

# The zodiacal vein-man between art, science and religion<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The article retraces the path of interpretation of astrological iconography contained in *Les très riches heures*, analyzing the link between astrology, science and religion represented in it. Thus, it seeks to highlight the attempt at cosmic ordering and orientation of which art was a part, providing plastic solutions capable of representing relations between the observable and the unknowable.

**Keywords:** *Zodiacal vein-man. Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry. Book of hours. Art and science.*

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The miniature of the zodiacal vein-man contained in the book of hours entitled *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (DURRIEU, 1904) is perhaps one of the most plastically notable examples of representation of the astrological elements of his time, in which a stated aesthetic-stylistic concern is noted ( Figure 1). However, as far as its meanings are concerned, the interpretation of this illustration, which shows a man covered in zodiacal signs and circumscribed in a mandorla<sup>1</sup>, remained incomplete for a long time. Much was speculated about the reason for the inclusion of such an image in a book of hours, which had a very specific function – of a devotional nature – which was to list prayers, texts and psalms for each day of the year. But the fact that the image of a zodiacal man is found exceptionally within a book of hours was not the only thing that caught the attention of art historians and archaeologists. Its unique iconographic configuration, composed by the Limbourg brothers, also raised questions. The Book of Hours was commissioned in 1413 by Jean de Valois (1340-1416), the Duke of Berry, a noted patron of the arts. Considered one of the most refined and sumptuous medieval manuscripts, the book has 206 folios, illustrated with 63 large full-page miniatures, four of medium size and 62 of a smaller format, all of them painted in gouache on vellum paper. It was commissioned to the Limbourg brothers: the famous miniaturist Pol Limbourg and his brothers Hermant and Jehannequin (ALEXANDER, 1990, p. 437). In 1426, Jean de Valois died and, coincidentally, the Limbourg brothers also succumbed to the plague. The Book of Hours was thus unfinished, but later, between 1482 and 1489, the work was completed by the miniaturist Jean Colombe (1430-1493).

In 1904, the art historian and conservator Paul Durrieu (1904, p. 6)<sup>2</sup> edited the manuscript of the Book of Hours, referring to it as the most admirable in the Duke of Berry's collection, "far surpassing all others in the be-

1 The mandorla (from the Italian mandorla) is, in religious art, an almond-shaped halo of light that envelops the entire figure of a holy person; it was used in Christian art generally for the figure of Christ and is also found in Buddhist art. Its origins are uncertain. The western mandorla first appears in the 5th-century mosaics that decorate the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, surrounding figures from the Old Testament. See more in the entry Mandorla at Encyclopaedia Britannica. London: Encyclopaedia, inc., 2007.

2 Paul Durrieu (1855-1925) was a French art historian, member of the École française de Rome and the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres. He was adjunct curator of the French Illuminations and Primitivists section of the Musée du Louvre.

**Figura 1**  
 The Limbourg brothers, Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry, 1416, manuscript illumination, 29 x 21cm, Chantilly, Musée Condé, licensed by Wikimedia Commons



auty of its images”. The presence of a zodiacal man in a manuscript of that nature intrigued him, however. In fact, an image like that raised questions of a bibliographical, historical, philosophical, theological and, above all, stylistic nature. Especially in the case of a representation that, apparently

constituting a unique example in its time, as Durrieu stated, would come to be recurrent in future printed books of hours, after the manuscript of the Duke de Berry.

