions, and strong cart wheels that will last a long time.” From the nuts “one can make a very good, very beautiful, and durable ink.” Also, it offered security. “If one eats the nuts with figs, one’s body is protected against all poisonous things,” and a plaster of nuts, with figs, onions, and honey “is good against the bites of mad dogs.”¹⁰ Yet it was not an entirely beneficial tree. Writers from the time of Pliny warn that it is dangerous, possibly deadly, to sleep in its shade.¹¹

A walnut tree laden with nuts appears in the fourth tapestry also.

Among the thirty-odd flowering plants carefully scattered over the millefleurs background of the first tapestry, the sweet violet, English daisy, strawberry, periwinkle, and daffodil appear to have symbolic significance.

Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) (137)

Violets were among the best-loved flowers of medieval times. Early writers tell how Adam and Eve, before the Fall, walked in the Garden of Eden where roses and lilies and violets grew.¹² Bishop Fortunatus, in the sixth century, says that in Paradise “virgins, singing their vows, gather roses and violets.”¹³ This same bishop sent a bouquet of violets and yellow crocuses to his



143, 144

The Garden of Delights (details), central panel, altarpiece by Jerome Bosch, early 16th c.

Madrid, Museo del Prado



dear friend, an abbess queen, with a message saying: though the flowers be humble, they bear the purple and gold of royalty and their sweet odor will refresh her spirits.¹⁴

Sigebert of Gembloux pictures the virgin martyrs, Agnes, Lucy, Barbara, and others, as picking violets in Paradise:

Wandering through the fresh fields go they,
Gathering flowers to make them a nosegay,
Gathering roses red for the Passion
Lilies and violets for love.¹⁵

Most especially, the violet is associated with the Virgin Mary, not so much because of its fragrance or "nobleness" or "love," but because of its humility, one of the most admired of Christian virtues. "Mary is the violet of humility," writes Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), "the lily of chastity, the rose of charity . . . and the glory and splendor of the heavens."¹⁶

In a fourteenth-century Netherlandish poem in honor of the Virgin, an unknown author speaks:

O Lady, rich in virtue, you are like the violet in your humility. . . And this neat little flower that has those sweet odors, that grows humbly in the dust . . . is nevertheless of precious purple such as the great rich kings wear in their royal garments. Thus does your Son, O adorable Lady, the King of Heaven, dress in this color because here upon earth, He will hold in graciousness his royal empire.¹⁷

Violets grow in the fifteenth-century Garden of Paradise where Mary and several saints relax while Dorothea picks the cherries (138). In a painting by Giovanni di Paolo violet plants appear around the Virgin of Humility as she sits on the ground (145).

The violet has its place in love poetry also. It is given special mention in the garden of *The Romance of the Rose*: among the "flowers yellow, white, and red" there grew "the violet, all too beautiful, and periwinkle, fresh and new."¹⁸ The violet is singled out, along with the lily of the vale, in the flowery mede of the faiblau quoted earlier. John Lydgate (about 1370–1451), in verses to his lady on Saint Valentine's Day, calls her: "O violet, O fleur désirée," and adds, "Since I am for you so amorous, embrace me, lady of the joyous heart."¹⁹

Probably violets were cultivated in every medieval castle garden and in at least some of the town gardens as well. A fourteenth-century bourgeois of Paris gives full instructions to his young wife on the culture of violet plants and adds: "Know that I am pleased rather than displeased that you tend rose-trees and care for violets . . . and dance and sing."²⁰

Macer's *Herbal* states that violets have great power against "wicked spirits."²¹

The humble, fragrant, well-loved violet appears in different hues in all of the Cloisters' tapestries except the fragments. It is also included in almost all medieval tapestries of "a thousand flowers."

English daisy (*Bellis perennis*) (137)

The English daisy, like the violet, was a favorite of medieval painters and tapestry weavers, and it too was one of the Mary flowers. In a fourteenth-century Netherlandish poem describing twelve flowers symbolic of Mary, the Virgin is likened to a "beautiful *matelieve*" (English daisy), since she is "without the blemish that brought us all to Hell when Mother Eve committed her evil deed," and since "by her sweet savor she contends against hell."²² The English daisy grows with the other Mary flowers in the Upper Rhenish painting of the Garden of Paradise (138).

The common names given the English daisy in the Middle Ages indicate the significance of this flower to the people. In France it was a *paquerette*, flower of Easter, with all of the Easter promise. In Germany it was a *masslieben*, measure of love, suggesting that even in those days maidens would pluck the petals one by one, saying "He loves me, he loves me not."

Chaucer writes of the daisy in his *Legend of Good Women*:

. . . of all the flowers in the mede
Then love I most these flowers white and red,
Such as men call daisies. . . .
This daisy of all flowers the flower
Fulfilled of virtue and all honor,
And ever fair and fresh of hue.²³

The anonymous author of *The Court of Love*, a fifteenth-century poem, describes the "high" castle of the queen who was Venus' lady:

Within and out it was painted wonderfully
With many a thousand daisy red as rose
And white also, this saw I verily,
But what those daisies might signify
Can I not tell, save that the queen's flower,
Alceste it was who kept there her sojourn
Which under Venus lady was and queen.²⁴

The English daisy, associated with the Virgin Mary, with "good women," with Venus and love, appears also in the second, fourth, and last of the Cloisters' tapestries.



145

Virgin of Humility, by Giovanni di Paolo (1402–82)

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Maria Antoinette Evans Fund



146

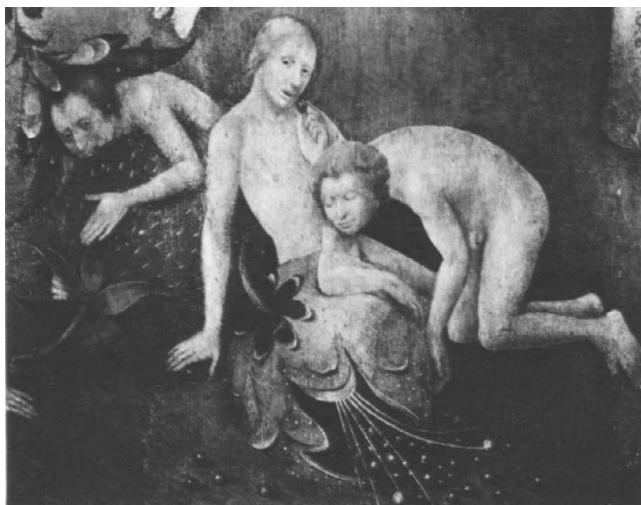
Virgin and Child. Rhenish, 1410–20

Solothurn, Museum

Wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) (137)

This plant, in fruit and flower, is included in many a medieval painting and tapestry. It was enjoyed for its decorative appearance, its medicinal properties, its symbolic significance, and for the taste of its delectable berries, which have been called “food for the blessed.”²⁵

The strawberry appears near the Virgin Mary in the fifteenth-century Garden of Paradise (138) and in the painting by Giovanni di Paolo where the Virgin sits in her humility (145). In a Rhenish painting of the early fifteenth century dozens of strawberry plants cover the bench on which Mary rests, a trellis of roses at her back and violets at her feet (146).

**147**

The Garden of Delights (detail), central panel,
altarpiece by Jerome Bosch, early 16th c.

Madrid, Museo del Prado

The strawberry is shown in entirely different surroundings, with an entirely different type of personage, in Bosch's *Garden of Delights*. Like the cherry, it is here an erotic symbol. A huge strawberry is held aloft in triumph by a group of naked men, another is enclosed in a transparent bubble where a couple caress. A youth brings a large strawberry to a young girl, and the most mammoth strawberry of all is being devoured by a hungry nude man (147).

Periwinkle (*Vinca major* or *V. minor*) (118)

A medical manuscript probably of the fourteenth century describes the periwinkle as

... an herb green of color.
In time of May it beareth blue flower. ...
The leaf is thick, shining and stiff
As is the green of ivy leaf,
An inch broad and nearly round.
Men call it "joy of the ground."²⁶

One of the virtues of the periwinkle claimed by the author of this manuscript is that when powdered and taken often with meals, it will "cure any discord between man and wife" and "bring them to unite" and to love one another "in any season." The herbal of Pseudo-Apuleius says that the periwinkle is good against "snakes and wild beasts and poisons, and spite." When carried on the person, it causes people to be free from terror, to be prosperous, and "to have grace."²⁷

According to a German *Hortus Sanitatis* of the fifteenth century, "Whoever carries this herb with him, the devil has no power over him . . . and if there be any witchery in the house it will drive it out soon. . . . It is much better if this herb is blessed with other herbs on Our Lady's Day."²⁸

It is not surprising that this splendid plant was especially mentioned, along with the violet, as growing in the pleasure gardens of *The Romance of the Rose*, and that it appears with other Mary plants in the Garden of Paradise painting, placed near the vanquished dragon of Saint George (138). The periwinkle appears also in the seventh Cloisters' tapestry and in the fragments.

Daffodil (*Narcissus Pseudo-Narcissus*) (118)

The medical manuscript quoted for the periwinkle says of the daffodil: "In February it beginneth to spring. . . . In March and April it will flower. No herb is so fair in color, the flower is yellow with a little white; and I

148

Crucifixion (detail). Northwest German Master,
15th c.

Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum



know no flower like to it. . . . Thanks be to God it groweth in the mede."²⁹

In the "Goldene Schmiede," Konrad von Würzburg's hymn to the Virgin, Mary is compared to several plants: the cedar of Lebanon, the almond tree, the violet, the peony, the lily, and also the "blossoming daffodil" because she "stands for chastity wherein God has enclosed all preciousness."³⁰

Common German names for the flower in the Middle Ages were *Osterlilie* and *Osterglocke*. In a painting of the Crucifixion by a fifteenth-century Cologne master a daffodil plant is conspicuously placed behind Mary and the mourning women (148), perhaps suggesting the promise of Easter and the Resurrection.

The daffodil is not included in most medieval herbals. However, the medical manuscript quoted above says that the daffodil, "kept in a clean cloth will keep all fiends out of the house" and "if you bear it on you day and night, the fiends shall have no power over you"; nor need you "have dread of any man. And good it is to bear . . . for a man who goeth forth in a fray to fight," for "if it be stamped and laid to a wound, it will staunch the blood astoundingly."³¹

In the second tapestry

The fountain

The planted woods of a large country estate, as described by Petrus Crescentius, are realistically shown here, with the nobleman's castle in the background where he can go "to refresh himself," and a flowery field in the foreground "to bring him great delight." However, instead of a tree in the center, as in the first tapestry, there is a fountain plentifully supplied with spring water that "runs beautiful and pure . . . and produces much pleasantness."³²

Any seigneur would be proud to have on his castle grounds as magnificent a fountain as this one, for the delight of himself, his lady, and his hunting companions. It would seem, however, that because it is a dominant feature of the tapestry it is intended to convey a more significant message.

The fountain, of course, is at times associated with the unicorn. In the Wharncliffe Book of Hours (56) the unicorn reclines in the lap of a maiden while beside the pair a fountain spouts water into a rivulet encircling their small island of seclusion. Other examples of the fountain in unicorn scenes are shown in figures 60, 61, 246. The unicorn's ability to drive out poison from the



149

Virgin with Her Attributes, woodcut in book of hours published by Thielman Kerver, Paris, 1504

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund

waters makes the association a natural one. The fountain of the tapestry, since it reflects so perfectly the image of the pheasant, may be symbolic of the "mirror without blemish," the symbol applied both to the Virgin in heaven and to the loved one on earth.

Even richer significance was given to fountains by some medieval theologians and lyric poets. Much of their thinking stems from the verse in the Song of Songs (4:15) in which the lover likens his beloved to "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." As with so much of the beautiful imagery in the Song of Songs, the "fountain of gardens" was applied to the Virgin Mary. Thus, in a book of hours dated 1504 the Virgin is surrounded by her many attributes, among them the "mirror without blemish," the "fountain of gardens," and the "well of living waters" (149). The fountain in the background of the tapestry altar frontal in Gelnhausen (51) undoubtedly refers to the Virgin rather than to the unicorn. A fountain labeled "living waters" is conspicuous in the foreground of a tapestry dated 1485, represent-

ing the Virgin enthroned with angels (287). In a scene at the left Moses strikes the rock at Horeb, bringing forth sweet water; at the right an angel touches the fountain of Bethesda while Christ, in the background, heals the sick.

Many medieval hymns extol the Virgin by calling her a fountain. According to Bernard of Clairvaux she is a "fountain of virtues," a "fountain overflowing" with "living waters" that "purifies sinners" so that "those who drink will not thirst and will find a cure."³³ In the "Stabat Mater" Mary is the "fountain of love."³⁴ Gautier de Coincy praises her as a "fountain of sweetness" and a "fountain of delights."³⁵ Dante describes her as a "fountain of living hope."³⁶

Abandoning his "lady of a hundred songs," the poet-musician Guillaume de Machaut (about 1300–77) wrote his *Lay de la Fonteinne* in praise of the Virgin, the fountain that can "wash away our sins, bring us her grace and our heart's ease." He equates the fountain not only with the Virgin but also with the Trinity:

No one can requite
The desires for grace that smite
My heart with sighs
Save her I prize
Above my life, above the light
Of day: the Virgin bright
Who put our care to flight.
Joy never dies
But multiplies
In her fountain of delight.

Three parts make up a fountain's flow:
The stream, the spout, the bowl. Although
These are three, these three are one
Essence the same. Even so
The waters of salvation run.³⁷

Jean de Meun, in the second part of *The Romance of the Rose*, gives even wider meaning to the fountain; here it represents the beauty of all nature and life itself that will never end:

When God whose glory is above
All measurement, in bounteous love
Created nature, he did make
Of her a fountain, whence should break
Unceasingly a thousand rills
Of beauty, which the whole world fills.
This fount wells ever and cannot
By time be wasted as I wot,
More high than heaven, and than the sea,
More deep; 'tis called immensity.³⁸

Fountains play a large part in the gardens of love of medieval romances. Guillaume de Machaut, in his *Fonteinne d'Amoureuse*, writes of the poet-lover being led

to a garden where a fountain flows into a vessel of marble; on the basin are carved figures of the renowned lovers Helen of Troy and Paris, together with Venus, goddess of love.³⁹ In Jean Froissart's *Cour de May*, Love holds court and the lady Mirth guards a fountain.⁴⁰

In *The Romance of the Rose* there are many fountains in Love's garden:

Within the glade sprang fountains clear
No frog or newt e'er came anear
Their waters, but 'neath cooling shade
They gently sounded. Mirth had made
Therefrom small channelled brooks to fling
Their waves with pleasant murmuring
In tiny tides. Bright green and lush
Around these sparkling streams did push
The sweetest grass. There might one lie
Beside one's love luxuriously
As though 'twere bed of down.⁴¹

It was in the main fountain in this garden, the Fountain of Love, that the lover saw reflected the *rosier* bearing the rosebud that captured his love and that he yearned to pluck. It is possibly not by chance that in

150

Cassone panel (detail): Garden of Love.
Florentine, 15th c.

New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery,
James Jackson Jarves Collection



the tapestry a bush of luxuriant roses is placed beside the fountain, close by the unicorn dipping his horn.

In Italian marriage chests and marriage platters fountains are often painted in the center of the composition. A panel from such a chest shows a Garden of Love in which a fountain plays an important part (150). Above, Cupid sits enthroned with bow and arrows held ready; below, two armored knights, a king, garlanded poets, and elegantly costumed ladies surround the fountain, paying tribute to the God of Love. Beyond, in a hollow of the hills, two lovers are caught in a net.

On a fifteenth-century Florentine marriage salver a fountain is shown in the midst of a rocky landscape (151). Several ladies disport themselves either at the fountain or at the stream that issues from it; a gentleman and other ladies are engaged in hunting a boar, a stag, and hares. The scene probably illustrates a specific story of romance. In any case, it represents, as does the second Unicorn Tapestry, a fountain at the center of a hunt.

Rose (*Rosa centifolia*)

Close to the fountain in the tapestry is a rosebush full of buds and many-petaled flowers (108). Roses, white or red, were probably the best loved of all medieval flowers, for their beauty, their fragrance, their many uses, and their symbolism. The earliest of the Church Fathers condemned roses for perfumes and crowns because of their association with pagan practices. Happily, this unfortunate attitude did not persist for long.

In the third century, Saint Cyprian exhorted Christians to die for their faith and win the "red crown of roses."⁴² From this time on the red rose was generally considered symbolic of martyrdom. In the fourth century, Saint Basil and Saint Ambrose wrote that the rose, along with the lily and the violet, grew in the Garden of Eden and that it was without thorns until after the sin of Adam and Eve.⁴³ Fortunatus pictured virgins in heaven, some gathering violets, others roses.⁴⁴ In the thirteenth century Peter of Mora, bishop of Capua, explained that: "The rose is the choir of martyrs or yet again the Virgin of virgins. The first rose is red . . . the second is white. . . . The red rose opens among thorns as the martyr grows up in the midst of heretics and persecutors. . . . The second rose, the Virgin Mary, is born amidst the thorns of iniquity . . . coming forth as the rising dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun." A third rose, according to Peter, "denotes Christ, the mediator between God and man."⁴⁵

Other writers associate the rose specifically with



151

Marriage salver. Florentine, workshop of Lorenzo di Niccolò, early 15th c.

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund

Christ. Walahfrid Strabo in his *Hortulus* says that Christ "has colored roses by his death."⁴⁶ The mystic Bernard of Clairvaux interprets the wounds of Christ as roses: "Look at His feet and His hands; do ye not see roses?" And he compares Christ to "this delightful flower," for after the cold of night "it opens in the morning with the first rays of the sun," and thus Christ, "after the sin of the first man," came to earth "in the fullness of time and blossomed in the sun of love."⁴⁷

This same Bernard, who was rapturously devoted to the Virgin Mary, was one of the first to attribute the rose especially to her. He says that Eve was "the thorn that brought death to the world," but Mary is the rose, the "source of salvation for all mankind," and again "Mary, the rose, was white through her virginity, red through her charity . . . white by her love of God, and red by her compassion for those who are near her."⁴⁸

Other writers call her the "rose of Sharon"—the beloved in the Song of Songs. She is "a rose without thorns, medicine for sinners,"⁴⁹ the "rose of Paradise," a "smiling rose flower," a "garden of roses guarded by God himself,"⁵⁰ a "rose of such sweetness and of such good fragrance that she refreshes the heart and soul."⁵¹



152

Miniature in *The Romance of the Rose*.
Flemish, 15th c.

British Museum, Ms. Harley 4425, fol. 184b (Courtesy of the
Trustees of the British Museum)

Roses grow in many paintings of the Virgin and Child. In the Rhenish panel where Mary sits on a bench planted with strawberries (146), rosebushes, trained on a trellis, create a decorative and meaningful background for her loveliness. The blossoms are both white, for her virginity, and red, for her charity and compassion; it is a white rose that she is offering to her Son.

In the Rhenish painting of the Garden of Paradise (138) a rosebush grows in the shade of the cherry tree against the enclosing wall. The roses are red, not only for Mary's compassion but also for the martyred saints, several of whom are gathered in this garden of celestial joy.

Peter of Mora says that besides the three kinds of roses that are "for good" there is one that is "for bad, and this rose is of certain for sensual pleasure."⁵² As a churchman, Peter would understandably frown on the rose as a symbol of earthly love, but poets and writers of romance adopted the rose in their imagery and allegories of love. In the thirteenth century a wandering scholar wrote to his beloved:

Take thou this rose, O rose,
Since love's own flower it is,
And by that rose
Thy lover captive is.⁵³

Frequently the loved one is called a rose: "rose of May, flower of flowers," "more tender and fresh than the rose in May," "a rose . . . more beautiful than all other things and by color and fragrance better than any other flower."⁵⁴

Guillaume de Lorris, the author of the first part of *The Romance of the Rose*, says that he wrote his poem for a lady "so worthy of love, that well may she be called the rose."⁵⁵ This tremendously popular poem is an extended allegory in which a rosebud is the object of the lover's desire and of his pursuit. He is aided by such advocates as the God of Love, Venus, Beauty, Courtesy, and Pity; he is opposed by Prudishness, Fear, Evil Talk, Chastity, Reason, and others. The poet-lover first



153

Miniature in *Manesse Codex*. Early 14th c.

(Photo after facsimile publication, Leipzig, 1925–27)

glimpses his rose in the mirror of the fountain. There, on a "rosebush charged full of roses" fairer than any man had seen before, are "closed buds and some more open and others at nearly height of bloom." He chooses a bud "fair . . . of color, red . . . and upright on its stem . . . bowing not to either side . . . of such sweet odor that it filled the place all around."⁵⁶

A miniature in a Flemish manuscript of the *Romance* (152) shows the lover near the end of his quest, approaching with confidence a gigantic rosebush with two full-blown red roses and the bud that is the object of his love.

The rosebush in the tapestry seems to be a more exquisite realization of the poet's dream. It is "charged full," it has buds that are closed, even one that grows "upright on its stem, bowing not to either side," and it is very "fair."

In the poems chaplets of roses were given by the ladies to their lovers. "He whose heart burns with love should wear a crown of roses," says a thirteenth-century Minnesänger.⁵⁷ The God of Love himself, in *The Romance of the Rose*, was clad in flowers and "on his head was set a chaplet of roses."⁵⁸ In Love's court Pleasure (*Deduit*) also wears a crown of roses, given to him

by his lady, Mirth (*Leece*).⁵⁹ Usually it is the man who receives the circlet of flowers as a token of love from his *amie*, but the ladies, too, might be garlanded with roses, as was Idleness (*Oiseuse*), that "noble damsel," one of the loveliest of the maidens in Love's entourage.⁶⁰

In a splendidly illustrated fourteenth-century manuscript of Minnesänger poems, the Manesse Codex, several of the heroes wear crowns of roses or are being presented with crowns by ladies. In one of the miniatures (153) the lover, climbing to his loved one's tower, is welcomed by her with a carefully wrought chaplet of roses, both white and red.

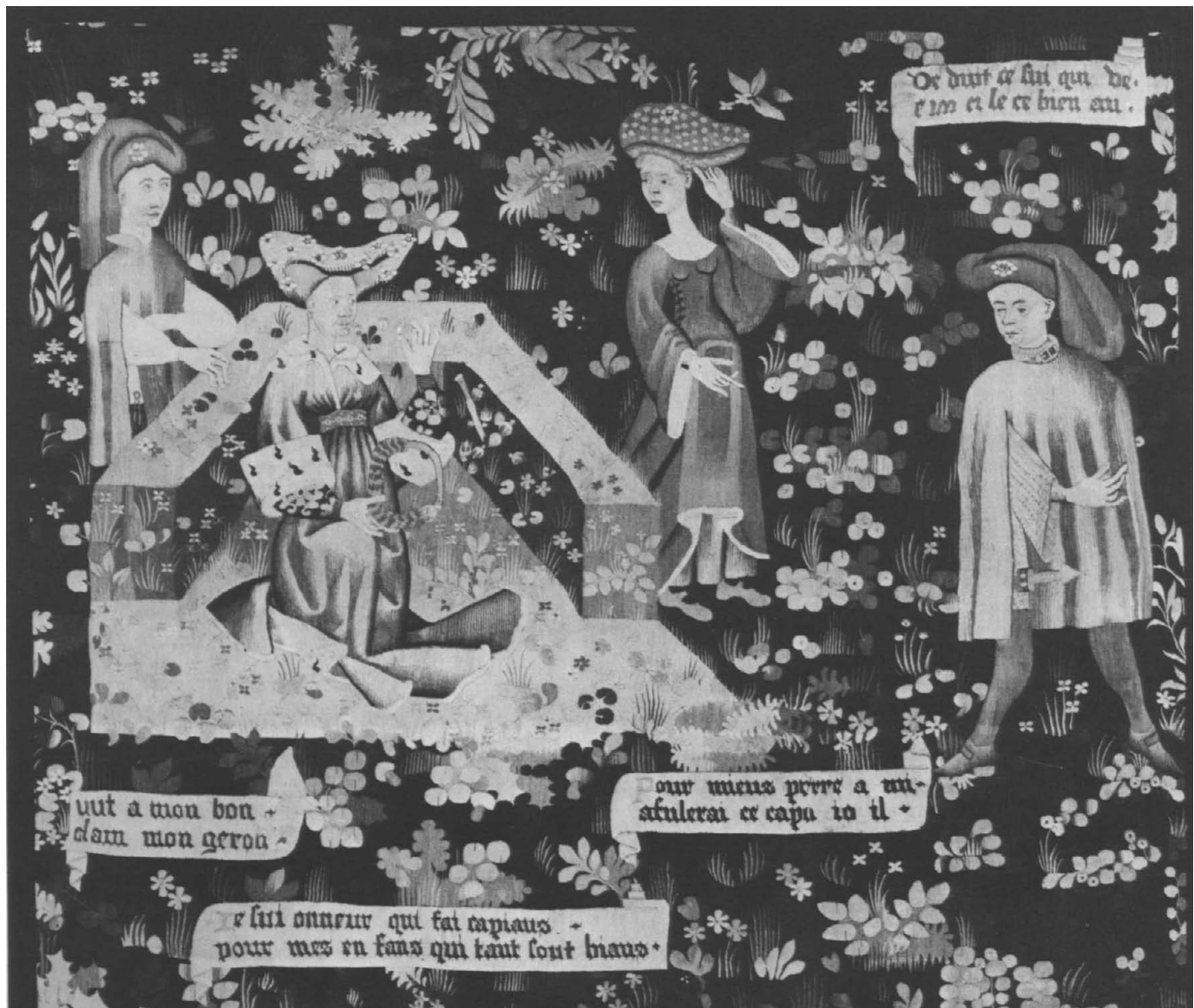
A stylishly costumed lady in an early fifteenth-century tapestry is fashioning such a chaplet (154); she has strung several blossoms on a circlet and is holding up a freshly cut rosebud for her companions to admire. According to the inscription at her feet she is Lady Honor, making chaplets for her "children who are so beauti-

154

Tapestry: Honor and Her Children.

Franco-Flemish (?), about 1440

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund





155

Ivory coffret (top). French, 14th c.

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery

ful." One of her children, the lad at the right, is Deduit; the others are not named.

Roses sometimes play a more belligerent role in allegories of the pursuit of love. On the lid of the ivory casket introduced earlier (44) are two scenes of an assault on the Castle of Love (155). At the left the lover-knights attack the fortress using roses for ammunition; the God of Love shoots his arrows from above while the ladies defend their ramparts by hurling roses onto the knights below. At the right the ladies have capitulated, to no one's displeasure, and two of them are about to ride away with bouquets of roses presented to them by their captors. In the jousting scene at the center one of the knights bears a shield emblazoned with roses.

Roses were associated not only with love but also with betrothal and marriage (141). Medieval writers occasionally used the rose as a symbol of faithfulness in marriage. In the fourteenth-century *Romance of Perceforest* the heroine, Lisane, gives a rose in an ivory box to her husband as he leaves home to seek his fortune at the king's court. She tells him that if she does anything to "merit reproach," the rose will wither, but if she remains faithful the rose will "stay as if newly picked." Though enemies attempt to assail her chastity, she outwits them, and the husband is overjoyed every

day to find that the rose remains red, unfaded, and fragrant.⁶¹

Adam of Cobsam, in his fifteenth-century tale of *The Carpenter's Chaste Wife*, also tells of roses as a test of fidelity. The carpenter married a poor widow's daughter, and the widow, "having no goods to give with her," gave the carpenter, "as for a precious jewel," a rose garland, affirming that it would never fade while her daughter "kept truly her wedlock."⁶²

"Constancy is the crown of woman," wrote the Minnesänger Walther von der Vogelweide; "when her purity is united with her joy of spirit, one can say that the lily is married to the rose."⁶³

If the Unicorn Tapestries were indeed designed to celebrate a marriage, or continuing wedded happiness, the rosebush of the second tapestry would be an appropriate symbol, beautiful, entrancing, and propitious. Another rosebush is introduced into the fourth tapestry near the unicorn, who is fiercely defending himself, and in the fragments of the fifth tapestry roses, both white and red, grow in profusion around the enclosure where the maiden tames the unicorn.

Orange (*Citrus sinensis*)

In the lower right corner of the second tapestry the orange tree in fruit and flower (96) has been identified as the sweet or China orange, a latecomer to western

Europe (the bitter Seville orange [*Citrus aurantium*] was cultivated in Italy and Provence probably as early as the twelfth century). Painters and tapestry weavers of the fifteenth century delighted in representing the sweet orange tree largely because of its decorative quality, perhaps because of its novelty, and possibly because of its symbolic significance.

Orange trees are present in the landscape of Paradise in the Ghent altarpiece of the Adoration of the Lamb, by Hubert and Jan van Eyck. What appear to be two oranges are placed on the mantelpiece in Rogier van der Weyden's Annunciation, in the Louvre. There may be symbolism intended in these trees and fruit, for in Flanders the orange was called the "pomme de Chine" or Chinese apple, and, as an apple, could be considered the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil offered by Eve to Adam.⁶⁴ Konrad von Megenberg describes "Adam's tree" as bearing beautiful golden fruit.⁶⁵ An orange tree would fit this description very well.

Five of the Cluny Museum's Lady with the Unicorn tapestries feature orange trees. Several other tapestries of the period depicting seigneurial pastimes, allegorical scenes, or pastoral activities include orange trees in the setting. In an allegorical tapestry where Venus sits enthroned, an orange tree occupies the middle background and a maiden inscribed as "May" holds before her what appears to be an orange, perhaps an offering to the goddess (156). A rosebush is placed at the side of Venus and a cherry tree grows behind two gentlemen who approach from the right.

The orange tree is associated with love in an allegory by the fifteenth-century Spanish poet Hernando del Castillo. The hero, stricken by love, is transported to a flowery meadow and then to a wooded field where he sees a grove of blossoming orange trees surrounded by a clear-running river. He crosses the river in a boat and comes at last to Love's abode.⁶⁶

It is possible that the orange tree in the Cloisters' tapestry was included both for its religious and secular implications. As all fruit trees could be interpreted as symbols of fertility, the orange, which produces fruit "all the year round," according to Pliny,⁶⁷ would be an especially appropriate addition to a marriage tapestry.

The French *Ortus Sanitatis* introduced in Chapter Three states that that *Citrus*, when eaten by pregnant

women, helps to prevent nausea. It also says that a mixture of the seeds, hot water, and wine "will resist all poisons when it is drunk."⁶⁸ The orange tree, in this latter respect, has an affinity with the unicorn himself, who, in this tapestry, is ridding the stream of venom.

In the fourth tapestry, where the unicorn forcefully defends himself, an orange tree, also in fruit and flower, is the dominant feature of the landscape.

Medlar (*Mespilus germanica*)

At the left of the unicorn in the second tapestry is a medlar (121), a tree unfamiliar to most Americans but common in the Middle Ages. It appears in almost every list of trees to be cultivated in medieval orchards. Charlemagne included it among the trees to be grown in the imperial gardens, and it was planted, along with apples, plums, and walnuts, in the graveyard of the monastery of Saint Gall.⁶⁹ The lover of *The Romance of the Rose* saw medlars as well as plums, cherries, apples, and other "domestic" trees in the garden of Mirth.⁷⁰ The unknown author of *The Flower and the Leaf*, probably a woman, delighted in the medlar that she beheld in the



156

Tapestry: Venus and May. Tournai or Brussels, end of 15th c.

Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs

garden of her dream:

And as I stood and cast aside mine eye,
I was 'ware of the fairest medlar tree
That ever yet in all my life I see,
As full of blossoms as it might be
Therein a goldfinch leaping prettily
Fro' bough to bough; and as him list he eet
Here and there of buds and blossoms sweet.⁷¹

The medlar in the tapestry is in fruit, not in flower, and a goldfinch is perched on one of its branches. Whether or not it is intended to be symbolic, it is perhaps significant that, according to the French *Ortus Sanitatis*, medlars crushed and mixed with wine will repel poisons.⁷² A small medlar appears in the third tapestry, where the unicorn leaps the stream, and there is another in the fourth tapestry, where he defends himself.

At the edge of the woods in the second tapestry, behind the hunters, are various decorative trees, including an oak, a beech, and a holly; these will be discussed in connection with the plants of the third, fourth, and fifth tapestries, where they are portrayed more prominently. The blossoming hawthorn in which one of the rabbits is taking cover is also more important as a feature of the third tapestry and will be discussed later. Among the plants growing in abundance along the stream, the sage, marigold, pimpernel, and pansy may have been chosen for their qualities that seem to echo the religious and secular themes of the tapestries. The same may be said of the wallflower that appears behind the lymrer.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

The designer of the tapestries probably intended this plant to be particularly noticed, for, like the rose, he placed it in silhouette against the fountain (96).

Besides being a flavorsome seasoning and a cure for many ills, sage was considered good against poisons. An herbal of 1525 says: "Seethe sage in ale or wine, and use to drink of it three days and thou shall be whole, by the grace of God."⁷³

The herb's Latin name derives from "salvere," to save, and an early monkish saying, much quoted in the Middle Ages, was: "Why should a man die whilst sage grows in his garden?"⁷⁴ The plant seems to have been grown in every medieval garden from the time of Charlemagne. In his "Goldene Schmiede" Konrad von Würzburg likens the Virgin Mary to several pungent herbs, including sage.⁷⁵ And sage is depicted with other Mary plants in the Rhenish painting of the Garden of Paradise (138).

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) (96)

Besides being an "herb for potage" and an "herb for the cup," as noted in several lists of plants considered necessary for a garden, this was another plant believed to be efficacious against poisons. According to the medical manuscript quoted for the periwinkle:

Golde [marigold] is bitter in savour,
Fair and yellow is its flower. . . .
Good is the leaf, so it is said,
To grind and drink at great need.
It will be drunken with whey or ale
Or with good red wine that be stale;
All manner of venim it will abate
In man's body both early and late.⁷⁶

The same manuscript states that if a man gathers marigolds in the month of August when the moon is new ("in vergine") and wears them while saying "three pater nosters and three aves between," he will "of deadly sin be clean." Like this medical treatise, the fifteenth-century *Secrets of Albertus Magnus* says that the marigold wrapped in the leaf of a bay tree and a "wolf's tooth added thereto" will prevent any man, friend or foe, from speaking a single word "against the bearer except words of peace. . . . Moreover, if the aforesaid

157

Tapestry: The Christ Child Pressing the Mystic Grapes.
Flemish, early 16th c.

Metropolitan Museum, Bequest of Benjamin Altman





158

Portrait of a Lady. Spanish, late 15th c.

Musée du Louvre

herb be put in any church where women have broken matrimony . . . they shall never be able to go forth again except it be put away."⁷⁷

Marigolds were sometimes associated with the festivities of marriage. In the *Grete Herball* of 1526 it is noted that "maidens make garlands of it when they go to feasts or bridals because it hath fair yellow flowers and ruddy."⁷⁸

The fourteenth-century Netherlandish poem that describes twelve flowers as symbolic of the Virgin Mary names one of them as the marigold.⁷⁹

The marigold appears also in the third, fourth, and sixth tapestries and is copied in a restored area at the bottom of the first tapestry.

Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*) (81)

There are two kinds of pimpernel, states the German *Hortus Sanitatis*: one "has delicate little leaves and flowers of a scarlet color and this is the male; the other

has flowers that are sky-colored and that is the female." Both are "good for bites of venomous beasts."⁸⁰

This herb "hath virtues many," according to the medical manuscript quoted earlier:

The man that beareth it day or night
Wicked spirit of him shall have no might;
It withstands the fiendish power
And destroyeth venim if it is near.⁸¹

The three pimpernel plants that appear in this tapestry, one just below the unicorn's head, the others close to the lion and his mate, all have red orange blossoms. Thus, according to the *Hortus Sanitatis*, all are of the male sex.

Wallflower (*Cheiranthus Cheiri*) (121)

"The flowers smell like violets," says the German *Hortus Sanitatis*, and the lemon-colored ones are the best in medicine."⁸² They were considered good for difficult labor in childbirth. According to Braunschweig's *Dis-tillierbuch* of 1500 the distilled flowers "drunk morning, noon and night" for three or four weeks would "make a woman fruitful."⁸³

The wallflower appears also in the first, fourth, and seventh of the Cloisters' tapestries, and it grows at the extreme right in the Rhenish painting of the Garden of Paradise (138).

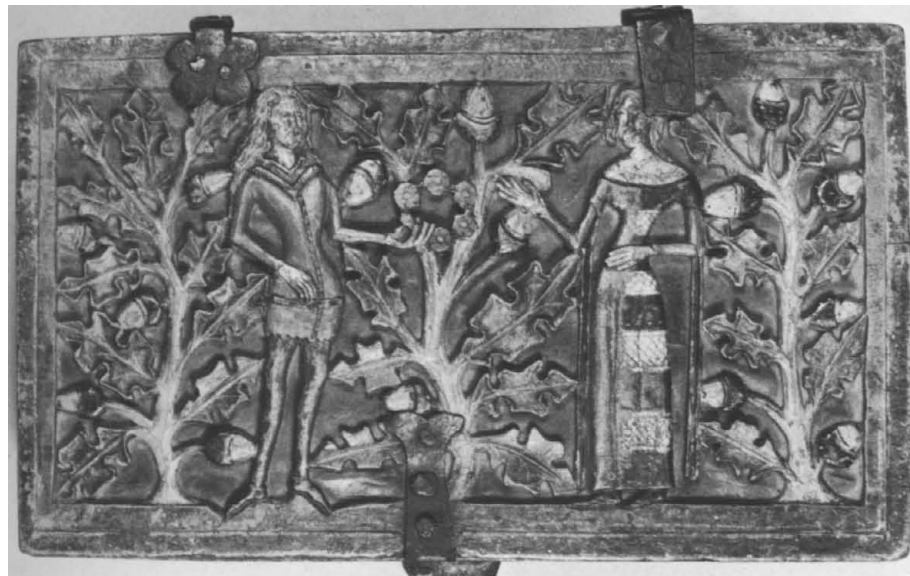
Pansy (*Viola tricolor*) (121)

The wild pansy—sometimes known as heartsease, love-in-idleness, or Johnny-jump-up—unlike its relative the fragrant violet—has petals of three colors, yellow, purple, and white. For this reason it was often called "herba trinitas" in the Middle Ages and could thus signify the Trinity.⁸⁴

A pansy is included with a rosebud, a full-blown rose, a strawberry plant, and a violet in a small early sixteenth-century tapestry, full of symbolism, representing the Christ Child pressing the mystic grapes (157).

The English name "pansy" is derived from the French "pensée," meaning "thought," which probably implies "thought of me" in the language of love. A late fifteenth-century Spanish portrait of a lady shows her against a background filled with pansies (158); the banderole she holds says "De quoilque non vede yo my recorde" ("I remember that one whom I no longer see").

The pansy may also have been a powerful love charm in medieval times, as it was in Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare, though he was skeptical about the existence of unicorns, drew upon age-old folklore for his



159

Minnekästchen (top). Swabia, about 1400

Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum



160

Minnekästchen (end). Middle Rhenish, 15th c.

Paris, Musée de Cluny

interpretation of the properties of plants. He has Oberon say, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (act 2, scene 1) that a "bolt of Cupid" missed its mark and fell instead

... upon a little Western flower;
Before, milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness. . . .
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.

The pansy appears in the third, fourth, and sixth tapestries also.

In the third tapestry

An oak has been placed in the center of the landscape, reaching majestically from the earth in the foreground to the azure sky. Nearby an exquisite hawthorn is silhouetted against the white body of the unicorn. In the lower left corner grows a pomegranate tree bearing ripe fruit. It seems probable that all three have symbolic intent.

Oak (Quercus Robur)

The oak "lasts for a great number of years," writes Isidore of Seville.⁸⁵ He and other theologians note that the patriarch Abraham, "who lived a long time, dwelt under the oak of Mambre, and this oak existed until the

empire of Constantine, the King."⁸⁶ Pseudo-Hugo of Saint Victor adds that the oak, "seeking the heights, is strong . . . and exceedingly durable."⁸⁷ Bartholomaeus Anglicus claims that it "excels all other trees in durability and strength."⁸⁸ Because it is "firm and lasting," says Peter of Mora, it "signifies the firmness of faith," and "sometimes it signifies those who are exalted and proud."⁸⁹

In the language of love the strong, long-lived oak was an important symbol of fidelity. Its leaves "betoken steadfastness," according to the German folk song cited in Chapter One, and "whoever wears them at the command of his true love is expected to remain faithful." Several Minnekästchen feature the oak in their carved decoration. A Swabian casket of about 1400 shows three oversize oaks as a background for a pair of lovers (159); the man is offering his lady a chaplet of red flowers. On a Rhenish Minnekästchen discussed earlier, where a scene of the hunt of the unicorn (48) is interpreted as an allegory of the search for fidelity, there is also a carving of a falconlike bird perched on a twig of oak with acorns, and an inscription: "Joyousness is my desire" (160). Hence, the oak may be associated with happiness in love. What appears to be an oak overshadows the scene of the unicorn-lover overcome by the hunter who is Love on a fourteenth-century ivory cofret (44), and an oak with well-defined acorns is placed behind the crowned lion on a French marriage coffret that also includes a betrothed pair and a unicorn (70).

An oak tree is included in each of the Cluny Museum's Lady with the Unicorn tapestries, and an oak appears in all but the last of the Cloisters' set. In the sixth tapestry the slain unicorn is garlanded with branches of oak that in a strange manner have sprouted thorns. It would seem that this wreath is intended to combine the symbolism of the oak that signifies firmness of faith and fidelity and joy in love with the crown of thorns that signifies Christ's Passion.

The *Grete Herball* claims that the root of this tree, if "sodden with cow's milk and drunk is good for empoisoning."⁹⁰

161

Third tapestry: the hawthorn. A field daisy appears between the ducks and a yellow flag grows behind the flat stone

Hawthorn or white thorn (*Crataegus Oxyacantha*) (161)

In the Middle Ages many believed that Christ's crown of thorns was made of hawthorn branches. Sir John Mandeville, writing of his travels to the Holy Land in the fourteenth century, says, "And you shall understand that our Lord Jesus, on the night he was taken, was led into a garden . . . and there the Jews scorned him and made him a crown of the branches of the aubespine, or white thorn, which grew in the same garden, and set it on his head. . . . And therefore hath white thorn many virtues, for he that beareth a branch thereof upon him, no thunder nor tempest may hurt him, and no evil spirit may enter in the house in which it is or come to the place that it is in."⁹¹



The hawthorn was closely associated with the festivities of May Day and with the springtime joyousness of the whole month of May. In Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, the knightly lover, Arcita, "to do his reverence to May . . . is ridden to the fields to muse and play. . . . And to the grove . . . to make him there the garland that one weaves of woodbine . . . and of green hawthorn leaves."⁹²

In the fifteenth-century *Court of Love*,

On May-day when the lark
began to rise,
To Matins went the lusty
nightingale
Within a temple shapen
hawthorne-wise.

And forth goeth all the Court,
both most and least,
To fetch the flowers fresh,
and branch and bloom,
And namely, hawthorn brought
both page and groom.⁹³

Lovers seem to be attracted to the hawthorn, as in an anonymous French poem of the twelfth century:

My lady hath her love lain
close beside her
In a garden where the
white thorn spreads her leaves.⁹⁴

A thirteenth-century wandering scholar calls his beloved "flower of the thorn":

Slenderly fashioned is she,
wise and fair,
Lovelier than the lily or the
rose.
The Queen of France is not so
beautiful.
And Death is now near neighbor
unto me
Unless she heal the wound
she made in me,
Flower o' the thorn.⁹⁵

In the *Lay Amoureux* of Eustache Deschamps (about 1346–about 1408) the poet goes out into the springtime world on May Day to see the fresh green "leaves, the flowers and buds smelling sweetly," and to search for the hawthorn in bloom. Sitting under a hawthorn, he is privileged to behold a marvelous happening that

could occur only on the first day of May: the God of Love himself appears in a chariot of fire, and then there come famous pairs of lovers from other times to delight the poet's heart.⁹⁶

Further evidence of the love potency of the hawthorn is found in the fifteenth-century poem *L'Amant rendu cordelier*, attributed to Martial d'Auvergne. Here the theme is one of a disappointed lover who has been "banished by his lady," has "renounced all noble service to Love," and has joined a strange monastic order where "only the martyrs of love are received." The prior enumerates his new obligations, warning him never to listen to the nightingale's song, never to think of bouquets of roses or of violets or pansies strewn on the table, never to sleep under a hawthorn tree, and, above all, never to look a woman in the eyes.⁹⁷

A thirteenth-century poem is entitled *Lay de l'espine* because, in this tale of young lovers separated and then united, the hawthorn near a ford in a river plays an im-



162

Madonna and Child, by Gentile da Fabriano.
About 1425

New Haven, Yale University Art Museum,
James Jackson Jarves Collection

portant part in their adventures “on the night of Saint John.”⁹⁸ It may not be a coincidence that in the tapestry the hawthorn is placed as close to the stream as possible, at a spot where there appears to be a shallow crossing.

