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The Lady and the Unicorn: The iconography of love in a series of fifteenth-century tapestries

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ABSTRACTS

The *corpus* of literature on the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries has most often focussed on technical/stylistic aspects or attempted to explain the iconography of this work with little definitive consensus in either domain. An informative element in the history of this problematic work is the patron, who played a primordial role in the artistic process of the late Middle Ages. Although the patron of our subject has been identified as Jean LeViste and his personal and family history is relatively well-documented, few attempts have been made to place this work in the context of his reality. An investigation of the figure and his milieu will certainly benefit our understanding of the themes of heraldic display and courtly love that are most often proposed to interpret our work. The patron's situation will bring us to a new level of interpretation in this work – the glorification of women – which, like the other themes represented throughout this series, served the interests of the patron and reflected his reality.

Le corpus de littérature sur les tapisseries dites de *La Dame à la licorne* se limite pour l'essentiel à l'exploration des aspects techniques et stylistiques ou à l'explication iconographique de cette œuvre. Un element important dans l'histoire de cette œuvre problématique est bien sûr le commanditaire qui jouait un rôle primordial dans le processus artistique de la fin du Moyen Âge. Bien que la figure derrière ces tapisseries fût identifié comme Jean LeViste et que son histoire personnelle et familiale soit assez bien documentée, peu de tentatives ont été entreprises afin de resituer cette œuvre dans le contexte de son créateur. Une investigation de ce personnage et de son milieu approfondira sans doute notre compréhension de la thématique de cette série, soit l'héraldique et l'amour courtois. Cette étude du commanditaire nous menera ensuite à un niveau d'interpretation inédite – la glorification de la femme – sujet qui servira les intérêts de Jean LeViste en reflètant sa réalité.

I. INTRODUCTION

Medieval art rarely provides its students with easy answers; it is more often than not impossible to solve the mysteries of who, what, where, why, when and how that surround the production of a work. On the one hand, we are simply lacking in documentation which was either never produced or has been the victim of negligence, disaster, or time. On the other hand, the Middle Ages often seem infinitely removed from the modern mind, and despite the realism with which that world was often depicted, it is difficult today to apprehend the meaning or circumstances of medieval imagery. The *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries (figures 1-6), although among the most popular and well-known works of the late Middle Ages in France, are no exception to this rule and are perhaps one of the best examples of the difficult task that lies in understanding medieval art.

Review of Literature

The *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries were unknown to the art world until the nineteenth century when the work slowly emerged from the shadows of obscurity.[1] Mention was first made by the historian Joulietton in 1813, when he noted the existence of "Turkish" tapestries housed in the Château de Boussac in France's Creuse region. The tapestries discreetly became the property of the municipality when the castle was sold and converted into the local *sous-préfecture* in 1835. July of 1841 would be the beginning of national interest and concern to preserve this treasure, as Prosper Mérimée, then inspector for the Commission of Historic Monuments, suggested that the Royal Library of King Louis-Philippe acquire this masterpiece which was placed for the interim at the Aubusson tapestry works. While the government haggled over purchase and restoration of the work with its champion Mérimée, the romantic spirit of nineteenth-century France was enchanted by the poetic imagery of the *Lady and the Unicorn* thanks to George Sand's various descriptions in her 1844 novel Jeanne, in an article in L'Illustration from 1847, and again in the novel Autour de la table published in 1862. This treasure finally found an appropriate home when it was acquired by the Musée de Cluny on July 17th, 1877 under Edmond du Sommerand, and the following year, the *Lady and the Unicorn* was displayed to the world as an example of Flemish tapestry at Paris's *Exposition Universelle*.[2] Gallic pride, however, refused to allow credit for this work to be usurped, while

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[1] This abbreviated chronology is indebted to the thorough research and documentation that Ms. Joubert gives on the course of our work through the 19th century. F. Joubert , La Tapisserie médiévale au Musée de Cluny, Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1987, p. 66-73.

[2] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne* a été tissée à Bruxelles," Gazette des Beaux Arts, Tome LXX, November 1967, p. 253.

intellectual insatiety demanded a better understanding, and art historians began to clarify the mystery of what seemed to be an entirely unique specimen of late medieval tapestry.

Relying on the only information available – the last known location of the work in the Creuse region and its alleged Flemish production – art historians at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries attempted to determine the *Lady and the Unicorn's* "nationality." Referring to a 1422 inventory of tapestry belonging to Charles VI, the eminent Jules Guiffrey found an explanation for the series which would have been of the same family as certain *tapisseries à la marche* cited in the royal accounts. Confusing this reference to low-warp technique with a geographical reference to the Marche region of France, Guiffrey attributed the *Lady and the Unicorn* to local workshops of Aubusson located, like the Château de Boussac, in the Creuse.[3] As the Aubusson tapestry works were not active until at least the late sixteenth century,[4] Mr. Guiffrey soon retracted his theory, only to adopt the equally specious proposal that the *Lady and the Unicorn* was the product of folkloric nomadic weavers of the Loire Valley, suggested in 1908 by Marquet de Vasselot.[5] Other tapestry centres, such as Tournai,[6] were proposed, while a local tradition in the Creuse region gained popularity for its exoticism: given the oriental flavour of the lady's luxurious fashions and the many crescent moons depicted throughout the series, the work was believed to have been brought from Turkey by Prince Zizim who settled in France while exiled by his brother Sultan Bazajet II.[7] The whimsical fantasy of this legend was too naïve even for the romantic temperament of George Sand, who recognised that "le croissant n'a rien d'essentiellement turc" and is found "sur les écussons d'une foule de familles nobles en France."[8] In effect, the origins of this work were not to be found in the mysterious Orient, and the very prominent heraldry that figures throughout the series provided the first valuable clue to the history of the *Lady and the Unicorn*.

In 1882 George Callier and Edouard du Somerand identified the scarlet banners decorated with three crescents on a blue band as the arms of the LeViste family of Lyon which had risen through the ranks of society thanks to initial wealth from commerce, distinguished careers as jurists, and successful marriages with noble women. As no other family is known to have borne these arms *d'azur à la bande cossue de gueules, chargée de trois croissants montants d'argent*,[9] the patronage of a member of the LeViste family is one of the few uncontested aspects of the *Lady and the Unicorn*. However, given the size of this veritable dynasty of jurists (Appendix 1) and the lack of documentation on the work's

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[3] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 254.
[4] F. Salet, "Chronique – Tapisserie: *La Dame à la licorne*, Oeuvre Bruxelloise," Bulletin Monumental CXXVI, 1968, p. 104.
[5] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 254.
[6] F. Duret-Robert, "Tapisseries: *La Dame à la licorne*," Connaissances des Arts, July 1974, p. 32.
[7] F. Joubert, La Tapisserie, p. 77.
[8] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 253.

execution, it is virtually impossible to respond with certainty to any question surrounding the creation, existence, or history of the *Lady and the Unicorn*. Fortunately, art history does not depend entirely on written sources and a work of art is never an isolated example, despite Henry Martin's declaration that our subject represents a unique specimen related to no other tapestry.[10] The *Lady and the Unicorn* is obviously related by its background motif to every other example of French *mille fleurs* tapestry. Furthermore, comparisons with works other than *tapisseries à fond de fleurettes* have also demonstrated considerable technical and stylistic similarities which have brought researchers to agree almost unanimously that our work was produced in the famous workshops of late fifteenth-century Flanders.[11]

A comparison of the *Lady and the Unicorn* with various Flemish tapestries, such as the "Penelope" fragment (figure 7) from a *Femmes Illustres* series commissioned by Mary of Burgundy for Ferry de Clugny in the early 1480's,[12] the *Heraldic Tapestry of Philippe le Bon* (figure 8) produced in Brussels,[13] or the *History of Perseus* tapestry (figure 9),[14] reinforces the theory that the *Lady and the Unicorn* is the product of one of Flanders' thriving tapestry centres. Flanders, however, is a very general term, referring to the entire Southern Netherlands which counted numerous tapestry centres in the fifteenth century, such as Arras, Tournai, Brussels, Bruges, and Lille, the importance and influence of which at the time are difficult to appreciate with few contemporary accounts of the tapestry industry.

Furthermore, the actual weaving practices of the time confuse the "nationality" of a work, for fluid artistic exchange among cities was one of the most vital aspects of the fifteenth-century tapestry industry.[15] Cartoons and models circulated among workships (and among media); weavers would migrate from one town to another following employment; workshops would practice subcontracting when faced with an overwhelming demand. Efforts to attribute the *Lady and the Unicorn* to a given tapestry centre have proven difficult and always lack the most necessary proof of documentation.[16] The most we seem able to do, then, is to consider the specific technical traits of our work and to identify which tapestry centres active at the end of the fifteenth century practised those

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[9] A. & C.-M Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy (Saône-et-Loire) et ses Seigneurs, Màcon: Protat Frères, Imprimeurs, 1917, note 1, p. 53.
[10] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," Mémoires de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France, Number 1, Volume 77, 1924-27, p. 160.
[11] Jean-Bernard de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste, Chevalier, Seigneur d'Arcy et sa tenture au lion et à la licorne," Bulletin Monumental, Tome 142-IV, 1984, p. 397.
[12] M Crick-Kuntziger, "Un Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu de Maître de *La Dame à la licorne*," Revue Belge d'archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art, Volume 23, 1954, pp. 4-5, 13.
[13] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 256-58
[14] M. Crick-Kuntziger, "Un Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu," pp. 5-11.
[15] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *La Dame à la licorne*, Paris: Editions de la réunion des musées nationiaux, 1978, s.p.
[16] M. Crick-Kuntziger, Marthe, "Un Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu," pp. 3-20. S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 253-278.

techniques, a monstrous task that would require a completely independent study. Moreover, the fallibility of such an approach and the impossibility of a precise answer to this question, again, results from the open and continual exchanges between tapestry producers, for artists could be commissioned to work in a neighbouring city that did not practice a desired technique, as the high-warp weaver Jean de Haze was summoned from Lille to Brussels by Philippe le Bon in 1466 in order to produce his large heraldic tapestry today located in Bern.[17]

The categorisation of a tapestry as one "nationality" or another is further complicated, for Flemish weaving does not necessarily imply that an original design or a given style is Flemish, as is demonstrated by a closer comparison between the *Lady and the Unicorn* of "Hearing" (figure 2) and her sister "Penelope" (figure 7). Despite the similarities between the two female figures and various details in the two weavings, these tapestries are clearly not the work of the same artist. The *Lady and the Unicorn*, like the *History of Perseus* (figure 9) and the *Hunt of the Unicorn*, illustrates the intellectual grace, clarity, and elegance proper to French art of this time and is quite foreign to the heavier realism of the very Flemish "Penelope."[18] Although practices are poorly documented, it seems that tapestry production involved a complex process and a number of individuals who each contributed to the work's final appearance.

The first step in tapestry production involved the design of small-scale cartoons which could range in complexity from the simplest indications to a fully detailed composition. The preliminary cartoon would be elaborated with any necessary details and enlarged into a full-scale model which would serve as a guide in the final weaving process. These three steps – cartoon, model, weaving – bring us to the first difficulty in appreciating the technique and style of a tapestry, for a considerable number of people – the cartoonist, the modelist, and the weavers – would all have an effect on a tapestry's outcome. With these scant details and a significant lack of documentation on local practices and technique we can imagine the various teams that might be responsible for creating a monumental work in wool. Sometimes, the cartoonist and modelist were one and the same person; cartoons could be re-used and updated by a workshop draughtsman who might even be responsible for the final model; less adept weavers would work on simpler passages leaving the most complex or important details for their most skilled colleagues. What is more, the specific weaving technique employed by an artisan – high- or low-warp – could also alter a composition's appearance from its cartoon and model.

At this final stage, a certain degree of (artistic) freedom could be afforded the weaver depending on the form of his loom. The low-warp technique involved a horizontal loom under

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[17] J. Lestocquoy, Deux Siècles de l'Histoire de la Tapisserie (1300-1500) : Paris, Arras, Lille, Tournai, Bruxelles, Arras: Mémoires de la Commission Départementale des Monuments Historiques du Pas-de-Calais, 1978, p. 116.

which the full-scale model was placed, allowing the weaver to reproduce an exact copy. The high-warp technique (of the *Lady and the Unicorn*), which employed a vertical loom, distanced the weaver from the model and, thus, provided this final artist with much more liberty to execute the work. The design outline and colour indications would be directly traced onto the warp threads, while the model was placed behind the weaver to serve as a guide for general consultation. The weaver could even be responsible for the addition of minor details, such as the flowers and animals that characterise *mille fleurs* tapestries. This process seems to have been standard throughout Europe of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, from Jean Bondol's *Apocalpyse* series (1374-80) to Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* (1516-19) and beyond. These tapestry landmarks owe part of their renown both to the fact that they are among the rare examples for which contracts remain to document the names of the famed artists who designed them. However, the intervention of various personalities and capabilities in the entire production of a tapestry shows not only that tapestry was the result of a complex process, but also that it is difficult to determine who the "artists" responsible for such works were. In addition to the technical mysteries surrounding its production, the *Lady and the Unicorn* is stylistically complex, for the many similarities (superficial and significant) between it and other works make it easy to establish it within a considerable "family" of works in various media, while the sophistication of the compositions would seem to indicate the involvement of an artist of great talent.

Perhaps, the *Lady and the Unicorn* is the work of one of the painters who served the royal courts in the Loire Valley as France began to regain its artistic prestige from Burgundy after the defeat of Charles the Bold at Grandson in 1476. Given the importance traditionally assigned to the artists of the Loire at this time and the LeViste family's ties to the Bourbonnais region, we may suggest a personality – though vague – such as the Master of Moulins who may provide useful stylistic similarities with our work. In effect, this master's work (figures 10a & 10b) demonstrates similar attention to the luxurious detail of contemporary fashion and a sensitivity to aristocratic personality, while his angels and Virgin Mary are of the same graceful, dreamy type seen in the *Lady and the Unicorn*. However, the limited oeuvre that can be attributed to the Master of Moulins is certainly a handicap, and, on closer inspection, the few examples that we do have are only superficially related to our tapestry series. We may find more convincing and significant relations in the flourishing Parisian artistic community, often overshadowed by the importance attributed to the royal artists of the Loire Valley, but equally productive as the courts and the source of a wealth of works in various media which, like tapestry, depended on cartoons and models.[19]

It is in the rejuvenated French capital that Geneviève Souchal claims our artist is to be found, and through an extensive examination of works covering a major portion of artistic production in

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[18] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 275. G. Souchal, "Un Grand Peintre," pp. 22-49.
[19] G. Souchal, "Un Grand Peintre," p. 36.

Paris of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, she establishes the *oeuvre* of the hypothetical "Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn*" who would have been the most influential artist of his time.[20] His vast production would have spanned approximately thirty years (c. 1480-1510) and touched a wide variety of media, most notably in illumination, tapestry and the graphic arts. His wide Parisian clientele would have included the many administrators and jurists who served the kingdom in the capital, as well as the most important printers of the day and even royal personalities such as Anne of Brittany. In effect, our appreciation of the *Lady and the Unicorn's* style is enhanced particularly by comparisons with contemporary production in media that also employed cartoons and models (figures 11-16), and Ms. Souchal's exhaustive study constitutes a stylistic family for our tapestry that includes the previously seen *History of Perseus*, certain panels of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series, a great number of engravings, and even examples from a form as foreign as painted miniature.

Despite the convincing similarities between so many works, this study has been criticised for the boldness of attributing the major portion of artistic production for a span of thirty years to one man: these many resemblances and repetitions could simply represent a stylistic school that predominated in Paris at this time.[21] When we consider that the common denominator among the majority of works included in the "Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn's*" corpus is the use of cartoons and models in production, it seems possible, then, that one man was responsible for this vast repertoire, but that his work was renowned and spread through the circulation and re-use of models either produced by him or copied from particularly well-known works. Such an artist could be directly responsible for the original models of the *Lady and the Unicorn*, as French tapestry production of our period depended on designers (celebrated painters for the most important works) who would provide the basic indications for main figures and details which would eventually be projected into cartoons elaborated with *mille fleurs*, animals, and minor details designed by a draughtsman employed by the workshop.[22]

The repeated use of motifs throughout the *Lady and the Unicorn*, such as the rabbits, the weasel, and the lion cub, seems to illustrate the workshop's free use of standard or older models in the elaboration of a work. When we compare our tapestry to different *mille fleurs* examples we find that re-use occurs between different series: the unicorn of the panel known as "Sight"[23] (figure 4) seems to have been cut and pasted onto the panel of the "Unicorn Captive" in the Cloisters (figure 14).

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[20] G. Souchal, "Un Grand Peintre," pp. 22-49.

[21] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication sur la tenture de *La Dame à la licorne*," Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France, 1977, pp. 166-67.

[22] J. Jobé (ed.), P. Verlet, M. Florisoone, A. Hoffmeister, & F. Tabard, The Art of Tapestry, Translated by Peggy Rowell Oberson, London: Thames & Hudson, 1965, p. 28.

[23] We shall refer to the *Lady and the Unicorn's* individual panels according to the titles assigned them at the Musée de Cluny and based on A. F. Kendrick's interpretation of the series as an allegory of the physical senses with an

Other examples illustrate the widespread use of direct copying of standard models that obscures our general appreciation of the style of tapestry: the male figures seen in the *mille fleurs* panels of *Reading* (figure 17) and the *Concert* (figure 23) seem to be twins, while the servant in the *Departure for the Hunt* (figure 21) has been woven from Albrecht Dürer's engraving of *The Six Warriors*.

Given the unremarkable quality of its thread and the absence of precious metals, the *Lady and the Unicorn* would have fetched a relatively modest price, unlike a work such as the *Heraldic Tapestry of Philippe le Bon* (figure 8) in which the gold and silver threads are a material reflection of the princely patron's extraordinary wealth.[24] Thus, we wonder if the *Lady and the Unicorn* was an original work, or was it, like the *Scenes from Seigneural Life* (figures 17-22) in the Musée de Cluny or the Château d'Angers' *Concert* (figure 23), rather a product of the cut-and-paste method that produced a variety of less expensive *mille fleurs* tapestries popular with wealthy or ennobled burghers?[25] It would require significant wealth and considerable prestige, perhaps even royal connections, to commission a renowned artist to execute an original series. Yet, the *Lady and the Unicorn* far surpasses these other more mediocre works for the clarity of its line, the richness of its detail, and the logic of its composition. What is more, like the *Heraldic Tapestry of Philippe le Bon* the *Lady and the Unicorn* is also a reflection of the status, wealth and nobility of its patron. On a most basic level, the noble language of heraldry seen in every panel of the series attaches the material and symbolic content of these six scenes to its patron.

The *Lady and the Unicorn* is the only remaining example we have of such a mélange of heraldry and imagery, as most *mille fleurs* works were either purely armorial or representational.[26] However, given the important role standardised models played in tapestry production, it is possible that such a scheme was a common tapestry format which simply required the weaver to replace the arms represented with those of the person who paid for the work. Nonetheless, this particular imagery (despite its superficial re-uses) presents six mesmerising and original vignettes to be visually associated with the family arms that are an integral part of these very scenes. Who, then, commissioned the *Lady and the Unicorn*?

We have already identified the arms that are repeated throughout the work as those of the LeViste family, notable in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for their great wealth and highly successful careers in the French royal administration, and notable today for the relative wealth of documentation and research that retraces their dynastic rise in Lyon and Paris.[27] The next step in

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introductory of concluding piece. A. F. Kendrick, "Quelques remarques sur les tapisseries de la *Dame à la licorne* du Musée de Cluny," Actes du Congrès d'Histoire de l'Art, *III*, Paris: 1924, pp. 662-666.

[24] F. Joubert, La Tapisserie, p. 81.

[25] F. Joubert, La Tapisserie, p. 81.

[26] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *La Dame à la licorne*, s.p.

[27] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi lyonnais à la fin du Moyen Âge, Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1964. A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy. G. Souchal, " 'Messeigneurs LeViste,'" pp. 209-267.

understanding the person behind the work is, obviously, to determine which specific member of the LeViste family was the patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn*. A look at the LeViste genealogy shows the number of choices we could have (Appendix 1).[28] Obviously, it is only worth considering those members who were alive and of reasonable age at the time of the work's execution, conditions which limit us to family members alive in the broadest range from 1480-1500. But, if we consider the clothing styles and the artistic repertoire to which this work has been compared by Geneviève Souchal, we can delineate our time span with even more precision to the last decade of the fifteenth century.[29]

The particular form of the heraldry provides us with another valuable indication, for these arms are those of an adult male, who would have been the eldest member of the entire LeViste clan at the time.[30] Therefore, all females can be eliminated from our selection, as can all males from the cadet branches of the family. This leaves us with the most likely candidate, Jean LeViste (IV), who bore the full heraldry from at least 1484 until his death on June 1st 1500,[31] and his less plausible, though not impossible cousin, Antoine (II) who assumed the arms upon Jean's passing. Though the ultimate date for the *Lady and the Unicorn* (1500) should be enough proof that Antoine LeViste could not have ordered this work, certain scholars maintain the possibility that this relatively young member of the family would either have ordered the work for his marriage in the first years of the sixteenth century or would have disregarded heraldic rules and ordered the work before 1500.[32]

The first assumption is easily disproved by common heraldic usage which called for the inclusion of a spouse's heraldry in a celebration of marriage, as illustrated by such tapestries as the *History of Perseus* or the *Concert*.[33] The traditional respect for heraldic rules in the LeViste family whereby younger male members "split" their arms,[34] would seem to end the debate of this second possibility. What is more, the *Lady and the Unicorn*, beyond its visual similarities with late fifteenth-century art and fashion, distances itself from the confused and ill-defined style of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance for its purely medieval spirit: its overwhelming symbolism, loving attention to detail, and conservative themes compel us to attach this work to the art and culture of an older generation and to the era of Jean LeViste.

J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," pp. 397-434.

[28] From G. Souchal, " 'Messeigneurs LeViste,'" Tableau 1.

[29] F. Joubert, La Tapisserie médiévale, p. 84.

[30] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication," p. 168. J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," pp. 414-15.

[31] F. Joubert, La Tapisserie médiévale, p. 78. I cite this with much hesitation, because according to Geneviève Souchal's genealogical tree, Antoine LeViste, Jean's father died in 1457.

[32] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 6e période,Tome CXXX, September 1997, pp. 66-67.

[33] Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *La Dame à la licorne*, s.p. J. B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 412.

[34] J. B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 415.

Having identified the patron of our work, we arrive at the question of his intentions which, of course, are far from easy to determine. Not only are we lacking in contemporary accounts of where or when the work was hung, which might have informed us of its function and its context, but we are also at a great psychological distance from the medieval mind. In the first place, our conception of art and its functions are very different from those of the late Middle Ages; secondly, the cultural forms that determined expression in art are not only infinitely removed from our reality, they also do not exactly represent the reality of the late medieval period.

Proposal

The particularity of art in the fifteenth century is often difficult for the modern mind to apprehend, for their was no distinction at this time between artist and artisan, or between what we today label the fine and decorative arts. The *raison d'être* of artwork was not the pure expression of beauty, for art was inherently connected to practical life; its immediate purpose was to embellish its immediate surroundings and to glorify its patron.[35] Georges Duby explains that as the Middle Ages progressed, art increasingly served the interests of private patrons, such that:

> L'artiste cessa d'accompagner le prêtre dans la célébration liturgique. Il ne fut plus l'auxiliaire d'un sacerdoce. Il se mit au service de l'homme. D'un homme avide de voir, et qui voulait que fussent représentés pour lui, non point certes la réalité quotidienne – l'art plus que jamais, disposait à l'évasion – mais ses rêves.[36]

It is, thus, clear that the patron assumes much of what we today conceive as the artist's role, for the initial inspiration for a work of art came from him or her, while the artist or artisan served to translate that self-centred inspiration into visual terms.

