

# CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF THE CZECH ART OF ILLUMINATION ABOUT THE YEAR 1400.

## Summary.

### I.

Czech painting in the second half of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries is now becoming, thanks to the painstaking efforts of native and foreign researchers, an important problem for European painting at that period in general. Today it is already an established fact that the influence of the Czech school of painting in the time of Charles IV and Wenceslaus IV, the most renowned period of Czech art, extended from the Italian frontiers to the Baltic Sea, and from the Rhine to the Vistula. Even England and France, lands of an ancient and mature artistic culture, where a long tradition had formed independent schools of painting, yielded to this powerful Czech influence at least in the sphere of book painting. The present essay sets out to prove this.

The assertion that the new Czech style of illumination, which arose under Charles IV and further developed under Wenceslaus IV, influenced English book painting is not entirely new. As early as 1901 Mr. J. W. Bradley<sup>1</sup> tried to show that the English school of illumination succumbed to Czech influences at the end of the fourteenth century. In his book, which was intended to give a survey of the development of the art of illumination in Central and Western Europe, Bradley rightly pointed out that the contact between England and Bohemia was then such a living one that this Czech influence is nothing surprising,

<sup>1</sup> John W. Bradley, *Historical introduction to the collection of illuminated letters and borders in the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London 1901.*

and he expressed the opinion that Queen Anne, the daughter of Charles IV and wife of the English King Richard II, brought Czech miniaturists with her to England<sup>1</sup>.

According to Bradley, the English miniaturists quickly learnt the new art of book ornamentation from the Czechs. His thorough knowledge of the more significant monuments of the Central European art of illumination put him on the right track, for in English MSS. of A. D. 1400 and after, we can certainly establish a Czech influence.

Over a quarter of a century has elapsed since Bradley's essay was written, and this time has been especially rich in fundamental works on Czech painting<sup>2</sup>, by which we are enabled to approach the problem of the mutual artistic influences between these two great cultural worlds with quite different scientific equipment and knowledge than those at Bradley's disposal. His main thesis remains unshaken, but so many new questions, urgently demanding solution, have arisen meanwhile, that we must open out the problem afresh in all its fulness, and this has not been done hitherto. Not even two very recent publications<sup>3</sup>, devoted to the history of English book painting, have thrown the desired light on this question.

<sup>1</sup> Bradley *ibid.*, p. 156. We cannot doubt that the Queen of Richard II, Anne of Bohemia (or Luxemburg) was the moving spirit of this change in England, a change which her immediate popularity soon rendered universal in every native scriptorium.

<sup>2</sup> More especially, Max Dvořák, *Die Illuminatoren des Johann von Neumarkt*, Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses XXII, Vienna, 1901.

K. Chytil, *Památky českého umění iluminátorského I*, Prague, 1915.

Fritz Burger, *Deutsche Malerei I*, Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft, Berlin, 1913, p. 121 ff.

E. Dostál, *Čechy a Avignon*, Časopis Matice Moravské, XLVI, Brno, 1922, pp. 1–105.

E. Dostál, *Iluminované rukopisy svatojakubské knihovny v Brně*, Časopis Matice Moravské, Brno, 1926, pp. 276–404.

<sup>3</sup> Eric G. Millar, *English Illuminated Manuscripts of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, Paris and Brussels, 1928, pages 30 foll.

Dr. Elfrida Saunders, *Englische Buchmalerei*, Florence and Munich, 1928, pages 136 foll.

The English authors have all been handicapped in dealing with this question because they have devoted insufficient attention to the most recent discoveries concerning the Czech school of painting. Almost the only Czech manuscripts known to English historians are *Liber Viaticus*, *Mariale Arnesti* and the manuscripts of Wenceslaus IV. They forget that since Woltman and Woerman drew the attention of the whole world to the Czech school of painting, our knowledge has grown in an unanticipated measure. They ignore completely the manuscripts in the Chapter Library at Prague, in St. James's Church at Brno, and in various other archives, manuscripts which prove that we have to deal not merely with single monuments of great price like the Bible of Wenceslaus IV, but with a whole great school of painting.

The first question to interest us here is this. Was it really a new Czech style which affected English book painting about 1400 and brought about a marked change of manner? If the answer to this question, obtained by a careful analysis of style, is in the affirmative, we must further determine whether we are to postulate some intermediate centre between Bohemia and England, such as Cologne or France, or whether we may count on the possibility of a direct influence of the Czech illuminated manuscripts on England, for the third eventuality, that there was a direct personal influence of Czech on English rubricators, is in our opinion impossible.

In time, the possibility of a Czech influence is strictly limited, because the Czech style under Charles IV changed towards 1400 into the playful, elegant, manneristic style which prevailed under Wenceslaus IV. Therefore the question as to which of the stylistic phases of the Czech art of illumination in the fourteenth century found its way abroad, offers us many fascinating glimpses into the history of the art of painting in Europe in that period of the Middle Ages.

## II.

Bradley (pp. 156 ff.) added a list to his stylistic analysis of the English manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and this list includes the works of illuminators which are especially important in assessing this transition in style. Today these

manuscripts are nearly all housed in the splendid library of the British Museum, London, so that it will not detract from the validity of our judgment, if in our analysis we dwell mostly on these manuscripts in the British Museum, for not even the most recent literature on the subject in England has been able to add any manuscript to Bradley's list which might in any way weigh against his opinion<sup>1</sup>.