A hawthorn is shown beside the fountain in the second tapestry, and in the sixth a hawthorn is placed near the dead unicorn, perhaps signifying the crown of thorns and equating the death of the unicorn with the Passion of Christ.

Pomegranate (*Punica Granatum*)

The pomegranate, says Hrabanus Maurus, “under the circle of the rind contains a multitude of seeds. The pomegranate is the Church or the unity of faith and the concord of peace.” He explains that even as the pomegranate has many seeds under one rind, so the Church has assembled in it many people of different sorts and yet has grace. The pomegranate is also a symbol of plenitude and hope, for “the Israelite explorers who were sent into the Promised Land brought back pomegranates with grapes and figs, as is told in the Book of Numbers.” Hrabanus quotes further the verse in the Song of Songs (Vulgate 6:6) where the bride says to the bridegroom, “Thy cheeks are as the bark of a pomegranate, besides what is hidden within thee.” And thus, with the Church, these things “that are seen are exceedingly great, but much greater are those that are not seen and are reserved for the future.”⁹⁹ Here, then, it is implied that the pomegranate is a symbol of an afterlife and a promise of immortality.

According to Cassiodorus and Bede, the pomegranate also may signify Christ. Just as “one must open [the pomegranate] and look into the interior, where such precious fragrant juice and scent flows forth, so must one also penetrate into the inner suffering of the Redeemer, in order to contemplate the boundless soul-suffering of the heart of God whose blood flows over all mankind.”¹⁰⁰

The pomegranate was a symbol of Christ’s mother also. Konrad von Würzburg likens the Virgin Mary to a pomegranate tree filled with the sweetness of rare pomegranates.¹⁰¹ Alain de Lille writes that even as the pomegranate contains a multitude of precious seeds under its skin, so the Virgin Mary held enclosed within

her a multitude of benefits for mankind in the form of her son, our Lord.¹⁰² The pomegranate is frequently included in devotional statues and paintings of the Virgin Mary and her Child. Two pomegranate trees flank the Madonna in a painting of about 1425 by Gentile da Fabriano (162); some of the fruits are open to display the many seeds.

Pliny says that the “branches of the pomegranate keep away snakes, the little buds . . . neutralize the stings of scorpions,” and the fruit “is in request for easing the nausea of women with child.”¹⁰³

More than any other fruit, the pomegranate was for centuries a symbol of fertility, doubtless because of its “multitude of seeds” and its association with the fruitfulness of the Promised Land. A pomegranate shrub is conspicuously placed in the foreground of a millefleurs tapestry of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century that features a family group (163). Whether or not the figures here are “Orientals” or “gypsies,” as has been



163

Tapestry: Oriental (?) Figures. Flemish (?), late 15th or early 16th c. Designed after a print by Albrecht Dürer.

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Francis Skinner Fund



164

Third tapestry: the pomegranate tree

suggested, it is certain that the woman could be a personification of fertility. She is clothed in a light cloak with breast exposed; her belly is ample, probably pregnant; she holds a baby in her arm, and she is followed by an older child who grasps her garment. An oak tree grows behind her, and a flourishing rosebush appears at the lower right. The pomegranates are rich with a "multitude of seeds" at which a bird is pecking.

In the third Cloisters' tapestry the tree and its fruit are accurately depicted (164). In the seventh tapestry, on the other hand, the tree to which the unicorn is chained, while it bears realistic pomegranates, is so stylized that it cannot be identified as any known tree that nature has produced.

Growing along the stream are several possibly significant plants, notably the clary, field daisy, primrose, and yellow flag.

Clary (*Salvia Sclarea*) (110)

"This herb hath leaves like to sage, but the leaves be broader and rounder," says the herbalist Banckes.¹⁰⁴ "It is a good herb to eat," says Petrus Crescentius, "and it lives forever."¹⁰⁵ Pliny claims that there are two kinds, one of which can be "used as an aphrodisiac," and it will also draw thorns from the flesh."¹⁰⁶ Hildegard von Bingen says that the clary, when mixed with a little honey and other herbs, is "of value for anyone who has taken poison."¹⁰⁷

This is the only clary represented in the Unicorn Tapestries.

Field daisy or marguerite
(*Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum*) (161)

The field daisy was sometimes called in medieval times *oculus Christi* or eye of Christ; it was also known as Saint John's flower, as maudlin daisy in honor of Saint Mary Magdalen, and as Our Lady's mint.¹⁰⁸ Konrad von Würzburg included it among the flowers to which the Virgin Mary could be compared: "Exaltedly shalt thy name radiate at all times, thou chosen marguerite, with thy ring of noble gold."¹⁰⁹

In the *Lay Amoureux* of Eustache Deschamps, when the poet, sitting under a hawthorn, witnessed the meeting of celebrated lovers, he also rejoiced in the glories of spring, "the time for loving," and he especially admired the "marguerite so spotless and pure."¹¹⁰

The German *Hortus Sanitatis* considered the daisy to be a cure for excessive sexual desire that conceivably might lead to infidelity: "Some of the masters say that this is devil's love and not human love. Anyone who is melancholic and has no peace, day or night, and has nothing in his head but to be all the time with women, let him take for himself these flowers, then his fantasy and wicked wishes will be changed to good and he shall think of the virtue of Saint John and offer a Pater Noster and Ave Maria and will be freed from this bad melancholy without fail."¹¹¹

Primrose (*Primula*) (123)

In the Middle Ages primroses were often called keys of heaven or Saint Peter's keys.¹¹² The plant was also one of those identified with "the flowers of the field" in the Song of Songs (Vulgate 2:1). Konrad von Megenberg explains its meaning: "This blossom may be likened to Our Lady who speaks in the writings, 'I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys': Now listen! She is a delicate flower of the field who stands on the road

of Grace and when the sinner comes to the spot, then this flower appears to him with full Mercy . . . otherwise the sinner would be lost."¹¹³ It is not surprising that, as the keys of heaven and as one of the Mary flowers, primroses are growing in the Rhenish Garden of Paradise (138).

The primrose was also associated with the merry celebrations of the first of May. In the fifteenth-century *Court of Love*, where members of the royal court went forth to fetch "flowers fresh" and hawthorn blooms, they later pelted one another with blossoms:

Each at [the] other threw the flowers bright,
The primrose, the violet, the gold.¹¹⁴

Primulas were especially welcome because they were among the earliest flowers of spring. The French *Ortus Sanitatis* notes that "the leaves begin to show in the winter time," after which, "the plants spread out over the land [making it] almost lemon-colored [for] they bear flowers the color of lemons."¹¹⁵ Braunschweig notes that the water of distilled primulas is good against "mad dogs . . . and venomous beasts," and that "the same water drunk . . . is good for women that beareth child."¹¹⁶

Primulas are represented in all of the Unicorn Tapestries except the fragments. Sometimes they are shown with characteristic yellow blossoms, other times with pink or red flowers—species that are not native to the lowlands, as shown in the tapestries, but to the high mountains.

Yellow flag or yellow iris (*Iris Pseudacorus*) (161)

The iris receives its name from the Greek goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods to men. As Albertus Magnus explains it, the flowers may be "white or lemon-colored or sky blue or purple; and because of this variety, they are called iris."¹¹⁷ In the Middle Ages the iris was usually called "Swertlilie" or sword lily in Germany, and "flour de lys" (with various spellings) or flower of the lily in France and in England. "The leaves of the yellow lily are like swords . . . and it has a flower that is yellow like saffron . . . and the root is like that of the sword lily. . . . It grows in watery places." This is the description of the yellow flag in the German *Hortus Sanitatis*.¹¹⁸ Much of the symbolism that is attributed to the purple iris, discussed further on, may be applied to the yellow flag also. Beyond this, the German *Hortus Sanitatis*, quoting Pliny, states that a concoction of "the roots mixed with wine and then drunk is exceedingly good for those who have eaten some poison"; it is also

a cure "for sore of breasts" and helps the "labor pains of the mother."

Another *Iris Pseudacorus*, this one more orange colored, appears in the fourth tapestry, on the near bank of the stream.

In the fourth tapestry

Fruit and nut trees dominate the landscape here. In the center, rising to the sky, is a well-developed orange tree in fruit and flower. Next to it on the right is a walnut tree laden with large brown nuts. Still further to the right is a rare strawberry tree and, in the upper right corner, an apricot. In the middle ground are small plums, medlars, and cherries. In the lower right is a peach tree with succulent fruit and in the opposite corner is a hazelnut tree. The felled tree at the upper left is a beech. Of these, the orange, walnut, and medlar have already been discussed. The apricot, if it is symbolic, shares the symbolism of its relative the peach.

Peach (*Prunus Persica*) (111)

This is another of the trees that Charlemagne ordered grown in the imperial gardens and that was planted, along with plums, medlars, and walnuts, in the cemetery-orchard of Saint Gall.¹¹⁹ It was one of the "domestic trees" that the lover saw in the garden of *The Romance of the Rose*.¹²⁰ Though common, and certainly a decorative tree, the peach is seldom represented in medieval paintings and tapestries. Konrad von Megenberg writes of it: "People say that . . . for afflicted men that are impotent because of a cold nature it is good to induce passion."¹²¹ Albertus Magnus notes the claim that the peach "increases intercourse."¹²² The French *Ortus Sanitatis* says, "The fertility of this tree is constant."¹²³

Hazelnut (*Corylus Avellana*)

This tree, placed prominently in the lower left-hand corner of the tapestry (123), was considered to have magic power. Konrad von Megenberg says that if "a branch or a twig is taken and split lengthwise and the two pieces laid close together, they will become joined by magic if the wood has the spirit of life in it."¹²⁴ This property would seem to imply that the tree stands for union and perhaps for regeneration and immortality.

Like the peach, the hazelnut was believed to be an aphrodisiac. Hildegard von Bingen notes that it is of value against male impotence,¹²⁵ and the German *Hor-*

tus Sanitatis says that the hazelnut, when mixed with the herb satirion, "will enable a man to satisfy the desire of his wife."¹²⁶

A more romantic reference is to be found in the thirteenth-century *Lai de Chievrefueil* by Marie de France, which tells the story of Tristan and Iseult with a non-tragic ending. At one point in the poem, Tristan, "grieved and tormented" by his desire for the queen, returns "straight to the realm of his banishment" and

hides "privily in the deep forest." Learning that Iseult would be passing through, he "cut a branch from a hazel tree . . . carved his name upon it," and placed it in her path. The author comments that the lovers were like the hazel and the honeysuckle, "so sweetly enlaced" that they would "wither and die if torn apart."¹²⁷

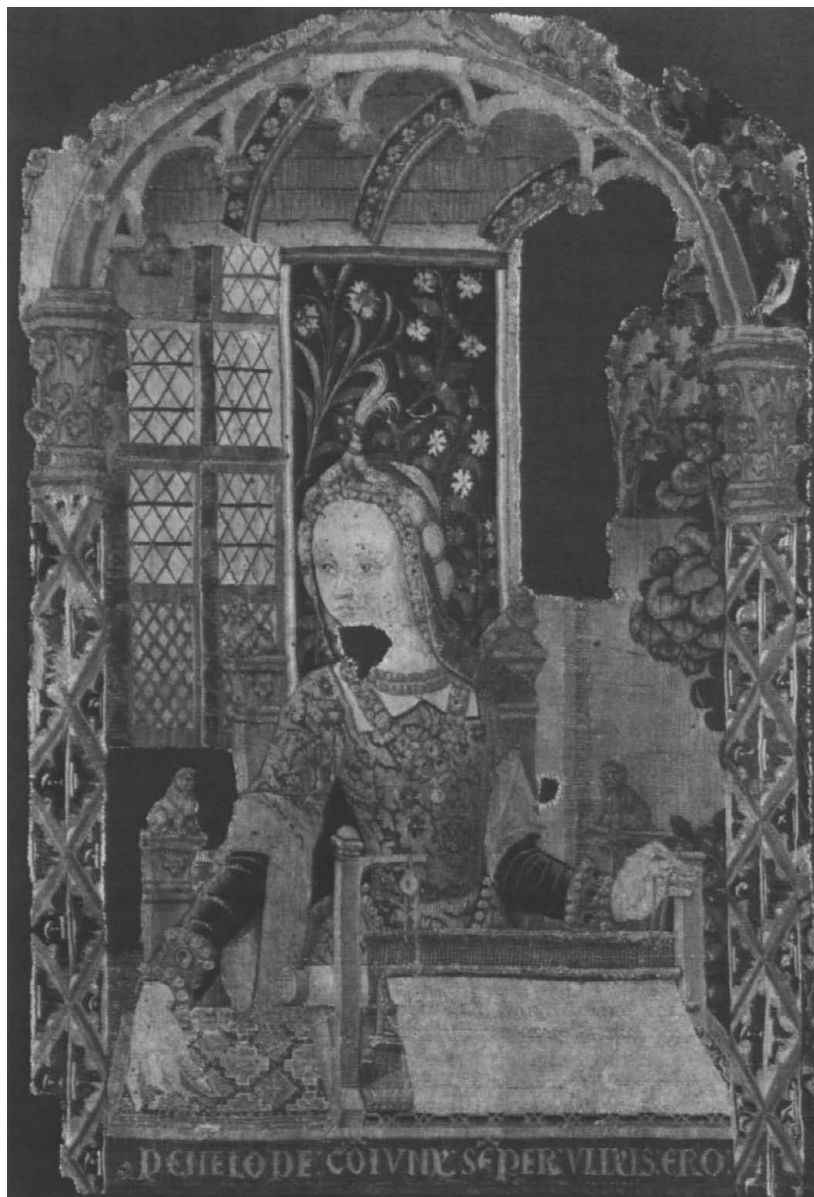
In a late fifteenth-century tapestry representing Penelope at her loom (165) a hazelnut tree is growing in the background at the right. Penelope, though "torn apart" from Ulysses for many years, remained ever faithful while she waited for his return. The hazelnut may be intended to symbolize her fidelity, as perhaps does the oak tree nearby.

A hazel bush is shown in a less important place in the third tapestry. A much larger hazel bush appears in the sixth tapestry, with a squirrel in its branches and a blackberry vine entwined around its trunk.

165

Tapestry: Penelope at Her Loom. From the Virtuous Women series. Flemish (?), 1480–83

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Maria Antoinette Evans Fund



Strawberry tree (*Arbutus Unedo*) (129)

According to the *Grand Herbier*, printed about 1522, the fruits of this tree are similar to cherries, and they are good "remedies against [illnesses of] the womb." They are also "of value against all poisons and the bites of venomous beasts."¹²⁸

Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

The beech "is an entirely noble tree," wrote Konrad von Megenberg, "and the wood is exceedingly good for firewood."¹²⁹ In the tapestry the tree that has just been felled by the woodsman at the upper left (131) is a beech. It may be intended as part of the reward for the huntsman who has harbored the quarry rather than a symbol of religious or secular significance. The value of the beech for firewood is recognized in Chaucer's *Yeoman's Tale*, where a crucible in which metals are being tempered suddenly shatters. The mishap is variously explained by three speakers, and finally:

"Nay," said the fourth,
"shut up and list to me;
It was because our fire
was not of beech."¹³⁰

In the grove of trees that forms the background of the second tapestry there is a beech that has not yet been chopped down for firewood.

Among the plants growing in and along the stream are a feverfew, forget-me-not, cattail, and plantain.

Feverfew (*Chrysanthemum Parthenium*) (130)

This was another plant that Charlemagne ordered cultivated in the imperial gardens. It was considered to be effective against poison and was “good . . . to lay to a sore that is bitten by venomous beasts.” Also, if “stamped and laid to a wound in which be broken bones, it shall bring the broken bones together again and heal them.”¹³¹ Since both the unicorn and a dog in this tapestry are wounded, the dog grievously, the presence of the feverfew with its healing properties is welcome and appropriate. This is the only feverfew shown in the tapestries.

The German *Hortus Sanitatis* recommends the feverfew for infertility in women: “Grind it to powder and mix it with wine, and it will make women fruitful and lighthearted.”¹³²

Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) (130)

Forget-me-nots are usually blue, and in the Middle Ages blue was the color of fidelity. A fifteenth-century German poet writes:

I found there in the bright radiance
A forget-me-not, that little blossom,
Whose color ever shines in steadfastness.¹³³

The very name of this flower, “vergisz mein nit” in fifteenth-century German and “ne m’oubliez mye” in medieval French, indicates its meaning for lovers. A German poet asks the forget-me-not to “greet for me with God in heart the one who is my love.” Another entreats the little flower to tell his lovely one that he remains hers, “right and true as she desires.”

A forget-me-not is shown with healing herbs alongside a vase of Mary flowers in a painting by Rogier van der Weyden of the Virgin and Child with Saints (174). Thus, forget-me-nots may be associated with celestial beings as well as ordinary humans who happen to be in love.

This is the only forget-me-not among the flora of the tapestries.

Cattail (*Typha latifolia*) (111)

Some people in the Middle Ages believed that the cattail was the reed put into Christ’s hand when he was mocked by the soldiers before the Crucifixion. According to the Gospel of Matthew, they “platted a crown of thorns” and “put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and



166

Wood panel (detail), the Mocking of Christ.
Netherlandish, about 1500

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund

mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!” In fact, another medieval name for the cattail was reed-mace. A wood panel of about 1500 at The Cloisters shows a mocker presenting Christ with this reed (166).

Plantain (*Plantago cornuti*) (111)

This was a valuable healing herb. The *Grete Herball* recommends: “Against biting of a serpent eat the herb and drink the juice and it putteth out all venom. . . . It is good also for stinging of a scorpion and biting of a spider.”¹³⁴ The herbalist Banckes adds: “For the same, hang the root of the plantain about the neck of the patient, and marvelously it helpeth.”¹³⁵ It was also considered useful “to bring out the child’s bed . . . in the mother’s womb.”¹³⁶ Hildegard von Bingen says that if a man and woman drink an evil magic love potion, the juice of the plantain should be given to them and the effects of the potion will be lessened.¹³⁷

The plantain also appears in the third tapestry.

In the fifth tapestry

The garden enclosed

In the fifth tapestry the maiden once undoubtedly sat taming the unicorn in a garden surrounded by a rose-covered fence. This is the *hortus conclusus*, an attribute of the Virgin Mary, inspired by a verse in the Song of Songs (4:12): "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse." Alain de Lille, in commenting on this passage, says that the Virgin is a "garden of delights in which the roses of endurance and the lily of virginity are not lacking. . . . [She] is a garden enclosed because she is a valley of charity that is sealed, into which nothing evil can break . . . since she is surrounded entirely by a guard of angels."¹³⁸

In the fifteenth century, the maiden's capture of the unicorn, signifying the Incarnation, is frequently shown as taking place in a *hortus conclusus*. In the Gelnhausen tapestry (51) the Virgin and the unicorn are seated in a garden of stylized flowers that is ringed about by a crenelated wall, while the angel Gabriel as a hunter announces his message from without. A rectangular stone wall with crenelations, a turret, and bolted doors surrounds the garden of the maiden and the unicorn in the tapestry altar frontal in Zurich (53), where roses, lilies, and violets "of humility" are shown, as well as a profusion of other attributes of the Virgin. The *hortus conclusus* of the allegorical Annunciation in Erfurt (52) is enclosed by a rustic wattle fence, and the Virgin is surrounded by a crowd of saints and angels.

In the fragments of the Cloisters' tapestry the garden is rectangular, bounded by a fence of wooden railings and a hedge of roses plentifully supplied with protective thorns. White roses intermingle with red, the white symbolizing Mary's virginity, the red her charity or else the suffering of her Son and the martyrdom of his saints.

Although the *hortus conclusus* of the tapestry is intended to be symbolic, it presents at the same time a partial picture of an actual medieval garden, in contrast to the flowery fields of the second, third, and fourth tapestries. Petrus Crescentius writes that, even though a "beautiful countryside brings great delectation," the grand seigneur should "install gardens near the fields . . . entirely surrounded by . . . thorny green hedges and trees well spaced." Even for lesser people there should be gardens enclosed "by hedges of thorn bushes and roses. . . . If it is possible it is good that the

garden be square and if it is large enough it should be planted all around with aromatic herbs . . . and also with flowers such as roses, violets, marigolds, lilies, irises, and the like, planted well for charm. In the part exposed to the sun, trees should be planted . . . whose leaves will give shade for pleasure."¹³⁹

The portion of the medieval garden that remains in the tapestry fragments shows the thorny rose hedge and the trees. A periwinkle grows from the turf near the fence, and surely many more flowers once graced the missing parts of this enchanting *hortus conclusus*. The trees "well spaced" include two oaks. The apple tree visible at the right and the holly growing inside the fence at the left were, like the oaks, significant to the medieval mind and to the themes of the tapestries.

Apple (*Malus pumila*)

Although "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" that God planted in the Garden of Eden is not specifically named in the Bible, it is considered in popular belief to be the apple tree. God commanded Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree or he would surely die, but Eve was tempted by the serpent "and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Thus Adam and Eve brought sin into the world and lost for mankind the chance to achieve celestial Paradise, until the Virgin, called the second Eve, and Christ, the new Adam, came to earth to redeem that sin.

In the twelfth-century French play the *Mystère d'Adam* the forbidden fruit is called the apple. Adam speaks to the Almighty: "If for an apple I thy love gainsay, / Ne'er in my life can I my folly pay." The Devil, tempting Adam first, promises him: "If of this apple thou partake, / Then thou shalt reign in majesty! / In power, God's partner thou canst be!" When the Devil is repulsed by Adam, he attempts by flattery to wheedle Eve, who temporizes. "Then," as the stage directions say, "a serpent, cunningly put together, shall ascend along the trunk of the forbidden tree, unto which Eve shall approach her ear as if hearkening unto its counsel. Thereafter Eve shall take the apple and shall offer it unto Adam." But Eve tastes the fruit first, and says: "What a savour! / I've never known so sweet a flavour! . . . / Now do mine eyes so clearly see / I seem Almighty God to be. . . . / Eat! Adam, eat!" "Then shall Adam eat a part of the apple," the directions continue, "and he shall straightway take knowledge of his sin."¹⁴⁰

An apple tree is placed in the center of the Garden of Eden in Vêrard's *Bible historiée* (246) and a serpent "cunningly put together" ascends its trunk; Adam and

Eve each hold an apple, and a unicorn, as a symbol of Christ, is present, promising redemption. When the Cloisters' tapestry was complete the apple tree was also most probably in the center of the garden, where the unicorn in the lap of the maiden signifies the Incarnation. The apples, unlike the fruits in the other tapestries, are lavishly enriched with silver-gilt threads (now tarnished), indicating their importance in the minds of the designers and weavers, and probably the patrons.

Medieval writers attributed to the apple tree and its fruit additional symbolism, largely inspired by verses of the Song of Songs. Hrabanus Maurus writes: "The apple . . . signifies Christ the Lord, as the Bride in the Song of Songs says: 'As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.' That is to say, just as the apple, in appearance, in fragrance, and in taste exceeds other trees of the forest, so does Christ surpass all the saints, who are called the sons of God. . . . I rest and remain tranquil [under his shadow] and by the sweetness of his heavenly grace I am refreshed."¹⁴¹

Alain de Lille interprets the shade of the apple tree as the Holy Spirit that overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation. He quotes the words of Gabriel as told in the gospel of Luke: "And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."¹⁴²

It is entirely appropriate that, in the tapestry, the coming of the unicorn to the maiden, signifying the coming of Christ to the Virgin, should take place in the shade of an apple tree.

Alain de Lille also notes that the bride in the Song of Songs sat down under the apple tree; she did not stand in stiff uprightness or walk about in restless curiosity, "or lie down in relaxed voluptuousness." She sat "full of grace with God through her humility, with angels through her virginity and with men through her fecundity. She is the one of whom it is said in the parable: 'A gracious woman shall find glory.'"

As for the fruit of the apple tree that was sweet to the taste, Alain de Lille says that it stands for "divine wisdom." In his interpretation of another verse in the Song of Songs, "Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples because I languish with love," he explains that "the flower is the promise of fruit," and that the apple, "because it is firm, signifies courage."

Statues and paintings of the Virgin and Child frequently represent either Mary or her Son holding an

apple, and often include the fruit as part of the setting. In Jan van Eyck's "Lucca Madonna" the Christ Child holds an apple and two more apples are on the window sill (167). Apples on their leafy twigs decorate the textile hanging behind the Madonna in the painting by Carlo Crivelli (109). A large apple in a crystal goblet is placed in an important position beside the Christ Child as he presses the mystic grapes in the Flemish allegorical tapestry (157).

The apple was rich in erotic symbolism, as well as religious. The verses from the Song of Songs quoted above are, first of all, imaginative poetic expressions of earthly love. In the Greek myth of Paris and the three goddesses, a tale well liked by medieval people, the golden apple was given to Venus, the Goddess of Love. In the poem known as *Chaucer's Dream* the hero is told of a magic tree with three precious apples: the first keeps youth and beauty "ever durable"; the second

167

The "Lucca Madonna," by Jan van Eyck
(active by 1422, died 1441)

Frankfurt/M, Städelches Kunstinstitut



nourishes one in pleasure “better than partridge or pheasant”; the third guarantees that he who bears it will not fail in his delight.¹⁴³

In the double portrait by Jan van Eyck of Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenani, his betrothed or his bride, an apple is placed on the window ledge and what appear to be three more apples are scattered on the top of the chest below (168). These are probably intended as symbolic of love in marriage and of hope for a number of heirs.

Since the unicorn in the lap of the maiden was the symbol of the lover captivated by his beloved, the apple tree in the Cloisters’ tapestry may be intended to suggest the sweetness of worldly love, as well as to recall the sin of Adam and Eve and Christ’s Incarnation.

168

Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenani,
by Jan van Eyck

London, National Gallery



Holly (*Ilex Aquifolium*)

A holly tree with prickly leaves and bright red berries grows luxuriantly within the garden enclosed where the maiden sits, fondling the unicorn. This is one of the plants known in the Middle Ages as Christ’s thorn, and Hrabanus Maurus states that the *Ilex* denotes the Passion of Christ.¹⁴⁴ The apple and the holly together could thus signify the whole drama of the Fall and the Redemption.

The holly also could protect against evil. According to Pliny, “a holly tree planted in a town house or a country villa will keep away magic influences,” and “a holly twig, cast at any animal . . . even if it falls short of the quarry will of its own accord roll nearer the mark, so powerful is the nature of this tree.”¹⁴⁵

Holly was used in decorations for Christmas in medieval times, even as today, and thus was associated with the Nativity and the joyousness of the yule season.

A holly tree appears in all but the first and last of the Cloisters’ tapestries, and in all six of the Cluny Museum’s Lady with the Unicorn set.

In the sixth tapestry

Since the killing of the unicorn may be interpreted in its religious aspect as the crucifixion of Christ, the presence in this tapestry of the hawthorn and the holly, referring to the crown of thorns, is relevant. The dead unicorn, too, is garlanded with oak branches that have miraculously sprouted thorns (169). It has already been noted that the oak stands for durability, strength, and the firmness of Christian faith, as well as fidelity in love and marriage. According to Pliny, leaves of the oak were used to make civic crowns, “that glorious emblem of military valor,” and a crown of oak was also “an emblem of the emperor’s clemency.”¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the garland of oak leaves on the dead unicorn is intended to suggest the additional meaning that he has won the distinguished award for his valor.

The hazel tree in the left foreground, bearing both flowers and nuts, is larger than those in the third and fourth tapestries, and it is made more prominent by the presence of the squirrel in its branches and more significant by the exquisitely designed and meticulously

169

Sixth tapestry: the dead unicorn garlanded with oak leaves on thorny branches. A Chinese lantern plant grows near the bottom of the tapestry; another is near the unicorn’s mouth





170

Sixth tapestry: the hazelnut tree entwined by a blackberry vine, a purple iris nearby

woven blackberry vine entwined around its trunk (170). In the Tristan and Iseult story as told by Marie de France the hazel and honeysuckle, like the lovers, were "so sweetly enlaced" that they would "wither and die if torn apart." In the tapestry it is a blackberry vine instead of a honeysuckle, but it is quite possible that the meaning may be essentially the same. In any case, the blackberry was believed by medieval people to have a significance of its own.

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*)

In the Vulgate and in the writings of the early theologians, the burning bush that Moses saw on the mount of Horeb is called a *rubus*, that is, a bramble bush or blackberry. In his sermon on the Annunciation Honorius of Autun explains that the bush that burned but was not consumed is a symbol of the mystery of the virgin birth: "Moses saw a burning bush that the flames did not consume, and in the midst of it Our Lord appeared. . . . This prefigures the blessed Virgin who was illuminated by the fire of the Holy Spirit, yet was not violated by the flame of concupiscence."¹⁴⁷

In a painting of this subject by Nicolas Froment (171) the burning bush is represented as a huge clump of brambly shrubs that serves as an apparently comfortable cushion for a complacent Virgin with her Child, who holds a mirror reflecting the two of them. The inscription at the base of the original frame makes clear that the shrubs are supposed to be bramble or blackberry, the *rubus* of the Vulgate: "Rubum quem viderat Moyses incombustum. . . ." The leaves, the small white blossoms, and the entwining prickly stems seem very close to the blackberry vine of the tapestry. The painting recalls the tapestries in another respect also, for in the upper right corner of the painted frame there is a unicorn in the lap of a maiden, and in the upper left the angel Gabriel as the heavenly hunter, with three hounds, blows his horn.

Like so many of the plants in the tapestries, the blackberry has associations with love. In Nicole de Margival's *Panthère d'Amours* the panther, symbolizing the poet's beloved, is surrounded by a hedge of blackberries and other thorny plants. The God of Love explains to the lover that the blackberry bush, because it is prickly and clinging, represents thoughts of love that may be painful but, even so, are not unwelcome.¹⁴⁸ Blackberry branches with fruit are represented on several fifteenth-century Minnekästchen (172). In Bosch's *Garden of Delights*, where cherries and strawberries are featured, blackberries also play a part. Amorous gentlemen hold what appear to be mammoth blackberries in their upstretched hands while others wear blackberries on their heads (173).

Pliny writes that blackberries "counteract the venom

171

Central panel of Triptych of the Burning Bush, by Nicolas Froment. About 1476

Aix-en-Provence, Cathedral of St. Sauveur (photo: Giraudon)

of the most vicious serpents . . . [and] the bloom or the berry counteracts that of scorpions."¹⁴⁹ Pseudo-Apu-leius states that the blackberry is good for "heartache," "new wounds," and "bite of adder."¹⁵⁰

Iris (*Iris germanica*)

The iris growing near the hazelnut tree (170) is the purple iris, a knightly flower associated with noblemen and kings. It can also "signify either Christ or Mary or another just man," according to Pierre Bersuire in his fourteenth-century *Dictionary*.¹⁵¹

Saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303–73) gives several reasons for comparing the Mother of God to the iris: "In height and breadth the sword-lily surpasses the other flowers. Although it grows in a valley it rises up above all heights. [The Virgin] is the flower that bloomed in Nazareth but spread out high over Lebanon. Her height

reaches above all heights, for the greatly blessed Queen of Heaven excels all creatures in majesty and in might." She is also like the leaf of the sword lily "that has two sharp edges and ends in a fine point." One of the two sharp edges is "the grief of her heart over the suffering of her Son," as the priest "Simeon foretold when he said that a sword would pierce her heart"; the other sharp edge is her "unflinching defense against all craftiness and power of the Devil. . . . Also, like the leaf of the sword lily, so does Mary possess a very fine point, that is, her humility." When greeted by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, "she called herself only a hand-maiden though she was chosen as mistress of angels and of men."¹⁵²

An anonymous French poem of the thirteenth century likens the Virgin to the iris because both are "beautiful," "sweet-smelling," "upright," and "virginal," and they both blossom in Paradise.¹⁵³ A purple iris does in-



172

Minnekästchen (front). Upper Rhenish, early 15th c.

Karlsruhe, Landesmuseum



173

The Garden of Delights (detail), central panel, altarpiece by Jerome Bosch, early 16th c.

Madrid, Museo del Prado

deed grow in the Paradise garden of the Van Eycks' Ghent altarpiece, and a clump of iris is conspicuously placed against the wall of Mary's celestial garden in the Upper Rhenish painting that has been cited in connection with the Mary flowers (138). A purple iris is combined with a stalk of Madonna lilies in a metal pitcher directly below the Virgin and Child in a painting by Rogier van der Weyden (174). Beneath the pitcher is a fleur-de-lis, believed to be a stylized iris, used as a heraldic device on a coat of arms, in this case probably the Florentine arms of one of the Medici princes.

The fleur-de-lis appeared in armorial bearings of many countries, but more particularly in the arms of the French royal house. While it is not universally accepted that the fleur-de-lis in the French royal arms originally derived from the iris, the idea has many supporters, especially in France. It is significant that in a

174

Virgin and Child with Saints, by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400–64)

Frankfurt/M, Städtisches Kunstinstitut



tapestry woven for a French king, either Charles VII or Louis XI, two winged stags support shields bearing the royal fleur-de-lis (175) while luxuriant iris are close by as the main floral features of the tapestry.

In a magnificent millefleurs tapestry woven for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (286), the heraldic fleur-de-lis again appears with naturalistic iris plants.

In the Cloisters' tapestry the iris may be intended to remind the observer that, in accordance with many accounts, the unicorn, after capture, was brought "to the palace of the king." In any case it was certainly a flower of nobility. As Philippe de Vitry explains in his *Chapel des fleurs de lis*, written in the fourteenth century, the French fleur-de-lis represents "learning, loyalty and knighthood."¹⁵⁴

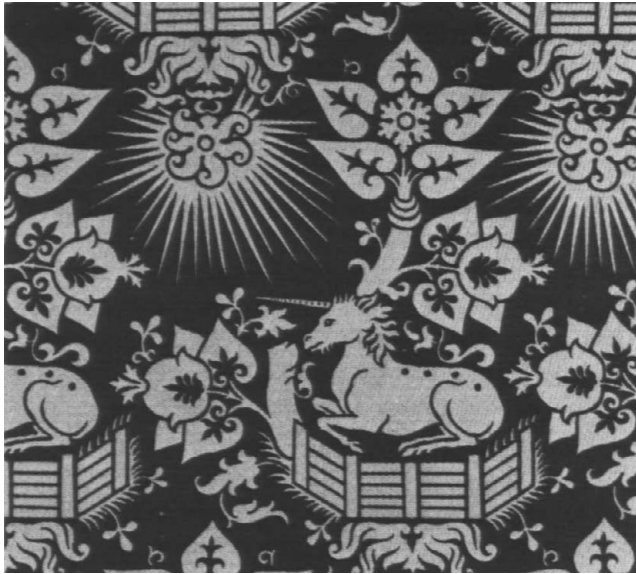
In a French translation of the *Book of Sidrac*, a work that was found in most princely libraries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the questioner asks: "What is the most noble flower that there may be?" and the answer is: "The fleur-de-lis . . . which is the flower of joy . . . and the most appropriate in the hand of a king."¹⁵⁵



175

Tapestry: Winged Stags. 15th c.

Rouen, Museum of Antiquities (photo: Ellebé, Rouen)



176

Textile. Venetian, 15th c.

(Photo of drawing in Friedrich Fischbach, *Ornamente der Gewebe* [Hanau, n.d.], pl. 26B)

It may be noted also that, according to Albertus Magnus, the root of the iris was of value against poisons and “the bites of venomous beasts.”¹⁵⁶

Chinese lantern plant or winter cherry (*Physalis Alkekengi*)

This distinctive plant with red orange husks like small lanterns is conspicuous in the sixth tapestry (169), the second (96), and the fourth (130). It was imported from the East and grown in western Europe for centuries before the Unicorn Tapestries were woven. The herbalists say that the cherrylike fruits are “good for much medicine,” but the specific cures do not appear to be related to the themes of the tapestries. Other medieval names for the plant were *herba salutaris*, the healthful herb, and *concordia*, meaning harmony or friendship.¹⁵⁷

In the seventh tapestry

Pomegranate

The single tree growing here is so stylized that, as E. J. Alexander and Carol Woodward remark, “It resembles no tree on earth.” However, its fruits are unmistakably pomegranates; some of the rinds have burst to display the many seeds within. Though the unicorn appears to

be bleeding from wounds inflicted by the hunters, the “wounds” are really blood-red pomegranate seeds and juice dripping onto his body. The unicorn here may be interpreted as the risen Christ in a paradise garden. It has already been noted that the pomegranate was one of the symbols of Christ and also of immortality. Accordingly, the presence of the tree and its fruits in this tapestry is appropriate indeed. However, since the unicorn is fenced, collared, and chained to a tree, he appears to be more significantly an image of the lover-bridegroom entrapped by his beloved lady, his bride, and the pomegranates, as symbols of fertility, probably express the hope of a married pair for many children. This tapestry, more than the others, appears to signify earthly love and marriage and the desire for progeny.

A Venetian textile of the fifteenth century presents a similar design of a unicorn within a fence resting under a tree (176). Here the tree, which may be interpreted as a Tree of Life, is even more stylized than in the tapestry, and so is the one pomegranate that it bears. The truncated tree at the side has refused to submit to Death, for it has sent forth a branch that produces foliage and another stylized pomegranate.

Silhouetted against the unicorn are a blossoming wild orchid and a scilla; placed close by are a bistort and cuckoo-pint. Important among the plants outside the fence are the carnation, purple iris, stock-gilliflower, Madonna lily, Saint Mary’s thistle, and columbine.

Wild orchid (probably *Orchis mascula*)

This plant, with its purple flowers somewhat faded by time, is placed in a position intended to be noticed and certainly intended to be meaningful (177). It was believed that its roots, distilled or sodden in goat’s milk or wine, were a potent aphrodisiac for both men and women. Braunschweig says that the root “causeth great heat and therefore it giveth lust unto the works of generation.”¹⁵⁸ The German *Hortus Sanitatis* recommends combining orchid roots with hazelnuts in wine and drinking the potion at night: “Then thou wilt that same night be potent, giving pleasure to thy wife.”¹⁵⁹ But the plant had an even greater value: it could ensure that a couple would have sons. For this reason the *Orchis* was called a “Knabenkraut” in medieval Germany, even as it is today. The *Hortus Sanitatis* says “if a man eats the larger part of the root he will beget a male child.” If by any chance he should desire to have a daughter, he should eat the “lesser part” and thus “he will produce a female child.”



177

Seventh tapestry: right to left, scilla in bloom and wild orchid (both against unicorn's body), scilla in fruit and bistort (beyond unicorn's right foreleg)

178

Seventh tapestry: the cuckoo-pint



Scilla or English bluebell (*Scilla nonscripta*)

Isidore of Seville notes the popular belief that if a scilla is "suspended whole above the threshold, all evil things will flee therefrom."¹⁶⁰ Perhaps this is reason enough for the scilla to be shown in a conspicuous position against the unicorn's body, but there may be an implication of fertility symbolism here as well, since the plant is represented not only in flower but also in fruit, directly in front of the unicorn's chest.

Bistort (*Polygonum Bistorta*)

This plant, growing next to the scilla in front of the unicorn, is not notable for its decorative quality. However, the herbalists say that it is of value in aiding a woman to conceive. According to the *Grand Herbier*, "An electuary of powdered bistort . . . and of aromatic spices . . . aids conception for it brings comfort to the retentive quality of the womb."¹⁶¹

Cuckoo-pint (*Arum maculatum*) (178)

Another symbol of fertility in medieval folklore,¹⁶² this was also considered to be a sovereign remedy against poisoning. "If a man has been severely poisoned, let him . . . eat the leaves of this herb with a little salt . . . or the root of the herb in boiled honey and the poison will cease."¹⁶³

Pliny claims that the *Arum*, if burned, is so powerful that it "keeps away serpents, especially asps, or makes them so tipsy that they are found in a state of torpor."¹⁶⁴

Further, according to the herbalists, the plant "drives away melancholy . . . and makes people happy in their hearts."¹⁶⁵

Carnation (*Dianthus Caryophyllus*) (179)

A many-petaled pink native to southern Europe, the carnation was a late-comer to medieval gardens. First cultivated in Italy early in the fifteenth century, it was later introduced into Flanders, France, Germany, and England. By the time the Unicorn Tapestries were woven it was widely known and loved for its delicate

179

Seventh tapestry: carnation with butterfly, purple iris with dragonfly. Left to right in foreground: periwinkle, violets, strawberries





180

Maximilian of Austria and Mary of Burgundy, illustration in *Chronique de Flandres*. About 1480

Bruges, Stadtsbibliothek, Ms. 437, fol. 395
(photo: copyright A. C. L., Brussels)

beauty and delicious clovelike fragrance. In the *Lady with the Unicorn* tapestries, the carnation is the flower chosen to represent the sense of smell. The lady is fashioning a chaplet of red and white carnations while her handmaiden holds for her a golden platter of more of the same fresh flowers (78).

In the fifteenth century the carnation became a popular emblem of betrothal and marriage. It is shown with this implication in many a tapestry, painting, and manuscript illustration. A page in the *Chronique de Flandres* shows Maximilian of Austria in his ermine-lined cloak holding up a wedding ring while his betrothed,

181

Tapestry: *Allegory of Time*. Flemish (?), 1500–10

The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Bequest



Mary of Burgundy, wearing a ducal crown over her long straight hair, responds by displaying a pink carnation (180). An account of the marriage of this noble couple on 18 August 1477, describes how, "following the custom, Mary had hidden a carnation on her person," and Maximilian "was given to understand that he should search for it. Whereupon he began to search circumspectly with his fingers . . . but could not find it until, on the advice of the bishop of Trèves, he opened the clothing of the *jeune fille*."¹⁶⁶

A tapestry representing Time illustrates the three ages of man, childhood, youth, and old age (181). The main scene consists of a group of young people of whom the chief characters are a gentleman presenting a lady with a bouquet of roses and pinks while she offers him a single carnation. The exchange of these particular flowers seems to indicate the betrothal of the

couple in a ritual that is charming and appropriately romantic. A young friend in the company holds out an apple as a symbol of fertility; behind the fiancé are a cherry tree and an orange tree, also probably connoting fruitfulness, as in the Unicorn Tapestries. And, as in the Cloisters' set, there are a rosebush, a pheasant, a unicorn, and other details that may be symbolic.

In several late Gothic portraits men as well as women hold one or more carnations as tokens, most probably, of recent betrothal or wedded bliss. A young lady in a hennin and garnet red dress, painted by Hans Memling, holds a single pink carnation in her delicate fingers (182). The background of a portrait of a princess of the house of Este by Pisanello (183) is patterned with carnations mingled with columbine blossoms and butterflies, said to be symbolic of love and fertility.¹⁶⁷ It may be noted that a butterfly hovers over one of the carna-

182

Lady with a Pink Carnation, by Hans Memling
(active about 1465, died 1494)



183

A Princess of the House of Este, by Pisanello
(c. 1395–c. 1455)



tion plants, much as in the Cloisters' tapestry.

