

The text of the Reading Book of Hours

The contents of the Reading manuscript are in accordance with what might be expected in an early fifteenth century Book of Hours.

The main text is Latin with some rubrics and two prayers written in French. The inclusion of the feasts of St. Genevieve (January 3rd) and St. Denis (September 9th) indicate a Paris calendar.

The Hours of the Virgin are Use of Paris.¹ They are imperfect, lacking both the start and the closing text of Matins and the opening text of Lauds, Prime and Vespers. The missing folios would have contained the prefatory miniatures for Matins, Lauds, Prime and Vespers. Standard subjects for such miniatures were: the Annunciation for Matins; the Visitation for Lauds; the Nativity for Prime; and the Flight into Egypt or the Massacre of the Innocents for Vespers. These gaps are caused by the removal of four folios which would have been located after the existing folios 18, 40, 51 and 69.²

The Penitential Psalms³ are also incomplete at the start because of a further missing folio which would have been located after the existing folio 80 and which would have contained a miniature and the first seven verses of Psalm 6. The most usual miniature marking the start of the Penitential .Psalms depicts the aged King David at prayer. A less usual alternative is Bathsheba bathing.

The two vernacular prayers which start at f.155r are commonly found in Books of Hours produced in Paris in the early fifteenth century. The prayer which begins, 'Doulce Dame...' is a version of the devotion known as the '15 Joys of the Virgin.' The set of prayers which begin, 'Beau sire Dieu...' is based upon the devotional text known as the 'Seven Requests to Our Lord.' Both devotions are incomplete, lacking their openings and any associated miniatures. The first lacks most of the introductory text. The second lacks the introduction which normally begins 'Doulce Dieu,.pere sainte trinite..' It also lacks the first of the seven requests and part of the second request.

¹ Minor variations in liturgical texts used in Books of Hours developed in differing localities, for example, in regions or even in cities/towns. The books reflected these local differences, hence the term 'use' (Use of Rome, Use of Paris, Use of Rouen, etc.).

² Material lacking on account of the first of the missing folios consists of the miniature, the opening text of Matins and most of the first two verses of the invitatory Psalm 94. Material lacking on account of the second is the end of the *Te Deum* at the close of Matins, the miniature at the start of Lauds and much of the text prior to Psalm 91. Material lacking on account of the third missing folio includes the end of the prayer *ecclesiam tuam...*, at the close of Lauds and the miniature at Prime, together with some of the opening lines leading up to the hymn, *Veni creator spiritus...* Material lacking on account of the fourth missing folio is the miniature at Vespers, together with the opening text and also nearly all of the first four verses of Psalm 121.

³ The Penitential Psalms are Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142 and were associated with atonement in the Jewish tradition. In the Christian tradition they were recited to obtain forgiveness for both the living and the dead and as a defence against sin.

The two Latin prayers known by their incipits, 'Obsecro te' and 'O Intemerata' are found in most C15th Latin Books of Hours. They are addressed directly to the Virgin and are discussed in more detail below.

There are 23 Memorials, quite a large number, as follows: the Trinity; St. Michael; John the Baptist; St. Peter; St. James the Great; St. Andrew; St. Etienne (Stephen); St. Laurence; St. Sebastian; St. Christopher; St. Denis; St. Martin; St. Nicholas; St Anthony; St. Fiacre; St. Katherine; St Margaret; St. Genevieve; St. Mary Magdalene; St. Anne; All Saints; The Cross; Peace. All take the form of antiphon followed by a verse and finally a prayer. With the exception of the memorials to the Cross and to Peace, each is illustrated by a small miniature.

The added text to St. Adriane is in Latin but is written in a different scribal hand to that found in the rest of the book. This text also takes the form of a memorial but there are no rubrics to indicate antiphon, verse and prayer.

