

Book of Hours (Use of Angers) with pilgrims' badges

In Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment

France (Angers?), 1450-1475?

80 folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, upper outer rectos, 1-80, incomplete, lacking six leaves, along with one quire at the beginning and several more before quire iv (collation i⁶ ii² [lacking at least two outer bifolia] iii² [lacking at least two inner bifolia] iv-v⁸ vi² vii⁸ [-1 leaf with loss of text] viii⁸ ix² x⁸ [-1 leaf with loss of text] xi-xiii⁸ xiv⁴), traces of quire and leaf signatures, partially cropped, in the lower margins of several leaves, horizontal crosswords, lower center versos in qq. ii, iv-v, vii, and x, ruled in light brown ink with full-length horizontal and vertical bounding lines, some prickings visible in lower margin (justification 101-105 x 66-69 mm.), written in a well-formed gothic bookhand on fifteen long lines, red rubrics, capitals highlighted in yellow, one- to two-line initials of red or blue, two-line initials of burnished gold on blue and rose with white tracery, FOUR ILLUMINATED INITIALS of three to four lines, in blue or rose with white tracery on burnished gold grounds and with infill of flowers or strawberries, with three-quarter floral border adorned with gold and painted in rose, green, and blue (ff. 12v, 15v, 19, 22), with initial on f. 22 executed in a slightly different style than the other three, later addition (ff. 79v-80) written in a handsome bâtarde script on fifteen long lines, capitals highlighted in red, underlining in red, one- to two-line red initials, some corrections by the scribe, six metal badges and one devotional image on parchment sewn in with green thread on f. 8, wide clean margins, in excellent condition. Bound in sixteenth-century brown leather, blind-tooled with two concentric rectangular frames of three fillets each and blind-stamped with four floral decorations at the corners of the inner rectangle and one floral and foliate stamp in the center, over pasteboard, sewn on five double bands, most of the leather has been lost from spine, both boards and three initial quires now unattached, traces of two fastenings (now lost) on upper and lower boards, some worming and warping of upper board, with large tear in leather, wear to edges of both boards exposing pasteboard underneath that comprises pages from early imprints, one metal badge sewn in front pastedown with white thread. Dimensions 173-178 x 122-127 mm.

Unexpected treasures fill the pages of this illuminated Book of Hours from Angers. With seven intact pilgrims' badges still sewn within its leaves, it is second only to the famous Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 77 L 60 in the number of intact badges it still contains. While scholars have found evidence that people customized their Books of Hours during the Middle Ages by adding objects like badges, it is extremely rare for these badges to survive intact within medieval books, as these have. Seven badges in a single, previously unstudied book is a very exciting find, sure to be of great scholarly interest.

PROVENANCE

1. The contents and decoration of this manuscript indicate that it was produced in the diocese of Angers, most likely in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, c. 1450-1475. The liturgical use of both the Hours of the Virgin and the Office of the Dead is that of Angers. The Calendar includes Saints Maurilius (13 September), bishop of Angers, and Serenedus (21 July; also known as Saint Céneré), who was particularly revered in Saulges, in the department of Mayenne, around forty miles north of Angers. Serenedus also appears in the Litany, as does Saint Maurice, patron saint of Angers Cathedral.

The quality of this book's illumination and the pattern of losses it has sustained both suggest that it was almost certainly decorated with illuminated miniatures at one time. The initials that survive bear comparison to those of London, British Library, Harley MS

4413, a Customary of Anjou and Maine produced in Northwestern France, likely in Angers, c. 1462-1480.

2. One or more early owners of the book sewed a number of pilgrims' badges into this Book of Hours. Seven of these badges remain, along with sewing holes indicating that more were likely once attached (see front pastedown and f. 10). Many of the badges that remain were likely obtained at pilgrimage destinations clustered in Northern France. These include two badges featuring Saint Maurice (f. 10), some of whose relics were housed at Angers Cathedral; two badges featuring Saint Mathurin (f. 10), whose relics were venerated in Larchant, in the Île-de-France region; and one badge depicting the Virgin Mary and bearing an inscription, "Notre dame de cleri," that most likely refers to the shrine dedicated to Mary at the Basilica of Cléry-Saint-André, near Orleans (f. 10).
3. Belonged to Magdelaine Angier who recorded her ownership in a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand on the rear pastedown: "Ces presentes heures apartiennent a Magelaine Angier."
4. Belonged to Jacques Le Blanc de la Vignolle (1610-1684), lawyer, historian, and genealogist of Maine and Mayenne and a resident of Laval, in the department of Mayenne. Le Blanc de la Vignolle identified himself in an inscription at the bottom of f. 78v, beginning "moy Jacques le Blanc ancien advocat ...". In the empty spaces on ff. 79-80v and the back pastedown, he provided a detailed genealogy of his family, tracing his maternal line back to the same Magdelaine Angier who left her own inscription on the back pastedown (see above) and her husband, Pierre Razeau, a royal notary.

