So rare are surviving fourteenth-century tapestries that the acquisition for The Cloisters of The Nine Heroes made for Jean, Duke of Berry, is an event of historic importance in the annals of the Museum. The famous Angers Apocalypse tapestries are the only other set of which substantial portions have survived; and there are but a few other single pieces of the period in existence. The Cloisters set has been assembled from ninety-four fragments of various sizes. Originally it consisted of three tapestries, each more than twenty-one feet wide and about sixteen feet high and each representing three Heroes surrounded by smaller figures in an architectural setting. The recovery of five of the nine Heroes and almost all of the accompanying smaller figures has made possible the reconstruction of one almost complete tapestry (ill. pp. 248, 249) and major portions of the other two (ill. pp. 245-247).

In 1932, when, with funds from the Munsey Bequest, the King Arthur tapestry (ill. p. 245) was purchased from the Clarence Mackay collection, it was believed that this was the only large fourteenth-century piece the Museum would ever be able to acquire. Yet only four years later Joseph Brummer, New York collector and antiquarian, opened packing cases in which he pointed proudly to five pairs of window curtains made up of ninety-one pieces of fourteenth-century tapestries. The fragments, ranging from mere scraps to pieces eight feet high, were haphazardly sewn together with bands of modern blue cloth decorated with fleurs-de-lis. These tapestries, like the Angers Apocalypse series, had been cut up in the course of centuries. We recognized them at once as part and parcel of the series to which the King Arthur belonged. In fact, three cardinals that originally surmounted the figure of the king were among the fragments in the curtains, and two figures cut from the right of the Hebrew Heroes were sewn to the left side of the Arthur—an association dating back at least as far as 1877, the year the Arthur, thus composed, was shown in the Retrospective Exhibition at Lyons.

Although there are no written records to confirm the story, it has been said that the Arthur was sold by J. J. Duveen, the father of the late Lord Duveen, to Monsieur Chabrières-Arlès, who lent it to the Lyons exhibition. The tapestry fragments in the curtains were sold by the Duveen firm to Baron Arthur Schickler just after the Franco-Prussian War. His daughter, Countess Hubert de Pourtalès, recalls seeing the fragments lying in a bundle on the floor of her father’s castle at Martinvast, five miles from Cherbourg, about 1872. From about 1876 until recent times the curtains made from these precious fourteenth-century hangings and lined with a heavy red material were used in the castle windows. Fortunately the curtains were no longer at Martinvast during the German invasion of France, for the aerial bombing of January 14, 1944, virtually destroyed the room in which they had hung. One old tapestry that remained there was consumed by the resulting fire; others were saved by German soldiers who had been using the castle and outlying buildings for a headquarters.

Encouraged by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Museum tried for more than ten years to obtain
the fragments for The Cloisters, and when the protracted and difficult negotiations were concluded, Mr. Rockefeller gave the funds for the acquisition and proper rehabilitation of the tapestries. To help complete the series, a fragment showing a knight holding a banner displaying a crescent and three balls (see ill. p. 249) was presented by Mr. and Mrs. George A. Douglass.

The tapestries have been pieced together in temporary workrooms at The Cloisters. It has taken two years of enthusiastic effort on the part of expert needleworkers to complete the painstaking task. In assembling the fragments every effort has been made to preserve each and every thread. The individual pieces were detached from the modern fabric on which they had been mounted, and were separated from one another where they had been sewn together without rhyme or reason. The pieces were then washed individually with soap and water on specially prepared stretchers. Fitting together the various pieces was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle that lacked a number of parts. As most of the vertical cuts had been made with a sharp instrument, it was comparatively easy to reweave the fragments once their positions had been determined. Most of the earlier restorations, including the letters at the top of the Hebrew Heroes, have not been removed. Patching has been kept to a minimum, and where the design is entirely missing, no effort has been made to reconstruct it. Plain, colored replacements for the missing areas are being woven at the National Manufactory of the Gobelins in Paris, and when they have been completed, they will be substituted for the linen and gauze now used for fill.

