

Collection of Prayers

In French and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Northern France, c. 1480-1530 with later additions

iii (modern paper) + i (parchment leaf from another manuscript, described below) + 30 + i (parchment leaf, described below) + iii (modern paper), foliated in pencil top outer corner recto, complete (collation i-iii^s iv⁶), no catchwords or signatures, ruled lightly in red ink with the top line full across, prickings outer margin on some leaves (justification 120-117 x 78-75 mm.), written in an accomplished cursive gothic book hand in nineteen long lines, majuscules touched with pale yellow, red rubrics, 1- to 2-line gold initials infilled and on grounds of red and blue (most initials in two colors), with white or silver highlights, heavily edged in black, f. 30v, "Iesus Maria Cor mundi" spelled out in gold letters on red and blue backgrounds with a gold heart between 'Cor' and 'mundi', 4-line initial in the same style on f. 1 with the text framed on all sides by a narrow bar border of red, blue, and gold, edged in black, initial f. 8v damaged, outer margins ff. 17 and 30 cut away (no loss of text), edges browned, a few stains, overall in very good condition. Bound in a modern blind tooled brown leather binding, smooth spine lettered in gold "French 15th Century Manuscript," excellent condition. Dimensions 197 x 135 mm.

Added leaves: Two leaves from an earlier manuscript, France, c. 1360-1400, tipped in on modern paper stubs at the front and back, ruled in lead (justification 140 x 90 mm.), written under the top line in a cursive gothic book hand in twenty-eight long lines, red rubrics, red and blue running titles, two-line red or blue initials, both leaves are frayed at the edges and have darkened and stained margins on one side. Dimensions c. 185 x 135 (edges frayed and uneven). The text is unidentified, but is clearly a commentary on legislation, probably ecclesiastical (perhaps a commentary on a provincial synod, topics include malefactors who destroy grain (Item <?> contra male factorum pro blado euelato de terra), and church stipends (Precium ad recipiendum fructus ecclesiastis stallum in choro et procurator genus ...)).

Lay spirituality in vernacular texts—that is for private devotion rather than public worship—is of special interest for historians. The prayers written in French in the present volume expand the corpus of known examples; they include some that circulated widely as well as others either little- or unknown that were written not long before the manuscript was copied. The attractive decoration is additionally noteworthy for students of the history of the reception over time of the manuscript book.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in Northern France at the end of the fifteenth or during the early decades of the sixteenth century, c. 1480-1530. The text here is complete, but it is possible this was once part of a longer manuscript, a Book of Hours, or another although given the format, not a Book of Hours.
2. Added decoration suggests these texts remained in active devotional use long after the manuscript was copied (perhaps as late as the nineteenth century).
3. Modern description in pencil inside front cover, "A 2205" and price code, front flyleaf, f. i, in pencil, "c" in a circle; inside back cover "462F."

TEXT

f. 1, *Sensuiuent plusieurs belles et bien deuotes oroisons*, incipit, "Benedictio dei patris cum angelis suis ..."; incipit, "Nam et si ambulauero in medio umbre mortis ...";

f. 1rv, *Austre oroison deuote*, incipit, "O sire dieu tout puissant qui as engendre eternallemen ton fils egal et diuine mesme substance comme toy ...; Pater noster, Aue maria";

This does not appear to be the same prayer as Rézau, 1986, no. 879, a prayer preceding the French translation of the Book of Hours by the poet Pierre Gringore (c. 1475-1538), first printed in Paris in 1525, despite the similar incipits (at least as consulted in the Paris 1536 edition by Jehan Petit). It is conceivable that Gringore knew of this prayer, and adapted it for his Book of Hours.

f. 2, incipit, "Noble mere du redempteur/ Fontaine de toute lyesse ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 1241]; manuscripts listed in Sonet, Sinclair, 1978, and Rézau, 1986, suggest this circulated primarily in sixteenth-century manuscripts;

f. 2rv, incipit, "Noble createur et redempteur et vray pere verite vie et la voye dadresse ..." [not in Sonet, 1956 or Rézau, 1986];

ff. 2v-10v, *Oroison a dieu le pere laquelle se doit dire par maniere de protestation humble et deuote*, incipit, "O Dieu createur redempteur conseruateur gubernateur..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 1314]; f. 3v, *Oroison deuote a Jesu christ*, incipit, "Doulx iesu christ ie proteste deuant toy. confesse et cognois ta foy ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 524]; f. 4, "Ie croids en dieu le pere tout puissant createur du ciel ..." [Creed, Sonet, 1956, no. 794]; f. 4v, *Oroison a tous les saincts*, incipit, "Ie vous supplie tous angles [sic] ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 932]; *Oroison tres deuote a prier pour son amy en quesce[n] necessite quil soit ou pour soy mesmes en disant particulierement por soy a chescunne foys*, incipit "Ie me commadent. Ie te commandent N. a dieu le roy tout ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 837]; f. 6, *Oroison de la croys a dieu comme celle de deuant*, incipit, "La sainte croix soit deuant toy ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 1020]; [f. 7], incipit, "Mon dieu ie croys de coeur et confesse ..." [Confession of Faith, Sonet, 1956, no. 1150; ed. Leroquais, 1927, vol. 2, pp. 330-331]; f. 8v, *Oroison deuote iesu christ*, incipit, "Doulx iesu christ fils de dieu redempteur ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 521]; f. 9v, incipit, "Nostre seigneur Jesu Chrsti fils de dieu le pere vif ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 1259];

