

**Prayerbook, including Devotional Offices for St. Francis and other saints  
In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment  
France, Loire Valley (Tours?), c. 1490-1500**

*ii + 118 + ii folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-118, lacking one full quire and four leaves with miniatures and text (collation i<sup>s</sup> [ii<sup>s</sup> lacking the entire quire] iii-v<sup>s</sup> vi<sup>s</sup> [-5, lacking one leaf after f. 36, with loss of text and a miniature of the Virgin] vii-x<sup>s</sup> xi<sup>s</sup> [-5, lacking one leaf after f. 75, with loss of text and a miniature St. Peter] xii<sup>s</sup> [-2, lacking one leaf after f. 79, with loss of text and a miniature of St. Francis] xiii<sup>s</sup> [-4, lacking one leaf after f. 88, with loss of text and a miniature of St. Mary Magdalene] xiv-xvi<sup>s</sup> xvii<sup>2</sup>), horizontal catchwords, ruled in red ink (justification 50 x 36 mm.), written in brown ink in gothic hybrid bookhand (bastarda) on 11 lines, rubrics in old rose (dusty pink), capitals touched in yellow, from f. 81 until the end 1-line initials alternating in burnished gold with black penwork flourishes and in blue with red penwork flourishes, matching paragraph marks, line-fillers in burnished gold and blue, or red and blue, very fine 2-line initials begin prayers throughout (44 in total), until f. 57v they are in blue infilled with ivy vine in red and blue with white penwork on burnished gold grounds, after f. 57v until the end they alternate with foliate initials painted in white and decorated with flowers and strawberries on grounds painted in liquid gold and with initials painted in liquid gold on muted pink grounds, two 3-line initials painted in white, one with foliage, another with a winding ribbon, both decorated with small white flowers on grounds painted in liquid gold, one accompanied by a three-quarter rinceaux border decorated with strawberries, flowers and acanthus leaves (f. 103), another accompanied by a full floral border decorated with a bird, thistles, cranberries, bluebells, pimpernels, acanthus leaves, and a coat of arms, painted on liquid gold grounds (f. 1), small worm hole on the first two leaves, the decorated border on f. 1 slightly trimmed, minor wear, in overall excellent condition. Bound c. 1800 by P. Noël in red morocco over pasteboards, both covers gold-tooled with a single fillet border, flat spine stamped in gold with four lozenge motifs within compartments outlined by a string of small square stamps, gilt title "Praeparatio ad communionem" and "Rel. P. Noël," marbled paper pastedowns and endpapers in pink, blue and brown, edges painted blue (color faded), in overall excellent condition. Dimensions 82 x 50 mm.*

This very pretty, and very tiny, illuminated devotional book is direct evidence of the religious life of a lay woman in France in the late fifteenth century. The texts, including numerous prayers and devotional Offices, are evidence that she had special reverence for the Franciscans, and it is likely that she belonged to the Franciscan Third Order. The coat of arms painted in the full decorated border on the opening page offers an intriguing layer to discovering the origin of this luxurious book and perhaps suggest this was a gift from a suitor to his love.

## PROVENANCE

1. The style of the illumination, as well as the "old rose" (dusty pink) color of the rubrics, suggest that the manuscript was painted in the Loire Valley, probably Tours, at the end of the fifteenth century (see below).

The manuscript was made for a woman, as indicated by the feminine forms of the words referring to the supplicant, as for example on f. 102, "michi indigne famule tue." The Franciscan texts, especially the Offices for the Feast of St. Francis and Anthony of Padua, as well as the prayers extracted from the works of the Franciscan theologian,

Bonaventure (canonized in 1482), and the wording of the prayer on f. 2 (discussed below) suggest that the original owner likely belonged to the Franciscan Third Order (the Franciscan Tertiaries). The Third Order Secular Franciscans do not live in community, but commit themselves to living according to the example of St. Francis. The very small size of the book would have allowed the woman to slip it in her pocket when she went to attend Mass.

