

Prayer Book (Cistercian use)

In Latin, some rubrics and prayers in French, manuscript on paper and parchment
Western France, diocese of Angers, c. 1516

225 + i folios on paper and parchment (1 leaf on parchment), watermark, grapes with a crozier, Briquet 13117 (Western France, around Angers, 1508-c.1530; Briquet, 1907, vol. 4, p. 652, pl. 13116-13120, modern foliation in pencil with many errors, 1-214 + first leaf unnumbered, 22 bis, 59 bis, 66 bis, 69 bis, 90 bis, 91 bis, 93 bis, 138 bis, 164 bis, 164 ter, lacking two leaves (collation i⁸ [-1, lacking the first leaf of the manuscript, with loss of text, the second leaf is unnumbered and loose] ii-xvi⁸ xvii⁸ [-8, lacking one leaf after f. 126, with loss of text] xviii⁴ [single parchment leaf, f. 127] xix-xxvi⁸ xxvii¹⁰ xxviii-xxix⁸), catchwords on the verso of the second and the final leaf of the quire (and on two occasions also on the third and sixth leaf of the quire), ruled in brown ink (justification c. 115 x 42 mm.), main texts written by three scribes, scribe 1: ff. [first unnumbered leaf]-37v, 71v-198v, written in dark brown ink in hybrida script in a single column on 24 lines, capitals occasionally touched in red, rubrics in red, 1- to 2-line initials in red, scribe 2: ff. 38-71, written in dark brown ink in a smaller hybrida script in a single column on 24 lines, capitals touched in yellow, rubrics in red, 1-line initials and line-endings in red or blue, scribe 3: ff. 162v-164, 199v-203, written in dark brown ink in a small and angular hybrida script in a single column on 26 lines, rubrics in red, 2-line initials in red, in addition at least five different scribes added prayers to empty spaces on the leaves; the first leaf is loose, ff. 150 and 205 are partly loose from the binding, f. 54 repaired with tape, some stains and signs of use, but overall in very good condition. Bound in the seventeenth century in brown marbled sheepskin over pasteboards gold-tooled with frames of filets, corner fleurons and in the center of the front and back boards a crown of thorns enclosing the initials "ADR," spine gold-tooled with filets and small dots, edges gilt, leather worn especially in the corners and spine, tailband partly detached, but in overall good condition. Dimensions 132 x 58 mm.

Made for, and almost certainly by, Cistercian nuns, this tiny Prayer Book (c. 5 x 2.3 inches) offers a fascinating window into the lives of religious women in the early sixteenth century. Its complex contents includes texts both for the liturgy and for private devotion, many of which are uncommon. Its unusual "agenda" format, tall and narrow, is another distinguishing feature, found also in other contemporary Books of Hours made in central France. Remarkably, our Prayer Book can be associated with a specific cloister, Le Perray-aux-Nonnains, near Angers.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was written for use by Cistercian nuns (and possibly copied by the nuns themselves) in the diocese of Angers around 1516, likely at the abbey of Le Perray-aux-Nonnains, as supported by the evidence of the text and watermark. The watermark has been identified around Angers 1508 to about 1530. The suffrage prayer to St. René, legendary bishop of Angers who was resuscitated by saint Maurille, on ff. 126v-127, supports localizing the manuscript in the diocese of Angers. Moreover, the inclusion on f. 127 of a suffrage to Magister Jean Michel, a saintly bishop of Angers in 1439-1447, confirms this localization.

The rubric on f. 51v introducing the prayer to our Savior sent by Pope Leo X (pope in 1513-1521) to Charles V (king of Spain in 1516-1558), allows dating the manuscript

after 1516. Finally, the inclusion of a prayer for King Louis on f. 63rv, which in this book was undoubtedly intended for Louis XII, suggests that the manuscript was made not long after 1515, the year when Louis died. The two slightly conflicting temporal references to contemporary regents suggest the manuscript was made around 1516.

The use of the manuscript by Cistercian nuns is indicated by the inclusion of St. Bernard in capital letters in the litanies on f. 76, and the petition on f. 77 for "abbatissa nostra" (f. 77), as well as feminine forms used in the prayers (see f. 57v). The only abbey for Cistercian nuns in the diocese of Angers at this time was the abbey of Le Perray-aux-Nonnains in Écouflant, on the outskirts of Angers.

Initially founded as a Benedictine monastery in 1189 by lord Robert IV de Sablé, the eleventh Grand Master of the Knights Templar, the monastery was given to Cistercian nuns in 1247. In 1570 the nuns of this abbey had built a *hôtel particulier* in Angers called the Hôtel du Perray for the use of the abbess. When our manuscript was made, the abbess at Perray-aux-Nonnains was Marguerite Veillon, abbess from 1508 to 1537 ("Les Abbesses du Perray," Online Resources).

