

*Neuvaine pour l'immaculée Conception...* (Eleven Novena prayers for the Virgin Mary, beginning with a Novena for the feast of the Immaculate Conception)

In French, illuminated manuscript on paper

France, c. 1840-1850

*i + 28 + i folios on nineteenth-century paper, modern foliation in pencil, 1-28, complete (collation i-ii<sup>6</sup> iii<sup>4</sup> iv-v<sup>6</sup>), text framed in a rectangle drawn in red and blue ink (justification 190 x 110 mm.), written in clear cursive nineteenth-century hand in brown ink on c. 30 lines, titles in blue and red ink, FULL-PAGE ILLUMINATED DEDICATION, TWELVE FULL-PAGE WATERCOLOR ILLUSTRATIONS on rectos (verso blank), twelve "cul-de-lampe" illustrations also in watercolor at the end of texts. Bound in the nineteenth century in France in brown calf, tooled in gold, cathedral panel design on the front and back boards enclosing the inscription "HIS," chalice and candle stamps on the spine, binding slightly worn on the front board and spine, otherwise the volume is in excellent condition. Dimensions 198 x 120 mm.*

An elegant Neo-Gothic manuscript made in the 1840s as a gift to a woman in a religious house in France. The text includes prayers ("novena" from *novem*, Latin for nine) addressed to God for special help and usually recited over nine days. The illustrations in gold and colors are emblematic referring to the mysteries of the Virgin Mary. This charming witness to popular piety and religious imagery continues the traditions of medieval illuminated manuscripts in the nineteenth century.

#### PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made in France around 1840-1850, as can be deduced from the style of illustration. The name of the religious institution where the manuscript was made is given in an emblematic acronym "SOPCEC" within the illustration on f. 10. A small cross is inscribed inside the letter "O." A comparable "signature," made using the initials "SOLM" and a cross that is inscribed to the letter "O," was used at the same period in pious images made at the Abbey Saint Pierre Solesmes (see Quintallet, 1998, vol. 3, list of sigla). The volume here was prepared for a woman, and was presented as a gift to a friend, as is indicated by the dedication "A UNE AMIE" on f. 2.

#### TEXT

Illustrations on separate leaves between the text pages are described below.

[f. 1, blank]; f. 4rv, Novena prayer for the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour l'immaculée Conception*, "Tres glorieuse Vierge je me rejouis avec vous de ce que par votre immaculée Conception...";

f. 6rv, Novena prayer for the Nativity of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Nativité de la Vierge*, "Vierge glorieuse & Mère très clémente voyez à vos pieds sacrés la plus indigne de vos servants...";

ff. 8-9, Novena prayer for the Presentation of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Présentation de la Vierge*, "Premierement il faut considerer que la Sainte Vierge quoique agée seulement de 3 ans se presenta dans le temple...";

f. 11rv, Novena prayer for the Marriage of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Mariage de la Vierge*, "Il faut considerer avec beaucoup de tendresse dans cette Neuvaine les Virtus eminentes que la très Sainte Vierge & son Epoux Saint Joseph...";

f. 13rv, Novena prayer for the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Fête de l'Annonciation*, "Il faut dans cette Neuvaine considerer le profond mystère de l'annonciation...";

f. 15rv, Novena prayer for the Visitation of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Visitation de la Vierge*, "Dans cette Neuvaine nous suivions par de pieuses meditations de la Sainte Vierge dans le penible voyage qu'elle entreprit pour visiter & assister sa bienheureuse cousine Elisabeth...";

ff. 17-18v, Novena prayer for the Awaiting of Our Lady, *Neuvaine pour l'Attente du notre Dame*, "Le Dieu tout puissant qui est renfermé dans le sein de la bienheureuse Vierge Marie est le Redempteur promis immediatement après la chute d'Adam...";

ff. 20-21r, Novena prayer for the birth of Christ, *Neuvaine pour la Naissance de notre Seigneur*, "Dans cette Neuvaine nous suivons son esprit les pieux Bergers à la creche de Bethléem...";

f. 23rv, Novena prayer for the Purification of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour la Purification de la Vierge*, "Dans cette Neuvaine meditons les mystères profonds qui se sont accomplis dans la Purification...";

f. 25rv, Novena prayer for Our Lady of Sorrows, *Neuvaine de notre Dame des Douleurs*, "Considerons dans cette Neuvaine avec la plus tendre compassion les cruelles douleurs de la Mère de Dieux...";

f. 27rv, Novena prayer for the Assumption of the Virgin, *Neuvaine pour l'Assomption de la Vierge*, "Representons nous la glorieuse Assomption de la Sainte Vierge ...."

## ILLUSTRATION

A full-page illuminated dedication painted in medieval style:

f. 2, a border in gold, red and blue panels, ornamented in white, encloses a blue field filled with gold *rinceaux*. On the field is inscribed A / UNE / AMIE in initials alternating in red and blue on gold grounds, in-filled with ivy-vines, ornamented with white penwork. The verso of the leaf is blank.

