

**Miniature Book of Hours (Use of Aosta)
In Latin, decorated manuscript on paper
Northern Italy (diocese of Aosta) or Germany (Cologne), c. 1450**

ii + 151 + ii folios on paper (first and last flyleaf are parchment pastedowns now lifted from inside front and back covers, those at back now loose in binding), modern pencil foliation in top outer corner of recto, missing one leaf, else complete (collation i¹²[-12, final leaf, with loss of text] ii-viii¹² ix¹⁰ x-xii¹² xiii¹⁰[cancelled blanks after sixth leaf and at quire end]), vertical catchwords in lower inner margin, fine frame ruling in reddish-brown ink (justification 40 x 27 mm.), left bounding line added in lead for offset Dominical letters in calendar (ff. 1-12), occasional surviving pricking at top and bottom throughout, no ruling provided for text, written in black ink above the top line in a small secretarial hand in sixteen long lines, red rubrics, many red one to three line majuscules and some spaces for incomplete initials, minor smudges and staining from moisture and fingers. ORIGINAL binding of deep brown leather over wooden boards, exposed spine with quires attached to endbands and by packed stitch to three leather thongs (both endbands and bottom thong detached from boards at back), metal clasp (some modern replacement of parts), leather covering featured tooled x-design with four diamond-shaped stamps and minute metal bosses (now lost) in center of front and back; leather is now mostly missing, leaving subtle impressions of its original decoration. Dimensions 68 x 48 mm.

This owner-produced Book of Hours, still in its original binding, is remarkable for its diminutive size and colophon. It was never illustrated by miniatures or figurative initials. The scribe (and original owner), Gerardus Beylarus, a teacher of theology in Cologne who also spent time in London, may have written this tiny book there or while travelling. The text of the Hours of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead are rare examples of the Use of Aosta.

PROVENANCE

1. A colophon is found on the final folio of this Book of Hours, reading: "Item hore pertinent gerardo beylari de <cinera?> maioris" ("cinera maioris" may refer to Mont Cenis, a pass in the Italian Alps; variants of the name listed in *Orbis latinus* include cinereus, mons cinisius, Canisius, cenisius, cinereus, citteneus, cineris mons). It is in the hand of the scribe who copied the rest of the text, and thus this ownership inscription indicates that Gerardus Beylarus made this particularly small volume for his own use. Gerardus's name appears in another manuscript, a theological text now Krakow, Jagiellonian University Library, MS 2229 (BB.IX.13) (Bénédictins de Bouveret, *Colophons*, no. 5211; Wisłocki, 1877-1881, p. 534), dated 1442-1443; Gerardus tells us there that he is theology "lector" in the province of Cologne but copied that book while in London, which may likewise be the case for this book. He copied this Krakow manuscript with another scribe, who identifies himself as a Dominican.

The text follows the use of the diocese of Aosta in the Italian Alps: the text of both the Hours of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead follow the use of that diocese (the incipit of the Hours of the Virgin (f. 13) states that it is "secundum usum augustensis" (use of Aosta, the Latin for "Aosta" is Augustana), and St. Gratus of Aosta is included in the Suffrages and the Litany. Since Gerardus clearly travelled (he was a Master of Theology in Cologne, and copied a manuscript in London in 1442-1443), this manuscript could have been copied while he was home in northern Italy, or alternatively in Cologne or even in London.

2. Private European collection.

TEXT

ff. 1-12v, Calendar, now ending in the middle of December;

Calendar, ungraded; now missing one folio at the end; entries are often heavily abbreviated, and the saints included are mostly common, including among others Scholastica (10 Feb.), Albinus (1 March), Gregory the Great (12 March), Benedict (21 March), and Jerome (30 Sept). Saints particularly venerated in Northern Italy (such as St. Gratus, the patron saint of Aosta, or missionary St. Vincent of Digne) are not present.

ff. 13-72, *Incipius hore beata marie virginis secundum usum augustensis*; f. 13, Matins; f. 32, Lauds; f. 48v, Prime; f. 53v, Terce; f. 56v, Sext; f. 59v, None; f. 62v, Vespers; f. 67v, Compline; followed by the changed Office for Holy Week and Advent;

Hours of the Virgin, or "Little Office," use of Aosta.

ff. 75v-81, Suffrages of saints: John the Baptist (ff. 75v-78); All Saints (f. 78); Barbara (f. 78v); the apostles (f. 79); Stephen (f. 79v); and Gratus and Pope Leo I (together, f. 79v);

