

**Prayer Book of Erasmus von Wolfstein, Canon of Bamberg**  
**In German and Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment**  
**Southern Germany, c. 1535-1536**  
**6 full-page miniatures, fifty-one full or partial illuminated borders**

ii (nineteenth-century paper) + 59 + ii (nineteenth-century paper) folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-58 (including 50 bis), complete (collation i<sup>2</sup> ii<sup>8</sup> iii<sup>6</sup> iv<sup>4</sup> v<sup>4</sup> vi<sup>10</sup> vii<sup>2</sup> viii<sup>8</sup> ix<sup>4</sup> x<sup>4</sup> [including 50 bis]), no catchwords or signatures, no ruling visible (justification c. 97 x 55 mm.), written in dark brown ink in a small flourished cursive bookhand (fraktura), calendar in italic and humanistic scripts, in single column on 22-23 lines, rubrics in red, 1- to 3-line foliate initials in liquid gold enhanced with brown on blue, red or pink grounds with ornament in blue, red or silver, illuminated calendar with 12 realistic strewn flowers in the beginning of each month, TWO SMALL HISTORIATED INITIALS, FIFTY-ONE FULL OR PARTIAL ILLUMINATED BORDERS of stylized flowers and foliage including FIFTEEN BORDERS WITH BIBLICAL OR OTHER SCENES, enhanced with animals (deer, rabbits, squirrel, goat), birds, butterflies and flowers, many on liquid gold grounds, SIX FULL-PAGE MINIATURES, illumination in some of the borders smudged and stained (ff. 1, 23v, 24, 38), other minor stains and signs of use, in overall good condition. Bound in the nineteenth century in pink velvet over pasteboards, silver fittings c. 1900 that comprise a center piece of a putto embracing a lion on the front cover, a youth wearing a laurel wreath playing a harp on the back cover, and four putti attaching two pairs of clasps (clasps lost), flat spine, charming decorative endpapers in red with gilt ornament of floral tendrils surrounding a man holding a cat by the tail eyed by a dog (front endleaves), a harper and a nobleman with various birds including a peacock (back endleaves), joints cracked, velvet slightly worn and detached at the head of the spine, in overall good condition. Dimensions 129 x 75 mm.

This exuberant hand-held Prayer Book is comprehensively illustrated with biblical scenes and a plethora of marginal depictions of birds, animals, and flowers, as well as ornamental borders and initials on almost every page. The manuscript includes a portrait of the original owner, Erasmus von Wolfstein. This Prayer Book offers valuable insights into private devotional practices in Catholic Bamberg during the early decades of the Protestant Reformation.

## PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made for Erasmus Graf von Wolfstein (d. 1539), canon of Bamberg, c. 1535-1536, possibly in Bamberg itself, or elsewhere in Southern Germany. Erasmus is depicted in prayer with his coat of arms *d'or, au deux lions de gueules* on f. 25, also found on his tombstone in the Bamberg Cathedral (Online Resources). The biographical notes on f. 3rv about the von Wolfstein family, mention Erasmus's nomination in 1523 in Bamberg when he received the senior position of the cathedral chapter (see below). The table for calculating the date of Easter (ff. 14v-15) begins with the year 1536, suggesting that the manuscript was copied then or in the previous year (the table is an original part of the manuscript).
2. The last biographical note on f. 3v was added by a different hand in 1554. It mentions Augsburg. In addition to his position in Bamberg, Erasmus von Wolfstein was also a canon in Augsburg, and it is possible that he gave the manuscript to a canon there.

