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CH 108 3/14/15

A Book of Hours, with Bestiary

UTS MS 49 (“the Book”) is a beautiful, illuminated Book of Hours. Although the scribe did not date it, it was most likely created between 1450 and 1475 in the low countries of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The text is on vellum, consists of 153 pages bound in black leather over old wooden boards, and its script is in formal gothic book hand (Digital Scriptorium).

Ten paper pages, hand-numbered i - xi, precede the vellum pages. Inside the front cover are the following notes, written in pencil: “UTS MS 49” and “UTS MS #49;” “Thomp.,” followed by erased numbers, and then “1480?,” presumably a date, marked out.

At one point, the Book was owned by Hermann Ninrick Theysen, aus Osten Walde (whose name is written on page i, in script), and later by Frederick Ferris Thompson (1836-1899), whose collection was given to UTS in 1923 at the death of his widow, Mary Clarke Thompson (Digital Scriptorium). Page i is also embossed with a circular library stamp, “Howard Justin Sosie, New York, Ex Libris”.

Page iii contains the following added notes in English script, “This book came out of a German monastery; its title was gone already when it was bound [illegible] 1790. It is written in Old Latin long before translations of [rest illegible].” The front side of all vellum pages have been numbered in pencil (now very faint) in the lower right corner. Additionally, modern capital letters have been pencilled to the center bottom of certain

pages, as follows: A (1), B (9), C (16), D(24), E (32), F (40), G (49), H (57), I (65), K (71), and V(151). On page 61b, the number “110” is pencilled in the upper left corner.

The only section of a Book of Hours with defined placement was the calendar, which listed feast days and saints’ days, and in the Book, occupies the first nine pages (front and back). The calendar contains the letters a-g repeated, representing the days of the week. Some of the days are blank; others, most likely the feast days, are in red; the rest are in black. All the vellum pages were lined (or bracketed) with a straight edge, in pencil, prior to the addition of the text and illuminations. Pages 109 through 113b consist of line fillers.

At the end of the Book, on page 167, are added notes in Latin script, and in different handwriting than that on page iii. The notes appear to be a record of deceased family members. The text reads “Benedictine [illegible] 1794” (meaning, “Blessed”), followed by the words “Pater meus mortuus 1798” (meaning, “My father died 1798”), then a listing of additional family members, such as “Sorosis” (sister), “Fila” (daughter), though there do not appear to be any proper names. Dates are written next to the family members, all within the range of 1794-1800. Family notes like these, listing births and deaths, were commonly added to Books of Hours (Duffy viii). The final two pages in the Book, 168 and 169 are blank, but for pencilled lines on 168. Page 168 is vellum; page 169 is the same paper as the opening pages.

The Book appears to be very well-used. It contains water-marks and some of the writing is faded, as if from being wet. Pages 128 through 135 contain large brown splotches, as if something spilled on them. Two of the folios are not attached to the

binding, though they remain tightly inserted. Pages 108-156b are mostly text, with fewer illuminations and borders, though they have many minor decorative flourishes, and decorated initials throughout. Most of the borders are ruled and elaborate; some pages, especially between 108 and 156b have decorative flourishes in the margins, but no ruled, elaborate borders. The book still opens easily, and it is quite fragile.

The Book of Hours was the most popular book of the late Middle Ages and was modelled after the Latin prayer books used by the Church (Duffy, 5). Although the particular contents of each book were dictated by the person who commissioned them, as per their own devotional choices, most contained the liturgical “Hours” of the Church, some of the Offices (such as the Office of the Dead), and frequently, many of the Psalms (Duffy, 6).

The fact that the Book came out of a monastery is unusual, as Books of Hours were primarily used as devotional books in private homes. Because of their great expense, particularly where lavishly illuminated, they were originally the province of the wealthy, and mostly made for women (Duffy, 8). After the advent of the printing press, they became more affordable and available, or in the word of one historian, “Books for everybody” (Duffy, viii, 4).

In a culture where images were important, and particularly where laypeople might not have been Latin literate, the images, or illuminations, were central to the Books of Hours. The illuminations were designed to increase comprehension of the text, and served as a guide to the user. In many of the Books, the illustrations were somewhat standardized, marking the opening of each of the Hours (Duffy, 11-12). Many of them,

including the Book, were beautifully decorated with miniature illuminations, elaborate, decorative borders, and illustrated initials.

