

The Reading Book of Hours

The core text of the Book of Hours is a simplified form of a devotion '*Officium parvum beate Marie Virginis*' (the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, Mary) which is at least as old as the ninth century. This Office is believed to have been in use during the tenth century in the Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino and to have become more widely established within religious orders. Later, it came into use among devout laypeople. For lay use, it was often added to the Psalter. From the mid-thirteenth century, though, the Little Office or Hours of the Virgin was more usually found as the central text of a separate book for private prayer, the Book of Hours. The 'Hours' referred to in the title are the canonical hours of Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers and Compline, the daily occasions of the cycle of prayer undertaken by monks and nuns. The Office of the Virgin and other Offices in Books of Hours retain this pattern of prayer and also retain liturgical forms, e.g. antiphons, psalms, hymns, verses and responses which would have originally been sung or chanted in communal worship by those in religious life. Books of Hours became popular and increasingly widespread in use in the Christian West from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries and beyond. As well as the core text, most Books of Hours contained, as a minimum, a liturgical calendar, the Penitential Psalms, the Litany of Saints, the Office of the Dead and various Suffrages of Saints.

The Reading Book of Hours contains the elements mentioned above, together with other devotional text. The arrangement of its contents is set out below.

Arrangement of Contents (Text)

Description	Folio
Calendar written in French	1r-12v
Gospel Sequences	13r-18v
Hours of the Virgin	19r-80v
Penitential Psalms	81r-93r
Litany and Collects	93r-98r
Hours of the Cross and of the Holy Spirit	98r-109v
Office of the Dead	110r-154r
Not Written	154v
Two prayers in French	155r-162r
Prayer: 'Obsecro te...'	162v-165r
Prayer: 'O intemerata et in eternum...'	165v-169v
Memorials of the Saints	169v-185r
Added memorial to St. Adriane	185v