In the late Gothic period, too, the carnation became associated with Christ and the Virgin, sometimes supplanting the rose in Mary's favor. The association is largely due to the fact that carnations smell like cloves. The Virgin was likened to this sweet-smelling spice; according to Konrad von Würzburg, Mary was a "fragrant sprig of cloves."¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, since cloves are shaped like nails they were symbolic of the nails that were driven into Christ's hands and feet on the cross.¹⁶⁹

184

Virgin and Child with Donors, by Hugo van der Goes
(active 1467, died 1482)

Frankfurt/M, Städelches Kunstinstitut



The carnation and the pinks, because of the similarity of their odor to the spice, thus inherited much of its symbolism. The blossoms in Germany were sometimes called "nail flowers."

Several late Gothic artists include the carnation, or its relative the clove pink, in paintings of the Madonna. Hugo van der Goes, in the central panel of a triptych, shows the Christ Child holding aloft a pink and white carnation almost as if it were a sign of victory over death on the cross (184). The donors, painted on the wings of the triptych by another artist, have been identified as Willem van Overbeke and his wife, Johanna de Keysere, who were married on 5 February 1478. It may be that in this case the carnation refers to the betrothal or marriage of the couple as well as to the virtues of Mary and the triumph of Christ. Conversely, in the Cloisters' tapestry, where secular symbolism seems to predominate, the carnation may be interpreted not only as a flower of betrothal and marriage but also as a Mary flower and an emblem of the risen unicorn-Christ.

The carnation is not included in the flower-filled Garden of Paradise (138), probably because the Rhenish artist was not yet familiar with this symbolic flower, but a somewhat later painting by the Cologne artist Stephan Lochner shows carnations growing in a turfed bench at the right and left of the Virgin (185). On one side a childlike angel, directed by another angel, holds up a clove pink, while on the other side an angel in a cope holds up a twig of roses.

The *Dianthus Caryophyllus* appears only in the seventh tapestry, but other pinks with broader leaves, probably *Dianthus Seguieri*, are included in all the other tapestries except the fragments of the fifth.

Stock-gilliflower (*Matthiola incana*)

Three of these sweet-smelling plants are placed outside the unicorn's enclosure, one against the fence at the right (186), the others at the sides of the fence, one in front of the unicorn, the other behind him. Since the flowers here are white, they may signify purity, and since they are exceedingly fragrant, they may signify love, as do the carnation and the rose. The plant belongs to the same family as the wallflower, so perhaps it was considered to have the same virtue, that of making a woman fruitful. In the Middle Ages, stock-gilliflowers were sometimes called "white violets" and "nail flow-

185

Virgin and Child with Angels, by Stephan Lochner
(c. 1400–51)

Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum





186

Seventh tapestry: center, Madonna lily. At left, Saint Mary's thistle. Between thistle and lily, a wallflower. Above, against fence, a stock-gilliflower. At right, among violets, the frog

ers," as were carnations; thus it may be that they sometimes shared the symbolism of the violet and the *Dianthus*. Whether or not there is anything in these conjectures, it can at least be said that the Virgin Mary seemed to like the stock-gilliflower, for there are two of these plants, one white, the other red, growing near her in the Rhenish Paradise Garden (138).

Stock-gilliflowers also appear in the first and fourth tapestries.

Madonna lily (*Lilium candidum*)

The white lily, grown in almost all recorded medieval gardens, depicted in a multitude of medieval paintings, and woven exquisitely in the Cloisters' tapestry (186), is not today's Easter lily (*Lilium grandiflorum*), which was native to the Ryukyu Islands, south of Japan, and not introduced in Europe until 1819.¹⁷⁰ One important difference is that the Madonna lily is more deliciously fragrant. Walahfrid Strabo says of the lily in his garden:

... ah! what lines can my simple Muse,
 Lean and meagre as she is, find to praise
 The shining lily? Its white is the white of glistening
 snow,
 Its scent the scent of sweetest frankincense.
 Not Parian marble in whiteness, not spikenard in
 fragrance
 Surpass our lily.¹⁷¹

This lily is called Madonna lily today because it is closely associated with the Virgin Mary. First of all, since it is white, it is a symbol of her purity. As Bernard of Clairvaux expressed it: "Mary is the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, the rose of clarity . . . and the

187

Annunciation, by Hans Memling
 (active about 1465, died 1494)

Metropolitan Museum, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan



glory and splendor of the heavens."¹⁶ Bartholomaeus Anglicus adds to the symbolism: "The lily is an herb with a white flower, and though the petals of the flower be white, yet within shineth the likeness of gold."¹⁷² Thus the lily is the symbol of Mary as the pure shrine for the "gold" that is Christ. The twelfth-century theologian Petrus Cantor wrote that the lily may be compared to the Virgin not only because of its dazzling whiteness but also because of the sweet fragrance that it "spreads about."¹⁷³ The lily of the Song of Songs was identified with the Madonna lily and thus with the Virgin Mary. For example, Konrad von Megenberg says that God speaks of his Mother in these words: "As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters."¹⁷⁴

There are few fifteenth-century representations of the Annunciation that do not include a stalk of Madonna lilies, either carried by the angel Gabriel or placed in a jar by Mary's side (187). As Queen of Heaven in the Ghent altarpiece, Mary wears a jeweled crown with red roses and white lilies that appear to be real flowers, freshly picked (188). As might be expected, a Madonna lily is growing in the Rhenish Garden of Paradise (138).

The lily is also associated with virgin saints. Sigebert of Gembloux pictured the martyrs Agnes, Lucy, and Barbara wandering through heaven's meadows gathering "lilies and violets for love."¹⁵ In the Ghent altarpiece a Madonna lily is planted near the group of virgin saints walking in solemn procession through the fields of Paradise. The lily is included in many another painting of the heavenly gardens where saints and angels dwell in joy.

On a more worldly level, the lily, because of its whiteness, is a symbol of the purity of the loved one, and because of its beauty and fragrance it is a simile for the sweetness of love. In the thirteenth-century romance of *Aucassin et Nicolette* Aucassin sings of his beloved:

Nicolette, white lily-flower,
 Sweetest lady found in bower. . . .
 Lily-flower so white, so sweet
 Fair the faring of thy feet.¹⁷⁵

In the thirteenth-century romance of *Floire et Blancheflor* the lily appears to be the flower of faithfulness in love and marriage. In this tale the lovers are separated, subjected to many trials, then reunited and wed. When they die they are buried in a common tomb on which two figures are represented, Floire offering his beloved a red rose, Blancheflor giving him a white lily.¹⁷⁶

Less romantic is the *Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus*, in which it is claimed that the lily can be used



188

Virgin Enthroned (detail), in the Ghent altarpiece, by Jan van Eyck (active 1422, died 1441)

Ghent, Cathedral of St. Bavo (photo: copyright A. C. L., Brussels)

as a test for the virginity of a young girl.¹⁷⁷ An Anglo-Saxon herbal states: "That you may know about a pregnant woman, of what sex she is to bear child . . . take two herbs in hand, namely the lily and rose, carrying them to the pregnant woman, bid her take which of the two she chooses . . . if she takes a lily, she will bear a boy, if she takes a rose, she will bring forth a girl."¹⁷⁸

Like so many of the plants in the tapestries, the lily could be used against the poison of serpents. As Walahfrid Strabo expresses it:

If a snake, treacherous and wily
As it is by nature, plants with deadly tongue its parcel
Of venom in you, sending grim death through the
unseen wound
To the inmost vaults of the heart, then crush lilies
with a weighty
Pestle and drink the juice in wine. Now place the pulp
On the top of the livid spot where the snake's tongue
jabbed,
Then indeed you will learn for yourself the wonderful
power this remedy has.¹⁷⁹

Saint Mary's thistle or holy thistle
(*Silybum Marianum*) (186)

Thistles, because they are prickly, were sometimes identified with the thorns in the verse from the Song of Songs: "As the lily among the thorns, is so my love among the daughters." According to Honorius of Autun, this means that as the lily surpasses the thistle in "adornment and sweetness, so Mary excels all others of the Church in the adornment of chastity and the sweetness of sanctity."¹⁸⁰ It is perhaps in this rather roundabout way that thistles, especially the Saint Mary's thistle, came to be associated with the Virgin Mary, and it is probably not by chance that the thistle in the tapestry is placed near the Madonna lily, which does indeed surpass the thistle in "adornment and sweetness."

In the mind of Louis II, Duke of Bourbon, the thistle was certainly associated with Mary, for in 1370, on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter, he founded a knightly order in honor of the Virgin and called it the "Order of the Thistle."¹⁸¹

On a fifteenth-century tapestry cushion cover a maiden and a unicorn are enclosed by a circle of stout interwoven branches from which prickly thistles grow, filling the entire field with flowers and leaves (189). It may be that this arrangement is to be interpreted as the

189

Tapestry cushion cover. German, third quarter 15th c.

Cologne, Schnütgen Museum



crown of thorns, or it may be intended as a garden enclosed, where the lady's virginity is protected by a hedge of impenetrable prickly plants. In *The Romance of the Rose* the lover was deterred at first from drawing near to the rose bush because it was surrounded by "thorns sharp . . . thistles thick . . . and briars for to prick."¹⁸² The thistle in the Cloisters' tapestry may be intended in part as a reminder that the unicorn-lover has gone through a thicket of thistles to gain his loved one, as, apparently, has the unicorn of the cushion cover.

The virtues of the thistle are stated by the herbalists. Pliny says that the root of any kind of wild thistle boiled in water, "if we may believe the report . . . affects the womb in such a way that male children are engendered."¹⁸³ According to the *Grand Herbar* the leaves of the holy thistle "cooked and eaten will increase milk in women marvelously."¹⁸⁴ Hildegard von Bingen says that if "a man eats or drinks poison, let him pulverize the head of the thistle and the root and the leaves and

190

Seventh tapestry: columbine



191

Annunciation (detail), by a Provençal master.
Completed in 1445

Aix-en-Provence, Church of St. Mary Magdalen (photo: Giraudon)

let him take the powder in food or drink, and the poison will be driven out from him."¹⁸⁵ Braunschweig reports that the distilled water of the holy thistle once cured "a little wench that had eaten venom with an apple."¹⁸⁶ And according to Pseudo-Apuleius, if you carry the wild thistle on you, "no evil at all can befall you."¹⁸⁷

The Saint Mary's thistle of the seventh tapestry is copied in the restored area at the bottom of the first tapestry. Another white thistle, *Carduus* or *Cirsium*, appears in the first tapestry between the heads of the first two hunters. Still another variety of thistle, *Cirsium arvense*, grows on the near side of the stream in the fourth tapestry.

Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) (190)

According to Pseudo-Apuleius this plant "is very near akin to the color of doves, whence . . . some people call it *columbina*."¹⁸⁸ Thus, like the *columba*, or dove, it was one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit. The colum-

bine occasionally appears with the Madonna lily in Annunciation scenes, as in a painting of about 1445 by a Provençal master (191). It appears, furthermore, in the Erfurt allegory of the Annunciation (52). In the fourteenth-century Netherlandish hymn cited earlier, Mary is praised as an “akeleye fier,”¹⁸⁹ through whom, on our behalf, God came to earth and took on human form to save us from our sins. The columbine grows in the Rhenish Garden of Paradise (138) and in the celestial garden of the Ghent altarpiece. Here, too, columbines blend with lilies and roses in the crown of Mary as Queen of Heaven (188).

The columbine has secular symbolism also. It appears in the background of the portrait of a princess (183), where, with the carnation, it is said to suggest love and fertility.¹⁹⁰ It is presented as an erotic plant in Bosch’s *Garden of Delights*. And in an undated French *virelai* it is the flower of “loyalty, constancy, and fidelity.”¹⁹¹ A manuscript illustration of the fifteenth century depicts the guardian of a castle with columbine blossoms on his surcoat; on his furry hat he is labeled “Leal,” or Loyalty (192).

Pseudo-Apuleius writes of the columbine: “Against all poisons, take dust of this same wort [and] administer it to drink; it driveth away all poisons; also it is said that sorcerers use it for their crafts.”¹⁹²

There can be no doubt that a large number of the plants in the tapestries relate to the religious and secular themes of the Hunt of the Unicorn, probably even more of the plants than have been included in this study. It would be unwise to assume, however, that all of the many meanings discussed here were in the minds of the seigneur who commissioned the tapestries, the designer who drew the patterns, and the weavers who wove them so expertly and so lovingly. But it would be equally unwise to assume, as some have done, that except for a very few symbolic plants, the trees and flowers were to be enjoyed by the medieval viewer for their decorative values only.

192

Illustration (detail) in Ptolemy’s *Geography*. Flemish, 15th c.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 4804, fol. 4^v



6

THE ~~AT~~ THE ~~FR~~ AND OTHER PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP OF THE TAPESTRIES

ITEM: Four pieces of tapestry of high warp loom, blue and gray, *semés* with tasseled cords and EE and a unicorn in the middle, each containing twenty-six square aulnes or thereabouts, valued at thirty-six livres.

Inventory of the Count of Saint-Pol, 1476¹



The A and E tied with a cord in a bowknot plays a conspicuous part in all of the tapestries, even appearing on dog collars in the third (123). The AE without the cord appears on a dog collar in the first tapestry, and on another collar here two A's are shown with coats of arms (222). The tied F and R, unlike the AE's, is not part of the fabric of the single tapestry on which it is found, the third; it has been cut out, presumably from another tapestry, and painstakingly sewn onto the sky, which, like most of the sky areas of the other tapestries, has recently been added.

It may as well be admitted at the outset that it is not yet known what either the AE or the FR signifies, or indeed for whom the tapestries were woven.

In 1942 James J. Rorimer, believing that he had found the solution for the problems, published in the Museum's *Bulletin* an article entitled "The Unicorn Tapestries Were Made for Anne of Brittany."² Both his reasoning and his conclusions must be examined again. His first "clue" stemmed from the similarity that he observed between the AE's in the tapestries and those in a small prayer book made for Anne of Brittany, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library. He surmised that the AE in the tapestries represented the first and last letters of Anne's name, citing for comparison such medieval elisions as DMS for Dominus, DS for Deus, JS for Jesus, and CHS for Charles. However, it should be noted that in all these instances, and, as a matter of fact, in most

medieval elisions of names, one or two consonants are included for clarification. In Anne's book of hours, on every page where the A and E are painted in the borders, a large number of N's are included also (193). Hundreds of initials tied together as in the tapestries have been studied by me and others, and of these only one instance might be considered to represent the first and last letters of a single name. This is the linked VE on the cuirass of a soldier in a manuscript illustration of Urie (Uriah), husband of Bathsheba, going into battle to be killed at King David's instigation (194). The interpretation, of course, is not certain. If this example does represent an exception to the "rule," there could well be another exception in the linked A and E in the tapestries. However, if such be the case, the letters could just as well refer to another Anne—or to an Antoinette, Antoine, Adolphe, or Alphonse.

The interpretation of the AE as the name of Anne of Brittany, twice queen of France (1491–98 and 1499–1514), was reinforced by Mr. Rorimer with other argu-

193

Illustration in prayer book of Anne of Brittany. About 1496. The borders are composed of cordelières

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M 50, fol. 5

ments. He emphasized the importance of the cordelière in Anne's life. The cordelière, a rope with a series of tight knots spaced at intervals, was worn by Saint Francis of Assisi and by brothers of the Franciscan order. Mr. Rorimer noted that "Francis, Duke of Brittany, Anne's grandfather, used the cordelière as an emblem in evidence of his devotion to his patron saint. Anne used it in every possible way. It appears with her arms, with the letter A in decorations, and as part of her dress. In 1498 she founded the chivalric order of the Dames de la Cordelière, which she bestowed upon the principal ladies of her court. The convent of Notre-Dame-de-la-Cordelière at Lyons was built by her." Indeed, in works of art made for Anne, the use of the cordelière seems to have been practically obligatory. A remarkable example, a manuscript of the *Histoire de*

la Toison d'Or, made for Anne, has the cordelières strung along the borders of almost every one of its 290 folios (195). Unfortunately for Mr. Rorimer's argument, the tasseled cord uniting the A and E of the tapestries is not a cordelière, for it lacks the characteristic tight knots of the true cordelière as seen in the illustrations. It is, rather, a "lac d'amours," a simple "lac," or a "noeud," a device very popular in the late Middle Ages. In view of Anne's consistent use of the cordelière, one must conclude that if the tapestries were indeed made for her, she would surely have insisted that the cordelière be present, especially in such a monumental, important ensemble as the Hunt of the Unicorn.

Mr. Rorimer also believed that the lord and lady of the castle (196), receiving the procession of hunters bringing the dead unicorn, could be identified as Queen

194

Uriah Leading the Army: miniature in book of hours of Louis of Laval, 1480–89

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 920, fol. 166



195

Anne of Brittany: miniature in *Histoire de la Toison d'Or*, 1492–98

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 138, fol. 1^v





196

Sixth tapestry: the lord and lady

197

Louis XII, by Jean Perréal (c. 1455–1530)

Windsor Castle, reproduced with the gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen (copyright reserved)

Anne and her husband, King Louis XII, and he suggested that the tapestries might have been commissioned to celebrate their marriage on 8 January 1499. He illustrated portraits of the king and queen for comparison. Indeed the man in the tapestry does resemble some of the portraits of Louis, especially in the long narrow nose turned up at the end; however, the nose can hardly be an identifying factor since two other gentlemen in the same tapestry have similar noses. Also, the lord of the castle has grayish light brown hair, whereas in all the representations of Louis that I have seen, the hair is dark brown, as it is in the fine portrait of him at Windsor Castle (197). Then, too, if the man were Louis, and if he wore a necklace at all, he would most likely have worn the collar of the Order of Saint Michael, consisting of cockleshells, bowknots, and a pendant of the saint killing the dragon.³ Portraits of the king invariably show him with this insigne, unless he is garbed in the royal robe of state, in which case the ample ermine collar would conceivably cover the chain. The gentleman in the tapestry wears no robe of state, and his necklace is an ordinary one, fashioned of simple golden links.

Mr. Rorimer noted that the lord of the castle is clothed in a red robe, a white hat, and red and white striped hose, and that one of the hunters in the sixth tapestry and another one in the third wear similar hose. He said: "We know that after his marriage to Anne, Louis added her color, white, to his own which had been red and yellow, and often used red and white exclusively." However, it must be remarked that red and white was not an unusual color scheme for costumes or for liveries, and that it was not at all limited to the use of Louis. Also, the king seems to have preferred the red and yellow even after his union with Anne. In an illustration of a battle scene in a manuscript dealing with Louis's war against Genoa, all the king's pennants are yellow and red.⁴ His page boys are clothed in red and yellow in a miniature showing Anne holding her daughter Claude while Louis stands before Reason (198). A wall hanging in another manuscript illustration, where Louis kneels in prayer, is striped in red and yellow;

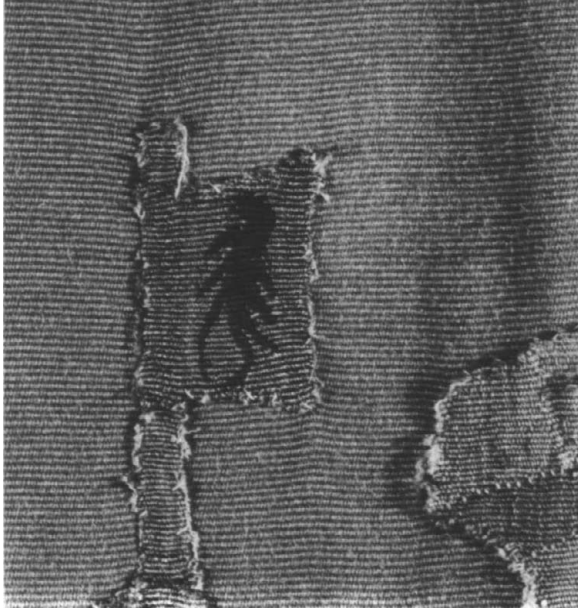


198

Miniature in Petrarch's *Remèdes*. Rouen, dated 1503

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 225, fol. 165





199

Sixth tapestry: banner with lion (?) rampant

here, L's surmounted by royal crowns leave no doubt that the hanging refers to the king.⁵

As for another of Mr. Rorimer's points, the three fleurs-de-lis on the collars of two dogs in the third tapestry (122), it should be noted that they are on red grounds, not blue as in the French royal arms. Also, by the time of Louis and Anne, many people in many lands used fleurs-de-lis in their armorial bearings. The inscription on the collar of the dog near the Gabriel-huntsman in the fourth tapestry (130), which appears to read OFANCRE, may indeed be an abbreviated OF[R]ANC[ORUM] RE[X], as Mr. Rorimer suggests; however, this acknowledgment of the "King of the French" may have been merely an honoring of the king by a vassal; it does not necessarily mean that the tapestry was made for the king or his queen.

The identification of the animal on one of the banners in the sixth tapestry (199) as Louis's porcupine "haphazardly drawn" is certainly debatable. This animal appears to be rampant; Louis's porcupine usually has his four feet firmly on the ground. To me, the beast on the banner looks more like a shaggy lion than a porcupine.

Mr. Rorimer, quite wisely, did not stress the physical likeness of the lady in the tapestry to the known portraits of Anne. Miniatures of the queen (195, 198, 200) show her with plump cheeks and a small chin. The chatelaine of the tapestry has a long narrow face with a noticeably dominating chin. Anne was only twenty-two when she married Louis, and surely the lady of the tapestry is older than this; in fact she appears older than does the queen in any of her portraits.

In justifying his identification of Anne, Mr. Rorimer relied more on the "literary and pictorial records of her costumes and accessories" than on facial similarities. In the tapestry, the lady wears an elegant reddish brocaded gown with wide sleeves lined with brown fur, a

blue sash from which is suspended a rosary, a necklace with a pendant cross, and a headdress that is entirely black. It is true that in the manuscript of *Le Voyage de Gênes* (200) Anne is clothed in a dark red dress lined with brown fur, and a blue sash with prayer beads attached, and it is also true that she wears an unmistakable cross in a medal offered to her by the city of Lyons in 1494. However, these objects of apparel are not unique to Anne: many ladies of the late Middle Ages wore crosses, rosaries, and red gowns with wide sleeves lined with brown fur, sometimes even sashed in blue. It may be noted, too, that there is an important difference in the fashion of the gown of the chatelaine in the tapestry and that worn by Anne in the manuscript portraits of her: the emphasis in the tapestry is on the V-line at the neck, whereas Anne's dress is invariably cut with a square neck, a shape more stylish for the period.

The head covering of the lady in the tapestry, with its inner hood of velvet and outer one of plain cloth, both black, was equated by Mr. Rorimer with the

200

Anne of Brittany: miniature in *Le Voyage de Gênes*, about 1507

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 5091, fol. 1



mourning headdress of Queen Anne after the death of her first husband, Charles VIII; he considered especially significant the "black cap" worn underneath, citing the expense accounts of the queen for her mourning attire. It is true that in these accounts there is the item: "fine black cloth for making *chaperons* . . . for the said lady." Following this are listed payments for "miniver for furring the *chaperons*," "caps of the material of linen crepe to serve for underneath," and "linen of Holland . . . for a dozen *tourches* [pleated pieces] for the forehead for the use of said lady."⁶ The last two items definitely do not specify that the color should be black; in fact, since the material was linen, it seems more probable that it was of a light color or white. Anne did not give up white for her mourning, as Mr. Rorimer implied, for in the accounts are payments for white furs and for "a mantle of white lamb." In short, Anne's mourning headdress, as it may be visualized from the descriptions in the accounts, does not appear to correspond with that of the chatelaine in the tapestry. Furthermore, it seems doubtful that Anne would be so

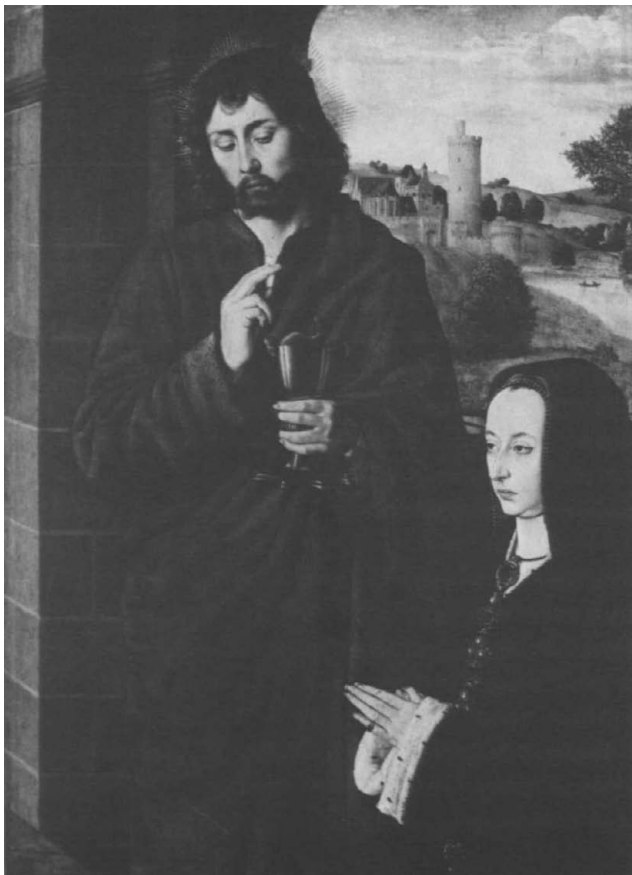
inconsiderate as to wear mourning for her first husband while she is standing arm in arm with her current or future spouse. As a matter of fact, black head coverings were not necessarily a sign of mourning. Olivier de la Marche, in his *Parement des dames*, about 1492, writes that the *chaperons* of noble ladies are "of velvet or of satin," while those of the bourgeoisie are of "fine cloth, black or red according to their pleasure."⁷

The black headdress of the lady in the tapestry is fashioned rather differently from the Breton coif of Anne and her court. In the tapestry the two parts of the headdress cover all but a few wisps of hair and fall loosely about the face to well over the shoulders. In the manuscripts Anne's headdress consists of an inner close-fitting cap that hugs the cheeks and is set well back from the forehead to disclose the hair; over it is the black *couvre-chef*, long in back, is cut short in front, rarely touching the shoulders; it is a very becoming and enchanting style. More like the headdress in the tapestry is that of Anne of France, Dame de Beaujeu (201), and that of an unknown donatrice (202), both in por-

201

Anne of France, Dame de Beaujeu, with St. John the Baptist, by the Master of Moulins, about 1492

Musée du Louvre



202

Unknown donatrice with St. Mary Magdalen, by the Master of Moulins, about 1492

Musée du Louvre



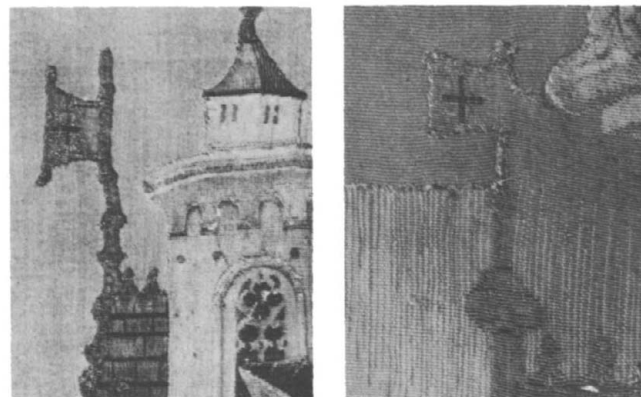
traits by the Master of Moulins. The lady inspecting the grapes in the Vendanges tapestry of about 1500 (203) is attired in a brocaded gown and a loosely draped couvre-chef that, except for the jewel, is not unlike the one worn by the chatelaine in the Cloisters' tapestry.

Mr. Rorimer cited another detail that he believed to be further evidence that the lady in the tapestry represents Anne. He stated that the banner with the blue black cross that flies above the castles in the third and sixth tapestries (204) "is unquestionably one which Anne is known to have used." But Anne's official arms were the ermine tails of Brittany, and if she also used a flag with a cross, so did many other people. The presence of this banner, then, lends little support to Mr. Rorimer's identification. As the writer on "the blasyng of armes" in the *Boke of Saint Albans* observes, "Now I turne agayne to the signe of the cros and aske a ques-

203

Tapestry: Vendanges (detail). Late 15th c.

Paris, Musée de Cluny



204

Banner with cross in third tapestry (left) and sixth

tion: How many crossis be borne in armys, to the which question under a certain nowmbur I dare not answere, for crossis innumerabull are borne now dayli."⁸

In conclusion it must be said that there is no substantial proof that the lord and lady in the tapestry are intended to represent Louis and Anne. If the gentleman does have some facial characteristics of Louis, especially the long, narrow nose, upturned at the end, it may be due to the desire of the designer of the tapestries, or of the person who commissioned them, to acknowledge and flatter the reigning sovereign. For instance, in certain tapestries King Ahasuerus is shown in the likeness of Charles VIII, and in the book of hours of Estienne Chevalier, now in Chantilly, the first king in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi is recognizable as a portrait of Charles VII. In several versions of the story of the unicorn hunt, the captured unicorn is brought to "the palace of the king." Perhaps this legend influenced the designer to endow the seigneur of the tapestry with some of the lineaments of Louis XII.

There are no signs of royalty on the persons of the lord and lady or anywhere else in the tapestries. Mr. Rorimer conjectured that in the original skies (now restored) there may have been coats of arms, possibly of Louis and Anne, such as those that appear in the Virtuous Women tapestries of about 1480-83 (205). Perhaps because there were royal coats of arms in the skies, he suggested, these areas were cut away during the French Revolution to prevent the destruction of the tapestries by the revolutionaries; however, it seems almost certain that these could not have been the arms of any of the French monarchs. At the time of the Revolution the tapestries were in the possession of the La Rochefoucauld family in their château of Verteuil, some

two hundred and fifty miles south of Paris. In the archives of the township of Verteuil are many documents relating to the activities of the Société Populaire against the occupants of the château and its contents. All of the Rochefoucauld records and portraits were burned and the tombs desecrated. Despite this, a letter dated 2 December 1793, to the Société of Verteuil from the "Comité de surveillance établi à Ruffec" exhorts the citizens of Verteuil to "Examine the old tapestries. Spare them because they do not show any signs of royalty; they contain *histoires*."⁹

Even if there had been "signs of royalty" in the Unicorn Tapestries, there was little opportunity for any member of the Rochefoucauld family or the custodian of the château to snip them away surreptitiously during the Reign of Terror. The liberal and enlightened Duke Louis Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld was arrested, along with his mother and his wife, in September 1792 at Eaux de Forges, some forty-five miles northwest of Paris. While being conducted to Paris, the duke on foot, the ladies in a carriage, the company was assaulted by an angry mob and the duke was assassinated. The duchesses were imprisoned and not released until September 1794, after the fall of Robespierre.¹⁰ At the château of Verteuil, meanwhile, the "conciierge of the house of La Rochefoucauld," Adrien François Bourgeois, was declared a traitor who maintained the principles of his employers, would not wear the tricolor cockade and ridiculed those who did wear it, was opposed to the placing of seals on the furniture of the château, and made no sacrifices for the Revolution. He too was incarcerated and not freed until September 1794.¹¹ With the duke dead, the duchesses and the caretaker in prison, and the furnishings of the château under constant surveillance by the Société Populaire, it seems impossible that anyone would have taken the trouble, and perhaps even risked his life, to remove coats of arms to save some "old tapestries."

Now, since Mr. Rorimer's conclusion that the tapestries were made for Anne of Brittany cannot be supported by the evidence, it becomes necessary to review the other possibilities that have been suggested.

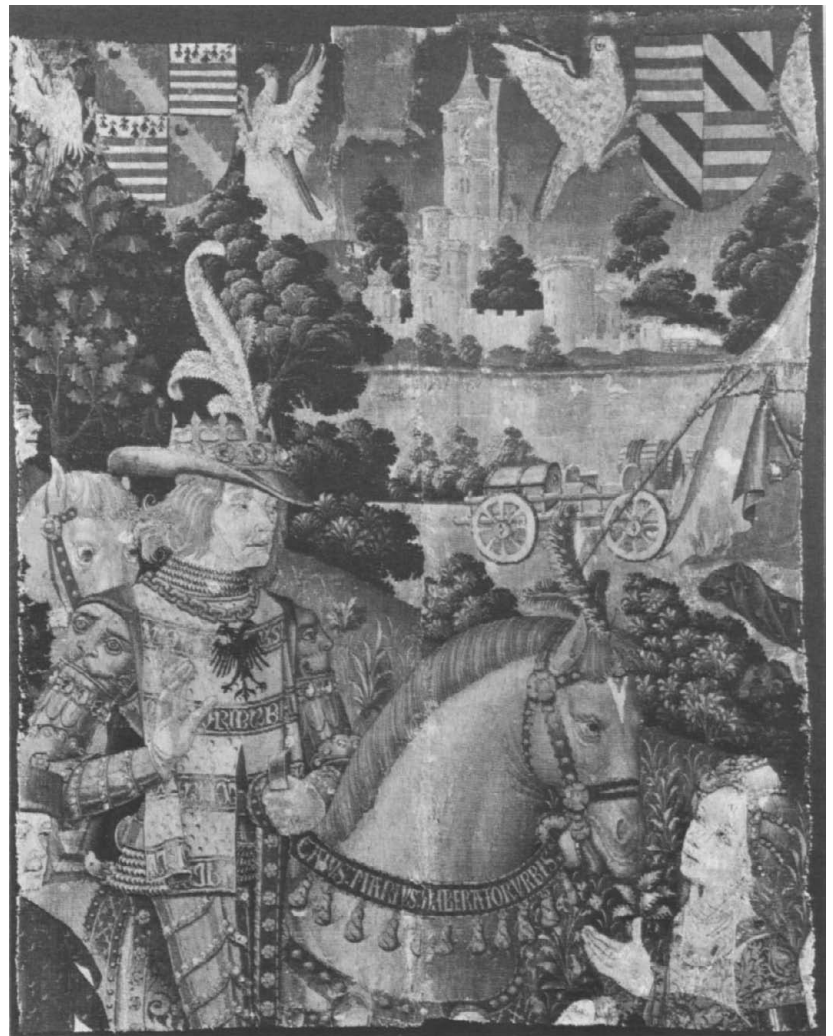
In the La Rochefoucauld family it is a tradition that the original owners of the tapestries were Jean II, seigneur of La Rochefoucauld, and his wife, Marguerite of Barbezieux and Verteuil. Although this is a tradition only, it should nevertheless not be lightly dismissed. As recently as 1950 the archivist Jean Marchand stated, though without an iota of proof, that the tapestries were woven for Jean and Marguerite and that these are the "two people figured in the . . . tapestry where the

unicorn is slain and brought back to the château of Verteuil."¹² In partial refutation of this statement and of the family tradition, it must be noted that, since Jean died about 1471,¹³ and since the style of the tapestries is later than that, they could not have been completed in his lifetime. However, it is not impossible, from the stylistic point of view, that they were woven for Marguerite de La Rochefoucauld and her second husband, Hardouin IX de Maillé, who died about 1492, leaving Marguerite once again a widow.¹⁴ There are apparently no existing contemporary portraits of Marguerite or Jean or Hardouin for comparison with the lady and lord of the tapestry, but Marguerite is probably portrayed in two colored drawings that are later copies of two

205

Tapestry fragment: Caius Marius at the Cimbri Camp, with coats of arms in sky. From the Virtuous Women series, about 1480–83

Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Maria Antoinette Evans Fund



of her tapestries, long since destroyed. Despite their seventeenth-century flavor, the drawings probably depict the originals more or less accurately in composition, major details, and the coats of arms, for they are part of the large collection of drawings made for Roger de Gaignières.

In one (206) the central figure is doubtless intended to be Marguerite. She is weaving on a hand loom that bears the La Rochefoucauld and de Maillé arms, and she is encircled by banderoles with the La Rochefoucauld device, "C'est mon plaisir." Suspended from the arcade behind her are shields, the first bearing the La Rochefoucauld arms, the second parti Barbezieux and La Rochefoucauld, the third parti de Maillé and La Rochefoucauld, the fourth La Rochefoucauld again, and finally Barbezieux and La Rochefoucauld once more.

In certain respects Marguerite resembles the châteline in the Cloisters' tapestry: her face is long and narrow, and she wears a brocaded dress and a black headdress falling over her shoulders, though the cap

underneath is white and jeweled. Two of her handmaidens have gowns with square yokes like that of the handmaiden in the tapestry fragments. The older gentleman at the left wears his hat tied on under his chin, as does the gray-haired hunter in the fire-colored tunic in the fourth Cloisters' tapestry (126). Whether any of the men in the drawing is supposed to represent Hardouin IX is impossible to say. Certainly the one on the right is placed in a prominent position. He is clothed elegantly in a long fur-lined robe and he holds a baton or scroll in his right hand. Hardouin, according to the records, was "counselor and chamberlain of the king"; he was also entrusted by Charles VIII to convey to his mother, the queen, a piece of a unicorn's horn.¹⁵ It cannot be said that either his features or his costume bears any special resemblance to those of the seigneur in the sixth tapestry.

The central figure in the second drawing (207) is also probably intended to represent Marguerite de La Rochefoucauld. Here she is accompanied by two chil-

206, 207

Drawings made for
Roger de Gaignières
(1642–1715) of tapestries
belonging to Marguerite
de La Rochefoucauld

Oxford, Bodleian Library,
Ms. Gough Drw. Gaignières, 16,
fols. 58, 59



dren, a boy who sprawls on the millefleurs ground and a girl in a brocaded dress who holds up a flower that appears to be a marguerite. The young man saluting with his hand to his hat may be Marguerite's head gardener, for he carries a pruning knife. His tights are striped red, gold, blue, white, gold, red—the colors of the Barbezieux and La Rochefoucauld. The youth splitting a stick at the left wears hose and tights that are parti-colored and striped blue and gold, the Barbezieux colors, and his tunic is red. The headdresses of all the ladies fall over their shoulders, and they are all black with under caps of white. The arms in this drawing are Barbezieux, La Rochefoucauld, parti de Maillé and La Rochefoucauld, and parti Barbezieux and La Rochefoucauld. In both of these drawings orange trees are conspicuous near the stone wall and a multitude of flowers carpets the ground.

Although there are similarities between Marguerite's garden tapestries, as recorded in the Gaignières drawings, and the Cloisters' tapestries, there is no solid proof

in these similarities that the Unicorn Tapestries were woven for Marguerite de Barbezieux, de La Rochefoucauld. Moreover, it is obvious that the coat of arms on the dog collar in the first Unicorn Tapestry is not that of the La Rochefoucauld house or of the Barbezieux or de Maillé.

In 1916 Roger Rodière of the Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France stated his doubt that the Unicorn Tapestries were made for "the sires of La Rochefoucauld [since] the initials A and E that are to be found everywhere and must be those of the first possessors of the work do not accord at all with Jean and with Marguerite nor with any known member of their *maison*."¹⁶ Earlier, in 1905, Émile Biais wrote: "If the ciphers AĒ do not seem to us to be the initials of the high seigneurs of the illustrious house of La Rochefoucauld, they probably recall two of their kin. . . . These monograms remain an enigma."¹⁷

The A and E are still an enigma, and they have remained a stumbling block to any attribution of the





208

Tapestry: Marriage of Peace and Love (detail).
Early 16th c.

Formerly on loan to The Cleveland Museum of Art (photo:
Heinrich Göbel, *Wandteppiche*, Part II, Vol. II [Leipzig, 1928], pl. 339)

209

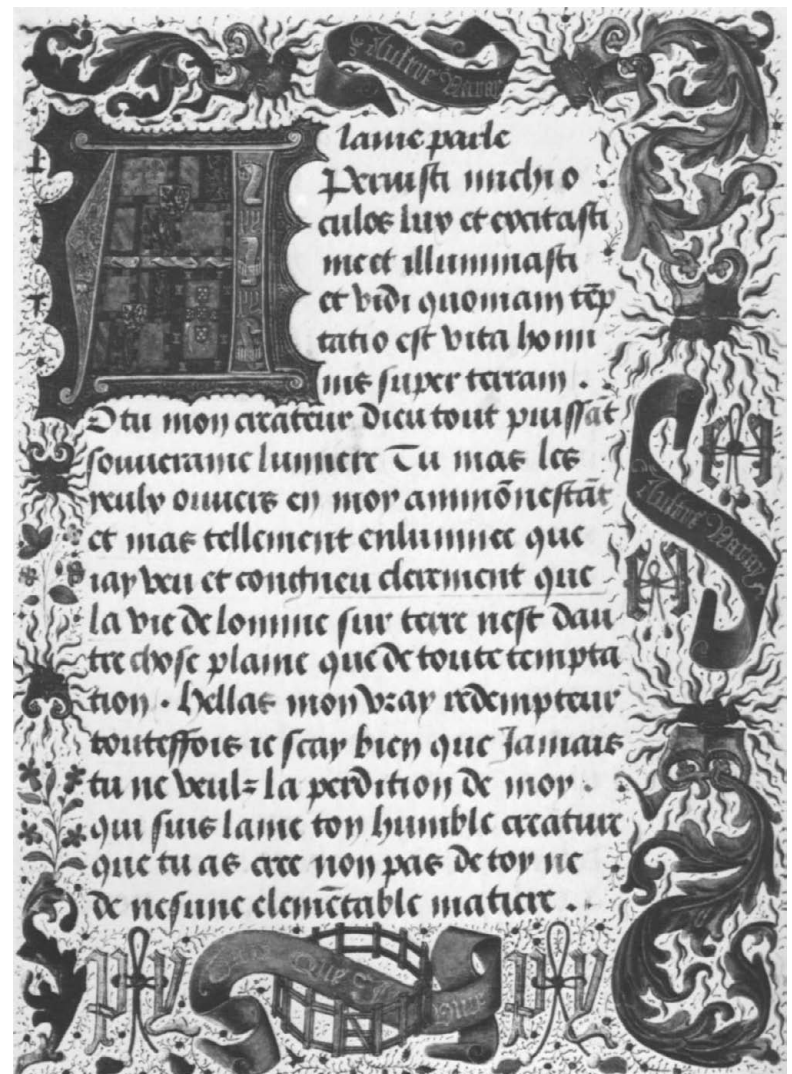
Page in *Livre des Echechs Amoureux*, made for
Antoine Rollin and Marie d'Ailly. Late 15th c.
Tied A and M in the margin and three representations
of dogs' collars and leashes

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 9197, fol. 202

210

Page with illuminated border showing P and Y tied
for Philip of Burgundy and his wife Ysabel, and
Philip's secret cipher of two Gothic E's tied

Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Ms. 10308, fol. 4



tapestries to the La Rochefoucauld family. No A seems to have married an E in any branch of this “illustrious house” in the latter part of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth. As a matter of fact, in this period there is a disappointing dearth among all the noble families of A’s wedded to E’s. In almost every discussion of the letters, however, except for that of Mr. Rorimer, it has been assumed that the AE tied with a knot necessarily stands for the first names of a married pair. A study of other examples of letters joined by cords results in the conclusion that there were various uses and meanings of this type of device and sometimes, unfortunately, there are no discernible meanings at all.

It is true that of the many explainable letters linked as in the Cloisters’ tapestries, the majority represent the initial of a husband and wife. The link may properly be called a “lac d’amour,” and it symbolizes the fidelity and loyalty of the couple to each other. In an early sixteenth-century tapestry representing an allegorical

marriage, the personage representing Loyalty holds up a love-knot for all to see (208). Typical among the numerous examples that could be cited are the A and M in the margin of a manuscript made for Antoine Rollin and Marie d’Ailly (209), the P and Y in the lower border of another manuscript, standing for Philip of Burgundy and his wife Ysabel (210), and the E and J in a tapestry recorded for Roger de Gaignières, signifying Estienne Petit and Jeanne Barillet (211).