Many scholars, therefore, explain the repetition of heraldic motifs throughout the series as proof of Jean LeViste's *parvenu* pride upon his succession to a position that conferred noble patent. However, this tapestry communicates much more than the simple acquisition of a noble title: it is an encyclopaedic illustration of noble culture, a visual representation of the standard forms that defined the "dream" of late medieval life.[37] In the fifteenth century, the knight and the lady, chivalric virtue and perfect love were the types that populated the contemporary imagination and embellished a harsh and hypocritical reality with a refined, simplistic game based on an idealised past. The elements of

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[35] J. Huizinga, The Autumn of the Middle Ages, Translated from the original Dutch by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 311.
[36] Georges Duby, Fondements d'un nouvel humanisme, 1280-1440, Geneva: Skira, 1966, p. 13.
[37] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 39-42.

this aristocratic fantasy – love and knighthood – provide the initial themes which allow us to interpret the imagery and symbolism of the *Lady and the Unicorn* in the next chapter of our study. Our understanding of the quasi-sacred form, content, and interrelation of these cultural foundations will not provide us with a clear-cut explanation of the series, but rather an appreciation for the most aristocratic values that it was intended to evoke in association with the LeViste family arms.

The inseparability of art and life of the Middle Ages, thus, obliges us to attempt a reconstruction of a work of art's context, an important part of which was the patron. Jean LeViste commissioned the *Lady and the Unicorn* to elevate his family through a very particular representations of noble culture. But, are these eclectic images simply the awkward *arriviste* pretension of a man recently ennobled? Thanks to a relative abundance of documentation of the LeViste dynasty and the jurist class of late medieval France, we are able to seek a deeper understanding of the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries in a study of Jean LeViste's biography and his social position as an established member of the emerging *noblesse de robe*. An investigation of the aristocracy as a social class and image will show us that the question of who was noble is not a clear-cut definition and that Jean LeViste's claims of *noblesse* are perhaps justified. Finally, we will situate this work in the LeViste family's use of material culture as a manifestation of its noble status, and we will see that the message created by this patron expresses the material, social and spiritual reality of the aristocracy.

This monumental declaration of nobility has been considered Jean LeViste's desperate attempt to immortalise his image before the family arms passed to a cadet branch for his lack of a male heir.[38] However, it is this absence of human male figures that is so curious in this representation of chivalric love. The man is an obvious necessity for the arts of love and war, and yet Jean LeViste glorifies his arms and person through the figure of a woman. We shall then attempt in our fourth chapter to investigate the obscure history of women and their roles in love and noble culture. The images of women from the Middle Ages, like the literature directed at them, invariably reflects the ideals of men, such that representations of women (literary and visual) materialise the "idols or demons of men's fantasies."[39] What would normally be considered a limiting lack of perspective, however, actually benefits our interests for the insight it gives to Jean LeViste's message of the perfection and nobility of the female soul. We finally will appreciate the totality of the *Lady and the Unicorn* when we place the work in the context of the women in Jean LeViste's life: his maternal ancestors, his wife, and most particularly his daughters who were of marrying age in the 1490s. The message of nobility and the glorification of women in a garden of love would be highly appropriate statements for a father whose eldest daughter would augment her family's nobility by twice marrying into illustrious

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[38] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 67. G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," pp. 264-65.
[39] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women in the West, II: The Silences of the Middle Ages, Cambridge (MA): The Bellknap Press, 1992, p. 267.

noble houses. Rather than lament his lack of male heir in the *Lady and the Unicorn*, it would seem that Jean LeViste celebrates "his women" as a monument to his family and himself.

II. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

Mille fleurs tapestry and the Lady and the Unicorn

The *Lady and the Unicorn* is perhaps the most admired example of typically French late medieval tapestry known as *mille fleurs*. Characterised by a red or dark blue background covered with a multitude of small flowers, this charming form in effect presents thousands of blossoms as the backdrop to relatively simple compositions which usually depict heraldic decoration, themes taken from noble culture, or more rarely, religious subjects. The exact origins of the highly decorative motif are rather obscure, although it may simulate more traditional decorative forms of both religious and secular nature.[40] Although its earliest appearance is uncertain, we can divide *mille fleurs* tapestries into three broad chronological groups which illustrate thier general development throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[41]

The first period is dated to the third quarter of the fifteenth century and is traditionally characterised by stylised flowers that are tightly packed into a checkerboard pattern which most often serves as the support for heraldic displays;[42] this primitive form would develop into the perfection marked by the *Heraldic Tapestry of Philippe le Bon* (figure 8). We, however, should not abruptly limit our appreciation of early *mille fleurs* tapestry to armorial works, for in this same time period, we note early developments in representational scenes on a similar floral pattern. Although their backgrounds are less densely filled, such works as *The Giving of the Roses* (figure 24) and *Couple sous un dais* (figure 25) demonstrate that the decorative motif of *mille fleurs* was appropriated for primitive representational compositions in wool. By the last quarter of the fifteenth century, the depiction of human figures on the floral background evolved into the "classic" style of *mille fleurs* tapestry, in which the background is characterised by more realism and diversity seen in two general types: planted bouquets on the dark blue or green ground or, more rarely, picked branches on a red ground.[43] These two forms provide the poetic setting for elegant personages displayed in the leisurely occupations of noble life or characters from contemporary literature, arranged usually in rather haphazard compositions. The third and final phase of *mille fleurs* development takes us into the first twenty-five years of the

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[40] It is possible that the *mille fleurs* motif simulates bouquests of flowers attached sheets of bunting that were a commmon decoration employed for festivals and processions. J. Jobé, (ed.), P. Verlet, , M. Flotisoone, A. Hoffmeister, & F. Tabard, The Art, p. 16. It has also been suggested that this tapestry recreates typical domestic decoration whereby the floor would be covered with cut branches of flowers in the spring and summer. A. Erlande-Brandenbug, *La Dame à la licorne*, s.p.

[41] "Les Trois Ages de la tapisserie mille-fleurs," Connaissance des Arts, n° 45, 15 November 1955, pp. 30-35.

[42] "Les Trois Ages," p. 31.

[43] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 266.

sixteenth century when the background motifs increase in elaborateness and mingle with small bushes and trees as a backdrop to a more organised garden that serves as the landscape setting for typical representational scenes of noble culture. These developments and the tentative appearance of perspective signal the end of the classic phase of *mille fleurs* production and in some respects the decline of monumental decorative arts in general. Henceforth, tapestry will conform to the canons of Italian Renaissance art, only to finish as the means to display imitations of the painted canvas in wool.

If we place the *Lady and the Unicorn* in the context of these three phases, we realise that our work truly merits its fame as the ultimate example of French *mille fleurs* tapestry. Situated at the end of the classic period, in the final decade of the fifteenth century, this series achieves a perfect culmination of traditional motifs combined with artistic innovation. The red background is elaborated by a variety of cut floral branches including bluebells, foxglove, daisies, violets, and marigolds, among which is depicted a peaceful menagerie of fierce and tame, wild and domestic animals such as lion cubs, lambs, rabbits, dogs and monkeys. The focus of each panel is a dark blue island, enclosed by a crenellated border and filled with yet another variety of flora and fauna. This contrast of background and foreground unites the two basic forms of *mille fleurs* motifs: the rare red "vermeil" ground with picked flower branches and the more common dark blue ground with planted bouquets. This combination of two traditional motifs results in a significant accomplishment whereby the designer provides a stage-like setting that allows him to create an organised and semi-perspectival composition, yet does not let these more painterly concerns overpower the decorative nature of his tapestry.

It is on this "stage" that the action in each scene takes place. The setting for each "episode" recalls the garden of the *Song of Songs*, with an enclosed meadow shaded by varying combinations of oak, holly, pine and orange trees. Every scene forms a triangular composition, the apex of which is an elegantly dressed lady engaged in a variety of activities; in four of the six panels she is attended by a female servant. In the scene commonly known as "Taste" (figure 1) the lady feeds a green bird perched on her gloved hand; in "Hearing" (figure 2), she plays an organ; "Smell" (figure 3) shows her making a chaplet of carnations; in "Sight" (figure 4), she shows a unicorn his reflection; she holds a banner of the LeViste family arms in one hand and a unicorn's horn in the other in the panel entitled "Touch" (figure 5); in the final scene, she is presented with a rich jewellery box filled with gold and jewels (figure 6).

As its title indicates, the *Lady and the Unicorn* involves another character, the unicorn, whose pendant figure is a lion. The latter has a consistently heraldic role on the left of each composition as he bears the arms of the LeViste family that are richly displayed on gold-trimmed "velvet" banners and pennants, on escutcheons, and even on the blue lances decorated with crescent moons. The unicorn also serves as arms bearer, but his role is more complex as he actually participates in two of

our six scenes: in "Sight" he abandons his heraldic function entirely and sits upon the lady's knee to gaze at his reflection in the golden mirror held in his mistress's hand; in "Touch" he participates both in the action and in the armorial display. This dual role of the unicorn illustrates the dual nature of our tapestry: on the one hand this is a heraldic work as many *mille fleurs* tapestries traditionally were; on the other, these scenes are representational and the visual harmony of the six panels clearly suggest a coherent thematic programme to be associated with the LeViste arms.

The heraldic function of this work has certainly not gone unnoticed,[44] and the prominence with which the LeViste family arms are repeated on a monumental scale has even been suggested to be a sign of the patron's *nouveau riche* pride.[45] In fact, armorial symbolism is repeated throughout this work beyond the banners, pennants, escutcheons and lances that are held by the animals, for heraldry was not limited to the abstract symbols that constituted a family crest. The motto was an essential part of an individual's heraldry, and we have numerous examples from the fifteenth century that recall to varying degrees the phrase *A Mon Seul Désir* embroidered on the tent in the sixth panel: René of Anjou's *Ardent Désir*,[46] Charles VIII's *A Mon Attente* or the *A Jamais (Vous Seul)* of Phillip of Cleves.[47] We may also see that the figures often considered as simple arms bearers,[48] that is the lion and the unicorn, make more siginficant contributions to the heraldic message communicated throughout this work.

Emblems, an important part of the abstract language of heraldry, provided some of the most diverse and obscure references to individuals, relationships, and states of mind: the knotty branch of Louis d'Orléans symbolised his resolve in the conflict with the house of Burgundy as explained by the accompanying motto *Je l'ennuie*, while the silver joiner's plane and motto *Je le planerai* of John the Fearless communicated his determination to break his cousin's spirit.[49] Animals, including fantastic beasts such as the griffon, the winged stag and, obviously, the unicorn,[50] were particularly popular in personal heraldry, not only for the symbolism that they conveyed, but also for the more or less clever word games they could create. For example, Charles VIII's childhood fiancée, Margaret of Austria chose the ostrich (in French, *autruche*) as her personal emblem for the reference it made to her native country (*Autriche*).[51] In this light, we may consider the lions seen throughout our series as a reference to the patron's native city of Lyon. Even more personal references could be created by animal

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[44] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 214. S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 265. A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication," p. 170. J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 412.
[45] C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé les tapisseries dites de *La Dame à la licorne*?" La Revue de l'Art, 55, 1982, p. 54. A. Erlande-Brandenburg, La Dame à la licorne, s.p.
[46] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer au Moyen Âge, Paris: Éditions du Félin, Philippe Lebaud, 1997, p. 211.
[47] J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 413.
[48] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 214. S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 265.
[49] J.-P. Lecat, Quand flamboyait la Toison d'or, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982, p. 124.
[50] E. Bourassin, Pour Comprendre le XV[e] Siècle, Paris: Éditions Tallandier, 1989, p. 24.

associations; thus, we note the choice of the bear displayed in Guillaume Juvenal des Ursins' heraldic tapestries in the Louvre. As the bear (*oursin*) created a homonym for the patron's family name, so the unicorn has been shown to suggest the name LeViste, since the unicorn, the fastest animal of all, was a symbol for *ui(s)tesse.*[52]

The meaning of the scenes

The heraldic aspect of our work is far from having been entirely explored, perhaps because the unicorn and the lion are often limited to a purely heraldic role. Our appreciation of the *Lady and the Unicorn* should, however, not be limited to its heraldic function, for unlike most armorial tapestries, our work associates these arms with a complex iconographic programme. It is clearly necessary to understand what is represented in this work beyond the simple description of the lady's actions in each panel; however, as proven by the considerable number of implausible interpretations of this tapestry, the iconographic programme's complexity and the symbolism's obscurity hardly lend themselves to facilitate the reading of the *Lady and the Unicorn.*[53]

The first plausible interpretation of the series was proposed by A. F. Kendrick who identified it as an allegory of the five senses with the sixth panel either as an introductory or concluding piece.[54] The series would be explained as follows:

Figure 1, Taste: The lady selects a treat from the chalice presented by her servant to feed to the bird perched on her hand. This sense is also illustrated by the monkey in the foreground

Figure 2, Hearing: The lady plays an organ that is activated by her servant.

Figure 3, Smell: The lady makes a chaplet of carnations selected from a golden platter held by her servant. Again, a monkey illustrates this sense as he smells a rose taken from a basket.

Figure 4, Sight: The lady is seated with the unicorn in her lap. She shows him his reflection in a large golden mirror.

Figure 5, Touch: In her right hand, the lady holds a LeViste banner atop a lance; in her left, she holds the unicorn's horn.

Figure 6, *A Mon Seul Désir*: Introduction/conclusion?[55]

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[51] E. Bourrasin, Pour Comprendre, p. 25.
[52] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne,*" p. 150. G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 214 & p. 248. K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne* : A Reinterpretation," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 6e période, Tome CXXX, September 1997, p. 254.
[53] For a comprehensive review of past and present theories, see F. Joubert, La Tapisserie médiévale, p. 78.
[54] A.F. Kendrick, "Quelques remarques," pp. 662-666.

It is this last piece that has caused art historians much irritation, for neither the inscription *A Mon Seul Désir*, nor the lady's action correspond to the scheme of the five senses. It is this complication that has brought certain scholars to consider this last panel and its inscription to be the key to understanding the allegorical theme represented in the *Lady and the Unicorn*.

A potential parallel for this inexplicable sixth depiction of the lady was identified by Sophie Schneebalg-Perelman who noted the former existence of a similar series that originally belonged to Prince Erard de la Marck, Prince-Bishop of Liège from the early sixteenth century.[56] Entitled *Los Sentidos*, this work is recorded in a 1548 inventory as representing the five physical senses introduced by a sixth panel bearing the inscription *Liberum Arbitrium*. It has, thus, been suggested that the inscription *A Mon Seul Désir*, finds its explanation in the Latin phrase meaning "according to one's free will:" the *Lady and the Unicorn* would therefore illustrate that one may use her senses "selon son libre arbitre, à sa convenance, *à son seul desir.*"[57] This interpretation would seem to find its verification in the lady's action, as she chooses jewels from the chest according to her free will or her only desire. However, without the actual scenes from *Los Sentidos*, we cannot fully appreciate any potential analogies. Granted, the similarities in the number of panels, the general subject, and the inscriptions are convincing; however, the very Renaissance spirit of this interpretation is troubling, and *Liberum Arbitrium* is to be interpreted, in Ms. Schneebalg-Perelman's own words "selon le goût de la Renaissance." The Gothic spirit that conceived this work would unlikely permit a representation of females engaged in such free and uncontrolled behaviour; it, therefore, seems necessary to find an interpretation that respects the medieval mentality of our work, for as Ms. Schneebalg-Perelman pointed out herself, "*La Dame à la licorne* n'offre aucune caractéristique de l'art de la Renaissance, mais une image radieuse de l'art gothique à son apogée."[58]

Late medieval humanism has provided a more appropriate parallel between *A Mon Seul Désir* and *Liberum Arbitrium*, for as Alain Erlande-Brandenburg has explained:

> Pour Socrate et Platon, le libre arbitre était l'aptitude à bien faire, qui nous est enlevée par nos passions, c'est à dire par la soumission à nos sens. Le geste de la jeune femme prend alors tout son sens, d'une très belle portée morale. Suivant sa propre volonté, elle renonce aux bijoux, symbole des appétits de nos sens.[59]

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[55] We shall employ the order of panels displayed at the Musée de Cluny, that is: "Taste," "Hearing," "Smell," "Sight," "Touch," and "A Mon Seul Désir."
[56] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 262-263.
[57] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 263-64.
[58] S. Schneebalg-Perelman, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 275.
[59] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication," p. 179.

This moralising interpretation, officially accepted by the Musée de Cluny, does have a considerable weakness: aside from the apparent incoherence between these very innocent representations of pleasure (the lady does not really partake in the sensuality evoked by the allegory) and a rather negative condemnation of the physical senses,[60] the reading of the *Lady and the Unicorn* that depends on the notion of *Liberum Arbitrium* ignores the images that are repeated throughout this work and that conform to what may be defined as the "iconography of love."

Although the identification of love iconography in the *Lady and the Unicorn* is hardly original,[61] it has met with relative little success having been condemned by the former director of the Musée de Cluny where the *Lady and the Unicorn* is housed.[62] The greatest weakness with previous such interpretations is the definition of our work as a celebration or commemoration of the marriage of a LeViste male,[63] for were this a wedding gift, the bride's arms would necessarily appear with those of her groom,[64] as seen, for example, in the tapestries of *History of Perseus* or the *mille fleurs* tapestry, *The Concert* (figures 9& 23). This difficulty, however, does not exclude the possibility of a representation of love, and this theme deserves more investigation, not only because of the proliferation of standard elements of the iconography of love throughout the series, but perhaps more importantly, because romance was an essential element of elite culture and expression in late medieval society, as reflected in contemporary literature and in a variety of visual media.

The most recent interpretation of the *Lady and the Unicorn* has proven more successful than past attempts to place our work in the context of love,[65] such that this "reinterpretation" is now presented at the Musée de Cluny as an alternative reading to that of Alain Erlande-Brandenburg.[66] As our tapestry does not conform to standard representations of the five senses and its sixth panel remains highly problematic, Kristina Gourlay has suggested that motifs with a more solid symbolic foundation, most notably the representation of the unicorn upon the maiden's knee, may provide us with the means to a proper interpretation of our work. This very familiar motif (previously identified as "Sight") evokes Richard de Fournival's thirteenth-century Bestiaire d'Amour story of the taming and capture of the unicorn. Because this theme was "so popular that any visual pairing of maiden and unicorn, particularly one that resembles the classic pose as clearly as the pair in *Sight*, would evoke the bestiary story in the viewer's mind," Ms. Gourlay has proposed a new explanation for our

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[60] C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 55.
[61] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 47-72. C. Nordenfalk, "The Five Senses in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XLVIII, 1985, pp. 1-22 & "Qui a commandé, pp. 52-56.
[62] Erlande-Brandenburg, Alain, "Communication," p. 168 and *La Dame à la Licorne*, s.p.
[63] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 67. C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 56, & "Les 5 sens dans l'art du Moyen-Âge," La Revue de l'Art, 34, 1976, p. 26.
[64] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *La Dame à la licorne*, s.p. J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 412.
[65] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," passim.
[66] N. Garnier, "*The Lady and the Unicorn*," Guided visit, Musée de Cluny, Paris, France, 15 February 1998.

six scenes which, thus, become a "romance based loosely on the Bestiary story" involving members of the LeViste family. The unicorn would be the chivalrous lover (the patron), and the lady would be the beloved maiden who entices her suitor with her noble qualities.

The tapestry series, apparently commissioned to commemorate or celebrate the patron's marriage, would be reinterpreted as follows:

> Taste → Pursuit: The earliest stage of love and courtship begins this romance and is symbolised by the lady's "bird of prey" which recalls the well-known "hunt of love" motif. The lady pursues her lover by enticing him with her qualities: her nobility symbolised by the "hawk", her wealth symbolised by the "pearls" contained in the chalice, and her virtue symbolised by the rose hedge behind her.
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> Hearing → Harmony: The illustration of the lady's noble qualities continues as she proves her refinement by playing the organ. Music would also symbolise the harmony that exists between two lovers.
>
> Smell → Recognition: The very common motif of garland weaving is used here to illustrate the next phase in the romance: having recongnised that the unicorn has been attracted by her noble qualities, the lady weaves a chaplet for her suitor as a "token of her returned interest."
>
> Sight → Capitulation: In the first scene where the lady actually interacts with her unicorn suitor, Ms. Gourlay recognises the Bestiary image in which the lover finally succumbs to the lady's charms and enters her embrace. This traditional symbol of chastity combined in this scene with the suggestiveness of the lady's lifted skirt would symbolise the balance of virtue and sexuality that make a perfect marriage.
>
> Touch → Capture: Having captured the unicorn's heart (symbolised by the background animals wearing collars), the lady now has the right to bear her lover's arms in marriage.
>
> *A Mon Seul Désir* → Resolution: To symbolise marriage, the lady renounces her personal heraldry, symbolised by the elaborate flower-link necklaces worn in the rest of the series. By removing her "device" the lady prepares herself to assume the heraldry of her husband.

Despite the appeal of this interpretation, it does have two major weaknesses. First, as with earlier attempts to identify the *Lady and the Unicorn* as a marriage gift or commemoration, this study does not take into account the heraldic tradition that would have required both spouses' or fiancés' heraldry to appear. Second, the motif of the capture of the unicorn, although highly standard in love iconography, does not automatically indicate that the Bestiary romance (or a variation on that theme) is necessarily represented. That very motif could itself symbolise the Virgin Mary or the Incarnation, while the lady holding a mirror was an emblem for the cardinal virtue of Prudence. The maiden and unicorn motif was part of a well-established tradition for symbolising and representing amorous themes that was based on a wide variety of imagery even older than the Bestiaire d'Amour. Influences from antiquity, Christianity, sacred and profane literature feudalism, and even Arab culture

contributed to the late medieval social construct of love, which was a powerful and popular image at this time. The wealth of contemporary visual representations of the medieval "art of love" allows us to appreciate the repertoire of its symbolism and, hence, to enlarge our appreciation of the meaning of the *Lady and the Unicorn*.

The Iconography of Love

Since ancient times, the setting for love has been the garden. The *locus amoenus* of antiquity was identified as the home of Venus and as such, was eventually transformed from the "lovely place" to the "place of love."[67] By the late Middle Ages, the love garden was perhaps even more popular in literary and visual representations, as the bucolic setting became nearly canonical for any amorous theme and could be indicated by a certain number of elements, standard since the time of Virgil: an enclosure, flowers, trees, animals, birds, a central water source.[68] The actual visual form that the garden took in the Middle Ages, though, shows that this formula was not fixed and could be adapted to the thematic and, or compositional requirements of a representation. Variations on this theme, such as the *Sixth Commandment* (figure 26) or the *Garden of Paradise* (figure 27), illustrate the potential variety of garden imagery which could convey a negative moral or illustrate the bliss of divine grace. Biblical gardens would, in turn, be incorporated into the repertoire of the *locus amoenus* which by the end of the Middle Ages included details from the gardens of Paradise, Eden, and the Song of Songs. The *Lady and the Unicorn*, thus, gives us a perfect example of the late medieval garden of love: the enclosed island, reminiscent of the *hortus conclusus*, contains the necessary flora and fauna symbolic of the peace, fertility, and abundance of paradise, and we appreciate the artist's compositional restraints which required him to eliminate the fountain or water source that is commonly seen in many romantic arbours. Furthermore, the very scenes depicted within this garden of love also correspond to a fairly consistent repertoire of themes and motifs in the iconography of love, and we can, thus, find similar representations in a variety of media for compositions or details that may seem problematic.

