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PEETERS

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THE GAME OF THE MONTH. PLAYFUL CALENDARS IN GHENT-BRUGES BOOKS OF HOURS¹

ANNEMARIEKE WILLEMSSEN
National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden

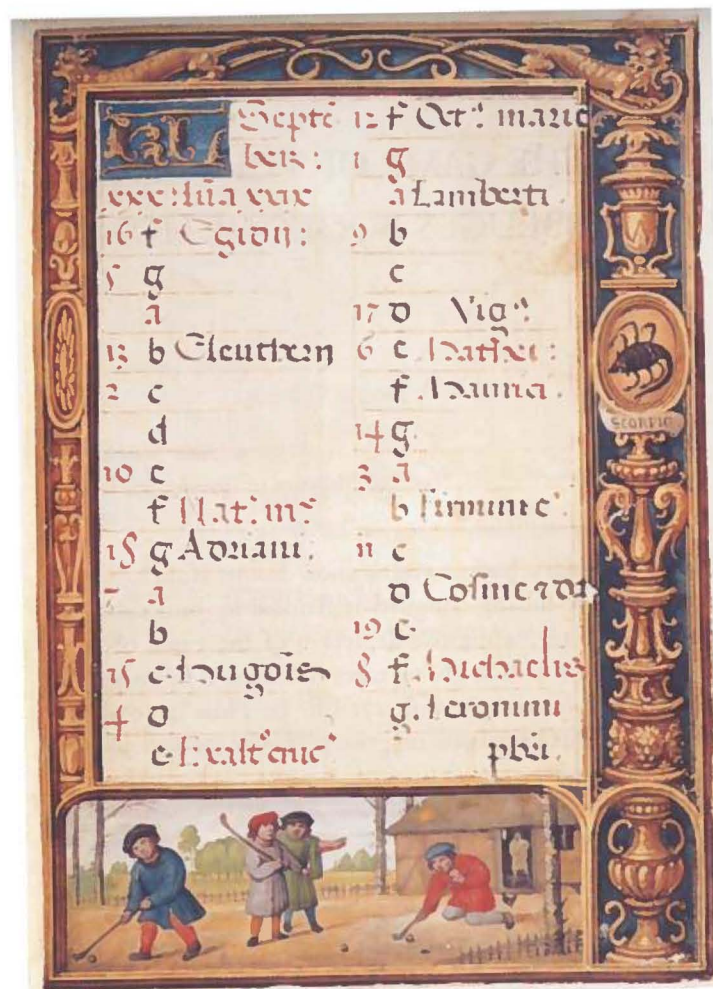
The British Library in London keeps among its treasures an early sixteenth century manuscript with signature Add. Ms. 24098 that bears the nickname *Golf Book*² because of an image of the medieval game of 'kolf' on the text page of the month of September, considered by the English to be an early depiction of golf (ill. 1). The manuscript is not, as its name suggests, a complete book. It contains twelve calendar pages, a few separate miniatures and some pages with historiated initials. All these have once been cut from a Book of Hours, where they must have been its most beautiful and valuable pages. The sheets were rebound and refoliated in 1928.³ 'Golf Pages' would therefore have been a more appropriate name.

The binding with calendar pages is a masterpiece in the British Library, not only for the quality of the large miniatures, attributed to the workshop of the Bruges master Simon Bening, but as much for the margins below these miniatures, that show a group of children playing a different game each month. Beneath a winter scene illustrating the month of January there is merry sledging; after that follow rolling hoops, a game with rattles, blowing bubbles and softball, shooting bows, playing with hobby-horses and windmills, catching butterflies, hitting geese, marbles and stilts, rolling balls, and finally on the December page a tug-of-war with two sledges. These twelve 'games of the month' can be found in the margins on the pages with a large miniature showing the labour of the month. On each double page the left-hand (verso) page contains this type of full-page illumination; the right-hand (recto) page depicts the calendar text, framed by decorative margins with small scenes in roundels. The margin below the text is also historiated. Usually it shows an additional labour of the month, but on the December and January pages both margins contain sledging games (fols. 18v-19 and 29v-30) and for

February both margins show hoops (fols. 19v-20). Geese hitting (August) is flanked by bird catching (fol. 26), while the depiction of the game of kolf, from which the book takes its name, is opposite the marbles margin (fol. 27) (ill. 1). Thus in total the calendar contains not twelve but seventeen playful margins.

PLAYING WITH SPACE

The calendar is in fact the very first part of a Book of Hours; it precedes the actual religious texts, like an entrance porch to the rest. It is not accidental that the 'earthly' elements of decoration (the zodiac, the planets, the labours of the month, children's games) are found both on the porches of churches and in the calendars of manuscripts.⁴ The calendar can be characterized as the most 'profane' part of the book, literally meant for daily life. The word 'profane' merely concerns the program of decoration and the use of the calendar, for it reflects pre-eminently the religious division of the year, with the festive days (in red) and the 'Saint of the Day' again and again. As the opening piece, the calendar is the eye-catcher of the illuminated manuscript, and certainly in the Ghent-Bruges Books of Hours this part has the most decoration per square inch, with usually one full-page miniature and various border decorations on each double page, a frequency that is neither attainable nor desirable with any of the subsequent devotional texts. Nowhere outside the calendar are there so many details concerning daily life and material culture, especially in the depictions of the monthly labours. From about 1500 onwards, a series of games could also form part of a calendar page; as suitable 'games of the month', the children's games were recurrent elements alongside the labours of the