Notes on the prayers *O intemerata* and *Obsecro te*

The notes which follow here are concerned with the two longest (and most traditional) prayers to the Virgin found within the Book of Hours: *O intemerata*, 'O undefiled', and *Obsecro te*, 'I beseech you.' Both prayers represent impassioned pleas but they are noticeably different in form and content. The first of these reaches back the furthest. In its original form, where the address to the Virgin is twinned with an invocation to Saint John, it is assigned by Wilmart to the 12th century and given French and Cistercian origins.⁴

The form found in the Reading Hours, addressed solely to the Virgin, seems to go back to the beginning of the 14th century. The opening is common to both versions. It comprises a series of formalized titles which illustrate and encapsulate the suitability of Mary to act as *mediatrix*, intermediary, between heaven and earth:

O intemerata et in eternum benedicta
singularis atque incomparabilis
virgo dei genitrix maria
gratissimum dei templum
spiritus sancti sacrarium
ianua regni celorum
per quam post deum
totus vivit orbis terrarum.

O undefiled and eternally blessed, matchless and incomparable virgin Mary
mother of God, **most pleasing temple of God, shrine of the Holy Spirit,**

⁴ Wilmart, A., '*Auteurs Spirituels*,' Études Augustiniennes, Paris, 1971, pp.474-504.

entrance of the kingdom of heaven, through whom after God the whole world lives.

This accumulation of epithets and antithetical phrases, enhanced by a use of assonance which borders on rhyme, utilizes a terminology directly rooted in the Bible and the early Christian Fathers. The epithets *benedicta*, 'blessed', and *gratissimum*, 'most pleasing', full of grace', are drawn directly from Gabriel's salutation at the Annunciation.⁵ Both Ambrose and Jerome⁶ characterize Mary as 'temple of God', while Ambrose likewise depicts her as *immaculatae castitatis sacrarium*, 'shrine of unstained chastity'.⁷ The initial *intemerata*, 'undefiled', 'inviolable', regularly denotes both Mary and a wider ideal of virginal purity.⁸ The formulation of Mary as 'doorway' to heaven seems to represent a neutralization of the threat of heavenly 'exclusion' for those who repent too late (as formulated in the New Testament)⁹ through Mary's identification with the heavenly *sponsa* called upon to 'open the door' in the *Song of Songs*.¹⁰

The most noticeable difference between the first and second version lies in the incorporation of a strongly marked element of confession which dominates the structure and influences the ethos.

The *confiteor* formula: *mea culpa mea culpa mea gravissima culpa*, **my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault**, recurs three times. The first instance follows an interpolated section which highlights Mary's role as fleshly vessel and the saving power of the Eucharist. The petitioner seeks absolution for having received the sacraments *indigne*, 'unworthily', that is, not in a state of grace, *sicut pluries feci*, 'as I have done many times'. This feature, argued by Wilmart to have originated as preparation for the taking of communion, points towards a different function and orientation for the prayer as a whole.

The shift is underscored by a form of ring-composition which harks back to the earlier version. There, Mary was immediately implored to intervene as *auxiliatrix*, 'helper', *miserrimo peccatori*, 'for a wretched sinner'. The plea recurs here, immediately following the first *mea culpa*. It is accompanied by the invocation *dei genetrix virgo*, 'virgin mother of God', through whom 'after God the whole world lives', thus providing a clear echo of the opening salutation. The prayer closes with a request to act as intercessor with her Son on the penitent's behalf, that he may start and continue in amendment of life.

The prayer with which (as commonly) it is paired, *Obsecro te*, 'I beseech you', appears in Books of Hours in the 14th century but may be an earlier composition.¹¹ The emphasis here seems to rest rather on an appeal to the

⁵ *ave gratia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus* (Luke 1.28.)

⁶ Ambrose, *De virginibus* 2.2.18.3, 2.4.26.5; *De institutione virginis* 17.105.1; Jerome, *Adversus Helvidium de Mariae virginitate perpetua* 8.200.22..