Twelve emblematic illustrations in aquarelle on rectos (verso blank):

f. 3, [illustrating the Immaculate Conception] a heart enflamed, emanating golden rays and surrounded by twelve stars and the words "Tora (sic) pulchra es Maria / Et macula originalis non est in te" (You are all beautiful Mary, and the original sin is not in you) from the Marian motet altered from the Song of Songs 4:7. The emblem of the heart was traditionally used to symbolize the soul. The heart of the believer (and of Mary) was filled with the Holy Spirit and ignited with the holy fire of His love;

f. 5, [illustrating the Nativity of the Virgin] a framed painting hanging from a nail with a pink ribbon, representing a landscape with a house by a river and mountains, and on the forefront, a lily growing among thorns; flanked by captions inscribed with the words "Quae est ista quae

processit secut [sic] sol?" (Who is she that advances like the sun? Song of Songs 6:10) and "Sicut lilium inter Spinam / ita [sic] amica mea inter Filias / Cant 2.2." (As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters, Song of Songs 2:2);

f. 7, [illustrating the Nativity of the Virgin] a medallion framed with pearls represents a landscape occupied by a circular altar on which a lily branch grows from a heart inflamed; golden rays emanate from heaven; above the medallion are inscribed the words "Holocaustum perfectum" (perfect holocaust (sacrifice)) and below the medallion "Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi / Cant 2.16." (My beloved is mine and I am his, Song of Songs 2:16);

f. 10, [illustrating the Marriage of the Virgin] two hearts are enflamed, surrounded by golden rays. Lily branches grow from the hearts and encircle the emblematic initials IMAR signifying MARIA, and SOPCEC with a cross inside the O, signifying the name of the religious institution where the manuscript was made. Below the image, on blue ground, framed by a laurel branch, are inscribed the words "O Admirabilis Unio!" in gold (How wonderful union!);

f. 12, [illustrating the Annunciation to the Virgin] a heart enflamed receives the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Two branches of the lily of the valley and a dove catching a snake are below the heart. The banderoles encircling the motifs contain the words of Gabriel and Mary: "Spiritus Sanctus Superveniet in te" (Holy Spirit will descend upon you), "Quomodo fiet istud?" (How will this happen?), "Ecce ancilla Domini" (Behold the handmaiden of the Lord);

f. 14, [illustrating the Visitation] a heart enflamed, enclosing a banderole inscribed with "Magnificat," flanked by a rose vine wrapped with a banderole containing the words of St. Elisabeth "Benedicta tu in mulieribus" (Blessed are you among women) and a golden frame supporting a laurel and containing the words "O Tabernaculum divini Amoris" (Oh tabernacle of divine love);

f. 16, [illustrating Our Lady of Awaiting] a framed painting on a pedestal representing snakes encircling a globe, covered partly by grey clouds, in a landscape within ruins of a temple. On the pedestal are inscribed the words "Rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant justum / Aperiat terra et germinet Salvatorem" (Drop down the heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness / Let the earth be opened and send forth a Savior), the opening words of the Rorate Mass, a Votive Mass in honor of the Virgin Mary during the season of Advent;

f. 19, [illustrating the Birth of Christ], three lilies grow in flowerpots, placed in a landscape, between a small tree and a burning bush of Moses; around them are wrapped scrolls on which reads: "Benedictus", "Fructus" and "Ventrus tui." In the sky, a heart enflamed within golden rays; a scroll entering the heart contains the inscription "beatam tue decent omnes." The scroll above the scene reads: "Rubum quem viderat Moyses incombustum conservatam agnovimus tuam laudabilem Virginitatem" (Marian antiphon, Hesbert nro. 4669), and below the scene it reads: "Dei Genitrix intercede pro nobis.";

f. 22, [illustrating the Purification of the Virgin] a golden medallion framed by laurel leaves represents a heart enflamed pierced by a sword. The inscription below reads: "Et tuam ipsius animam doloris gladius pertransibit Luc. 2" (Luke 2:35);

f. 24, [illustrating Our Lady of Sorrows] the Cross and tomb of Christ with the Arma Christi and a heart enflamed pierced by seven swords;

f. 26, [illustrating the Assumption of the Virgin] a dove in flames in a landscape; a crown and lily branches within golden rays in the sky. The scene is flanked by columns wrapped in a rose vine and a scroll on which reads: "Surge propra Amica quea columba mea formosa mea et veni iam Hyems transiit et recessit Cant: 2.10" (Song of Songs 2:10-11);

f. 28, [illustrating the end of the text] a medallion framed by a serpent enclosing Memento Mori: a tombstone, a skull, a scythe, an hourglass and a black book ending with the words "Finis" in gold.

Twelve emblematic "cul-de-lampe" illustrations are placed at the ends of texts on ff. 4v, 6v, 9, 11, 12, 13v, 15v, 18v, 21, 23v, 25v, and 27v.

A Novena consists of prayers repeated on nine successive days or weeks and the prayers collected here are all devoted to the life of the Virgin Mary. The manuscript was prepared for a female friend as a gift in a (yet unidentified) religious house in France. It opens with a fine Neo-Gothic dedication page. The watercolor illustrations that follow are charming for their colors and naive quality, as well their rich, concealed symbolism. They are painted in the naive manner typical of the nineteenth-century holy cards or prayer cards distributed for popular piety.

In the early 1830s the romantic taste for symbols provoked the return of the language of emblems, and subsequently, the year 1843 saw a sudden explosion in the fashion of emblematic images and sentences printed as lithographs with color and gold (Seguin, 1984, pp. 61, 67). The artist-artisans producing popular imagery in the nineteenth century were typically provincial. However, the foremost were the printmakers working in Paris on rue Saint-Jacques. The best known of them in this period was Charles Letaille, who in 1939 inherited the Pintard stocks at 30 rue Saint-Jacques. The iconographical range included, in addition to religious imagery, a category that Duchartre and Saulnier (1944, p. 50) call the great human passions, centering on the theme of *Love*. It was no longer specifically religious devotion that engendered the production of images, but a wider social use; the exchange or gift of pious images was a sign of belonging to the same large family of "right-minded people" ("bien-pensants") facing the hostility of the world (Seguin, 1984, p. 19).

Popular imagery and piety is in fashion again and has received much scholarly interest in France and elsewhere over the last forty years; the seven-volume series dedicated solely to the bibliography on the subject since 1984 is a good indication of its importance (Plongeron and Lerou, 1984-1998).

## LITERATURE

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