



Book of Hours (Use of Rome)

In Latin, illuminated manuscript, on parchment
Southern Low Countries, Bruges, c. 1450-60

11 large and 21 small miniatures by the Workshop of Willem Vrelant

109 ff., written in neat Gothic script in brown ink on a single column (justification 120 x 85 mm.), 20 lines per page, ruled in brown ink, rubrics in red, with 11 large and 21 miniatures in grisaille and full foliate and floral borders in grisaille on all facing text pages, on f. 109 v, later coat of arms (possibly 19th century?), in excellent condition, a few miniatures very lightly rubbed, with wide uncut margins (trace of old restoration in margin of f. 3, completing the corner of the sheet). Bound in nineteenth-century (possibly earlier) faded green silk over pasteboards, some wear at spine and at edges of thongs, but solid in binding. Dimensions 197 x 136 mm.

The substantial dimensions, wide clean borders, and rich cycle of illumination distinguish this handsome Book of Hours. Its illumination typifies manuscript production in Bruges in the third quarter of the fifteenth century in the workshop of the Dutchman Willem Vrelant, and it is certainly by one of the hands of his atelier. Especially striking is the predominantly grey and black palette (known as grisaille or, in this case, semi-grisaille), with details carefully highlighted in liquid gold and touches of blue pigment used sparingly to bring out features of the settings.

PROVENANCE

1. To judge by the style of decoration and the most distinctive saints in the calendar, the manuscript was produced in Bruges, the main center of Flemish book production in the later fifteenth century, in the workshop of the prolific illuminator Willem Vrelant.

2. France, later in the fifteenth century, on the basis of saints added to the calendar, for example Saint Appolonia and the rare Saint Mammes (17 August), honored in the diocese of Langres.
3. Unidentified coat-of arms, f. 109v, possibly 19th century, following near-contemporary prayer, with armorial shield, pasted in on linen, quartered, 1, 3, gray crenellated towers (or castles) on black; 2, 4, gold salamanders(?) with blue stripes on red; small center roundel superimposed of 3 gold fleur de lis on blue.

TEXT

ff. 1-6v, Calendar, in Latin, with many saints of the north, such as Amand, Vaast, Omer (Audomarus), Bertin, Winnoc, Bavo, Amalberge, Walburge, Dorothy, Dympna, Gertrude, Aldegonde. Some saints are added later, but still in the fifteenth century (see Provenance).

ff. 7-9v, Gospel Sequences;

ff. ff. 10-12v, Hours of the Cross;

ff. 13-15, Hours of the Holy Ghost

ff. 15v-21v, Mass of the Virgin Mary; with f. 19, *O Intemerata*; and ff. 20-21, *Obsecro te*;

ff. 22-29 v, Suffrages, Saint John the Baptist (f. 22v), Saint Peter (f. 23), Saint Paul (f. 23v), Saint John (f. 24), Saint Andrew (f. 24v), Saint Jacob (f. 25), Saint Jacob (f. 25), Saint Stephen (f. 25v), Saint Lawrence (f. 26), Saint Anthony (f. 26v), Saint Catherine (f. 27), Saint Agatha (f. 27v), Saint Barbara (f. 28), Saint Margaret (f. 28v), Saint Mary Magdalene (f. 28v), Saint Anne (f. 29v);

ff. 30v-73v, Hours of the Virgin, with Matins (ff. 31-41), Lauds (ff. 41v-48), Prime (ff. 48v-51), Terce (ff. 51v-54), Sext (ff. 54v-57), None (ff. 57v-60; Vespers (ff. 60v-65), Compline (ff. 65v-68v);

ff. 69v-73v, Advent Office of the Virgin;

ff. 74-85, Seven Penitential Psalms and Litanies (ff. 80v-85);

ff. 85v-109, Office of the Dead, with the addition of a prayer to the Virgin Mary, incipit *Salutote Sanctissima Virgo Maria* (f. 109).