At the end of the text on the last leaf, f. 118v, the monogram "ES" was inscribed three times. They are perhaps the initials of the owner. The coat of arms painted on f. 1 is probably at least partly fictive, but could reveal something about the owner of the book (see below).

2. An erased inscription (probably of ownership) at the top of the second front flyleaf.
3. Belonged to the bibliophile Andres Roure (1911-1996) of Barcelona whose leather bookplate with gilt text is found on the front pastedown.
4. Swiss private collection.

## TEXT

ff. 1-8v, [Prayers of St. Ambrose before Mass for each day of the week], *Oracio famosa et devota preparativa ad communionem*, incipit, incipit, "Summe sacerdos et vere pontifex domine ihesu christe qui te obtulisti deo patri hostiam vram (sic, for "puram") veram et immaculatam ... et in te numquam deficis. Co/[medat];

Ending imperfectly (lacking the end of "Panis dulcissime, sana palatum cordis..." and the entire "Panis sancte, panis vive, panis munde..." for Saturday.

ff. 9-19v, [Prayers extracted from Bonaventure's, *De septem verbis Domini in Cruce*, beginning imperfectly with a prayer from the "fifth word"], f. 9rv, incipit, "[a]//pidam [sic, for avidam] benigne dicens. Sicio. Hominum fidem cupio salutemque desidero, pro qua pati me offero ... quo felix semper maneam. Amen."; ff. 9v-11, [prayer from the "second word"], incipit, "Ihesu largitor venie Ihesu solamen tristem ... Memento mei domine. Amen."; ff. 11v-13, [prayer from the "third word"], "Ihesu lux et rex glorie, fili dei et hominis ..."; ff. 13v-15, [prayer from the "sixth word"], "Ihesu nostra redemptio, ihesu redemptor omnis, ihesu nostra dilectio..."; ff. 15-17, [prayer from the "fourth word"], "Ihesu patris ingenitus virtus et sapientia..."; ff. 17-19v, [prayer from the seventh word], "Ihesu via rectissima, ihesu salutis (h)ostium ... vite donum tribuat. Amen.";

ff. 20-36v, [Prayers for Christ before the Holy Passion], ff. 20-22, incipit, "Domine ihesu christe fili dei vivi, in honore..."; f. 22-25v, "Transfige domine dulcissime ihesu christe vere deus amoris medullas anime mee..."; ff. 25v-27, "Precor te piissime domine ihesu christe propter illam caritatem..."; ff. 27-36v, *Oracio ad christum pro die obitus*, "O Rex clementissime salvator homini, sola spes venie post lapsum..."; [ending imperfectly, lacking one leaf with the end of this prayer and the miniature opening the prayers to the Virgin];

ff. 37-75v, [Prayers, hymns and songs to the Virgin Mary, lacking the opening miniature], ff. 37-43, *Oracio ad virginem mariam pro mente elevanda*, incipit, "Sancta et inter sanctos post domini singulariter sancta maria mater admirabilis virginitatis..."; ff. 43v-48v, "Gloriosa summi rex genitrix christi mater dulcissima virgo..."; ff. 48v-53v, *Oracio ad eandem pro die obitus*, "O sanctissima et intemerata gloriosissima et piissima virgo mari, Ego indignus..."; ff. 54-55v, [prayer to the Virgin at the hour of death], *Oracio ad eandem virginem pro impetrando eius auxilio in hora mortis*, "Propter gravamen et tormentum quo torquebatur spiritus tuus et cor tuum..."; ff. 56-57v, "Per te accessum habemus ad filium tuum o beata inventrix gracie genitrix vite..."; f. 57v-61v, *Item alia oracio eandem virginem mariam simul et ad beatum Iohannem evangelistam*, "O beata et intemerata et in eternum benedicta virgo maria..."; ff. 61v-64, *Item ad eandem virginem mariam cruce christi transverberatam oracio devota*, "Stabat mater dolorosa..."; ff. 64v-66, "Gaude flore virginali que honore speciali transcendis..."; ff. 66v-68v, "Ave mundi gloria, virgo mater maria, ave benignissima..."; ff. 68v-70v, *Item alius hymnus eque devotus in honorem eiusdem*, "Ave mundi spes maria, ave mitis, ave pia, ave plena gracia..."; ff. 70v-75v, *Carmen laudabile in honorem eiusdem virginis marie*, "Virgo decus celi, virgo sanctissima virgo, Que super angelicos ...," *Explicit carmen*;