Our Heroes tapestries illustrate a theme of chivalry well loved by noblemen and townspeople alike, especially in the fourteenth century. The Nine Heroes, called in medieval English the Nine Worthies (in French the Neuf Preux), were first systematized and made popular about 1310 by a jongleur named Jacques de Longuyon in his “Vows of the Peacock” (Voeux du Paon), which he added to the older “Romance of Alexander.” In this courtly poem of vows and daring deeds he told how his hero, Porus, fought as “never man had fought” before; he fought more bravely than even the nine great heroes of yore. With the medieval poet’s awareness of the value of three and three times three, Jacques chose for his roster of heroes three pagans, three Hebrews, and three Christians. The pagans are Hector, Alexander, and Julius Caesar; the Hebrews, David, Joshua, and Judas Maccabeus; the Christians, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey de Bouillon. Conquerors all, their claim to “worthiness” was summed up by a fifteenth-century poet in The Flower and the Leaf:

“Nine, crownéd, be very exemplair
Of all honour, longing to chivalry,
And those, certain, be called the nine
worthie.”

The idea of the “nine worthie” caught the imagination of the people of the time and inspired many a work of art. A pageant of the Nine Heroes was presented at Arras in 1336. Nine Heroes were sculptured on the mantelpiece at the château of Coucy before 1387. They decorated the Hansa Saal in Cologne and the fourteenth-century Schöne Brunn in Nuremberg. They were frescoed, about 1390, on the walls of Castle Runkelstein outside Bolzano. They appeared on enameled cups and playing cards, in manuscripts and stained-glass windows. Many a great fourteenth-century nobleman owned tapestries of the Nine Heroes: Charles V, Louis of Anjou, Philip of Burgundy, Charles VI, the Count of Hainaut, and Jean, Duke of Berry. Besides his Nine Heroes tapestries, the Duke of Berry had statues of the Nine Heroes on his fireplace at Bourges and, by 1385, on his keep, called Maubergeon, at Poitiers. He owned a “nef” (a table ornament in the form of a ship) which was decorated with the Nine Heroes and a “basin” (for washing the hands at meals) on which the Heroes were enameled in red. As a counterpart to the “worthie” men artists of the fourteenth century soon developed a similar series of “worthie” women, and many a group of Heroes in wall paintings and tapestries, in sculpture, manuscripts, and goldsmith’s work had its balancing group of Heroines. Occasionally, too, there was
King Arthur with bishops and cardinals. One of the Nine Heroes tapestries at The Cloisters. The lower panel was purchased in 1932 with funds from the Munsey Bequest; the cardinals above were among the ninety-one fragments acquired in 1947 with funds given by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Alexander the Great with courtiers. One of the Nine Heroes tapestries at The Cloisters. Originally at the left of a tapestry showing the three pagan Heroes. Rockefeller Gift, 1947
Julius Caesar with courtiers. One of the Nine Heroes tapestries at The Cloisters. From the right of the tapestry of the pagan Heroes. Rockefeller Gift, 1947
The Hebrew Heroes with courtiers and warriors; Joshua at the left, David in the center, and Judas Maccabeus missing. One of the Nine Heroes tapestries at The Cloisters. This set of three tapestries was woven, probably in the workshops of Nicolas Bataille, about 1385 for Jean, Duke of Berry. The tapestry shown here and those on pages 245-247 were photographed before the reconstruction was completed. All the figures in this hanging except three at the sides of the door are part of the 1947 purchase.
One of five pairs of window curtains made about 1872 from fragments of fourteenth-century tapestries of the Nine Heroes woven for Jean, Duke of Berry
a temptation, though it spoiled the symmetry, to add a tenth hero of local or contemporary fame. Thus Bertrand du Guesclin, defender of the French crown in the Hundred Years' War, was often added to the group of Nine Heroes in France.

Of the three pagan Heroes originally shown in one hanging in our set there still exist two, who can be recognized by their coats of arms; Alexander has a lion in a chair emblazoned on his shield, and Julius Caesar a double-headed imperial eagle in sable on gold. Of the three Hebrew Heroes we again have two: David, with a golden harp on an azure ground, and Joshua, with a dragon on his shield and a "sun in its glory" on the drapery at his feet. Of the three Christian Heroes only Arthur remains. He is clearly identified by the three crowns of gold on an azure ground. All the Heroes are seated impressively on Gothic thrones in elaborate Gothic niches. All of them are bearded, and all of them are crowned, even Joshua, in complete disregard for historical accuracy. They are clothed in medieval garments and medieval armor, with no attempt to recreate an impression of bygone days. The Middle Ages liked to bring its heroes up to date.