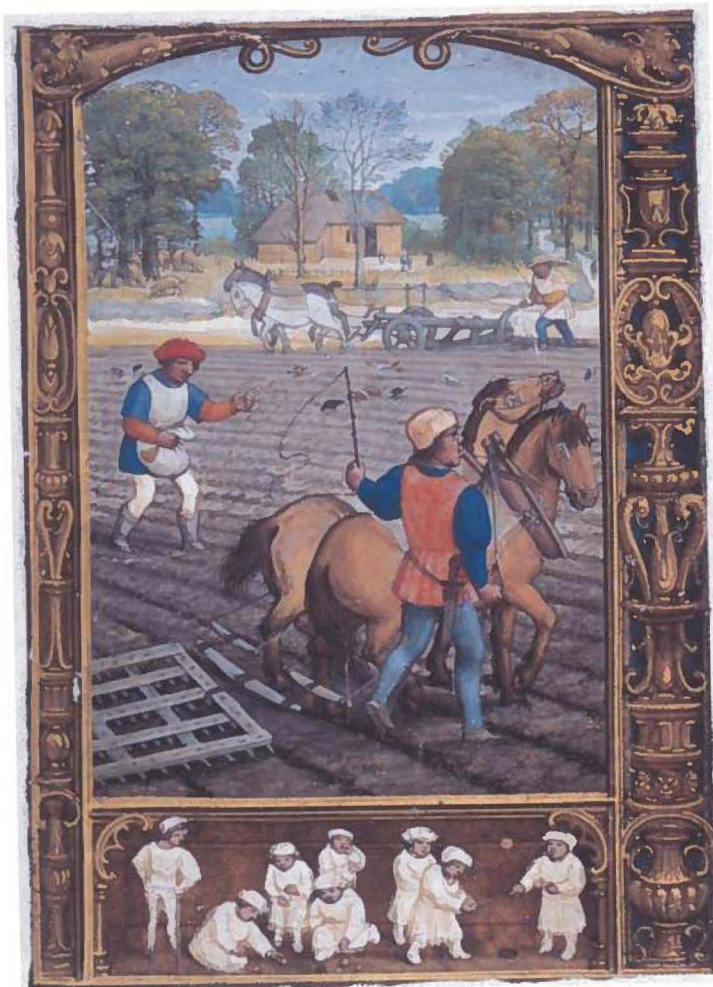


ILL. 1.
Simon Bening,
*The Month of
September*, miniatures
from the so-called
Golf Book, Bruges, ca.
1520. – London, The
British Library, Add.
Ms. 24098,
fol. 26v-27.
(© London, The
British Library).

month and the zodiacal signs to illustrate the cyclical character of time and of the calendar itself.

In appendix II to her article *Pieter Bruegel's Children's Games, Folly and Chance*, Sandra Hindman presents an overview of games in the calendars of Ghent-Bruges manuscripts; there they are used as models for elements in the well-known Bruegel painting with children's games, currently in Vienna.⁶ Hindman uses five manuscripts from the seven Books of Hours from Ghent-Bruges dating from around 1500 known to me, which have a series of children's games in the calendar:

- *Book of Hours* ('Spielbuch'); Bruges (?), Simon Bening, 1500-1510; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 28346;
- *Golf Book*; Bruges, Simon Bening, ca. 1520; London, The British Library, Add. Ms. 24098;
- *Hours of Catharine of Portugal or of Don Fernando*; Ghent/Bruges, Simon Bening, ca. 1530; Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Ms. 13 ilum;
- *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*; Ghent/Bruges, Simon Bening/Gerard Horenbout/Maximilian Master, 1500-1510; New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 52.



ILL. 2.
Simon Bening,
The Month of December,
miniature from a Book
of Hours ('Spielbuch'),
Bruges?, 1500-1510. –
Munich, Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek, Clm.
28346, fol. 15v-16.
(© Munich, Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek).



margins of the twenty-four pages are filled with children at play; the pictures are strongly reminiscent of the earlier mentioned manuscripts in contents and style. The Munich manuscript, however, due to its comprehensiveness, is the best sample of children's games: it shows a mock tournament with barrels on sledges and wooden lances, hoops, hitting ceramics and blind man's buff, rattles, hand-ball, blowing bubbles, the May Queen, shooting bows, hobby-horses and windmills (to ride, or to hit each other with), a baby walker, catching butterflies, fish jousting, marbles, a bird on a string, knucklebones, pig's bladders, stilts, ice games and sledges; in between with November (fol. 15) is a depiction of the game of kolf (therefore, this manuscript could also be called 'Golf Book', or for instance – as introduced in my 1998 thesis – 'Spielbuch'). In one of the two winter margins for December, that are filled with entertainment in the snow and on the ice, a group of three boys is busy making a lion (or dog) of snow (fol. 15v) (ill. 2).

Closely related to both preceding manuscripts is the *Hours of Catherine of Portugal* or of the Infant Ferdinand, nowadays in Lisbon.⁸ This work is also attributed to Simon Bening and the (originally twenty-four) calendar pages (fol. 1v-12) have also been executed with playful margins. In this calendar, when

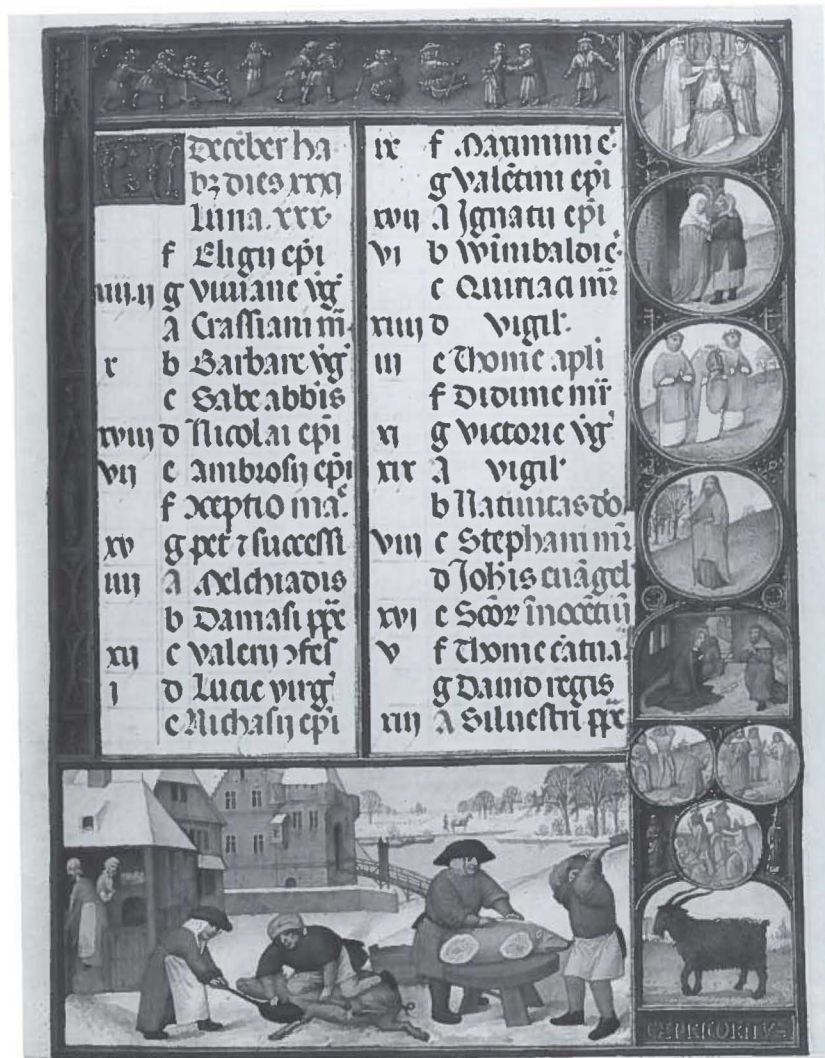
the book is open, the left page of each month shows the monthly labour with a four-line poem about that month in a frame beneath. The right-hand page bears the text of the calendar, with at the top the two zodiacal signs, each ruling a part of the month. All the calendar pages are provided with children at play in the bottom margins. These margins attract attention by the high quality of their execution, with all kinds of amusing details worked into a fairly fixed programme of games and pastimes.