⁷ Ambrose, *De institutione virginis* 17.105.1

⁸ Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1.8.40; *De virginitate* 6.28.8; *Exhortatio virginitatis* 5.29.1; 6.35.1; Paulinus of Nola, *Epistulae* 29.18.5.20; Prudentius, *Liber Cathemerinon* 3.141.

⁹ *Matthew* 23.13; 25.10; *Luke* 13.25.

¹⁰ *Song of Songs* 5.2-6..

¹¹ I am indebted to Erik Drigsdahl for the suggestion that it originated at the Papal Court at Avignon..

humanity of Mary than on the claim to repentance. As before, the initial stress is on perpetual virginity, with Mary hailed in triple designation: *virgo ante partum, virgo in partu, virgo post partum*, 'virgin before birth, virgin in birth, virgin after birth.' In what follows, however, the emphasis shifts rather to empathetic affectivity, as the joys of Annunciation are counterbalanced with Mary's suffering at the foot of the Cross:

et per illam sanctam maximam compassionem et acerbissimum cordis dolorem quem habuisti quando vidisti ante crucem nudatum et in ipsa levatum vidisti pendentem crucifixum ... clamantem audisti et morientem vidisti ... Et per contractionem viscerum suorum pre nimio dolore vulnerum suorum et per dolorem quem habuisti quando vidisti eum vulnerari ... et per omnem passionem eius et per omnem dolorem cordis tui ...

and through that great holy compassion and sharp pain of the heart which **you** had when you saw **him** naked before the cross and raised on it hanging crucified ... **you** heard **him** crying out and saw **him** dying ... and through the contraction of **his** entrails through the too great pain of **his** wounds and the pain which **you** had when **you** saw **him** wounded and through all **his** passion and through all the pain of **your** heart ...

Syntax and antithesis work together to underscore the elements of interdependence and shared pain between mother and son. The tradition of the 'suffering Mary', as Amy Neff points out, is one which developed over time, from the Ambrosian Mary shown as gazing on the wounds of her son *piis oculis*, 'with pious/piteous eyes',¹² to the depiction of her 'bitter weeping' and 'grievous grief' in Thomas à Kempis.¹³ For Bonaventura, writing in the 13th century, it is precisely Mary's *compassio*, her *dolor cordis*, 'grief of the heart' as opposed to *dolor corporis*, 'pain of the body', which sets her above and apart from other women.¹⁴

This evocation of human suffering serves to pave the way for the closing petition, with its shifting of the affective association from (human) mother and (divine) son to (divine) intercessor and (human) intercessee. Once again, the close looks back the opening. There, Mary was invoked as *mater dei pietate plenissima*, 'mother of God most full of pity', 'mother of orphans, consolation of the bereft'. Here, she is begged as *dulcissima virgo*, 'most sweet virgin',

¹² Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.1255. The coda, 'because she was awaiting not the death of her child but the salvation of the world', seems to set maternal affection against pious acceptance of the will of God. Against this however may perhaps be set the reminder elsewhere in relation to the requirement to 'support' one's mother that this will never compensate *dolores*, the 'pains', *cruciatu*, the 'torments', which she suffered *pro te*, 'on your behalf.'

¹³ *flevit ... amarissime, doluit gravissime* (Thomas à Kempis, *De resurrectione orationes in duas partes sectae* 5.1.8)

¹⁴ Bonaventura, *Collationes de septem donis spiritus sancti* 6.19. For Mary's suffering at the cross as a 'second birth', see A. Neff, 'The pain of *Compassio*: Mary's labor at the foot of the cross', *The Art Bulletin*, 80.2 (1998), 254-273. In this context it may be worth noting the existence of the variant form *viscerum tuorum*, 'your entrails', in a small number of manuscripts of this prayer. This transfers the sharpness of the pain from Christ to Mary; as well as 'entrails', *viscera* can also connote 'womb'.

mater misericordie, 'mother of mercy', to 'show her face' in the petitioner's last days and to reveal the 'day and hour' of his/her end.