For the sake of clearness it will be necessary to depict briefly the state of English book painting in the closing years of the fourteenth century. First, there is the large Wyclif Bible in two volumes painted about 1380<sup>2</sup>. Since there are no figured miniatures in either volume, our analysis is concerned only with ornament, which in both form and colour is quite conservative. Here we see initials consisting of intertwined twigs, panels of Romanesque scrolls set with white dots, circles and strokes, roses with thorns between the petals, Gothic ivy trefoils, spoon-shaped leaves, bell-shaped and rhombic leaves, corner medallions, golden balls set on hairlike stems, with filigree linear ornaments also attached, on a green background, dots and rings of gold not too clearly burnished, with a dark, muddy blue and pink as the fundamental elements of the colour scheme.

Nearly all these features are also seen in the beautiful Bible perhaps painted for Richard II<sup>3</sup>, which, Bradley asserts, shows a "strong Bohemian influence". Indeed, the ornamentation of this manuscript exhibits elements which prove that Czech ornamentation was not unknown to the miniator, but the use of older ornamentation as well places this manuscript among those of the transition style. In his description of two reproductions of miniatures from this manuscript, the author of the British Museum publication *Schools of Illumination* makes the interesting surmise

<sup>1</sup> Most sincere gratitude and thanks are here due to the administrators of the MSS. department of the British Museum for their extreme courtesy and readiness in giving the author immediate access to the most precious MSS. and in allowing him to photograph them without any of those long formalities which make work so difficult in other libraries of world repute.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Egerton MSS 617-618.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Royal MS. 1 E IX.

that the Czech style was introduced into England by artists from the Lower Rhine in the train of Queen Anne of Bohemia, since these two miniatures show inscriptions in the Low German dialect.

Besides all the elements of the older ornamentation as traced in the Wyclif Bible, there are also features of Czech ornamentation. Above all, there is the acanthus leaf, which here appears in various forms as an embellishment of the older decorative scheme. It has a fairly clear shape, and yet every competent judge of Czech ornament will recognise at once that he is not dealing here with original Czech work but with something in which the Czech ornamentation has been already changed.

Only one other ornamental element besides the acanthus may possibly be of Czech origin, namely the filigree decoration which adorns the background of some figured miniatures instead of the usual rectangular and rhombic ornament. Inasmuch as the use of filigree is comparatively rare in the French miniatures of the time, whereas it is very common in the Czech ones, it may well be supposed that the English miniators took this manner of embellishment from Czech books, but it cannot be proved with the same degree of certainty as in the case of the Czech acanthus.

Further, in deciding how far Czech painting influenced the English, the new colouring of the English miniatures is also of importance. No longer do we meet with muddy blue and pink tones, but with bright and lustrous colours as in the Czech manuscripts. We cannot assert that the English miniator imitated strictly the light colours of Czech miniatures, for there still remains behind something of the old colour grading, but there is a difference between the Wyclif Bible and that of Richard II which is so marked as to colours that this alone might constitute the chief feature of a great transition in style.

Another MS. contemporaneous, at least in its second part, with the Bible of Richard II is a beautiful Pontifical<sup>1</sup>. This clearly consists of two parts, the first (pp. 1 – 131) being illuminated in the old style, and very roughly at that, comprising in itself an example of the decline of the English art of illumination in

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Lansdowne MS. 451.

the latter half of the fourteenth century. But the second part (pages 132 – 249) illustrates, perhaps better than Richard II's Bible, the penetrating influence of Czech ornament on English works. In the border decorations, there suddenly appears an acanthus of beautifully harmonious form and colour.

Another monument dating from about A. D. 1400 and linked with the name of Richard II is the magnificent Missal, doubtless painted for use in the Royal Chapel. Unfortunately however, this beautiful manuscript has not come down to us complete. The miniatures, both decorative and figured, have been cut out. Only a few of these are preserved in two manuscript volumes in the British Museum. All the English writers surmise, and rightly, that the whole manuscript must have been extraordinarily rich and beautiful, for even these extant fragments evince a remarkable carefulness in execution and wealth of ornament. The ornamental initials fill the greater part of the two volumes, covering 350 pages, and we can classify them according to the degree in which the Czech elements have been accepted. And let it be observed at the outset that the initials, showing all the marks of the old style, mostly stand opposite those with Czech ornament.

All the ornamental elements, as presented to us in the Wyclif Bible (Egerton MS. 617 – 8) appear here too in gorgeous splendour, but side by side with the older decoration the Czech acanthus is seen which, however, has peculiar forms. It would seem that the rubricator was not acquainted with these initials direct from original Czech manuscripts, but from some other hand, perhaps from the work of some English scriptorium. Not only the shape but also the colour points to this. The most important difference between the acanthus ornament of Richard II's Bible and that of the initials from the Missal is that in the latter it tends, so to speak, to become Romanesque. The English illuminator does not give up the fundamental shape of the Czech acanthus leaf, but he varies its general appearance rather intensely in some details. The acanthus of these English miniatures has not the soft, supple form familiar to us from Czech manuscripts, but the leaves are sharp and angular so that they appear hard, and the mode of painting with its tendency towards lines and dots, strengthens this impression of hardness.