The five large figures in our tapestries are surrounded by little people who might have stepped out of a fourteenth-century ducal castle. There are spearmen and archers, musicians and churchmen. A lady plays a psaltery, another a harp; one holds a leopard, another a falcon; one a dog, and another a lily. They are lively and pert, and contribute largely to the interest of the tapestries. There is no precedent for these little figures in Jacques de Longuyon's poem or in any other description of the Nine Heroes so far discovered. They are apparently the invention of the designer of the tapestries and thus make this series unique among the known representations of the Heroes.

Ten of the thirteen banners flying from turrets in the tapestry depicting the Hebrew Heroes and the escutcheons in the vaults above David and Joshua display the golden fleurs-de-lis of France on an azure ground within an indented border of red. These are the arms of Jean, Duke of Berry and Auvergne, Count of Poitou, Étampes, and Boulogne, third son of King Jean of France, and one of the greatest art collectors of the Middle Ages or of any time. It can be assumed from the presence of the arms that the tapestries were made to Berry's order or woven for him as a gift.

There is no mention of tapestries in Berry's inventories of 1401-1403 and 1413-1416, as they were undertaken by his Keepers of the Jewels and consist only of the objects entrusted to their care. The more complete inventory of Berry's valuable possessions taken at the order
of his nephew, Charles VI, after the Duke's death in 1416 lists a Nine Heroes set with dimensions similar to those of our set; but it is described as "of the work of Arras, made of gold, silver, and wool of many colors." Since our set has no gold or silver threads, we cannot, even by stretching a point here and there, identify it with the one in the inventory. Of course, makers of inventories are sometimes careless or ignorant; certainly the compilers of the 1416 inventory were more concerned with the assessed value of the objects listed than with precise descriptions.

Disappointing as it may be to find no written record that our Heroes tapestries belonged to the Duke of Berry, there is still the internal evidence of the arms on the banners. There is perhaps further evidence in the tapestry with the pagan Heroes. The u's scattered over the dark blue ground behind the lady with the lily, in the alcove above Alexander, recall the English girl whom Berry is said to have met and loved in his youth, when he was in England as hostage for his father, King Jean. King René of Anjou recorded the incident in his romance "Le Livre de cueur d'armours espris" and indicated that Berry's life-long devotion to the lady, "servant of the God of Love," was shown by the inclusion of a swan along with the bear in his device. A sixteenth-century French historian ingeniously inferred from the combination of the "Ours" and the "Cygne" that the unknown lady was called Ursine. Modern scholars tend to support this view, and some of them even interpret the famous secret cipher of Berry, the interlaced V (or U) E, as representing the first and last letters of the lady's name. If the u's in our tapestry do not refer to Ursine, they may at least be equated with the U of the cipher. They are even closer in form to the letters on the liveries worn by retainers in the miniatures representing January and May in the Duke's well-known manuscript, Les Très Riches Heures, at Chantilly (see ill. p. 238).

The y's which appear in the same hanging with the u's cannot be associated as directly, either in fact or in fancy, with the Duke of Berry, and may be interpreted in as many different ways as the almost identical y's in one of the late scenes of the Angers Apocalypse tapestries. Berry's close connection with the court of France suggests that the y's of our tapestry may be a tribute to Queen Ysabeau of Bavaria, consort of Charles VI, as were undoubtedly the "Y's with crowns" on nine tapestries listed as one item in the Duke's inventory. It is possible that the controversial y's of the Apocalypse tapestry also refer to Ysabeau. That they appear in our tapestry behind a lady holding a white lily, but in the Apocalypse tapestry behind the harlot combing her hair, may be a significant indication of the change in the reputation of the Queen between the time of her marriage to the King in 1385 and the years of her liaison with the Duke of Orleans after her husband became insane for the first time in 1392. Since, in the Middle Ages, the y was occasionally used for j, it is not impossible that our y's refer to Jeanne d'Armagnac, Berry's first wife, who died in 1386, or to Jeanne de Boulogne, the young girl whom he married in 1389.