The human figure overloaded with zodiacal signs seems to have been inspired by certain similar illustrations found in works on judicial astrology. The introduction, next to the calendar, of a figure of the same genus, which bibliophiles call “anatomical man”, where only the planets were replaced by the signs of the zodiac, became, shortly after the time of the Duke of Berry, a practically constant tradition in the printed books of hours with engravings, edited in Paris in the last years of the 15th century by the Pigouchets, the Simon Vostres, the Vérards and their followers. In contrast, in the whole series of handwritten hour books, which go back to a time before the invention of printing, the image has never been found, to my knowledge, except in Chantilly’s manuscript. How is *Les Très Riches Heures* a unique example among manuscripts? How was the image of the “anatomical man” introduced into it? Is this a testament to the great credit that astrologers [...] enjoyed with King Charles V and his brothers? Was it inspired by one of the manuscripts found in the library of Duke Jean? How did a later analogous image come to have good fortune in Paris in other printed books of hours? There is a very interesting bibliography problem to be solved there; we just point it out to the researchers<sup>3</sup> (DURRIEU, 1904, p. 29-30).

Durrieu understood the figure as a key element, which marked the exceptionality of that copy of the book of hours. He interpreted it as an “anatomical man”, based on the bibliography available at the time. In the decades that followed Durrieu’s publication, some historians of science, of astrology<sup>4</sup> and even medicine historians (SUDHOFF, 1914, p. 206) sought, each in their own way, to decipher the different elements contained

3 In this and other quotations in foreign languages the translation is ours. In the original: “La figure humaine surchargée des signes du zodiaque paraît être inspirée de certaines illustrations analogues, qui se trouvent dans des ouvrages d’astrologie judiciaire. L’introduction près du calendrier d’une figure du même genre, que les bibliophiles appellent la figure de «l’homme anatomique», où seulement les planètes sont substituées aux signes du zodiaque, est devenue, longtemps après l’époque du duc de Berry, une tradition à peu près constante dans les livres d’heures imprimés avec gravures qui ont été édités à Paris, à dater des dernières années du quinzième siècle, par les Pigouchet, les Simon Vostre, les Vérard, et leurs émules. Au contraire, dans toute la série des livres d’heures manuscrits remontant à une époque antérieure à l’invention de l’imprimerie, jamais, à ma connaissance, on ne l’a rencontrée, en dehors du manuscrit de Chantilly. Comment *Les Très Riches Heures* constituent-elles ainsi parmi les manuscrits un exemple unique? Comment l’image de ‘l’homme anatomique’ s’y est-elle glissée? Est-ce un témoignage du grand crédit dont les astrologues [...] ont joui auprès du roi Charles V et de ses frères? A-t-elle été inspirée par un des manuscrits qui se trouvaient dans la bibliothèque du duc Jean? Comment plus tard, une image analogue a-t-elle fait fortune à Paris pour les livres d’heures imprimés? Il y a là un très intéressant problème de bibliographie à résoudre; nous nous bornons à le signaler aux chercheurs.”

4 On debate about the zodiacal vein-man see Deonna (1913, 1914) and Boll, Bezold (1926).

in that illustration. Most of them pointed to the medieval tradition of medical-astrological doctrine, raising the hypothesis that the material could derive from medicinal and astrological aspects in vogue at the end of the 14th century and widely disseminated in the 15th century.

In 1916, on the pages of the *Revue Archéologique*, the archaeologist Franz Cumont, based on the 1904 edition of the book of hours, wrote an article entitled *Astrologica*, in which he seeks to answer the questions that Durrieu had left open. To this end, Cumont resorts to concepts that are particular to astrological theory. First, Cumont points with great relevance the ancient notion of melothesia to explain the presence of zodiacal signs over the entire length of the figure's body. The classic concept of melothesia emerged in the Hellenistic period, representing the "doctrine of domination of the 12 zodiacal signs through the indications of certain anatomical regions of the human body"<sup>5</sup> (GELLER, 2014, p. 3). That is, melothesia dealt with celestial influences – planets, zodiacal constellations and even the decans of the zodiacal signs – over parts of the human anatomy. It thus appears as the praxis of what we know as astrological medicine. It is clear that Cumont's concern was to answer the philosophical and philological question of the placement of the figure of the zodiacal man in a book of hours. To do so, however, it was necessary for Cumont to also deal with the artistic dimension of illustration. For the stylistic configuration of the image was exceptionally unusual and intriguing. It demonstrated a new questioning of an artistic nature, and pointed to intersections between different domains of knowledge, as we will see.

