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## Prayer Book

In German, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Germany, c. 1600-1650

*i + 29 + i leaves, modern foliation in upper right corner recto 1-29 (collation iii<sup>10</sup> iii<sup>9</sup> [final leaf inserted into quire]) complete, written on 17 lines single column in a late Neudörffer Fraktur script, ruling indiscernible, (justification 114 x 70 mm.), title and rubrics in red, FIVE FIVE-LINE ILLUMINATED INITIALS with foliage, putti, and birds (ff. 2v, 7, 8, 9v, 13), EIGHT FIVE-LINE HISTORIATED INITIALS featuring Christ, the Virgin, and Saints (ff. 1, 3v, 4v, 11, 12, 21, 23v, 24v), excellent condition with minimal staining and spotting. Bound in Vienna by Ferdinand Bakala (binder's stamp, back turn-in: "Ferd. Bakala Wien") in the early twentieth century in blind-stamped calf, with multiple borders and central diamond shape, raised bands, slight creasing along spine, otherwise in excellent condition. Dimensions 150 × 110 mm.*

Written on parchment in a flowing Neudörffer Fraktur with thirteen illuminated and historiated initials, this deluxe Prayer Book was clearly a special commission. With its almost exclusive focus on invocations for a good death and prayers for souls in Purgatory, this must have served as a meditation on the Last Things for its original Catholic owner. The tradition of copying Prayer Books by hand continued in Germany for centuries after the invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century. This example, copied a century after the Protestant Reformation, includes vernacular prayers that circulated in both Catholic and Protestant printed sources.

## PROVENANCE

1. Copied and illuminated in first half of the seventeenth century, as suggested by the script and style of the illuminations; this was created for a Catholic owner with historiated initials featuring the Stigmata of Saint Francis (f. 4v); the Virgin and Child (ff. 3v, 12); popes (f. 11); a prayer attributed to Saint Augustine (13-20v); and a prayer for souls in Purgatory (ff. 24v-29v). Possibly made for a man with the third person "er" (he) used in the rubric on folio 11v, yet Prayer Books of this era were more often owned by women (see Schott, 1937).
2. Folio 29v with a few lines in Greek in a later hand: *πένα τον Αρχιμανδριτης | Μιχάλης φτιαγμένος | εμένα μέσα στο χρονος | χιλια πεντακόσια | σαράντα. Αμήν.* "The pen(?) of Archimandrite (i.e. abbot of a large Orthodox monastery) Michael, who made me in the year one thousand five hundred and forty. Amen." This curious annotation does not seem to be written by a native speaker but rather by someone who was simply copying an inscription.
3. Possibly owned by Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863-1914) or someone within his circle. An early twentieth-century stamp, "Ferd. Bakala Wien," on the rear cover turn-in identifies the shop of Ferdinand Bakala, the Archduke's official

bookbinder active in Vienna between 1908-1945 who worked exclusively for the Ferdinand and those in his orbit (see Bohatta, 1942).

## TEXT

ff. 1-2v, *Ein Gebett zü Jhesü Christo vmb ein seelige sterbstündt*, incipit, "O JHESU Christ dü bist mein züersicht, so mich Ellenden der grimmig Todt anfight züsterben mach mich allzeit berait, ...";

A prayer to Jesus Christ in the blessed hour of death, printed in Johannes Leisentritt, *Catholisch Gesangbuch voller Geistlicher Lieder vnd Psalmen der alten Apostolischer recht vnd war-glaubiger Christlicher Kirchen*, 1584, f. 331-332v (Online Resources).

ff. 2v-3v, *Ein Gebett umb ein seeliges End*, incipit, "O liebster herr JHESU Christ der du uns zü der Ewigen Seeligkeit der Welt anfang erwehlet durch deinnen Todt erkaüfft ...";

A prayer for a blissful end.

ff. 3v-4, *Von Gott ein guet seeliges Ende züerwerben*, incipit, "O oberste Gottheit unmessige gietligkeit und allerheiligste Dreyfaltigkeit erbarme dich über mich Ellenden Sünder ...";

To acquire a happy ending from God.

ff. 4-6v, *Ein trostliches Gebett zür zeit des abschids aüs diser Welt zu forechen*, incipit, "O HERR JHESU Christe die stünd meines abschids nachet sich mei(n)es Lebens end ist verhanden, Wie herzlich gern wil Ich sterben ...";