Innumerable other explanations of the y's could be suggested. Unfortunately, any attempt to explain them can result, at best, in little more than reasonable or ingenious hypotheses. It so happens that the people of the Middle Ages delighted in cryptic letters, secret ciphers, and obscure devices, many of which are still secret, cryptic, and obscure to the twentieth-century mind. We feel certain, however, that the u's and y's in our tapestry were intended to have some meaning for the owner and were not used merely for decorative effect.

The fact that our Heroes tapestries seem not to have been in Berry's possession at the time of his death leads to the conclusion that he must have given them away sometime previously, possibly to a son or a daughter as a wedding present or to a favorite brother or nephew at New Year's. Perhaps he exchanged the tapestries for illuminated manuscripts or precious goldsmith's work, having no need for our set of Heroes after he had acquired the set noted in the inventory as enriched with silver and gold.

What appears to have been the companion set of Heroines for our set of Heroes is listed and described in an inventory of the possessions of Berry's nephew, Charles VI, made shortly
before his death in 1422. The set consisted of three hangings, all of which had “up above, on top . . ., the arms of Berry and many little shields.” The three Heroines in one of the hangings are noted as being “large personages with their names in writing below . . . and many other small personages above them.” By the description it would seem that Charles owned the exact female counterpart to our Heroes. The presence of the Berry arms on Charles’s set proves that these Heroines, like our Heroes, belonged to Berry at some time or were ordered by him to be given away. Although Charles’s tapestries are listed as “very old and worn” (bien viels et use), two of them were claimed after his death by the English regent, the Duke of Bedford, who was something of a connoisseur of art and knew a good thing when he saw it.

There were no Heroes sets listed in Charles’s inventory of 1422. But that the King and Queen owned at least one such set, and probably two, is shown by the record of payments to Jau-doigne of Paris in 1389 for the repair of “two tapestries from the Hall of the Nine Heroes” and again, ten years later, for the repair of “the Nine Heroes.” (The “two Heroines” tapestries were mended in 1396.) It may be that these two Nine Heroes were “the two tapestries of the Nine Heroes” which the King inherited from his father, Charles V, in 1380. It would be pleasant to believe that one of these sets of Nine Heroes was ours, possibly presented to Charles by his uncle, the Duke of Berry, along with the similar set of Heroines described in the King’s inventory as showing the Berry arms. It may or may not be of significance that two of the banners in our tapestries bear the arms of France.

The presence of the arms of Burgundy on one of the banners in the tapestry of the Hebrew Heroes led to an examination of the accounts and inventories of Philip the Bold of Burgundy, the younger brother of Jean of Berry and an even greater collector of richly woven tapestries. Philip’s set of Heroes and Heroines was delivered to him in July 1388, was lined and “corded for hanging” shortly thereafter, had the
names of the Heroes and Heroines added in 1389, and was finally paid for in 1390. It was woven of Arras thread and the "heroes [were] plainly worked in large figures with their coats of arms and their armor entirely of fine gold and fine silver from Cyprus." Neither the description nor the dimensions of this set correspond with those of our Heroes, and its history shows that it had no connection with the Duke of Berry.

The Heroes tapestries are very closely related to the Angers Apocalypse tapestries, especially in their technique. In fact, the Apocalypse tapestries are the only woven pictures surviving that afford a suitable basis for comparison with ours. Last year, during the Loan Exhibition of French Tapestries, pieces from both sets were examined side by side. Both series are woven with approximately twelve and a half ribs, or warp threads, to the inch, with double threads for the weft. The same restricted colors, with similar shading in the same light and dark tones, appear in both sets. Shaded reds and blues predominate, recurring at intervals in the pattern. In both sets the stonework, woven in a golden tan color, slightly more faded in some places than in others, is silhouetted against a very dark blue, almost black sky. Similarities of design are apparent in the illustrations. For example, our five Heroes, like the Angers figures (see ill., left), are seated under vaulted architectural structures. Moreover, such details as the butterflies and the foliage at the outer edges of the tapestries are comparable. If the Heroes tapestries were not woven in the same workshops as the Angers Apocalypse, they must have been produced under virtually identical supervision and with similarly trained weavers.