This calendar is no longer complete: the page with the calendar text of June and on the verso-side the Work of July was cut from the cover at some point, as was the folio with the calendar of November and the Work of December.⁹ Since all the games known from the other manuscripts are present in the other ten months, it is hard to say what games will have been depicted in the margins of the lost folios. In place of the June calendar a page was later added with the appropriate calendar text; its margin shows – to stay more or less in style – some putti at play. The two semi-circles holding zodiacal signs on the other pages were left blank. The back of the page is empty. Obviously there has been no attempt to imitate the rest of the calendar closely. Instead, the calendar text of June was inserted, executed in a style which would tone in fairly well with the rest. The

- *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary*; Ghent/Bruges, Simon Bening/Gerard Horenbout/Jan Provost/Maximilian Master, ca. 1510; Antwerp, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Inv. no. 946;
- *Spinola Hours*; Ghent/Mechelen, Gerard Horenbout/Master of James IV of Scotland/Master of the Dresden Prayerbook/Master of the Lübeck Bible, ca. 1515; Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig IX 18;
- *Book of Hours of the Duke of Olivares*; Bruges, 1505; Valencia, Real-Colegio de Corpus Christi, S. n.

GOLF BOOKS

The marginal illustrations for the calendar in the above-mentioned *Golf Book* are among the most famous and most cited depictions of games and pastimes from the Netherlands. Closely connected to this book is a Flemish Book of Hours, also attributed to Simon Bening and dated around 1500, that is kept in Munich.⁷ In this manuscript, as in the *Golf Book*, each month takes up two pages, a verso and a facing recto-side (4v until 16). Here, all upper



ILL. 3.
Gerard Horenbout et al., *The Month of December*, miniature from the *Spinola Hours*, Ghent-Mechelen, ca. 1515. — Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig IX 18, fol. 7. (© Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum).

addition does not seem recent and can probably be explained by the use of the calendar — a missing month page with its red letter days was most inconvenient. The calendar text was considered of more importance than the undoubtedly beautiful image that was once on the verso-side.

GAMES IN BREVIAIRES

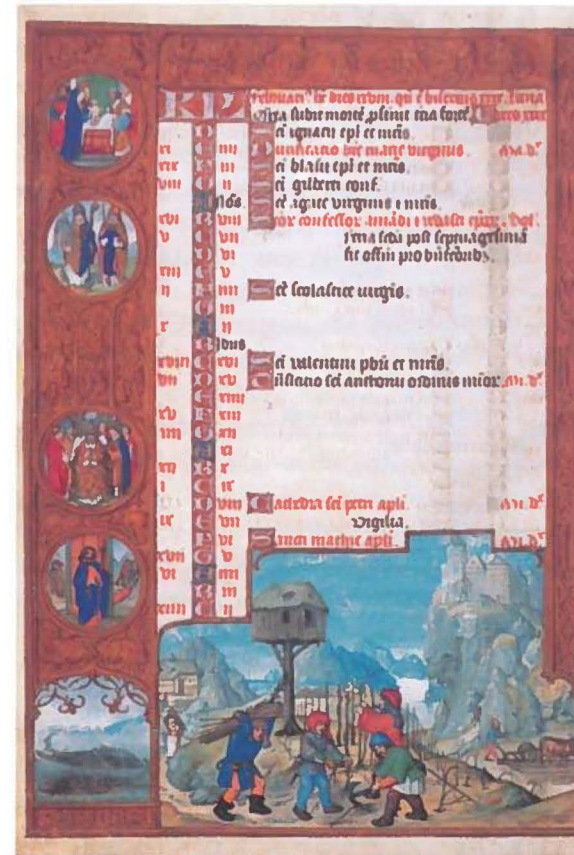
A similar series of games can be found in small frames in the top margins of the calendar of the *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary*.¹⁰ It was formerly attributed to the master of the Hortulus Animae, possibly (the workshop of) Alexander Bening, but nowadays usually to Gerard Horenbout — and others. The manuscript was completed around 1510 in Bruges. The calendar here takes up only twelve sides (fols. 1v until 7); each calendar page is decorated at the bottom with a detailed scene of the labour of the month. In the side margin three medallions hold scenes relating to the feasts of

that month. A narrow upper margin contains three rectangular frames. The central one depicts the zodiacal sign, that dominates the month and is flanked by two small pictures of children's games. Sometimes these two belong together (fol. 2 left and right: hoops; fol. 3: one ball-game; fol. 3v a continuous parade), but mostly two unrelated games are shown. The repertoire corresponds reasonably well with that in the group of manuscripts by Simon Bening, and the depictions are comparable in both contents and execution. Other kinds of games however have also been depicted, some of which are unique to this Breviary. Moreover, the games of July and August (fols. 4v-5) are mostly in polychrome; only the boys' clothing is kept in one colour.

The closest resemblance to this breviary is to be found in the monochrome series in the calendar of the so-called *Spinola Hours*, that derived its name from belonging to the collection of the Spinola family from at least the eighteenth century. Hindman mentions it in the collection of Prof. Peter Ludwig in Aix-la-Chapelle (Germany); it is currently owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum,¹¹ which bought the entire Ludwig collection in 1983. The margins in this manuscript closely resemble the Antwerp breviary's in style and placing; here the games are also set in small frames in the top margins of the twelve calendar pages. The range of games is very broad and again contains many 'unique' items. Successively (fols. 1v-7), January shows a mock fight of two 'horsemen' sitting on barrels (that are tied to sledges) with helmets, shields and (blunt) lances, the February games include follow the leader, stilt-walking, and kolf. March has marbles (or balls), clappers and a rattle, April hand-ball and May a parade with the May Queen. In June we see the familiar tournament on hobby-horses with windmill-lances, while in July birds and butterflies are being caught in various ways, showing also a boy with a bird on a string. August has swimming and a boat fight, September a bird-cage and a ball-game. In October, the month of butchering, various games with knucklebones are depicted, in November activities with hoops, and finally in December skating, sledging and a cart with horse's head on the ice (ill. 3).

Related to this book is the *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*, nowadays in New York.¹² This manuscript too has the upper margins of the twelve calendar pages (fols. 2-7v) filled with narrow frames, with games executed in a golden colour. The games largely correspond with the repertoire in the *Spinola Hours* and their division over the months only differs here and there; March, April, July and September show small variations. Most noteworthy is the exchange of

ILL. 4.
Simon Bening, Gerard Horenbout et al., *The Month of February*, miniature from the *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*, Ghent-Bruges, 1500-1510. — New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M. 52, fol. 2v. (© New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library).



ILL. 5.
Mock tournament on hobby-horses, miniature (detail) from the *Book of Hours of the Duke of Olivares*, Bruges, 1505. — Valencia, Real-Colegio de Corpus Christi, s. n., fol. 11. (© Valencia, Real-Colegio de Corpus Christi).