It is in this aspect that Cumont errs in his analysis: his tools are insufficient to respond to certain elements of the work, and he ends up resorting to easy solutions and formulae. Regarding the double human figure contained in the miniature – a fundamental aspect for the interpretation of the image, as we will see – he said that it was the artist's "will" to express his "virtuosity" when representing front and back<sup>6</sup> (CUMONT, 1916, p.

5 Astrological medicine was already commonly used by the Egyptians, but it was in the school developed around Hippocratic medicine that the concept of melothesia gained specific therapeutic contours. Cf. Geller (2014, p. 3).

6 In the original: "dû au désir du peintre de montrer son habileté à modeler le nu de dos comme de face."

10). Now, as the art historian Harry Bober (1948, p. 8-19) would show some decades after Cumont, occurrences of analogous duplicate figures could be found amidst the pictorial repertoire of manuscript treatises on general medicine and surgery from the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>7</sup> It was, therefore, the iconography of what we will call here the zodiacal vein-man, a conjunction of representations of *Homo Signorum* – man of signs, an iconographic type that imagetically represented the impact of the 12 zodiacal signs on the human body<sup>8</sup>, the so-called melothesia – and *Homo Venarum* – man of veins, an iconographic type where the main veins of the human body were represented, for use related to phlebotomy or venous bleeding: a medicinal practice, then very widespread, of incisions performed in the veins with an object of removal, by bleeding, of substances considered harmful to the human body. The representation constructed in the form front-back expressed the complementarity between the two iconographies, from whose union the zodiacal vein-man emerged<sup>9</sup>.

It is necessary to keep in mind, in order to conceive the pertinence and importance of this type of iconography for the time, the binding nature of pre-modern epistemology, which operated essentially by analogies between the constituent things of the world. Formulations from Antiquity that linked the human being to the cosmos in a relationship of similarity – the “microcosm man” – were at the base of knowledge as a whole, including medicine and its therapeutic practices. As a miniature of the macrocosm, the human being and his body, composed of the four elements (fire, water, earth and water) and permeated by the four humors or fluids (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, melancholy), kept a sympathetic relationship with the heavenly bodies. The constellations, located in the outermost sphere according to Ptolemaic astronomy, governed the outermost parts of the human anatomy; the planets, constituting the innermost spheres of the celestial system, governed the innermost organs of the body, the viscera. And the Moon, being the closest celestial body to

7 Bober presents as an example of a duplicated figure representing the conjunction between *Homo Signorum* and *Homo Venarum* the figures illustrating Codex 3599, f. 116 and 116v, preserved at the Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris.

8 We can identify the emergence of this iconographic type from the mid-twelfth century, in a phenomenon that intensifies from the thirteenth century onwards. It should be noted that this is not a renewal of astrological literature. The survival of the doctrine of the 12 signs and its influence on the human body is actually due more to a development of medicinal practices on the body.

9 Bober uses the expression “Zodiac-Vein Man”.

the center of the system, just above the so-called sublunar world (whose matter was also shaped by mixtures between the four elements), exerted a decisive influence on fluids such as the tides. In an analogous and sympathetic manner, it also acted on the humoral fluids present in the human body (BOBER, 1948, p. 7-12). Now considering the importance of venous bloodletting in the repertoire of therapeutic practices in the Middle Ages<sup>10</sup>, and the fact that, as a consequence of the Moon's influence on fluids, there would be favorable and unfavorable months and days for its realization, determined by the Moon's position in relation to the constellations and planets (and, by extension, the affected anatomical regions, according to the logic of melothesia), we begin to understand the meaning of the presence of Zodiacal-Venose iconography in a calendar-type book, such as the books of hours.