We know that most of the Angers Apocalypse tapestries were woven before 1384 for the Duke of Berry’s brother, Louis, Duke of Anjou, by Nicolas Bataille, master tapestry-weaver and merchant of Paris (d. about 1400). And we know that Berry also ordered textiles from Bataille. Payments to Bataille as early as 1374 are recorded in the voluminous but incomplete account books kept by Berry’s treasurers, although the entries do not describe or itemize the purchases, merely noting their cost. The fact that Bataille’s widow is listed among the creditors claiming settlements from the Duke’s estate in 1416 indicates that further orders were received from him.

The Heroes tapestries may have been made for the Duke of Berry’s palace at Bourges and may actually have been woven there. This possibility is suggested by an extract from a contemporary document which can no longer be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale but which was noted by A. de Champeaux and P. Gauchery in their Travaux d’art executés pour Jean de France, Duc de Berry (Paris, 1894). According to this record there was a “payment made in
1385 to Jehan le Prestre, roofer and plasterer, for having completely reroofed the great hall of the palace at Bourges, where formerly the grain received as tithes by the Duke had been kept and where they were now making his tapestry at the same time that they were cutting stones for the palace."

Could "they" refer to Paris craftsmen summoned to Bourges to weave the Duke's tapestries? In the absence of more complete documentation it would be rash to conclude that the account cited above refers to our Heroes. Some seventeen castles were built or remodeled for the Duke's personal use, and there were many other buildings under his patronage where the tapestries might have hung. Several convincing points, however, strengthen the plausibility of the association of our tapestries with Bourges.

It is more than coincidence that certain works of art at Bourges bear a striking relationship to the Heroes tapestries. As we have already noted, the Duke had statues of the Nine Heroes placed in gabled niches above one of the great mantelpieces of his palace at Bourges. An exterior wall, with turrets and balustrades, still standing among the remains of this fourteenth-century castle may well have inspired the framework of one of our tapestries. High up on several of the remaining interior walls there are friezes with leaf motives which are similar to the schematic frieze that divides the upper and lower sections of the Heroes tapestries. Little turrets with open windows appear again and again in the Bourges stonework; for instance, the breast of one of the mantelpieces is divided by five such structures (ill. p. 253).

Further, the relationship between the Heroes tapestries and Bourges stained-glass windows (ill. p. 257), especially those from the Sainte Chapelle of the palace, is impressive. Elements in the design and coloring of both the tapestries and the glass suggest a definite dependence of the one upon the other. The placing of large figures in niches and the silhouetting of some of the figures against Italian brocades are common to both. The architectural structures with groined vaults, the thin columnar sections supporting gables ornamented with crockets and finials, and the quatrefoil tracery below some of the figures are very similar. The tonality of the faces and hair is remarkably close. But even more striking is the similar use of yellow, outlined in red, for the crockets and finials of the architecture. Nothing in the architecture of the period would have suggested this selection of colors, which is obviously borrowed from stained glass.

The Pope granted permission for the building of the Sainte Chapelle in 1391, fourteen years before its dedication, and it may well be that the designs for the stained-glass windows had been prepared long before their execution. If we could only discover who designed the stained-glass windows from the Sainte Chapelle or the related early fifteenth-century windows in the chapels of Pierre Trousseau and Simon Aligret, the Duke's physician, in the Cathedral.
The Prophets at the left were painted for the Duke of Berry’s Psalter (B. N. ms. fr. 13091) by André Beauneveu. The stone Prophet at the upper right, the figure from a stained-glass window at the lower right, and the stained glass shown on the opposite page were made for Berry’s Sainte Chapelle at Bourges. The glass is now in the crypt of Bourges Cathedral, the sculpture in the House of Jacques Coeur.
of Bourges, we might learn more about the Heroes tapestries. It is certain that this Bourges glass has a definite character of its own, and it should not be confused with stained glass in other parts of Europe which was also under the influence of the International style.

The stained glass and the stylistically related statues of prophets and apostles (ill. p. 256) from the Sainte Chapelle are generally believed to have been influenced if not actually designed by André Beauneveu (d. before 1403). The importance of this master, the general superintendent of Berry’s artistic enterprises, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century is described in a contemporary document. Jean Froissart, in a passage in his Chronicle referring to the year 1393, relates that the Duke of Berry gave “orders for sculptures and paintings to Master André Beauneveu, who was well qualified because no one was superior to him and no one was his equal in any land; nor is there any master by whom there remain so many good works in France or in Hainaut, where he was born, or in the Kingdom of England.”

