Introduction

The book of hours is one of the most familiar relics of medieval and early modern Europe. Libraries, museums, and private collectors around the world own thousands of them. That number represents but a fraction of all the books of hours created between 1250 and 1600. Many were destroyed over the intervening centuries of war, natural disaster, and religious change, not to mention the mundane ravages of time. Still, the survival of so many examples and the diversity of their contents make the book of hours an ideal source for exploring the history of art, religion, and the book. Scholars have lavished attention on books of hours. Art historians write about the books' fabrication, illustration, and patronage.[1] Literary scholars and historians shed light on texts, prayers, and readership.[2] Abundant scholarship on the book of hours has helped to make it the best-known artifact of medieval and early modern culture.

Yet for all that has been learned, the book of hours remains a bit of a puzzle. Why were so many books of hours created, in both manuscript and print? The usual answer is that the book's illustrations and luxurious ornament made it a beautiful art object, a prized possession displaying its owner's wealth. But many books of hours were not illustrated, or even particularly beautiful. Why a book – *a Latin prayer book* – should be so keenly desired in an era of low literacy and uneven knowledge of Latin has yet to be explained.

This is a study of the book of hours in the time and place of its greatest popularity: France from the late fourteenth to the early seventeenth century. Although the book of hours is often called the medieval European

[1] Out of the great wealth of scholarship, I would single out more recent work, especially that by François Avril, Adelaide Bennett, Isabelle Delaunay, Jean-Luc Deuffic, Eberhard König, Flora M. Lewis, Margaret M. Manion, Ina Nettekoven, Myra D. Orth, Joachim Plotzek, Lilian M. C. Randall, Alexa K. Sand, Kathryn A. Smith, Heribert Tenschert, and Roger S. Wieck (see the Bibliography).

[2] See the works by Jean-François Cottier, Eamon Duffy, Mary C. Erler, Rachel Fulton, Geneviève Hasenohr, Pierre Rézeau, Paul Saenger, Don C. Skemer, and Mary Beth Winn cited in the Bibliography.

best-seller, this was true of France as nowhere else, and truer of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries than the middle ages. In the chapters that follow I explain the book's appeal, by way of a social history of the book of hours (Part I) and an ethnography of prayer (Part II). Combining history with ethnography is the best way to understand both the book of hours and the practices of prayer it recorded and guided.[3] Practices of prayer were saturated with meanings created by family, community, church, and custom. Only a historical account can offer enough specificity about the social and cultural processes through which that occurred. And only ethnography can help uncover the myriad ways that men and women of the past made and remade their religious worlds.

A notable feature of the book of hours is that it was the product of many hands. No institution or official controlled it. Rather, many people lent a hand in fashioning it: scribes, artists, printers, booksellers, devotional writers, and, above all, lay patrons and owners. The books' contents were conventional – Latin offices, Latin and vernacular prayers, and images. But what was inside the books' covers varied considerably by region, and by scribe or publisher. Moreover, owners continued to choose their own books – both new and used – from booksellers' wares, and to alter inherited books. They rebound them, stitched together manuscript and print, sewed pilgrim badges onto end pages, and added prayers to patron saints and legends about local shrines. Older manuscripts remained in use, and circulated through gift-giving and the market for second-hand books. Each *owned* prayer book was a created object. And each was unique: fashioned by not only book artisans and publishers, but also the owners themselves, who chose and remade their books, leaving their traces all over them.

Because so many hands crafted it, the book of hours changed in concert with the larger cultural, religious, and social transformations of the late middle ages and early modern period. It flourished in the same era that witnessed a significant expansion of literacy and schooling, and the growth of the printing industry. There were also important shifts in linguistic practice, as French gradually began to displace Latin and the regional vernaculars. Equally importantly, the book of hours became a best-seller in the second half of the fifteenth century, a time of expanded lay participation in the liturgy, church patronage, and voluntary religious groups.[4] John Van Engen called for more attention to "the long fifteenth

[3] Further discussion of my ethnographic approach is provided in the Prologue to Part II.
[4] See Catherine Vincent, *Fiat Lux: Lumière et luminaires dans la vie religieuse en Occident du XIIIe siècle au début du XVIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2004); Vincent, *Les confréries médiévales dans le royaume de France, XIIIe-XVe siècle* (Paris: A. Michel, 1994); Jacques Chiffoleau, *La*

century" (*c.* 1370s–*c.* 1520s) as a distinct period of church history, especially in England and northern Europe.[5] This was the era of confraternities, beguines, preachers, and the *devotio moderna*. Among "the fifteenth-century church's carnival of religious options" was the book of hours.[6] It remained the most commonly owned book among the laity into the sixteenth century, as evangelical reformers criticized "the papal religion" and the Protestant movement took shape. After 1550, Calvinism gained adherents throughout the kingdom, and the French went to war in the name of religion many times before the century's end. But the book of hours endured as the exemplary prayer book and a prized family possession, if no longer a best-seller.