A comforting prayer at the time of parting from this world; printed in Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein*, 1576 (Online Resources, unfoliated; this prayer, and the four following are found in this order in the *Betbüchlein*, following [XIII] Gebet zu Gott in Todes nöcten).

ff. 7-8, incipit, "ACH du guttiger HERR JHESU mein Erlöser Hailland und Seeligmacher auf dich hab Ich je und alle wege meinen ainigen trost Hoffnüng ...";

Printed in Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein*, 1576 (Online Resources).

ff. 8-9v, incipit, "ACH du son Däüid erbarme dich mein Erleichte meine Aügen das Ich nicht im Todt entschlaffe und meine feindt sich uber mich frene, O HERR hilft mir errette mein Seel ...";

Printed in Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein*, 1576 (Online Resources).

ff. 9v-11, incipit, "Nach dir verlanget mich herr JHESU wie ein hirschen nach einen frischen wasser, HERR heilig Ich erqüicke meine Seel eroffne mir ...";

Printed in Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein*, 1576 (Online Resources).

f. 11, incipit, "Ach du heiliger Geist mein Trost, Störck, Krafft, versücheung und underpfandt der ewigen Erbschafftistche mir bey in meinen ...";

Printed in Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein*, 1576 (Online Resources).

ff. 11v-13, *Gebett der umbstehender bey dem Krancken wenn er in letzten zügen ist*, incipit, "FARHIN dü edle Seel im namen Gottes des Allmechtigen Vatters der dich so Adenlich nach seinen Bild erschaffen ...";

Prayer of those who accompany the sick when they are near death, printed in Theobald Fettich, *Ordnung und Regiment, wie man sich vor der scharpffen und giftigen* (Online Resources, 1573 edition).

ff. 13-20v, *Ein Andechtiges Gebett des h(eiligen) Aügüstini von allen Christglaübig Seelen*, incipit, "O dü Göttliches wösen O heilige ungethaite dreyflatigkeit O dü heilige gesegnete und unbegreifliche Gottheit ...";

A devout prayer of St. Augustine for all faithful, Christ-believing souls.

ff. 20v-23, *Ein andres schones Gebett für alle Christ glaübigen Seelen*, incipit, "O Gott Vatter Son und Heilliger Geist drey Personen in einem Gottlichen wesen heilige underthailte Dreyfaltigkeit Allmächtiger Gott ein gewaltiger schöpfer all creatum im himel un aüf Erden...";

Another beautiful prayer for all souls who believe in Christ.

ff. 23v-24v, *Ein Gebett für die Abgestorbuen christglaübigen Seelen*, incipit, "O Vatter der barmherzigkeit gedenckhen alle glaübigen die aüf diser welt und disem sterblich en leibe Christlich und wol geschaiden seind...";

A prayer for the dead Christian souls.

ff. 24v-29v. *Ein Andechtiges Gebett in Triebzal Zusprech*, incipit, "O dü mein aller süessester herr Jhesu Christe wahrer Gott der dü von des hochsten Allmechtigen Vatter scholz in die Welt gesondt bist die sunden nach züllassen di geplagten züerlosen di gefangenen lodig zümachen ... Ewigkeit zü ewigkeit, Amen."

## ILLUSTRATIONS

The Prayer Book is highlighted by thirteen painted initials featuring the Virgin and Child, saints (John, Francis receiving the Stigmata), Popes, cherubs, and angels. The flowing, spirited compositions show the influence of German Mannerist painters such as Hans Rottenhammer (1564-1625) and Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610). The initial of the Resurrection, for example, is quite close to a painting attributed to the circle of Hans Rottenhammer (Online Resources)

Subjects as follows:

f. 1, 'O' with John the Evangelist and Eagle;

f. 2v, 'O' with drolleries and acanthus vines;

f. 3v, 'O' with standing Virgin and Child;

- f. 4v, 'O' with Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata;
- f. 7, 'A' with angels and fruit;
- f. 8, 'A' with angel and bird;
- f. 9v, 'N' with putti and skull;
- f. 11, 'A' with Two Popes and Christ Child;
- f. 12, 'F' with seated Virgin and Child;
- f. 13, 'O' with Sacred Monogram (IHS);
- f. 21, 'O' with souls in Purgatory;
- f. 23v, 'O' with Harrowing of Hell;
- f. 24v, 'O' with Resurrection of Christ.

