



Book of Hours (Use of Rome)

ca.1465

1 vol. (144 fol.)

Call no.: MS 963

Collection overview

Books of hours are the most common surviving form of the medieval book and are as diverse as the patrons who commissioned them. Beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, they flourished as part of a rich array of devotional works used to frame the temporal structure of a community's spiritual lives. In keeping with individual spiritual and aesthetic preferences, books of hours were often customized to appeal to the particular purchaser, and they vary greatly through time and from region to region.

This diminutive and comparatively austere book of hours (Use of Rome) appears to have been produced near Bruges between about 1460 and 1470, possibly influenced by the prolific illuminator Willem Vrelant. Written in Latin in a skilled Gothic Italic Rotunda hand, the book lacks a calendar and miniatures of any kind, nor is there any evidence that any were ever present.

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Background

Books of hours are the most common surviving form of the medieval book and are as diverse as the patrons who commissioned them. Beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, they flourished as part of a rich array of devotional works that developed in the centuries before moveable type and that assisted in regulating the temporal structure of a community's spiritual lives. Unlike psalters (which contained the psalms to be read by a monastic community throughout their week along with a liturgical calendar, litany of saints, and prayers) and breviaries (which included the sung and spoken portions of the Divine Office, along with texts used during feast days), which were employed primarily by the clergy, books of hours were devotional texts aimed primarily at a lay audience.

In keeping with individual spiritual and aesthetic preferences, books of hours were often customized to appeal to the particular purchaser, and they vary greatly through time and from region to region. In many ways, the Virgin Mary is situated at the heart of a book of hours, and the book of hours was at the heart of medieval cult of Mary, who was considered the spiritual mother of humanity and the most beloved and valuable intercessor

with God. The Office of the Blessed Virgin is the key section in nearly every book of hours and consists of texts, prayers, and hymns to be recited to the Virgin during the eight canonical hours, regulating and sanctifying the day. From there, books typically include a liturgical calendar and a variable array of other readings, such as the Office of the Holy Spirit, Office of the Cross, the penitential psalms, a liturgy, the Office of the Dead (recited in favor of departed relatives or friends), or the prayers to the Virgin, Obsecro te and O intemerata.

At the lower end of the market, books of hours produced for sale through booksellers could be quite simple, lacking customization or illustration, and they were sometimes even printed on paper rather than parchment or vellum. Famously, though, other books of hours were commissioned to suit the sumptuous tastes of the high elite. In addition to selecting specific saints for the litany or readings and prayers to suit an individual's devotional preferences, books may be graced with more or less elaborate miniature paintings marking the beginning of each section. Designed to impress as much as to demarcate section of text, these illustrations may contain portraits of the patron, coats of arms, or personal emblems, or they may feature scenes from the Bible meaningful to the patron. The text as a whole can be decorated with rubricated and gilt initials and more or less ornate designs.

As popular as they were for centuries, books of hours declined precipitously in the latter half of the sixteenth century. While moveable type had an impact on the relative cost of production -- and thus popularity -- the key factors in their decline were the liturgical changes introduced in the Council of Trent combined with a series of decisions by Pope Pius V to dispense with the clerical requirement to pray the Office of the Blessed Virgin and to standardize liturgy.

Scope of collection

This diminutive and comparatively austere book of hours (Use of Rome) appears to have been produced near Bruges between about 1460 and 1470, possibly influenced by the prolific Flemish illuminator Willem Vrelant. Written in Latin in a skilled Gothic Italic Rotunda hand, the book lacks a calendar and miniatures of any kind, nor is there any evidence that any were ever present.

The text, in a single block, is divided into fourteen divisions, each marked by a four- or five-line pink initial with white penwork enclosing scrolling sprays of blue foliage terminating in squat blossoms, all on burnished gold



Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary

grounds. Each of these folios has colored floral borders on all four sides with acanthus-leaf sprays and bezants. The text includes two-line crisp dentelle initials in gold on pink and blue grounds highlighted with white penwork; and one-line initials in blue with red penwork or liquid gold with black penwork.

Stylistically, the book bears a clear resemblance to a Flemish Book of Hours at the Walters Museum of Art (Ms. W.177), which they regard as influenced by Vrelant. The books are quite similar in the script, design, use of color, and particularly the decorative flourishes on colored initials. The litany in W.177 includes a "heavy contingent of South Netherlandish and northern French saints," and the male saints in particular (less so the female) overlap to a high degree with those listed in the SCUA Book of Hours. The cataloger of the Walters volume notes that the "Italianate script and later Italian provenance suggest that the manuscript might have been created for a member of the Italian community in Bruges."

The list of female saints mentioned in the SCUA Book of Hours is nearly identical to a different Walters book, Ms. W.208, which they note was created in or near Antwerp, ca.1470. Mary Magdalene, Mary Egyptian, Anne, Clare, Juliana, Elizabeth, Ursula, and Martha all appear in common between W.208 and the SCUA Book of Hours, although paleographically and stylistically the volumes are otherwise quite different.