Occasionally letters tied with a knot indicate the first and last names of a single individual, such as A and D for the printer Antoine Denidel (212) or R and G for the printer Robert Gourmont (213). In these instances the knot has lost its meaning as a symbol of fidelity; the lac is minus the amour, and is probably used mostly to make the signature more decorative. A tapestry in which the letters can be identified with the first and last names of the owner is included in the Gaignières collection of drawings (214); here the E and P stands for Estienne Petit, son of the Estienne Petit and Jeanne

211

Drawing (detail) made for Roger de Gaignières (1642–1715) of a tapestry with tied E and J for Estienne Petit and Jeanne Barillet

(photo: Joseph Guibert, *Les Dessins d’archéologie de Roger de Gaignières* [Paris, n.d.], no. B. 1777, pl. III. 93)



212

Device of Antoine Denidel (active 1495–1501)

(photo: A. Claudin, *Histoire de l’Imprimerie en France II* [Paris, 1901], p. 267)

213

Device of Robert Gourmont (active 1498–1518)

(photo: Claudin, *Histoire de l’Imprimerie II*, p. 360)



214

Drawing (detail) made for Roger de Gaignières of tapestry with E and P tied for Estienne Petit

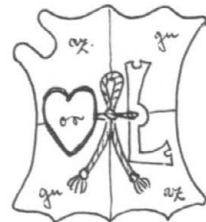
(photo: Guibert, *Les Dessins . . . de Gaignières*, no. B. 1780, pl. III. 96)



215

Jetton bearing device of Philip the Fair,
dated 1492 on obverse

The Hague, Koninklijk Penningkabinet



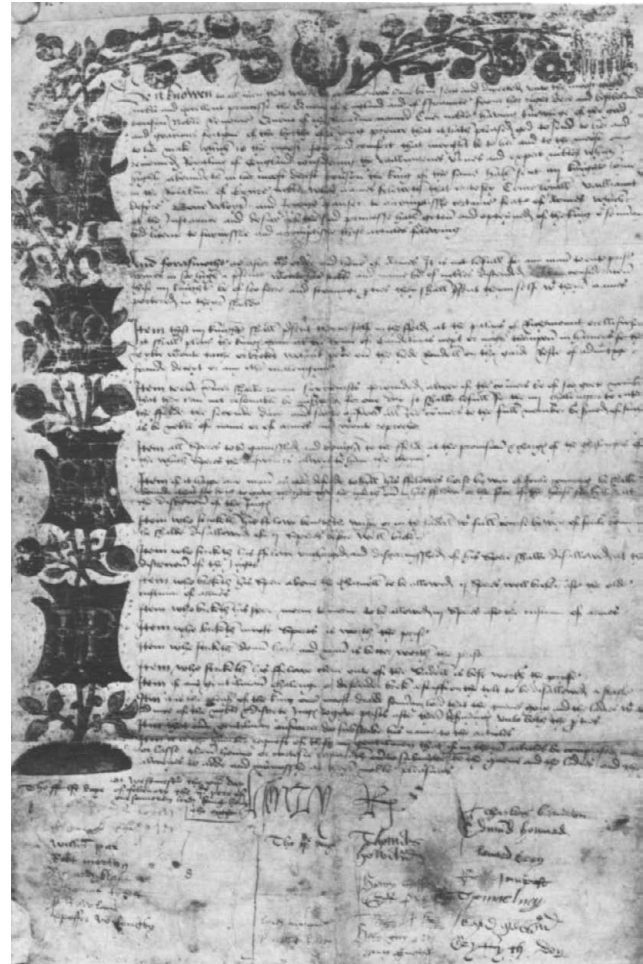
Barillet mentioned above. On the altarpiece by Hans Memling of the Adoration of the Magi, in the Hospital of Saint Jean in Bruges, are inscribed the letters IF tied with a bowknot, standing for Jean Floreins, who commissioned the painting; the same letters appear three times on the original frame of the outside wings of the altarpiece. An English manuscript compiled between 1510 and 1525 depicts standards of many noblemen, and two of them bear linked letters that are the initials of first and last names: ID for Sir John Dygby and TD for Lord Thomas Dacre.¹⁸

A few examples are known of tied letters that indicate the devices, rather than the names, of noble gentlemen. In 1492 a jetton issued during the rule of Philip the Fair, Duke of Burgundy and Archduke of Austria,

216

Parchment with articles of a joust, 1510,
bearing the devices of the four participants.
Drawing of the shields by Helmut Nickel

British Museum, Cart. Harl. Antiq. 83. H. 1
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



was inscribed with a tied Q and V in the center, surrounded by the interpretive words "Qui Vouldra," which was the duke's motto (215). A similar joining of letters to indicate mottoes of noblemen is recorded on a tablet posted for a tournament held at Westminster, England, in 1510 (216). At the top is the shield of King Henry VIII with a joined heart and L, meaning "Cueur Loyal." Next is the shield of Sir Thomas Kuyvet with the letters V and D standing for "Vaillant Desir," followed by the shields of Lord William of Devon with B and V for "Bon Vouloir" and Sir Edward Nevile with I and P for "Joyeux Penser."¹⁹

While a large number of letters tied with a lac d'amour can be explained in one way or another, an even larger number remain as enigmas to the modern



217

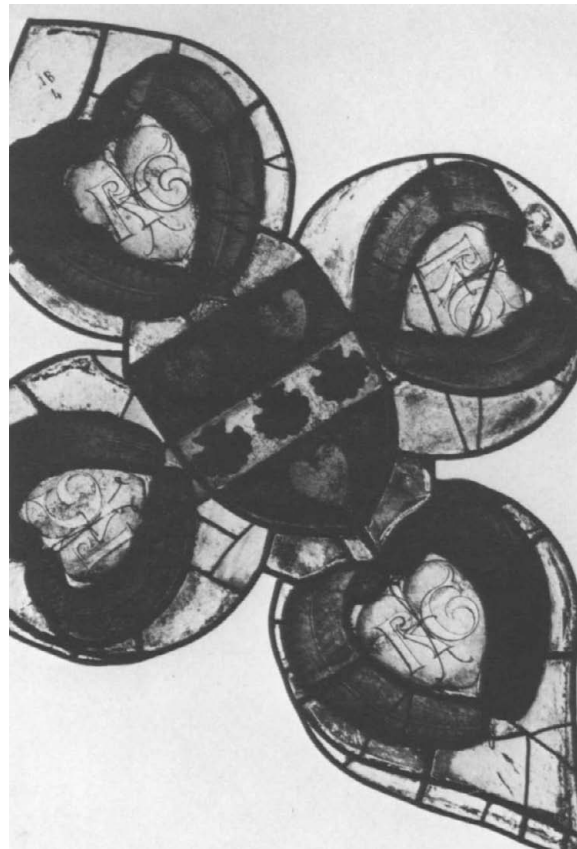
Tapestry (detail) with tied E and E of Philip the Good, 1466. See also 286

Berne, Historisches Museum

218

Page (detail) in book of hours of Estienne Chevalier, by Jean Fouquet, 1452–60

Chantilly, Musée Condé (photo: Giraudon)



219

Stained glass panel with Jacques Coeur's coat of arms and device RG. 15th c.

Bourges, Cathedral

mind. Many of these undoubtedly were intended to be mysterious even in their own day, for medieval people, especially in the fifteenth century, delighted in cryptic letters, secret ciphers, and devices to be understood by a few persons only. A well-known and much-discussed example of a secret device is the tied E \mathfrak{E} that Philip the Good of Burgundy repeatedly used on pages of his numerous manuscripts (210), on his tapestries (217, 286), and on his private seal, "which he kept in his possession."²⁰ No one has yet solved the problem of these two Gothic E's, nor has anyone explained satisfactorily the similar E's of Estienne Chevalier, which appear on his shields even when his name is spelled out, often on the same shield (218). Another notable cryptic cipher is the R and G carved on the exterior walls of Jacques Coeur's house in Bourges, and found with his coat of arms in a stained-glass window in the cathedral of Bourges (219).

Hypotheses have been offered for the AE's tied with

lacs d'amour adorned with pansies, found in the borders of a manuscript made for Charles of France (220), brother of King Louis XI, but again, the true meaning of these letters is unknown.²¹

No one has attempted to interpret the EE's and *houppes* (presumably tasseled cords) on various items listed in the inventory of Louis of Luxembourg, Count of Saint-Pol, who was beheaded for treason in 1475. Unexplained AA's with *houppes* were on other objects in the count's possession, not in association with the EE's. It may be worthy of note that four items in the inventory attest to the count's interest in unicorns. His standard bore a unicorn, *houppes*, and the motto "Mon-mieulx"; "a large old tapestry was figured with *houppes* and a unicorn"; on another tapestry was "a fountain, a unicorn, and other beasts"; and a set of four tapestries included not only *houppes* and EE's but also "a

220

Miniature from book of hours of Charles of France showing cipher AE decorated with pansy. Dated 1465

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund



unicorn in the middle."²² It would be tempting but foolhardy to conclude that A's and E's and tasseled cords are somehow to be associated with unicorns.

Countless other examples of mysterious letters could be noted here, but probably enough has been said to show that the failure to link the A and E in the Cloisters' tapestries with any individuals in the La Rochefoucauld family does not necessarily rule out the attribution of the tapestries to this noble house. If, by a remote chance the A and E stand for the first and last letters of a name, they could refer to Antoine, the second son of François de La Rochefoucauld and Marguerite de Barbezieux, whose tapestries have been discussed. Antoine was born probably about 1475. In due time he was married to Antoinette of Amboise, thus introducing into the La Rochefoucauld family two other names beginning with A and ending with E.

It is possible, of course, that the linked AE is a secret motto of a member of the La Rochefoucauld family, akin to the secret EÏ of Duke Philip of Burgundy or the secret RG of Jacques Coeur of Bourges. Although the La Rochefoucauld motto was "C'est mon plaisir," it is conceivable that an individual member of the family would choose a distinguishing motto of his own or a motto appropriate to the themes of the Unicorn Tapestries. The A and E could mean "Amor in Eternum" (an armorial tapestry in the Musée des Arts Decoratifs has the inscription "In Eternum"), or it could mean "Amour et Esperance" (one of the mottoes of Charles de Bourbon was "Esperance"; it appeared on a unicorn tapestry woven for him [57]). Equally, the letters could mean "Amours et Entendement" or "Amours et Enfants" or even "A l'Espée." The fact remains, however, that the cipher is still a mystery today, as perhaps it was intended to be from the beginning.

The linked F and R sewn onto the modern sky of the third tapestry seems to offer better evidence for association with the La Rochefoucauld family. One historian of tapestries writes that the initials "are supposed to be those of François de la Rochefoucauld,"²³ and indeed they may be. Examples of letters tied with a cord that are the initials of first and last names of individuals have already been mentioned. François, the first in the long line of La Rochefoucauld to bear the name of the beloved saint, was the only son of Jean de La Rochefoucauld and Marguerite de Barbezieux, traditionally considered to be the original owners of the tapestries. François was councilor and chamberlain of Kings Charles VIII and Louis XII and godfather to François I, who elevated him from baron to count. He was married for the first time by contract to Louise de Crussol in



221

Seals of the Crussol family.

(A) Guillaume de Crussol (1370),

(B) Louis de Crussol (1466),

(C) Jacques de Crussol (1492)

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection
Clairambault, nos. 3050, 3053, 3051

1470, but the marriage was not consummated until about 1473²⁴ or, according to other authorities, in 1478.²⁵ The Crussol family apparently liked unicorns: the coat of arms on existing seals of Louise's great-grandfather, Guillaume, of her father, Louis, and of her brother, Jacques, all bear the head of a unicorn as crest (221).²⁶ It may be that Louis planned to present a set of tapestries depicting the story of the unicorn to his daughter as a gift for her marriage. Unfortunately, he died in 1473,²⁷ and since the tapestries are stylistically about two decades later in date, he could not have been directly responsible for their weaving. However, it is worth noting that he bequeathed to Louise, besides her dowry, the large sum of 10,000 écus d'or;²⁸ this amount would have been more than enough to pay for even as rich a set of tapestries as the Hunt of the Unicorn, inasmuch as Philip the Good of Burgundy paid only 5,000 écus d'or for the equally rich and somewhat larger set of tapestries of the History of Alexander.²⁹ Of course it could have been Louise's brother, Jacques, who commissioned the set—he lived until 1525—or it could have been François de La Rochefoucauld himself, choosing in this way to honor his wife, whose family used the unicorn as a device. Louise bore François six children before she died at an unknown date.³⁰

François took for his second wife Barbe du Bois of the noble house of Fiennes, allied to the Counts of Flanders and the Counts of Saint-Pol.³¹ As noted earlier, the Saint-Pol family was interested in unicorns. The date of the marriage of François and Barbe cannot be discovered. They had two sons and a daughter. François died in 1516, not long after his godson became king of France; Barbe outlived her husband to marry again.

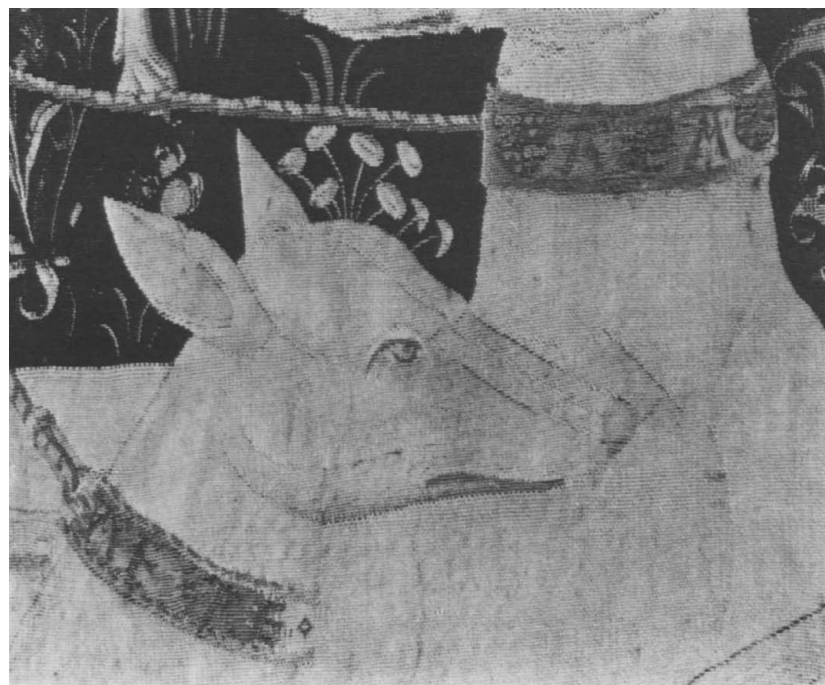
Although the interpretation of the F and R is by no means certain, and the letters in any case are not woven into the fabric of the third tapestry, it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider the possibility that the set was commissioned for François I de La Rochefoucauld, seigneur of Barbezieux, Verteuil, and other holdings, friend and adviser of kings. No portraits of François or

either of his wives are known to exist, so comparisons cannot be made with the lord and lady of the sixth tapestry. If these figures represent François and his second wife, the small boy beside them fondling his dog could be François II, Antoine, Hubert, or Louis—the sons of François by his first wife.³² The hypotheses that the tapestries may have been woven for François gains some support from the banner atop the castle in the sixth tapestry (199). If the animal on the banner is a rampant lion, rather than a porcupine, sable on silver, it is the coat of arms of the de Fiennes family and thus of François's second wife.³³

A single coat of arms is found today in the tapestries, shown three times on a dog collar in the Start of the Hunt (222). Since the shields are only about an inch high and are badly worn in spots, the arms are difficult to decipher and have been a puzzlement to heraldists of

222

First tapestry: collar of greyhound with coat of arms twice repeated, and collar with AE's. The slit forming the jawline of the lower hound has been sewn together



several countries. But even if the arms could be identified, this would not settle all doubts as to the original ownership of the tapestries, since the arms need not have been those of the owner but could have been those of another member of the family or even of a friend. In the Virtuous Women tapestries, for example (205), the shields in the skies include that of the owner, Cardinal Ferry de Clugny, and those of, presumably, his relatives or friends. In addition, it may be recalled that, as far as dog collars are concerned, Marguerite of Flanders in 1405 had several with devices that were not her own. On the other hand, identification of the coat of arms might at least offer a clue that would lead toward a specific locale or a specific family.

The arms on the dog collar are generally read: first and fourth quarters, *fascé d'or et azure à trois roses de gules brochant sur les deux premiers fascés* (barred gold and blue with three red roses passing over the first two bars); second and third quarters, *d'or* (or *d'argent*) *à trois écus de gules* (gold or silver with three red shields). The heraldists have discovered several families who bore the coat of arms with three red shields³⁴ and a few whose arms approximate the bars and roses,³⁵ but no one has found evidence of an alliance between two such houses. However, recent research has uncovered a possible explanation. The de la Haye family house of Normandy had arms of three red shields on silver, and a Françoise de la Haye married a Guillaume de La Rochefoucauld sometime before 1490.³⁶ This Guillaume used as a seal on a document of 1506, when he was gravely ill, not the La Rochefoucauld arms, but a device that included "in the left corner, as a quartering, three roses or cinquefoils."³⁷ Only this description of the seal exists, but it raises the possibility that the coat of arms on the dog collar refers to Guillaume de La Rochefoucauld and his wife Françoise de la Haye. Guillaume was a cousin of Count François de La Rochefoucauld, whose ownership of the tapestries is being considered.

In the left-hand fragment of the fifth tapestry the greyhound's collar is inscribed, seemingly, CHS (133), an abbreviation for Charles. At least two relatives of Count François were named Charles: Guillaume's brother, a friar in the convent of the Cordeliers at Verteuil, founded in 1471 by Jean, father of François,³⁸ and a nephew of Louise de Crussol, François's first wife.³⁹

If the inscription on the dog collar in the fourth tapestry (130) is to be read as O F[R]ANC[ORUM] RE[X] ("O King of the French"), it could be François's expression of loyalty to Charles VIII or Louis XII, the kings whom he served as councilor and chamberlain.

Since the monogram F and R has been largely re-

sponsible for the serious consideration that the tapestries were woven for François de La Rochefoucauld, it is necessary to determine whether or not these letters were part of the original weaving. A similar F and R exists in the château of Verteuil (223). Like the Cloisters' monogram, it has been cut out from its original fabric; it is now sewn onto the modern border of a late sixteenth-century tapestry known as the Stolen Child.⁴⁰ Both monograms are woven of silver threads, with outlines in rose-colored wool, and the letters, the cord that unites them, and the dimensions are nearly identical. Furthermore, both FR's show similarities with the AE's of the tapestries: these, too, are woven with silver threads outlined in rose-colored wool; their terminal points end in a flourish of curves, and there are similar embellishing indentations and holes for the insertion of the cords. Moreover, all the letters are very like capital letters found in manuscripts and printed books of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century (261). Thus, there is a definite relationship between the FR's and the Cloisters' tapestries.

At one time it seemed possible that these two FR's had been woven into the original skies of the Unicorn Tapestries, and that when the skies were removed, the letters were meticulously cut out and preserved as too precious to be discarded. Unfortunately, a careful ex-

223

F and R tied with cord sewn onto restored sky of third tapestry (above) and onto restored border of a tapestry at Verteuil

(photo: courtesy the Marquis and Marquise de Amodio)



amination shows that the FR's could not have been part of the main fabric of these tapestries. The essential difference is that the warp threads of the FR's are finer—19 to 22 per inch as against the 14 to 21 per inch of the tapestries. A chemical analysis of a silver thread from the FR on the third tapestry discloses a slight difference in composition from the metallic threads in the tapestry to which it is attached, although the percentage of silver, copper, and gold in this thread is typically medieval.⁴¹

Even though the FR's could not have been woven into the original skies of the Unicorn Tapestries, there is still the possibility that they once formed part of the set. The reasons for this rather bold surmise may be found in the medieval inventories and account books where tapestries are described and measured and valued. Of special interest to this study are the *chambre* tapestries, or tapestries for a bedroom. Regularly, these included both hangings for the walls and also furnishings for the bed itself, normally comprising a *couverture* or coverlet, a *dossier* for the back of the bed, a *ciel* for the overhead covering, and *gouttières* or cornice bands for surrounding the top of the bed. Typical were the two "chambers" of tapestries ordered by Philip the Good in 1466. One of these "represented *orangiers*" and consisted of a *couverture du lit* six and a third aulnes wide and seven and a third aulnes long (that is, about fourteen by seventeen feet), a *ciel* about eleven feet wide and thirteen and a half feet long, a *dossier* about thirteen and a half feet wide by nine and a half feet high, and cornice bands about two feet wide running about thirty-eight feet long, plus four wall hangings about twelve feet high and of varying widths.⁴² The second *chambre*, figured with "woodcutters," consisted of the same ensemble as the bedroom of "orangiers." More elaborate and probably more dramatic in content was another *chambre de tapisserie* of Philip the Good "worked in gold, silver and silk and fine woollen threads," of the History of Alexander. It included a *ciel*, *dossier*, *couverture du lit*, *gouttières*, and six hangings for the walls.⁴³

After I had read many similar descriptions of such ensembles for a *chambre*, it occurred to me that the Hunt of the Unicorn may also have been designed for a bedroom. If so, it would explain in part why the first and last tapestries differ in style from the others: one of these may have been a *dossier* and the other a *ciel* or even a *couverture du lit*. Tapestries with millefleurs backgrounds and quiet subjects may have seemed more suitable for bed furnishings than those with naturalistic settings and hunters engaged in lively and often

violent activities. Almost anyone would agree that to lie in bed and look up at the Unicorn in Captivity as a *ciel* would be a delightful experience indeed.

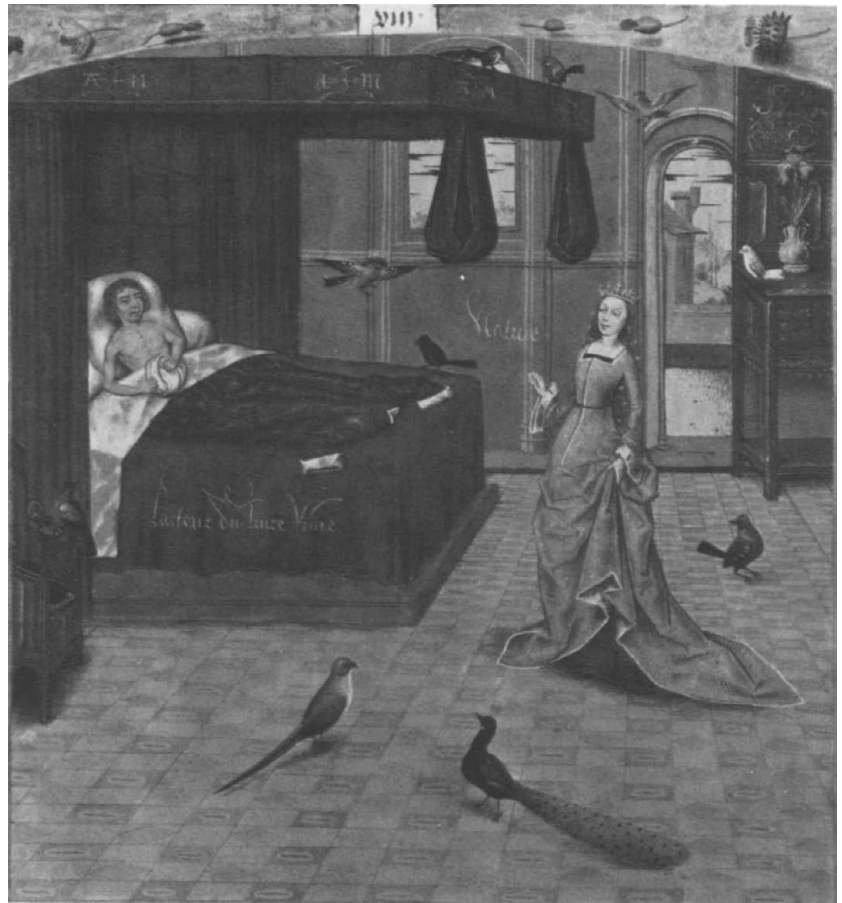
If the Unicorn Tapestries were designed as a bedroom ensemble, it may be that the FR's were woven into the *gouttières* for the bed. Narrow and very long, *gouttières* were of course woven on a separate, probably narrower loom where the warp threads may have been finer than those for the larger hangings. And so the possibility cannot be ruled out that the FR's belonged to the Unicorn Tapestries.

Instances may be cited of letters appearing on cornice bands. In the inventory of the ill-fated Count of Saint-Pol, mentioned earlier, there is an item listed of a "*ciel* of which the *gouttières* are strewn with tasseled cords and EE."⁴⁴ An A and M tied with a bowknot appears four times on the cornice of a bed in the manuscript illuminated for Antoine Rollin and Marie d'Ailly (224).

224

Miniature (detail) in *Livre des Echecs Amoureux*

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 9197, fol. 13



Estienne Chevalier's linked Gothic EE's surround the ciel of Elizabeth's bed and also ornament the mantel-piece in an illustration of the birth of Saint John the Baptist in Estienne's book of hours (225), and the same cipher is shown on the cornice bands of the Virgin's bed in another miniature in this manuscript. The letter C for Charles of Burgundy tied with M for Margaret of York is repeated several times on the gouttières of Margaret's bed in a manuscript of about 1470 in the British Museum.⁴⁵ Another example of a similar use of initials, in this case a P and Y, is shown in a book of hours made for Ysabel de Lalaing, widow of Pierre de Hennin, sei-

gneur de Boussu, at the end of the fifteenth century.⁴⁶

Of course it cannot be proved that the FR now sewn onto the third Unicorn Tapestry was once part of a gouttière in an ensemble that included a ciel, dossier, couverture du lit, and wall hangings. Neither can it be proved that the FR stands for Count François I de La Rochefoucauld, son of Jean de La Rochefoucauld and Marguerite de Barbezieux. Other writers have attributed the Unicorn Tapestries to him without discussion of any kind. Here, at least, there has been presented a hypothesis that may be accepted or rejected by historians of the future or by the reader of today.



225

The Birth of John the Baptist: miniature in book of hours of Estienne Chevalier, 1452–60, by Jean Fouquet

Chantilly, Musée Condé (photo: Giraudon)

7

THE MAKING OF THE TAPESTRIES

[I] Philip, Duke of Burgundy [commission] Robert Dary and Jehan de l'Ortye, merchants [and] workers of tapestry . . . to have made and to deliver to us fairly and honestly and without any fraud, within the term of four years . . . 8 pieces of large tapestries of high warp loom of which 2 should each contain 22 aulnes long and 8 aulnes wide, and the 6 others each 16 aulnes long and of the same width as the above . . . for the sum of 8,960 crowns; the same merchants shall cause to be made by Bauduin de Bailloeul, or by another better painter if they can find him, all the *patrons* of the stories and devices that we have [discussed] with them at this conference . . . ; and according to the said *patrons*, that which is shown as yellow should be of fine gold thread of Venice and that which is shown as white should be fine silver thread of Venice; . . . and the rest of these tapestries should be made of good and of fine silk and of fine carded and spun woolen thread of the finest and best colors that can be found. . . .

Contract by Philip the Good of Burgundy for
the tapestries of the Golden Fleece, October 1449.¹

The list of persons directly responsible for the making of the Unicorn Tapestries, if such a list existed, would undoubtedly be a long one. First of all there would be the man or woman who conceived the idea for the general subject matter and for the details of the story. Then there would be the designer or designers who drew the preliminary sketches (*petits patrons*) and the painter who executed the full-scale *patrons* or cartoons on large linen sheets or on strips of paper pasted together. There would be the dyers of the fine silk and woolen threads and those who prepared the metallic threads by winding strips of silver or gilded silver around strands of silk, all to be used as the wefts for creating the designs. There would be the workmen who set up the enormous looms with heavy, undyed woolen warps, and the many weavers who worked side by side on these looms day after day with their bobbins of colored wools and silks, producing in textile form the scenes in the painted cartoons. And, of course, there would also be the wealthy patron who commissioned the tapestries and paid for the well-done, certainly expensive job.

The idea

The person who commissioned the tapestries was most probably the one who chose the general theme of the unicorn story. He may also have been the one who originated the specific details. Philip the Good himself seems to have worked out the subjects and devices for his Golden Fleece tapestries after discussing them with his adviser. On the other hand, when the officials of the church of Saint Mary Magdalen at Troyes ordered a set of tapestries depicting the life of their patron saint, they hired a specialist, a Jacobin friar named Didier, to put “in writing” the “story” to be presented in each of the hangings; for this Didier was paid in cash and wine.²

Whoever it was who masterminded the themes of the Unicorn Tapestries, he must have been imbued with the lore of the unicorn, with medieval beliefs about other beasts and birds, and with the “language” of trees and flowers. But he appears to have been an inventive person also, for he conceived the idea of integrating the familiar aspects of the unicorn legend with a fully developed representation of a medieval hunt. There is no other known medieval series like it, either in the records

or in existing works of art. However, some sixty years or so after the period of the tapestries the French engraver Jean Duvet created a sequence of prints with a similar theme (226), honoring not only the unicorn but the love of King Henry II for his mistress Diane de Poitiers, who, as the historians say, was virtually queen of France. This set of engravings is apparently the sole example besides the tapestries to combine scenes of the unicorn legend with incidents of a hunt. It may be that Duvet knew of the tapestries, and it is entirely possible that Henry himself had seen them, since his father, François I, was the godson of François de La Rochefoucauld and had a close relationship with the La Rochefoucauld family.

The design

It has generally been accepted, but it is by no means certain, that more than one painter was called upon to draw the designs for the Unicorn Tapestries, and that more than one cartoonist rendered the designs into the full-scale *patrons* for the weavers to follow. Obviously the first tapestry and the last, with their millefleurs backgrounds, are fundamentally different from the others, with their naturalistic landscape. Moreover, several of the plants are less accurately depicted in the millefleurs hangings. The most conspicuous instance is the tree in the seventh tapestry, where the fruits are recognizably pomegranates while the tree itself is imaginary, whereas in the third tapestry both the fruit and shrub are correctly drawn. Also, the cherry and the oak in the first tapestry are more stylized than the cherry and the oak in the second tapestry. The trunks of the trees in the millefleurs hangings are interpreted as conventionalized designs, whereas in the others the texture of the barks is at least suggested. Furthermore, the AE's in the first and last tapestries are more slender than in the others, and they are tied with more flourishes and swirls. Then too, the figures in the first tapestry are

226

The Hunt of the Unicorn, engravings by Jean Duvet, about 1562

British Museum (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



(A) A hunter brings furmets to Henry II and Diane de Poitiers for judging the size of the quarry



(B) The unicorn dips his horn into a river to rid it of poison



(C) The unicorn gores one of the hunters



(D) The unicorn, tamed by the maiden, is securely tied



(E) The unicorn, ridden by an amorino, is borne on a chariot



(F) The unicorn in a triumphal procession, with an amorino about to crown him with a wreath of leaves

somewhat like wooden mannikins compared to the men and women of the others, who are truly flesh-and-blood people. Still more differences could be noted, but these are the most apparent and the most important.

Several explanations have been proposed for the dissimilarities. One art historian believed that the millefleurs hangings were not originally intended to be part of the series at all.³ This theory might be seriously considered were it not for the presence of the same enigmatic and definitely unusual AE conspicuously placed in the millefleurs tapestries as it is in the others. This monogram alone seems proof enough that the seven tapestries are integral parts of the same ensemble.

A more reasonable suggestion is that the first and last tapestries were designed and woven at a later date and added to the set. However, there is nothing specific in either the style of the drawing or in the details of the costumes or backgrounds to indicate that this explanation is necessarily the correct one. It is entirely possible that the first and last tapestries are of approximately the same date as the others, and that they are different mainly because they were planned by a different designer. It is also possible that all the tapestries were designed by one man, and that such disparities as the stiffness of the figures in the *Start of the Hunt* and the unreal pomegranate tree in the *Unicorn in Captivity* are due to the fact that the tapestries were executed by a different and less accomplished workshop of weavers. Any medieval tapestry is as much the product of the weavers' degree of training and knowledge as it is of the painters' drawing ability and compositional skill.

A small but possibly significant similarity between the first tapestry and three of the others may be seen in the drawing of the hair of some of the hunters: they have vertical curls, as if wound and set around a tube (118, center figure; 121, lymerer; 123, foreground figure; 129, the seigneur of the hunt). This is an unusual style, not often found in the period of the tapestries. Moreover, it may be added that on close examination the faces of the hunters in the *Start of the Hunt* are not fundamentally unlike those of several in the other tapestries. However, it seems most probable that more than one designer provided the *patrons* for the Unicorn Tapestries.

Whether there was one designer or whether there were more, it appears that there must have been a good reason why two of the set have millefleurs backgrounds entirely different from the sophisticated and complicated landscape settings of the rest. It could be said, of course, that one designer just happened to like millefleurs tapestries, but another theory, discussed in Chap-

ter Six, could better account for the difference. If the series was made for a bedchamber, the five more naturalistic tapestries filled with lively activities may have been designed for the walls and the two with millefleurs backgrounds and more static subjects may have been intended as fittings for the bed. A miniature from a prayer book of King Alfonso V of Aragon (227) shows this sort of distinction between a millefleurs bed coverlet and tapestries with falconry scenes as murals. One wishes that the miniaturist had chosen to paint a canopy over the king's bed instead of the enveloping tent so that we might have evidence of a dossier and ciel also. In another fifteenth-century miniature (228) King Charles VI of France reclines on a bed entirely fitted with millefleurs fabrics, most probably tapestries. On the ciel and on the dossier are the royal arms and crown, and on the cornice bands, the king's motto. Here one

227

Miniature in prayer book of Alfonso V of Aragon.
15th c.

British Museum, Ms. 28962, fol. 14^v
(Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)





228

Miniature in *Dialogues* of Pierre Salmon. About 1412

Geneva, Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Ms. fr. 165, fol. 7
(photo: Jean Arlaud, Geneva)

regrets that there are no storied wall hangings to serve for comparison.

If the Cloisters' set was indeed designed for a bed-chamber, one can imagine the Start of the Hunt as the dossier, or dorsal, and the Unicorn in Captivity as either the couverture du lit or the ciel. To the right of the dorsal, which introduced the theme of the hunt, there would logically follow the unicorn at the fountain, with the other tapestries continuing the story around the walls.

Since the patterns of the millefleurs tapestries are not complicated, they probably presented no special problems to either the designer or the cartoonist. The composition of each of the others, however, and of the series as a whole, must have been a challenge to both the man who made the *petits patrons* and the man who rendered these into the full-scale cartoons. The results are no less than masterly, and these are perhaps the most brilliant and most magnificent of all late Gothic tapestries in both design and execution.

The unicorn first appears in a peaceful moment as he

kneels and dips his horn into the stream to purify it of poison (229). The animals lining the bank wait for him to complete his act of mercy so that they may drink without danger; the hunters wait also, unwilling to intrude with clashing swords and thrusting spears into this tranquil, almost holy scene. The tapestry evokes a mood of restrained quiet and momentary peace. The upright shaft of the fountain placed firmly in the center, and the horizontal strip of stream drawn straight across the base provide lines of stability; the oval of the fountain's basin, echoed in the grouping of the hunters above, creates an area of repose in the center of the composition. There are very few diagonals to disturb the quiet; the important exceptions are the arms of the huntsman pointing to the unicorn, and the antlers of the stag that direct the eye to the next tapestry where the unicorn leaps the stream.

Action is the keynote of the third tapestry. The unicorn, his head held high, his magic horn uplifted toward the sky, is moving swiftly and majestically from his pursuers on one side of the brook to the huntsmen intent on his capture on the opposite bank. The designer has placed him off center, the better to suggest his flight, and has planted an oak tree solidly down the middle, the better to point up the asymmetry. The strong vertical of the oak also serves to stabilize the composition of the tapestry, and to keep it, as it were, firmly fixed to the wall. Two of the hunters are standing, merely observing the scene, the others are moving with deliberation only, yet an impression of intense excitement and activity is achieved, largely by means of the spears slashing obliquely across the warp and weft of the fabric and the unicorn's horn thrusting diagonally upward. The stream that runs horizontally at the base of the second tapestry here continues its flow and becomes a more important motif by widening out and curving diagonally into the background.

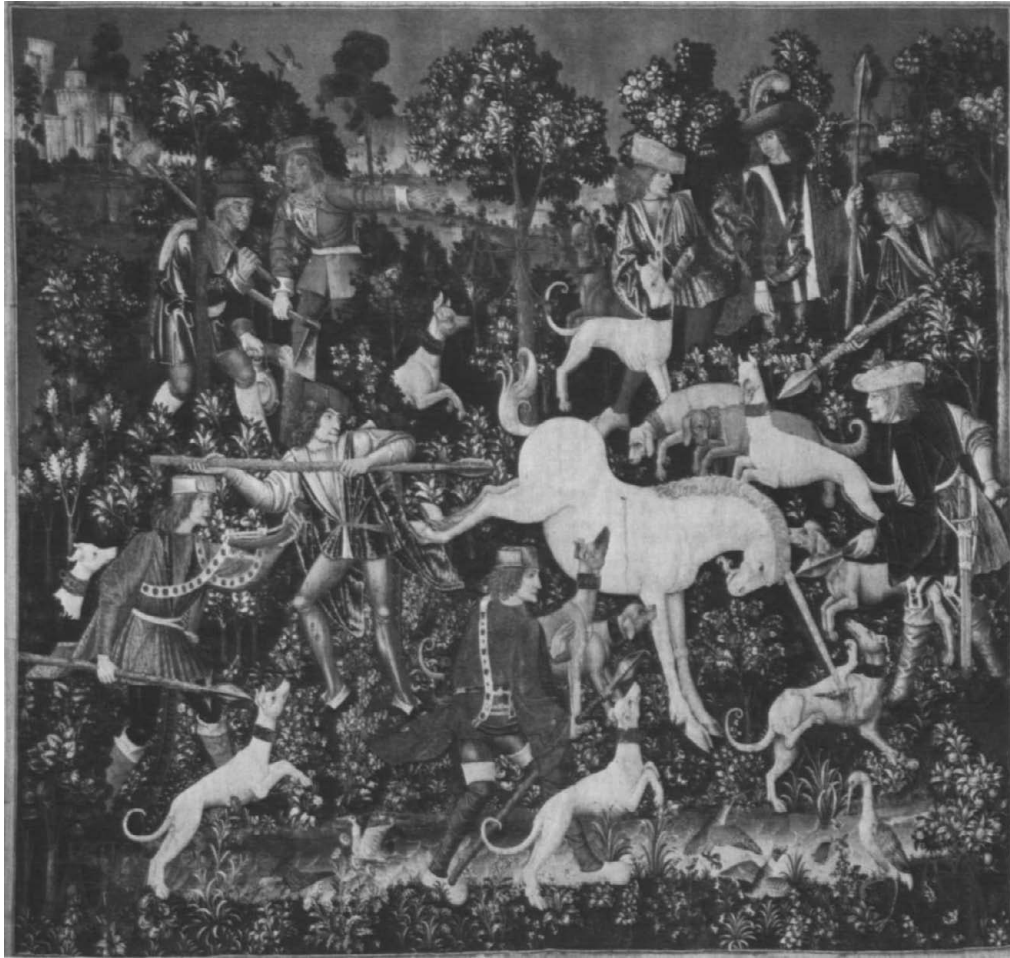
The pace accelerates in the next tapestry, where the unicorn defends himself by goring a dog and kicking out at a hunter with his hard hooves. The silhouette of the unicorn in violent action is responsible for most of the mood of vehemence here, but the speeding dogs with their curling tails, the flying woodcocks frightened by the commotion, and once again the thrusting spears contribute their share to the excitement. The central tree, instead of being planted in the foreground, is placed toward the rear so that it will have little stabilizing influence. However, the stream, as in the second tapestry, runs quietly across the base, and a heron stands beside it, motionless on one leg. The contrast is ironic and delightful.



229

The second, third, fourth, fifth,
and sixth tapestries





230

Fourth tapestry: distant castles with area of original sky. Hatching, as a shading device, is seen in the sky, hunter's sleeve, and leaves of the orange tree. The hunter's hand is defined with the slit technique



The composition of the fifth tapestry, in which the maiden tames the unicorn by her charm, her beauty, and her virginity, must have created a mood of relative peace and quiet, providing relief from the violence of the two preceding tapestries. And yet all is not entirely tranquil here. The assault of the dogs continues, a hunter blows his warning horn, and the expression of the unicorn, as the maiden's hand rests upon his mane, indicates that he is far from being completely submissive. Furthermore, there are hints of treachery to come in the sly countenance and posture of the handmaiden as she signals the hunter to approach.

The killing of the unicorn occupies only a portion of the sixth tapestry, as if the designer found it unbearable to develop this tragic scene into a larger composition. Yet the event is depicted with unrelenting realism; there is no attempt to minimize the agony of the dying animal in this magnificently dramatic interpretation of

cruelty and death. The larger part of the tapestry shows the procession of hunters bringing the dead unicorn to the lord and lady of the castle. The two events, differing from each other in locale, content, and mood, nevertheless form a unified composition, with a young horn-blowing hunter serving not only to announce the death of the unicorn but also to make a transition between the two separate scenes. In contrast to the clashing tumult of the killing, the cortege escorting the slain animal proceeds with the measured beat of a funeral march and comes to a halt when confronted by a wall, as it were, of people. The massing of men and women at the right of the tapestry, and the placing of large piles of the castle's stonework above them, puts a full stop to the action of this tapestry and of the five that precede it. This closing is like a "finis" at the end of a book or the final chord of a symphony.

Each of the tapestries is designed in a different tempo, and each expresses its own distinctive mood, yet each depends on the others to achieve a dynamic composition that sweeps to the conclusion. Recurring motifs unite them, with variations that contribute to the movement of the whole. Chief among them is the unicorn, of course. As he progresses through the series, he creates a rhythm by the alternating downward and upward positions of his body, especially his horn. He first dips his horn to purify the waters, then he raises it high as he leaps through the stream; he lowers it again as he attacks the hound, and lifts it once more as he is caressed by the maiden. At the end, when he is dying, his head with its horn is thrust sidewise, and when he is brought to the seigneur, limp and dead on the back of the horse, his horn is again lifted, this time upheld by the huntsman's hand.

The stream is another motif that moves through the tapestries. It appears to originate from the fountain's abundant overflow and runs between narrowed banks across the lower part of the second tapestry. In the next it widens out and becomes a larger body of water. Then, in the following scene, it narrows again and is somewhat obscured by a huntsman and hounds and waterfowl. Whether or not the stream continued in the fifth tapestry we cannot know, for that part of the composition is missing, but, realizing the expertise of the designer, we could assume that there would be a place for this motif here also. In the tapestry where the unicorn is killed the stream has almost disappeared, but it may be glimpsed below the unicorn's head. Also, the water motif is present in the castle's moat.

In the distant views, where one might expect uniformity, there is variety. The trees are sometimes dense-



ly planted, with only a small gap to give a glimpse of the horizon; at other times they stand separated, providing a more extensive view of the countryside (230). The principal castle is first shown at the upper left, then at the right, at the left again, and finally at the right. Each time it is constructed differently. The last one, performing its important function in the composition of the whole, is a picturesque assemblage of buildings in multicolored stonework. With its tower too small for the men watching on the parapets, it seems to be more decorative than real (231).

Total realism, however, was far from being the designer's major objective. He was interested not only in telling the story of the unicorn in a masterly manner, but also in creating textured murals that would enhance the walls they hung on and yet not deny their existence. Hence, he made little use of perspective, for that would have given the illusion of openings in the walls. His

compositions are projected vertically and are relatively flat; most of the huntsmen do not stand behind each other but group themselves above one another, in a nonrealistic manner. On the other hand, most of the details are realistically drawn, from the pheasants at the fountain to the squirrel in the hazelnut tree, from the hawthorn bush to the blackberry vine, from the hunter with unshaven chin to the small boy playing with his dog.