Bober was one of the few researchers, within the field of art history, to take the stylistic elements present in that illustration as essential data for the analysis, thus seeking to investigate and decipher them (SEZNEC, 1940, p. 63-64). He was the one who intuited that seen from the back referred to the iconography of the venous man, although he did not have perforations on his body, much less the characteristic lines that related the parts of the body to the applicability of venous bloodletting. For Bober, the Limbourg brothers chose not to list these signs in the figure on the back, because, in the case of a double and ambivalent figure, the frontal figure would already exercise, a priori, this function<sup>11</sup> The double

10 Phlebotomy was, recalls Bober, "the most common operation in both preventive and curative medicine", as the transcribed passage indicates in *The School of Salerno, Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* (Francis Packard and Fielding H. Garrison, New York, 1920, p. 148), cited by Bober (1948), who, speaking about the therapeutic indications of bloodletting, affirms: "Of bleeding many profits grow and great, / The Spirits and senses are renewed thereby: [...] / By bleeding, to the marrow commeth heat, / It maketh cleane your braine, relieves your eye / It mends your appetite, restoreth sleepe, / Correcting humours that do waking keepe: / All inward parts and senses also Clearing, / It mends the voyce, touch, smell and taste and hearing."

11 Many, before Bober, speculated about the origin of the double figure in the illustration. F. de Mély, for example, raised the hypothesis that the prototype for the creation of the double figure was the iconography of *The Three Graces* contained in the Cathedral of Siena. For Mély, the Limbourg brothers had some contact with this iconography on their travels to Italy. Some time later, this idea was refuted by the archaeologist and historian Waldemar Deonna, who relates the astrological figure of the Duke of Berry to the Sun god figures of the Modena relief and to other pagan figures. The duality of the figure, according to him, could be related to the equally dual figure of Janus Bifrons. Their opposite disposition, back to back, and the contrast between the hair color of the two figures could indicate the polar opposition between West and East, between day

