Book of Hours (Use of Besançon)
In Latin and French, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Northern France, c. 1430-1440
4 full-page miniatures by a Burgundian illuminator active in Besançon.

ff. 113ff., preceded and followed by original parchment flyleaves, (collation: i12, ii-iv8, v-vi6, vii7 [i wanting], viiiio, ix-x8, xii7 [i wanting], xii-xii8, xiv8), wanting leaves (perhaps once with miniatures), written in a Gothic bâtarde script, in a single column, on fourteen long lines in black ink, between two verticals and fifteen horizontal lines ruled in red, rubrics in red, catchwords et ends of some quires, one-line initials in red and blue, 2-line initials in burnished gold on pink and blue grounds with white tracery, 4-line initials in blue and pink on burnished gold grounds filled with gothic ivy-leaf designs, four full-page miniatures in arc-top compartments within full borders with pen-and-ink rinceaux and multicolored acanthus leaves. Bound in sixteenth century gold and black painted fanfare binding over wooden boards, opening pastedown reusing earlier Latin manuscript, gilt edges, sewn on five cords, (binding slightly damaged on lower and upper spine binding corners, some browning and mildew to folio extremities, in particular to the opening flyleaves, inscription intentionally rubbed from opening calendar page). Dimensions 182 x 130mm.

This Book of Hours belongs to a group of Books of Hours of Besançon provenance, identified by François Avril, which are the work of a Burgundian illuminator, probably from Dijon, who was active in Besançon in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. In keeping with the liturgical use of the Hours of the Virgin, the calendar features several saints of the region including St. Ferieul and St. Antidius. The modelling of the head, hair and facial features recall the influence of early Parisian illumination, notably that of the Egerton Master. The four remaining miniatures in this Book of Hours are of an excellent quality, housed within an elegant sixteenth century fanfare binding.

PROVENANCE
1. Liturgical use for this Book of Hours is for the use of Besançon (Hours of the Virgin), with a Calendar boasting saints venerated in Besançon such as St. Ferieul, the patron saint of Besançon and founder of the Church of Besançon, and St. Antidius, a fifth century bishop of Besançon. Stylistic elements point towards a production in Northern France by an artist active in Besançon in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

2. European Private Collection

TEXT
ff. 1-12v, Calendar (Use of Besançon) with the following noteworthy saints: St. Ferieul (May 30, Jun. 16 and Sept. 5); and St. Antidius (Jun. 17);

ff. 13-61v, Hours of the Virgin Mary (Use of Besançon), with Matins (f.13), Lauds (f.25), Prime (f. 38, incomplete), Terce (f. 42, incomplete), Sext (f. 45, incomplete), None (f. 49, incomplete), Vespers (f. 51) and Compline (f.56v);

ff. 62-65, Short Hours of the Cross, with Matins (f.62); Lauds (f.); Prime (f.63v); Terce (f.64); Sext (f.64v); None (f.64v); Vespers (f.65) and Compline (f.65v);

ff. 66-79v, Seven Penitential Psalms;
ff. 79v-86v, Litany of Saints;

ff. 87-108, Office of the Dead (unidentifiable);

ff. 108v-116, Prayers including Obsecro te (f. 109) and O intemerata (f. 113v);

ff. 116v-117v, Gospel of John;

ff. 118-123v, Prayers.

ILLUSTRATION
f. 18, Annunciation;

f. 56v, Crowning of the Virgin Mary;

f. 62, Crucifixion;

f. 66, King David in Prayer.

Paris was a leading city in the production of illuminated manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages; however production plummeted in the early years of the fifteenth century as a result of multiple difficulties, including the plague, the fall of the city to the English and the Burgundian-Armagnac feud. The fifteenth century thus saw a rise in manuscript production in provincial centers, particularly in Burgundy and the neighboring Franche-Comté owing to the artistic patronage of the Dukes of Burgundy.

The four miniatures in this Book of Hours are of high quality; the scenes of the Annunciation, the Crowning of the Virgin Mary and the Crucifixion are set before finely executed diapered backgrounds, and the artist was evidently well-accomplished in linear perspective as witnessed by accurate checkered flooring in the scene of the Annunciation. The soft pink and green tones, seen noticeably in the scene of the Annunciation, are typical of the influence of Flemish illumination on Northern French illumination, given its close proximity to the Flemish border and the heightened activity in Flanders.

This manuscript belongs to a group of Books of Hours of Besançon provenance. Francois Avril has observed that the illuminator was a Burgundian illuminator, probably from Dijon, who was active in Besançon in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. He has also suggested that the illuminator was influenced by “golden age” style of the Egerton Master, a collaborator of the Boucicaut Master. The group includes Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS lat. 1186 (Use of Langres), New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 293, Vienna Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 1881, State Library of Victoria, RARES 096 R66HM and a manuscript from the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, MSR-02.

Several manuscripts in this group display common workshop practices; more than one artist was often responsible for the miniatures in each book. The artist who executed our book of hours was most likely he who executed several miniatures in the State Library of Victoria, RARES 096.
R66HM. The opening miniature of St. John the Evangelist in the Victoria manuscript bears very close resemblance to the figures which feature in our copy; the tilted heads, the flat and heavy ringlets which curl away from the face and the simple delineation of facial features with largely downcast eyes. The influence of early Parisian illumination is evident in the elegant modeling and tilting of heads and facial features and the elegant flow of garments, notably the Egerton Master.

An interesting personal touch in this book of hours, perhaps by one of its former owners, is a landscape pen and ink drawing that is sketched onto one of the opening flyleaves (partially water damaged). It appears to depict a rural setting with two figures crossing a wooden footbridge which leads to a church and what appears to be the boundary to a walled town. The landscape is mountainous with tall trees and a small river.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Nash, S. *Between France and Flanders: Manuscript illumination in Amiens in the Fifteenth Century*, University of Toronto Press, 1999.


**ONLINE RESOURCES**

Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 293
[http://utu.morganlibrary.org/medren/Manuscript_images.cfm?ACC_NO=M.293&StartRow=19.0](http://utu.morganlibrary.org/medren/Manuscript_images.cfm?ACC_NO=M.293&StartRow=19.0)

State Library of Victoria, RARES 096 R66HM

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