The great variety of these details is one of the most remarkable and enjoyable features of the tapestries, to be observed not only in the plant and animal life but also in the differing personalities of the people. In the

231

Sixth tapestry: the castle



232

Second tapestry: the lymerer and other members of the hunt

second tapestry, where the unicorn purifies the waters, one notes the lymerer, with stubble on his chin (232), serious and alert, though he has probably been up since dawn to track the unicorn to his lair. Next to him stands a blond gentleman with languid eyes and a contemptuous expression, who perhaps dislikes the lymerer or else disapproves of the expedition entirely. Above him a huntsman holding four dogs on leash is hardworking and intense. Then there are three hunters with their heads together, one smiling, one thoughtful, one plump-cheeked and rather sulky. At the right of the fountain the gentleman in brocaded jerkin with hand upraised, undoubtedly the seigneur of the hunt (120), is every inch a nobleman, accustomed to giving orders. The man beside him with stringy hair and stupid expression is

obviously a yokel (233), content to carry his master's spear. At the far right a fresh-faced youth with curling orange hair listens to a gray-haired nobleman who is wise as well as old (280).

In the next tapestry there is a complete change of characters. This lack of continuity is difficult to explain. Perhaps the designer enjoyed drawing as many different personalities as possible and believed that the viewer would enjoy this too. Perhaps he considered that the content and mood of this scene required a different type of actors. Certainly there are more cruel and ugly faces here, notably those of the three men who attack the unicorn with their spears (234, 122). Two of them have obviously lost their upper teeth. Perhaps toothlessness seemed a fitting way to designate villainy. The



233

Second tapestry: the yokel

234

Third tapestry: toothless spearman





235

Third tapestry: supercilious dandy

gentleman in the background with outflung arm (235) is not a villain but rather a supercilious dandy who would not deign to soil his fine clothes with the sweat of the hunt or risk danger from the unicorn's horn. The man at the upper left in the brocaded jerkin, apparently the seigneur of the hunt (236), is less authoritative than the seigneur of the preceding tapestry, and he appears to wait for advice from his bright-eyed companion. The huntsman in the left foreground with his spear at rest on his shoulder (123) is not an active pursuer of the unicorn either. In fact, he gazes into the distance, perhaps contemplating the symbolic significance of the event.

The personnel changes again in the fourth tapestry where the unicorn defends himself. A different toothless man prepares to spear the unicorn from behind as he swerves to dodge the unicorn's kicks (130). A gray-haired huntsman with a furry hat tied under his chin approaches the unicorn's head within touching distance (126); he is undoubtedly an experienced hunter who calculates his moves and knows full well that at this precise moment he is not in danger from the unicorn's

horn. The only other hunter who is thrusting his spear keeps his distance; he has a rather weak face. His hair is arranged in vertical curls like that of the gentleman in the first tapestry, but more rigidly set. Beside him the seigneur of the hunt is once again depicted differently (129); here he seems to be a sensitive, compassionate person who regards the scene almost with sorrow. He wears a brocaded jacket, a feather in his hat, and his hair is in vertical curls. Two peasants have been added to the cast here, one a woodsman with his ax, the other a bearer of refreshments; the face of the latter has the dignity of an old servant who has served his master loyally for all of his adult life (131). From the point of view of symbolism, the most significant addition to the group in this tapestry is the hunter who represents the angel Gabriel. His features are idealized except for the lifelike detail of puffed-out cheeks as he blows his horn (130).

The young woman in the fifth tapestry may not be beautiful, but she is beautifully depicted by the designer (237). Her face is intriguingly flirtatious, her movements are supple and seductive, and she is richly gowned. The young hunter in this tapestry has a rather

236

Third tapestry: probably the seigneur of the hunt



237 Fifth tapestry: the handmaiden. The line at the neck of her dress illustrates the slit technique



sour expression; his mouth turns down unhappily and he merely touches the horn to his lips (133). His face and manner are in sharp contrast to those of the two youths of the third tapestry who blow their horns with gusto (236, 238).

In the death scene that concludes the hunt the most evil-looking man of the whole series is the hunter who thrusts his spear into the unicorn's side (239). Like the

spear-wielders in the third and fourth tapestries, this man has lost his upper teeth. Of the others who participate in the killing, one seems to be a weakling, the other an inscrutable character who at least attacks the unicorn with his sword, a nobler weapon than a spear (135). Two of the hunters who escort the dead unicorn to the castle appear to be good, solid citizens performing their duty without question or emotion; the third



238

Third tapestry: horn-blower

239

Sixth tapestry:
the killer of the unicorn





240

Sixth tapestry: men of the lord's company and the lady of the castle

man, supporting the unicorn's horn, is more alert and perhaps more aware of the significance of the occasion (169). The man beyond the horse's head, who has removed his hat, is one of the handsomest of all the people in the tapestries; moreover, he appears to have intelligence and integrity (240). In contrast, the two men behind him, their heads together, are not to be trusted; surely they are plotting some infamous deed. The lord and lady of the castle, whoever they may be, are certainly of the aristocracy (196); he waits in dignity, with the assurance that the unicorn's horn will be his; she turns her head away from the sight of the unicorn, perhaps in sadness that the killing was necessary. They appear to be a fond couple as he puts his arm through hers while she fingers her string of prayer beads. The two rather unattractive women at the right of the lord and lady are paying no attention to the solemn approach of the unicorn; they are much too busy gossiping (241). The one at the right has a hard, unfeeling face and fingers that curl like tentacles; the other has a glint in her eye as if she had just heard some delightfully unsavory tittle-tattle. The woman standing behind them is the only one of the group who might be called pretty. She has not entirely covered her blond hair but has arranged it in a jeweled coil that frames and enhances her face. She listens to the conversation of the others with a slightly amused, superior expression. Aloof from them all, a small boy plays with his dog. The dog obviously adores his master, but the boy expresses no childish delight. Perhaps he too is saddened at the death of the unicorn.

The expert portrayal of so many diverse characters, one of the many noteworthy aspects of the series, is a remarkable achievement for the painters who drew the designs and the cartoons, and for the weavers who interpreted them.

Remarkable too, and almost unique, are the varied, sumptuous color schemes of the tapestries. Reds, of course, were commonly used in tapestries of this period, but in the Unicorn Tapestries there are not only dark reds and light reds but brownish reds, bluish reds, fiery reds, and vermilion reds. There is an unusual amount

241

Sixth tapestry: women of the lord's company and the boy with his dog





242

Drawing, Trojan War series. The Arming of Hector and Hector's Departure. About 1465–70

Musée du Louvre



243

Tapestry: The Arming of Hector and Hector's Departure. Tournai, about 1474

Metropolitan Museum, Fletcher Fund

of orange, and several large areas of pale lemon yellow seldom found in tapestries. These colors, combined with the greens and blues, the browns, golden yellows, and flesh tones, result in effects of incomparable brilliance, made more dramatic and effective by the contrasting whites of the all-important unicorn and also of several of the hounds and parts of the hunters' costumes.

Whether the magnificent color schemes were entirely dictated by the designer or are partly due to the fine color sense of the weavers is impossible to determine. The series of Trojan War drawings in the Louvre, which are now generally believed to be rare examples of medieval *petits patrons*, are largely in sepia, merely tinted with color (242). The tapestries made from these drawings, in contrast, are sumptuous with color and enriched with patterned textiles and flowery foregrounds (243).⁴ No full-scale cartoons of the medieval period, so far as is known, have survived. A Renaissance cartoon in Brussels, probably of about 1520–50, is largely in monochrome with written instructions for the colors.⁵ On the other hand, the cartoons by Raphael, designed about 1515 for the Acts of the Apostles tapestries in the Vatican, are painted in full color (290).⁶

The several medieval accounts of the commissioning of cartoons are seldom explicit beyond giving the subjects to be depicted, the dimensions, the names of the painters, and the prices to be paid for the work. To be sure, Philip the Good specified that the areas painted yellow on the cartoons for his Golden Fleece tapestries should be woven in gold and those in white should be of fine silver thread.¹ It is thus apparent that certain parts, at least, of these cartoons were in color, and it seems reasonable to presume that the major portions were depicted in color also. Another order specifies that the painter Jacques Daret was to furnish a "*patron* on linen cloth with colors in tempera . . . well painted and figured . . . for the making of a high-warp loom tapestry."⁷

It would be fortunate indeed if the designer or designers of the Unicorn Tapestries could be identified. It would also be unusual, since there are very few existing medieval tapestries whose designers are known. For these few there are either written records or the names are woven into the tapestries themselves. A good example of a well-documented set is the fourteenth-century series in Angers depicting the Apocalypse. According to the account books of Duke Louis I of Anjou, brother of King Charles V of France, the duke commissioned "Hennequin of Bruges, painter to the king" to execute the "*pourtraiteures*" and "*patrons*" for the "story of the Apocalypse." The king lent Louis not only his court

painter but also his illustrated manuscript of the Apocalypse to assist in the designing of the "beau tappis."⁸ Also, there are records naming the designer of the Life of the Virgin tapestries in Beaune. By a contract dated 13 September 1474, a Burgundian painter, Pierre Spicre, undertook to paint the "designs for the stories of Our Lady" for Cardinal Jean Rolin, who planned to present the tapestries to the church of Notre Dame in Beaune.⁹ For some reason, the weaving was not completed until 1500, as is stated in an inscription on the last scene of the tapestries. Pierre Spicre painted the cartoons for other tapestries, but these tapestries have not survived.

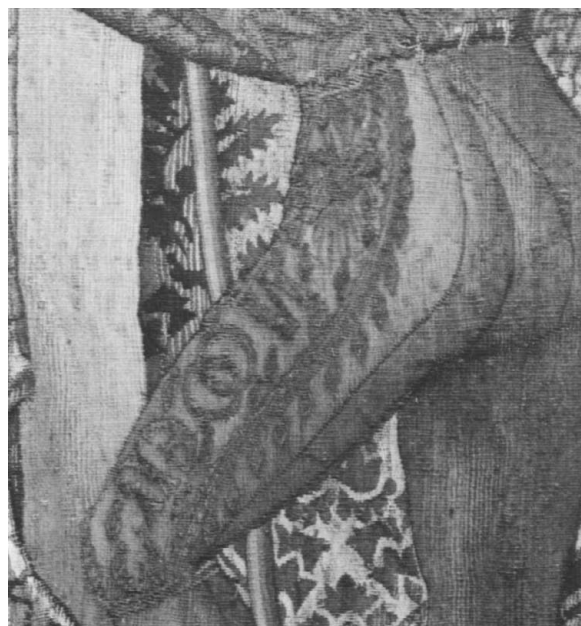
The designers for a later tapestry, the Communion of Herkenbald, in Brussels, have also been recorded. Account books in Louvain, dated 1513, list the payment of two and a half Rhine florins and two pots of wine to Master Jan van Brussel (also known as Jan van Roome) for the *petit patron*, and to the "painter Philippe" thirteen and a half florins for making the cartoon, and, in addition, ten sous for bringing the cartoon to the church and hanging it there.¹⁰

The name PHILIP is inscribed on a sixteenth-century tapestry in Brussels, the Descent from the Cross; it appears inconspicuously on the border of the chaperon worn by a bearded bystander.¹¹ Whether this is the same Philippe who painted the cartoon for the Herkenbald tapestry is a matter for conjecture. On the other hand, several tapestries bear the name of Jan van Roome, spelled in different ways as was not unusual in the Middle Ages. One of these is the Redemption tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum; another is the tapestry at The Cloisters known as the Glorification of Charles VIII; on this, the signature on the tights of a page in the lower left corner may be read as REON (244). Another cartoon painter of Brussels, known not

244

Tapestry: The Glorification of Charles VIII
(detail of signature). Brussels, about 1490

The Cloisters Collection, The Cloisters Fund



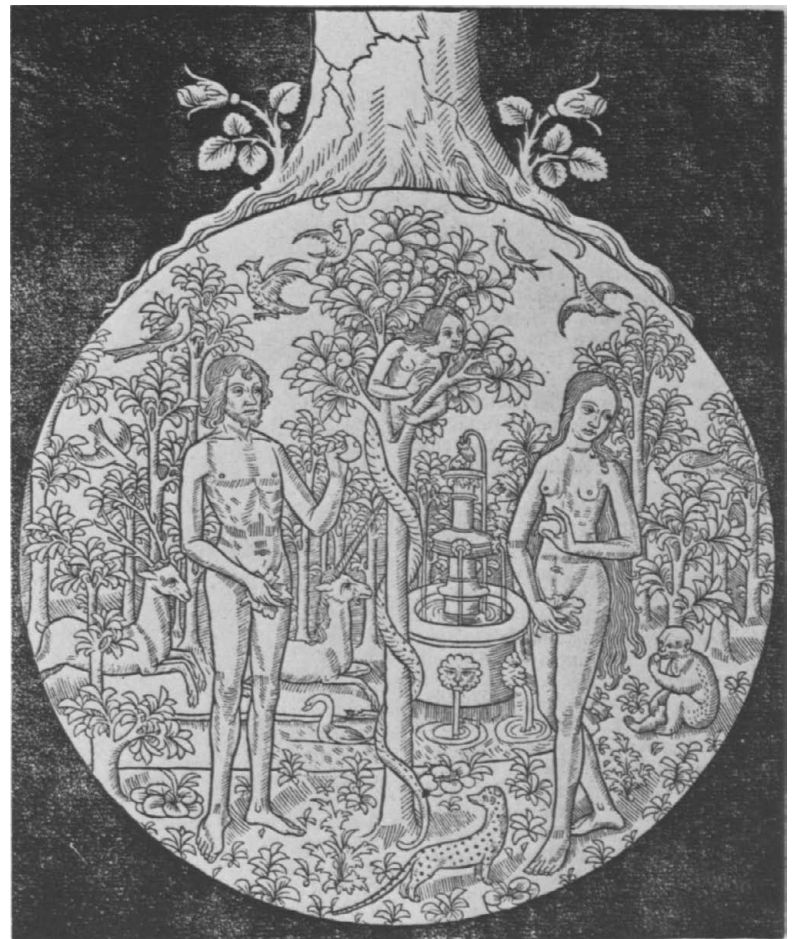
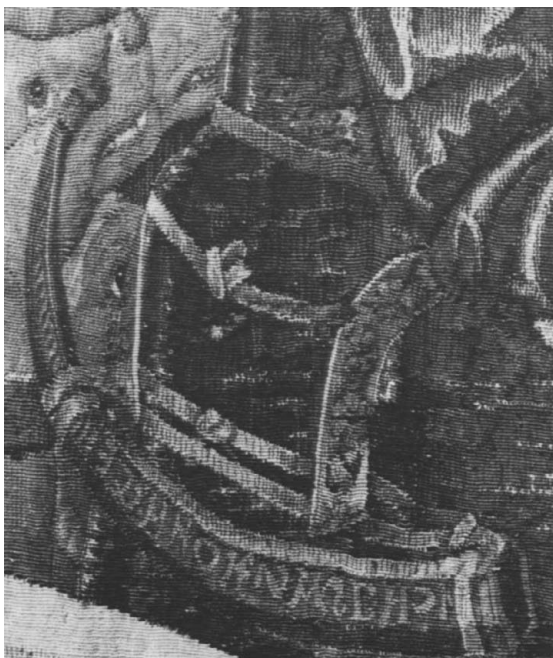
only from the records but also from his name woven into a tapestry, is Leonard Knoest. The letters KNOEST are clearly inscribed on the platform in the center of a tapestry in Brussels, the *Invention of the Cross*.¹² Other “signatures” on tapestries have been discovered, deciphered, and interpreted from time to time, sometimes more ingeniously than convincingly.

Woven in the Unicorn Tapestries are two inscriptions that may someday provide the clue to the designer. Both are difficult to decipher. The more legible one is on the horn of the fair-haired huntsman at the left of the second tapestry (232), the other is on the horn of the man in the right foreground of the third tapestry who directs his spear at the unicorn (122). The first inscription (245) may be read, from right to left, JONES (Johannes?), followed by AN, then one or two questionable letters, then ON, then several more questionable letters with an E near the end—possibly the second letter of FECIT. The only deduction possible from this at the present time is that one of the designers of the tapestries may have been someone named Jean or Johannes, but this may be another instance of an interpretation arrived at with more imagination than justification.

What can be demonstrated, however, is the relationship of the designer or designers to French works of art, especially woodcuts and metal cuts printed in Paris around the turn of the fifteenth century. The *Temptation of Adam and Eve* (246), first published by Antoine Vêrard about 1495, has many similarities to the tapestries. There is the central, dominant tree, as in the third and last tapestries, with woods in the background and a field of flowers in the foreground. There is a fountain, nearly identical with the fountain in the second tapestry, pouring water into a pool that narrows to a horizontal stream. There are the stag and the genet, almost

245

Second tapestry: inscription on hunter's horn



246

The Temptation of Adam and Eve. Woodcut in Bible published by Antoine Vêrard, Paris, about 1500

Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund

exact repetitions of these animals in the same tapestry. Above all, there is the unicorn, appearing as if he had temporarily removed himself from the tapestries in order to witness the eating of the forbidden fruit.

The Adam and Eve do not appear to have their counterparts in the tapestries, perhaps because Adam is bearded and both are nude, but the figures in several other of Vêrard's publications are strikingly similar. For example, the courtiers on the presentation page of *Orosius' Histoire Universelle*, dated 1491 (247), are close cousins to the less active participants in the Hunt of the Unicorn. The drawing of the faces with prominent noses, the subtle delineation of character differences, the curled locks of hair, and the gestures that keep the composition from being static are all comparable. Especially to be noticed are the bent fingers of the man at the left as he rests his hand on his stick, of the king as he holds his scepter, none too firmly, and of the

nobleman beside him who touches his belt; these fingers recall the tentacle-like fingers of the hard-faced woman in the sixth tapestry (241). The furred hats with feathers, the rope necklaces, and the textiles of moiré and brocade are also seen in the tapestries. The grouping of two men turned to converse with one another while a third stands almost full-face behind them recalls a group at the left of the fountain in the second tapestry. One of the page boys in private conversation near the arched entrance is posed and costumed like the lad in the sixth tapestry; the other wears striped tights ending just above the knee, as do two of the men in the first tapestry. The little dog in the print is not being patted, but he surely could be the little dog of the sixth tapestry.

A presentation page in Vêrard's *L'Art de bien Vivre et de bien Mourir*, dated 1492, shows similar groupings, facial types, and gestures (248). The man at the right with the disdainful expression suggests the supercilious dandy in the third tapestry (235). An older courtier at the right, who almost did not get into the picture, recalls the wise gray-haired nobleman at the far right of the second tapestry. In a marriage scene from the same publication (249) women are assembled in front of and



248

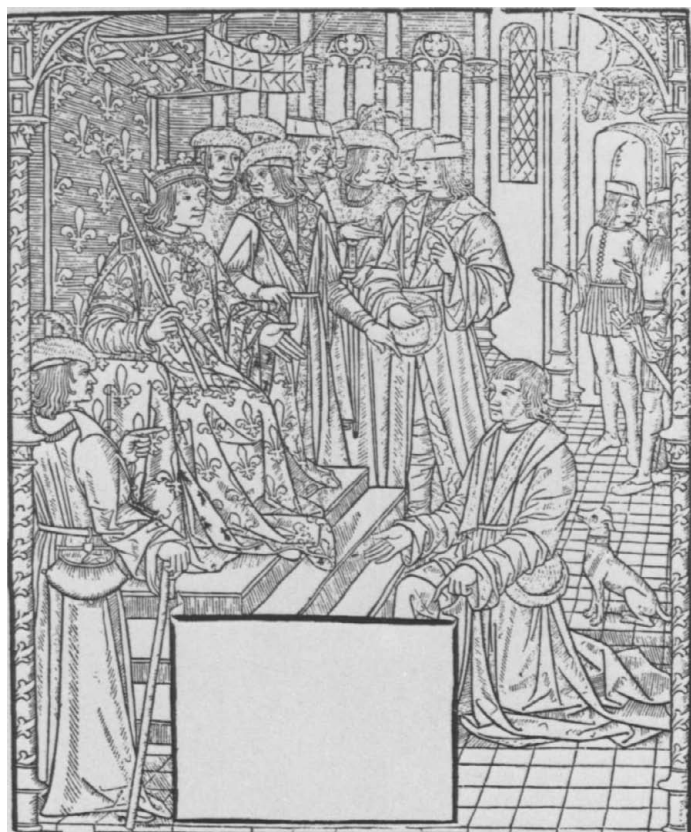
Woodcut in *L'Art de bien Vivre et de bien Mourir*, published by Antoine Vêrard, 1492

(photo: Hind, *Introduction*, fig. 398)

247

Author Kneeling before a King, Woodcut in *Histoire Universelle* of Orosius, published by Antoine Vêrard, 1491

(photo: Arthur M. Hind, *An Introduction to a History of Woodcut*, II [London, 1935], fig. 399)



249

Woodcut in *L'Art de bien Vivre*

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés D 852, fol. HH viii^v





250

Woodcut in *Miroir historial* of Vincent of Beauvais, 1495/96

Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund

under an arched doorway in a manner not unlike the grouping of women in the sixth tapestry, and, as in the same tapestry, the lady in full profile holds her gown with bent fingers.

A more dynamic composition from V  rard's workshop is the triumphal entry of "Charles Roy" in Vincent of Beauvais's *Miroir Historial*, printed in 1495/96 (250). The drama is as excitingly depicted as the activities of the hunt are in the tapestries; as in the sixth tapestry, two scenes in two different moods are skillfully combined into a unified composition. Once again women are grouped under an archway. The sharp-nosed attendants of the queen are not unlike two of the ladies in the sixth tapestry. The gentleman at the right with flowing wavy hair and big-brimmed hat tied under his chin is in many ways similar to the gray-haired huntsman in the fourth tapestry whose hat is secured in the same manner (126).

Toothless men as evil tormentors of Christ appear in a large print of scenes of the Passion, attributed to a Paris press, probably V  rard's (251). The strong contrapposto movement of the man at the right is almost identical with that of the huntsman in the right foreground of the third tapestry (122), and his accouterments are similar.

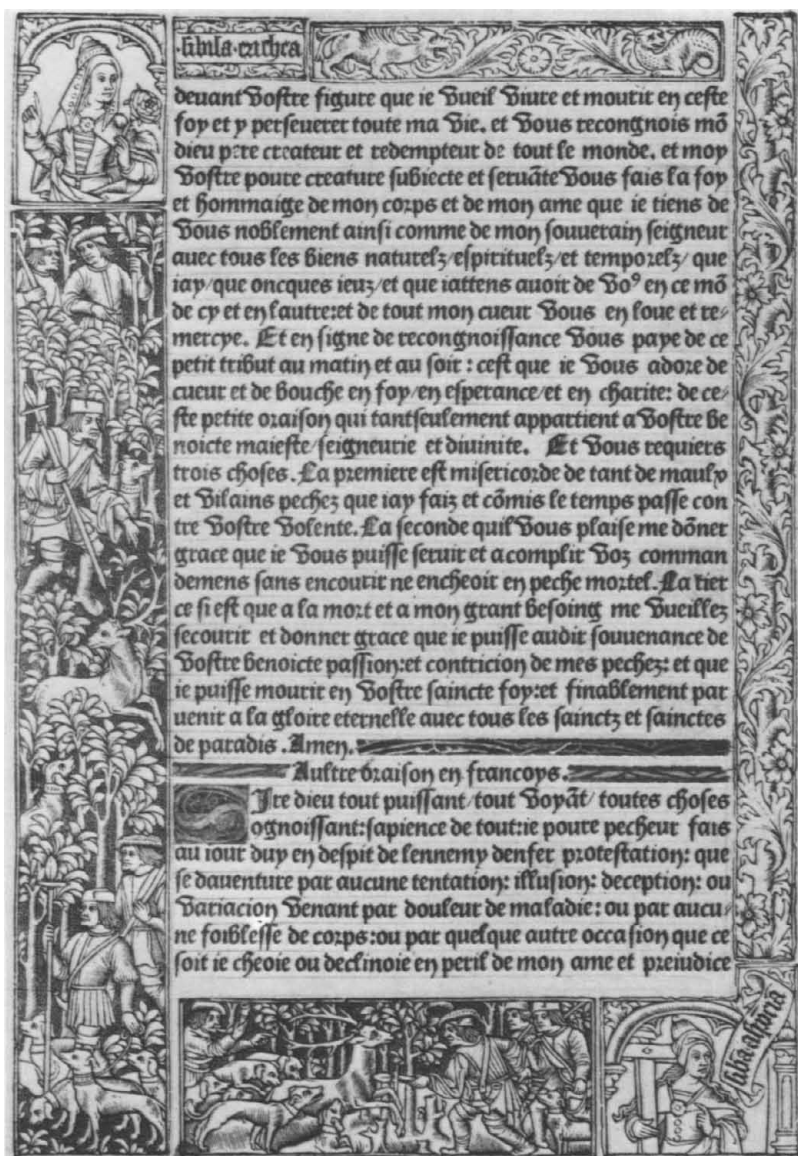
Books by other Parisian printers and publishers yield further comparative material, notably books of hours printed from metal blocks by Philippe Pigouchet for the publisher Simon Vostre. Marginal ornamentations in a book of hours of 1498 depict scenes of a stag hunt that are noticeably similar to scenes in the tapestries (252). The vertical border shows hunters quietly conversing (top) and waiting for the action to begin (bottom), their spears at rest, their hounds in readiness, one of them on leash. Above the stag's horns an eager dog is very like one in the fourth tapestry (128). As in the tapestries, trees and shrubs provide a decorative setting. In the lower border the confrontation of hunter and quarry suggests the composition of the third and especially the sixth tapestry; here too a young hunter blows his horn.

251

Woodcut, Scenes of the Passion (detail). End of 15th c.

(photo: P. A. Lemoisne, *Zylographies du XIV^e et du XV^e si  cle de la Collection des Estampes de la Biblioth  que Nationale* [Paris, 1930], II, pl. 128)





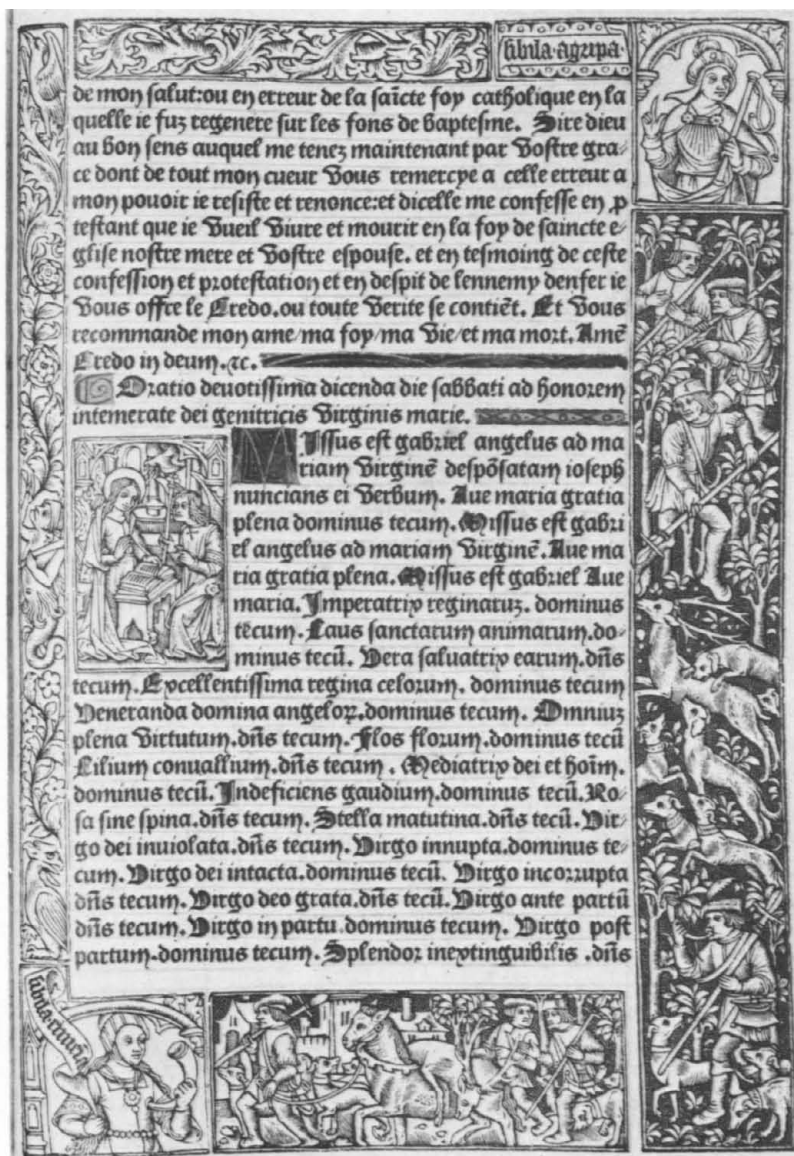
252, 253

Scenes of a stag hunt, in book of hours printed by Philippe Pigouchet for Simon Vostre, 1498

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund

254

Unicorn and other beasts. Marginal decoration in book of hours printed by Pigouchet for Vostre



The faces of the men, though small, their gestures, and their stances resemble those of the huntsmen in the tapestries; their costumes, from hats to boots, are of similar cut and style, lacking only the magnificence.

The vertical border of another Pigouchet page (253) shows the hunt in a more exciting phase, emphasized by the diagonals of the thrusting spears, as in the third and fourth tapestries. The dogs attacking the stag, one having bounded on his back, recall the death scene in the sixth tapestry. In the lower border the stag is carried on horseback in a scene remarkably like that in the sixth tapestry. Since the normal procedure was to dismember the stag in the field, it seems significant that the stag's body is intact, as is the unicorn's in the tapestry. The unicorn on another page of the same book (254) cannot be equated with the magnificent beast of



the tapestries; he is tiny in scale and his role in the story here does not require that he be a hero.

Still more illustrations in this book of hours have affinities with the tapestries. Bathsheba bathes in a fountain (255) very like the fountain of the second tapestry. In the Death of Uriah (256) an evil-looking man spearing a fallen swordsman is toothless, and his posture is similar to that of a hunter in the third tapestry (234). In the Martyrdom of Saint John (257) the executioner at the left is likewise toothless and his pose is like that of the huntsman avoiding the unicorn's kick in the fourth tapestry (130). A fruit-picking scene on another page (258) shows a genet among the flowers that a maiden gathers and what appears to be a heron perched on the lowest branch of the apple tree. The contours of the individual leaves, fruit, and twigs are carefully drawn in a decorative yet realistic manner, as are almost all of the trees in the tapestries.

The printer-publisher Thielman Kerver, who came to Paris from Coblenz, had his draftsmen copy many

255, 256, 257

Bathsheba, Death of Uriah, and Martyrdom of St. John, in book of hours printed by Philippe Pigouchet for Simon Vostre, 1498

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund



of Pigouchet's illustrations, a practice not uncommon among publishers of his time. A marginal decoration of his, derived from Pigouchet, shows beasts assembled under a starry sky and a unicorn dipping his horn in the manner of the unicorn in the second tapestry (259). Kerver seems to have been devoted to unicorns. He called his business house "At the Sign of the Unicorn," and his device featured two unicorns as supports for his shield, held by a strap to a central oak tree (260).

Not only are such illustrations similar to elements in the tapestries, but also capital letters in Parisian books of this time resemble the design of the AE and FR of the tapestries (261).

It is impossible to arrive at one definitive conclusion regarding the relationship between the Paris prints and the Unicorn Tapestries. Perhaps one of V  rard's or Pigouchet's designers composed the *patrons* for the tapestries. Or perhaps the artists in both media were trained in the same atelier. Whatever the case, the de-



258

Marginal decoration in books of hours printed by Pigouchet for Vostre



259

Unicorn dipping his horn. Marginal decoration in book of hours published by Thielman Kerver. Paris, 1504

Metropolitan Museum, Rogers Fund



260

Device of Thielman Kerver. In 1504 book of hours



261

Ornamented letters used by Ulrich Gering and Berthold Rembolt in books printed about 1494, Paris

(photos: A. Claudin, *Histoire de l'imprimerie en France*, I [Paris, 1900], pp. 114-115)





262 Miniature in *Miroir Historial* of Vincent of Beauvais, by the Coëtivy Master

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 51, fol. 211

263 Miniature in *Histoire Universelle* of Orosius, by the Coëtivy Master

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 64, fol. 55^v

signs for the Hunt of the Unicorn have at the very least a distinct Paris flavor.

Unfortunately, the artists who drew with such skill the designs for the book illustrations were not acknowledged along with the printers and publishers, and their identities are now lost. It is known that publishers employed miniature painters such as Jacques de Besançon and Jean Bourdichon¹³ to embellish volumes intended for princely patrons, but their work seems to have consisted mainly in coloring the black and white printed pictures. The character of their known manuscript illuminations is distinctly different from the prints that are related to the tapestries.

The many manuscripts of the last decade of the fifteenth century that were examined for this study are less significant for stylistic comparisons with the tapestries than are the printed books. However, the earlier miniatures of the Coëtivy Master (active about 1455–80) are worthy of note. First, this master's color schemes are reminiscent of the vibrant, daring, and unusual color schemes of the tapestries. He also uses a distinctive, uncommon pale yellow,¹⁴ and he is especially fond of an orange red that he shades with dark blue red to produce a glowing effect like that of the costume of the gray-haired hunter in the fourth tapestry (126). He also enjoyed painting patterned tiled roofs (262) similar to the one in the sixth tapestry (231), and, as in the same tapestry, he tinted the stonework of his buildings to make it more colorful. There are other similarities. Ugly, toothless men appear in many of his



miniatures (263). His Eve, in a Creation scene (264), is rather like the handmaiden in the fifth tapestry, both in her pose and gesture and in her sly expression. The genet near the fountain in this miniature is almost a repetition of this same animal in the second tapestry (100), the Vérard woodcut of Adam and Eve (246), and the Pigouchet fruit-picking scene (258). This *enlumineur* has been called the Coëtivy Master after the book of hours that he produced for Olivier de Coëtivy and Marguerite de Valois sometime between 1458 and 1473.¹⁵

Years ago the distinguished scholar Paul Durrieu argued with considerable cogency that the Coëtivy Master could well have been Henri Vulcop, enlumineur of Marie of Anjou, queen of France, and of her son Charles.¹⁶ Recently, Nicole Reynaud of the Louvre, agreeing with this identification, attributed to Vulcop the *petits patrons* for the Trojan War tapestries,¹⁷ arguing that there are resemblances to Vulcop's work in the facial characteristics, the proportions and movements of the bodies, the architectural backgrounds, the battle compositions (265), and in specific scenes such as the Execution of Polyxena, (266, 267). Her studies are worth serious consideration here since they lead her to her belief that Vulcop influenced the designer of the Unicorn



266 Execution of Polyxena, in *Histoire Universelle* of Orosius, by the Coëtivy Master

(photo: Nicole Reynaud, "Un peintre français," *Revue de l'Art*, no. 22 [1973], fig. 20)

267 Drawing. Trojan War series. Execution of Polyxena

Musée du Louvre (photo: *Der Trojanische Krieg*)



265

Drawing, Trojan War series. About 1465–70

Musée du Louvre (photo: P. Schumann, *Der Trojanische Krieg* [Dresden, 1898])





268, 269, 270

Drawings. Trojan War series.

Man with dog, Warrior, Killing of King Priam

Musée du Louvre (photos: *Der Trojanische Krieg*)

Tapestries. She finds similarities among the Vulcop miniatures (about 1465–80), the Trojan War *patrons* (about 1465–70), and Paris prints of a later period, for example, the Death of Uriah, dated 1498 (256), already mentioned as related to the Cloisters' tapestries. She also notes the resemblance of the scene of a man with his dog in one of the Trojan War *patrons* (268) to that of the boy with his dog in the Cloisters' tapestry (241). Still more comparisons may be made. The movement of a warrior in one of the *patrons* (269) is similar to that of the huntsman attacking the unicorn from the rear in the fourth tapestry (130); and the face and movement of the killer thrusting his sword into the back of King Priam (270) is not unlike the evil-faced hunter spearing the unicorn in the sixth tapestry (239). And there are ugly, brutal faces with hawk noses, jutting chins, and sunken upper lips in the Trojan War drawings (271, 272) just as there are in the tapestries, the Paris prints, and the miniatures of the Coëtivy Master. Mme. Reynaud believes that the Unicorn Tapestries were designed by an unknown disciple of Vulcop who inherited from his master many of his workshop drawings and presumably his color schemes and style. This seems a reason-

able possibility. The name Vulcop, also spelled Wilcop, Wilcap, and Wulcob, indicates that the painter, working in France, was a foreigner or of foreign heritage, perhaps Netherlandish or Rhenish.

The color schemes of the Coëtivy Master and of the tapestries are reminiscent of earlier fifteenth-century manuscripts of the northern Netherlands. A splendid example is the book of hours in the Pierpont Morgan Library, illuminated for Catherine of Cleves about 1435–40, probably in Utrecht.¹⁸ Several of its miniatures combine true reds, blue reds, and vermillion reds with clear yellows in compositions that also include the usual blues, greens, flesh tones, browns, black, and white. As in the tapestries, these color schemes are daringly bold and vibrant, yet harmonious. The Cleves Master gave some of his favorite characters orange-colored hair like that of the young huntsman at the right in the second tapestry; among the people he so endowed are the young Virgin Mary, the princess who is rescued by Saint George, and the maiden who fondles a unicorn.

A book of hours for Catherine of Lochorst,¹⁹ probably by the Cleves Master about 1440, displays similar color compositions and also many personages with vertical sausage-shaped curls like those of several of the huntsmen in the tapestries (273). Other north Netherlandish manuscripts of about the same date, as well as



271, 272
Brutal faces, Trojan
War series

some that were produced several decades later, nearer the time of the tapestries, have color combinations not unlike those of the Cleves Book of Hours. Similar brilliant harmonies occur in panel paintings of the north Netherlands, about 1500. The unknown painter of a Christ Carrying the Cross, in the Metropolitan Museum, employs a palette that includes various juxtaposed reds and also yellows. A mounted official in a furred hat wears a red robe and vermillion gloves and rides a brownish orange horse. A man with upraised hand has a pinkish tunic with vermillion undersleeves. Near him are soldiers in brownish orange armor. Other bright reds appear in Veronica's cloak, in hats, stockings, and horse trappings. One of the thieves has orange hair and beard. The man next to him wears a yellow gown shaded with red and another man wears a yellow conical cap with vermillion brim.

The inference from all these observations is that the designer of the tapestries, though undoubtedly working in France, perhaps as a disciple of Vulcop, may have had a Netherlandish heritage or he may have been influenced directly or indirectly, especially in his color

273

Miniature (fol. 151^v) in book of hours, probably by the Cleves Master. About 1440

Münster, Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte





274

Tapestry: The Story of Perseus. Flemish, about 1500.
Private collection, France

(photo: R. Guillemot, courtesy *Connaissance des Arts*)

schemes, by north Netherlandish works of art. This hypothesis is the most hypothetical of those presented in this study. Future researchers may lead to a more satisfactory conclusion. In the meantime, the designer of the tapestries will be called the Master of The Cloisters' Unicorn.

At least one other existing tapestry may be credited to him. It represents Perseus mounted on his horse Pegasus, galloping away from three lissome nymphs, one of whom rides a swan, another a dolphin, while the third stands in a stream, her side pierced by an arrow shot by blindfolded Cupid (274). Since 1954, when this tapestry, privately owned, was first published,²⁰ distinguished art connoisseurs have generally compared it to the Cluny Museum's Lady with the Unicorn set, noting the similarities in the jewelry, headdresses, coiffures, and the proportions of the female figures. It is my opinion, however, that in the overall composition, in the selection and drawing of details, and even in the postures of the nymphs this tapestry is closer to the Hunt of the Unicorn than it is to the Lady with the Unicorn. The setting, with its stream bordered on the near side by growing plants and on the far side by a grove of bushes and trees with a distant glimpse of a castle on a hill, is very like that of three of the Cloisters' tapestries. The trees include oaks, hollies, pomegranates, medlars, an orange, a beech, a blue plum, a hazelnut, and a small hawthorn in flower; all of these might have been selected by the seigneur of the Cloisters' set,

planted by the same landscape gardener, and depicted by the same skillful designer. There are similarities, too, in the drawing of the sweet violets, pinks, daisies, and Chinese lantern plant.

Although there are orange trees, oaks, and hollies in the Cluny Museum's set, they are designed differently and they play an entirely different role in the compositions. Even though some of the same flowers are included, those in the rose-colored backgrounds are treated in a manner unlike that of the Perseus and Cloisters' tapestries; they are *coupées*, that is, they are shown with their severed stems and branches; only the flowers in the dark blue "islands" are drawn as if they were growing plants.

In the Perseus tapestry a squirrel much like the one in the Cloisters' tapestry sits atop an orange tree, and a male pheasant observes his reflection in the stream while his mate stands beside him. A genet sniffs the air in the center foreground, a pair of partridges rest among the flowers, and ducks and a woodcock swim about in the stream. Rabbits are present, though they are brown instead of white, and a small dog is a lady's pet rather than a hunting hound. Genets also appear in the Lady with the Unicorn set; apparently they were favorite animals at the time.

At first glance the figures of the Perseus tapestry seem unlike those of the Hunt of the Unicorn, but this does not preclude the possibility that the same artist composed the *patrons* for both. The people in the Perseus tapestry are legendary, so it is natural for them to be idealized in face and form. The people in the Cloisters' tapestries, on the other hand, are lifelike individuals of their time and might be observed any day on the

castle grounds, though probably in less elegant garments. The faces of the nymphs in the Perseus tapestry are prettier than those of the women in the Hunt of the Unicorn, save for the one who wears her hair framing her face, the strands tied with ribbons and bedecked with a central jewel. This hair style, probably borrowed from Italy, also appears in the Lady with the Unicorn set, but here tufts of loose hair like plumes crown the coiffures of three of the ladies (75, 76, 80). The central nymph of the Perseus tapestry has the same plume-like tufts, and the experts have made much of this parallel. However, comparable foreign-type hair arrangements can be found in many a print that illustrates sibyls, legendary women, or ladies of antiquity.

The posture of the central nymph is like that of the handmaiden in the fifth Cloisters' tapestry. The dolphin-rider touches the dolphin's wing with fingers not unlike those of the flexible-fingered woman in the sixth tapestry. The swan-rider spreads out her right hand as if to find out whether or not it is raining; the gesture is like that in a Kerver print of 1499 in which Bathsheba tests her bath water as it flows from a lion-head tap

(275). Both gestures are similar to that of another Bathsheba in a late fifteenth-century book of hours (276), and it may be noted that Bathsheba's coiffure in this miniature is like that of the pretty lady in the Cloisters' tapestry.

In a recent study Geneviève Souchal of the Cluny Museum acknowledges the stylistic analogies between the Perseus tapestry and the Hunt of the Unicorn while reiterating the points of similarity between the Perseus and the Lady with the Unicorn.²¹ She argues, not very convincingly, that the Cluny Museum's and the Cloisters' sets were designed by the same man. Naturally, she relates the composition of Sight, in the Cluny Museum's set, and the Unicorn Tamed by the Maiden, for the pose of the unicorn is similar, and so too is the arm of the lady, with her fingers lightly touching the unicorn's mane. However, this treatment was not unique, as is evident in the Wharncliffe Book of Hours (56). Also, the sweetly docile expression of the Cluny unicorn is subtly different from that of the wild-eyed, still not completely tamed unicorn in the Cloisters' tapestry. In fact it may be said that the designer of the Cluny

275

Illustration in book of hours published by Thielman Kerver. Paris, 1499

New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, W. S. Glazier Estate



276

Miniature in book of hours made for Nicolas Séguier. French, about 1500

Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. lat. 1400, fol. 98 (photo: Giraudon)



tapestries did not create as majestic a unicorn as did the designer of the Cloisters' tapestries. In Touch (79) he is a meek creature with strange tufts of hair growing on his back. In Hearing (76) he turns his head awkwardly, and his torso is too thick and thus lacking in grace.

Regarding the similarities in the types of women, Mme. Souchal notes that in both sets they have slim bodies with flat busts, long, slender arms, "admirable" hands, faces with small, neat chins, expressions unsmiling, eyelids half lowered in oblique glances. But this description could apply to women in scores of other works of art of the period, showing only that the formulas followed in the tapestries were very much in vogue. As for the figures in the Cluny tapestries, not one of them suggests the type of movement of the handmaiden in the Cloisters' fragment. And as for the faces, I believe that none of the attractive ladies in the Cluny set would feel flattered to be likened to the Cloisters' women.