*Valnea nō curet nec mltū comestio duret.
Nemo laxari debet vel fleubothomari.*



the margins in February (ill. 4) and November; these two pages are usually painted next to each other on one bifolio and this exchanging of games might point to a mistake in the Spinola-manuscript.

BOOKS OF HOURS FOR DUKE AND EMPEROR

Another variety of series of games can be found in the *Book of Hours of the Duke of Olivares*, made in 1505 in Bruges. It is currently in the library of the Real-Cole-

gio de Corpus Cristi in Valencia (Spain).¹³ Here the calendar of each month (fols. 3v-15) is spread over two pages, with on the left-hand side the first part of the month-text, decorated at the bottom with a broad ornamental belt and at the top with two squares holding the labour of the month and the zodiac sign, together in a rectangular frame. On the right-hand page, the second part of the text follows, with at the top a small zone with ornaments and at the bottom a rectangular margin with children at play, with the same width as the ornamental belt on the verso-side. In contrast to the manuscripts mentioned earlier, where mostly monochrome scenes are set against an abstract background, in this manuscript the games are rendered in polychromy against a realistic background: a square with houses, a field with trees (ill. 5), or even a walled playground (August).

The scenes are depicted in detail and often more than one game is combined within one picture (for instance rolling hoops and spinning tops in March), so the range of games corresponds with the double series in the 'first group' and the protracted margins of the 'second group'. The Olivares Hours have not been attributed convincingly, but the similarities with the *Grimani Breviary*¹⁴ are striking and it is therefore most likely that the book comes from the immediate circles of Bening and Horenbout.

On the basis of the scantily available photographic material¹⁵ of the so-called *Prayer Book of Charles V*, also called 'the other Golf Book', a Southern-Netherlandish Book of Hours auctioned in January 1914 at Bernard Quaritch's in London, of which the present location is unknown, the scenes of play that face the Hours and prayers bear a greater resemblance to the margins in the *Book of Hours of the Duke of Olivares* than the others do. Moreover, in the Quaritch book there are polychrome depictions with a realistic background, and the style of the figures resembles the Valencian pages. Hindman cites the scenes as follows: at the laudes (fols. 45v and 46) curling (Drost ill. IV: two boys curling and a third shooting a bow at a target) and kolf (the reason why this book was also called 'Golf Book'); at the terts (fol. 71v) top and whip (Drost ill. V: boys spinning tops in a church porch); at the nones (fols. 86v and 87) 'skittles with knucklebones' — here the game must be meant in which knucklebones are aimed from a distance at a row of standing knucklebones — and hoops; finally at the psalms of penance (fol. 120v) blowing bubbles. Everything points to a choice made from the well-known range of children's games to decorate the Hours and prayers in this book.¹⁶ In making this choice their sequence was not maintained; that was no longer important, since the relationship with the months had lapsed.

GAME OF THE MONTH

Month	Zodiac sign	Occupations	Games
January	Aquarius	Feasting Warming by the fire	Sledge fight
February	Pisces	Warming by the fire Harrowing ground	Rolling hoops
March	Aries	Pruning Harrowing ground	Rattles Spinning tops
April	Taurus	Picking flowers Falcon hunt	Hand-ball Blowing bubbles
May	Gemini	Falcon hunt Courting, making music	Shooting bows May-parade
June	Cancer	Shearing sheep Mowing	Tournament hobby-horses
July	Leo	Harvesting Mowing	Catching butterflies catching birds
August	Virgo	Harvesting wheat Winnowing	Boat fight
September	Libra	Pressing grapes Harvesting grapes	Marbles
October	Scorpio	Sowing Butchering	Knucklebones
November	Sagittarius	Collecting acorns Threshing, feeding animals	Kolf game Bowls
December	Capricorn	Butchering Baking	Sledging Ice sports

Fig. 1 – Scheme with months, zodiac signs and accompanying occupations and games

WINTER FUN AND MARBLES TIME

Children's games appear as a fixed cycle in this small group of seven Books of Hours mentioned above. Without exception these are very richly decorated books, in which the standard scheme for the Labours of the Month is extended with a range of other appropriate depictions of things that change in the course of the year: zodiacal signs and planets, sometimes a second work of the month. Children's games could also be spread over the year, because they are partly determined by the seasons, and from this an additional scheme of games has arisen. It was an obvious choice to border the picture of December, in which snow is usually seen on the fields and the water is frozen, with a margin showing snow or ice sports. In this way the games played are linked where possible to their logical place in the year: sledge-riding in winter, butterfly-catching in summer, and playing with knucklebones in the months of butchering. Facing the knucklebone game in the *Golf Book* in the margin of folio 28 is the slaughter of a pig. Rattles can also often be seen in March, because of the Holy Week before Easter, when the bells were silent and children

went past the doors with rattles. May is decorated with a May-parade (because of the May Queen) or, as in the 'Spielbuch', with the parrot shooting that was traditionally held by the guilds in May. The connection of certain games with the season or with a feast or custom in a certain month underlies the scheme of the 'Game of the Month' (see Figure 1). This scheme characterizes September as marbles time and shows kolf in November. As with the Labours of the Month, a game could sometimes shift a month; in the Valencia Hours the hoops are found in March, while elsewhere they were placed in February; but they are combined with the spinning tops found here in other manuscripts. As far as content is concerned, relationships with the main miniature ('with a wink') did occur but are exceptional: a fake fight with hobby-horses and whirligigs was placed beneath a depiction of a jousting tournament and a miniature with a hunting theme was underlined by a group of boys catching butterflies in their caps (both in the *Golf Book*). Figure 1 is thus a common divisor, and variations are possible. The tournaments on hobby-horses may accompany May, but also August, and some books show unique games, that cannot even be

interpreted. In particular the series of twenty-four instead of twelve margins frequently show rarities.

In contrast to the main miniatures in full-colour, in six of the seven manuscripts the children at play in the margins are shown in a single colour, against a mostly monochrome background. According to some descriptions the children are done in grisaille, which means in shades of grey giving the appearance of sculpture. This however, is not precise enough. It is true that in some margins the figures are in silvery grey, but in other margins they are in white, or in a tint that imitates gold or bronze. More precisely, the technique used is interpreted as camaïeu, monochrome painting that gives the impression of precious metalwork. In the margins of these manuscripts there is gold-camaïeu as well as silver- and bronze-camaïeu, and also white. It is possible that the white is meant to give the appearance of alabaster or ivory carving. The figures have been painted in one of these tints against a background colour, that sometimes shows some shading, for instance to suggest the sky. The rest of the margin, like the architectural framework to the left and right of the illustration, is usually executed in the same tint of camaïeu as the playful margin on the same page, with the same background colour. The use of the camaïeu differs within the group of manuscripts; sometimes the illustrations are carried out in one shade of camaïeu (*Spinola Hours*), sometimes in different tints of camaïeu combined with monochrome fields (*Golf Book* and 'Spielbuch') or with polychromy (*Mayer van den Bergh Breviary*), while the series in the Valencia Book of Hours are in full polychromy.