Somewhat earlier, perhaps, than all the manuscripts previously cited is the so-called Psalter of Princess Joan<sup>1</sup>. The Czech element is represented by its rich ornamentation consisting of delicately executed shapes where the acanthus is again evident filling the staves of the letter and partly its base. The colours of the acanthus have comparatively light shining tones, and it is much suppler and less thorny than in Richard II's Missal.

Showing remarkable conformity with this Psalter is another Psalter and Book of Hours which likewise rest in the British Museum<sup>2</sup>. The manuscript is not illumined in one style throughout, but exhibits quite clearly two parts with differing styles. In the second part (p. 28 onwards) the acanthus leaf and flowers are more in evidence than in any other English manuscript, so that we may truly say that here the acanthus ornament prevails over the older one, represented only by a fine filigree decoration terminating in bell-shaped and spoon-shaped leaves. In the first portion of the manuscript the older decoration is prevalent, although an acanthus does appear here and there. On page 14, for example, there is a fairly rich blue acanthus.

In this category we may also include two other manuscripts from the Dyson-Perrins collection, which comprises some of the best and most characteristic specimens of the new English art of illumination. They are Queen Elizabeth's *Book of Hours* (A. D. 1410) and the Book of Hours painted for Henry Beauchamp, Duke of Warwick.

The former is a splendid proof of the change effected in the general appearance of the border decoration by the introduction of the acanthus element. Indeed, on some pages of this richly illustrated manuscript, the Czech ingredients so predominate that they completely suppress the older English ornament. The decoration is, moreover, distinctly pliant as compared with the remarkably flat decoration of older manuscripts. In these details, as well as in the new magnificent colouring, we have irrefragable proofs of Czech influence, for no other school shows any such remarkable

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Royal MS. 2 B VIII.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Royal MS. 2 A XVIII.

resemblances, in general or in detail, to the English school of A. D. 1410.

From the Duke of Warwick's Book of Hours, we are able to trace the Czech influence further in manuscripts which, it is true, are not so closely related to Czech art as those already considered, but in which, nevertheless, such ornamentation would be impossible without the Czech influence. Moreover in these works, which we shall now consider, the ornamentation is elaborated so independently and with such changes that Bradley is justified in speaking of a new *English ornamentation*.

The manuscripts are these:

- (a) Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester's Psalter<sup>1</sup>,
- (b) Admiralty Ordinance, (ca. A. D. 1415)<sup>2</sup>,
- (c) Occleve's *De Regimine Principum*<sup>3</sup>,
- (d) Lydgate's *Vita Sancti Edmundi*<sup>4</sup>,
- (e) Gower's *Confessio Amantis*<sup>5</sup>.

A Sarum Missal<sup>6</sup> leads us somewhat further. The miniator hastens towards a definite geometrization, and once more we actually see a distinct renaissance of the Romanesque elements in manuscripts painted about 1400. Even the acanthus has become subordinate to the general type, and there is no very striking difference between the Romanesque scrolls, painted strongly plastic quite in the old style, and the short acanthus leaves, twisted like scrolls. At first glance it is a beautiful manuscript with strong plastic painting showing how considerable the ornamental wealth of English illuminated works really was, but not offering a sure proof of a Czech influence on English painting so far as ornament is concerned.

A wholly different impression is made by the marginal decoration in the Missal presented in the year 1446 to the Church

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Royal MS. 2 B I.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Cotton MS. Vespasian B XXII.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Arundel MS. 38.

<sup>4</sup> British Museum, Harley MS. 4826.

<sup>5</sup> British Museum, Harley MS. 3490.

<sup>6</sup> British Museum, Harley MS. 2785.



of St. Lawrence in the Old Jewry, London<sup>1</sup>. This is one of the English manuscripts in which the acanthus is used, relatively speaking, very profusely. The acanthus and filigree ornaments prevail, presenting a general picture more harmonious and varied than the usual decoration of English manuscripts.

These manuscripts which we have examined are among the most characteristic specimens of the new art of illumination as it was generally received in England at the close of the fourteenth century. We shall not analyse other manuscripts<sup>2</sup> which actually have acanthus elements in their adornment. Nor shall we analyse those two very precious manuscripts illuminated by John Siferwas the Dominican (ca. A. D. 1400) the Lovel Lectionary and the Sherborne Missal, whose ornament offers few characteristics by which we might judge that the painter had any very detailed knowledge of Czech manuscripts or the new Czech system of illumination. John Siferwas, it would seem, knew some of the manuscripts painted in France about A. D. 1400, but he created a style of decoration which, whilst owing something to the French one, was so independent, that one cannot possibly say that he copied any French model. In both documents, the Lovel Lectionary and the still more magnificent Sherborne Missal, the decorative system is similar and shows no Czech influence.

Having analysed the English manuscripts whose illuminations may depend upon the Czech works of the second half of the fourteenth century, we may conclude the following. Shortly before the end of the century, an element appeared in England which was certainly modelled on Czech ornamentation, namely, the acanthus and acanthus foliage in bright, shining colours with a distinct suppleness and executed in regular ornamental shapes. No evidence is forthcoming that the acanthus element reached England through another channel, say Cologne, since, so far as we know, the manuscripts of both Cologne and of the Netherlands have an ornamentation differing from the Czech model more pointedly than the new English one does, as will be seen later.