Mme. Souchal compares several details in the Cluny set to the Paris prints that I have related to the Cloisters' set. For example, she likens the Bathsheba and mirror in the Pigouchet Hours (255) to the lady and mirror in Sight (75). The similarities of coiffures and costumes are also presented as arguments. Admitting that there are differences between the two sets, Mme. Souchal attributes this to their having been woven in different workshops and on different types of looms.

However, along with other scholars, I feel that the differences between the sets are so major that there is scant reason to think they emanated from the imagination and hand of the same designer or designers. Each set is magnificent in its own way.

The date

There is general agreement that the Cloisters' tapestries were designed about 1500, perhaps as early as 1490, perhaps as late as 1505. This period is determined not only by the style in relation to the prints but by the cut of the costumes of both the men and women. Here the printed books are again helpful because they usually include a colophon indicating the year of publication.

In the matter of costumes, the boots and shoes of the tapestries are important indications of the date. In the last years of the fifteenth century men gave up the pointed footwear that had been fashionable for several decades in favor of boots and shoes with blunt, square toes that surely must have been more comfortable, if not so elegant. The new toes continued to be fashion-



277

Woodcut (detail) in *Danse Macabre*, published by Guy Marchant, Paris, 1490; first published 1485

Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund

able well into the sixteenth century. One of the earliest illustrations to show the new style is a print of a knight being claimed by Death, published by Guy Marchant in 1485 (277). Similar soft cuffed boots, also worn with tights, are seen on many of the huntsmen in the tapestries.

As noted earlier, striped tights ending at the knee, as worn by two of the hunters in the first tapestry, are found in one of the illustrations in Orosius' *Histoire Universelle* (247), published in 1491. The short outer cloaks of several of the gentlemen in the tapestries have loose wide sleeves with slits for the wearer to put his arms through for greater freedom of action (123, 126). Similar sleeves are depicted in the late fifteenth-century prints of Vêrard (248), Pigouchet, and Marchant (277). The doublets in the tapestries are interestingly varied. Many of them, like those of the prints (248, 252, 253), have snugly fitted tops and wide pleated skirts (118, 241). A few are opened down the front to disclose the shirt beneath and are held in place with ribbon ties (232, 234, 280; compare 257). The sleeves of many of

the doublets are fashioned in a distinctive way: the upper parts full and gathered above the elbow to tight-fitting forearms (118, 232; compare 252, 253).

The interest in squareness is evident not only in the shoes but also in the soft, cuffed caps that were apparently worn even when more luxurious furry, brimmed hats were placed over them (236). One of the hunters in the first tapestry and one in the sixth wear the cuffed caps while their furry hats are slung over their shoulders. Many of the hats are decorated with ostrich plumes of different colors. Similar headgear may be seen in the prints (247, 248, 253).

The ladies' costumes of this period as shown in prints, painted portraits, and tapestries, are less picturesque than those of earlier decades. Horned head-dresses and hennins like church spires are no longer in style; instead the ladies wear fitted caps covered with loosely arranged veils, sometimes jeweled. These sim-

278

Margaret of Austria, by the Master of Moulins.
About 1491

Metropolitan Museum, Robert Lehman Collection



pler head coverings must have been less difficult to arrange and more comfortable to wear (249, 250). The gowns have tight-fitting bodices, sometimes with square yokes of a different material, like that of the handmaiden in the fifth tapestry, which may be compared to the gown worn by Margaret of Austria in her portrait by the Master of Moulins (278). The sleeves of the gowns in the tapestries are full, especially at the wrists, as are the sleeves in Pigouchet's fruit-gathering scene (258). Skirts fit snugly from the waist to the hips and fall in ample folds to the ground. The materials in the costumes in the tapestries, all of the period, are sumptuous velvets, brocades, and moiré silks.

Like the costumes, the weapons may be dated around 1500. Distinctive asymmetrical cross guards appear on the swords of two of the hunters (126, 239). Similar cross guards are shown in the prints (247).

And so the evidence seems to indicate that a few years before 1500, or a few years after, the *petits patrons* for the tapestries were drawn and the full-size cartoons were executed by French artists or by artists working in France who may have been influenced to some extent by north Netherlandish paintings or miniatures.

The weaving

Once the cartoons were delivered to the weavers, they became the property of the master of the workshop, and they were often used to make duplicate sets of tapestries. Occasionally the owner of the original set purchased the cartoons; in this way he could ensure that he had sole possession of the designs. Also, if he liked, he could hang the painted cloths, reserving the more valuable tapestries for festive occasions. Philip the Good of Burgundy bought from the master weavers Robert Dary and Jehan de l'Ortye the *patrons* from which their workers had woven his Golden Fleece tapestries.²² An account of the commune of Lille for 1480 describes how "rich *patrons de haute-lice*" were placed in the great hall for the oath-taking ceremony of the châtelain of Lille.²³

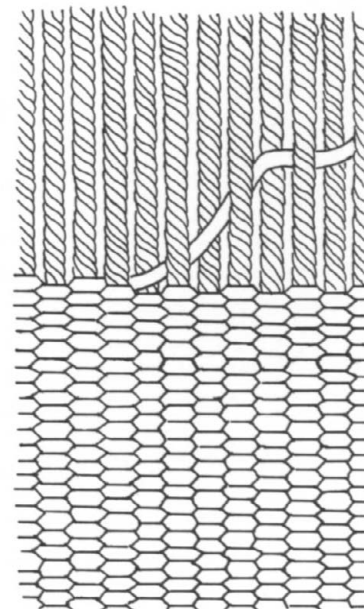
There are no descriptions of exactly how the fifteenth-century weavers employed the cartoons in copying the designs. It is believed that, even as in later times, when a high-warp or vertical (*haute-lice*) loom was used, the cartoon was hung behind the weavers. They would refer to it by turning their heads and sketch the main outlines of the composition on the warp threads as they progressed. When a low-warp or hori-

zontal (*basse-lice*) loom was used, the cartoon was probably attached underneath the warps so that the designs were visible through them.

The weavers working on at least five of the Unicorn Tapestries must have been accomplished draftsmen themselves to reproduce the subtle differences of character on the faces of the hunters, the supple movements of the bodies, and the realistic appearances of the animals, all achieved by passing colored weft threads alternately over and under the tough wooden warps. In fact, it is recorded that some of the weavers of Brussels, about 1475, were designing their own cartoons. This quite understandably aroused the ire of the painters, whose livelihood was thereby diminished. After a long dispute between the two guilds it was agreed, in 1476, that the weavers should be allowed to draw "textiles, trees, boats, animals, and grasses for their verdures"; moreover, they would be permitted to complete or correct the cartoons themselves "with charcoal, chalk, or

279

Basic tapestry weave and formation of ribs

**280**

Second tapestry: the seigneur of the hunt and men of his company



pen.”²⁴ For all other matters they were bound to employ professional painters under pain of fine. Similar license probably was granted to weavers in workshops of other towns. Certainly it is inconceivable that the painter himself would painstakingly draw every English daisy, wild strawberry, sweet violet, or all of the other oft-repeated plants in the Unicorn Tapestries. Probably such a painter would indicate the more significant or more unusual plants and leave the rest to the weavers, who might depict many of the plants from direct observation, from memory, or from manuscript illuminations or sketches available in the shop.

Medieval looms were normally set up so that the warp threads run horizontally when the completed tapestry hangs on a wall. The weft threads run verti-

cally, meaning that the weavers, as they faced their looms, worked the designs sideways. Furthermore, they worked from the back of the tapestry. In large tapestries, such as the Hunt of the Unicorn, several persons would weave together on the same loom, keeping pace with one another.

The Unicorn Tapestries are superb examples of typical medieval techniques. The warp threads of undyed wool, tightly twisted and very strong, are covered completely by the finer weft threads that form the designs (279). The warps are visible only as ribs, but besides supporting the wefts, they contribute to the special aesthetic appeal that a textile can give as opposed to, for instance, a colored print or a painting. As for the weft threads, each color is passed back and forth in the area where the cartoon requires that color; consequently, the back of the tapestry appears practically the same as the front, in reverse (280, 281). Where one color stops and turns back on itself, and another starts, doing the

281

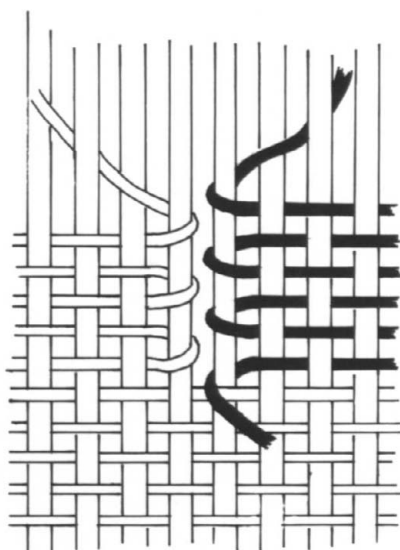
Same scene photographed from the back of the tapestry

(photo: William F. Pons)



282

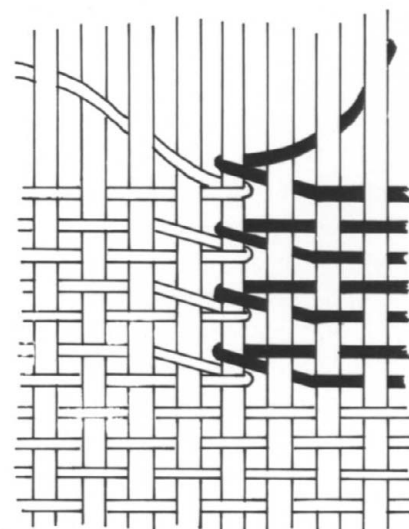
Formation of a slit



same thing in the opposite direction, a slit occurs (282). An example of a slit is to be seen in the first tapestry where the dark area of a hound's jaw appears against the white body of the dog behind him (222). This particular slit was stitched together after the weaving was completed. Such slits were kept to a minimum since they weaken the fabric. Furthermore, the stitchery tends to interfere with the special beauty that is the essence of the woven textile. In the Unicorn Tapestries, as in most of the products of the technically advanced workshops, slits were avoided by dovetailing or interlocking. For dovetailing, at the point where one color ends and another begins, wefts of the first and second color pass around the same warp thread (283). Several instances of this painstaking technique may be seen in the tapestries. A more complicated but more satisfactory method of avoiding slits is interlocking, a linking of the weft threads of the two adjoining colors (284).

283

Dovetailing



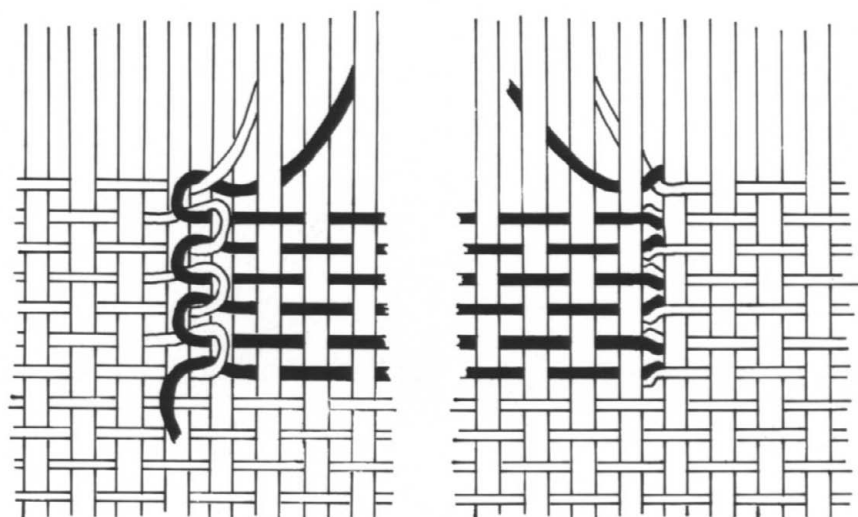
The joining is invisible from the front and the fabric remains strong throughout. At least five of the Unicorn Tapestries include this sophisticated technique.

Slits do not always present themselves as a problem; tiny slits that produce small holes are used intentionally, effectively, and frequently in the tapestries to delineate, for instance, lines in the faces and hands of the people and in the animals' heads and bodies. A series of small dark dots results in a more subtle effect of modeling than does a strong woven line (230, 237).

The shadings from light to dark in the Hunt of the Unicorn, as in all great medieval tapestries, are achieved chiefly by hatchings, that is, strokes of lighter-hued wool penetrating in the darker-hued areas and vice versa (230). Half-tones result where the hatchings adjoin. Regular expert hatchings running at right angles to the ribs not only enhance the illusion of three dimensions but also contribute to the texture appeal that is

284

Interlocking (back and face)

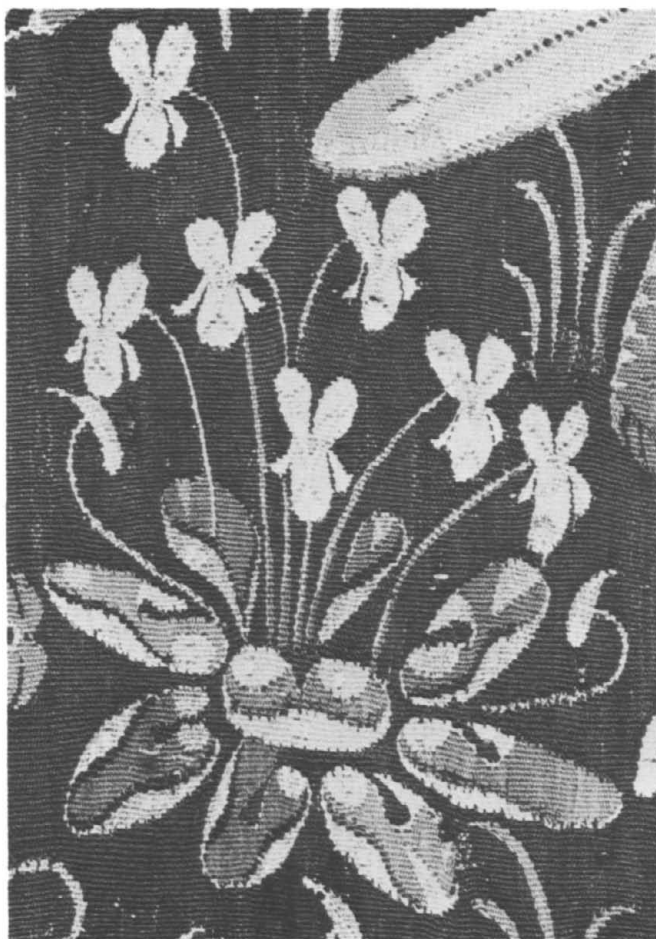


unique to great tapestries. Hatchings are time-consuming for the weaver, however, and quicker results were obtained with solid patches of light color woven adjacent to patches of dark. This method was used in the first tapestry, especially in the representation of some of the plants. The difference between the techniques is evident when one compares a sweet violet in the first tapestry with a violet in the sixth (285).

The weft threads of the Unicorn Tapestries are predominantly of wool, a material that accepts dyes of almost incomparable depth and richness. Silk threads are used throughout, especially for highlights; they add their own distinctive quality of shining splendor. The silver threads that may once have been gilded have tarnished so that they no longer contribute their touches of opulence. These threads, of metal foil wrapped around strands of tan or yellow silk, are used chiefly in the monograms and in the garments of brocaded materials.

285

Violet plant in first tapestry (left) and sixth



All the colors were apparently achieved by means of three vegetable dyestuffs only, madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) for the reds, weld (*Reseda luteola*) for the yellows, and woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) for the blues. This conclusion is based on an analysis of the dyes of forty-seven samples of unattached threads snipped from the backs of all the tapestries. The analysis was done at the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique in Brussels by Dr. L. Masschelein-Kleiner.

With the three dyes, red, yellow and blue, providing the primary colors, other hues were achieved by combining two and occasionally three of the dyes. All three were readily available in Europe at the time the tapestries were woven.

Madder produced the brilliant red dyes, so beloved by medieval people, and also provided varying hues and shades of red when so desired. Known since at least the days of ancient Greece and Rome, it was widely cultivated in Europe in the Middle Ages. The dye is derived from the roots. After two years of growth the roots are dried and milled into powder for the dye bath. As with all dyes, metallic mordants were needed to achieve color permanence; they also tended to enrich



the color, and different mordants could produce different hues. Good examples of bright madder reds are the doublet of the horn-blowing hunter in the sixth tapestry, the holly berries in the third, and the clove pink silhouetted against the dog at the left in the fourth tapestry.

The mordant for the first example was not determined; for the others it was aluminum. All of these reds have faded slightly, as is shown by their greater intensity when one views them on the backs of the tapestries. The paler hatchings of the hunter's doublet have zinc as the mordant. Both aluminum and zinc are found in the purplish red hose of the youngest hunter at the killing of the unicorn; here the color is more bluish than it is on the back of the tapestry. Copper was added to aluminum for the darkest reds of the gray-haired hunter's cloak in the fourth tapestry.

Weld, the source of the yellows, resembles the garden mignonette. Like madder, it was in common use from ancient times. Except for the roots, the coloring matter is present throughout the plants, so they are cut off at the roots and dried. The dyer buys the dried plants in bundles, breaks them up, and stews them. Aluminum appears to be the mordant for most of the yellows in the tapestries, including the yellow silk used in the green leaves. The deeper golden yellow of the brocaded doublet of the master of the hunt in the second tapestry shows zinc as the mordant.

Weld and madder were combined to achieve the brilliant orange silk wefts of the gray-haired hunter's cloak in the fourth tapestry; in this case, because of the smallness of the sample, the mordant was not identified. Madder was again added to weld to produce the brownish orange of the Gabriel-hunter's boots in the same tapestry, as well as the orange in the silk sleeves of the youngest killer of the unicorn. Aluminum was the mordant in both cases.

The blue dye from the woad plant has a long history. Julius Caesar reported that "All Britons stain themselves with woad which grows wild and produces a blue color which gives them a terrible appearance in battle."²⁵ Widely grown in the Middle Ages, woad, related to mustard, was practically the only source of blue dye available until the Indian indigo plant began to be imported in large quantities in the Renaissance period. The dye of woad is extracted from the leaves alone, and the making of the dyestuff was a complicated and apparently noisome process. The leaves were first ground to a pulp, dried, and then ground again, this time into a powder. The powder, spread on a stone floor and sprinkled with water was allowed to ferment for nine

weeks. The odor from the fermenting mass was so offensive that the dye producers were prohibited by law from setting up near residential or business areas of towns. Moreover, the wastes from the industry polluted streams, and the very cultivation of the plants ruined land at a time when farmers knew little of revitalizing soils. Nevertheless, the growing of woad and the manufacture of the dye therefrom continued extensively because the people of the Middle Ages loved the color blue, the color of the royal French arms, of the Virgin's mantle, of celestial cherubims, the color that symbolized fidelity.

Woad was sometimes used alone in the tapestries, as in the sky of the left fragment of the fifth tapestry; the mordants here are zinc and aluminum. The same combination was used in the light blue moiré cloak of the spear-carrying hunter in the sixth tapestry. Madder was added to the woad in the darker areas of this garment. The midnight blue background of the seventh tapestry was achieved by the addition of both madder and weld to the woad, with zinc and aluminum. The same combination produced the blue-black shadings that help to create the fiery cloak of the gray-haired hunter in the fourth tapestry; the black of his shoes, interestingly enough, is achieved by the three dyes with aluminum alone for the mordant. Oxide of iron, sometimes employed for black dyes in the Middle Ages, was, fortunately, not used in the tapestries; probably the dyers knew well that iron black is corrosive and that it would sooner or later destroy the silk and woolen threads.

As might be expected, the greens of the tapestries were made by combining weld and woad. The dark green of the hazelnut bush in the sixth tapestry shows zinc and aluminum as the mordants; the darker green of the oak leaves in the second tapestry shows aluminum and iron; a still darker green in the fifth tapestry shows zinc added to the aluminum and iron. The mordants for the light greens were not determined because the available snippets of silk and wool were too small.

The workshop

The workshop that employed these varied and beautifully dyed wools and silks is not known, nor can it be deduced with certainty in what town or region the tapestries were woven. Several writers have assumed that they were produced somewhere in France; others have suggested Tournai; Bruges has also been mentioned as a possibility; and recently it has been considered that

most probably the workshop was one of the many establishments in Brussels.

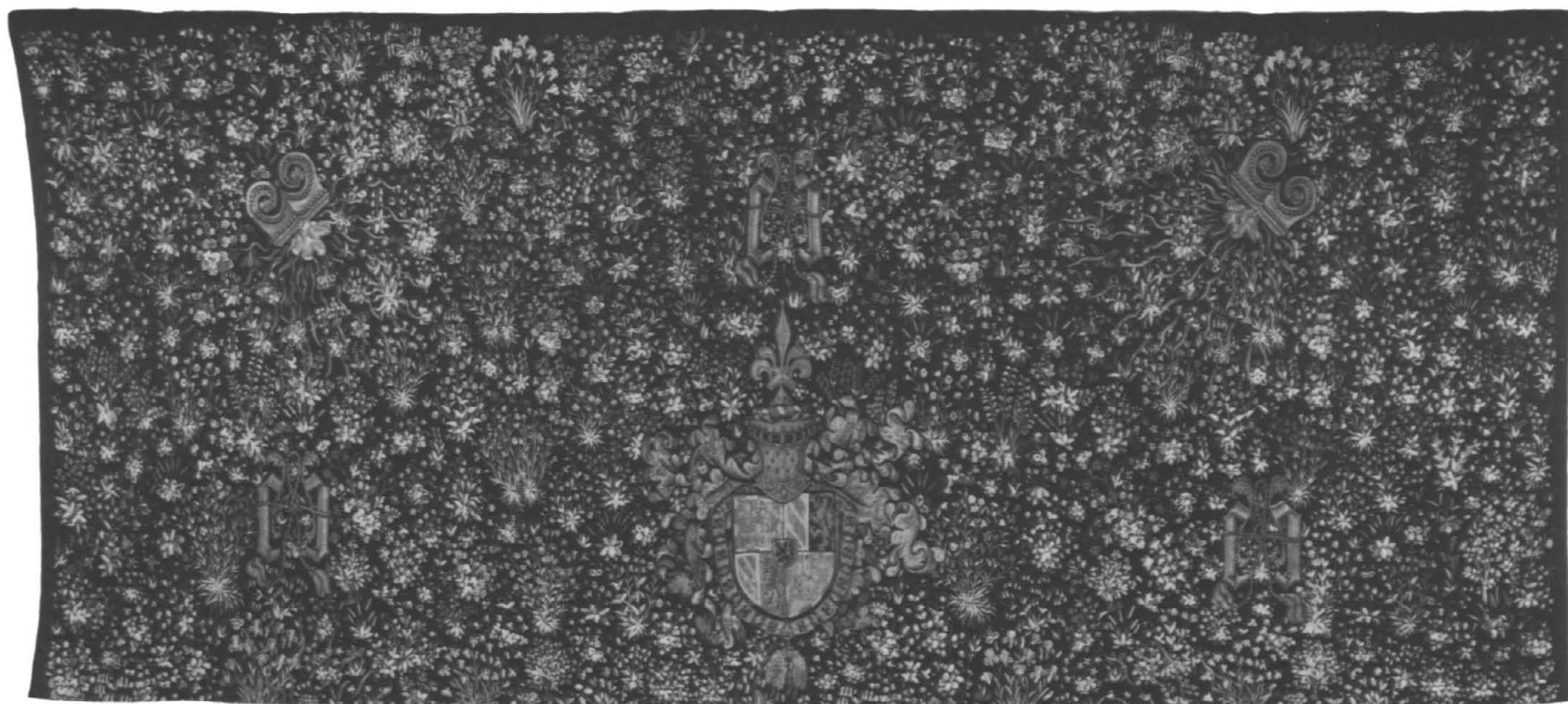
For many years it was believed that verdure tapestries, especially those with millefleurs backgrounds, were woven in France because they seemed to be in the best tradition of French taste and sensibility and idyllic charm. Also, a large majority of these tapestries were to be found in French châteaux. The overwhelming difficulty in accepting this attribution is that there is no evidence of any weaving establishment in France producing tapestries during the major part of the fifteenth century. The hypothesis has been set forth that the many tapestries in the French châteaux were woven by itinerant workers who had no fixed centers for their workshops but who traveled from place to place as the orders came in and set up their looms and other equipment on the spot where the tapestries were to hang.²⁶ This slender hypothesis was accepted by many writers on the subject, and such workshops were attributed to the region "au bords de la Loire." There is documentary evidence, however, that Flemish ateliers, notably those in Brussels, were weaving verdure and millefleurs hangings in the fifteenth century. For instance, in 1466 Philip the Good paid "Jehan le Haze, tapestry worker

living in Brussels . . . for eight pieces of verdure tapestries . . . worked in gold, silver, and silk and . . . fine woolen threads; and in the center of each of the said pieces [are] the arms and crested helm with wreath and lambrequins of the said seigneur . . . and in the corners of each the device of monseigneur and four pairs of EE coupled."²⁷ As early as 1865 Alexandre Pinchart suggested that the magnificent millefleurs tapestry in Berne (286) might be a portion of this set of hangings ordered by Philip the Good. In 1889 Jacob Stammer made a more positive identification, quoting the relevant documents.²⁸ Subsequent historians, however, incorrectly interpreted the coupled EE's as CC's and assigned this tapestry to Charles the Bold,²⁹ thus denying the connection between the recorded payment by Philip the Good to Jehan le Haze of Brussels and the hanging in Berne. The problem has been restudied in recent years, notably by Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman, who writes convincingly that Pinchart and Stammer were indeed correct in their attribution and that there thus exists today an exceptionally fine millefleurs tapestry that was produced about 1466 by expert weavers, not in France but in Brussels. Francis Salet, of the Cluny Museum, in his review of one of Mme. Schneebalg's articles, wrote that it "is time now to abandon the hypothesis of itinerant ateliers working *sur les bords de la Loire*."³⁰ A majority of other connoisseurs now agree with him, and in fact it is doubtful that the Unicorn Tapestries were woven in France.

286

Millefleurs tapestry with arms and devices of Philip the Good. Brussels, 1466

Berne, Historisches Museum



Tournai may be ruled out also, for the tapestries produced by Tournai weavers in the late fifteenth century are coarser and much less refined than are the Unicorn Tapestries, except perhaps for the first one of the set. Julien Coffinet, an experienced weaver of tapestries and an authority on medieval tapestry techniques, asserts that the Unicorn in Captivity was woven in Brussels. He regards the weaving of the entire set as similar to that of the Virgin with the Fountain, in the Louvre (287),³¹ a tapestry attributed by connoisseurs to a Brussels atelier. Coffinet also believes that the method of rendering velvets such as those of the hunters' garments in the second, third, fourth, and sixth tapestries, is entirely different from the technique in the Tournai ateliers,³² and he adds that the "abundance of small regular hatchings indicates Brussels as the probable place of manufacture."³³

The possibility that the Unicorn Tapestries were woven in Bruges is remote. The only existing hangings

known to have been produced in Bruges at this period are those depicting the story of Saint Anatoile, woven in the workshop of Jean de Wilde and dated 1501–06 (288).³⁴ These also are very coarse, displaying none of the finesse of the Hunt of the Unicorn, and the color schemes are inexpert. Furthermore, the velvets and brocades are rendered differently from those in the Unicorn Tapestries. It is possible that tapestries of higher quality may have been produced in some other workshop in Bruges than that of Jean de Wilde, but the evidence is lacking.

There is no doubt that in Brussels there were any number of tapestry workshops turning out hundreds of hangings of the highest quality, and certainly capable of producing such accomplished works as the Hunt of the Unicorn. Examples of those displaying superb technique are the Redemption tapestry in the Metropolitan Museum and the Glorification of Charles VIII, at The Cloisters, both of which, as mentioned earlier, bear the signature of the Brussels designer Jan van Roome. The rich series of the Life of the Virgin, in the Royal Palace, Madrid, was ordered for the Spanish

287

Tapestry: Virgin with Fountain. Dated 1485

Musée du Louvre





288

Tapestry: one of the St. Anatoile de Salins set.
Bruges, workshop of Jean de Wilde, 1501–06

Musée du Louvre

court from a Brussels atelier.³⁵ Another important tapestry in the Madrid collection, the Mass of Saint Gregory (289), bears the inscription **BRUXEL** on the border of the saint's vestment. Admittedly, none of these bear any similarity in design to the Unicorn Tapestries. Religious in content, they perhaps reflect to some extent the carved and polychromed altarpieces that were also produced in Brussels at the time. However, the difference in design should not be considered a determining factor in the attribution to a given workshop. The Brussels weavers were capable of producing any cartoon that was submitted to them. It may be worth noting that only fifteen years or so after the probable date of the Unicorn Tapestries the Brussels atelier of Pieter van

289

Tapestry: The Mass of St. Gregory (detail). Brussels,
about 1500

Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional





290

Cartoon by Raphael for Acts of the Apostles series, 1515–16

Victoria and Albert Museum

291

Tapestry woven after Raphael's cartoon. Brussels, workshop of Pieter van Aelst, about 1519

Rome, The Vatican (photo: Alinari)

Aelst was engaged in weaving the Acts of the Apostles after cartoons by Raphael (290, 291). These tapestries were surely entirely different from such typical Brussels tapestries of fine quality as the Mass of Saint Gregory.

The major body of the guild records of Brussels was destroyed in the bombardment of that city in 1695.³⁶ Another source that might have been of prime importance, the private accounts of Philip the Good (the *Comptes de l'Epargne*), were used for the making of cannon cartridges by the army of the Revolution in

292

Tapestry: The Shepherd. Attributed to Brussels, possibly workshop of Pieter van Aelst, late 15th c.

Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs

1793,³⁷ except for one volume that somehow escaped unharmed. This volume contains the all-important account of Duke Philip's order of the millefleurs tapestry from Jehan le Haze of Brussels in 1466, discussed above.

More verdures woven in Brussels workshops are recorded in other accounts, showing that Philip's millefleurs was not unique. Several tapestries with secular subjects are also listed. In 1466 Philip the Good presented to Pope Paul II six tapestries depicting the History of Hannibal that he had ordered from Jehan le Haze.³⁸ In Philip's inventory, too, were a "large old tapestry of Duke Regnault de Montauban" made in "Brabant" (Brussels) and another Brussels tapestry showing "young men and women playing at various games."³⁹ The inventories of Lorenzo de' Medici and the account books of Philip the Fair, noting purchases from Pieter van Aelst, show that verdures with scenes of falcon hunts, seigneurial pastimes, and pastoral life were valued productions of Brussels ateliers at the period of the Unicorn Tapestries.⁴⁰ The tapestry known as The Shepherd (292) is now attributed to Brussels, possibly to the workshop of van Aelst, and dated late fifteenth century.

It appears that Brussels was the most important center for the manufacture of fine tapestries around 1500.



Shortly before 1506 Vincent Quirini of Venice wrote that the Low Countries excelled in three things: "the extremely fine and beautiful linen cloth made in abundance in Holland," "the music which one can truthfully say is perfect," and "the magnificent tapestries with figures that are fabricated in Brabant."⁴¹

Even though most of the guild records were destroyed, some interesting information about the Brussels tapestry industry survives. Between 1418 and 1446 about five hundred names of tapestry weavers were inscribed in the registry of wool workers.⁴² About 1448 the tapestry weavers separated from the wool workers

293

Modern basse-lice loom, Gobelins workshop, Paris

(photo: Hachette, in Madeleine Jarry, *La Tapisserie* [Paris, 1968])



to form their own corporation, and in 1451 they formulated their statutes.⁴³ These were similar to those of other guilds, such as those of Paris in 1302. To be admitted as a master it was necessary to be a citizen of Brussels and to have qualified as an expert in the craft. A "foreigner" could work as a master in Brussels if he could prove that he had been engaged in the craft for three years in another "*ville franche*" and if he paid his admission fee of four florins. Each master was allowed only one apprentice besides his legitimate children. The apprentices trained for three years and were required to work only three days a week. All weavers were forbidden to work in the morning before the bells sounded

the arrival of the day or in the evening after the "last bells," and they were never allowed to weave by artificial light. They were to observe all Sundays and holidays. They were not to use goat or cow hair or any other materials equally defective.⁴⁴ All tapestries had to be examined and approved by a group of jurors before they were sold. In 1451 these jurors met three times a week in the chapel of the hospital of Saint Christopher; in 1473 and after, they checked the tapestries no less than three times a year in each of the many workshops.⁴⁵ Tapestry weavers were forbidden to insult the jurors or their clerks or their secretaries.⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier, an agreement with the painter's guild permitted the weavers themselves to draw some of the less important parts of the designs.

By 1472 the corporation of tapestry workers was rich and powerful enough to own a house, the *Arbre d'Or*, on the town's *Grande Place*. It also had in the Church of the *Sablon* an altar where three masses were said every week.⁴⁷

It was not until 1528 that the workshops were required to place in the borders of their tapestries the Brussels mark: two B's, for Brussels Brabant, separated by a red shield.⁴⁸ Had such a regulation been adopted earlier, some part of the identification might have remained visible on the bits of the original borders that still remain on the third and fifth of the Unicorn Tapestries.

There is general agreement that most of the Brussels workshops used horizontal looms (293). If the Hunt of the Unicorn was indeed woven in Brussels, one can imagine that the workshop was equipped with at least five large horizontal looms on which all but the first and last tapestries were produced simultaneously.⁴⁹ Probably several weavers worked side by side at each basse-lice loom, from daylight to dark except on holidays and Sundays. In view of the fineness of the technique, each tapestry would probably have taken several years to complete. Philip the Good's large series of the Golden Fleece was delivered, as stipulated, in four years' time. The first and the seventh of the Unicorn Tapestries, because of their difference in technique, were probably executed in one or two other Brussels ateliers.

One can be sure that all of the set would have been passed by the examiners without hesitation, and that there would have been no occasion for the weavers to insult the jurors, clerks, or secretaries. The masters of the ateliers must have been exceedingly proud of their workers' achievements, and the lucky patron must have exulted in owning one of the most glorious sets of tapestries that the late Middle Ages produced.

8

THE TAPESTRIES IN THE INVENTORIES, THEIR TREATMENT DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, AND THEIR HISTORY IN LATER YEARS

The year one thousand six hundred eighty, Monday, the eighteenth day of March, eight o'clock in the morning. At the request of the very noble and very illustrious Monseigneur François de La Rochefoucauld . . . peer and *grand veneur* of France, grand master of the *garderobe* of the King and lieutenant general for his Majesty in the province of Berry . . . heir of his father, the very noble and very illustrious Monseigneur François, duc de La Rochefoucauld, *chevalier* of the order of the King, who died in this hôtel on the night of the sixteenth or seventeenth of the month . . . this inventory has been made and a description of all the household furnishings, the vessels of silver and vermeil, deeds and papers left by the . . . late seigneur duc de La Rochefoucauld and found in the rooms which he occupied in this hôtel. . . . And these same furnishings have been valued and estimated by Claude Botot, merchant of household furnishings, and sworn appraiser authorized by the Châtelet of Paris.

Inventory of
Duke François VI de La Rochefoucauld¹



Chapter Six proposed many possibilities and a few probabilities, concluding with a hypothesis concerning the original ownership of the tapestries. This chapter offers some established facts about the later history of the tapestries, with only a few conjectures.

One of the indisputable facts is that in 1728 the tapestries were in the La Rochefoucauld château of Verteuil (294). According to an inventory made at the death of Duke François VIII² five of them were hanging in the “large bedroom of the new building.” Item 437 states: “The said chamber is hung with a tapestry of high-warp loom, in five pieces, almost half worn out [*presque mi-usée*], called of the Unicorn, estimated [at] 150 livres.” Two more were in “a large lower hall near the chapel, presently serving as a storage place for furniture.” They are described in item 671 as “two pieces of tapestry of the Unicorn, torn in various places” and valued at 45 livres.

It is not surprising that the tapestries were worn and torn “in various places,” for, after all, they were then well over two centuries old, but as a matter of interest, all twenty sets of tapestries at Verteuil were listed in a similar condition. Many were even described as “very old” and “badly worn” (*fort usée*). The five Unicorn Tapestries in the great chamber were at least only “half worn out,” and they were valued at a higher figure than any other set except a large one of eleven pieces. Furthermore, it appears that the five were decorating one of the best bedrooms of the château. The bed was elegant, with sumptuous fittings of violet velvet embroidered in gold and silver, lined in green taffeta, with a

green taffeta bedspread and “bouquets” of green and white feathers on the finials of the posts. It was valued at 605 livres, the most expensive item in the inventory. There were also armchairs upholstered in the “same velvet as the bed,” an embroidered dais, a large Turkish rug in an alcove, a walnut table, tabourets covered with blue brocade, a mirror, and a small ebony chest, “badly worn and worm-eaten, decorated with two hands, a clasp, two ciphers, three rosettes, and two heraldic panthers.”

Until recently it was believed that this inventory of 1728 contained the earliest record of the Unicorn Tapestries. A few years ago, on the chance that something new might turn up, I investigated further in the Archives Nationales in Paris, and, much to everyone’s surprise and delight, something new did turn up. It was in an unpublished inventory made in 1680 at the death of Duke François VI de La Rochefaucauld, the renowned author of *Réflexions . . . et Maximes Morales* (295). This inventory, an excerpt from which begins this chapter, lists the duke’s possessions, not in his château of Verteuil, but in his town house on the rue de Seine in Paris (296). Among the items in the grande chambre of the late seigneur were “hangings of tapestry of *haute lisse* representing a hunt of the unicorn in seven pieces containing twenty-two aulnes in length by

294

Château of Verteuil (Charente)

(photo: courtesy the Marquis and Marquise de Amodio)

four aulnes in height, or thereabouts, appraised at the amount of 1500 livres."¹ This inventory presents a different, brighter, more detailed picture of the tapestries than does the inventory of 1728. In 1680 the tapestries were apparently neither "mi-usée" nor torn "in various places," and they were valued at a sum eight times greater. Furthermore, all seven were hanging in one bedroom, the grande chambre of the duke himself. It may be that François VI, following the medieval procedure, transported his favorite possessions with him when he moved from one of his residences to another.

Of special interest are the dimensions of the tapestries in this inventory. In length they totaled twenty-two aulnes. Since the inventory was made in Paris, it may be assumed that the unit of measure was the French aulne, about forty-six inches; hence, the seven tapestries in all were a little over eighty-four feet long. The six more or less complete tapestries today measure about seventy feet. It can be estimated that the missing portions at the sides of the seventh tapestry, and probably of the others, amount in all to a foot, possibly more. There remain about twelve to thirteen feet, and this would be the original width of the fifth tapestry. The two fragments, together with the gap between them, measure four and a half feet across; thus they represent probably a little more than one third the width of the original tapestry. The missing portion at the right certainly contained an apple tree (a few of its branches and fruits remain) and the all-important figure of the maiden, whose delicate hand still rests on the

unicorn's mane. One can imagine her sitting among flowers in her brocaded gown, her skirt arranged in decorative folds about her knees and feet. Undoubtedly she was the central figure in the composition. To the right of her there may have been several more of her handmaidens and perhaps hunters outside the garden enclosed.

The inventory gives the height of the tapestries as four aulnes "or thereabouts"—a little over fifteen feet. Since the tapestries are now only twelve feet one inch high, it would seem that about three feet are missing from either the upper or lower areas, or both. Of course it is impossible to know what the inventory's "thereabouts" ("ou environ") might mean. One suspects that the takers of the inventory did not bother with a ladder but merely estimated by eye. However, even allowing for as much as a foot in error, this leaves the not inconsiderable sum of at least two feet lost from the tops and bottoms. For the first and last tapestries one can easily imagine that the extra footage would consist of more of the millefleurs background; such an addition would be especially welcome at the top of the Unicorn in Captivity, where the area above the pomegranate tree seems to be incomplete. In the tapestries with the more naturalistic settings a few more inches at the base would improve the compositions. For instance, the panther in the second tapestry could well use a little more room for his resting place. The major missing areas, however, were most probably at the tops. It has already been noted that the present skies are restorations. Now, with

295

Duke François VI de La Rochefoucauld. Miniature painted on enamel by Jean Petitot, 1648

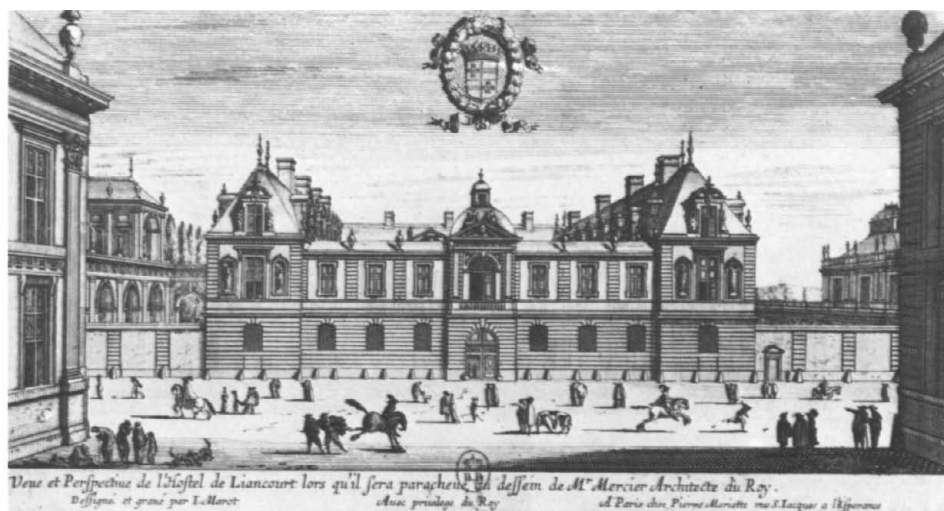
(Collection of the Marquis and Marquise de Amodio)



296

Hôtel de Liancourt (now destroyed), rue de Seine, Paris. Etching by Jean Marot (1619?–79)

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale





297

Tapestry: History of Julius Caesar. About 1465–70

Berne, Historisches Museum

the information from the 1680 inventory at hand, it may be computed that there were about two feet more of sky in the original tapestries. This space was surely filled with something, for, judging from all other medieval tapestries, three or so feet of empty blue would have seemed intolerably dull and a deplorable waste of the weavers' skill and the designer's talent. As suggested in Chapter Six, coats of arms may have been in these areas. However, it would seem that if this were so, the arms would have been mentioned in the inventory, for another item in the inventory specifies that a set of tapestries depicted the châteaux of the La Roche-foucauld and their device. Furthermore, the preservation of the two FR monograms, whether or not they were originally part of the series, seems to indicate that the coats of arms would have been salvaged also, unless they were worn beyond recognition.

It seems more probable that the skies were filled with bands of inscriptions. Many a medieval tapestry utilized the space in this way, with texts explaining the action below (297). Such scripts were not only informative but decorative as well. However, letters in tapes-

tries can easily become worn, and the inscription thus become unintelligible. Since it is difficult to restore a woven inscription, it may have been simpler—if inscriptions appeared in the Unicorn Tapestries—to cut them out and discard them. One can imagine someone doing this without a qualm as long as the essential composition remained intact. All of the inscriptions originally placed below the scenes in the Apocalypse tapestries in Angers have been destroyed, as have many of the legends explaining the meanings of the Sacraments tapestries, portions of which are in the Metropolitan Museum.