It is not surprising that A. F. Kendrick identified our series as an allegory of the five senses: they were a common element not only of the medieval art of love, but of sacred and profane representations love gardens, as we see depicted in the miniatures of the *Sixth Commandment* and the *Garden of Paradise*, in the engravings of the *Large Garden of Love* and *Lovers by a Fountain*, as well as in the fresco of the *Month of May* (figures 26-30). Not only is love the power most commonly evoked to

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[67] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love in 15th-century Netherlandish and German Engravings : Some Studies in Secular Iconography in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1974), Ann Arbor (MI): University Microfilms International, 1985, p. 12.

justify the benefits of the senses,[69] the discovery of the universe of romance naturally begins with sight which leads to the heart and soul.[70] Poem 154 of the *Carmina Burana*, thus, explains the sensual experience which proceeded from the five arrows sent by Cupid: ... *the five ways by which we get involved in love: sight; speech; touch; a mingling of lips, like a blending of nectar, conducive to the last act; and what the fifth act is Venus makes woundrously clear in bed.*[71] As pointed out by Kristina Gourlay, the five senses theory is "inadequate," however it is far from incompatible with the love theme which she proposes as the proper interpretation of the *Lady and the Unicorn*.[72] The physical senses, although they cannot fully explain the significance of the six scenes presented in our tapestry, were indispensable to the representation of love and its pleasures, for they played a role in amorous relationships. As shown by the diverse tradition of the garden motif, the forms and representation of love in the Middle Ages depended on numerous and diverse influences, and it is highly risky to attempt to explain a work of art as complex as the *Lady and the Unicorn* with one source. In order to understand or appreciate what seem to be isolated or inexplicable motifs in these six panels, we should look at the mysterious elements of each panel in the context of other representations of love.

The panel known as "Taste" at first seems quite easy to situate in the iconography of love, since it has been identified by Ms. Gourlay as an allegory of the hunt of love. In effect, hunting birds were an important symbol in the representation of love where they may appear as major and minor details. A most popular variation of the hunt of love was the hawk and heron motif, symbolic of the masculine and feminine sides of sexuality,[73] which we see in various works including the upper portion of "Hearing," "Touch," and "*A Mon Seul Désir*." The first panel in our series, though, is clearly not a hunt of love, for if we compare this small bird to the birds of prey seen throughout the series or to the lady's hawk in *L'Offrand du héron* (figure 31), we see that our bird is neither hawk, nor falcon. This diminutive green bird is more similar to a parrot or a budgie, as identified by Henry Martin.[74] Gentle birds (doves, partridges, swallows and sparrows which were associated with Venus) were also favoured in the iconography of love and were, thus, included in the menagerie of our work and other love scenes. However, it seems that the green parrot had a more significant role in medieval love, symbolic of a young lover or fiancé.[75] Henry Martin identified the motif of a green parrot perched upon a lady's hand as an allegory for *Joy*, as seen in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

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[68] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir au Moyen Age, Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1996, p.130.
[69] C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 55.
[70] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 144.
[71] The Love Songs of the Carmina Burana, Translated from the original Latin by E. D. Blodgett and Roy Arthur Swanson, New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987, p. 236.
[72] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 48.
[73] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p.
[74] Mr. Martin goes so far as to identify the bird's species either *Palaeornis Alexandri* or *Palaeornis* or *psittiacus torquatus*. H. Martin, , "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 141, note 2.
[75] C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 54.

manuscript 5066 (f° 110).[76] This most appropriate sentiment for the garden of love may be identified in another *mille fleurs* tapestry such as the *Concert* scene housed in the Louvre (figure 32). What to make, though, of the very striking similarity between "Taste" and the Swiss tapestry *Weltflucht einer Jungen Dame* (figure 71)? The title of the latter would seem to broaden the possible significations of the green parrot motif, and we shall return to this theme of retreat from the world in a further chapter. For the time being, we wish to concern ourselves with the iconography of love and, therefore, must complete our exploration of the various elements in this and the five other scenes.

The chalice held by the lady's servant is a curious and conspicuous object. Such a goblet, though, was associated with contexts of love and, as seen in the engraving of the *Large Garden of Love* or Gerard David's *Marriage at Cana*, could be offered as a betrothal gift; an actual example of such a wedding goblet may well be provided by the so-called *Monkey Cup* in the Cloisters of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[77] Let us next consider the mysterious contents of this chalice. Are these grains that the lady feeds to her parrot,[78] or is this golden cup filled with pearls symbolic of the lady's great wealth?[79] Spices were also symbolic of wealth in the Middle Ages and obviously more appropriate in a depiction of the sense of taste than pearls; moreover, depictions or descriptions of paradisiacal settings evoked the scent of spices as the "aroma of paradise." Whole cardamom grains resemble the white spherical objects in this chalice, and this spice, extremely popular in the late fifteenth century, was known at that time as *graines de paradis*.[80] The most fragant spices, such as nutmeg, mace, clove, or cardamom, were often exchanged between friends and lovers as a token of esteem, and were fashionably displayed in a vessel of gold or silver.[81] Although it is difficult to prove what exactly is contained in this chalice, we find an interesting repetition of the combined motif of "bead" filled chalice and green parrot in the miniature of *The Magic of Love* (figure 34) in which exotic spices evoke the enticing mysteries of love that captivate the green parrot or the lover.

The scene of "Hearing" represents one of the most common activities in the garden of love, music which we see represented in tapestry (the *Concert* – figure 23) and in many engravings such as the *Large Garden of Love*, *Music-making couple*, and the *Two Musicians* (figures 28, 33 & 35). This motif has been identified as an allegory of "Harmony,"[82] and does not demand further explanation, beyond its obvious indispensable role in amorous relations.

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[76] H. Martin, , "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 142.
[77] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p. 98.
[78] H. Martin, , "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 142.
[79] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 60.
[80] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 109.
[81] W. Schivelbusch, , Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants, Translated from the original German by David Jacobson, New York : Vintage Books, 1992, p. 6.
[82] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 60-61. H. Martin, , "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 143.

The representation of "Smell" also presents us with another exceedingly common motif in the iconography of love – the flower garland. The crowning of a lover with a wreath of flowers, as seen in the engravings of the *Large Garden of Love*, *Lovers by a fountain*, and *Love Garden with Chess Players* (figures 28, 29 & 36) was one of the most popular of all romantic gestures. Lonely lovers were frequently depicted weaving a chaplet in gardens,[83] and this composition was typically employed in Calendar pages to illustrate the months of April or May when began the season of love (figure 37).[84] Finally, the particular flowers represented in this scene also had strong associations with the *locus amoenus*, as the carnation was a symbol of betrothal and marriage, and the rose was the flower of Venus.[85]

The panel known as "Sight" provided Ms. Gourlay with the key to her theory, in which she admirably illustrated the importance of the motif of maiden and unicorn in love iconography and its dependence on the Bestiaire d'Amour story of the hunt and capture of the unicorn. This particular version illustrates the ambiguity of much love imagery, which often would combine eroticism (implied by the lady's lifted skirt) with a certain morality (doubly represented by the motifs of the maiden with unicorn and the *hortus conclusus* in which they sit) to represent the balance of sexuality and chastity that characterise a perfect (marital) love.[86] It would seem that this pose became so integrated into the iconography of love that it was appropriated as a typical stance for two lovers (figures 38 & 39). We should also not forget the important role the unicorn played in the system of love symbolism, for this animal, identified with the chivalrous lover, was so popular in the late Middle Ages that it was the "supreme symbol" of courtly love.[87]

The erotic suggestiveness in the fifth panel, "Touch," is much more blatant than in the previous scene, as the lady's hand grasps the unicorn's erect horn. Phallic symbolism was quite common in love imagery (notice the proliferation of daggers in an engraving like *Love Garden with Chess Players* – figure 36), but in our scene it achieves a particular tension with the unmistakable symbols of virginity (the enclosed garden, long flowing hair, and physical contact with a unicorn). The contrast between virtue and physical pleasure, however, was part of the culture of love in the Middle Ages particularly in epithalmic poetry and imagery which glorified the sexual union of two wed partners often in a frank and graphic manner.[88] However, this composition is not readily identifiable in the iconography of love. Kristina Gourlay's suggestion of "Capture" seems quite a good explanation, for as she points out, a common metaphor to describe love and its effects was

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[83] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, pp. 140-142.
[84] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 143.
[85] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 61.
[86] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 63.
[87] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, pp. 122-23.
[88] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 129-130.

imprisonment or the chains of love.[89] The bound wild animals in the background reinforce the image of the lover's captivity. However, we will see shortly that compositional parallels for this scene can be found in other contexts which will broaden our appreciation of the intended meaning for our series and our appreciation of the social significance of love in the late Middle Ages.

The final scene in our work, "*A Mon Seul Desir.*" has always proven problematic in interpreting this series; with no clear understanding of this enigmatic piece, it almost seems impossible to appreciate the *Lady and the Unicorn* completely. Despite the romantic tone of the inscription *A Mon Seul Desir* and the numerous examples of love scenes with similar tents, such as *Couple sous un dais*, *Liebesgarten mit Zelt*, or *Visite d'un chevalier* (figures 25, 40 & 41), it is difficult to situate our composition in the repertoire of love imagery, as this detail is found in a variety of specific contexts. We seem to be confronted with another original composition in which the lady's action is nearly impossible to interpret. Does she choose or replace the jewels in the casket? Kristina Gourlay has related this scene to a marriage theme, which we propose to accept, however we beg the reader's patience, as we hope to achieve the means to explain this most mysterious element by the end of our paper.

Armes et Amours

It is these last two panels which seem to be pure invention in the iconography of love. However, a solid compositional parallel for "Touch" may be found in representations of love's flipside: knighthood. The undeniable similarity between the lady's pose and depictions of knights such as *The Nine Worthies* (figures 42 & 43) is the first clue that the representation of love in the *Lady and the Unicorn* is also dependent on masculine military imagery. If we consider the entire series, though, we notice references to a knight which establish themselves with a certain repetitiveness. The lances that support the LeViste banners and pennants throughout the series are used for war, not for jousting.[90] The animals that support those arms were symbolic of particularly knightly virtues: the lion, like the unicorn, symbolised "the strength, ferocity, courage, fidelity and mercy" of a valiant warrior and chivalrous knight.[91] Even less conspicuous members of the menagerie that exists throughout this series could recall such events in knightly literature and history as the *voeux du faisan* or the *voeux du héron*. What is often considered the conclusion of this series, *A Mon Seul Desir*, has a rather poetic resonance with another chivalric custom when we read Huizinga's description of the fifteenth century *pas d'armes* that centred around the *fontaine des pleurs*, "For an entire year an unknown

[89] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 65.
[90] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication," p. 171.
[91] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 55.

knight on the first of each month will pitch a tent in front of the fountain. Inside the tent a lady (only a painting) sits and holds a unicorn that carries three shields."[92] Although hardly an explanation for the mysterious composition of the *Lady and the Unicorn*'s final panel, this tradition does evoke the same spirit that conceived this iconic image of the lovely mistress of the unicorn before the tent of golden tears.

Thus, the image of love depicted in the *Lady and the Unicorn* seems to be expanded by references to knightly culture and creates a larger image of noble culture in general, for love and war were the two traditional occupations of the noble class, the two elements that informed their identity and culture to the core. The dialectic between arms and love (*armes* and *amours*) was established in secular literature in the thirteenth century as the lyric love poetry of the troubadours began to influence what had previously been the purely military genre of the *chanson de geste*, and from the end of the thirteenth century throughout the late Middle Ages, *romans* that imposed an art of love were directly linked to chivalric virtues.[93] Military prowess was what rendered the knight worthy of love, and the lady came to replace the feudal lord and even God as focus of a knight's total devotion, that for which he risked his life in the throes of battle.[94] Medieval love was in fact a system based directly on the feudal model, such that the lady was her lover's mistress in the literal sense of the term: she held the "sovereign" power and he was her vassal in love. The rules of romance even borrowed the sacred forms of feudalism as in the ceremony whereby a hopeful lover, or *suppliant*, would declare himself the *homme lige* of his lady by pledging on bended knee and with clasped hands never to have another *seigneur* of love, after which the oath would be sealed with a kiss (figure 41).[95] Such ceremony gives us an indication of the very formal nature of love in the Middle Ages, and this "liturgy" is expanded by the spiritual content of love and war.

By the thirteenth century, love was an art, a knowledge or mastery of the rules that governed the practice of love and, the most basic requirement in love was the "virtue" of *noblesse*. André le Chapelain makes this clear for us in his treaty on courteous love when he excludes the Third Estate from all matters of love, for these members of society are *[t]out naturellement conduits à accomplir les oeuvres de Vénus comme le cheval et le mulet, suivant l'instinct de nature. Les travaux de la terre et les plaisirs du labour et du binage leur suffisent.*[96] In addition to the particular refinement and *savoir-faire* that love required, virtue was also essential in the art of love, particularly the typically noble virtues of generosity and courage which are foreign to the stingy and jealous nature of the *vilain*.[97] Through the association of love with traditional signs of religious mystery, the visual arts contributed to the

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[92] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 97-102..
[93] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 52.
[94] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 205.
[95] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 21.
[96] From J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 34.

sanctification of the forms and images of noble culture. Love was, thus, a purely noble domain which provided a complementary, refined identity to feudalism and elevated the warrior to a level of virtue and piety formerly only attainable through religion.[98] Despite changes in political and economic realities, the nobility maintained its superior social image while its cultural forms provided the signs of membership in this idealised elite. However, towards the end of the Middle Ages, love, though retaining its earlier forms, would be significantly altered in its spirit, as attested by the most important secular literary work of the time, the Roman de la Rose.

This monumental work presents us with a unique and historically fascinating perspective on love in the Middle Ages, for it provides the exposition of two opposed theories of romance that are based in the same tradition. Begun around 1236 by Guillaume de Lorris, this allegorical *roman* espouses all the courtly ideals of the traditional *fin'amor* and its noble practitioners who were pure, faithful, and self-sacrificing in the name of the *bien-aimée*. In the hands of its second author, Jean de Meun, the Roman de la Rose would remain an allegory of love, but of a markedly different nature than that of his predecessor. Finished around 1280, this romance, thus, provided an encyclopaedic view of the *ars amandi* by presenting the older traditional model, and Jean de Meun's criticism of courtly love's artificiality which threatened the human species by not respecting the divine decrees of Nature. His libertine views (such as the condemnation of virginity) would profoundly irk the Church, while his cynical views of female nature provoked a lively literary debate, as well as attacks from defenders of the traditional *fin'amor* and women.

Despite the shift in attitude towards love and its practice, amorous pursuit remained a purely noble domain open only to those who possessed the necessary virtues. Gone, however, was the ethical content of the older form; in the later Middle Ages, virtue was the means to achieve love and was defined by aristocratic qualities such as "carefreeness, receptability to enjoyment, gaiety of spirit, love, beauty, wealth, gentleness, freedom of spirit (*franchise*), and *Courteoisie*."[99] The Roman de la Rose provided the nobility with an encyclopaedic view of love which in turn offered the means to explain and depict their world and existence, such that the elite found not only the rules of love, but also their ideals of worldliness and erudition summed up in one romantic work. It is difficult to appreciate the impact of this *roman*, but Johan Huizinga reminds us, "It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the fact that the ruling class of an entire period obtained, in this manner, its view of life and its erudition in the form of an *ars amandi*."[100] Noble culture, it would seem, found its definition in the culture of love.

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[97] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, pp. 30-31.
[98] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 126-127.
[99] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, p. 136.
[100] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, p. 127.

The Roman de la Rose and the concepts of love it exposed were influential well into the fifteenth century which witnessed a Renaissance of chivalric values at various princely courts, such that tournaments, orders of chivalry, and the art of love were revived in form if not in spirit for the amusement of knights and ladies. Love became a worldly game for the social elite, which was preoccupied not with the transcendental nature of love, but rather with *déduit*, or the amorous divertissement and pleasure that were characteristic of both noble life and the practice of love. It would seem that the great number of depictions of love would be proof of the nobility's interest in love and its desire to see noble culture depicted on large and small scale. Thus, if we consider the specific example of the *Lady and the Unicorn* which presents an image of aristocratic culture based on the nobility's traditional roles, we begin to see that the arms repeated throughout this work are intended to attach such noble concepts to the family represented, that is the LeVistes.

Like many members of the bourgeoisie who achieved remarkable social and financial success (Jacques Cœur, Nicolas Rolin), the LeViste jurist dynasty employed art and architecture as a sign of membership in the noble class whose power they usurped. Although the nobility had lost a significant portion of its political and economic force to these *arrivistes*, the former group, nonetheless, remained the envy of the Third Estate whose rising members desired only to assimilate themselves to their social betters. As the exact reality of nobility does not coincide entirely with the images and ideals of this class, it is possible that Jean LeViste may well have been an accepted member of the noble class. In addition to the official title granted him as President of the *Cour des Aides*, his family history and biography strengthen his noble pretensions, as we shall see shortly. The *Lady and the Unicorn*, considered in light of noble imagery and LeViste artistic patronage, thus, emerges as an encyclopaedic view of spiritual and material signs of *noblesse*.

III. THE PATRON

LeViste family history and Jean LeViste's biography

When considering the new classes that were changing the identity of French society in the late Middle Ages, we may find a perfect illustration of the emerging *noblesse de robe* in the LeViste family.[101] At the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, the LeVistes migrated from Vimy (Neuville-sur-Saône) to Lyon where they established themselves as artisans. Throughout the fourteenth century, their prosperity grew and they converted their activity to commerce, thereby amassing a considerable fortune and significant influence within Lyon's urban oligarchy. Barthélemy LeViste, a successful cloth merchant, made the decisive shift from commerce to law when he decided that the legal profession would provide more security for his sons in the dark years of the plague and the Hundred Years' War.[102] Law would, thus, provide the LeVistes with the means to rise to the highest levels of society and to mark the late Middle Ages as one of the most important dynasties of the emerging *noblesse de robe.*

Having completed his studies, Jean LeViste (I)[103] returned to his native town of Lyon where he established himself as the family's, and quite possibly the city's, first doctor of law with clients of impressive stature, such as the Abbot of Ainay, the city consuls, and the Archbishop of Lyon.[104] A highly successful law practice and a series of strategic marriages made him the wealthiest man in the city, and upon his death in 1383, Jean (I) left his heirs with sufficient means to establish the LeViste line of jurists and pursue the ultimate goal of noble status.

Noble aspirations do seem to begin with this generation, particularly with Jean (I)'s eldest son Jean (II), who continued the family law practice and surpassed his father's success by serving the *princes de sang.* His career began with the Duke of Orléans, for whom Jean (II) may well have adminsitered the state of Asti, included in Valentina Visconti's dowry; in 1402, he passed into the service of Duke Louis of Bourbon whom he served as *conseiller* and, later, as chancellor of Bourbonnais from 1408 to 1415.[105] Jean (II) would continue his rise in princely administration to finish as the first man from Lyon to enter royal service. As *conseiller du roi* Charles VI, Jean (II) demonstrated such zealous dedication to the crown that, despite his despicable personality, he was

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[101] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, pp. 293-350.
[102] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 336.
[103] We shall refer to the patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn* simply as Jean LeViste, while the other members of his family will be specified by a number in parentheses: Jean (I), Jean (II), Antoine (I), etc.
[104] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 337.
[105] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 174.

appointed protector and leader of Lyon during the Burgundian threat.[106] In this career we see two of the key factors to LeViste success: service to lesser princes leading to entry into high royal functions and staunch royalism. Marriage would also be essential to this family's rise in society; thus, Jean (II)'s marriage with the noble but poor Sibylle de Bullieu set the pattern for future LeViste generations. By wedding noblewomen whose fathers could provide no dowry, rising members of the jurist class were able not only to facilitate the purchase of noble lands, but also to decrease the distance that was perceived between themselves and the *noblesse de souche.* Such alliances with noble families also lent more validity to pretensions to nobility, as Jean (II)'s proud references to his wife's *bonne et ancienne maison de Forez* would seem to strengthen his own claim to be *chevalier d'armes et de loix.*[107]

Even if the nobility of the LeVistes was contestable, Jean (II) was certain to rear his children in a manner that befit members of a grand family. All but one of his children forsook the traditional family legal profession, in favour of the more traditional noble occupations of seigneur or religious, while his daughters were wed to members of the *noblesse de souche.*[108] Upon Jean (II)'s death, although no longer the wealthiest family in Lyon, the LeVistes nonetheless found themselves endowed with considerable wealth, which had gradually been converted from urban real estate into more noble forms of capital such as rural landholdings, seigneuries and pensions.[109] As a noble testator should do, Jean (II) guaranteed the longevity of his patrimony under the clauses and stipulations of strict male primogeniture typical of noble culture. More striking are the measures he took to preserve the LeViste family arms which, in the case that one of his sons were not alive to assume the full heraldry, would be passed to a son of his daughter, Catherine, provided that the boy and his descendents would bear the arms and name of the testator as well as reside in the ancestral home at 29 rue St Jean in Lyon; were this refused, the arms and property would pass to his eldest son's daughter and in turn, to her eldest son, etc.[110]

Jean (II)'s firstborn, Antoine, lived as a seigneur should from the revenue generated by land holdings and from the very generous share left to him from his father's fortune. Jean (II)'s heir was also allied to the *noblesse d'épée* through his marriage to Béatrice de la Bussière soon after 1431; within a few years their first son Jean (the future patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn*) was born.[111] In 1434 the LeViste estate was considerably enlarged when Antoine assumed his wife's inheritence of three

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[106] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, pp. 340-41.
[107] P. Contamine, La Noblesse au Royaume de France de Philippe le Bel à Louis XII, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, p. 97.
[108] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," pp. 218-220.
[109] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, pp. 344-345.
[110] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 222.
[111] René Fédou discovered the reference to Jean LeViste's parents in the *Obituaire de la province de Lyon* which cites, "nobilis Johannis Le Viste junioris, domini Bellecurie, d'Arcy, ac consiliarii Regii," "dominus Anth. Le Viste" and Béatrix de la Bussière "uxor predicti domini Anthonii et mater domini Johannis junioris." G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," pp. 224-225.

quarters of the seigneuries of Arcy and St. Christophe. Originally bequeathed by Lancelot de Sémur to his niece Béatrice de la Bussière,[112] one quarter of the property was already in the hands of creditors, and the remaining lands were well beyond the financial means of the impoverished house of la Bussière. These lands would eventually be passed to Antoine's eldest son Jean who continued the social climb initiated generations before him. This *chevalier* and *seigneur d'Arcy* may be considered the climax of the LeViste dynasty, and his tapestries of the *Lady and the Unicorn* may well be the radiant image of an individual's and a family's ultimate social success.

Unlike his father, Jean would pursue a legal career which, significantly, can be relatively well traced.[113] His study of law began in Avignon in 1452 and finished six years later in Paris. The first years of his career are somewhat shadowy, although we find mention of him made in 1464 when he is cited as *conseiller lai* in the Parlement of Paris. It seems likely, though, that Jean LeViste began in the service of the Dukes of Bourbon, for this was a common "entry level position" for promising jurists, like the LeVistes and Charles Guillard, the patron of the *History of Perseus* tapestry. Furthermore, Jean LeViste must have been in Bourbon service for some time before 1465, the year in which the duke compensated his faithful servant with lifelong use of a house in Notre-Dame-des-Champs just outside of Paris. Jean LeViste would maintain ties to the Duchy of Bourbon despite his eventual service to the kingdom, and we find numerous rewards paid to Jean LeViste by the Bourbon family until 1489.

Like his ancestors before him, Jean LeViste benefited from his position with the Duke of Bourbon to enter into service at the Parlement of Paris, and by 1471 he would seem to have achieved a certain level of importance among his noble peers. We find *Jh Le Viste...ecuyer...conseiller du roi en sa cour du parlement de Paris* listed in the *Registre de Guerre* among the notable figures who received regular *gages, pensions et ordonnances*, such as the Dukes of Lorraine and Brabant, Tanguy de Chastel, and Charles d'Amboise. That he had entered the good graces of the "Universal Spider" Louis XI seems proven by the controversy provoked in that same year, when the king created a seventh office of *Maitre de la Chambre des Requêtes* expressly for Jean LeViste. The uproar caused by this appointment incited nearly three years of contention and debate from the other six members who sought legal recourse against what was perceived as a perversion of the administration and, perhaps, a usurpation of noble power. Jean LeViste, nonetheless, was maintained in his function in the *Chambre des Requêtes* and continued to benefit from royal favour, as may be deduced from the *gages, pensions et ordonnaces* awarded to him which totalled more than one thousand *livres tournois* from 1473 to 1475. More significantly, we begin to see at this time the increasingly important role Jean LeViste played in his

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[112] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, p. 54.
[113] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," passim.

king's service, as the faithful administrator was employed on considerable diplomatic, legal, and even military missions.