German Prayer Books (*Gebetbuch*) are a genre of published and handwritten devotional works created from the Middle Ages into the nineteenth century. Written for private edification, Prayer Books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were popular with both Catholics and Protestants. While rudimentary Prayer Books were common, deluxe copies, both printed and manuscript with exquisite binding and decoration were favored among the wealthy. Amaranthes describes such luxury copies in the entry for "Gebet-Buch" from his *Frauenzimmer-Lexicon* of 1715: "Prayer book: a book bound in silver, velvet, saffian, cordian, French or other leather-binding, with or without clasps, sometimes also with a silver lock. Women and girls carry them to church and read them while sitting in the pews" (Amaranthes, 1715, pp. 638–39). Amaranthes goes on to list over thirty published Prayer Books, many by female authors, revealing the popularity of this genre.

This beautifully preserved Prayer Book was intended for Catholic devotion and boasts an extremely attractive *Neudörffer* Fraktur and with vibrant initials painted in an energetic Mannerist style. Clearly executed by a highly skilled hand, the book focuses on prayers to be said in the hour of death, for the sick and dying, for troubled times, and for souls in Purgatory. The Prayer Book's short length and emphasis on the "Last Things" suggested that it was composed especially for a client preoccupied with preparing for a good death.

The prayers themselves come from a mixture of mid to late sixteenth-century sources, both Catholic and Lutheran. The first prayer, "A prayer to Jesus Christ in the blessed hour of death" appeared in Johannes Leisentritt's *Catholisch Gesangbuch* (1584). Johannes Leisentritt, or Johann Leisentritt (1527-1586) was a Catholic priest, who published a number of Counter Reformation hymnals. A sequence of prayers to be said by the dying follows; many of these are found in the *Betbüchlein* (1576) by Andreas Musculus, or Andreas Meusel (1514-1581), a Lutheran theologian and Protestant reformer. A prayer for those who accompany the sick is found in the *Ordnung und Regiment* (first published 1531) of the Catholic author, Theobald Fettich; documented 1510-

1534, Fettich was a physician and humanist, associated with Erasmus and others. In his Prayer Book, *Musculus* drew heavily on the medieval tradition, translating traditional prayers by the early Church Fathers (Matthias, 2019, p. 216); in Leisentritt's Catholic hymnal, there are hymns from Lutheran sources. The fusion here of prayers that circulated in both Catholic and Protestant sources is an interesting reflection of the rich pool of prayers in German available to both sides of the confessional divide by the early seventeenth century.

Whereas by c.1490 most other textual types had wholly switched to production in the new technology of print (and German-language printed Prayer Books do exist from the incunable period) the tradition of manuscript copying of Prayer Books continued through the eighteenth century. The reason for this is surely the opportunity these books provided to create an entirely individual assembly of texts with which to shape and assist one's spiritual life. The individuality of early modern Prayer Books, such as this, and their rich repertory of texts make them particularly important sources for scholars today.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

National Library of Russia, Online Exhibition, "Manuscript German Prayer Books"  
[http://expositions.nlr.ru/eng/ex\\_manus/prayer\\_books/](http://expositions.nlr.ru/eng/ex_manus/prayer_books/)

Johannes Leisentritt, *Catholisch Gesangbuch voller Geistlicher Lieder vnd Psalmen der alten Apostolischer recht vnd war-glaubiger Christlicher Kirchen*, Bautzen, 1584  
<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=5om2AAM2TIMC&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA1>

Andreas Musculus, *Betbüchlein, sehr schön und nützlich*, Frankfurt am Main, 1579  
[https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10982425\\_00001.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10982425_00001.html)

Fettich, Theobald. *Ordnung und Regiment, wie man sich vor der scharpffen und giftigen Kranckheit der Pestilenz bewaren sol: Auch wie denen so darmit begriffen, zu helffen sey, sampt den natürlichen Ursachen des Englischen Schwaiß*, Munich, [1573] [VD16 F 812]  
<https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00032485/images/>

"Resurrection of Christ," Oil on canvas Circle of Hans Rottenhammer the Elder (German, 1564-1625)

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/hans-rottenhammer-the-elder/resurrection-of-christ-3LqZKV6WNavbnN99HPgjOO2>

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