According to Le Blanc de la Vignolle's records, he bequeathed this Book of Hours to his grandchildren, Jacques and Marie Le Blanc, on 27 May 1677 (on the occasion of his election as dean of lawyers), just as his mother, Claude Bigot, had bequeathed the book to him (f. 79: "Jacques et Marie le Blanc aux quels ie laisse les presentes heures comme ma mere claud bigot me les a laisses").

5. Belonged to Ambroise-François Hardy de Lévaré (born 20 July 1749), squire and marshal of the house of King Louis XVI (reigned 1774-1791). Hardy de Lévaré recorded his own name and the details of his career and marriage at the top of the front pastedown and then provided a genealogy of his family, traced through the paternal line at least as far back as the sixteenth century. The Hardy de Lévaré family had resided for several previous generations in Laval; indeed, Hardy de Lévaré's grandfather, Ambroise-Jean Hardy de Lévaré (1700-1780) served as mayor of the town. It is quite probable, then, that this Book of Hours passed from the Le Blanc family to the Hardy de Lévaré family by marriage or gift.
6. Private Collection, USA.

TEXT

ff. 1-6v, Calendar, beginning imperfectly with July;

ff. 7-8v, *Obsecro te*, with masculine forms, beginning and ending imperfectly;

f. 9rv, Psalms, beginning imperfectly in the middle of Psalm 148 and ending imperfectly in the middle of Psalm 149, almost certainly from Hours of Virgin, Lauds; [f. 10rv, ruled and blank but for the six badges and one painting sewn onto the recto];

ff. 11-27v, Hours of the Virgin, use of Angers, beginning imperfectly in the middle of Terce (f. 11) and continuing with Sext (f. 12v), None (f. 15v), Vespers (f. 19), and Compline (f. 22); [f. 28rv, blank but ruled];

ff. 29-45v, Seven Penitential Psalms and Litany, beginning imperfectly in the middle of the first Psalm;

ff. 46-78v, Office of the Dead, use of Angers, beginning imperfectly; [f. 79; blank but for later additions];

ff. 79v-80, Seven Prayers of Saint Gregory on the Passion; [f. 80v, blank but for later additions].

PILGRIMS' BADGES

The manuscript includes seven metal pilgrims' badges:

front pastedown, round gilt badge (diameter 21 mm.) depicting a mounted saint (Saint Eustace or Saint Hubert?) facing a stag with a crucifix between its antlers;

f. 10, shield-shaped badge (dimensions 21 x 15 mm.) depicting Saint Maurice standing in armor, still retaining some traces of white paint, and holding a spear with a pennant painted red and a shield with a cross on a red-painted ground, with fetters placed in empty spaces;

f. 10, round badge (diameter 31 mm.) depicting Saint Mathurin, one hand held up in blessing and the other grasping a book, exorcising Princess Theodora, shown kneeling before him with a horned figure leaping above her head, with two sets of fetters placed in empty spaces;

f. 10, oval badge (dimensions 18 x 15 mm.) depicting the Virgin Mary standing and holding the Christ child, similar in style to a very fragmentary badge surviving in a manuscript formerly in the Bonn-Bad Godesberg collection of Hermann Kunst (his MS 5, c. 1470) on flyleaf i^v (see Van Asperen, 2009, p. 532, appendix V, section 14.13);

f. 10, round badge (diameter 33 mm.) depicting the Virgin Mary, crowned and shown from the waist up, holding the Christ child, with inscription around the outside, "n[otre] dame de cleri," likely referring to the shrine of the Virgin Mary at the Basilica of Notre Dame de Cléry-Saint-André, somewhat similar in style to a Mary of Mont-Roland badge in the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 77 L 60 (Bruges, c. 1400-1460), on f. 98 (see Van Asperen, 2009, p. 523, appendix V, section 8) and a Mary of Regensburg badge in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Series Nova 2624 (Bruges, c. 1520-1530) on f. 253 (see Van Asperen, 2009, p. 524, appendix V, section 11);