From 1473 to 1474 Jean LeViste was charged with the *avitaillement des gens de guerre en Roussillon pour le recouvrement dud. pays*, a military function which undoubtedly flattered and perhaps validated his noble aspirations. In these same years, the king entrusted his *conseiller* with diplomatic functions of the utmost importance. Various trips made to the duchy of Bar from 1473 to 1474 would seem to indicate that Jean LeViste was implicated in Louis XI's machinations that would eventually thwart Charles the Bold's imperial aspirations: LeViste's voyage to the Barrois in August 1474 coincides with Duke René II of Lorraine and Bar's decision of August 15th 1474 to abandon the Duke of Burgundy and to ally with France. On September 22nd 1476, Louis XI appointed his *conseiller* to the sixteen man jury that would investigate and judge the charges of treason and lèse-majesté brought against the king's cousin, Jacques d'Armagnac, Duke of Nemours. Louis XI would pay his faithful servant the greatest and final honour on May 22nd 1482, when the king actually visited and lodged with LeViste in his château at Arcy. Returning from a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Cléry, Louis XI paid *à son fidèle serviteur...l'honneur de loger* at the Château d'Arcy and donated a relic of St. George to LeViste's seigneurial chapel.[114] The miraculous cures that Louis XI sought in this and many other pilgrimages would not come, and the king died in 1483 to be succeeded by his young son Charles VIII, who would maintain Jean LeViste in his privileged position at the core of the royal politics.

On September 2nd 1483, a delegation was chosen by the Parlement of Paris to visit the young king and ask him for royal confirmation; one of the LeViste family was a member of this party which left Paris for Amboise where Charles VIII gave the Parlement his full approval. It is not clear whether this LeViste was Jean or his cousin Aymé who also was a member of the Parlement of Paris, but we are certain that Jean continued in his position as *conseiller du roi* and eventually was employed in delicate matters of justice, such as the 1487 trial of Philippe de Commines. The crowning achievement of his career, however, came in 1489 when Jean LeViste was appointed *president des generaulx sur le fait de la justice des aides a Paris*. As head of the *Cour des Aides*, Jean LeViste led the sovereign court that oversaw extraordinary royal finance, evaluated at thirty times more than the kingdom's regular feudal revenues.[115] This position, traditionally assigned to members of the clergy, was given only to intimate members of the royal entourage whose loyalty and tenure surpassed all others. Remunerated with 1000 livres tournois per annum as well as all expenses reimbursed for *voyages et chevauchées*, the greatest compensation for this position was certainly the noble title automatically conferred upon the President of the *Cour des Aides*.

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[114] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, p. 64.
[115] E. Bourassin, Pour Comprendre, p. 82.

As did most successful jurists, Jean LeViste likely married late in life once his career was securely established, and like many of his peers, Jean LeViste took a noble wife.[116] His spouse, however, was hardly a member of the declining *noblesse d'épée* which unloaded the costly burden of daughters on wealthy merchants and jurists. On the contrary, Geneviève de Nanterre came from a long established noble family whose name was as respected as its fortune was immense, and such a reputation would seem to attest to the relation of parity Jean LeViste established among the traditional nobility. Daughter of Damoiselle Guillemette LeClerc and first president of the Parlement of Paris Mathieu de Nanterre, Jean LeViste's wife was a considerable party who brought property, prestige, and money to her husband.[117]

Three daughters would issue from this marriage: Claude, Jeanne and Geneviève; the two eldest daughters would enter into highly successful marriages which quite reflect the dual nature of LeViste interests and lineage. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, Claude, the firstborn, would marry twice and both times with members of very illustrious noble families. In contrast, her younger sister Jeanne's husband was *conseiller du roi* and second president of parlement: despite a series of seigneuries and a noble mother, Thibault Baillet was not of the same noble stuff as his brothers-in-law, rather a peer of his father-in-law. The youngest LeViste daughter did not marry, and with no male heir Jean LeViste would be forced to concede the full family arms and a certain number of ancestral properties, including the house at 29 rue St. Jean in Lyon, to a cadet branch of his family. However, the patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn* had established himself as an independent seigneur of domains inherited from his maternal ancestry of the *noblesse de souche*, and throughout his adult life Jean LeViste continued to regain and consolidate considerable properties which had been lost from the la Bussière heritage.

In 1457, upon the death of Antoine LeViste, Jean was sole heir to his father's fortune and lands. In April of that year, Béatrice de la Bussière ceded her claims to the noble estates of Arcy-sur-Loire and St-Christophe-en-Brionnais to her son, as recorded by the *Inventaire général des titres papiers et autres ensiegnements des terres et seigneuries d'Arcy, Vindecy* where we read of the *donnation faite par Madame Béatrice de la Bussière veuve d'Antoine Le Viste a noble Jean Le Viste des terres et dépendances dicelles en date du 25 avril 1457*.[118] In 1460, Jean LeViste presented *un acte de reprise avec dénombrement de la terre d'Arcy* and its dependencies to the Duke of Burgundy, Phillip the Good, and would take full possession of the lands in 1464, as testified by his payment of one thousand livres for the last quarter of this property which had been in the hands of creditors. As full owner of these ancestral lands, the *conseiller du roi* and

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[116] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 237.
[117] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 238.
[118] J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 416.

seigneur d'Arcy duly labelled himself in this document *egregius domicellus*.[119] Finally, at the highpoint of his career and the end of his life Jean LeViste continued to assemble what would seem to be a "maternal patrimony," as he purchased the seigneuries of Saint Sorlin (1489) and Arigny (title to revenue 1491, land 1494), and a *maison forte* at Liergues (1491) all of which had formerly been possessions of the la Bussière family.[120]

Although we do not benefit from Jean LeViste's will (which was published in part before being lost), it seems likely that Claude LeViste would have been his principle beneficiary in order to maintain the integrity of his personal domain. Furthermore, she would execute the restoration of her father's seigneurial chapel, as expressed that this undertaking was to be done *le plutôt que faire se pourra par mon héritière ou héritiers*.[121] It was this chapel that was to have been the final resting place of Jean LeViste, where he hoped to preserve a public memory of himself as *chevalier* and *seigneur d'Arcy*. But, would this man of common origins have been justified in his claims to nobility? Many scholars refuse to categorise Jean LeViste as a nobleman, but rather as a *parvenu* or a *nouveau riche*, like many commoners who declared themselves aristocrats simply because they owned noble property.[122] Furthermore, Jean LeViste's paternal nobility was weak if at all existant, while his "true" nobility descended from the maternal side: legally and traditionally, nobility could not be transmitted from mother to child. Louis XI reminded his subjects of the invalidity of such pretensions when he denounced those who claimed nobility *tant a cause de leurs femmes, meres et nobles fiefs qu'ils ont acquis que autrement*.[123] Nonetheless, Jean LeViste had no reserves about labelling himself with noble titles, particularly since the President of the Cour des Aides automatically received an official noble patent. He also came from a throroughly noble *milieu* as his father lived as a true seigneur and his mother's greatest asset was her pedigree. Moreover, the reality of nobility was hardly as simple as the clear cut definition of the three estates that all too often conditions our view of medieval society. It, therefore, seems pertinent to investigate the nobility as a social and legal state in order to answer the question, "Was Jean LeViste noble?". We undoubtedly will not arrive at a devinitive answer, but we will certainly see that we should not categorically refuse Jean LeViste the rank of nobleman and that the message he created with the *Lady and the Unicorn* and with other artistic forms conveyed the message that this man was noble not only in title but also in spirit.

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[119] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, pp. 57-58.
[120] J. Odin, "Claude LeViste, Châtelaine beaujolaise, et la célèbre tenture de la *Dame à la licorne*," Bulletin de la Société des Amis du Beaujolais, Académie de Villefranche-en-Beaujolais, 1967, p. 22.
[121] The emphasis is ours. G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 238.
[122] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, "Communication," p. 174. C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 55. J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 412.
[123] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 58.

Nobility in the late Middle Ages

How does one define nobility? The basic benefit of nobility was privilege, particularly the fiscal privileges that members of this caste enjoyed.[124] Therefore, in order to regulate privilege and to guarantee that only the truly meritorious were exempt from taxation, there would necessarily be some sort of legal definition that allowed the categorisation of who was noble and who was not, who was privileged and who was not. In the simplest terms and at the basis of feudalism was the sacred notion of the Three Estates that constituted medieval French society: the ecclesiastic Church or First Estate, the military nobility or Second Estate, and the common labourers or the Third Estate. Although the true feudal era had come to a close by the thirteenth century, this formal model was still effective as the *États généraux de Tours* confirmed when they declared in 1484 :

> *La distinction des états des membres de la chose publique n'est inconnue de personne, selon laquelle il est prescrit à l'Église de prier pour les autres, de conseiller et d'exhorter, à la noblesse de protéger les autres par les armes, et au peuple de les nourrir et de les entretenir par les contributions et par l'agriculture; et cela non point pour l'avantage particulier de chacun, mais dans le seul but du seul bien public, que chacun, en accomplissant son office, doit poursuivre et rechercher, sans travailler seulement pour soi mais pour tous ensemble, en sorte que, si l'on usurpe l'office de son associé ou si l'on rejette son fardeau sur un autre, on s'occupe mal de l'utilité du bien commun. Cette spécificité des offices, ni les femmes, ni les jeunes, pour peu qu'ils aient quelque teinture d'instruction, ne l'ignorent.*[125]

A change in one's estate would pose a threat to the common good, to the stability of society, for this triple social division was considered a divine institution, the success or failure of which depended not on the validity of the model, but rather on the effectiveness of those who fulfilled their roles.[126] The clergyman prayed; the nobleman protected; the commoner laboured. As the medieval conception of the world and society was perfectly static, there was little place for change or alteration in the stereotypes that populated the three estates, and the idealised images for each class allowed this social model to find its justification in the face of attacks on all sides from a conflicting reality. Although the clergy continued to pray and perform its sacerdotal role, the Church's image of spiritual leader had been severely tarnished from corruption, hypocrisy, and the Great Schism. Noble power had significantly declined in the economy and even in the politics of the time, as capital began to replace force as the key to power. This new power, money, was generated by members of the third estate – merchants, bankers and jurists – who defied categorisation in any of the established classes: it was obviously illogical to group these urbane burghers with those who toiled the land, but sacred tradition excluded them from the nobility.

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[124] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 21.
[125] From P. Contamine, La Noblesse, pp. 4-5.
[126] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 62-63.

However, the Second Estate maintained its hold on the popular imagination such that there was no group more admired or envied than the aristocracy,[127] and the ultimate sign of success was a place in the ultimate social caste. What is more the nobility needed and accepted the new blood and money that came from the successful bourgeois who sought acceptance in France's elite, as proven by the pattern of social extinction and renewal that marks the period from 1280 to 1510.[128] France's traditional noble population was gradually being depleted throughout the end of the Middle Ages for two general reasons, one biological and the other economic. First, the noble "race" lost its numbers as a result of death from war, sickness and the infirmity that characterises intermarriage, in addition to the obvious effect of celibacy that was practiced by an increased number of noble religious. Second, a large portion of this class simply ran out of money, as feudal revenues could not meet the demands of a lifestyle which was based on war and leisure. It was this latter reason that favoured the renewal in noble population and the changes in the hierarchy of French society.

A common social practice began around 1300, as wealthy peasants, burghers, and especially jurists began purchasing noble properties. Although the simple acquisition of such property did not instantly guarantee a noble title, many such new landowners were eventually integrated into the noble class, provided that they, their children, and their descendents led a noble lifestyle in castles or manor houses furnished with all the amenities of refined living; that their daughters entered into noble marriages; and most importantly, that the landowners went to war in the name of their sovereign.[129] Marriage was the other means of entry into the noble class, as we have seen in the specific case of the LeViste jurists, who took advantage of the impoverished state of the *noblesse de souche* and usurped a bit of prestige by marrying young *damoiselles* whose father could not afford a dowery. This pattern was so common that by the fifteenth century, and especially after 1450, all major cities had a group of *notables*, that is influential citizens whose fortune was made in banking, commerce, or law and was invested in all forms of real-estate, but most particularly in noble lands.[130]

The greatest desire of the *parvenus* who were starting to fill the ranks of the second estate was, naturally, to assimilate to their adopted class. Theoretically this would have represented a drastic change for bourgeois *arrivistes*, as a guiding principle in noble culture (the price of fiscal exemption) was the interdiction of any sort of commerce or manual labour. Throughout the second half of the fifteenth century, the notion of inappropriate noble comportment was given a specific term as the idea became widespread. Behaviour or practices which were not conducive to *poursuivre le fait de noble* were characterised variably throughout the latter years of this century as *desrogeant a fait de noble* (1447),

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[127] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 61-62.
[128] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 65.
[129] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 76.
[130] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 97.

desroguer au privilege de noblesse (1470), or simply *desrogeance* (1485).[131] All of these terms refer to the activities or conduct that were considered typical of the third estate and that were thought to infect the upper echelons of society.

Noble status required a noble lifestyle, that is to live off the revenues generated by one's terrestrial property, to surround oneself with the luxury and comfort that befit an individual of this station, and to serve one's sovereign (and therefore one's country and people) in a military function. However, the newest members of the nobility may not be to blame for the decay in noble values and identity; in order to facilitate assimilation to their adoptive class, they were likely more traditional and conservative in their thoughts, activities and lifestyle.[132] Furthermore, as the noble population actually decreased from 1300 to 1500, it would seem that former members of the third estate represented only a moderate to insignificant change in the demographics and numbers of the late medieval French nobility.[133] Part of this decline may be explained by the horrors of the Hundred Years War. Another explanantion may be purely economic: as the financially taxing nature of a proper lifestyle made it nearly impossible to live off one's land, many nobles supplemented their income with extra-feudal earnings from agriculture, forestry, urban real estate, and even commerce and usurious loans.[134] Despite the stigma of *derrogeance*, equally vivid in the minds of the nobles and *roturiers*, there were acceptable occupations besides that of *chevalier*.

Antoine de la Sale defines the two professional domains that are appropriate for males of the highest class of society: the ecclesiastic and judicial or the military and courtly.[135] The basic roles of clergyman or knight were long accepted paths for noblemen to follow, however in the late Middle Ages, the judicial function began to emerge as a separate entity and may perhaps be seen as a conflation of two aspects of the more traditional occupations. Royal administrators and jurists defended the validity of a prince's sovereign claims which in more theocratic times had been the responsibility of the Church, and in so doing defended the physical welfare of the country, as did the *noblesse d'épée*. It, however, was not acceptable to be a simple notary or lawyer: what was essential to the respectability of the judicial realm, and perhaps what most interested nobles in this field, was the dispensation of justice, a primordial and prestigious function in the Middle Ages. Despite the importance of and demand for this activity, however, there were origianally relatively few nobles who could actually be qualified as jurists or legal experts. From a social perspective, the legal profession demanded skills and qualifications which were acquired at the university, not on the battlefield, and

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[131] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 207.
[132] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 315.
[133] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 280.
[134] While most nobles employed a middleman in their investments, Philippe de Commynes invested in a merchant ship andJoan of Naples benefited from the interest generated by loans. P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 115.
[135] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 164

were foreign to the noble mind.[136] A historical perspective shows us, moreover, that the implication of lay, non-noble administrators in the royal administration was a sign of the end of pure feudalism, the harbinger of a new era.

In the thirteenth century, Philippe Auguste found the means to overcome a menacing nobility in burghers who were well-versed in Roman Law, such that by the fourteenth century, the monarchy had established a certain stable loyalty through the centralisation of government and the inclusion of non-nobles in political life.[137] The result of this shift in power and revolution in social functioning was the first distribution of noble patents by a French king from 1275 to 1325.[138] Throughout the end of the medieval period, then, public service to princes or kings provided possibilities to rise in the fixed hierarchy for the urban bourgeoisie who did not conform to established social definitions, yet possessed the means for success – wealth and education.[139] Lyon in particular would be one of the kingdom's most important cities for its economic, social, and political contributions. The years between 1370 and 1450 saw the rise of Lyon's jurist class from which emerged its doctors of law who would establish a number of highly successful "dynasties" based on faithful service to the crown and political, economic, and cultural superiority ao the peasants, artisans, and merchants of the Third Estate.[140]

In his indispensable study of Lyon's jurist class at the end of the Middle Ages, René Fédou illustrates the typical pattern of the rise of the "Lyonnais Legal Dynasty," which emerges as a sort of LeViste family portrait.[141] Springboarded by original success in commerce, a founding member preserves the essential monetary wealth by shifting his family's interest to law, as Barthélemy LeViste did when he sent his son Jean (I) to earn his doctorate in law. A skillful use of connections to (minor) princes is the standard means to achieve success and could be seen as the trademark of LeViste careers which invariably started with a considerable personality, such as the Duke of Orléans or the Duke of Bourbon who provided the necessary professional and diplomatic experience if not the desired prestige. A strong personality, such as Jean (II) LeViste, recognises and seizes the opportunity to forge a place for his family in the royal administration that is established as the monarchy begins to stabilise its power. Through purchases of noble properties and marriages with noble women, men like Jean (II) and his descendents gradually penetrated the ranks of France's noble

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[136] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, pp. 192-193.
[137] Joan Evans, Life in Medieval France, London: Phaidon Press, 1957, p. 139.
[138] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 20.
[139] I. Clonlas, La Vie quotidienne dans les châteaux de la Loire au temps de la Renaissance, Paris: Hachette, 1983, p. 437.
[140] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 295.
[141] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, pp. 293-350. Philippe Contamine also cites the LeViste family as the perfect example of a legal dynasty that rose from the Third Estate to the Second Estate. P. Contamine, La Noblesse, pp. 97-98 & p. 194.

class. By the end of the fifteenth century, the *noblesse de robe*, although it did not exist as a term, would exist as a noble stereotype, having won a certain amount of ground from the sacred *noblesse d'épée*.[142]

Tradition was hardly adverse to the nobility of those who served the kingdom in a judicial function, and there were even certain regions around the Midi (Dauphiné in particular) that found the title of Doctor of Law, with its special expertise and functions, worthy of the privileges and title of nobility.[143] LeViste noble pretensions then become all the more clear when we note that this tradition, common in neighbouring regions but less so in Lyonnais, was respected by Jean (II) LeViste who declared himself *chevalier d'armes et de loi*.[144] What is more, Jean (II) was one of a very small number of Lyonnais citizens to declare inherent nobility when he claimed that *son bisaieul estoit noble [...] et [...] partit du païs de Bourgoigne, duquel il estoit natif et vint demourer en la ville de Lion ou il avoit vescu noblement*.[145] Are such tenuous claims proof of an *arriviste* attitude or validation of cultural and social superiority?

That there were individuals and families who pretended or unjustifiably claimed to be noble is unquestionable: the number of investigations and rejections of such claims throughout the fifteenth century would seem to be proof thereof.[146] However, there were undoubtedly those who felt their cases were unfairly rejected. Were there rules to determine who was noble or not? The desire to put a definition on nobility that emerged in the fifteenth century would seem to indicate that there were at least attempts to provide such criteria, and we do find exact recipes for what it took to make a baron, vicomte, duke, etc.[147] But such prescriptions apply rarely to reality and less often to perceptions. A whole variety of factors determined first, if one were noble and second, how noble one was; were the second answer insufficient, it seems likely that the first would hardly matter.

Theoretically and traditionally, only a "prince" had the power to change one's estate, as is clear in the fourteenth-century *Songe du Vergier* which states: *Peut aucun estre anobly par le prince qui ne congnoist souverain autre en terre. [Un empereur, un roi,] ou autre seigneur terrier qui ait pouvoir et puissance de faire loy, car s'il a puissance de faire loy par consequent il peut annoblir*.[148] This tradition is upheld into the extreme end of the Middle Ages, as a fifteenth-century source informs us that only a prince may raise a commoner to the ranks of noble: *le prince le tient par parole noble en lui donnant tiltre, honneur, liberté et franchise comme les aultres gentilzhommes le tiennent qui son yssus de nobles parens... [et donne] a celluy qu'il ayme aulcun office, lequel emporte avecques lui enclose dignité*.[149] It would initially seem simple to verify a claim to

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[142] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 330.
[143] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 74.
[144] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 218.
[145] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 194.
[146] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 38.
[147] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 74.
[148] From P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 67.
[149] From P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 72.

nobility, as letters of noble patent were officially to be recorded in the *Registre du Trésor des Chartes et de la Chambre des Comptes*.[150] However, for reasons of cost relatively few ennoblements were actually recorded, and we can only wonder how many more have been lost to negligence, hazard, or time. Furthermore, the definition of "prince" is hardly clear when we consider these texts, and given the meaning of the word, the Dukes of Burgundy, Brittany, Orléans and Bourbon were as much princes as was the King of France. As the LeViste dynasty had a record of exemplary service to different sovereigns, including the Dukes of Bourbon and Orléans who were endowed with the power to ennoble, it seems quite possible that these faithful servants were compensated with an "official" title uttered by a "prince."

We then see that Jean LeViste, the patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn*, undoubteldy considered himself noble as he deserved, not only because his presidency of the Cour des Aides conferred nobility, but also because he met the requirements of respectable standing within this social class. The three criteria that can be said to influence the degree of one's nobility are :

1. The quality and quantity of noble land possessions
2. The longevity (real or claimed) of family lineage
3. The nature of family ties and alliances[151]

The LeVistes, and Jean in particular, owned a considerable number of noble domains and thus are an exception to the rule that noble properties owned by commoners were of insignicant size and little value.[152] The longevity of LeViste noble lineage dates to an unknown past cited by Jean (II) as we have seen above. The tenuousness of these claims are counterbalanced by the long line of noblewomen that mothered LeViste children and local tradition that equated doctors of law, like Jean (II) and Jean (IV) LeViste, with members of the *noblesse d'épée*. That the LeViste family truly believed themselves noble may be proven by the various references they make to themselves in noble terms or by the fact that from an early date they were not undaunted by taking advantage of the nobility's fiscal exemption.[153]

However, the *noblesse de souche* was hostile to new members no matter how justified their claims seemed, and the tarnish of common origins could remain with a family even generations after the initial ennoblement. To illustrate the tenacious stigma of bourgeois origins Philippe Contamine gives the example of the LePelletier family, successful merchants from Rouen who accumulated noble properties while maintaining their commercial activities only to attain a noble title in 1471. In 1485 they began construction of the nobleman's requisite château (Martainville, Pays de Caux), and the next year they were included in the presentation of nobles that took place in the city of Rouen on

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[150] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 67.
[151] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 78.
[152] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 102.

3 July 1486. Nonethelss, their bourgeois origins and commercial activities were still remembered well into the eighteenth century.[154] As the image of nobility depended little on reality, but on an idealised past based on *armes et amours*, true membership seems to have depended on a vital symbolic content. Although they did not command the economic or political power of the feudal age, the nobility still represented a spiritual and social ideal that commanded the popular mind and appealed to a transcendant notion of an ideal past bathed in the virtue and sanctity of love and knighthood. In contrast to the often lingering stigma of common origins, the essence of nobility was virtue which was theoretically available to everyone and a model or school of thought to be transmitted to noble children *tant par estude de clergie que par l'enseignement des vaillans chevaliers ou escuiers preux hommes et bien renommés.*[155] It was undoubtedly this culture that truly proved one's inherent nobility, and this spiritual content of chivalric culture is clearly expressed in the *Lady and the Unicorn*. If we re-examine the history of the LeViste family from the point of view of material culture, we may well see that art and architecture were a most useful means to communicate the true nobility of a family that rose with an incessant determination from common beginnings to reach the highest levels of society.