BENING AND HORENBOUT

These Books of Hours with a playful calendar can be grouped both by the contents and by the appearance of their games. For instance, the calendar scenes in the *Spinola Hours* closely resemble those in the *Hours of Eleonor of Portugal*; in both cases it concerns scenes in gold-camaïeu in the upper border of a calendar covering twelve pages. The upper margins of the twelve calendar pages of the *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary* are closely connected to the two above-mentioned manuscripts, but here the scenes are rendered in a variety of colour combinations (camaïeu, colour on camaïeu, sometimes polychromy). Furthermore, the narrow, elongated horizontal frames that occur in the other two Books of Hours have been divided in two here, separated by a zodiacal sign. According to current attributions, Gerard Horenbout has contributed to all three of the manuscripts, but the hand

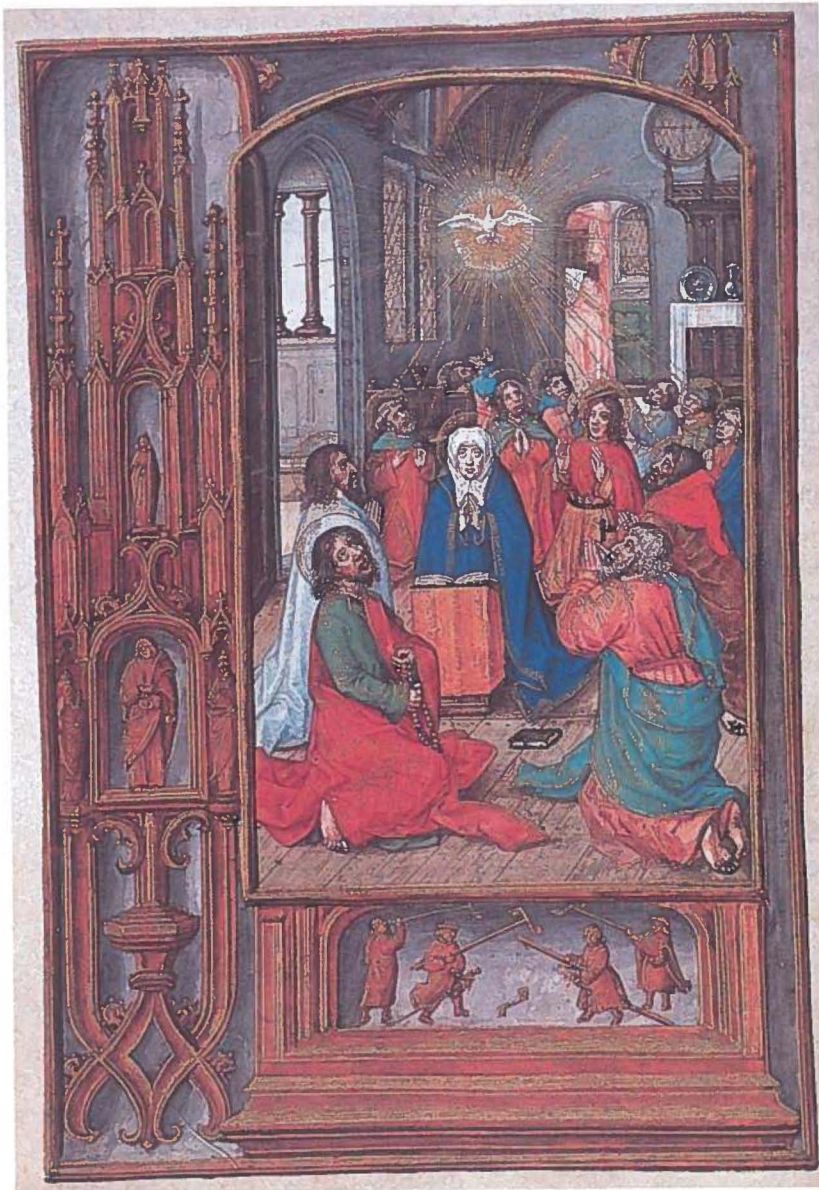
of Simon Bening has been recognized in all three of them as well. As regards content the three series show some remarkable correspondence, such as the presence of a (sledge-) cart in the December margin: one is a sledge-cart with children on it, pushed and pulled by others (*Mayer van den Bergh Breviary*, fol. 7), one is a sledge cart with a horse's head (*Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*), and one is a land version, with horse's head and wheels (*Spinola Hours*, fol. 7v) (ill. 3). It seems likely that the three calendars, as far as the children's games are concerned, are by the same hand, maybe that of Horenbout. Moreover, on the basis of a 'mistake' the calendars have in common – in all three manuscripts the zodiacal signs of scorpio and libra are transposed – it is assumed that the *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary*, the *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal* and the *Spinola Hours* are from one and the same workshop.

Clear correspondence can also be recognized in the *Golf Book* and the 'Spielbuch', both attributed to Simon Bening. These books have a series of double lower margins because the calendar months each cover two pages. In both books, the playful margins are executed in gold-camaïeu against a coloured background. In the *Golf Book* seventeen margins are filled with games, in the 'Spielbuch' all twenty-four. The system of the twenty-four margins of the *Mayer van den Bergh Breviary* is seemingly repeated here, but divided over two pages. As these Books of Hours are usually much smaller than the Breviaries, the margins correspond in size and execution. Closely connected to these two, but partly deviant in programme, is the *Hours of Catherine of Portugal* in Lisbon. This is also attributed to Simon Bening and especially the high-quality decoration of the calendar is seen as his work. These three manuscripts form a second group, the probable provenant being the workshop of Simon Bening. However, this second group of manuscripts is quite closely related to the first.

The Hours in Valencia, of the Duke of Olivares, clearly deviate from the six manuscripts in the two groups mentioned earlier, mainly because the playful margins are in full colour here, without any pieces in camaïeu, and because the scenes were each placed in different realistic surroundings. The scenes do show some resemblance to the style of Simon Bening, but not really to the other calendars.

PLAYING WITH SPACE

All these playful calendars are part of manuscripts that are allocated to the group of so-called Ghent-Bruges



ILL. 6.
Simon Bening-Gerard
Horenbout *et al.*,
Pentecost, miniature
from the *Rothschild
Prayer Book*, Ghent-
Bruges, 1510-1520. —
Present location
unknown, formerly:
Vienna, Öster-
reichische National-
bibliothek, Ms. s. n.
2844, fol. 32v.
(© Vienna, Öster-
reichische National-
bibliothek).

