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Book of Hours (Use of Poitiers)

In Latin and French, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France, likely Paris, c. 1505-10

13 large miniatures by the Master of Etienne Poncher and another Parisian illuminator

132 ff., preceded by two and followed by four paper flyleaves, on parchment, complete (collation: i⁶, ii⁶, iii⁶⁺¹, iv¹⁰, v⁶, vi¹⁰, vii-ix⁸, x⁴, xi-xii⁸, xiii⁴, xiv-xviii⁸), traces of catchwords, mostly cut short, 16 long lines, ruled in pink, justification 148 x 89 mm, written in a regular lettre batârde script, rubrics in red, line-fillers in liquid gold on blue or red grounds, numerous 1- and 2-line initials in liquid gold on alternating blue or dark red grounds, 12 larger 3- to 4-line high initials in blue on red or gold grounds highlighted with liquid gold decoration and flowers in the infills, 3 heraldic designs (respectively on ff. 72, 72v [with original painted background still faintly visible, and clearly visible using ultraviolet light], 132v), 13 large miniatures within architectural frames of camaïeu d'or (a few losses of surface pigment), text placed below miniatures copied in cartouches or unscrolled banderoles sometimes held by winged putti. Bound in a late nineteenth-century or early twentieth century binding (English ?) of black long-grained morocco over pasteboard, back sewn on four raised thongs with "Missale" tooled in gilt in second compartment, sides tooled in blind, double panel of fillet borders with repeated geometrical motifs in outer and inner panels. Dimensions 200 x 145 mm.

This is a thoroughly Renaissance manuscript by two Parisian artists contemporary with the rise of the printed Book of Hours in Paris, which influenced the present work. It was perhaps made for the celebrated Belleville family, which maintained important royal connections and whose heraldry appears in a full-page miniature at the end of the manuscript. The original owner, a woman, added the tender and even erotic contemporary note and accounts for the proliferation of saintly women in the litany.

PROVENANCE

1. Whereas the liturgical use of the manuscript is for Poitiers and many Angevin saints are present, the style of the paintings seems to confirm that the manuscript was ordered by a patron from Angers in Paris. There are the following typical Angevin saints: Saint Aubin (Bishop of Angers), Saint René d'Angers, Saint Maurille (also Bishop of Angers), as well as the very local Saint Lézin of Angers, and Saint Calais and Saint Mamer (Memer). The miniatures are, however, by two hands, both distinctly Parisian in style (see Illustration below).
2. Painted arms on f. 132v: *giromné de vair et de gueules de dix pièces* of the Belleville family. This family originates in the Saintonge region (see La Chesnaye des Bois, *Dictionnaire de la noblesse*,

Paris, 1771, tome II, pp. 293-294). Repeated twice is an initial I, first with cordelières (fol. 72), secondly entirely traced using the same cordelières (fol. 72v), presumably the first letter of a Christian name, perhaps "Jean" or "Jeanne." There is a Jean III de Harpedane, seigneur de Belleville, De Cosnac (Saintonge) who married first Marguerite de Valois, then Jeanne de Blois in 1458. Members of this family were highly placed: Jean III was chamberlain and counselor to the king, as was his successor Gilles de Belleville, son of Jean and Jeanne, who is closer in date to the production of the present manuscript. A better study of the successive members of the influential family of Harpedane de Belleville might reveal the identity of the owner who had his or her arms elaborately painted at the end of the codex. The liturgical use of Poitiers would be appropriate for the Belleville family, which lives nearby.

3. An inscription written in a near-contemporary hand on f. 72v, barely legible with ultraviolet light, likely composed by a woman, reads: "Sy je me més auprez de mon mary / Je le pry et veu estre mary [...]" [If I lie near my husband / I want him to be in good spirits...].
4. Cutting pasted on verso of first rear paper flyleaf, referring to the Duke of Norfolk: "The Duke of Norfolk has bought at the hammer a beautiful manuscript on vellum...." The present manuscript could thus have belonged to the Duke of Norfolk.

TEXT

ff. 1-12v, Calendar in brown and pale red ink, in French, with noteworthy saints: Hillary (13 Jan.), in red; Blaise (3 Feb.), in red; Lezin (13 Feb.); Aubin (1 March); Lubin (14 March); Anicet, Pape (17 April); Memer (10 May); Perrenelle (31 May); Marcellin (2 June); Claude (6 June); Barnabe (11 June), in red; Kalais (1 July); Martial (3 July); Armel (16 Aug.); Fiacre (30 Aug.); Loup and Gille (1 Sept.); Maurille (13 Sept.); Foy (6 Oct.); Leonard (15 Oct.); René (12 Nov.), in red; Maclou (15 Nov.); Gatian of Tours (18 Dec.); Maurice (in red, 22 September) is the patron saint of the Cathedral.