Images of nobility

Art and architecture have long been the sign of wealth, power, and importance. Although the imagery and themes of late medieval art were undeniably linked to the High Middle Ages, they were no longer the property of the Church or the monarchy, as art became the means for wealthy individuals, often non-nobles, to advertise their success and to create what we would today label a public image. The emerging jurist class, the future *noblesse de robe*, recognised the communicative potential of art and architecture which they employed as the manifestation of their membership in the nobility, as the ultimate sign of success. Once again, the LeViste family provides us with the paradigm of such patronage which may well have used works of art and intellect for the most practical intention of an individual's self-glorification.

Jurists were the only members of society, outside the nobility and the clergy, to possess considerable libraries. Not only was a library indispensable to the practice of law, but literature had a great intellectual and cultural value for this class that had benefited from academic education and, thus, distinguished itself from an urban population comprised largely of merchants and artisans. Literature also communicated a social message about the owner of a library, as the cost of illuminated manuscripts was well-beyond the financial means of all but a very small, privileged minority. Possession of a library could be seen as a sign of membership in a refined elite that had both the

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[153] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 224.
[154] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 100.

financial and cultural means to appreciate literature which was the "property" of the First and Second Estates. Jean (II) LeViste had a particularly impressive library: thirty to forty volumes of religious, legal, and romantic works so valuable it became an heirloom to be passed from one generation to the next.[156] On the one hand, such a practice was practical for it supplied future LeViste jurists with indispensable legal works; on the other, by providing his children with religious and romantic literature, such as the *romancium suum de Lanceloto et du Saint Graal* bequeathed by Jean (II) to his son Pierre,[157] a nobleman assured the transmission of noble values and culture to his posterity. In short, the possession of a library such as that of the LeViste family was communicative of a social, cultural and economic superiority to the majority of France's population, including a good portion of clergy and nobles.

Architecture was also employed by France's legal elite to demonstrate their wealth and refinement, and throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, jurists demonstrated a certain predilection for highly fashionable *hostels* in the most aristocratic urban neighbourhoods, richly furnished and abundantly decorated.[158] The 1428 will of Jean (II) LeViste illustrates the money and attention consecrated to the ancestral home, located at 29 rue St. Jean in Lyon, which symbolised the family's wealth and a dynasty's longevity: the testator is sure to mention his *antique maison paternelle qu'il habite* and *dans laquelle il a dépensé plus de 1300 écus d'or, comme cela peut apparaître clairement à tous ceux qui la regardent.*[159] Although no precise inventory survives, other sources, such as testaments or tax records, provide us with a fairly good idea of the house's interior luxury. In 1430, Jean (II)'s heirs settled their father's fiscal debt of 209 livres 10 sous in a most noble style with a collection of *objets* including *XIII tasses et une eguere et une cheyne a tornelles dorés...plus 2 crayes dorés et une blanche.*[160]

The late fifteenth century of the *Lady and the Unicorn* saw what may be described as a "construction boom" stimulated by the avid interest in architecture manifested by all ranks of the aristocracy.[161] As we know, Jean LeViste enjoyed the the use of a townhouse in Paris given to him by the Duke of Bourbon in Notre-Dame-des-Champs (see page 3). He also benefited from a second residence located in the heart of the city at 97, rue du Four, which was the subject of a 1497 contract whereby Jean LeViste negotiated a large-scale refurbishment of his home, as well as the construction of a two-story gallery therein.[162] Undoubtedly more important to Jean LeViste's noble image, though,

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[155] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 301.
[156] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, pp. 317-318.
[157] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 221.
[158] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 314.
[159] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 221.
[160] R. Fédou, Les Hommes de loi, p. 314.
[161] P. Contamine, La noblesse, p. 141.
[162] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 244.

was architecture that was directly associated with his role and image of seigneur: the Château d'Arcy (figure 44) and the seigneurial chapel in the parish church of Vindecy.

The Château d'Arcy is located in the commune of Vindecy on the right bank of the Loire. Originally part of the Burgundian domain, the seigneury of Arcy was brought under the French crown by Louis XI.[163] The castle, likely built around 1300 by Jean de Sémur,[164] would be the focus of important renovations under Jean LeViste who sought to imprint his ownership throughout his noble home and, thus, marked the structure with the architectural style of the late fifteenth century. His trademark *trois croissants montants* was the decorative motif favoured by Jean LeViste (figure 45) and can still be seen today on the château's entry, the floor tiles, the chapel vault keystone, the grand hall fireplace, the fireplace of the former archive hall, the tympanum above the entrance to the polygonal tower (also built under Jean LeViste).[165] As the seigneur's rights extended well beyond his castle walls, Jean LeViste marked his ownership and superiority throughout his domain as any seigneur should.

As expressed in his will, Jean LeViste intended to imprint the seigneurial chapel in the parish church of Vindecy with the identity of its local seigneur; the chapel was to be the funerary monument to Jean LeViste, his mother, and all the former seigneurs d'Arcy who were buried therein. We read in his will (today lost) :

> *...Item et parce que en ladite chappelle de Vindecy est enterrée madite mère et aussi aultres chevaliers jadis seigneurs dudit lieu d'Arcy, et que de plus elle est de petite valuer, et par succession du temps elle pourra tomber en ruine et désolation, je ordonne, soit que j'aille de vie à trespas audit lieu d'Arcy, ou en ladite ville de Paris, ou ailleurs, que ladite chappelle soit faicte de pierre de taille tout à l'entour et à voûte, en laquelle seront poseées mes armes, et aussi une fenêtre de pierre de taille pour mettre en icelle une belle verrière, en laquelle sera mise une imaige de Notre-Dame, parce que ladite chappelle est de fondation de ladite Notre-Dame, et aussi sera mise d'un côté l'imaige de Monsieur Saint Jehan en ladite verrière, qui présentera à ladite imaige de Notre-Dame ma personne, qui sera abillée en façon de chevalier, avec cotte d'armes, en laquelle seront mes armes...j'ai intention de faire construire et bâtir ladite chappelle avant que je passe de vie à trespas, et si ladite chappelle n'est pas faicte avant mondit trespas, je veulx qu'elle soit faicte après mondit trespas et le plutôt que faire se pourra par mon héritière ou héritiers...*[166]

We are struck by the specifications Jean LeViste gives for this tomb, as we see that his main intention was to be portrayed with knightly trappings and as part of the long line of noble seigneurs d'Arcy who came before him. Although Jean LeViste was actually buried in the Celestine Church in Paris, we can appreciate the effect of such a tomb thanks to a drawing by Gaignières which illustrates his effigy plaque. (figure 46) Here, we see Jean LeViste, dressed not as a *chevalier* but as the noble President of the Cour des Aides (perhaps, symbolised by the *bourse* at his side), and the insciption

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[163] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, p. 6.
[164] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 243.
[165] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, p. 65.

clearly states the nobility of the deceased : *Cy gist noble home mess[ire] Jehan LeViste ...d'Arcy sur Loire, conseiller du roy et president des generaulx sur le fait de la justice des aides....* Although the Seigneur d'Arcy would not rest in his chapel at Vindecy, his eldest daughter Claude did execute the restorations stipulated in her father's will. Although the only remains of this project are fragments of stained glass, we do have an idea of the decorative richness and magnificence that were associated with the patron when we read of the chapel's functional contents: one chalice, two silver *burettes*, three missals, chasubles, altar dressings, and a reliquary *de monseigneur St Georges...lequel a esté faict en partie d'une offrande que le feu roy Louis, derrenierement trespassé, donna audit lieu et chappelle d'Arcy.*[167]

Tapestry, the most princely of artistic media, naturally played an important role in the image of nobility created through art by the LeViste family. Jean (II)'s will gives an impressive list of mural hangings that betray this family's passionate attachment to their arms. Although we cannot determine whether the *tapisseries* in Jean (II)'s will refer to tapestry, embroidery, or some other form of mural decoration, it would seem that all of these works were of a heraldic nature and became an important element of the family patrimony, like the ancestral home, the library, and the family arms themselves. The visual language of heraldry was and still is associated with the aristocracy; however, in the late Middle Ages, it was hardly uncommon for non-nobles to have family arms and to proudly display them wherever they could. The LeViste's prominent use of heraldry could, therefore, simply be considered typical *nouveau riche* mimicry of noble practice. But, their respect for traditional heraldic rules (such as the splitting of arms in cadet branches seen in the arms of Guillaume (III))[168] and the care with which Jean (II) sought to maintain the arms in the branch led by the eldest male seem to distinguish this family's heraldic display from a commoner's haphasard aping of the noble language of arms.

Distinction was also created by the form that their heraldry took, as the very representation of the family arms was a prized object to be passed from father to eldest male child. Jean (II)'s tapestries were bequeathed to his sons: the mediocre works were to be divided between his younger heirs, Pierre and Jean (III), while the most impressive hangings were to remain in the LeViste home *pour le service et la commodité dudit Antoine son fils et de ses enfants mâles ou de celui de ses enfants et de ses enfants mâles auquel sera dévolue ladite maison.*[169] Obvsiouly, in addition to inheriting tapestries, Jean LeViste patronised this medium himself to monumentalise his family and heraldry. The iconography of love and knighthood provide the fixed signs of traditional noble culture that enrich this message of nobility; but, if we consider the larger ideal image of the Second Estate, we realise that the *Lady and*

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[166] J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 429.
[167] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 245.
[168] J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 414.
[169] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 221.

the Unicorn conveys a comprehensive, encyclopaedic vision of noble culture to be associated directly with the LeViste family.

Love was the realm of pleasure and leisure, which corresponded to the ideal noble lifestyle. A true nobleman was a knight who lived from the revenues generated by his various land holdings. He did not work and, when not at war, led what ideally was a lifestyle of leisure. The various activities that characterise the iconography of love illustrate the typical amusements of the noble class, such as cards, chess, dining and dancing. Other activities appropriate to the love garden reflect the refined state of the noble soul; music, represented in the panel known as "Hearing," was considered a particularly *courtoise* activity and proof of one's nobility,[170] while the exotic flavour of certain details could convey travel to far lands that was an essential achievement for a sophisticated noble person. [171]

The theme of love also allowed the material or physical reality of noble life to be illustrated, beginning with the garden motif itself. Nature and the out-of-doors were the preferred arena for noble activities, perhaps because castle life was particularly dreary and monotonous.[172] We have already noted the role of the garden in the iconography of love, but we should also appreciate the realm of the garden in noble living. As society became more refined, so did castle life, and gardens and menageries became an indispensable element of the seigneurial manor. Arbours full of fragrant flowers, ripe fruit, and many animals were perhaps so quickly appropriated for the noble culture of love, because it was an image that was so familiar to them in their daily life.

The nobleman's favourite outdoor activity and particular privilege was, of course, hunting, which was associated with the particularly elevated state of the noble soul. The very definition of this class's members often contained references to the hunt, as one fifteenth-century text notes *noble homme vivant noblement doit [...] amer les chiens et les oiseaux*;[173] and the association established between hunting and military activities endowed the former with the virtuous qualities of the latter. This complex imagery was further enriched by the iconography of love which particularly favoured hunting motifs, such as the chase of the hawk and heron, hunting dogs, scenes of venery, etc. The masculine theme of the hunt, like that of knighthood, provided a perfect arena for images of courtly love, whereby the valiant lover proves his worth through knightly virtues in both sacred and profane contexts (figures 47-49).

More practical than virtue, for it permitted the nobleman to pursue a lifestyle of leisure, was wealth: necessary to equip oneself as a knight, to surround oneself with appropriate magnificence, to avoid practising a trade. This material ideal can be seen in the extravagance and leisure of love scenes, but it is of particular importance in the *Lady and the Unicorn*'s imagery for it symbolises in

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[170] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 153.
[171] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, pp. 185-87.
[172] J. Verdon (ed.), Vivre en France au Moyen Age, Geneva: Éditions Liber, 1996, p. 51.

precious detail the great fortune possessed by Jean LeViste. Various minor elements, such as the golden chalice, platter, and mirror, or the casket filled with jewels realistically simulate material wealth, while the luxury of late medieval noble life is conveyed by details of exoticism. Contact with the Orient during the Crusades originally introduced refinement into European culture, for Arabic products provided the means for the upper levels of society to distinguish themselves from the lower classes through material confort. Carpets, sofas, and baldachins embellished noble rooms; spices enlivened the noble table; silks, velvets, and damasks elaborated the noble wardrobe. The carpet was particularly associated with Eastern culture and was often displayed as a prominent status symbol, perhaps as we see in the panel of "Hearing."[174] In this context of refinement and luxury we may find further support for our suggestion that the objects held in the chalice of "Taste" represent cardamom grains (page 21), also known as *graines de paradis* in medieval France. Spices were also discovered in the Middle East, and as they were absorbed into European cuisine, they became a status symbol not only for consumption but also for display. The rarest and most perfumed spices, such as clove, nutmeg, mace and cardamom, were the most expensive and, naturally, were reserved for the aristocracy.[175] Spices could be offered as gifts or displayed in serving vessels (as in our scene), and "the moderation of excess with which they were served attested to the host's social rank."[176]

The ultimate sign of social and economic status, though, was clothing, which is so elaborately and richly portrayed in our series. Cloth communicated wealth and privilege, and for this reason the nobility used fashion to distance itself from *parvenus*, while the up-and-coming bourgeoisie used it as a manifestation of its social rise (both as a symbol of the source of their wealth and as a symbol of their new status). The *Lady and the Unicorn* actually allows us an appreciation of the social distinctions that clothing communicated: throughout the series the servant displays a variety of clothing that is both luxurious and similar to that of her mistress, however their difference in status is maintained by the relative simplicity and lack of decoration of the servant's gowns. Furthermore, we know that the lady of this series is a member of the upper aristocracy for her maid is too richly dressed to serve a more common mistress.[177] The clothing depicted in the *Lady and the Unicorn*, however, does not depict the reality of fashion at the time,[178] and likely represents an artist's fantastic conception of exotic styles or his interpretation of foreign, perhaps Italian, fashion plates.[179] Whether realistic or fanciful, the sumptuous fabrics, complex designs, jewelled notions, and elaborate *parures* worn by the lady clearly

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[173] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 177.
[174] M. Snodin & M. Howard, Ornament : A Social History Since 1450, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996p. 184-85.
[175] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 103.
[176] W. Schivelbusch, Tastes of Paradise, p. 7.
[177] M. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 152.
[178] J. Evans, Dress in Medieval France, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 66.
[179] A. Erlande-Brandenburg, *La Dame à la licorne*, s.p.

express considerable wealth and noble status, for ermine and crowns were reserved only for the highest levels of society, while red fabric – the most costly – was available only to its wealthiest members.

We have already mentioned the role heraldry plays in this tapestry series and its function to "prove" Jean LeViste's nobility. The abstract language of heraldry, seen in each panel of our tapestry series, was born on the battlefield and directly related to the noble identity. The signs and symbols of the crest or *blason* were originally the means of communication between knights in combat who would have been unidentifiable for the armour that covered them from head to foot. The word *blason*, derived from the German verb *blasen*, thus, announced the presence of a notable figure as the sounding of a horn.[180] The form which the heraldic displays take in the *Lady and the Unicorn* seems to have been chosen for their particularly military connotation, and contribute with other details to a depiction of the primordial role and essence of the nobility which was that of warrior. But, if we consider the depiction of noble culture that has emerged through the study of love imagery, we realise that the armorial motifs of this work should not be considered from an entirely separate perspective: the heraldic level of meaning in the *Lady and the Unicorn* contributes to the larger theme of noble culture while their military forms are justified by Jean LeViste's service in the *avitaillement* of Louis XI's troops in Rousillon. Like the other signs and symbols of noble culture depicted throughout our work, the lion and the unicorn had particularly noble connotations which unlikely contributed to the message of LeViste nobility. Assimilated through word associations with the patron of our work, these two particular were symbolic of the most noble virtues, thus identified with Jean LeViste: the unicorn symbolised the purity, speed, strength, and loyalty of the chivalrous knight, while the lion symbolised the strength, ferocity, courage, fidelity, and mercy of a valiant warrior.[181]

We, therefore, see that as many scholars have suggested, Jean LeViste did commission the *Lady and the Unicorn* as a manifestation of his personal success, perhaps even to commemorate his appointment to the *Cour des Aides* and the official noble title it conferred. Jean LeViste's activity as a tapestry patron seems to have been considerable, when we realise that he possessed other works similar in form and content to the *Lady and the Unicorn*. The inventory executed between 1595 and 1597 upon the death of Eléonore de Chabannes provides several interesting descriptions of tapestries which could, almost, be taken for our subject:

- *Une pieche de tappisserie à fond rouge pour mettre sur ung manteau de cheminée, esquelles y a des armoiries à troys croissans.*

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[180] H. Jougla de Morenas, Noblesse 38, Paris: Éditions du Grand Armorial de France, 1938, p. 75.
[181] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 55.

- *Cinq pieces de tapisseries à fond rouge ou son figurez dez Sibilles et licornes avecq des armoiries à troys croissans, de la haulteur de troys aulnes ung tiers*

- *Plus une aultre tendeeur de tappisserie à fonds rouge ou sont représentées des licornes et bestions avecq des armes ou sont figurés des croissans, consistant en sept pieches conteant de haulteur troys aulnes ung quart et de tour vingt-six aulnes, prisé la somme de cinquante escus*[182]

However, we know that these entries do not refer to our work, for the *Lady and the Unicorn's* line of inheritance from Jean LeViste's family to its final owners in the Château de Boussac did not pass through the house of Chabannes.[183] Nonetheless, we know that these works were at one point the property of the LeViste family whose arms are recognised in these descriptions, and Eléonore de Chabannes was the grand niece of Jean de Chabannes, the second husband of Jean LeViste's eldest daughter, Claude. This couple died with no heirs and their belongings were distributed between Jeanne LeViste, Claude's cousin who received the *Lady and the Unicorn*, and Charles de Chabannes, Jean's nephew and Eléonore's father who received the rest of the LeViste collection in Claude's possession.

The second, and more interesting, similarity between our series and the works cited in the inventory is their depiction of women, which, we will see, plays a very significant role in the message communicated by the *Lady and the Unicorn*. We may simply explain this woman's presence as an indispensable figure in the garden of love; but, if we consider the rich detail with which she is depicted in conjunction with the wealth of symbols of female virtue, we see that our understanding of the *Lady and the Unicorn* is not complete without an investigation of female culture. The most consistent elements throughout the series are the iconic representation of female perfection surrounded by references to the LeViste family or the patron himself: it would seem that the image of the female played a significant role in Jean LeViste's declaration of nobility.

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[182] P. Verlet & F. Salet, La Dame à la licorne, p. 43.
[183] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 167-168.

IV. WOMEN

The Glorification of Women

The original expression of respect for women came from courtly love, particularly in the poetry of troubadours whose real innovation and provocation was this respectful and positive view.[183] Obviously this new attitude did not really change society's vision of women, who were still considered the weaker sex on all levels; but, it did place them on a pedestal before man, for his role in courtly love was to be his lady's servant. The first obligation of *fin'amor* was submission to one's *dame, damna* or *domina* who was the knight's mistress in the literal sense of the term: the beloved woman was "celle qui exerce le pouvoir, la suzeraine, dont l'amant se veut le vassal."[184] Furthermore, the culture of love was established and developed at the courts of such females as Aliénor d'Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne. This latter princess was the patron of André le Chapelain's De amore et amoris remedio, the most important contribution of which was the idea that woman is at the centre of all existence.[185] As the *ars amandi* became anchored in noble culture, so then did an inherent respect for women, and we find this courteous point of view promoted in the education of noble youths: in the fourteenth century, Geoffroy de Charny reminds noblemen to *honorer la douce Mère [de Dieu]...les dames, et les demoiselles* and the Livre du champ d'or a la couleur fine et des trois manteaux (1389) suggests that a young male must honour all women, *soit damoiselle, ancille ou dame* in memory of the Virgin Mary.[186]

However, it is obvious that real attitudes towards females were likely not as honourable as those proposed as models for noble behaviour; the various "images" or types of women from the late Middle Ages may be resumed by the ubiquitous Roman de la Rose and the literary debate it provoked, which represents no less than "toute la question feminine au moyen âge."[187] In the *roman* itself we are provided with the two general views of love and its female practitioners, and both schools of thought found supporters throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: the chivalric *Minne* of Guillaume de Lorris was championed by defenders of women and their virtue such as the Maréchal de Boucicaut and Christine de Pisan, while the more earthy, cynical perspective of Jean de Meun which was taken up in the poetic correspondence of Jean de Montreuil and Pierre and Gontier

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[183] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 44.
[184] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 15.
[185] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 27.
[186] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, pp. 165-167.
[187] R. M. Ratelle, Defense et illustration des femmes au quinzieme siecle: le champion des dames de Martin Le Franc, Montreal : McGill University. Dept. of French. Thesis 1939, p. 40.

Col.[188] The Church, of course, condemned any threat to chastity, while its views on feminine virtue often find their best comparison in the misogyny of contemporary fables.[189] Within the fairly standard iconography of love, we may find any of these three opinions communicated, and in turn, a corresponding attitude towards women and female virtue: traditional gallantry and defence of women; satirical disdain and degradation; moralising advocacy of chastity and base misogyny.[190]

The very poetic imagery of the *Lady and the Unicorn* would seem to be enough proof that our work presents a positive view of love and women. However, we realise that this attitude exceeds courteous respect or physical attraction if we look at more typical representations of love from this time. The *Scenes from Aristocratic Life* (figures 17-22) or certain love garden engravings (figures 28, 29 & 36) could be classified as "genre" for their realistic depiction of men and women engaged in typical noble amusements. While the *Lady and the Unicorn* also represents activities common to the noble "art" of love, it is unique among other amorous scenes for the practitioner in this garden of love is a lone female. The garden and its female inhabitants are absorbingly realistic for their minute detail, but these pastiches of symbols and motifs creates an iconic, otherworldly abstraction that refer not only to the realm of love, but also to the perfection of woman on all levels. Jean LeViste may, thus, complete the nobleman's requisite adoration of women begun in his chapel *de fondation de ladite Notre Dame* with the images of love illustrated in the *Lady and the Unicorn*.

Immediately appreciable is the late medieval female physical ideal which also found its source in the art of love and twelfth-century *romances*[191] and was codified in love poems, courtesy books, and collections of cosmetic recipes.[192] Tall, slender, and elegant with fair skin, blonde hair, and a fey delicacy, the female figures throughout our series correspond perfectly to the canons of late medieval beauty. The "family" tie between the ladies of this series and her "sisters," Penelope or Perseus's nymphs (figures 7 & 9), also exists with nearly every other depiction of a perfect female "type," such as *The Wise Virgins* by Martin Schongauer (figure 50), "Dame Espérance" (figure 51), Wild Maidens (figure 52), or practically any depiction of the Virgin (figures 10a, 53-55, 58, 65). The *Lady and the Unicorn's* positive representation of the female, though, goes well beyond a simple physical ideal to typify and communicate a certain moral excellence or perfection that was expected of the medieval woman.

Despite their traditionally negative spiritual reputation of women as the doomed inheritors of Eve, women were presented a clearly defined ideal to which they should aspire, based on the concept

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[188] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, pp. 137-138.
[189] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 43.
[190] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p. 90.
[191] E. J. Putnam, The Lady, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 113.
[192] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 58.

of a woman's "saving grace and ultimate virtue," her chastity.[193] Furthermore, themes celebratory of women were quite popular after the premature death of Mary of Burgundy (1482) whose virtue inspired Jean Molinet's definition of the perfect female who possessed "gratieuseté, honnesteté, fidelité, liberalité, affabilité, debonnaireté, humilité, chasteté, constance, attemprance, et science."[194] This aspect of moral perfection stands in marked contrast to earlier images of women as temptresses and spiritual weaklings; women *could* be paragons of virtue as was illustrated by literary works, such as Martin LeFranc's Le Champion des Dames or Christine de Pisan's La Cité des Dames. The visual arts, in turn, gave form to the intangible perfection of the female soul through the traditional forms and imagery of ideal culture – love, knighthood and religion – and thus established what may be termed the iconography of the "glorification of woman."