It was not unusual for Books of Hours, like other medieval books, to contain illustrations of animals, often in the decorative borders. Though at first glance, these appear to be random and whimsical drawings (of, for example, a unicorn, or monkey), they, in fact, had theological meaning. In antiquity and on into the Middle Ages, animal species signified particular meaning in the cosmos and were often used to illustrate spiritual lessons (Clark and McMunn, 1). Monasteries used bestiaries (which tended to be didactic) as teaching texts. So too, Books of Hours, including the Book, used animals for symbolic purposes, with the animals acting (like the illuminations themselves) as comprehension or memory tools, and to appeal to the reader (Clark and McMunn, 6). The animals in the Book, like those in medieval bestiaries, are vividly animated and compelling, in essence acting as medieval carriers of subliminal messages by reaching the “*oculum imaginationis*.” (Rowland, 18).

There are 21 illuminations in the Book of Hours. They are painted primarily in flat paint, though all the gold is luminescent, very lush, and very thick; the gold appears to be painted with real gold. They are very finely drawn, with great detail. Because the illuminations are exquisite, and gold paint is lavishly used, I believe the Book would have been commissioned by a wealthy person, and most likely, given its small size and the decorative, almost feminine, flourishes added to most pages, made for a woman. Perhaps it was given to a monastery at her death.

The remainder of this paper will focus on the illuminations and in particular, the

animals, contained therein.

List of Illuminations, including Animals (page numbers in parenthesis)

1. (22) Miniature: Nativity, cow in manger (Digital Scriptorium)

Border: Two angels with musical instruments

2. (25) Miniature: Presentation in the Temple (Digital Scriptorium)

Border: Unicorn, lying down.

Goat, lying down

3. (27b) Miniature: Adoration of the Magi (Digital Scriptorium)

Border: Two monkeys, holding fruit

Swallow, or perhaps a Lark

4. (30b) Miniature: Mary ascending the steps of the Temple (Digital Scriptorium)

Border: Monkey, holding fruit

Monkey, on all fours

Quail

Dove

5. (33) Miniature: Flight into Egypt. with Mary and Jesus on horse (Digital Scriptorium)

6. (38) Miniature: Assumption of the Virgin: Two angels bear the soul of Mary into heaven (Digital Scriptorium; Zolotova, text accompanying plate 39)

Border: Donkey lying down, looking at man with stick

Crane

7. (43b) Full-page illumination: The Agony in the Garden: Gethsemane, with Christ praying before a vision of the chalice with a host.

Border: Unicorn, sitting down

8. (44) Miniature: The Treachery of Judas: Kiss of Judas as Christ reattaches Malchus's ear

(Digital Scriptorium)

Border: Bluebird, or perhaps a Halcyon

Three Angels, one with cross, others with other items

9. (53) Miniature: The Flagellation of Christ

Border: Bear, lying down face down

10. (55) Miniature: The Way of the Cross

Small Miniature: Shepherd and small goat, with boy

Border: Winged Sphinx

Bear

11. (57) Miniature: Christ Before Pilate, being mocked

Border: Sphinx, on all fours; Sphinx, up on hind legs

12. (59) Miniature: Crucifixion

Border: Phoenix, feeding baby birds in nest

Hoopoe

13. (60) Miniature: The Descent from the Cross: Removing Christ's body from the cross

Border: Bear, sitting up

Monkey, walking, bent over

14. (61b) Miniature: The Entombment: Placing Christ's body in the Sepulchre

Small Miniature: Three people in raft, one (without shirt), praying or reaching

into water, with large, open-mouthed fish (perhaps an illustration of Jonah 1: 4-17 or Luke 8:22-25).

15. (64) Miniature: Jesus, teaching.

Border: Monkey, on all fours

Monkey, walking, bent over

Bear, sitting

Two Bluebirds, or perhaps Halcyons

Archer with arrow in his mouth, with bow

16. (76) Border: Heron

17. (78b) Dog, sitting

17. (83) Miniature: The Pentecost: The Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Virgin and the Apostles, with dove (Zolotova, 22)

Border: Two cranes

Three angels with musical instruments

18. (88b) Border: Dog, sitting

19. (90b) Border: Bluebird

20. (92b) Border: Monkey, sitting

21. (97b) Full page illumination: The Mass of St. Gregory

22. (100b) Full page illumination: The Last Judgment

23. (101) Miniature: David in countryside in prayer, with crown removed and lyre; Jerusalem in background

Border: grey animal with head of person

Lion

Bluebird

24. (119) Miniature: Purgatory

Border: Skull, with scroll

25. (127) Bas-de-page scene of white-robed clerics and black-robed nuns praying beside a draped coffin. (Digital Scriptorium)

25. (15b, 50, 73, 77, 80b, 86, 151) Borders: Decorative only

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