During its long primetime, the book of hours was principally the prayer book of the laity. For noble, bourgeois, and artisan families it was a prized possession signifying their wealth and elevated or rising social position. It was often the only book possessed by those owning books. It was also used as a primer for literacy.[7] It was sometimes a family record book. So, for many owners, the book of hours combined prayer book with primer, art object, reference work, and album.

But above all, the book of hours was a guide to prayer for the women, men, and families who owned it. More precisely, it was a tool and an emblem of intercessory prayer. Many varieties of prayer appear in books of hours: offices or hourly prayer; prayer linked to the mass and sacraments; prayer to God, the Virgin Mary, and saints; meditation on the passion; prayers connected to pilgrimage and confraternities; penitential practices; the arts of dying; and prayer with images. The book of hours includes some prayers addressed to God the Father. But most prayers were intercessory. Devotees addressed the Virgin Mary and the saints, asking for their intervention before God, and in exchange offered them praise, tribute, or donations. They also prayed for the salvation of the souls in purgatory. Other prayers were intercessory in less obvious ways. For example, any prayer prefaced by a rubric promising an indulgence depended on intercession, since those seeking indulgences hoped for

comptabilité de l'au-delà: Les hommes, la mort, et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du moyen âge, vers 1320–vers 1480 (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1980); Nicole Lemaître, *Le Rouergue flamboyant: Clergé et paroisses du diocèse de Rodez (1417–1563)* (Paris: Cerf, 1988); and Jean-Michel Matz, "La noblesse angevine et l'église au temps de la seconde maison d'Anjou (vers 1356–vers 1480)," in Noël Coulet and Jean-Michel Matz (eds.), *La noblesse dans les territoires angevins à la fin du moyen âge* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2000), 619–37.

[5] John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77 (2008), 257–84.

[6] Ibid. 284, 269.

[7] In England, books of hours were also called "primers." I will use the term in its American sense: a small book for teaching literacy.

God's grace banked in the church's so-called treasury of merits. Other prayers were introduced by rubrics specifying that a saint, king, or pope had created or approved the prayer. So the authority became a kind of intermediary between devotee and God.

Indeed, to pray was to participate in a grand network of spiritual patronage and kinship, where all exchanges and relationships were reciprocal. This was a world in which nearly everyone assumed that eternal salvation as well as most earthly business was best conducted through intercession, and facilitated by the grand and small courtesies of patronage. The book of hours was perfectly attuned to the culture of intercession in the late medieval and early modern world.[8]

In this book I offer a new lexicon for the activity of prayer in this era.[9] Here two ideas are key: prayer was speech, and prayer was a rite. As both speech and rite, prayer was fundamentally collective. Even the most personal, individual prayer was fashioned in the social world of conversation, interaction, and relationships. Because speech is always concrete and dialogic, it is by definition shaped at a particular historical moment, in a specific social world. Dialogues between devotees and God or a saint come into focus when they are read alongside other social and cultural practices, especially those involving speech and oral performance. But even wordy practices like these also engaged the senses and the body. The book of hours makes it abundantly clear that, in addition to speech, prayer was also a rite. Through the rites of prayer – encompassing gesture, posture, and words – devotees situated themselves in a cosmos ruled by God and his heavenly court. Woven into both the language and posture of prayer were contemporary notions about social hierarchy, power and authority, the natural and supernatural worlds, and the bonds linking human beings to each other, to the saints, and to God. This book shows that prayer was part of the practice of everyday life.

Also distinctive to my interpretation in this book is the notion that the book of hours was an archive of prayer. I propose the term "archive" cautiously. It can suggest factual certainty and documentary fixity, so it must be subjected to critical scrutiny.[10] Beyond that, I employ the concept

[8] On the many forms of intercession see Jean-Marie Moeglin (ed.), *L'intercession du moyen âge à l'époque moderne: Autour d'une pratique sociale* (Geneva: Droz, 2004).

[9] In this I take suggestions from work on the anthropology of prayer by Stephen C. Headley and his colleagues, as well as M. M. Bakhtin (see the Bibliography). For further discussion see the Prologue to Part II and Chapter 4.