As we have seen, love was the realm of women and the aim of the *ars amandi* was service to the *bien-aimée*. The central role women played in love is, therefore, illustrated in banal (figures 17-22 & 41) and fantastic themes of love (figure 56) in which women are the focus of this culture. The *Lady and the Unicorn* could almost be interpreted as a representation of the Goddess of Love, as this lone female seems to rule in solitude over the garden of love of our tapestries. The female figures of our tapestry series are distinctive, though, for their mélange of iconographies which attaches them to the most sacred realms of chivalry and religion. The flip-side of the feminine realm of love was, of course, the masculine domain of knighthood which has already been shown to influence the imagery of our tapestries. The world of chivalry and its knightly virtues also contributed their forms to the positive representation of women.

Inheriting the very popular subject of the *Neuf Preux* from Guillaume de Machaut, Eustache Deschamps accorded women a place in the Pantheon of chivalry by glorifying those who were exemplary of knightly virtues.[195] This theme was easily translated into the visual arts, for like the literary version, depictions of these valiant women were directly drawn from male models. Although few examples remain, we know that Charles VI owned a series of the *Neuf Preuses*,[196] while the figures of *Semiramis* at the Honolulu Academy of Arts or *Penthesilea* (figure 57) are attributed to such series. This latter tapestry shows the dependence on male representations of the *Neuf Preux* (figures 42-43) and provides us with yet another parallel for the very military pose of the lady in "Touch," thus confirming the influence the most masculine domain of knighthood could exert on images and values for women. Very similar, and perhaps one and the same as the chivalric theme of the *Neuf Preuses*, is the subject of the *Illustrious Women*, which we know from the "Penelope" fragment of Ferry de Clugny's series. Like the *Neuf Preuses*, the *Illustrious Women* celebrated females who were types to be

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[193] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 81.
[194] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 297.
[195] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, p. 76.

imitated, and Penelope exemplifies the knightly virtue of loyalty through the practice of her most feminine virtue of chastity. It would, thus, seem that the similarity between "Penelope" and the women of the *Lady and the Unicorn* series goes beyond both works' representation of ideal feminine beauty: the proliferation of emblems and signs of female virtue in these works testifies to their shared theme of the glorification of women, the visual language of which depended, like all other idealised cultural forms, on the repertoire of religious art.

Despite its traditionally negative and condemning view of feminine virtue, the Church employed the female figure as a powerful and very positive symbol, which could even play a role in delicate theological matters as the *Sibyls* did in the fifteenth century throughout Europe. This large group of prophetesses, who foresaw the birth of Christ, allowed the reconciliation of pagan antiquity with Medieval Christianity, as Europe outside of Italy became more familiar with ancient Greek and Roman culture.[198] Moreover, this group of pagan women allowed females to be placed on the same level of spiritual insight as men and may almost be seen as feminist "types" for the Old Testament prophets whose visions they shared. The influence of the image of sibyls was such, we should not forget, that other LeViste tapestries (today lost) which depicted a "series" of female figures, were referred to as *cinq pieces de tapisseries à fond rouge ou sont figurez dez Sibilles.*[199] When we compare the ladies from "Hearing," "*A Mon Seul Désir*," and most particularly "Sight" with contemporary representations of these ancient, exotic prophetesses (figure 15), we recognise the power of such typified images of female perfection, the basic form of which may have communicated a notion of virtue and spiritual perfection.

To exmplify moral perfection, the Church employed other images of the feminine, most notably the personifications of the Seven Virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice. Brought from Italy to France, this theme presented a standardised female form which bore the attributes of the spiritual or moral ideals to which every person should aspire. Though not a glorification of the female being, the Virtues, nonetheless, associated the idealised female physical form with more abstract images of the soul's perfection. The Virtues figured in the margins of the *Heures à l'usage de Xaintes* published for Simon Vostre around 1507, show the spread of such imagery, while the bottom figure of *Temperance* recalls the lady's pose from "Sight" in reverse (figure 16). The traditional Italian representations of the Virtues, however, provide us with even more informative images, as we cannot help but identify this scheme with of our six ladies who clearly bear the attributes of these well-known personifications: "Taste" bears the chalice of Charity; "Smell" is identified by the flowering crown associated with Hope; a lady holding a mirror, as in "Sight," was a

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[197] J. Jobé (ed.), P. Verlet, M. Florisoone, A. Hoffmeister, & F. Tabard, The Art, p. 21.
[198] E. Mâle, Religious Art in France : The Late Middle Ages. A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 254-56.

common symbol Prudence; and, the lady who grasps the Unicorn's horn and the lance with LeViste arms finds a parallel in the emblem of Fortitude who held a column in each hand.[199] Although it is certainly not an allegory of the Virtues, the *Lady and the Unicorn* may well be intended to evoke the virtuous state to which every woman should and could aspire. Like love, the theme of the glorification of women depended on elements of martial and religious culture, but while the secular imagery of knighthood came from the purely masculine realm of war, the sacred imagery depended on religion's "feminine identity."

The glorification and positive representation of women in the Middle Ages obviously found its roots in devotion to and depiction of the Virgin Mary who represented the sublime idea of the ultimately perfect woman.[200] Despite the typically misogynist view of women as stingy, nasty, dishonest, chatty, sneaky and malicious[201] that persisted through the end of Middle Ages, relations between men and women were influenced by the positive image of the female that the Virgin Mary presented. As virgin, wife, mother and widow, She elevated accepted female roles in medieval society to a level of spiritual perfection through her personal role as the New Eve who eradicated sin and provided redemption. The effect the Virgin had on society's views of women may well be reflected in the transformation that the Virgin and Child formula underwent throughout the Middle Ages.[202] Originally portrayed respectively as the Throne of Wisdom and the teacher-priest-saviour, the Virgin Mary and her son gradually became more human and were represented as an affectionate, gentle mother and a playful, fragile infant, often within the enclosed space of a sacred garden of love (figures 58& 59). By the end of the Middle Ages, these intimate representations celebrated the purely feminine role of mother and often included intimate details, such as the Virgin's nursing her son (figures 53 & 60).

The importance of Mary as an image and model of female perfection accounts for the wide use of traditionally sacred symbols and motifs in the glorification of women, as this theme was invariably based on St. Bernard's cult of the loving, merciful Virgin, an image also appreciated by the noble practitioners of *fin'amor*. The *hortus conclusus*, already encountered in the iconography of love, maintains the sanctity of the enclosed garden of love, but also communicates a different ideal identified with woman and purely womanly roles. The portrait of the childless Mary of Guelders (figure 61) sanctifies the bearing of an heir, as the countess realises her dream in the guise of an Annunciation within an enclosed garden. The "Imitation of Mary" was, however, an everyday reality, as seen in the cosy interiors of Jan van Eyck (figure 53) or in the "Penelope" (figure 7) where we see

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[198] P. Verlet & F. Salet, La Dame à la licorne, p. 43.
[199] E. Mâle, Religious Art, pp. 321-22.
[200] E. Mâle, Religious Art, p. 205.
[201] Cited from the *Songe du Vergier* in J. Verdon, Vivre en France, p. 114.
[202] Émile Mâle, Religious Art, p. 147.

that virtue is manifested by the abbreviated *hortus conclusus* of *mille fleurs* tapestry. We may, then, appreciate the significance of this decorative form for its inherent resemblance to the sacred enclosed garden of the *Song of Songs* that was long taken to be the home the perfect romantic female, the chosen bride, the Shulamite, the Virgin Mary. The apparently superficial decoration of the *Lady and the Unicorn* would, thus, seem to contribute to its more profound symbolic functions to recreate the garden of love, a paradise ruled by the blessed inheritor of the New Eve.

Mary represented inimitable perfection in all aspects of female existence – daughter, wife, mother, widow, Christian – and, therefore, permitted all women in an acceptable situation (that is surrounded by a patriarchal family) to identify with the universal model. Given the evidently secular nature of our garden of love and its references to physical sexuality, the female in our depictions – though virtuous – are not virgins (or at least not for long); we would seem to be in the presence of the ideal wife who possesses nobility, beauty, a mastery of love, and above all, perfect virtue, that is chastity. The suggestive details of "Sight" and "Touch" clearly ground these images in more physical, sensual circumstances which further relates our work to the imagery of the *Song of Songs*; this "lewd" content is tempered by the various references to the Virgin Mary identified throughout our work and validated in diverse examples. The rose hedge of the panel known as "Taste" recalls this symbol seen in Stephan Lochner's *Virgin of the Rose Garden* (figure 55); the taming of the Unicorn is seen in many representations of the Virgin Mary (figures 62-63); a figure such as the Netherlandish woodcut of the *Madonna in the Sun* (figure 65) practically seems a model for the panel of "Touch;" the curious tent in the sixth panel reminds us of certain *sacre conversazione* that honoured the Virgin by placing her under such an open pavilion (figure 67). We even find a strikingly similar parallel for the general composition of this entire work in a Netherlandish illustration of the *Canticum Canticorum* (figure 66), the source for *hortus conclusus* imagery and perhaps the oldest celebration of purely feminine images and ideals. We, therefore, suggest that the overwhelming imagery from the *Song of Songs* implies a marriage theme, as this poem was the celebration of the perfect bride; however, we must not limit our interpretation in this context to the celebration of a particular marriage.

On closer inspection, we realise that these female figures, although not portraits of specific women, are actually emblems of the LeViste family. Not only are the six ladies in our series surrounded by LeViste heraldry, their clothing is the same red, blue and gold of the family arms, and marks their membership in this family and its nobility. Throughout the Middle Ages, colour played a significant role in the abstract language of heraldry. From the time of St. Louis, vassals would sport their liege's colour as a sign of fidelity, and throughout the later Middle Ages that concern us, princes would mark their influence and power by clothing their entourage in garments of their signature

colour(s), decorated with a personal emblem.[203] Furthermore, several of the ladies are physically assimilated to the unicorn whose horn is recalled in the curious hairstyle *à l'aigrette* seen throughout the series and in the lady's pointed crown in the panel of "Touch." These women are an integral part of Jean LeViste's pride and family monument: they are the practitioners of his ideal vision of noble life. But, what was this glorified vision of female noble existence intended to demonstrate? And, who was intended to appreciate its message?

The Perfect Noble Wife

If we consider the nobility to which the LeVistes pretended, we realise the importance women played in his family's claims since the earlier part of the fifteenth century at least. Jean (II) was quite proud of his wife's *bonne et ancienne maison de Forez*,[204] as he was of the *nobilem dominum regnandum dominum de Bussiera militem* into which his eldest son Antoine would enter by marriage.[205] The patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn* was the third generation of such noble unions and had established an impressive personal domain, which included the seigneuries of Arcy, St.-Christophe-en-Brionnais, St.-Bonnet-des-Quarts, and Bussières, based on ancestral claims from the maternal side of his family.[206] His wife's status, as a member of the old and powerful house of Nanterre, confirmed and strengthened the validity of Jean LeViste's claims to nobility which depended on two generations of female lineage. Though it may have been argued in the fifteenth century that noble descent could not be transmitted from mother to son,[207] women played an important and respected role in noble culture that was linked not only to the fantasy of chivalric love, but also to the reality of feudal life.

Vassals were naturally expected to pay homage and honour to their seigneur's wife, regardless of the ceremony of courtly love. The nobleman's ideal wife commanded such respect, not simply for her beauty or kindness, but also for her wisdom, fortitude, and loyalty. The knightly virtues that served the warrior on the battlefield also served his wife, for, as Christine de Pisan reminds us, such qualities were indispensable to a woman who was responsible for the management of her family's domains in her husband's absence.[208] Noblewomen also commanded a certain degree of economic power which they gained most often through marriage: the "power of the keys" gave them full charge of the household's functioning, and gifts and dowries that included clothing, jewellery,

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[203] J. Evans, Art in Medieval France 987-1498: A Study in Patronage, London: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 185.
[204] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 97.
[205] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 224.
[206] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 97.
[207] From P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 58.
[208] From J. Verdon (ed.), Vivre en France, p. 114.

money, pensions and land holdings were often left in their control.[210] Finally, in cultures in which men were responsible for the physical and legal defence of the country (in contrast to a leisure society), women were the repositories and transmitters of culture and values;[211] therefore, the ideal noblewoman was a powerful image of virtue and wisdom that served as a model for her peers and subordinates.

The command that the noblewoman may have had on the popular imagination is best illustrated by the ultimate example of this role at the time, the Queen of France. Like her peers, the king's consort shared in her husband's prestige: as he was "emperor in his kingdom," she was "mistress of the house" of France, that is a model wife and mother.[212] The increasing popularity of positive images of women throughout the fifteenth century may, perhaps, be related to the perceived image of the country's foremost female, as we note the increasing piety and morality of the female royal court in France after the death of the notorious Isabeau of Bavaria whose scandalous debauchery and moral laxity would find marked contrast in her successor Marie of Anjou. This tendency would continue throughout the century to find its strongest manifestation at the court of Anne of Brittany, wife of Charles VIII and Louis XII, who was particularly conscientious and protective of her maids' virtue.[213] Her female court was most highly regarded for its nobility, beauty and intelligence; the piety of the Queen's ladies was celebrated when Anne of Brittany extended the *Ordre de la Cordelière de St. François* to her female entourage whose merits won them the privilege of wearing the order's insignia, or *gorgery*: a golden plaque embellished with red and black enamelled letters surrounded by a braided cord also enamelled in black.[214]

Courtly images of the female correspond to this idealised image of noble perfection which all bear the same air of gracious piety and demure poise (figures 37, 68 & 69). Although, all members of the nobility were responsible for exemplary moral behaviour, its women, ever burdened by the stigma of their role in the Fall of Man, had a double moral obligation: to prove their own spiritual perfection and to provide a model thereof, by emulating the ultimate female, the Virgin Mary. We then see that the Marian imagery included in this work contributes to the image of nobility, not only for its place in the iconography of love, but also for its place in the iconography of the ideal woman. However, women, though capable of spiritual achievement, were inherently spiritually flawed and, therefore, required the guidance and protection of a male figure – father, husband, or God.

While the glorification of LeViste women on a monumental scale would certainly have served Jean LeViste's desire to manifest his own nobility, such images of feminine perfection would

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[210] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women , p. 279.
[211] E. J. Putnam, The Lady, p. 131.
[212] E. Bourassin, Pour Comprendre, p. 68.
[213] E. Bourassin, Pour Comprendre, p. 77.
[214] I. Cloulas, La Vie quotidienne, p. 69.

undoubtedly have been appreciated or understood by the women of Jean LeViste's household: his wife, Geneviève de Nanterre, and their three daughters, Claude, Jeanne, and Geneviève. Perhaps, as has been suggested, our patron intended this work to celebrate his marriage[214] and more particularly his wife whose nobility and wealth undoubtedly contributed to those of Jean LeViste himself. However, the problem of heraldry again renders this argument problematic: if Jean LeViste intended to honour his wife in view of reinforcing his noble claims, he would undoubtedly have depicted her arms alongside his own, not only as the respect due his spouse, but also as a manifestation of the noble ranks to which the jurist had himself acceded. However, it is not impossible that these images of female perfection were intended, at least on one level, to communicate with the women in his custody.

The female situation in the Middle Ages may be resumed by the word "custody" which signifies "all efforts to educate women and save their souls."[215] Despite images and ideals of respect and admiration for women promoted by chivalric love, females were nonetheless dangerous to themselves and society because of their degenerate nature which had introduced sin into the world. Thus, despite the popularity of images of courtly love at the end of the Middle Ages, fifteenth-century literature on family, courtesy, and medicine insists on female fragility and male duty to protect woman from her own weakness.[216] "A woman in custody was loved and protected like a jewel of inestimable value, hidden like a fragile and precious treasure, guarded as a source of imminent danger, imprisoned as a well of inevitable evil."[217] Therefore, from earliest childhood and throughout their lives, women were placed in the custody of men (fathers, husbands, clergy) who guaranteed not only the female's salvation and the continued honour of her family, but also that she would be a source of pride and an object of approval of both family and society. The removal and protection from worldly threats may well strengthen Mr. Erlande-Brandenburg's interpretation of the renunciation of the senses, and it certainly seems to justify a comparison between the panel of "Sight" and the Swiss tapestry *Weltflucht einer Jungen Dame* (figure 71). Although their role as wife or mother may have had potential for respect and a relative amount of power, noblewomen were first and foremost females and, as such, required guidance, reinforcement and protection in their spiritual lives in order to attain the perfection that is represented in the tapestries of the *Lady and the Unicorn*.

The abundance of moral treatises and condemning sermons on female virtue shows the contemporary concern with the preservation and protection of a woman's means to salvation – her chastity. Most moral treatises addressed to women, such as the Doctrinal des Princesses et Nobles Dames by Jean Marot were, of course, specifically for members of the nobility or royalty who were,

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[214] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 66-67.
[215] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 82.
[216] C. Klapsich-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 57.

as we have seen, expected to provide a model of behaviour and morality for the lower classes.[219] Given the traditional role of ornament as a moralising tool and the male's responsibility to encourage and defend female virtue, it seems possible, then, that the *Lady and the Unicorn* was meant, at least on one level, to educate the LeViste women who would have benefited from its poetic expression of female perfection.

This perspective allows us to consider the *Lady and the Unicorn* in a new light, as more than a manifestation of *arrivisme* pride, a simple allegory of the five senses, or even the noble garden of love. The *Lady and the Unicorn* combines the purest vision of the *locus amoenus* with an unequivocal expression of perfect female virtue and depends on a considerable number of iconographic and social traditions to create an image of the perfect noble wife. Perhaps because our modern view of love as a romantic relationship has blinded us to the social significance of love as a cultural sign in the late Middle Ages, we have never considered the involvement of Jean LeViste's daughters in this tapestry, apart from Henry Martin's outdated attempt to attribute this work to the occasion of Claude LeViste's second marriage.[220] The lady in our series is beautiful, rich and refined; her nobility is proven, not only by associations with knightly culture, but also by her capacity to love which, as symbolised by the fertile garden, will allow her to bear many heirs; this noble virtue, however, is tempered by the woman's "ultimate virtue and saving grace," her chastity. The inclusion of love imagery conveys a romantic, feminine message of nobility, and the image of perfection projected by the six ladies of our work, who are physically assimilated to the LeViste family, depicts that to which the LeViste women should aspire. This complex celebration of LeViste women and their virtue magnifies glorification of the LeViste male (the unicorn and lion) who protects the lady and her enclosed garden of love.

However, marital relations typically had little to do with romance and self-sacrifice: the art of love and its practice were signs of membership in the upper class of French society in the late Middle Ages.[221] The actual paradox in the marital relation was not so much that it had nothing to do with love, but rather that the lady (who was formerly the object of the entire system of love) was expected to provide her husband with an all-consuming love which made her blindly believe in the "ultimate perfection" of her spouse.[222] Love, for authors like Christine de Pisan and the Ménagier de Paris of the later Middle Ages, was identified with obedience, and in the custodial relationship of marriage,

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[218] C. Klapsich-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 87.
[219] C. Klapsich-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, pp. 78-79.
[220] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 147-56. Mr. Martin recognised the weakness of his theory for iconographical arguments (the association of a once married woman with symbols of virginity such as the lady's long flowing hair or her contact with the unicorn). This theory is further rejected for the rules of heraldry and simply for the unacceptable date of 1510-13.
[221] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 25.
[222] C. Klapsisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, pp. 109-111.

women obeyed their husband.[222] If we consider the representations of perfect female nobility in the garden of love, we see that this woman masters the art of love, not only by being perfectly rich, noble and virtuous, but by focussing her enjoyment of the sensual pleasures of on her male counterpart – her fiancé or husband.

A wife's extreme love and adulation of her husband was known as *dilectio* and may be evoked in the first panel of our tapestry "Taste," in which the lady dotes on her symbolic fiancé with the *delectio* of the *graines de paradis* served in what may be seen as a "marriage cup."[223] The panel of "Hearing" recalls the ideal state of "Harmony" which reigned in the garden of love and was essential to a family's proper functioning, as illustrated by the depiction of the perfect family in the *mille fleurs* tapestry of the *Concert* (figure 23). This common allegory beautifies the female spouse's duty to obey her husband and family in order to maintain peace through the images of love and noble refinement.[224] The lady of the third panel not only "materialises" her virtue with the garland of humble flowers she weaves, this perfect woman awaits her lover and diverts herself by making a chaplet of carnations symbolic of their marriage. When we consider the various influences on the image of the perfect wife, the lady of "Sight" emerges as the first of particularly complex images in the series. The motif of maiden and unicorn, symbolic not only of courtly (physical) love but also Marian virtue, may be enriched by the allegorical figure of female noble existence, *Oiseuse* whose only occupation was to gaze at her own beauty.[225] Our lady, like *Oiseuse*, occupies herself with a luxurious mirror; however, the object of her interest is the reflection of her knightly suitor and future husband, the unicorn. The panel of "Touch" can also be appreciated for the various cultural forms it represents: the lady's virtue is appreciated through her long flowing hair, Marian appearance, and contact with the unicorn; her nobility is proven by her knightly stance, as well as her domination in the world of love; her capacity to fulfil the physical duties of a wife is illustrated by the phallic symbolism common to the epithalmic genre. Finally, the panel known as *A Mon Seul Desir* may be seen as the climax of the exposition of the LeViste lady's perfection and may be related to the ceremony, celebration, or reality of marriage.

A series depicting the perfect wife would, likely, include a depiction of the actual wedding, and as suggested already by Kristina Gourlay,[226] we may perhaps interpret the sixth panel of the *Lady and the Unicorn* in this context. The lady and her servant are both clothed in scarlet gowns, the most sumptuous of the series: red fabrics – made from the crushed bodies of Mediterranean insects known as kermes – were the most expensive to produce and, thus, reserved for the most special occasions in

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[222] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 112.
[223] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, pp. 97-98.
[224] C. Klapsisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, pp. 108-109.
[225] M. Cazenave, D. Poirion, A. Strubel, & M. Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 149.
[226] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," pp. 65-66.

the Middle Ages, such as weddings.[227] What is more, the luxurious tent held open on either side may also be related to a marriage context, as we find a very similar representation thereof in *Couple sous un dais* (figure25), which depicts a married couple with references either to the bride's virtue or fertility (the pot of flowers she waters) and marital faith and sexuality (the lap dog). Furthermore, we may relate the lady's lifting of her skirt as a common gesture associated with marriage scenes, found also in the well-known *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait* (figure 70) and in the engraving of the *Large Garden of Love* (figure 28).[228]

Finally, the casket which the lady receives from her servant may be interpreted in a marriage context in at least two possible ways. Were this panel an introductory scene announcing the depiction of a perfect wife, we may interpret the chest of jewels as the present given by the groom to his bride. The lady would, therefore, select a necklace from the box in preparation for her marriage, perhaps assuming the first material sign of her husband's control seen throughout the rest of the series. Or, it is also possible to interpret her gesture as removal of the heavy necklace, and the scene may evoke an image following the actual wedding: after the celebration, brides were assisted in their undressing and preparation for the nuptial bed by their friends or servants.[229] The lady perhaps prepares herself to practice the very explicit art of love and marriage that has been exposed throughout our series. We may even propose to reconcile this reading with Alain Erlande-Brandenburg's theory of the renunciation of the senses: the inherently weaker lady attains the only means for a non-religious woman to dominate the threat of physical desire and to protect her virtue – marriage.[230]

The images of the *Lady and the Unicorn* would, therefore, seem to communicate on several levels: as a sign of Jean LeViste's personal nobility, as a glorification of the women in his family, as a model for the ladies in his household to imitate. If our work was intended to provide the LeViste women with a didactic model, we should note the parallel with one of the most well-known literary works from the late Middle Ages, Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry. Inspired by a garden setting,[231] this moralising treatise presented stories and anecdotes from a father's youth *pour [ses] filles aprandre à roumancier*.[232] The aim of this work was to prepare the chevalier's daughters for their future role as wife, and he does not hesitate to include somewhat ribald accounts in his children's preparatory advice, as an essential part of a successful marriage was the physical union of two conjugal partners. Acceptable sexuality, however, is limited to the bonds of marriage, for the

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[227] F. Piponnier & P. Mane, Se Vêtir au Moyen Âge, Paris: Société Nouvelle Adam Biro, 1995, pp. 23-24.
[228] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p. 99.
[229] J. Verdon (ed.), Vivre en France, p. 106.
[230] Cazenave, Michel, Daniel Poirion, Armand Strubel, & Michel Zink, L'Art d'Aimer, p. 44.
[231] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p. 93.
[232] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, p. 148.

chevalier advises against gambling[233] – one of the most common activities of the garden of love (figure 40) – because gallant young men lose on purpose and offer jewels and precious objects as wagers which allow them, of course, to enter the good graces of their lady partners whose virtue could hence be tragically compromised.[234] Could the conspicuous absence of games and cards from our garden of love come from the same fatherly concern not to depict the licentious behaviour implied by the euphemism of *jouer*[235] as expressed in Eustache Deschamps' ballad of Robin and Marion:

> *Or apprenez-moi, mon doux ami,*
> *cet art. Alors il la touche et prend ses mesures.*
> *Les pages de son livre ouvrit;*
> *sa plume y bouta raide et dure.*
> *Elle cria un peu, mais elle endure.*
> *Et lui commence à jouer :*
> *un, deux, trois et à redoubler...*[236]

Like the Chevalier de la Tour Landry, Jean LeViste seems to create an image of love and female perfection that includes the reality of a married woman, yet establishes ideals and limitations that protect his female offspring from the threats of the outside world, their own weakness, and certain negative images promoted by society. Like the Chevalier de la Tour Landry, the patron of the *Lady and the Unicorn* has conceived this masterpiece to educate his daughters in matters of love in view of a noble father's greatest– a good marriage for his daughters.[237]

A Wedding?