This set of prayers is also found in Birmingham Public Library, 091/MED/6, Book of Hours, Paris, late fifteenth century, perhaps 1497 (Ker, 1969-2002, vol. 2, p. 66); in Paris, BnF, MS lat 10561, Book of Hours, sixteenth century; with some differences, in Claremont Colleges, Honnold Library, Crispin 18, Book of Hours, late fifteenth century; and in London, Oratory, MS 12546 (Ker, vol. 1, p. 168), Book of Hours, France, late fifteenth century. Additional manuscripts are listed in Rézau, 1986.

ff. 10v-11, incipit, "Sire dieu tout puissant qui par la mort et passion ..." [Sonet, 1956, no. 2006], listing one manuscript, Poitiers, Bib. Mun, MS 42, Prayers, sixteenth century; Rézau, 1986, suggests this is the same prayer as Sonet, 1939, adding three manuscripts to the one listed in Sonet).

ff. 11-13, incipit, "Mon dieu mon pere mon createur ie confesse a uoie este ung grandt pecheur ...; Apres ie te supplie mon benoist ...; Apres ie croids mon doulx ...; Mon benoist saulueur

iesus tu es le ...; Mon dieu reply de bonte ...” [Rézau, 1986, no. 559, listing a single printed Book of Hours as a source];

Prayer in five parts [Sonet, 1956, no. 1191], listing two manuscripts (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries); Sinclair, 1978, adds another manuscript.

f. 13, incipit, “Sire dieu tout puissant tout voyant ...” [Profession of Faith, Sonet, 1956, no. 2007, many sources];

f. 13v, incipit, “Benoicte et tres sainte trinite pere fils et...”; [not identified];

f. 14, *Oroison a nostre seigneur deu*, incipit, “O sire dieu tout puissant qui as engendre eternellement ton fils ...” [this same prayer is found on f. 1rv, above];

ff. 14v-18v, *Oroison tres deuote a nostre dame*, incipit, “Belle tres douce vierge pucelle Marie mere de iesu christ le vray dieu ...” [Sonet, 1956, no. 218];

ff. 18v-30v, *Se auscum est en tribulation affliction persecution ou temptation corporelle sy dye on face dire ceste belle oroison par lespasse de trente iours et il sera deliure*. *Oroison*, incipit, “Tres doulx seigneur iesu chrsti fils de dieu viuant qui tu ... en trinite par faicte. Par tous les siecles des siecles. Amen. [Sonet, 1956, no. 2206, listing a single manuscript, Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 101, where it occupies 13 folios].

Rézau, 1986 adds an additional manuscript, Soisson, Bib. mun., MS 110, ff. 128v-136, and suggests this prayer is the same as Sonnet, nos. 1561-1562, 2183, and 2205. Whether these should be considered as one prayer or as different French translations of the same popular Latin prayer is an interesting question. A comparison based on the incipits listed suggests that there are differences in their texts, and possibly in the length of the prayers as well (the prayer in our manuscript and in the manuscript at Chantilly are longer than many examples listed in Rézau).

This collection of prayers in French is relatively short, and it may have once belonged to a longer devotional manuscript, possibly even a Book of Hours. Some of the prayers included were widely known and circulated in both Books of Hours and in other types of manuscripts, for example a French translation of the Profession of Faith. Other prayers, however, were much less common, including one which is known also in a Book of Hours printed c. 1502 in Paris. Two of the prayers here do not appear in the standard repertoires (Sonet, 1956, Sinclair, 1978 and 1987, Rézau, 1986). The volume concludes with a very long prayer (here twelve folios in length) for “any tribulation, affliction, persecution, or bodily temptation” (Sonet, 1956, 2206, listing only one other manuscript). Rézau, 1956, suggests this French translation of a very popular Latin prayer, circulated more widely by grouping together versions Sonet considered to be different prayers. All of the prayers, which appear to be in the masculine voice (cf. ff. 11 and 13, “pecheur”), are in French, apart from the opening prayer on f. 1, which is in Latin, with occasional short cues to standard Latin prayers (Pater noster, Ave maria).

One of the interesting features of this manuscript is its decoration. On the last page, below the final prayer, the words “Iesus Maria/ cor mundum” (Jesus Maria/ clean heart) are found in gold letters on red and blue backgrounds, with a gold heart between *cor* and *mundum*. The phrase

echoes the verse from Psalm 50, "Create in me a clean heart oh God," and it was certainly added to the manuscript. Indeed, close examination suggests all the decoration here may have been added. Manuscripts, especially ones with devotional content, could live long lives. The additions in this manuscript, whether they were added in the nineteenth century, or somewhat earlier, are evidence of its continued devotional use long after this was made.

The initials in this manuscript are painted, either over existing initials, or perhaps in spaces left for the decoration. This manuscript is thus an interesting example of a devotional manuscript carefully altered by the addition of decoration by a later owner. Manuscripts decorated with illuminated initials and borders cut from other manuscripts are a parallel phenomenon, and like added painted decoration, one that has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive survey. Many of the known examples of manuscripts with pasted-in initials are manuscripts associated with nuns. The nuns from the English Bridgettine Abbey of Syon, to cite a well-studied case, cut out initials from their manuscripts to use in other manuscripts (De Hamel, 1991; Alexander, 1992, p. 49; McKitterick, 2003). The Augustinian canonesses at Sint-Mariëndall in Diest (North-Brabant), and the nearby convent of Soeterbeeck, also decorated their books in this fashion (Rudy, 2015, pp. 106-108).

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TM 938