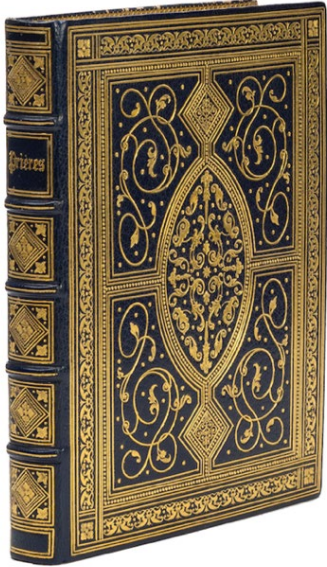


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## WOVEN PRAYER BOOK CUSTOMIZED WITH INITIALS 'MM' IN UNUSUALLY ORNATE DELUXE MOROCCO BINDING BY MARCELIN LORTIC

*Livre de Prières Tissé d'après les enluminures des manuscrits du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*

[Book of Prayers woven after illuminations in manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth century]

In Latin and French, illustrated book woven in silk

Lyon, R.P.J. Hervier, designer; J. A. Henry, fabricator, for A. Roux, 1886-1887

[viii] (paper) + {6} (unnumbered) + 44 + [viii] (paper) = 50 silk pages, small in 4°, 43 pages numbered in Roman numerals, plus 6 preliminary pages, plus paper fly leaves front and back, two of them marbled paper mounted with silk, text block 171 x 134 mm., text in one or two columns, the second unnumbered page with woven monogram "MM," one half-page and three full-page illustrations, in addition to various styles of decorative borders and initials throughout on every page, woven entirely in silver-gray and black silk, with a greyish-silver texture to the cast, fore edges gilt. Bound in dark blue panel gilt morocco by Marcelin Lortic of Paris, the covers with elaborate foliates, strapwork, fleurons, and friezes, inside with crimson morocco doublures, edges gilt with a knotted cord design, fold-ins gilt and stamped "M. Lortic" at front, with five raised bands, spine gilt stamped "Prières" in Gothic blackletter, in very good condition, with some abrasions to the left edge of the spine and some edges of lower board, two stains pp. 23-25, and with fine creasing to the edges of some pages, likely original to the time of binding. Dimensions 178 x 145 mm.

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This unorthodox Prayer Book is entirely woven from silk. First exhibited at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle – the World's Fair best known for the official unveiling of the Eiffel Tower – the woven Prayer Book was universally hailed as a marvel and its fabricator J. A. Henry was awarded a grand prize. This uncommon example is bound in beautiful and luxurious dark blue gilt morocco with maroon morocco doublures signed by the well-known Parisian bookbinder Marcelin Lortic (1852–1928). It is further distinguished from others by its rare woven monogram inside the escutcheon on the first unnumbered pages with the interlaced initials “MM,” customized for an unidentified owner.

### PROVENANCE

Woven in Lyon by the firm of J. A. Henry, with interlaced initials “MM” woven into escutcheon; pencil inscription “G-1979” on back paper fly leaf.

### TEXT

p. {1}, Half-title page, “Livre de Prières”;

p. {2}, Escutcheon woven with interlaced initials “MM”;

p. {3}, Title-page, “Livre de Prières Tissé d’après les enluminures des manuscrits du XIVe au XVIe siècle. Lyon mdcccclxxxvi.”;

p. {4}, official sanction of the content of the volume, incipit, “*Varias precum formulas*,” with the date September 8, 1886 and the name of Cardinal Louis-Marie Claverot, archbishop of Lyon and Vienne, with his arms and motto, along with the archiepiscopal arms of Lyon and the motto “*Prima sedes Galliarum*,” a reference to the importance of the city as a seat of Christian faith from the late second century on;

p. {5}, “Les Prières du Matin et du Soir”;

pp. 1-4, “Prières du Matin”;

pp. 5-10, “Prières du Soir”;

pp. 11-24, “Le saint Sacrifice de la Messe”;

pp. 25-32, “La Messe de Mariage”;

pp. 33-43, Prayers, for Communion (p. 33), to the Sacrament (p. 36), to the Holy Spirit (p. 38), to the Holy Virgin (p. 39), and diverse prayers (p. 42);

p. [44], “Table des Matières”.

The woven Prayer Book contains prayers for morning and night followed by others for special Masses, including marriage and communion. Every page is richly decorated with ornate borders in

the style of illuminated manuscripts from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, including the title page with four angels playing musical instruments and with the coat of arms of the city of Lyon. The title page in particular borrows elements from the celebrated French illuminator Jean Bourdichon, an artist made popular by a facsimile of the *Grandes Heures* of Anne of Brittany published by Engelmann and Graf between 1846 and 1849. The original *Grandes Heures* is in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (MS lat. 919).

The silk pages were created on a Jacquard loom, a partly-automated weaving machine, involving over one hundred thousand punch cards and millions of small manipulations by a skilled weaver. It reportedly took two years and close to fifty trials before a full book was successfully completed. Achieving the pixel-like precision of its text and illustrations required the pages to be woven with four hundred threads per inch, with each black silk thread of the weft (running vertically to the page) passing under the grayish-silver threads of the warp (horizontal to the page). The information for the designs and text was encoded in patterns on punch cards joined together in long chains and fed into the machine perched atop the loom. These punch cards determined the precise movements of mechanized hooks that lifted individual threads, under which the worker shuttled back and forth the black thread. In this way the Jacquard loom assumed the most detail-oriented portion of the process, previously done by a second worker. If laid out end to end the mass of punch cards that controlled the loom's movements would cover over seven hundred and fifty square feet (seventy square meters) – easily the entire floor of a one-bedroom apartment. It is estimated that just fifty to sixty examples were made, yet no census exists.