**Figure 2**  
 Guild Book of the  
 Barber Surgeons (MS  
 Egerton 2572, f. 50),  
 c. 1486, manuscript  
 illumination, s.d., Lon-  
 don, British Museum,  
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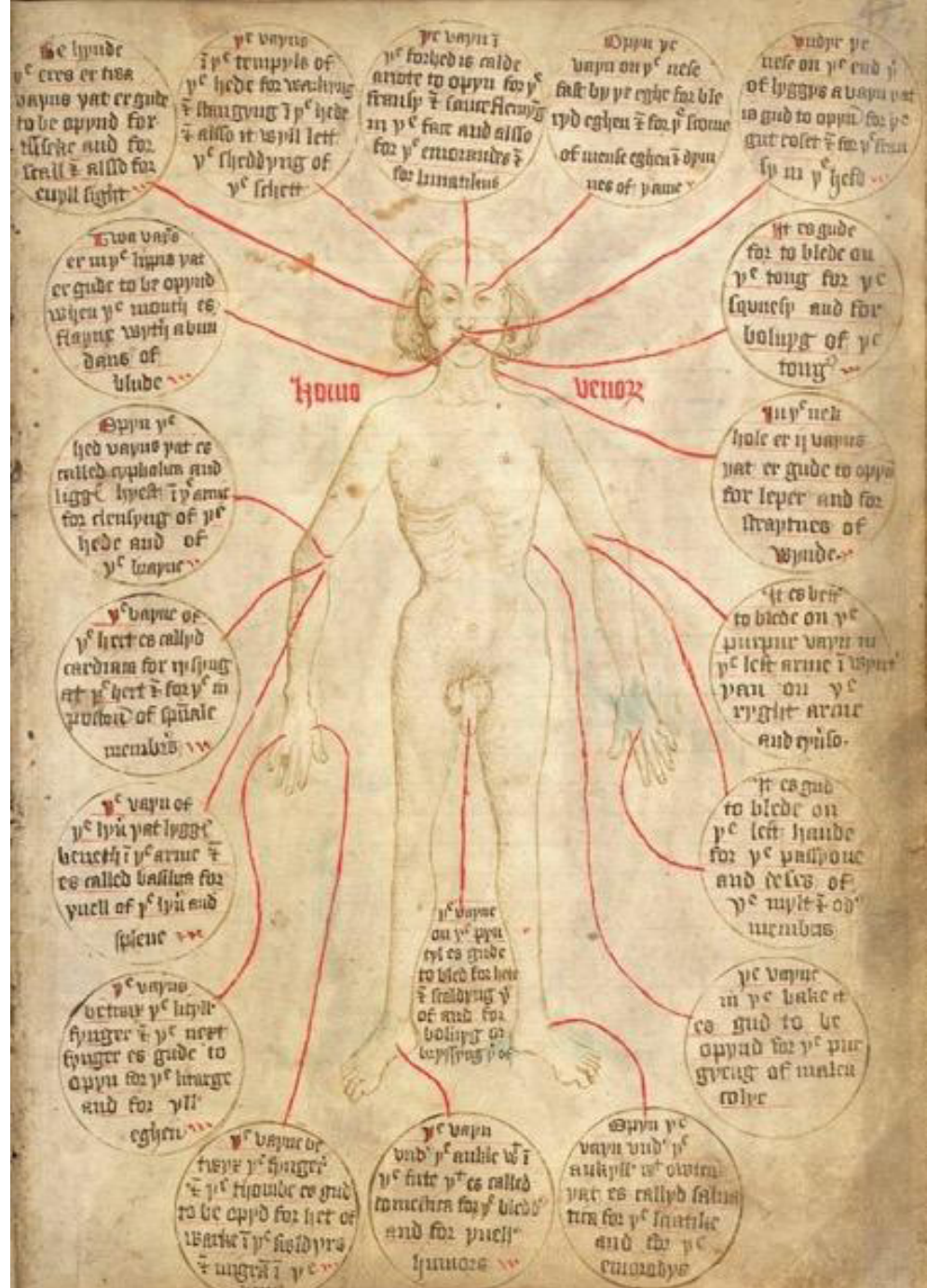


figure was, therefore, more than a whim or artistic subterfuge. It would have a clear function: by answering the figure of the man of signs with a double that referred to the iconography of *Homo Venarum* (Figure 2), the Limbourg brothers were to be rescuing essential elements of medical-as-trological practice.

and night. Bober (1948, p. 18-19) discards all the possibilities above, considering the lack of any indication that can confirm these interpretations. If “they all seem to possess some element of possibility,” he admits, “there is nothing that can effectively argue for any one of them, and for the exclusion of any of the others.” Cf. Mély (1913, 1922); Deonna (1914).



**Figure 3**  
 Liber Cosmographiae,  
 1408, manuscript  
 illumination, s. d.,  
 Dublin, The Wren Li-  
 brary, Trinity College,  
 licensed by Wikimedia  
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In fact, figures similar to those of *Les très riches heures*, conjugating *Homo Signorum* and *Homo Venarum*, already existed previously, as shown by Bober, providing examples extracted from manuscripts of the 14th and 15th century. In most of them the two figures are inseparable, to the point of merging into one (Figure 3). In them, the venous man may or may not have lines connected to different parts of his body, perforation points etc.

The double image contained in the illustration of *Les très riches heures* refers, then, to a medical-astrological approach, in the figure of the zodiacal vein-man. This hypothesis is supported by the probability, also supported by Bober (1948, p. 27), that the Duke of Berry had someone in his court who had mastered astrological medical knowledge. The amount of elements and references contained in the miniature led us to believe, in fact, that both the Limbourg brothers and the court of the Duke of Berry were familiar with this late astrological tradition, specific to the 15th century. It is known that the Duke of Berry was a great enthusiast of magical-astrological literature from pagan Antiquity. Among his library titles was a copy of