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Arundel MS. 108.

<sup>2</sup> E. g. British Museum, Add. MS. 16998 or Royal MS. 19 D III.

In the first English manuscripts whose miniators adopted the acanthus, it is used most frequently only to fill up the staves of letters, although isolated acanthus foliage also appears in the border decoration. About A. D. 1410, the acanthus appears in the border decoration much more abundantly, but in forms which show a rather superficial relationship to the Czech decorative system. The nearer we approach the middle of the century, the more strongly is the acanthus connected with the twig, which forms the skeleton of the ornamental framework, but at the same time the purely linear threadlike ornament is multiplied so that the point of similarity to the Czech manuscripts of either that or of an earlier period consists only in the acanthus.

As is well known, the Czech illuminators, in handling the new decorative style, gradually freed their ornament from all those elements which might still recall the earlier Romanesque or Gothic geometrizing ornament. About 1400 the acanthus became so general in Czech painting that it suppressed all older features. Drollery and facetious elements gradually disappeared. The manuscripts painted for Wenceslaus IV, with their symbolical drollery, are an exception. Further, the decoration of Czech manuscripts always creates an effect by the well balancing of colour against colour. No colour so dominates as to suppress the others. The wealth of shade and tone is wonderful, from light pink to dark fiery red, from light grey to dark, replete blue. Every shade of green and yellow is to be seen in the Czech manuscripts, but the artists evinced an amazing feeling for colour in avoiding those shades which might produce a glaring effect or might spoil the general harmony. And harmony of colour is borne out by symmetry of line. The very first manuscripts in the new style are distinguished by a peculiar lightness, grace and suppleness of ornamental line, especially in that of the marginal acanthus. It is true that in some of the Wenceslaus IV manuscripts, the excess of acanthus elements is such that the whole marginal decoration becomes too heavy and lacks a harmonious effect; but side by side with these works, where the rubricators had to display the greatest wealth of ornament in order to please their patrons, there appeared a number of others more restrained in

ornament and distinguished by a truly Renaissance feeling for the consonance of beautiful harmoniously-created forms.

This refined feeling for ornament permeates even individual features. The acanthus leaves and petals have different shapes in different manuscripts, but everywhere there is the striving after a lightly coloured artistic shape whose beauty is not too solid in its effect.

In English manuscripts the acanthus plays a different part. At the beginning of the new style there is a new element which is not organically connected with the older ornament. In Richard II's Bible, for example, we see that the initials decorated with the acanthus stand side by side with those adorned in the old style without any attempt at adjustment. Further development proceeds in an opposite direction than in the Czech manuscripts. In the English manuscripts the acanthus adapts itself to the older ornament, as is beautifully shown by the shapes and colours of the decoration of Richard II's Missal.

When, about 1410, English artists began using the acanthus more abundantly not only for the panel of the initial, but also for the ornamental framework of the border, it was always attached to the stereotyped framework of twigs, not of acanthus stalks. In short, the marginal decoration in the English manuscripts never did become, as it were, a living acanthus organism as in the Czech ones.

The nearer we approach to the middle of the fifteenth century, the more do we find the English miniators receiving filigree decorative elements into their marginal ornament, so that, for example, in MS. Arundel 109 filigree and dot ornaments are about equal to the acanthus elements. In English manuscripts, the acanthus never does constitute the only element: it always remains only supplementary to the geometrical framework, to which an ornament of quite another type is also attached.

In colours also a striking difference is manifest from the very beginning. There can be no doubt that the Czech range of colours had a very strong influence on the first English manuscripts painted in the new style, and that this first wave of Czech influence was powerful enough to determine the foundations of

the colour range of English ornamentation for half a century, but only the foundations. In Richard II's Bible and Missal, for instance, we perceive the reforming influence of Czech colours at work, for the blue and the pink, which, together with gold, had previously decided the colour effect of English ornamentation, are now freed from that ingredient which gave them a rather dirty and dismal shade, so that these colours become almost as bright and pleasing as in the Czech manuscripts of Charles IV's time. From the very beginning, however, these two simple colours are combined with white dots and lines which give a certain hardness to the otherwise soft colour scheme. Other colours actually did appear in the fifteenth century, but the English never attained that harmonious blending of colours evinced by the Czech manuscripts.

In concluding this comparison of Czech and English painting, we may well ask one further question. Whence did the Czech influences actually come into English painting, and were these influences still at work all the time during which the elements of Czech ornamentation appeared in English painting? We know that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries English painting had close relationships with the French. May we not then suppose that France had some influence on the development of English ornament?

### III.

It is certainly interesting that about 1400 the acanthus begins to appear in French manuscripts as an ornamental element, and that it has forms similar to those employed by the miniators of Czech and Moravian manuscripts. Count Paul Durrieu<sup>1</sup>, one of the best connoisseurs of the French art of that time, emphasized this fact, adding that there were mutual influences at work between Italy, Bohemia and France.