The male saints listed in the SCUA litany are Andrew, Jacob, John, Thomas, Jacob, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon, Jude, Mathias, Barnabas, Luke, Mark, Stephen, Linus, Cletus, Clement, Cyprian, Lawrence, Vincent, George, Fabian, Sebastian, Cosmas, Damian, Gervais, Prothas(?), Christopher, Silvester, Leo, Gregory, Ambrosius, Jerome, Augustine, Anthony, Nicholas, Martinus, Leonarte, Francis, Bernard, and Ludovic. Female saints include Mary Magdalen, Mary Egyptian, Anna, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Agnes, Clara, Margareta, Barbara, Catherine, Juliana, Elizabeth, Ursula, and Martha.

At some time probably in the eighteenth century, the manuscript was trimmed and rebound in full mottled calf with gilt bands and flowers in four spine compartments. The fore-edges are painted with mottled red. The first leaf of the book is rubbed and soiled, and there are other stains sporadically in the book, with water damage on the lower edge of most leaves, extending occasionally into the gutter. A few of the decorative borders are closely trimmed at the top, presumably upon rebinding. The binding is coming loose, being wormed, torn at base and slightly detaching at front.

Contents

- **Fols. 1-6v.**: Incipit officium sacracissime crucis (Office of the Cross)
- **Fols. 7r-10v.** : Officium Sancti Spiritus ad Matutinas ueserus (Office of the Holy Spirit at Matins)
- **Fols. 11r-16v.** : Incipit missa Beate Marie Virginis (Mass of the Blessed Virgin), with the Creed and, most unusually, the final lesson from John's Gospel.
- **Fols. 17r-71v.** : Incipit office[ium] b[ea]te Marie virginis secundi usum roma[n]e ecclesie (Office of the Blessed Virgin), with Matins (17r-33v), As Laudes (34r-44r, 44v blank), Ad Primam (45r-48v), Ad Terciam (49r-52v), Ad Sextam (53r-56v), Ad Nonam (57r-60v), Ad Vesp[er]as (61r-67v), and Ad Compl[e]ctoriu[m] (68r-71v).
- **Fols. 72r-80v.** : Officium b[ea]te Marie Virginis qd dicitur per totum adventum (Office of the Virgin for Advent)

- **Fols. 81r-99v.** : Incipiunt septem psalmi penitenciales (Seven Penitential Psalms), with a litany (91v) and prayers (96r). The litany has no local saints that would serve to identify the manuscript's intended destination.
- **Fols. 100r-139v.**: Incipiunt vigile mortuoru[m] (Office of the Dead)
- **Fols. 140r-144v.**: Obsecro te (male use).

Inventory

Book of hours (Use of Rome), Flemish	ca.1465	121 mm x 91 mm (justification 70 mm x 54 mm). Collation: i + I8-XVIII8 + i
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Administrative information

Access

The item is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Scott Gwara, Feb. 2017.

While the provenance is only fragmentary, the book of hours bears traces of several previous owners.

- The rear of the free front end paper (fol. 1v) bears an otherwise unidentified shelf mark or inventory number, "G / 19231"
- The front paste-down bears the engraved bookplate of Christian Hammer (1818-1905) of Stockholm, a jeweler, art collector, and bibliophile, bearing the inventory number 1:5923. The volume is listed and described in *Catalogue de la bibliothèque Hammer à Stockholm*, tome 1. Stockholm, 1886, where the description reads:

- Incipit officium sacracissime crucis -- Officium sanct spiritus ad matutinas...
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-
- "Xllo. Manuscrit de 143 feui du XIVE siècle sur vélin très fin d'Italie. Au commencement
- de chaque partie, les feuillets sont entourées d'une bordure et ornées de majuscules
- en or et en couleurs. Rel. de veau."
-

Hammer's bookplate features an engraving of an angel wielding a hammer and driving a rococo chariot and bears his motto, "En avant, toujours en avant" along with the inscription "Bibl. Hammer." Hammer's collections were dispersed soon after 1900

- The front pastedown includes a tiny octagonal bookplate, dated 1911, of the Swedish soldier and bibliophile Thore Virgin (1886-1957). His name appears in ink on the free front end paper (fol. 1r), with an apparent acquisition date of 18 March 1915. Much of Virgin's collection was donated to the library at Uppsala University.
- There is a faint inscription in Italian on the final vellum page (fol. 143v) beginning with the word "Bendita" (to sprinkle with holy water).

Processing Information

Processed by I. Eliot Wentworth, Feb. 2017.

Language:

Latin

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Cite as: Book of Hours (Use of Rome) (MS 963). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Books of hours--Belgium--Early works to 1800
- Catholic Church--Liturgy--Texts--Early works to 1800
- Catholic Church--Prayers and devotions--Latin--Early works to 1800

Contributors

Genres and formats

- Books of hours

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