3. Modern booksellers's notes, verso of the first front flyleaf.

TEXT

f. 1r-v, [Gospel extract from St. John], *Evangelium Sancti Joannis primo*, incipit, "In principio erat verbum ...";

ff. 1v-2v, [added later to blank space], Benedicite verses [difficult to read];

f. 3r-v, incipit, "Anno domini 1499 do ward Bor vom Wolfstain geborn am Sambstag nach Quasimodo geniti zwischen sechs unnd sieben uhrn. / Anno domini 1509 ist Bor vom Wolfstain am 20 tag Junii Possession seiner <?> Pfründ In Augsburg gegeben. / Anno domini 1510 ist Bor vom Wolfstain ... Possession seiner <?> Pfrund in Bamberg gegeben. / Anno domini 1520 ist Bor vom Wolfstain am viertentag ... genommen worden. / [f. 3v], Anno domini 1523 ist Bor vom Wolfstain am dinstag nach misericordia domini in das Ca<pp>itel zu Bamberg genommen worden." / [added later], "Anno domini 1550 am ... Augsburg ..., [at the bottom of the page], 1554";

ff. 4-14, Calendar in Latin;

ff. 14v-15v, Table of Golden numbers, Dominical letters, leap years, etc. for the period of 1536-1575;

f. 16r-v, Originally left blank; now with a payer in German added later [ink abraded and worn; text illegible];

ff. 17-25, [Prayers in German, f. 17r-v], *Gebett gegen gott, u morgens, unitten*, incipit, "O Allmechtiger genediger guettiger ..."; ff. 17v-18, *Christliche beicht*, incipit, "Barmherziger und land writtiger herr vatter ..."; f. 18v, *Dancksagung zum Gott*, incipit, "Lob Ehr und vreiss ..."; ff. 18v-19, incipit, "Gott heilliger Vatter..."; ff. 19v-20, *So mann zum Tenebre leutet*, incipit, "O herr Jesu ..."; f. 20, *Onser teglich brot gibuns heut*, incipit, "Freundlicher lieber vatter ..."; f. 20v, incipit, "Underlas ...; ...; [ff. 25v-26, blank];

ff. 26v-31v, [Prayers in German on the Nativity], *Von der heiligen geburtz christi*, incipit, "Herr allmechtiger Gott ...";

ff. 32-37, [Prayers on the Mass and to Christ in German], *Sanct sagung und Betrachtung in der heiligen mess empfangen ...*, incipit, "O mein Gott mir mein herr ...";

ff. 37v-41, [Prayers to Christ against illness in German], *Etliche gebet gegen Gott zubitten fur die krancken menschen*, incipit, "O allmechtiger ewiger Gott ...";

ff. 41v-42v, [Prayers to Christ to be said before going to bed, in German], *Ein gebet so einer schlaffen geen will*, incipit, "Ich danck dir himlischer vatter ..."; [f. 43, blank];

ff. 43v-50v, Seven Penitential Psalms in Latin;

ff. 50v-57v, Litanies, followed by prayers, in Latin, ending with the prayer of St. Bernard to Christ, incipit, "O bone Jesu, duo in me (ag)nosco ...";

ff. 57v-58, [Added to the blank space by a contemporary scribe, Psalm 102, in Latin], incipit, "Benedic anima mea ...";

f. 58v, Miniature of St. John.

## ILLUSTRATION

Although relatively few Books of Hours were copied in Germany during the Middle Ages, there was a flourishing tradition of Prayer Books in both Latin and in the vernacular. Some of these were illuminated, at times quite lavishly, a phenomenon that continued well into the sixteenth century. Our Prayer Book belongs within the tradition of luxurious, illuminated Prayer Books from Southern Germany, particularly sixteenth-century Prayer Books produced in Augsburg. Although stylistically different, one can compare generally, for example, two earlier manuscripts, the Prayer Book illuminated by the Augsburg artist, Renner Narziß (fl. 1502-1536), now Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS Marlay 9, copied in Augsburg in 1514 (Online Resources), with each miniature accompanied by scatter borders on pale gold, including a squirrel and peacock (as in our manuscript), and the *Gebetbuch des Bernhard von Waldkirch*, Munich, Clm 30080, by Nikolaus Bertschi (um 1490–1541/42) (Hamburger, et al., 2016, p. 115), with its vivid and imaginative borders including animals and small vignettes (see also Merkl, 1999, Munich, BSB, clm 5550, pp. 296-7. Kat. 16, fig. 231).