2. The coat of arms of the manuscript's owner (who may have been the first owner), were painted onto the space left for an illustration at the beginning of the locally composed hymn *Vexilla Regis* on f. 69 (see discussion below). The arms were scraped out, but the offset on the facing page suggests that they contained *azure a cross or*.
3. One of the nuns who added a short text in the blank space on f. 37v identifies herself as "Seur (sister) Puoullemepele (?)".
4. The binding, which dates from the seventeenth century, incorporates the initials "ADR".
5. Twentieth-century inscription "de Meaux" in the upper margin of the first leaf of the manuscript (loose).

TEXT

[unnumbered loose leaf, which was originally the second leaf of the manuscript; the first leaf is now missing; beginning imperfectly in the *Protector in te sperantium Deus* prayer], incipit, "//Ut, te rectore, te duce, sic transeamus per bona temporalia, ut non amittamus eterna"; [Gospel extract according to St. Luke], *Sequentia sancti evangelii secundum Lucam*, incipit, "Gloria tibi Domine. In illo tempore missus est ...";

ff. 1-11v, Passion according to St. Matthew, at the end of the text the nun is instructed to bow in prayer "*hic faciat paulam flectat et oret*" (f. 10v);

ff. 11v-21, Passion according to St. Mark;

ff. 21-29v, Passion according to St. Luke;

ff. 29v-37v, Passion according to St. John;

f. 37v, [added in space originally left blank], incipit, "Considerant le dit du saige Salomon disant que amour est plus forte que la mort ... Seur Puoullemepele(?)";

f. 38rv: *Oraison sur la contemplation de ce que notre Seigneur Ihesu Christ sua sang et au ou jardin d'olivet (des Oliviers)*, ...;

ff. 38v-40v, [Prayers for the seven hours of the Cross], *Sequitur orationes secundum septem verba(m) que Christus dixit in Cruce et ordinatur beatem septem hora(s) canonicas*, ...;

ff. 40v-42, Seven prayers of St. Gregory;

ff. 42-43v, [Prayer of Bede to Jesus Christ], incipit, "Domine Ihesu Christe, qui septem verba ...";

ff. 43v-44v, [Prayer on the Passion of Christ], incipit, "Gracias ago tibi, Domine Ihesu Christe ...";

ff. 44v-47, Five prayers to be said kneeling in front of the Crucifix, each beginning "Laus honor et gloria ...";

f. 47, [Prayer], incipit, "Saucia Domine Ihesu Christe ...";

f. 47r-v, [Prayer], incipit, "O rex gloriose inter sanctos tuos qui semper es laudabilis ...";

ff. 47v-48, [Prayer], incipit, "Deus qui gloriosissimum ...";

f. 48r-v, [Prayer of St. Anselm of Canterbury], incipit, "Domine, Deus meus ...";

ff. 48v-50, Prayers to different parts of the body of Christ;

ff. 50-50v, Prayers on the *Arma Christi*;

ff. 50v-51, Prayers from the chapel of the Holy Cross in Rome;

ff. 51-51v, [Indulgence prayer to which is attached 8,000 years of "vray pardon"], incipit, "Domine Ihesu Christe rogo ...";

ff. 51v-52, *L'espître St. Sauveur que pape Leon anvoya au roy Charles Quint conque la dira devotement l'anneny ne luy nuyra le Jour que il aura dite*, incipit, "Crux Christi sit mecum ...";

This sixteenth-century prayer appears also in the Book of Hours Paris, BnF, MS lat. 10554 (Leroquais, 1927, vol. 2, p. 12), and Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, MS 7201 (Hilg, 1983, p. 97).

ff. 52-52v, [Prayer of St. Louis, which protects against sudden death by fire or the sword], incipit, "Benedictio Dei Patris ...";