Historians often point to the woven Prayer Book as one of the most complex and unusual objects produced on a Jacquard loom, which was a key landmark in the centuries-long development of the programmable computer and the digital image. Earlier in the nineteenth century the punch cards used by Jacquard looms were described by Ada Lovelace (1815–1853), called the “Enchantress of Numbers,” in her explanation of machine-readable algorithms theoretically processed by Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine – a mechanical computer that was never actually built in the nineteenth century. More recently the anthropologist Nicholas Gessler has noted that the Jacquard loom separated the “work” from the “weaving,” which was in some sense “the beginning of a long process of information losing its body” (*Cabinet Magazine* 21 (2006), pp. 21-26).

The woven Prayer Book also exemplifies nineteenth-century attitudes toward the illuminated manuscript. Through facsimile editions of medieval manuscripts, Catholic devotional publishing sought to teach catechism to children and to promote “good taste” through manuscript illumination. Parisian publishers held a near-exclusive on the production of the gift book, that is, books for the Mass, “livres de raison,” and marriage books, churned out in large editions, but also sometimes written and illuminated entirely by hand in neo-Gothic style. These facsimiles and the related neo-Gothic manuscripts went a long way toward forming a basis for the re-appreciation of medieval manuscript illumination on the eve of modern times and the *Livre de prières tissé* figures large in that history of recovery. In some ways it is an elegant and luxurious, though unorthodox, version of the nineteenth-century gift book, entirely in keeping with the taste of the times (Hindman et al, 2001, esp. pp. 132-143). Comparing the Lyon imprint to gift books, Harthan declared it to be the “final exaltation of the medieval Book of Hours” (Harthan, 1977, p. 174).

## ILLUSTRATION

Every page is surrounded by border decorations of a wide variety; listed below are the half- and full-page illustrations:

p. {6}, Nativity (full-page), after paintings by Fra Angelico (no single source is identified, but best compared to the Nativity on a panel from the Armadio degli Argenti (Silver Chest) at the Museo nazionale di San Marco, Florence);

p. 11, Elevation of the Host (historiated initial 'M');

p. 12, Crucifixion (full-page), perhaps derived from a painting attributed to Fra Bartolomeo;

p. 26, Virgin and Child surrounded by Angels (full-page);

p. 33, Christ with the Virgin and St. John the Baptist (half-page), after the fresco of the Disputation of the Holy Sacrament by Raphael in the Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican City.

Inspired by Italian Renaissance paintings attributed to artists famous in the nineteenth-century, the book's full-page and smaller illustrations enliven the text and borders. The full-page Nativity blends elements from paintings by Fra Angelico, drawing mainly on the Armadio degli Argenti (Silver Chest) at the Museo di San Marco in Florence, yet mindfully transposing the Christ Child from barn floor to crib. The Crucifixion is modeled after Fra Bartolomeo, as identified in the nineteenth century by early critics, who likely received this information from the fabricator J. A. Henry. A half-page illustration of Christ with the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist is directly modeled on Raphael's fresco of the Disputation of the Holy Sacrament in the Stanza della Segnatura at the Vatican City. For the border designs Jean Hervier drew upon a composite facsimile edition titled *L'imitation de Jésus-Christ* published by Gruel and Engelmann in 1883. The portraits of kneeling donors that appear in the borders are modeled on plates in this edition, as noted by Lilian Randall (1981), which in turn reproduce a manuscript illuminated in Ghent around 1425 for Elizabeth van Munte and Daniel Rym that is now at the Walters Museum of Art in Baltimore.

This example is bound in blue morocco with elaborate gilding by Marcelin Lortic (1852–1928). Compared to the plain exterior of the Jansenist-style covers in most other examples, the client in this case desired a far more opulent product with gilt panels and elegant flowers on looping tendrils. A comparable but less ornate binding by Marcelin Lortic was illustrated in 1888 by Léopold Derôme as a prime example of luxurious gilt morocco made in Paris. Among the most sought-after Parisian bookbinders of his day and boasting an international clientele, Lortic built on the success of his father, Pierre-Marcelin Lortic (d. 1892), who had been called king of the Jansenist binding for the quality and luster of his fine morocco leathers. The success of Lortic's deluxe style was held in distain by some, as characterized by the author and bibliophile Octave Uzanne, who describes a figural "traditionalist" bibliophile entirely indignant of the modern luxury binding: "Ne lui parlez point de Lortic, il l'égratignerait jusqu'au maroquin" ("Do not talk to him of Lortic, he very well might scratch its morocco") (Uzanne 1887, p. 138).

It is difficult to determine how many copies of the *Livre de prières tissé* were fabricated and how many are extant, since there is no census of the edition. This is in part because it falls between the cracks of traditional cataloguing, because the book is technically neither a printed book nor a manuscript. In addition to a copy in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (recently the subject of the exhibition "Woven Words: Decoding the Silk Book," February 6 to April 28, 2019; see also Randall 1981), there are copies in the following North American institutions: the Newberry Library, Chicago; University of Chicago Special Collections; Denison Library, Scripps College; the Cincinnati Historical Society; the University of Delaware; the College of Saint Catherina, Saint Paul, Minnesota; Watson Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Morgan Library and Museum, New York (see also Randall, 1981, n. 30, and Laird, in Burlingham, 2001, no. 63, p. 131, for lists of copies in North America and abroad).

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