Durrieu was well aware that the acanthus appears in other French manuscripts about 1400, but he did not know whence it came. Its *point de départ* was, he thought, Italy, although he did

<sup>1</sup> P. Durrieu, *Les très riches heures de Jean de France, duc de Berry*, Paris, 1904. See page 65.

not hide the fact that the Czech works are also adorned with this characteristic decoration. Now, however, we can state with certainty that Italy was not the place of origin as Durrieu thought, since the Italian acanthus is quite different in character from that appearing in French and Czech manuscripts. Clearly Bohemia and not Italy was the source of the new French ornamentation. Moreover, the French illuminated manuscripts, like the English ones, began to change about 1400. New decorative elements appeared, unknown to the Gothic scheme hitherto prevalent, and these included the acanthus leaf as well as the acanthus foliage.

The French manuscripts painted in the seventh and eighth decades of the fourteenth century exhibit a rather stereotyped and almost conventional kind of border decoration. A narrow lath encloses both the column of the text and the figured picture which seldom fills out the initial and yet is an independent supplement to the column of the text. To these an ornament of ilex or ivy is attached, here richer, there poorer, sometimes with a conventional dragon in the corners, sometimes set with birds, hares, rabbits, angels, and other queer figures. The ornament always has thorny shapes. The ilex or ivy leaves grow either from narrow stalks, or they are joined to the main lath by some ornament.

Then in the ninth decade the French miniators began to take great delight in rich frames of filigree ornament which now began to compete strongly with the older ilex decoration; and two decades later (about 1410) this new border ornament with its fine symmetry, beautiful suppleness of line and harmonious composition received that element from Czech book-painting which it was able to adapt to the greatest advantage, namely the acanthus leaf and acanthus foliage, and these, with their suppleness, grace and lightness of form became only, so to speak, supplementary to the new scheme. This acanthus, with its delicate, graceful forms, does not in any way resemble the heavy, strongly plastic acanthus ornaments of contemporary Italian manuscripts. It bears eloquent testimony to the fine feeling for ornament on the part of these French artists that they could adapt the new foreign element in such a lively manner from the very beginning. The colours – bright blue, red, pink and violet – fully correspond

to the Czech models. The golden acanthus also appears in the French, though not in the Czech manuscripts.

One of the most beautiful French manuscripts is the Book of Hours of the Duc de Berry<sup>1</sup>, illuminated by the famous artist Jaquemart de Hesdin and others. The extant codex is unfortunately imperfect, but it shows acanthus leaves of Czech origin – a clear proof that the acanthus had penetrated into French works in general (A. D. 1410), even in that magnificent Book of Hours of the Duc de Berry, lying today at Chantilly, whose marginal decoration includes the acanthus, and that in an abundant measure. This decoration, we may calmly assert, is worthy of artists who executed figured miniatures. It is based entirely on the acanthus. The older elements are quite subordinate. Nor is the embellishment monotonous, since, although it may be classified into four groups, there is in each group such a variety of solutions that we must suppose the illuminators to have been men of a highly refined artistic fancy. In the third group we may indeed determine the quite direct influence of Czech ornamentation, and the ornamental system of the remaining groups is also built up on the Czech acanthus. Moreover, in this and other manuscripts, the French artists took over the Czech colour range in full. No English manuscript adopted the Czech colours with such surprising closeness.

Another very famous and magnificent manuscript of the French Netherlands, dating from the middle of the fifteenth century, showed clear traces of Czech influence – the renowned Turin Book of Hours. The original was destroyed by fire in 1904, but two years previously Count Durrieu had issued his publication to which we may refer<sup>2</sup>. For us one illustration is important, that is, the beautiful miniature of the Madonna with the holy women<sup>3</sup>. Its ornamental frame is not in the form of a lath to which stalks bearing ilex leaves are attached, but it consists of a very rich acanthus foliage, in itself a masterpiece of refined taste and creative ability. It may well have been the work of Hubert van Eyck and,

<sup>1</sup> *Grandes Heures du duc de Berry*, Bibl. Nat. Latin 919.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Durrieu, *Heures de Turin*, Paris, 1902.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* fig. XXXVI.

if so, it would point to the fact that the foremost scriptoria of that age received the acanthus elements of Czech ornamentation.

Side by side with these greater works we must here name some less-known ones, of interest to us in our search – the manuscript known as *Le Téreence de ducs*, and the description of travels called *Le Livre de Merveilles*, compiled by Jean Hayton. In the latter the acanthus in the *only* ornamental element used in the border decoration<sup>1</sup>.

A further stage in the development of this really magnificent marginal decoration is represented by the Duke of Bedford's Book of Hours<sup>2</sup>, painted in some French scriptorium about 1430. Some pages of this beautiful manuscript are adorned by an acanthus ornament strongly recalling that of *Le Téreence de ducs*, but filigree ornament is also there, as well as quite naturalistic flowers: violets, pinks, corn-flowers and roses. This was something new in principle, which later obliterated the usual character of French ornamentation.

Another manuscript in the British Museum leads us back a little. It is a Book of Hours of unknown origin<sup>3</sup> which, with Henry VI's Psalter<sup>4</sup>, points to the relationship between the manuscripts of Northern France and those of Avignon – a problem in itself<sup>5</sup>. It is, however, quite clear that the Avignon scriptoria first used the acanthus element in the second decade of the *fifteenth* century. They may well have found their models in the works of the illuminators of the Netherlands and Northern France who began to employ the Czech acanthus in such an abundant measure about 1410.