[10] For critical approaches to the making and meanings of archives, see Kathryn Burns, "Notaries, Truth, and Consequences," *American Historical Review* 110 (2005), 350–79; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1987); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009);

in a double sense: the book of hours is an archive of the religious past for us, but it was also an archive of prayer for owners of books of hours themselves. For its owners and readers, the book of hours was an archive because it preserved materials – both written and visual – and ordered them for further use. The book of hours provided its owners and readers with multiple personal scripts for prayer. The scripts could be – indeed, by definition, were – modified by the books' owners, who used, read, and looked at their books in wildly different ways.

To understand those multiple uses requires attention to the ways owners read, viewed, and handled their books of hours. So I address literacy, reading practices, and the interplay of image with imagination. Equally important are the languages of prayer, particularly the relation of Latin to the vernacular. The liturgy left a strong imprint on the language of prayer. But the liturgy was in Latin, the language of western Christianity from late antiquity. Apart from a small elite of clerics, scholars, and male professionals, few could easily speak or read Latin. So I ask what it meant to know a language reserved for religious purposes – what anthropologists and adherents of some religious traditions would call a sacred language. There is no easy answer. But Latin – at least in fragments – had broader currency in this religious world than is generally acknowledged. Most people were steeped in liturgical Latin through habitual participation in rites and sacraments. Creeping vernacularization also transformed the book of hours into a Latin–French hybrid. A major task of this book is to untangle the web of meanings linking language, literacy, and religious practice in the world inhabited by owners of books of hours.

An important factor in the appeal of the book of hours is the authority granted to writing. Although rates of literacy remained low by modern standards, even artisans and peasants commonly had some facility with the written word, or contact with texts and books through kin, neighbors, and co-workers who could read.[11] Moreover, texts and books not only

Laurie Nussdorfer, "Writing and the Power of Speech: Notaries and Artisans in Baroque Rome," in Barbara Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (eds.), *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 103–18; Kristen Neuschel, "From 'Written Record' to the Paper Chase? The Documentation of Noble Life in the Sixteenth Century," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 27 (2001), 201–18; and James M. O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," *American Archivist* 56 (1993), 234–55.

[11] See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Printing and the People," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford University Press, 1975), 189–226; Franz H. Bäuml, "Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy," *Speculum* 55 (1980), 237–65; Nicole Lemaître, *Le scribe et le mage: Notaires et société rurale en Bas-Limousin aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Ussel: Musée du Pays d'Ussel, 2000); and Julia C. Crick and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

disseminated ideas, but held authority simply by virtue of being written. This was a notable feature of European societies beginning in the eleventh or twelfth century.[12] By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the written word was both authoritative and increasingly familiar. Dynamic interaction between the spoken and written word helped to create the conditions in which the book of hours flourished.

The book of hours was an archive of prayer, but it was also intimately attached to the liturgy. This is another distinctive feature of my interpretation. I do not mean this only in the obvious sense that the book of hours included texts from the liturgy. Rather, the book of hours framed religious practice for its users because it was *a liturgical book*. It is usually not considered a liturgical book by scholars of medieval and Renaissance books because, according to their categories, it was intended for private use.[13] But I believe it makes sense to call the book of hours a liturgical book, because it provided a bridge between the liturgy and the home. The practices of prayer that the book of hours represented and guided were at the same time both individual and collective, public and private. The book of hours lent authority to practices of prayer, when those practices were inscribed inside the same book that owners took with them to mass, funerals, and vespers, where they prayed for the souls of departed kin waiting to be released from purgatory.

This helps to explain its allure for owners. For the book of hours rested on the authority of the liturgy. It was a best-seller at a time when the liturgy contributed powerfully to the ordering of collective and public life. Christians of this era believed that rites of collective or public worship were the principal means through which God granted his grace and assistance. The liturgy was the template for the bond between God and

[12] See M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 1983) and *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); and Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), chap. 4. See also Paul Zumthor, *La poésie et la voix dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), chap. 2; Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); and William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[13] See L. M. J. Delaissé, "The Importance of Books of Hours for the History of the Medieval Book," in Ursula McCracken *et al.* (eds.), *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner* (Baltimore, MD: Walters Art Gallery, 1974), 203; and Roger Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1997), 100. On the definition of liturgical books see also Pierre-Marie Gy, *La liturgie dans l'histoire* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), chap. 4.

humanity. Political authority was sanctioned liturgically. For example, kings became kings through rites of coronation. The liturgy also filled a variety of social functions.[14] Rites of passage like birth, marriage, and death were marked by celebration of the sacraments. The liturgy touched the lives of the faithful every day, in ways that have not been fully enough appreciated. The book of hours drew its authority from owners' confidence in the efficacy and power of the liturgy.

