



Omne labia
mea aperies. Et
os meum annun-
tiabit laudem tuam.



Omne labia mea
aperies. Et os meum
annuntiabit lau-
dem tuam.



Omne labia mea
aperies. Et os meum
annuntiabit lau-
dem tuam.



Omne ne uideat
augustas me non in
na corpias me. Et
sare me domine qui



Annun-
tiat
nichpla-
tialis
mfula-
le an-
tribue-
Oia p-
bate pater nichplac. Et
ciamur promissione
Eus qui beatum nich-
pouitiam tuam in
decorasti mirabilis tribue-
ma. ut eius merita et in

Willamette Scene

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per eius suffragium. o-
solet auxiliari morbi



San-
me
plec-
mgi-
glo-

maior orphanor conf-
tati hie circumum lab-



in libro uite a-



hominem auge pa-



hat vs Ora pro nobis



uigna obtine nobis ga-



Item qui exaudiet dñs
uocem orationis mee.
Quia inclinauit
auris suam mihi



1. Antiphona de W-

from the library vault

A
BOOK
to
ELEVATE
the
SOUL

Wealthy men and women today may choose to surround themselves with original works of art — these signed originals may be worth more than money in the bank, and in addition they decorate, and they elevate the soul. The 14th and 15th centuries had their own version of “signed originals”; then, men and women, well-born and wealthy, could commission their own highly personal works of art. Small books of prayers, illuminated with miniature paintings, were in fashion.

In the first half of the 15th century, a Flemish artist created for a young noblewoman a certain manuscript containing 13 lovely miniature paintings, a manuscript that in the 20th century has found its way to the rare books collection in the Willamette University Library. A renewal of interest in this manuscript is long overdue — although it is not the equal of the well-known *Book of Hours of the Duc de Berry* or *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, it is a member of that genre and it is unique; it is much too lovely to languish unknown in the library vault.

Studying this prayer book, and comparing it with others, and also with photographs of the much grander and more valuable Books of Hours in the great libraries of the world, was a labor of love for me this summer; there was something sweetly moving about turning over the exceedingly old, delicate, exquisitely tiny, highly colored pages.

The title on the binding is *Praeces Piae*; this is the title of a whole class of books, and signifies no more than that it is someone's personal, rather informal collection of conventional prayers, intended for moments of private piety. Investigations into manuscript holdings indicated that there are several similar *Praeces Piae* in the manuscript collection of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, and that there is current research in progress on them.

Also popular during the medieval period were the *Books of Hours*, prayer books that are similar to the *Praeces Piae*. There exist subtle differences between the two kinds of prayer books: the *Book of Hours* always contains a Calendar of Saints, a complete Office of the Virgin, the Office of the Dead, and certain Psalms; a *Praeces Piae* may lack one or all of these items. In the case of Willamette's book, the Office of the Virgin is missing.

Before the manuscript itself is set before him, the reader might be interested in how it came to be in the embrace of the Willamette University Library Vault. I understand that for many years it was kept under the heavy guard of the vault in the Business Office. One day it was deemed

from the library vault

A BOOK to ELEVATE the SOUL

“Whoever finds it
is begged to return it —
either for God or for money.”

— Marie Francois Treau, 1678¹

safe to move it to the vault in the library; however, it was at that time in the view of the librarian not a “new acquisition” and consequently no acquisition date was given it, nor is there any information about it in the card catalogue.

Like one of my own good Freshman English students I didn't give up there, but really started digging. Reference librarian, Mrs. Gertrude Johnson, confirmed what I had already heard: that the book is unofficially recognized as a gift to the library, sometime during the 40's or 50's, from Charles E. McCulloch, then Chairman of the Board of Trustees. It seems likely that this information is true, although it is regrettable that no authoritative record exists.

I combed the index of the *Oregonian* and great heaps of *Collegians* for these years, with hopes of news of *Praeces Piae*, but to no avail. I discovered instead Mr. McCulloch's desire in general to avoid publicity over his many generous gifts to the University. Other volumes of interest to students of literature were given to Willamette by Mr. McCulloch during this period; they include a 2nd folio Shakespeare (1632) and a first edition of Johnson's Dictionary (1753).

¹There is a penned inscription in French near the front of the book which reads: “This book belongs to Marie Francois Treau, who begs anyone who finds it to return it to her for god or for money.” The inscription is dated 1678.



By Adele Birnbaum, Asst. Prof. of English

Today the outward appearance of this book of prayers does not indicate its age or value; it was re-bound in the 19th century in a dull maroon with gold lettering; the pages were cropped when it was re-bound, and some of the marginal embellishments were lost; and the tight binding does not permit free handling of the pages. To open it for reading is to fear that one might damage it.

The book is but slightly bigger than a pocket Oxford French Dictionary. Once it is opened, great wealth is revealed, both in the exquisitely colored lettering and paintings, and in the liberal overlay of gold leaf. The paintings themselves are approximately double the size of their reproduction on the front cover of this magazine.

