

Calendar from a Book of Hours  
In French, manuscript on parchment  
France, likely Paris, c. 1425-50

*12 folios (i<sup>12</sup>), complete in itself, modern foliation in pencil in lower right margins, written on a single column, ruled in pink ink for 16 lines (justification 77 x 45 mm.), in an accomplished letter bâtarde in liquid gold, blue, and burgundy red ink, "KL" initials in liquid gold and blue with contrasting dense penwork in blue and red, lower right corner torn on f. 1, first folio recto and last folio verso somewhat worn. Bound in nineteenth-century (?) vellum binding over card, modern parchment pastedowns, in good condition. Dimensions 130 x 85 mm.*

This independent calendar written in blue, red, and burnished gold leaf from a deluxe Book of Hours presents a medieval artifact charming in its own right as well as a useful didactic tool for the study of the veneration of saints and the medieval methods of telling time. It was surely written and used in Paris but the source manuscript has not been identified.

#### PROVENANCE

1. The script and secondary decoration would suggest an origin in fifteenth-century Paris, probably in the second quarter of the century, and the Parisian provenance is readily confirmed by the listing of the saints. In a triple-graded calendar, ordinary feast days are written in alternating red and blue ink, whereas special feast days are written in gold leaf. Saints Genevieve, Saint Louis, and Saint Denis, patron saints of Paris, appear in gold on January 3, August 25, and October 9 respectively. Many other Parisian saints are also present (compare Perdrizet, 1993, cited below).
2. In a very slightly later hand a medieval user has added "S. Nicolas de tol[entino]" next to Saint Demeter on September 9. This addition confirms the dating of our calendar before 1450, since Pope Eugene IV canonized Nicolas only in 1446. This is the only emendation found in the calendar.
3. Rear pastedown, upper right corner, in pencil: 3MD4K.

#### TEXT

ff. 1-12, Calendar for the use of Paris, beginning with the Feast of the Circumcision (January 1) and ending with the feast of St. Sylvester (December 31).

Calendars at the front of Books of Hours told the date by citing the feast that was celebrated on that particular day. This is the medieval way of telling time. Some local feasts help determine the Calendar's "use," the place where the manuscript was intended to be used and an important detail helpful in determining where the Book of Hours was actually made.

Medieval calendar pages look rather complicated to the modern eye. Typically they are laid out in four columns. In the far right appear the special feasts for each day of the month. These are mostly commemorations of the day the saints were martyred (their "birthdays" into heaven). Other feasts commemorate important events in the lives of Christ and the Virgin. In this example, three colors are used, red, blue, and gold. Ordinary feast days are written in alternating red and blue and special feast days are written in gold. It is common for calendars in French Books of Hours to be written in easy-to-read French, as occurs here.

The feasts listed in medieval Calendars are mostly commemoration of the day the saints were martyred (their "birthdays" into heaven). Other feasts commemorate important events in the lives of Christ and the Virgin. But no Calendars include the events of Christ's Passion (Resurrection, Ascension, or the Descent of the Holy Spirit): these were movable feasts whose dates depend upon that of Easter, the celebration of which changed from year to year. In a way, Calendars in Books of Hours are perpetual calendars since they can be used from one year to the next.

The majority of feasts are written in black (or dark brown) ink, whereas the more important feasts appear in red (hence, our term "red-letter day," meaning a major event) or, sometimes, blue. Sometimes in deluxe manuscripts, from which the present fragment must come, the most important feasts are written with gold leaf. Along with the major feasts celebrated by the medieval Catholic Church as a whole, Calendars also include feasts of a more local interest. In addition to geographic uses, some Books of Hours were made for particular religious orders, such as Franciscan or Dominican.

Letters (running from A through G) and Roman numbers (from I to XIX) appear to the left of the list of saints' days: the Dominical Letters help finding Sundays and all the other days of the week throughout the year (each year this Sunday Letter changed, moving backward); the Golden Numbers indicate the appearances of new moons and full moons throughout the year (the latter by counting ahead fourteen days). This esoteric information was extremely important to the medieval Christian, since it helped determine the date of Easter, the Church's most important feast, in any given year.

Finally, many Calendars, especially those from the thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century, include the ancient Roman calendrical system. Each month had but three fixed points: Kalends (always the first day of the month and from which we derive our term "calendar"), Ides (the middle of the month, either the thirteenth or fifteenth), and Nones (the ninth day before the Ides, counting inclusively; it fell on the fifth or seventh of the month). All the days in between were counted backward from these three fixed points.

Medieval time was Roman time. It followed the reformed but still imperfect system instituted by Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.). Pope Gregory XIII (papacy, 1572-85) reformed the Julian calendar

and, adding ten days (October 4 in 1582 was followed by October 15) and other fine tunings instituted in 1583 the Gregorian calendar we use today.

Independent calendars are collectible in their own right. They provide useful information on the veneration of saints in different areas of Europe and are good study tools for the telling of time. Just when calendars began to be extracted from their source manuscripts is unknown, but the present example—as is the case with many other extant examples—has an early binding, which suggests that it was the treasured possession of a collector.

#### LITERATURE

Grotefend, H. *Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, 2 vols., Hannover 1891-98 (reprint available).

Perdrizet, Paul. *Le calendrier parisien à la fin du moyen âge d'après le bréviaire et les livres d'heures*, Paris 1933 (Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, Fascicule 63).

Pickering, F. P. *Calendar Pages of Medieval Service Books: Prefatory Note or an Introduction for Historians*, Reading, 1980 (Reading Medieval Studies Monograph).

Wieck, Roger S. *Painted Prayers. The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art*, New York, George Braziller in association with The Pierpont Morgan Library, 1997.

Wieck, Roger S. *Time Sanctified. The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*, New York, George Braziller in association with The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 1988.

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

The Center for Handskriftstudier i Danmark, introduction and Tutorial on Books of Hours by Erik Drigsdahl

[www.chd.dk/tutor/index.html](http://www.chd.dk/tutor/index.html)

Online Calendar of Saints Days

[www.medievalist.net/calendar/home.htm](http://www.medievalist.net/calendar/home.htm)

Les Enluminures: Medieval Books of Hours with Basic and Advanced Tutorials with texts from Wieck's *Painted Prayers*

[www.medievalbooksofhours.com](http://www.medievalbooksofhours.com)