ff. 75v-77, [Short Office for St. Peter with versicles and responsories, beginning imperfectly, lacking one leaf with the opening miniature and text], incipit, "/// frui celi gaudio, Ubi letus consedisti sedibus quas elegisti sanctorum consorcio ...";

ff. 77-79, [Short Office for St. Paul], incipit, "Gaude paule cum fuisti vocatus a voce christi tua fuit conversio ...";

f. 79r-v, [Short office for St. John the Evangelist], incipit, "Iste est iohannes qui supra pectus domini in cena recubuit...", [ending imperfectly, lacking one leaf with the end of the prayer and the opening miniature to the office of St. Francis];

ff. 80-88, [Office in honor of St. Francis, lacking the opening miniature (one leaf before f. 80), beginning with the Vespers antiphon], incipit, "Crucis vox hunc alloquitur ter dicens tu te prepara, vade francisce repara domum meam que labitur. Psalmus. Dixit Domine. Antiphona. Crucis verbum ... Psalmus. Laudate dominum omnes gentes [Psalm 116], Capitulum. Fratres. Michi autem absit gloriari nisi in cruce domini nostri ihesu christi per quem michi mundus crucifixus est, et ego mundo ... Crucis apparet hostia... stigmata in eius carne protrahit.";

f. 88r-v, [Short Office for St. Anthony of Padua], incipit, "O sydus hispanie gemma paupertatis anthoni pater pie forma puritatis ..."; [ending imperfectly (lacking one leaf after f. 88)];

ff. 89-93, [Office in honor of St. Magdalene, beginning imperfectly, lacking the opening miniature and text], incipit, "Dulcis amici dei lacrimus inflectere nostris....", [and on f. 92], *antiphona de eadem*, "O redundans fons celestis misericordie, de quo beata magdalena copiosum hausit...";

ff. 93-94, [Office in honor of St. Catherine], "O quam mirificis deus ordinat omnia factus...";

ff. 94v-100, Athanasian Creed;

ff. 100-102v, [Nine verses of St. Bernard], *Sequuntur ix versus psalterii quos beatus bernardus cothidie dicebat*, incipit, "O bone ihesu ...; "Illumina oculos meos...", [followed on f. 102 by the prayer], "Omnipotens sempiterne deus qui ezechie regi vide te cum lacrimis deprecanti spacuim vite contulisti, consede michi indigne famule tue ...";

ff. 102v-117, [Prayers for the Office of the dead for the seven hours of the day (Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, Compline)], *Sequitur officium deffunctor secundum septem horas diei. Et pro matutinas dicuntur vigilie cum novem lectionibus et cum invitatorio et Venite Et in fine dicitur sequens oracio*, incipit, "Domine sancte pater omnipotens eterne deus, qui nimia caritate victus filium tuum unigenitum voluisti pro salute humani generis discipuli osculo tradi ..."; [prayer], "Domine ihesu christe fili dei vivi qui ex utero virginis verus deus et verus homo nasci voluisti..."; [prayer], "Domine ihesu christe qui hora diei tertia..."; *Cetera ut supra in prima. Oracio*, "Domine ihesu christe qui hora diei sexta pro nobis moriturus calvarie montem ascendisti..."; *Ad nonam. Antiphona*. "Domine ihesu christe per benignissimam vocem quam pro nobis moriens..."; *Cetera ut in prima. Oracio*. "Domine ihesu christe qui hora diei nona pro nobis pendens in cruce ..."; *Ad vespas ...*;

ff. 115-117, [Prayer in preparation for confession], *Preparacio dispositura ad faciendam confessionem*, incipit, "Clementissime et misericors ihesu christe qui penitenti adultere et lacrimabili peccatrici marie tue pietatis ... Qui vivis <?> et regnas in secula seculorum. Amen."