ILLUSTRATION:

11 Large miniatures, all in arched frames, as follow:

f. 15v, Virgin in Majesty;

f. 30v, Annunciation;

f. 41v, Visitation;

f. 48v, Nativity;
f. 51v, Annunciation to the Shepherds;
f. 54v, Adoration of the Magi;
f. 57v, Presentation in the Temple;
f. 60v, Massacre of the Innocents;
f. 65v, Flight into Egypt;
f. 69v, Coronation of the Virgin;
f. 85v, Resurrection of Lazarus.

21 Small miniatures, mostly of the Suffrages:

f. 7, Saint John the Evangelist;
f. 7v, Saint Luke;
f. 8v, Saint Matthew;
f. 9, Saint Mark;
f. 19, Lamentation'
f. 22, Trinity;
f. 22v, Saint John the Baptist;
f. 23, Saint Peter;
f. 23v, Saint Paul;
f. 24, Saint John;
f. 24v, Saint Andrew;
f. 25, Saint James;
f. 25, Saint Stephen;
f. 26, Saint Lawrence;
f. 26v, Saint Anthony;

f. 27, Saint Catherine;

f. 27v, Saint Agatha;

f. 28, Saint Barbara;

f. 28v, Saint Margaret;

f. 29, Saint Magdalene;

f. 29v, Saint Anne.

The decoration of this attractive Book of Hours is typical of the work associated with the workshops of Bruges in the third quarter of the fifteenth century and can be associated in particular with the prolific and highly successful school of Willem Vrelant (on whom see especially Bernard Bousmanne, *Guillaume Wielant ou Willem Vrelant, miniaturiste à la cour de Bourgogne au XVe siècle*, Brussels, 1997; and more recently Bousmanne and Delcourt, 2011. For a brief summary and characterization of his style with a list of manuscripts, see Georges Dogaer, *Flemish miniature painting in the 15th and 16th centuries*, Amsterdam, 1987, pp. 98-105). Willem was born in Utrecht but is recorded as an illuminator in Bruges from 1454, and died there in June 1482. He is documented working on two different commissions for Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in 1468 and 1469. It may be this exalted patronage that led his style to become so popular and imitated: "his production must have been enormous ... that it remains difficult to draw a firm line between the œuvre of the Master and that of his followers" (Dogaer, 1987, p. 99), "Willem Vrelant was one of the most successful painters of manuscripts in the Low Countries. Even today we still have some hundred manuscripts decorated by him or his close associates ... many were made for highest circles of the Burgundian Court. Their decoration is splendid; their images clear, bold, and naturalistic and the style easy to recognize" (Anne H. van Buren, "Willem Vrelant: questions and issues," *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art*, 68, 1999, pp. 3-30, at p. 3).

Although Vrelant's name is recorded in the documents, only one extant manuscript can be assigned to him on documentary evidence. This is the *Chroniques de Hainaut* copied for the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good (Brussels, BR, MS 9243), and likely completed for his son Charles the Bold. There is a document for a second manuscript that has not survived. His figures sometimes appear stiff and immobile with staring expressionless eyes, blushing cheeks and thick lips. Landscapes are composed of different, interconnected planes with meandering streams and crooked paths. Interiors display wooden ceilings and shuttered windows. There are dozens of Books of Hours associated with the Vrelant style, and it has recently been suggested that his wife and daughter were among other illuminators working side-by-side with him in his active atelier. Among these Books of Hours, those in grisaille – like this one – stand out, for they are relatively unusual in the vast production of the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The present manuscript can be compared to three with which it shares technique, as well as compositions: London, British Library, Yates Thompson MS 4; New York, Morgan Library, MS M.25; and Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W.180.

LITERATURE

Bousmanne, Bernard and Thierry Delcourt, eds., with Pascal Schandel and Ilona Hans-Collas, *Miniatures flamandes, 1404-1482*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2011

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