- ff. 52v-54, [Prayer of St. Bernard], incipit, "O bone Ihesu ...";
- ff. 54v-55, [Prayer of St. Anselm of Canterbury], incipit, "O bone Ihesu ...";
- ff. 55-57, The Eight Verses of St. Bernard, followed by two prayers to Christ;
- f. 57, [Prayer on the Five Wounds of Christ], incipit, "Domine Ihesu Christe filii Dei ...";
- f. 57r-v, [Prayer], incipit, "Deus qui gloriosissimum ..."; [The same prayer is also found above on ff. 47v-48].
- ff. 57v-63, [Prayer of St. Augustine,] incipit, "Deus, propicius esto michi peccatrice ...," [followed by prayers to Christ];
- f. 63r-v, [Prayer for King Louis], *Oratio pro Rege*, incipit, "Quesumus, omnipotens Deus, ut famulus tuus Ludovicus rex noster ...";
- ff. 63v-65, Prayer to the living and dead, followed by five short prayers to God the Father;
- ff. 65-66, Seven prayers of St. Gregory;
- ff. 66-69, Prayers of St. Gregory, preceded by a rubric explaining the indulgence of 14,000 years granted for prayers in the presence of an image of the *Man of Sorrows*;
- ff. 69-74v, Hymn *Vexilla Regis*, followed by an antiphon on the Holy Cross, a prayer, the Hours of the Holy Cross (ff. 69v-), the Hours of the Holy Spirit (ff. 71-), hymns and antiphons;
- ff. 74v-78v, Litanies, followed by prayers;
- ff. 78v-89v, Verses, prayers, hymns and antiphons for before and after Communion;
- ff. 89v-90v, Hours of the Conception of the Virgin;
- ff. 90v-91v, Seven Joys of the Virgin;
- ff. 91v-99v, [Marian prayers], incipit, "Obsecro te ..."; "O intemerata ..."; "O Domina mea sanctam Mariam ..."; "Ave ancilla trinitatis ..."; "Ave rosa sine spinis ..."; "Gaude flore virginali ..."; "O Domine glorie ..."; "O illustrissima et excellentissima, gloriosa, semper virgo, Maria ..."; "Stabat mater ...";
- ff. 100-103v, *Hore devotissima Dominam nostram pieatis. Ad matutinas, ...*;
- ff. 104-108v, [Prayers in honor of the Passion of Christ and in honor of the Virgin Mary], incipit, "Domina sancta Maria perpetua virgo ...";

f. 108v, [Prayer attached to an indulgence of 12,000 years of pardon], incipit, "Ave sanctissima Maria ...";

ff. 108v-111v, *S'ensuivent cinq belles oraisons que moseigneur St. Jehan l'evangeliste fist en l'honneur de la Vierge Marie ...*, incipit, "Mediatrix ...";

ff. 111v-114v, [Office of the Virgin Mary], *Incipit officium beate Marie*, incipit, "Salve sancta parens ...";

ff. 115-134v, Suffrages of good angels, all angels, St. Gabriel, St. Michael, the Four Evangelists, St. John the Baptist, all saint patriarchs and prophets, St. Peter and St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, St. James the Great, St. Andrew, all apostles and disciples, St. Stephen, St. Lawrence, St. Christopher, St. Sebastian, St. Denis, St. Gregory, St. Augustine, St. Martin, St. Nicholas, St. Claude, St. René (bishop of Angers), Magister Jean Michel (saintly bishop of Angers), St. Anthony, St. Roch, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Eligius, St. Jerome (on a parchment singleton), St. Benedict, St. Fiacre, St. Francis, St. Anna, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine, St. Cecilia, St. Scholastica, St. Margaret, St. Barbara, St. Apollonia, the 11,000 virgin martyrs, other prayers to St. Mary Magdalene, St. Radegund of Poitiers, ten thousand martyrs, St. Joseph, and all saints;

ff. 135-136, Two prayers for the elevation of the Host and one for the elevation of the Chalice;

ff. 136-137, [Two prayers for the elevation of the Host, the first attached to an indulgence of 100,000 days of pardon], incipit, "Benedicatur hora in qua deus homo natus est ..."; [the second to an indulgence of 2,000 years of pardon, granted by Pope Boniface], incipit, "Domine Jesu Christe qui hanc sacratissimam carnem ...";

ff. 137-139v, Eight prayers to be said before the Communion;

ff. 139v-140v, Seven short prayers to be said after the Communion;

ff. 140v-143, Passion of St. Margaret;

ff. 143v-144v, [prayer to the Virgin Mary and all saints], incipit, "Sancte Dei genitrix [sic] ..."; [prayer to all saints living and dead], incipit, "Sanctorum tuorum intercessionibus ...";

ff. 144v-157, Prayers for different people or situations: for one who is being kept captive, for a friend, for the sick who are close to death, before a procession, for the procession in front of the church doors, for the procession choir, in the chapter house, in the dormitory, in the refectory, in the kitchen, in the storehouse, for peace (commemoration), for the dying, for asking for rain, for those who leave for a journey, for the disloyal, for different troubles, for heretics, for Jews, before singing the psalms or the canonical hours, before and after the Divine Office, and for the abbess and the congregation;

ff. 157-158v, Hours of the Blessed Sacrament;

ff. 158v-160; Hours of St. Catherine;

ff. 160v-162v, Hours of St. Barbara;

ff. 162v-164, [added later in the sixteenth century], Suffrages of St. Avia, St. Mary Egyptian, St. Anna, St. Agnes, and a prayer to be said at night when going to sleep and in the morning when getting up and before doing anything else (rubric in French), incipit, "Sir mon Dieu ...";

ff. 164v-164 bis, [added later by a different scribe], Incipit, "Hec est preclarum vas paracleti spiritus sancti, hec est gloriosa civitas Dei, hec est mulier virtutis que contrivit caput serpentis ..."; [ff. 164 bis v-164 ter v, blank, but ruled];