The borders in our Prayer Book are executed in several different styles. The border on ff. 29v-30 is in a Renaissance style which includes swags in the upper and lower margins tied with cords, very similar to the ornament used by the Venetian Putti Master, who illuminated books for Nicolaus Jensen in the 1470s. The strewn flower borders show the influence of Ghent-Bruges illumination; this style was adopted by Southern German artists early in the sixteenth century (Kress, 2004). Our artist adapted this style to include not only flowers and leaves, but also naturalistic birds and animals, and small narrative scenes or other images.

Six full-page miniatures:

f. 26v, Nativity, with angels and shepherds in the border;

f. 32, Mass of St. Gregory;

f. 37v, Six of the seven corporal works of mercy: clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the sick, give water to the thirsty, visit the imprisoned, and shelter the homeless (the seventh work, which was not illustrated here, is to bury the dead);

f. 41v, Man kneeling in prayer next to his bed, with a vision of the Trinity above;

f. 43v, David in prayer; David and Goliath, and the crowning of David in the border;

f. 58v, St. John writing on a book, while the Virgin Mary and Child appear to him in a mandorla on the sky.

Fifteen iconographic subjects depicted in the borders:

f. 18v, God the Father; skull, tomb, hourglass;

f. 19v, Crucifixion;

f. 22, Annunciation;

f. 22v, Virgin and Child;

f. 23v, Christ;

f. 24v, God giving the law tablets to Moses;

f. 25, Erasmus von Wolfstein in prayer to God the Father (likened to Moses), with his coat of arms *d'or, au deux lions de gueules*;

f. 27, Presentation in the Temple (?) (seated bishop holding a child and a kneeling woman);

f. 27v, Adoration of the Magi;

f. 28, Christ Carrying the Cross; St. Veronica;

f. 28v, Arrest of Christ;

f. 30, Resurrection;

f. 34, Job on the dunghill;

f. 36, Judas bringing the soldiers to Christ and the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane;

f. 44, King David and Uriah.

Two historiated initials:

f. 28, Triumphal entry into Jerusalem;

f. 31v, God the Father.

Our manuscript was made for Erasmus Graf von Wolfstein, the son of Georg and Magdalena von Wolfstein. He studied in Ingolstadt and Freiburg im Breisgau. In 1497 he became a canon in Bamberg, and from 1523 onwards the sources mention him as the senior canon of the cathedral chapter. Erasmus von Wolfstein was also a canon in Augsburg. He died in 1539 and was buried in the Bamberg Cathedral. His tombstone reads "Anno Domini 1539 die Vero 27 Mensis Aprilis Obijt Venerabilis ac Nobilis Dominus Erasmus de Wolffstein Canonicus et senior huius Bambergensis ecclesie cuius Anima Requiescat in Pace" (In the year of our Lord 1539, on the 27th of April, the venerable and noble Erasmus von Wolfstein, canon and senior of this Bamberg church, died, whose soul may rest in peace) (for an image, see Online Resources).

There is further evidence of the kind of books that Erasmus von Wolfstein owned, because in 1525, he reported the losses that his library suffered during the Peasants' War in 1524-1526: two Breviaries, an Antiphonal, a medical book, a book of instructions on distilling medicine, Johannes Indagine's treatise on chiromancy (published in 1523 as *Die Kunst der chiromanzei*), some printed books and an old manuscript on parchment, whose contents he admitted he did not know (Meckseper and Schraut, 1985, pp. 25-26). For Erasmus von Wolfstein, see also Zunker, 2018, pp. 644, 700-707, 753, Wendehorst, 2006, p. 244, and von Guttenberg and Wendehorst, 1966, p. 157.

## LITERATURE

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Zunker, M. M. OSB. *Das Bistum Eichstätt 2: Die Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Walburg in Eichstätt* (Germania Sacra. Dritte Folge 15), Berlin, Boston, 2018.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Tombstone of Erasmus von Wolfstein (d. 1539), Bamberg Cathedral

[https://www.inschriften.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/abbildungen/dio-05/dio-05\\_026\\_01.jpg](https://www.inschriften.net/fileadmin/user_upload/abbildungen/dio-05/dio-05_026_01.jpg)

Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS Marlay 9

<https://collection.beta.fitz.ms/id/image/media-3434047443>

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