Suffrages or Memorials are prayers spoken to individual saints seeking support, guidance, or intercession. Suffrages often begin with the Trinity, the Virgin, Archangel Michael, and then John the Baptist, but here begin with John the Baptist, and notably includes St. Gratus of Aosta.

ff. 81-111v, *Sequens officium mortuorum in matutinum*, incipit, "Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis, dolores inferni circumdederunt me ...";

Office of the Dead, use of Aosta; the Online version of Ottosen's *Responsories and Versicles of the Latin Office of the Dead* lists only four other manuscripts containing this Use, all contemporary with this one and held in the Biblioteca del Seminario Maggiore in Aosta.

Medieval Christians were well aware of death's proximity, and generally experienced a great deal of anxiety about purgatory, not only for themselves, but for their loved ones. Medieval religious were also responsible for the souls of benefactors and brethren from purgatory. It was therefore necessary to say an Office of the Dead frequently, making it a crucial section of the Book of Hours.

ff. 111v-124, Penitential Psalms;

Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142.

ff. 124-130v, Litany of the Saints, including Gratus of Aosta, Columbanus, and Gallus;

ff. 129-135v, incipit, "Pie et exaudibilis domine Jesu Christe ..."; incipit, "Obsecro te ..." [for masculine use; rubrics lacking];

The prayer, "*Pie et exaudibilis domine Jesu Christe*" (also called the *Oratio Isidori pro omnibus Christianis*) is a general intercessory prayer dating from the Carolingian era or earlier that could be said alone or alongside other prayers, such as the previous Litany (Choy 2016, 179-80).

ff. 135v-137, *Secundum orationes versus sancti bernardi*, incipit, "O Bone jesu Illumina oculos meos ... in saecula saeculorum. Amen";

The so-called Verses of St. Bernard were very popular in late medieval devotional books, including Books of Hours, however, they tend to be found in books meant for laypeople (France, 2011, 339). They are often preceded by a rubric explaining how St. Bernard tricked the Devil into revealing the eight powerful Psalm verses that would protect anyone who recited them daily from dying in sin.

ff. 137-149v, Prayers including "O intemerata" (f. 144v, for masculine use), and "Anima Christi" (f. 149rv).

The "O Intemerata" (twelfth century) and "Anima Christi" (fourteenth century) were two of the most popular prayers in the late Middle Ages and are frequently found in Books of Hours. The "Anima Christi" was added after the colophon to one of the folios left empty at the end of the quire and is possibly a contemporary addition.

The Book of Hours was the most popular type of manuscript in Western Europe in the late Middle Ages. Books of Hours contain a collection of devotional texts meant to be used throughout the day for private prayer and were predominantly produced by professional scribes for laypeople. They usually contain a fundamental set of texts: a calendar, Hours of the Virgin, Penitential Psalms, Office of the Dead, and a Litany of the Saints. However, as this manuscript demonstrates, the exact contents of these texts and their order varies based on the needs and locale of the user, and additional texts (such as the Verses of St. Bernard) and prayers are often found. It is these variations that make them unique and fascinating. The number of surviving Books of Hours manuscripts is unknown – certainly in the thousands – and there were over 2,000 separate printed editions of the text between 1485 and 1530. These personal books used during the most intimate moments of prayer were absolutely central to devotional life of the late Middle Ages.

This Book of Hours has a number of features that make it stand out from other contemporary witnesses. First, it is remarkably small, and furthermore survives in its original binding, which is likewise uncommon. It is also rather 'work-a-day' compared to other surviving Books of Hours, which are characterized by rich illumination, elegant script, and full-page miniatures. Containing only minor initials (some of which were never completed, suggesting that the scribe had intended to insert them in another color than the red he had at hand, but never had the opportunity), its casual script and heavily abbreviated text makes this a rare example of a Book of Hours copied by a scribe, named in the colophon, for his own use: Gerardus Beylarus. In the latter half of the fifteenth century when this manuscript was made, bookmaking was less the domain of monks than of commercial scribes. There were also "occasional" scribes who certainly copied books for their own use (Bühler, 1960); this tiny volume, which was not only written by, but also "pertinent" (belonged) to Gerardus, seems to be the work of such an individual.

While many elaborately decorated Books of Hours have almost pristine margins, the last third of this manuscript's pages are more worn and fingerprinted; users of this manuscript, original or later, seem to have visited these sections most frequently (see Rudy, 2010).

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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