The Paris bedroom of Duke François VI de La Roche-foucauld must have been a large one to have accommodated some eighty-four running feet of tapestries. His bed, according to the inventory, was a four-poster with fittings of red damask, consisting of cornice bands and embroidered valances around the top, a ciel, dossier, and four curtains with separate hangings extending below, all of these decorated with gold lace, and a "bedspread of the same material also with gold lace." The bedposts were covered with red damask and each was topped with a bouquet of white wool in imitation of feather aigrettes. Other furniture included a "large mirror, two feet high, bordered with crystal, gilded

plaques, and gold lace all around," a large painting representing Adonis, an ebony cabinet in the Chinese style, a table blackened to look like ebony with a red leather cover, and two small round tables also black in the manner of Chinese ebony. There were also four large armchairs covered with red damask and apparently equipped with reading desks, four smaller armchairs, and six walnut benches. In the fireplace were a large iron grill, shovel, tongs, and pincers, all topped with silver knobs. The mantel ornaments were of silver, consisting of four ewers, a vase, a basin with a figure of Mélusine (legendary ancestor of the La Rochefoucauld), and a fountain in the form of a pyramid. And, of course, hanging on the walls were the seven Unicorn Tapestries.

As noted earlier, the tapestries were in the château of Verteuil during the time of the Revolution. Although many of the château's objects were destroyed then, the "old tapestries" were spared, in accordance with the directive from the Comité de Surveillance of Ruffec, because they did not show any signs of royalty. In 1793 they and other treasures were looted from the château by peasants of the village. According to a later account, an "old inhabitant of the country of Verteuil" said that the tapestries were used by the next generation of peasants "to protect from freezing the potatoes in their barns and also to cover their espalier trees."³

In the 1850s Count Hippolyte de La Rochefoucauld and his wife, Countess Elizabeth (298), started to search for the family's lost possessions and to buy them back whenever possible. One day a peasant's wife informed the countess that her husband had some "old curtains" that might interest her; they were covering vegetables in his barn. The "old curtains" were the Unicorn Tapestries.⁴ Restored, they were installed in a salon of the château in 1856, and a coffered ceiling was built for the room with F's and R's included in the decoration (299, 300, 301).

There are no records of the damage the tapestries suffered while they were out of the château, nor are there any details concerning the repairs that were made under the direction of the La Rochefoucauld family. Undoubtedly the most serious loss was a large part of the fifth tapestry where the unicorn was tamed by the virgin maid. To be sure, the 1728 inventory presented all seven tapestries as either "presque mi-usée" or "trouées en divers endroits," but there is no indication that only portions remained of one of the set. Although there may have been continued wear and tear after 1728, it seems that the major damage to the fifth tapestry occurred during the sixty or so years after the set

was taken from the château. Probably the same statement could be made concerning the missing skies in the other tapestries. Some portions may have been torn prior to the Revolution and then damaged beyond repair after the looting.

The old photograph shows that a large area at the bottom of the first tapestry was rewoven, apparently in the nineteenth century, with flower motifs copied from the Unicorn in Captivity and others of the series. A lost portion in the lower right corner of the sixth tapestry was filled in with pieces of old tapestry of much later date. In the lower left corner of the seventh tapestry, where surely there was once an AE as in the other corners, a series of very small strips of millefleurs background have been meticulously joined to create an illusion of completeness; the bits and pieces appear to have been salvaged from the edges of the same tapestry. Also, an area at the bottom of this tapestry has been restored in the same manner as in the Start of the Hunt, though less obviously.

These repairs aside, it is truly amazing that in spite of time and adverse treatment, the tapestries have been

298

Elisabeth du Roux, Countess Hippolyte de La Rochefoucauld

(Collection of the Marquis and Marquise de Amodio)





so little damaged. Barbier de Montault, who saw them at Verteuil in the 1880s, wrote that, although "somewhat restored, [they] are of a freshness and of an incomparable grace." He recorded the "lacuna" in the fifth tapestry and said that one of the two fragments had been "transformed into a portière."⁵

A few French savants who were privileged to see the tapestries in the first decades of the twentieth century recorded their impressions. Émile Biais described six of the set in detail but did not mention the existence of the fragments. He observed, however, that the Unicorn in Captivity had been "reduced in width on account of having been damaged." His praise of the set is lavish: he admires the "rich composition," "the figures . . . active, alive . . . very surely drawn . . . the flowerets and foliage . . . reproduced with the care employed by master illuminators of manuscripts." He delights in the coloring of "striking intensity" that "four centuries and excessive vicissitudes" have in no way diminished. In fact he considers the set truly a "masterpiece."⁶

At a meeting of the Congrès Archéologique at Angoulême in 1912 Louis Serbat reported on the château of Verteuil, listing among other things six of the tapestries; he called them "magnificent," among the most beautiful tapestries with unicorns in the world.⁷

At about the same time Jules Guiffrey, the great con-

noisseur of tapestries, published the "very unusual series decorating one of the salons of the château of Verteuil . . . [where] the unicorn is the principal figure in the drama that unrolls in six scenes." He questioned the meanings of the AE and the FR and stated that not one of the tapestries contained a coat of arms. In spite of "all these mysterious problems," he concluded, "the hangings . . . present a unique example of a very original subject." They combine a fabulous theme with a realistic treatment of "the personages, the animals . . . [and] also the landscape. . . . One encounters few tapestries offering such expressive and characteristic types."⁸

R. Rodière was apparently the first person to record the coat of arms. In a notice read at a session of the Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France in 1916 he reported that "in one of the tapestries . . . the collar of one of the hunting dogs . . . bears a shield quartered: 1 and 4, barred gold and azure with three red ringlets placed over the first two bars; 2 and 3, gold with three red mallets. These are the arms . . . of the house of La Vieville . . . quartered with Mailly-Lorsignol."⁹ This reading of the arms cannot be accepted today. In spite of the difficulty of tapestry weaving, the worker, if required to, could have depicted the Vieville rings (302) accurately and would have found it easy to weave mallets that did not look like shields (303). It must also be

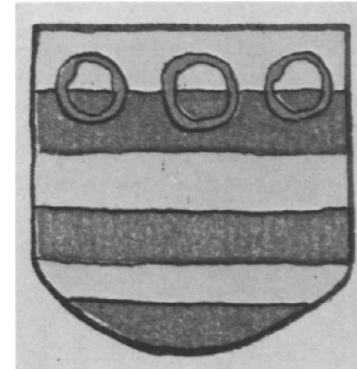


299, 300, 301

The tapestries at Verteuil, about 1890–1900

said that the alliance referred to by Rodière took place in 1328, at least a century and a half before the tapestries were woven.

In 1922, when Count Aimery de La Rochefoucauld was châtelain of Verteuil, six of the tapestries (not including the fragmentary fifth) were sent to New York and displayed at the Anderson Galleries under the auspices of the Paris dealer Edouard Larcade.¹⁰ John D. Rockefeller, Jr., given a private showing, was amazed at the brilliance of the tapestries. As he wrote later, “The effect . . . was so sumptuous that, having known in advance all about them, I merely lingered five minutes to satisfy my eye with the beauty and richness of their color and design and bought them forthwith.”¹¹ The purchase and delivery were not so easily accomplished as Mr. Rockefeller implied, however. Instead of being delivered to the Rockefeller home “forthwith,” they were taken to London by M. Larcade, and the sale was officially consummated there in February 1923.¹² Shipped back to New York and certified as duty-free antiques, the tapestries were released by the customs authorities in March. The story twice appeared as front-page, headline news in the *New York Times*.¹³



302

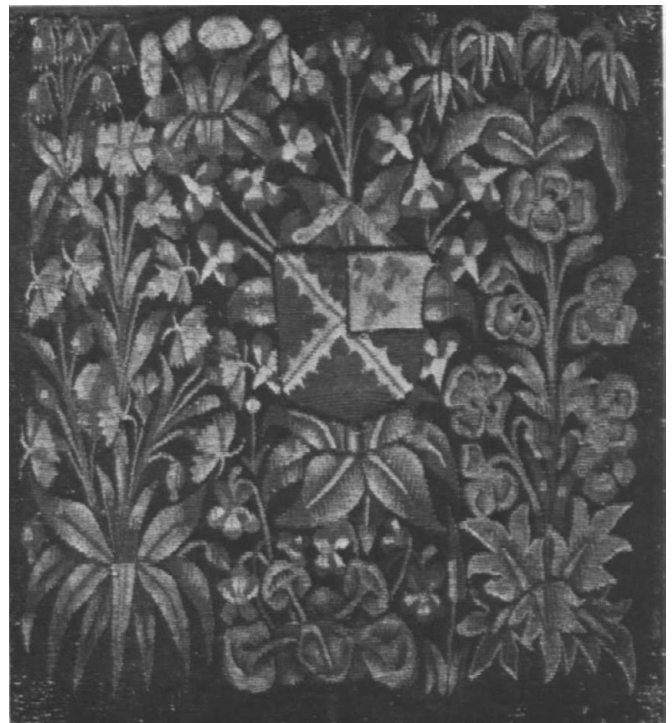
Coat of arms of the Viefville family

(photo: Paul Bergmans, *Armorial de Flandre du XVI^e siècle* [Brussels, 1919], pl. 1, fig. 13)

303

Tapestry with coat of arms showing mallets, about 1500

(photo: Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, *Catalogue des Tapisseries XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle. Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles* [Brussels, (1956)], pl. 14)





304

The tapestries in the residence of Mr. and Mrs.
John D. Rockefeller, Jr., New York

The new owner of the tapestries created a special room for them in his residence on Fifty-fourth Street. The setting approached the medieval, with a fifteenth-century French mantelpiece and fifteenth-century Italian chairs (304). Except for the mantelpiece wall, the room was completely lined with the tapestries. They reached from ceiling to floorboard, turned corners, and even covered the door. This way of hanging tapestries had its medieval precedent. For example, the Duke of Berry's guests had to lift the tapestry covering the entrance to the hall when they arrived for his January feast (305). In Mr. Rockefeller's room "the tapestry covering the door was so arranged that it could be drawn up from about half its height and looped like a window curtain to permit passage under it without inconvenience."¹⁴ "The room was Mr. Rockefeller's most cherished retreat," his biographer wrote, "and there he

would often bring his guests to enjoy with them that initial shock of beauty which had greeted him when he first saw the tapestries."¹⁵

Five years after Mr. Rockefeller bought them, all six of the tapestries were included in an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.¹⁶ Then, in 1934, as plans were being developed for the building of The Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park, James Rorimer, astute and farsighted as he was, included a gallery that he designated "Tapestry Hall." One day Mr. Rockefeller asked Mr. Rorimer, "Have you any tapestries for this wall?" and the reply was, "Well, I was thinking of something like the Unicorn Tapestries." As Mr. Rorimer recalled it, Mr. Rockefeller uttered a shocked "What?" and then kept a discreet silence.¹⁷

Not long afterward, Mr. Rockefeller wrote to the Trustees of the Museum offering to give, "among other works of art, The Gothic Tapestries known as 'The Hunt of the Unicorn'—six pieces. (These I should hope would be ultimately and permanently housed in the

proposed Cloister Museum in Fort Tryon Park).” His condition was “That I retain a life interest in them with actual possession throughout my life or as I may from time to time decide.”¹⁸

By March 1935 Mr. Rockefeller had decided to relinquish his life interest in his precious tapestries. He wrote to the President of the Museum: “As soon as the building is completed and ready for occupancy, the set of Gothic tapestries which I recently gave the Museum may be permanently installed in the room which has been designed for them.”¹⁹

The tapestries arrived at the Museum in the spring of 1937, and work on preparing them for exhibition was begun. They were washed, to remove centuries of accumulated dirt. The material that had been used to fill in the missing areas of the skies was removed, since it had faded to a dull tan color. It was replaced by woolen rep dyed with vegetable dyes in varying shades of blue to match as nearly as possible the original patches of blue visible between and below the trunks and branches of the trees (230). A major addition was a narrow tapestry-woven border to surround each of the six hangings. The new material copied the portion of the original border discovered at the lower left edge of the third tapestry. This piece of the original border is especially valuable in that it establishes the terminal point at the left for one of the tapestries and thus helps us to estimate, by comparison, the original widths of the second, fourth, and sixth tapestries.

Certain areas of old restoration were retained. The most noticeable are the lower portion of the first tapestry, the smaller similar area at the base of the last one, and the pieces of sixteenth-century tapestry used to fill in the lower right-hand corner of the sixth tapestry. Less apparent are small patches here and there: for example, in the second tapestry, bits and pieces of the stag, the hyena, the lioness, the rabbit, and a stretch of the stream. The head of the panther, on the other hand, was partially rewoven because the old repair was ugly and inaccurate. Other relatively minor renovations and mendings were made, but on the whole the tapestries were in a remarkable state of preservation. The weaving of the borders, the reweaving of the other areas, and the replacing of the skies were done by Baroness Wilhelmine von Godin, a trained worker in this field. She finished the work in April 1938, and the tapestries were hanging in the Tapestry Hall when The Cloisters opened in May.

Meantime, Mr. Rorimer and the staff of the Medieval Department were engaged in research on all aspects of



305

Miniature in *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke of Berry.
Before 1416

Chantilly, Musée Condé

the tapestries. In the process, William H. Forsyth called on Count Gabriel de La Rochefoucauld, son of Count Aimery, at his Paris residence in July 1936, hoping to find some pertinent family documents. Instead, he received the information in a casual way from the count that there were two fragments remaining that belonged to the unicorn series, and that his father had kept them as a “souvenir.” Mr. Forsyth recalls that he “nearly jumped out of his chair” at the news.²⁰ The existence of the fragments had apparently not been recorded, except in Barbier de Montault’s disclosure in 1888 that one of them had been made into a portière. Mr. Forsyth was not shown the fragments during his visit, though they were undoubtedly in one of the rooms of the house. Later, the daughter of Count Gabriel, the Marquise de Amodio, recalled that the fragments had been

in Paris, framed and under glass, as long as she could remember.²¹

Photographs of the fragments were sent by the count to the Museum, where it was immediately evident that they were parts of the original set, since one of them has the characteristic monogram AE of the other tapestries. Although Count Gabriel was reluctant to part with the fragments, negotiations for their purchase were completed in January 1938. On March 21 they arrived at the Museum where they were hastily prepared for exhibition. It was found that another strip of original border, this one different in color from that of the third tapestry, still remained on the left fragment. The fragments were joined together with a strip of ribbed material to form a pleasant unit, and when The Cloisters opened in May they were reunited with their companions of the series, apparently for the first time in several decades.

The room designed for the tapestries under Mr. Rorimer's direction was a long gallery where five of the series hung in sequence along one wall, with the Unicorn in Captivity alone on the end wall. The fragments were placed over a doorway in one corner. A row of windows high up on the wall opposite the five tapestries admitted daylight into the gallery. The windows, enriched with stained-glass armorial panels, were fitted with glass that absorbed the ultraviolet light that might fade the colors of the tapestries. For furnishings there were Mr. Rockefeller's French fireplace and his Italian chairs, two Renaissance benches, and modern tables in the medieval style.

When Mr. Rockefeller presented the tapestries to the Museum, he wrote that he hoped they "would be permanently housed in the . . . Cloister Museum." In World War II, however, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, they were taken down, packed in specially constructed boxes, and sent for safety, along with other Museum treasures, out of New York City. The tapestries were returned to The Cloisters in time for Easter in 1944.

It may be noted that during these war years the château of Verteuil, the former home of the tapestries, was occupied by the Germans, and the Nazi flag flew from the tops of its towers. Had the tapestries still been in the château at the time, perhaps they would have ended up in the "collection" of Reichsmarschall Herman Goering.

Shortly after the tapestries were once again on display, Mr. Rockefeller, on a visit to The Cloisters, admitted that he had never been "happy" with the way they were exhibited. Hung along one wall of a long gallery, they failed to give him the thrill he had experienced when he first saw them in the Anderson Galleries, and they did not give the sumptuous effect that he had achieved with them in his home. Since I was then in charge of The Cloisters—Mr. Rorimer was serving as Monuments officer in the Army in Europe—I was requested by Mr. Rockefeller to do a "little thinking and dreaming" about the possibility of a different installation that would recapture the impression of colorful richness that the tapestries once gave him. With the acquiescence of Mr. Rorimer, I embarked on a little dreaming and rather more thinking, and presently I came up with a few ideas that seemed to have possibilities. At this point we engaged the architect of The Cloisters, Charles Collens, and he also had ideas. The two of us, with the cooperation of Mr. Rockefeller, worked out a plan.

The result may be seen today. The long gallery was reduced to about three-fifths of its length to create a spacious, well-proportioned room resembling a medieval *grande chambre*.²² A monumental stone fireplace from Alençon was installed in the center of one wall, and on the opposite wall a fifteenth-century window from Cluny provided a view into the Cuxa cloister with its garden. The tapestries were hung on all four walls of the room so that the visitor, entering, is encompassed by movement and brilliance and color.

The work was finished and the new room opened to the public in May 1949. Mr. Rockefeller was "happy" once again with the appearance of his "Gothic tapestries." He wrote that he was "overjoyed at the whole effect of the room and felt that the setting and lighting left nothing to be desired in the presentation of the tapestries. The great fireplace is magnificent, while the window looking out into the cloister gives a sense of intimacy and variety that adds charm. The proportions of the room and everything about the arrangement of the tapestries seemed to me to be beyond criticism."²³

Ever after, when Mr. Rockefeller would come to The Cloisters at our request to give his opinion on a possible purchase, or to see a new acquisition, or to advise on other matters, he would climax his visit by going once more to see his beloved Unicorn Tapestries.

ENVOI

For the beginning of this book I quoted a medieval German folk song on the unicorn. In the initial paragraphs I noted that the image of this fabulous beast is still alive today, partly because of the magnificent interpretations of him in the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries. Now, for the ending of the book, I quote some verses by a modern author, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, who has written so perceptively of the unicorn in the seventh Cloisters' tapestry.

The Unicorn in Captivity

Here sits the unicorn
In captivity;
His bright invulnerability
Captive at last;
The chase long past,
Winded and spent,
By the king's spears rent;
Collared and tied
To a pomegranate tree—
Here sits the Unicorn
In captivity,
Yet free.

Here sits the Unicorn;
His overtakelessness
Bound by a circle small
As a maid's embrace;
Ringed by a round corral;
Pinioned in place
By a fence of scarlet rail,
Fragile as a king's crown,
Delicately laid down
Over horn, hoofs, and tail,
As a butterfly net
Is lightly set.

He could leap the corral,
If he rose
To his full white height;
He could splinter the fencing light,
With three blows
Of his porcelain hoofs in flight—
If he chose.
He could shatter his prison wall,
Could escape them all—
If he rose,
If he chose. . . .

Here sits the Unicorn;
Head in a collar cased,
Like a girdle laced
Round a maiden's waist,
Brodered and buckled wide,
Carelessly tied.
He could slip his head
From the jewelled noose
So lightly tied—
If he tried,
As a maid could loose
The belt from her side;
He could slip the bond
So lightly tied—
If he tried.

Here sits the Unicorn;
 Leashed by a chain of gold
 To the pomegranate tree.
 So light a chain to hold
 So fierce a beast;
 Delicate as a cross at rest
 On a maiden's breast.
 He could snap the golden chain
 With one toss of his mane,
 If he chose to move,
 If he chose to prove
 His liberty.
 But he does not choose
 What choice would lose.
 He stays, the Unicorn,
 In captivity. . . .

Yet look again—
 His horn is free,
 Rising above
 Chain, fence, and tree,
 Free hymn of love;
 His horn
 Burst from his tranquil brow,
 Like a comet born;
 Cleaves like a galley's prow
 Into seas untorn;
 Springs like a lily, white
 From the earth below;

Spirals, a bird in flight
 To a longed-for height;
 Or a fountain bright,
 Spurting to light
 Of early morn—
 O luminous horn!

Here sits the Unicorn—
 In captivity?
 In repose.
 Forgotten now the blows
 When the huntsmen rose
 With their spears; dread sounds
 of the baying hounds,
 With their cry for blood;
 And the answering flood
 In his veins for strife,
 Of his rage for life,
 In hoofs that plunged,
 In horn that lunged.
 Forgotten the strife;
 Now the need to kill
 Has died like fire,
 And the need to love
 Has replaced desire;
 Forgotten now the pain
 Of the wounds, the fence, the chain,—
 Where he sits so still,
 Where he waits Thy will. . . .

NOTES AND INDEX

1

The Unicorn in Ancient and Medieval Texts

1. Odell Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn* (Boston, 1930), pp. 82–83. Shepard translates a poem collected by Ludwig Uhland in *Alte hoch- und niederdeutsche Volkslieder* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1845), II, no. 339. I have changed one word. Shepard uses “gentle” in introducing the unicorn. Since the German adjective is “hoch-geporn,” I prefer “noble.”
2. Ctésias, *La Perse, L’Inde*, trans. R. Henry (Brussels, 1947), pp. 80–82.
3. *Historia Animalium*, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), p. 221.
4. *The Gallic War*, trans. H. J. Edwards (London, 1917), pp. 351–352.
5. *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass. 1956), III, p. 57.
6. *On the Characteristics of Animals*, trans. A. F. Scholfield (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), III, pp. 289 ff.
7. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 273 ff.
8. Shepard, p. 39.
9. “Adversus Marcionem,” *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1854), II, col. 346.
10. “Enarrationes in XII psalmos Davidicos,” *Patrologia Latina* XIV, col. 1099.
11. “Homily on Psalm 28,” in *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way (Washington, D.C., 1963), pp. 204–205.
12. Shepard, p. 47; Florence McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill, 1962).
13. Charles Cahier, Arthur Martin, *Mélanges d’Archéologie* (Paris, 1851), II, pp. 221–223.
14. Thomas Wright, *Popular Treatises on Science Written during the Middle Ages* (London, 1841), p. 81.
15. *Mélanges d’Archéologie* II, p. 220.
16. *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXII, col. 819.
17. *De Bestiis et Aliis Rebus*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXVII, cols. 59–60.
18. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, cols. 1317–1318.
19. *Etymologia*, in *Patrologia Latina* LXXXII, cols. 435–436.
20. *De Animalibus*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (ed. Clemens Bäumker) [Münster, 1916, 1921], XV (ed. Hermann Stadler), pp. 234, 861, 890; XVI (ed. Stadler), p. 1426.
21. *Le Livre des propriétés des choses* (Bruges, 1482) (British Museum, Ms. Royal 15 E 111), fols. 258 verso, 259.
22. *Speculum Naturale*, Book XX, Ch. 114 (Strasbourg, before 1479) (New York Public Library).
23. “Goldene Schmiede,” in Alwin Schultz, *Die Legende vom Leben der Jungfrau Maria* (Leipzig, 1878), pp. 55–56.
24. Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1928), p. 49.

25. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, trans. George Claridge Druce (Ashford, Kent, 1936), pp. 44–45.
26. Otto Keller, *Die Antike Tierwelt* (Leipzig, 1909), I, pp. 419–420.
27. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, col. 1318.
28. *Der Physiologus*, trans. Emil Peters (Munich, 1921), pp. 34–35.
29. Johannes de Hees, *Itinerarius* (Cologne, 1500) (Pierpont Morgan Library); Shepard, p. 152.
30. Le Comte [Alexandre] de Laborde, *Notice des Émaux, Bijoux et Objets Divers, exposés dans les Galeries du Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 1853), II, p. 362.
31. Le Comte [Alexandre] de Laborde, *Les Ducs de Bourgogne*, III (Paris, 1852), p. 235, no. 6097.
32. *Archeologia*, 26 (London, 1836), p. 277.
33. Laborde, *Ducs de Bourgogne*, II (Paris, 1851), p. 438, no. 5280; p. 441, no. 5292.
34. Olivier de la Marche, *Mémoires*, in *Collection Complète de Mémoires relatifs à l’Histoire de France*, ed. C. B. Petitot (Paris, 1820), X, p. 314.
35. Shepard, p. 84.
36. John Addington Symonds, *Wine, Women and Song* (London, 1931), p. 138.
37. *Li Bestiaires d’Amours di Maistre Richart de Fornival*, ed. Cesare Segre (Milan, 1957), pp. 42–44.
38. Friedrich Lauchert, *Geschichte des Physiologus* (Strassburg, 1889), pp. 193–194.
39. *Le Romans de la Dame a la Lycorne et du Biau Chevalier au Lyon*, ed. Friedrich Gennrich, *Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur*, 18 (Dresden, 1908), pp. 166–173.
40. Kolhaussen, p. 52.
41. Lauchert, p. 193.

2

The Unicorn in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art

1. *Le Bestiaire d’Amour*, ed. C. Hippeau (Paris, 1860), pp. 1–3.
2. *The Christian Topography*, trans. J. W. McCrindle (London, printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1897), pp. 360–361.
3. *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, trans. and ed. Sir Henry Yule (London, 1903), II, p. 285.
4. William M. Ivins, Jr., “A First Edition of Breydenbach’s Itinerary,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 14 (1919–20), p. 215.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 216; Odell Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn* (Boston, 1930), p. 215.
6. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, trans. George Claridge Druce (Ashford, Kent, 1936), p. 44.
7. *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton* (London, 1900), II, p. 225.
8. Josef Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus* (Leipzig, 1899), pp. 29, 81, 82.
9. Very similar to the example in the Walters Art Gallery, a 14th-century ivory box in the Metropolitan Museum, as well as others of the group, pairs the story of Tristan and Iseult with the capture of the unicorn.
10. *Le Romans de la Dame a la Lycorne et du Biau Chevalier au Lyon*, ed. Friedrich Gennrich, *Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur*, 18 (Dresden, 1908), pp. 168–169.
11. H. Moranvillé, *Inventaire de l'Orfèvrerie et des Joyaux de Louis I, duc d'Anjou* (Paris, 1906), no. 878, p. 291.
12. Hans Sachs, "Lament of the Wild Men about the Unfaithful World," in Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 113–114.
13. *Golden Legend* III, pp. 83, 85.
14. For drawings of the medal, Émile Molinier, *Les Bronzes de la Renaissance: les Plaquettes* (Paris, 1886), II, pp. 178–179.
15. *The Triumphs of Petrarch*, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago, 1962), p. 53.
16. Description from *Les Trésors des Églises de France* (Paris, 1965), no. 329, p. 176.
17. The theory that the set may have been woven for the marriage of Claude Le Viste and Jean de Chabannes (1513) has been suggested by several writers; e.g., Pierre Verlet and Francis Salet, *La Dame à la Licorne* (Paris, 1960), pp. 38–39. The theory has now been abandoned, according to Geneviève Souchal, who believes that the styles of both the tapestries and the costumes are earlier than 1513; see Geneviève Souchal and Francis Salet, *Chefs d'œuvre de la tapisserie du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle* (catalogue) (Paris, 1973), p. 111.
6. *Physiologus, a Metrical Bestiary*, pp. 6–8.
7. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 15.
8. *The Book of Beasts*, trans. and ed. T. H. White (New York, 1954), p. 9.
9. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 7–11.
10. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 16.
11. *Book of Beasts*, p. 11.
12. *Book of Beasts*, p. 7.
13. *Bestiaire d'Amour*, p. 29.
14. Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1928), p. 50.
15. Helen Woodruff, "The Physiologus of Bern," *Art Bulletin* XII (1930), p. 245.
16. John Addington Symonds, *Wine, Women and Song* (London, 1931), p. 73.
17. Wright, p. 86.
18. *Physiologus, a Metrical Bestiary*, p. 27.
19. *Book of Beasts*, p. 38.
20. This and quotations immediately following, *Book of Beasts*, pp. 37–40.
21. *Physiologus, a Metrical Bestiary*, p. 43.
22. Armenian bestiary in Charles Cahier, *Nouveaux Mélanges* (Paris, 1874), I, p. 128.
23. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, pp. 59–60.
24. This and quotations in next paragraph from Greek *Physiologus* in Albert S. Cook, *The Old English Elene, Phoenix, and Physiologus*, (New Haven, 1919), p. lxiii.
25. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, pp. 61–63.
26. *Bestiaire d'Amour*, p. 24.
27. *Le Dit de la Panthère d'Amours*, ed. Henry A. Todd for Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris, 1883), XVI, pp. 4, 18, 20.
28. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 69.
29. *Book of Beasts*, p. 92.
30. *Ortus Sanitatis, traduit de latin en françois* (Paris, c. 1500) (Pierpont Morgan Library), leaf 38.
31. *Mediaeval Lore from Bartholomew Anglicus*, ed. Robert Steele (London, 1924), p. 144.
32. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 38.
33. *Book of Beasts*, p. 93.
34. *The Triumphs of Petrarch*, trans. Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago, 1962), p. 54.
35. *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 26^e année (1865), p. 439.
36. *Book of Beasts*, 31.
37. This and following extract, *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, pp. 49–50.
38. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 32.
39. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 48.
40. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 23.

3

The Birds and the Beasts in the Tapestries

1. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, trans. George Claridge Druce (Ashford, Kent, 1936), p. 11.
2. Thomas Wright, *Popular Treatises on Science Written during the Middle Ages* (London, 1841), p. 75.
3. *Physiologus, a Metrical Bestiary of Twelve Chapters by Bishop Theobald*, trans. Alan Wood Rendell (London, 1928), pp. 5–7.
4. *Speculum Ecclesiae*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1854), CLXXII, col. 936.
5. Quoted in Richard de Fournival, *Le Bestiaire d'Amour*, ed. C. Hippeau (Paris, 1860), p. 108.

41. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 61–62.
42. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 75.
43. *Le Livre de chasse du roy Modus*, trans. Gunnar Tilander (Paris, 1931), p. 175.
44. Otto Castellieri, *The Court of Burgundy* (London, 1929), p. 148.
45. *Etymologia*, in *Patrologia Latina* LXXXII, col. 469.
46. *De Animalibus*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* (ed. Clemens Bäumker) [Münster, 1916], XV (ed. Hermann Stadler), p. 510.
47. Herbert Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch* (Washington, 1946), p. 35, p. 178, note 73.
48. *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), III, p. 403.
49. Helen Waddell, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics* (New York, 1933), p. 89.
50. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 139–140.
51. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 76.
52. Waddell, p. 227.
53. Wright, pp. 108–109.
54. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 136–137.
55. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 90; *Book of Beasts*, p. 137.
56. *Etymologia*, in *Patrologia Latina* LXXXII, col. 461.
57. *De Universo*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXI, col. 246.
58. *De Bestiis et Aliis Rebus*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXVII, col. 47.
59. J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1927), p. 78.
60. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 118–119.
61. *Medieval Lore*, p. 127.
62. *Book of Beasts*, p. 144.
63. *Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 80.
64. Wright, p. 116.
65. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 145–146.
66. *Speculum Naturale*, Book XX, Ch. 114 (Strasbourg, before 1479) (New York Public Library).
67. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 44.
68. Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (London, 1912), II, p. 282.
69. *Book of Beasts*, pp. 87, 213.
70. Elisabeth Wolffhardt, “Beiträge zur Pflanzensymbolik,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* 8 (Berlin, 1954), p. 188.
71. *Historia Animalium*, trans. D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, eds. J. A. Smith, W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1910), IV, p. 5512.
72. *On the Characteristics of Animals*, trans. A. F. Scholfield (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), II, p. 233; Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* (Pierpont Morgan Library, M875), fol. 300^v.

73. *Natural History*, VIII, p. 495.
74. *On the Characteristics of Animals*, III, p. 31.
75. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, cols. 1341–1342.

4

The Hunt

1. *La Chasse de Gaston Phoebus, Comte de Foix*, ed. Joseph Lavallée, *Journal des Chasseurs*, 18 année, Suppl. 3 (Paris, 1854), pp. 6–8. Gaston’s treatise was translated into English, almost in its entirety, by Edward, Duke of York (d. 1415) and published as *The Master of Game*, eds. W. A. and F. Baillie-Grohman (London, 1904); this work has been of great help in my own translations from *La Chasse*.
2. The terms *levrier* and *chien courant* were used by Gaston Phoebus and other writers of the time in a broader sense than they would be today.
3. This and succeeding passages, *La Chasse*, pp. 103–108.
4. *Master of Game*, p. 143.
5. Le Comte de Laborde, *Les Ducs de Bourgogne* (Paris, 1851), II, Item 4253, p. 266.
6. Le Chanoine Dehaisnes, *Documents concernant l’Histoire de l’Art dans la Flandre, L’Artois et le Hainaut avant le XV^e Siècle* (Lille, 1886), II, p. 887.
7. *La Chasse*, p. 119.
8. *La Chasse*, pp. 174–175.
9. *La Chasse*, pp. 130–146, 151, 152.
10. *The Art of Hunting*, ed. Alice Dryden (Northampton, England, 1908), p. 122.
11. *La Chasse*, p. 155.
12. *La Chasse*, pp. 11, 20–21.
13. *Le Livre de chasse du roy Modus*, trans. Gunnar Tilander (Paris, 1931), p. 5.
14. *Le Roman des Deduis*, n. pag., appended to an early printed edition of Gaston Phoebus, *La Chasse* (Paris, c. 1505) (Pierpont Morgan Library).
15. *Master of Game*, p. 72.
16. *La Chasse*, pp. 11–12.
17. *Le Trésor de Vènerie*, ed. H. V. Michelant (Metz, 1856), p. 82.
18. *Le Roman des Deduis*.
19. *La Chasse*, p. 194.
20. *Le Roman des Deduis*.
21. *Master of Game*, p. 246.
22. *La Prise Amoureuse*, ed. E. Hoepffner, *Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur*, 22 (1910), pp. 1–59.

5

*The Groves of Trees, the Flowery Fields,
and the Gardens*

1. Helen Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars* (London, 1930), pp. 200–201.
2. *The Flora of the Unicorn Tapestries*, originally in *Journal of the New York Botanical Garden* (May, June, 1941); reprinted by NYBG as pamphlet (1941). The authors do not explore the symbolism of the plants. Earlier, Eleanor C. Marquand identified many of the plants and discussed the possible symbolism of a few; "Plant Symbolism in the Unicorn Tapestries," *Parnassus*, X, 5 (New York, October 1938), pp. 3–8, 33, 40.
3. Frank Crisp, *Medieval Gardens* (London, 1924), I, p. 28.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Representative Medieval and Tudor Plays*, Roger Sherman Loomis and Henry W. Wells, trans. and eds. (New York, 1942), pp. 125–126.
6. Pierre de Crescens, *Les Profits Champêtres* (Paris, 1965, privately printed for Amis du Crédit Lyonnais), text in modern French from manuscript in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, pp. 47–48.
7. *De Universo*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1854), CXI, col. 514.
8. *Sequentiae*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXCVI, cols. 1433–1434.
9. Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Berlin and Leipzig), IX, col. 78.
10. *Profits Champêtres*, pp. 36–37.
11. *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), V, p. 63.
12. Charles Joret, *La Rose dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1892), p. 233.
13. Joret, p. 236.
14. "Miscellanea," *Patrologia Latina* LXXXVIII, col. 287.
15. Helen Waddell, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (New York, 1933), p. 159.
16. *De Beata Maria Virgine*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXXIV, col. 1012.
17. Lottlisa Behling, *Die Pflanze in der Mittelalterlichen Tafelmalerei* (Weimar, 1957), p. 26.
18. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Ernest Langlois (Paris, 1920), II, p. 73.
19. "To My Sovereign Lady," *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1897), pp. 283–284.
20. *The Goodman of Paris*, trans. Eileen Power (London, 1928), pp. 42, 196–197.
21. M[aud] Grieve, *A Modern Herbal* (New York, 1967), II, p. 835.
22. Behling, p. 27.
23. *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1900), III, pp. 68–69.
24. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp. 411–412.
25. Behling, pp. 19, 120.
26. George Stephens, "Extracts in Prose and Verse from an Old English Medical Manuscript Preserved in the Royal Library at Stockholm," *Archæologia* 30 (London, 1844), p. 376.
27. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, ed. Oswald Cockayne (*Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages* [London, 1864], XXXV) (rpt. 1965), I, p. 67.
28. *Hortus Sanitatis*, or *Gart der Gesundheit* (Peter Schoeffer, Mainz, 1485) (Metropolitan Museum, Department of Prints and Photographs), leaf 79.
29. Stephens, p. 382.
30. *Goldene Schmiede*, ed. Wilhelm Grimm (Berlin, 1840), p. 13, line 423.
31. Stephens, p. 383.
32. *Profits Champêtres*, pp. 48–49.
33. Rohault de Fleury, *La sainte Vierge* (Paris, 1878), I, pp. 396, 398.
34. Matthew Britt, *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal* (New York, 1936), p. 133. The hymn is ascribed to Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306).
35. *La sainte Vierge*, I, p. 412.
36. Quoted from the *Divine Comedy* in Anna Brownell Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna* (London, 1904), p. 15.
37. Trans. William Earle Nettles in program notes for a concert by the New York Pro Musica at The Cloisters.
38. *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. F. S. Ellis (London, 1900), III, p. 55.
39. Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), Ms. fr. 1584, fols. ciiii ff.
40. Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 208–209.
41. *The Romance of the Rose* I, p. 48.
42. Joret, p. 238.
43. Joret, pp. 232–233.
44. Joret, p. 236.
45. *De Rosa alphabetica*, in *Spicilegium Solesmense*, ed. J. B. Pitra (Paris, 1855), III, p. 490.
46. Joret, p. 242.
47. Joret, p. 243.
48. Joret, pp. 247–248.
49. Joret, p. 248.
50. Joret, pp. 253–254.
51. Joret, p. 251.
52. *Spicilegium Solesmense* III, p. 496.
53. *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 253.
54. Joret, pp. 330–331.
55. *Le Roman de la Rose* II, p. 3.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–87.
57. Joret, p. 308.

58. *Le Roman de la Rose* II, pp. 45–46.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–43.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
61. Joret, pp. 325–328.
62. Joret, pp. 328–329.
63. Joret, p. 372.
64. A. P. Mirimonde, "Le Langage Secret des Vieux Tableaux," *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas* ([Nancy], 1963–64), p. 70.
65. *Das Buch der Natur*, ed. F. Pfeiffer (Hildesheim, 1962), p. 312.
66. *The Other World*, p. 214.
67. *Natural History* IV, p. 457.
68. *Ortus Sanitatis*, translated de latin en françois (Paris, c. 1500) (Pierpont Morgan Library), leaf 68^v.
69. John Asch, "And Let the Gardener Have on His House the Beard-of-Jove," *Garden Journal*, 18, 5 (September/October 1968), pp. 137, 146.
70. *Le Roman de la Rose* II, p. 70.
71. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, p. 364.
72. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 147.
73. *An Herbal* [Banckes' *Herbal*, 1525], eds. Sanford V. Larkey, Thomas Pyles (New York, 1941), p. 74.
74. Stephens, p. 389.
75. *Goldene Schmiede*, p. 18.
76. Stephens, pp. 367–368.
77. Florence Hines, *A Chaplet of Herbs* (London, n.d.), p. 51.
78. *The Grete Herball* (Southwarke, 1526) (Metropolitan Museum, Department of Prints and Photographs), leaf 47.
79. Behling, p. 28. The marigold is here called "goltbloem"; in medieval English it is usually "goldes," in French "souci." The "Mary's gold" or "marigold" is not generally found in medieval literature. The author of the *Grete Herball* says that it is named "calendula" because it "bears flowers all the kalends of every month of the year."
80. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 28.
81. Stephens, p. 371.
82. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 105.
83. *The Vertuose Boke of Distyllacyon* (translation by L. Andrews of Braunschweig's *Distillierbuch*; London, 1527) (Pierpont Morgan Library), ch. 109.
84. Hermann Fischer, *Mittelalterliche Pflanzenkunde* (Munich, 1919), p. 288.
85. *Etymologia*, in *Patrologia Latina* LXXXII, col. 616.
86. *De Bestiis et Aliis Rebus*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXVII, col. 114.
87. *Ibid.*, col. 158.
88. *De proprietatibus rerum* (Cologne, c. 1472) (Pierpont Morgan Library), fol. 175^v.
89. *Spicilegium Solesmense* II, p. 364.
90. *The Grete Herball*, leaf 154.
91. Thomas Wright, *Early Travels in Palestine* (London, 1848), p. 133.
92. J. U. Nicolson, *Canterbury Tales*, rendered into modern English (Garden City, 1934), p. 44.
93. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp. 445–447.
94. Will Durant, *The Age of Faith (The Story of Civilization IV)* (New York, 1950), p. 1038. I have reversed the order of the verses.
95. *Medieval Latin Lyrics*, p. 257.
96. Deschamps, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de St.-Hilaire (Paris, 1878–1903), II, pp. 193 ff.
97. *L'Amant rendu cordelier*, ed. A. de Montaiglon (Société des anciens textes français, Paris, 1881), pp. 60 ff.
98. Ed. R. Zenker, *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 17 (1893), pp. 233 ff.
99. *De Universo*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXI, cols. 512–513.
100. P. H. Heimans, "Der Granatapfel, ein Sinnbild der Göttlichen Liebe," *Der Pionier* 1 (Munich, 1908–09), p. 51.
101. *Goldene Schmiede*, p. 40.
102. *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum*, in *Patrologia Latina* CCX, cols. 82–83.
103. *Natural History* VI, pp. 485–489.
104. *An Herbal*, p. 28.
105. *Das buch von pflanzung der äcker, Boum und aller Krüter* (Strassburg, 1512) (Metropolitan Museum, Department of Prints and Photographs), leaf 107^v.
106. *Natural History* VI, p. 407.
107. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, col. 1191.
108. *Mittelalterliche Pflanzenkunde*, p. 264; *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 193; *Modern Herbal* I, p. 248.
109. *Goldene Schmiede*, p. 24.
110. *Oeuvres Complètes* II, p. 194.
111. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 193.
112. *Mittelalterliche Pflanzenkunde*, p. 280.
113. *Buch der Natur*, p. 412.
114. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, p. 447.
115. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 116^v.
116. *Vertuose Boke*, ch. 124.
117. *De Vegetabilibus et Plantis*, in *Parva Naturalia* (Venice, 1517) (Pierpont Morgan Library), leaf 171.
118. *Hortus Sanitatis*, chs. 21, 195.
119. "And Let the Gardener Have . . .," pp. 137, 146.
120. *Le Roman de la Rose* II, p. 70.
121. *Buch der Natur*, p. 342.
122. *De Vegetabilibus et Plantis*, leaf 159^v.
123. *Ortus Sanitatis*, leaf 176.
124. *Buch der Natur*, p. 334.
125. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, col. 1226.
126. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 355.