Many scholars have attempted to prove that the *Lady and the Unicorn* was commissioned as a celebration of a LeViste male's marriage;[238] however, such theories are disproved by the lack of a female spouse's heraldry in this work. Nonetheless, we may still consider the possibility that the *Lady*

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[233] As did Anne de France in her advice to her daughter Susanne at the end of the fifteenth century. P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 175.
[234] P. Contamine, La Noblesse, p. 176.
[235] J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 42.
[236] From J. Verdon, Le Plaisir, p. 35.
[237] J. Huizinga, The Autumn, p. 149.
[238] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 67. C. Nordenfalk, "Qui a commandé," p. 56, & "Les 5 sens dans l'art du Moyen-Âge," La Revue de l'Art, 34, 1976, p. 26.

and the Unicorn played a role in a LeViste marriage. It seems possible that Jean LeViste may well have commissioned this work with at least one of his daughter's marriage in sight. Obviously, he could have intended his work to function on a didactic level, whereby, his daughters (and perhaps his own wife) would have benefited from its beauty and their noble custodian's care. However, given the date of Claude LeViste's first marriage, it seems possible that the *Lady and the Unicorn* functioned in a particular marriage and, perhaps, in several ways.

Claude LeViste and Geoffroy de Balsac were married on August 26th 1493.[240] This most satisfactory date would perhaps suggest that our tapestries played a traditional decorative role, as *mille fleur* works were the most popular form of decoration at weddings for the "flowery meads" they simulated.[241] However, it seems curious that Jean LeViste would omit the groom's arms from a commemoration of his daughter's marriage. But, another role of tapestry in the marriage celebration came in the form of sumptuary gifts which were given to the bride, as both sides of her family attempted to outdo the other in extravagant displays to honour the future wife.[242] On the one hand her family celebrated its personal honour and the her virtue through such material display, while her in-laws showered her with gifts as proof of the honour she would enjoy in her new family. We may also wonder at the possibility of this work's commission before 1493 (perhaps in 1489 when Jean LeViste received his noble title), in which case it could have served as a sort of "advertisement" for his daughters as they neared the age of marriage.

As the principle motivation in marriage was money – particularly for the upper classes – a young man's future wife was most often chosen by his parents and family, who ensured that the woman was of an appropriate social and economic standing to be accepted into the family.[243] Although it was possible, love was hardly a necessity for married life and considered little more than an extra perquisite resulting from a husband and wife's shared life and efforts.[244] Love, as seen in our examination of the *Lady and the Unicorn*, was a sign of nobility. In addition to these images of aristocratic virtue, we should not forget the richness with which material culture is depicted to contribute to the nobility of the family throughout this series. That Jean LeViste would choose to monumentalise his family's nobility in the form of the perfect bride in waiting, may, therefore, be explained by the very illustrious family into which Claude LeViste entered in 1493.

Geoffroy de Balsac, seigneur of Montmorillon and of St. Clément,[245] was a member of the most knightly *noblesse d'épée*. His status seems to have been considerable, as he was raised at the royal

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[240] J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 425.
[241] R. S. Favis, The Garden of Love, p. 105.
[242] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 141.
[243] J. Verdon (ed.), Vivre en France, p. 103.
[244] C. Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), A History of Women, p. 282.
[245] G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," p. 213.

court where he served as page and first *valet de chambre* to Charles VIII,[245] and he continued to serve the monarchy under Louis XII as *chambellan* and *conseiller royal*.[246] This marriage was contracted, naturally, with the financial stipulations that were the greatest concern of noble partners: *Par le contrat, [Claude] fut dotée de 25.000£ compris en cette somme 1.000 écus d'or à elle légués par le testament de M. Mayeul de Nanterre, président au Parlement de Paris, son ayeul maternel, le tout hypothéqué sur la seigneurie d'Arigny et de Liergues et le seigneur de Balzac la dota de sa terre de Montmorillon et de 600£ de rentes.*[247] In addition to matters of money, though, the question of a potential wife's nobility would likely concern such a family as the Balsacs, and the *Lady and the Unicorn* may well have served to materialise Jean LeViste's honour, the irreproachable perfection of his daughters, in short his "sole desire" – that of any noble father – the successful marriage of his daughters. The validity of Jean LeViste's "claims" to *noblesse* has been shown in our examination of noble culture; however, the particular monument to his success, contrary to popular belief, is not a lament at his lack of a male heir.[248] This is a celebration of the perfect bride in waiting who will continue and surpass LeViste nobility through extremely successful marriages. Claude LeViste, herself, would enter a second very successful marriage with Jean de Chabannes, cousin of Geoffroy de Balsac and member of a most illustrious house. Although Claude LeViste would die childless, the *Lady and the Unicorn* continued to associate her father's arms and very personal view of nobility with a long and intricate line of distinguished aristocratic families.[249]

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[245] A. & C.-M. Fleury, Le Château d'Arcy, p. 66.
[246] J. Odin, "Claude LeViste," p. 25.
[247] From J.-B. de Vaivre, "Messire Jehan LeViste," p. 425.
[248] K. Gourlay, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 67. G. Souchal, "Messeigneurs LeViste," pp. 264-265.
[249] H. Martin, "*La Dame à la licorne*," p. 162.

V. CONCLUSION

The *Lady and the Unicorn* thus emerges as a monument to the LeViste family whose bourgeois origins were rapidly obscured by spectacular legal careers in the royal sphere. However, this work far surpasses a simple heraldic display, as seems evident from the various iconographic traditions that contribute to its imagery. Much more than a sign of the *orgueil du parvenu*, the *Lady and the Unicorn* is an encyclopaedic vision of noble culture and of the ideals promoted for women in the late fifteenth century. Therefore, Jean LeViste's complex and very personal vision of nobility focuses in this work on women and is, consequently, clarified not only by the history of women but also by the life of the females in Jean LeViste's life.

The role of women in the culture of love is quite obvious, but what is less evident is the informative perspective visual representations of love and noble culture may provide us in the study of women. As it is inherently linked to the garden of love by its form, *mille fleurs* tapestry, in particular, may prove to be a useful tool to investigate the reality of women in the Middle Ages. This potential becomes all the more convincing when we survey the subjects of this very popular decorative form and realise that nearly all secular subjects include a representation of women in some form. It would seem, then, that the history of women in the Middle Ages is much less distant and irretrievable than is typically assumed. Though such images hardly represent the reality of women, they certainly do inform our understanding what was expected of women through the idealised images that formed the popular vision of women in the late Middle Ages.

Illustrations

Figure 1
The Lady and the Unicorn
"Taste"
1490-1500
Wool and silk
3.77m x 4.66m
Paris, Musée des Thermes
et de l'Hôtel de Cluny,

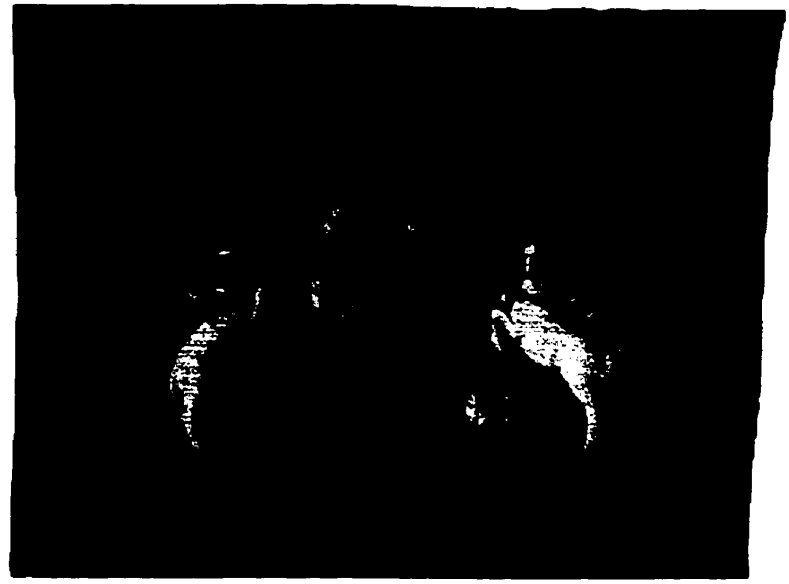


Figure 2
The Lady and the Unicorn
"Hearing"
3.69m x 2.90m

Figure 3
The Lady and the Unicorn
"Smell"
3.68m x 3.22m

Figure 4
The Lady and the Unicorn
"Sight"
3.12m x 3.30m

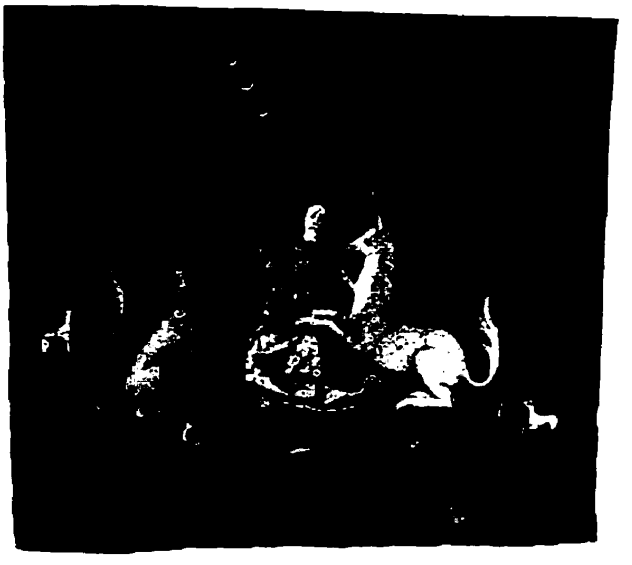


Figure 5
The Lady and the Unicorn
"Touch"
3.73m x 3.58m

Figure 6
The Lady and the Unicorn
"A Mon Seul Désir"
3.77m x 4.73m

Figure 7
"Penelope" (fragment)
The Illustrious Women
1480-1483
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts

Figure 8
The Heraldic Tapestry of Philip le Bon
(detail)
1466
Bern, Musée d'Histoire

Figure 9
The History of Perseus
1490-1495
Private Collection

Figure 10a
Moulins Triptych
Virgin and Child (Central Panel)
The Master of Moulins
c. 1498
Moulins Cathedral

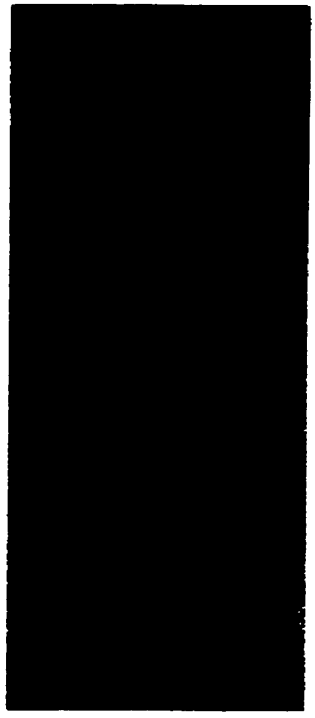


Figure 10b
Moulins Triptych
Anne de Beaujeu (Right Wing)

Figure 11
"Calice de la sainte plaie," and "Cueillette des fruits"
The Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn Book of Hours*
Printed by Pigouchet for Simon Vostre
16 September 1498.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. des Impr., Vélins 29112

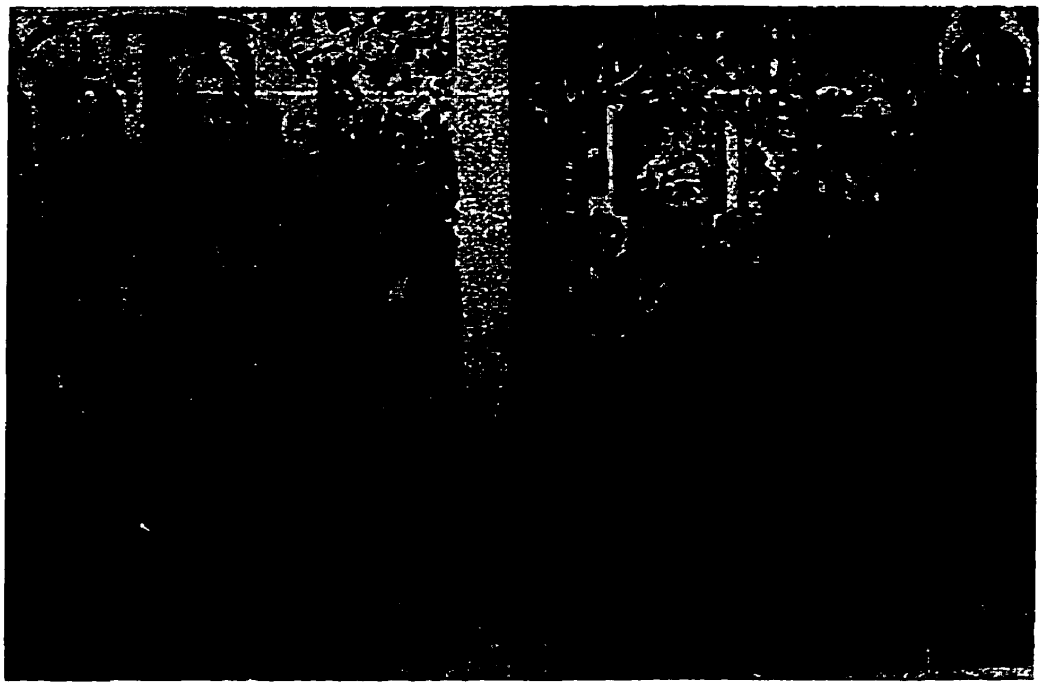


Figure 12
"Bain de Bethsabée"
Miniature from the *Heures de Séguier*
Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn*
Chantillly, Musée Condé

Figure 13
"Bain de Bethsabée"
Book of Hours
Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn*
Printed by Pigouchet for Vostre,
16 September 1498.

Figure 14
The Unicorn in Captivity
The Master of the Hunt of the Unicorn (?)
c. 1500
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
The Cloisters Collection

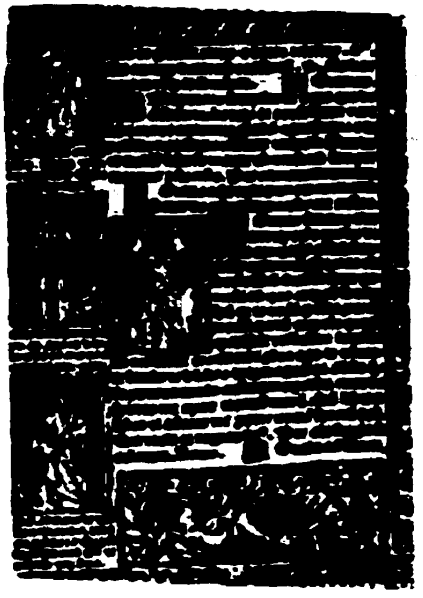


Figure 15
"Sibyls"
Book of Hours
Master of the *Hunt of the Unicorn*
Printed for Vostre c. 1502
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
Rés. des Impr., Vélins 1559

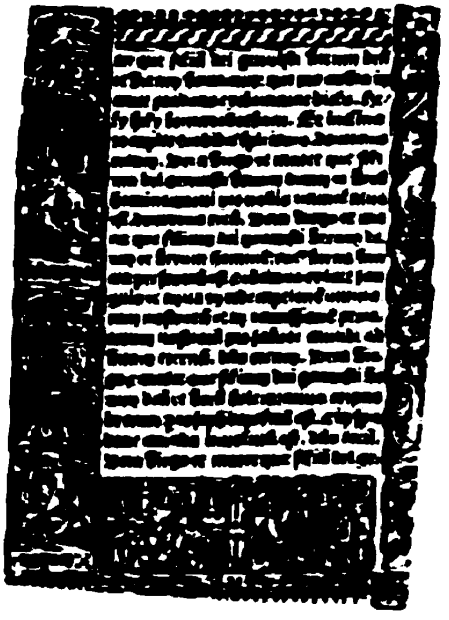


Figure 16
"Prudence and Temperance" & "Confession and Marriage"
Master of the Hunt of the Unicorn
Heures à l'usage de Xaintes
Printed for Vostre c. 1507.

Figure 17
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"Reading"
c. 1500
Paris, Musée des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny

Figure 18 (below)
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"Scenes of Gallantry"

Figure 19
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"Embroidery"

Figure 20 (below)
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"The Promenade"

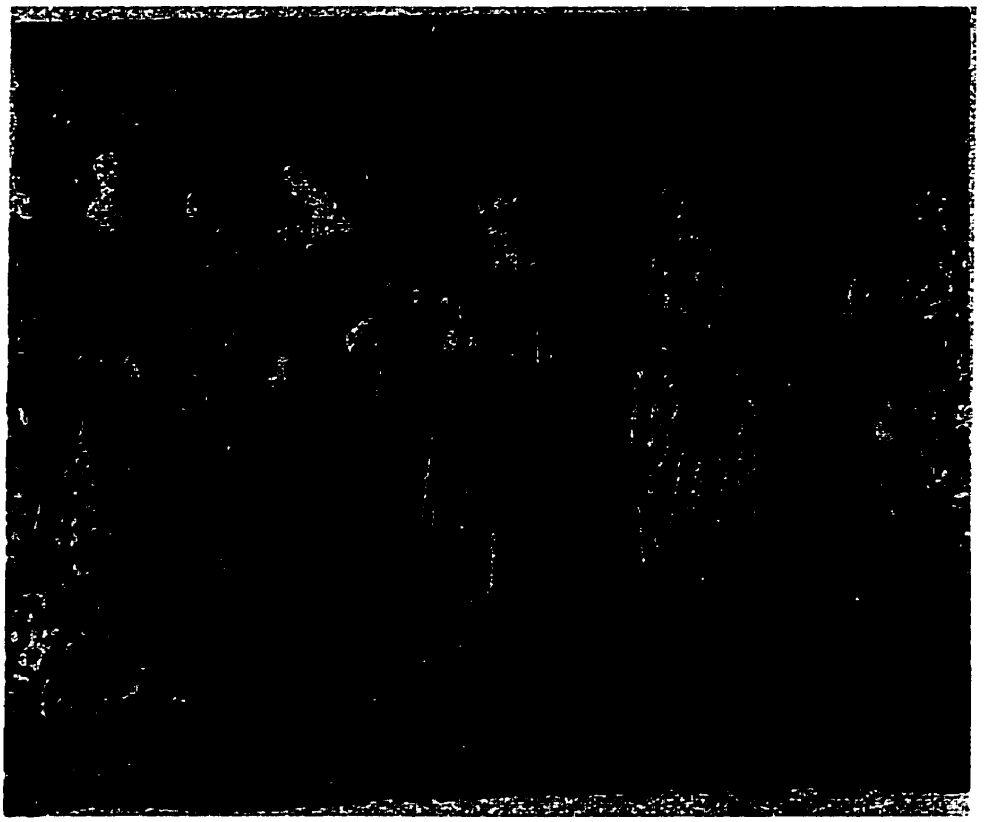


Figure 21
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"The Departure for the Hunt"

Figure 22
Scenes from Seigneurial Life
"The Bath"

Figure 23
The Concert
Early Sixteenth Century
Château d'Angers

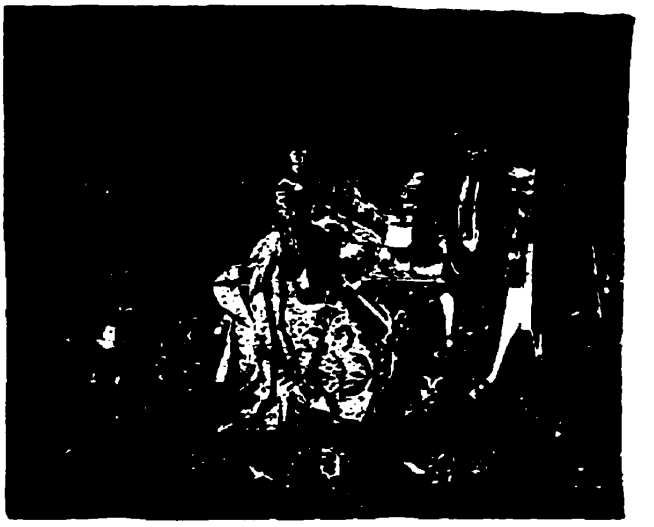


Figure 24 (right)
The Giving of the Roses (detail)
c. 1435-1440
New York, Metropolitan
Museum of Art

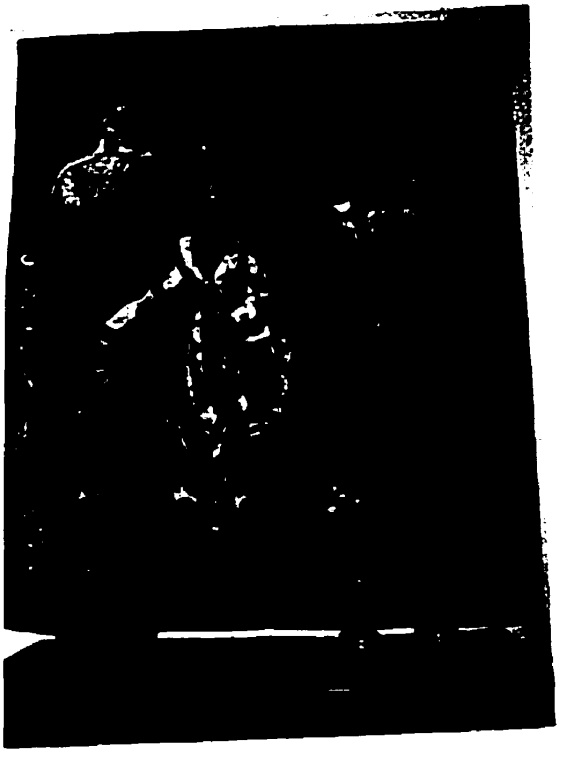


Figure 25
Couple sous un dais
c. 1460-65
Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs

Figure 26
"Sous le soleil de Satan"
Le Sixième Commandement
Late fifteenth century
Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe

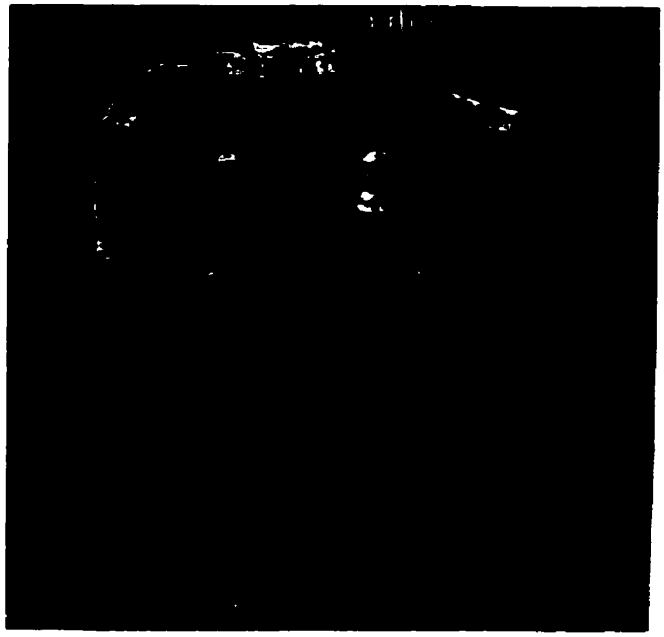


Figure 27
Garden of Paradise
Rhenish Master of the *Garden of Paradise*
c. 1410-1420
Frankfort, Städelsches Kunstinstitut

Figure 28
The Large Garden of Love
The Master of the *Garden of Love*
c. 1460

Figure 29 (above)
Lovers by a Fountain
Master g x b
Late fifteenth century

Figure 30 (right)
The Month of May
Fresco
c. 1400
Trente, Castello del Buonconsiglio

Figure 31 (below)
L'Offrande du héron
Early sixteenth century
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

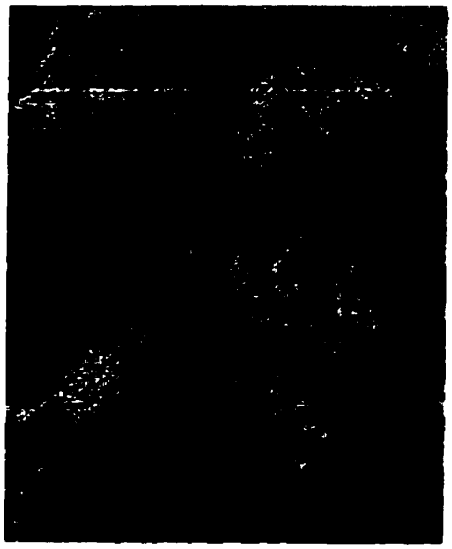


Figure 32 (above)
The Concert (detail)
Early sixteenth century
Paris, Musée du Louvre

Figure 33 (above)
Music-making couple by a fountain
Israhel van Meckenem
c. 1500

Figure 34
Love Magic
Master of the *Bonner Diptych*
c. 1480
Leipzig, Bildenden Künste

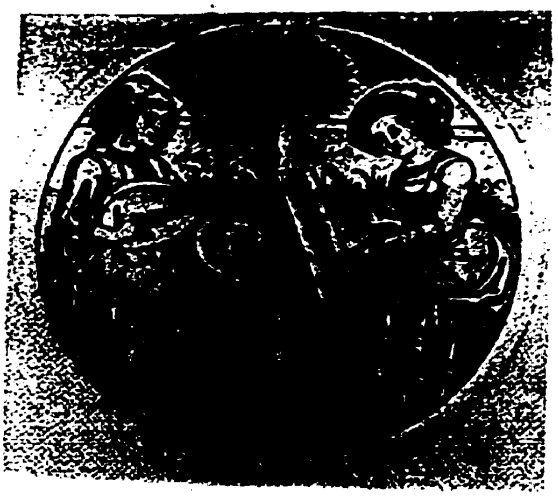


Figure 35
The Two Musicians
Master
Late fifteenth century

Figure 36 (above)
Love Garden with Chess Players
Master E. S.
Third quarter fifteenth century

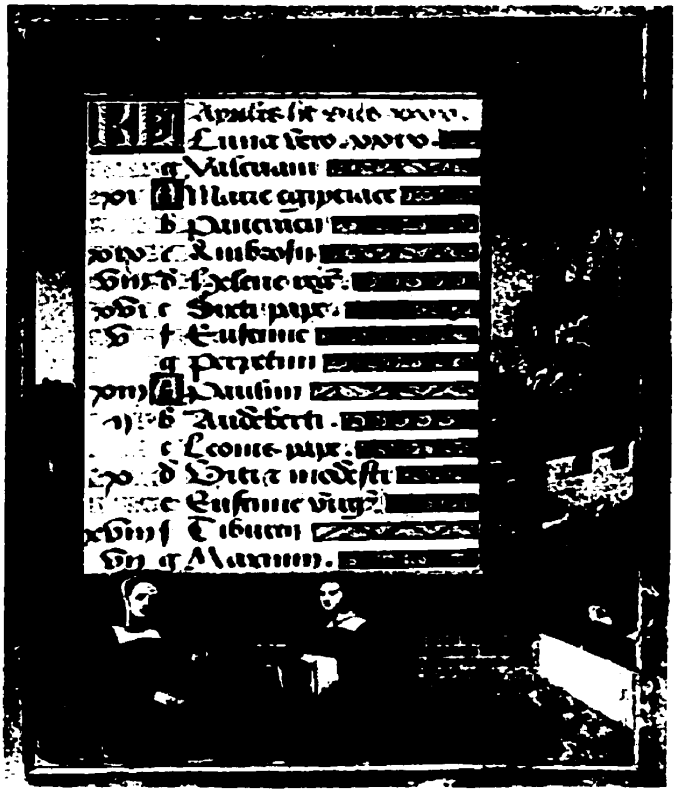


Figure 37
Calendar page, The Month of April
The Hours of Anne of Brittany
Jean Bourdichon
End fifteenth century
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
Latin ms. 9474

Figure 38
Samson and Delilah
Master E. S.
Third quarter fifteenth century

Figure 39 (above)
Folio 7 (detail)
Wharncliffe Hours
Maître François
Illumination
Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria

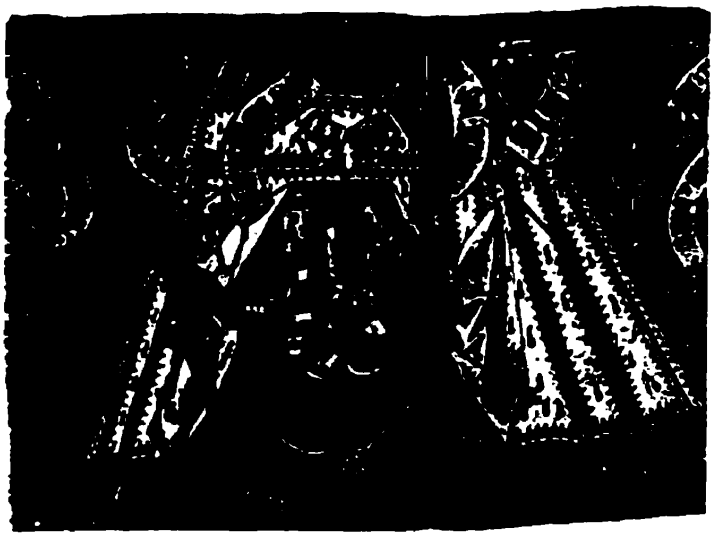


Figure 40
Liebesgarten mit Zelt (detail)
Tapestry
c. 1490
Basel, Historisches Museum

Figure 41
"Visite d'un chevalier"
L'ordre de la courtoisie
Illuminated miniature
c. 1500
Chantilly, Musée Condé

Figure 42
Die Neun Helden
Tapestry
c. 1480-1490
Basel, Historisches Museum

Figure 43
The Nine Worthies
Jaquiero
Fifteenth Century
Manta, Castello

Figure 44 (left)
The Château of Arcy
Originally built c. 1500
Vindecy, France

Figure 45 (right)
LeViste family arms
Mantel, *Chambre du roi*
Château of Arcy

Figure 46
Funerary plaque of Jean LeViste's tomb in the Celestine Church of Paris
Sketch, Gagnières Collection
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
Estampes, vol. Pe 11, fol 87.

Figure 47
Jagd nach der Treue
Tapestry
c. 1480-1490
Strasbourg

Figure 48
Ivory Mirror Case
Unknown French
London, Victoria and Albert Museum

Figure 49
Saint George Killing the Dragon
Monogrammist LN
Engraving
Mid fifteenth century

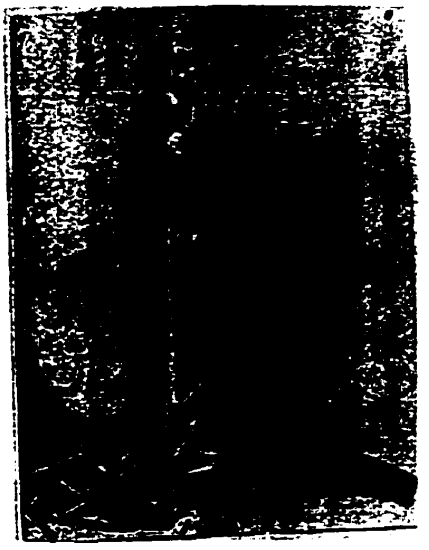


Figure 50 (above)
"The Third Wise Virgin"
Martin Schongauer
1470-1480
London

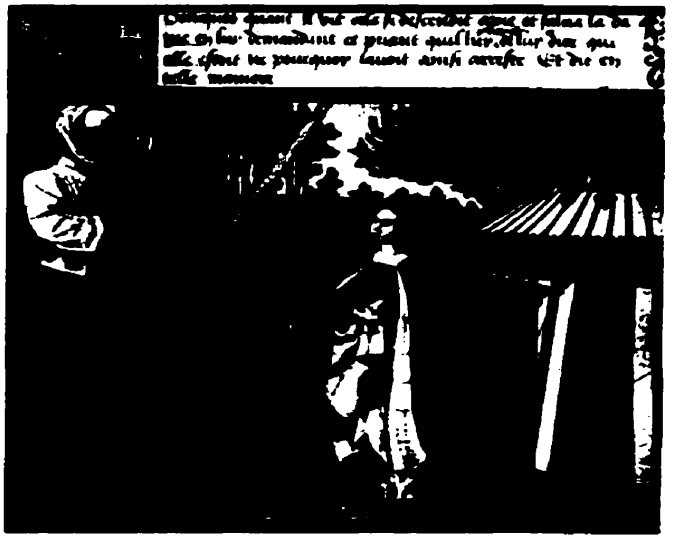


Figure 51 (above)
"Désir désigne Cœur à Dame Espérance (detail)
Le Cœur d'Amour Épris
Codex 2597 fol. 5 v.
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

Figure 52
Wildweibchen mit Einhorn
Tapestry
c. 1500-1510
Strasbourg

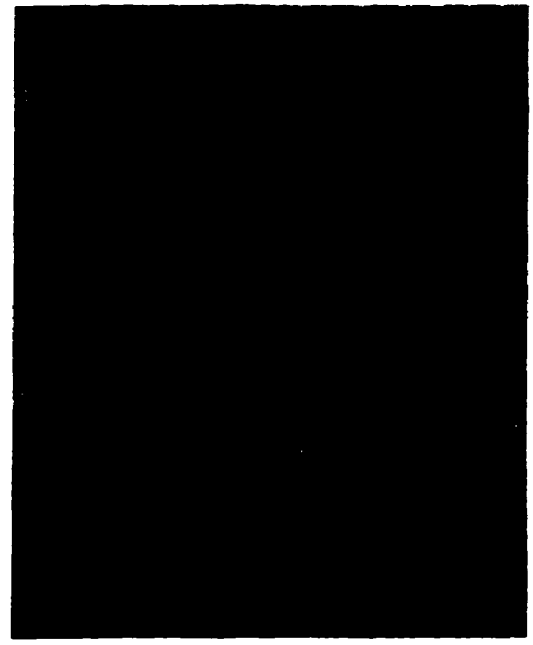


Figure 53 (above, left)
The "Lucca Madonna"
Jan van Eyck
Panel
1434-1435
Frankfort, Städelsches Kunstinstitut

Figure 54 (above, right)
The Virgin Among Virgins
Très Belles Heures du duc de Berry
Jan van Eyck
Illumination
1435
Formerly Turin, Royal Library

Figure 55 (left)
Madonna in the Rose Garden
Stephan Lochner
Panel
c. 1440
Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum

Figure 56
The Paradise of Venus
Unknown Florentine
Paris, Musée du Louvre

Figure 57
Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons
Tapestry
End of the fifteenth century
Angers, Musée des Tapisseries

Figure 58 (above, left)
Madonna of Humility
Master of Flémalle
Panel
c. 1430
Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum

Figure 59 (above, right)
L'Enfant faisant ses premiers pas
Illumination
Fifteenth century
Paris, Bibl. Nat., latin 1405, folio 49.

Figure 60 (left)
Holy Family
Joos van Cleve
c. 1513
New York, Metropolitan Museum

Figure 61
Annunciation (Mary of Guelders in a walled garden)
The Hourse of Mary of Guelders
1415
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek

Figure 62
Annunciation
Tapestry
c. 1500
Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum

Figure 63
Hortus Conclusus (detail)
Tapestry
1554
Sarnen (Switzerland), Benediktinerkloster

Figure 64
Hortus Conclusus
Tapestry
c. 1480
Zurich, Schweizerisches Landmuseum

Figure 65 (above, left)
Madonna in the Sun
Netherlandish woodcut
c. 1450-1560

Figure 66 (above, right)
Canticum Canticorum
Netherlandish woodcut
1470-1475

Figure 67 (left)
Virgin and Child with Four Saints
(*"Medici Madonna"*)
Rogier van der Weyden
c. 1450
Frankfort, Städelsches Kunstinstitut

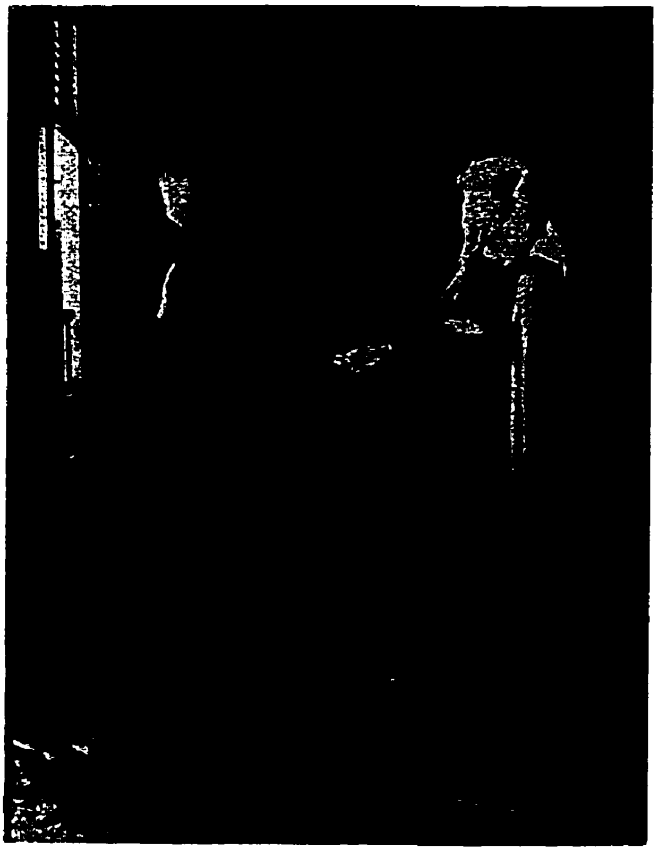


Figure 68 (above, left)
Jean Marot presenting his book on the Italian Campaign to Anne of Brittany
Illumination
c. 1507
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale

Figure 69 (above, right)
Claude de France with patron saints
The Primer of Claude de France
Illumination
c. 1505-1510
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

Figure 70 (left)
Arnolfini Wedding Portrait
Jan van Eyck
Panel
1434
London, National Gallery

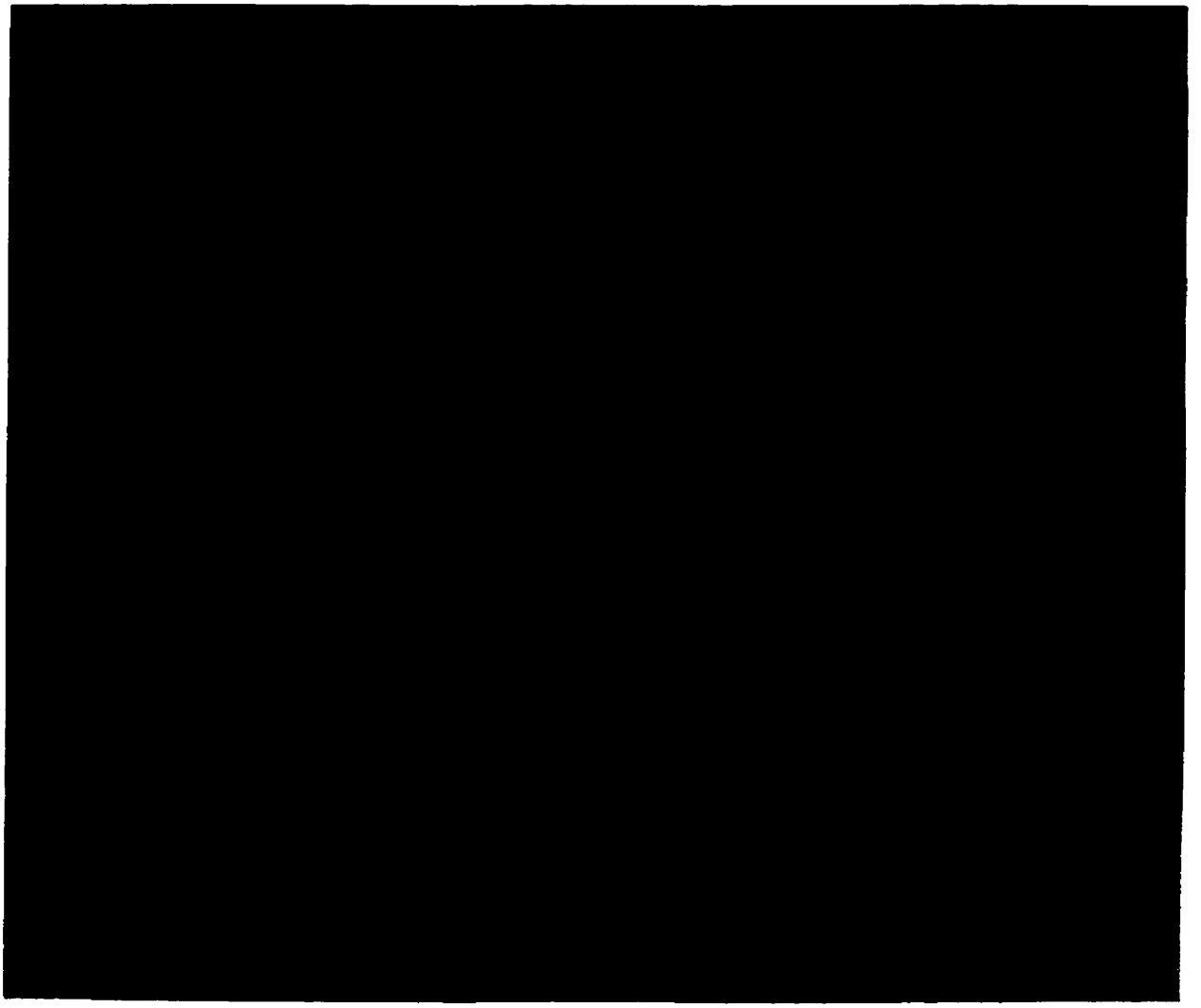
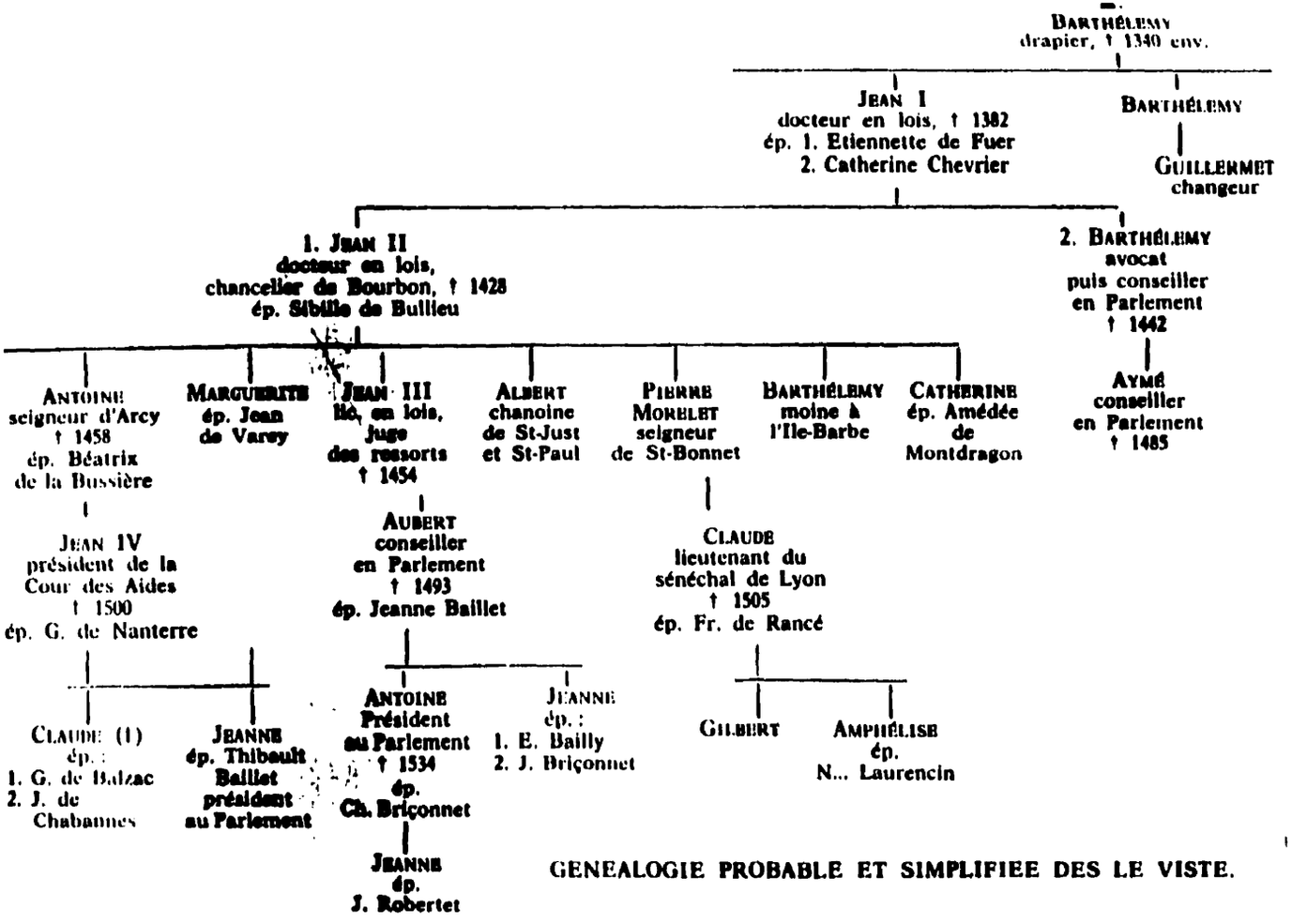


Figure 71
Weltflucht einer Jungen Dame
Tapestry
c. 1500-1510
Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe



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