f. 10, round badge (diameter 15 mm.) depicting Saint Maurice holding a spear in his right hand and a shield with a cross in his left, with two sets of fetters placed in empty spaces;

f. 10, round badge (diameter 18 mm.) depicting Saint Mathurin, one hand held up in blessing and the other grasping a book, exorcising Princess Theodora, shown kneeling before him with a horned figure leaping above her head.

DEVOTIONAL IMAGE

This manuscript includes one parchment painting:

f. 10, rectangular painting on parchment (dimensions 25 x 20 mm.) of the Holy Face, with some loss of pigment, similar in design and coloration to that found in Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, MS 59 (Southern France, c. 1485) on f. 110 (see Van Asperen, 2009, p. 575, appendix VII, section 4.2).

With pilgrims' badges still stitched within its pages, this illuminated Book of Hours is an object of great rarity and historical value. Even as the later textual additions provide a rich history of its use by later owners, the added badges and painting provide important physical evidence as to how this book was used early on. This is a subject currently generating great scholarly interest and enthusiasm among historians of the book and of medieval lay devotion (as can be seen, for example, in Rudy, 2015 and Rudy, 2016), and this as yet unstudied volume makes an exciting addition to the very small number of manuscripts in which physical badges survive.

Books of Hours were easily the bestsellers of the late Middle Ages, the single most popular and widely circulated set of texts in the Latin West. Named for their core text, the Office (or Hours) of the Virgin Mary, Books of Hours bring together prayers to be recited by lay people at different times of day, following the eight hours of the monastic Divine Office.

Not only would this book have served a clear devotional purpose of its own, guiding its owner through his or her daily prayers, but it also served as a repository for devotional objects gathered by one or more of its early owners in a far less quotidian context. The thin metal badges sewn within the pages of this volume are pilgrims' badges, souvenirs sold at pilgrimage churches that devout travelers could affix to their clothing or hats as a mark of identification or even as a protective talisman.

Books of Hours with intact pilgrims' badges are now extremely rare, exceptional witnesses to a late medieval practice that was far from rare itself. The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw a peak in pilgrimage to popular shrines around Europe and beyond, and by the second half of the fifteenth century it seems to have become a common practice for pilgrims to sew their badges into their Books of Hours, particularly in the southern Netherlands and Northern France. Eighty-one manuscripts retain traces of metal badges in the forms of imprints and sewing holes (for a full list, see Van Asperen, 2009, p. 286). Only ten other manuscripts still contain metal badges, though. Of these, five contain only one metal badge each (or a fragment thereof) and only the Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 77 L 6o (Bruges, c. 1440-1460), with its astonishing twenty-three badges surviving sewn onto its final folio, contains more badges than the present manuscript. Manuscripts with intact badges are exceedingly rare on the market; only two others are listed on the Schoenberg Database, with the most recent (containing a single metal badge) for sale by Christie's, London on 3 June 2009 (lot 13).

Sewn within the pages of this prayer book, these badges, often wafer-thin and made of cheap lead-tin alloy, could be kept safe and sound. Their presence in Books of Hours would no doubt also have prompted users to recall their experiences of pilgrimage, far more communal and extraordinary than the daily reading of their prayer books. As talismans, these objects could also have been sewn into books to protect the books themselves and, in a sense, to prolong their owners' contact with the associated relics. For example, Saint Mathurin, featured in two badges in this Book of Hours, was frequently invoked against infertility during the Middle Ages. An early female owner of this book, perhaps even Magdelaine Angier, who signed her name in the back, might well have felt a particular devotion to this saint for this reason.

Along similar lines, the painting of the Holy Face was almost certainly added as a focus for the owner's devotions. The owner might have contemplated this image, depicting the vernicle, or the cloth of Saint Veronica on which Christ's features were said to have been impressed after it was used to wipe Christ's face, as he or she prayed the "Salva sancta facies" (Hail, Holy Face), an indulgenced prayer. The loss of pigment from Christ's face was almost certainly the result of touching or kissing by a devout owner.

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