Abu Ma'schar's *Introductorium Maior*<sup>12</sup>. Durrieu (1904, p. 29) had already pointed out that the zodiacal man contained in the book of hours would possibly be the result of knowledge about judicial astrology at the time<sup>13</sup>. And Cumont had already touched, as we have seen, the concept of melothesia to exemplify the doctrine of astral influxes in astrological-medical practice. He had stated that the late astrological tradition contained in the illustration was due to the survival, circulation and penetration of works such as Manilius' (1977) *Astronomicas*<sup>14</sup> and even Ptolemy's (1980) *Tetrabiblo*<sup>15</sup>: The representation of the zodiacal man dates back, according to Cumont, to the Middle Ages, from the 11th century onwards, when scholars had in their hands astrological manuscripts coming from the East via India and the Middle East, through Abu Ma'schar. These manuscripts revealed the link between the human being and the cosmos, and configu-

12 Abū Ma'shar Ġa'far ibn Muḥammad ibn Umar al-Balḥī (in greek; πομάσαρ; in latin Gafar Abumasar Albalaghi e Abuma'xar Albalachi) was the best-known astrologer of the Middle Ages. He was born in Balḥ, in the eastern Persian province of Ḥurāsān, now Afghanistan. In 787 BC, he died at al-Wāsiṭ in central Iraq in 886 BC. Apparently he spent most of his life in Baghdad, where he lived near the Ḥurāsān Gate. Cf. Abu Ma'schar (1995-1996).

13 Judicial astrology intended, by means of certain techniques (particularly through the horoscope), to lead to "judgments", to "conclusions" about the destiny of individuals and peoples according to the configuration and position of the planets from certain moments of their life or story.

14 Manilius, having the poem of Aratus as a basis for the composition of his own work, wrote his poems at the end of the time of Augustus and the beginning of Tiberius (precisely between 9 and 14 AD). For many, Manilius' didactic poem could not be listed as an astrological manual or something destined for the training of new astrologers. However, according to Goold, the fact of undertaking a task of such magnitude as the composition of a didactic poem does not detract from Manilius' merit in the attempt to create a work that encompassed the astrological knowledge of the time. It is an astrological manual, but not complete and somewhat rudimentary. Written in hexameters, the work reflects the most common form of expression among scholars of the time, that is, it was a common style of the time used by several Roman scholars. In general terms, Manilius wrote for the Roman court which, in a way, knew Greek philosophy, especially the Stoics. *Astronomicas*, II, 454: "Aries caput est ante omnia princeps / Sortitus, censusque sui pulcherrima colla / Taurus, et in Geminos aequali brachia sorte / Scribuntur connexa humeris, pectusque locatum / Sub Cancro est, laterum regnum scapulaeque Leonis; / Virginis in propriam descendunt illa sorlem; / Libra regit clunes, et Scorpios inguine gaudet / Centauro femina accedunt, Capricornus utrisque / imperitat, genibus, erurum fundentis Aquari / arbitrium est, Piscesque pedum sibi iura reposcunt."

15 Ptolemy (circa 100-178 AD) was one of the most famous astrologers of his time, but he is understood today much more as a geographer-astronomer than an astrologer. In any case, Ptolemy insisted on making a certain distinction between astrology and astronomy. However, this did not mean a depreciation of the astrological object, but an emphasis on the distinction of the apparatuses, when it came to cosmological analysis. *Tetrabiblos* means "fourfold book", "book in four parts". It is a Greek name and is the best-known name given to the work. The work was probably written around 150 AD. in Alexandria, a veritable Mecca for astrological studies in the Greco-Roman period. The work, over time, was forgotten, and only in the 9th century was it rescued and translated into Arabic by Ishaq ben Hunein. Soon after, and based on Hunein's version, it was again translated into Latin by Plato Tiburtinus (1138) and Aegidius of Thebaldis (13th century). Both translations were only published in the 15th century. See Ptolemy (1980).