f. 13, blank;

ff. 14-71v, Hours of the Virgin (use of Poitiers), with interspersed Hours of the Cross and of the Holy Spirit from Lauds (ff. 36-37 and ff. 37-38): with Matins (ff. 14-27); Lauds (ff. 25-35v); Prime (ff. 38-44v), with antiphon, *O admirabile*, and capitulum, *Virgo verbo*; Terce (ff. 45-49v); Sext (ff. 50-54); None (ff. 54v-58v); Vespers (ff. 59-66); Compline (ff. 66v-71v);

ff. 73-85, Seven Penitential Psalms and litanies (ff. 85-91v), including Hillary, Maure, as well as an unusual number of saintly women, Neomadia (shepherdess of Poitiers), Gemina, Valeria, Macrina, perhaps suggesting a woman patron;

ff. 92-92v, blank;

ff. 94-132, Office of the Dead (use of Poitiers).

ILLUSTRATION

f. 13v, Annunciation;

f. 24v, Visitation;

f. 36, Crucifixion;

f. 37v, Mystical Pentecost;

f. 38v, Nativity;

f. 45, Annunciation to the Shepherds;

f. 50, Adoration of the Magi;

f. 54v, Presentation in the Temple;

f. 59, Flight into Egypt;

f. 66v, Coronation of the Virgin;

ff. 72-72v, Initials I, full page, with cordelières [added later (?), originally painted on a colored background, visible and confirmed using ultraviolet light];

f. 73, David and Bathsheba;

f. 93, Raising of Lazarus;

f. 100v, Job on the Dungheap;

f. 132v, Heraldic composition: Arms of the Belleville de Harpedane Family (Saintonge and Poitou) [likely added at a slightly later date].

Six of the thirteen miniatures (the Annunciation, Visitation, Crucifixion, Mystical Pentecost, Annunciation to the Shepherds, and the Adoration of the Magi) are by the Master of Etienne Poncher. This painter is named after two manuscripts made for the prelate, who was Bishop of Paris from 1502 to 1519: his Pontifical for the use of Paris (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 956) and a work titled *Les empereurs de Rome et d'Allemagne, les Papes et les roys de France* (Sale, Mensing, Amsterdam, 1929, lot 45, present location unknown) (see Delaunay, 2000, vol. 1, p. 290). The face of the saint in profile holding the spoon to his mouth in the Mystical Pentecost (f. 37v) is particularly close to that of Saint Mark in a Parisian Book of Hours in the BnF (MS lat. 13294, f. 15). The face of the second apostle on the right in the same miniature is nearly identical to that of Saint Joseph in the Visitation in another Book of Hours by the Master (Paris, BnF, MS lat. 18017). In the Visitation miniature, as well as in many in the present manuscript, there are the same gold angels painted on the lavish architectural frames. The porcelain-like faces with their small round pupils of the Master

of Etienne Poncher are easily identifiable hallmarks of his style, which we can trace in Paris from the 1490s to around 1510. This manuscript emerges as an example of his late style, as it evolved into the sixteenth century. Here the Master is working side-by-side another unidentifiable Parisian painter who was much influenced by Jean Pichore, especially in his treatment of the hair and faces.

Nearly all its miniatures include rich Renaissance frames, with column pilasters on each side, garlands, sometimes putti, and occasionally *trompe l'oeil* features, such as jewels and/ or marbled panels. (Another unusual *trompe l'oeil* feature is the appearance of the figures of the Virgin and Saint John beneath the text block on f. 36). Somewhat archaic at this late date are the attractive floral and foliate initials in green and blue placed on liquid gold grounds.

There are several unusual features worth noting in the present manuscript. One is the exceptionally rare illustration of the Mystical Pentecost (f. 37v), an allegorical scene in which the Dove of the Holy Spirit radiates the usual flames of inspiration. However, the Holy Spirit's fire is transformed into Christ's blood, and the twelve apostles partake of the liquid sustenance before setting out to convert the world. This illustration occurs in the "*Grandes Heures Royales*," completed after August 1490 and published by Antoine V  rard (see Wieck, 1998, no. 65, p. 84). Our illuminator has apparently misunderstood the iconography, because the fountain has not turned red, although the apostles in the foreground drink from the waters putting spoons to their mouth, exactly as in the V  rard imprint. Probably the inclusion of this scene shows the influence of printed *Horae*, and perhaps the illuminator was following an uncolored model. Another rare feature is the inclusion of two different illustrations for the Office of the Dead, both a Raising of Lazarus (again the illuminator seems to have misunderstood the iconography) and Job on his Dungheap.

LITERATURE

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