Now we need to move up to Northern Europe in the early 1400s (the same time that Masaccio and Donatello and Brunelleschi are in Florence). So far, we have been exclusively in Florence, Italy. But up in northern Europe, in an area called Flanders (which is primarily Belgium today, but also a part of what is today Holland) there was also a Renaissance.

Here is a map of Europe in the fifteenth century. The area in Northern Europe that is dark red is Flanders, which was controlled by the Dukes of Burgundy (in France) during this time period, and we call the art and culture of this area Flemish.

Like Florence, Flanders encompassed an area with rich industrial and banking cities that allowed a large middle class population to flourish. It was this rising middle class that often commissioned the new, realistic images of the Northern Renaissance.

The first thing to notice is how far we are from Italy. This may not seem a great distance to us today, but imagine crossing the Alps on a mule to get from Italy to Flanders. It wasn't easy! As a result, the Renaissance in Florence in the 1400s developed separately from the Renaissance in Flanders in Northern Europe. There were some business contacts, some travel back and forth, and some artistic exchange, but not a great deal.

Classical Antiquity?
The fact that we are far from Italy tells us something about the character of the Northern Renaissance. Remember that in Italy we said that the Renaissance was a rebirth of the art and culture of Ancient Greece and Rome? Well, in Northern Europe we're pretty far from the important centers of Ancient Greek and Roman culture, and so the Renaissance in the North is not a rebirth of Ancient Greek and Roman culture the way it was in Florence.

Oil Paint
Here's another important difference: the artists of the North invented oil paint! They use oil paint fifty years or more before they use it in Italy (where they use tempera until then). Think about what oil paint can do that fresco and tempera can not do! Keep this in mind as you look at the first Northern Renaissance painting we're going to discuss, the *Merode Altarpiece*. The Renaissance in Northern Europe is very different from the Renaissance in Italy, as we will soon see.