red an applied cosmology – or, as we are used to saying, magic. In other words, it was a kind of assertion of equality or equivalence between man and the universe, as we have seen. Aby Warburg, in his seminal text on the influence of *Sphaera Barbarica*<sup>16</sup> (BOLL, 1903) in the cosmic ordering of the West, relates the practice of man-microcosm to the Indian maxim *tat tvam asi*<sup>17</sup> (WARBURG, 2015, p. 295), demonstrating that the reduced knowledge about the stars by ancient astronomy “facilitated the idea, basically sublime, that the human being should be seen as a small cosmos that maintains direct relationships with the astral world” (p. 296).

The miniature of the Duke de Berry’s *Très Riches Heures* concatenates, in fact, the elements contained in the doctrine of man-microcosm. In the center, we have a man standing, framed by a mandorla. Warburg, in the same text on the *Sphaera Barbarica*, refers to the miniature and its reading by Cumont. The mandorla-shaped frame, according to Warburg, would be in accordance with ancient astronomy, having a metaphorical meaning of the relationship of space between human beings and the cosmos. But why would the Limbourg brothers have chosen to use the mandorla to circumscribe man, absent in other representations of the venous-zodiacal figure? The most reasonable explanation – taking into account the hypothesis that the figure effectively represents the complementarity between the zodiacal man and the venous man – lies in the very process of elaborating the iconography of the zodiacal man. This iconographic representation, as we have seen, presupposes the macrocosm/microcosm binomial. To a certain extent, it is a type and variant of the microcosm man. The first illustrations of the zodiacal man contained a circle where the zodiacal signs were arranged (Figure 4). In others, the signs were juxtaposed along the entire length of the human body.

In Chantilly’s illustration, there is a combination of the two iconographic types, but in a complex way. It is true that the mandorlas that envelop the figure of man seem to be remnants of the iconography of the microcosm

16 The philologist Franz Boll has magnificently reconstructed the *Sphaera Barbarica*, adding the great introduction by the Arabic astrologer Abu Ma’schar..

17 From Sanskrit, it means “That is you”, one of the four maxims expounded in the Upanishads, and part of the scriptures of Hinduism. Warburg uses this expression, detached from its context, to relate it to the doctrine established between man and the cosmos.

**Figure 4**  
 Microcosmic Man,  
 (MS. Lat. 11229, f.  
 45r.), manuscript  
 illumination, 15th  
 century, s.d. Paris, Bi-  
 bliothèque Nationale,  
 licensed by Wikimedia  
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man. However, this is not a faithful resumption of the model. For the two bands, the outermost and the innermost, perform an extra function other than that originally performed by the diagram that normally circumscribed the human figure. Here, they also represent a kind of calendar.

In the Chantilly zodiac frame, the outermost border shows the 360 degrees of the circle of the heavens, scaled and subdivided into 12 thirty-degree sectors, each corresponding to one zodiacal constellation. The graduations on the inner edge of the frame mark the days of each month for the whole year. The calibrations are precisely synchronized so that each month spans the interval from the exact midpoint of one sign to that of its successor. Between these two border strips is a pictorial band of the zodiac where each sign, silhouetted against the deep blue ground in a mandorla-shaped opening in the frame, is confined precisely within its own sector of the

circle. The whole belt reads in the canonical counter-clockwise direction, following its observed apparent daily westward motion. The scheme is that of a theoretical, uncorrected diagram, like the ideal orientation of the compass-card, following such standard descriptions as that found in Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* and other computistic works. (BOBER, 1948, p. 27-28).

The microcosmic diagram of the zodiacal man must be read in a radial direction: it begins with the outer circle containing the 12 zodiacal signs; then the seven planets, and finally the innermost circle, man. The Chantilly miniature mandorla, on the other hand, has another type of measurement. According to Bober (1948, p. 28), the structure works as a precision gauge, a rotary index whose circular motion is independent of its center. This measurement scheme is, according to him, similar to that of

**Figure 5**  
 Volvella of the moon like a moveable device for working out the position of the sun and moon in the zodiac (MS 3026C), 1488, manuscript illumination, s. d., Wales, National Library of Wales, licensed by Wikimedia Commons



the solar and lunar measurement disks, the *Volvella*,<sup>18</sup> through which the astrologer made his calculations based on the position of the stars and planets (Figure 5).