For over a month this summer I was tête à tête with this book, either in the library in Salem or in the dry, undusty, undull manuscript reference room at the Huntington Library in San Marino. The exact nature of such a relationship is expressed metaphorically by Abbé Leroquais, *Les Livres d'Heures*:

In choosing the books of hours as a subject of study, I gave myself the labor of a bee: one who would extract an exquisite honey. I will stock the pages of this volume with all that I have plundered from these manuscripts as enticing as flowers.

On the following page I have described in some detail the pictures “enticing as flowers” which were reproduced for this issue of the *Willamette Scene*.



(1) **Crucifixion.** The portrayal is characterized by symmetry; the cross is central with 2 figures on either side of it and the arc of heaven directly above. Below, the Virgin and Mary Magdalene may be found in a traditional pose on Christ's right, and on his left are a soldier and another spectator wearing a hat of Flemish style. "Domine labia mea aperies" is used here as the opening of matins. There is a luxurious touch in the use of gold to highlight areas of the illuminated letter and of the vaguely botanical forms in the border. Here there are flowers in different stages of bloom and suggestions of insect life.

(2) **Pentecost.** The portrayal of the descent of the Holy Ghost to the Virgin and the 12 Apostles is again symmetrical and conventional: the Virgin is central (with bowed head and clasped hands), with 6 Apostles on each side in attitudes of piety, somewhat precariously perched on benches. One might compare the portrayal of the same scene by the Master of Catherine of Cleves; the latter is a more ambitious work of art, but the design of the picture and even the color of the robes is the same. In the *Praeces Piae* the artist confined his originality to the patterned tiles of the floor, some of which seem to reflect the Holy Ghost, whereas in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* the artist portrayed the elaborate vaulting of the interior of the building and the buttressing and decoration of the exterior.

(3) **Annunciation.** The Virgin is seated in a traditional pose before a table with a book; her position indicates that she has just looked up from her reading to see the angel Gabriel kneeling before her, holding a bandlerole which reads "Ave Maria plena gracia." In the foreground is a vase holding the lily which is symbolic of her purity. It is characteristic of illustrations of prayer books and books of hours that the central scene is a "set piece"

while in the background of that scene or in the margins of the page the artist can create freely. The artist's pleasure in varying and patterning the floor tiles is again apparent, as is his delight in the ever-changing and fanciful botanical forms in the margin.

(4) **Last Judgment.** Christ, robed in orange and green, is seated on a rainbow symbolizing heaven, with his feet poised on the globe of the earth. The resurrected dead are highly stylized; all that can be seen of them are heads emerging from heavy black slices in the earth and water. A change from the artist's usual symmetry is seen in the grotesque demon with threatening tongue who fills the lower right corner. An angel with long trumpet appears at Christ's right and left hand; the figures are grotesque (probably unwittingly so) with vivid blue bodies and wings, and appear to be seated on slices of sky. The light of heaven radiates from the stars above.

(5) **St. Nicholas.** Garbed as a bishop, he is blessing three injured mariners in a wooden tub or boat — perhaps alluding to his miracle of calming a storm at sea.

(6) **St. Anthony.** He is pictured carrying a cane and with a pig at his feet. He is dressed in black and stands on a simple tile floor near a wall beyond which a formal garden appears. Possibly the flames at his feet refer to his temptation.

(7) **Pietà.** This scene, pictured with the artist's characteristic simplicity and symmetry, shows again the background of the formal garden typical of these smaller paintings.

(8) **St. Sebastian.** Naked, tied to a tree, St. Sebastian is pictured pierced by several arrows, and with two of his persecutors still attacking. His face is similar in feature to this artist's portrayal of the face of the martyred Christ. The stylized trees and walks are repeated.

(9) **St. Barbara.** As in other pictures of her, Barbara is shown before a tower with three windows, probably symbolizing the trinity.

(10) **St. Agatha.** She is holding a severed breast with iron tongs, indicative of her martyrdom. The tile floor, low wall, and highly stylized background are the same as those in the paintings of St. Anthony and St. Catherine.

(11) **St. Catherine.** She appears with the instruments of her martyrdom, the sword and the wheel, and with her persecutor, half reclining on the floor beneath her.

(12) **A funeral.** (A larger picture following the series of portraits of the saints). Before what appears to be a raised, draped coffin 4 tonsured monks appear, one reading the service from a book on a lectern. To the right are the mourners in black, with hoods low over their bowed heads. A rich gold inlaid canopy hangs above the scene. In the text of the manuscript the Office of the Dead follows.

(13.) **Virgin and Child.** The Virgin is pictured draped in characteristic blue garb; her halo and flowing hair here receive some decorative flourishes. The background is typical of the artist's interior scenes, with the geometrical gold and blue canopy or tapestry above, a low wall which simulates marble, and a tile floor. Interestingly, the prayers which follow this drawing are French whereas the rest of the book is Latin.

* * *

The presence of this manuscript and other rare books in the library makes one wonder if this institution should not venture into some method of publicizing unexplored depths and unexpected treasures. Perhaps an answer is Christmas card production, following the example of major libraries and museums around the world. And perhaps interested persons could establish a "Friends of the Library" group. At any rate, it is to be hoped that present friends of Willamette will continue to supplement the library's holdings of rare books in the grand tradition of Mr. Charles E. McCulloch and others.

Adele Birnbaum

WILLAMETTE SCENE