In his work on the Chantilly Book of Hours, Durrieu pointed to yet another possibility, that the French rubricators received the acanthus ornament either directly from the Italians or at least from manuscripts of Italian origin, but this hypothesis, though put forward by so distinguished a scholar, cannot be accepted.

<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Franç. 2810.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Add. MS. 18.850.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Add. MS. 32.454.

<sup>4</sup> British Museum, Cotton MS. Domitian A XVII, folio 13.

<sup>5</sup> See E. Dostál, *Čechy a Avignon*.

As countless examples testify<sup>1</sup>, the Italian acanthus is, above all, an ornament, and seldom constitutes a picture in itself. Its leaves twist, as it were, into paper cones. Their edges are smooth and not indented and crinkly like those of the Czech acanthus, and their shapes are indisputably heavier and more plastic than the very heaviest Czech specimens in the manuscripts of Wenceslaus IV. Their colouring is also different. Everything goes to show that the French illuminators modelled their work not on the heavy, plastic Italian leaf, but on the light, supple Czech one.

We may now return to our previous question. Did the Czech ornamental elements reach English painting through the medium of the manuscripts or miniatures of the French Netherlands? Judging from the evidence, we must answer in the negative. At the time when the first acanthus elements appeared in Richard II's Missal (ca 1390), there was not so much as a notion of the acanthus in French painting. In colours too, the English acanthus decoration of the more advanced fifteenth century differed very distinctly from the French.

It still remains for us to deal with another question raised by all those English authors who have recently devoted their attention to the mutual relations between English and Czech painting. Did the new ornament reach England from Bohemia, and not from the region of the Lower Rhine, more especially Cologne?

As already mentioned, this opinion originated from two inscriptions in the Lower Rhine dialect found on certain miniatures in Richard II's Bible. Yet, as Millar admits, neither of these inscriptions has been deciphered with authority. Our own impression is that the words of these inscriptions are not German. The main evidence for saying that the illuminator came from the Lower Rhine is therefore quite problematical.

Much has been written of late on the history of the lively relations between the Lower Rhine and England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Even such serious writers as Vitzthum<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> See especially Paolo d'Ancona, *La miniatura fiorentina*, Florence, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Vitzthum, *Die Pariser Miniaturmalerei von der Zeit des hl. Ludwig bis zu Philipp von Valois*, pages 196 fol.



Clemen<sup>1</sup> state that in the artistic development of the two regions, England gave just those impulses which the Lower Rhine and Cologne gratefully received!

As a matter of fact, the illuminated manuscripts of the second half of the fourteenth century, whose origin in the Lower Rhine or at Cologne is warranted, are exceedingly rare. It is characteristic that all the more recent works dealing with the paintings of the Lower Rhine and chiefly Cologne are silent about the Cologne illuminators and their monuments<sup>2</sup>. Neither do the lists of Rhine monuments offer us much material. Single manuscripts are, indeed, forthcoming, which can be in some way connected with the Lower Rhine or Cologne; and isolated miniatures in the city books are described by Scheibler<sup>3</sup>, but there is no indication of a great school of illumination to compare with the Czech one, with its own individual style recognizable at first sight. So far as there are books of Cologne origin, in the fourteenth century they are mostly painted after French models<sup>4</sup>. In the following century they are still dependent upon Franco-Flemish models. To reward our very intensive search, we have not managed to find a single Cologne manuscript dating from 1390 to show that the new ornament had been naturalized in the Lower Rhine scriptoria by that time.

Now Millar believed that not only the scriptoria of the Lower Rhine and Cologne but also those of France, Flanders and Holland contributed towards the rise of the new style. This theory is certainly not tenable if we are to judge by the evidence derived from the Dutch manuscripts which, as is generally acknowledged, were nearest and most closely related to the products of

<sup>1</sup> Paul Clemen, *Die Chorschranken des Kölner Domes*. Walraff-Richartz Jahrbuch I. 48, and the article in *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* XXXIV, 1912, pages 62 foll.

<sup>2</sup> Scheibler-Aldenhoven, *Geschichte der Kölner Malerschule*. - Heribert Reiner, *Die Kölner Malerschule*, 1925. - Burger-Schmitz, *Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft, Die Deutsche Malerei*, II, 363 fol.

<sup>3</sup> Scheibler, page 85. Burger, figs. 49, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Vitzthum, page 196. C. H. Weigelt, *Rheinsche Miniaturen* in Walraff-Richartz Jahrbuch I, pages 5 foll.

the studios of the Lower Rhine. A beautiful publication<sup>1</sup> presents in word and picture a very satisfactory account of the outstanding productions of painters in the Netherlands at the end of the fourteenth century. From this it is clear that before 1400 there is no Dutch painting which is in any way very noteworthy. Art is displayed mainly in the form of border decoration, and this shows that the painting of France, and pre-eminently that of Paris, was the unattainable model for the Dutch miniators during the whole of the fourteenth century.