Books of Hours, that mark the last blossoming of the art of book illumination. Of all the names in circulation (real names and given names) of Ghent-Bruges illuminators, Simon Bening and Gerard Horenbout in particular are connected with groups of books in which there are scenes with children at play. The attribution, however, seldom states explicitly which elements of the decoration were executed by which master. The hand of Gerard Horenbout for instance is recognized in the calendar of the *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*, but so far nobody has dared to state that he also painted the medallions with saints or the 'figures' in the upper margin. If Simon Bening himself illuminated both the *Golf Book* and the 'Spielbuch' — and there seems to be consensus on that — then he must also have painted the children at play. That children at play were part of his repertoire is also known from other manuscripts; children throwing snowballs for

instance are depicted within a winter landscape in a calendar in Munich traditionally attributed to Bening,¹⁷ recognized by Thomas Kren as part of what is now called the *Munich-Montserrat Hours*,¹⁸ illuminated by Simon Bening personally. The same scene points out how close the link is between different Ghent-Bruges manuscripts and workshops. The three boys throwing snowballs also occur in the *Breviarium Grimani* (fol. 3), that is attributed to a range of illuminators including Bening and Horenbout (although it is not suggested who has executed this specific page). An identical boy can be seen in the *Breviary of Eleonor of Portugal*, as part of the margin in the calendar that is traditionally attributed to Gerard Horenbout. From this, it may at least be concluded that both artists (and both workshops) knew and used the motive.

TOYS IN THE MARGIN

As Hindman already noted, in the circles of the workshops of Bening and Horenbout, separate scenes from the cycles of games in calendars are used as margins beneath other images. Thus the mock tournament occurs as marginal decoration below the 'Pentecost' miniature in the *Rothschild Prayer Book* illuminated by Gerard Horenbout in the second decade of the sixteenth century (ill. 6).¹⁹ The similarity of execution is striking, but the differences are also noticeable: here boys and girls are busy, and the fighting is clearly so heavy that one of the windmill lances has broken and falls to the ground. As regards content, the relationship with the main miniature, which in the *Golf Book* may have been the reason to place the tournament with windmills in that month (June), is missing here; this emphasizes that such a relationship must not be regarded as a necessity. It also indicates that there was a broad repertoire from which to choose, following tradition but sometimes diverging from it. The margins with children at play were part of the repertoire of an illuminator, probably because of the calendar cycles. They could also be adapted outside the calendar context. There, a margin with children at play functions as a frivolous detail in a decorated page. Both image tradition and available space determine the how and why of the game depicted.

Some playful scenes from the calendar series became more popular than others, such as the two boys spinning tops in front of a church, that can be found in many Ghent-Bruges manuscripts.²⁰ This picture of two boys whipping tops, one of them seen from behind, is found in calendars, but frequently occurs separately in Books of Hours, where it evidently has no relationship as regards content with the main image. Two boys spinning

ILL. 7.
Boy with hoop, miniature from a Psalter, Ghent, 1320-1330. — Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 5, fol. 127v. (© Oxford, Bodleian Library).

ILL. 8.
Lucas van Valkenborch, *Winter landscape near Antwerp with snowfall*, painting on panel, 1575. — Frankfurt am Main, Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Inv. no. 1857. (© Frankfurt am Main, Städtisches Kunstinstitut).

their tops in front of or on the steps of a church porch can for instance be found in the *Rothschild Prayer Book* beneath a depiction of 'St Anthony of Padova' (fol. 240v); in the so-called *Stockholm-Kassel Book of Hours*²¹ beneath an image of 'St John on Patmos' (fol. 59) — this time in full-colour, not in camaïeu —; in other Books of Hours beneath the 'Visitation'²² or beneath the 'Vera Icon', the face of Christ.²³ In the *Book of Hours of James IV of Scotland*²⁴ the scene even appears twice, almost identically, once on folio 18 beneath the beginning of the Gospels according to Mark with a small image of the evangelist, and again on folio 190 beneath the prologue of the Psalter, accompanied by a small image of 'St Benedict praying', kneeling before a crucifix. That the margin with the boys spinning tops

became so popular outside the calendar, as a border for large images, is probably because this scene offers a successful and attractive possibility to fill a bottom and side margin with one continuous scene.

The motive of the boy with a spinning top is not limited to this setting in front of a church; in one case the subject is rendered as an isolated image. In the *Croy Hours*,²⁵ a child spinning a top is used as a free-standing figure (fol. 159) with on the back of the page (fol. 159v) a copy of this figure within the contours of the drawing. This means that there, in different colours, a child with a spinning top is also depicted, mirrored in its position towards the toy, and appropriately seen from behind.

MOTIVE ON THE MOVE

The series of games in the Ghent-Bruges calendars as a whole was new, but of course the Ghent-Bruges illuminators were inspired by separate scenes of play from earlier times. The tradition is shown by some Ghent Psalters of the beginning of the fourteenth century, known to us mainly through books preserved in the Bodleian Library and the Royal Library of Denmark.²⁶ These tiny Prayer Books have dozens of figures at play depicted in the margins, equipped with spinning tops, hoops (ill. 7), windmills, hobby-horses and other objects that can also be encountered in the later Flemish calendars. The theme is not limited to Flanders. There is a number of games known from French and Italian manuscripts of the sixteenth century.²⁷ Being more influenced by Renaissance motifs than the Flemish, Italian books usually showed the games played by naked putti in a setting that is deliberately non-realistic.

It is noteworthy that these putti, in fact non-realistic babies, placed against a fictitious landscape or background, play the same games as the realistically rendered children in the hyper-realistic settings of the Flemish manuscripts, with the same attributes. The toys in French and Italian art are actually much more naturalistic than the people who hold them.

From the end of the sixteenth century, the idea of using appropriate games to illustrate the time of year became a tradition in the Netherlands. This can be seen in series of woodcuts and engravings, depicting the months, planets or seasons, mostly but not exclusively made for printed calendars.²⁸ In large-scale painting games also became popular. Good examples are some paintings of the seasons executed by Lucas van Valkenborch in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, now to be seen in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Städtisches Kunstinstitut



in Frankfurt. They show details such as a boat fight, as known from the summer months of the Flemish calendars, in a painting of September, and children throwing snowballs or men playing kolf on the ice in winter time (ill. 8).²⁹ Finally, obviously Bruegel knew his traditions too. The combination of all the games and toys in his famous Children's Games painting is new, but none of the scenes is in itself.

The number of toys depicted in the margins of manuscripts exceeds those in all other types of art.³⁰ The inventiveness of the painter might have resulted in unparalleled items, such as the cart in the Spinola-manuscript, but seldomly a toy really forms an isolated phenomenon. When toys were part of the repertoire of an illuminator or a manuscript-workshop, the artists usually mastered a wide range of playful matters; a child riding a hobby-horse is usually found in the company of some other games, rarities and drolleries. The general reason why toys were depicted in medieval works of art is to indicate or stress that the person with the toy is a child. This function of toys as pointers to children also accounts for the exceptional cases where a toy is held by an adult person or an animal: here the toys indicate that the carrier is behaving like a child.