The only paintings unquestionably accepted by modern scholars as the work of Beauneveu are twenty-four miniatures painted in the thirteenth-eighties for the Duke of Berry’s Psalter (B. N. ms. fr. 13091). Although the seated figures in the Psalter (see ill. p. 256) may be compared in composition and in general style to the Heroes in the tapestries, such figures were similarly treated by other artists. There are other manuscript paintings which seem closer in some respects to the Heroes tapestries.

A manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Albumasar astrological treatises (M. 785), not only shows seated figures comparable to the Heroes (ill. p. 259), but also has certain details, in particular the wind-swept veils (ill. above), which have definite affinities to the drawing in our tapestries. This manuscript, presented on June 7, 1403, to the Duke of Berry, was “created” by Abbot Lubertus, who from 1394 until 1417 directed a flourishing center for the illumination of manuscripts in the Abbey of St. Bartholomew of Eechoutte, near Bruges.

A page in Berry’s Petites Heures (B. N. ms. lat. 18014, folio 22), reproduced on page 255, recalls the general composition of the Heroes tapestries. The principal scene, the Annunciation, is surrounded by small niches in which
saints and other figures are placed against backgrounds of red and blue alternately. Although this manuscript was not inventoried in Berry’s library until 1402, it is believed to have been painted in the eighties. Authorities differ as to the painter of the Annunciation; was it Jacquemart de Hesdin or one of the other artists who worked for the Duke?

The attribution of manuscript illuminations of this period to specific artists is sometimes difficult. The attribution of tapestries on the basis of their relation to manuscript paintings is even more difficult, for comparison is complicated by our inability to know what latitude a master weaver and his fellow craftsmen had in interpreting the cartoons supplied by a designer. It is only by the records that we know that Hennequin of Bruges (Jean Bandol) made “the portraits and the patterns” for the Apocalypse tapestries. Although there are marked similarities in design between this set and ours, as has already been noted, the differences in drawing make it seem unlikely that Jean Bandol was the designer of both. All the evidence concerning the designer of the Heroes tapestries points to a Flemish master, perhaps from Bruges, working in France under the influence of Beauneveu. But it is not possible to single out a Beauneveu, a Jacquemart de Hesdin, a Bandol, or any of the other masters who may have
worked for the Duke of Berry in the last decades of the fourteenth century.

The relationship of our tapestries to the arts of the last quarter of the fourteenth century is clear. From their close resemblance to the Angers Apocalypse tapestries, most of which were completed before 1384, and to the manuscripts mentioned above, which were executed in the eighties and nineties, we may conclude that the Heroes tapestries were designed and woven about 1385.

The inventories of Jean, Duke of Berry, were published by Jules Guiffrey, in Inventaires de Jean, duc de Berri (1401-1416), 2 vols., Paris, 1894-1896. Certain of Berry's expense accounts, namely, the "Registre de Barthelémi de Noces," were published in Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes, vol. LII (1891); and excerpts from his accounts are quoted in Jules Guiffrey, Histoire générale de la tapisserie, part 1, Paris, 1878-1885. Most of the existing unpublished accounts are in the Archives Nationales, Paris.

Other inventories and expense accounts which have been referred to in this article are Bernard Prost, Inventaires mobiliers et extraits des comptes des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de Valois, 2 vols., Paris, 1902-1913, and Jules Labarte, Inventaire du mobilier de Charles V, roi de France, Paris, 1879. Excerpts from the accounts of Charles VI are included in Guiffrey's Histoire générale, mentioned above.

The manuscript illuminations reproduced on page 256 were photographed by Harry Bober, and the stone Prophet (on the same page) by Robert Gauchery. The Bourges stained glass is reproduced through the courtesy of M. Gauchery and the Direction de Beaux Arts, Monuments Historiques; and the illuminations from the Albumasar manuscript through the courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library. The Annunciation (ill. p. 255) was brought to our attention by Louis Grodecki.

BELOW: The arms of Jean, Duke of Berry. From his Grandes Heures in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (ms. lat. 919)