Our analysis of the ornamentation of English manuscripts painted about 1390 fully corroborates Bradley's hypothesis. We can state with certainty that English ornament received Czech elements, although we cannot strictly define through which channel they came. That the Czech influences came by way of the comparatively old-fashioned Lower Rhine or Dutch scriptoria is impossible, and that they came through France is highly improbable. As to the time of the rise of the Czech elements, no direct proofs can be found that Queen Anne took Czech miniators with her to her new home thus transplanting the new art of illumination from Bohemia to England. So far as we can see from the manuscripts preserved, there are no traces of direct collaboration. Yet it is very probable that through the Queen's influence the English scriptoria became acquainted with the Czech style of illumination some twenty years earlier than the French ones did. At least there is no serious evidence to the contrary.

#### IV.

Let us proceed to the second part of our investigation whether a Czech influence is traceable in the figured miniatures of England at this time. This problem is indeed much more complicated, for in the second half of the fourteenth century the Czech school of painting is dependent both on Italian art (especially on the models of Florence and Siena) and also on the figured painting of France. It is true that the Czech school worked

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Byvanck and G. J. Hoogewerff, *Noord Nederlandsche Miniaturen der 14<sup>e</sup>, 15<sup>e</sup> en 16<sup>e</sup> eeuwen*, Gravenhage, 1922-1925.

up these two elements into an original whole. Our difficulty lies in this very fact, for when we determine Czech elements in English figured miniatures, we can never be certain that they actually came from Bohemia.

Years ago Bradley ascertained that in the English books a new style of figure appeared about 1390, at the same time as, and no less remarkable than the new acanthus element. In Richard II's Bible and Missal there are figures depicted quite plastically. Indeed, in the Bible the miniator changed entirely from linear presentation to plastic painting in which the colour does not merely fill in the features, but forms directly the plasticity of the bodies. In the Missal the painting is not so uniform.

We may cite other manuscripts<sup>1</sup> as examples of plastic figuring. But others rather prove that the new plastic style was not generally received, since the old tradition was so strong that in time it absorbed the new elements completely, and an independent style emerged.

In short, the resulting plastic art was something quite new, and had nothing in common with the former one of a decorative linear character. The new plastic art sought to create a body in three-dimensioned space. In this it agreed with Czech art very closely, as also in the pose and dress of the figures. The Czechs, it would seem, owed most to Italy (Giotto), whereas there is evidence of the influence on the English of a new naturalism which permeated art everywhere (A. D. 1375 – 1400) with increasing power.

A careful analysis of individual figures in the most representative manuscripts (A. D. 1390 – 1450) leads us to the following conclusion. We have no clear proof that Czech art had a strong influence on English figured miniatures. There is no imported element to correspond to the acanthus decoration. The figures in the English manuscripts of the period are very diverse, and proffer no definite impression. English painting became distinctly

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Royal 2 B VIII, Royal 2 A XVIII (second part from page 34), Cotton MS. Vespasian B XII, Arundel 38, Harley 2785.

eclectic, and, it would seem, it varied with the leading tendencies of the time.

Naturalistic influences prevailed to a fairly marked degree, and English artists naturally sought help and suggestions from the more mature Franco-Flemish school. At the same time such a typical artist as John Siferwas could make use of such foreign elements in both figured and ornamental painting so independently that he could produce a new style in which the ancient delight of the English in the decorative function of the line might celebrate once more its signal triumph. In other manuscripts too, the Franco-Flemish influences are treated more or less happily.

## V.

What part did Cologne play in the formation of the new style of English painting? In answering this question some English writers have not proceeded with sufficient caution. English scholarship still inclines without reason to the view than in the relationships between Cologne and England, Cologne was the giver and England the receiver. This view has, however, been refuted by German writers.

Let us discuss, as a typical case, the altar of St. Clare. It is the generally received opinion that this altar was painted about 1380, that is, some ten years before the rise of the new style in England. (For some unknown reason, it was completely repainted about 1410.) Now, the older pictures in St. Clare's Monastery, Cologne, were obviously painted in the Gothic linear style. The quite decoratively linear types of the faces, the general lines of the figures in Gothic style, the colouring of the altar and the decoratively plastic manner of presentation — all these exclude the possibility that such work might be the model for the new English figured paintings of about 1390.

Those English scholars who maintain the Cologne theory can name no monuments in support of their thesis except those works ascribed to the supposed Master William, works the origin of which has been dated too early, for they certainly do not go back to before 1400, as German scholarship now recognizes.

As for the paintings at Cologne in the new style beginning

with the later pictures of the altar of St. Clare, these all show clear traces of the new plastic style, a soft modelling and an indefiniteness of outline (less stylish than before), qualities which Saunders mentions as characteristic of the Cologne school about 1380.

Similar characteristics are displayed by the miniatures in the new English style, but there are nevertheless fairly obvious differences.

The painting of Cologne, like that of Bohemia, is, we should say, distinguished by a greater transcendentalism, whereas English painting is characterized by a greater earthliness. The figures of the saints in Richard II's Bible are still idealistic, and yet there is much naturalism in them. The lyricism of Cologne art is quite absent from English miniatures. Even the beautiful miniature of the Crucifixion in the Sherborne Missal, although executed from monumentally idealistic plans, bears no traces whatever of Cologne lyricism. Very often there appears in English miniatures, and that chiefly in the facial expression of the persons depicted, a material aridity of presentation. The poetry of the Czech and Cologne paintings is foreign to these miniatures. Hence our conclusion that no English book could have been painted by a Cologne or Czech miniator.