ff. 165-198v, Office for anointing the sick administered by a priest; funeral office, procession and burial celebrated by a priest, the abbess and the nuns, with long rubrics explaining how to proceed when one of the nuns approaches her final hour and dies;

f. 199, [by a different, contemporary scribe, in French], incipit, "Ceste oraison est aprove par une devote religieuse qui avoit ung frere qu'elle aymoît sur tout rien il advint qu'il mourut ...";

ff. 199v-203, [by the same scribe who wrote ff. 162v-164], *Premierement l'on doit en estant le plus*, Incipit, "Deus Deus meus respice..."; prayers to accompany the Seven Penitential Psalms;

ff. 203v-204, [by a different scribe], incipit, "Veni sancte spiritus amor ...";

ff. 204v-210v, [by a different scribe, a long text in French about penitence and confession], incipit, "Donc commence l'homme a est Juste. ...";

ff. 211-212, [by a different, later, scribe], incipit, "O illustrissima et excellentissima, gloriosa, semper virgo, Maria ..." [the same prayer is also found on ff. 96v-98]; [ff. 212v-214v, blank, but ruled];

f. i (back flyleaf), incipit, "Sancti tres reges Gaspar, Melchior, Balthasar, orate pro nobis nunc et in hora mortis nostre."

This small handheld book was intended to accompany the private and public prayer of a Cistercian nun. The mix of prayers for private devotion with formal liturgical prayers is particularly interesting. Among its many prayers are several little-known texts, including the Hours of St. Barbara (ff. 160v-162v), the Passion of St. Margaret (ff. 140v-143), and the suffrage prayer for the local fifteenth-century bishop, Magister Jean Michel, venerated for his saintly life (f. 127). Before his career in the Church, Jean Michel was a *conseiller* to Louis II, duke of Anjou, with whom he travelled to Italy. As a bishop, Jean Michel offered special help to war victims and those suffering from the famine (see Online Resources).

The ancient hymn *Vexilla Regis* (ff. 69-74v) also has local origins. One of the most famous Christian hymns ever written, it celebrates the True Cross and is sung daily at Vespers during the two-week Passiontide until Maundy Thursday, at the Good Friday Mass procession. During the Middle Ages it was also sung on all three feasts of the Holy Cross (Exaltation of the Cross, Finding of the Cross, and its Triumph; today it is sung only on the feast of the Exaltation of the

Cross). It was composed by Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers (c. 130 km south-east of Angers), for the procession of a relic of the True Cross to the monastery of Saint-Croix at Poitiers in 569. Saint-Croix, renamed after the relic, was the first French monastery for nuns, founded in 552 by Queen Radegund, who convinced the Byzantine Emperor Justin II to send a relic of the True Cross for her newly-founded monastery. Saint Radegund of Poitiers, canonized in the ninth century, is venerated in our book in the suffrages and litanies.

Small private devotional books were an essential part of the spiritual life of religious women in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Nuns sometimes owned Books of Hours, but much more often they used collections of prayers. In contrast to Books of Hours, Prayer Books such as the one described here are relatively little studied. In her study of scribes active in medieval German convents, Cyrus suggests that the scribes of these prayer books were often also the compiler: "By choosing the texts on which she focused her prayer, the woman scribe also chose what to emphasize in her own inner life" (Cyrus, 2009, p. 110). The contents of our Prayer Book, with its complex mixture of private prayers and formal liturgical texts, is particularly rich and will repay careful study.

LITERATURE

Berman, C., ed. *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform*, Kalamazoo, 2002.

Berman, C. *The White Nuns: Cistercian Abbeys for Women in Medieval France*, Pennsylvania, 2018.

Berthier, M. *L'Abbaye cistercienne du Perray aux Nonnains*, éditions Les Amis des Monastères, Paris, 1987.

Berthier, M. "Les abbesses cisterciennes du Perray aux Nonnains," *Les Cahiers du Baugeois* 20 (1993), p. 61.

Briquet, C.-M. *Les filigranes: Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 ...*, vol. 4, Paris, 1907.

Online at <https://archive.org/details/BriquetLesFiligranes4>

Cyrus, C. *The Scribes for Women's Convents in Medieval Germany*, Toronto, 2009.

Hilg, H. *Kataloge des Germanischen Nationalmuseums Nürnberg*, vol. 2.1, Nürnberg, 1983.

Leroquais, V. *Les livres d'heures manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 3 vols, Paris, 1927.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Jean Ier Michel (bishop of Angers)

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Ier_Michel_\(%C3%A9v%C3%AAsque\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Ier_Michel_(%C3%A9v%C3%AAsque))

"Les Abbesses du Perray"

<https://chroniquesdanjou.wordpress.com/2018/12/26/les-abesses-du-perray/>

TM 1112