This book is based on my reading of hundreds of manuscript and printed books of hours in library collections in France, the United States, and England. Although I make every effort to respect the book of hours as a work of art and literature, my goal has been to understand it as a personal and family possession, and a guide to prayer and literacy for the women and men who used it. I rely on the work of art historians and manuscript scholars to identify manuscripts. I have also tended to neglect the best-known, luxury books of hours in favor of more ordinary books and those marked by owners' use. Books of hours preserve a wealth of information about who owned them and how they were used. Many surviving books contain materials added by owners: monogrammed bindings, owners' names, family records (*livres de raison*), hand-written texts, annotations, medical recipes, devotional images, and small objects like pilgrim badges. Not every book that survives today bears traces of its early owners. Of over three hundred manuscript books of hours in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France catalogued by Victor Leroquais, fewer than half include any mark left by an owner.[15] The same is true of the six hundred printed books of hours in Paris libraries catalogued by Paul Lacombe.[16] It used to be common for collectors and librarians to erase signs of earlier owners from their books. Happily, that is no longer standard practice.[17] For it is precisely those personal marks that make

[14] On this issue, see John Bossy's pioneering work on the social meaning of the sacraments: *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford University Press, 1985); "Blood and Baptism: Kinship, Community, and Christianity in Western Europe from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," *Studies in Church History* 10 (1973), 129–43; "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983), 29–61; and *Dalla comunità all'individuo: Per una storia sociale dei sacramenti nell'Europa moderna* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998).

[15] Victor Leroquais, *Les livres d'heures manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 3 vols. and supplement (Paris and Mâcon: Protat Frères, 1927–43).

[16] Paul Lacombe, *Livres d'heures imprimés au XVe et au XVIe siècle conservés dans les bibliothèques publiques de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1907).

[17] See Paul Saenger and Michael Heinlen, "Incunable Description and its Implication for the Analysis of Fifteenth-Century Reading Habits," in Sandra Hindman (ed.), *Printing the Written Word: The Social History of Books, circa 1450–1520* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 225–58; Paul Saenger, "The Implications of Incunable Description for the History of Reading Revisited," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 91 (1997),

books of hours a rich mine of information about how they were made and used.

This study unites a history of the material book, an exploration of how the book was read and what it meant to its owners, and an account of the practices of prayer represented in the book. To keep the *people* behind the books in mind, it helps to think of the book of hours as an artifact – a material object which, if carefully interpreted, can shed light on the lives of its makers and users. Mary and Richard Rouse likened a manuscript to an archeological find. A manuscript is "on a level with a potsherd," they wrote, and "can be examined for every drop of information it will yield, pertinent to the society to which it belonged." But a manuscript is unlike a potsherd in that it is "articulate": "a manuscript also has a voice."[18] Yet for Henry Glassie every artifact is potentially articulate – is even "a text," whether or not it is inscribed – because it provides an avenue to understanding the culture that formed it. Glassie remarked, "Artifacts recall the technology by which nature was made cultural, and they incarnate the creator's mind, holding in form and ornament the plan that preceded them and the decisions committed in their making." Borrowing from linguistics and literary criticism, Glassie suggested interpreting an artifact by careful elucidation of its form, pattern, and multiple contexts of creation, exchange, and use.[19]

While the Rouses compared texts to artifacts and Glassie treated artifacts like texts, Michel de Certeau considered texts and artifacts equally part of the same historical processes. Describing a visit to the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, Certeau commented in his characteristically evocative way about the open-air exhibits of nineteenth-century American farm life: he saw in the old tools "the marks of the active hands and laboring or patient bodies for which these things composed the daily circuits: the fascinating presence of absences whose traces were everywhere."[20] He continued: "Like tools, proverbs or other discourses are *marked by uses*; they offer to analysis the *imprints of acts* or of processes of

495–504; Annie Parent-Charon, "Usages du livre en France au XVe siècle," in Monique Ornato and Nicole Pons (eds.), *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XVe siècle* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 1995), 459–72; Monique Hulvey, "Not So Marginal: Manuscript Annotations in the Folger Incunabula," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 92 (1998), 159–76; and William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 151–78.

[18] Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 3.

[19] Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 42.

[20] Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. I: *Arts de faire*, rev. edn. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 39 (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 21).

enunciation; they signify the *operations* whose object they have been." Those acts and processes comprise what Certeau called "arts of doing" (*arts de faire*) whose "systems of representation" and "processes of fabrication" are properly the object of study by historians, sociologists, and others. Following Certeau, we could say that artifacts point toward practice, and toward "the active hands" and "laboring or patient bodies for which these things composed the daily circuits."

As artifacts of the religious past, books of hours are not transparent or easily legible. But if properly interpreted, they can help us understand the lives of the women and men who made them what they were.