Dutch book painting must also be excluded as a possible model in either ornamentation or figured compositions for the English miniators painting in the new style.

## VI.

As far as possible, we have compared the English miniatures painted in the new style with the Czech, French and Dutch book decoration and with the picture painting of the Cologne school, and we have determined that there are points of agreement in certain types, in the general plastic presentation and in the main trends of these various schools of painting, but we have not been able to achieve a definite result as with our analysis of the ornamentation.

One further attempt we can make to obtain safer definition of the source of the new English art. We can compare the English

picture paintings with the book paintings and use the result of this comparison for the final solution of this obscure problem.

The extant specimens of English picture and wall painting (1350–1450) do not show that either the Czech or any other school influenced their development very strongly<sup>1</sup>. When we consider an interesting case, that of the famous diptych at Wilton House which has been denoted as a specimen of the Czech school of painting<sup>2</sup>, we find that most writers have merely jumped to the conclusion from the circumstance that Queen Anne came from Prague, etc. We can state with absolute certainty, on purely critical grounds, that this diptych is not of Czech origin, albeit it was not painted by an artist who had no connection whatever with the Czech art of that time.

Regardless of the youthful appearance of Richard II himself (who, when he died in 1399, was only 34 years of age), we may place the painting of this picture in the closing years of the fourteenth century. Just at that time, in Franco-Flemish and English miniatures, Gothic idealism was first combined with a striving after grace, delicacy and beauty, achieved by both the perfect harmony of construction and the new plasticity and colouring.

One feature determines the English origin of this diptych: an excessive delight in richly ornamental dress, set with jewels and precious stones.

No less English is another painting depicting four incidents in the life of St. Ethelreda<sup>3</sup>. The first two pictures of the preserved altar wings are a splendid confirmation of our previous analysis. In the picture of the marriage of St. Ethelreda with King Egfrith, only just the faces of the people are executed in a mildly plastic manner. All the rest is merely a part of the decorative whole. The dress of King and Queen, of Bishop Wilfrid and other persons

<sup>1</sup> See Tancred Borenius and E. W. Tristram, *Englische Malerei des Mittelalters*, Florence-Munich, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> See Neville R. Wilkinson, *Wilton House Pictures*, London, 1907. Page 68. Borenius and Tristram refer to the theory of Bohemian origin but declare themselves in favour of a French source.

<sup>3</sup> Borenius-Tristram, fig. 75.

and the broad ermine collars, are joined on to the golden background ornamented in relief, giving us the impression of a gorgeous coloured mosaic.

In the five pictures portraying Christ's passion<sup>1</sup> everything is again in this typically English style, and confirms our previous analysis.

The picture of the Crucifixion (the private possession of Lord Lee of Fareham<sup>2</sup>), is not so typically English. There are some things in common with Queen Elizabeth's Book of Hours<sup>3</sup> and the Sherborne Missal. On the whole, however, it may be said to belong to the English school of 1400-1410.

As for the triptych, supposed to come from the Estouteville family and thought by Cockerell<sup>4</sup> to be of Lower Rhine origin, we see in it rather a relationship to the German school of painting in general. The pictures of the Sacrifice in the Temple and the Annunciation link this triptych with Hamburg (and thus even with Bohemia), whereas it shows connections with the Middle Rhine in the pictures of the Sacrifice and the Crucifixion in which the figure of the centurion standing on the right of the cross is absolutely identical with figures in the painting of the Crucifixion at Mainz.

Bohemia, the Middle Rhine, Hamburg, Cologne. For which source are we to decide? When we consider that the iconographic themes of this triptych were at that time the common property of very many scriptoria, that they travelled from one centre of art to another, and that we even have compositions put together according to such patterns, then naturally these iconographic resemblances lose that power to convince attributed to them by English authors.

#### Conclusion.

We have endeavoured in this essay to solve the problem of the Czech influence on English and French painting about the year 1400. So far as we were concerned with the analysis of

<sup>1</sup> Borenius-Tristram, fig 71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sydney C. Cockerell in the Burlington Magazine, XLII, 1923, page 261.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

ornamentation, our undertaking was successful. We were able to determine with considerable probability that only the Czech acanthus ornament could have influenced the decoration of the English manuscripts painted in the new style shortly before 1400, and the rise of the new French decorative marginal design in manuscripts about 1400.

As soon as we proceeded to the analysis of figured miniatures, the results of our analysis became very slight. Just at that time there are influences passing from one centre of art to another so similar in their main tendencies that it is impossible to determine from which source any particular element derives. We have established only a negative conclusion, namely that the school of painting at Cologne did not have a decisive influence on the rise of the new style of English figured painting. In this there is no difference between English book picture painting and wall painting.

Further, we were able to certify that whilst a Czech influence on figured miniatures and picture paintings is not impossible, in many works there is a greater probability that the Franco-Flemish scriptoria inspired English painters. Doubtless the English school of painting worked foreign influences very quickly and thoroughly into pictures which are typically English. It is important that the scriptoria of the Czech lands were actually on such a high artistic level in 1400 that even to lands rich in an ancient artistic tradition they could stand as models pointing the way to artistic progress<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The author is deeply indebted to Dr. Simeon Potter for the great kindness and willingness with which he undertook the task of translating this summary into English.

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