ff. 117-118v, [Added in a different hand, Psalm 109], incipit, "Dixit dominus ..." [followed by the canticle *Confitebor*], incipit, "Dixit dominus ... Magna opera domini."

The manuscript begins with the *Summe sacerdos* prayer in preparation of the Mass, divided for each day of the week. It has often been attributed to St. Ambrose (340 - 397), but scholars now ascribe the work to the twelfth-century Benedictine monk Jean de Fécamp, and it was integrated into the Roman Missal in 1570. This prayer was an important part of private devotions for priests in the Middle Ages, but was also modified for the use of the laity. On Sunday the prayer, as composed for priests, requests "doce me servum tuum indignum, quem inter cetera dona tua etiam ad officium sacerdotale vocare dignatus es, nullis meis meritis, sed sola dignatione misericordiae tuae" (teach me your unworthy servant, whom among your other gifts you have deigned to call to the priestly office, by no merits of mine, but only by the condescension of your mercy). In our manuscript the form of the words is in feminine, "doce me indignam famulam tuam," indicating that the manuscript was made for a woman, and instead of the priestly office, she has been called to the perfect and holy state of religion, "ad statum perfectionis et sancte religionis" (f. 2).

The illuminated decoration, in addition to the rubrics written in "old rose" ink, allow us to localize the making of this prayerbook in the Loire Valley, probably Tours. Numerous comparisons can be made with manuscripts illuminated in the workshop of Jean Poyer (active c. 1483-1504) and his contemporaries in Tours. The delicate initials painted in white, formed of foliage or winding ribbons and infilled with flowers, the blue-and-ochre acanthus leaves in the rinceaux borders (f. 103), and the initials painted in liquid gold on muted pink grounds, are some of the popular motifs in this style in vogue around 1500. The styles of the decorated border on f. 1, and of the burnished gold initials, are slightly more conservative, but these different examples of decor often coexisted in manuscripts made at the end of the fifteenth century. In our prayerbook, made in one continuous operation, they form an eloquent

ensemble. The "old rose" color of the rubrics is found especially in private devotional manuscripts made in the Loire Valley, a region where blue (or even green in Bourges) ink may be chosen for rubrics at this time (see for instance the so-called *Heures Le Bigot*, de Chancel-Bardelot *et al.*, 2012, pp. 280-281).

The decorated lower border on f. 1 includes a painted coat of arms as follows: *d'azur écartelé, au 2 et 3, trois feuilles de chêne d'or, lapin d'argent rampant sur le tout*. The heraldic figure contained in compartments 2 and 3, *trois feuilles de chêne d'or*, belong at the end of the fifteenth century to the Norman family Benard de Monville, to the Poitevin counts d'Orfeuille and the Burgundian family Du Ban de Frolois. The rabbit in heraldry is rare, but not unknown. However, the coat of arms is composed atypically with the compartments 1 and 4 containing no figure, suggesting that the shield is fictive. The rabbit is an attribute of love, carnal love, and Venus. One hypothesis could be that the book was a gift from an admiring suitor to his beloved, as expressed by the *lapin rampant* in the fictive arms. The fact that only two quarters are blazoned could be taken to indicate that the couple is not (yet) united.

## LITERATURE

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Ann K. Warren, "Five Religious Options for Medieval Women," *Christian History Magazine*  
<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/five-religious-options-for-medieval-women>