Within the depiction of toys, a strong pictorial tradition can be recognized. For example, the combination of hobby-horse and windmill-lance as a playful variant of reality is probably the reason that relatively

many hobby-horses and windmills have been painted. It represents a stereotype, and when an illuminator wanted to quickly insert a humorous detail, the choice of a child riding a hobby-horse may have been the best option. This pictorial tradition also depends on technical possibilities, as every technique has its own limitations. When a manuscript painter wanted to depict a child at play with a few strokes of a very thin brush on one or two square centimeters, he may have been tempted to choose easily recognizable things such as a child with a spinning top or a hoop. The choice of a certain type of toy may have been made to attain the best possible result in the best manageable way. Only when many different toys are needed, as in these calendar series, are toys to be found which are more difficult to depict.

RELATION WITH REALITY

The playful margins form an important source for the appearance and use of playthings in this period. From the casual nature of these kinds of details and the fact that they apparently raised no questions, it can be assumed that the attributes used realistically represent existing specimens. Not that model hobby-horses need to have been present in the workshops; the miniaturists mastered all these kinds of scenes and simply painted familiar objects: a spinning top, a game of kolf, a birdcage. The subjects of the decoration must have been well-known or the decoration would not have fulfilled its function as support and explanation of the text. This applies even more to the border decoration, which by definition has no emphasis, and most of all to the details of those borders.

Showing twelve or even twenty-four different games played outdoors, these calendars can be seen as a catalogue of games played in those days by children. The information from these pictures can be combined with other sources. Excavated objects, among which there are numerous toys, are important, and so are texts of municipal statutes designed to regulate pastimes and games. The best example with which to judge the realism of these calendars is the *Book of Hours of the Duke of Olivares* in Valencia, because the scenes are in full-colour and in different settings. In most months, the children at play are shown on a square laid with large cobblestones, between some high houses. The high, narrow doors on the ground floor have firm locks and the windows are barred. The upper floors show paired windows and the houses have step gables, as can clearly be seen in the image accompanying April. Wooden benches stand in front of the houses. It is a town view better known from a

depiction of two boys spinning tops in a street from another Ghent-Bruges Book of Hours, currently in the Houghton Library (ill. 9).³¹ It is possible that this town view is meant to be Bruges, but more likely it is Bening's way of painting 'any city'. Because of his background the city resembles a typical Flanders city of his time.

Archery (May), bird-catching (June) and riding hobby-horses (August) are pictured in three different landscapes. Elements of the cultivation of nature are clearly visible, such as fences, to which the targets are attached, and a path on which the boys on hobby-horses are galloping. The game of kolf is located on a field outside the town, near a small lake. The page for the month of July shows a ball-game on a clearly marked playground, next to a square in front of some houses used for playing 'tennis'. This cycle indicates which game was played where. Mock duelling, rolling hoops and spinning tops took place on the city squares, in conformity with the impression given by the statutes issued to limit the noise of hoops in the streets. Shooting bows and playing kolf, both considered quite dangerous activities, were wisely banned from the city, both by law and in the calendar pictures. It is clear that for some of the games certain spaces were designated, which were obviously used (permanently) solely for that purpose.

The spaces used for play as depicted in this manuscript, correspond to the locations where toys have been excavated. The market square with children at play is a visual pendant to an excavated market site in Amersfoort (The Netherlands)³² where knucklebones,

balls and dice were found. The boys shooting arrows outside the city can be connected to the ground near the Olofspoort in Amsterdam,³³ where the archaeological finds of a bow, an arrow and even a parrot, shot to pieces, indicate that it was a shooting field, just outside the city gate. An Amsterdam statute from 1485 mentions shooting and kolf as games to be played only outside the walls.³⁴ It is no surprise that in the Valencia manuscript kolf is also practised outside the city, in the month of November. Finds of a kolf ball and the leaden shoe of a kolf stick, alongside tops and knucklebones in the wastepit of an orphanage in the city of Delft,³⁵ illustrate that these games were frequently played by children in those days. Most of the boys with spinning tops in the Ghent-Bruges Books of Hours use a type of top with a flat upper part, that corresponds in shape and in time to wooden tops found in the city of Bruges (ill. 10).³⁶ That is as close as it gets.

CONCLUSION

The illuminators from the workshops of Simon Bening and Gerard Horenbout were some of the most skillful painters in history. The miniatures they made are accurate to the smallest detail, which is proven by the confrontation with objects preserved from this period. Thus these craftsmen delivered continuous proof of their ability. Wherever, within the given possibilities, they did divert from the fixed themes – usually by elaborating on them, not by changing them – they used their creativity and the range of their mastered repertoire to put as much as possible into the assignment. In doing so, they lived up to their reputation as artists with each product.

A Ghent-Bruges Book of Hours of the sixteenth century had a fixed text, a fixed division, fixed plates and an extensive fixed program for the rest of the decoration. But where the book was different, giving extras, especially in small details, it became a distinctive work of art. The miniatures in the *Golf Book* may be of a superior quality, the manuscript would never have been so famous without the series of children at play in the margins, especially the image of golf in the month of September. Hopefully this manuscript will once be reunited with the other, doubtlessly beautiful pages of the Book of Hours it belonged to.

There may well be images of children at play in other margins beyond the scope of this article. As it is, the small border images of these calendars show exactly how and where games were played, while details such as the attributes used show the degree of realism. These playful calendars are a true mirror of daily life



ILL. 9.
'Ghent Associates',
Boys in a street, Miniature from the *Prayer Book of Joan of Castille*, Ghent, ca. 1485-1490. – Cambridge, Houghton Library, Mss. Typ. 443 and 443.1, fol. 194 (443.1). (© Cambridge, Houghton Library).

ILL. 10.
Two spinning tops, wood, found in Bruges at the site 'Jonkheere' (behind the Belfort), 16th century. – Bruges, City Archaeology Service, Inv. nos. 94001/10D/2510 and 2511. (© Bruges, City Archaeology Service).