127. *Six Lais d'Amour*, ed. Philéas Lebesque (Paris [1913]), pp. 99–106.
128. *Le Grand Herbar en Francoys* (Janot, Paris, c. 1530) (Pierpont Morgan Library), leaf 21^v.
129. *Buch der Natur*, pp. 323–324.
130. *Canterbury Tales*, p. 514.
131. *An Herbal*, p. 32.
132. *Hortus Sanitatis*, leaf 158^v.
133. Verses and quotations immediately following, Behling, p. 81.
134. *The Grete Herball*, leaf 117^v.
135. *An Herbal*, pp. 60–61.
136. *The Grete Herball*, leaf 117^v.
137. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, cols. 1169 ff.
138. *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum*, in *Patrologia Latina* CCX, col. 82.
139. *Profits Champêtres*, pp. 47–49.
140. *Adam, a Religious Play of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Edward Noble Stone, in *University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature* (Seattle, 1928), pp. 5–14.
141. *De Universo*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXI, col. 512.
142. This and quotations in following paragraphs, *Elucidatio in Cantica Canticorum*, in *Patrologia Latina* CCX, cols. 65–67.
143. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721), p. 547. The poem, also known as *The Isle of Ladies*, is no longer thought to be by Chaucer; it was probably written in the fifteenth century.
144. *De Universo*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXI, col. 515.
145. *Natural History* VII, p. 85.
146. *Natural History* IV, p. 391.
147. "In Annunciatione Sanctae Mariae," *Patrologia Latina* CLXXII, col. 904.
148. *Dit de la Panthère d'Amours* (Société des anciens textes français) (Paris, 1883), pp. 21–22.
149. *Natural History* VII, p. 85.
150. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* I, pp. 193–195.
151. Robert A. Koch, "Flower Symbolism in the Portinari Altar," *The Art Bulletin*, 46 (New York, March 1964), p. 71.
152. Behling, p. 38.
153. *Il Simbolo dei Fiori*, ed. Vincenzo de Bartholomaeis, in *Casinensia* (Montecassino, 1929), p. 345.
154. Karl Voretzsch, *Introduction to the Study of Old French Literature* (New York, 1931), p. 469.
155. *La fontaine de toutes scièces du philosophe Sydrac* (Paris, 1486) (Pierpont Morgan Library), Question and Reply no. 831.
156. *De Vegetabilibus et Plantis*, leaf 171^v.
157. *Mittelalterliche Pflanzenkunde*, p. 278.
158. *Vertuose Boke*, ch. 246.
159. This and the following quotations, *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 355.
160. *Etymologia*, in *Patrologia Latina* LXXXII, col. 633.
161. *Le Grand Herbar*, leaf 29.
162. Émile Mâle, *L'Art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France* (Paris, 1910), p. 72.
163. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 16.
164. *Natural History* VII, p. 105.
165. *Hortus Sanitatis*, ch. 16.
166. Fernand Mercier, "La Valeur Symbolique de l'Oeillet dans la Peinture du Moyen Age," *La Revue de l'Art* 71 (1937), p. 233.
167. Elisabeth Wolffhardt, "Beiträge zur Pflanzensymbolik," *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft* 8 (Berlin, 1954), p. 188.
168. *Goldene Schmiede*, p. 25.
169. "Flower Symbolism in the Portinari Altar," p. 73.
170. T. H. Everett, "George Washington Never Saw These," *Garden Journal* 24, 1 (February 1974), p. 6.
171. *Hortulus*, English trans. Raef Payne (Pittsburgh, 1966), p. 47.
172. *De proprietatibus rerum*, fol. 235.
173. Wolffhardt, p. 180.
174. *Buch der Natur*, p. 406.
175. *Aucassin and Nicolette*, trans. Eugene Mason (London, 1938), p. 12.
176. Joret, p. 323.
177. Buckner Hollingsworth, *Flower Chronicles* (New Brunswick, 1958), p. 80.
178. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* III, p. 145.
179. *Hortulus*, pp. 47–49.
180. *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, in *Patrologia Latina* CLXXII, col. 502.
181. Hilderic Friend, *Flowers and Flower Lore* (London, 1884), I, p. 12.
182. *Le Roman de la Rose* II, p. 87.
183. *Natural History* VI, p. 155.
184. *Le Grand Herbar*, leaf 154^v.
185. *Physica*, in *Patrologia Latina* CXC VII, col. 1210.
186. *Vertuose Boke*, ch. 59.
187. Angelo de Gubernatis, *La Mythologie des Plantes* (Paris, 1878–82), II, p. 60.
188. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* I, p. 171.
189. Behling, p. 27.
190. Wolffhardt, p. 188.
191. Henry Martin, "Les Heures de Boussu et leur Bordures Symboliques," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Fourth Period, III (Paris, 1910), p. 133.
192. *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft* I, p. 171.

6

The AE the FR and Other Problems Relating to the Original Ownership of the Tapestries

1. Jules Gauthier, "Inventaire du Mobilier du Connétable de Saint-Paul en 1476," *Bulletin Archéologique* (Paris, 1885), p. 48.
2. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1942, pp. 7–20.
3. I am indebted to Geneviève Souchal of the Cluny Museum for this observation.
4. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. fr. 5091 (about 1507), fol. 7^v.
5. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. lat. 4804, fol. 1^v.
6. C. Leber, *Collection des . . . dissertations . . . relatifs à l'histoire de France* (Paris, 1838), XIX, pp. 252–256.
7. Victor Gay, *Glossaire archéologique du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1887), I, p. 332.
8. *The Boke of Saint Albans* (1486), facsimile with intro. by William Blades (London, 1901), p. 112.
9. Abbé J. F. Chevalier, *Verteuil sous la Revolution* (Ruffec, 1930), pp. 117–118. The author's sources are in the municipal archives of Verteuil.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–100.
12. Jean Marchand, *Iconographie . . . de la Maison de La Roche-foucauld* ([Paris] 1953), p. 36.
13. P. Anselme, *Histoire Généalogique . . . de la Maison Royale de France, des Pairs, Grands Officiers de la Couronne . . .* (Paris, 1728), IV, pp. 425–426.
14. Anselme, IV, p. 449; VII, p. 501.
15. *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, series 6 (1865), I, p. 429.
16. *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (Paris, 1916), pp. 309–310.
17. "Les Tapisseries de 'la Licorne' du Château de Verteuil," *Bulletin du Comité des Sociétés des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1905), XXIX, pp. 675–676.
18. *Banners, Standards and Badges from a Tudor Manuscript in the College of Arms*, ed. with an introduction by Lord Howard de Walden (London, De Walden Library, 1904), pp. 96, 187.
19. Charles Ffoulkes, "Jousting Cheques of the Sixteenth Century," *Archaeologia* 63 (London, 1912), pp. 34–39.
20. Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman, "Les Sources de l'Histoire de la Tapisserie Bruxelloise," *Annales de la Société Royale d'Archéologie de Bruxelles* LI (Brussels, 1966), pp. 333–334.
21. Margaret B. Freeman, "The Annunciation from a Book of Hours for Charles of France," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1960, pp. 111, 115.
22. Gauthier, items 188, 287, 348, 357, pp. 24–57.
23. Roger-Armand Weigert, *French Tapestry* (Newton, Mass., 1962), p. 81.
24. Anselme III, p. 766; IV, p. 426.
25. Marchand, pl. 2 (genealogical chart of 1622); Henri Jouglas de Morenas, *Grand Armorial de France* (Paris, 1934–49), VI, p. 32.
26. G. Demay, *Inventaire des sceaux de la collection Clairambault à la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1885), I, p. 323.
27. Anselme III, p. 766.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Eugène Soil, *Les Tapisseries de Tournai* (Tournai, 1892), p. 236.
30. Anselme IV, p. 426.
31. Marchand, pl. 2; Anselme IV, 426.
32. Anselme IV, p. 426.
33. J. B. Rietstap, *Armoires des Familles contenues dans L'Armorial Général* (Paris, 1903), I, pl. ccxlv; Jouglas de Morenas, II, p. 154; Marchand, pl. 2.
34. Among them d'Abbeville (Rietstap, I, p. 105; Pierre Palliot, *La Vraie et Parfaite Science des Armoires* [Paris, 1895], I, p. 310); Bailleul (Jouglas de Morenas, I, p. 328); du Bost La Blanche (Rietstap, I, pl. cclxxvi); and de la Haye (Palliot, p. 310).
35. Among them Mondion (Jouglas de Morenas, V, p. 75; Rietstap, IV, pl. ccxxvii); Marguenat (Jouglas de Morenas, IV, p. 528; Palliot, II, p. 547; Rietstap, IV, pl. cxlv); and Teinturier of Tournai (suggested by Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, letter in Medieval Department, Metropolitan Museum).
36. Anselme IV, pp. 451–452.
37. Ch. Dangibaud, "Verteuil et Bayers, Documents inédits," *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société archéologique de la Charente*, series 6 (1898), VIII, p. 220.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 176–178.
39. Jouglas de Morenas, III, p. 122.
40. The existence of this monogram was made known to the Metropolitan Museum by the Marquis de Amodio, O.B.E., in a letter, 5 October 1962, to Mr. Rorimer.
41. Report of Pieter Meyers, Research Laboratory, Metropolitan Museum, October 1971.
42. Soil, p. 379. The aulne in these documents is presumably the Flemish aulne, which is about 27 inches; Philip the Good and his weavers measured tapestries in Flemish aulnes.
43. Alexandre Pinchart, *Histoire générale de la tapisserie*, part III, *Pays-Bas* (n.d., in series begun by Jules Guiffrey [Paris, 1878–85]), p. 75, note 15.
44. Gauthier, item 288, p. 48.
45. Otto Pächt, *The Master of Mary of Burgundy* (London, 1948), pl. 1 (British Museum, Ms. Add. 7970, fol. 1^v).
46. Henry Martin, "Les Heures de Boussu," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Fourth Period (1910), III, pl. opp. p. 132 (ms. Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal).

7

The Making of the Tapestries

1. Alexandre Pinchart, *Histoire générale de la tapisserie*, part III, *Pays-Bas* (n.d., in series begun by Jules Guiffrey [Paris, 1878–85]), p. 74, note 5.
2. Philippe Guignard, "Mémoires fournis aux peintres chargés d'exécuter les cartons d'une tapisserie destinée à la collégiale saint-Urbain de Troyes," *Mémoires de la Société d'agriculture, des sciences, arts, et belles-lettres du département de l'Aube*, series 2, vol. II (1849–50), pp. 427, 428 (note 1), 429, 430.
3. The late Guido Schoenberger in conversation with the author.
4. Several sets of tapestries were made from cartoons based on these *petits patrons*. The fragment illustrated (243) is believed to be from one of the earlier sets. Even so it differs from the drawing in numerous details. See Jean-Paul Asselberghs, "Les Tapisseries Tournaisiennes de la Guerre de Troie," *Revue Belge d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art*, XXIX (Brussels, 1970).
5. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, *Les Tapisseries de l'Hôtel de Ville de Bruxelles* (Antwerp, 1944), pp. 24, 25, pl. x.
6. John Shearman, *Raphael's Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen and the Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel* (London, 1972).
7. Eugène Soil, *Les Tapisseries de Tournai* (Tournai, 1892), p. 209.
8. Louis de Farcy, *Les Tapisseries de la cathédrale d'Angers* (Angers, n.d.), pp. 13, 14.
9. Jules Guiffrey, *Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie*, VI, *Les Tapisseries* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 83, 84, pl. III.
10. George Leland Hunter, *The Practical Book of Tapestries* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 54; Guiffrey, p. 114.
11. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, *Catalogue des tapisseries, XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles* (Brussels) [1956], pp. 37, 38, pl. 26.
12. Crick-Kuntziger, *Catalogue*, no. 13, pp. 28, 29, pl. 17.
13. A[nnatole] Claudin, *Histoire de l'Imprimerie en France, au XV^e et au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1901), II, p. 470.
14. I am indebted to Eleanor Spencer and Nicole Reynaud for calling my attention to this observation about the Coëtivy Master.
15. Nicole Reynaud, "La Resurrection de Lazare et le maître de Coëtivy," *Revue du Louvre*, 15 (Paris, 1965), p. 173, note 4.
16. *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (Paris, 1921), pp. 301–317.
17. "Un peintre français cartonnier de tapisseries au XV^e siècle: Henri de Vulcop," *Revue de l'Art*, 22 (1973), pp. 7–21.
18. John Plummer, *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (New York, 1966); Pierpont Morgan Library, Mss. M917, M945.
19. Paul Pieper, "Das Stundenbuch der Katharina van Lochorst und der Meister der Katharina von Kleve," *Westfalen*, 44 (1966), pp. 97–162.
20. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, "Un chef-d'œuvre inconnu du Maître de la 'Dame à la Licorne,'" *Revue Belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art*, 23 (1954), pp. 3–20.
21. "Un grand peintre français de la fin du XV^e siècle: le maître de la Chasse à la Licorne," *Revue de l'Art*, 22 (1973), pp. 22–49. Mme. Souchal's research on the designer of the Cloisters' tapestries was undertaken independently of mine. She, too, emphasizes the importance of the Paris prints and cites many that I have discussed. She adds many works that she believes were executed by this master, such as the Virtuous Women tapestries and the western rose window of the Ste. Chapelle in Paris. The attribution of these two seems possible; others that she assigns to the designer of the Cloisters' tapestries appear doubtful to me.
22. Pinchart, p. 75.
23. Pinchart, p. 46.
24. Alphonse Wauters, *Les tapisseries bruxelloises* (Brussels, 1878), p. 48.
25. William F. Leggett, *Ancient and Medieval Dyes* (New York, 1944), p. 34.
26. Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman, "'La Dame à la Licorne' a été tissée à Bruxelles," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (November 1967), p. 254.
27. Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman, "La tenture armoriée de Philippe le Bon à Berne," *Jahrbuch des Bernischen Historischen Museums*, XXXIX–XL (1959–60), p. 158.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 146; Stammeler's publication is almost impossible to find today.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
30. Salet, "La Tapisserie Bruxelloise au XV^e Siècle," *Bulletin Monumental*, 124 (1966), p. 435.
31. *Arachne, ou l'art de la tapisserie* (Geneva, 1971), p. 202.
32. In conversation with the author.
33. "Métamorphoses de la tapisserie," *L'Oeil*, 220 (November 1973), p. 5.
34. Salet, "La Tapisserie Bruxelloise," p. 436.
35. Marthe Crick-Kuntziger, "La Tapisserie Bruxelloise au XV^{me} siècle," in *Bruxelles au XV^{me} siècle* (Brussels, 1953), p. 101.
36. Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman, "Les Sources de l'Histoire de la Tapisserie Bruxelloise," *Annales de la Société Royale d'Archéologie de Bruxelles*, LI (Brussels, 1966), p. 280.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 288–289.
38. Wauters, p. 50.
39. Le Comte [Alexandre] de Laborde, *Les Ducs de Bourgogne*, II (Paris, 1851), p. 271, nos. 4283, 4284.
40. Schneebalg-Perelman, "Les Sources," p. 331.
41. Wauters, pp. 125–126.
42. Schneebalg-Perelman, "Les Sources," p. 282.
43. Wauters, pp. 32–33.
44. Wauters, pp. 34–35.
45. Wauters, pp. 35, 41–45.
46. Wauters, p. 34.
47. Pinchart, p. 118.

48. Salet, "La Tapisserie Bruxelloise," p. 433.

49. The two inventories that list the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries describes them as *haute lice*, and there may seem to be a contradiction here. However, most connoisseurs agree that it is impossible to distinguish between *basse lice* and *haute lice* tapestries merely by looking at them. The assessors who made the inventories seem always to have termed large, important tapestries as *haute lice*.

8

The Tapestries in the Inventories, Their Treatment During the French Revolution, and Their History in Later Years

1. Ms. in Archives Nationales, Paris, *Minutier Central XCII*, 229.
2. P[aul] de Fleury, "Inventaire des Objets Mobiliers . . . dans les Châteaux de La Rochefoucauld, Verteuil et de La Terne," *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique . . . de la Charente*, années 1884–85 (Angoulême, 1886), pp. 126–128, 163. The inventory is preserved in the Archives Départementales, Angoulême.
3. Émile Biais, "Les Tapisseries de 'La Licorne' du Château de Verteuil," *Bulletin du Comité des Sociétés des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1905), XXIX, p. 675, note 2.
4. Letter, 20 November 1968, to author from the Marquis de Amodio, O.B.E., whose wife, née Anne de La Rochefoucauld, is the present owner of Verteuil. She is the great granddaughter of Count Hippolyte and daughter of Count Gabriel and Odile de Richelieu.
5. "Note sur les Tapisseries de Boussac," *Revue de l'Art Chrétien* (Paris, 1888), p. 114. The principal subject is the Cluny Museum's Lady with the Unicorn series; one paragraph is devoted to the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries.
6. Biais, pp. 669–677.
7. "Château de Verteuil," *Congrès Archéologique de France, tenue à Angoulême* (Paris, 1913), pp. 133–134.
8. *Histoire générale des arts appliqués à l'industrie*, VI, *Les Tapisseries* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 98–100.
9. Note communicated by C. Enlart, *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (Paris, 1916), pp. 309–311.
10. *New York Times*, 19 November 1922, Section VII, p. 8, col. 5.
11. Letter to the author, 22 May 1944.
12. Archives of the Rockefeller family.
13. *New York Times*, 27 February 1923, p. 1, col. 5; 2 March, p. 1, col. 3; 7 March, p. 7, cols. 2–3.
14. Rockefeller, letter to author, 22 May 1944.
15. Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr., A Portrait* (New York, 1956), p. 333.
16. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of French Gothic Tapestries* (New York, 1928), pp. 19, 21. The credit line says merely "Lent by Friends." The coat of arms on the dog collar of the first tapestry, according to the catalogue, was "identified by Robert T. Nichol of the Museum staff as those of the great family of Chavagnac d'Amandine (Auv.): sable, 2 bars gold, in chief 3 roses of same, quartering Du Bost la Blanche (Forez): 3 escutcheons gules." This reading of the arms cannot be accepted, since the first and fourth quarterings are not black with gold roses but blue with red roses.
17. Fosdick, p. 339.
18. Letter, 15 January 1935. Museum Archives.
19. Letter to George Blumenthal, 14 March 1935. Museum Archives.
20. Conversation with the author.
21. Conversation with the author.
22. The remaining two-fifths of the gallery was reserved as a room with the necessary wall space for the Heroes Tapestries, which The Cloisters expected to acquire. When the suggestion was made to Mr. Rockefeller that the left-over portion of the gallery could be used for this rare set of fourteenth-century tapestries, he was delighted. "In this way," he said, "we can get two bites out of one cherry."
23. Letter to Collens, copy to the author, 3 May 1949.

INDEX

Names of the principal early authorities and literary sources are printed in SMALL CAPITALS

- Acts of the Apostles** tapestries, 193, 217
- Adam and Eve**
and apple, 136
and genet, 79
and orange, 125
and unicorn, 40, 51, 56, 79, 115, 121, 125
and violet, 115
- ADAM OF COBSAM**, 124
- ADAM OF SAINT VICTOR**, 115
- AE**, 95, 156, 157, 165, 167, 169–170, 172, 176, 178, 199
- AELIAN**, 14–15, 89
- Aelst**, Pieter van, 215, 216
- AICART DE HESDIN**, 107
- ALAIN DE LILLE**, 131, 136, 137
- ALBERTUS MAGNUS**
on goldfinch, 83
on iris, 142
on peach, 133
on unicorn, 23
on yellow flag, 133
- ALCUIN**, 84
- AMBROSE, SAINT**, 17, 121
- Amodio**, Marquise de, 227–228
- Anne of Brittany**, 156–157, 159–162, 163
- Anne of France**, 161
- Annunciation, the**
and apple tree, 137
and columbine, 153
and hunt of unicorn, 23, 25, 102
and iris, 141
and Madonna lily, 150
and unicorn with maiden, 44, 49–50, 137
- Apocalypse** tapestries, 193, 222
- APOLLONIUS OF TYANA**, 15
- apple**, 136–138, 147
- ARISTOTLE**, 14, 89
- B**
- BANCKES' HERBAL**, 126, 132, 135
- BARTHOLOMAEUS ANGLICUS**
on frog, 89
on lily, 150
on oak, 128
on swan, 88
on unicorn, 23
on weasel, 79
- BASIL, SAINT**, 17, 121
- beech**, 104, 134
- Benedict**, Saint, 54
- BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX**, 116, 120, 121, 150
- BERNARD VON BREYDENBACH**, 37
- BERSUIRE, PIERRE**, 141
- bestiaries**, 19, 68
See also Cambridge bestiary; Fournival, Richard de; Guillaume le Clerc; Philippe de Thaun; Pierpont Morgan Library bestiary; Theobald, Bishop
- Biais**, Émile, 165, 224
- Bibles**
unicorn illustrated in, 37, 38, 39, 40
unicorn mentioned in, 15, 17
- BIRGITTA, SAINT**, 141
- bistort**, 144
- blackberry**, 78, 140
- bluebell**, 144
- BOCCACCIO**, 111
- BRAUNSCHWEIG, HIERONYMOUS**
on orchid, 143
on primrose, 133
on thistle, 152
on wallflower, 127
- Bruges**, 212, 214
- Brussel**, Jan van, 193
- Brussels**, 208, 213, 214–218
- BURKART VON HOHENFELS**, 30
- butterfly**, 89, 147–148
- CAESAR, JULIUS**, 14
- CAMBRIDGE BESTIARY**
on dog, 80
on dove, 88
on horse, 89
on lion, 71–72
on nightingale, 84
on partridge, 84
on stag, 73–74
on swan, 87
on weasel, 79
- carnation**, 65, 144, 146–148
- cattail**, 135
- chain**
symbol of capture, 52, 76, 107, 143
symbol of lover's devotion, 30, 48
- Charlemagne**, 125, 126, 133, 135
- Charles VII (France)**, 61, 142
- Charles VIII (France)**, 164, 170, 172
- chastity**
ermine and, 79
unicorn and, 57–58, 60, 65
- CHAUCER**, 116, 130, 134
- cherry tree**, 111–114
- Chinese lantern plant**, 143
- Christ, Jesus**
apple tree and, 137
butterfly and, 89
carnation and, 148
cattail and, 135
crown of thorns of, 30, 83, 129, 131, 138, 152
dove and, 88
enemies of, 25, 45
goldfinch and, 83
iris and, 141
lion and, 68, 71, 73
Nativity of, 39, 138
panther and, 77
Passion of, 25, 45, 83, 129, 131, 138
pomegranate and, 131
rose and, 121
stag and, 73
unicorn and, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 30, 40, 49–50, 137, 143
walnut and, 115
- clary**, 111, 132
- Cleves Master**, 202
- clove pink**, 148
- Coëtivy, Katherine de**, 61
- Coëtivy Master**, 200–202
- Coffinet**, Julien, 214
- collars**
of deer, 76
of hounds, 95, 172
of unicorn, 30, 43, 51, 52, 76, 143
- columbine**, 152–153
- cordelière**, 157
- COSMAS INDICOPLEUSTES**, 36
- costumes**
hunters', 95
men's, 206–207
women's, 49, 160–162, 164, 165
- COUR DE MAY**, 120
- COURT OF LOVE**, 116, 130, 133
- CRESCENTIUS, PETRUS**
on clary, 132
on gardens, 136
on trees, 114, 119
on walnut, 115
- Crussol, Guillaume de**, 171
- Crussol, Jacques de**, 171
- Crussol, Louis de**, 171
- Crussol, Louise de**, 170–171, 172
- CTESIAs**, 14
- cuckoo-pint**, 144
- Cyprian, Saint**, 121
- Daffodil**, 118–119
- daisy**, 116, 132
- Dante**, 120
- DESCHAMPS, EUSTACE**, 130, 132
- dogs**, 81
See also hounds
- dove**, 88
- dragon**, 76, 77
See also serpent
- dragonfly**, 40
- Durrieu, Paul**, 201
- Duvet, Jean**, 176
- Edward**, Duke of York, 101
- English daisy**, 116
- ermine**, 79
- Este, Borso d'**, 60–61
- F**
- FABRI, FELIX**, 37
- fecundity**
goldfinch and, 84
orange and, 125
pomegranate and, 131, 143
- feverfew**, 135
- fidelity**
columbine and, 153
dog and, 80
hazelnut and, 134
lion and, 72, 73
oak and, 128
rose and, 124
stag and, 74
unicorn and, 47, 49
- field daisy**, 132
- fleur-de-lis**, 142, 160
- forget-me-not**, 135
- Forsyth, William H.**, 227
- FORTUNATUS, BISHOP**, 115, 121
- fountain**, 82, 119–121
- FOURNIVAL, RICHARD DE**
on illustration of beasts and birds, 33
on lion, 72
on panther, 78
on unicorn, 30, 45, 46, 107
- FR**, 156, 170, 171, 172–173, 174, 199, 222
- François I (France)**, 170, 176
- frog**, 89
- Gabriel**, angel, 137, 141, 150
in fourth Unicorn Tapestry, 23, 25, 50, 102, 186
hunter of unicorn, 49–50, 51, 56, 136, 140
- GACE DE LA BUIGNE**, 99, 104, 105

- Gaignières, Roger de, 53, 164, 167
- GARDEN OF DELIGHTS, 114, 118, 140, 153
- Garden of Eden, 115
apple tree in, 136
genet in, 79
rose in, 121
unicorn in, 40, 56
- garden enclosed, 50, 51, 136, 152
- Garden of Love, 55, 56, 121
- Garden of Paradise, 112, 115, 116, 117, 118, 122, 125, 126, 127, 133, 142, 143, 148, 149, 150, 153
- gardens, 111, 136
- GASTON III, COUNT OF FOIX
on dismemberment of stag, 107
on greyhounds, 92–93
on hounds' leashes, 95
on lymerer, 95, 96
on pleasures of hunt, 91, 92
on procedures of hunt, 97
on running hounds, 93, 95
on stag at bay, 101, 105
- Gautier de Coincy, 120
- genet, 79
- Glorification of Charles VII
tapestry (The Cloisters), 193, 214
- God of Love, 53, 58, 121, 130
and blackberry, 140
and God of Heaven, 30
hunter as, 47
and panther, 78
and rose, 123, 124
See also love
- Golden Fleece tapestries, 175, 176, 193, 207
- goldfinch, 83–84
- Gonzaga, Cecilia, 34, 52
- GRAND HERBIER, 134, 144, 152
- GRETE HERBALL, 127, 129, 135
- greyhounds. *See* hounds
- Guiffrey, Jules, 224
- GUILLAUME LE CLERC
on dove, 88
on hyena, 80
on lion, 68, 72
on natures of beasts, 67
on panther, 76, 77
on unicorn, 25, 41
on weasel, 79
- H**andmaiden, 13, 23, 42, 186
- HARDOUIN, 101, 104
- Hardouin IX de Maillé, 163, 164
- hawthorn, 129–131
- Haye, Françoise de la, 172
- hazelnut, 133–134, 138
- Henry II (France), 176
- heraldry
fleur-de-lis in, 142, 160
lion and, 63, 65
unicorn and, 34, 60–61, 63, 65, 171
- Herkenbald tapestries, 193
- heron, 87
- HILDEGARD VON BINGEN
on frog, 89
on hazelnut, 133
on plantain, 135
on thistle, 152
on unicorn, 23, 27
- holly, 138
- HONORIUS OF AUTUN
on blackberry, 140
on lion, 68
on unicorn, 21, 23
on Virgin Mary, 151
- horse, 89
- hortus conclusus. *See* garden enclosed
- HORTUS SANITATIS
on feverfew, 135
on field daisy, 132
on hazelnut, 134
on orchid, 143
on periwinkle, 118
on pimpernel, 127
on wallflower, 127
on yellow flag, 133
- hounds
of angel Gabriel, 50, 51
collars of, 95, 172
greyhounds, 92–93
leashes of, 95
of Love, 107
running hounds, 92, 93–95
and unicorn capture, 47
use of in hunt, 97, 99, 102, 104–105
- HRABANUS MAURUS
on apple, 137
on heron, 87
on holly, 138
on pomegranate, 132
on walnut, 115
- hunter
as angel Gabriel, 23, 25, 102, 136
as bridegroom, 48
as Love, 30, 45–46, 47, 107
as lover, 47–48
- hunters
costumes of, 95
as enemies of Christ, 23, 25, 46
as enemies of unicorn, 43, 44, 45
reward to, 104, 134
at scene of water purification, 56
- hunt of the stag, 74, 91–92, 96, 97, 101, 107
- hunt of the unicorn, 11, 13, 44–50, 101, 102, 105
Annunciation symbolism of, 23, 25, 44, 49–50
love symbolism of, 46, 47–48, 107
Passion symbolism of, 25, 45
- hunting horn, 101
- signals of, 99, 101, 102, 105, 107
in Unicorn Tapestries, 102, 194
- hyena, 80
- I**ncarnation allegory, 19, 21, 23, 25, 44, 51, 102, 136
- inscriptions. *See* tapestries; Unicorn Tapestries
- iris, 141–142
See also yellow flag
- ISIDORE OF SEVILLE
on dove, 88
on goldfinch, 83
on heron, 87
on oak, 128
on scilla, 144
on unicorn, 23
- J**ames IV (Scotland), 61
- JOHANNES OF HESE, 27
- John Chrysostom, Saint, 44
- Judgment of Paris, 56, 137
- K**erver, Thielmann, prints
published by, 198–199, 205
- Knoest, Leonard, 194
- KONRAD VON MEGENBURG
on beech, 134
on goldfinch, 83
on hazelnut, 133
on lion, 72
on orange, 125
on peach, 133
on primrose, 132
on unicorn, 25
on Virgin Mary, 150
- KONRAD VON WÜRZBURG
on daffodil, 119
on field daisy, 132
on sage, 126
on unicorn, 23
on Virgin Mary, 131, 148
- L**ac d'amour, 157, 167, 168, 170
- Lady with the Unicorn tapestries
carnations in, 145
genet in, 79
heraldic aspects of, 63, 65
holly in, 138
mirror in, 153
oaks in, 129
oranges in, 125
original ownership of, 65
and Perseus tapestry, 204–205
rabbits in, 80
unicorn in, 13, 34
and Unicorn Tapestries, 205–206
- La Rochefoucauld, Aimery de, 225
- La Rochefoucauld, Barbe du Bois de, 171
- La Rochefoucauld, Elizabeth de, 223
- La Rochefoucauld, François I de, 170, 171, 172, 174, 176
- La Rochefoucauld, François VI de, 219, 220–221, 222–223
- La Rochefoucauld, François VIII de, 220
- La Rochefoucauld, Gabriel de, 227–228
- La Rochefoucauld, Guillaume de, 172
- La Rochefoucauld, Hippolyte de, 223
- La Rochefoucauld, Jean II de, 163, 170, 172, 174
- La Rochefoucauld, Marguerite de Barbezieux, de, 163–165, 170, 174
- La Rochefoucauld family, 162–163, 165, 167, 170
- le Haze, Jehan, 213, 217
- leopard. *See* panther
- letters
printed in books, 172, 199
tied, 156, 167–170, 173–174
See also AE, FR
- Life of the Virgin tapestries (Beaune), 193
- Life of the Virgin tapestries (Madrid), 214
- lily, 111, 149–150
- lion, 68, 71–73
design of, second Unicorn Tapestry, 90
in heraldry, 63, 65
and Resurrection, 51, 68, 71
with unicorn, 37, 41, 58, 60, 63, 65, 73
- lord and lady of the castle, 13, 15, 21, 49, 107, 157, 159, 160–161, 162, 171, 191
- lord of the hunt. *See* seigneur of the hunt
- Louis XII (France), 159–160, 162, 170, 172
- Love
fountain and, 120
as hunter, 30, 45–46, 47, 107, 128
See also God of Love
- love-knot, 157, 167, 168, 170
- love symbolism
of apple tree, 138
of columbine, 153
of fountain, 120–121
of hawthorn, 130
of lily, 150
of lion, 72
of nightingale, 84
of oak, 128
of orange, 125
of pansy, 127–128
of rose, 122–124
of unicorn, 29–30, 45, 46, 47, 138, 143
- LYDGATE, JOHN, 116
- lymerer, 95, 96, 97, 185
- M**acer's Herbal, 116
- Machaut, Guillaume de, 120
- madder, 211
- Madonna lily, 149–150
- maiden, tamer of unicorn, 11, 19, 21, 23, 29, 38, 42–44, 55, 102, 136, 140
in fifth Unicorn Tapestry, 13, 42, 48–49, 104, 136, 182

love symbolism of, 45–48, 53
 marriage symbolism of, 52
 MANDEVILLE, SIR JOHN, 129
 Marchand, Jean, 163
 Marchant, Guy, print published by, 206
 MARCO POLO, 36
 MARGIVAL, NICOLE DE, 78, 140
 marguerite, 132
 Marguerite of Flanders, dog collars of, 95, 172
 MARIE DE FRANCE, 134, 140
 marigold, 126–127
 marriage
 apples and, 138
 carnations and, 146–147, 148
 marigolds and, 127
 roses and, 124
 unicorn and, 52
 Mass of Saint Gregory tapestry, 215
 medlar, 125–126
 millefleurs tapestries, 111, 179, 213
 mirror, 46–47, 53, 82, 119
 monoceros, 14, 15, 19
 Montault, Barbier de, 224

Narwhal tusk, 29
 nightingale, 84
 Noah's ark, 39, 73

Oak, 128–129
 and Christ's crown of thorns, 30, 138
 orange, 124–125
 orchid, 143
 ORTUS SANITATIS
 on hyena, 80
 on medlar, 126
 on nightingale, 84
 on orange, 125
 on peach, 133
 on pheasant, 80
 on primrose, 133
 on rabbit, 80
 on squirrel, 88
 on weasel, 79

Palace of the king, 13, 15, 19, 21, 25, 43, 44, 162
 pansy, 127–128
 panther, 76–78
 and the beloved, 78, 140
 and Christ, 77
 design of, second Unicorn Tapestry, 90
 PANTHÈRE D'AMOURS, LA, 78, 140
 Paris (mythological figure), 56, 137
 partridge, 84–85

Passion, the
 goldfinch and, 83
 hawthorn and, 131
 holly and, 138
 oak and, 129
 unicorn and, 25, 45, 51
 peach, 133
 pelican, 51, 58
 periwinkle, 118
 Perseus tapestry, 204–205
 PETER ABELARD, 68
 PETER OF MORA, 121, 122, 128
 Petrarch, Francesco, 57–58, 79
 pheasant, 80–82
 Philip the Good
 bed-chamber tapestries of, 173
 cartoons made for, 193
 dog collars of, 95
 and Feast of the Pheasant, 82
 millefleurs tapestry of, 142, 213, 217
 secret cipher of, 169, 170
 tapestry commissions of, 171, 175, 176, 207
 PHILIPPE DE THAUN
 on dove, 88
 on lion, 68
 on partridge, 84
 on stag, 73
 on unicorn, 21
 PHYSIOLOGUS, 17, 21
 of Berne, 19, 43, 68
 of Brussels, 43, 71
 of Izmir, 43–44
 Pierpont Morgan Library
 bestiary, 71, 77
 PIERRE DE BEAUVAIS, 21
 Pigouchet, Philippe, prints
 published by, 196, 197, 201, 206
 pimperl, 127
 Pinchart, Alexandre, 213
 pink. *See* carnation
 plantain, 111, 135
 PLINY
 on blackberry, 140
 on clary, 132
 on cuckoo-pint, 144
 on frog, 89
 on goldfinch, 84
 on holly, 138
 on oak, 138
 on orange, 125
 on pomegranate, 131
 on thistle, 152
 on unicorn, 14
 on walnut, 115
 on yellow flag, 133
 pomegranate, 107, 131–132, 143, 176
 primrose, 111, 132–133
 prints, French, 40, 136, 194–200, 205, 206
 Psalters, 37–38, 39, 44
 PSEUDO-APULEIUS
 on blackberry, 141
 on columbine, 152, 153
 on periwinkle, 118
 on thistle, 152

PSEUDO-HUGO OF SAINT VICTOR
 on heron, 87
 on oak, 128
 on unicorn, 23

QUEEN MARY'S PSALTER, 39, 41, 71, 73, 78, 79

Rabbit, 80
 Raphael, tapestry cartoons of, 193, 217

Redemption, the
 goldfinch and, 83
 holly and, 138
 unicorn and, 11, 25, 51

Redemption tapestry (Metropolitan Museum), 193, 214

re èm, 15

Resurrection, the
 butterfly and, 89
 daffodil and, 119
 lion and, 51, 68, 71
 unicorn and, 25, 143

Reuwich, Erhard, 37

Reynaud, Nicole, 201–202

rhinoceros, 15, 36

Rochevoucauld. *See*
 La Rochevoucauld

Rockefeller, John D., Jr., 225–227, 228

Rodière, Roger, 165, 224–225

ROMANCE OF THE ROSE
 fountain in, 82, 120

medlar in, 125

peach in, 133

periwinkle in, 118

rose in, 122–123

thistle in, 152

violet in, 116

Roome, Jan van, 193, 214

Rorimer, James Jr., 226, 227, 228
 theories of, concerning
 Unicorn Tapestries, 156–157, 159–163

rose, 111, 120, 121–124

running hounds. *See* hounds

Sage, 111, 126

Saint Mary's thistle, 151–152

Saint-Pol, Count of, 155, 170, 171, 173

Salet, Francis, 213

Schneebalg-Perelman, Sophie, 213

scilla, 144

SECRETS OF ALBERTUS MAGNUS, 126, 150

seigneur of the hunt, 48, 95, 96, 102, 185

Serbat, Louis, 224

serpent

 foe of stag, 73

 poisoner of waters, 27, 54, 55

 tempter of Adam and Eve, 136

Sforza, Battista, 58

Shepherd tapestry, 217

SIGEBERT OF GEMBLoux, 116, 150

Souchal, Geneviève, 205–206

squirrel, 88–89, 138

stag, 73–74, 76

 dismemberment of, 107

 hunting of, 74, 91–92, 96, 97, 101

 killing of, 105

Stammmler, Jacob, 213

stock-gilliflower, 148–149

STRABO, WALAHFRID, 121, 150, 151

strawberry, 117

strawberry tree, 134

Stuttgart Psalter, 37–38

swan, 87–88

Tapestries

 for bed chambers, 173–174, 178

 cartoons for, 178, 193, 208

 commissioners of, 175, 176, 193

 designers of, 193

 dyes and dyeing for, 211–212

 inscriptions in, 193, 215, 222

 looms for, 207–208, 209

 millefleurs, 111, 179, 213

 signatures in, 193–194, 214

 weaving of, 177, 207–209

TERTULLIAN, 17

THEOBALD, BISHOP, 68, 73, 76

Theodore Psalter, 44

THIBAUT, COUNT OF CHAMPAGNE, 30

thistle, 78, 151–152

Tournai, 212, 214

trees, planting of, 114, 119

Tristan and Iseult, 46, 47, 134, 140

Trojan War cartoons, 193, 201–202

UNICORN

 with Adam and Eve, 40, 51, 56, 79, 137

 in Annunciation allegory,

 23, 25, 44, 49–50, 51, 56, 102

 belief in, 13

 in bestiaries, 21, 25, 30, 41, 45, 46, 107

 in Bibles, 15, 17, 37, 38, 39, 40

 in books of hours, 41, 53, 54–

 55, 56, 197, 199, 202

 capture of, 13, 19, 21, 23, 30,

 44–47, 107

 chained, 30, 107, 143

 and chastity, 57–58, 60, 65

 Christ symbolized by, 17, 19,

 21, 25, 27, 30, 40, 43, 50, 136, 143

 and Christ's crown of thorns,

 129, 138

 collared, 30, 43, 51, 52, 76, 143

 in Creation scene, 39

UNICORN (*continued*)

death of, 13, 47, 105, 182, 188
 fidelity of, 47, 49
 fierceness of, 13, 14, 15, 19, 36,
 40, 41, 42, 45, 60, 101–102
 in Garden of Eden, 40, 56, 137
 in Garden of Love, 55–56
 gentleness of, 15
 in heraldry, 34, 60–61, 63, 65,
 171
 hunted by angel Gabriel, 23,
 49–50, 51, 56, 102, 136, 140
 in Incarnation allegory, 19, 21,
 25, 44, 102, 136, 137
 on jewel box, 46
 and Judgment of Paris, 56
 in Lady with the Unicorn
 Tapestries, 13, 34, 63, 65
 with lion, 37, 41, 58, 60, 63, 65,
 73
 as lover, 29–30, 46, 47–48, 107,
 143
 loyalty of, 30
 and marriage, 52
 on marriage coffret, 58, 60
 on medal, 34, 52
 on Minnekästchen, 47, 55, 58,
 76
 and the Nativity, 39
 and Noah's ark, 39
 in paintings, 50–51, 56, 57, 58
 in Passion allegory, 25, 45, 51
 in *Physiologus*, 17, 19, 21, 27,
 43
 and pomegranate, 107, 143
 in prints, 40, 52, 54, 55, 194,
 197, 199
 as printer's device, 199
 in Psalters, 37–38, 39, 44
 as purifier of waters, 13, 15,
 27, 54–56, 58, 60–61, 96, 119
 in Redemption allegory, 11,
 25, 51
 in Resurrection allegory, 25,
 143
 taken to lord and lady of
 castle, 13, 15, 21, 49, 105, 182
 taken to palace of king, 13, 15,
 19, 21, 25, 43, 162
 tamed by maiden, 11, 13, 19,
 21, 23, 38, 42–44, 45–48,
 49–53, 55, 104, 136, 140, 182
 in tapestries, 13, 34, 48, 49–50,
 51, 52, 53–54, 57

in travel books, 36–37
 with Tristan and Iseult, 46–47
 and virginity, 52
 and Virgin Mary, 19, 21, 23,
 25, 44, 49, 50, 51, 56, 102,
 136, 137, 140
 with wild men and women,
 34, 52
See also hunt of the unicorn;
 Unicorn Tapestries
 unicorn's horn
 drinking cups of, 14, 15, 29
 given to lord and lady of
 castle, 107
 horn of salvation, 17, 50
 repeller of poison, 13, 14, 15,
 27, 29, 53, 61

UNICORN TAPESTRIES

banners in, 160, 171
 Barbier de Montault on, 224,
 227
 as bed-chamber ensemble,
 173, 174, 178–179, 182, 220,
 221
 birds and beasts in, 68, 90
 cartoons for, 175, 176, 209
 and Cleves Master, 202
 coats of arms in, 95, 162, 165,
 171–172, 222, 224
 and Coëtivy Master, 200
 color schemes of, 191, 193, 202
 date of, 13, 177, 206–207
 design of, 176–177, 178–179,
 182–183
 designer(s) of, 34, 49, 68, 90,
 176, 177, 193, 203, 204
 dimensions of (in 1680),
 221–222
 dyes employed in, 211–212
 Émile Biais on, 165, 224
 hair styles in, 178, 186, 191
 heraldry in, 160, 162, 171–172
 inscriptions in, 23, 25, 95, 102,
 160, 172, 194, 222
 Jean Marchand on, 163
 Jules Coffinet on, 214
 Jules Guiffrey on, 224
 Louis Serbat on, 224
 lover or bridegroom in, 48–49
 and manuscript illustrations,
 200–201, 202, 203, 207
 men's costumes in, 206–207
 metal threads in, 137, 172, 173,
 211

millefleur backgrounds in,
 176, 177, 179
 as murals, 183
 original ownership of, 39, 60,
 72, 124
 in Paris, 219, 220–221
patrons for, 175, 176, 179
 and Perseus tapestry, 204–205
 personalities in, 25, 158, 183,
 185–186, 188, 191
 plants and trees in, 111, 153
 and prints, 40, 136, 194–201,
 205, 206
 restorations of, 162, 221–222,
 223, 227
 Roger Rodière on, 165, 224–
 225
 at The Cloisters, 13, 226–227,
 228
 Trojan War cartoons and,
 201–202
 at Verteuil, 162–163, 220, 223,
 224, 225
 weapons in, 188, 207
 weavers of, 208
 weaving techniques in, 209–
 211, 214
 women in, 186, 191
 workshop of, 212, 213–214,
 218
 Utrecht Psalter, 38

Venus

English daisy and, 116
 fountain and, 120
 orange and, 125
 and Paris, 137
 with unicorn, 58
 Vêrard, Antoine, prints
 published by, 40, 136, 194–
 196, 201, 206
 Verteuil, château of, 162, 163,
 172, 220, 223, 224, 225, 228
 VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, 23, 88
 violet, 111, 115–116
 Virgin Mary
 blackberry and, 140
 carnation and, 148
 cherry tree and, 112–114
 columbine and, 153
 daffodil and, 119
 English daisy and, 116
 field daisy and, 132

forget-me-not and, 135
 fountain and, 119–120
 garden enclosed and, 132
 iris and, 141–142
 Madonna lily and, 150
 marigold and, 127
 mirror and, 46–47
 pomegranate and, 131
 primrose and, 132–133
 rose and, 121–122
 sage and, 126
 stock-gilliflower and, 149
 strawberry and, 117
 thistle and, 151
 unicorn and, 19, 21, 23, 25, 44,
 49, 50, 51, 56, 102, 136, 137,
 140
 violet and, 116
 Virgin with the Fountain
 tapestry, 214
 Virtuous Women tapestries, 82,
 162, 172
 Vitry, Philippe de, 142
 VORAGINE, JACOBUS DA, 42, 54
 Vulcop, Henri, 201, 202, 203

Wallflower, 111, 127, 148

walnut, 115
 WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE,
 124
 weasel, 79
 weavers
 as designers, 208–209
 regulations concerning, 218
 weaving process
 cartoons, 207–208
 dyes and dyeing, 211–212
 hatchings, 210–211
 looms, 209
 weld, 211, 212
 Wharnccliffe Book of Hours, 53,
 119, 205
 wild men and women, 34, 52
 winter cherry, 143
 woad, 211, 212
 WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH,
 30, 72

Yellow flag, 133
See also iris

