A Fishing Party at the Court of William VI
Count of Holland, Zeeland and Hainault

Notes on a Drawing in the Louvre
by OTTO KURZ

The miniature or, to be accurate, the coloured drawing (23 : 37.5 cm) reproduced here (Fig. 1) aroused many years ago the interest of Aby Warburg, who put a photograph of it into his collection, but unfortunately he never published anything on this drawing and there is only a short reference to it in his notes 1). It was this photograph which caught my attention and induced me to investigate the history of a work of art which seems so far to have received much less attention than it deserves.

When the German Emperor Matthias died on March 23rd, 1619, an inventory was drawn up of the art treasures in his possession 2). There we find under No. 131: “Ein taffel von miniatur, wie die alte burgundsche herzog und herzogin pflegten gekleidt zu sein, mit einer vischerei”.

Any doubts as to the identity of this “taffel von miniatur” with the painting now in the Louvre are dispelled as soon as we consult Mechel’s catalogue of the Imperial Picture Gallery in Vienna which was published in 1784. The description given by Mechel is worth quoting in full 2a):

D’un ancien maitre.

Sur papier. Large de 1 pied 3 pouces; haut de 10 pouces.

1) On the folder containing the photograph Warburg wrote: “Burgund. Entwurf für Teppich? Fischer-spiel Chantilly.” Dr. Gertrud Bing who had the great kindness to go for me through Warburg’s manuscript notes, found an iconographical note saying: “Stammbuch Lipperheide. Fischende Frauen nach Mann. Lipperheide. Vgl. frühe Malerei” and, added later, “angelende Frauen vgl. v. Eyck (?)” In the Lipperheide Library there are a French and a German ‘album amicorum’ containing such a scene. Cf. Katalog der von Lipperheideschen Kostümbibliothek, 1896—1901, Nos. 849 and 1105.


2a) Chr. de Mechel, Catalogue des tableaux de la Galerie Impériale et Royale de Vienne, 1784, p.143, no.7.
When the late Gustav Glück, who was then director of the Vienna Gallery, discussed the iconographical forerunners of Rubens’ Garden of Love, he also mentioned our miniature, known to him only from the description in Mechel’s catalogue. “Leider ist das merkwürdige Stück heute verschollen.” 3) When he wrote this he was not aware that the “curious piece” had been in the Louvre for many years. 4) How it came to France is not known. Most likely it was among the paintings taken to Paris as booty in Napoleonic times, many of which were never returned. 5)

II

Little need be added to Mechel’s description of the miniature. A distinguished party has assembled in the open on the two banks of a brook which affords an opportunity for angling. Eight ladies stand on the left bank, eight gentlemen on the right, while a ninth is crouching on one knee in front of them. At first sight this gentleman might be mistaken for a woman, but headdresses like the one he sports were far from uncommon for men at the time. 6)

The clothes worn by the members of our party are typically Burgundian, a style of dress of which it has been said that it even surpassed the only two comparable extravaganzas of human apparel, the costume of the German Landsknechte in the early sixteenth century and the French court dress of the seventeenth century 7). It inspired painters for the next two hundred years, whenever they desired to depict extravagant historic costumes 8). But as far as our miniature is concerned, there can be no doubt that we are here confronted by people who display, not without pride, the latest creations of fashion. The miniatures of the Très Riches Heures easily come to mind as a close parallel, suggesting thus the years between 1410 and 1420 as the most likely date for the picture in the Louvre.

The sumptuous dresses worn by the ladies are girded high under their breasts; they trail on the ground in long trains and their extravagantly wide and long sleeves have pinked tabs and hanging cuffs. The two ladies in the

4) F. Reiset, Notice des dessins, cartons, pastels, miniatures et émaux, P.I, 1866, p.340, No. 636: “Costumes des anciens ducs de Bourgogne, de leurs femmes et de leurs enfants…. Ce dessin a été, tout au moins, entièrement retouché vers la fin du XVIe siècle ou au commencement du XVIIe. Il nous paraît même bien postérieur aux personnages qu’il représente, et ce n’est vraisemblablement que la reproduction d’un monument ancien.”
5) It does not occur in the list of paintings from Vienna which remained in France, published by E. v. Engerth, Gemälde, Beschr. Verzeichnis, Bd. 1, 1884, p. LXXXVIII. However, this list is very incomplete as may be seen from Lhotsky, loc. cit., III, p.520, where paintings are mentioned which are missing from Engerth’s list.
6) Similar head-dresses may be seen, e.g., on a drawing in Dresden with various studies, probably copies, which has been published by J. Dupont as a ‘Design for a Tapestry’, Old Master Drawings, IX, 1934—35, pl.51; G. Ring, A Century of French Painting, 1949, p.201.
7) J. Huizinga, Herfsttij der middeleeuwen, c.XVIII (Verzamelde werken, III, p.313).
8) One of the earliest examples is a figure on the ‘Presentation in the Temple’ by the ‘Master of the Holy Kinship’ (Louvre, reprod., L. Réau, La peinture au Musée du Louvre, École allemande, n.d., p.3). For a general discussion, see H. van de Waal, Drie eeuwen vaderlandsche geschied-uitbeelding, 1952, p.59ff.