in the cities of the Netherlands at the end of the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. This article is based on elements of a Ph.D.-research project on children's toys in the Netherlands 1100-1550, carried out at the University of Nijmegen from 1994 until 1998 and published in Dutch in the thesis *Kinder delijt, Middeleeuws speelgoed in de Nederlanden* ('Children's delight, Medieval Toys in the Netherlands') by the Nijmegen University Press in 1998. The research project was supported by the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). The author likes to thank prof.dr. Jos Koldeweij and dr. Anne Margreet As-Vijvers for their comments on this theme and drs. Michiel van Groesen MA for his suggestions on this text.
2. See *Miniatures and Borders from a Flemish Horae, reproduced in honour of Sir George Warner*, London, 1911.
3. Noted in pencil on the first page of the manuscript (examination by author, July 1996).
4. Roger S. Wieck, *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, London, 1988.
5. Sandra Hindman, 'Pieter Bruegel's Children's Games, Folly and Chance', *Art Bulletin* 53 (1981): 447-475.
6. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Children's Games*, painting on panel, around 1560. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. no. 1017.
7. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 28346. See *Flämischer Kalender des XVI. Jahrhunderts aus einem vom Meister der 'Horulus Animae' gemalten Gebetbuch*, Munich, 1938; Wilhelm Hansen, *Kalenderminiaturen der Stundenbücher, Mittelalterliches Leben im Jahreslauf*, Munich, 1984: 98 (ills. 82-86), 214-216.
8. See 'Les principaux manuscrits à peintures conservés à Portugal', *Bulletin de la Société Française de Reproduction des Manuscrits à Peintures* 14 (1930): 26-27, ill. 33; Jonathan Black, 'Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga', *Portuguese Libraries (Descriptive Inventories of manuscripts Microfilmed for the Hill Monastic Library, vol. 3)*, Collegeville (MI), 1990: 519.
9. Examination by author, June 2001.
10. See Hans Nieuwdrorp and Brigitte Dekeyser, *Breviarium Mayer van den Bergh, Alle miniatures*, Ghent 1997 and its bibliography, and the CDrom 'Breviarium Mayer van den Bergh' published by Bright Image in 1997.
11. See Anton von Euw and Joachim M. Plotzek, *Die Handschriften der Sammlung Ludwig*, Cologne, 1982: vol. 4, 256-285, no. IX 18.
12. John Plummer and Anselm Strittmatter, *Liturgical manuscripts for the Mass and the Divine Office*, exh. cat. (New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library), New York, 1964: 43, ill. 15 and *Flemish illuminated manuscripts 1475-1550*, exh. cat. (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten), ed. by Maurits Smeyers and Jan Van der Stock, Antwerp, 1997: 37.
13. See Felipe M. Garin Ortiz de Taranco, *Un libro de horas del Conde-Duque de Olivares*, Valencia, 1951.
14. Venice, Biblioteca nazionale Marciana, Ms. lat. I, 99. See *The Grimani Breviary, reproduced from the Illuminated Manuscript belonging to the Biblioteca Marciana*, Venice, London, 1977 and its bibliography.
15. Johanna W.P. Drost, *Het Nederlandsch kinderspel vóór de 17e eeuw*, The Hague, 1914: ills. IV and V.
16. A similar series is in the *Book of Hours of Guillaume le Braque*, auctioned at Sotheby's in London in 1977 and illuminated in the first half of the sixteenth century in Valenciennes (France). The lower margins beneath the illustrated Hours show children at play in polychromy. Among their games are rolling balls, kolf and spinning tops. See *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts and Miniatures*, Sotheby's, London, 13 July 1977, lot 67: 77-78 and the colour illustration opposite page 77.
17. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 23638. See *Flämischer Kalender des XVI. Jahrhunderts, gemalt von Simon Bening, dem Hauptmeister des 'Breviarium Grimani'*, Munich, 1936.

18. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 23638 and Montserrat, Montserrat Abbey, Ms. 53. Suggested by Thomas Kren in his lecture 'Landscape as Leitmotiv: A reintegrated Book of Hours, illuminated by Simon Bening' on the 'Studiedag Vlaamse miniaturen voor vorsten en burgers 1475-1550' in Antwerp, 5th May 1997.
19. Present location of the manuscript unknown, auctioned (by Christie's London, 8 July 1999, lot 102) after being returned to the heirs of baron Rothschild; formerly in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. s. n. 2844, see Franz Unterkircher, *Das Rothschild-Gebetbuch, Die schönsten Miniaturen einer flämischen Stundenbuches*, Graz, 1984.
20. See Judith A. Testa, *The Stockholm-Kassel Book of Hours: A reintegrated Manuscript from the Shop of Simon Bening*, Stockholm, 1992.
21. Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Ms. A 227, see Testa 1992 (see note 20) and its bibliography.
22. Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Ms. 13 ilum. (see note 8): fol. 32v, see also Willemsen 1998 (see note 1), ill. 235.
23. The *Imhof Prayer Book* from the Collection Beels, auctioned at Sotheby's in London on 21 June 1988, lot 107, fol. 194. With thanks to Anne Margreet As-Vijvers.
24. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 1897, see Franz Unterkircher, *Das Gebetbuch Jakobs IV. von Schottland (und seiner Gemahlin Margaret Tudor), Codex Vindobonensis 1897*, Graz, 1987.
25. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 1858, see *Das Croy-Geberbuch, Codex 1858 der Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Wien*, ed. by Otto Mazal and Dagmar Thoss, Luzern, 1993.
26. Examples: Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Ms. GkS 3384, 8°; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 5-6; Cambridge, Trinity College, Ms. B. 11. 22, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, Ms. W. 88, see Willemsen 1998 (see note 1): 207-211.
27. Playing children in French manuscripts for instance Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 135 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Douce 276 (see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval children*, New Haven-London, 2001), series of playing putti from a French manuscript are depicted in Pierre Riché and Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, *L'Enfance au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1994: 209-215; playing putti in Italian manuscripts see Jonathan J.G. Alexander, *The painted Page, Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450-1550*, London - Munich, 1994: 73, 121, 139, 156, 157.
28. See Erik Dal and Povl Skårup, *The Ages of Man and the Months of the Year, Poetry, Prose and Pictures outlining the Douze Mois Figurés Motif mainly found in Shepherd's Calendars and in Livres d'Heures (14th to 17th Century)*, Copenhagen, 1980.
29. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. no. 5684 (*September*), part of a series of (originally twelve months); Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Inv. no. 1857 (*Winter landscape*).
30. A full catalogue of depictions of toys in Dutch and Flemish Art of the period 1100-1550 can be found in 'Bijlage A' of my 'Kinder delijt' (see note 1).
31. Cambridge, Houghton Library, Ms. Typ. 443.1 (*Hours of Joan of Castille*).
32. Monique Krauwer and Francien Snieder, *Nering en vermaak, de opgraving van een veertiende-eeuwse markt in Amersfoort*, Amersfoort 1994; see also: Willemsen 1998 (see note 1): 163-164.
33. Jan M. Baart and Louise H. van Wijngaarden-Bakker, 'Spelen bij de poort', Vondsten onder de St. Olofskapel, ed. by H.H. van Regteren Altena, Amsterdam 1972: 28-34; see also Willemsen 1998 (see note 1): 165-168.
34. Joh. C. Breen, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Amsterdam*, The Hague, 1902: 213.
35. Epko J. Bult, 'Archeologische kroniek van Delft, juni 1991-augustus 1992', *Jaarboek Delfia Batavorum* 1992, Delft 1993: 146-150; see also Willemsen 1998 (see note 1): 169-170.
36. With thanks to Bieke Hillewaert of the Archaeology Service Bruges for her assistance.

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