

**Breviary for the Winter Season (Secular Use)**  
**In Middle Dutch, illuminated manuscript on parchment**  
**The Netherlands, Delft, c. 1475**

*i + 180 + ii folios on parchment, paginated in modern pencil, incorrect numbering between 75 and 77, catchwords in lower margin near gutter, remains of quire signatures on some rectos at lower right corner, complete, with missing leaves apparently removed early, as text appears continuous (collation i<sup>s</sup>, ii<sup>6</sup>, iii-iv<sup>s</sup>, v-vi<sup>s-1</sup>, vii-viii<sup>s</sup>, ix<sup>s-1</sup>, x<sup>6</sup>, xi<sup>6-1</sup>, xii-xvii<sup>s</sup>, xviii<sup>6</sup>), 31 lines in two columns ruled in ink (justification 115 x 80 mm), in several hybrida formata hands, majuscules flashed in red, 2-line alternating red and blue ink initials, 2-line red or blue initials flourished in alternating color, 3-6-line blue initials formed as puzzle initials with bare parchment flourished in red or red and blue, 5-7-line puzzle initials in red and blue, flourished in red, blue, and green, one 10-line puzzle initial in red, blue, and green, with full border of ink flourishing in red, blue, and green with gold (p.1), one 8-line puzzle initial in red and blue with red and blue flourishing and ONE MINIATURE OF THE NATIVITY (p. 40), some erased marginal notes, parchment in generally good condition. Bound in modern red morocco in pull-off slipcase, by Borsdam (San Francisco), the spine titles of book and case misidentify the manuscript as a commonplace book, and the language as Flemish, paper slip in back cover concerning provenance, mostly repeated in pencil on verso of front flyleaf. Dimensions 180 x 127 mm.*

Containing the daily round of prayers recited in Latin by the clergy, this volume is quite rare because it is in the vernacular and made for a community of women. Its lovely set of ink-flourished initials, partial borders, and a single miniature, all localized to a workshop in Delft, demonstrates why manuscripts from fifteenth-century Delft are so individualistic and highly prized. Previously unknown and unpublished, it offers a fresh glimpse into late medieval Dutch women's communal religious life.

## PROVENANCE

1. Made for a Dutch convent in the third or fourth quarter of the fifteenth century. Sections throughout specify use in a women's community. Lacking a calendar, litany, Office of the Dead, or the full Sanctorale that includes the annual round of saints' feasts celebrated at this institution, only future textual research may reveal precisely which order of Dutch nuns would have prayed from this volume.
2. J. A. G., initials in gold on the spine of the box, unidentified owner apparently purchased the volume in 1956 in Copenhagen, and had it bound in its current binding in 1958 in San Francisco, CA, according to a hand-written note stored inside the back cover.
3. Private collection, USA.

## TEXT

pp. 1-247, Temporale for the winter season, from the first Sunday in Advent to Palm Sunday;

pp. 247-263, Matins and Lauds for Holy Thursday;

pp. 263-71, Matins and Lauds for Holy Saturday;

pp. 271-275, Psalter of St. Augustine, *Dit is die loef der salme dier augustinus of seit*, incipit "Die sanc der salmen heilicht dat lichaem"..."Daer om en ist geen noot veel boeken te studieren dan den souter";

pp. 275-79, Psalter of St. Hillary [Hilarius' commentaries on select psalms], *Hier beginnen di salmen die sinte Hilarius die biscop toeht ibt and salmen om te bidde om sonder lingen oorber*, incipit "Die wil dat hem on se heer goedertieren"..."die gracie ons here iesu christi amen";

pp. 279-80, Psalter of St. Jerome, (entirely in red) *Alsoe als iberonimus seit inden prologe opten souter soe hebbenre tien autoren gemeeste der salmisten*, incipit "Als David"..."Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum et in via peccatorum non stetit etc";

## ILLUSTRATION

The plentiful ink flourishing assists in localizing this manuscript to south Holland. Initials of all sizes feature many south Holland features, such as *drieboeken* (triangles, for examples, see p. 235) and *radijsjen* (radishes, for examples, see p. 235). However, other even more local features are frequently worked in, including the Delft feature of the *schulp-rand* (scalloped edge, for example, see p. 1). The second flourisher also employs the *zonnetijes* (suns, for examples see pp. 223) characteristic of Haarlem.

The column-miniature (37 x 30 mm, p.40) features Mary and Joseph kneeling at either end of the brick manger in which the Christ child lays. Instead of the cows who would usually feed through them, two angels kneel at the manger's stanchions, as if it were a prie-dieu. Wooden beams like columns hold up a patched thatch roof. Only Mary and Christ bear golden halos, and only Christ's is cruciform. The emphasis is entirely on the religious iconography, and there is no landscape in the blue sky or sense of architectural space. Nevertheless, the style accords with a Delft origin.

The prayers and readings for the Divine Office, the daily round of prayers said by medieval clergy throughout the year, are included in a Breviary. At their most expansive, including both Temporale (the annual round of liturgical feasts) and Sanctorale (the annual round of saints' feasts) for the entire year, this volume contains the Temporale for the winter season, from the beginning of Advent to Palm Sunday, adding pieces of the offices for Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday.

Prayers specifically for women mark this as a Breviary for nuns. The nine, rather than twelve, lessons for major feasts identify the volume as made for that apparent paradox, secular nuns. Secular clergy were largely priests, and remained distinct from the regular clergy, who followed a rule (a *regula*) and lived communally. The nuns praying from the present volume had therefore joined orders following the secular clergy: among them, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and others. Given that the Divine Office was always said in Latin, Breviaries translated into the vernacular are rare. It may be noteworthy, then, that the Dutch Brethren (and Sistren) of the Common Life promoted translation and followed the Augustinians. While the lack of a calendar, litany, or the full Sanctorale prevent a more specific identification, it

seems likely that this volume was made for use by Augustinian nuns or women following the tradition of the Common Life. The abbreviated Psalters at the end of the volume are also in Dutch and remind us that the Dutch Offices were not for formal singing in church, but for more informal, personal meditation. Such a pious woman would have prayed from the beautiful pages of this volume, brightening the dark of winter with lively, colorful penwork, a cheerful Nativity miniature, and uplifting prayer in her own language.

#### LITERATURE

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#### ONLINE RESOURCES

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