So, starting from the elements cited by Bober, we can say that the mandorla of Chantilly's manuscript has the function of temporally measuring astral movements. It is a cosmic guidance tool. Thus, in the astrological illustration of *Les Très Riches Heures*, not only *Homo Signorum* and *Homo Venarum* are combined, but also a calendar-circle (*Volvella*).

Finally, in the outermost part of the miniature, there are small inscriptions on the characteristics of the signs, subdivided in the four corners of the page of the Duke of Berry's book of hours:

Aries, Leo, Sagittarius are warm and dry, masculine, oriental. Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn are cold and dry, melancholy, feminine, western. Gemini, Aquarius, Libra are warm and moist, masculine, sanguine, southern. Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces are cold and wet, phlegmatic, feminine, northern<sup>19</sup>

These inscriptions refer to the astrological characteristics and qualities of the entire composition. They represent the coalescence between the corporeal dimension and the astral forces. The interchange of properly human and earthly characteristics with the heavenly bodies confirms the canon of phlebotomy in relation to the zodiac. The signs are divided into four groups with three signs each, which share the same aspects. This configuration is heir to ancient mathematics of an astrological nature, via Ptolemy (1980), and defines the physical properties of signs: cold or hot, masculine or feminine etc. These characteristics are in line with the four temperaments: biliary, melancholic, sanguine or phlegmatic.

18 A volvelle is a type of chart, a paper construction with rotating parts. It is considered an early example of an analog paper computer. The first examples of volvellas are found on the pages of astronomy books. They go back to "certain Arabic treatises on humoral medicine" and to the Persian astronomer Abu Rayhan Biruni (c. 1000), who made important contributions to the development of the concept of volume. Cf. Crupi (2019).

19 In the original: Aries, Leo, Sagittarius sunt calida et sicca, collerica, masculina, orientalia. // Taurus, Virgo, Capricornus sunt frigida et sicca, melancolica, feminina, occidentalia. // Gemini, Aquarius, Libra sunt calida et humida, masculina, sanguinea, meridionalia. // Cancer, Scorpius, Pisces sunt frigida et humida, flemmatica, feminina, septentrionalia.

The multiple and convergent elements of *Les très riches heures* miniature leave no doubt: the man at the center of the image is closely related to ancient astrological medicine. Like the earth, according to the cosmography of the ancients, he too is suspended at the center of the world. Both the Earth and man are subject to the same stellar influences, and this parallelism is expressed through the texts that convey the doctrine of melothesia (BOUCHÉ-LECLERQ, 1899, p. 129).

Finally, it is worth remembering the conjunctural aspect of the issue, that is, the alliance that, since antiquity, via Greece and the East, united astrology/astronomy and the human being. We know that astral divination, forbidden by the Church, was extirpated from the Latin countries at the end of Antiquity and the Roman Empire. It reappeared in Europe, however, with the introduction of Arab pseudoscience in the Middle Ages, a side effect of wanderings and migrations. This shows how the manuscripts and the images they contain were able to keep and transmit essential notions about the influences and aspects of the planets, about the nature and properties of the zodiac. The attempt to order the world and guide the cosmos was made through symbols and representations, such as the figure of the zodiacal vein-man that has occupied us here. It was a materialization of the consciousness of the space between the man-microcosm and the cosmos: a link between the observable and the unknowable that art was able to show through visual strategies that proved to be perennial, but, at the same time, always renewed by formal ingenuity. Reading these images, as well as reading the firmament, constituted for millennia an enterprise towards the unknowable, in which art actively participated.

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